A recent photography workshop with students provided the cover design concept for this issue of Social Alternatives. The workshop applied Chrono-photography using multiple flashes to create a sequence of images to reveal motion. Chrono-photography is a technique first invented around 1882 by Étienne-Jules Marey using a camera styled similarly to a gun with a trigger enabling him to fire the camera in quick succession. Later Harold Eugene Edgerton invented a stroboscope (flash) to capture successive phases of motion. For the workshop students used speed-lights (off-camera flash) to fire multiple flash light to capture the teacher dancing with lustre red and gold material. The effects were magical and the images captured metaphorically encompasses many of the arts and crafts genres. For example, the movement of dance, theatre, the capture of an image through photography and film. Chrono-photography can be seen from the position of the post-cinematic era, such as the innovation by the Lumière brothers who debuted the first motion picture, the Cinématographe Lumière, around 1895. It is imperative to discuss the history of a medium, as it is an important part of creative research, it can fuel many contemporary investigative endeavours of any design or artistic work.

For this issue cover concept one of the chrono-photographed richly coloured images of moving material from the student workshop was chosen to represent a broad view of creative practices and a ‘multiplicity of processes’ for those practices (McGowan et al, 2019). Within the image, only just visible, are hands (holding the material) to embody the title ‘Dirty Hands’, the idea that the understanding of creativity is undergoing a change. All types of creative practice can involve the community and be a rewarding experience for both researcher and those engaged in the creative research. As suggested by McGowan et al. (2019):

… communities demand more agency in community engagement practices, and there is an increased need for demonstration of impact by funding bodies. At this moment of flux, researchers and creative practitioners within universities are designing research projects which attempt to support, consult and engage with community members in innovative ways to reimagine community engagement as a more focused, situated and cooperative process.

Reference:
Social Alternatives is an independent, quarterly refereed journal which aims to promote public debate, commentary and dialogue about contemporary social, political, economic and environmental issues.

Social Alternatives analyses, critiques and reviews contemporary social issues and problems. The journal seeks to generate insight, knowledge and debate. It publishes refereed articles, review essays, commentaries and book reviews as well as short stories, poems, images and cartoons.

The journal has grappled with matters of contemporary concern for four decades, publishing articles and themed issues on topics such as peace and conflict, racism, indigenous rights, social justice, human rights, inequality and the environment. Please show your support by subscribing to the journal. For other enquiries please contact a member of the Editorial Collective.

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- copyright release form
- title page listing contributing authors, contact details, affiliation and short bio of approximately 80 words
- abstract should be a maximum of 150 words
- three - five keywords.

Please use Australian/English spelling and follow Harvard referencing. Submit tables, graphs, pictures and diagrams on separate pages. Remove in-text references identifying authors and replace with [name removed for the review process].

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Dirty Hands: Community engagement through practice as research

Lee McGowan, Donna Hancox and Alex Philp

Community engagement can be understood as a practice, an aspiration or a philosophy, and encompasses many forms and a multiplicity of processes. Despite the diversity of ways of seeing or doing community engagement it is always, at its heart, a collaborative endeavour which can lead to lasting change in communities. The role of creative practitioners in community engagement is often directed by disciplinary traditions and skills. However, those established ways of doing are undergoing a profound change: communities demand more agency in community engagement practices, and there is an increased need for demonstration of impact by funding bodies. At this moment of flux, researchers and creative practitioners within universities are designing research projects which attempt to support, consult and engage with community members in innovative ways to reimagine community engagement as a more focused, situated and cooperative process.

The articles collected in Dirty Hands: Community engagement through practice as research feature six research projects located across a range of creative practice-based disciplines, in one instance in a single project. These projects emerge from collisions and collaboration in dance, photography, music, performance-making, arts-practice, and an interactive experimental work drawing on theatre, creative writing and animation, and they are all driven by the principle that their engagement with their community occurs at a local level. The mode of and context for each piece of research – whether in an urban, regional or remote centre – are designed to promote further engagement and cooperation with communities and result in outcomes beneficial to and reflective of the participant community.

‘Writing Wrongheaded’ examines a dance project restaged at the 2018 Dublin Dance Festival in the week leading up to the referendum to repeal the eighth amendment to the Irish Constitution, which addressed the right for women to access abortion in Ireland. The work was developed in conjunction with the Civic Theatre, Tallaght, Co. Dublin, and those volunteers recruited to view the work and create a response. The research is aligned with the societal shift in the position of women’s bodily autonomy in Ireland, and the subsequent paper included in this special issue explores the unique capacity of contemporary dance to engage audiences in the discourse around female bodily autonomy in a country not always comfortable with its discussion, let alone its enactment. By situating research of these issues in collaborative community-based practice, the work also offers a valuable contribution to the broader context of dance as activism and creative interventions into urgent social issues.

‘Doing Feminism and Communities of Practice in Australian Art’ provides equally valuable insight into the rarely-underscored, powerful relationship between Australian feminist communities and socially-engaged art practice as it is demonstrated in the recent resurgence of creative activity and its championing by art institutions and universities. This practitioner reflection draws on the authors’ membership of the feminist collective, LEVEL, and their participation in Doing Feminism – Sharing the World, a project curated by Anne Marsh. In reflecting upon and analysing the dialogic and collective methods used in socially-engaged practice research, the article considers the current potential of consciousness-raising strategies and the capacity of participatory art methods to open up possibilities of frameworks for collaboration and future feminist activism.

‘Senses of Community’, the third article in this issue, explores the impact and incorporation of the tools and techniques associated with practice research in the development of a trans-disciplinary work. A multi-disciplinary team, including an animator, an artist, a director, a theatre-maker, a creative writer and a researcher in community-based storytelling, experimented with art processes and product to reflexively investigate the ‘making’ of an experiential work. While the paper considers the performative engagement with its local community, its main purpose is to explore the work’s emergence from the dialogic relationship between their collective creative practice and its underpinning conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Traditions of ethnodrama inform and influence the resulting intermedial production, as well as its presentation in text.
‘In Country’, the powerful new short story from a regional Queensland writer, captures the impact, implications and difficult questions that arise during a research project in Papua New Guinea. Its premise, tensions and themes of individual and community memories, the challenges inherent in breaking well-worn cycles and the strength of working with a collective of women strongly align it with the themed articles featured elsewhere in the issue.

Outside of negative views, reinforced by recent media coverage, and negative experiences investigated in a Royal Commission, most know little of Australian aged care. ‘Spaces, Sauce and Schedules’, a photographic essay, provides important insight into the daily lives of seven older Australians living in a Brisbane-based residential facility. This creative and design-based research considers the importance and sentiment of artefacts, personal living preferences and coping with decline and medicalisation as three themes that inform its capture of the mundane, its reframing of expectations and raising of questions, and its contribution to a community-wide conversation about ageing and life inside aged care.

Musical and design thinking form the foundation of collaborative approaches to creative music production in the article ‘Practice in Play’. The authors investigate the role of play within a community of practice in a university-based contemporary music program. The researcher practitioners, who are also educators, reflect on Flow, a student-led public music event incorporating two rehearsal spaces, three recording studios and five sites for live performance. They examine the creation and curation of knowledge-building in key project activities, particularly those simulating, or acting as precursors to, the students’ future work as it occurs naturally in social domains of professional practice.

As part of the production of a new work, the Belloo Creative company worked with Indigenous theatre-maker Emily Coleman to trial a project that welcomed Aboriginal audiences to the 2018 Brisbane Festival. Rovers is a critically-acclaimed performance work based on the lives of its two Indigenous Australian leading performers: Roxanne MacDonald and Barbara Lowing. As a case study, this final article draws from the personal practices of its authors to present a multi-layered perspective on community engagement in Australian performance. More specifically, it offers insight and understanding of potential strategies for community engagement by independent performance-makers and cultural institutions.

If, as noted by Gattenhof et al. in their article, ‘artists are inherently creative practice researchers’, it is no surprise that the authors of the articles presented in this issue are either arts practitioners or practitioner researchers. They tend to work in fields where they are seen as singular creatives whose practice is often regarded as being at odds with the divergent demands of engaging with their community. In this issue, these two seemingly oppositional forces are held up, deconstructed and deliberated on in order to reflect and refract the potential for practice as research to disrupt and illuminate the rich diversity in academic collaborations with local communities. Whether its exploring feminist activism, location and dislocation within embodied practice, the discourse of Australian aged care, innovation and play in music-making methodologies, or communication and celebration in independent performance-making, research through collaborative community engagement can help us re-evaluate how the ideal society might be imagined and how social injustices can be avoided or reconciled. As scholarly activity, the projects explored in this issue offer rich new territory for investigation of current practices as well as a vision for future frameworks of collaboration. This is an issue about the significant potential of creative practitioners, researchers, multiple disciplines and communities working collaboratively: about what community engagement through practice as research can do for communities, and what engaging with communities can do for practice as research.

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Writing Wrongheaded: Narratives from a dance piece and community project exploring women’s bodily autonomy in Ireland

JENNY ROCHE

Dance can address deep issues relating to the pressures of societal forces on subjectivity and how that is manifested in our experiences as embodied subjects. This research captures key perspectives on the creation, performance and audience engagement with the dance piece Wrongheaded by Liz Roche Company. This explored women's bodily autonomy in Ireland in the wake of the Referendum to Repeal the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution, which concerned reproductive rights for women and access to abortion. This article explores the origins of the dance piece, its performance in the Dublin Dance Festival 2018 in the lead up to the Referendum and the perspectives of a group of community participants who took part in the Active Audience project – an initiative whereby a group of volunteers were invited to respond to the piece through an installation performance. Another strand which runs through this article is the identification of the power of personal narratives within the creation of Wrongheaded, the Active Audience engagement and the circulating discourse surrounding the Referendum. This is framed through literature on narrative practice and in particular the writing of Michael White (1948 – 2008), one of the founders of the field of Narrative Therapy.

This article discusses a dance project – Wrongheaded – developed by choreographer Liz Roche, artistic director of Liz Roche Company, Ireland. Wrongheaded was first performed in 2016 and subsequently restaged for the Dublin Dance Festival in 2018 in the week leading up to the Referendum to Repeal the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution, which addressed the right for women to access abortion in Ireland. Wrongheaded explores Irish women’s relationship to bodily autonomy more generally but draws heavily on the themes surrounding this particular social issue. A key focus of this article is the exploration of a community engagement initiative entitled Active Audience which was developed in conjunction with the Civic Theatre, Tallaght, Co. Dublin, and involved the recruitment of volunteers to view Wrongheaded and create a response to the piece. These responses were collated as an installation which was presented alongside further performances of the work in the Civic Theatre in October 2018. Supported by interviews with some of the creative team, this paper presents the perspectives of the Active Audience members to map how the performances of Wrongheaded and the Active Audience project intersected with the issues they encountered surrounding this momentous referendum. This is framed in light of the alignment of the work with this key societal shift in the position of women’s bodily autonomy in Ireland, the particular capacity of contemporary dance as a means to communicate with audiences directly through the body and writings on narrative practice. Before discussing the details of the work, I will outline the context of its emergence as a dance piece addressing female bodily autonomy in Ireland through placing it in relation to broader discussions on dance as activism.

Dance writer, Eric Mullis (2015: 72-3) explores the potential for activism in dance through choreographic approaches that are either formalist or contextual in nature. Drawing from Langer (1953) he outlines that from a formalist perspective, while ‘dance movement manifests virtual powers that can be read as semblances of physical, psychological, or social forces’, political themes are considered to be more successfully represented by other media which can impart more specific details regarding a particular social issue. For example, French-based Israeli choreographer, Emanuel Gat (2011), describes how, while he does not overtly address social issues within his work, the inner logic of his choreographic structures should be robust enough to allow audiences to reflect on important social themes and human power relationships through the physical interactions of the dancers. On the other hand, Mullis (2015: 72) explains that the contextualist generally views the body of the dancer as indicative of a person.
who has a particular embodied history within a culture that inevitably codes bodies in terms of broader social values. Therefore, through representing ‘alternative embodied subjectivities and social relationships that embody more egalitarian social values’, dance can comment on a range of social issues, particularly in relation to the issue of embodiment itself (Mullis 2015: 73).

Roche would more usually present work from a formalist approach, without a particular signalling of social issues within the context of the work. However, her work is situated within an approach to contemporary dance which privileges somatic rather than virtuosic movement vocabularies, democratic processes of devising choreography and egalitarian relationships between genders on stage. Therefore, there are certain values relating to embodiment embedded within the choreography that stem from radical developments in the 1960s, through the New York based Judson Church movement and subsequent New Dance developments throughout the rest of the world, which challenged earlier more hierarchical approaches to dancemaking. Furthermore, a compelling case has been made for the radical potential of somatic practices to undermine hegemonic relationships to bodily experience and promote individual autonomy through releasing subjects from habitual, mindless or oppressive movement patterns (Kampe 2014; Fortin et al. 2009). As such, while Roche’s choreography is not overtly issue based, it resonates with this particular ethos regarding embodied practice.

While not directly pursuing activist art, the emergence of Wrongheaded as described by Roche below aligns more with Mullis’s (2015) definition of communitarian art making whereby the personal narrative of the artist intersects with the narratives of a community within the social sphere. According to Mullis (2015), the communitarian acknowledges the support network or community that supports her/him to make art and is ethically driven to address issues that impact on that community. This interweaving of personal and social narratives was particularly evident in the development of Wrongheaded whereby Roche and the key members of the creative team had experienced directly the challenges associated with female bodily autonomy in Ireland.

Before proceeding into a detailed account of these developments, I will outline my own position in relation to the work. My research normally encompasses my own creative practice in collaboration with others and I write about these processes. While not participating in the making or performing of the work in this project, I was invited by Roche to write about this process given the importance of the subject matter to the current climate of women’s rights in Ireland (and worldwide), and the potential for the perspectives formed inside the creation of the piece and its expansion to the community participants to be lost. This builds on the close artistic and personal relationship to Roche as her sister and collaborator over many projects through the dance company we formed together, Rex Levitates (1999 – 2013). As such, I am coming from an internal or ‘emic’ position as insider to many of the processes and practices of the artists involved but with an added distance which is helpful in a research context.

**Context for the Creation and Performances of Wrongheaded**

Primarily, Wrongheaded involves a collaboration between Roche, spoken word poet Elaine Feeney and filmmaker Mary Wycherley. This was supported through the creative input of composer Ray Harman and lighting designer Sinead Wallace (subsequently designed by Stephen Dodd). The piece was made with, and initially performed by, dancers Sarah Cerneaux and Justine Cooper in the 2016 version and this was expanded to include two male dancers, Kévin Coquelard and Jack Webb for the Dublin Dance Festival performances in 2018.

In an interview, Roche (2018) cited the story of Savita Halappanavar as a catalyst for the making of Wrongheaded. She remembers an ‘upsurge in the remembering of Savita Halappanaver’, perhaps around the time of the inquest into Halappanaver’s death. Halappanaver, an Indian dentist living in Ireland, died in University Hospital, Galway in 2012, as a result of being denied a termination after her amniotic fluids broke during her seventeenth week of pregnancy (Lentin 2015: 179). Although her foetus was declared unviable, it continued to register a heartbeat, and Halappanaver’s husband, Praveen, claimed that they were repeatedly refused a termination because of this and because the hospital had told them that Ireland is ‘a Catholic country’ (Houston 2012). As Ursula Barry (2018: 183) explained, at that point in time, ‘detection of a foetal heartbeat is enough to deny women urgent medical attention’. According to Quilty et al. (2015: 13), Halappanaver’s ‘death turned the international spotlight on Ireland’s shameful and restrictive abortion regime, provoking national outrage and protest and reigniting and reinvigorating abortion rights activism in Ireland and beyond’. The Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution had been passed in 1983. This added article 40.3.3 which read, ‘The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due respect to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right’ (Quilty et al. 2015: 10). Barry (2018: 189), in writing prior to the Referendum, outlined that in Ireland, ‘abortion is a reality in women’s lives and that our heavily restrictive laws criminalise and harm women, particularly
vulnerable women (women with poor health; women on low incomes; undocumented women; women subject to violent and sexual abuse)’. The enshrinement in law of the equality of the foetus with its pregnant mother had created amongst other tragic outcomes ambiguity within maternal healthcare in Ireland about the lawfulness of medical interventions within problem pregnancies. The tragedy of Halappanavar was one of many catalysing events which motivated a groundswell of support for repealing the amendment and as outlined above, was one of the inspirations for the making of Wrongheaded, even before, according to Feeney (2016) ‘a Referendum was on the cards’. Roche (2018) explained her own experiences of giving birth within the Irish health system and in the light of Halappanaver’s tragic story, ‘the disempowerment of that came back and I thought, I need to make something about this’.

Roche described how in the initial stages it was challenging to balance the different media of text, film and dance in Wrongheaded (2018). After Roche, Wycherley and Feeney (also joined by dancer Justine Cooper) met initially in Limerick to discuss the project, they decided on a structure based on a poem for ten minutes, a film for ten minutes and a dance for ten minutes. However, the poem became twenty-four minutes and ‘very intense’ (Roche 2018). Feeney (2018) explained that she had found it challenging to address this topic only from ‘the “I” narrative’ and while she had her own difficult stories about being a woman in Ireland through encountering what she describes as ‘institutional misogyny’, she was drawn to other stories. She wrote these stories:

in a linear narrative but then eventually obscured them to such an effect that it almost became rhythms of speech … [becoming] a melting pot of all these different voices, a young girl, a mother trapped in a maternity hospital and unhappy, a couple in a marriage, a girl on a bridge who is suicidal in a crisis pregnancy (Feeney 2018).

The resulting text was twenty minutes long and Feeney (2018) explained how she ‘was really appreciative of the levels [Liz] went to, to engage with the text’.

Wycherley, from her perspective as the filmmaker (2018) described the ‘fullness’ of all elements and saw the challenge in how ‘things can weave so that they don’t cancel each other out’. She remembered that she focused on bringing in ‘quietness … stillness … and slowing things down’ at moments through the film as a way of ‘dealing with the intensity of the subject’ and the various elements coming together (Wycherley 2018). Roche explained that Wycherley saw the setting for the film as a cave while she had ‘wanted this completely non-space, this totally claustrophobic nothing space with walls’ (Roche 2018). She added that it may not have been the initial intention and they tried to resist the setting of the cave because it seemed somewhat obvious and ‘like a kind of Anne Lovett4 grotto … we felt that there were other forces at play…this oppressed female energy that was working its way out through us’. The early version of the piece was made on a small budget and Roche (2018) described the response as muted in 2016. While the piece received positive reviews and Roche remembered, ‘people were moved by it … [but] it did feel like a wall of nothing coming back about the piece’ (Roche 2018). However, the piece was invited to open the Cardiff Dance Festival in 2017 and at that point, Roche (2018) found, ‘the reviews were really encouraging … they were respectful of the piece and talked about it in relation to their view of Ireland and subjugation of women … whereas it was so mixed in Ireland’. She described how subsequently through circumstances rather than direct design, the piece was programmed as part of the Dublin Dance Festival 2018, just before the Referendum was scheduled to take place (Roche 2018).5 Dance writer Dee Reynolds (2007: 1) proposes that dance, in particular, can anticipate social change through the concept of ‘kinesthetic imagination’. She describes this as being ‘a response and an active resistance to constraining patterns of energy usage that are culturally dominant, and that shape the kinesthetic experiences and habits of individual subjects’ (Reynolds 2007: 1). In this way, choreographic works can signal new economies of energy usage and ways of experiencing subjectivity in response to repressive social norms (Reynolds 2007). As Feeney (2016) outlined, the interest in pursuing this creative work came before the Referendum was in place but to some degree, it could be seen to have anticipated the groundswell for change regarding this issue.6

Image one: Photo taken by author on 15 June 2018 in Meetinghouse Lane, North City Centre Dublin.
Wrongheaded: The performances

In the 2018 version of Wrongheaded, the film is projected on the floor of the Project Arts Centre for ten minutes, overlaid by the text from the poem as the two women enter the theatre space. They are also projected in the film, their virtual selves trapped inside a space inside the black box of the theatre. In the version that was presented at the Dublin Dance Festival 2018, there were more men involved in the production. This included Stephen Dodd taking over as lighting designer, the two male dancers, Coquelard and Webb, and the inclusion of actor Andrew Bennett as the male voiceover. The male dancers appear momentarily at the back, dressed in the same costume colours as the two women until the film disappears and the two women are alone again dancing frenetically, cued by Feeney's words.

The women are here to count,
To sit together and carve out arms.
To bury their dead, to feed their living,
When they are done they can
Dance in the end clutches of their spat energy.
Bone of bone’s, sharp cuckoo barrage.
Sweet desire,
All spent.

(Feeney 2016: 1)

Cerneaux and Cooper dance the first phrases in complete unison at speed through grasping, panicked movements, until they back themselves against separate walls and continue into forced breathing as if in labour, panting through various body positions, some reflecting positions of birthing.

This leads to a sequence travelling forward from the pelvis into space. Their precariousness as they move between standing and falling is magnified by the ongoing images evoked through Feeney’s voice as she recounts the poem like a stream of consciousness, travelling in and out of a myriad of stories and situations. The staging in the black box alongside the intensity of the words and frantic nature of the dance creates a claustrophobic quality that builds without respite until Cooper collapses on top of Cerneaux in a messy assemblage of legs and hips which Cerneaux immediately struggles to free herself from underneath. They move downstream and begin a repetitive action of catching their mouths as if to stop vomiting or screaming, grabbing between their legs, grabbing their bellies, checking their hands and looking up startled. Repeated over and over until they move to face each other along a diagonal in a series of poses, one crouched while the other attacks; shifting between these power relationships from one movement frame to the next. The men enter again at this point in the poem:

I wonder how many party bags of ice it would take?
For what?
To keep her body frozen on the back seat of our car
To keep her frozen in your beating stone heart
To not ever again reflect the stars
Never
No never. To never again reflect the lights on the riverbed
My dead child.
Never, no no never.

(Feeney 2016: 12)

They wrap their arms around the women, evoking the shared stories of couples travelling to the UK to terminate unviable pregnancies and having to find ways to bring the remains of their dead babies home.7 The men leave and the women continue dancing, more space between them, supporting, bracing, transporting each other, instead of in unison they move through previously seen shapes but this time in complement to each other, one struggles and then the other as they watch each other and keep check. Breathing accelerates again and brings them to the floor, collapsing momentarily until a gasp for breath lifts one head and torso upwards followed by the next. They continue dancing together until the words become obscured by the sound score, which suddenly drops out to reveal the final line spoken:

I am not beyond begging for my sister, or my daughter or your mother …

(Feeney 2016: 16)
This is thirty minutes into the performance, at which time the women leave, and the men enter to dance the women’s movement phrases with the same frenetic speed and repetitive unison re-embodifying these earlier seen shapes but without the continuous recital of the poem, which instead returns periodically but now mainly spoken by the male voice.

Harman’s sound score becomes more dominant and moves through various textures and sounds; a bell, a gong, the sound of a heartbeat during an ultrasound scan. The men embody vulnerability through these movements, whether thrusting pelvises forward into space or tracing the frenetic repetition of vomiting, checking and startled looks. The women reappear again from back stage when the text returns, ‘I wonder how many party bags of ice it would take?’ but this time, there is no embrace between the couples (Feeney 2016: 12). Instead we observe the distance between them. Coquelard and Webb continue dancing Cerneaux and Cooper’s movements, with a building rhythmic musical score which disintegrates into heavy panting as the men lower themselves to the ground. The women appear again from behind, joining in these last breaths for the final lines of the poem.

Sshh! They tell us all the time
They are a whole alphabet of gestures.
They are a whole language of figurative translation.
Here/There is a pain of woman.
Here/There is a pain of man.

(Feeney 2016: 16-17)

The lights go out and the performance ends.

The Active Audience: Responses to the work and installation process

This section describes the interaction with the Active Audience to illustrate how art can function ‘as a mode of enquiry’ through drawing out the narratives of the participants in the project (Bochner and Ellis 2003). Arthur P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis (2003: 507) explain their understanding within research contexts that, ‘what was important about art was what it awakened or evoked in the spectator, how it created meanings, how it could heal, and what it could teach, incite, inspire, or provoke’. Indeed, narratives reveal the deeply held beliefs that underscore how we make meaning of our experiences within the social context (White 2016). Beyond merely mirroring our individual beliefs, Michael White, founder of Narrative Therapy with David Epston8, explains that stories ‘are shaping of life, and that they have real, not imagined effects’ (White 2016: 25). He describes ‘culturally available’ stories as shaped through dominant discourses that present a certain determinacy in how persons live their lives (White 2016: 26). However, White (2016: 27) explains that between the gaps of these larger social narratives, which are often inconsistent with experiences individuals have within life as it is lived, individual stories emerge that constitute ‘meaning-making’ and allow for indeterminacy. Bochner and Ellis (2003) identify the
transgressive potential of art as inquiry which resonates with the narrative approach and allows individuals to question the dominant stories in relation to their individual life experiences.

The Active Audience arose out of Liz Roche Company’s three-year residency at Civic Theatre, Tallaght, Co. Dublin and developed in conjunction with Civic Theatre, Tallaght Community Arts and Dublin Dance Festival. A group of twenty-five members of the public responded to a public call for involvement in the program for the three-year period. This was year two of the program and involved attending performances of Wrongheaded and presenting their responses to the work within an installation piece at the County Library, Tallaght prior to the performances of Wrongheaded in the Civic Theatre on the 19 and 20 October 2018. Thirteen of the Active Audience committed to being involved with the installation. The main through line of this piece was a film featuring the responses from the Active Audience members which were recorded and edited by Roche and filmmaker Luca Truffarelli. This sat within an installation environment designed by Truffarelli and Roche that included footage on a TV screen from the Oireachtas debates leading up to the Referendum, audio featuring American news commentary about the Referendum coming from a speaker under a table that offered sweets to passers-by, and a table with microphone and a chair surrounded by buckets filled with water with washing lines over them. The Active Audience performed moments in sync with the film, enhancing and amplifying gestures and words. Jenny MacDonald (Active Audience facilitator) and Katherine O’Malley (Associate Artist to Liz Roche Company) supported the development of these movements.

Roche acknowledged that some of the Active Audience members were working through some of their own experiences and that it was important to be with them in those moments, ‘to breathe with’ them. For example, one of the Active Audience members described in the film how she, ‘like Savita’, was told she would have to continue to carry her baby who had died at four months into her pregnancy. She delivered the baby at seven months and explains how she felt she too could have died and that her power was taken away in that experience. Another Active Audience member described in the film how the dancers had seemed that they were:

being possessed by generations of women who have been affected by the Irish attitude towards women and sexuality and birth. That these women were embodying generations of experiences and no one experience. And it made me feel connected to a long chain of women who had gone before me…my mother, my grandparents and women who went before them and that was very powerful (Wrongheaded Responses video footage).

Another participant wrote and delivered a very resonant and affecting poem about her own experience of life in the wake of the Eighth Amendment:

I watch the dancers and all the while I’m filled with a sense of impending doom
Like something terrible is about to happen
But then I remember, something terrible has happened, has been happening
To countless others, to countless friends
On the stage I see that this is our world
All is confusion, misconceptions, incorrect conceptions, conceptions
Must we carry this alone?
Will no one care or share?
Am I alone?
Are there others who feel like me? Out on the street it seems not
But time will tell...
...Yes, time
Tick Tock, Body Clock
I turn Eighteen just in time to vote ‘No’ to the Eighth Amendment
Tick Tock, Body Clock
My body clock stops ticking just in time for me to vote ‘Yes’ to repeal the Eighth,
My entire reproductive life has been lived in its shadow.
(Wrongheaded Responses video footage)

I attended the installation on both days and spoke to a focus group of four Active Audience members following the final performance. We discussed a range of issues, including the experience of viewing and responding to Wrongheaded in light of the Referendum and their engagement with the Active Audience project. A couple of the Active Audience members expressed the opinion that viewing Wrongheaded during the heat of the debate on the Eighth gave an opportunity to experience the complexity of the abortion rights issue and its many sides. One said,

I think there was so much nuance and complexity in the work that it really served to highlight the subtlety and nuance and complexity of the issue as a whole and I think I certainly found for me that it made me feel a little more at peace with my own questioning of my own way of teasing out the issue (Focus Group: 2018).

This was cited as being due to the power of movement to communicate beyond words, ‘I was impacted viscerally but I didn’t feel there was an agenda coming at me and I really respected that about the work’ (Focus Group: 2018). Another member explained that ‘it was a more human way of engaging with the subject because I just find sometimes that words can hurt a bit too much when you are talking about these sorts of things’ (Focus Group: 2018).

One of the Active Audience expressed in the video, ‘it was “reveal” as much as “repeal”, as the degree of support for repealing the Eighth was not realised until the voting was finally counted (Wrongheaded Responses video footage). Many people spoke of a silent majority who expressed their opinions through ‘secret ballot’ and how this awareness of a sea change in the Irish consciousness only came to light through this process. While the Referendum had been widely debated through the media in the lead up to the vote, the Active Audience explained how they had been reluctant to discuss the topic outside intimate family circles. One participant explained,

It’s such a personal topic and it became so public and so fraught and militant. We were also talking about how social media has become such a vehicle for discussing things, but I think in a rote way, and uncensored and people don’t discuss, they sort of have rehearsed arguments that they just trip out and I just felt silenced throughout the whole thing (Focus Group: 2018).

The focus group explained that the Active Audience engagement gave a ‘safe space’ to discuss the topic of the Referendum. One member stated, ‘I found that this space of Active Audience was quite refreshing because while I’m sure there were different views within individuals, whatever was expressed amongst us, there was also a safe space and exploratory component’ (Focus Group: 2018). I asked the Active Audience members whether they had felt any particular pressure when viewing the work in light of the impending Referendum. One responded,

there was so much charge in the ether ... I was feeling a certain pressure, externally, but I felt that the work itself was a means to aerate the mind and give a bit of space and again, refine my understanding of it at a different level and it was one of the most neutralising experiences I had throughout that whole Referendum time (Focus Group: 2018).
The group discussed the timing of viewing *Wrongheaded* in the lead up to the Referendum and how this ‘coloured the lens’ in that initial experience. Seeing the work, months later, one member commented,

> there is a lot less of the Referendum in there than we've been mulling over in our head. I don't think [it's] any less relevant, I think it's a much bigger view – what it actually says is how much the context of the time influenced what we produced…did we see stuff that isn't inherently in the work? (Focus Group: 2018).

There were a number of comments regarding the two male dancers in the piece, one member felt, ‘it put a different light on it … they were sensitive to the whole subject matter and I thought that was amazing’ (Focus Group: 2018). Another member expressed how ‘interplay between the genders is an ongoing dynamic that is constantly being renegotiated and explored by people and so the interplay of gender within the piece will continue to be thought provoking and raise questions after that specific referendum’ (Focus Group: 2018). Interestingly, Roche (2018) expressed some reservations about the inclusion of the two male dancers, concerned that she might have made this decision out of a need to validate the women's experience through the male voices. She had been aware through a friend involved in the campaign that in canvassing for the ‘Yes’ vote in the Referendum, people had liked when it was a man and a woman at the door … and that they would say that the woman who was seeking an abortion would do this on the advice of her doctor … most people would imagine the doctor to be a man … what many people didn’t want was a decision just made by women (Roche 2018).

On reflection, she expressed surprise at her own view in relation to the male/female dynamic. However, viewing the piece beyond its relationship to the Referendum and within the context of the revelations of institutional sexual abuse by the Catholic Church in Ireland, which intersects with many of the issues in *Wrongheaded*, there seemed to be a broader resonance enabled through the presence and vulnerability of the male dancers. Indeed, one Active Audience member addressed this in her response ‘this doesn’t just happen to women but everywhere there is a power differential … when it changes for women, we may hope that it will change for all disempowered groups and individuals’ (*Wrongheaded Responses* video footage).

One of the Active Audience focus group members described how Roche’s approach supported her ‘as an older person, it was nice to feel that you could be involved ... because I loved the rapport we all developed between us … everything was quite gentle and there were no barriers, you didn't feel you couldn't do it’ (Focus Group: 2018). Other members enjoyed the flexibility offered in the project,

> Liz was so open to it being reciprocal, her humility in terms of her flexibility with her choreography … you know, she created her piece, and I can imagine if I was to create something, I would feel kind of protective…she let us create the installation and put our own views into it and let it grow (Focus Group: 2018).

The group appreciated the agency they had in the process and while they acknowledged how the editing in the film formed the shape of the installation, they expressed,

> the rest of it, we kind of seemed to do ourselves … and I loved the way it evolved. None of us had any difficulty with the ensemble we created … we were able to work together, to move together – there was no clash; there were no egos (Focus Group: 2018).

One member felt that in light of the Referendum and through the engagement with the Active Audience, it was a time to ‘come to terms’ with her own story. She remarked,

> I didn't actually go in with that whole intention of opening up but I did feel it was a platform and with the whole referendum going on...that you can now express…with the Savita situation, I just felt, ‘My God, nothing has changed’. I mean, my happening was forty years ago … And that nothing has changed (Focus Group: 2018).

Another member described how challenging it was to develop a response, having had some anxiety about doing this through movement,

> I thought about it a lot and what struck me about the dancing was … that it was a bodily response and it put aside words and that's what led me to choose movement and gesture to respond because that's the only way I can do it honestly (Focus Group: 2018).

The key theme that emerged from the Focus Group was the value they found in having a space to discuss and work with these issues through an emergent and ‘organic’ creative process (Focus Group: 2018). This process aligns with narrative practice approaches I have encountered which give space for the individual’s story to be heard respectfully and within a community of support. Drawing
on Michel Foucault’s mapping of power relations, White (2016: 40) described the importance of addressing power issues at a local level, because it was ‘at these local sites that the practices of power were perfected’. Rather than being imposed from the top down, Foucault proposed that in modern systems of power, power is ‘taken up’ and that these micro-politics allow power to have ‘its global effects’ (White 2016: 40). As outlined above, narrative or storytelling reveals the meaning-making that individuals place on certain life events and has a key role to play in illuminating the influence of power on their lives (White 2016: 25). White (2016: 43) explains, ‘as these practices of power are unmasked, it becomes possible for persons to take a position on them, and to counter the influences of these practices in their lives and relationships’. It is not directly the process of narrating life experiences that accomplishes this possibility, but how the exploration of the stories we have woven about our life experiences become externalised and no longer completely identified with us as individuals; the problem may then be recognised as systemic and not only personal (White 2016: 43).

While the initial impetus for this work was as artistic practice and community engagement rather than academic research, this article illustrates how processes from within the arts practice discipline can address key societal issues and allow participants to explore a complex issue from a myriad of perspectives. Enquiry is embedded within the process of art making, as is the situated location of the practitioner. This latter element ensures that personal narratives have a place in the enfolding of this enquiry and recognition of the ambiguity and inconsistencies that living produces. The circulation of various personal narratives of the impact of the Eighth Amendment on the lives of Irish women, after decades of silence at a public level on these issues, allowed many women and men to air their experiences and review their beliefs on bodily autonomy. These stories shifted people’s thinking to form a more compassionate recognition of the complexity of life, beyond the simplified moral stance offered by the Catholic Church in Ireland for so many years, and a respectful but firm support for women’s choice in their reproductive decision-making. The Active Audience presented a microcosm through which to view these issues viscerally, many times moving beyond words to engage at an affective level with the powers at play. Their responses were deeply hopeful and inspiring in the depth of their consideration and recognition of the complexity surrounding the issues involved in this topic. The project itself provided a possibility to air these complexities, work them through the body, share perspectives across generations and let healing begin.

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End Notes

2. This conflict of interest was disclosed with all interviewees involved in the research.
3. Subsequently, Halappanaver contracted septicemia and E. coli, dying due to the resulting shock and multi-organ failure caused by her cervix being open to these infections (Lentin 2015; Houston 2012).
4. Anne Lovett died at aged fifteen, after giving birth in secret and alone in Our Lady of Lourdes grotto in Co. Longford in 1984; her child also died (Inglis 2002).
5. Since the Dublin Dance Festival, Wrongheaded has been performed in various venues around Ireland, at Dance Base Edinburgh for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and the Leap Dance Festival, Liverpool. The film has travelled independently of the piece to Athens Video Dance Festival; Tocht Dance Festival, Tralee; the Fastnet Film Festival; The American Dance Festival Movies by Movers; Dance Waves Festival - Moving Images, Cyprus; Bucharest International Dance Film Festival; Kerry Film Festival; Festival Internacional VideoDanza BA, Buenos Aires; Underwire Festival in London; Plarforma Festival Lithuania; Bucharest International Dance Film Festival Romania and Loikka Dance Film Festival, Finland.
6. Indeed, a Citizen’s Assembly (CA) had been formed in 2016 to debate a range of key issues in Irish society, including the Eighth amendment. This assembly included one hundred members, comprised of a government appointed chairperson and ninety-nine randomly selected citizens eligible to vote in a referendum and supported by an expert advisory group drawn from relevant fields (CA 2017). The recommendations of the CA given in its report in June 2017 were that article 40.3.3 would be removed from the Irish Constitution and that issues regarding the rights of pregnant women would be for the Oireachtas (Ireland’s national parliament) to legislate (CA 2017). This paved the way for the Referendum to take place on 25 May 2018. In 2018, the amendment was repealed by an historic Referendum with the ‘Yes’ side winning by 66.4% to 33.6% from a voting turnout of 64.13% (The Irish Times 26 May 2018).
7. Growing information on the reality of women travelling to Britain (approximately 4,000 a year as documented by Bacik (2015) and stories of women with fatal foetal abnormalities being forced to either continue with their pregnancy in Ireland or travel for a termination to Britain entered the public discourse intensively in the lead up to the Referendum.
8. Michael White and David Epston founded the field of Narrative Therapy and the Dulwich Centre, Adelaide, one of the most significant centres for narrative practice worldwide.

North

Imagine we are in a train crossing the Urals, leaning against the back door, watching spirals of barbed wire spike up towards light.

Further, inland, somebody looking like you climbs up the mountains’ vertical. On his back, a box the size of your ribcage.

Inside the chest, a trapped bird reaches forward; her hours, frozen water droplets, lined up on ribbons.

Our foreheads face North. Through glass, the landscape speeds away. Ears listen to knocks coming from a different compartment; our fingertips touch a cold feather in mid-flight.

The train suddenly stops and the man looks back, dropping the cube into abyss. Faint sounds echo in circles. Smaller and smaller.

Far out here, we put our eyes to the bird’s eye and come out running.

MARIA STADNICKA,
GLOUCESTERSHIRE, U.K.
Doing Feminism and Communities of Practice in Australian Art

RACHAEL HAYNES AND COURTNEY PEDERSEN

The powerful relationship between feminism and socially-engaged art practice is demonstrated by a recent resurgence of this creative activity and its championing by art institutions and universities. However, the history of feminist community art projects in Australia and their relevance to contemporary practice is rarely underscored. This practitioner reflection draws on the authors’ recent experiences participating in a residency program at Norma Redpath House in Melbourne, Australia, as part of the project Doing Feminism – Sharing the World, curated by Anne Marsh. This involvement, as part of the feminist collective, LEVEL, included staging a participatory artwork in the form of a picnic and guided discussion in a public park. By reflecting upon and analysing the dialogic and collective methods utilised in socially-engaged practice research, this article proposes future frameworks for collaboration. It considers the current potential of consciousness-raising strategies and how participatory art methods open up possibilities for future feminist activism.

Introduction

A recent resurgence of socially-engaged art in Australia is demonstrated through its championing by academic and art institutions in recent thematic exhibitions and events. For example, the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand (AAANZ) 2018 Conference eschewed the more rigidly art historical focus of its previous incarnations in favour of the theme, ‘Aesthetics, Politics and Histories: The Social Context of Art’. However, the history of feminist community art projects in Australia and their relevance to contemporary practice is rarely underscored. Marnie Badham argues that community art practice is informed by shared principles and ethics, and less likely to consider its own historical context (2010: 86). It is imperative, however, that the genealogy of feminist art practice, including its significance for community-based, socially-engaged, participatory, relational or dialogic art, is acknowledged and discussed. As Anne Marsh observes, many feminist artists working in the 1970s sought to ‘bridge the gap between art and life, to make art more meaningful in communities and to create work that had a broader resonance across different sectors of society’ (2017: 16). Important precursors in this regard include Vivienne Binns’s participatory community art project, Mothers’ Memories/ Others’ Memories (1979-81) and Anne Graham’s community-focused events.

This practitioner reflection draws on our recent experiences participating in a residency program at Norma Redpath House in Melbourne, Australia, as part of the project Doing Feminism – Sharing the World, curated by Anne Marsh. Doing Feminism was a twelve-week residency program, an artist house and studio bequeathed to the University of Melbourne. The residency program was focused on feminist art-making and participatory practice, and involved collaborative groups from across Australia including Nat Thomas and Fitzroy High School Feminist Collective, Open Circle, Favour Economy, LEVEL, Sisters Akousmatica, Sleepover Club, Snapcat, Sunday School, Art/Mums Collective, Feminist Colour-IN, and Arts Project Australia. The projects emerging from this residency included discussions, forums, workshops, roundtables, interviews, recordings, performances, actions, podcasts and meals. The curatorial provocation of Doing Feminism was investigating ways of ‘sharing the world’ through the lens of feminist ethics (doingfeminism-sharingtheworld.tumblr.com). Our involvement, as two members of the feminist collective, LEVEL, included staging a participatory artwork in the form of a picnic and guided discussion in a public park, titled We need to talk - Sharing the World.

We need to talk (2013-2018) was a series of participatory art events devised and presented by LEVEL, in order to consider the personal and activate the political through the sharing of food and ideas. The members of LEVEL (2010-2018) also included artists Courtney Coombs, Caitlin Franzmann, Anita Holtsclaw and Alice Lang. These events were staged in public spaces in order to highlight the importance for feminist discussion to move from the private realm and into forms of activism; and to facilitate opening up the events to larger numbers and more diverse
participants. Each iteration of the project was context-specific, and responded to: collective imaginations of a fairer world – We need to talk - I want a world… (2013, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney); and collective actions to bring about change – We need to talk - Recipe for a Revolution (2014, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane).

In this recent iteration of We need to talk, LEVEL responded to the provocation of ‘Sharing the World’ as part of the residency program at Norma Redpath House. The event was publicised via social media and we gathered with friends and strangers in nearby Carlton Gardens, Melbourne, to discuss feminist ways of sharing the world. Participants were asked to note down aspects of the conversation that resonated with them. Afterwards, we collated these observations to form the foundation of a manifesto for collective activity and ways of being in the world together. These collaborative strategies included: investing in small gestures and exchanges of caring and sharing; relishing the joys of working together; embracing slowness; reclaiming time to be together; valuing intergenerational relationships, and learning to be comfortable with discomfort!

Creative practice-led research provides a powerful tool to critically engage with participatory methods in both art making and academic research. By reflecting upon and analysing the dialogic and collective methods utilised in socially-engaged practice, and by investigating their relationship to genealogical pathways of feminist practice, this article proposes future frameworks for collaboration. It considers the potential of contemporary consciousness-raising strategies and how participatory art methods open up possibilities for future feminist activism.

**Feminist Community-Based and Socially-Engaged Art Practice in Australia**

Through the work of writers and theorists such as Claire Bishop, the establishment in 2005 of the California College of the Arts MFA in Social Practice, and the global reach of organisations such as Creative Time, in the second decade of the twenty-first century socially-engaged art practice became synonymous with North America. Prior to this, the French curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud’s text *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) had made strong claims for a set of global practices known as ‘relational art’ which had emerged in the 1990s. Bourriaud’s argument was that artists such as Liam Gillick, Philippe Parreno and Rikrit Tiravanija worked in ways that could not be explained by conceptual approaches to art developed in the mid-twentieth century. He asserted that this new way of working was ‘relational’ and that it was fundamentally formed by the contingent dynamics of social interaction. Both Bourriaud’s relational art and the later discussion of social practice rendered the work of Australian artists who had been working this way largely invisible. As Anne Marsh pointed out in 2015, while Tiravanija’s work was being celebrated for its use of food as a point of social connection in pieces like *untitled 1992/1995 (free/still)* (1992/1995/2007/2011), the Australian artist Anne Graham had also been preparing meals as part of her practice since the early 1990s (Marsh 2015). Observations like Marsh’s pointed out the lacuna in much turn-of-the millennium art theory.

The twenty-first century interest in relational art, social practice or socially-engaged art largely ignored the work done in previous decades, particularly by feminist artists whose commitment to an ethical engagement with the broader community was a cornerstone of their work. In the Australian context, Anne Graham’s work in the early 1990s raised questions about the role of public space and the practice of care in marginalised sites. As Anne Marsh has noted, Graham ‘engaged with feminist and Marxist critiques of the artist’s role in society and the ways in which gender, class and race restricted people’s choices’ (Marsh 2014: 232). The first work of this type for Graham was *Installation for Walla Mulla Park* (1992). Initiated by Artspace in Sydney, this work consisted of a series of modular tents erected under a railway bridge where meals were prepared and served each evening. Before the current (and valid) concerns regarding social practice and gentrification (see Gogarty 2014), artist projects working to reclaim discarded and liminal spaces for creative and convivial activity were seen as a lived expression of care for spaces, places and people. Susan Best’s description of Graham’s work summarises the intention this way:

The site, a kind of overlooked non-site, came into view as at once no-man’s land – a barely habitable urban off-cut – and makeshift shelter for the homeless who camp in the adjoining park. This contradictory status of the park, at once uninhabitable and yet inhabited, was underscored by the installation itself which signalled a very fragile kind of temporary dwelling: an efflorescence of welcoming warmth marked by its extreme transience. This illumination of urban blight was not achieved by the kind of overt and aggressive political posturing which leaves one accused and abused, but rather through an encircling of the problem, allowing it to come to light in its many and various ways (Best 2000: 154).

This description connects Graham’s work with a purposive renegotiation of contested space, both in *Installation for Walla Mulla Park* and its next incarnation in Melbourne: *Streetlight*, The Fifth Australian Sculpture Triennial, 1993. In both, shared food and shelter form the basis for disrupting environments ‘where the art of ignoring others has been perfected’ (Graham 2001: 81).
While the ‘social turn’ in contemporary art became broadly synonymous with collaborative, participatory or dialogic processes and indeed, the sociability of art contexts (Bishop 2006), Marnie Badham defines socially-engaged arts more tightly, as ‘community and cultural development art processes that intend positive social change and facilitate individuals and communities in active participation in their cultural identity’ (2010: 86). This definition, with its clear intention of social change, makes the legacy of feminist art activism evident. We need to talk was developed both as a response to, and as an extension of, the Australian feminist contribution to relational or social modes of art making.

Collaboration, Conversation and Participatory Art Methods in Feminist Practice Research

Feminist frameworks for creative practice research

This research employs the complementary methodologies of practice-led research and reflective practice, which draw on reflective thinking (Dewey 1933) and endeavour to integrate theory and practice in a meaningful way (Schon 1983; Gray and Malins 2004: 22). Reflective practice facilitates the tacit and embodied knowledge of the researcher, bringing these experiences into a constructive dialogue with theoretical frameworks and contextual factors. ‘Practice’ also designates the productive evolution of creative making, critical thinking and reflection over time. Mary Jane Jacob, in her essay ‘Experience as Thinking’, draws on John Dewey’s conception of knowledge production through experience to outline a ‘dialectic process ... between doing and reflecting, thinking and making’ (2013: 100). For Dewey (1933), reflective thinking involves continual, critical evaluation of assumptions, values and practices. An important aspect of this reflective practice is the role of collaborative analysis and writing, and the potential for this process to represent different perspectives and deepen the insights gained from the research.

This reflective activity operates in two modalities – reflection on previous experience, and reflecting forward to future possibilities (Burnard 2006: 4). This corresponds with a feminist research methodology in which there is a critical engagement with the genealogies of feminist practices (looking backward), in order to envisage future directions and strategies for feminist activism (looking forward). Nancy Naples asserts the productive application of reflective practice for feminist researchers, in order to ‘reformulate their epistemological frameworks and methodological strategies in response to different research experiences, shifting feminist theoretical debates and personal reflections’ (2003: 202). Therefore, reflective practice facilitates a responsive, critical analysis of the iterative, creative investigations conducted in collaborative practice-led research.

Conversation as contemporary consciousness-raising

The dialogue-focused strategies of consciousness-raising (CR) established in the feminist practices of the 1970s have informed our approach to creating participatory artworks and processes. As Vivien Green Fryd has explained, the CR process was ‘intended to raise awareness and understanding of women’s lives and concerns’, and the group dynamics ‘raised consciousness that the “personal is political” and that individual concerns were not unique but common among women’ (2007: 36). Nancy Naples concurs, stating that, ‘Once the problem was named ... we could politically challenge what previously had been defined as personal, private troubles’ (2003: 200). However, the limits of CR groups also became apparent, as participants had different views and difficulty in negotiating these differences (Naples 2003: 201).

Collective dialogues and CR processes provide important strategies to identify patterns of oppression and to ‘come to voice’ (Naples 2003: 166). However, the key question that remains is how CR strategies can provide the foundation for collective social action? Patricia Hill Collins argues that sharing individual perspectives through these dialogues can contribute to ‘the process of crafting a group-based point of view’, which in turn provides the potential for collective action to take place (1998: 47). Further complicating this process, as sociologist Deborah Gerson argues, is that ‘Feminists, using similar bodies of experience can come to very different strategic answers’ (1995: 33). Collective CR can highlight and challenge the political thread of patriarchal structures and their effects through the sharing of personal experiences. However, in this process, the differences of background, experiences and context also need to be recognised. Negotiating and engaging with this complex dynamic between individual concerns and collective aims has been at the core of our feminist methods and projects.

Future Frameworks for Collaboration

Participatory art, community engagement and caveats

Marnie Badham identifies a number of key debates in the field of socially-engaged art including: the emphasis of process over product, questions related to the prominence of spectacle in the experience-economy of contemporary art, and the ethics of working with others in non-exploitative ways (2010: 94). Badham also points to a key concern in understanding the social, economic and creative value of this practice, observing that while the instrumental benefits of community-based arts have been documented including ‘increasing social capital, economic development and health outcomes’, artistic values have been largely disregarded (2010: 84). Grant Kester concurs and frames this neglect in relation to
As Dimitrakaki argues, this form of knowledge would be:

2012: 266). Knowledge here is framed as experiential in or transformative processes (hooks 1994: 14; Bishop producers of knowledge in a framework of emancipatory pedagogies, as outlined by bell hooks and Paulo Freire, constructed (Keifer-Boyd 2007: 141). Models of critical critique of the ways in which gender roles are socially correlations here to the strategies of CR, including an emphasis on personal, lived experience and an active acknowledgement of difference. There are contradictory positions. Feminist art pedagogies provide in order to express diverse perspectives and participatory processes focus on ways to be ‘socially useful’, positing this use-value against the traditional purview of aesthetics (2012: 313-314).

In the series We need to talk, participatory processes enabled social engagement with a cross-section of communities, both inside and outside of the art world. The public picnics, workshops and conversations occupied border spaces within and beyond institutional frameworks. Previous iterations of We need to talk were facilitated by art galleries as ‘public projects and programs’. This reflects the ‘educational turn’ in contemporary art – the use of educational formats and models by artists, which is also evident in curatorial and public programs (Wilson and O’Neill 2010). The residency program Doing Feminism – Sharing the World was predicated on the collaborative and dialogic nature of feminist practice and generated a range of workshops and discussions, highlighting the prevalence of these strategies in an Australian context. What had previously been considered a marginal practice had reached such a level of critical visibility in this country that a substantial program of related events was now possible.

Grant Kester conceptualises dialogic works in contemporary art as those which involve ‘open ended forms of participatory interaction’ (Kester cited in Wilson 2007: 118). Dialogic methods were utilised in We need to talk in order to express diverse perspectives and participatory processes. Feminist art pedagogies provide an important framework for this approach. These include recognising the social processes of learning and an active acknowledgement of difference. There are correlations here to the strategies of CR, including an emphasis on personal, lived experience and a critique of the ways in which gender roles are socially constructed (Keifer-Boyd 2007: 141). Models of critical pedagogies, as outlined by bell hooks and Paulo Freire, are also relevant, as participants are positioned as co-producers of knowledge in a framework of emancipatory or transformative processes (hooks 1994: 14; Bishop 2012: 266). Knowledge here is framed as experiential in nature, and posits an alternative, if not radical approach. As Dimitrakaki argues, this form of knowledge would be:

However, she provides the following caveat – ‘this experiential knowledge of the social can be appropriated retrospectively by the capitalist knowledge economy’, including art institutions and galleries (2012: 315).

The form of conversation-based artworks raises the question of documentation in relation to participatory methods. As Claire Bishop describes, so often a secondary audience is reliant on ‘casual photographs of people talking, eating, attending a workshop’, which are inadequate to convey the social or affective dynamic at play in participatory projects (2012: 5). Furthermore, it is precisely these values that are of primary concern in social practices that engage participatory methods; ‘a group dynamic, a social situation, a change of energy, a raised consciousness’ – how can these be captured or represented? (Bishop 2012: 6). In the case of We need to talk, photographs of participants eating food on picnic rugs in public spaces co-exist with text-based works in the form of posters, placards, notebooks, index cards, photographs and banners. The point is that these records of the dialogic process mark the continuation, not the conclusion of the conversation. If, as Bishop suggests, ‘visual analyses fall short’ when considering these practices (2012: 5), other kinds of analytical engagement are required in order to gain deeper insights into their complexity and significance. This reiterates the importance of reflective practice, and the potential of collaborative analysis and writing, when engaging in participatory art and practice-led research.

Frameworks for collaboration

Our research investigates how collaborative methods and dialogic forms of art-making can operate as contemporary social practice in an explicitly feminist way. As Aagerstoun and Auther observe, core feminist strategies developed in the 1970s included community-based participation, collaboration and CR as tools for empowerment, and to:

 [...] subvert the myth of individual artistic genius, use art as a teaching tool, mitigate the isolation of women artists in the art world, and uncover and underscore previously hidden aspects of women’s lives (2006: viii).

Collaboration has been a foundational method in feminist practice, however, it is not an uncomplicated one. As thinkers, artists and creative practitioners, women are often battling to establish their own distinct identity in difficult circumstances, and collaboration offers the opportunity to move (at least temporarily) beyond this battle for self-assertion and enter into a dialogue with others that can be mutually affirming. Feminist collaboration also requires participants to accept and work within a framework of diversity and difference. Gil Coleman and Ann Rippin characterise their collaborative
approach to research as ‘highlighting mutuality, and explicitly pointing to the different sorts of knowledge that partners in the collaboration bring’ (2000: 576). This model of collaboration highlights the co-production of knowledge, and the respectful negotiation of different perspectives that leads, not to any easy consensus, but rather, maintains a feminist space for active dissent.

In 1995 bell hooks advocated for the importance of feminist networks and spaces, arguing that:

[...] consciousness raising groups, gatherings and public meetings need to become a central aspect of feminist practice again. Women need space where we can explore intimately all aspects of female experience (1995: 639).

This call resonates with Lisa Bloom's conception of feminist networks, emphasising dialogic models that are context rich and collaborative in nature (2003: 21). If, socially-engaged art is a 'tool for change' (Badham 2010: 88) and participation is conceived of as 'a politicised working process (Bishop 2012: 2) – the direction of that change and the way it is achieved are equally significant. As Janna Graham aptly describes, the history of feminist art practice is characterised by motivations of care, while agitating for change:

Within the history of feminist practice, we have this kind of duality and friction between an interest in care and an interest in 'The Fight'. I think that this kind of discomfort; this uncomfortable terrain is a feminist history that's interesting to reclaim because it doesn’t choose one over the other. It doesn’t say, ‘we’re doing proper politics’ or ‘we’re caring for the community’ (Crean et al. 2010: 152).

Likewise, Aagerstoun and Auther emphasise both the critical and affirmative qualities of feminist activism. In their collaborative account, ‘Considering Feminist Activist Art,’ they characterise feminist activist art as critical, positive and progressive:

[...] by positive we mean work that takes a stand, expressing its maker’s faith in achieving results or positing alternatives; by progressive we mean a belief in the feminist tenets of equality and inclusiveness, a better world free of sexism, racism, homophobia, economic inequality, and violence (2006: vii).

Doing feminism suggests the dual purpose of socially-engaged practice – to activate spaces for feminist dialogues and subsequent action; and to foster and negotiate these relational spaces as communities of care, where difference is respected and the move to cultural hegemony is resisted. CR strategies provide a useful feminist tool to contest dominant discourses (Weedon 1987). However, as bell hooks identifies, additional tools of analysis are required in order to understand the social structures and systemic issues at play (1984). The localised context of such conversations, which are often limited to already known networks, limits the diversity of experiences and potentially contributes to the marginalisation of such groups (Naples 2003: 183). The danger of a persistent cultural hegemony is also imminent – such that the ‘dominant culture uses education, philosophy, religion, aesthetics and art to make its dominance appear normal and natural to the heterogeneous groups that constitute society’ (Miller and Yudice 2002: 9). Despite these limitations, dialogic processes and consciousness-raising strategies, ‘remain central for the development of oppositional discourses and feminist praxis’ (Naples 2003: 201).

Conclusion

Feminism both informs and frames contemporary social practice in the visual arts in a number of significant ways. As Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner, Nancy Princenthal and Sue Scott pointed out in 2007, ‘the feminist art movement mounted an attack on some of the most ingrained assumptions about art and artists’ (2007: 13), including the myth of the male, heroic genius, the autonomous art object, and the individualistic nature of the creative process. The interruption of many of these assumptions made the plurality of contemporary art possible, however the ongoing contribution of feminism to contemporary art is still often overlooked or misrepresented. Our creative practice research has consistently used reflexive and discursive strategies to resist the characterisation of feminism as a passé historical moment, and reclaim its potency for political understanding and social engagement. This approach has drawn on the legacy of CR strategies of the second wave, and rethinks these in a contemporary context, reclaiming the ‘relational’ or ‘social practice’ space in the art world as an explicitly feminist one.

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This article explores the practice as research process through reflection on the development of a transdisciplinary work entitled *Tasting Words*, undertaken by a multidisciplinary team of researchers from the Creative Industries Faculty at Queensland University of Technology. ‘Conceived, worked on, and completed simultaneously rather than separately’ (Brien 2006: 7), the work is the product of the dialogue that takes place between the creative practice and the underpinning conceptual and theoretical frameworks that it draws from: digital liveness, sensory substitution and community engagement. Borrowing from the tradition of ethnodrama (Saldaña 2005), it is an exploratory experiment in using art processes and product to reflexively investigate outcomes of a creative work. In order to best capture the dialogic processes and outcomes, the work is presented as an ethnodramatic script.

**Introduction**

Artists are inherently creative practice researchers. They may not use the Practice as Research (PaR) framework to formally structure their experiments, creative interrogations, work in progress showings and reading around the idea or impetus for their artworks but they are no strangers to reflective practice cycles and seeking feedback from audience members and critical friends. When artists become artist-scholars – that is, when artists enter the world of academia through postgraduate study or employment in tertiary institutions – they find themselves placing the artwork in conversation with theory to form a symbiotic relationship between both fields of knowing and meaning-making. As such, the dialogue between theory and practice represents what can be described as a ‘shift in the creative researcher’s thinking’ (Haseman and Mafe 2009: 215). The making and the artwork no longer exist within their disciplinary field, rather they are intrinsic to the research process and the approach, and the resulting outputs require appropriate academic scrutiny (ibid.). The *Tasting Words* project team consists of an animator, a theatre director, a writer, a community storyteller and a theatre-maker who wanted to explore how we could transform the experience of a word through our other senses (sight, sound, taste and smell). The team created a limited, though diverse, collection of experimental components to operate in the space. These components were designed to affect and be responsive to participants’ senses through the collaborative creative process of an immersive, interactive theatre experience presented in the Black Box room, Studio 110 at Queensland University of Technology’s (QUT) Kelvin Grove campus. This article, like the creative practice, offers a sense of the imbrication of form and content.

**Ways Of Working**

The practice-led research undertaken in the project moved across blurring, disciplinary boundaries. As practitioners, we moved continually through three identified phases: practice, including creating the work; theory, to develop criteria, examine conceptual foundations, and consider design; and evaluation, to determine results and formulate outcomes held against criteria (Candy and Edmonds 2010). This structured approach enabled us as practitioners to iteratively consider and weight the research outcomes and associated creative work (ibid.). Where the research is initiated in practice, it facilitates discoveries and insight that emerge as a result of the expertise and experience practitioners bring to the activities they engage in when conducting their ‘creative work’ (Smith and Dean 2009). The development, design and delivery are the result of a process of theorisation and contextualisation (ibid.) as understood from the collective viewpoints of the team of practitioner researchers. The outputs arising from this praxis are characterised by the intermingling of diverse expertise and the site of research, which became ‘a meeting point in-between the performers, the observers, and the confluence of media involved in a performance.
at a particular moment in time’ (Chapple and Kattenbelt 2006: 12).

In order to address the creative and the critical, to develop known from unknown, the team entered the creative investigation with two questions to focus the experiments – what if you could taste, smell or touch words and story? How might this sensory substitution change audiences’ engagement with and experience of written or spoken text? Tasting Words (renamed Senses of Community) is the first stage of a larger project that will connect time/space, words/senses and urban/regional communities. The aim of the project is to create an interactive performance-based artwork that transforms the written or spoken word (text) to be experienced as a multi-sensory performance. This intermedial performance-based work explores the ways in which audiences may be able to experience words through the engagement of other senses beyond sight or sound to expand our understanding of story telling and innovate the processes associated with live performance. It will embrace two interrelated theory fields of digital liveness (Auslander 2012) and sensory substitution (Eagleman 2015). The audience for this work is not determined by age or particular demographic. The work is open in both form and content so that diverse cohorts may encounter and engage with the work. The project received seed funding from QUT’s Creative Lab in 2017 and is concerned with the ways in which digital technologies have and continue to disrupt performing, screen and creative arts. This journal article forms part of the reflective research work surrounding the project.

The project is positioned as a dialogue between creative practice and the conceptual and theoretical frameworks the work draws from (Smith and Dean 2009). The resulting text is communicated as a script that has been constructed from interviews conducted with the research team that formed part of the documentation for the project, put into conversation with imagined realities and theoretical frames to understand both the form and the reception of the work.

Prologue – China Cups on a Wooden Bench

Sandra Gattenhof is cradling her soy flat white in the foyer of La Boite Theatre Company. She is having an informal meeting with Nathan Sibthorpe, a research assistant she has engaged.

NATHAN: Right, a journal article about Tasting Words?
SANDRA: Yes, but remember we’re changing the title – we’re calling it Senses of Community.
NATHAN: Oh yes. That’s right.
SANDRA: Feels like it suits the project more, don’t you think? Especially when it’s about more than just taste.
NATHAN: Sure. And less about words – we’re really focusing on a community.
SANDRA: Exactly.
NATHAN: And this article has to capture what happened in the work-in-progress last year?
SANDRA: Yes. But remember, we’ve already got the transcripts from all of those interviews we did. We can probably use those to introduce the work. I’ve had an idea. I think we should write the article as a verbatim script.
NATHAN: You mean just put the interviews into a script format?
SANDRA: Yeah, with some creative licence. Where it’s a creative practice as research project, I think we should respond with a piece of creative practice.
NATHAN: Sure. But you know it’s dangerous giving me creative licence for something like this.
Sandra raises an eyebrow.
NATHAN: What do you mean?
SANDRA: Where it’s a creative practice as research project, I think we should respond with a piece of creative practice.
NATHAN: Sure. But you know it’s dangerous giving me creative licence for something like this.
SANDRA: What do you mean?
Nathan thinks for a moment. Sandra begins cutting into the slab of steak in front of her. She sees the meat, as Nathan watches. Sandra takes a bite, chews and then realises.
SANDRA: Oh. I’m eating steak? Really? They don’t even serve steak here.
NATHAN: Well no. It’s a café.
SANDRA: Wait. Did this meeting even happen?
NATHAN: Not really. I think it was a phone call.
SANDRA: Right.
NATHAN: But we have met here before.
SANDRA: But without the steak.
NATHAN: The steak’s a metaphor.
SANDRA: Is it?
NATHAN: Could be.
SANDRA: What for?
NATHAN: Couldn’t say. It was kind of just an instinct.
SANDRA: Creative licence.
NATHAN: Yep. But that kind of says something about the project right? Like this whole idea that memory and the way we understand the world is all so slippery. We assume that our senses are just live connections to the world around us, but there is in fact no direct feed between reality and the brain. David Eagleman talks about your impression of the world being ‘laboriously constructed by your brain’ (2009). We are interpretive beings. Sometimes the best way to capture our impression of something is...
with, well, some sort of creativity.

SANDRA: And we can bring that to communities – this kind of creative licence to capture their stories in a totally different way.

NATHAN: Yeah. Because the way we understand our stories instinctively, like our sense of place, it’s not a logical thing.

SANDRA: No. But that’s what’s great about the technology here. We can take these different impressions – a sight, a smell, a sound – and give them direct causal relationships, like an imposed logic.

NATHAN: Well yes, but also the technology can introduce its own kind of chaos and unpredictability. There are rules, but we can install a sense of randomness. To try and capture that strange unpredictability that our brain has.

Sandra nods, taking another bite of steak.

NATHAN: Are you sure you’re ok with me putting words in your mouth like this?

SANDRA: And steak?

NATHAN: Well yeah, fictional steak.

SANDRA: Hey, it’s all an experiment! May as well see what happens.

NATHAN: I could butcher it completely.

Sandra looks down at the steak.

NATHAN: I don’t think that’s what it means.

SANDRA: Maybe it’s a metaphor for how meaty all of these ideas are?

She grins, mid-chew. Nathan notices the pool of red juices collected on her plate.

Nathan takes a deep breath. The café fades to black around him as he reaches for a memory. He lands on a particular day. Like the Ghost of Creative Practice Future, he lurks outside of Studio 110 at QUT Kelvin Grove, on 14 September 2017.

Scene One – Air Conditioning and the Smell of Polished Wood

Donna finishes reading a message on her phone and prepares to re-enter Studio 110. Donna hesitates for a moment, gathering her wits and reminding herself where she is. There is a particular smell to the new Z9 building. Like the fresh leather of a new car, the building came with a freshly polished wood scent that has underscored her transition into this workspace.

Sandra pushes through the studio door all of a sudden, waking Donna from her daydream.

SANDRA: There you are!

DONNA: Yes! Sorry Sandra, how are they going in there?

SANDRA: Great! Lee’s giving them a bit of a tour around the space but mostly people are just happy to spend time exploring the map. I’ve just come out to see if there are any other...

An anonymous colleague approaches Donna and Sandra.

ANON. COLLEAGUE: Oh good, you’re here. Did you guys have a showing today?

SANDRA: Yes. Welcome! Come on in.

ANON. COLLEAGUE: Lee just told me to come down after 2pm.

SANDRA: Oh right, but he didn’t explain it or anything?

ANON. COLLEAGUE: If he did, let’s just say I didn’t quite catch it.

DONNA: This is a project called ‘Senses of Community’. It’s a seed project from the QUT Creative Lab, which is the research centre for the School of Creative Practice in the Creative Industries Faculty.

SANDRA: It came out of an idea across about three or four people who were interested in how we could transform the experience of sensing a word through the other senses of sight, sound, taste and smell. We’re playing with the notion of synaesthesia, which is where one sense replaces another.

DONNA: This is a fairly experimental research piece. But we do have an idea of how it might be applied outside of the lab that we’re working in at the moment. Sandra and I have been interested in thinking about how this kind of creative work could be used in communities, to allow communities to find ways to authentically represent the place where they live.

SANDRA: The big plan is to develop this sort of toolkit that we can take into any community to develop a sense of place through interaction with community members. We’ll find rich ways of incorporating different senses, based on technological ideas we’ve been playing with.

DONNA: For the sake of this development, we’ve been using our local community and Kelvin Grove as a sample place to be explored.

SANDRA: The first thing you’ll see in the space is a large map of the place we’re representing. Kelvin Grove is projected across the floor. But what we’ve done is taken five aerial photographs from Google Earth maps which show the progression of change in the landscape over the last seventeen years. The map represents this place from 2001 right through to the current year.

ANON. COLLEAGUE: Right. I see. And what do I have to do?

DONNA: Well that’s kind of up to you!

SANDRA: We’re inviting you to walk through the map and maybe locate a sense memory somewhere in the floor.
We’ve got a whole lot of craft materials – pens, paper, scissors – and you’re welcome to create an object, to write words, to draw an image or any combination of those three things.

ANON. COLLEAGUE: Okay, I just make something and add it to the map. But I don’t have to explain it or anything?

DONNA: No, there are no rules – your contribution is yours! One of the applications that we’re really excited about is this idea of community consultation. Because consultation is often thought of as arriving at a place, asking a series of questions about what people might need, what their experiences are of particular things and that approach elicits a particular kind of information. But it doesn’t always give a really honest or very thoughtful response at times when people just answer questions. When we apply a much more creative approach to consultation where we start to ask people to give us a sense of how they inhabit a space, the ways in which they remember or feel as though they belong to a place, then you can start to really uncover needs of that community in a way that a series of questions just can’t possibly uncover.

SANDRA: Absolutely.

DONNA: And what that allows then is for communities to show a much more holistic, a much more authentic and nuanced way of representing their place. It also allows people to find a vocabulary of their own, one that they can feel comfortable in telling you what it is that they need. Or what it is that they feel as though is really urgent and pressing in their community. You start to get information that’s just not possible in really traditional consultation methods.

DONNA: Yes, and then the audience get to experience that place using their senses as well. They then feel a little bit more immersed in the experience of somebody else’s community rather than just being told what it’s like to live in a particular place.

ANON. COLLEAGUE: Okay, this is all sounding great.

SANDRA: Excellent!

DONNA: Oh, we’ve just explained it all with words haven’t we?

SANDRA: Well yes, but just forget everything we’ve told you and go inside. Have an experience!

The anonymous colleague nods. They all enter the space. Donna watches her colleague getting lost in the projected map.

Scene Two – Dim Blue Lights and Crisp Stationery

Lee is absentmindedly folding a sheet of paper, lurking at the edges of Studio 110. He’s watching his colleagues immersed in a projected map. Lee is a researcher focusing on generative narratives and community engagement, with a lifting Scottish accent.

Lee watches a colleague sitting at the corner of a map. The colleague is assembling a ramshackle house out of paper. The construction is crude, using sticky tape rather than origami. The colleague shuffles their paper house carefully into position, seeking out the right location on a street where they used to live.

An anonymous postgrad student recognises Lee in the corner and breaks away from the map.

STUDENT: Lee!

LEE: Aw hey! I didn’t see you there – sorry, was completely engrossed by watching this house go up! Here, have a look – what do you reckon that’s a share house? It’s just around the corner from here.

STUDENT: Yeah, probably. And that one over there is where that house burnt down apparently.

LEE: Really?

STUDENT: Yeah, someone was saying – it burnt down and now the land is still vacant. You can see it sort of disappear when the map changes.

LEE: I’ll have to look out for it!

STUDENT: How did you get involved with all this?

LEE: As a creative writer who is interested in digital narratives and how we tell stories that happen off the page, this is really perfect actually. I just got this opportunity to play with really smart people on an incredible idea around how we engage communities. Around storytelling and not in the traditional ways like writing a story or taking photographs. We wanted to do more than that to build meaning around place.

STUDENT: Yeah wow. What else have you seen people doing to the map?

LEE: One person made a map of all the offices on the campus and added bits and pieces to the map to tell their story of their experience at QUT.

STUDENT: Right, that’s L Block over here!

LEE: Yeah, yeah, which isn’t there anymore! It’s been demolished but you can see all of these memories people have from when it was here.

STUDENT: Yep – I remember that weird hallway in between the buildings.

LEE: And you know what was really lovely to see was people talking to each other about the space that they were in. One member of staff who’d picked up his son
from school spent time describing the map to his son. About the places he’d worked and the buildings that he had become attached to, you know.

STUDENT: Oh right.

LEE: The ways that people interacted with the space was really lovely because it became about storytelling for them as well as part of the project. That was really interesting.

STUDENT: Have you guys put anything on the map yourselves?

LEE: No, not on the map. Not yet, because we put our memories into the objects.

STUDENT: Oh?

LEE: Yeah because I think one of the really juicy parts of this project is this idea of transposing the senses. Moving an experience from one sense to another sense. If you touched a thing you saw a different thing or heard something or you smelled something else. It's really about how we experience space through our other senses rather than just walking around taking everything for granted I think.

STUDENT: Which part is your memory then?

LEE: Mine's the one about Room 60. You know it’s become this really formalised, established coffee shop but it used to be this space for students and staff to experiment, to show their works you know to catch up and have a gas over a beer about what they were working on. I've written fragments to recall a sense of that …

STUDENT: Where is this?

LEE: Aye, see that milk jug over there – go and smell the coffee.

The student raises an eyebrow before wandering over to the plinth that hosts a jug of coffee beans. Lee watches eagerly as the student picks up the milk jug. While the student breathes in the fresh coffee beans, an image of a deconstructed cocktail appears on the wall beside them with a burst of music and the words: 'A HUSKY DRINKING DEN ON CARRAWAY'.

The student notices. They put the jug down. They pick it up. The music vamps in again, and more words are added: ‘HANDBEADED BEERS, HOMEMADE GIN’.

The student notices Nathan sitting behind a desk, a computer nearby.

STUDENT: Are you doing that? Did you make that happen?

NATHAN: No, you made that happen.

STUDENT: Right. It’s connected to the object.

NATHAN: Some are triggered by touch or proximity. We used a Makey-Makey kit to set up these interactive triggers. (Makey-Makey kits are so great, they contain interchangeable individual pieces of small electronic circuits all with different functions, so when you link them together, they flash and whirr and beep.) We’re really interested in the idea of non-language-based story or sense memory. How our understanding of places or of narrative can come from different senses, the way that we might remember something smelling or sounding or touching. We’ve used the technology to create these cause/effect relationships between the senses. We have a whole lot of stimulus that responds to our sense memories of place and we’ve tried to link them together in ways that feel right to us.

LEE: Like this one over here – this is a broken par can light from the Woodward theatre, which was decommissioned when L Block was demolished.

The student rests their hand against the metal of the broken light. A rapid montage of colourful imagery appears on the wall. It evolves into an image of rubble.

LEE: That's a montage that Nathan made up of all these images from people involved in the theatre when it was there.

NATHAN: It’s like blurry flashes of dozens of productions over several decades worth of this thriving active culture.

LEE: But then mixed in with these almost disturbing images of what is now effectively a construction site.

NATHAN: Which feels like it is still haunted by the ghosts of all of these shows. And even though the site is an empty mess right now, it’s still hard not to think about all of this energy that was put into the place.

STUDENT: Totally. What else should I touch?

LEE: Aw you have to ring the triangle.

NATHAN: Yes. Ring the triangle.

The student glances around to see a triangle hanging from a bar. They locate the triangle beater nearby and touch it gently to the instrument. A soft ‘ding’ echoes across the room as the whole projected map turns dark.

The colleague with the paper share house appears dumbfounded momentarily, as their street disappears from beneath them. A giant ballerina appears across the floor, slowly gliding through the room. In the darkness, George Michael’s ‘Careless Whisper’ plays until the ballerina finishes her journey and the map fades back into view.

The student giggles, resisting the urge to ring the triangle again.

STUDENT: What was that one about?

Scene Three – Pumpkin Quiche and Whiteboard Markers

One week earlier. The research team is sitting around a cluttered development table in Studio 110. Fluorescent
lighting illuminates a whiteboard covered in tangential bullet points and notepads with assorted diagrams.

Sorin, concealing a sketchpad behind a sheet of cardboard, is a researcher in immersive cinematic storytelling using AR and VR technologies. Recently Sorin got his hands on a new Augmented Reality headset and now when he enters new rooms he can’t help imagining animated content occupying the space.

Sandra, Donna, Lee and Nathan are all eyeing Sorin’s sketchpad with interest.

SANDRA: Alright Sorin, show us what you’ve got as your response!

SORIN: Okay but it’s not finished yet. It’s still a bit rough around the edges.

DONNA: That’s quite okay.

NATHAN: We’re not here to judge!

Sorin unsheathes his sketchpad, revealing a charcoal drawing of a ballerina, mid-dance.

LEE: Oh wow! Look at that!

SANDRA: Beautiful!

SORIN: I looked at the Z9 space and I wanted to capture a sense of the activity that goes on in here. Because when you walk through the building there are always these dancers in their studios doing their work and moving through the hallways. So, I illustrated a dancer.

DONNA: That’s so true, it’s such a feature of this building – there are always people practising their craft that you see in passing.

SANDRA: Yeah, like the acting students loudly quoting Shakespeare.

LEE: Or the music students playing their instruments.

NATHAN: If this is a visual sense, it would be great to link it to a sound maybe.

LEE: Like someone plays an instrument and it triggers this ballerina to appear and dance!

NATHAN: Something like that.

DONNA: Do you think this kind of thing counts as sensory substitution?

SANDRA: Well it plays into ideas of (syn)aesthetics in performance. Synaesthesia is a medical term, referring to a sensory neurological condition, but Josephine Machon appropriated the term (syn)aesthetics to talk about ‘fused sensory perceptual experiences’ in artistic practice (2009: 14). Machon is interested in the ‘aesthetic potential within performance which embraces a fused sensory experience’ (ibid.).

NATHAN: I mean it’s not quite a scientific use of sensory substitution. The neuroscientist David Eagleman explores technologies that convert raw data from one sense to another, in order to augment sensory abilities. Like a vest with vibrational motors that turns sound into touch (Novich and Eagleman 2015). The technology doesn’t interpret the data, but after a while the subject’s brain finds a way to interpret tactile sensations as an alternative to hearing with the ears. We’re not really working in that space, but perhaps our instincts are inspired by similar territory. Like how Machon borrows synaesthesia to talk about that feeling of ‘intersensual’ performance work (2009: 14).

Everyone at the table nods. Lee takes a bite of his pumpkin quiche and considers. He momentarily becomes self-aware of his scripted construct.

LEE: Is that why you’re writing this account as a script?

SANDRA: Yes, there’s something there. Responding creatively means that you’re constructing a bigger sense of the project, not just limited to the facts or the words, right?

LEE: Alright big man, but is this quiche a metaphor or is it just a quiche?

NATHAN: No, I’m pretty sure that one’s just a quiche.

Scene Four – Bright Lights and a Biscuit on the Floor

One week later, the anonymous student is still investigating the interactive installation components during the work-in-progress showing in Studio 110. The student approaches a potted fern and takes hold of a leaf. A distant voice is heard describing their workspace in L Block, where similar ferns could be found.

The voice fades quickly. The student brushes their fingers over a different leaf. Two more voices emerge, from different perspectives, both commenting on the space.

Sandra wanders through the map, eagerly observing the different contributions that have been made by the day’s participants. She notices a biscuit placed carefully over a campus building. No further context is given and she wonders what it could be referencing. The biscuits were intended as light catering but Sandra smiles at the playfulness employed.

The colleague who used to live in a sharehouse notices that the street next to them keeps changing shape.

COLLEAGUE: Oh, they must have widened this street at some point! Every time I try to line up this mailbox, I turn around and the whole street keeps shifting!

SANDRA: Yes, well that’s because you’re looking at five different maps that keep changing. If the landscape is shifting over time, you won’t be able to pin it down!

COLLEAGUE: Five? I thought it kept changing. Do you know which year this one is from now? The street seems wider than I remember here.
SANDRA: Well, I think we might be somewhere between 2007 and 2013.

COLLEAGUE: Between?

SANDRA: That's the trick – the maps are never still, they're always cross-fading between years. It's a really slow fade. You might not notice how the space is gradually changing, but it's always moving.

COLLEAGUE: Right, like time itself!

SANDRA: Exactly. We're never actually looking at a specific year, it's always somewhere between. And it's kind of the same with all of these identifiers, and the place-markers. Our sense of the place is somewhere in between all of these different elements and perspectives. In between five different versions of the map and in between memories from multiple individuals. The sense of the community is hosted in an intermedial space.

COLLEAGUE: And always in flux it seems!

SANDRA: Never finished.

At the other end of the room, the student is fervently tickling the fern, triggering a crowd of voices layered over each other in a cacophony of memory.

LEE has overheard the conversation and approaches Sandra.

LEE: This whole experience depends on in-betweenness really.

SANDRA: It does. It's all hosted in intermedial space. Chiel Kattenbelt uses intermediality to refer to these 'co-relationships between different media that result in a redefinition of the media that are influencing each other, which in turn leads to a refreshed perception' (2008: 25).

LEE: And this whole event is about refreshing our perceptions of the place. Sandra, would you call this an intermedial performance piece then?

SANDRA: I think it could be considered a performance, yes. It really plays into these notions of digital liveness. Traditionally live performance occurs when performers and audience are both physically and temporally co-present. But the digital is not bound by these conditions.

LEE: Right, the digital elements are the performers?

SANDRA: Yes, in a way, but the other participants are also performers for each other. Their co-creation of the space is framed as a part of the performance of the work. The literature suggests to us that digital liveness is heightened when users engage in the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content, which we refer to as co-creation (Bruns 2007: 3).

LEE: But this idea of liveness comes from a theatre background? What does it mean when we start talking about being 'live', and digital?

SANDRA: Well, Philip Auslander’s nascent definition of digital liveness refers to ‘the creation of the effect of liveness in our interaction with computers and virtual entities’ (2012: 7).

LEE: When we trigger these sense objects, it feels like it's ‘live’ then?

SANDRA: Yes, because it’s happening in shared time and space. But the research also identifies two core attributes to characterise the experience of rich digital liveness: Presence and Immediacy.

LEE: Presence, because we’re here together.

SANDRA: Yes, but Gadamer proposes that presence is about more than just being there at the same time as something else – he says 'to be present is to participate' (2004: 121).

LEE: Makes sense. Our presence is heightened when we’re consuming a digital object, and participating in its creation.

SANDRA: When we can fully devote our attention to the event on or around a screen.

LEE: What about immediacy?

SANDRA: Immediacy stems from the power of being always connected, and an urgency that '… we gain access through liveness to something of broader, “central” significance, which is worth accessing now, not later … ' (Couldry 2004: 356). It's the feeling that 'whatever is being shown now must, relatively, have a higher status than what is no longer being shown' (ibid.).

LEE: And that immediacy is what makes people want to participate, right?

SANDRA: It helps.

LEE: Because ultimately for this to be here, means it also has to be packed down at some point. It’s got a sense of event to it – it’s happening now, but we’ll pack it away soon.

Lee and Sandra both check their watches. The work-in-progress installation has already been open for two hours and there is limited time left. They both survey the room, admiring the paraphernalia that has accumulated in a brief window of time.

Scene Five – Tangled String and Flicking Switches

It is the morning after the work-in-progress presentation. The research team has assembled inside Studio 110 to consider the results of the experiment before clearing the space. Without the projectors turned on, the floor is strewn with an assembly of string, paper, objects, origami, scraps of cardboard, and bits of food. There is a strange order to the clutter, but it is nonetheless cluttered.
Nathan powers up the projectors and the team can consider the map once more.

DONNA: I was really delighted with the responses yesterday. It showed that evoking memory through the senses is a really powerful way for people to understand the place that they live. They started to think about smells and sounds and taste and textures that they associated with the place, it brought up really visceral memories that they were able to try then to translate to other people.

SANDRA: It was wonderful to see people come in and be really interested in that map and be very excited to use the craft materials to add their own memory or marker of place.

DONNA: When I look at the map now, after people have finished placing their different memories on the map, what’s really interesting is the way in which people have very different experiences of exactly the same location. Not just the entire map but particular places on the map. For some people there are really happy memories, there are memories that feel attached to something creative for them and then for other people there are memories that are a little bit more painful.

LEE: I think what it does, is it helps people de-familiarise themselves enough with the situation that they’re in so they can start to look at the place that they live or the place that they work in really different ways. And you know I think when people start to do that, that’s when life becomes a lot more interesting. You know you remember stuff and you connect things that you never connected before and it becomes more meaningful for people. I see this map almost like a social topography you know and from that you can see these layers of narrative building up that you wouldn’t have just in writing a story.

DONNA: Also, it was interesting for me to see how much people really engaged perhaps with the natural environment as well. I don’t think about this necessarily being a place with lots of animals but a number of people had bird memories and some really funny great bird memories that reminded me of that as well. But also about the cats that are on the campus.

NATHAN: It’s kind of about taking the essence of the idea and multiplying it by the logistical possibilities.

SANDRA: I’m really interested in seeing this floor map as an interactive surface. You can interact with it by touching it or moving through it and it somehow responds.

SORIN: What I’m seeing is exploring virtual memories with animation, I think animation lends itself quite naturally to this virtual idea. For example, we can look into the past history, we can look into the history of the place going all the way back to the military barracks and we can just juxtapose that with the current creative activities that are going on around Z9 and the campus in general as well. I think there’ll be an interesting tension and contrast that will create something interesting for us, a new experience through layered historical data and memories.

NATHAN: Ultimately, I think the big ambition is that what people would contribute on the floor could be very quickly transformed into something that is tactile or interactive in the same way that our trigger objects were. That within our infrastructure, we could responsively link sensory experiences on the fly as they emerge. Then it’s this evolving installation, this dynamic beast that is constantly growing to accommodate new memories.

Everyone nods. The team takes a moment to watch the map slowly shifting on the floor. Donna places the paper curlew back down in its place, being careful to line it up as it was arranged.

DONNA: I really enjoyed seeing people have a very different idea of the same place that I come to every day than I do. It reminded me of what a really diverse place this is. It’s easy to just think that you know it and you know it really well until people start telling you how they experience it. Then you realise that you don’t know it as well as you think you do which is a really great experience.

Lee edges towards the interactive objects. He rings the triangle once more and everyone indulges in a victory lap for the Careless Whisper Ballerina.

Conclusion

This project – and subsequent article – attempted to playfully disrupt expected and accepted ways of doing and reporting research. Not just as an exercise in experimentation but as an investigation of methods through which we can creatively and authentically capture data, and compellingly share research as widely as possible. For many communities, being asked directly about their experiences and opinions can be viewed as intrusive or intimidating. However, when we invite people to share how they experience their communities through senses and memories we are able to gather rich data that allows audiences outside that community to both better understand those experiences and to reflect on their own similar experiences. Arts-based researchers aim for an understanding of universal conditions and predictable outcomes where possible, as well as using methods that can be adapted and repeated by others while also encouraging variation and even uniqueness in both methods and outcomes (McNiff 2011: 387).

In this work, the research team very much allowed themselves to be participants, co-creators, observers, artists and researchers. When we as researchers insert ourselves – however subtly or explicitly – into our work we acknowledge that we can never be objective, neutral scholars. Even more importantly, when we attempt to
uncover avenues and languages through which to explore and articulate the experiences of communities we work with, we acknowledge that we are not the experts. At most, if we are lucky, we are guests and documenters.

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Recording
“You grow to love what you create, pouring out of your mouth.” – Jane Wong

It goes around and around but that is not it; we put it on to breaststroke through voice. A voice imprinted, grooved, calling out across surface silences housed inside. Perhaps a tiny plunk, a wee bone of a quartz pebble rolling through dusty dirt, in the grand scheme of everydayness. Yet, lovers rise for no less than a beloved breath, and that first dada echoes down centuries, that first mama, too, speaks cell memory—cave walls and the beautiful pictograms stored there, a hand once reached out to scratch. It is that wild, that necessary to existence.

Melanie Faith, Pennsylvania, U.S.A
I’ve just switched off the engine, killing the lights, when someone’s banging on the car roof. A rangy young man in ragged shorts and t-shirt appears beside me, brandishing a bush-knife and wrenching at the locked door, his mouth open in a fury of yelling. In front, a boy about sixteen holds a rock as big as his head, poised to plunge it through the windshield. The lamp on my cabin’s front porch – so near yet so far – backlights a third youth squinting through the passenger window’s dark glass. He has a gun.

It’s not if; it’s when.

Seconds ago, Robert’s car was pulling in beside mine. Now his headlights arc in reverse, briefly sweeping my assailants. His tyres crunch urgently towards the gate which the security guards are dawdling over: two men in black uniforms manoeuvre the rusty cyclone-mesh as Robert shoots the gap. Abandoning me. Three more uniformed men lounge outside the gatehouse, one lighting a cigarette, one checking his pockets. Looking at anything but the young men pummelling my car and shouting Wallet! Laptop! Phone! So much for the safety of the research compound. Security has been paid off.

Wait – wallet?

Realisation penetrates my shock. They know about the team of white people staying in the compound. Presumably they know we’re two women and a man. Tipped off that the professor is dining out in Moresby tonight and will return after dark, alone, they’ve assumed it’s the man: fit, forty and six foot three. That a professor driving a car could be female hasn’t crossed their minds. They’re trying to intimidate Ted into handing over his valuables so they can scamper into the night, avoiding the risks of confronting him outside the car.

They’ve underestimated Ted, I think. He’d be climbing out, taking them on, notoriously unpredictable Second World War hand-gun and all.

Crash! The youngest raskol smashes the rock down, and the windshield shatters like ice. Impatient with my inertia, they’re coming through. The engine stalls as I fumble the key. I could lean on the horn – Maddie and Ted will be in their cabins – but making them rush out would only endanger them too.

Wait – wallet?

I lean my forehead on the cabin door-frame. That stings. I put my fingers up to check, and they come away sticky.

It’s early June when I first fly to Port Moresby and then to Aro with Ted and our PhD student, Maddie. Somehow a group in Aro, Southern Highlands, has heard about our embryonic sexual health program, and they want to be the pilot site. Sexually transmitted diseases are rising alarmingly, writes someone called Nadia Awa Tane. Her signature block identifies Nadia as a Community Development Officer with an oil company. We do not have a large budget for community work, she writes, but we can provide accommodation and transport. Please help us.

Aro Airport is a paddock enclosed by a mesh fence. The crowd pressed against it must number in the thousands. Market day, explains a woman in a Médecins Sans Frontières t-shirt as we stand on the grass beside the strip, waiting for our luggage. But there’s always a crowd to see the plane come in.

Médecins Sans Frontières are pulling out, the woman tells me, until the government provides police at the hospital. It’s a magnet – people looking for cash, drugs, blankets. Tribal groups fighting over the spoils. Patients are safer anywhere else. The tall African man beside her shakes his head, his black skin making his shirt mobile that’s out of credit. Now go, go – the police are coming! I make my tone urgent, as if I’m anxious on the boys’ account. I don’t have a wallet or laptop – quick, run! Get out of here! My arms make shooing motions as if they are giant chooks.

A protesting shriek announces that the compound gate is being hauled open. Two sets of headlights sweep the curtains.

Then I’m inside, expecting the door to thump open before I can shoot the bolts. In the dark I rush to check windows, fearing the sound of smashing glass.

I lean my forehead on the cabin door-frame. That stings. I put my fingers up to check, and they come away sticky.

*
look white even through layers of dust. I have served in thirteen war-torn countries, he says. I have never seen anything like this place.

The sun, brighter than it is hot, deepens the harlequin colours of blankets spread haphazardly on the ochre ground, black and red umbrellas printed with yellow birds-of-paradise, vivid costumes of mingled western and traditional dress. Almost every face is marked with a different creation in red and yellow, set off by bones through septums and strings of beads wrapped round necks, arms, ankles. I breathe in trampled grass, cook-smoke, dust, manure, body odour. It all seems peaceful enough.

The security guards let Nadia and her group of twenty or so inside the fence to greet us with a welcome sign: Aro says no to HIV & AIDS. Children's slim arms stretch to wreath our necks in flowers. Nadia hugs us like old friends. She introduces her husband James, the district police officer, and statuesque women's leader Miriam. We're whisked off to a church hall packed with pastors, youth leaders, women's leaders, health workers, teachers, chiefs, elders. Men sit one side of the room, women the other. Nadia invites Pastor Charles to bless the gathering and everyone bows their heads as he prays in his own language and then, haltingly, in English. Amen.

We settle into the complex business of explaining our program as simply and respectfully as possible, in a strange place full of strange people, when we don’t really know yet what it will be. We speak English which Nadia translates into tok ples.

At first there are no questions or interjections. We know, I begin carefully, that Papua New Guinea is a country with many languages, many cultures, rich traditions of dance and storytelling. We – I gesture at Ted and Maddie – are Australian community theatre workers. At home, we use techniques developed over decades in Australia, England, Canada, the US and South America, for education and community-building. I pause to give Nadia time to catch up. Everyone’s listening to her, but their eyes are on me.

Our project has funding to explore how these forms of community theatre might combine with Papua New Guinea’s performance traditions. We hope to create with you new forms of drama that help people understand HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. I keep my voice calm and confident, not sure what the reaction will be. It will be at the mention of STDs. We are told that everyone has heard of HIV and AIDS, but most people don’t understand what they are, or how these diseases travel, or how to protect themselves.

As Nadia translates this, heads nod and voices murmur assent. Encouraged, I indicate Nadia and Miriam. Aro has asked to lead the way in developing this new program. We are very excited and grateful for this offer.

A man asks a question. Nadia listens courteously, turns to me and nods. He asks, how long will you stay?

I incline my head towards the questioner. We think a simple exercise, I say quietly so as not to break the spell, to explore the space around the window. This is a very smooth exercise, I say quietly so as not to break the spell, but it teaches us to pay close attention to another person.

The sun, brighter than it is hot, deepens the harlequin colours of blankets spread haphazardly on the ochre ground, black and red umbrellas printed with yellow birds-of-paradise, vivid costumes of mingled western and traditional dress. Almost every face is marked with a different creation in red and yellow, set off by bones through septums and strings of beads wrapped round necks, arms, ankles. I breathe in trampled grass, cook-smoke, dust, manure, body odour. It all seems peaceful enough.

That's the theory. The hall is hot and airless, sun soaking through the corrugated roof. It feels like a hundred years since I woke this morning in my bed in Brisbane. I'm a professor, I've worked with community theatre practitioners in a dozen countries, and I have no idea whether this project can succeed. Everything depends on the people in this hall.

A man begins to speak in tok ples. He continues far past the point where any Australian audience would be fidgeting and trying to interrupt. When he finishes, there is a respectful pause. I glance at Nadia but her gaze is on the man as she nods appreciatively. A woman speaks, and again there's a pause before the next person takes their turn. A stately, formal conversation. At last Nadia turns to me.

People are not sure what you mean by teaching through drama. Here, a teacher stands in front of the class and the children listen. A pastor delivers a sermon and the congregation attends. A dance troupe performs and people watch. But you are talking about something else.

I run my eyes over the group. The room's arranged for the kind of interaction Nadia has described – rows of seats, no stage space to speak of. And a lot of these elders are elderly. What experience will make my words resonate?

I murmur to Ted and Maddie, who nod. I ask for two volunteers, a man and a woman.

A large woman we've been told is the community nurse motions a much younger woman, barely out of her teens, towards the stage area. I shake hands with Jenny, who says she's a health-worker, and match her with Maddie. The men are shyer: eventually Nadia's husband James steps forward to stand opposite Ted. Nadia helps me give instructions: the pairs are to maintain eye contact. The volunteer must mirror the team member's movements, so precisely the audience can't tell who's mimicking who. Maddie and Ted begin the exercise in the usual fashion, slowly raising one hand.

Too late I realise mirrors are probably rare in this town, besides those on vehicles. But the volunteers have grasped the idea. Maddie and Ted begin to use both arms, stretch, bend their legs, turn toward and away from their partners in a slow-motion dance. The familiar magic of watching this exercise seeps through me. The crowd, too, is entranced.

Now, I instruct softly, without any interruption, without letting us see the change, switch leaders. Nadia translates and both couples make the transition as smoothly as birds landing on water. They become braver, Jenny and Maddie lowering themselves to the floor, James and Ted mounting an empty pew, stretching to explore the space around the window. This is a very simple exercise, I say quietly so as not to break the spell, but it teaches us to pay close attention to another person.
To respect, watch, trust, lead and be led. It creates a connection we can feel, in a way not possible through words alone.

I see people nodding, and speak a little more loudly. We believe in the power of theatre for communication and transformation. Drama engages head, heart and body: I touch my forehead, chest, hips, and Nadia mirrors me almost as closely as the demonstrating couples. If you tell someone how to stay healthy, they may forget or not believe you. But if their whole being learns through action, they will act on the information in real life.

I have the performers shake off their tension and take a bow, to enthusiastic applause. Audience members take turns to stand and address my team, in tok ples or tok pisin, a few in English. They thank us for coming to Aro. They are pleased we have come to help with a serious health problem. They nominate participants for our program and ask God’s blessing on our work. The session ends with another prayer, hugs and handshakes and cups of sweet tea and photos on the hall steps. By the time we climb into a troop carrier and trundle out of town towards our night’s accommodation I’m exhausted, but reassured what’s brought us here is not some arrogant delusion about making a difference. We’ve been invited and welcomed. Now to play the mirror game: respect, watch, trust, lead and be led.

We stay at Wambuli, a compound owned by Nadia’s employer, and travel mostly in company vehicles. The road-builders also have a compound in town and the foreman invites us up to the Highlands Hotel for lunch. The only western hotel in the district, with the only employer, and travel mostly in company vehicles. The senior staff of the oil and gas companies.

Andrew the foreman lives with his wife Penny in a tiny upstairs flat at the complex. Penny’s delighted to come along on the trip to the hotel, confiding as we bump along the highway that she hasn’t been out of the town since she arrived. I sit in the front with Andrew and Penny: Maddie and Ted are in the back with half a dozen men, two more utes travelling behind us. Penny says the most she’s seen of local culture has been a couple of trips to the market by the airport. It’s better if people forget about serious health problem. They nominated participants for our program and ask God’s blessing on our work. The session ends with another prayer, hugs and handshakes and cups of sweet tea and photos on the hall steps. By the time we climb into a troop carrier and trundle out of town towards our night’s accommodation I’m exhausted, but reassured what’s brought us here is not some arrogant delusion about making a difference. We’ve been invited and welcomed. Now to play the mirror game: respect, watch, trust, lead and be led.

Every ex-pat in PNG is either a miner or a missionary. He points his fork at me. Which are you?

Penny says, Babe!

Maddie draws herself up. We’re neither. We were invited here. It’s a partnership.

Andrew cocks a derisive eyebrow. You getting your PhD out of this, princess? Journal articles and that? He shakes his head. Youse don’t even know which youse are. *

In the Dash 8 back to Moresby, this first trip, Maddie nudges me and indicates the man in the window-seat: mid-thirties, sandy beard, wearing a khaki shirt with the logo of one of the gas companies. Maddie murmurs a name that means nothing to me. She rolls her eyes, leans across, says Hi Alan. Apparently he’s a Rugby League star from Queensland, retired the previous year.

Alan tells us about the football clinics he’s running for teenage boys in the Aro basin: Not much for kids to do around there. I’m about to smile when he says without irony or apology, We give them what they want so we can take their gas.

So. Miner.

Jenny stands with a ball of red wool in her hands. Her character is Lucy, wife of Sam, who is being played by youth pastor Nikolas. Does Lucy sleep with Sam? I ask the group. Broad grins – of course the young wife sleeps with her bridegroom. Jenny keeps hold of the wool’s end and tosses the ball to Nikolas who catches it gingerly, uncomfortable with its signification.

Does Lucy sleep with anyone else? I ask, poised to return the wool to Jenny. But the group wants an innocent Lucy. She is only sixteen, Chief Tomas declares with authority. She has not slept with anyone else.

What about Sam? I prompt. Sam is a different kettle of fish. Nikolas blushes as the group invents half a dozen partners, each of whom takes the floor and holds the wool. There is much merriment in inventing partners for these six women – husbands, boyfriends, casual encounters. The room is soon cats’-cradled with red wool. There is much merriment in inventing partners for these six women – husbands, boyfriends, casual encounters. The room is soon cats’-cradled with red wool and laughter, but people sober as the point is made: Lucy is faithful to her husband, but through him she’s had sex with everyone else in the network. What if the HIV virus finds her? What if it passes to her baby? Miriam asserts that if Lucy becomes ill, she is not to blame. This is a new perspective: there are murmurs of surprise and agreement. One woman has tears running down her face. I ask for ways to ‘cut the wool’, and as each person is assigned ways of changing their behaviour – abstain, be faithful, use condoms – the net is snipped. Sam, Lucy and their unborn baby are all saved.

I speak softly to Nadia at morning tea. They talked about women trading sex for food or transport. I say carefully. No-one mentioned rape. No-one talked about the men’s responsibility. It was all down to the women.

Nadia pats my arm. She says, a garden does not grow in a day.
The drivers play a game on the Highlands Highway, Eric tells me. He's looking straight ahead, big hands light on the wheel, elbow out the window. Over the hill-crest the sky is thick white, sombre morning light casting no shadows. It is called Sixteen Sixteens. Along the road they try to have sex with sixteen girls under sixteen.

I think of my niece in Brisbane. Maddie looks like she might throw up. I want to be sceptical: surely some boss somewhere is tapping his watch, waiting for the truck? And would a man be physically capable of that much sex in a day's drive? But even if the story's apocryphal, a joke, it's a nasty one. Eric isn't smiling. And while the HIV prevalence rate nationwide is one percent, in places it's over sixty. Most of those places lie along the Highway.

Nadia is taking us into the mountains, to a camp near the head of the new gas pipeline. We crest a hill to find the valley below scabbed with rectangular khaki tents and demountables, a scribble of dirt road winding through them. Around the camp's outskirts - tattered lace caught on vegetation - hundreds of tiny shacks dribble off into low forest. Poles and ropes support motley walls improvised from brush-wood panels, tarps, palm-leaves, blankets, sheets of corrugated iron. It's the largest conglomeration of human dwellings I've seen outside of Moresby.

Nadia catches my eye. About two thousand people, she confirms. The men earn kina - it draws the women. I look again at the camp's square lines and see a magnet thickly dusted with iron filings.

We're met by a rope-thin woman with fervid eyes, who tells me in one breath that her name is Stella, she's HIV-positive and works as a sexual health educator. She's with a dozen or so women, mostly young. The men of our party - Eric the driver, James and young Raven - head deeper into camp with cardboard boxes of male condoms and two wooden penises.

Maddie and I follow Stella into the forest, smiling at the women who join our procession. Many carry infants. A swarm of children buzz around their legs. The circus has come to town.

We stop in a clearing beside a fresh-smelling stream: us and a couple of hundred women and children. I do logistics rapidly in my head. Time's short: Nadia wants us back at Wambuli before dark. We play balloon games to relax the group and make them laugh, and demystify and destigmatise condoms. Then we perform our demonstrations of male and female condom use, encouraging our audience to share this new knowledge with their friends: left hands are useful for mimicking genitalia, minimising the need for props. We field questions translated by Stella: many are about persuading men to let the women use condoms. Stella has useful tips on this and we encourage the women to share their own experiences - what's worked, what hasn't. The children join in the games and watch the demonstrations with wide eyes, another generation coming on like a wave. We're supposed to be an inoculation but the size of the camp, the women's desperate poverty, make me feel like a bandaid.

When we rejoin Eric and James at the troopie, Eric's grinning. He holds the wooden penises in one hand and shakes his cardboard box upside down to show me it's empty. We gave them all out, he says happily.

That should last a few rounds of Sixteen Sixteens.

A man said to me, he prefers skin-to-skin. Eric rubs a hand over his own bald head. I told him, there is no pleasure if you are dead. He mimes sliding a condom onto one of the penises. Use this skin to save your skin! He laughs, delighted with his own joke. I hope the questioner took it seriously.

Chief Tomas's bush-knife is discreetly tucked under one of the church pews at the back of the hall. He covers the blade in public as people wear clothes, for decorum, because a naked weapon or body signals aggression and vulnerability: demands response. He unsheathes the blade each afternoon for the hour-long walk back to his village.

He confides in me as we dunk biscuits and watch the women plucking chickens for our lunch: two weeks ago, my men killed ten men from the next village. They only killed two of us. Chief Tomas shrugs. In a tribal fight, a chief must pay compensation to his men's families, and that chief cannot afford so many pigs. He must kill me for revenge, and also to restore his ... He stops, stuck for the word. Honour? I suggest. Status? Tomas nods. Yes, those things.

Can't you just pay him the pigs so he'll stop hunting you? Maddie's eavesdropping. Chief Tomas gives her a fatherly smile. It does not work like that.

We're playing the game Postcards, and Ted has asked for a tableau of 'an unhappy village'. Each person in turn walks into the stage-space, says who they are and assumes a frozen posture. So far we have someone passed out with a bottle in hand, someone hunched under the influence of drugs, a minister preaching to an empty church. Chief Tomas touches Miriam's elbow and suggests something. Miriam slips off her wrap and shoves it up her shirt - I see, she is pregnant. They take the stage. Tomas draws back his fist and Miriam cowers before him, arms wrapped round her head.

They've forgotten to name what they're doing but we all see it. The air in the room tightens. I can't take my eyes off Tomas: raised eyebrows, flared nostrils, drawn-back lips. The hard line of his arm, bent knees storing the full force of his body, ready to follow that fist. Here is a man who chops other men down, who's told me he personally killed three in that last bloody tribal fight.

James, the policeman, steps forward. I think he will lay a hand on Tomas's shoulder - be father, brother, preacher or friend, remonstrate with the man's fury. But James kneels and cringes: a frightened child witnessing his father's attack on his mother. No-one else seems to know what to do. In the silence, Tomas's expression is the most powerful voice in the room.

Then half a dozen women surround Miriam, arms wrapped round their heads in the same helpless posture.
I’ve been told other women will protect the victim by absorbing blows with their own bodies. When we debrief the exercise, poses relaxed but everyone still in place, I ask the human shield to move aside. We all contemplate again the space between Miriam and Tomas.

When a man beats his wife, Nadia explains, it is considered a family affair. No-one will interfere.

What if he kills her? I ask baldly. Everyone looks at me with limpid eyes.

If he kills her, Miriam says in a clear voice, they will be sad. But they won’t do anything to stop it.

Normally we would clear the space and shake off this energy before creating ‘A happy village’. But I don’t want some pie-in-the-sky idyll. From here, I say, gesturing around the tableau, how do we make this a happy village?

I want to know where they think the point of transformation might be: in Tomas, in Miriam, in the women, in the missing male figure. A whisper in my mind: someone will ride into town bringing something from the outside: armloads of cash, a religious crusade, a new politician. But they know better.

The minister kneels to pray. Someone sits beside the drug addict before creating ‘A happy village’. The drunk looks at his bottle as if he’s never seen it before, then tosses it aside. People begin to work gardens, pump water, hang clothes. Everyone is smiling. Miriam and Tomas make eye contact and take each other’s hands. James knee-walks over to Miriam and clasps her round the legs, eyes squeezed tight in childish ecstasy.

What changed? I demand when everyone is in place. What made the difference? People look at one another. They know what I’m asking, my voice on the edge of terseness – transformation like this doesn’t just happen. It’s Tomas who answers. Togetherness, he says seriously. People must talk, and work together.

There’s nothing twee or easy about the feeling in the room. Everyone’s nodding. I see the smile on Nadia’s face and allow myself to share it. The contribution of tools and materials we bring is valuable, but the architects and builders are the people around me. For one rare moment, our presence here feels like a simple thing.

How does this feel? They look from one to another. Bad, says Eric. Jenny looks up from the floor and agrees. Then Ted asks the women to stand and the men to kneel. There is laughter, and again he asks how they feel. We are out of balance, Chief Tomas declares. Stand up then, Ted says cheerfully. How does this feel? The men and women look at each other, grin, chorus that this feels better.

Ted’s not a drama teacher for nothing. His tone sends a quiver down my back, especially as I happen to be looking at Nadia’s bandaged hand, held awkwardly out from her chest. No doctors at the hospital: she must be in agony. This, Ted says, is an equal society.

The morning of our last workshop for this trip, Nadia turns up with a bandage round her hand. She looks pale and upset. She won’t tell me the story so I draw Miriam aside.

Miriam’s lips tighten in disgust. Nadia’s father’s fourth wife is a lazy woman who cannot pay her children’s school fees. She could get a job, but she doesn’t. Nadia has a job, so the woman insists Nadia should pay.

I recall that Nadia has two school-aged children of her own to provide for. Miriam nods. But Nadia’s father was drunk last night. He fights with his first wife, Nadia’s mother. When Nadia said she would not pay school fees for his youngest children, he flew at her with his bush-knife. Aiming for her head.

Horribly, Miriam mimes what happened: Nadia’s hands flying to protect her skull, the bush-knife slicing down, striking off her index finger. It’s lucky her eight year-old son was there, Miriam says matter-of-factly. She sent him to fetch her own bush-knife, so she could fight back. Otherwise she would be dead.

Ted’s running the exercise: he hasn’t heard this story. I think about stopping him. But he’s calling everyone into a circle, alternating male and female, and Nadia joins them. I let it run. When Ted asks everyone to hold hands, Nadia takes James’s hand with her left and positions her right arm across her chest so Raven can hold her elbow.

Ted asks all the women to kneel on the floor. How does this feel? They look from one to another. Bad, says Eric. Jenny looks up from the floor and agrees. Then Ted asks the women to stand and the men to kneel. There is laughter, and again he asks how they feel. We are out of balance, Chief Tomas declares. Stand up then, Ted says cheerfully. How does this feel? They look from one to another. grin, chorus that this feels better.

The night before we’re due to fly out again, we stay at a research compound. Robert Pawai, head of drama at the university, has invited us to dinner at the Crowne Plaza, saying he wants to talk strategy. But Maddie has a dodgy tummy and Ted’s asleep when I’m ready to go, and I don’t have the heart to wake him. Mindful of all advice I set out in daylight, car doors locked and windows up, not stopping till I’m in the hotel carpark.

Sepik masks and stuffed birds-of-paradise supervise our dinner. Robert talks about historical tensions in the Papua New Guinean theatre scene. I’m so exhausted I’m falling asleep in my chicken kiev. Another time, Robert’s lecture would interest me, but right now it seems tangential to our work with the community at Aro. I’m fairly sure Robert has no specific knowledge of Aro’s performance traditions, and the longer I sit here trying to hold my head upright the more I’m convinced he’s showing off to the Australian academic. And he’s disappointed I’m not Ted. As he finally lays down his knife and fork, suggesting dessert and coffee, I’m draping my bag over my shoulder. Will you follow me back to the compound, for safety? I muster a smile, hoping he doesn’t read my precaution as an invitation.

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Spaces, Sauce and Schedules: A photographic journey of aged care

TRICIA KING, EVONNE MILLER AND GERALDINE DONOGHUE

This project used a mixed-methods photographic approach of practice-led, social documentary and participant photo voice to provide insight into the daily lives of seven older Australians living in one residential aged care facility in Brisbane. The ten selected photographs vividly capture residents’ lived experience of aged care, evocatively conveying routine moments, memories and the mundane as they retain personal control and identity through their behaviours, daily patterns and the personalisation of their rooms. The photographs are grouped into three core categories: the importance and sentiment of valued artefacts (spaces); the ways in which residents maintain personal preferences in the living of their everyday life (sauce); and coping with physical decline and associated medicalised aspects of daily care (schedules). As most people know little about aged care and hold very negative views, the ten images generated through this research are designed to help reframe expectations and help trigger a community-wide conversation about ageing and life inside aged care.

The role of photography and our relationship to photo taking as a cultural practice has transformed in the last century. As a culture, we are now visually literate – from childhood we are exposed to photographs in a wide variety of contexts and arrangements. This enables us to develop the techniques required to draw meaning and social value from images and to situate the images themselves as historical artefacts (van Dijck 2008; Sekula 1981) in both individual and collective social memories. Implicitly drawing on principles of qualitative social research, which seeks answers to questions about the social world (Wagner 2004), documentary photography strives towards the empirical creation of images that work to reveal and represent cultural and social life. Whether driven by a specialist documentary photographer undertaking investigatory work or produced by participants themselves as a way to highlight important personal moments, the exploration of lives, identity and what it means to have a visual presence are all questions that a visual medium such as photography is equipped to explore. Social scientists have widely used photography as a medium for ethnographic research, allowing the camera to become a social actor that facilitates the flow of shared experiences (Ardevol 2012). Rather than shying away from the camera and preventing it from intruding, creative practice such as documentary photography and participant-led photo voice (giving the camera to the participant to create images) positions the camera to be a tool of investigation that openly facilitates questions, answers and conversations.

One place where the camera has seldom entered is aged care, which is perplexing given the rapidly increasing older population and the subsequent growing demand for aged care services in nations such as Australia (ABS 2008). Of the little imagery available, it is frequently negative; forging an inseparable association with fragility, dependence, poor health, sexual inactivity and a life lonely and excluded from society (Bai 2014). This is unfortunate, because although the phenomenon of ageing raises many confronting social and political issues such as housing, healthcare, workforce and financial concerns (ABS 2008), older people continue to live meaningful lives (both inside and outside of aged care) and their lives need to be more visible in our culture.

Indeed, given that images form part of the social construction of age, social gerontologists such as Mike Featherstone and Michael Hepworth urge for the generation of positive images to ‘not only empower the older people to achieve a better ageing process but also persuade the rest of us to throw away negative age stereotypes’ (1998: 30). Photography is able to penetrate the socio-culturally overlooked. By producing vision from behind closed doors, it is a valuable means of both capturing the lived experience inside aged care and potentially challenging the limited, often stereotypically negative views held by the wider community.

This project used a combination of practice-led, social documentary photographs in combination with participant generated photographs known as Photo Voice (Wang
and Burris 1997) to capture and highlight the lives of seven older Australians living in one residential aged care facility in Brisbane. These residents were participants in a larger semi-longitudinal three-year ethnographic case study investigating the ‘lived experience’ of aged care (Inside Aged Care 2018). The residents were invited to work with the photographer in producing a series of portraits that would show the wider community what it was like to live in aged care and additionally were given cameras to produce their own images. It was envisioned that having the camera themselves, without the research team overseeing the image creation, residents could facilitate a more intimate narrative which would draw upon their own nostalgic recollection of personal histories as they select deeply personal moments to highlight (Lewinson et al. 2012). The research team engaged the residents in visual methodologies: the photographer and first author (TK) spent time with each resident, developing rapport and informally discussing their life histories and experiences in aged care while they were being photographed in their rooms or other important places in the facility. The other members of the project team (EM and GD) provided guidance on the participatory photographic element, instructing the residents how to operate the camera and giving guidance on the scope of the project. Informal interview techniques, in a casual conversational tone, enabled residents to share intimate memories and reflect on the highs and lows of their new life in aged care both during the photography session and when they worked reflexively on their own. This composite framework of life in aged care, fueled by the dual lenses of the residents and of the documentary observer, allowed the project to deeply investigate the lived experience through a multi-layered narrative.

From over two hundred images that form part of the series, the twelve selected photographs in this article vividly capture the lived experience of life in aged care, powerfully and evocatively conveying memories, routine moments and the mundane. Three powerful patterns, speaking to the ways in which older adults maintain and cope with challenges to personal identity in aged care, emerged: the value and sentiment of artefacts and rituals (spaces); the ways in which residents maintain personal preferences in the living of their everyday life (sauce); and coping with physical decline and associated medicalised aspects of daily care (schedules).

**Spaces: Artefacts in aged care**

A move to aged care is a deeply personal and life-changing event which can impact significantly on residents’ physical, emotional and social experiences of life (Miller et al. 2014). Many people enter aged care following a hospital stay or other extruding circumstances that mean they are no longer physically or mentally able to remain at home. Often, extended family members are left to pack up their homes and select a few personal items to bring with the resident to their new space; few are able to do this process of packing and moving themselves. This lack of control over their environment and belongings can cause feelings of discontent, displacement, disillusionment and despair (Manzo 2003; Shippee 2009; Lewinson et al. 2012; Lustbader 2014). Having typically left their previous home and community during an unplanned time of crisis, the possessions and mementos (artefacts) that residents are able to bring to aged care are greatly valued and often enable residents to retain their sense of self and identity (Miller et al. 2014). Often, the objects or images are the only reflection of their personal histories in this new environment. Thus, their presence allows re-immersion of their past into their new daily life, offering an interconnectivity that helps to preserve self-identity. These artefacts formed a central discussion point between the researchers and the residents and many of the images captured in the photographs highlight the relationship between the residents and their objects – be it a clock which reminds the resident of their mother every time it chimes (photograph one) or a lifetime’s collection of spoons brought in from a former home (photograph two). In contrast, many of the participant images focused less on a connection to objects and more on a connection to the environment, perhaps as a way to highlight a personal narrative that does not involve an accompanying oral narration (and thus has a greater accessibility to a potential viewer). Mildred’s photo voice reveals the importance of her patio as a space she is able to recreate inside aged care and her need for spaces to continue to experience important relationships which form her identity (photographs three and four).

**Sauce: Keeping Identity in aged care**

The photographs highlight the importance of personalisation and individuality in the rooms of each resident, not only through the objects selected when moving into aged care but also in the ways in which residents maintain personal control in an environment that often caters more to collective, rather than individual, experiences. Daily patterns and choices, whilst perhaps mundane and taken for granted by those living outside of communal environments such as aged care, allow the residents to maintain their sense of identity. As detailed by Featherstone (2010), when people experience disconnection through their changed relationship to the world through a process such as ageing, retaining connection to key identifiers of the self becomes a critical component to maintaining health and activity in later years.

We can see this in the case of photograph five, which shows a ‘secret stash’ of BBQ sauce. During the documentary session, Patrick comically glanced around shows a ‘secret stash’ of BBQ sauce. During the documentary session, Patrick comically glanced around to ensure nobody else was looking and then gestured...
to open his closet door to reveal a scrunched-up dressing gown and a number of bottles of BBQ sauce. His condiments and his Gai Waterhouse books had become prized possessions in this phase of his life; the sauce specifically signalling his attempt to maintain some semblance of autonomy and control over an aspect of care that challenged personal selfhood. Prior to moving into aged care, Patrick had been a keen chef. Consequently, while he had choice from a range of food offered at the facility, he found it difficult to adjust to eating food that had been mass prepared. The documentary photograph and Patrick’s own image of ‘scrambled eggs Wednesday’ (photograph six) work together with the ‘stash of sauce’ (photograph five) to tell both an intimate and observational narrative about the ways residents respond to aspects of institutional living that inherently challenge personal taste and identity.

Schedules: The institutional, medicalised, communal environment of aged care

This photographic series, from what residents bring with them through to their own maintenance of identity, concludes with six images that highlight the challenges associated with living in an institutional, communal environment, along with the reality of physical decline and receiving associated medicalised care. Loss is an inevitable experience for many residents, as they cope with changes in their physical capacities, the experience of bodily decline, medicalised care or new feelings of isolation. Images from both the researcher and the residents highlight a sombre undertone to residents’ daily experiences. For example, photograph seven shows Jeff confined mostly to his room; his reflection in the window hints at the outside world but is overshadowed by the reflection of equipment needed for his care in daily life. Photograph eight echoes this confinement and isolation with an image taken by Edith who is confined to her chair with bandaged feet, her rows of knitting almost demarcating time as they grow. Photograph nine shows the staff member checking off medication and photograph 10 shows a walking aid within arms distance of the resident: a reminder that home in aged care is not just about living life, but also about receiving medicalised care. The expanse of the shared areas, which is similar to hallways seen in hospitals and rehabilitation facilities is similarly echoed in researcher and participant photographs with both photographs 11 and 12 illustrating the common room at different times of the day. Whilst the two images are vastly different in their level of occupation, both images convey a sense of endless waiting – all the tables are empty and the residents appear to be sitting there and waiting to be moved to the next scheduled part of the day (meals, bathing or rest).

As the twelve shortlisted images on the following pages show, the combined images of the residents and the observer work in parallel to show a layered narrative of life in aged care. TK’s role as a documentary photographer enabled her to pause, observe, interpret and create a reflective visual narrative, whereas the residents provided intimate moments which highlighted their own interactions with their experiences of aged care. The photo voice technique allowed residents the tools to photograph the strengths as well as the problems within their lived community; working in parallel to thus complement and contrast with the observer perspective of the documentary photographs (Wang and Burris 1997). The emergent pattern of images around spaces, sauce and schedules allow significant insight into the often overlooked but important daily experiences within aged care, allowing viewers to see aspects of their lives which form critical components of their mental, physical and emotional identity.

These images along with others from the project, 37 in total, were first publicly exhibited in February 2017 at the State Library of Queensland (and subsequently shown in other venues and presentations over the following 18 months) and all images are freely available online and downloadable from the project website (Inside Aged Care: 2018). Many people do not see inside the walls of aged care until a family member is moved there (or indeed they move to aged care themselves) and many do not understand the lived experience. The images generated through this research are designed to – in a small way – reframe preconceived ideas and/or expectations and help to trigger a community-wide conversation about ageing and life inside aged care.

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Photograph one: Mum’s clock (researcher image).

Photograph two: Marie’s spoons (researcher image).
Photograph three: Mildred’s patio (resident image).

Photograph four: Mildred’s building (resident image).
Photograph five: Hidden sauce (researcher image).

Photograph six: Scrambled eggs Wednesday (resident image).
Photograph seven: In my room (researcher image).

Photograph eight: The knitted rows (resident image).
Photograph nine: The daily routine (researcher image)

Photograph 10: Constant companion (resident image)
Photograph 11: Waiting (researcher image)

Photograph 12: Waiting (resident image)
References


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The Last Lightning

White vines; upside-down branch of a heavenly tree; spectator who watches the lovers behind the scene, who, boundless, waits for their shouting to stop; meteorological rogue; inauspicious cousin of crimson clouds and waterspouts—you are gentle, trenchant, taking the time to ensure no thunder follows. When finally you descend, after the downpour, after gusts, you twist as the signature of a minor god, the ink blue-white, hot, coating the rooftops. Blessed be the moment you’re bestowed the will to announce your arrival with erasure, to calm the night, leaving the insomniac stunned by his window, the photographer drenched on a high ground, in the quiet, all clicks futile.

Marco yan,
Hong Kong
This paper investigates the role of play in university-based communities of practice. We consider play through the lens of Bogost (2016), as an exploration of the possibilities afforded by a structure or system. As educators and creative practitioners in a contemporary music university program, we draw on collaborative approaches that act as precursors to our students’ future work in more naturally occurring social domains. Through the design of musical interventions that are intended to foster joint creativity, our students are encouraged to play with the possibilities available within a system, with the idea of a system being considered from a social standpoint as well as from a technical standpoint.

Building on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) conception of communities of practice (CoPs), we use Hoadley’s (2012) definition of ‘knowledge-building communities’ to differentiate explicitly designed learning communities of practice from endemic CoPs. We consider knowledge-building as an experiential activity, and argue that play is an essential component of any knowledge building. We believe that fostering a ‘whole of student’, or holistic, approach in our teaching reinforces the transformational role that music can play. In this paper, we discuss an exemplar of this approach, Flow, a student-run, collaborative, interactive musical experiment. While this project did not overtly target pre-existing external communities such as with other ‘community music’ projects, we designed it as a pedagogical strategy to encourage inclusive and collaborative approaches, processes, and technologies as a normative aspect of our students’ creative practice.

Music is a social practice. As a form of cultural expression, it shapes and is shaped by our societies, reflecting and extending our cultural understandings and the social worlds we inhabit in all their diversity. While musical texts are continuous with their socio-temporal origins, the definition and value of music remains dynamic and evolving. As a creative activity, it requires a shared understanding of the codes and conventions of what constitutes ‘music’ itself. Music making (and its reception) depends on a ‘network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produce(s) the kind of art [musical] works that … [music]… is noted for’ (Becker 1982: 34). Contrary to the pervasive Western notion of music creation as the act of an isolated, singular genius, the majority of music making across cultures and history has been conceived and performed collaboratively. Musicians may sometimes practise alone, but, usually they play together.

This paper investigates the role of play in university-based communities of practice. As educators and creative practitioners based in a contemporary music university program, we draw on, and use, a number of collaborative strategies for students in our practice-based curricula. This involves the creation and curation of project-based activities as ‘knowledge-building communities’ (Hoadley 2012). These communities support practice scenarios that act as precursors to our students’ future work in more naturally occurring social domains and communities of practice. This approach often involves co-teaching within cross-disciplinary activities to facilitate a sense of intellectual and creative curiosity to extend students’ practice. The discussions and projects resultant from collaborative, practice-led, and student-driven work have served to expand our own approaches to teaching, creative practice, and research.

Our music course prioritises a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) model focused on experimentation and the creation of new work rather than a traditional conservatoire approach that favours specific, technical excellency and existing repertoire. We endeavour to foster confident and creative musicians who are capable of bringing new work and practices into the world. Whilst still emphasising and teaching musicianship and musicology, we encourage students to draw on a form of ‘common sense epistemology’ that strengthens expertise necessary
within a community of practice by bridging the things in the mind with ‘an external world of observable things and actions’ (Bereiter 2005: 7).

To evidence our approach in practice, we draw here on a music installation/performance work that demonstrates how a large-scale active music space can work in the co-creation and/or co-construction of knowledge. The project, Flow, from Queensland University of Technology’s (QUT) 2016 CreateX showcase, constructed a collaborative and interactive musical experiment created and facilitated by undergraduate music students. The project was designed as an extended work that invited the general public to interact and influence the music being produced throughout the day. Students worked together to keep the installation/performance running as an open, continuous, multi-room, eight-hour musical work.

To context this approach and project, we begin with an overview of the concepts that underpin our pedagogical approach. This literature informs our approach to designing student-led, project-based activities as knowledge-based communities of practice and as spaces of play and experimentation. We then discuss the Flow project to reflect on how this approach might demonstrate a vision for future frameworks of creative collaboration in a higher education curriculum.

Social Learning and Creative Practice

Communities of practice

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) early work on defining the concept of Communities of Practice (CoP) recognises the importance of social interaction in learning, and the key role played by community in both individual learning and collective knowledge-building. Wenger further states that communities of practice ‘have been around as long as human beings have learned together’ (2011: 3), and by using the term in this descriptive sense, he contends that by identifying such communities, we can better perceive the structures defined by engagement in practice. Wenger’s later work with his wife argues that like any structure, a community of practice will have borders, or boundaries, that delineate different communities of practice within a ‘landscape of practice’ (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2014: 13).

Østerlund and Carlile highlight the importance of sharing knowledge across boundaries, with knowledge sharing ‘defined by the specific differences and dependencies in practices existing within or across communities’ (2003: 1). Similarly, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2014) differentiate between expertise in practice (competence) and awareness of the multiplicity of different practices across a landscape (knowledgeability). As such, projects that aim to invite outsiders into a community of practice do not need to focus solely on the expertise of the practice; they can also work to build knowledgeability of the domain, and how different communities must navigate different boundaries. Scholarship in organisational theory points to communities being effective environments for sharing implicit knowledge (Davenport and Prusak 1998; Brown and Duguid 2000, 2001; Huysman and de Wit 2002) and the importance of community in fostering creativity (Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer 2014).

Communities of practice in higher education

Whilst there have been efforts to develop community support systems within the higher education setting (Koch 2003), Mercieca notes a perceived deficit of communities of practice in higher education settings, claiming the uptake has been ‘surprisingly limited’ (2017: 4). We can only surmise that this conclusion is drawn in relation to a perceived lack of uptake in explicitly designed communities of practice, as her very definition of the phenomenon (built on Wenger’s work) defines these communities as ‘voluntary groups of people who, sharing a common concern or a passion, come together to explore these concerns and ideas and share and grow their practice’ (2017: 3). Hoadley (2012) identifies that, over time, the term community of practice has evolved from a descriptive term to a prescriptive term. He clearly delineates the difference between a community of practice as ‘an endemic phenomenon that occurs naturally’ and ‘one that can be explicitly created and fostered’ by using the term ‘knowledge-building community’ to delineate communities of practice that have been explicitly designed for the purposes of learning and teaching (2012: 291-292). It is for this reason that we use Hoadley’s knowledge-building community to demarcate explicitly designed communities of practice.

Although Mercieca (2017) argues that there is a lack of appetite for the use of communities of practice as an instructional strategy within academic institutions to explicitly develop knowledge-building communities, she overlooks the knowledge sharing that takes place within the collaborative assessment models that now dominate university curricula, particularly in Arts-based courses. Strategies such as project-based learning engender communities of practice within undergraduate cohorts, and encourage practice-based learning and knowledge-building. We also contend that communities of practice emerge naturally in the normal course of academia, as well as from everyday undergraduate student life, and while the codification of these naturally forming communities may help to identify and describe key attributes that can then be used to assist in their deliberate development, a perceived lack of communities of practice in the higher education setting should not be conflated with a deficiency of these communities on campus.
Mercieca’s claim ‘that academics are often isolated in their practice and individualism, rather than collaboration, is the norm’ (2017: 4) similarly runs counter to our approach towards music practice and pedagogy. This is evidenced by our co-teaching approach in many units, shared management and coordination roles across several key units in the curriculum, and intensive modes of teaching and assessment work that see staff and students from multiple units working together on a single project. Such projects balance and expand what Brown et al. refer to as ‘common knowledge and distributed expertise’ (1996: 159), with differing expertise in the community recognised and valued, and this expertise contextualised within a larger project setting.

Collaborative activities are entirely typical in our experience as creative practitioners in music, and this is also evident in co-teaching approaches that build coursework through cooperation, shared dialogue, and shared practice. Designing coursework that provides us with the opportunity to get our ‘hands dirty’ with students allows us to bridge the gap between practice and pedagogy, and foster the emergence of communities of practice across both the student cohort and the academic and discipline-specific technical staff. Such collaborations increase ‘knowledgeability’, in Wenger’s definition of the term, and assist in the creation of Headley’s ‘knowledge-building communities’. Students may not become expert practitioners in unfamiliar disciplines, but they will be exposed to techniques and technologies used across a broader landscape of practice, and become more aware of how to navigate the boundaries encountered across these different landscapes. This form of knowledgeability also assists us in our aim to develop explicit knowledge-building communities, as well as further undergraduate inter- and cross-disciplinary work within our School of Creative Practice. For without knowledge of these various landscapes of learning, how can we expect students to work either within or across them?

Kenny extends Wenger’s concept to specifically interrogate the field of music education. She deploys the term, Communities of Musical Practice (CoMP), to focus ‘on the ways that distinct communities make meaning from and interpret their shared music-making experiences’ (2016: 11). While useful, Kenny’s focus still lies in traditional conservatoire approaches to music and forms of ‘community music’ that are located in marginalised communities where there is the goal of explicit transcultural exchange. Our research, practice, and curricula are focused on emergent musical forms; we explicitly create technologically mediated music productions and performances within a collaborative studio model. This approach became necessary as we shifted away from individualised music lessons to a group learning environment, but these more interactive and often cross-disciplinary projects have become a strength of our program. These collaborative projects also provide an opportunity for our students to engage in social learning, with a focus on shared creative output rather than individual expertise.

Much of the work around the role, and importance, of social interaction in cognitive development builds on concepts first introduced by Vygotsky in the 1920s (Brown et al. 1996). In addition to recognising the importance of social interaction, Vygotsky forwards the theory of a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This concept has been hugely influential in educational theory, particularly in scholarship around early childhood learning, with ZPD used to examine the development of written skills in children (Steward 2012), the importance of mentorship in improving interpersonal action synchronisation (Kleinspehn-Ammerlahn et al. 2011), early learning therapy (Lyons 1984), and childhood musical development (De Vries 2005). ZPD has also been further developed to provide a theoretical framework secondary school teaching practice (Fani and Ghaemi, 2011; Warford 2011) and to examine how this theory can be effective in mobile and low-resource education settings (O’Sullivan and Seabra 2016).

Roth and Radford conclude that all teacher-student interactions are mediated by the connection between emotion and cognition, that the idea of a ZPD is itself emergent from teacher-student activity, and ‘as an outcome of joint activity, the object/motive of activity emerges as the real outcome of the learning activity’ (2011: vii). As such, when incorporating creative practice into teaching activities, our role as educators is to curate environments that motivate students to engage in activity that will best serve to develop an understanding of their individual ZPDs. Play can act as one source of motivation in incentivising creative, collaborative work.

Music, play and spaces of experimental practice

Existing codes and conventions define the parameters in which musicians can play, whether adhering to the existing rules or pushing against these rules to extend not only their own musical technique but also what actually constitutes music. Chase and Hatschek have questioned the efficacy of traditional Western lecture-essay-examination models, arguing for music education programs that encourage collaboration and ‘integrative learning experiences in and beyond the classroom’ (2010: 125). This is central to our approach to teaching. If music is developed through consensus and experimentation, from creation to reception, then music teaching and learning should be interactive and dynamic – we would say, playful. In a practitioner sense, play is made possible under certain conditions. The restrictions
implicit to or imposed on a system demarcate the playing field and encourage specific and new ways to test the constraints of those limits. By testing such constraints in collaborative settings, practitioners can develop a greater understanding of a domain, build individual knowledge, and move incrementally towards greater expertise through a zone of proximal development.

To Vygotsky, play was a ‘leading source of development in preschool years’ and claimed defining play on the basis of pleasure to be incorrect (1966: 1). Hakkarainen et al. build on Vygotsky’s theory of play in early childhood, developing interventions to assist in cognitive development through collaborative activities that focus on ‘joint creativity and dialogic improvisation’ between children and adult mentors (2013: 216). We can reframe this narrative, dialogic focus to be considered instead in musical terms, and widen the scope of such an intervention to encompass all learners, allowing us to define the types of musical intervention common in our professional practice and teaching practice as a form of play focused on joint creativity and musical improvisation, that is to say, play situated within a community of practice.

Veblen described the idle curiosity of scientific activity as being ‘closely related to the aptitude for play, observed both in man and in the lower animals’ (1906). Bogost (2016) contends that play is possible within any structure. Arguing the importance of limitations and boundaries in all forms of play, and that fun is an emergent emotional state resulting from play, Bogost contends that:

Play is not only fun, not only a child’s activity, but also exploring the free movement present in a system of any kind, where system might refer to a social situation as much as a machine assembly … it is better to think of play as a condition of the universe rather than a human activity – everything is ‘at play’ (2016: 113).

Navigating both social and technical forms of play is a necessity in any community of practice, and knowledge-building communities must consider both the social and technical domains.

Play can surpass the acts of individual actors; it can create the illusion of something larger than the sum of the players. Anyone who regularly attends musical events will most likely have had a moment where they witnessed a symphony orchestra, jazz quartet, rock band, or even a solo performer that seemed to be creating a sound that transcended the individual(s) involved. This ‘illusion’, a form of gestalt, where the whole appears to be greater than the sum of the component parts, is a result of the harmony of play across the musical acts of several actors. Csikszentmihalyi would term these individual states ‘flow’ (1992), a state we argue is emergent from play. Indeed, Csikszentmihalyi’s idea of ‘flow’, in addition to the metaphor of small (musical) tributaries flowing to a greater river, inspired the name of the creative project discussed later in this paper.

Considering systems of music production, such as the active musical space presented in this paper, we therefore situate play as the exploration of the possibilities afforded by certain arrangement of music-making conditions, based both in the social and material worlds. Play is as necessary in a jazz jam as it is in a recording studio. It is fundamental to the interaction between three other people in a small rehearsal room for the first time, just as it is to an individual navigating a new music-making software package for the first time. It is through play that we explore the possibilities of a technology and its domain, and find new approaches to the endeavour of working a system.

We consider someone a good player when they stretch the limits of what we think possible within a system; no matter if they are a football player, guitarist, or a child playing hide-and-seek, we intuitively see successful play as someone extending or pushing boundaries whilst still staying in the recognised structure. This structure can be physical or social. As Bogost argues,

Play entails a paradox: it is an activity of freedom and pleasure and openness and possibility, but it arises from limiting freedoms rather than expanding them. The boundaries of a playground, the contents contained within them. Their structures. (2016: 115-116).

In Bogost’s understanding, play is autotelic; an activity in and of itself, with the purpose of discovering the ways in which one can work the workings of a system, operating it in a way that lets us discover something within it (Bogost 2016: 114). Play can be a purpose, and play can be purposive. It necessarily involves an acceptance of limitations, a consent to the structures present delineating the playground, but it can also open up adjacent possibilities and innovative leaps outside the constraints of the system. Play is, therefore, also a property of the agencies afforded to the participant. Such agencies are often determined by traditions, rules, and expertise found within communities of practice. Through the act of play, with a purpose in and of itself, the outcomes will be determined by the resources and restrictions endemic to a given location of practice. In the collaborative, cross-disciplinary contexts that are central to our school’s teaching philosophy, practices and constraints are expanded so that contiguous possibilities and serendipitous findings are more likely to reveal themselves.
If we consider play as a condition of objects and situations (Bogost 2016: 119), then we can consider the term to encompass all activities in the production of music. We can play an instrument, play in a band, or, in the case of the *Flow* project, play the floor of an entire building. Each locus of play offers a series of possibilities and limitations, some obvious or extrinsic and others undefined or intrinsic. Therefore, in addition to determining tools available, playing a space requires a tacit understanding of all the potentials and restrictions that are inherent in this locus of music making, an understanding of the possibilities of the space and of the social group, and how these delineate the boundaries of possible practice. Communities of practice can inhibit innovation, when the community exists to preserve established practice, with the act of play bound by these traditions, or motivate innovation, when the act of play is borne from experimentation.

Therefore, we attribute play as a motive for all music making borne from idle curiosity and not pragmatic efficiency, which is much of the music making that has led to new forms, new technologies, and emergent scenes. Communities of practice may then emerge to codify these practices, or can be designed as knowledge-building communities to teach such practices. With this framework, we can design programs to develop expertise in a domain, and knowledgeability of the various practices across the boundaries of the landscape of practice found in technologically mediated creative work. A primary aim of such a program is to encourage students to become active participants in local communities of practice, to look beyond the often-insular institutional activities that populate an undergraduate creative practice degree.

**Practice in Play: The *Flow* project**

To understand how these concepts are integrated in the creation and curation of curriculum-embedded communities of practice, we now reflect on an applied example of this approach. The outward-facing interactive musical event, *Flow*, premiered on 28 August 2016. This project was anchored to a capstone undergraduate music production unit in the music department in which we work at QUT. The work was enacted across the fifth floor of the School of Creative Practice’s newly opened state-of-the-art building, and incorporated three recording studio control rooms, five live performance rooms and two rehearsal rooms. Links to documentation, audio excerpts, and video footage of the event are available through the online links in appendix A.

*Flow* had a number of research aims. From a technical standpoint, the project served to investigate whether a new technology, Ableton’s *Link* protocol, could be used to synchronise a number of digital audio workstations across a large scale, multi-room environment. From a social learning perspective, the project built on Eno’s ideas around the use of generative music to model ways in which societies could function better (Hattenstone 2017). The playful or experimental element of the project came in the group’s openness to seeing how the overall musical structure would shift and change when left in the hands of an ostensibly ‘unmusical’ and technically-inerudite public from outside the student CoP. Open questions informing the design of the project included: Would a number of the novice participants align their engagement with the technology to attempt to achieve a unified musical output?; Would these novice participants musically interact with the students or limit their participation in the face of existing relationships and overt musical know-how?; and, How might musical participation take place without looking and feeling like an educational exercise for the students and the general public?

**Project Overview**

To realise the project, we developed what was essentially a musical playground with third year music students. Encouraging the general public to engage with the project and assuring them that their interactivity would not yield any ‘wrong’ or unmusical outcomes, the students and teaching staff designed constraints that gave the community ensembles and audience members musical ‘boundaries’ that could be pushed against, or played with, but not broken in such a way that the overall timing and tuning of the ultimate music output would be compromised.

To achieve this, each studio was locked to a central clock using Ableton’s *Link* technology. This kept all eight individual musical streams in time throughout the day, with ten rooms synchronised together, unifying the tempo across every music workstation. The varying and multiple performances were kept in tune by limiting the harmonic structure available to each ensemble or iOS app to a predetermined pentatonic scale. Music students collaborated with local and international artists to create and capture a series of musical excerpts. Some ensembles and performers had material pre-prepared, others simply improvised within the predetermined scale.

The general public were then given the opportunity to shape the musical piece with a series of iPad apps and a modular synthesiser to create electronic elements to sit alongside the live recordings captured in the first four studio spaces. Intuitive drum machines and pattern sequencers on a number of iPads enabled participants to then contribute to the work. While the proliferation of such tablet-based apps now provides readily available access to electronic music production tools, the technical complexities associated with modern music production practice still seems to intimidate many young musicians.
Through an act of play, an interactive audience who might ordinarily exist on the periphery of music technology were also mentored in the use of music technology. This resulted in their ZPDs shifting as their skills improved incrementally, reinforcing what was possible with readily available, easy-to-use music software, and what could be realised with further practice and expertise.

Through the Flow project, QUT Music students worked collaboratively towards an open and yet cohesive musical end goal. In essence, the project was a cross between a recording session and a live performance. What began as an opportunity to investigate the technical possibilities of new music synchronisation software became a knowledge-building experience as students were tasked with working together to develop and deliver the project. The intention was to also make the project a potential learning experience for the public invited to interact with the students. In this way, Flow attempted to deconstruct and demystify the music production process, by inviting external participants to connect with the act of music making through play.

**Flow: Reflection**

This project created a landscape of learning (Wenger 2011; Wenger-Traynor 2014). It allowed novices in the field of music technology to directly engage with typical configurations of equipment used to capture and edit music performances. It invited them to imagine how many musically isolated performances could be balanced to create a cohesive, singular musical experience, and align individual involvement within this active musical space. The aim of the project was to invite a public, unfamiliar with the domain of the recording studio, across a boundary and into an active community of practice. In this sense, we, as creative practitioners, leveraged the resources available to us in a large institution to develop a space that would drive active music participation, through play, from members of the local community traditionally unaccustomed to using the kinds of technology and configurations of spaces designed to produce music.

Flow saw QUT Music’s CoP engage with a number of external groups: the general public as well as local school ensembles, local and international artists. The project allowed students to develop further technical expertise within their own community of practice, as well as prepare them for a more complex engagement with their own practice and their potential futures with music. On an institutional level, we leveraged institutional resources to develop novel approaches to the development of large-scale active musical spaces within the new studio facilities in the School of Creative Practice precinct.

**Conclusion**

Projects such as Flow highlight the benefit of incorporating play into explicitly designed knowledge-building communities focused on creative practice. Experience is a poor motivator for innovation and novelty. Nevertheless, play is not a requisite for every community of practice; established practices based around tradition and repertoire are well served by communities that protect and sustain recognised, codified practice. However, whilst such traditional master-apprentice relationships may be appropriate in such conservatoire music educational models, a course focused on the creation of new work is better served by a community that facilitates learning through participation. Free from more formal constraints, such participation can encourage experimentation, or play, and encourage practice that treats existing boundaries as a border that can be pushed a little, rather than a wall that cannot be crossed.

Whilst a proliferation of digital music making tools now affords anyone with an interest in music production the ability to realise their musical impulses, the evolution of these tools has also culminated in music that can be entirely realised by a machine. With our emphasis on a more holistic approach to education and creative practice, we think it is the responsibility of any practitioner or educator working at the intersection of emerging technology and creative practice to advocate for the importance of the social and communal role of such practice.

More affordable digital music production tools may have enabled musicians to self-realise entire works in isolation, but in many cases, this has simply shifted these communities online (Salavuo 2006; Waldron 2011). The global reach of the internet has also enabled collaboration to take place simultaneously across multiple sites allowing individual musicians to collaborate virtually (and transculturally) with musicians in a range of sites while physically performing in geographic isolation. However, while technically possible (and accessible), these collaborations lack the essential human experience of people in a shared physical location working together. Interestingly, even the companies providing the internet resources for online collaboration have recognised this. For example, Dropbox have recently partnered with Australian record label Future Classic to launch a Los Angeles based creative incubator and recording studio. Such a partnership suggests there is growing acknowledgement of the important role social interaction has to play in collaborative creative activity, even by companies that create online services that ostensibly allow creative practitioners to avoid these in-person, social interactions.
Through cultivating an emphasis on collective knowledge, we aim to reinforce the value of building knowledge through curiosity, communication and collaborative approaches. Although our community of practice model is currently contained within a university program (and the institutional setting of the university itself), our goal is to expand these practices into more complex social settings where participation through musical engagement might have a stronger reparative and/or advocacy role.

References
Chase, D. and Hatschek, K. 2010 ‘Learning that is greater than the sum of its parts: efforts to build an integrative learning model in music management’, *Journal of The Music and Entertainment Industry Educators Association*, 10, 1: 125-147.
Merceica, B. 2017 ‘What is a community of practice?’, in J. McDonald and A. Cater-Steel (eds) *Communities of Practice: Facilitating social learning in higher education*, Singapore.

Appendix A
Links to detailed documentation of the Flow projects are included below:

QUT Createx 2016: the technology and design behind Flow
https://qutcreatexflow.tumblr.com/
Overview of the process of Flow
https://vimeo.com/180837845

Timelapse of Flow
https://vimeo.com/198768641/6171bdd1f4

Flow recording excerpt one

Flow recording excerpt two
https://soundcloud.com/yanto-browning-qut/flow-recording-excerpt-2/s-si1mg

Flow recording excerpt three

Authors
Yanto Browning is a Brisbane-based academic, record producer, and musician, with a strong background in technology in music performance and production. With twenty years of studio experience, Yanto has produced several hundred records for a broad range of Australian bands and artists, and has also worked as a composer and producer of music for film and contemporary dance. He has researched, developed, designed and produced several interactive musical spaces, investigating gestural control of electronic instruments and concepts of play, centred around the creation of active musical spaces that incorporate interactivity. This work has included performances and installations at events such as the 2017 Ars Electronica festival. As an educator, Yanto has managed and coordinated the music production program at the Queensland University of Technology for the past several years, whilst continuing his research and personal practice around technology in music. He is currently a lecturer in music and a PhD candidate at the Queensland University of Technology.

Dr Kiley Gaffney is an academic, composer, and musician, who has collaborated with a range of music and visual artists. As a professional musician, she released two albums, Bitter Fluff (WEA 1996) and Sweet Meat (WEA 2001) and has performed extensively both in Australia and internationally. Kiley’s research interests are primarily in Cultural Studies, psychology and social theory, and the philosophy of performance. She has managed, coordinated and taught into the performance minor within the music program at QUT for the last four years, trialling experimental teaching strategies and performance practices, with a particular emphasis on collaborative teaching modes and student-led learning through project-based assessment.

The Party – for Tony Abbott

I was taught not
to put too much stock
in the corporeal

that the mystery lies elsewhere
in the invisible that is everywhere and nowhere
God of flesh and spirit and wrath

I was taught all this with a straight face
by men with buttons missing
on their gabardine jackets

and odd cufflinks that shrugged off the light
and strange little tics
that became dry sobs at Remembrance Day parade

we snickered at these sobs
behind our childish hands
the same hands that we were taught

could grasp all the bounty of God’s earth
if only we had the courage and belief
to reach out and grasp what was rightfully ours

reach out
before it was taken from us
by some lurking opaque malevolence

these hands
that have never grown callouses
that have never scarred or bled

or been crushed in the machines
that print our money, our wedding invitations
our gilded place names for the high table

at the tireless council of the aggrieved

Justin Lowe,
Katoomba, NSW
Community Engagement and Australian Performance

Community engagement is a broad term that embraces a diverse range of activities and practices across sectors and disciplines in contemporary Australia, as noted in the introduction for this special edition of Social Alternatives. Community engagement in the arts is broadly defined by the Australia Council, the national funding organisation for arts and culture, as covering:

[A]ll the ways that artists and arts organisations can connect with communities. Engaging with a community is about creating a healthy and committed relationship between equals, based on mutual respect and reciprocity. Engaging with communities is a fluid activity which requires ongoing maintenance, communication and respect for the ‘process’ of working together (2014: 1).

Community engagement has been readily adopted as a term into the nomenclature of Australian performance, particularly in the last decade, by artists as well as our major cultural institutions. Indeed, the Australian Major Performing Arts Group (AMPAG), which is the peak body for Australia’s largest cultural institutions, has reported a substantial overall increase in ancillary community participation projects in their venues and a doubling of engagement projects that target diverse communities since 2010 (2019). Public festivals have embraced participatory engagement projects, such as the work of the Queensland Music Festival (QMF) in regional Queensland across the last decade. QMF regularly commissions large-scale community engagement projects such as Boomtown in Gladstone in 2013, where a musical was co-created with the participation of 300 community members and performed to an audience of over 20,000 (Carter and Heim 2015: 202). Community engagement projects are also now routinely showcased within the major programs of city-based festivals, for example, The Good Room’s I’ve Been Meaning to Ask You: a work created and performed by middle school children as part of the 2018 Brisbane Festival. While there are many factors accounting for the rise of community engagement in Australian performance, at the heart of this growth is the power of the word itself, which promises connection, collective endeavour and reciprocity without expectation. Engagement, unlike its sister word ‘development’, does not encode the expectation of a ‘positive’ outcome, however well-intentioned. The semantic openness of community engagement as a term suits the temporal and collaborative nature of performance-making (Schechner 2002: 2) and provides an opportunity for mutual exploration and learning between audiences and performance-makers outside the confines of traditional theatrical structures and conventions.

Community engagement can also function more problematically in public discourse. As Don Watson (2005: 1), iconoclastic Australian political speech-writer and author suggests, community engagement can be
describes is a leaching of meaning and legitimacy: up approaches (Head 2007: 441). The danger that Watson describes is a leaching of meaning and legitimacy:

In As You Like It, Jacques says he can suck ‘melancholy out of a song as a weasel sucks eggs’… [We] have sucked the meaning out of the words; and the result is just as melancholy. They are shells of words: words from which life has gone, facsimiles, frauds, corpses (Watson 2005: 1).

I suspect many creative practitioners in Australia have experienced this co-option – a community engagement process where a funding agency consults about an already decided policy; or when a theatre project claiming to be community-driven has pre-determined artistic or political agendas. Arts education academic Peter Wright, in a report documenting a collaboration with influential community arts company, BIGHART also observes this weaselisation of language in the arts, where important terms for practice become ‘ubiquitous … [and are] used in an uncritical way, and as if [the] descriptor has one single meaning to which everyone agrees’ (2016: 11). The potential pollution of community engagement through its ubiquity is not a reason to reject it unquestioningly – here lessons can be taken from sectors outside the arts, such as community development and environmental science, who have been experimenting with participatory processes under the umbrella term of community engagement for longer. Curtis et al. suggest that:

Critiques of community engagement are often misguided as they are frequently based on [observation of] inauthentic or poor engagement practices. Moreover, these critiques have often failed to grasp the nature of the problems being addressed, acknowledge the contributions of engagement or understand the importance of building adaptive capacity to respond to an increasingly complex and uncertain future (Curtis et al. 2014: 175).

What is needed, then, are accounts of community engagement that demonstrate the potential for authentic contribution to building adaptive capacity in an increasingly fragile and precarious performance-making sector (Kelly 2013: 85) and that shift monolithic interpretations of the term in public discourse into more nuanced and specific understandings. In essence, we need to snatch the term back from the jaws of ‘weaselisation’. Part of doing this also involves an honest historicisation of community engagement in Australian performance to understand how it plays out, and at its best, reconciles, many of the longstanding tensions between traditions of community performance and our larger cultural institutions (Kelly 2017: 89).

**Tensions Between Community-based Practice and Mainstages in Australian Performance**

Like many of the cultural traditions of the post-colonial settler cultures of Australia (Eckersall 2007: 287), performance – particularly in its most established institutional incarnation, the theatre company – is highly circumscribed by historical European theatre practices. Indeed, Kathryn Kelly’s creative practice, dramaturgy, arose out of one of the very first experiments in community engagement undertaken by a European theatre institution, the Hamburg National Theatre in Germany, in 1767. Traditionally, theatre companies would communicate with their audiences outside of the theatre only by the daily posting of a flyer, nailed to the theatre door with the title of the play, the cast list and most importantly, the menu for the free buffet in the foyer! The Hamburg National Theatre’s dramaturg, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, incidentally the founder of the profession of dramaturgy, initiated a radical broadening of communication with his theatre’s audiences when he began a weekly publication of a pamphlet called Hamburgische Dramaturgie (Hamburg Dramaturgies). Distributed across the city, the pamphlet was full of searingly honest critical commentary about the repertory of the theatre and the impact of its work on the broader cultural and political foment of enlightenment Germany, which was a divided culture both geographically and politically (Kelly 2017: 5). This influential publication led to the development of many of the instruments of communication between a theatre institution and its audience that we use today, including the theatrical program to accompany a performance, the notion of a curated season and the idea that it was incumbent on a theatre company to reach out as broadly as it could to recruit audiences. Lessing’s Hamburg Dramaturgies extended the ambit of influence for the theatre company from just the performance event and its immediate audience to the whole community in which the company resided and emphasised its role in intervening in the urgent cultural and political agendas of the day (Kelly 2017: 6). Despite Lessing’s radical intentions, his publication still emphasised the ‘citadel’ of the theatre company and the flow of information and expertise moved from this ‘citadel’ through the audience and into the broader community without a mechanism for return dialogue or reciprocity.

In Australian performance where the broader culture is often anti-intellectual, or at least suspicious of ‘elites’ (Hage 2000: 7), the very structures of these European theatre companies, imported into Australia across the early part of the twentieth century and cemented by
Atlee’s notions of art for the common good through post-war welfare state (Kelly 2017: 26), create tension and complexity. The binary of ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ play out in very particular ways, containing the potential for both a self-consciously colonial ‘disdain’ for imported cultural formats and an internalised valorisation of them (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 6; McCallum 2009: 5). Much of the advancement of professional theatre practice in Australia was born out of these extremes. For example, Queensland was the only state in the country to create its publicly funded theatre company through an Act of Parliament as a statutory organisation. The Royal Queensland Theatre Company opened its inaugural season in 1969 with the canonical British playwright’s account of the Portuguese colonisation of Peru, Peter Schaffer’s The Royal Hunt of the Sun. Five years later, in 1974, Queensland saw the birth of the most radical community theatre company in the country, the Popular Theatre Troupe, whose agit-prop work was delivered in situ, on work sites and off the back of trucks as it sought to fight against the limitations on civil liberties imposed by the incumbent Bjelke-Petersen State Government (Fotheringham 1987: 5). In Queensland, this meant that the institutions that were meant to personify professional practice and community practice were born in a particular cultural and political moment that set them in opposition to one another and created a relatively divided sector in terms of employment, expertise and mandate.

Charting the full relationship between traditions of community and mainstage theatre in Australia lies outside the scope of this article, beyond noting that the major cultural institutions have attracted a disproportionately high concentration of resources, particularly as a result of successive reviews and specialist funding arrangements across the late 1990s and 2000s (Craik 2007: 21). These occurred with once-a-decade peaks of investment outside the major cultural institutions in organisations that worked predominantly in community across the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Regardless of any ideological or practical judgements about this history, one of the implications is a relatively segregated sector. Historically, mainstage Australian theatre companies relied on fairly traditional modes of communication with their audiences not out of place with Lessing’s first experimentations – artist-in-residence programs, regional touring, school education programs and youth outreach. In most cases, the ‘expertise’ remained within the ‘citadel’ of the institution and the major site of artistic work was still within the walls of the theatre venue, most of which were based in capital cities. Community engagement was often conflated with audience engagement and the flow of communication was still directed outwards with very little opportunity for return dialogue or reciprocity. The goodwill of individual practitioners working within these institutions can not be underestimated, however, even when innovative development or outreach programs began, they were often ‘one-off’ initiatives, secured by project funding or philanthropy rather than the core funding of mainstage institutions and therefore not driven by the core mandate of those companies (Kelly 2013: 83).

Meanwhile, professional practices developed outside our major cultural institutions that were shaped solely around working in community, for community and by community, and whose forays into the mainstages and major institutional structures were peripatetic (Fotheringham 1987). The separation of expertise persisted into the 1990s, with new generations of practice specialities, for example, community cultural development and youth arts, inspired by community development methodology and experiments in radical theatre praxis from those seminal community theatre companies in the 1970s and Australia’s long history of radical artistic practice (Madyaningrum 2001: 3). Consequently, local performers and creatives might go for decades working exclusively on mainstages or vice versa. This is certainly the case with the two performers in Rovers, Roxanne MacDonald and Barbara Lowing, who, despite illustrious careers on Australian mainstages and the Aboriginal Theatre movement, had to wait over twenty years to be reunited onstage in 2018.

Aboriginal Theatre Movement

This binary of ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ also impacted the trajectory of the vibrant Aboriginal Theatre movement, which surged in the 1970s with the founding of Ninethana in 1972 by Bob Maza and Jack Charles and the subsequent co-founding of The National Black Theatre in 1974 in Redfern by Maza and Aileen Corpus, Bindi Williams, Zac Martin and Gary Foley (Potts 2016). The tensions between the performance traditions associated with theatrical institutions and community practice created a double dispossession of Aboriginal Australia’s performance traditions – marginalised from the Anglophile repertoires of the mainstage theatre companies and then bundled into a catch-all category of community practice that was historically vulnerable to precarious funding but also not necessarily equipped to engage with the formidable weight of Aboriginal performance traditions and cultural practices. When the Aboriginal Theatre movement surged again in the 1990s, fuelled by the political and cultures changes of that decade and a new generation of remarkably talented Aboriginal practitioners, like Queensland’s Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman, many of those initial collaborations were shoe-horned into European institutional theatre models, like Enoch and Mailman’s company, Kooemma Jdarra, which was founded in 1993 but subsequently defunded within a decade. Again, the full discussion of this performance history lies outside of the scope of the article, but it is worthwhile to contrast the history of Kooemma Jdarra with Aboriginal cultural institutions that were built around family
and relationship structures, like Ilbijerri in Melbourne which has seen a decades-long commitment from the Maza family. Ilbijerri has not just survived the vagaries of funding, but has flourished. As Aboriginal cultural leader Alethea Beetson argued, it is because this is a ‘sovereign-based’ company, controlled by Aboriginal people (Beetson 2018). Ilbijerri has blazed the way in shifting previously intractable binaries like community versus professional by establishing major cultural institutions and theatre companies that are intensely engaged in community and producing world-class repertoire, showing the important contribution of Aboriginal knowledge frameworks to the Australian performance sector.

Indeed, the traceline of this contribution can be seen even on the mainstages when, in 2010, Wesley Enoch was appointed as the first Aboriginal Artistic Director of a mainstage theatre company in Australia, The Queensland Theatre Company, which was no longer royal, but still solidly bound by statutory authority status. Indeed, the impacts of cultural resurgence, identity politics, globalisation and rapid technological growth in the new millennium seem to have shifted many of the previously intractable patterns in Australian performance, hand in glove with the rise of post-dramatic performance and the overall decline in funding for all parts of the Australian performance sector (Kelly 2013). This has forced many Australian mainstage theatre companies and cultural institutions to seek new ways to engage with the community beyond the old ‘citadel’ models, in order to grow new audiences and to adapt to a broader culture that is changing rapidly.

I think the days of the arts in ivory towers are behind us; the very best arts organ[i]sations are … connecting communities with artists … Not only can the arts build communities, I think we must (Landesman in Borwick 2012: 2).

This is not to pretend that the underlying cultural and economic pressures that created the tensions between community and mainstage practice and institutions do not still exist. The enduring bipartisan commitment to hands-off funding via the Australia Council was dismantled by the Federal Government in 2015 without notice, and while a substantial proportion of that funding has been returned, the climate for arts and cultural funding is one of decline and intense competition, particularly between the larger and smaller cultural institutions.

These longstanding and seemingly intractable post-colonial binaries are such tempting invitations, as they allow us (academic, practitioner, policy maker or artist) to pick a side and to fight for the success of one half of the equation without considering the cost to the other. The danger of thinking in these binaries is that it stymies the potential for innovation through collaboration and partnership and it ignores our overall mutual dependence and participation in an Australian performance sector marked by increasing scarcity and precariousness. As noted, Aboriginal knowledge frameworks provide one insight into possible models of innovation, but significantly, so does the rise of community engagement and its power as a term that resists easy categorisation into a binary relationship – the ‘other’ of the mainstage and vice versa; or the specialisation of the artist that might result in professional ghettoisation. Community engagement is available to any kind of artist, institution or policy setting and most importantly, it takes its place in our nomenclature as a broad term that can describe a much more diverse range of partnerships and situations inside and outside of our sector, linking to traditions of socially engaged work across all fields and economies. The challenge, as outlined earlier, is to imbue the term with specific and authentic examples in the public discourse and to work, as the Australia Council suggests, with respect, reciprocity and a commitment to fluid and ongoing ‘process.

Case Study Context: Australian independent theatre, community engagement and Rovers

As noted earlier, the millennium has brought a number of changes to Australian performance, including the rise of the independent sector as many of the traditional structures for making work fractured (Kelly 2013) and incomes for artists steadily diminished (Throsby and Peteskaya 2017: 2) due to reduced numbers of professional productions (Meyrick 2005: 3) and the festivalisation of much of the production of new cultural content in Australia. As Brauneck claims:

Independent theatre takes place outside the established institutions, the repertory theatre, or as Otto Brahn called them, the ‘permanent stages’. It emerged as an alternative and in opposition to such theatres … [I]t always calls for contemporaneity and explores new paths, even transcending boundaries and conventions (2017: 13).

There is now an ecology of small theatre companies and collectives nationally that work professionally, but are not operationally funded. They move across and between the different major cultural institutions, sometimes across art forms and often produce new work that is then subsequently programmed by the mainstage or major cultural institutions, including festivals and major venues. In Queensland, perhaps because of the fecund tradition of community arts, community cultural development and youth arts, and the rich intercultural and physical theatre traditions there is a strong community of independent artists and companies that
have completely collapsed the binary between ‘elite’ and ‘community’ by making professional work, often for large cultural institutions with community as cast, creative and audience simultaneously, dissolving traditional theatrical hierarchies and conventions. This includes companies like The Good Room, The Walking Neighbourhood, Motherboard Productions, Debase and Belloo Creative. The next section of the article will shift into a case study analysis of Belloo Creative’s Rovers which provides a personally-inflected case study of community engagement undertaken by myself and Aboriginal cultural consultant and emerging artist Emily Coleman.


Belloo Creative is an award-winning all-female theatre company, with playwright and co-artistic director Katherine Lyall-Watson, director and co-artistic director, Caroline Dunphy, producer Danielle Shankey and and Kathryn Kelly as company dramaturg. Founded in 2013, Belloo’s mandate is to bring stories and people ‘out of the shadows’ and our work is often inter-cultural and based on true stories. Rovers was Belloo’s third production and arose from a desire to make a new work for associated Belloo performer, Barbara Lowing. Barbara is an extraordinary actor, beloved by colleagues and admired for her emotive vocal technique and onstage charisma. However, like many actors who have chosen to stay in the sector into their middle and later decades, she was facing long stretches of unemployment due to structural disadvantages outside of her control – the diminishing repertory for older female performers, the impact of long-term casual work, caring responsibilities and rising costs of living. Barbara is also a performer who loves touring. In 2017, Katherine Lyall-Watson, Belloo’s playwright, proposed a project to develop a small cast touring show and potentially a financial vehicle for Barbara – a new play drawn from her life. Within the same week of beginning the interviews for the play, Belloo director Caroline Dunphy connected with an old friend Roxanne MacDonald at the launch of a shared film project. Caroline was shocked that Roxanne, whose luminous face had inspired a generation of Murri and non-Murri performers in Queensland, was working as a security guard at a hospital at night, walking over twenty kilometres each shift. Just before Caroline and Roxanne were thrown out of the launch, the last two people talking, their conversation touched on Barbara. Roxanne related an old yarn; she and Barbara had last done a show together in the mid-1990s, an iconic Mabo inspired revamp of The Taming of the Shrew, which saw them tour Central Australia together, visiting Uluru and eating oysters late at night in their hotel room in Alice Springs. The reminiscence lit up the evening. So, divine accident or fate, it was a portent for Caroline, who could see a show for Belloo that re-united these two powerful women who had both made such important and unsung contributions to the life of the local theatrical community. Rovers was born. Part verbatim, part fictive memory, Rovers draws on feminist tropes of the road movie and the notion of the ‘wild woman’ to celebrate the power of these two extraordinary performers. Through their ancestral memories, Rovers explores Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal experiences of colonisation, reconciliation, memory and aging. Rovers was programmed by Northern Rivers Performing Arts in Lismore in late 2017 and then built momentum quickly over a year, with a short reading at a Belloo International Women’s Day event in March 2018 at Queensland Theatre and a longer showing as part of the Commonwealth Games Indigenous Arts Festival in Brisbane. After seeing the showing, the Brisbane Festival programmed the work for inclusion as part of the Theatre Republic in September 2018. As part of those negotiations with the Brisbane Festival Belloo producer, Danielle Shankey requested that a substantial tranche of free tickets be set aside for Aboriginal community members. This was a potentially risky request as the power of the large cultural institutions in these negotiations can be decidedly one-way. But, for all of the artists involved, it seemed unbearable to finally re-unite these women onstage and to not reunite their audiences and communities as well. Ethically, it was incumbent on us as a theatre company trying to make respectful intercultural work to also ensure an intercultural audience for that work.

**Relational Interculturalism: A personal reflection by Emily Coleman and Kathryn Kelly on the community engagement in Rovers**

Rovers became an inter-cultural work through relationships and serendipity. Working from and through relationships became the defining principle of the project. Surprisingly to us, but certainly not when you contextualise the rapid changes to Australian performance in the last two decades, the Brisbane Festival were delighted with the proposal and generously offered not just the release of tickets, but an opportunity to work with their Indigenous Advisory Committee and the dedicated producer who supported it. Their only request was that the project try to collect the contact details of the invitees for their official database. Belloo was able to secure a small grant from the Brisbane City Council to employ an artist who could reach out to Aboriginal community members, invite them, provide assistance with transport and welcome them to the space, hopefully making it more culturally safe. We reached out through our existing relationships to a young artist already known to the company, Emily Coleman, who is a very proud Bundjalung Githabul woman, from a long line of storytellers. Emily is an emerging creative artist working in Brisbane whose work focuses on a commitment to Indigenous storytelling and cultural integration. Emily and I, mirroring Barbara and Roxanne, set about trying to work out how best to plan and implement this modest community engagement project. Emily undertook all the
liaison with the local Aboriginal community and managed the ticket allocation and we worked together on liaison with the Festival and supported each other where needed. For both of us, our lodestar through the whole two months of the project was the 8ways model (8ways 2018), an Aboriginal pedagogical knowledge framework which is open source and available online. I offer a quote from one of the key facilitators and advocates of the 8ways project, Tyson Yungaporta:

The element of ‘Community Links’ is now understood by more practitioners in terms of Aboriginal relationships with both insiders and outsiders, and the centrality of these relationships to the development and acquisition of all knowledge. We know that any learning (or program, or policy) that fails to connect to this system of relationships will ultimately fail (2018).

Emily and I felt it important to include both of our voices in the reflection in dialogue with each other, much as we had while we worked on the project together. I turn to her now for her perspective:

Emily: I believe the most beneficial step in the Rover’s Community Engagement project was when we built Community Links through ‘Story Sharing’ and ‘Land links’. By sharing who I am, and where my family are from, I was able to contextualise my place in the community to our invited guests, which I believe clarified any potential preconceptions.

Kathryn: We started with a meeting with our wonderful cultural consultant, Nadine MacDonald Dowd, who explained to us the importance of inviting elders and building one-on-one relationships with them. But where to begin?

Emily: Finding significant community members, particularly Elders, proved challenging. We wanted to be able to include as many Indigenous community members as we could, which meant reaching far beyond our personal networks. The process of deciding who to contact and how to reach them took longer than we initially anticipated because we struggled to find out who should be invited. We had a list of invitees which was built largely from Aunty Rox’s family contacts, however, there was very little need for the Community Engagement team to contact them directly. One of the first steps in the process was to make contact with the Brisbane Festival team and Indigenous Advisory Group Chair. They had a ‘database’ of names which we may have been able to gain access to. However, it quickly became apparent that the list would not be made available to the Rover’s team, for several reasons. Most significantly, the list was not up to date, which meant we may have been making attempts to contact people who were not in a state where they would be able to attend or contacting people who are no longer with us. In either case, I felt it would have been disrespectful to cold call any of the contacts on the list before it had been thoroughly checked and updated.

Kathryn: After a wonderful lunch with the Brisbane Festival producer and IAG Chair, although we couldn’t proceed with using their database, we were given a formal introduction to an elder connected to the Brisbane Festival, Aunty Melita Orcher, who recorded an Acknowledgement of Country for us which is incorporated into the first moments of Rovers.

Emily: Once a relationship was established with Aunty Melita Orcher and her Cherbourg Dormitory sisters (Aunty Estelle and Aunty Bernie), they were happy to share their contacts with us, and invite other community members to the show. Initially, we found ourselves scrambling for contacts, however once we made familiar connections and community links, we ended up with a sizable list. We found the best way was to casually approach the guests we already had about any significant community members they thought might be interested. We invited several Elders and younger community members but didn’t want to make anyone feel pressured to attend the show.

Kathryn: Indeed, one of the important moments for Emily and me, and the point at which it seemed we went from a few community members invited to over-subscription was when we decided that we wouldn’t ask people to share their contact details for the Brisbane Festival. The chain of relationship was strong when it was passed from one person in dialogue to another, but anything else was inappropriate. It became really clear to Belloo that any sort of ‘database’ was such a ‘European’ idea of how a theatre company must communicate into community. It was our relationship to Emily that was important and hers with those community members and it would be maintaining both of those webs of relationships that would enable us to build an ongoing connection. Emily worked for us again on our next show, SAND, and she holds our community engagement capacity and expertise.

Emily: Rover’s Community Engagement is an example of how a theatre company can invite Indigenous people into the space, but also invite their input, which, in turn, fosters knowledge transference and cultural integration. Martin Nakata discusses the idea of ‘The Cultural Interface’; he suggests that this interface is the cross section of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people and describes it as: ‘a place of constant tension and negotiation of different interests’ (2002: 6). Despite the tension within the space, it’s a way for us to explore future learning
and understanding. This interface is a vital part of conversations and connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Richard Walley says: ‘Knowledge is the one thing which will break down barriers between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians’ (Walley in Casey 2004: 174). During the hour before the show, our invited guests had the chance to sit and enjoy Theatre Republic, where they could grab a drink and have a yarn. In these pre-show gatherings, there were several moments of ‘The Cultural Interface’. The auntsies sat with a group of younger attendees from a range of backgrounds and shared stories with them. These casual, unplanned moments were where I saw the most significant examples of community engagement throughout the entire process. They were moments of genuine trans-generational, multicultural storytelling and knowledge sharing within one diverse community.

**Kathryn:** The season of *Rovers* was a joyous experience for us with the show opening to a diverse audience that could interpret the work’s full range of potential cultural meanings, languages and ancestral histories. Playwright Katherine Lyall-Watson had been nervous about how her consultative writing about Roxanne’s life and stories would be received:

> While I knew that Roxy was comfortable with what I’d written, I had no idea how it would come across to other Indigenous people and whether Roxy talking about her deceased grandmother on stage would be offensive to any audiences. We were walking a fine line and it was important to bring in the community and hear from them so that we could know what worked and what didn’t work and address any inadvertent errors in an open and respectful fashion. Welcoming Indigenous people into the space and giving them places of honour in the audience where they could chat to Roxy before the show was part of this process. Talking afterwards and being open to their feedback was another part. For me, we have taken the first steps in engaging with First Australians — but there is a long way still to go. I was heartened by the elders who saw *Rovers* and told us that they’d like to share their own stories, too. Finding a way to respectfully hear what they want to say without appropriating it, feels like an important next step (2018).

**Emily:** The biggest challenge for me was the concept of integrating traditional European theatre practices and processes with my own understanding of cultural knowledge practices and maintaining respect for my Elders. I found that when I connected with Elders, I needed to have a sense of familiarity, and uphold a very casual tone. However, when I connected with professionals within the Brisbane Festival team, I took on a more ‘professional persona’ which further highlighted the disparity between the Indigenous community and current institutional practices. As this was a pilot project for community engagement and cultural integration, the Rover’s Team and Belloo Creative did their best with the available knowledge at the time. This project was a major learning curve for all parties involved. Anyone wanting to undertake a cultural integration or community engagement project with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities needs to first build a relationship with community members while maintaining complete transparency, and with the highest level of respect, for the people and their cultural practices. You need to be willing to take a step away from the traditional European theatre practices and values that many popular institutions abide by (for example, you may not be able to connect via email). Although it seems very simple, it affects the type of connection you want to build with the community. A suggested first step would be to review the 8ways to develop a degree of Indigenous cultural competence.

**Belloo Creative’s Learnings from Rovers**

Emily’s sister and brother-in-law filmed audiences and took ‘vox pops’ after *Rovers* with the responses from audiences being joyful and heartwarming. Audience members mingled in the space afterwards, chatting and talking and waiting for both performers to come out, often to a round of applause. The reviews caught this feeling of engaging with important issues with heart and storytelling:

> Belloo Creative is continuing their streak of developing outstanding shows. They've brought us a production that celebrates women without alienating men. They've delivered a performance with diversity that isn't tokenistic or patronising. They discuss serious and important concepts without lecturing or depressing. This is a cast and crew delivering state of the art theatre. It's a standard to which other productions can aspire (McCaulley 2018).

Aunty Melita came back to see the show again and the feedback from the Aboriginal audience members was that they felt genuinely welcomed and safe. And yet, there was a sense that while the two communities shared the space comfortably, they did not necessarily interact. My reflections, my ‘Deconstruct / Reconstruct’ to return to the 8ways model, makes me wonder if we need to do more to enable dialogue between the communities in the audience. What is our responsibility having brought them together? If the communities are still divided then is it tokenism? Does it begin to veer towards Watson's critique of 'wealisation'? There is discussion of a national tour for *Rovers* in 2020 and these questions will be the
challenge for Emily and Belloo. Is there a way to provide invitation, welcome, cultural safety and extend that into cultural dialogue? Overall, the community engagement project has been an immensely rich experience for Belloo Creative and can now be incorporated into our making processes as a routine and joyful part of developing a new Australian performance work. We offer our learnings up for other independent companies that might wish to embark on this journey:

- Don’t be afraid to ask. Know what you want. Think about what your responsibilities are.

- Leverage at the point of programming by asking for First Nations access.

- The engagement expertise (historically) is likely to be outside of a major institution but the bulk of the resource (historically) is likely to be inside – look to maximise both through partnership.

- Chase targeted resources. For a major cultural institution a small grant is inefficient, but it can be catalytic for an independent company.

- Try to use a relationally connected Indigenous Knowledge framework for which you have permission.

- Take action and move through relationships, not timelines or processes.

- Meet face to face if you can, then via phone and email.

- Perhaps you won’t get a ‘no’, but rather no response. This is probably because you haven’t asked respectfully or shouldn’t have asked.

- Try and avoid Western frames that involve and encode time and linear structure, for example, databases!

- Try and see your context through Indigenous eyes or knowledge.

- Ask on whose land and through whose relationships your show is occurring.

- Continually reflect.

- Scarcity is no justification for inaction. Small is powerful. Relationships are all. We can always do better. We will always fail. We are better together.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, *Rovers* provides an authentic case study of partnership between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal theatre-makers. The production demonstrates the potential for community engagement by independent theatre-makers in partnership with mainstage institutions. Further, it also demonstrates the continuing contribution of Indigenous knowledge frameworks to Australian performance.

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**Live at the Pt Chev RSA**

the ramps are there so the truly elderly may enter with dignity

none of the pokies installed
for the inveterately hopeful notices age

and there’s a veranda
where survivors of all the health warnings

smoke in the peace earned for them
by long departed soldiers

the reliably straightforward kitchen menu
doesn’t require glasses or reading

advanced years are no joke but can be funny
when wires are crossed identities mistaken

and the karaoke machine at full volume
reinvents another place and time

*Tony Beyers*
*Taranaki, N.Z.*
“audience imaginations are invigorated and inspired”
- Blue Curtain Brisbane

“This is theatre at its best”. - Australian Stage
“Buckets of charisma and soul.”
- Stage Whispers

Image four: Image from the Brisbane Festival season of Rovers. Credit Joseph Lynch.

Image five: Image from community engagement project, Rovers opening night with Aunty Melita Orcher, Kath Kelly, Cinnamon Watson, Aunty Estelle, Emily Coleman, Aunty Berenice and Danielle Shankey. Credit Joseph Lynch.
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Authors
Dr Kathryn Kelly is a dramaturg, theatre historian and critic and she is currently a Lecturer at Queensland University of Technology in Performance. She completed her PhD on the pedagogy of dramaturgy in 2017 and has taught extensively in the last seven years at institutions including the University of Queensland, Western Australian Academy for the Performing Arts (WAAPA), Flinders University, Griffith University, and Southbank Institute of Technology. Her publications include a history of Australian dramaturgy 2000-2010 in *Catching Australian Theatre in the 2000s* (Australian Theatre Series, Bril) as well as with the *Australasian Drama Studies* journal and various industry journals. Kathryn was a critic with *Realtime* and contributor to the *Fanciful Fiction Auxiliary*. She is currently company dramaturg with award-winning, all-female theatre company, Belloo Creative, who are the Company in Residence at Queensland Theatre. Her dramaturgy practice is in text-based theatre, dance and contemporary performance. She has worked for every major festival and theatre company in Queensland; nationally for Theatreworks (Melbourne); Malthouse (Melbourne); Playwriting Australia (Sydney) and the Darwin Writers Centre and internationally for the Factory Theatre and Cahoots Theatre Projects in Toronto, Canada. Formerly, she has worked as CEO of Playlab (2004-2008), Australia’s second largest theatrical publisher and as Resident Artist for World Interplay, the largest festival for young playwrights in the world. She has also worked for Arts Queensland and other arts organisations in her twenty-five years in the performance sector.

Emily Coleman is an emerging Indigenous creative artist working in Brisbane. She has recently completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Drama) at Queensland University of Technology. Her work has and continues to hold a focused commitment to Indigenous storytelling and cultural integration. She has worked as a performer with Ngarrama Productions, located in the Hunter Region of New South Wales, and with them has toured a show to various remote Indigenous communities around Australia. She is a very proud Bundjalung Githabul woman and is from a long line of storytellers. Her goal is to work closely with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creative artists to generate work that speaks from the perspective of Indigenous people. She draws inspiration from personal experiences and the stories of her community to create work that engages with the broader Indigenous community. Within her practice, she is working towards making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories and voices more prominent and accessible in Australian theatre.

**Oppositions**

Morning is the opposite of this under-utilized office, stale fluorescence that fails to light up the space.

The music breaks, my in-ear headphones are the opposite of silence—I hear my swallowed spit, or did someone just speak?

Cold tea, scattered pencils, books erect like monuments, a clock’s composure—opposites of living in the moment.

I want the chair to spin, roll across the room, clash with the wall. I want the paperclips to fight.

If someone barged in, pulled out a knife, I’d stay put and try to communicate.

To pit one against the other is a way of finding company, the drama between A and B, their melodrama with Y and Z.

The opposite of *this* is not *that*, but the absence of *this*—how a friend was with me, then no longer is, and I don’t want any substitutes.

*Marco Yan,*
*Hong Kong*
Much as Le Carré's *Tinker Taylor Soldier Spy* upping the ante, perhaps like Joel Morehu-Barlow, goes on recklessly the prudent inhibitions that make others pull back. Ariki, in. True, they scent the opportunities; but they also lack con-artists is that they have a weakness for being drawn them draw you in. Yet perhaps a deeper truth about be finely attuned to what others are thinking, and let A good con-artist, of course, knows not to push; rather, best friend at work is a Prince? colleagues are eager to adopt – for instance, that their Few of us can be tempted so far down the paths of fantasy, because big lies about ourselves are difficult to sustain. But what if your pet fantasy is one your best friend at work is a Prince? A good con-artist, of course, knows not to push; rather, be finely attuned to what others are thinking, and let them draw you in. Yet perhaps a deeper truth about con-artists is that they have a weakness for being drawn in. True, they scent the opportunities; but they also lack the prudent inhibitions that make others pull back. Ariki, perhaps like Joel Morehu-Barlow, goes on recklessly upping the ante.

Much as Le Carré’s *Tinker Taylor Soldier Spy* revels in detailed suspenseful accounts of how its heroes manipulate the rules of an institution, Synott shows in fine detail how his hero defeats Queensland Health’s security. Simply letting slip that you are a royal, or sporting an HRH monogram, does not get you far with cynical Australians. But when you start giving them expensive gifts (yet tasteful and sensitively-chosen ones, even life-changing ones) and when you make it clear that you want only to see your colleagues happy, they recognise that you are from an exotic gift-giving culture. Soon it seems simplest to accept that you are what you say: a wealthy Polynesian prince - The last person who would ever want to fiddle Health’s books! Arriving by stretch-limousine instead of by taxi also helps, as does showing a lordly disdain for working hours.

Thus, Ariki becomes a ‘character’, one whom everyone wants as a friend. In short, someone to whom the usual rules need not apply. For example, if he offers a superior officer a first-class air ticket and premium seats for an overseas football match this is not a bribe, since he wants nothing in return. It is simply the Prince being generous.

Now, Ariki can start gaming the system. When he is asked to expedite Health's pork-barrelling system of payments to ancillary commercial firms, he creates his own company and slips it onto the payees list. The payment forms must be checked and signed by a second officer, but Ariki is expert at distracting the co-signer. What bored public servant is going to check the fine print while the Prince is talking lazily of sending her and her spouse to Paris on some dream holiday, with all fares and hotels paid?

The moral a training officer might draw from this story is: when you find a colleague to whom the rules do not apply, then make very sure that the rules do apply!

Yet Synott’s larrikin hero truly enjoys helping anyone whose marriage or whose projects he might save with a gift of cash. Soon he meets a passionate activist, and learns that the environment, too, needs rescuing! (Yes, this is also a love story – with a strange twist.) The fortunes he steals from Health go towards saving threatened species.

The novel now seems to be leaving Le Carré’s world, moving more towards that of Edward Abbey’s *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, as it speculates, lightly, on ways to make Mammon pay for rescuing nature … But no more spoilers!

This tale is preceded by a rubric: *To lighten the hearts of those working to preserve the sustainability of our natural environment*. An afterword, in equally academic jargon, explains that the book’s themes include “… relationships in formal institutions, and issues of self-concept and identity in 21st century societies”. Luckily the fictional parts are much better written than this! In fact, *The Fake Prince* is a romp of a read, a thriller with good local colour, unexpected plot twists, and a couple of worthy if not world-shattering morals in tow.
Landscape with Buses

On both sides of the frontline, orchards in bloom. People buy and sell goods, occupy central squares, dogs run after barefoot children with grain baskets – linen flags. Buses on schedule, taxis in queue.

Business as usual. Gunshots, grenades, mortars.

Stray barks come out of houses with blown-up windows. Splinters rising – morning’s canines. Soldiers wake up to the call to prayer, switch radio on, shave by the roadside. Nametags rest in shoe polish tins, heat bakes bread already sliced. Buses carry wounded further inland.

Maria Stadnicka, Gloucestershire, U.K.

The Jazz Singer

I.

from this cold bed
I can gaze out three billion light years.

when I feel pinned
by the jackboot of memory,
when the words swim on the page in quicksilver shoals,

when my phone rings out
with that little “pip!”
of someone chasing the last bus of the night,

I can heap my pillows
and give names to the stars,
measure their slow drift down the length

of that crone’s finger of crab apple branch
that scratches at my sleep.
there is a strange comfort that I find
in their pale, inexorable business.

II.

which brings me back
to that man of a certain age,
who feels each subtle shift in buoyancy,
those tiny air pockets that don’t show up on radar,

Sartre weeping in a darkened cinema, pricked by the quaver of Al Jolson’s “Swanny”, while corpses bob mutely down the Volga, and the sun glides along the rainbow slick of the Great Society.

it is a luxury, that single tear,
like Hamlet’s fevered tap on Newton’s shoulder, the conflation of a privilege and a right that lines the coat of every dosshouse revolutionary.

Justin Lowe, Katoomba, NSW
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