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cultural solutions



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INTRODUCTION

The fourth pillar

Building on firm foundations

Julianne Schultz

WESLEY Enoch is a remarkable man. He has an enviable ability to cut through: to see the whole picture, reduce complex problems to their key components and find solutions. And then capture it all in a pithy one liner.

An alert careers counsellor might have suggested that these were attributes that would equip him to become an important playwright, and maybe even one day the artistic director of the Queensland Theatre Company. But it is unlikely that such a position, especially given its importance at the cultural heart of establishment Brisbane, registered on the list of realistic possibilities for a young Aboriginal boy, from a poor outer suburb, no matter how much his personal history, rich with Indigenous, European and Asian forebears, embodied modern Australia.

Yet, after studying theatre at Queensland University of Technology, establishing his own theatre company, writing award-winning plays, working with the best here and abroad, that is his job. Now he is shaping and directing the agenda of one of the most important cultural institutions in the country, broadening its agenda, ensuring that forgotten stories get told, that the sum of histories that make up modern Australia find a voice – classics and new, settler and Indigenous.

He does not flinch from uncomfortable truths, but he is not rash, and so his insights and observations are highly valued, and sometimes passionately discussed. It was these attributes that meant he played an important role in the discussions that informed the development of the 2013 National Cultural Policy.

On one hot Melbourne day he was in a group of about twenty artistic and cultural leaders discussing how best to reframe thinking about the place of arts, creativity and culture in public policy. The conversation moved from the core areas of support for artists and organisations, to the possible outputs

and outcomes – creative, institutional, economic and social – that might be realised. ‘Don’t ever underestimate that there are sometimes cultural solutions to intractable problems. When the law, economics and other systems fail, cultural and creative activities can work,’ he said. ‘I know, it happened to me.’

At the time I scribbled it down, and underlined Cultural Solutions, a good topic for Griffith REVIEW.

CULTURE IS COMPLEX. It is everything – language, heritage, art, social relations, education, identity – and at the same time, it is annoyingly intangible. It is the essential glue that binds us, it enriches and informs our lives every day, it is something we make and something we participate in as a human right, and while its public value can be assessed it resists conventional measurement.

Getting this right is important for individuals, for communities and for the country as a whole. It is one of the hoary mantras of management consultants that ‘culture eats strategy for lunch’, and while this applies to companies, it is just as true in smaller family and community groups and at a large scale in states and nations.

Culture is value laden, and in a globally connected, settler society like Australia where there are many layers of identity, an increasingly rich understanding of history and heritage, an extraordinarily talented and well trained cohort of artists, educators and creatives – this will inevitably be a vibrant and contested domain. But culture is not singular – the temptation to impose a one correct view is ideological and dangerous. States that have adopted exclusionary definitions of culture have not generally prevailed, or been noted for their openness, resilience and innovation.

This is why culture is recognised as one of the four pillars of a successful society – the other three are political, economic and social institutions; the capacity and wellbeing of people; and the land and its resources. Culture is a pillar, but it also binds the others; to participate in its creation and expression is a human right.

ARTISTS HAVE AN important role to play in the development, expression and communication of culture. They are the research scientists in its lab, making meaning, drawing connections, asking difficult questions, bringing

joy and pride through the brilliance of the works that they create.

We are well accustomed to the excellence of the professional arts, to the success of the commercial arts, to the importance of training and providing opportunities for emerging artists and other creatives. Australians are hungry consumers of cultural activities, eager to attend, to participate, to offer an opinion. The Australian Bureau of Statistics recently estimated the economic value of the creative and cultural sector as being more than \$87 billion, about 7 per cent of GDP, and employing just under a million people.

Sometimes the important work that is done by professional artists and others to join the dots in an applied way – to work with communities and individuals on creative projects that enrich their lives, that provide new ways of engagement, that make abstract concepts tangible – is overlooked. This work can be of the highest professional standard, it can explore new modes of engagement, it can operate in an ethical and respectful way and it can deliver measurable outcomes that help solve the intractable problems that the institutions have not been able to reach.

Creating Australia is the peak body of the producers involved in Community Cultural Development charged with a mission to advocate the cultural work that engages with the nitty gritty. This is important because it broadens and deepens the reach of culture and its artistic expression, bringing it in to the lives of those who may otherwise have felt excluded. It is local, personal, fun and at its best excellent and transformative.

As Senior Australian of the Year and former Liberal MP Fred Chaney said at the end of a 2011 meeting with the key producers in this domain: ‘Concepts float past most people’s ears and hearts and minds. Stories that capture the concepts you’re trying to get across very seldom miss the target. You are custodians of incredible, powerful stories. You don’t need to explain the theory once you hear the story. I don’t think you should underestimate the power of people just knowing what it is you do, how you do it and what the outcomes are because we are all faced with stories of failure in the areas in which you succeed every day.’

This edition, and the linked e-book, *Cultural Solutions: Notes from the Front*, showcase this work and put flesh on the bones of the cultural richness around us, and its capacity to provide solutions to intractable problems, by exercise of disciplined, empathetic and engaged creativity and connection.

INTRODUCTION

The lessons of history

Creating space for community arts and cultural development

Sue-Anne Wallace

FOR those who work in the community arts and cultural development sector, there is a fraught question about the practice. The consultation draft of Creating Australia's Strategic Plan captured this tension:

The practice of community arts and cultural development is diverse and much debated, by artists, communities and funding agencies. Some prefer not to use the description at all. Others prefer alternative terms such as participatory arts or community engaged arts practice. And as this work grows in scale and impact, it is a good debate to have.

Another question arises as to who the practitioners are. Artists, some say, and they are right. Arts workers, others chorus, and they are right too. Yet, names and labels can be a problem, vested as they are with preconceptions of practice and intent.

I want to approach CACD practice from a different perspective. Would we regard ourselves as historians? Probably not! And does that matter?

A RECENTLY PUBLISHED book, *Australian History Now* edited by Anna Clark and Paul Ashton (NewSouth, 2013), set me thinking that community arts and cultural development may be creating the history of place, site and community. We're different to (traditional) historians in that we are not passive observers, but then again contemporary historians also interpolate their experiences into writing history.

Clark and Ashton write of the previously marginalised methodologies that now shape understanding of Australian history – perspectives such as those related to rights’ movements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women, children, land – to produce the ‘democratisation of historical research and writing’. Postmodernism descended on history as it did on arts practice, particularly in theoretical writings on visual arts. These narratives of history, however – what might be called applied history, ‘urban history’ and public history – are only now being incorporated into what the community regards as *its* history.

Aren’t these the same rights that are relevant to the practice of community arts and cultural development? Could we have been working along similar paths to historians without engaging with them? It’s an interesting thought.

So how to further explore the link between history and community arts and cultural development? Paul Ashton developed a useful definition of public history:

...the practice of historical work in a wide range of forums and sites which involves the negotiation of different understandings about the nature of the past and its meaning and uses in the present. It operates at the intersections of these historical practices.

Perhaps this is a long bow – because although we negotiate the different understandings of the past and their meanings and uses in the present, we do not stop at documenting and locking that history into the present moment. CACD takes the historical perspective, allows for the tensions which will inevitably exist between one memory of an event and another, and through collaborative artistic practice, creates a new memory, a new environment, a new community, a new perspective of the present, with a life for the future.

One could call this work of CACD history making, although its purpose is differently motivated, intending to lead to innovative artistic outcomes and social or cultural impact. As artists, organisations and communities attested at their National Forum at the Sydney Opera House on 13 October, 2011, community arts and cultural development practice has diversity and breadth; extends geographically across rural, regional and urban communities; uses a mix of artforms and creative tools to deliver projects; partners with a range

of sectors; and generates a variety of benefits and outcomes.

Just as the history profession, in a conservative academic metier, has come to terms with contemporary and potentially transient histories, so too may more traditional artistic practices come to terms with the contemporary and possibly transient artistic practices of professional artists with communities.

LOOKING AT HISTORY may teach us how to value the differences we bring to artistic practice. Artists in CACD practice debate the relationship of their work to traditional art forms – visual arts, theatre, music, dance and literature. Just as contemporary ways of framing history now have an equal place alongside other histories, CACD co-exists with other art forms. It's not as if the arts haven't jostled before about hierarchies. We could remind ourselves of Renaissance arguments about the hierarchy of painting over sculpture, and more contemporary opinions of the relative positions of visual arts and craft.

These are vibrant issues and will be addressed by Creating Australia, the newly formed national body for community, arts and cultural development. Creating Australia wants to improve the understanding, knowledge and visibility of community arts and cultural development to support and nurture a strong, collaborative and professional sector with growing levels of investment and employment, and opportunities for new models of working and investment partnerships.

Seeing historians debate their profession, its terminology and practices should inspire us to do the same and to claim the legitimacy and value of this artistic practice and its contribution to society.

Tools for social transformation

Making the personal creative and political

Pilar Kasat

MY understanding of the power of community arts was shaped as a child growing up in Chile, under the military regime of Augusto Pinochet. Its repressive influence penetrated the most private realms of family life fostering a culture of fear and self-censorship. I remember my mother saying: 'Never talk about politics in public.' So I didn't. This was not surprising – in 1973 the regime murdered and jailed thousands of civilians during and after the bloody coup d'état that toppled the democratically elected Chilean President Salvador Allende.

The voices of dissent were silent for a very long time.

For years, people were too afraid to speak out. The arts became a powerful vehicle to express dissent, to communicate, and to help people make sense of their reality. It is impossible to remember that time of my life without the music, and poetry of Victor Jara, Violeta Parra and Pablo Neruda. These artists became powerful icons and their work became emblems of the struggle of the people and their thirst for freedom.

I BECAME INVOLVED in politics at seventeen. Ideas of class, colonisation, power and privilege began to resonate with me as I witnessed horrendous injustices against students, peasants and Indigenous people.

A few years later and after a very intense time of political activism, I fled. I arrived in Perth in 1987 as a political refugee. I was just twenty-one. The process of *integration* to the Australian society was difficult and lengthy.

The need to understand and express aspects of my cultural identity became an important process that helped me make sense of being a Chilean in exile. I understood that in order to develop a sense of belonging in Australia I needed to find a *voice*. Armed with those insights and a desire to share my experiences, I found a sense of identity through the arts. I become involved in visual, performing, as well as filmmaking projects.

The awakening of my political consciousness left an enduring mark that has coloured the way I understand and view the world. It is not surprising that I found it comforting when I discovered that some of those who inspired me back home had influenced community arts practice in many parts of the world, including Australia.

Worldwide, community arts has been linked to human rights advocates, most notably Brazilians, Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. Freire became internationally known in 1970 for his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Continuum)*. Central to his philosophy is the vision of a free humanity in which the oppressed liberate themselves through a process of education and critical reflection. Boal, a theatre director, cultural activist, and a close disciple of Freire, created the social-dramatic form of *The Theatre of the Oppressed*. This has been widely recognised as grassroots activism where the participants are not just spectators or actors they became the *spec-actors* and therefore empowered to enter into the play and change the course of the dramatic action.

In the anthology *Community, Culture and Globalisation*, published by the Rockefeller Foundation in 2002, Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard provide a compelling case for understanding community arts as a global movement to foster pluralism and participation, and for encouraging communities to resist the homogenisation of world cultures by the forces of globalisation. Their anthology presents powerful examples of community arts in the Americas, Asia, and Africa. The vast majority of these stories have a common thread – poverty, military oppression, and/or colonial power.

An example of the transformative power of community arts in a western context can be seen in the Northern Visions' 2011 documentary *In Our Time: Creating Arts within Reach*. It traces the history of community arts in Belfast against the backdrop of the ethno-political and religious conflict that afflicted Northern Ireland during the 1970s and '80s. The documentary describes how

community theatre was at the forefront of bringing together, at the grassroots level, the divided community of Protestants and Catholics at a time when political discussions were leading to the historic Good Friday Agreement. As Martin Lynch said: ‘There was a kind of euphoria around what we had achieved, and what they [the politicians] had achieved, and in some way, what was happening at the political level through the political parties, was being mirrored by what was happening at the community level and that was an extraordinary feeling.’

Community arts practice in Northern Ireland was described as the catalyst for a creative force that assisted in providing a forum for the community to make sense of what was happening and to respond to the realities of the time. Overall, community arts was described as creating a sense of hope and civic normality on the streets of Northern Ireland, where festivals and parades were finally happening after years of deserted streets because of the armed conflict. In David Hyndman’s words: ‘The arts changed that very destructive and negative scene, something that all the combined troops, all the battalions of the British Army and the RUC [Royal Ulster Constabulary] could not do, the arts did!’

IN AUSTRALIA, FOR decades politicians of all persuasions have been developing a range of social policies aimed at ‘dealing’ with Aboriginal communities. One of the most draconian of these policies resulted in what has become known as the Stolen Generations. In 1997 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission published the *Bringing them home report*. This landmark report contains heart-wrenching stories of the devastating impact this policy had, and continues to have, on Aboriginal communities across Australia.

Since then, many other studies have continued to highlight the entrenched disadvantage that Aboriginal people sustain. In the introduction to one of the most recent reports by the Indigenous Implementation Board in Western Australia (2011), the chair, Lieutenant General (Rtd) John Sanderson, provided the following bleak assessment: ‘The evidence is clear – the existing strategies are costly and do not deliver sustained change to the wellbeing and prospect of the majority of Aboriginal people in either the cities or the regions.’

These reports are clearly dealing with complex and multifaceted issues. However, all of these documents highlight the systemic disempowerment of Aboriginal people and call for models of engagement based on community development principles in which the centrality of culture and self-determination are respected. Here, community arts can play – and is playing – a vital role.

As the managing director of CAN WA I have had the opportunity to deepen and consolidate the community arts work of the agency by initiating long-term projects with Noongar people in the Wheatbelt region. The aim of these projects is to create diverse opportunities for Noongar people to express their cultural identity through the arts.

The *Narrogin Stories* project was conceived and developed by CAN WA in 2010 in response to a spate of Aboriginal youth suicides in the small town of Narrogin. This left the community shocked and ill equipped to deal with such a collective grief. During 2009, family feuds ensued, exacerbating an already complex and delicate community situation.

ABC News, September 2009

...the State Coroner is currently investigating the deaths of six Aboriginal men who are believed to have committed suicide within months of each other in Narrogin last year (Norman 2009).

ABC News, November 2009

Two people are recovering from gunshot wounds in hospital after a violent feud broke out between two families in Narrogin overnight. The brawl involving more than one hundred and fifty people erupted following the funeral of an Indigenous Elder (Bell 2009).

THE FIRST STEP for CAN WA was to understand the complexity of what was happening in the community directly from those involved. After many phone conversations over several weeks, a face-to-face meeting was arranged with three representatives of each of the feuding families. The tension in Narrogin had been escalating in the days before this meeting, and it was somewhat risky attempting to have a dialogue at this time. This was the first

time we were meeting representatives of the feuding families and certainly the first time we were all meeting together.

The tension in the room was palpable. As a way of introduction, I told the story of who I was, where I came from and why I was interested and committed to this work. I expressed my personal sense of loss for my culture, my family and my country and briefly shared aspects of the colonial history experienced in Latin America. This personal disclosure made me *vulnerable* and, as a result of this, more open to connect and communicate with the Noongar people.

I was being myself, which is considered by Aboriginal academics to be an important aspect of communicating and engaging with Aboriginal people.

The meeting was very difficult and both parties were voicing their frustration and despair. I remember vividly asking, ‘Who benefits from this family feuding?’ To my surprise, someone said, ‘no one’; this was echoed on the other side of the table. Answering this question was a very powerful moment. Together they *named* their common ground. This was a breakthrough.

Engaging a community artist with the skills and sensitivity to work with a community that had experienced trauma and grief required careful consideration. The search ended in Melbourne where I met Catherine Simmonds, a seasoned theatre practitioner with extensive experience in working with diverse communities. We met in a coffee shop in Fitzroy. As I began explaining the background of the project and some of my thoughts, I had an almost instant sense of relief. Catherine’s responses made it clear that she understood the complexities we were facing and the fragility of the community dynamics. Her experience working with refugees and trafficked women reassured me that she would be able to work with Noongar people in Narrogin.

The project brief was simple: to facilitate a new narrative in Narrogin. The current narrative was about pain, suicide, violence, and family feuding. The challenge was to creatively draw out a *new* narrative from the community. This is consistent with Indigenous researchers, activists, and educators who are calling for ways of working with Aboriginal people that privilege their knowledge, voices and experiences.

Geri Hayden, a Noongar woman employed by CAN WA, wove through the community, taking Catherine with her and spontaneously arranging

meetings as they saw people on the streets. Most of their conversations with community members happened over a cuppa in living rooms, sitting around kitchen tables and with small groups in the bush.

No! Nobody wants this. I don't want this for my kids.

Kids are dreaming about it. Even when it's fireworks kids think it's shooting.

I wanna forgive, but I don't feel like I'm ready to forgive yet.

When Catherine came back to Perth from Narrogin, she was full of information and emotions. She and Geri had been privy to some deep and painful conversations. We recognised that stories recorded would be a powerful testimony of the collective grief and also the beginning of articulation of hope. The soundscape had the potential to be the collective voice of the Noongar people of Narrogin.

There were some serious risks associated with playing the soundscape in public. The soundscape contained stories and voices of both sides of the feuding families. Thus it could exacerbate an already volatile community situation and open up deep wounds. It could also create a bigger rift between the feuding families and create more animosity. In addition, it could destroy all the positive work done previously and risk CAN WA's relationships within the community and with the funding bodies.

Nevertheless, the idea of playing the soundscape at a community celebration had remarkable potential. It could create the opportunity for a dialogue between the feuding families and begin a healing process. It could also begin improving community relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the town by demonstrating the willingness of the Noongar community to address their community conflict. Furthermore it could consolidate CAN WA's trustworthiness both at the community level and with the funding bodies.

ONE SATURDAY AFTERNOON, Geri and Catherine came to my place to figure out how the soundscape would flow as a story. Catherine spent hours listening to the recordings from the kitchen conversations. She had begun the process of selecting segments that were representative of the key themes the community had spoken about. Geri's input was essential during

this process. She knew the community's code about what material could be used and what could be damaging to include. She was able to gauge what was poignant but could be repeated in public, in contrast to statements that might sound harmless to *Wadjelas* but could be considered offensive to the community. Her insider knowledge was invaluable. The community recordings needed to come together in a narrative which would flow naturally, reflected what the community said and, at the same time, contain nothing that would be potentially inflammatory. Above all it had to be real.

Catherine showed us dozens of direct quotations she had transcribed from the recordings. She cut them on strips of paper and we scattered them on my kitchen table. We read them aloud. Some were very powerful and full of heartbreak, others were witty and funny. Some were a declaration of remorse and even admission of wrongdoing. There were also memories.

We used to all go out together as a mob, didn't matter what family you were from...

People were sharing meals together, singing together laughing together.

The themes of community (*moort*), knowledge and culture (*kaitijin*) were strong and consistent with elements of Noongar cosmology identified by Len Collard in *Speaking from the Heart: Stories of Life, Family and Country* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2007).

The second theme that emerged from the recording was the sense of loss, hurt, and forgiveness:

We need time to recover and heal.

If your heart forgives the darkness goes away top to toe.

Finally, the last theme that emerged was about their hope for the future:

At the end of the day, I want peace; I want it for our kids.

Makes you feel good, taking little steps towards a better future for everyone in this town.

A community narrative was beginning to emerge. The Noongar people had the opportunity to openly talk about and reflect on what was happening in their community, to express regret, and to articulate their own solutions to the community's problems. Most importantly, they had embraced the opportunity to imagine a better future, as they spoke about their hopes and aspirations for their families and in particular for their children.

DAYS BEFORE THE launch, I was in town talking to a few locals. I wanted to personally invite them to the event. The most memorable encounter was with the senior sergeant at the Narrogin Police Station. After my polite invitation he asked,

'Have you got security for this event?' I hesitated for a moment, and thought no, we don't have security. However, what came out of my mouth was, 'We don't need security; we build relationships with communities.' I felt frustrated; his response was not what I had hoped for. I was inviting him to come along and be part of this event. I was hoping for the police to show their support and take this opportunity in their community-policing role.

I left the station and a wave of panic hit me. His words about security began to haunt me. He could be right; the whole event could turn sour. CAN WA could be held responsible for bringing this event together without taking the appropriate precautions, given the level of antagonism that the community had experienced. That night I could hardly sleep. I called Geri first thing the next day. She reassured me. She had complete trust in the process. She knew that the community had embraced the project and that there would be no confrontation at the event. She told me one more thing: her sons and her mother would perform at the launch. They wanted to be there for her and the community at no cost to CAN WA. Geri's mother is a well respected Noongar Elder and sought-after performer of Welcome to Country. Geri's sons are also well known Noongar artists who have travelled the world teaching Noongar song and dance. Geri had made this event hers; she was prepared to invest herself and her family in it. This was a clear sign to me that the process was right.

June 24, 2010, the day of the performance, was a very cold, crisp and clear winter's morning. On the day that Australia heard it had its first female prime minister, Narrogin was preparing for a community event after years of

feuding. The venue was a hub of activity. People were coming and going, the valley of Narrogin was represented by a delicate cane and cloth structure with little paper houses on top and installed in the centre of the venue. Outside, barbecues were prepared and three big half forty-four-gallon drums had been mounted to hold open fires: as people came in they would see that the fires were burning.

Two hundred and thirty Noongar men, women, and children and a few Wadjelas packed the John Higgins Centre in Narrogin. The atmosphere was truly extraordinary. Aboriginal comedian Mark Bin Bakar was the MC for the evening. He was able to enrapture the audience with his outrageous and cheeky alter ego character – Mary G. Mary G was in charge of introducing the soundscape and ‘she’ was well briefed to ensure the introduction would be sensitively handled but at the same time not too overtly sombre or serious. Just before playing the soundscape, the people gathered around two large screens placed at each side of the room. Each table had a beautiful paper lantern on it. Children were invited to light the candles inside the lanterns. The fluoro lights went off, the soundscape was heard under the soft light of candles. At that point the crowd went completely silent. Everyone listened attentively. They were listening to their own voices, they recognised themselves and their stories.

That night people laughed and people cried. I truly knew then, we had made a difference.

This is tremendous; to see all the Noongars together like this. It just blew me away. That’s why I become a bit emotional. Last time I came up here they were so split. But tonight seeing the faces of all the people who were so against each other and seeing their children all mixing up on the floor. (Janet Hayden, Noongar Elder)

We have had so many issues in relation to feuding and anti-social behaviour issues in Narrogin over the past 12–18 months, it has been systemic. It’s good to see that these people are coming together as a collective, and they are actually working together. (Mick Williams, then Senior Sergeant Narrogin Police)

I think it's giving people a voice and empowering people, and allowing people to see that they are worth something... That's what it's all about, coming together. I think it has been a huge step forward, allowing people to feel good about themselves. (Mark Bin Bakar)

THE *NARROGIN STORIES* transformed the dominant narrative of violence, suicide, and family feuding to a story of a community coming together and of healing.

During the project, the community critically reflected on the reasons for the feuding and they grieved for the loss of their young men to suicide. At the launch of the *Narrogin Stories*, the Noongar people came together and listened to *their own* voices. The soundscape affirmed the hopes of each community member who spoke out about the need to reconcile and to build a new future for their children. The *Narrogin Stories* became a powerful public statement that helped consolidate the will of the community to move forward and demonstrated the transformative power of community arts practice.

In the days that followed the event at the John Higgins Centre in June 2010, we heard some extraordinary feedback. The most outstanding of this was a letter published in the local newspaper jointly written by Noongar Elders. The letter expressed the healing that had occurred that night and acknowledged the importance of the community coming together. Since then, there has not been a repeat of the damning media reports like those from the ABC in 2009. I would not say that the family feuds are completely resolved. That would not be true, however, the *Narrogin Stories* gave the community a platform from where to begin to reconcile.

Many positive news stories have emerged from the Noongar community of Narrogin since, including the story of the *Yarns of the Heart Noongar Dolls*. This project saw Noongar women travelling with their creations to the prestigious Sydney Contemporary Arts Museum to be part of a national textile exhibition. In November 2013 Narrogin hosted its first Kambarang (spring) Festival and celebrated a series of public art works honouring local Noongar stories on the banks of the Gnarojin Park.

The transformative aspects of such experiences not only affected the project participants, but also the artists and art workers who have been involved. We have been deeply touched by the stories we have heard since getting involved in Narrogin in 2009 and we have learnt about ourselves and 'others'. The creative process has made us more open and better able to challenge our own perceptions of power and privilege, race, poverty and resilience. Above all, the process has enabled some long-lasting and transformative human connections.

Despite the power of these transformative moments, there are dominant forces that work against the ripples of positive social change. Racism is one of them; it disguises and manifests in surreptitious as well as overt ways. So understanding community arts as a cultural empowering and liberating process poses some interesting questions about what happens after the community has found its voice: who is prepared to listen, and ultimately who has the power and the resources to make and support sustained changes? These are difficult questions and the answers lie in understanding that this work is powerful and makes a difference but it cannot be sustained within a short-term parachuting cultural engagement strategy. It requires the wisdom to acknowledge that solutions to complex social problems need long-term plans. Communities that have been disenfranchised need resources, opportunities to be heard, to heal, to gain skills and to generate solutions to their own community problems. Community arts are a first step to enable cultural dialogue, to tap into individual and community strengths and self-awareness and to foster self-esteem. Community arts channel the power of creativity rather than destruction and desperation. They foster imagination rather than hopelessness, enabling hope where there has been despair. Surely, imagining hope and a better future is all of our business.

References available at www.griffithreview.com

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ESSAY

The art of collaboration

Working together on Ngurntakura Wangki

Sandy Toussaint

WE are driving late at night along a highway that crosses the remote Kimberley region of northern Western Australia. We are in an area known as the Fitzroy Valley, about three and a half thousand kilometres north of Perth, Western Australia's southern capital city, and a similar distance east from Darwin, the capital of the Northern Territory. Australia's capital city and home of federal government, Canberra, is about six thousand kilometres to the southeast of where we drive, and Broome, a town known to attract tourists to its renowned coastline and socio-cultural mix of people and lifestyles, is four hundred kilometres to our west. The contrasts in distance, density, cultures and environments are vast. We leave Broome in the afternoon to travel inland to the river country, broadly an area where people from the Bunuba, Gooniyandi and Nykina language groups have sustained traditional Customary Law relationships for countless generations. Our aim is to be in Fitzroy Crossing, a town through which the iconic and extensive Fitzroy River flows, by nightfall.

Amy Ngurnta Nuggett sits in the passenger seat beside me. Her daughter, Marminjiya, sits in the back seat with a young granddaughter. Amy is a senior Juwaliny-Walmajarri woman and I have known and worked with her and her family since the 1980s. Amy is known locally as an artist and a traditional owner in native title Customary Law. A widow for many years, and now in her late sixties, Amy has five adult children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, and an extended family that resides in Kimberley and Western Desert communities and towns.

We continue driving and eventually reach the town of Fitzroy Crossing, then travel a little further to the Bayulu Community where Amy now lives. We unload the vehicle – bags, water bottles, some food and several swags, or bedrolls, and large striped, plastic bags filled with clothes. These are vital resources for families living in remote settings. When I return to the Bayulu Community two days later, Ngurnta tells me that she needs to visit Mangkaja Arts to see whether any of her paintings have sold. She is keen to see whether she will have enough money to pay for food (tinned milk, bread, tea, flour, fruit, sugar, tinned fish) and fuel to travel inland to visit her traditional desert homelands. Such a trip will require strong four-wheel drive vehicles, and good drivers to take family across *jilji*, or sandhill, country and safely back to Fitzroy Crossing.

We visit Mangkaja Arts, where Amy learns that payment for her painting is not ready for her to collect. We then meet up with Marminjiya who is on a lunch break from her work at a local Aboriginal resource agency. We also meet Amy's eldest daughter, Wayawu, who is employed on a part-time basis as a journalist and broadcaster with the local west Kimberley-based radio station, Wangkiyupurnanupurru, and Amy's mother's sister, Wapi. We have lunch together sitting under a tree not far from the Bunuba-owned Ngiyali Roadhouse.

We talk during lunch about a number of things: the circumstances of Amy's *ngawaji*, or grandchildren, Mangkaja, a prospective trip to the desert, and the high cost of clothes at the local store. We also start telling stories, including several about Amy as a young girl. A thoughtful quietness comes over Wayawu who suddenly says, 'Let's write a book about Amy, about her life, let's talk about Amy's stories... She's got a big mob of stories, and she does painting...' It is from this moment that a small literary and artistic seed is sown, one that is later referred to thematically as visual storytelling.

Amy makes it clear that she likes the book idea, in part because it might assist the young people, especially her grandchildren, to learn more about her life as a Juwaliny-Walmajarri woman who married a Walmajarri man, both of whom left the desert with their families to eventually live in the Fitzroy Valley's river country. Amy also makes plain that she wants the story to be inclusive, rather than narrowly focused on her, as a way of explaining the

significance and interconnections of family life, culture and land over time. It is this interconnected emphasis on family, storytelling and painting, rather than particular details about Amy's personal life that sit at the heart of the project.



WE WORK INTERMITTENTLY on the book and the exhibition by visiting, being, and talking with each other during time together in many desert and Fitzroy Valley settings, and in Perth. We also talk on the phone and occasionally by email: retelling stories, finding and sorting old and new photographs, conversing along the way with Aboriginal, or *piyirn*, family members, and *kartiya*, or non-Aboriginal, friends. Aboriginal family connections are obviously continuously sustained by Amy and her children, but we also rekindle friendships from the past with non-Aboriginal people.

I look through many of the Kimberley field notes I recorded throughout the 1980s and 1990s up to the present, and am reminded that they contain stories and ethnographic interviews, conversations and observations that I have recorded by, about or with Amy and other family members during the past three decades. Many of these were for anthropological and community-inspired projects, but none can be compared with how I work with the family on Ngurntakura Wangki.

Each of us has other demands in our lives but we remain loyal to the idea of visual storytelling and Amy as inspiration, and we experience both

shadows and joys with the work. Joyfulness and heartfelt emotion emerges when a significant gesture results in artefacts made by Amy's late husband being returned to the family. Shadows include the sorrowful reality when loved ones pass away, coupled with a significant health scare for Amy. Our collaboration extends across time, place, culture and emotion but we continue to work together and stay focused because the book and exhibition matter.

We submit a few proposals seeking publishing and exhibition support and receive a mix of responses. One of these includes the view that the storytelling in the book lacks attention to systematic chronology; another is that Amy's art might be included in a 'group show' rather than a solo exhibition. While puzzled by these responses that, in many ways, reveal a naïvety about Aboriginal storytelling and art, we continue to work together on an idea that first sprang from, and was regularly guided by, Ngurnta's family.

Several years on, both book and exhibition find a home. We work closely and collaboratively with Mangkaja Arts and Perth's Gallery Central, although the contrasts in distance, density, cultures and environments remain vast. We gain encouraging funding support from the Australia Council, UWA and the Department of Culture and the Arts.

I REFLECT ON the way the Ngurntakura Wangki book and exhibition grew from a small literary and artistic seed in a remote setting that was regularly watered and illuminated by the thoughts, words and ideas of a Walmajarri family as we worked collectively together, often through difficult and complex circumstances. We are not certain that either book or exhibition will attract wide interest, or that they should. But we are comforted in the knowledge that the stories the book contains and that the artworks created by Amy have been given life in a way that matters most to family, country and culture.

Sandy Toussaint is a professor of anthropology and associate director of the Berndt Museum at the University of Western Australia. Her latest book is an edited collection of prose, short stories and poetry *Kimberley Stories* (Fremantle Press, 2012). Sandy is also a counsellor with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

ESSAY

Inside the tent

The opposite of shovelling muck

Natasha Cica

‘IN Australia, culture is what does not qualify for arts funding.’ So quipped a young Sydneysider in *THINKtent*, a project whose prototype I delivered across Tasmania last year. *THINKtent* invites members of the public into a small, travelling canvas tent that provides an intimate, beautiful and ‘safe’ space for people to come together for conversation and reflection: the Tasmanian tent is internally adorned with commissioned design furniture and decor, inspired by the lost Tasmanian wilderness of Lake Pedder. *THINKtent* holds up to ten participants at a time in sessions each lasting around an hour, each including a personality or specialist speaking on a topic of their choice. I host *THINKtent* as one long, meandering performance across the day, recording it by taking handwritten notes and still photographs. Smartphones and their relentless distraction are unwelcome.

THINKtent must be culture, because it hasn’t received arts funding as such. *THINKtent* debuted in Tasmania’s Ten Days on the Island arts festival in 2013, however, which currently receives \$1.5 million in public funding – Tasmania’s Opposition promised to halve that in government – and benefited from marketing support and cross-island schlepping by the Ten Days’ team between site placements in Burnie, Launceston and the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA). Business boosting came from Hobart-based Peta Heffernan of Liminal Spaces, providing design curation *pro bono*. Extra private-pocket support came from the participating designer/makers Simon Ancher, Angela Griffiths, Penny Malone and Rachael Rose, who effectively worked free of fee. My assistant Sally Laing volunteered unpaid overtime to

keep the backend running, smoothing compliance issues across a matrix of three local government regimes. I burnt buckets of midnight oil and worked through weekends and public holidays to ensure the frontend fronted.

I'm not complaining, but I am recalling a decade-old statement by a safely superannuated bureaucrat regarding his decision to allocate zero budgetary dollars to commissioning content for a cultural initiative that made him, his political masters and the State of Tasmania look pretty damned good on bigger stages – 'the creative mind always overinvests.' Indeed it does, which adds extra value to the freedoms I was afforded across 2012–13 by being one of twelve Australians who received an inaugural Sidney Myer Creative Fellowship from Melbourne's Sidney Myer Fund, rewarding talent and courage. This fiscal buffer – bless you, Sidney Myer, one hundred and sixty thousand times I bless you – enabled my investment in developing *THINKtent* beyond its Ten Days' testbed. At the time of writing, the Tasmanian *THINKtent* is tracking to appear in the Sydney Opera House as part of Advance's 2014 global awards forum, and iterations featuring curators and designers outside Australia are planned for Belgrade and Helsinki later in the year.

THINKtent RECENTLY FEATURED in the 2014 season of the outdoor food, art, craft, design, music-and-more market on the lawns at MONA, now in its third summer. Branded MoMa, its craft curator Natalie Holtsbaum says the no-trash and mostly child-friendly (with occasional nudity) market 'honours ideas, whether they are in infancy or fully developed', is 'a space for risk taking', and is characterised by 'a deep respect for environment and tradition...whether this relates to how an apple cider is prepared, to master craftsmen breaking rules or to celebrating traditional cultures.'

MoMa's the brainchild of Kirsha Kaechele, founder of the Life is Art Foundation, who relocated to Hobart a few years ago as the partner of MONA owner David Walsh. Kaechele was born in California – where she still holds land that she has farmed with marijuana as a statement about how hard it became to fund arts projects after the 2008 global financial crisis – and largely raised in Guam. Since then her trajectory has taken her all over, including southern Lebanon (where she accidentally rubbed up with Hezbollah, some assumed she was Jewish), Europe (where Walsh crashed a Basel

Art Fair black tie event to get closer to Kaechele back when she was a bigger name than him) and Manhattan (where she used to live, and where Walsh proposed marriage in the middle of a heatwave last August – partying on at a celebration featuring a handcut ice dining table, while a lithe performance artist collected falling drips). Kaechele also spent many years in New Orleans, where she set up an art space in a disused bakery in the seriously no-go ghetto of the Eighth Ward, shovelled muck in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, grew life-as-art gardens with local children – aged from three to sixteen, ‘and one eighteen-year-old, who is the one I loved so much because he didn’t want to participate in the gangster scene but got shot anyway’ – who had never seen or eaten a carrot and set up a social enterprise for them to sell their vegetables to the fanciest restaurants in town.

Currently she’s adapting the food garden idea for schools in underprivileged communities in Tasmania, as the *24 Carrot Garden* project that’s rolling out as a lower budget version of Stephanie Alexander’s kitchen gardens. On Tasmania, a place many consider to be a cotcase of socio-economic dysfunction, Kaechele is refreshingly positive: ‘It’s one of the more functional places I’ve lived. There are hyperfunctional places like Manhattan, but there you’re in an artificial bubble because all the riffraff has been pushed out to the edges. Here the riffraff is kind of all around, but it’s really not that bad...it’s nothing like the ghettos of America.’

Of her time in New Orleans, Kaechele says, ‘I felt like it was the best human work I had done in the world’. Unfortunately a centrepiece of that portfolio triggered the disfavour of the influential Warhol Foundation. They’d asked her to throw one of her spectacular dinners, art pieces attracting the likes of Uma Thurman (which she recently replicated in Hobart as the *Curiouser & Curiouser* feast at the first Dark MoFo festival last winter). ‘I ran the table down the worst block in New Orleans, and they couldn’t handle their privilege in contrast with the lack of privilege of my neighbours. Even though the neighbours were all invited, and the Warhol Foundation wouldn’t pay for the seats for my neighbours, so I sold extra seats to rich New Orleanians to subsidise forty places [for them],’ she recalls. ‘And my best friend from that neighbourhood, Loach, my first protector, had died a few days before. I was at the hospital when he died. So I got my friends Peter

Nadin and Anne Kennedy to pay for his funeral, because the family had no money, nor did I...and the family scheduled their second line, which is the big marching band that celebrates a person's life, for the night of the dinner. So they bust into the dinner, the street, hundreds of people, and the band, with horns, and they circled around me and they start chanting – *You lost one, but you won a hundred; You lost one, but you won a hundred.* I mean, I'm weeping,' Kaechele explains. 'As far as I'm concerned, it's the best night I've ever had,' she continues, but the Warhol representatives 'just couldn't take it.' Kaechele and her projects lost foundation support. 'I felt, you're okay as long as your dinner's in the Mandarin Oriental, whatever safe rich bubble it's in, you don't feel guilty about your privilege then. But somehow I took the blame... The neighbours weren't upset, they were happy, because all their family members were working the dinner, making money. Or invited. They had a choice – do you want to sit down and have the dinner, or do you want to work? The Warhol Foundation were really pansy asses, and I'm not afraid to say it.'

LOCATED ABOUT AS geographically far from that scene as you can hurl yourself, MoMa's clearly become the vehicle for Kaechele to get fully back into her professional stride. It doesn't hurt to have Walsh as a lover, backer and producer, as she frankly acknowledges. 'I would be doing the same thing I was doing before I lived here if I didn't have [access to those] resources,' Kaechele reflects over a five-course degustation lunch at MONA's Source restaurant. 'But these resources have been so relaxing and empowering, I am so grateful. It takes the pressure off.' Despite her Southern Belle-style charm, Kaechele is no pansy ass by any stretch of the imagination. According to Holtsbaum, it's Kaechele who delivers 'the big wow' in the MoMa production – through 'her curation of big minds and big ideas, expressed through art, performance and structures.'

The conceptual fulcrum of this year's market was the *Derwent River Heavy Metal* project, an art-science collaboration drilling down into the problem of heavy metal pollution in the river that embraces the MONA peninsula on three sides, whose project partners include the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS), CSIRO, Monash Art Design and Architecture (MADA), the University of Texas and the Massachusetts

Institute of Technology. 'I just thought the river was perfect when I arrived here,' says Kaechele, 'and then I discovered there's this horrible dark side in the form of toxicity resting in the sediment...there's no known solution, even after two scientific symposia with experts in heavy metal and a bunch of artists and creative people.' Hypothetically, oysters could be one answer. 'Each oyster can filter fifty litres of water per day, they're really efficient at bio-accumulating metals...unfortunately, David did the math and you would need 1.1 trillion oysters to clean the Derwent,' says Kaechele, but they've commissioned a piece as a kind of poetic homage to that possibility. Fine art specialist Kit Wise from MADA has collaborated with IMAS on the *Chapel Oyster Massage Hatchery*, incorporating an aquarium sitting in a wooden tepee with live oysters feeding on fluorescent-looking algae and a videolink to oysters working in the river, with human massage available nearby. As each oyster dies, it will be embalmed in slumped glass made from old Moorilla wine bottles and used to plug a hole in the concrete waffle section of another market project, the rammed earth *Heavy Metal Retaining Wall* designed by Ross Brewin, Alysia Bennett and architecture students from MADA, with windows featuring artworks themed around concentrated heavy metals like cadmium and mercury.

Another market anchor was *Total Body Burden*, a work curated by Kaechele and supported by Hobart Pathology and the Menzies Research Institute. Members of the public peed into jars with the label of their choice: Hobart, Artist, or Rest of the World. The urine was pooled and tested once a day for heavy metal concentration – artists scored most highly. Participants were then interviewed by medical practitioner Molly Shorthouse, prepared by visual artist Cat Glennon to be 'softed' on clean white sheets (don't ask), and entered a decommissioned dental van for a psychodramatic experience with Tora Lopez and Rya Kleinpeter of New York-based *INNER COURSE*, wearing peekaboo costumes in their trademark shade of Caucasian Nude. Astrology readings emphasising the planet Mercury became part of the package when a Tasmanian called Joanne just turned up in a nurse's uniform and started offering the service. Nearby, another New Yorker Daphane Park hung out with healers in her *Exquisite Corpse Café Superconductor*, a domelike sculpture made of ripped blue denim dipped in beeswax, inspired by the work

of Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich and his notions of capturing the universal cosmic energy of ‘orgone’. Periodically, Rome-based artist Emiliano Maggi swathed himself in a slinky black forehead-to-foot bodysuit to deliver a performance and sound interpretation of a river nymph transforming herself into a dead tree, featuring an electric guitar embedded in a massive eucalypt dragged from Walsh’s remote beach property at Marion Bay. Surrounded by all that – especially on MoMa opening day, with around four thousand punters swirling around outside, downing luscious edibles curated by foodie Jo Cook and quaffing cocktails laced with squid ink – my sweet round *THINKtent* looked a bit, well, square. Who really cared to sit on buttongrass cushions to engage with worthy, nerdy topics like *Beauty in the public domain*, *Is culture entertainment?* and *Who’s got the power? Influencing change in curious times*, speakers interrogating literacy and social equity and democracy, and scientists demystifying naked fish and dirty mud? Enter a brief crisis of confidence. It was getting insanely hot as the sun beat down on that canvas – did *THINKtent* need the help of occasional nudity?

I flashed back to the very first *THINKtent* performance on Burnie’s seafront. The billed talent was perfectly poised – Theatre North director Greg Leong, resplendent in a butter coloured satin suit. But the boardwalk was deserted, except for a lone grey nomad reading his newspaper on a park bench nearby. ‘What now?’ wondered Leong (all set to riff on *Too many festivals?*), ‘How will it work?’ Great question. The bloke on the bench turned out to be chasing arts festivals all around Australia in his campervan. A retired photojournalist, he’d long moonlighted as a member of a Melbourne choral group specialising in traditional Balkan music. Pretty soon the tent was full – not just of people, but of songs sung in Bulgarian, Cantonese and French, a curtain raiser to an excursion from permaculture to pig-rearing to political secrets, an ocean storm that didn’t blow us over, and some skateboarding (code for ‘delinquent’) youths I persuaded to try out *THINKtent* instead of ripping it down.

Unfolding at MoMa, *THINKtent* attracted an assorted, all-age collection of visitors from Canada to Northcote, Stockholm to Moonah. It threw up a new project idea about taking celebrity chefs to Risdon Prison to teach food preparation skills. It challenged tensions between ‘elite’ and ‘popular’

conversation, and underlying anxieties about what culture really is, and for whom. It made me ponder why we seem to need permissions from gatekeepers and bankrollers before we start the work that truly transforms us and touches others. Like the worried well, too many of us get knotted up about distinctions without differences, about predetermined outcomes and prescribed outputs. Culture is not compliance. It is woodchopping competitions is opera is V8 supercars is needlepoint is ornamental cabbage arrangements in the street is whisky tours is kindy kids growing broccoli is poems is dancing in the dark to David Bowie in unsensible shoes is fresh watermelon juice is dressing like Vivienne Westwood or Cate Blanchett or Serge Gainsbourg or yourself is cooking for Chinese New Year wherever your family comes from is new and old stuff on small and large screens is surfing is breaking cruel rules is the heartbeat of an oyster is football in any code is manga is homemade preserves is pop-up jazz is playing roulette preferably not Russian is shell collecting is demonstrations in the streets is design is story is dreams is voice is meaning is scent is life is art is let it go and things will come is brave and creative solutions to the problems of the human condition. Or as Kaechele put it around course three of that standout lunch, as we soaked up the view of the corrupted/cleansed Derwent and stared in reverence at the privilege of a perfectly poached egg yolk in a skin of truffle oil sitting on a bed of parmesan-scented custard: ‘All these things come in life, this beautiful dance where you feel like you’re part of the formation of a snowflake. Honestly, that’s how I feel about a project. The seed idea comes, and it’s strong enough to let you know that that’s the seed: and then, suddenly all the little things start locking in and connecting. I’m just watching the snowflake form, and that’s it. That’s my version of curating. And granted, a few phone calls and this and that, but they’re out of inspiration. So here we are. It’s the opposite of shovelling muck.’

Natasha Cica is director of the consulting practice Liminal Strategy, and was the founding director of the Inglis Clark Centre for Civil Society at the University of Tasmania until 2014. In 2012 she was awarded an inaugural Sidney Myer Creative Fellowship, and in 2013 was celebrated by the *Australian Financial Review* and Westpac as one of Australia’s 100 Women of Influence. She is the author of *Pedder Dreaming: Olegas Truchanas and A Lost Tasmanian Wilderness* (UGP, 2011) and co-edited *Griffith REVIEW 39: Tasmania – The Tipping Point?*

Films with punch

Documenting and producing social change

Alex Kelly

STORIES can provide us with new possibilities, new visions, introduce us to new truths and ways of seeing. Cultural content, such as social issue documentaries, can be a powerful tool in shifting narratives, galvanising and reframing how a community sees and understands itself, and creating deep impact.

But is simply telling a story enough to create these changes? In a highly media-saturated world cultural producers need to be savvy and strategic about how stories are told, shared and distributed, and how audiences are activated to achieve deep and lasting change.

After twenty years of activism, mobilising diverse communities and groups through a range of projects and campaigns with a focus on media and narrative, I believe transformation is brought about when diverse tactics are used in tandem by broad coalitions. Protests, lobbying, strikes and storytelling, alongside luck and the elusive combination of zeitgeist and timing, are a part of the mix. Culture is a much more powerful driver of change than many activists realise. Activists often focus on media, messaging, meaning and framing, but there is not a great deal of exploration of the power of art, culture and story to make change.

In a media-saturated world audiences are fragmenting and media is being consumed in rapidly changing ways. For ideas to stick and create long-term impact, cultural producers concerned with catalysing change must combine beautiful poetic storytelling, strategic distribution and marketing with alliance building and savvy advocacy and lobbying.

Exposing injustice alone struggles to make an impact in a climate of spectacle and over-dramatisation of the mundane. Audiences can be overwhelmed by compassion-fatigue and saturated with stories on many media platforms. To get them to engage, media makers need to think about what the audience can be invited to do after they've seen a film or theatre show – how the power of audience can be harnessed to create change. To prevent compassion-fatigue there needs to be an understanding that there are meaningful ways of responding to realise the impact the campaign can achieve.

Producers also need to think about which audiences they want to reach. It's not necessarily about getting a mass audience to see a film – maybe it is wiser to reach a key audience of policymakers for a particular industry or sector, decision-makers or people of influence within a community.

BRITDOC, a British social change documentary film funder, distributor and production company coined the term 'impact producer' in late 2012. Naming this work has proved useful to those who work in the burgeoning sector known as the 'impact space'.

Impact producers manage 'outreach and engagement' for films – they are often a hybrid of strategist, marketer, grant writer, publicist, social media expert, campaigner and community organiser. An impact producer may not have all these skills, but they know how to manage a project that covers all the bases. As Jennifer MacArthur of Borderline Media says, 'And no, your office intern can't do this.'

Having a shared language enables impact producers to explore tactics and approaches to creating social impact with film as the sector rapidly evolves.

There are more funding programs supporting this area of work including Impact Partners, and in the USA, the Ford Foundation's Just Films program and Fledgling Fund. There is a need for more funders to support impact work in Australia. Perhaps the BRITDOC GOOD PITCH2 event in Sydney in October 2014 will go some way to encouraging this.

While many of the tactics engaged by these filmmakers and producers are not new – age-old community mobilisation techniques – there are new approaches created by technological innovation and digital platforms. Socially engaged cultural producers are seeing new models of funding emerge

including crowd funding platforms like Pozible and Kickstarter; new ways to distribute content online by video on demand through Netflix, iTunes and Distrify, and new ways to reach audiences through social media, are becoming important.

THERE ARE SOME great case studies of films that have made an impact. Filmmaker Josh Fox made his anti-hydraulic fracturing – fracking – film *Gasland* for just US\$32,000. The film has had huge success in festivals, theatres, and through movement and community-based distribution. Whilst *Gasland* doesn't boast high production values – it's essentially a road movie Fox shot as he travelled across America exploring the impact of fracking – it is a good story, well told. Its timing was fantastic. Launched just as concern about fracking gained traction, the film became integral to anti-fracking campaigns.

The campaign around the film has cost more than six times the cost of making the film, at least US\$204,000 to date. *Gasland 2* was launched in mid-2013.

According to the BRITDOC impact evaluation, *Gasland* hoped to put the issue of fracking 'on the map' and encourage audiences to connect with grassroots organisations and movements via social media and at screenings to build a stronger anti-fracking movement. The film team also worked with these movements to lobby elected officials and institutions in order to curtail fracking.

Gasland has successfully achieved its social change aims, with more than 250 screenings across the United States, more than a hundred thousand signatures on petitions, celebrities enlisted and media appearances.

Due in part to the massive movement that grew around the film, hydro-fracking bans were enacted in Pittsburgh, Licking Township and Baldwin, Pennsylvania; Tompkins County and Cooperstown, New York; France and Quebec; and extended hydrofracking moratoriums were placed in New York State and South Africa.

Josh Fox spent three weeks in Australia screening *Gasland* in 2010 and the film has been a powerful tool for campaign groups organising against fracking such as Lock the Gate and Quit Coal.

THE INVISIBLE WAR (2012) is a harrowing film that explores the high incidence of sexual assault in the US military. Sharing the stories of veterans of military sexual trauma the film details the huge numbers of women and men assaulted in the military and the systemic cover ups that have in the past protected perpetrators.

Two days after viewing the film – immediately after a high profile launch of the film at Sundance Film Festival – the outgoing US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta changed the military’s internal reporting structure so that an immediate supervisor is no longer the only person to whom a victim can report abuse. ‘Clearly this film has changed the conversation,’ Senator Richard Blumenthal, a former federal prosecutor said.

The online campaign, devised by New York based impact producer Nancy Schwartzman, *Invisible No More* – #notinvisible – invited viewers to sign a petition, host a screening, donate to the campaign or spread the word via social media or email. It encouraged audiences to ‘Stand With Survivors’. The aims of the campaign were to raise awareness, drive political and cultural change, and help survivors of military sexual assault heal. *The Invisible War* is a powerful example of the kind of impact a film can make when an integrated strategy is rolled out.

HOBART FILMMAKER, HEATHER Kirkpatrick, self-funded and distributed her debut feature film, *Mary Meets Mohammad*, which became a 2013 Walkley Award documentary finalist. After winning the 2014 Tasmanian Media Award for ‘Best Feature, Documentary or Current Affairs’, the judges said: ‘In many ways she succeeded where much of the media had failed in putting a human face on the ongoing national political issue of asylum seekers. It was a particularly Tasmanian angle on an ongoing national story.’ After a booming season at Hobart’s State Cinema, *Mary Meets Mohammad* was picked up for national theatrical distribution by the Palace Cinema chain and ranked 13th out of all 33 Australian films at the box office, despite limited seasons.

Mary Meets Mohammad has also been screened at more than 350 community venues across Australia including; schools, churches, refugee advocacy groups, Rotary Clubs and CWA networks, sparking debate and discussions around

refugee policy in Australia. A study guide accompanies the film and many q&a's after screenings have seen audiences meet asylum seekers and refugees face to face, for the first time. Around 200 more community screenings are expected in 2014.

No film is a silver bullet. But filmmakers working in alliance with social movements can introduce and encourage the use of new narratives, frames and ideas in culture and society. Especially when they combine age-old activist organising techniques with great storytelling and the power of digital distribution. I look forward to seeing how the impact space grows over the next five years.

This essay has been amended for clarification purposes.

Alex Kelly is an Alice Springs based filmmaker and producer. She joined Big hART in 2004, worked on *Ngapartji Ngapartji* 2005-2010, and is now national producer. She is the impact producer on Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein's new project *The Message*. In 2013 Alex was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to examine models of social change, documentary impact and engagement in UK, Canada and USA. She blogs at echotango.org.

ESSAY

Footnotes from the field

'Is Lily there? Where is my Lily? My Lily is lost in the world'

Paula Abood

THIS was the cry of MamaFatu, a participant in *The Book of the Living* (2006), a Sydney-based storytelling project that brought Sierra Leonean women together in the first years of this century. MamaFatu's sixteen-year-old daughter had disappeared in the chaos of war, a decade-long fratricidal convulsion that left more than fifty thousand people dead, up to one-quarter of the population displaced, thousands of women and girls subjected to sexual violence, and hundreds upon hundreds suffering the signature rebel atrocity of limb amputation. MamaFatu had been recounting how women put skin-tight shorts underneath their dresses to try and protect themselves against rape. Then she fell silent mid-sentence. She stood up and walked out of the room. In the twilight of her Marrickville backyard, MamaFatu called out to her lost daughter and broke down.

In this instance, the story circle became a mourning ritual where women who had escaped the brutality of war could express the grief they had hitherto been forced to suppress. This process especially enabled recently arrived women to make sense of what they had endured by bearing witness to each other's story. As women struggled to voice heartbreaking experiences of loss, to describe the savagery that marks civil war, the circle of women would invariably sing each other up as another fell to the ground in sorrow.

Trinh T. Minh-ha speaks of the story 'as a cure and a protection, being at once musical, historical, poetical, ethical, educational, magical' in her book *Woman, Native, Other* (Indiana University Press, 1989). Community leader Fatmata Mansaray affirms this in how she experienced the making of *The Book of the Living*: 'Our stories are not easy to tell. They bring up all the pain and suffering that we didn't have time to process because we were running

from war, from death. Many of us could not bury our loved ones. Many of us could not properly mourn our loss. We need to hear these stories. They are stories which are a lesson against war.'

This project is but one of a legion in the archive of community cultural praxis; at once about engaging people to create, learn, express, connect, communicate and heal in empowering and nurturing ways. This work is also about fostering creativity in all its diversity to inspire and facilitate critical dialogue among and between cultures. Despite coming from diverse ethnic, linguistic, religious and regional traditions, the Sierra Leonean women in this project bonded emotionally through their shared experiences of the unspoken, and at times, unspeakable suffering, including the abjection of the refugee camp, and the manifest racism in the new country. In the years since, the women have become a force in civic life and agitated publicly against all forms of violence across communities. Community building is an especially critical aspect of this type of cultural work, empowering women being fundamental to transformative change.

Longing to see Sakhi to offer my prayers
 I cross the tulips through the desert
 Crying aloud, the tears run down my cheek
 I yearn for what I don't yet seek

WRITING ABOUT EMPOWERMENT and the use of story in *Community Development: A Critical Approach* (The Policy Press, 2006) Margaret Ledwith confirms that 'sharing stories embodies trust, respect, dignity and all the other qualities that frame this approach to practice'. This certainly was axiomatic in another project of note that took place around the same time in the little spaces of south-west and western Sydney. The Afghan Women's Dobaiti Project had its beginnings in the 2001 project *Bread and Other Stories*, a creative initiative that produced poetry, prose and letters by Afghan, Arab and Bosnian women. The workshops for this project coincided with the events of September 11 and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, the drowning of 353 refugees on board *SIEV X*, and the children overboard incident. Women were turning up to workshops in Bankstown citing episodes of racial abuse directed at them, their families and communities. Politically, the women felt

vulnerable, silenced, and powerless.

Speaking back to the warped discourses that had come to define Afghan cultures and identities necessitated cultural intervention. Questions of safety were naturally paramount given the unabashed hostility and violence that afflicted Afghan and Muslim women's everyday experiences of the world: scarves were being pulled from women and girls' heads; women were spat upon and menaced from one end of the city to the other. As complex and exacting as any community cultural endeavour ought to be, a fundamental aim of the Dobaiti Project was to nurture and renew cultural expression by providing a safe space for women to share their ideas, insights and knowledge in their own language and on their own terms. This approach was shaped by a set of critical questions posed in 1997 by Haitian scholar Myriam JA Chancy in *Searching for Safe Spaces* (Temple University Press, 1997):

How do we reclaim ourselves...without a firm presence in the very circles that keep us perpetually on their peripheries, looking in?... How do we affirm our existence, even in those margins, without a language of our own making, especially when language has become an arena of perpetual struggle for so many of us who have had to function with imposed, European language as a result of colonisation and displacement?

WOMEN'S CULTURAL HERITAGE remains the wellspring of creativity and the Afghan community in Sydney was blessed to have a teacher and practitioner of Dobaiti poetry in their midst. Rukhshana Sarwar had taught literature at Kabul University and specialised in this literary form. Recognised as a traditional lyrical expression for love, Dobaiti underwent a thematic transition in the suburbs of post-September 11 Sydney. Displacement, dislocation and despair found their narrative rhythm in verse. Equally, remembering the 'stunning dusk in Bakwa and Sadyan', the Buddhas of Bamiyan, and the love of Ghor, Jalalabad and Mazar inflected the soulful pages of *Poetry Across Rooftops* (Bankstown, 2006).

This project perfectly embodied feminist poet Audre Lorde's wisdom in *Sister Outsider* (Crossing Press, 1984): 'For women, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first

made into language, then into idea, and then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we give name to the nameless so it can be thought.'

Poetry Across Rooftops and *The Book of the Living* both attest to Lisa Suhair Majaj's idea that 'articulation functions as a fundamental vehicle of agency, understood as the ability to affirm the self and to take action in the world'. In both projects, it was the women who mobilised, envisioning and organising their own healing from within, aspiring in all their sadness buried beneath the burdens of settlement to achieve a more nourishing emotional, moral, intellectual and spiritual existence. While cultural mediation is key to community cultural work, it is crucial that the layers that give voice to culturally complex expression are not reduced to only being stories against war, or about the 'other', but read as allegories for living, for enabling collective action for social change, for agitating for a more just and humane world.

References and notes available at www.griffithreview.com

Paula Abood is a community cultural worker, writer and educator. She has worked with culturally diverse communities in Western Sydney over the past twenty-seven years. She has written for performance, radio, publications and film and was awarded a Western Sydney Artists' Fellowship in 2007 for the blogging project *Race and the City*, and in 2013, the Australia Council's Ros Bower Award, recognising outstanding community arts and cultural work.

ESSAY

Neglect at your peril

Writing at the heart of culture

Mary Delahunty

HE was too tall for a teenager. Heavy and built like a tree, he tried to make himself invisible at the back of the nervous group, clutching a sheet of paper. He was awkward, his large hand rubbing at a face full of pimples. I would never have picked him to make the speech. When the other kids finally settled into their places on the stage and the audience quietened he stepped forward with the words. I was moved in an unexpected way.

With care he told his story. Broken family, limited schooling, in and out of juvenile justice centres. Hopeless. Until he hooked up with Maud Clark's Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company. Tonight he was welcoming educators, government, councillors, social workers and philanthropists to a performance by teenagers, who like him, had fallen through the cracks. I knew of Somebody's Daughter's work with women in prison, giving voice to their stories, but this salvation of kids from the street was new and arresting. Where schools, welfare agencies and Rotary failed, despite innovative attempts, to throw a safety net around these teenagers, Maud Clark's company offered a place, an equal meeting place, and a chance to be heard.

Somebody's Daughter works with women in prison post-release and marginalised young people to create high quality theatre and pathways back into education and community. It's a creative model of social change that works, often when all else has failed. Words are at the heart of it.

IN THE MAELSTROM of tweets, texts and dashed off opinion, a yearning remains for considered words. Words that tell a story, words that build bridges between ideas, create safe places for reflection, words that challenge

and invite discovery of inner lives. Words matter. Though words themselves don't necessarily make literature, they matter on the contemporary canvas of open media where remarks reign, full of conceit and certainly incomplete.

Words, whether on stage, screen or page are the crucible of culture. Literature, at its best, slices through the noise and ephemera of life. Yet the place of the literary sector in Australia is shrinking, while other art forms roar into prominence and value. This is reflected in its neglected role in the national conversation, the carping response to the Book Industry Strategy Group report and the decline in Australia Council funding for literature. It is timely to ask, why is literature lagging and what can be done about it?

Fifteen years ago literature received \$4 million from the Australia Council, allocated to writers and literary organisations. This was more than the \$2.7 million allocated to dance, or the \$2.2 million for new media and just behind the \$5.9 million allocated to visual arts and crafts. By 2003–4 when the Australia Council reported on its first education and arts strategy, literature lifted its take to \$6.9 million or 5 per cent of the total, although it had been overtaken by the unhelpful non-specific categorisation at \$15 million or 12 per cent and dwarfed by orchestras/opera/music which received just over half the total funds.

Seven years on, the total funds available had grown, but literature dropped back to \$6.6 million, while dance grew to \$16.1 million, and visual arts to \$16.9 million. In 2012 the allocation to literature shrunk again to \$5.9 million and then the following year rose to \$7.1 million, tellingly still below the \$7.7 million it was awarded in 2010. Literature is the only artform to go backwards since 2010. All other sectors have increased their share of funding.

LITERATURE WAS A foundation board of the Australia Council for the Arts in 1975. It has now become a poor cousin.

Even in the days before the formation of the Australia Council, writing was a special interest of prime ministers and members of parliament. Supporting literature and those who create it was the first stamp on the cultural map of a new nation when in 1908 the government, led by writer and lawyer Alfred Deakin, established the Commonwealth Literary Fund (CLF) to provide pensions for needy writers or their families.

In 1920, fifty-two-year-old Henry Lawson was given a pension – £52 a year. His mother Louisa Lawson also applied, but was rejected. Frank Moorhouse, in his 2004 research report *The Writer and the State* prepared for the National Archives of Australia, discovered the pivotal role of prime ministers and their interest in ‘men of letters’. Prime ministers Scullin and Menzies expanded the CLF beyond welfare to play a role in nurturing the literary arts through cultural promotion and stimulation, address concerns about national security by applying a political test, and use the arts in public diplomacy.

Between 1908 and 1973, when the CLF became the Literature Board, 172 writers or their families received financial assistance.

Private and corporate giving tells a similar tale. Literature has become almost invisible. As corporations and philanthropists deepen the pool of arts funds, literature languishes, a quaint curio in a world of artist visibility and sophisticated sell.

The *Australian Business Arts Foundation Survey of Private Sector Support* in 2010 revealed that private support for the arts had increased just over 4 per cent in the previous year to \$221 million, doubling in just eight years. Literature, which in this survey included the print media, suffered near the bottom of the table. Art galleries, music and opera received the lion’s share with \$87 million; literature and libraries with \$10 million about 5 per cent.

In November 2012 the Australia Council reported on private sector support for its key organisations nationally. The report was particularly bleak for literature. ‘Total private sector income for eight literature companies was \$312,000 – a decrease of \$316,000 on 2010 levels. Literature companies report significantly lower levels of average earnings compared to other artforms. Literature companies find it difficult to attract corporate sponsorship income. In 2011, literature companies received \$114,000 in corporate sponsorship – an average of just \$14,000 per company and the lowest of the sector.’

Books and writing struggle in the arts marketplace. Experienced figures from organisations competing in Australia’s complex literary ecosystem suggest it may be because of arbitrary divisions in the sector. At a public policy level, writers and organisations are overseen by the Ministry for the Arts, whereas publishers, printers and booksellers draw attention from the Department of Industry. Literature is a mere squeak amid a cacophony of

louder and bigger interests: writing versus opera, books versus cars. Neither opera nor dance would flourish in the Industry portfolio. Literature, writing and publishing are fractured and effectively silenced.

The lack of understanding and trust between the creators and the distributors exacerbated by this structural schism is also disappointing. The carping response by some in the sector to the Book Industry Strategy Group's report and the feebleness of co-operation on the subsequent government advisory council threatens to neuter efforts by dedicated individuals. 'Publishers disrespect the role of author advocacy,' experienced practitioners say.

Has the schism between the arts and industry arms – perhaps the protracted struggles for public and educational lending rights, and against parallel importation – sapped the sector's co-operative impulses? If the Australia Council felt hobbled as a public voice for the sector during these policy disputes and retreated from advocacy, who can make the case?

In Victoria in 2006 when we set out on the City of Literature odyssey I found it was essential to first convince ministerial colleagues that literature underpins the arts and culture is at the heart of who we are as a modern prosperous democracy. We used the vernacular of demonstrable economic value of cultural creation to move the conversation from cultural entitlement to a debate about the returns on investment. The Centre for Books Writing and Ideas, now the Wheeler Centre, and a successful City of Literature flag were the outcome. These developments have bipartisan support and continue to deliver handsomely.

THE SECTOR MUST re-engage with the art of advocacy. It must call up the powerful words of our diverse literary landscape and press both private and public funding bodies, and the general community, to support literature whether is it on screen, stage or page. And we can enlist a passionate public. A staggering 89 per cent of Australians register as readers, attendance at writers' festivals is spectacular, as is interest in response to literary awards and prizes.

The contemporary face of literature should be presented by a passionate and professional peak organisation, a nimble body that can motivate, from a reasoned position of empirical evidence around the cultural and economic value of the sector. Such a body, call it for example the Australian Literature

Council/ Council for Australian Writing, must be composed of people with high level skills and experience in strategy, marketing, government and private funding, negotiation and communication. Although they should have meaningful and deep relationships with the sector, such a body should not be created as a strictly representative entity where the old battles would be fought again around a bloated board table. It should work with a mission to expand the funding for the sector.

The Australian Major Performing Arts Group sprang from a similar challenge fourteen years ago with an unambiguous aim: 'To promote awareness of the contribution of major performing arts to the community and to ensure that these companies are adequately supported by the government. By doing so, AMPAG helps guarantee their long-term success and their accessibility to all.' The major performing arts companies saw value in forgoing cutthroat competition for public and private dollars, instead forging an effective industry lobby that has vastly increased financial support – state and federal funding has nearly doubled, as has private giving. How galling then to see one of our illustrious writers, David Malouf, welcoming visitors to the AMPAG website with a luminous testimonial to the performing arts. How powerful would he and other writers be presenting the literary underpinning of all arts?

Literature in Australia is blessed with dedicated people and outstanding organisations. The Australian Society of Authors works effectively to protect writers' rights and royalties in the digital age; the Australia Council is inventive with shrinking largesse; literary journals nurture talent; while the Book Industry Strategy Group struggles valiantly to frame the economic arguments. Yet, compounding the departmental split, the sector is beset with perhaps the greatest handbrake on advancement: competition between enthusiastic amateurs and credible professionals. Advocacy is weak when the stakes are low.

Let's lift the horizon. Imagine the firepower of a body that could co-ordinate the initially delayed and scattergun but ultimately successful campaign against parallel importation into a pre-emptive and effective voice for the sector with ongoing coalition of effort.

The Book Industry Collaborative Council is not the answer. Established June 2013, its role is to help the book industry deal with the rapid changes being brought by digitisation and to assist the industry implement

recommendations from the Strategy Group: ‘The Council will work to maintain a dialogue between the industry and government and to encourage collaboration between the supply chain sectors ensuring this interconnectivity is vital to strengthening the position of the Australian book industry within the global market.’

Advice to government is necessary but limited. Fearless advocacy for the wider sector is now needed to drive creative and hardheaded action.

How might it be paid for? A board of five with lean administrative support would be a small call on the development funds of the Australia Council as has been done to establish Creating Australia to advocate for community arts. There are other possibilities, including the Copyright Agency Ltd’s model. CAL manages the use of text and images in return for payment to writers, visual artists and publishers. It collects licence fees from government, education institutions and corporations and returns it to both the industry and creators. No schism here. Indeed its Cultural Fund has, since 1995, provided \$14 million to support projects as diverse as festivals, residencies, symposiums, prizes and publications. The Cultural Fund draws 1.5 per cent of CAL’s revenue which last year was over \$140 million. With such lateral thinking it might be possible to leapfrog the silos.

Literature should be part of the bigger conversation about the place and role of culture at all levels of Australian society. Words and language are at the heart of cultural creation and production. Literature must not let the opportunity for serious recognition and reward slip. In this new environment, broadening the definition of writing – making the links and literary underpinning of other artforms clear – carries the promise of a more robust writing world. Our arguments must be creative and expansive, not territorial and exclusive. And in arguing for more money less tied to the old literature structures, we can build bridges and status.

Mary Delahunty is the author of *Public Life: Private Grief* (Hardie Grant, 2010). Before embarking on a political career as a minister for education, arts and planning in Victoria, she was a Gold Walkley award-winning journalist, former interviewer on ABC TV’s *7.30 Report* and *Four Corners*. She was the founding CEO of Writing Australia and founder of Writing@Rosebank a residential writers’ retreat. Her writing has appeared in *Griffith REVIEW*, *Meanjin*, *The Age*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Hoopla*, *Crikey* and *The Drum*. Her book *Behind the Scenes with Julia Gillard PM* will be published in June 2014.

ESSAY

It all begins with love

Making a play for change in Bundaberg

Rod Ainsworth

THE cost to the nation of domestic violence runs to billions of dollars a year. In 2009, the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children worked with consultants KPMG to quantify it, using longitudinal research. The report, *The Cost of Violence Against Women and Their Children*, estimated the cost at \$13.6 billion this year with an estimated increase to \$15.6 billion by 2021. This means that in Bundaberg, where Creative Regions is based, the dollar cost of domestic violence was about \$58.85 million in 2013.

Domestic violence is a major priority in the Bundaberg region. The Domestic Violence (DV) Forum was formed in 2011 as an interagency taskforce including over twenty agencies to collect data and develop a strategy around a whole-of-community response. The strategy is based on data collected by Queensland Police Service in Bundaberg between 2007 and 2009. This showed an increase over two years in the number of domestic violence breach offences of 27.7 per cent compared to a statewide increase of 5.1 per cent; breaches per 100,000 population up 24.2 per cent compared to an increase in 0.5 per cent across Queensland; total domestic violence orders up 22.8 per cent and domestic violence referrals by organisation up 72 per cent.

Domestic violence is one of the most insidious issues in the region, and even as it is addressed through primary support organisations, the incidents keep growing.

Creative Regions came to this issue after a board member, Anne McWhirter, then a senior manager with Uniting Care Community, argued for something extra to be done to address the problem. While the primary service sector was resolved to implement strategies, nothing seemed to be

curbing the violence. McWhirter felt that a more creative, proactive approach was needed. At the time, Creative Regions was in the final year of a three-year initiative supported by three levels of government called Regional Stages – a project designed to produce new performance work in regional Queensland, rather than being on the receiving end of work developed in the capital. The statistics made the case, so the proposal to create new performance work as a community campaign against violence needed no sales pitch.

WE QUICKLY AGREED that the most effective way of putting issues into performance was to use the direct experiences of victims and perpetrators through verbatim theatre – to present real experiences to emphasise the impacts of the issue locally.

As the creative producer I enlisted the support of Ross Peddlesden, local radio broadcaster and White Ribbon Day Ambassador, who agreed to work on the project as a volunteer interviewer. Together we presented a pitch to the Bundaberg DV Forum. As long as Creative Regions ensured the privacy and confidentiality of clients, the forum agreed to participate. A memorandum of understanding between Creative Regions was distributed to all forum members, and a process for connecting with their clients was developed with each organisation. Initially only two signed up. Interviews began in mid-2012 with a mix of perpetrators and victims – but only a handful of people agreed to get involved despite processes to guarantee confidentiality. The local newspaper, the *News Mail*, ran a story on the project and called for interested people to contact us – only one person came forward.

Contacting and interviewing victims and perpetrators was difficult and time-consuming. Most often, perpetrators would come to interviews grudgingly or not turn up at all and we both felt that the responses sounded almost scripted; they seemed to repeat the language of counselling. At that point we decided to focus on victims, and although we only conducted a few interviews, the stories were compelling. When a third organisation joined the project the number of interviewees doubled.

Ross Peddlesden recorded the interviews, which were then transcribed professionally. After we checked the accuracy against the recorded interviews I began the process of structuring the ideas. The victims told their stories – all

of them chilling and tragic. They all seemed to follow a pattern. Though the team was well aware of the ‘cycle of violence’, most of those interviewed reported that the violence began after a pregnancy – and there were other similarities that quickly became threads in the structure of the play.

It was very clear that the voices in the play should all be women – even where male voices were required. The strength of the women and their stories – their struggles with dangerous relationships that remained hidden or ignored for many years – demanded the utmost respect.

The play, *It all begins with love*, became a five-hander, by women of various ages, each identified by number rather than name to suggest statistics, the predictability of the cycle and the nameless and silenced worlds within which they live. Some of the characters are direct from individual interviewees, some are amalgams of numerous stories recounted.

THE PLAY WAS read by five local women in May 2013 at a Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month function, attended by more than 126 representatives of the DV sector and community. The feedback was heartening. A local senior sergeant said that he had attended many professional development sessions with role-plays and theatre in the past, but this was by far the best he’d experienced. Bundaberg magistrate Deborah Vasta said: ‘I think this is a wonderful project...because I think, down the track, it saves a lot of money, a lot of taxpayers’ dollars imprisoning these people, prosecuting them. I think education and rehabilitation is the key...to get people to recognise domestic violence and do something about it before it’s too late... We need to do everything we can to stop these cycles. Surely our kids’ futures are worth it.’

Uniting Care Community and Lifeline Counsellor, Alex Johnson said: ‘The best part was that it gave an unsanitised version. I think too often we have a very sterile description of what happens and that was so real... It really punctuated exactly what it is that people have to deal with – with such power and clarity. It was great.’

It all begins with love is scheduled for a professional production in Bundaberg in November 2014 as part of a local campaign to encourage the participation of men as the audience through a targeted approach with the business sector and local sports and community service clubs.

INTERESTINGLY, THE PERSON who came forward through the *News Mail* article recounted her experiences as a child witnessing violence in her household. This was a complete contrast to the direct experiences of women interviewed through the domestic violence services. She was the exception to the rule and provided an interesting contrast in what seemed like a predictable cycle.

This interviewee was the inspiration for the structure of the play. Her recollections of violence in her household when she was a child, and focus on the role of music in her life now, led to the development of a lullaby (the only text created for the play by the playwright) which frames the play throughout and links two distinct spaces.

The structure of the play divides the characters into ‘The Exception’ and ‘The Rule’ which creates two completely different spaces or moods – the latter a dangerous place on the edge of violence, the other a seemingly safe, reflexive space of an older woman recounting her childhood experiences.

For example, the first scene of the play is ‘The Exception’. The silences in this scene are far more telling than the dialogue...

SCENE 1 – THE EXCEPTION

With a delicate cup of tea. A space of her own.

FIVE: My heart is going.
 My husband and I get on tremendously well.
 We used to go to church. He belonged to a men’s club where
 he was involved in charity work.
 I think I picked a good one there.

By contrast, the scenes addressing ‘The Rule’ are fast paced and focus on the stories of the remaining four women.

SCENE 3 – THE RULE

THREE: It starts off with...
 HIM: Those jeans don’t fit you very well.
 THREE: But it is a said as a bit of friendly advice, you know. That
 would progress to...

HIM: You don't want to wear those jeans.
 THREE: To
 HIM: You're not wearing those jeans!
 ONE: He managed to get my sister pregnant as well.
 THREE: I switched to skirts.

The five characters tell their own stories independently, all interleaved with a rhythm that moves from rapid-fire crosses between characters to begin with then moving to longer blocks of dialogue from each character as the play progresses and the audience needs to focus on the impacts of violence to each woman. The cycle of violence as relevant to the interviewees – that pattern that emerged early in the devising process – appears where the women speak in one consolidated voice, such as at the end of the second scene.

ONE: He used to tell me that I was beautiful.
 And then...
 THREE: I never intended...
 TWO: We lived together for five years before we married...
 FOUR: So we bought a house together...
 ONE: And then...
 ALL: (To audience) I fell pregnant.

The resolutions for the characters reflect those of the interviewees. All women interviewed had managed to leave the relationship and most have a story of hope. The play, only thirty minutes in length, is designed to reflect the 'light at the end of the tunnel' – especially given that it is hoped the play will be used in education and counselling situations as a conversation starter. However, it was important to reflect the tinge of darkness that is ever present for victims of domestic violence. The final scene of the play presents this dichotomy...

FOUR: He went to the grave, thirty years after we split up, still angry, vengeful, negative.
 Then I met a fabulous man...who's, um, the kindest person

know, kinder than me, um, who made me feel strong again, made me feel confident, made me feel like I didn't have any reason to feel that I was in any way to blame.

TWO: Um, yeah... I have a life story that would make a great horror story...

The play culminates with a direct address to the audience, again highlighting the tragedy surrounding domestic violence, a word of caution from the victims, perhaps, but also a sense that there is always an end in sight...

ALL: (To audience) There are so many stories.

FIVE: And they all begin with love.

Rod Ainsworth is a playwright and creative producer with Creative Regions, a not-for-profit arts producer based in Bundaberg and servicing regional Queensland. The company works to assist regional communities thrive through creativity by distilling ideas into relevant arts experiences. Funding for the 2014 production has been received from Australia Council for the Arts, Arts Queensland and Bundaberg Regional Council. www.creativeregions.com.au

INTERVIEW

The serious surreal

Nourishing a childhood imagination

Sarah Emery & Caitlin Newton-Broad

SARAH Emery was the outreach director of Shopfront, an arts co-operative owned by young people, based in Carlton, Sydney from 2008–2013. She was awarded the Australia Council’s 2013 Kirk Robson Award for her sustained work in community and her new book, *Invisible Maps: An Art Guide to Spark Young People’s Imagination* will be published by Shopfront in 2014. *Invisible Maps* is a hands-on guidebook, filled with multi-arts processes that have engaged and delighted the hundreds of young people Emery has worked with. Her book is accompanied by a double music CD, created by young people with long time collaborator and music producer Michael Moebus (meem).

CNB: I remember travelling with you to Campbelltown, in Sydney’s southwest, to a school for young people who have been excluded from mainstream education. Lomandra is a place where young people who have mental and other health diagnoses, who may be on the edge of the juvenile justice system, who may have trauma in their lives, re-engage with learning. I distinctly remember you saying that you work in this space because it is artistically so exciting. Can you describe in more detail what you mean?

SE: I see my role as an artist – my art form is shaping the process. The outcome, the final artwork, belongs to the young people. Working at places like Lomandra makes art-making grounded in a sense of play and game. Working with young people at Lomandra is about finding the pieces of a puzzle – finding ways to create art not through an

aesthetic perspective, taking it back a step into a playful and child-like space, function, action, play. Lots of young people at Lomandra didn't have the support, nourishment and nurturing of childhood. My role is finding creative processes that bring them back to that space and it can be incredibly engaging artistically.

I guess because not all tasks are taken up by the young people in the room, not all ideas are successful in those spaces, so when they are successful you can see each person in their own light, you can see a real sense of joy in the making.

CNB: Do you see working as an artist in the community distinct from working as an artist in the studio or rehearsal room?

SE: In my case, it is not necessarily about the outcome, it is the process of engagement that is interesting. How I frame tasks, how I choose the materials, that is where my creativity gets placed into the work. It is very collaborative. Whatever we make, when the artwork is successful, it is really owned by the young artists who made it. So I guess that really is quite different to the emphasis on product in artistic studio practice.



Photo: Sarah Emery, *Walking Project*, Shopfront/Woniora Road, 2013

This is a picture of a young artist. He is blindfolded and sitting in a chair, the people around him are filling up his hands with all sorts of textures they have collected (dirt, glue, hair, rocks). People are smiling and laughing as he is trying to guess the objects in his hand. Why I like it is that it shows an incredible act of bravery. This person has put himself forward and agreed to take away his eyesight. He is trusting everyone in the room. I like the sheer delight of everyone there and it speaks a lot about the artistic process and the courage young people have when putting themselves in these creative scenarios.

CNB: You are a trained teacher, so where do you see your work now as distinct from teaching?

SE: There are so many restraints placed on teachers in terms of outcomes, curriculum and following syllabus, and they aren't given the freedom to tailor work to the young people who are right in front of them. In my role, working in outreach, arriving from the 'outside' you really have a lot of freedom to be responsive to the ideas in the room and follow tangents. I guess there is definitely skills development that community artists bring to that space, but it is by practical application and discovery. It is not going in and teaching young people how to do a specific task or technique; it is real problem-solving and real creation towards the expression of ideas and I think that is quite distinct from the emphasis in school.

CNB: Briefly, what were your beginnings as an artist?

SE: We've already discussed that I studied teaching. I knew I didn't necessarily want to be a teacher after I finished my degree. I discovered Shopfront when I was twenty-one. When I walked through the door I met the outreach director Kate Clugston and she told me a bit about her work in Intensive English Centres and working with young people with mental health issues and I immediately thought 'I want your job'. When I began in the Shopfront artist-in-residence program, I started to assist Kate in both the residential and outreach

context, and the work met my interest in education and my interest in being an artistic devisor. I was falling into a dream space and I knew this was where I wanted to take my practice.

CNB: Tell us about the book you are writing?

SE: Invisible Maps is a little bit like a recipe book, but not as prescriptive. With my own practice, I am one of those artists who researches, reads and looks at other people's work. I try to steal ideas that spark my practice; I don't follow prescriptive tasks and one small thing might grab my imagination and I build from there. I love to look at pictures and simple tasks and take those into the room. I have approached this book in a similar way to how I approach my own practice. I have collected a bunch of work, drawn out themes and categories that people can explore, offering different ways to respond to ideas. One chapter is about portraiture, which invites people to layer and add visual processes that drill down and extend the idea of portraiture. Each 'recipe' aims to spark facilitators and young people's imaginations. One idea could unravel in different directions, you create a piece of work using a whole range of different methods. The book offers a framework people can use directly to build repertoire or as inspiration for their own work.

CNB: Can you describe the settings you worked in to develop this body of work?

SE: The work that I was doing at Shopfront was entering into very diverse spaces around St George and western Sydney and in some cases, regional towns in NSW. The outreach director is funded by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services with the express aim of engaging disadvantaged young people. A lot of the tasks I developed were aimed to open up people's imagination; I developed a set of tasks that were not trying to get one outcome but to get a multitude of responses, responding to a multitude of different

stories and young people's situations. To be specific, I was working with young people through Intensive English Centres. Some young people were refugees, or new migrants, setting up a life or staying for a limited window of time, in an intense period of transformation. I worked in Schools for Specific Purposes that were often described as 'the last stop' for young people. Many had gone through a number of transitional phases and for whatever reason the mainstream school was not for them, they ended up at SSPs or in community linkage programs. This setting offers serious intervention so that they can access a form of education.

Woniara Road School is a secondary school for young people who have a mental health diagnosis. It is one of only two such schools in Sydney – and the young people who attend Woniara are often introverted, with serious and surreal imaginations. I had to work hard trying to gain trust and to create a non-intimidating atmosphere of risk and play, encouraging any kind of response and building upon the work slowly. Over four years, this quite consistent group became creative powerhouses, prepared to show their colours, making incredible music, visuals, writing and performance. Some have managed to make the crossover to self-initiated engagement and training in the arts.

CNB: Lomandra's principal Mark Smith, when talking about the value of your work, says that you create 'a shift in imagination' for his students. This seems to me a simple yet powerful statement. Are there specific features of successful collaborations you have noticed?

SE: What I found really rewarding about the work I did at Lomandra was the act of coming back again over a number of years. Each year, young people would be involved in a project and then there was the chance to return and we would meet again. The building upon blocks that happened in between those gaps, across years, developed trust over time. Each time we return, young people are more confident and creative and willing to take part and they know they can trust the process. This work could only be achieved by working over four years, taking part in those projects.

Any engagement or any creativity that can be made available to young people, especially those who have not had access to structured play and experiment, is important. I would say the real power is returning to a place year after year, to create a rich fabric of memories and experiences that lasts beyond a one-off workshop or project. You become part of the community's history in that way, you really become part of the culture of a place where your presence is felt more than a limited time.

One of the really lovely things was going back to a school or youth service and seeing the photographs or the bits and pieces on the wall from the last project, with a visual legacy that remains in a space.

CNB: A strong feature of your book is the tools you use to generate ideas and processes. Can you describe these?

SE: When I first started working in outreach contexts, often in drop-in situations where a person may turn up intermittently, I realised the importance of collecting every artistic offer a young person would make. I got into a process where I really wanted to collect every small offering that each person had put in the process, so that their voice wouldn't be lost. I started a process originally around generating small bits of text and photographs with small interviews and post-it notes. It is not intimidating for young people – to be handed a memo, a space for a small idea. I always carry around a toolkit of sharpies, textas and pencils, and have a good-quality microphone to collect voice samples. These are the things I have really stuck with and kept over time. Through other processes, I have enjoyed building on the visual artwork that I do, by layering images with acetate, interacting with photocopies and putting imagery back together. Often quite simple small things work. I have often used malleable materials (masking tape, cardboard, wire) so that young people can hold, handle and grab it themselves to pull the work together.

CNB: What future artistic directions would you like to be part of in the development of Australian culture?

SE: Seeing young people's art in mainstream spaces is an exciting future. I am very interested in creating spaces for work from the community, made by young people and others, to be seen by general audiences. There is a tendency for people from youth arts to go and see youth arts, but how does that work reach other people in the community? Seeing some institutions or festivals take on content made by young people, seeing children's television created by young people for young people is exciting. It is important that youth arts can filter out and reach all the different places that the arts can reach.

Caitlin Newton-Broad is co-artistic director/CEO of Shopfront. She has twenty years' experience in contemporary arts and community arts practice. She has worked in Australia with PACT Centre for Emerging Artists, Urban Theatre Projects & Performance Space and in the UK with Blast Theory and Creative Partnerships arts-in-education program. www.shopfront.org.au

Sarah Emery is an award-winning multi-artform practitioner. She is currently exploring the limits of portraiture and the moving camera in a collaborative process with community members and is associate director with Milkcrate Theatre, Sydney.

My greatest ally

The power of a cuppa

Tim Bishop

IN this article I'm going to write about traditional Aboriginal dance, but first, I'm going to talk about tea. Cups of tea. Why? Because I love tea and have it every day, and can tell you all about its therapeutic benefits...but in all seriousness, I must talk about tea because it is my greatest ally when working with Aboriginal communities.

But even before that, I would like to acknowledge that this article was written on the land of the Darug people. This article is about workshops focused on Darug traditional dances, language and song – all held on Darug land.

So back to tea... Any particular brand, you might ask? Whatever is in the cupboard! Is there something 'special' you put in the tea to have people become agreeable? Herbal, green, chamomile, Darjeeling, English Breakfast, what? Nah, just *black!* What I find interesting about a cup of tea is that it is a process, not just an end result. From the moment in time you ask, 'Would you like a cuppa,' you're *sharing* time with people until you finish your cup, and if you have had a decent yarn, you'll put the kettle on again! A cup of tea allows for time for all parties to test the water and also to gauge people's intent, or see the colour of their stripes.

As a graduate of NAISDA (1999–2002), an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Dance college, I was trained in classical ballet, contemporary dance, tap, jazz, yoga and drama. But for the first four weeks of each year, we took part in the Cultural Residency Program, where we learnt traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance from specific regions of our country.

Over the four years I was a student, I had the privilege of learning Aboriginal dance from Arnhem Land's Yirrkala and Ngukurr, and also Torres Strait dances from Murray (Miriam Mer) and Yam (Iama) Islands. Later I went on to

dance professionally with Bangarra Dance Theatre (2003–2006), and have been working in the Community Arts and Cultural Development sector within the Indigenous and dance communities since.

For the last two and half years I have been working at Bankstown Youth Development Service (BYDS) as the Indigenous Arts Officer, creating arts and culture based programs of activity for Indigenous young people in the Bankstown region.

In 2013, I was invited by ‘Nani’ Lorraine Humphries, the Aboriginal worker at Chester Hill North Public School, to organise some traditional Aboriginal dance there for the school’s Aboriginal students. I applied for funding and was successful. What follows from here is a direct result of my greatest ally, the cuppa.

AFTER BEING IN this game for a while, I have come to realise that to make anything work really well, you need friends in all parts of the community. Because everyone talks. To each other, about each other, about their business and especially about everyone else’s business. If it is a serious and proper discussion, a good cuppa will definitely be involved. This is how the Aboriginal community works.

The community is made up of, but not limited to: Aboriginal Land Councils, the Department of Education, Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, the school principal, the students, the parents of the students, but most importantly of all –community elders. Over the past two and half years I have had *many* cups of tea with *all* of them. My theory behind this was that sooner or later the kids will go home with a note to their parents about doing some dance. For millennia, our culture has used dance as a vessel for passing on stories and learning – so there was a good chance that they would want their children to take part. But if the parents weren’t sure about it, they might ask *their* parents or someone senior and respected in the community.

So all of those previous cups of tea I had with the elders, Aboriginal community, and associated circles might *really* have been about them having many chances to see who I was and what I was all about – and not the other way around. Setting up a meeting with all of these key groups over a cuppa and a yarn at the school might just get me over the line.

This meeting with the parents is a direct result of their own request to Nani Lorraine for their children to learn traditional Aboriginal dance. Their idea... I was just the lucky duck that got to facilitate it. Over a cuppa tea and a good yarn, of course! It must have went well because Nani Lorraine and I got the go ahead!

So the rest is history... I set up the classes, got the best dance teachers for the job, rolled them out at the school once a week for a month, and at the end of it all we performed at an end of year school performance.

IN THE DAYS leading up to the performance, one of the children asked, 'Do we get to paint up like Aboriginal people?'

To which I replied, 'Yes, *you* are Aboriginal, and *all of us* will be painting up, because this is what we do when we are doing traditional dance.'

Something magical happens when you finally get to paint up the kids in traditional ochre. It is a moment when all of the practice and everything you have been working towards comes together – and it all falls into place for them. You see a change in them, and it is different for everyone. This makes me smile.

The performance went really well, and I am still so very proud of them. They had a good time of it – some of them were even smiling during the performance. This brings an even bigger smile to my face.

Afterwards, they told me that they had enjoyed themselves. That is the pinnacle for me, why I do my job. They had a good time of it and I was able to facilitate a positive learning experience around traditional Aboriginal culture.

This year I am looking forward to continuing their learning journey as last year's process created a solid foundation to work from.

All because I took the time to have lots of tea to make sure it was right before we even started.

Tim is proud of his Aboriginal bloodlines from the Muruwari Tribe in Northern NSW. Having graduated from NAISDA Dance College (1999-2002), Tim went on to dance with Bangarra Dance Theatre (2003-2006), performing nationally and internationally. Since 2007, Tim has been working in the Community Arts and Cultural Development sector as an administrator, producer, dance teacher and freelance dance artist. These experiences have taken him from Wollongong, to Arnhem Land, Borroloola, Mornington Island and Shanghai, landing firmly in Bankstown NSW. Tim likes cartoons and animation. A lot.

ESSAY

Making more of senior moments

Creative ageing with care

Neal Price

AGEING trends and demographics indicate that pressure on care services will increase rapidly in the next decade. Baby boomers have vastly different expectations from previous generations. As this generation reaches retirement and seeks respite or residential care it will become increasingly necessary to provide meaningful opportunities for entertainment and lifestyle choices.

Aged care recipients and advocates will demand customised care that is responsive to a more technologically literate cohort of seniors. Strategies that promote good health and ensure social and cultural wellbeing will be needed to effectively address the social, psychological and physical needs that accompany ageing.

Current approaches in leisure and lifestyle programs are failing to adequately engage the older person with creative possibilities in the retirement years. Certificate courses are limited in their preparation for future challenges. There is little focus on innovation and creativity and limited mention of research and evaluation. Current reports from aged care workers describe management decisions that reduce staffing hours and extend roles with fewer resources to meet them. It remains to be seen if the aged care sector will be able to meet the challenges that come with a growing client base.

Facilities that incorporate art and culture into their service delivery and promote lifestyle, health and wellbeing programs are likely to achieve a stronger share value in the marketplace and therefore are a more attractive business model.

This trend will continue as cashed-up retirees choose services that provide opportunities for creative retirement and healthier lifestyle choices.

Politicians and aged care management have long known that the sector requires a significant overhaul that integrates other models of care into its service delivery model. The current public discussion about the National Disability Insurance Scheme belies the kind of public and political awareness required for these changes. Without this occurring, retirees are in for a reality check that comes with a big shock.

Including a creative ageing perspective as a core aged care strategy is not a panacea to fix an ailing sector. It is, however, one strategy to re-humanise and revitalise a sector that has been built on the medical model and paired with theological concepts of charity, limited resources, low wages and volunteerism.

While aged care facilities have complex management issues, they are also home to individuals with major lifetime achievements and a wealth of personal narratives. Some of them have national significance and were at the centre of national life, such as the introduction of decimal currency, world conflicts, politics, farming, bushfires and droughts, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and immigration stories. Many have born witness to the massive social and community growth of our nation. Individual stories can add to a national and local database of experiences that capture the historic, social and political history of this country. As time passes, we lose many of the old diggers, seniors who went through the Great Depression, pioneers of rural development, and participants in many of the great events that shaped our land.

Creative ageing methodologies aim to explore the creative potential of seniors rather than simply entertain them. Current programs based around games and entertainment do little to teach new skills, connect to community resources and events, or contribute to our understanding of health and wellness as we age.

Wellness and health strategies are a counterpoint to an industry based on illness and failing health. By developing a comprehensive creative ageing strategy, engagement with those making the transition to care or those already in respite or residential care can be strengthened. Issues of institutionalisation,

mental health and residential resilience can be addressed as creativity, spontaneity and imagination become central to aged care environments.

The inclusion of digital storytelling and other arts and cultural activities, delivered by artists and arts workers into an institutional setting, will act as a change agent in workplace cultures that lack resilience or spontaneity. There is a need for outside influences to build and maintain a healthy work and living environment in a residential setting. Connection to local schools, volunteer and community groups, and active links to community resources ensures that aged care facilities are providing valuable opportunities for their residents. Significant connections to community can be developed and new skills can be learned that make the ageing process a more resilient and creative time.

THERE ARE MANY robust examples of artists and arts workers making inroads into changing the culture of the aged care sector. Tasmanian-based Chris Mead, in partnership with TasTAFE, has developed the *Big Window Project* with aged care providers and unemployed participants to gain valuable experience and skills in digital media. The *Carnival of the Here and Now* also has made inroads into revitalising connections between aged care and community as it provides celebratory participation and cultural change.

Anna Yen and Clark Crystal, Queensland arts workers who make up the performing duo The Lamingtons, use theatre, movement and clowning to engage with seniors with dementia and others in care. Their partnership, The Playful Engagement Project, with the Australian Research Council, Wesley Mission and Griffith University, is an arts and health project celebrating every person as a unique and valued member of the community. It supports extensive research and promotion of the benefits of creative ageing methodologies on quality of life issues for residents, carers and people living with dementia.

Both of these projects add to the dialogue needed to further define the role of creativity in the ageing process and reverse the inward looking focus common in institutional care outwards toward community connection, acceptance and public awareness.

The emergence of creative ageing principles embedded into aged care delivery will do much to educate and inspire aged care workers to consult with residents about the types of leisure and lifestyle options they want. The

existing bottom line, that is to provide the 'best' care for the fewest dollars, is a troublesome direction for the aged care sector to travel. A more realistic and informed investment that includes the infrastructure required to embed creative ageing principles needs to be calculated to meet new growth areas in the aged care sector.

As I approach sixty this year, I look forward to more examples of the arts and culture thriving in our aged care centres.

ESSAY

Digital dreaming

Ancient beliefs and modern technology

Liz Thompson

EIGHT years ago I was working with Annie Nayina Milgin, a senior Nyikina Mangala cultural custodian in the Kimberley, putting the finishing touches to a book we'd collaborated on about the ancestral dreaming track of Woonyoomboo. Woonyoomboo is a major creation ancestor for the Nyikina people. His journey ended near a place called Mjirrikan where he rode on the back of a giant Rainbow Serpent before turning into the Night Heron. Annie and her partner, traditional law man and chairman of the Kimberley Land Council for many years, John Darragah Watson, are deeply concerned about the maintenance, holding and transmission of important cultural heritage. The book about Woonyoomboo, along with others on which we've collaborated, are part of their ongoing efforts to hold culture for future generations.

Both Annie and John are cultural bosses for Yiriman, which operates within the Nyikina, Mangala, Walmajarri and Karajarri language region, extending from Bidyadanga in the West Kimberley to Balgo in the south. The organisation often works with young people identified by juvenile services as likely offenders, returning them to country for lengthy walks with elders during which they are reconnected with country, kin, law and culture. They believe, like many of the elders and cultural custodians with whom I work, that these connections are essential to wellbeing.

John and Annie asked me to assist in teaching young people in their community how to tell their own stories using digital media. They wanted this to occur for a number of reasons: the rate at which cultural knowledge is being lost; the desire for a cultural archiving process to be established; the need for young people to be engaged in creative practices which interest and excite them; a 'skilling up' in digital media capabilities as a way of enhancing employment opportunities; and the wish to use digital media to facilitate self-expression with a capacity to communicate in a broad social context. John and Annie were keen to facilitate young people's capacity to create and share stories about their lives and community that reflect and celebrate alternative realities to that of the mainstream media narrative.

Twenty years ago, Aboriginal scholar Marcia Langton wrote on the politics and aesthetics of filmmaking by and about Aboriginal people for what was then the Australian Film Commission. She suggested the work of Aboriginal media organisations was filling in 'the empty place which most white filmmakers have circumscribed with their mumbo jumbo, landscape and fauna pastiches'.

'The most dense relationship is not between actual people,' suggested Langton, 'but between white Australians and the symbols (of Aboriginality) created by their predecessors. Australians do not know and relate to Aboriginal people. They relate to stories told by former colonists.'

These discourses continue to exist, now less concerned with flora and fauna pastiches and more with the relentless narrative of dysfunction. The media has considerable influence on the way in which identifications are constructed by youth, particularly youth whose traditional cultural framework has been subject to profound trauma. This vulnerability is intensified by the barrage of negative media representations in which young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders invariably see themselves framed in a 'one-dimensional' narrative of despair – 'yet another form of blindness and neglect' suggests Lisa Slater, a researcher in the field of Indigenous cultural studies.

Anthropologist Faye Ginsburg says that digital media is potentially an environment through which these young people can appear, inscribe their own stories, participate and render visible 'Indigenous cultural and historical realities to themselves and the broader societies that have stereotyped or denied them.'



Workshop participants at Kalkarindji school creating an animated interpretation of their story about the Wave hill Walk-off. The media production process responded to learning areas which included Literacy, ICT, Critical & Creative Thinking, Personal & Social Capability, Ethical Understanding and Intercultural Understanding.

THE WORKSHOPS WE implemented in Jarlmadangah community school in the Kimberley, Western Australia, and Jilkminggan and Wugular schools in the Northern Territory were an endeavour to respond to these multiple issues and concerns. With limited funds, two of us ran workshops over six weeks, supporting more than forty students to produce simple slide-shows with audio scripts based on their own written texts.

Several culturally rich media stories were made, including a wonderful story by Bronson, a student at Jarlmadangah, which explained how his grandfather took him out on country, taught him how to put a small stone beneath his arm and throw it into the *jila* (waterhole) where the sacred Rainbow Serpent lived. In the resulting short film, Bronson's grandfather calls out to the serpent in language asking him to keep Bronson and the other children safe. He explains how the serpent will smell their sweat on the small stone, know who they are and protect them while they are at the site. In a subsequent discussion, Bronson explained the film was important to him both because

it held and conveyed important traditional knowledge (it is also held by the community cultural centre as part of important community-based cultural archives) and because it showed non-Aboriginal people how to behave the 'right way' on country, how to respect the ancestral beings residing there.

While many interesting and valuable stories were made during the workshops, the practice was not maintained when we left the schools. Teachers whom we hoped would also gain skills complained of having no capacity to support creative projects that did not meet their curriculum obligations. It became clear we needed to develop resources that established the links existing between the creative practice and curriculum outcomes.

Krista Scott, an experienced teacher, assistant principal and creative thinker in the context of curriculum resource development, joined the team. She began to travel and work with us to help refine these connections and to respond to repeated requests from elders that traditional knowledge be integrated into learning. The idea of a 'both-way' education is not new – it was part of a progressive educational model which really gained strength and momentum in the early 1980s – but in recent years state and federal legislation has seen funding for bilingual education axed in the Northern Territory and support for 'both-way' teaching programs systematically eroded.

According to researcher Helen Hughes, senior fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents are uninterested in having culture in school because 'they argue that they speak vernacular languages at home and that their communities teach children traditions and culture'. This claim is utterly contrary to my experience. Elders and community leaders I have worked with across all Australian states, over twenty-five years, have been consistently vocal in their desire for implementation of culturally relevant or 'both-way' learning in their schools.

'You have to bring your culture with you when you walking, keep both-ways, white fella way and black fella way. Black fella way should come into the school. Plenty time they are in the same boat rocking,' says Umpila elder Beverly Pascoe. Djungadjunga Yunupingu, who worked with SharingStories as cultural facilitator on Elcho Island and who is a *dalkarramirri* (ceremonial ritual specialist) of the Yirritja clan groups, agrees: 'We are now living in a modern world, in two worlds, Balanda (European) and Yolngu. If we learn

Balanda system all the time and teach the children Balanda westernised culture that is very difficult for them,' he says. 'Our expectation is for Yolngu to hold their heritage, their culture, their song and dance. I want to see culture in schools as often as literacy.'

In Wilcannia, NSW, Paakantji cultural custodian and language speaker Murray Butcher says 'we're in a desperate race against time' to hold culture as elders pass away. Murray became a teacher because he wanted to ensure the transmission of culture and language. 'I didn't want my grandmother's dream to die – of our language and culture being able to be taught in schools,' he says.

These passionately held beliefs are backed up by mounting global evidence demonstrating the efficacy of both culturally relevant and bilingual approaches to learning.

It is these directives we have followed over the past seven years as we have developed and trialed a series of innovative teaching resources which build on the existing knowledge and experience of students and communities, in a manner that supports cultural transmission, learning on country, and contributes to capacity and community building.

ONE OF THE first resources was developed with Jilkminggan elders and related to rivers. The non-Aboriginal teacher planned to explore three major river systems that term: the Mississippi, Amazon and Ganges. Jilkminggan community identify as *Biginini bilong Roper*, or Children of the Roper River, and live upon its banks. In response to discussions between the teacher, myself, Krista and Mangarrayi traditional owners Sheila Conway and Jessie Roberts, we developed a resource that supported the creation of digital stories relating to the Roper River. All knowledge to be explored was public or unrestricted, appropriate for children to hear and know. A condition of this kind of work is that the right to share public material must be approved, often by numerous custodians. Perspectives on what is approved for telling or distribution isn't static, but changes according to circumstances and needs to be determined locally. Copyright and IP of cultural knowledge always remains with custodians.

Students created short films and slideshows with audio scripts and recordings about the Dreaming stories belonging to the river, food and

medicine found in and around it, language words relating to it, recreational activities that take place within it, songs that brought the river into being, as well as community members memories and oral histories relevant to it.

The resource included further study for participants using the initial Roper River-related outcomes as a comparative study base for learning about the Ganges, Amazon and Mississippi rivers. Participants in Jilkminggan were encouraged to write to young people involved in the SharingStories program living on the banks of the Amazon River in Iquitos, Peru, and on the banks of the Ganges in Varanasi, India. These young digital storytellers had uploaded media relative to their own experience of the rivers beside which they live. Jilkminggan students related this to their learning, making connections to their own world in order to scaffold new understanding. As researcher Robyn Ober says in the context of a 'both-way' approach: 'It's about our way of telling stories; it's about our way of making meaning in our world. Both-ways is about going from the known to the unknown, using current knowledge as a springboard to gain new conceptual academic understandings.'

As a place-based pedagogy, the process at Jilkminggan supported experiential learning through the local landscape. Environmental and place-based education expert David A. Gruenewald argues, 'linking such experience to the experience of others in other places and to the cultural, political, economic and ecological forces that connect people and places on a global scale' is highly effective.

In the course of the work produced at Jilkminggan, the creation of digital stories involved script, song and caption writing in which participants wrote about their various experiences of and relationships with their river. All of which enhanced literacy in both English and first languages. Photography, film, audio recording, editing and storyboarding enhanced literacy acquisition and IT skills in meaningful ways. The themes and ideas responded to societal and environmental process learning, personal and social capabilities, critical and creative thinking, and intercultural understanding learning areas. The resources allowed for a move beyond the classroom as a learning environment and for the collective historical experiences of the community to become a context for learning. As Inge Kral, research fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, noted in her observations of young

Aboriginal media producers, engagement was high because those involved 'are choosing to participate because these cultural production roles are in the domains of knowledge that matter to them – culture, arts, country, and new technologies – within a framework of social relatedness.'

During our workshops, school attendance often increases and students with special needs or identified as low achievers regularly excel. One student was recognised by elders in his community as a *maparn*, or traditional healer, with very particular and highly valued traditional power. He was identified by the school as a student consistently failing to complete academic tasks. He took a camera home and returned the next day with footage in which he documented a fishing trip by shooting through the rear window of the car as it travelled across salt bush plains; a fluid, hand-held single-shot around his father as he dug native honey from the ground, and low tracking shots of soldier crabs scuttling across the sand. Making a short story about his community, he filmed his foot moving on the pedal of his bicycle as a method of visually depicting transitions from one house to another. His vision of the world was unique, with access to inspired perspectives as understood by the elders, and seemed to find a wonderful expression in the context of the program. He completed his films and received substantial applause for his work at the final screening.



Portraits made by workshop participants in Palm Island are pasted in public places with glue made of flour, sugar and water.

WE HAVE NOW implemented programs and resources in schools across four Australian states with considerable success. In evaluation interviews teachers and principals have spoken of significant on-site professional development.

The promised 'Digital Education Revolution' for every child has not been effectively supported. The stated aims of the 'revolution', which remain highly relevant, included: deployment of quality digital tools, resources and infrastructure which would help support the Australian Curriculum; increased support in information and communication technology (ICT) proficiency for teachers and students which would in turn support the use of ICT in teaching and learning.

In my experience, effective professional development for teachers supposed to be implementing the 'revolution' has been extremely poor and fails to meet these stated aims. This is even more profoundly felt in a remote Aboriginal context where there is a narrow focus on conventional literacy and numeracy acquisition to the detriment of a wide range of other learning outcomes. Similarly there are very few resources available that serve teacher needs. As a result, the support and training we provide in digital skills development, implementation methodologies and resources are deemed to be extremely useful.

Several of the designed resources assigned students the task of going out to interview elders about aspects of community life and culture. Their non-Aboriginal teachers went with them, learned from the interviews and discussions that took place and met parents and families of the young people they taught, often for the first time. Many teachers receive little orientation in working within an Aboriginal context and have little contact with the community beyond the children they teach at school. On Elcho Island, participating teachers' evaluation included reference to the fact that, through the program, they had 'developed a stronger relationship with families of the eleven kids that were involved' and could now, 'build on those relationships' and 'bring learning out into community and give it more context.' The practice was regularly seen as strengthening often poor relationships between schools and the communities they serve.

Selected pieces of media from the programs are hosted on a fully moderated platform (www.sharingstories.org). Responses from non-Aboriginal students to the media demonstrate a refreshing perspective which suggest a degree of success in the context of John and Annie's intentions for the production of stories which offer alternative realities to media stereotypes. In response to a story by Lancetta about hunting sweet bush gum, a student from St Aloysius College in Sydney wrote: 'According to your pictures, Wugularr looks like a beautiful and interesting place to visit. I never heard of bush gums...or what they taste like.' Another, in response to a story about the community garden at Jarlmadangah: 'I think that it is really great that your community has no problems and has a TAFE course going on. I can't believe you can make so many things with native trees and plants. It is really good you are teaching everyone about your culture and I think your community is a real success story!'

As Djungadjunga says: 'The production of digital stories about their own lives allows children to express from their own heritage, from their own culture, from their own land and their own stories and try to make a bridge between themselves and other communities with technology. Through that technology they are telling and sharing who they are.'

The content produced within the framework I've described is fresh, vital, resilient, often celebratory and inspiring. In addition to photography, audio recording and film, we now work with a slate of great artists who support students in projection, stop-animation, performance and a variety of other approaches to interpreting stories and culture with digital media outcomes. As Paakantji leader Murray Butcher points out, there is tremendous potential in this process for community to utilise digital tools to hold cultural references, to 'put our stories into technology where our kids are able to walk comfortably and learn culture through that medium. We have to try and marry our ancient beliefs with modern technology.'

IN 2012, STUDENTS at Wugularr school won the Best Youth Media Award at the fourteenth National Indigenous Media Festival for *Talking about our Country*, their piece about the mermaids and Rainbow Serpent that live at Malkgulumbu (Beswick Falls). The piece was produced in the context of

a SharingStories resource focused on ‘interpreting historical texts’. In 2013, students from Amanbidji and Kalkarindji communities won the Best Youth Video, Best Sound Recording and Best Sound Editing awards at the fifteenth festival with pieces they produced during SharingStories’ workshops with curriculum resources exploring the *Nangurrugurru* (emu) Dreaming track that runs through their country.

The dominant educational model does not acknowledge multiple types of intelligence, nor does it generally cultivate creativity.

Curriculum is a powerful tool that has been manipulated and molded. Terri Seddon, Professor of Education at Monash University, argues that in Australia it has become ‘a means of regulation, an instrument of control and construction, wrapped up in nation-building rhetoric’, an increasingly contested social product, ‘constituted within historically specific social relations of possession/dispossession and advantage/disadvantage’. In this context, cultures whose knowledge systems were embedded in ceremonial process, song, dance, visual arts, sophisticated systems of zoology, biology and the sciences, have been rendered largely irrelevant by ‘modern’ educational pedagogy.

A digital storytelling practice of the kind we have developed provides significant opportunity for the collective historical experiences of the community to become a context for learning. It ensures provision of cultural resources that support the formation of individuals with strong linguistic and cultural identities, as well as achieving western pedagogical curricular objectives and ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children become digitally literate. This is particularly pertinent in light of the rapid rise of digital media technologies within the education system.

Of course it could be argued that the education system is not an ideal vessel in relation to truly self-representational expression. The issue of educational agendas and filters which restrict online access means there is a very real danger of digital storytelling projects being hijacked or compromised. Certainly, community-owned and controlled endeavours supporting media production are ideal. The reality is that programs of this kind need ongoing funding, provision and maintenance of technology and skills training, which requires significant infrastructure and which many communities do not have.

They may receive content produced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities via the ICTV distribution networks or Indigitube or Kimberley Aboriginal Media, PAW Media or other Indigenous media organisations, however, their capacity to produce is limited.

Finding ways to 'skill up' more young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is imperative and there is immense potential to do this in schools. In the face of ongoing disengagement from learning in a school environment as demonstrated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth in remote areas, endemically poor relationships between school and the communities they are designed to serve, as well as ongoing alienation and disenfranchisement young people experience because of the manner in which schools construct knowledge and correspondingly success and failure, there is every reason to engage to work in this space, despite the inherent complexity. There is a dearth of research in Australia exploring the strategic fit which exists between standard curriculum objectives, the acquisition of digital media literacies, self representational digital storytelling and 'learning-on-country' or 'both-way' learning in remote community schools.

The approach SharingStories has developed and implemented requires considerable time and resources. It is possible, but it is neither quick nor easy. As Antonio Lopez suggests in his excellent essay 'Circling the Cross: Bridging Native America, Education, and Digital Media', it requires 'patience, ingenuity and a spirit of committed experimentation', as well as considerable care.

References available at www.griffithreview.com

Liz Thompson has published twenty-eight books with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The 'Sharing Our Stories' series won the Australian Awards for Excellence in Educational Publishing. Her television documentary *Breaking Bows & Arrows* won the United Nations Australian Media Peace Award and World Television Award for contribution to Conflict Resolution. Liz works as a freelance producer for ABC Radio National, has a PhD in Media Arts and is founder of SharingStories Foundation, www.sharingstoriesfoundation.org.

ESSAY

We are not just passing through

Back to Bourke

Graeme Gibson

IT'S August 2013 and I'm in a café on another cloudless late winter day in Bourke, northwest New South Wales, with Andrew Hull, local poet and artist. Last time I was here, twelve years ago, people advised against going out at night. Not safe, they said. But now the place has an entirely different feel about it. And this is despite regular negative media reports, including a front page earlier in 2013 carrying the bold headline: 'Bourke tops list: more dangerous than any country in the world'.

I've asked 'Hully', as he's known around here, for his take on the town he was born in more than forty years ago: 'A while back I had tennis elbow, it was sore for quite a while, but gradually, without me really noticing, it started getting better.' He's a natural storyteller. 'It's the same with Bourke, things have been slowly getting better,' he continues. 'Twelve and more years ago there was a lot of unemployment with drought; there weren't the same services that are here now. It's a lot more positive than it was. There's still a way to go, but people are doing things. Like the bloke who runs this place.'

Phil Parnaby is 'the bloke who runs this place', Diggers on the Darling, a café, restaurant and conference centre in the old Bourke RSL club building. Born and bred in Bourke, Parnaby's seen a lot and is optimistic for the town. Crime and anti-social behaviour have been very longstanding concerns, but in March he took a different approach to the boys who were causing him problems. 'They used to come in for a glass of water, or to use the toilet. They'd always make a mess, there'd be water and paper towels everywhere. They'd steal the sugars,' he says. 'I'd chase them away; called the police a few

times. I tried to explain to them I'm running a business and don't need the grief they cause me. And did they really need grief from me?'

As Parnaby sees it, positive role models are lacking for many of the boys. These are the behaviours they have learned. 'We reached an agreement. If they come with me and we do something useful, I'll do something for them. But it has to be two-way. And there has to be respect.' So once or twice a week they go and clean up a park or water newly planted trees. Once a week they go back to Diggers and order a meal off the menu. They eat in the restaurant. Parnaby invites different people to come and spend time, talking with them. During winter they watch Monday night football. In the warmer months they often do something on the river. Parnaby has a couple of jet skis and a boat they enjoy.

His efforts have not been without some local sniping though. 'A few people said I must be getting government money to do it. But I'm not. I'm doing it because I can and because it needs to happen,' he says. 'Some of these boys are hard cases. They're the next generation of druggies and car thieves. Most people don't want to know them.' There was a murmur around town for a while that he must be a paedophile, spending all that time with a group of boys. So he always has someone else with him as a safeguard.

'Ninety per cent of the time it's good,' he continues, 'but every now and then we re-negotiate. I remind them they have to give something back.' His canoe went missing recently. He got it back. 'First they all denied it,' he says. 'Then they said, "it wasn't me." So we talked about shared responsibility.' And, after denying any mischief, a few of them were surprised to see themselves caught 'mucking up' on the restaurant's security cameras. 'I knew it'd be like this,' Parnaby expands on his understanding of the underlying problem. 'They're kids and they're part of a cycle that's been going on for decades, expecting they can just have things. The cycle won't be broken easily.' He understands this, from his own early years where alcohol abuse was part of life. 'They think the cops are picking on them, but I tell them the cops are there to help them. Then they go home and someone will tell them not to let the cops push them around.'

Parnaby renovated the RSL building to open Diggers and he's working on the old town hall next door. His plans for the once-grand building include

an Aboriginal art gallery in part of the building. 'A couple of the older boys are artists; they've had work in exhibitions. They can work in the gallery, when it opens, but it's going to be commercial. When it's open they have to be in there. Reliably. No question.'

It's grown from small numbers at the start, up to thirty kids now, mostly boys. 'The townspeople like what I'm doing,' he says, 'and the customers in the restaurant approve.' He shows me a framed local newspaper article about the work he's doing that hangs proudly on the restaurant wall. His approach is pragmatic, tough but fair, he believes. He takes satisfaction from it and regularly talks with others who share his concerns, his hopes for Bourke and its children.

ORIGINALLY FROM THE New South Wales mid-north coast, Kelly Edwards has been a police officer for ten years, three and a half of them in Bourke. Juggling family and work is the lot of many young families and on returning from maternity leave in November 2012 she wanted a part-time position. Youth liaison officer was all that was available at that time. 'I wasn't keen, I had no idea what it entailed,' she says. 'And I had no particular affinity for youth.' She took the job thinking she would give it three months initially, leaving open the likelihood of seeking a different position.

She runs a couple of group activities. Tough Tiddahs (sisters) is a group of girls she sees a couple of times a week. They cook for residents of a nursing home. Kel's Club is both girls and boys, many of them siblings. Some of the boys are also part of the group Parnaby works with. After an absence of many years she has re-introduced Blue Light Discos. In winter 2013 Edwards and another local community worker took twelve of the girls by bus on a trip to the snow. In November they went to the Corroboree Festival in Sydney.

Edwards was a dancer for seventeen years and she's worked with the Tough Tiddahs' girls on dance. In September they performed in public at the Yaama Aboriginal community festival. The festival was making a re-appearance after an absence of several years. 'Some of them were terrified of this,' she says. 'They thought they weren't good enough. "Shame" they call it. It can hold them back from trying new things, but they all did it. They were terrific.' She does school visits as well and the programs run out of the Police

Citizens Youth Club. One of her aims is to get other police and members of the community involved. To learn about safe people, discover safe places. Getting the kids to know and belong to the community. Know that they can achieve, that they have choices.

Edwards has strong support from a couple of close colleagues in the police service. Learning about, and being a part of positive community efforts to deal with Bourke's problems has been an absolute highlight for Edwards. 'This is something I knew nothing about, a completely different side of policing. Mostly you see the worst side, when something's happened.'

Community and human service professionals learn, as part of their training, about self-protection. How to distance themselves from the problems they work with. Edwards is learning this on the job, with strong support from the community she's become part of. She's learned to avoid them becoming dependent on her. 'When I'm away there's others to carry on, it doesn't all just stop,' she says. None of which has stopped her working virtually full-time in what is officially a three-day a week position.

She wants these kids to respect her, not because she's a police officer, but because she's a strong woman. Getting to know and be trusted by the girls has been rewarding, and this has extended to their families where she has developed relationships. In the early days most of the kids were from the more stable homes, but as time has gone on kids from more troubled backgrounds have started to join. These are positive signs. After the initial hesitation about the role, Edwards has grown into it. She's discovered a passion for working with kids. 'I love it, don't want to do anything else. I'm not here to change the world,' she says, 'I just want to make a difference.'

A *SYDNEY MORNING Herald* article of February 2013 drew heavily, and selectively, on statistics supplied by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. While it is correct that Bourke has for many years been over represented, and often number one, in New South Wales for both domestic and non-domestic violent assault, sexual assault, break and enter, stealing, motor vehicle theft and malicious property damage, there is little defence to the headline: 'more dangerous than any country in the world'. Comparing a town of three

thousand people to United Nations' statistics based on samples of a hundred thousand people can readily present a distorted picture. Omitting the most dangerous crime of all – murder, of which there were none in Bourke in 2012, two in the past ten years – adds to the distortion.

Most of the crime is between Aboriginal perpetrators and Aboriginal victims. Unsurprisingly, the leading causes of adult crime are noted as alcohol and drugs, followed by unemployment and a lack of purposeful activity. For youth crime, boredom and family background are leading causes. Disengaged youth become angry young men. The question of nature versus nurture looms large while the cycle continues. *The next generation of druggies and car thieves.*

The people of Bourke are accustomed to bad news stories about their town but the *Herald's* article was widely condemned. The local newspaper, the *Western Herald*, reported the local council mayor demanding an apology and a columnist expressed the view, 'that one inflammatory headline has blown apart the chance to discuss some ugly truths.' An understandable response, but the chance is only lost if people are seeking an opportunity to avoid those ugly truths.

Some of the ugly truths include high levels of child sexual assault, which are linked to all of the other social ills, compounded by overcrowded and sub-standard housing. These were addressed in a NSW Ombudsman's report in 2012, *Responding to Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities*. The report was also heavily critical of the more than fifty government or community service organisations that are charged with addressing the town's needs, saying most of these are 'poorly integrated and inefficient'. Yet they continue to be funded. Some see this as the protection of an established empire, that there is a vested interest in the town's problems remaining unresolved. Most of the problems occur in the evenings, when paid workers have gone home. The issue of disengaged and disadvantaged youth is an ongoing concern, yet there is no dedicated youth worker. Decisions are often made by people living anywhere other than Bourke who, some feel, have no direct experience and limited understanding of the issues.

The council has been criticised in the past for not engaging with the town's social problems, including in a university study into factors affecting crime in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. But that seems

set to change. Phil Johnston, council's tourism and development manager explains this: 'Council's default position has been to resist the cost shifting that the state government is always trying to put onto local government. So it's a natural extension to resist engaging with the town's socio-economic conditions that would be a further drain on resources. But frank discussion has led to an understanding that conditions aren't getting better and council have to engage.' The extent of that engagement is to be determined, Johnston says.

ALISON WHEELER WORKS for Medicare Local on a community resilience building project. She's an admirer of the commitment that Parnaby and Edwards apply and the results they are getting through their different approaches. Wheeler says there are many people with complex needs suffering multiple disadvantages. 'Drug and alcohol abuse, poor nutrition, child abuse and domestic violence are often inter-connected and have a compounding effect,' she says. 'There's also an underpinning inter-generational trauma related to family dislocation and loss of land,' she adds. 'These are not an excuse but may be an explanation.' Intergenerational trauma is the trauma that is transferred from the first generation of survivors that directly experienced or witnessed traumatic events to subsequent generations. A recommendation of the 2012 NSW Ombudsman's report was greater access to healing programs to address the intergenerational trauma. Add to this the poverty, the over-representation of Aboriginal people in prison, and recall the learned behaviour Parnaby noted. The conditions of many Aboriginal people in remote Australia can be called Fourth World. They don't have quite the same poor health outcomes as people in the most disadvantaged, strife-ridden Third World countries. However, they don't live lives that most people in modern and prosperous First World Australia would recognise.

Kevin Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generation in February 2008 led to the establishment of the Healing Foundation. This independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation has an overarching goal of helping young people heal from their distress of intergenerational trauma and prevent the transmission of that trauma to future generations. Breaking the cycle.

Wheeler has helped organise meetings between the foundation and various service providers and community members in Bourke. The

foundation isn't able to talk about their proposed work until agreements are reached, but Wheeler says they will start work in 2014 soon after their program is finalised. Importantly, they will take as long as necessary to get the program properly planned and accepted by the local community before starting.

Another of the ugly truths is the underlying division – with limited interaction and little understanding – between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Racism is mostly subtle rather than open, but when people don't know each other, or actively avoid each other, relations are brittle at best. There is also entrenched conflict between Aboriginal people and other Aboriginal people just as there is between non-Aboriginal people and other non-Aboriginal people. And there are those who believe that Aboriginal people should just get over it, that the continual reference to the stolen generation and dispossession from land is a smokescreen for an inability or unwillingness to take responsibility for the situation.

Fairfax's *Good Weekend* magazine published a feature article on Bourke in November 2013. Titled 'The lost town,' it highlighted the social ills of Bourke, particularly as they effect very young people, while focusing on some of the local efforts to improve the situation. Less dramatic and more reflective than its coverage from February, this could be seen as a travel advisory downgrade.

WHITE SETTLEMENT IN the area began in 1853 and pastoralism developed quickly, with Bourke being recognised as a major wool centre, even spruiked as the 'Chicago of the west'. Riverboat traffic serviced the town and the pastoral industry from 1859 until the coming of the railway in 1885. The town of Bourke is at the traditional boundaries of four Aboriginal nations and Aboriginal people were forcibly relocated to Bourke in the 1920s.

Bourke has been affected by the loss or decline of its rural industries over many years. Irrigated agriculture has been important since the 1970s, although this is subject to varying water allocations. Being the largest town in the region, service industries are important to the local economy, tourism increasingly so. Unemployment is high, incomes are low. Levels of functional illiteracy are high, a low value is placed on education and the population has declined in recent years.

Despite this, shady trees, parks and the riverside setting offer an inviting setting, a relief from the surrounding 'great grey plain' as Henry Lawson described it in 1892. It's a tough place though, at the whims of nature. In drought, the Darling River can dry to a series of pools. In flood it might be fifty kilometres wide. Still, many people will tell you how much they love it. Wouldn't live anywhere else.

Alistair Ferguson, chair of the Aboriginal Community Working Party, was born in nearby Brewarrina. He's lived in Bourke most of his forty-six years and he loves it. The Bourke ACWP has been established for nearly twenty years, with Ferguson chair for the past ten. He's also current chair of the Bourke Aboriginal Health Service. He's been around the block a few times and comes from a long line of Aboriginal activists. His great-grandfather, Bill Ferguson, was an organiser of the Aboriginal Day of Mourning in Sydney on Australia Day 1938. The Ferguson name is symbolic, being associated with the likes of William Cooper, Jack Patton, Pearl Gibbs and Sir Douglas Nichols, all strong Aboriginal pioneering activists.

The ACWP has an admirable list of achievements including: implementation of the Wangkumarra language program, the first in the NSW High School curriculum; initiation of an alcohol management program which has received two national awards; lobbying for a child safety review through the NSW Ombudsman's Office; and negotiating an overarching service-level agreement with the NSW Department of Family and Community Services. It has initiated sporting and recreational program and moved beyond traditional government funding sources to engage with the corporate sector in jointly developing an innovative, best practice Aboriginal housing and home ownership model. Importantly, six members of the ACWP have completed accredited governance training. This has provided a platform for members of the ACWP being involved in other Bourke non-Aboriginal associations.

Bourke, Ferguson says, 'has been resource rich and outcome poor. We've been massively funded for little positive return.' The community working party has developed and recommended a new approach to the provision of services and the governance and accountability of that provision in Bourke. This recognises that while the level of funding for service provision has been strong, the level of accountability has been weak.

The Maranguka Proposal, as the new approach is known, is a grassroots vision for true empowerment of the Aboriginal community. ‘The vision has been there for many years,’ according to Ferguson. ‘It was shared by our forefathers.’ The vision was spurred into action with a 2011 NSW Ombudsman’s report, *Addressing Aboriginal disadvantage: the need to do things differently*. Maranguka, which means ‘caring for others’, is all about doing things differently. ‘It’s time for the community to move beyond the existing service delivery model,’ Ferguson says, ‘a model which has clearly failed.’

Maranguka is designed to create better coordinated support to vulnerable families and children in Bourke. It involves establishing a community-led and multi-disciplinary team initially focused on family case management with the necessary support services working in partnership with relevant government agencies and non-government organisations. It will also, Ferguson believes, eventually build social capital and strengthen bonds with the wider community. Creating a place that is safe, enjoyable and a model to others.

Maranguka is based on extensive research, input and expertise from other Indigenous communities in Australia, North America and New Zealand, while building its own capacity. This includes an approach known as collective impact, a different form of collaboration with dedicated staff and a purpose-built rather than an off-the-shelf structure. It also focuses on the development of evidence-based policy.

ON ALMOST ANY issue in almost any place, local decision-making is held up as the panacea. The locals always know best, is the catchcry. This, though, can overlook the tendency for tunnel vision, or short sightedness, where local people may be too close to a problem, or it may be too difficult. This does not appear to be the case here. The ACWP has been responsible for a number of past initiatives, shining lights into uncomfortable places. And while developing Maranguka, Ferguson and one other member of the ACWP went on a study tour of Cape York and other Queensland communities. ‘We wanted to look at innovations and learn from others, not re-invent the wheel,’ Ferguson says. ‘While we were in Queensland, having meetings in many small communities, I often excused myself from meetings, went outside and asked people in the street what they thought about things, such as

the Family Responsibilities Commission.’ This commission empowers local elders to make decisions about families that come before it. ‘I asked how they thought it was working for them and their community. That was enlightening, I learned a lot from that.’

An earlier strategic plan of the ACWP articulated the desire for local decision-making by local people: those people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who choose to live in Bourke – people who are not just passing through – and have a personal commitment to its future. Kelly Edwards and Phil Parnaby provide good examples of what individuals can achieve. ‘Change is needed throughout the community,’ Ferguson says, ‘not just in the Aboriginal community.’ And, unlike a number of people who told me, off the record, they believed there was no real commitment to change – among those service providers identified as ‘poorly integrated and inefficient’ – Ferguson believes people will change when they are involved in the change.

The Maranguka Proposal was endorsed in principle by the ACWP in August 2013, with a foundation stone of overturning society’s historical deficit-based approach that views Aboriginal people as ‘the problem’, rather than as people ‘having a problem’. It is not about reinforcing Aboriginal people and communities as victims. Maranguka proposes an annual ‘community report card’ to offset concerns that agency reporting is always at a state level, concealing the true state of affairs at a local level. This will also go some way towards increased accountability and transparency. Its approach is aligned to the NSW Government’s Office of Aboriginal Affairs (OAA) commitment to the development of staged local decision making. The OAA has committed to funding a temporary position with Maranguka to collect and analyse data that will drive evidence-based policy development. This is one of the foundations of Maranguka.

A key component of Maranguka is support for legislative change to enable local Aboriginal leaders to undertake community conferencing with identified vulnerable Aboriginal families. This proposed intervention would have teeth. Its focus is the welfare of children and it will not require the consent of the identified families. It does, however, require legislative change, similar to that in Queensland that established the Families Responsibilities Commission. ‘We live in hope for this,’ Ferguson says, ‘other wise it’s more of the same.’

Maranguka also supports the Justice Reinvestment Campaign, which aims to convince the NSW Government to shift policy and spending from incarceration towards prevention, early intervention and treatment for young Aboriginal people at risk. Young Aboriginal people, the campaign says, are twenty-eight times more likely to be placed in juvenile detention, at an average cost of \$650 a person a day. For young people from Bourke, detention is in Dubbo, four hours' drive away. In Bourke alone, Ferguson says, juvenile detention costs more than \$2 million each year. The campaign argues for the diversion of a portion of funds currently spent on incarceration to be reinvested into education, program and services that address the underlying causes of crime and meet community need.

Justice Reinvestment, Ferguson says, has attracted philanthropic support, which is expected to fund a caseworker in Bourke to work intensively with young people and their families. The evidence of their impact will be used to strengthen the argument for a state government diversion of funds away from incarceration and into early intervention programs.

There might be a case for accepting that some people might only ever have welfare as an income, but it's important that that income be used wisely and that people have some purposeful activity, a meaning in their lives. 'But,' Ferguson says, with his passion, dedication and determination, 'we should never give up on people. While Bourke has been good to a lot of people, this vision is about giving back. Bourke's worth fighting for and it's now better placed to get it right.' And he sees good reason for optimism. Bourke's tennis elbow might have more improvement to come. He also knows it will be a slow process and understands the importance. 'After all,' he says, 'if Bourke can't get it right, the rest of Aboriginal Australia has no hope.'

References available at www.griffithreview.com

Graeme Gibson is an adult educator and facilitator, working primarily in community development. Essay writing is becoming an obsession. He has also self-published a book, *Beyond Fear and Loathing: local politics at work*, based on personal experience from where he lives, at Jervis Bay on the NSW south coast. He is completing a post-graduate writing program at Swinburne University of Technology.

MEMOIR

Stoking the creative fires

Space alone does not an artist make

Kim V Goldsmith

WALKING through the enormous concertina doors of the double-storey brick building on the corner of a busy intersection in Dubbo for the first time, a feeling of nostalgia and awe overcome me as I imagine the action and day-to-day routines played out here in an era well before my time.

A local landmark, the 1919-built fire station, was to become my studio space for three months in 2013, an opportunity that had eluded me for the past decade.

Today it is called the Fire Station Arts Centre, an initiative of the regional arts board Orana Arts, in partnership with the local Aboriginal Lands Council. It is designed to be a hub of community arts activity, supported financially by more commercial ventures and grants.

The building's cavernous entrance, once home to a fire truck, now plays host to the coffee drinking, art appreciating crowd of the city and surrounds who come, not only to get a caffeine fix or to see a performance or exhibition, but to sate their curiosity about what was once a derelict building with its big red doors and broken windows, home to hundreds of pigeons.

Upstairs, normally off limits to the public, are a series of rooms for artists. I chose one of these for my new studio for its bright, natural light and high ceilings, an adjoining enclosed verandah and a view looking down on the intersection and a primary school across the road.

I am the first Fire Station Arts Centre artist-in-resident. In the ensuing months, other artists come to inhabit the upstairs spaces, but I feel the privilege and responsibility of being the first artist to be part of the building's new life.

I'VE CALLED MYSELF a visual artist since 2003, wearing the title alongside that of journalist, marketing communications consultant and trainer – a multiple life.

However, the room I was to make mine at the Fire Station could not accommodate all these identities. I had to be strict and make more space for the opportunity that had been handed to me, leaving behind my other lives as I entered the building each week.

Serendipity may have created the opportunity, but such happy accidents don't often go on to make art.

Following the rejection of yet another art proposal from a prominent regional art gallery, I was commiserating with friends over a few bottles of wine one night when the suggestion arose to resubmit my idea to the creative directors of a regional contemporary art festival being organised for 2015. Given the research, experimentation and documentation required for my installation art works have to fit in between consulting and writing jobs, I wasted little time tweaking the proposal to specifically address the forum the Cementa festival presented.

Two weeks later an invitation to exhibit at the festival was extended to me by phone.

In sharing the good news far and wide it was suggested by the regional arts development officer at Orana Arts that I might consider undertaking a residency at the Fire Station Arts Centre, due to open at the end of August 2013, sponsored by the arts board in support of the Cementa festival.

Orana Arts facilitates opportunities for artists as well as overseeing the development of all art forms in their region. As such, they had been instrumental in supporting the inaugural four-day Cementa event held at Kandos in early in 2013.

AFTER THE FIRE Station's opening weekend crowds disappeared, I planned to spend two days each week in my new studio space with the view of creating elements of a new sensory installation work centred on small native birds as an indicator species for environmental health, also touching on some regional development issues. My research was underway and I had a previously developed maquette as my starting point. It was simply a matter

of getting down to work.

This was my first residency and the first time anyone had seen the worth in sponsoring my practice. I felt it was going to be a turning point in my identity as an artist

As I set up the studio in time for the August 29 public opening, I had little idea that along with the joy of working in this building, with its history and the social buzz from those inhabiting the space, I would face some of the most difficult days in my time as an artist.

My expectation of a residency centred on creating something defining the time spent in the space. In the first few weeks I worked slavishly on various elements of the new installation impressed by my output.

Then one day, only weeks after starting the residency, it all stopped.

I walked into the studio as I did at the same time twice a week, only to feel like someone had left the lights on all night and the battery was flat. I sat there that day, staring out the window at the passing traffic, the pigeons on the ledge peering in the window at me. I wandered around the room in search of something. I left that day having done nothing but consumed too much coffee.

Having set myself up as an artist in a community space, carving out time to play the role, I was finding the discipline required was eroding my creativity – it felt forced.

I was learning the space alone did not the artist make. What was more important was securing the mental space in which to be creative.

With time, the studio itself provided the load-bearing walls necessary to free my thinking, for ideas to unfurl, to make mistakes and start again. To simply sit and think for a day is a luxury in a crowded world, but so necessary.

This realisation is perhaps the strongest and most enduring legacy of my time at the Fire Station Arts Centre.

Kim V. Goldsmith has worked in regional media and marketing communications for twenty-five years. She has been active in the visual arts sector of Central West NSW for more than a decade, establishing a regional artist collective between 2003-2011 and spending more time over the past five years on her own practice of creating sensory installations and digital art. Goldsmith draws on her interest in rural and regional issues to explore environmental themes.