Stories from Community Cultural Development, apocryphal or emblematic?
Mining the Seams of Personal Practice.

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Submission
November 2016

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Acknowledgments and Dedications

I thank those who have given support, assistance and encouragement in the writing of this thesis; my family who have not only supported this thesis but my life's work that contributed to its writing with their understanding, interest, and patience, Ray Kelly who enrolled in his own studies alongside me long ago and whose graduation inspired me to complete this task, Gillian Arrighi at University of Newcastle who always supported and believed in the value of the work, Carolyn McKay who offered cogent editorial comment and much needed encouragement when I lagged, and my supervisors Kathy Mee and especially David Watt for his generous patience, counsel and belief that I could and should finish this work.

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Abstract

The practice of Community Cultural Development (CCD) is shaped by ideals, ethical standards and socially democratic values. Principles of doing good, altruism, social change, participation, collaboration, even 'community' itself are embedded as the dominant operating paradigms. CCD practice has thus attracted a number of assumptions and operational touchstones in its brief history. Drawing on stories from 40 years of CCD work, I question how well have I lived up to these standards in my own practice. These stories focus on several specific projects including: *The Ribbons of Steel* project marking the closure of BHP Steelmaking in Newcastle in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW), my writer-in-residency at Windale (NSW), my time with Pipi Storm Childrens' Circus, and my work with Australian Aboriginal communities. In undertaking this journey the essential questions I address are:

How can stories reveal a deeper understanding of the principles of our work?

What can be understood from these stories of our relationship to the communities in which we work?

Such questions require a deep reflection upon and analysis of my own career. Identifying and investigating the underlying philosophical principles, interrogating how well or not I have applied them, and what lessons I have learned in the struggle to cleave to a principled approach lies at the core of this thesis. While I approach this examination from a particularly individual perspective, I situate my work in the broader practice of CCD to demonstrate how the stories may be emblematic – seams that we can mine for knowledge. In so doing I arrive at a deeper understanding and clarity around what are the essential and foundation impulses and principles of CCD work.

Prologue

I was standing at the gates to BHP Steelworks in Newcastle; it was November 9th 1999. It was the day of the closure of the BHP Steelmaking plant after nearly 90 years of operations and I was not alone. Around me were the families of those who were about to lose their jobs, some two thousand people. BHP was the defining industry of Newcastle. Newcastle was called 'Steel City'. This assumed reality existed regardless of the fact that both the University of Newcastle and Hunter Health Services had become larger employers in the region: the identity of Newcastle was Steel City and this closure was seen as a betrayal. The closure had been foreshadowed and it was accepted, begrudgingly in some quarters, that it must happen. It was the common story of industrial capitalism: the bottom line overruled any emotional attachments communities or workers had for what they perceived as 'their' company. Companies are always owned by shareholders and decisions are always made by Boards of Management and the decision to close the Newcastle Steelworks had been made long ago in the mid 1960s around a table in the BHP Board management offices in Melbourne: they just hadn't bothered to tell anyone who worked there until recently. A couple of years ago the town received the news BHP steelmaking in Newcastle would soon come to an end. Originally the closing date had been 2005 and this premature closing in 1999 had caught some, many, unprepared. Emotions were running high on this day, on both sides of the gate. Those of us standing outside the company gates could see the BHP Workers (because they could only be referred to as a cohesive identity, a Community with Capital letters) assembling down near the furnaces to walk out the gates for one last time.

I did not work at BHP nor did I have any family who worked there. Like everyone in Newcastle I knew some people who worked there and like everyone in Newcastle I was familiar with the Plant, its varied coloured smoke that clung to washing, the continual trains moving in and out, the gas burning atop chimneys all through the night, sparks in the dusk and dawn, billowing clouds of steam from the cooling towers and coke ovens, loud crashes and booms echoing across the nearby suburbs causing one to stop and wait for a siren. It seemed one had to

drive around the huge site whenever you moved from one suburb to another on the north side of the city - it couldn't be avoided. BHP Steelworks was part of my understanding of Newcastle but I had never worked there, until the last six months.

As part of the closure, the BHP Board had decided to mount an arts festival or program of cultural activities to mark the event. This was to be a tri-partnership with the Community Cultural Development Board of the Australia Council for the Arts, Newcastle Community Arts Centre and BHP along with some other smaller local cultural organisations. It was to cover a range of arts media from visual arts exhibitions, commissioned writing, videos, live performances, community activities, cultural collecting and curatorial projects, etc. Its brief and vision was also to involve the BHP staff and workers, their families and the surrounding community as much as possible in the activities. At the time I was Artistic Director of a local theatre company, Freewheels Theatre In Education, and I was well known as a Community Cultural Development (CCD) worker with a strong track record for a variety of work often focusing on celebratory performance and working with community participants. I had been approached to consider the role of Artistic Director of this Festival to be called *Ribbons of Steel* - the various strands of the BHP story and experience interpreted and presented across a range of media and cultural outcomes. Like many in the town I was suspicious of what was seen as a sop to the community to allay the fallout of negative public opinion that was expected to accompany the closure. I had turned down the offer and a team of outsiders was brought in from Melbourne, or somewhere - and in the mind of the community it was Melbourne because this was the worst place you could come from, as this was where the BHP Board met.

When it became evident that this *Ribbons of Steel* event was going ahead I was again approached to assist this team. It was recognised there was little local knowledge on the creative team, especially in terms of performance. I was asked to be responsible for the central piece of the festival, a performance season on-site at BHP to mark the closure. It was to be written in collaboration with a committee of representatives from the workers and to incorporate them alongside their

families, other community performers or participants and professional performers. This component of *Ribbons of Steel* was to be overseen by Newcastle Community Arts Centre, for which I had been Chair for some years previously. I accepted the position of Writer and Co-Director of the performance with the intent of being part of a significant moment in the history of Newcastle and wanting to assist in giving voice to the various experiences associated with the history and closure of the site. This production had three performances in a large shed and designated outside area on the BHP site and played to full houses over the weekend 2 weeks previous to the gates closing.

As I now stood at the gates I noticed many of the cast, participants and audience in the crowd around me and amongst those walking towards me from inside the BHP site. When the two groups met it was an outpouring of emotion. Families and friends called for one another in the throng and came together like metal filings around magnets. The sound of back-slapping and congratulations, affirmations of 'bloody good', 'right' and 'on yer' attached themselves to nothing in particular other than a general sense of pride and achievement in this moment of ending. This was definitely an event in Newcastle history. I stood there thinking all the stories I had written and told only a few weekends ago were simply beginnings.

Out of the throng Dave Egan approached me. Dave worked in the Coke Ovens on the plant and had been sceptical when we first met - about the whole project and anything I had brought to them. His was a common enough response to our initial approach. He ended up being a performer in the final show, performing alongside a Butoh dance group from Sydney, quite a journey for him over the past 4 months, on top of him losing his employment. He approached me with his two kids hanging off his legs, his arms down around their shoulders. He wasn't crying but you could see he had been. He stood in front of me and looked down at his kids to explain to them.

"This is the fella who did the show"

They looked at me and kept hanging onto his legs as he shifted his gaze to me.

"This wouldn't be like this if you hadn't done that show." He gestured to the people around us. "Thanks a lot. I mean it thanks, it made a difference. Good on yer," and he leaned forward.

We hugged while I said "Thank you" and we slapped each other on the shoulder as we parted.

The raw emotion of the event was washing over me after that, when Steve Ford a shop foreman and small meticulous man who had used the cultural festival as an opportunity to learn about photography waved to me. Photography was an activity he always wanted to pursue, maybe even as a business, and now it looked like he might have the time. He came over to where I was standing. He was a more considered man, more thoughtful than Dave. It gave me the opportunity to gather myself. It was the first I had seen him since the performances.

"Glad you came."

"Yea" I answered enthusiastically, thinking it was a question. He smiled and I knew it wasn't.

He nodded at me in the reserved masculine code of the site, which seemed slightly at odds in the current environment but which I now understood contained much more than its minimalist gestures. "You did good, thanks."

And again I said, "Thank you", and I meant it. We chatted and looked around at the crowd. I asked him why he didn't have his camera with him and he showed me he did, slung behind his shoulder.

He looked around at all his mates and fellow workers. "Just not taking photos at the moment."

The crowd was moving around like a single entity, workers from all parts of the site. Slowly small groups, families mostly, started to move away, there was to be a picnic at a local park and another at a local club. Across the crowd I saw 'Aub' (Aubrey) Brooks. He was one of the main spokespeople for the workers, a long-time employee from a family of BHP workers with over 125 years of service between them and one of the main voices in shaping the *Ribbons of Steel* project, because he wanted it to be "right, 'n the truth". When we first met I recognised him as someone I had to be on good terms with and who would not tolerate 'stuff ups' or excuses. He had seen me after the first performance and been pleased, especially as I had made changes, adding more material only a few hours before the first performance and sought him out to run it past him. I had not extended the same courtesy to the senior management and bosses. He caught my eye between the heads. He raised his chin and gave me a nod and I returned it with a smile – the minimalist code. Aub didn't smile, he was serious with me, he saved his laughter for those he had known for longer than six months but I was pleased to receive his acknowledgement and acceptance in this, his place.

This event and these incidents provoked a number of questions and issues for me, about who I am and what I do, about my role and practice as a CCD worker. The practice of CCD is shaped as much by ideals and principles of what is usually referred to as socially democratic values. As such it is often aspirational in its application: we set goals of high ethical standards of action and motivation. How well have I lived up to these in my work? Such questions require a deeper reflection upon and analysis of my career over the past 40 years. Investigating these underlying philosophical principles, identifying them and interrogating how well or not I have applied them and what lessons I have learned in the struggle to cleave to them lies at the core of what follows. What is my relationship to the communities I have been involved with and how might the stories that describe these interactions provide insight into these issues? Addressing these questions is the journey of this thesis.

Introduction

'The unexamined life is not worth living.'

Plato

While I would like to claim my life has followed a path and trajectory, a plan if you will, more often than not I have said yes to opportunity and then considered it after the event. Undertaking this thesis, this self-reflexive study of my practice, may be another example of this. I have often used this reflection and post-examination as a process, a way of understanding, a heuristic method to increase my knowledge and resources, as the springboard for my next move. It has served me well and I thank Plato via Socrates for the advice.

This thesis addresses a number of questions: what drives and has driven my working life, what are my motivations and how do I go about achieving these things? While I approach these questions from a particularly individual and personal starting point I will demonstrate my history in the practice is emblematic and as such applicable to the broader practice of Community Arts or Community Cultural Development (CCD). This area of work and practice quickly attracted a number of assumptions and operational touchstones in its brief history. These were often quite noble or altruistic, and accorded the work a status or worth that was often its own justification. Embedded in its theoretical hegemony was an assumption of its social value and accepted processes that reflected best practice of consultation, participation and democracy. Principles of doing good, altruism, social change, participation, collaboration, even 'community' itself' were taken as givens and as the dominant operating paradigms for CCD work. I have always felt that one needs to be a little suspicious of that which proclaims its own worth. This thesis is therefore a slightly suspicious reflection on my own work, and the industry and practice I have been involved with for over 40 years.

And So It Begins

As someone who identifies as a storyteller it is through story that I often find myself expressing this self-reflection. I do this either in writing or oral narratives

shared in formal published or performance settings, or through casual gatherings and conversations. This act of writing or telling allows me to revisit the events, reshape them to consider different aspects and look at them from a distance so I may arrive at a deeper understanding of what was happening and what I had been a part of or lived through. This hermeneutic phenomenological approach to the stories of my life is a natural response as a writer and storyteller; it is simply who I am and how I live my life. That it had a theoretical nomenclature to apply to it is something I discovered as I began to research my craft more deeply. Writing and storytelling has essentially been my *raison d'être* rather than a *metier*. It is my forum to both record and explore my world, what Max Van Manen refers to as phenomenological writing from 'the region of lived experience' (Van Manen 2003). His works, particularly *Researching Lived Experience* (1990), opened a direction for me to synthesise my own lived experience in relation to the cultural practice theories and principles that have framed and shaped much of my individual and collaborative work as a CCD worker. This approach lies at the core of this thesis.

Van Manen's discussions of phenomenological writing provided the necessary step forward beyond the simple memoir writing I saw so much of during my time as Director of the Hunter Writers Centre (HWC). Through his writing I saw how such work could be a basis for moving forward, rather than simply looking back. At the HWC it seemed every second person had a story to tell and it was evident that all felt it not only necessary, but essential that it be told. Often I would ask these writers, "What is the story about?" and they would enthusiastically launch into a spirited telling of said story *at* me. As they paused for breath I would have to stop them and ask "And what is the meaning of the story? What is it about, beyond the list of incidents and happenings, the events of your life?" More often than not I was met with questioning looks and statements of, "I just need to write it." I have always recognised the power of the story, it's telling, and how both as teller and audience we are so often energised by the act. Certainly there is the power of the actual telling or writing of the words, 'getting it out there', the organic sequence of word and syntax, the cadence of the text, the arrangement of sound and juxtaposition of image, without even considering content, and the

recognition we experience as we read or listen to a story. Further, I was aware of the fact that in the best of these experiences there is something more - something hinted at underneath, suggested. It is this hidden quality, what is often referred to as subtext, that I respond to and it is this I aspire to in my storytelling, both in the telling and the writing.

Writing brings to story a more considered telling and shaping of the narrative: the pace of the pen or keyboard is that much slower than the voice and speech, as these in turn are in themselves that much slower than thought. Yet always we attempt to capture some truth in the telling, some essence of the experience that is by its nature elusive and slips away from the actual lived event. This can be true of the 'momentous' events of our lives as much as the 'mundane'. But life is more often than not lived rather than reflected upon, and we find ourselves continually propelled forward in an unfolding narrative, like Tristram Shandy (Sterne 2003) struggling to keep up with the events, and wondering what we have missed, questioning our memory, anxious over what we have lost, grabbing the present as it slips through our fingers. Even significant events are reduced over time, though often the residue resides with us as meaning, learned knowledge or insight. Writing demands an attention to the stories one commits to page, both in recall and memory and in precision of both the text and subtext, for in the act of writing things become more fixed than if one is performing or telling the stories when it is possible to amend and develop narratives through repeated tellings or performances. Much of my work has been in performance, applied theatre primarily, and as a director of many productions I have changed and modified them throughout their seasons. Similarly as an actor I have evolved and nuanced delivery through subsequent performances creating in the process variations and explorations of the character and story. When committing words to page one cannot rely on the performer to use the tricks of performance to convey the layered meaning of the text; it must reside and be present in the words on paper. I have always enjoyed the act of reading and understand myself to be a 'page hugger 'rather than a 'page turner' as a reader (Goldsmith 2011), both enjoying the actual word and looking for their concealed meaning. Van Manen writes,

> Writing is not just externalising internal knowledge, rather it is the very act of making contact with the things of our world. In this sense to do research is to write, and the insights achieved depend on the right words and phrases, on styles and traditions, on metaphor and figures of speech, on argument and poetic image. (Van Manen 2003. 237)

My own stories may be actual writings, words on screen or paper, oral narratives, performances, scripts, films or videos - either personal or commissioned work for others. In these I am attempting to capture not 'just the facts' as Joe Friday in the 'stories from the streets' TV series *The Naked City* asks for, but the alluded to truths, hidden motivations and subtexts through either research or my own attentive listening to stories. Most of my work is writing for performance, not all, but certainly, most. This thesis grew from the response of audiences as I told stories of my experience in community cultural work over the years. I was met with encouragements of "You should write this up before it gets lost". In saying this I assumed they were showing both an interest in the content and (possibly I wondered) a concern for any potentially fading memory and skills at recall (a number of the stories did include episodes of substance abuse). Much of my work as a CCD worker has been this very activity, documenting the oral experiences of different communities and individuals before they are lost. That my own experience was worthy of such an approach had not occurred to me until others suggested I consider it. As I found myself lecturing and teaching at University of Newcastle (UoN) and using my extensive lived experience as a resource for exploring and communicating the practice of community cultural work, I found students expressing their interest in both the events and the perspectives I provided, often individual if not unique. It was both the actual content of the narratives and my own comments on them, the lessons or insights I drew from my experiences that encouraged my audience to in turn encourage me.

As a writer I am painfully aware of subtextual meaning, an orientation that my mother asks me to leave behind whenever we go to the movies, asking instead that I, 'Just enjoy the story'. Yet for me the enjoyment of the story is not diminished by fossicking beyond the surface: rather it is enhanced, for it is under this surface

that the insight and knowledge exists - as van Manen says "phenomenological text should never be read merely for its surface message" (van Manen 2014). This notion of meanings or value buried underneath the surface information and event of a narrative sits well for a person who lives in a mining region where much of its history is contained in the catacomb of tunnels that run beneath its surface settlement. A project I directed in 2008 called *SITESOUNDMIN(e)D* looked at narratives associated with site, in this case the James Fletcher Hospital in Newcastle. It looked at the palimpsests of site (Joyce 2013), what lies beneath successive periods of usage and settlement. My own contribution was a work called ***unearthed*** and looked at the first discovery of coal by white settlers in the area and the beginning of mining. It looked at "secrets buried deep", because in truth the local Aboriginals knew of and used this resource hence 'discovery' was too grand a word. More importantly in the process of mining, more things than coal were 'unearthed'. Secret burial sites were disturbed and the bones from the diggings used for lime in mortar in the walls that were built in the initial colonial settlement's construction. This story was little known and was mostly passed down through oral traditions among local Aboriginals. Its inclusion was a surprise for many who were the audience for the final production/concert. It provided a deeper insight into the foundations upon which our city, Newcastle, was built.

Buried in the stories of my work there are similar secrets that we may not talk about with openness as they may reflect upon the work in ways we may not wish to have as part of our history. Much of the subtext of my writing in these stories is about the relationship between the cultural worker or artist and the community he/she works for, with or alongside. This relationship is my focus in this thesis and how it is expressed in the narratives we tell and how we may interpret these to gain insight into the nature of this relationship. Much is made of the principles of this work, its democratic basis, the importance of participation and collaboration, the artist 'in the community' and it is the deeper understanding, meanings and expressions of these that I mine in these stories.

The story in the preceding prologue is one I have told with more or less detail in various instances. It has represented for me an example of a quintessential work

experience. I am both immersed in and apart from that experience. It is not that such a dichotomy invalidates the experience, either my commitment to the work or the project and its outcomes, it is simply a common experience in my line of work. The communities I engage with, the issues manifest in the situations, are strong and emotional and often there are high stakes at play so one cannot be involved and not be moved. This has been a common experience of those other workers in this area I have spoken to, and whose voices will appear in this thesis. Our work is often aligned to important social change in the broader world and our investment is passionate. It needs to be because often we work in under-resourced situations and need to have strong passion to nurture and drive us, and maintain our commitment to this area. The BHP story embodies so many of the principles, experiences and elements of the work that I have done. It is not uncommon when I gather with fellow workers in this area that we share such stories – one of the features of this work is a wealth of unusual and entertaining tales.

In this thesis I ask are these narratives apocryphal or emblematic? Have they become reassuring myths that we tell to help us maintain our passion, to justify our commitment, to bolster our standing in the broader cultural and arts community and industry, or are they the 'seams we mine' for knowledge and direction, to undertake our practice, making that practice better the next time. What is to be learned by the stories we tell? An investigation of a number of these more significant tales is at the core of this thesis. I believe they are our reserves for theory and practice and by looking at them in relation to our overtly stated aims and goals we can measure our growth, success and provide avenues for new directions forward.

Community Arts to Community Cultural Development – A Career

My career in community and creative arts seemed to grow under and around me rather than my following a vision laid out as a pathway in front of me. It grew from my actions rather than from any forethought and planning so afterthought has always seemed important. While in part this is a result of my own nature, it

has also been a necessary response to the career I found myself in and the times, milieu and environment this career was enacted within, and has grown through.

The philosophy of the work had its roots in community development and social action theories but its cultural implementation grew around us out of our practice. The policy papers, government initiatives, collating of events and practice, academic analysis, led in turn to conferences, courses and eventually degrees. A body of knowledge grew and the engaged community nature of the work generated a specific discourse that saw a continuous adding to the body of theory and knowledge around this practice. Such a history makes the work done by workers in the area a practical laboratory for the development of knowledge about the practice. This experimental and experiential methodology requires examination and reflection and as one of those workers fortunate enough to have experienced much of the experiment, change and development of knowledge of what it is we do - and as a person practiced in reflection, I am interested in contributing to the now active industry of CCD training and academic discourse.

I wish to examine both the broader practice of Community Cultural Development in its principles and the expression of these principles, and my own personal experience of working in this area of the arts – or cultural industry or community work or whatever description it next attracts. This reflection upon my own work and the projects I have created or collaborated on and the people and communities I have worked with, for or alongside, recognises the important place that practice has in research and the examination of embodied knowledge as a source for gaining insight and understanding. It is this critical reflexivity that can lead to better approaches in undertaking this work in the future. Certainly it is in the area of Practice Led Research that many of the new directions and principles of practice that shape this field of activity has been generated. Much of the literature that has built up has been based on the description of projects and an unpacking of these projects in terms of their goals and their results. Initially this was undertaken by the workers and artists who undertook these projects as a way of communicating to a broader audience or vested interest partners what was actually involved in the practice. Over time we have seen a more critical academic analysis

being undertaken by observers outside the actual practice. This more critical perspective has brought different discourses into the work. My extensive experience and knowledge in this area provides a rich source for such a critical reflection. This thesis is then both a general and personal, a philosophical and practical exploration of both the industry I have worked in and the nature of my work as a CCD worker.

While this thesis relies heavily on experiential knowledge there exists a significant and growing body of literature around CCD that has contributed to this thesis. This journey has caused me to undertake extensive reading of the existing literature around a practice that has undergone a number of name changes and re-assessments over its own existence of the past 40-50 years. I place alongside this a parallel critical refection of my own body of practice, which has also spanned the same time period. In addition to existing literature I will also draw upon the archive of projects that include their descriptions, goals, methods of implementation and the acquittal documents for these projects that represent 'on the ground' assessments, at point of origin in many cases. I have sought to understand what are the essential aims and methods of this area of cultural work as articulated by these various policy statements from bodies and organisations that shaped the work through either government policy or funding strategies. As well I draw on critical statements by key artists or practitioners, the actual practice on the ground, interviews with participants on a number of featured projects and looking at my own experience in the variety of projects I have undertaken over that time and their outcomes in relation to their intended goals.

This examination will involve a move from a general overview of both the broader movement, activity and my own practice, to a critical and focused reflection and discussion of specific aspects of explicit and implicit elements and underlying principles that define and shape the work as I have experienced it. I will look at the subtexts of meaning to be found in the narratives of my own and the broader practice. In so doing I seek to arrive at a deeper understanding and clarity around what are the essential and foundation impulses and principles of our work.

Structure of Thesis

The first Chapter will explore the journey *From There to Here* for Community Arts within the broader industry and government support and policy framework in the Australian context. I will follow the evolution of Community Arts through a number of nomenclature changes such as Community Cultural Development, Community Cultural Action, Public Art, to current terms such as Social Practice or Socially Engaged Art. The reasons for these name changes and the attendant changes in practice will be noted and explored, with attention to the impact on design, and outcome of projects.

The second chapter presents a more personal history that is plaited with the broader history of Chapter 1. I do this in order to lay a bedrock for discussion of ideas and principles that I wish to address in subsequent chapters. In doing this I will draw on specific projects or activities and their relationship to the motivations for and principles of CCD work as experienced by myself. I will identify what for me seems to be an essential starting point in this work. I will explore the idea that the shared experience is central to CCD and that this shared experience reflects an equality or mutuality that seems to underpin much of its philosophy and principles.

The third chapter will explore the nature of *Collaboration and Partnership*, for at the heart of CCD is the notion of individual and community coming together to create artistic product or events. Much of this is articulated in the policies and criteria disseminated by cultural stakeholders as an essential principle of enactment of this work. How these partnerships are actually enacted and how they influence the work and outcomes will be explored both conceptually and practically with direct reference to a number of projects I have been involved in. It is here that I shall start to unpack in more detail a number of specific projects that I will use in detail in this thesis i.e. The *Ribbons of Steel Project* marking the closure of BHP Steelmaking activities in Newcastle for which I was Writer and Co-Director of the central performance event nominally referred to as *The Forge*, and *The Windale Writer In Residence Project* for which I was both writer and

designer. As well I will draw on my long participation in Pipi Storm, a seminal Community Arts team established in the mid 1970s that continued through to the early 1990s.

In the fourth chapter I will move into a deeper examination of the idea of *Engagement*. Drawing on theoretical paradigms of social action, community change and the theoretical writings of among others, Claire Bishop, Shannon Jackson and Augusto Boal, I will canvass different understandings of what constitutes engagement and how this is played out in CCD. Referring to specific experiences from particularly the *Ribbons of Steel* experience, but also other projects in relation to their intended goals and outcomes, I will investigate the experience of engagement from both the artist's or CCD worker's and the community participant's perspective. This will draw on reflections from actual participants in some of the projects and discussions with fellow practitioners in the Australian context. I will explore whether divisions exist and explore the question - Could one envisage and design for qualities of engagement where divisions disappear between community and cultural worker?

A deeper engagement will be explored in the following chapter *The Embedded Artist*. The role of the 'artist in the community' is often at the centre of our practice and the term itself, regularly found in the literature, speaks of a specific relationship that articulates many implied and unspoken assumptions. My own experience as a Writer in Residence in Windale, a suburb in Newcastle in regional NSW, will provide a platform for me to examine more complex relations between CCD workers/artists and the communities we work with. Having lived in Newcastle and worked as a CCD worker here for some 30 years, I will also reflect upon this experience and the nature of my role in this broader community and my identity as a CCD worker. In this I will draw on a number of other projects including my roles as Artistic Director for Freewheels T.I.E. Co. for 13 years and Director for the Hunter Writers Centre for some 12 years.

In drawing these thoughts and experiences together I will explore *The Stories We Tell*. Here I will draw on narrative theory as a framework for understanding not

only underlying goals of our practice but also how we then present and shape them in our own stories to convey a desired picture of both our individual work and the nature of the broader practice of CCD or socially engaged art. I will also explore the potency of narrative in much of the work I have produced or undertaken and its recurrent importance to both the community and the CCD worker.

In undertaking this journey the essential questions I wish to address are;

How can stories reveal a deeper understanding of the principles of our work? and *What can be understood of our relationship to the communities in which I/we work?*

Chapter 1

From There to Here – a nomenclature story

In the Beginning…

… a career in Community Cultural Development (CCD) was not offered to me at High School; the thought of undertaking either training or study in this area was simply not an option. The term didn't really exist in the late 1960s; indeed the history of Community Cultural Development can be seen as a history of changing nomenclature including community arts, applied theatre/art, participatory art through to socially engaged art, each new appellation arriving with its own stated goals, aims and guiding principles. All of these labels describe the area in which my practice has been undertaken over the past 45 years. Before moving onto my personal practice and a reflection upon the principles and motivations that have informed that work (Chapter 2), I wish to assay a brief history of this changing landscape in the Australian context. In particular, I will survey the principles and aims of this area of practice as expressed by the contemporary theory of the time or the funding bodies for this work, as it was they who often defined the work in the broader arts and cultural practice.

It should be noted that the activities that would come to be encompassed by this nomenclature existed before any labelling came along. Such activities as community performance, group storytelling or celebratory arts have been part of communities' fabric and infrastructure from as long ago as we started living together in extended social units. They were our rituals of community, often giving identity and meaning. They could be either expressions of our communal faith or beliefs, or the group expressions of individual creative impulses shared with neighbours – 'let's put on a show, have a dance'. We recognised their existence, participated in them and while these events and practices were discussed within the broader practice of creative event, performance or art making on the one hand, or community development on the other - they had not yet been named as a specific recognised practice with a philosophy and method worthy of

detailed investigation. The term Community Arts appeared and grew in the 1960s to identify those activities that spilled away from the well documented and promoted creative work of individual artists, or seemed separate from the existing social community events under such headings as sport, ritual, or festival. The term addressed and attempted to encompass the new creative interactions with and for the community that had in their design and intent both artistic and social outcomes as their parallel and equally important goals. I was fortunate to find myself participating in these activities as they began to assert their identity through the 1960/70s, both in Australia and overseas. It was around this time the term Community Arts became a common term. We took our inspiration from wherever we looked and whatever caught our eye - folk dancing, African tribal village get-togethers, Dada cabaret, circus, festivals, religious street procession, political street theatre and protest, community storytelling, activist political theatre - but there was certainly a sense of making it up as we went along. We were defining the work as we enacted it.

Community Arts to Community Cultural Development

Through a confluence of both grassroots activity and government policy, Australia found itself in the vanguard of this practice in the 1970s and 80s when Community Arts was strongly supported through various government initiatives. Gay Hawkins in her book *From Nimbin To Mardi Gras* (1993) has provided a detailed and comprehensive history of the political, theoretical and infrastructural history of Community Arts in Australia and I do not wish to restate or overly quote her here. However, I do wish to look at the main landmarks and significant changes and draw out elements that reflect the theory and motivations for that work. I do this to provide a basis for exploring my individual responses to these in the chapters that follow. I wish to particularly point out the expressed aims or principles that many of these government initiatives used to define the practice in order to see how these were either reflected or contrasted in my own work.

As I stated above, the activities were in many cases already being enacted but it was through the recognition of government arts funding agencies that Community

Arts began to establish its independent presence in the broader social and arts world. The Whitlam Labour government, which came to power in 1972, had as a significant part of its campaign policy a re-invigoration of the arts through increased subsidies, the establishment of a single statutory authority to administer this funding, opportunities for practitioners and artists, and an encouragement of the value of and participation in the arts. Central to this were the ideas of access and participation, as Hawkins notes: "Culture had to be better disseminated. It had to move out of the elite citadels and into everyday life. It had to be taken to where the people were" (1993: 31). As a consequence of this position the idea of Community Arts became, if not foregrounded, at least established as an important and integral part of any cultural or arts discussion.

The Australia Council for the Arts (ACFTA) was the Federal Government's body for the support and nurturing of the various arts industries and was established in 1967 by the then Liberal government. Central to its function was its standing as an arms-length body that functioned independent of and removed from the machinations of political decision making. When the Whitlam Labor government came into power in 1973 it set a goal of prioritising the arts and set about reshaping ACTFA and establishing it as an independent statutory entity. It was divided into a number of Boards or Committees that covered traditional areas of the arts such as Visual Arts, Theatre, Literature, and Music along with some new initiatives that indicated more visionary approaches to cultural support and arts industry growth in Australian society, most notably The Aboriginal Arts Board. In the early days also significant for myself and fellow cultural workers was the Community Arts Program through the Community Arts Committee (CAC) championed by the incoming Whitlam Labor government. This was the Federal Government funding conduit established to address issues of accessibility in the arts within a broader political discussion around equality, and social engineering towards democratised empowerment of disenfranchised communities because of either geographical, racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural or class backgrounds within broader Australian society. In the Council's initial implementation Community Arts still did not either deserve or warrant the mainstream status of a fully-fledged Board alongside other art forms. This was a reflection of the status of the work in

relation to the broader arts community at that time and the still evolving understanding of what Community Arts actually was.

With the priorities of access and participation being so strong in the incoming Whitlam government, the CAC found itself more generously funded and tasked with bringing about this change in the distribution of arts and cultural product (Hawkins 1993: 29; Filewod and Watt 2001: 46). It could be said Community Arts had a big job artistically, and socially. Community Arts was the nomenclature for a broad range of activities that saw arts groups touring outside the established venues for presentation of arts activities, employing different processes for generating work that saw artists working in and for identifiable communities, developing projects that looked at giving voice to sections of society that had hitherto not been well represented in the artistic output of our cultural practice, and providing access and empowerment through different structures for the creation of artistic product. It grew out of a variety of sections of the industry – though terms such as the Arts Industry, Cultural or Creative Industries were not common during this time. It encompassed all the art forms and practices, writing, performance, visual art making, dance etc. and often incorporated craft activities that were more commonly excluded from what was understood as 'fine' or serious art practice. Its venues were more often than not outside the established art venues of theatres, galleries, concert halls etc. and for audiences distinct from the mainstream. It was early times and exactly what constituted community arts was evolving. As noted by Grostal and Harrison, "The term Community Arts has multiple meanings. This is a result no doubt of the profound ambiguity about the two terms themselves" (Grostal and Harrison 1994: 147). The CAC itself was central to defining this new area but found itself in a difficult position of both supporting work through distributing funding and producing results while in tandem having to promote, define and in many cases explain the work to both the broader community and the arts industry itself. Many traditional arts practitioners and companies looked upon Community Arts as less than their own professional work, if not amateur, and those working in it as unskilled. Again and again the work was defined by its social impact and assessed by how well it reflected access and participation, especially of new audiences and

communities. The CAC, being under resourced, focussed on the support of work and its development of theory was often put on the backburner in the early years. When the Whitlam government was replaced by a more conservative Liberal government in 1975 the Arts in general and Community Arts in particular entered what Hawkins calls "the black years" (1993: 47). Of interest is the fact Hawkins (1993: 47) suggests most of this threat to Community Arts came from others sectors of the Australia Council for the Arts and the more traditional bastions of the arts who wanted to protect what little funding they had and felt Community Arts was not where money should be spent. In response to this the CAC worked with various Community Arts groups and practitioners and representative bodies such as the National Community Arts Cooperative and the NSW Community Arts Association in organising a number of conferences and forums. It was in papers presented at these that we saw the beginning of a critical discourse that began looking at the principles and theory of the work.

Community Arts was both a part of and apart from the general arts industry and government funding frameworks. Its engagement with community and social movements placed it as different to mainstream arts practice. It came with ideas that went beyond the aesthetics of artistic creation and included social and community impact, action and change: "From the outset the community arts movement was radical" (Grostal and Harrison 1994:148). As such it included much of the rhetoric of social change in its dialogue and in government policy. Concepts such as 'access and participation' were entrenched in its policies and principles, in government strategies and in funding agencies' guidelines. Alongside these, 'process' was also as important as 'product' in Community Arts, though this was more a general understanding rather than a stated aim or principle in the early literature or guidelines where the focus was strongly on access and participation and 'getting the numbers up', both in audience and funding. In mainstream arts practice, audiences receive the end product but the process is unseen and often hidden. This concealment adds to a mystery around the arts and the artist's role that perpetuates a romantic, special and separate view of creativity. Community Arts wanted to undermine or de-mystify this and replace it

with a view of creativity as being more democratic and something all could actively participate in.

As the work established its presence, Community Arts earned its place as an established Board on the Australia Council in 1977/78. At a state government level, the arts funding bodies similarly implemented designated Community Arts programs and funding strategies. Local councils, often being directly responsible for many of the identified community groups, also developed Community Arts strategies and arts and cultural programs became integrated into community service programs throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Over time the work went through many changes. The 'bringing of culture to the community' embodied by the early ideals of access and participation gave way to the recognition that culture existed within the communities already, very likely alongside creative practitioners and it was necessary to engage with this. The evolution of practice and morphing of nomenclature saw Community Arts give way to Community Cultural Development, supported again by a name change in the Australia Council with the establishment of the Community Cultural Development Committee in the 1987, later changed to the Community Cultural Development Unit in 1989 (Hawkins 1993: 78, 83). This also saw policies of democratising the arts spread across the ACFTA and become more embedded in the individual art forms. It became expected that the established and flagship companies in theatre, music, literature and the visual arts would develop programs that reflected Community Arts practice. CCD also meant process came to the fore over product as boundaries between the two blurred and, in some cases, disappeared. Definitions of culture changed as more socially aware ideas replaced the arts paradigms that had been the initial starting points.

CCD always had a strong focus on young people and children as a focus on these areas fitted with both an access policy and the notion of getting the next generation participating in the arts. Similarly, there was a desire to see arts and cultural activity outside the main urban and capital city centres so touring to regional centres was encouraged and prioritised through policy. The establishment

of the Aboriginal Arts Board in 1973 was recognition of the importance of support for Indigenous art and cultural practice and there had always been a steady flow of support and funds through CAC channels to this area as well. In 1982 we saw a number of specific initiatives targeted by government and ACTFA policies (Hawkins 1993: 72). Specific Youth Arts policies and funds that supported young people as creative artists and not merely audience or spectators led to the establishment of quite a number of Youth Theatres across the country in the early 1980s. The Multicultural Arts Fund recognised the cultural diversity through migration of the broader Australian community and supported not only its visible presence in the creative output of arts practice (it had been predominantly absent) but also the recognition that these new cultures brought with them their own cultural and arts practices and forms (Grostal and Harrison1994). Art and Working Life was another Incentive Fund that grew directly out of the Community Arts Board of ACTFA from one of its project officers, Deborah Mills. Her list of objectives clearly reflected basic assumptions of CCD.

1. To encourage art practice and policy which is informed by the concerns and issues affecting workers' own lives and which acknowledges working class cultural tradition and the multicultural nature of that tradition.

2. To encourage the development of opportunities for workers and their families to gain access to the arts and to enjoy opportunities for creative self-expression and participation

3. To promote communication within the trade union movement and between trade unions, artists and arts organisations…

4. To encourage community. trade union, private sector, local, State and Commonwealth Government support. (Filewod and Watt 2001: 50)

It is of particular note how this set of aims so strongly articulated principles of CCD practice and that it was accepted as policy by both ACTFA and broader government bodies. It showed both the growing strength and acceptance of CCD in the Australian community that saw its work so highly regarded and at the forefront of CCD practice worldwide.

By Any Other Name

Others appellations and terminologies also floated around as a means of distinguishing the work from existing arts activity. Community Cultural Action arose to describe a more political application of arts practice addressing the issues of specific communities. The term Applied Arts, which had existed in the broader Fine Arts nomenclature and described work created or designed for a purpose or decoration beyond pure aesthetic values or intellectual stimulation, led to terms such as Applied Theatre. Community Theatre distinguished itself from the long history of amateur theatrics and theatrical companies by emphasising its social theory and political values above the 'putting on a play' experience: it had a purpose beyond entertainment and the aesthetic, embracing community building, empowerment, giving voice. Theatre in Education and Drama in Education were practices that specifically addressed an educational function and often defined themselves outside the aesthetic paradigms of conventional bourgeois or traditional theatre, though they evolved their own aesthetic within their practice. Their work often focussed on specific issues and themes in a more didactic model.

In the early 2000s, primarily in the visual art practice, we saw the rise of the term Socially Engaged Art especially in the US. Placing participation with community as central, it attempted to reimagine the role of the artist and creative practice outside the *atelier* and isolation and individualism that had developed in the fine art world (notwithstanding any previous histories of religious and community murals or frescoes created by groups rather than individuals). They wanted instead to produce work that had a social benefit as well as an aesthetic outcome. The potency of this term is evidenced through the establishment in 2005 of the Social Practice MFA at the California College of the Arts which validated this area of practice within the broader arts community in the US. The writings of Suzanne Lacey, Claire Bishop and Shannon Jackson have become both the champions and touchstones for theoretical discourse on this area. With each change of terminology came reinterpretations in the aims and goals of the practice, a redefining of the past.

Theory

As I indicated earlier (Introduction), much of the early theoretical discussion was descriptive of the work and projects done, often because actually defining what was happening or what we were doing has been at the forefront of our work because as a new(ish) practice we have had to explain it. While we often place this work in the paradigm of broader social movements and theories of community and its enactment, much of the discussion surrounding the theory and foundation principles is predicated on an accepted assumption that 'what we say is what we do'. The foundation principles are often not interrogated in detail in relation to the work or in terms of a clear definition or understanding of what we mean by terms. It is this deeper interrogation that lies at the heart of this thesis, in relation to the literature and to my own practice.

As a base discussion of CCD, especially in the Australian context, books edited by both Vivienne Binns (1991) and Richard Fotheringham (1987) set early paradigms, goals and discourse and can be considered seminal in their breadth of issues and theory - as well as providing a forum for many of the early and original practitioners in the area. These books presented the essential ideas of community, participation, collaboration, empowerment etc. that are addressed in this thesis. It was these publications that first discussed these concepts in relation to work in Australia and as such they articulated many of the principles and process for the work. Of course these were early works and as such grew from the enthusiasm and zeal or early achievements and so reflected a very positive rather than a distanced critical appraisal. Later Arlene Goldfarb's two books (Adams and Goldfarb 2005; Goldfarb 2010) provided a more contemporary, global perspective in their description and explanations of this area. Her eloquent descriptions of the practice and cogent articulation of the principles of the work remain a touchstone for many experienced practitioners and an entry point for new workers in the area. As valuable as her work is, it can be argued it also reflects the oft found reliance on an assumption of the value and driving forces of the work without any deep questioning of what is actually meant by such terms as participation,

collaboration, partnership or engagement. Of equal importance are a range of papers and publications that came out of the Australia Council of the Arts and various Australian State based Community Arts Organisations in the 1970s and 80s (Hawkins 1993; Johanson and Rentschler 2002). Often this early work reads more like manifesto than critical analysis, as is to be expected in work addressing the early years of development. Some recent works of particular significance have been instrumental in providing focus for a number of the chapters in this thesis. Helen Nicholson's *Applied Theatre: The Gift of Theatre* (Nicholson 2005) provides a starting point for the early discussion of the motivations for and intent of CCD workers such as myself. Her discussion of 'the gift' provides a particularly cogent basis for discussing the idea of 'doing good' or the altruism of the community development worker which I address in Chapter 2. The entry of fine and visual arts theorists into the area has seen a richer theoretical discussion of the field's work evolve. Significant commentators and thinkers on this have been Claire Bishop (2004, 2006, 2010, 2012) and Shannon Jackson (2011) both of whom have provided springboards for the sections of this work that looks at notions of participation, collaboration and engagement in an arts practice or paradigm. Alongside this I have folded in work from outside a strictly arts-based practice as notions of participation theory, engagement theory and collaboration are more commonly found in discourses around management, business or education theory. In my later examination of the role of narrative in this work I have drawn on various narrative theorists particularly Brenton Faber (2002). Building on his strong work folding both narrative theory and community narratives together and their importance in the process of defining identity and effecting cultural change, I apply this approach to CCD workers ourselves and the role of our own stories in our identity, history and practice. Much of this literature is predicated on implied assumptions of why we do this and the principles or motivations of the work and it is these pre-existing paradigms in relation to my own work and their veracity or truth that I pursue here.

Such assumptions are evident when we discuss terms such as participation, involvement, engagement, collaboration, terms at the centre of our practice, yet we often have different and individual understandings of their meaning. Clearly

all these terms can be seen as either active or passive. In relation to performance, an audience can be passively receiving a performance or actively receiving a performance: simply being there does not mean engagement, nor engagement mean participation. I wish to have a more specific application and interrogation of these terms in this work and, to achieve this, I am operating from base assumptions of my own. For the purpose of my discourse I am applying the terms 'participation' and 'collaboration' as applicable to what I see as the socially experienced relationship of CCD projects. They are the enacted relationships and roles undertaken, the tasks carried out over the course of the project's creation and production. I am using 'engagement' to describe a less overtly tangible aspect of the experiential relationship. It is the emotional psychological or spiritual commitment to the project, the intangible investment in the project by the participant, an individual or a community, that often provides the drive for its manifestation and activity. These assumptions are made so I may discuss more deeply the overall nature of the relationship between arts worker and community as I have experienced them through my own work.

Chapter 2

What Kept Me Going

And the world will be a better place
For you and me

de Shannon, Myers, & Holiday

Back in the 1970s, whenever Pipi Storm went to visit the Australia Council for the Arts in its then North Sydney offices, they would always greet us with,
"Oh, it's Pipi Storm, we'd better get more chairs" – there was always a minimum of three of us, usually four or more. We were a non-hierarchical collective who could only be represented as a group – it was the times, we were driven by ideals and principles.

What these driving ideals and principles were is the focus of this chapter. What do I identify as the main motivating forces, for myself, and those I worked alongside in CCD practice, and how did they change over time both in response to the broader stated aims and principles of representational bodies and our own growth and understanding? As CCD was a practice that relied on a certain drive and zeal for its ongoing existence and growth, these ideals needed to be more than comfortable reassurances; they needed to sustain us in activities that did not initially attract either strong status or a living income. They became the engine that drove the work in place of an absence of living wages or critical accolades and acceptance in the early years of our practice. How did these personal ideals shape and influence and, in some cases, become principles of practice? Further, what impact did they have on the work and my own career?

'Doing Good'

The late 1960s and early 70s were aspirational and idealistic times and an underlying concept of improving on the status quo for the greater good held a strong attraction for many. This underlying altruism and sense of 'doing good' was simply accepted as a given in both our motivation and in the results we achieved. At a distance this seems the naïve notion of youth and as youth we seldom questioned either the veracity of our ideals or our results. Much of this thesis is a result of reconsidering many of the accepted truths of my work that have happily escaped too much close interrogation. Questioning the nature of altruism can be a complex process and the process of looking at our naïve selves can be even more fraught. By looking at narratives of significant moments or events in my history, I hope to be able to unpack these motivating principles and ideals in a more critical light, drawing insight from these youthful assumptions. This core question of how altruistic we were or, at least, what our essential motivational impulses were, is what I wish to first address before looking at those principles of participation, collaboration and engagement that we held as central to our work.

As I note above, the early 1970s was an era of political ideology. Fresh out of the 60s and the activism of anti-Vietnam War protest, anti-apartheid tours, Aboriginal rights marches and Green Bans, much of our lives and work was driven by larger social and political ideals. While for some this was manifest in adherence to existing ideologies of the left from Marxism, Anarchism or the burgeoning environmental activism embodied in the 'Back to the Earth' movement, it was also an expression of a desire to be doing something of purpose and for the greater good, making 'the world a better place for you and me' in the words of a popular song of the day (de Shannon, Myers & Holiday 1968). This was evident not only in our small, scruffy and oddly disparate collective but also in the wider world of government policy. It was an era of reformation. As stated in the first chapter, the establishment of the Australia Council was to be the government vehicle through which this task of change would be implemented. It was tasked with supporting the creation of a diverse range of artistic output and creativity. For Pipi Storm it

arrived not just at a pivotal moment in our lives, but at a time of hope and change in broader Australian society.

The idea of doing good, of improving the lives of those involved with Pipi Storm's activities, was inherent and accepted in all our work, and it added an air of nobility to it. It was supported by the aims and objectives that evolved for our group and also reflected in the aims of government support organisations at the time. However, altruism is never a simple process. The very word is contested and is often preceded with terms such as 'pure' or 'true' to identify the veracity of its purpose. Such descriptions give rise to the converse idea of 'Impure Altruism' as part of the dialogue around 'doing good' or altruism. Certainly it appears these days altruism needs to receive artificial encouragement through charity tax concessions for both large corporations and individuals to make it part of their accepted activities, hence the growth of the 'charity industry'. While we cannot second guess its genuine intention, we can recognise it is not always spontaneous. Andreoni discusses this when considering the charity industry and what he calls "the warm glow of giving" (Andreoni 1990: 464). He notes unspoken or hidden motivations that directly relate to the giver can be just as strong as a desire to improve or assist another's situation. The act of giving comes with implied relationships of giver and receiver and embedded in these roles of exchange are notions of haves and have-nots, privilege and disadvantage, empowered and disenfranchised - a status. Altruism can both explicitly and implicitly, consciously and unconsciously, be about maintaining this status quo and entrenched roles. The giver can have an investment in not simply preserving this arrangement by shoring up their position and role in such a status quo, but their very own individual identity and sense of worth. This position can be explicit and conscious or implicit and subconscious. The 'good person' or altruistic action is a powerful and validating narrative for a life's work. Certainly the results of such actions are likely to be beneficial for the focus of this goodwill but that act of giving can also be more substantial than a mere "warm glow" for the person bestowing the largesse. Being young we were seeking our roles in the world and defining the people we wished to be. As creative practitioners in a field that was not initially given strong recognition, we sought reassurance in the ways we positioned our

activities as beneficial to others rather than ourselves. It fed a narrative of social engagement and revolutionary action allowing us a place of both inclusion in and separateness from a system and society in which we wanted to see change for the better. We also benefited from this stance and the work as we saw our practice evolve from early isolated acts into long term careers according us a benefit that extended beyond individual projects. Over time as we grew older the body of work expanded, our understanding was influenced by experience and the nature of this 'altruism' changed and became more nuanced and defined for me.

The communities I found myself working with broadened my view of the world and gave me an experience of genuine diversity outside my own experience. As much of the focus of my work was with young people and children, people whom I was often only ten years older than and chronologically not far removed from, I was continually confronted with different situations and narratives, often of young people who found themselves disadvantaged in their social situations. I remember undertaking a series of circus workshops in Mt Penang Boys Home, a State government juvenile lock up and correctional institution on the NSW Central Coast. I was 26 and met a 16 year old who had lived in the street behind where I had lived at his age in Narraweena, a working class suburb on the Northern Beaches of Sydney. It had the sobriquet of 'Criminal Hill' because it had quite a few housing commission (public housing) houses and a high proportion of unemployed. It sat beside a more 'refined' suburb of Beacon Hill, in which was Beacon Hill High School where we both attended. Both of us had lived on the borders between these two suburbs. This youth was sent to My Penang for stealing cars and driving them in street races along the Wakehurst Parkway, a long stretch of isolated road through the bush fringe area and known 'drag strip' on the Northern Beaches. I was familiar with it and the activity. When he told me why he was locked up I was struck by the thought "there but for the grace of good fortune". I was angry at what I perceived as circumstantial bad luck that set in train a process of institutional disadvantage and disempowerment. It was like looking at an alternate pathway for myself and I realised any perceived or actual barriers between myself and those I worked with were not so great.

Pipi Storm

Pipi Storm was an assorted group of students and unemployed who had met or knew one another through the loose network of alternative activities of the late 60s and early 70s. All of us had been involved in a range of either; fringe performance, community activities, political theatre, out-of-school programs such as Creative Leisure Movement, an after and out-of-schools program for children and young people that focused on craft and art activities, and various street theatre performance groups, either overtly political such as the Draft Resisters Union or broader 'Hippie' and happening performance collectives including White Company, a Sydney based troupe who performed at various alternative 'happenings' in the early 1970s, and Performing Poets of Nimbin, a spoken word performance group that grew out of the Nimbin Festival of 1973. Some of the group had been working in schools as teachers. We worked with other groups; KAN (Kids Activity Newtown) which modelled itself on the INTERACTion Bus from London, Chippendale Settlement, a community centre in the inner city suburb of Sydney where many Aboriginals lived, Schools Smorgasbord (Ballina), a radical education experiment that saw activities across a broad age range (5 – 80yrs) and many venues/locations (schools, halls, parks, beaches, pubs) on the North Coast of NSW, and Teenage Roadshow, which took Aboriginal youth and bands from the inner city on bus rides to regional and isolated Aboriginal settlements in NSW and Central Australia. We were influenced by stories of other groups and activities from overseas; INTERACTion from England, Popular Theatre Troupe, from Brisbane, San Francisco Mime Troupe, El Teatro Campesino from the U.S. All these organisations located their work in marginalised or disadvantaged communities and engaged with these communities through cultural activities, often through performance. Many of these companies and their work we first heard about while studying at the University of New South Wales or through journals such as *The Drama Review*. Those of us who came through the University of NSW were particularly inspired by the work of Oliver Fiala, a lecturer/tutor there who, influenced by Dorothy Heathcote, undertook a practical course in the School of Education that saw students involved with community theatre projects. While some came from middle and upper middle

class backgrounds, all but one of the driving forces of what became the core of Pipi Storm, had our roots in a working class background and carried on our shoulders hopes of improvement from our working class parents. This strongly influenced the ongoing nature of the organisation and its activities.

From informal events where we were simply a group of people who would perform or run our events at fairs, child-care centres or festivals, we became programmed acts occasioning a need for a name. Pipi Storm Children's Circus became the umbrella that covered our performances. We would make up various stories about the source of the name. After a few years, even we started to be a little unsure about its actual derivation, lost as it was in the proliferation of creative interpretations we generated for its existence. It was commonly believed to have originated at Canberra 75, a festival of arts and community activities that a number of the group attended in 1975. It had something to do with Pipi, a young baby of one of the group's members, a rainstorm upon arrival at the festival and a wet nappy at the end of a long drive. Somehow Pipi Storm became the banner under which we all collected.

Its genesis was haphazard and it took some time for it to evolve from a casual group, either operating in a reactive or spontaneous and immediate way, into a more considered and planned manner with long-term goals and aspirations. In the beginning our events involved music drawn from an eclectic range of cultural sources, what would later be called 'world music', community dances featuring folk dances from equally diverse cultures, various circus skills and acts and street spruiking. Initially our events were craft activities and music workshops leading to music and community dances and fairly unstructured. Performances were introduced and used as a means to attract an audience to get them involved with the community dances and music. In this early stage the group was very fluid and from more diverse backgrounds. Certainly a number of the people in this early time were important in shaping the nature and direction of the group in terms of its activities and operations but they did not stay on with Pipi Storm. A number of these people went on to initiate other projects and groups that were similarly idealistic e.g. Woodford Folk Festival, a music festival in southern Queensland

that championed 'world music'; Vital Statistix, an initially all female community theatre group based in Adelaide South Australia; Wimmins Theatre, a physical and circus based performance group in Sydney; Legs on the Wall, a physical theatre company that created both in-theatre and site-specific performances. Each of these subsequent groups carried on Pipi Storm's strong ties with community and principles of access and would draw on specific aspects of Pipi Storm's work, Legs developing circus and physical theatre, Linsey Pollack at Woodford carried on the world music and homemade instruments workshop for children and young people, Vital Statistix and Wimmins Theatre developing stories from local communities.

The principle of participation of the community with the events and activities in an active rather than passive role was present from the beginning. We were interested in interaction 'with' rather than performing 'for' our audience (though like any performers we appreciated the audience's applause). Alongside this we focused on celebration with a strong element of music and circus activities as a core part of our events. This encompassing mutuality of experience was always central to our work and activity, both for us as performers, and our community as audience. For me this equal and reciprocal sharing of the event always held a strong potency. In these early years I could not have articulated this in any clear principle or tenet but certainly the feeling when it occurred, that feeling of shared mutual experience, this was what I sought - with an equal desire to win   the applause of the audience. There seemed parallel goals evolving for me in the work in these early years. These dual goals of mutual shared experience and the audience's appreciation has remained my focus throughout my career. My understanding of these two goals and their importance evolved with the work over time and saw one of them becoming more prominent.

While we discussed these attributes and principles between ourselves as important foundations for our events there was little articulation of these concepts as guiding principles or as a cohesive belief system under which we wished to establish any form of organised group or body. Indeed while there were a number of us with strong political positions in the group and some could actually say they had

ideological or philosophic paradigms, we were neither 'card carriers' nor formal group joiners. For myself I had grown up in a household where my father was a member of the Irish Republican Army in the 1920/30s and where there was a muted dialogue of socialist critique, which exposed me to a Marxist viewpoint fairly early. However the most formal engagement I had with any organisation was with the Draft Resisters Union and this was more a product of self-interest and opposition to the War in S.E. Asia at the time. In talking with Bronwyn Vaughan, one of the other founding members of Pipi Storm and someone with a similar background to myself, she noted there was distinct difference between those with strong political ideas, critique and ideals and those who did not either have or express these views. It was a time of suspicion of the powers that be, including radical or reformist positions. Even so she asserts there was a distinct political viewpoint underlying much of our work even if no overt political ideology was embraced by all:

> I felt there was a political motivation for me even if others didn't say so for themselves and we all felt committed to what we were doing. Of course I grew up play acting and putting on plays for my family and Gwennie (Bronwyn's mother) always encouraged me. I was acting from an early age and even as a schoolteacher I was always doing drama or some creative activity in class. I saw performing as something I wanted to do. Getting the sack from school helped me move into it fulltime or at least more permanently. But for me it was also a part of my political activity. As a feminist I wanted to show different roles for women and for young girls in particular. I was always aware of this even in the Circus (Pipi Storm Children's Circus) before we started doing things like *Carburetta and Dummy Half* or *The Dresses* (two shows focusing on women's roles performed after leaving Pipi Storm). The work with unions was logical for me as I had grown up with a very committed union family and I was always discussing class differences and struggle. I saw performance as a way of both enacting and embodying my feminist and union ideals. (interview with B Vaughan 2009)

Bronwyn's observations recognise the differences in the motivations within the group and she went on to note how individuals' experience influenced the directions we took which led us into areas that might be considered political though the motivation for this was often personal. For example,

> Russell (Cheek) was more interested in the performing than where or why we did the shows. He wanted to move into a more mainstage career. Murray (Oliver), because he came from the country, was committed to regional tours. I think it was his push that got us going outback and to regional areas. (Vaughan 2009)

While some of us placed our work in a political context, our collective stance was more an in-principle or ethical position than an ideological one. This was expressed through the terms and ideas we used such as participation, de-mystifying skills, community involvement, grassroots engagement, inclusion, empowerment, rather than referencing any specific ideology. Interestingly many of these terms were also evident in the aims and guidelines for the funding bodies that sprung up from the mid 70s to support these activities. As Nicholson, in her book *Applied Theatre* (2005) notes, for some involved in this activity this more personal focus on the individual and personal growth was common and the lack of a broader social aspect was prevalent in the beginning of much of the Community Arts movement. We supported ourselves by working in more mainstream jobs as part time or casual workers or collected unemployment benefits, what was often referred to as the 'alternative arts funding'. Different commitments saw some of us involved with children's rights groups, food co-ops, grassroots political movements and unions with others more interested in the performance possibilities that we were exploring, though it was pretty well agreed by all that we all wanted "a revolution we could dance to" (attributed to Emma Goldman circa 1930).

A Plaited History

Slowly, we moved towards a more permanent operation as an ongoing 'business entity'. It was only gradually that we realised our group could develop further, for we did not originally consider it as formal or accepted work, let alone a career. What was evolving was a group, an entity with its own articulated aims and objectives drawn from our practice and the informal discussion of why we were doing these activities. This growth and change was often in response to the process of either applying for funding for projects or of establishing partnerships with other groups. A core of 5 or 6 people became the hub of the group and I was there in 1975 as one of this new group now operating under the name Pipi Storm.

Our prime focus was working with children and young people and much of this was itself informed by our understanding of social justice and the education philosophies that grew out of the Free Education Movement of the 60s. We were influenced by writers, books and theoreticians such as Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Postman and Weingartner's *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (1971), Ivan Illich's *De-Schooling Society* (1971), and A. S. Neill's *Summerhill* (1969), as well as the Steiner movement and Montessori experiments in education. We were interested in working in areas outside the mainstream of cultural and educational activity, often with those we were familiar with – disadvantaged suburbs and communities. We would run community folk dance events – the aim being to involve children in group activities through a physically engaging, playful and celebratory approach to our events. To attract attention we taught ourselves the various circus skills such as stilt-walking, tight rope, juggling, acrobatics and balancing, magic and escape acts. As we had taught ourselves these skills we started to teach the children and youth who came along to events in parks, associated with after-school centres, community festivals etc. As well, from a very early beginning we found ourselves working with Aboriginal communities. This grew from our strong connections with the Chippendale Settlement, a community centre in Sydney that ran a range of welfare, cultural and support programs for the Chippendale and Redfern areas with a particular focus on Aboriginal communities. Later this was reinforced through our desire to

diligently and extensively tour in regional areas, initially of NSW and later Australia-wide. Both these activities brought us into an increasingly close contact with Aboriginals and their urban and regional communities. This, woven with the range of interests that individuals brought to the group, for example, political movements including Anti-Apartheid and Anti-Racist Movements, created a very specific direction for us. It must be recognised that we did not intend or set out to become a group or see ourselves as such; rather we were a loose collective undertaking mutually interesting work with similar communities in a manner celebratory and entertaining to them and us. Out of this we developed 'shows', what became the Pipi Storm Children's Circus performances. This was for many of us a very enjoyable alternative to 'real' work. As we developed our skills and expertise, we found more work and we recognised we could actually support ourselves either by charging fees or through seeking funding via various government arts funding programs.

Pipi Storm's work had seen us noticed and even championed by the Australia Council's Community Arts Committee. Our commitment to touring and working in and with marginalised communities and groups fitted well with the emerging Community Arts ethos. One of the great things about the Community Arts nomenclature was it gave us a name and legitimised what we did – Community Arts. It also provided a funding source and, for a number of years, we were consistently and substantially supported by this funding stream. Of course we worked very much in the same way we had started, as a collective, and while we happily adopted the name and role of a Community Arts organisation, we saw ourselves as simply continuing the activities we had been involved with either individually or collectively since the late 60s. While the evolution of practice and morphing of nomenclature happened around us, we often saw ourselves as outside this broader politicization of the practice. Pipi Storm was marked by a strong work ethic rather than a theoretical, political or intellectual ethic. Our work was our focus rather than the theory behind it, but we maintained an awareness of the changes as we were now embedded in the newly emerged Community Arts area and needed to be informed regarding funding policies and directions.

Many of the name changes and shifting government priorities or initiatives saw Pipi Storm and myself simply focusing on areas with which we were already involved and foregrounding them in our project design or funding applications. The move to Multiculturalism in the 1980s and following this Cultural Diversity in the 1990s, fed into our history of drawing from a diversity of cultural traditions especially in our musical programs where we would teach folk dances from an eclectic range of countries and use instruments from these countries. The Art and Working Life program, adopted in the early 80s, allowed us to segue easily from our informal work with trade unions and the green bans campaigns to specific funded programs such as *Silicon Chip Slippery Dip,* developed with unions to address the loss of jobs to technology in the white collar sectors. Later there was also *Working Woman's Lunch* showcasing the working woman's experience with various female-centric unions such as nursing, factory workers, hospitality workers. Our work in regional Australia was always a touchstone of our compulsive touring and we were well placed to slot into the development of longer term engagements with regional and outback communities. ArtsNSW programs such as the Western Sydney Arts Initiative (1999) reflected what had already been anticipated by a move to re-locate Pipi Storm's office and operational base to the outer suburbs of Sydney in 1983. As these new focus areas or cultural initiatives arose, it seemed natural to me, a welcome recognition of areas that deserved support. Assimilating these directives was not a difficult process and I found myself easily adjusting. It was a process of organic adaptation to new environments rather than undertaking a new ideological or political position.

Of course, governments without policies could not impose such initiatives and rationales and the discourse around this became more sophisticated. As Arlene Goldbard (2006) indicates, such re-alignments of practice needed strong bases of theory and method. As these changes occurred I found myself having to respond to these altered policies, theories and methods. This occurred initially as a pragmatic response to changing criteria for funding assessment but, slowly, I began questioning my own work more deeply. The ease with which I had adapted to these changes had concealed complacency in my self-analysis and reflexivity of

practice. Often I found the 'top down' policies from government planning merely impositions and hindrances to the work I was doing. As a group, we were confident in the value and efficacy of our work and having evolved our practice on the job we did not want to be distracted from the task by unnecessary discussion of what we were doing. Also the growing emergence of an industry was attracting more groups and individuals to this area of work. I vividly remember hearing a well-known Australian playwright who had written for State theatre companies and mainstage companies espousing the newfound area for writing he had "discovered"– youth theatre! That his 13 and 15 cast plays were becoming too expensive for the mainstage companies and he had now found an avenue for his large cast works that did not require large salary costs had seen him become a champion of an area that had been previously considered 'amateur'. More and more artists were seeing themselves as cultural workers happy to engage with grassroots practice. For some, this became a committed area of their work, for others, a detour in response to increased funding and, for others, a stepping stone to other areas of the arts and cultural industry. With all this change going on, I had to get over my initial annoyance at the increased stress in an already embattled and beleaguered work place. At the time I considered whether I wanted to continue working in the way I had or whether I wanted to move into a more secure employment. In 1983 I started a family and wondered if the uncertain and often insecure existence of the work I had been doing was a viable option for supporting a family. I started to look more deeply at what it was I actually did and what I had been doing for the previous 10 – 15 years that saw this increased interest from other areas of the arts and government policies and initiatives. I questioned why I should keep doing it and if I did what would keep me in it? This inquiry took me back to my motivation for being involved.

A Lesson in Reciprocity

Pipi Storm's model of performance for many years was consistent and simple. We would visit a community, often an isolated regional town, and put on a performance of our 'children's circus' followed by large-scale workshops and games. In smaller regional centres these performances and workshops would be

open for the whole town. The performance was framed as a circus or a cabaret with musical acts often with songs, skills based acts such as acrobatics, magic, juggling, balancing, stilt-walking, tight rope and clowning. Interspersed among these were involvement acts predicated on the notion that something had gone wrong and an essential element of an act was missing. Animals had escaped, we had forgotten a performer in a previous town, someone was lost and we required stand-ins – members of the audience to come with us and help us perform the act. These audience members were taken backstage behind our bus and trailer to the side of the performance area and quickly rehearsed and dressed in costumes to re-enter some time later and perform the act. Audiences in these acts were often asked to perform both actions and text that constituted the performance.

In a suburban primary school in Darwin, Pipi Storm was performing under the hot sun. I was the person who was responsible for the acrobats or the balancing acts in the show. This would require me to quickly train audience members in simple pyramid or body balances, or gymnastics. The idea behind these acts was that the presentation of these simple acts of strength, poise and physical expertise in a theatrical context was seen as a feat of admirable skill. Often children would be nervous and I would have to instil confidence in them about their ability to achieve these feats as a performance in front of an audience of peers and adults. The awe and wonder we experience as audience when we go to circus and see surprising, challenging or, in some cases, unbelievable acts needed to be something they felt they could claim from their audience through their act. They also needed to find within themselves a sense of projection of confidence and performance – in circus, a 'ta-dah' moment. When that 'ta-dah' moment was achieved, community performer and audience collectively understood that they were capable of achieving feats they would not have previously considered themselves open to or willing to try. The resulting sense of accomplishment, confidence and pride was as much the goal of the act as the audience's enjoyment – this was our 'gift' in these performances; we were doing good, our performances had a goal beyond entertainment.

With the audience sitting around us defining our 'circus ring' and performing area we would point to those audience members we wished to come and help us get the problem act together. As I chose my 10 assistants for a later 'acrobatic fleas' act – my narrative premise being that they had run away on the back of a local dog and I needed replacements – I pointed to various audience members asking them to stand up. Knowing what I was about to ask of them I tended to choose from the older stronger students and audience members. As I pointed to one person and she stood I realised I had chosen a person of small stature – a 'dwarf'. I immediately thought I had made a mistake. I realised I could not ask her to undertake the activities, balances and gymnastics, incorporated in the act but let her join us knowing I would explain my mistake to her backstage and assure her we would choose her for a later act she was more suitable for. I did not want to have this person involved in an act where she simply stood to the side as a non-involved appendage or prop in the event. The frequent use of children in mainstream children's theatre in this de-personalised functional manner was something we strived to avoid in Pipi Storm. None of us were particularly fond of the 'he's behind you' formulaic involvement of children in our performances. Our goal was for something more, something special, hence we asked more of them in both physical performance and sometimes with text. Later on in our activities as we grew more adventuresome ourselves, we allowed them to decide the direction of shows or narratives during the course of the performance. To have this person not actively involved as a performing 'flea' participant would be essentially offensive and counter to the aims of providing a meaningful and positive experience for the students.

When we were behind our vehicle I gathered the group together, turned to the young girl and explained the situation, suggesting she would be better in another act later, a musical act, assuring her she would be picked and have an opportunity to perform. Nearly all the other students I had chosen interjected, indicating that was not necessary, that she would be fine and they would help her. The immediacy of their response and confidence was remarkable and took me by surprise. I was aware they did not know what I was about to ask them to do and their confidence may be misplaced. The act involved simple tumbles and rolls

building to dive rolls through hoops with two-person balances and pyramid balances. The pyramids included a squatting stance base with people standing on thighs (and depending on the skills and experience of the selected students, a dive roll through the gaps between bodies) and the kneeling version being on hands and knees with people on top. I was worried that there was potential for injury if they did not have the strength or balance and collapsed. The hands and knees pyramid involved four as a base building through three, then two to a person standing on the top. At its apex it was as high as an adult person, if not slightly higher. It was an adventurous trick and the applause it drew was always deserved, as a ten-person pyramid requires skill.

I was not feeling comfortable or confident in either explaining the situation or proceeding with the preparation for the act but knew I had very little time so decided to accept their encouragement and get them ready for their performance, thinking that, as they realised what was being asked they would choose safety and precaution as the option. It became obvious the young girl did not have the strength to support in the pyramid work, so they chose her for the apex. At this point we had rehearsed all the preliminary tricks, including the young girl's involvement with the tumbling and the initial pyramids. We quickly went through a rehearsal for the final pyramid and I suggested I hold her hand as she took her place as the fourth layer on top of three tiers of students kneeling on the ground and each other's backs. We managed it with her holding tight and me stretching up. All this was happening while the performance continued on the other side of the bus and van. The shows were always a barrelling experience carried by momentum and our own confidence that we had done this many times before. I dressed them in their costumes – for some reason swimming goggles convinced the audience they were indeed fleas - and it only remained that their tricks convinced them they were acrobats.

All went well: the students introduced themselves with forward and backward tumbles and cartwheels. Then they moved through to dive rolls through hoops, the young girl I was concerned for holding the hoop and providing a strong flourish and 'ta-dah' at their conclusion. The standing pyramids followed and constructed

an impressive line across the performance area and clearly surprised the audience with their ability to hold their construction through to the end of the audience applause. As we moved into the kneeling pyramid adrenaline was carrying us on. The base of four went down, the next three climbed up, the penultimate two slowly climbed on top of them, which made a high enough construction already. I turned and lifted the girl onto the base and held her hand as she climbed up the second and then the third level of the pyramid. She kneeled there a second before slowly getting to her feet. The audience was quiet. I had moved to the front of the pyramid to be closer to her and be able to continue holding her hand as she straightened up. I was now forced to extend my reach to maintain my grip. I was very focused on the group of performers who had been offering encouragement as she had climbed up, turning their heads and following her and was aware I was probably blocking the view for quite a few of the audience. Then she let go of my hand – not what we had agreed upon backstage. She once again stretched out her arms for her second 'ta dah' moment. I was standing in front concerned what would happen if she fell, ready to catch her and it took a moment for me to register the sound of the audience. I realised they were cheering, and she was beaming. They held it for a second and I told her to take my hand and jump down as I caught her. The rest of the group dismounted and took their place to accept their applause, which was still going. All held hands and did the traditional circus acrobat raising of the hands and bow before turning around to do it to the other half of the audience and then left the performance area with the audience still cheering and clapping.

Backstage everyone was grinning and congratulating each other but mostly congratulating their crowning member who was still beaming. Clearly for her this had been a special moment; she was proud of her achievement and her confidence and belief in herself radiated. When I sent her back to her seat in the audience again they cheered her and her friends were praising and congratulating her as she took her seat. We continued with the show.

After the show some other Pipi Stormers suggested I had made a dangerous or risky choice. I could hardly argue. Again I had said yes and acted in the moment. I

had given in to the students who had been swept along on their enthusiasm, excitement and lack of knowledge. Though I recognized the potential for disaster it was only after that I saw just how bad it could have been for her and us. It is not that we had not had accidents over the course of our activities - working with stilt-walking workshops, acrobatics, intensely physical community games with Earth Balls is bound to see falls and grazed knees, sprains and once a broken wrist - but there were surprisingly few considering the activities and the indestructible mentality of young people, especially boys. It had been risky. It had also been triumphant for that young girl, her fellow performers, and for the audience who shared in the moment.

This moment is one of the most significant that sticks in my mind from the years of touring with Pipi Storm. It exemplified the best of what we hoped to achieve in providing an affirming experience for our audience members. It placed them in a new and challenging situation that they found they could rise to and recognize strengths and resources they hitherto did not know they possessed. It said they could do feats deserving of applause and admiration and they were capable and deserving of praise. It reinforced and celebrated the students' strengths, talents, value and achievements, their worth as people. But more than this, it did all this for me as well. I had not been confident that this particular group of students could achieve what this simple act entailed. I had looked at a person and seen a limitation rather than a courageous girl open to challenge and opportunity. In the rush of getting the show together and having the show run I had been challenged by a group of young students. Their knowledge of the act they were to perform was lacking, but their knowledge of themselves and their young friend was not. They understood they were about to perform in front of their friends and knew that this was going to ask that they rise to the occasion. They knew that every one of them had the resources to achieve this. The physically strong knew their friend would have her own challenge in achieving this but they knew her strengths and their own resources in being able to assist her and support her in achieving the tasks set. They knew these things better than I. As one of the audience who shared, I have since held that girl in the highest admiration – and gratitude, because that day reciprocity was achieved. For all my own self-confidence in the

integrity of our work, its value and worth, the good we were doing for our audience and the people we worked with – the gift we brought – that day I received a gift back tenfold.

Achieving Principles/Reciprocity

I have thought about that event often. For me it represents and embodies many essential touchstones and tenets of my work and practice. The principles exist but personal motivations are another thing- whatever I want personally I am reminded that no matter how convinced or comfortable I am in my knowledge and experience I don't know it all. Nearly 40 years of experience does not accord me a position of superiority in the events I am engaged in; it is not the nature of the work. I always have to remember that my work is about an exchange of skills, knowledge and experience. The individual creative arts worker works toward his/her own personal vision for an audience and the social or community welfare worker provides a service for their clients. My work depends on not just a sharing but also a recognition of a mutual experience as integral to the project or event. While I am there bringing my 'gift', all those others involved are bringing theirs and no one gift can claim dominance. The performance is not mine *for* an audience, no matter how much I, or others like me, plan it. Nicholson argues strongly for applied drama and CCD as being active forces in empowerment through developing what she suggests is a critical literacy: "Translated into drama, the idea that literacy is not a set of isolated skills but encourages creative and critical thought" (Nicholson 2005: 53). This certainly reflects the idea of the gift motivating the audience into a process of change of their circumstances that sits centrally with much of my work. Interestingly Nicholson also goes on to propose that the nature of the performance found in the field of applied drama is itself a gift for the practitioner. It requires a repositioning of their traditional skills and theatrical contexts, the actor's voice, body, the space they occupy, from a contained and separate product for an audience, to elements in a process of generating dialogue, a dialogue aimed at the deconstruction of social paradigms leading to change. Change is not solely intended for the audience but the

performer or cultural worker as well. She clearly recognises a mutuality of experience for both sides of the traditional binary divide.

The performance/event/project is a mechanism, a starting point, an excuse for us to create something that did not exist before and we are all elements in that. CCD is about communication and establishing and building relationships. Like all relationships they work best where all parties are respected and their needs and contributions are given equal value. The knowledge of the subject matter or topics of a community show, the lived experience of each member of that community, is as important in the project as the skills or experience that I as a CCD worker or artist bring to a project.

I am not alone in the struggle to enact my work and projects in a manner that ethically reflects the democratic or community values espoused. Big hART (http://bighart.org/) is a community arts or socially engaged cultural organisation that has produced a range of work over the past 20 years across both urban and regional communities. Over time their work integrated a practice Vanessa Bates, who worked as a community writer on a number of their projects, called "mutual mentoring" (interview with Bates 2012). This means that when, as artists, they enter a community they understand that the journey is one of mutual sharing of knowledge and experience. Each side is mentoring the other, each individual is mentoring each and all the others in their knowledge and/or experience base. This practice recognises that neither side of the community partnership has precedence or status above the other, and further that no individual occupies such a position either. Each person brings to a project a lived experience with a knowledge and range of skills that can be applied to the project. Similarly the presentation of that project is a showcase for all parties to share their work with their audience. In discussions with a number of Big hART workers, they noted the difficulty they had at times adhering to these principled goals of mutual mentoring, especially when professional CCD and arts workers were more aware of deadlines than community arts workers. For myself I am aware of times in my own work when my adherence to principles of mutuality and reciprocity has been tested and, for want of moving projects along, I have chosen short cuts in process. That we fall

short in our ideals does not undermine them. That we build careers on our work does not undermine the concept of mutuality or reciprocity, it simply means we need to be mindful we continue to integrate these principles in our projects.

The principles of mutuality and reciprocity and experiencing them in projects have become central to my work. Achieving them gives me more satisfaction than the sound of the audiences' applause these days. They shape the projects I want to do and become involved with, the organisational structure for administering them, the names we give roles, the methods of implementation, where they take place, who comes to them, who creates and implements them. For example the appellation "written by Brian Joyce" is very different than a credit that says a project is "Created by" and lists the team of people working on the project, one of whom may be me with the duties of writer, dramaturg or director.

Of course as a person with an extensive history, knowledge and experience in the area, I am often put forward in leadership roles and positions. In these situations the onus is upon me to dismantle the traditional power structure that goes with such a position if I am to be faithful to the ideals I have evolved. I do - but this often fights with my knowledge of what needs to be or must be done if results are to be achieved, with my impatience at having to retread familiar ground, my anxiety around timetables. Sometimes I just don't want to talk or consult any more. I find myself simply wanting to get the job done and in doing this I forget what the job is. My goal is not to repeat a successful model or project exactly as I have undertaken it before. I want to be surprised by doing something I have not done before, I want my self confidence in my ability to hold true to the ideals that brought me to this work, to be strengthened in those ideals, for the work is as much about them as it is about the projects undertaken.

When this happens then I believe I am 'doing good', for those I work with and for me. I have, by default, shaped a career in CCD. What was an enjoyable alternative to real work became my life's work. I have had to learn about it on the job, though if I was starting out now I could have the option of undertaking a course, a course that would likely include reference to work I have undertaken (Aitchinson 2001;

Kelly 1998; O'Toole and Bundy 1993; Gauntlett and O'Connor 1995). These days we find nearly all our work including creative and cultural activity placed in a pragmatic outcome-based assessment paradigm. It is argued and generally accepted that arts-based and cultural activity is beneficial for the persons undertaking it and the communities in which it happens. Of course a change in the political *zeitgeist* can see this ignored and once again cultural activity and work is devalued, non-mainstream communities are marginalized, community cultural work deemed non-essential. Mike White has in his book *A Social Tonic* (2009) mounted a strong argument that we need to stop trying to justify the good done by CCD work and its ilk and simply accept it does achieve beneficial outcomes for those involved. He posits that such effort distracts us from looking at ways in which we can continue to do the work in a more effective manner. I like this idea. It implies I have much more to learn, indeed that we always have much more to learn. CCD is after all a very young practice.

Chapter 3

Collaboration and Partnership

"what matters is not the enclosure of the work within a harmonious figure, but the centrifugal force produced by it -- a plurality of language as a guarantee of a truth that is not merely partial."

Italo Calvino, Six Memos For The Next Millennium

Having examined my motivations for undertaking CCD work, I wish to now look at *how* we undertake that work and what most distinguishes our processes of communication and the resulting relationships. As I have stated that working 'with' communities rather than 'for' or 'alongside' is my preference then the 'how' becomes important as it defines the relationship.

In an interview between Claire Bishop and Dušan Barok, in responding to a question addressing the nature of the 'distance' between artists or cultural workers and the participants or audience for their projects Bishop answered "I would say that this gap is largely a fantasy projection on the part of the viewer who is uncomfortable with being confronted by people of another class or race" (Barok 2009: 2). It seems to me there are some strong implicit assumptions in this response about the nature of this relationship and that these reflect self-serving positions of knowledge and authority in relation to understanding the work. As I stated in the introduction I have become suspicious of that which becomes self-serving. She implies that any such gap is "fantasy". In her response one senses a self-assurance regarding the relationship between the artist and the participants. Her comment implies a binary of worker and audience and her comment regarding class or race suggests difference not just in attribute but also in power and status as both class and race are significant factors in power relationships. How we relate to the 'other', those who are different, distinct or separate from us, is always affected by power and status relationships which are in turn affected by factors such as gender, education, age, ethnicity, religion, class, etc. Her response suggests a pre-existing given of having bridged these differences, and further that such a reshaped relationship, having been established, is inviolable and to not

recognise it is due to a lack on the part the observer. This seems to imply such a relationship is built on a knowing or recognition between the artist and participant and a subsequent open and full communication and dialogue. It follows this is a knowledge and process that the critical viewer does not have and so therefore cannot perceive the true reality of such work or the relationship between the parties. Indeed Bishop goes on to say, "The reality is that no socially-engaged project would even happen without clear and exhaustive communication" (Barok 2009: 2). Here she seems to posit that either the work cannot exist without there being a pre-existing relationship that has been arrived at through a process of mutual and transparent communication, or in the absence of this, the arrangement does not fit the definition of a socially engaged project. It seems a self-fulfilling truth – if you don't know you can't see, if you can't see you don't know, if it is named thus then thus it is - but how does one actually bring about such a situation?

Central to the practice of Community Cultural Development are the ideas of collaboration and participation. Bishop recognises this by naming her early book, on what she terms 'socially engaged art', *Participation* (Bishop 2006). In this she addresses what she sees as a change in the role of audience or spectator across contemporary art practice by looking at various statements of intent from significant practitioners. She collects a range of writings from the accepted canon of arts practice, theory and manifestos from practitioners on what is seen as a change from a passive reception role for audiences or spectators to an active participatory role in the creation of contemporary art. It is this move that has caused a rise in what she and others call 'socially engaged' or 'socially oriented' projects (Lacey 1993, 1995, 2010; Shaughnessy 2012; Helguera 2011; Thompson 2012). Of course as Helguera himself notes "there is no general agreed-upon understanding of participation, engagement, or collaboration" (2011: 13) and each of these writers, and indeed most writers in the field, bring their own understandings of these terms, most often through descriptions of projects practices and strategies employed. What is accepted by all is a changed relationship between the artist or arts worker and those who have traditionally received their work. This change has seen a perception of the traditional role of

artist moving into a more collaborative role with their audience or viewers. Bishop further explores, in her book *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (Bishop 2012), what she describes as a broad 'tendency' towards this 'participatory art'. In this work she looks at a range of projects she considers as 'socially engaged' art projects. While Bishop's background is in contemporary art practice, many of the projects or programs dealt with in the book are what we would call CCD projects; she even has a chapter on Community Arts in which she looks at those same movements that developed in Britain in the late 1960s and 1970s that so influenced work in Australia including my own. Indeed, *Artificial Hells* is a significant inclusion of work usually seen as CCD into a more theoretical dialogue around contemporary art. Along with Shannon Jackson's book *Social Works: performing art, supporting politics* (2011), it shaped much of the theoretical dialogue around socially engaged art practice in recent years. Core to their discussions has been an exploration of the nature of participation and collaboration between creative artists and their audience or spectators.

Of course for CCD workers and their projects these two concepts are the basis upon which we build our work. Such processes and elements were essential premises from the beginning of my own work and these terms were often used in our statement of aims and objectives and as descriptions of our process in our funding applications. But what distinguishes good collaboration or participation and how willing are we to deconstruct our processes in responding to Helguera's comment of no commonly 'agreed-upon meaning' for these foundations terms? Helguera, following from Lacey's work in *Mapping the Terrain,* does suggest some distinctions in kinds of 'participation' suggesting a progression of immersion and agency from "Nominal Participation" through 'Directed, Creative to Collaborative Participation' (2011: 15) with a coda look at the new world of virtual participation, an area that Delanty (2003) also addresses. In a practice where process is as important as product, how participants work together, how they relate and communicate, is as integral as any artistic or social outcomes. The nature of the relationship between the artists or cultural workers and the participants or audience is the focus of this chapter, with a specific focus on the processes of participation and collaboration. Certainly any criticism of such

relationships cannot be dismissed as uninformed as simply as Bishop appears to do. In this chapter I will look at this relationship and how participation and collaboration are enacted in projects in which I have been involved. While I will address this from my own individual experience, I will also look at the work of two artists I worked with during the BHP *Ribbons of Steel* project as examples of two different approaches and their resulting outcomes and what might be learned from these experiences. I will also look at this communication and interaction from the perspective of fulfilling the goals of mutuality and reciprocity that I have positioned as central to what constitutes effective CCD projects and work for myself and I believe in general.

Establishing Communication

Before the mechanics of how we communicate can be arrived at or deconstructed it is necessary first that all parties meet. In CCD or socially engaged art projects, partnerships are formed in a variety of ways: organically, imposed, or through recognition of mutual advantage, circumstance, need, experiment and searching, or by accident or serendipity. Some are brief and purpose-oriented, some part of complex multi-strand community interventions, and some have a life beyond the initial reasons for the partnership being established. A CCD project is essentially a contract of mutual advantage between two or more parties. In the field of CCD, partnership usually comes about through the focus in a project on a specific purpose and outcome. These partnerships are predicated on recognition of a collaboration between the parties that includes the sharing of their individual resources in the creation of an event or outcome that expresses something inherent to the participants and community from which it arises. More often than not it initially forms around the process of identifying a theme or issue and creating an artistic outcome or response. Identifying the theme or issue can be done by the community itself or by the artist. There can be different initiators and starting points for such projects. While an adherence to what is understood as 'best practice' is aspirational and a guide, how well this is fulfilled or achieved can influence the outcome and affect the very nature of a project. Essentially projects are initiated by communities, artists or government policy through existing

government infrastructures and each of these will come with their own agendas, preconceptions and idiosyncrasies. As has been emphasized, at the core of such work is communication and partnership and this can be enacted in its own particular manner.

The Artist Initiative

a) The Artist's Personal Interests

Clearly, individual practitioners come with their own sets of interests or passions. In these circumstances the artist may identify a theme, issue or focus they wish to explore. They will then identify and contact the relevant community, for example, refugees, prisoners, people in a geographic location (suburb, town, housing estate, region), domestic violence survivors etc., and propose a project. In many cases the artist may even share a similar background or experience to these identified communities. Once this initial meeting is established there are a number of directions a project can take and this rests on the degree of collaboration or participation of the respective parties. For the effective fulfilment of a CCD project there needs to be significant meaningful participation and dialogue from all the participants. What constitutes 'meaningful participation' needs to encompass all parties and participants and not be the judgement of one individual, be it either an outspoken community member or an 'inspired' artist or worker. Passions can drive individuals to push for the fulfilment of personal visions or agendas and CCD workers need to be aware of this both in themselves and the communities they interact with. For instance, early in the history of the Australia Councils Art and Working Life Program a specific Union leader associated with the Waterside Workers' Federation wanted to have chamber music concerts on the docks and this was seen as community arts. However, there was no real collaboration or consultation on this and it was little more than taking a pre-packaged cultural product to a new audience. In essence it was a very basic response to the calls for access, participation and 'bringing art to the masses' which the person in question felt would 'be good' for them.

In some cases, a project can be fully or partially formed in the artist's mind or vision. What they may find themselves undertaking is a consultation that is little more than information gathering to fulfil their own preordained destination. While I have seen this called 'socially engaged' art or practice, it falls short of the processes of mutuality or democratic process rightfully associated with CCD work. Public art projects, where the creative product is removed from its traditional venue in the gallery, theatre, or concert hall can, in the minds of some, be seen as community or socially engaged work if it appears in a public space e.g. a specific sculpture in my home town of Newcastle was a 'gift' from the artist to the public. No consultation around the work was undertaken and no one actually asked for it but he managed to convince the local council of its worth by attaching a value to it as representing the union and brotherhood of workers in this industrial town. It sits in the middle of a main road intersection and its most community or socially engaged function is the continual stories it provokes when anyone asks how it came to be in such a prominent position. Such projects call into question the appellation of CCD project though I have often seen such projects called CCD work.

b) Artists Responding to Policy

Changes in government arts policy in Australia have often been messages aimed at both the artists and the community to make them consider activities outside their existing operations or existence. These policies are often about governments implementing their social policies through cultural activity. The Western Sydney Arts Strategy of the NSW Ministry for the Arts in 1999 was designed to make artists and arts organisations who were predominantly based in the Sydney city centre consider and be more aware of markets and communities in the western urban fringe and to include them in their activities and to promote interaction between creative artists and different communities. Another example, the Art and Working Life Program that the Australia Council established in 1982, was instigated to both promote culture in the workplace and the creation of cultural products that reflected or grew from the work place. A significant aspect of its policy was that funding applications for projects for this initiative needed to be

applications from partnerships of unions and arts workers. This caveat was imposed so that an existing consultation and contact between the participants was inbuilt into a project.

It was not uncommon for CCD workers to tailor or shape their projects to current themes, government policies or designated issues. Many of these social and political initiatives recognised areas of disadvantage or disempowerment and a positive response to them is to be expected from artists and workers interested in using their practice as agents of change or dialogue with social issues. This is something I return to later in Chapter 3.

c) The Commission

The contract approach whereby a community group or organisation approaches an artist or creative group to create an artistic product in collaboration with the community is also common. Often this comes about because a community has seen a similar project and they wish to repeat the success of that in their own community. This process saw many community murals appear on walls, or performances based on verbatim accounts of refugee experiences, for example, appear in community halls – sometimes with mixed results. No matter how one may develop an approach or framework for developing a CCD project, such modelling does not mean that projects can be duplicated or repeated because there are always different elements involved. In my own experience I have been commissioned to write and produce specific performances because of previous work. This can range from being commissioned to write a play with school children addressing water usage in a drought affected area (*Our Creek* for Wyong Council) to the larger Windale project (which I deal with in detail later in Chapter 5) where I was commissioned to develop a large-scale community performance with the diverse members of a disadvantaged suburb specifically because they saw the success of the *Ribbons of Steel* project with BHP. Of course the dangers in assuming one can replicate the success of a previous project are many. Further the idea of replication in some ways runs contrary to the idea of CCD where the

process of establishing a relationship and collaboration that is specific to the issues or project at hand means that each situation is its own individual event.

The CCD Relationship

If CCD is based upon a relationship, then that relationship is one predicated upon communication and collaboration rather than entrenched social structure and history. It is one that requires negotiation and it is the nature of this relationship that distinguishes it. The words we use as a reflection of the democratic process of devising such work, such as 'participation' and 'collaboration', need to be more than just catch phrases for our submissions, or a reassuring catechism. We need to look at how we achieve these things and how effectively they are enacted. Having written these words so many times over the years in funding application after funding application they have taken on the role of essential and familiar tools of trade, touchstones in design of my work. With that familiarity I have found myself questioning their meaning and realising they have been allowed to exist without challenge or question. If they are central to my work I feel they need to change with the work itself. Their role and meaning need to be continually interrogated and, for them to be effective tools, the need to be living and alive in the present, not comforting talismans of tradition. In considering CCD work, effective participation means that participants have a meaningful role in the design and direction of the project. Further mutuality means that this participation is not where the community fulfils a role already designated for them by the artist. What happens when this is or is not fulfilled is what I explore in the following narratives.

A Tale of Two Artists

The scope and breadth of the artists working on the *Ribbons of Steel* project was extensive. In terms of *The Forge*, the central performance of *Ribbons of Steel*, performance artists included a percussionist from Brazil, various choreographers, pyro-technicians, actors, musicians, a choir, composers, dancers, writers, directors, trapeze artists, acrobats, school students and a trance dance music

lighting specialist. All were asked to engage with a specific identified community or sub group on the site or in the surrounding suburbs, auxiliary business or environment. These partnerships were assigned by the Artistic Directors for the performance (primarily myself) in consultation with and in collaboration with them to create a cultural artwork, product, performance etc.

In the performance component for which I was responsible, this meant various elements were to be undertaken within the context of a formal sit-down audience performance that took place in a modified three storey workshed on site. There was also a series of independent performances on small stages or outside site-specific performances constituting an extended promenade performance that led the audience to the site of the more formal performance in the workshed venue. Overall the performance stretched over 3 hours. Very different styles and performance modes were incorporated into the evening and these needed to be integrated as a cohesive whole. These included sideshow tents and stalls, roving puppets, and street based agit-prop, outside. Inside there was a similar diversity including trapeze, a formally composed cantata for brass band and choir, physical theatre, dance, puppetry, scripted scenes, and monologues. There was also choreographed movement for large scale machinery culminating in the faux rear wall of the workshed being dropped to reveal the actual industrial site that would soon be disappearing. In this we had trains moving past and cooling towers releasing clouds of steam, all cued to their moment in the performance. This was a varied and unknown performance with the opportunity for many things to go wrong and carried risk in terms of artistic failure, physical injury and failing to adequately encompass the diversity of feeling and response to the closure.

Two aspects I wish to draw attention to here revolved around two of the invited performance makers who were asked to develop work. The process for these components of the performance was that individual directors, choreographers and performance makers were partnered up with specific worker groups and their representatives to collaborate on creating a segment of the final performance. This entailed a focused topic or theme, for example, the history of the site, the process of mining coal or making steel, the experience of migrant workers, management

and board, and specific work sites on the plant such as the blast furnaces, rolling mills, coke ovens, transport. These scenes were to be incorporated into an over-arching narrative of the experience of working at BHP. It was a conglomerate performance with different performance makers and BHP groups responsible for individual components and myself responsible for some individual elements, and the over-all performance narrative and staging.

Returning now to the involvement of two of the individual directors responsible for two separate components of this performance: one of these I will identify and the other I will refer to without designating their identity as they offer two very polar positions on the spectrum of success and failure in CCD work. Our un-named director/performance maker was an artist living in Newcastle at the time who had produced a number of shows locally. Previously I had worked as dramaturg with him and we had shared many conversations about the experience of the immigrant artist attempting to produce creative work in Australia. I asked him to develop a component of the show that reflected the migrant experience at BHP, specifically the Mediterranean migrant experience that was strong in the plant, as he himself was a migrant. His contact point was the Italian community of workers from the stores department of the BHP plant. The migrant experience was significant at BHP and the guiding committee for the performance strongly wanted it represented in the final performance.

He was pleased to be a part of such a significant performance and process. He immediately set to work devising a performance that would look at the dreams of the migrant worker, aspects of homeland and longing. He quickly called on a few of the community actors he had previously worked with in his other productions. He chose to write the script for the performance himself. When I asked if he needed anything he said he would contact me if he needed anything. In describing what follows I wish to convey the events and happenings of this process so I may look at what occurred to better understand it, not as a criticism or judgement of any individual.

Some time into the production I heard from the representative of the Italian workers in the stores department. He said no one had contacted them and he wondered if their piece was still in the performance. I contacted this director and communicated this message. He assured me everything was fine and under control. I suggested he needed to contact the worker representatives and discuss the piece. He said there was little time and he was focused on getting the final performance together. When I questioned if the work reflected the input of the BHP voice he assured me he understood their experience from his own experience as a migrant worker. We discussed the aims of the project and the idea of this being a collaborative process. For him the collaborative process was under way in his work with the team of artists he had drawn around him. Their work focused on poetic and mythic symbols of the migrant experience, those things that had gained a universal meaning and so potently express the experience of those on site at BHP, and he opined that the minutiae of individual experience would only diminish the work. He felt he was an artist brought in to interpret and reflect back to the community their experience as he understood it. I wondered if this was a very bad choice and pairing but in the overall mix of the complex project and the multitude of strands, I kept pushing forward.

While I did achieve a meeting between the director and the migrant workers group it must be said it was too little too late. Even the positives that grew from this meeting, such as a number of the workers volunteering to perform in the end piece, the integration of specific items (talismans) from the site into the performance, the idea of having some workers attend rehearsals in a consulting directing/dramaturge role, other than the props or talismans nothing eventuated or was represented in the final performance. The final performance was less than satisfying for nearly all involved. The BHP workers were especially put out for what they described to me as a dishonest process and not what they had been promised. The director for his part felt his original vision had been compromised by too many extraneous ideas and that the end performance was negatively affected by having to lose time in meetings rather than being able to attend to time rehearsing his script. It was evident to me he saw collaboration as an interference with his pre-conceived idea and artistic vision. His experience as a migrant was

enough for him to base his work on and in shutting out input from the BHP workers he seemed to exclude both reciprocity and mutuality by controlling the processes of participation and collaboration. For myself, I used excuses of time and the scale of the project to not intervene or either ensure facilitating the parties' communication, or replace the artist with a more suitable choice. The end result showed the flaws.

The other artist was Tess de Quincey, a choreographer who was Artistic Director for a company called Bodyweather, a Butoh influenced group from Sydney. I had been familiar with her work and worked briefly with her in the past. Butoh is a form of movement-based performance that variously is categorised as either dance or physical performance. It comes from Japan and had its genesis in a somatic exploration of the extreme hostile environments experienced at the sites of Hiroshima and Nagasaki following their atomic bombing in WW2. It is marked by a painfully slow movement style of often grotesque physical poses and images of the performer's body. Its goal is to embody extreme somatic experience and conditions in an energised, stylised and focused physical performance.

I asked her to collaborate with the workers from the coke ovens. On a site with no shortage of hostile environments, the coke ovens had a reputation for some of the most unpleasant conditions and a record of some of the more horrific accidents. When I initially approached the workers at the coke ovens and told them a movement group called Bodyweather was assigned to them, their response was taciturn:

"What, we're getting the dancing girls?"

I explained the basis of the group's work and my reasons for choosing this particular group to work with them. I explained the basis of Butoh and its relation to hostile environments and how this can be embodied through movement and physical imagery. I highlighted Bodyweather's committed work ethic, rigorous research and engagement with the subjects/topics of their work and the startling results of strong images through the simple physical presence of the body.

"Dancing girls," they repeated.

Their scepticism barely concealed their disappointment and derision. These men - and all who worked in the coke ovens were male - were all big and strong, with a direct no-bullshit approach to their work, others and the world at large. Tess is a small woman, slight of build though with a very strong body. The first day I introduced her to the representatives of the workers was a tense meeting. Tess arrived with two of her company, another woman, young, attractive and equally slight if less strong looking than Tess, a typical young female dancer, and a male in his early 30s, the same size and build as Tess and while not effete, anything less than a rugby scrimmage player at the end of an 80-minute game looked 'queer' to the BHP men. Later, I often wondered if the attractive young female was a strategy on Tess's part, as at least the BHP workers were happy to stay and talk, just to be around her. After establishing the workshop (and working at BHP I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable in using this term for what we did as cultural workers - it seemed incongruous amidst serious industrial workshops) I sat back and let Tess take control. Tess asked many questions about their workplace and what it was like spending eight-hour shifts in such an environment. The men slowly relaxed and shared their stories. I thought often they were trying to impress these 'dancing girls' as to just how difficult and terrible their job was, to scare them even. The three 'dancers' were attentive and continually interested. After a while I left them to further explore what might be achieved. At the end of a couple of hours as time was winding up, I turned up to see how things went. I noted the tension was still there.

The next day Tess rang me and said she had been very impressed by the meeting but she recognised the men were sceptical and she also felt she needed more than their stories, so asked me,

"Is it possible to spend a shift with the men in the coke ovens?'

I was aware of work regulations, Occupational Health & Safety (OH and S) issues within the plant and more generally across the site, and that she was asking for access to one of the more dangerous worksites. I said I didn't like her chances but I would pursue it. The representatives from the coke ovens were more than surprised by the request – incredulous was more like it.

"Why would anyone want to come here if they didn't have to?" they asked.

I explained Bodyweather felt they needed to understand what the workers had told them, to experience it physically to be able to devise the work they had been asked to. And so four 'dancing girls' (three females and one male) after going through a 90 minute safety induction were kitted up in heavy protective clothing and went off under the guidance of four volunteer workers who were not rostered on for that shift. They spent eight hours shadowing the men on that shift, simply observing what their work entailed. I met them at the end of their shift and noted the sense of respect between the coke oven crew and the artists that had been engendered by their shared experience. They all felt it had been valuable in ways I realised I could not comprehend, not having been there. They agreed to do it again in a couple of days.

From this experience Tess identified a number of simple gestures or moves that were part of the repetitious physical tasks of each shift: a lifting of the leg with a sideways cocked leg at the knee as they stepped over pipes and gantries around the ovens, a slow focused walk along a safety path above the lids on the ovens and a shielding of the eyes and face as they recoiled from the heat and glare, their bodies leaning back and turning slightly away. The material had been gathered for their performance. Now Tess suggested the workers join them in devising the piece and perform alongside them in it. So now the BHP men spent a shift with the 'dancing girls' experiencing their warm ups and preparation, working with performers in pairs to develop duets and ensemble movement pieces, developing a new knowing of their own bodies and of their own work. It continued through a series of rehearsals developing their final performance for the major sit down performance.

I did not see their work through rehearsals as I was busy with other components of the performance and the nature of the larger work was that each section was the responsibility of the designated director/choreographer – besides, other components were having problems and did require my attention. Tess kept me informed about the process and told me she was pleased with how things were progressing so I was reassured and trusted her. Because of a number of factors and events with such a conglomerate work I did not see this section of the performance until opening night in front of an audience. Standing at the side of the performance area I watched as a group of eight performers, let's call them 'dancers', four from Bodyweather and four from the BHP coke ovens, performed their piece as one of the first sections of the main performance. The precise ensemble work, the poised and measured control of the movements, the simple eloquence of the gestures and movements and the serious focus and intent of the performance was riveting. I stood transfixed by their work and artistry. In the emotion of the evening I realised I was crying, the only time I did during the entire process of working on *The Forge* performance.

The disparate consequences of these two narratives was evident. As regards the first director's work, the migrant workers were right to feel cheated in terms of their experience. Contributions offered and the opportunities they represented were rejected and mutual respect never achieved. The stance of the already knowledgeable artist closed a door to creativity and friendship that meant all missed the opportunity to genuinely collaborate and create work that was new and surprising. He was taken by the idea of his gift to these people, his ability to show them their experience rather than allow them to share their experience with him and have a role in the design and outcome of a genuinely collaborative work. The gift of theatre was in this case a pre-existing package brought to the community and, when it was not appreciated, both sides felt dissatisfaction.

Conversely, after BHP closed, Bodyweather went on to other work, a piece in the harsh desert sand hills in central Australia outside Alice Springs. This was a commissioned piece performed by their core dancer/members and reflected their

stream of work of performing in outside environments. The men from the BHP coke ovens went out to see them perform, a long trip to see some 'dancing girls'. They chose to do this because they were interested in the work these 'dancing girls' did and because they had grown to know and respect this. Friendships had been established and ongoing contacts started. For the workers in the coke ovens, suspicion had been overcome and trust had been established. The same could be said for the Bodyweather members. While there were many components to the *Ribbons of Steel* project and *The Forge* performance I think none so effectively fulfilled the aims of the project as this component.

What came out of the collaboration of the BHP coke ovens workers and Bodyweather was a genuine expression of every person's contribution through a process of respectful dialogue. In terms of the brief to create a work that expressed the experience of the workers of a specific site at BHP, Tess managed this with a level of artistic and aesthetic quality that was exemplary. It was not that there was not division in the beginning, nor distrust and testing, but these obstacles were resolved by a genuine openness and sharing and by more, a reaching out to be immersed in the other's experience and to not simply understand but to experience it as it is by the other. The respect that was generated overcame any insecurities that may have inhibited meaningful participation and collaboration from either side, indeed there were no sides in the end result, only a single creative vision and performance group.

A Relationship over Time

I want to now look at an interesting relationship that arose during my time at Pipi Storm. The headmaster at Tibooburra had previously been Principal at Maroubra Public School in Sydney and we had contact with him both from visits to his school and socially, as he was a friend of Bronwyn Vaughan's mother Gwen, Bronwyn being a founding member of Pipi Storm. He was aware of our work and the impact we could have on individual students and the culture of a school as a whole. He was especially interested in our workshop programs and the skills sharing that we then focused into community performances. When he decided to

move to Tibooburra he felt we could have a unique impact on this very small isolated community. He extended an invitation to come out and said he would find some money to pay us. This was an add-on to an existing tour of rural Far West NSW. It was based on mutual friendship and contact; there were no formal contracts and all was done on trust as the funds were not there when we arrived.

Tibooburra is a small town in the corner of New South Wales (NSW) where the borders of Queensland, South Australian and NSW meet. It is the most isolated settlement in NSW, some 1500kms and 18 hours drive from Sydney. Because of its isolation and its history as a focal point in settlement in the region it attracts a reasonably steady flow of 'off the beaten track' tourists. As well, it has a history of attracting visual artists to the region because of the striking landscapes and light in the region. This has resulted in an awareness and appreciation of cultural and arts activity – a famous focal point is a mural painted by Clifton Pugh, a noted Australian painter, adorning the walls of the local pub, along with work by Russel Drysdale, Rick Amor and others. Even so the isolation of the town did mean that the creative experience of the students was limited. The principal wanted us to look at both creative and confidence-building projects for the students.

Pipi Storm first went there in 1976 as part of a School of the Air (a wireless radio school for isolated families) residency in which surrounding schools from White Cliffs, Lightning Ridge, School of the Air students and Tibooburra students had a week-long arts and education camp. Our role was to perform our show and then run a series of circus, music and performance skills workshops with the students, parents and teachers towards producing another circus based performance at the end of the week. It rained and we ended up being trapped and isolated there for longer than expected, a story in itself. One of the outcomes of this first visit was to establish a strong connection between Pipi Storm and the people of Tibooburra. Our first visit was successful partly because of circumstances beyond our control. Heavy rains during our first visit ended up making the roads in and out of this isolated town un-passable. What was supposed to be a 4 day arts and craft activity camp ended up being over a week of being 'trapped' with no way out until the rains stopped and the road - a stretch of 300kms of unsealed clay and sand - dried

out. Actually the situation was of some concern as the town had quite a few extra people in it and as supplies in the town were not enough to cover the time period, they had to be dropped in by plane. Also there were many others trapped in the town besides those attending the events organised for the students. These included truckies, drovers, boundary fence riders, hunters as well as a couple of tourists. The situation saw us having to devise a different entertainment each night, always incorporating the stranded population. The Principal and a number of parents and townspeople thanked us, because they said without our activities they worried things could have become more serious as we witnessed some fraying of nerves and social niceties – a sort of 'Grand Hotel' in the outback.

We returned over the successive years as they ran their arts camps. Most times a show was brought to them, and workshops were undertaken with the students in which a further community show was devised and performed. Not only students but also adults from the town were involved. This went on for six years leading up to the Centenary of the town in 1981. Over this time the actual Pipi Storm team members changed and only one from the original team, myself, remained by the time of the centenary celebrations. As part of the activities and celebrations for this significant event once again Pipi Storm was called up by the Tibooburra School Principal (a new person by now as the original Principal had moved back to Sydney) about coming up for their annual week long arts festival and camp, a special one this year. We were aware of the significance of this year and were looking forward to the call. When it came there was a surprising caveat - we were not to do anything for the activities, but were to simply be their guests this time around. What had initially been an invitation to come and undertake our work 6 years previously was now an invitation to the party to simply enjoy it. In truth, all of the activities were now run by teachers and townsfolk and there was never any problem in finding performers for the annual performance whatever it would be. It still included stilt-walking and clowning and acrobatics and magic, music and celebration - it looked like a Pipi Storm show. Over the years, community circus as a form had evolved and become a more visible format for youth theatre performances, and one very popular in regional areas: Tibooburra was simply one of the first locations to embrace this.

These arts camps and the resulting performances had always been a mutual collaboration between the community and Pipi Storm. Their content, design and production were the result of a genuine group effort. Over time the visual artists who visited the town found themselves folded into the community performances. For the few weeks we visited Tibooburra each year nearly everyone in the town was involved in cultural activities in some way or another, culminating in a festival day focused around a newly devised performance of circus each year. For Pipi Storm it became like going home for Christmas, less a job and more of an annual family ritual.

Interestingly after the invite for their centenary and another change in school principal things quietened down in Tibooburra and we were not invited back, though a couple of members from Pipi Storm did visit socially. It was as though the family had changed and grown apart. A few years later when a change in government arts funding policy and focus saw a shift to funding regional arts in the 1990s new groups established themselves in far west NSW. One of these was Outback Circus, which later became Outback Arts, a designated community arts and regionally based organisation with a specific charter to develop socially engaged cultural projects that aimed at building community adhesion and identity in isolated areas. Their main mechanism for achieving this was to run circus schools and workshops for young people in various isolated town and regions of NSW. In talking informally to them at a Regional Arts Conference in the late 1990s they recounted how, when they went to Tibooburra, they were pleased to find an existing culture of collaboration and willingness to be involved and participate in community. The people of Tibooburra knew how to put on a circus as they had done it before.

The skills they acquired were more than the practical circus skills of tightrope, juggling, magic, or clowning, they also had the actual organisation and management skills necessary to be able to run the workshops, the production skills necessary to put on a show, the knowledge of how to implement a community cultural development project. Even more important they accepted and

owned recognition of the value and importance of such events to their isolated community. Their active participation in all these aspects over the years created more that good circus performers, it created good CCD workers capable of implementing their own programs and working alongside other new practitioners and companies in the field. Such knowledge and confidence is a direct result of truly representative communication and relationship that developed over time. All participants were focussed on the same project and outcome – the traditional 'let's put on a show' - along with other social agendas specific to the isolated experience of Tibooburra such communication skills, confidence building and contact with the wider world - and while we may have originally been the people with the performance knowledge it was their towns show and they truly owned it. The nature of our relationship and how each of us participated in it meant both sides benefitted greatly. For them they achieved an autonomy in being able to implement their own programs and to compensate for their isolation and generate an ongoing culture of community performance and celebration. For me it reinforced the importance of a genuine empowered 'collaborative participation' (Helguera 2011: 15) in the democratic generation of community cultural programs.

The legacy of a good relationship

From these stories it is evident that a deeper bond and stronger relationship is established if the participation and collaboration enacted is meaningful and arrived at through an open and mutual dialogue and collaboration. For me it is less about roles, history or skills (though all these are important), and more about experience and establishing a relationship based on communication. If such a relationship is established, then all participants have an equal role and investment in the life and outcomes of both the relationship and any projects associated with it. Ownership is an important element of creative CCD projects and a sense of achieving this is to be found when participation is active, has potency, and can direct the design and outcomes of the project. In such a situation the success is shared, or the frustrations and disappointment understood and accepted by all without blame, for it is a mutual shared experience. The process itself generates

its own stronger investment from all involved. In such cases outcomes are more than the artistic end product and can exist long after the project ends.

Chapter 4

Engagement

You get this wrong you have to answer to me.

<div align="right">Auntie Doris, Aboriginal Elder, Toronto NSW</div>

An interrogation of the essential precepts and terminology of CCD and their meanings is core to my reflection upon my work. In this chapter I wish to turn to the idea of 'engagement'. Having discussed the concepts of participation and collaboration in the previous chapter, it may seem illogical to now look at engagement - one assumes participants need to be engaged before they can either participate or collaborate. But I wish to take a slightly different perspective in looking at engagement as it pertains to the activity we undertake as cultural workers and, in so doing, arrive at a new understanding of how this concept can shape the role of a CCD worker in relation to their practice and the communities with which they are involved.

Engagement, by its most simple definition can simply mean involvement, paying attention to, taking notice of or holding focus. The second half of the last century saw the development of a structured analysis of and evolving theory about engagement, especially in the two areas of education and business and marketing. This discourse, though it embraced different directions, became known as 'engagement theory'. The seminal theoreticians in the two respective areas were Kearsley and Schneidermann (1999) in education, and Kahn (1990) and Harter, Schmidt, Keyes (2002, 2003) in business and marketing. While aspects of these theories are both applicable and useful for CCD workers and their projects, it is a slightly different direction I will explore in this chapter. A different direction is critical and beneficial because when we work with communities the issues or events are often a matter of their core identity and at times a matter of life and

death, as was, for example, the impact of the closure of the Newcastle BHP steel plant for the workers. On this basis, how can we generate a similarly strong emotional and personal engagement on the part of the CCD worker? How do we raise the 'ante' for the CCD worker? Before examining these issues, I will look at what is generally understood by engagement theory and its applicability to community cultural work.

Engagement Theory Background

While terms such as 'community engagement' or 'social engagement' were in common parlance throughout much of the twentieth century, they were frequently appropriated as political terms useful in the development of communities and as part of the discourse around community building. Often these were terms used by politicians, planners and businesspeople in the establishment or development of new communities and as such were not deeply questioned or analysed in relation to the overriding super objectives or goals of community or civic development. The use of these terms reflected descriptions of basic enlistment or marketing strategies or slogans, like 'getting people on board', or 'bringing the community together'. Sometimes, when these political visions or community development plans have gone awry, social workers would also find themselves using these same terms as remedies for the problems caused by ineffective community or social planning and development. That is, effective community engagement was seen as a solution to alienation, community fragmentation or disempowerment.

Before teasing out my own different interpretation of 'engagement', it is necessary to here look at commonly used appellations and to distinguish between terms such as 'social', 'community' and 'civic' engagement and what is generally understood by these. 'Social engagement' is used more often in relation to the individual and his/her interaction with others and refers to participation in collective activities with others. As social animals it is assumed we benefit from interaction with other people and our social engagement is a mark of our effective social adjustment or ability to exist as both an individual and a part of a broader human society. 'Community and civic engagement' refers to groups or

organisations and these terms have more fluid understandings, often overlapping or being used interchangeably, though 'civic' more commonly applies to government or political organisations. They most often describe networks of communication and influence.

All these concepts describe relationships and at the core of 'engagement' is a relationship; indeed when we decide to choose a partner in life or marriage we signify this by becoming 'engaged'. Certainly it describes the action of union and this state of being or enactment. However I wish to apply a different meaning to the word 'engagement', one that looks at the individual and the nature of that engagement.

Engagement theory certainly addresses how one might attract attention, make people take notice or 'engage' and as such can often present or provide the CCD worker with effective strategies to actually 'engage' members of a community, especially in the early or formative stages of implementing a project. Examples of strategies include undertaking community consultation through open community meetings, establishing a presence on site in the community, or brainstorming sessions to arrive at goals and methods. I feel it still has serious inherent problems as well. More often than not it explores what one does once one has gained a person's attention. Again this could be useful for a person developing a community development project but it seems to me there remain essential elements that are fundamentally at odds with a CCD project and the principles of CCD best practice.

There was little formal discussion of engagement theory generally until the 1980s and specially 1990s when it was co-opted by both education and business. In education it related to classroom dynamics and the student experience in the learning process (Kearsley and Schneiderman 1999). Business theorists in the United States morphed this engagement theory into 'stakeholder theory' with a keen eye on the bottom line of efficient business methods and maximising profit (Freeman 1988 2010, Kahn 1990). The rise of corporate structures and often mega-structures saw a need to shore up their viability and consolidate their

operational base through support networks. 'Stakeholder theory' became a useful shorthand for identifying and enlisting interested participants and moving onto engagement theory to assure survival of organisations and increase the profitability of businesses by the appearance of mutual investment.

As noted above, much of the dialogue around this theory rests within the areas of either education or marketing and consumer strategies. In these discussions the concept of engagement can be passive and/or active. Of particular note is the idea that the person who is framed as the target for engagement is definitely seen as an 'other', separate, distinct or disengaged. They are perceived as someone to be enticed or seduced (though not coerced, for this seems too much like social engineering) into being involved and once this is achieved then secondary goals are set for these people. In marketing, these goals are that the customer will purchase goods or services and in education, that the student will acquire information or knowledge and show this acquisition by passing tests or exams. Engagement theory is a functional strategy for communication and interpersonal bridge-building to achieve what are often pre-existing aims. In terms of a CCD project, these aims may well be seen as the desired participation and collaboration and so, much of this theory and dialogue as very useful for a novice CCD worker. Yet, as I stated, there are inherent problems, especially in relation to the ideas of mutuality and reciprocity that I have placed as central and foregrounded aims in my own practice. There is an implicit power imbalance in this discourse. A hierarchy exists between the teacher and the student in the education paradigm and between the marketer and the customer in business and this hierarchy is often exploited by those in the dominant position to achieve their individual desired results, even if they present these results as beneficial to the subordinate participant.

At the core of much engagement theory is a binary of 'us and them'. The other is targeted and a performance or outcome is often the goal of the engagement - on both sides of this binary. In this binary relationship the hoped for outcomes are therefore different as the parties are separate. The goals, outcomes, the results, the return on investment are often different for each of the respective participants or

players. As discussed in Chapter 1, the idea of mutuality and shared experience is for me central to an effective CCD project. Certainly in CCD work there is the premise that each party has desired outcomes and so we could propose that they have a shared outcome of achieving their desires. Establishing a process for achieving this could only prove to each party's benefit and if engagement theory can contribute to this then it is a good thing. However even with all its beneficial planning and tactical strategies, engagement theory at its core seems to eschew this idea of mutuality. Such an investment requires us to look more deeply at the idea of engagement.

A Different Engagement

When looking at social, community or political situations we often hear the phrase 'the stakeholders involved'. As noted, business has appropriated this terminology and developed its own separate theoretical strand, 'stakeholder theory', as part of its management strategies. But what is actually meant by this and what does such a description mean in relation to the community cultural project? Is this simply a list of the participants involved? Leaving aside wagers and betting, stakeholders are considered as 'those with an interest in'. As an example, in traditional corporations, 'those with an interest in' would include only management and shareholders. However, Freeman (1984, 2010) introduced the idea that stakeholders include members from the expanded network of contacts and interactions of the corporation, for instance, unions, workers, customers, and the communities in which the corporations exist.

This broader understanding of 'stakeholder' is relevant to CCD work. There are certainly diverse experiences and roles in a CCD project. These can include any or a number of the following: active, passive, creative or receptive spectators, audience members, participants, turnout, onlookers, contributors, collaborators, performers, artists, researchers, reviewers, critics, tutors, administrators, facilitators, co-ordinators, technicians, assistants, volunteers, supporters, sponsors, funders and more. Are the stakes of each stakeholder equal, exclusive of, in opposition to, shared or even recognised by the others? How then does one assess

who is a stakeholder or how the stakes they are placing at risk will affect them or the situation they share? Further, how do the stakes affect their behaviour in a situation? What does it do to their engagement in the situation and its unfolding?

A different way of unpacking this notion of the stakeholder is through the process of attempting to understand what is at stake for a character in a narrative. In teaching creative writing, as I have through my years at the Hunter Writers Centre and at University, I often ask my students in creating their narratives 'What is at stake for the characters in your story?'. I am not alone in this; most creative writing text books ask the same. It is a common question in the construction of narrative and is embedded in a creative writer's understanding of the classic foundations of narrative, especially tragedy. We know what will happen to Oedipus - he is going to end up a motherfu*&er and Thebes will be destroyed. There are serious consequences. In my classes I ask students 'How will your characters change - what is lost and or gained?' These characters do not simply participate in the story nor is their only task to drive or direct the narrative; they are engaged in what at times can be a life and death situation - it matters to them, they have 'things at stake'. The concept of things 'at stake' implies there is something at risk, an investment of value to be gained or lost. A character with something at stake will commit, fight more strongly, try harder, be more engaged. It is this deeper engagement, something beyond a simple presence or being there, giving attention, even participating or contributing to, that I seek in my work, from myself and from those I work with. This idea of engagement has occupied my thoughts in relation to my practice for much of my working life. For the purpose of this discussion, I am proposing that effective engagement reflects a high stakes risk. This is the core concern of this chapter – what is at risk as a stakeholder? Before looking at stakes and risk in my own work, I will share a few anecdotal observations from other well-known CCD workers.

Realising the Stakes

Most of us who work in the community development field are aware of the oft-told tale of Augusto Boal (Ramsay 2013: 23). Boal was a Brazilian theatre

director and community worker who developed an approach to creating social and community change through performance and theatre productions. Influenced by Paolo Friere's writings in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) he developed various theatre and performance forms such as Forum Theatre, Image Theatre, Invisible Theatre and Legislative Theatre which he refined through practice before documenting them in his own work beginning with *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979), in the title acknowledging both his direct debt to Freire and his commitment to applying performance and theatre to social change. The story goes that one day Boal was performing, with his troupe, to a group of peasants in Brazil, an agitprop piece about landownership and how the landowners have stolen the peasants' land. If this is to change then the peasants, his audience, must rise up and confront their oppressors. The performance shows this uprising and how by direct action, by armed revolt if necessary, the power base can be overturned and the peasants can reclaim their land. All, performers and audience, are swept up in the liberating victory of this performed resolution and the applause at the end of the performance is enthusiastically euphoric on the part of the audience and appreciatively received on the part of the performers. The audience is inspired by this ending and rush off to their homes where they gather what little arms and weapons they can find - old rifles, agricultural implements, sticks and household tools or implements and return to where the performers are packing up and say, "Very well, pick up your weapons and join us and let us go and confront the landowners now". Boal and his troupe are completely taken aback. He explains to them their 'weapons' are not real but only wooden props for the show. "No matter" the peasant/audience says, "we can take spades and picks and we can destroy these oppressors". "But" says Boal "we are only actors we were only telling the story. We can't go out and fight the landowners". Both parties retired disillusioned from the experience, though for very different reasons and with very different results. The status quo remained for the peasants, the troupe moved on to their next performance and one of the most influential practitioners and theorists of our field learned a salient lesson - the stakes are different.

The brutal and blunt realisation experienced by Boal is available to all of us once we pause to consider the Fly In Fly Out nature of much of our project based careers. My time at BHP brought to the fore many conflicting thoughts and feelings about my CCD practice. In working at BHP alongside their employees, some of whom had been there all their working lives and who now faced an end to this, I was struck with the contradiction that for 2,200 workers it meant the end of their jobs, while for me it represented a job. The announcement that the BHP Newcastle steelmaking plant was closing meant two very distinct and disparate results for its employees, for me, for a whole range of artists and for CCD workers who worked on this project – the end of a job and the creation of a job. If BHP had not been closing and if they had not wanted to mark this event in some way through a process of cultural expression and product, then I would not have been employed. Glib though this simplification may sound, it is sometimes good to remember basic truths that we may seek to overlook in our rush to believe in the worthiness of our endeavour.

 Of course these observations have been raised before. John Romeril, a playwright who worked on numerous community projects in Melbourne, once remarked jokingly in conversation, "What Year is it next year, so we know what we are doing". As socially committed arts practitioners we would always keep up with what was the next designated area of social or community focus and call for action. With each designated International Year of the *Something* - Human Rights (1968), Women (1975), Child (1979), Disabled Persons (1981), Peace (1986), Literacy (1990), Family (1994), Volunteer (2001), Potato (2008), Reconciliation (2009), Youth (2010/11), Quinoa (2013) etc. - we would consider how we could respond, develop projects and access funds for projects we would implement in that particular year. Tim Prentki, at a conference in Limerick (7th International Drama in Education Research Conference 2012), shockingly compared CCD workers to lawyers chasing ambulances for work - seeking out the next victim, problem or disaster.

Such observations characterise our work as opportunistic and ourselves as parasites on the world we live in, a harsh perspective indeed and not one actually

embraced by either of these long term committed practitioners. Yet their comments reflect some cogent hidden truths that warrant consideration. It would be presumptuous for me to judge the motivation of others in so harsh a light as these statements suggest but I will look at some general thoughts provoked around this and some specific responses in relation to my own practice.

These observations reflect the precarious existence of CCD workers and their constant need to always be looking for both opportunities for projects and sources of income. They describe a very survival oriented and selfish motivation for our industry – obviously well at odds with the ideas of doing good or altruism. Of course one hopes and trusts in seeking to assure our individual survival we invariably undertake processes that do good or are beneficial to the communities in which we work. Such beneficial outcomes can however, in a harsh and critical light, appear as by-products of our desperate survival drives. Our stakes are often our survival. Could they be more than this and how do we encourage the stakes to be more?

Risky Business

To answer the above questions, here I focus on my engagement with the closure of BHP, the formal contractual obligations of that engagement and what was at risk for me as CCD worker. I have already discussed my initial resistance at becoming involved with the BHP project. I was deeply suspicious of the intent and design of this event. I was similarly very wary of all the conflicting agendas and egos involved and did not feel comfortable adding my own, along with my doubts about the goals of the project, to the mix. However as I have described earlier, I did become involved and I look back on this project with fond memories, satisfaction and pride. It was a significant and large-scale event and offered challenges in its design, creation and staging, not to mention fulfilling my involvement in a manner I considered ethical. Once I became involved my engagement certainly brought with it high stakes. The fact I had publicly criticized the actual core purpose of the project - a cultural festival to mark a significant betrayal, and questioned whether it could fulfil its stated aims of

articulating such a diverse and conflicting range of emotions and responses without editorial interference, meant that if I was to become involved I was setting myself up for criticism.

The very size and scope of the event that was to take place on a site that was not made for performance brought with it risks, the diversity and investment of such a large range of participants, the symbolic meaning of BHP in the broader community and significance of this event, the very raw emotions of many involved all contributed very high stakes, and now I had loaded on a further risk for myself by criticising the project and questioning its legitimacy. How could I ethically become involved with a work that I had suggested was little more than a 'sop to the community'.

My main criticism had been that the process of consultation and avenue for an authentic expression of the workers' and employees' feelings regarding the closure would not be allowed by a process funded and controlled by management of the company and outside agencies. In particular the Australia Council, which wanted a showcase for its policy of Industry Partnerships, working with significant industrial and business companies on CCD projects. Further, I had expressed concerns that the importing of outside artists and practitioners would not allow an honest and comprehensive expression of the local experience or emotional landscape.

Any project has its risks and stakes. We wish to undertake a project with the goal of an optimum and successful outcome that best represents the presentation or enactment of the experiences and issues involved in the project in an authentic and respectful manner, while also showcasing our skills and effectiveness as CCD workers entrusted with this responsibility. The contracts we sign articulate that the details of obligations of delivery are the first touchstones of success or failure – we fulfil our contracts on time or we don't and as such they represent a legal detailing of risk and responsibility. Yet it is in the implementation and journey of the project that the real risks and stakes reveal themselves.

The very notion that this was a project that brought together partners as diverse as the largest and richest private corporation in Australia, BHP, and the Australia Council for the Arts, the prime national arts funding and policy body, meant it was a project with a lot of attention focused on it and that was only the beginning. That it represented an iconic symbol of Newcastle, that the numbers involved were bigger than anything I had been involved with before, that the site for the performance was a working industrial site added seeming exponential consideration to be dealt with. Artistically, the conglomerate nature of the work meant it would only come together in the final days. Many of those involved were deeply emotionally involved with the process and the end result defined it as a work that would require sensitive and clear management.

For those people about to be unemployed, the ramifications of that event were life changing in profound ways. They included loss of income, ongoing work, the status accorded them by their employment. That families depended on many of them, that they covered a spectrum from apprentices who were faced with planned career trajectories suddenly truncated, through mid-career workers forced into retraining or resettlement because there would not be work for their skills set in Newcastle after BHP folded up shop, to workers approaching retirement faced with an early exit that saw their plans thrown into disarray, meant the range and depth of emotional response was significant. Their investment in this event had been built up across years, and in many cases generations, and the stakes in terms of their lives were undoubtedly high. My role as prime writer and director of the event to articulate and represent the full potency of this as legitimately as possible meant I had to include them as core designers and editors on all the work performed. My previous statements regarding what I anticipated would be censorship of these feelings, especially those of betrayal by management of both workers and the broader community meant I took pains to consult, especially with those who had least voice. I had clearly positioned myself as wanting to be the voice of the disenfranchised and strove to fulfil that role.

An interesting situation arose early on in my time on site. At the time BHP had experienced its longest period of accident free operations, a fact proudly

announced on numerous notice boards around the site with daily updates of the safety record of what is a very dangerous workplace; 276 days without incident and counting when we arrived. A common story that was generated and went around the plant was that this record was likely to be tarnished by 'these artists and cultural workers' who were now on site and seemed to not have the same reverence or respect for OH and S practices or rules. The performance we devised for the BHP closure included aerial and trapeze rigs being mounted in what were simple industrial tin sheds on site. As well, we were using explosions and fireworks inside a shed that we found had a drain running underneath with industrial oils and run-off flowing through it. It seemed the first high stakes situation I was faced with was that I would be responsible for ruining their safety record through either injury or death of one of the number of artists I was bringing onto the site - and injuries and deaths were events that had a history on the site as I learned in my research.

This of course was simply a reflection of a deeper concern on the part of the workers - that we would not do the job well, that we would betray their trust, their experience and their lives when they were at their most vulnerable. This is not interpretation on my part; these concerns were explicitly expressed to me by more than one BHP staffer. The importance of fulfilling the duties of this contract were brought home early to all of us involved in the initial planning stages for this project. Indeed one of the reasons I was brought in was that I was local and so was more likely to recognise the high stakes of their situation, which many thought the outsiders from Melbourne were not fully cognizant or respectful of. If they got it wrong or somehow failed, then it would not have surprised many of the BHP workers and staff. However quite a few made it clear they did not expect me to get it wrong so the stakes were higher for me than the out-of-towners. In the past being told I had 'got it wrong' was not an overly big problem for me. In writing for performance it simply meant I could rectify it and get it right as part of a process of development of work or creative process. But this was a project to mark an ending with a short season of only three performances over a weekend and there would be no later point to reassess and rectify.

Clearly in recounting the flawed process of participation and collaboration with the migrant workers in the previous chapter this project had its failures. This was not the only one. Another of the artists brought in saw his job as simply an out-of-town gig and ran his workshops and returned back to Sydney, leaving the participants who had worked with him to face the weekend of performances without his support or guidance. Individuals had frustrating moments and some of the diverse range of performances could have had more rehearsal. And yes, there was the instance of someone accidentally setting all the supply of indoor fireworks off during rehearsals in the aforementioned building with the drain and industrial waste – a sight those of us present at the time enjoyed immensely, and the story of which spread across the industrial site as probably one of the best lead-up performances to the big event. At least the OH and S committee were philosophic and amused by our predicament and also said they wished they'd seen it as it sounded great. By and large the performances and the overall event was valued by most. As Dave, who was quoted in the Prologue indicated, it made a positive difference.

Certainly the acquittals of the project, which were written by the out-of-towner from Melbourne, accorded it a success and the Australia Council was pleased with what they saw as a very fruitful partnership with Australia's largest industrial company. My own liaising with BHP management, overall *Ribbons of Steel* Directors and the Australia Council was professional and effective, though I did focus my consultation and collaboration on other areas of the diverse stakeholders. In the Prologue I recount my feelings following the project, "My sense of both being a part of and apart from" all that happened. I still see some of the people involved and share contact with them: we live in the same town. No one since has come up to me and taken me to task about my role or my being involved after my early criticisms. Most times when it happens we share stories of the events around closure with a relaxed emotional pride in our involvement and contribution. Nigel, an engineer from the site, always likes talking about the fireworks and laughs at what a naïve fool I was to bring them on site, but how fantastic it was when they went up.

For all my initial misgivings about the process of the project I am pleased that I was involved. It matters to me that those involved feel pride and that their experiences were expressed and respected. I was assisted in my role by a history and culture of labour committees and meetings that existed within the larger culture of BHP and the Unions who represented the workers on site. This worked very strongly in establishing the communication I felt such a project needed if it was to be achieved with integrity. When relationships were established between the BHP workers and the cultural workers, such as Tess De Quincey, Erth, a physical performance and puppet group from Sydney, or David Branson, who directed a choreography of forklift trucks, and myself, the results were significant and rewarding. In some cases, the relationships forged in the project continue. It is in this continuance that the stakes are most clearly revealed. If I feel I can comfortably meet the people I worked with beyond the end of projects, and enjoy ongoing communication, and even friendships, then the process must have embodied some reciprocal respect and valuing of each other's involvement and experience.

Returning to Auntie Doris

In Australia, our inability to effectively respond to our history associated with the original peoples of this country has become one of the most important, sensitive and high stakes issues with which we have to deal. Questions of responsibility and guilt are entrenched in the dialogues around our history. They raise questions of what to do about reparations for past wrongs and responses to current social problems. Those of us engaged with these issues are always aware of the risks of getting it wrong and making mistakes. As Auntie Doris stated in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, it is not something we can avoid, but we have to answer for it. And for a little old lady, Auntie Doris was frigging scary.

Her statement was made in a consultation meeting with local Aboriginal Elders and custodians at the beginning of a project aimed at producing a play about Birabahan, a Gamileroi man (Gamileroi was a tribe from the highlands area of the New England area of central NSW) and the Christian missionary the Reverend

Lancelot Threlkeld, who both lived in the Lake Macquarie region of NSW near where I live (Schaefer 2009; Joyce 2006). These two scholars from the period of early white settlement were responsible for compiling the first Aboriginal language/English word list in the colony, the basis of which would become the first dictionary. The goal was to tell the story of this cross-cultural collaboration and friendship and the forgotten place of this very significant achievement. It would also see the representation of the Awabakal language in a living theatrical context as a way of reactivating the living traditions of Aboriginal languages. Present at the meeting were a number of the core creative personnel and researchers: Ray Kelly, a prominent local Aboriginal community leader and a writer, and myself were to be the writers for the play which I was to direct; David Watt and Kerrie Schaefer, from the University of Newcastle, were the prime researchers on this project; representatives from the Aboriginal Consultation Group of Lake Macquarie City Council were also present along with Elders and significant custodians. They had a strong history of protecting and overseeing Indigenous presentation and saw this project as extremely important to the local Aboriginal community. The consultation was open, vocal and covered an enormous amount of ground. This meeting recognized the different stakeholders in the community and in this project, for example, Shane Frost, a local Aboriginal who presented himself as the current custodian (though there was some community dispute and discussion around this) and strong activist, representatives of the local Land Council (at the time in the process of being disbanded because of mismanagement), another local Aboriginal writer who felt she should or could be writing the play rather than Ray and myself. At the end of the meeting, after such a broad discussion, as we were leaving, Auntie Doris, a well-respected Elder turned to me and spoke the words quoted at the beginning of this chapter:

'You get this wrong you have to answer to me.'

When Ray, Kerrie and I sat in the car after, the scope and the importance of the project, and the responsibility to serve all the stakeholders, was clear to all of us. Kerrie expressed her doubts as to whether the project was achievable in light of Auntie Doris' warning as we left. She felt the risks were inordinately high.

However, for me at that moment I realized that while the risks had been raised, the ante increased – I felt liberated. I realized that the scope for wrong footing on this journey was huge, the opportunity for misunderstanding ever present, the likelihood of a mistake or offence occurring a certainty. The stakes were high and the risks were real, but equally I realized that what Auntie Doris offered was an open dialogue and if I made a mistake, she would tell me and we would then rectify it. For me this felt like the real 'gift' in the situation. No matter that we would produce a play, that this play would show a history few knew, that the reputation of a significant Aboriginal scholar would be reinstated, that an Aboriginal language that had fallen in to silence would again be brought to life, that the performance on the shores of Lake Macquarie would be a major cultural recognition for the local Aboriginal community – the gift was there in Auntie's words. Indeed, it seems to me a useful dictum for all CCD work and one I carry with me ever since. I always feel I need to respect and be able to answer to those with high stakes in a project.

In this instance I realised a contradiction existed: stakes had been raised but I felt less at risk. While the stakes and risks can be raised in a project by a participant articulating exactly what the value and importance of the work is to them as community members and the onus it places upon the CCD worker to respect and honour these high stakes engagement from them, if the dialogue is in place, if the mutual respect exists then this 'upping the ante' is an opportunity, not a burden. Indeed, the burden shared, as in the old adage, is lessened. While I had been aware of this in the past and through my work I understood the importance of establishing rapport and communication, I always had an awareness when I undertook projects that I wanted to 'get it right' and 'do the job well'. There is always a tension of satisfying the community participants I work with. At times in my career I had felt the stab of what I considered failure in a project, in different aspects of the work or a project. Even with all the feelings associated with the aesthetic or practical shortcomings of a performance or event, the idea that participants were disappointed or worse, felt wounded, affected me more deeply than any of the other perceived failures. Because I took the responsibilities of CCD work seriously I felt a trust had been let down or a relationship sullied. Yet

in this instance, when Auntie Doris very clearly raised the stakes for me, I felt unburdened. I recognised her serious intent and the warning in her words, but equally I heard her articulation of our mutual commitment to this work and our shared journey in the project. It was her words that reminded me of my own principles, because she shared them as well.

Conclusion

If we are engaged in a mutual dialogue, if there is a real reciprocity, we can raise the stakes very high because we are not dealing with one's own survival as a CCD worker, or a community participant's personal concerns and agenda. In such a case we are dealing with getting the project 'right', presenting an authentic enactment of the diverse elements and investments of the participants that honours and respects these inputs and experience. This should be our welcome and reassuring goal in undertaking our work and not a frightening thing. When stakes are raised high, if we do have this genuine dialogue, the process assumes more importance and legitimacy over and above the final outcome. Of course everyone wants to share in the achievement and celebration of a 'job well done' and an outcome made public, but how we get there is core in CCD work. We need to all want to achieve this in a way that reflects principles of mutuality and reciprocity. Therefore, the CCD process comes back to the relationships that we build. 'Engagement' for the CCD worker is therefore *how* we do it ethically, with principles of empowerment, consultation, participation and collaboration. These are our high stakes, which rather than minimise we need to respect and escalate if necessary. Optimally the process must be done well so that if it is done well, you can live with it, as well as the people you live with.

In both the instances and stories recounted above, a further factor in my engagement and the stakes of such is evident by my residence in Newcastle. I already knew many of the people involved with both these projects. I had pre-existing relationships with members of both the BHP community and the local Aboriginal community. I had worked with both on previous projects and performances either through the Workers Cultural Action Committee, the cultural

and arts agency of the local Trades Hall Council who had very strong opinions regarding the BHP closure, and through both Koompartoo Land Council at Lake Macquarie (the organisation being disbanded) and Awabakal Land Council, the largest local Aboriginal Land Council, who between them represented most of the Aboriginal community in Newcastle. As well, I knew some of the key players in these organisations and the two communities and interacted socially with them. When one lives, or is in residence in a community, this by its very nature can raise the stakes and affect the process and outcomes of CCD work. It is this I wish to address in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

The Embedded Artist

Home is where the heart is,
Let's go to your place.

Lene Lovich. *Home*

In this chapter I want to look at how where we live affects us, and how we affect where we live.

Place

Within community engagement practice, concepts such as place, location and site in particular have become predominant motifs or themes for the defining and creation of work. Place can be interpreted as a location, position, building, landscape or site used for specific purposes or activities (De Certeau 1988). In terms of community arts, obviously the notion of community is key and begins with definitions of 'community'. In the 1970s, community was primarily understood as a geographical location. In this way, community arts' early privileging of place predates the recent enthusiasm for site specificity in more mainstream or 'high' art practices. The appellation of 'site specific' can be found across many art forms and practices and while it has a particular meaning, often it is used without a clear understanding of what that might be. 'Site specific' may merely refer to projects that are performed, exhibited or enacted at locations outside the accepted venues for cultural practice. However, within CCD practice it is accepted that 'site specific' refers to work designed specifically for the site at which it occurs; indeed, it is meant to exist only at this site and cannot be transferred to another location. The term locates site as a prime and defining factor of a project or creative product. Thus, a great deal of interest in 'site specific' work has come out of community arts and community cultural practice because much of its work has grown around and from a history of working with communities defined by location or place.

Now community is not simply defined as the people who live or reside in a specific or boundaried location. CCD has developed a much more sophisticated understanding of what 'community' might mean. In the contemporary instance Delanty talks about the evolving nature our notion and understanding of community in his book *Community* (2003). He draws attention to the transient communities that arise around what are quite temporal issues. He looks at this not only in the real world situations of local politics but also in the diversity of the virtual world and the web, such as issues that occur through social media that rise and fall quickly attracting many participants in a virtual community. Alternatively, in geographical areas with diverse populations a specific issue such as transport brings people together who then may have little or no contact once the issue is addressed. Such communities are transient because they are a function of short lived foci. These communities are less a function of fixed attributes such as geography, race, religion or workplace and more about communities that come together out of temporal social situations, some short lived and some that extend over longer times. A social perspective of 'community' refers to a network that connects non-homogenous individuals, institutions and organisations. That community identity is shaped by 'culture', a complex interaction of behaviours, values and meanings. Inherent in any community are "different histories, social structures, value systems, and cultural understandings of the world" (McCloskey, McDonald and Cook 2013: 10). Any community engagement must therefore be premised on an understanding of the specific cultural dynamics that define the community in question for effective trust and collaboration.

Yet, it is still true that the 'village' has long been a major defining unit of community. Even in a contemporary situation where we have massive migration and villages encompass people with diverse attributes or identifying factors, we still accept the village as a unit of community. Mike Pearson in his work *Theatre/ Archaeology* (2001) explores the strong connection between the village and personal identity and history. He proposes the concept of the 'one square mile', that area that was the territory of play and exploration during our childhood and growth. He suggests it provides a fertile ground for creating myth and narrative and leads to the development of identity. His performance "Bubbling Tom" was a

walking promenade performance around the town of Hilbaldstow, Lincolnshire to the significant sites of his childhood (Pearson 2000, 2015). At each site he told stories of that place. The accumulating stories grew to not only a personal narrative of his early life but a narrative of the town, its inhabitants and the community itself. Clearly being embedded in a community is an important part of how our identity evolves. For Mike Pearson, and many others including myself, it also clearly becomes a source of inspiration and starting point for the development of creative work either individually or in collaboration with others.

Recognition of this in terms of community cultural development and the arts can clearly be seen in what is called Artists-in-Residence (AIR) programs. AIR programs often reflected the early practice of CCD, as these were frequently about the cultural worker going to a community which was located in a specific geographic location or place other than where the CCD worker resided. The process of establishing communication and developing the infrastructure for projects would see prolonged stays or residence in this location. AIR programs see the creative practitioner temporarily embedded in a specific location or community. While the specific aims of any residency are, in best practice, negotiated between the artist and the community, the general expectation is that the artist will create something inspired by, derived from or in collaboration with the community with whom they are in residence. A contradiction in this term is that many artists are visitors. Even if they are accorded a domicile for the period of their residency, this is temporary, with an understanding that they will leave at the end of a fixed period. In some residencies, it may not even mean actually living in the community but simply existing alongside the community and sharing their daily existence, for example, artists in worksites, offices, or artists who become regular members of an organisation or community group such as Greenpeace.

In this chapter I will look at two 'villages' that I've had direct contact with and the relationships that have evolved in both those instances. The first is as a formal Writer in Residence position in Windale, a suburb of Newcastle, and the other is

my relationship with greater Newcastle, the place I call home and where I actually reside.

Windale

Windale is a suburb that figured prominently in the late 1990s and early 2000s in a series of government reports and investigations into what were referred to as "No Go Zones" (Vinson 1999), communities identified as having a 'locational disadvantage' and often exhibiting a smorgasbord of social and community problems. Social researcher Tony Vinson, whose work focused on collating demographic statistics based on postcodes (Vinson 2000), particularly singled out Windale as one of the worst suburbs in Australia, and its postcode, 2306, became less an address and more a stigma, a branding of failure on[the part of?] both its inhabitants and the local and state governments responsible for it. A geographic anomaly of its location contributed to much of this negative definition. Windale 2306 was a very small postcode area that resided within the much larger postcode of Charlestown 2290 - smack in the middle of it like the hole in a donut. If Windale was simply absorbed into this larger postcode then all the statistics of unemployment, public housing tenancy, single parent families, pensioners and benefits recipients, lack of home ownership, domestic disturbance, drug and alcohol problems and all the other problems of social disadvantage would be balanced out by a much larger geographic and demographic sampling. But no, Windale retained its postcode, often proudly and so this very small suburb seemed, on the basis of the mode of presenting figures in a report, a concentrated microcosm of all that can go wrong in the suburbs of Australia.

As with many dysfunctional communities, programs are developed to address these 'problems'. To some extent as a result of Vinson's report, Windale had its share of these and the Windale Community Renewal Project (Jacobs, Arthurson and Randolph 2005; Stewart-Weeks 2002;) implemented by the NSW Department of Housing in the early 2000s was the umbrella they fell under. In Windale these took the form of youth groups, support groups for young single mothers, alcohol and drug dependence programs, eco-greening and planting, men's sheds and other

smaller one-off workshops aimed at enhancing the skills of the people who lived there. Many of these were under the guidance and management of Greg Heyes, a cultural officer for NSW Department of Housing in the early 2000s. While they were very successful for the participants, often it was a niche within the community who engaged with these programs, and while their benefits were self-evident to those on the ground, little changed in the perception of the suburb in the wider world. It was around this time that I was brought on board as a Writer In Residence.

The ideas behind the notion of a writer or cultural worker in residence are varied and each placement can have its own specific goals. Like the history of CCD itself, the role and function of a writer in residence has changed over time from being simply about the presence of a writer in the community, to using such placements as a time of research, to tell stories from the community, to acting as a resource to develop skills for community members, to collaborating with communities in developing new and original work that reflects the concerns and narratives of the community. They can be initiated by funding bodies in alignment with their policies, communities themselves as a recognition of an identified need, or by individual writer/artists. My position was jointly funded by the NSW Department of Housing, Lake Macquarie City Council (LMCC) and a research grant from the University of Newcastle (UoN) and was seen as building on the work Greg Heyes had done. While recognising his grass roots work, the directions for my placement were to move the activities to encompass a larger number of participants and achieve a more visible public outcome – a large -scale community performance, clearly inspired by my work on the *Ribbons of Steel* performance for BHP closure. Specifically, I was to address the existing negative metanarrative of Windale and, in collaboration with the community, write an alternative, more representative metanarrative of the suburb and the people who lived there. I was to undertake this with a core creative team drawn from residents of Windale who would be undertaking a mentoring and training program under my direction and tutelage in Community Cultural Development alongside the development of this alternative story. The narrative that I was to be responsible for would be written up as a large-scale community performance involving local

Windale population members, community groups and selected professional actors. My placement therefore had two clear goals, one being an artistic product, the performance, and the other, being the development of an employment program and cottage industry base built on a skilled team of CCD workers capable of formulating, sourcing funding for and implementing in the future a range of cultural programs based in Windale, all focused on the greater goal of Community Renewal. While these two goals can be easily articulated, the scope of such a program may, in hindsight, be considered grandiose, but CCD work has never been distinguished by small vision.

My introduction into Windale was through Greg's position. He had already run a number of small programs, developed a relationship with community members and was known by many in the community through a number of market days and fetes that he had attended. He was also known through a planting day he had organised as the culmination to a program of clearing up the rubbish-clogged creek, landscaping and revegetation of open areas. It was through these events that he had begun a dialogue with some community members about the perceived image of Windale and how this impacted on the residents. He had told them who I was and the work I had done. Some were familiar with the *Ribbons of Steel* project for the closure of BHP. At the time I was Director of the Hunter Writers Centre and many had heard of it and a number were pleased to think they would be gaining access to those resources in their own suburb. He organised a couple of public meetings to introduce me to the community. At these the basic idea and goals of my placement were presented to those attending and discussed. It was here that the aims and process were decided and agreed upon. Once in place I was pretty much on my own as Greg's position with the Department of Housing was a 'sunset' placement and his time was nearly up. However, David Watt from UoN made himself available as a sounding board and person to turn to and he attended some of the community meetings. My main support was from within the community and, specifically, the eventual CCD mentees.

Early in my time there, 'my residence', I was confronted by a blunt realization. I did not live in Windale nor did I actually take up residence. Instead I was to spend

time in the community through a variety of different existing structures. These included workshops with the programs and activities already in operation, the youth group, single mother's group, men's shed and the school but as well I was to be a presence in the community. This was to be achieved by my taking up residence in the library for specific times during the week, Tuesday mornings and Monday afternoons during which I would collate and write material, the stories of the community, be available for others to talk with and listen to their stories, to run workshops in facilitating them to write their stories as well as write my work in preparation for the performance. In parallel with this, I had weekly sessions with the creative team in skills development. This by necessity focused on very practical concerns as, at this stage, while there was funding for my placement and remuneration for those on the creative team to attend these workshops, there was no ongoing funding for us to achieve the larger goals of the performance and the range of other outcomes that ensued from my placement and the team's work. Hence the creative team was faced with what all CCD organisations are faced with - identifying, sourcing and applying for funds to be able to fulfil one's vision while functioning as a practical component of the CCD mentoring process. While I may not have been resident in Windale, this breadth of activity, my continuous and regular presence and the shared challenge we all felt in our situation made for a much deeper engagement with the community than might be expected by my visitor status. At various times I felt swamped, immersed, claimed, included, and occasionally what I term: 'embedded'.

The contradictions around my identity as Writer in Residence were brought home to me early in my sessions at the library. When people heard of my presence, they came to visit. I was identified not only as a writer but also Director of the Hunter Writers Centre. I soon learned that there were many living in Windale who also identified themselves as writers. It begged the question of why bring me in? If there were already writers living here then who was I to claim the mantle of Windale's Writer in Residence? From my experience at the Hunter Writers Centre, I was familiar with the fact that many people wrote but seldom shared their work. I understood that for some this was a very personal activity. Others came with unrealistic expectations and understandings of what constitutes the

process of crafting beyond the first impulse to put words on paper, writing was a purge and not a crafting or polishing process for them. Others did choose to engage with the task of actually crafting their work to the best they could, such that they felt proud of their result and wanted to share it with a readership or audience. I established a writers group in the Library and people came either regularly or desultorily as was their want. While those that came were very interested in working on their own work, often memoir based material but in some cases genre writing, they were not particularly interested in contributing to material for a performance, especially as its likelihood of eventuating was wavering. As one of the regular attendees, Rose, put it;

"I'm not that interested in the rest of them here. I think it's good what you're doing but I want to work on my work"

It was at this time and through this process that I began to question my own role in developing this alternative meta-narrative of Windale. In truth Windale was in an enviable location. Midway between and quite close to Lake Macquarie, a fishing and boating wonderland, and Redhead Beach, a surfing and family magnet, with ample bushland around it, a nearby shopping centre with major supermarkets and specialty shops, a significant regional hospital with outpatients care two suburbs away, many of the residents were full of praise as regards its location. Yet there was criticism about the nature of the large blocks and tracts of public housing alongside privately owned residences, 1940/50 fibro houses that had little upkeep, the poor transport services, the seeming disregard with which successive governments treated them. Given the preponderance of public housing tenants, and the change in the nature of public housing over time, this resulted in a varied and itinerant population that generated a divided community between longer and short term residents. Initially public housing was about helping working class people find supported entry into home ownership but governments gradually started to use these places as dumping grounds for people with "problems" and the nature of the estates changed. I was not blind to the problems of the community for they were evident and the longer I stayed the more I saw their impact but I found myself questioning the predominant negative view of

Windale. This was reflected in some of my own stories and writing during the residency.

I grew up in a fibro house. So when I come to Windale there is a familiarity in the landscape, something recognizable that I find reassuring and comfortable, I like these fibro houses. I don't know if its nostalgia, memories of childhood but I think it's more than that. I like that they are in some way as much a part of the Australian landscape as corrugated iron.

Most of my childhood and early teens were spent in a fibro house. I remember it having two colours, a light or sky blue and an olive, moss green, though it may have had other paintings. Flat sections of solid colour, marked out in rectangles the size of the sheets of fibro that were such a boon to housing; quick to put up and cheap, they gave the street a Mondrian geometry. When we built a garage for the house it too was constructed of fibro – I remember the frame of the garage being there one day and the next it was clad in off-white flat sheets, a canvas awaiting its flat colour palette – it became a finished building so quickly.

The streets and rows of fibro houses in Windale bring back memories of my childhood. Even the yards that run into one another because there are no fences, like houses in my childhood street. I used to wander from one house to another – there was more mobility and sharing. Children moved from house to house, lunches provided by different mothers, sometimes sleeping over in friends' houses – parents would walk up the street or send one of the 'kids' up to tell the other parents where their kids were and they were staying over.

We played cricket or soccer in the yard and it was not uncommon for a misguided hit or kick to end up thudding into the house and

producing a loud crack as we had smashed a sheet of fibro. Kids would scatter. The panel would be replaced with a new sheet, repainted and often this panel would be slightly brighter than the rest of the house.

As I worked with the few regular writers who visited me in the Library, some three regular attendees, I found myself writing small stories, sometimes directly related to Windale, sometimes, like the excerpt above which moves to a remembrance of childhood games interrupted by the father of one of the group coming out in his underwear, old Y-front Bonds, and my sense of unease about the whole incident, and an awareness that other worlds existed in my suburb. Most of these shorter works were undoubtedly influenced by the editing and mentoring I was undertaking with my regular writers and they became more personal either on my part or in retelling events that I was being told by different people who visited, often with simple anecdotes. They included children's stories that ended up being read out in the children's reading area of the Library to small groups of children. My time in the Men's Shed produced fishing stories as many of the men who came in enjoyed fishing. From the women came stories of how changes in bus timetables disrupted the casual bus stop community meetings of residents, friends and acquaintances who simply no longer gathered and were lost to one another. The travel group generated stories of countries far from Windale when they met on Tuesday once a month to share pictures from their past trips and dream of their next. This produced an encyclopaedic compendium of narratives that meandered and diverged through wonder, loss, achievement and grief. Meanwhile I was aware of my intended goal and responsibility to produce some sort of defining statement of Windale, a script for a community performance that would show to the outside world that this maligned and misunderstood suburb was, instead, different to their negative perceptions. But this grand story seemed always outside my grasp and, in truth, began to interest me less. I grappled with my responsibility, my duty to both the community that I was beginning to connect with and the oganisations that were paying for me to spend

my time here getting to know these people and to listen to their stories. I dutifully wrote down all this as this was my role – writer in residence.

As I wrote these smaller works, snapshots of life in Windale, memories of my own childhood, imagined lives and occurrences prompted by either shared anecdotes or my observations of the community, I began to question the idea of the metanarrative, or at least of my being responsible for writing it. This was further compounded by the unlikelihood of actually getting the celebratory community performance up and running, and I will address this next as I look at the experience of not just myself as writer but my involvement as a member of the mentored creative team. It occurred to me if one metanarrative, the negative image of Windale as 'the worst postcode in Australia', was a lie, and my time in Windale put the lie to that in the first weeks, then I wondered if an alternative positive metanarrative may well be false as well. I came to recognise an inherent contradiction in my role here. Whether we could find funds for such a project as a large community performance, the idea of a script or performance that would fulfil a similar role to that of the performance that marked the closure of BHP was slipping from me. BHP had represented a work that summed up a history at its end, for all on the site. It could look back and from a clear focus point, the closure of the site. Any questions of the future were an expression of fears that were very concrete in the present moment and reasonably shared by all. Windale was a much more diverse group. There were marked differences among its community and more, divisions and hostilities. The very nature of its public perception as negative or 'bad' in contrast to presenting a positive or 'good' image was not one all could support of feel they owned. Without writing a reformist narrative I started to focus on this diversity and a more balanced view that still celebrated the community and its residents.

However, my role as Writer in Residence, or the 'Windale Writer' was most surprisingly challenged in the fourth week of my sessions at the Library by a resident who came to see me. This woman had been in a couple of weeks previously and had been more than willing to talk to me and tell me what she thought of Windale and the people who lived there. The Librarian had informed

me after she left that she was a regular and an identity, locally. Ruth came in the third week with a wad of letters from the Department of Housing. She wanted me to write a letter of complaint to them. In her mind it was clear, I was a writer and would be able to write a better letter than she could herself. She would dictate but I would turn it into a more eloquent and forceful argument. I tried to explain that this was not what my role was, and that I was here to write stories and develop material with the intent of developing a script for a performance. She retorted: "That's all well and good but if you're the writer in residence in Windale then you should write for Windale." In truth this was the reason I had come here, in the same way I had taken the job at BHP, to tell their stories and to give voice to their experience. I explained there may be a conflict of interest in what she was asking me to do as part of my wages was being provided by the Department of Housing. As British writer on community arts Francois Matarosso notes,

> -in practice the relationship between artist and project participant is complicated by a range of other stakeholders including funding agencies, institutions, public sector agencies and many more- (1997: 80).

She clearly identified the Department of Housing as the problem in the area and that if I helped her at least they would be contributing something positive to Windale.

I was amused by the brazen effrontery of her approach and found the whole thing interesting as it would make a good story. But for her, this was an issue of agency and voice. From her point of view the question was, where did I stand? And this would be proven by my actions, not by who paid for my being there. In her mind there were clear lines drawn in this community between those present and those absent. I should note that this was not necessarily the sole view of people in Windale. Many had good relationships with their 'landlords' and worked in close partnership with the Department of Housing in improving their accommodation and the suburb.

A Conundrum

The ethics of this situation seemed to be more of concern for me than her. What, then, was my "ethical space of engagement" (Ermine 2007) – that positioning of me in relation to the community and our separate intentions? It is assumed that CCD work is inherently ethical, often without stating what these ethics are. Indeed, in a seminal work like Matarasso's *Use or Ornament* the word 'ethics' does not appear. Often when people talk of ethics in the area, there is no statement of what their ethics are, simply a suggestion of acting with some form of principled integrity. In Chapter 1 I laid out my motivating principles as mutuality and reciprocity. Through the practice of ongoing consultation and integrating the views and opinions of the various participants in a project, I sought to engender these things. I hadn't expected to have a person suggest a completely different direction or purpose to my residency. What was I supposed to do in my situation? Balancing many positions, agendas, needs and inputs is a major role for a CCD worker where you have a responsibility to those who fund you and to those in whose community you are working.

Maria Lind, quoted by Bishop, writes on the Turkish community arts group Oda Projesi, a collective of three women who "work with groups of people in their immediate environments and allow them to wield great influence on the project." She recognizes the authority of community members to change the direction of the project. As Bishop goes on to state:

> Lind's judgment is based on an ethics of authorial renunciation: the better work exemplifies a superior model of collaborative practice where authorship is suppressed in favour of facilitating others' creativity. (Bishop 2005, no page)

At times I have worked on projects where ownership is rightly accorded to the group that creates the work collectively or I have worked and received no credit at all.

In this situation however it was not a matter of ownership but Ruth attempting to redefine the role that I was supposed to fulfil. As much as I explained that my role was to write a creative performance, Ruth's fixation on her own situation prioritized her needs over mine. Ultimately I surrendered, agreeing to write the letter for her on the proviso that she continued to attend the Library meeting groups. In this way those principles of reciprocity and mutuality, which have been the core ethical practices of the work, were I felt being enacted. She did attend the group over the next couple of weeks and she was vocal about what should be included in any creative output. Then she brought the response to the letter I had written and asked me to write a reply - which I did. It occurred to me that my role of writer in residence at Windale had been subverted and I was effectively being used. The fact of my continued presence in the community, my regular attendance at the library, meant that I could not avoid Ruth's campaign of redefining my role. Of course that role had been defined by the funding agencies to serve *their* needs.

In summary, for me, as contradictory as it seemed to the original brief, this incident forced me to think differently as to the responsibilities of the artist or writer in residence. Such CCD programs have as their intended result a creative and a social outcome. In many of our acquittals to funding bodies we talk about the benefits to individual members of these communities. In this instance I was forced to see myself in a very different light. My ability to write a good letter and to mount a good argument was ultimately something that I was quite proud of because of this process. And my skills did assist one individual member of that community. In allowing them to "wield great influence on the project" (Bishop 2006: 3) I had facilitated others' beneficial outcome. I had, to paraphrase Bishop's statement above, seen authorship suppressed in favour of facilitating others' benefit. While at the time I felt this was a compromise I now see this as a very effective utilisation by a member of the community of my residency and the project itself.

Mentoring

Parallel with my creative role was my mentoring of local CCD workers. The mentoring of the local community creative team, which was an integral part of the

project, developed its own problems. For the mentees, used to conventional or traditional forms of employment, a career in the arts or CCD was full of contradiction.

The choice between the uncertainty of a CCD worker's income, reliant on funding, versus government benefit payments (unemployment, single parent, pensions, etc.) had a self-evident answer for a single mother. The group did formulate a number of funding applications, including a substantial application for the rehearsal and production of the large scale community performance with comprehensive budgeting, support letters and all the networking required for such a visionary event, part of which involved the symbolic secession of Windale and the issuing of local passports. However, the only successful application was a small local grant for $5,000 from the Lake Macquarie City Council Community Arts funding program, hardly a living income for the team members. The frustration associated with this caused a number of them to question their commitment and they drifted away. They recognized the important role that creativity and art could play in their community but the difficulty in bringing this to fruition when faced with the realities of day to day survival saw them fall back onto the known income sources rather than the unknown. More than this, the failure of the funding bodies to see the worth of the large scale production affected these people at a personal level. It was taken as yet another negative judgment of the worth of Windale. By comparison I saw this as the vagaries of arts funding. As much as I felt embedded in the community and these people's lives, again I was aware of the differences of the stakes and the engagement.

The longer I stayed in Windale - and my 'residency' with this community extended long beyond the funding period, eventually stretching to me having ongoing contact for just over two and a half years - the more I questioned my role and what I was achieving. Over this time my role there changed dramatically and continually. As the major production slipped from possibility, more and more my work focused on facilitating other people's stories and writing. The travel group put out a small pamphlet of travel anecdotes, one person worked on a memoir and

another had the intention of becoming a creative writer and has since enrolled in a university creative writing course.

My own work focused on the short anecdotal narratives that I had been developing out of the research. Some of these were stories that people told me in response to my asking: what does it mean to live in Windale? One of these was by Elise Edwards, a member of the creative CCD team. She was strongly committed to seeing this project succeed but could not financially afford to commit to the long process of CCD without remuneration and left to work in a child care centre. She recounted the difficulties in her son's education and part-time employment. Ten years down the track I remain in contact with Elise who still lives in Windale. When I visit I usually visit the Library and then head up to her place for a cup of coffee and a catch-up chat. I see the same streets; the suburb itself has not radically changed though the population has. There are the long term residents, some of whom I recognise, but as with any public housing estate there is a continual flow of people. It was tensions between these two sections of the residents that strongly militated against Windale having a united narrative.

Ultimately Greg Heyes' original vision of using the arts to generate a pride in place and to facilitate community renewal was not fulfilled on a macro level. But there were a number of individuals who developed ongoing commitments to exploring their own creativity and creative identities. In terms of a positive metanarrative of Windale, only assorted short personal narratives remain either in my own files, or at the Windale Library where I used to take up temporary residence while I wrote my own stories of living in Windale. I have retained those works I felt articulated something of the contradictions of the place. One of the most productive of the people I worked with was Elise. Her commitment to both the project and the suburb was very strong and if anyone was engaged, invested or embedded with the project it was her. As she wrote in one of her writings for the project, "By being involved in this project and having a say in its direction I want to make sure that what is said about Windale reflects the whole truth". She wrote from a very direct and heartfelt place, about how she came to Windale, the people

she met, what it was like living there, "the whole truth". In the following excerpt she recounted its impact on her son.

Elise's Story - an excerpt.

Windale residents often use another address to be seriously considered for employment. What employer would consider a junkie, or a thief, or an uneducated or illiterate worker as a serious contender for their advertised position? These are the images a Windale address will provide for many employers.

When my son was in year 10, job experience was part of his year 10 requirements. My son came first in maths in both year 10 and year 11 and 1st in computers in year 9 and 2nd in computers in years 10 and 11. My son was keen to work in the computer industry so he canvassed many computer shops on our local bus route well in advance of the job experience required dates.

FX Games at Charlestown was happy to offer my son job experience; my son collected the appropriate forms the same day from his career advisor at school. Filled out the forms and I signed where required, my son left early to hand in the forms on his way to school. By the time my son reached school the career advisor called my son to his office and told him that FX Games could no longer provide job experience for him.

When my son asked why? The career advisor explained that FX Games had been informed by an undisclosed person that the only reason my son wished to work at FX Games was so that he could check out where their surveillance cameras were positioned. They even went as far as to state they didn't want a student from Windale to work for them.

The school did not defend my son, as being a straight A student in Computers. Neither did they state his motivation was genuine to work in the Computer industry.

The career advisor also refused my son's request to telephone me, he was sent back to class and had no way of contacting me until he arrived home Friday afternoon off the bus at 4pm. I couldn't contact the school until Monday morning and the owner manager at FX games laughed at me. She said she didn't have to employ anybody she didn't want to employ.

My son had been a paying customer at FX Games, but didn't know anybody working there. He had not told another student about his job experience at FX Games. When FX Games agreed to my son working his job experience requirements at their store they didn't know my son's address. The consent forms he was required to fill out and to lodge was the first time he had informed this store of his address and by the time he had reached school they suddenly didn't want him to work for them.

Stigma is a figment of a person's imagination. Stigma is a real occurrence.

What struck me most about Elise's story was that it all turns on denial of being in Windale, a denial of accepting where you live, though she would always personally say how happy she was to live there, and still does.

Embedded

My long time position and role with this stigmatized community caused me to reflect on my own allegiance to another specific community. I live in West Wallsend and outer fringe suburb of Newcastle, NSW. Greater Newcastle is the world in which my creativity and my cultural activity have been enacted and embedded for the past 30 years. Over this time I have been artistic director and/or

director of two major cultural organisations locally, Freewheels Theatre In Education Co and Hunter Writers Centre, a professional community theatre organisation and a community service support centre for literary and writing practitioners and their output. In both these roles I have often focused on projects that look to local stories and local communities. Further, in these roles, beyond the duties to those organisations, I have been recognized as a creative and cultural practitioner in this region. This has seen me called upon to offer advice, consult and be a part of many community and cultural projects.

Some of these were projects in which I, or commissioned writers, were enlisted to write these stories for professional performance. Some of these included *SAO* by John O'Donohue, a play about the Arnotts Biscuit factory that was established in Newcastle in the nineteenth century; *A Property of the Clan* by Nick Enright, derived from the death of a local girl, Lee Leigh at a party at Stockton Beach; *Sideshow* by Laurel Quillan and Brian Joyce about the history of travelling show families who took up residence in Newcastle; *When the Dust Settles* by Carl Caulfield about the community pollution associated with Pasminco, a sulphide and phosphate factory at Boolaroo; and *No more the Fur Elise, No More the Bullied Bloom* written by John O'Donohue for the closure of BHP. The success of these productions in bringing local experience and lives to a local audience often saw me approached to undertake CCD projects. Specific groups would see these stories and be inspired to want to tell their own story through a CCD project. They saw me as a resource in the community with skills they could utilize for themselves. And I presented a way for them to engage with creative projects derived from their own experiences and situations.

An example of this chain of events was during my time at Freewheels I staged a professional production of *Boss of the Pool* by Mary Morris, an adaption of a Robin Klein young adult novel. The main character is a young boy who has Downs Syndrome. In staging the production we researched through Belmont Special Needs School, a special school for developmentally challenged children and adolescents, including a number with Downs Syndrome. This led to myself and one of the Freewheels actors working with their students to create, rehearse

and produce an in-house performance by the students at the school. This was seen by a person who had a family member involved in HeadStart, a local support group for people with Acquired Brain Injury. They approached me and we established a working partnership that resulted in a public season of the community play *Does this Bus go to Lambton?,* devised and performed by a cast of people with Acquired Brain Injury. This chain of events of people seeing work and then seeking further projects resulted in a proliferation of creative products focused on narratives directly connected to this region. While I have not been involved in all these projects, I have become a mainstay go-to person for the development of this kind of work in the region. Thus this has seen me establish relationships and partnerships with diverse groups and institutions, from small community support organisations to large government departments including the Department of Aging, Disability and Home Care.

One of the more significant relationships has been with individuals from, and over time, the broader Aboriginal community. This started with an individual, Ray Kelly, approaching me to write a play about a story he told me, his own story. As I noted in the previous chapter, Ray was a person with a significant presence in the local Aboriginal community and he had seen a play I wrote about issues around child abuse. He was inspired in seeing how a performance could articulate deep and painful narratives and issues, especially those that marked much of the Aboriginal experience which was little known or spoken about. Instead of my writing the work I mentored him in writing the play *Get Up And Dance* himself. In the process the play was commissioned for Freewheels then produced and toured from 1989 for two years. We continue as a creative partnership: I have worked with him on all his plays since and we have collaborated on joint productions and plays. This led to work that has extended to the broader Aboriginal community in the region and major Aboriginal cultural organisations including three Land Councils (LC), Worimi LC, Awabakal LC and Koomparto LC (later Birabahn LC). Land Councils are support organisations that represent Aboriginal communities and provide culturally appropriate and sensitive support services in areas including medical, legal, housing, employment and financial as well as running some specific Aboriginal focused businesses and enterprises. The

development of such a relationship and the trust required could only have been arrived at through an extended contact living side by side in the same community. Currently I work alongside another local Indigenous performance maker, Rod Smith. We, in partnership, run a company called Ngarrama Productions Ltd. We have been working together now for eight years and have created and toured work to other regions of NSW and interstate in Australia. This was set up with two main aims, identified as important to building a sense of pride in the local Aboriginal community; to provide employment for local Aboriginal artists and to tell local contemporary Indigenous stories. From the first performance of *Get Up And Dance,* the role of the performance of works that clearly identified Aboriginal cultural paradigms and experience has been a cause community pride among the broader Aboriginal population in Newcastle. Performance and narrative in Aboriginal culture, an oral/aural culture, has always been a means of promoting and conserving culture and identity. Having these stories performed by locals has reinforced this and seen a strong sense of ownership of the work by the community.

Local Stories

My role as director of the Hunter Writers' Centre (HWC) deepened my involvement with the stories of the region and its community through involvement with local historical societies and the intensely personal memoirs that HWC members wrote. This in turn saw me reaching out to establish projects that celebrated these local narratives of community and place. Three projects in particular encapsulate this experience. The first, *SITESOUNDMIN(e)D* was a song cycle for seven different writers and four different composers commissioned by the HWC and looking at a history of usage and human activity associated with the site of the then James Fletcher Hospital stretching from pre-white settlement to the contemporary closure of the mental health hospital in 2009 (Joyce, 2013). This project brought together a range of local artists, bands, musicians, and poets working in collaboration with Hunter Health Services and resulted in a formal in-theatre performance. This project continues to explore a further iteration as a site-specific audio recorded walking tour. At the time of its performance, the audience

remarked on the fact that this was a hidden history of Newcastle. It was this response that precipitated the second project *Brought to Light*.

In partnership with Gerry Bobsien, I facilitated and produced *Brought to Light*. Gerry was the Director of The Lock-Up, a re-purposed gaol and former Newcastle Police Station that was now a Police and Justice Museum and home to a number of small community groups including the HWC. The Lock-Up was owned and administered by the Historic Houses Trust (Newcastle Branch) and they were very interested in undertaking a further exploration of other sites around the town. Like *SITESOUNDMIN(e)D*, this project similarly brought together a range of artists from different media to engage with forgotten and hidden sites around Newcastle. The four sites chosen included a swimming baths that had been a focus for the many sailors who once visited Newcastle Harbour but was still intact yet now built over by a shopping mall and hidden underneath among the foundations. Another site was a submerged concrete sculptural relief map of the world that lay underneath the sand in the Newcastle Ocean Baths children's pool and which had not been seen in over thirty years. The third site was AAA House, a derelict mine manager's house that originally oversaw the diggings of the first mines and now was hidden in the midst of suburbia. Finally there was the forgotten harbour history of early sail and steam powered ships that carried coal and lumber out of the port. This resulted in a range of work including a suite of poems, small scale sculptures, a fictional video of children unearthing the submerged map of the world, an exhibition of staged photos exploring the suburbanites' response to this derelict house and a series of paintings of water and palimpsest on its surface. They were all shown in the Lock Up gallery and exhibition areas and while most who saw it said they never knew about these sites, older community members came forward with memories of each.

In 2009, Gerry and I also mounted and coordinated an exhibition, *The Star,* of artefacts, contemporary videos, news reports, audio and video recorded oral histories and a documentary of the 1979 Star Hotel riot. This riot was a significant event in the contemporary history of Newcastle and occurred when the police forcibly closed a favoured pub and music venue resulting in police cars being

overturned and burned in the streets. Mass arrests followed and were held in the then Police Station. Again this work was exhibited at the Lock-Up and attracted an audience that did not normally engage with such cultural activities as gallery exhibitions, concerts or site specific installations. In this instance, *The Star* exhibition brought together community members who had had little or no contact since the event itself. On the opening night the exhibition generated its own community of shared experience, all brought together at The Lock-Up gallery, the former Newcastle Police Station where many had been as serving police officers, or had been held as detainees on a night over thirty years ago.

By living in Newcastle and this region my work has been shaped by its extended community, its history and its very landscape. I find the stories of the community around me to be a source of continual revelation, challenge and grist for creative projects. I enjoy and am thankful for the fact that people bring them to me and bring me into them. What is clear is that an ongoing, embedded presence of a CCD worker in a community legitimates that worker. It leads to a cumulative and considered knowledge of the person and an understanding that can generate trust and mutual respect. I've lived in Newcastle for over 30 years: by local lore I'm still a blow-in, although I feel like a Novocastrian. It has been through this continuing engagement with local stories and narratives that define that Novocastrian identity that I feel I am a part of this town. Possibly I am more a part than I think given the repeated approaches for me to be involved in the cultural celebrations and projects marking the closure of BHP that I have discussed in this thesis. These approaches have been made because I am known as a member of the community, and my work has been recognised as being respectful to and having a sensitivity to local considerations. There has been an ongoing and strong commitment to voicing local stories. Such a perception can only be built up over an extended period of time of living and being in a place.

In the original 'village' there was always the ritual role of the storyteller, the shaman, the person who created the narratives that were told, the person who shaped community identities. This poses a question: is the CCD worker trying to recapture this role of the person who is the conduit of community consciousness,

community identity and community narrative? As I have stated it is in stories that we find our identity. The passion with which HWC members approached their memoir writing showed me that this was not just about summarising life, but energising it. For me, stories are essential in defining identity, individually and for communities. The stories in this thesis so far have been an expression of that. How *we* do that to define who we are as CCD workers is something I will deal with in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Stories We Tell

I heard it was the deep fryer.

I heard XXXX got a bad dumpling and finally lost it.

Yea, the food wasn't that good – you hear lots of stories.

Conversation overheard in Carrington St, West Wallsend

Narrative identity is a term commonly used in psychology to describe the process of developing a sense of one's identity or self through creating a narrative that generates meaning from the events of one's life (Ricoeur 1991; Brockmeier, Donal, Carbaugh 2001). This concept and approach can be often seen in the narratives that are constructed with individuals who are members of disadvantaged groups or sections of society. These stories are often identified via the communities they derive from, for example, prison stories (Hall and Rossmanith 2016), refugee stories, abuse survivor stories, LGBTI stories. In the same way that an individual narrative is constructed from the separate events of an individual's life, these separate stories, when accumulated, give meaning and identity to the community from which these people come. In this thesis I have framed my stories within an hermeneutic epistemology drawing on the work of Van Manen (1990, 2003). My focus has been to critically examine these stories in relation to some of the core principles of CCD work and my own practice. My goal is not to give meaning, because it seems to me in CCD we use terms such as empowerment, participation, collaboration, engagement as our *raison d'etre*. In this thesis I aim to arrive at a deeper understanding of the very elements we have traditionally used to define ourselves. In this process I want the stories to become elements of change pointing forward rather than reassuring memories of past achievements.

As I stated in the Introduction to this thesis it is not uncommon for CCD workers to sit around and share their stories. In the beginning it was how we developed an understanding of what it was we were actually doing. It also functioned as a means of affirmation for us. They were stories of achievement, chaos, struggle, and surprise at the discovery we were experiencing. They were often filled with laughter, disbelief and 'tell it again's'. The stories relayed to our funding bodies, our acquittals, were usually different - they highlighted the positives and the achievements, the 'extraordinary' benefits of our work. They were affirmations in the face of the precarious existence of a project-by-project CCD worker. The best versions of these stories found their way into the literature in the chronicling of the practice and contributed to the development of the theory and principles we base our work on. But narratives can be more that a means of establishing or expressing identity. As Faber (2002) explores, such narratives can be agents of change, both evolution and revolution. What kind of stories can achieve this? The 'how' and 'where' we tell them is the focus of this chapter.

Gather Round and I'll Tell You a Tale

In the 1990s I spent a number of years on the NSW Arts Advisory Board and a couple of individual discipline committees for funding (Theatre and Regional Touring) for the then Ministry for the Arts NSW (what is now ArtsNSW). Part of the job was reading the acquittals of funding and projects. One year I remember a committee sitting around the table all surprised at one specific acquittal from a major arts organisation (because of confidentiality I can't name) whose artistic director had written an annual report that was characterised by a fairly negative appraisal of the organisation's achievements. We were all surprised because we had not seen any other reports or acquittals that took such a stance in relation to their own work. We were doubly surprised because this organisation was considered one of the better performers and to be very mindful of achieving innovative work of high quality and not resting on its past record. It was an unusual event. More often than not we embroider over the difficult aspects of our work, so this person's showcasing of the failings and faults initially seemed a poorly judged move. As I suggested in the first chapter, proving and justifying our

value was always a pressure and it was not uncommon for us to see our acquittals as stepping-stones to the next project and the next year's funding, so we wanted to lay a strong foundation for the future. The committee members were puzzled and in discussing the report the committee wondered if the individual in question was having his 'artistic crisis' – most creative individuals or organisations go through this at one time or another precipitating crushing crises of confidence and stagnation, always a problem for funding agencies. What should we do when the government funding agency, our boss, wants to see results for its investment and often is pressured to abandon artists or groups in their tough years? In such situations the lack of output can make the Minister for the Arts vulnerable to accusations of profligate and wasteful spending of taxpayers' money. The arts are always open to such attacks, arts funding often being the first to be cut. However in this instance, there was a sense that this report was a watershed moment for the writer, a clearing out before moving on. The next few years for this organisation saw growth before the individual in question left the company, handing over a strong vibrant arts organisation. I was impressed by the courage and perspicacity of the individual to recognise that the best direction for creativity is always forward and sometimes one needs to be done with the past to establish the new.

Just the Facts, Mam

As I noted earlier, with CCD projects we often find ourselves explaining or justifying them in terms of their social impact or outcome. This becomes even more prevalent when funding for projects derives from sources other than arts funding. A recent project by Ngarrama Productions saw us go to Mimili, an isolated settlement in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in South Australia to produce a video about financial management and debt for the Aboriginal population there. These communities are made up of Central Australian tribes who still retain traditional languages, customs and lifestyles even though they are now settled in communities with permanent housing rather than their previous nomadic existence. Access to these areas is restricted and monitored by the APY Land Council, an autonomous governing body of Elders and community leaders. In the last chapter I noted Ngarrama was a group focused

on local stories and local artists so the offer to produce something for Aboriginals who still lived traditional lifestyles and spoke their original language seemed a long step. We had produced a play in collaboration with some local Newcastle Aboriginal community workers and the NSW Office of Fair Trading about financial management. This had proved very successful, touring Aboriginal communities throughout the eastern states of Australia. We were approached about turning it into a video so it could be subtitled in Pitjantjatjara, one of the dominant languages on the APY Lands. When we considered the project closely, we thought something better could be done. Why not use the existing play and script as the basis to develop a new community video with local Pitjantjatjara people, in situ at Mimili, one of the settlements on the APY? After much Skypeing, emails and a very long three-and-a-half-day trip for Rod Smith by plane and car from Newcastle to the APY lands for a 20 minute meeting with Council and Elders, we eventually found ourselves with permission to visit and create the video and DVD *Kutjapa Kutjapa Wiyakitjanku* in collaboration with locals. It was only the beginning of many stories. When we arrived we found the original translation of the script from our play was incorrect and we had to spend 3 days with the local cast and Elders arriving at a new script. The translation and writing sessions for this remain one of the highlights of my creative life and I was humbled by the diligence, creativity and language skills of those involved – but that is another story. What is of interest here is that the resulting 200 DVDs were distributed free across the APY Lands by the SA state government. When a government does something like that they want to make sure they justify their spending. So it was a great pleasure to see the Minister for Business and Consumer Affairs report in Parliament, and have his report recorded in Hansard. There it was in black and white.

> I am also advised that 44 per cent of people said that they were worried about buying expensive items and not really understanding the total price, compared with 55 per cent the previous year. As I said, we're not trying to draw a direct cause and effect correlation, but I think we can extrapolate and say that it is likely that the video is playing a positive role in helping to change people's behaviour so that they better understand their rights and

responsibilities around money and to help provide them with the skills to better manage money and the family finances.

There's nothing like statistics and evidence of social change to justify the value of cultural product and the arts, or so we are told. Of course how we value our work should never be reduced to cold empirical data no matter how often we find ourselves shoehorned into that process. It was also good to hear the Minister understand the value of process as much as outcome and statistical results.

> I'm very pleased to be able to report that there has been an overwhelming amount of interest in the consumer rights DVD titled *Deadly Dollars— Something for Nothing*. This is largely due to the approach taken by Consumer and Business Services and the production company, Ngarrama Productions, to garner support from the local community right from the very start of the project. I think a key to the success of this was the local Aboriginal communities' strong input and engagement right from the very start.
>
> The local community leaders and members had significant input to developing the script to ensure that the DVD would be of relevance to the APY lands audience. The video was filmed in Pitjantjatjara, featuring local actors. (HANSARD-10-15990. 2015).

When we speak of the importance of and prioritising process it can sometimes be received with scepticism by others as though we are apologising for or trying to distract from our results. To have process recognised as integral to the success of this project by the Minister in this case was heartening and reinforces one's commitment to the work and that it is being understood. Further, I found his use of the word 'engagement' in the context of an Aboriginal project, alongside the light in which I re-define it in this thesis, also interesting. For him it indicated 'consultation and involvement'. If he had known the full story he might have had a different understanding more akin to my use of it in this thesis.

A Bit of A Yarn

As noted earlier how Australia responds to issues around our Indigenous population means that associated cultural work comes with very high stakes and risk. Many mistakes have been made that leave suspicion and wounds on both sides. For Ngarrama (Rod and I), so far from home and out of any comfort zone, this project itself was a high-risk engagement. Just how high was the risk and stakes was brought home to us in the first hour of our arrival. While all appropriate protocols had been followed, and Rod had taken his 3-day journey to establish communication some months earlier, we arrived to find things had changed and we were in the middle of major unrest. Some weeks before our arrival a news team and their camera crew had videoed on the Lands. Because access to the APY Lands is restricted, it was unclear among the community how this crew gained access. Their coverage showed the community in a negative light and this left ingrained suspicions among members of the community towards anyone who arrived with video equipment, regardless of their reason for being there. The emotion and anger of some members of the community was such that Rod and Greg, our cameraman, thought our stay at Mimili would not extend past our first hour there.

No matter how we explained our purpose and how we had arrived there, at least one individual was not to be swayed and said we 'had no right to be here, you leave now'. This individual was the local Pastor and his desire to protect his community from further negative portrayals was strong. Not even the reassurances of the Town Council Chairman, with whom we had been liaising, soothed his anger. For us the likelihood of us having to turn around and cancel the project after months of planning, rental and purchase of equipment, a thousand kilometre drive from Alice Springs, and flights from Newcastle was high stakes. Emotions were very high and the fact the communications were in a mixture of Pitjantjatjara and English meant I was having difficulty grasping all the issues involved. Eventually we were allowed to stay until the next day when we would make a presentation to the entire community about who we were and why we were there.

After a couple of hundred kilometres round trip to our motel out on the Highway, off the APY territory because our presence on the Lands was now in question, we found ourselves back in Mimili the next morning nervously expecting to have to face a mob, and not in the 'good' Aboriginal meaning of the word, signifying 'family or kin'. We congregated in the community hall where we explained who we were, where we came from and why we had come to Mimili. We showed them videos of some of our previous work and questions started to flow, not unfriendly but inquisitive. Soon we were sitting around yarning about the project and our purpose there. The recent experience of the news crew's visit and the resulting misrepresentation of the community as dysfunctional, welfare reliant and violent had left a deep distrust of anyone other than themselves being in control of the stories presented about their community. This did not mean a sanitised presentation but one that respected and honoured all of those involved and that all felt they could own. This was a good story to tell.

We got the go-ahead, so quickly confirmed the locations of sacred sites and which aspects of Mimili we should not video. When we showed them the script, it was then we found out it had been translated into Yankunytjatjara rather than Pitjantjatjara, which led us to the aforementioned session of second translation and writing that was such a highlight for me. What became clear, again in a mixture of Pitjantjatjara and English, was that we found a communication and shared purpose through the process of changing the script so the local community could feel ownership of it. All who worked on the script recognised that this project needed to be successful because of the high emotions in the beginning and that stakes were high on both sides. It was through a process of respectful listening on both sides that we established a shared goal.

By the end of our almost two week stay, we had established friendships evidenced by two other videos shot there. The first was the translation process to the new script in Pitjantjatjara, which became the creative product of all. The video chronicled a remarkable creative collaboration. The second was a video we shot when we were taken out for a maku (witchetty grub) hunt and feast out of town one evening. Our co-workers had requested the outing to be videoed as they felt it

was important to document traditional activities and 'bush knowledge' and that these were essential stories to tell for their identity. These videos were produced, like *Kutjapa Kutjapa Wiyakitjanku,* just for distribution among members of Mimili and on the APY Lands. High stakes once again enforced a need to establish communication and a diligence in mutual respect and reciprocity in our working together.

Closer to home, Ngarrama has been working on another project about mental health issues in the Aboriginal community. Precipitated by the murder/suicide of a prominent member of the community, we commissioned a number of Aboriginal writers and composers to create a song cycle around the issues and the incident. The pain and rawness of the issues and the situation meant the project required sensitivity and respect for all participants. Through a series of consultations and workshops we had worked up a solid base for the piece. Throughout, Rod and I, along with a local Aboriginal mental health worker Toni Manton, were liaising with surviving members of the family tragedy. After two years these members decided they did not want to continue with the project, and did not want the project to proceed with any content that identified them or their family. Their leaving meant the project would need to be completely re-designed. No question existed that this would not be undertaken and done. The project had required great trust and respect on the part of both the family members and ourselves and to not have listened to their request would not have respected the process that all had been through over the previous two and a half years. This placement of community members central to the design and decision making of a project has become standard in Ngarrama's productions. In many ways this is a reflection of the nature of Aboriginal communities where close networks of family bring strong mutual responsibilities with serious consequences for ignoring them. One is always cognizant of one's responsibility to other members of family or community and the need to be respectful. Mutuality and reciprocity seem to be an integral aspect of Australian Aboriginal culture and community and I continue to learn how understanding their impact can shape my work.

The sense of shared identity among Aboriginal communities is often strong. They want to be involved in projects that show this. This usually means establishing a willing participation in the core direction of projects is not difficult, even if sometimes that participation is extended by 'yarn times' with everyone having an opinion before they decide there is something else they have to do. Another offshoot of this willingness to express their opinion is that Yeena, an actor in a different Ngarrama play I wrote, is continually wanting to change the lines, something, I point out, that might not work with some writers or other companies. But then as Yeena says

> "If you get it wrong, we have to make it sound right so no one thinks we're gammin "

"Gammin" is an Aboriginal creole word for 'faking it, not real, untrue, not authentic'. In a country where Aboriginals only became recognised as 'human' in 1967 (It was only after the 1967 Referendum about recognising Aboriginal peoples in the census and hence not as 'fauna and flora', which is where they had previously sat, that Aboriginals were able to receive citizen and voting rights) - and there is so much negative and contested presentation of Aboriginality, it is important that Aboriginal identity and culture is presented with authenticity and all understand this. In the complex matrix of family ties that is the rhizome of Aboriginal families' lineage, I am not sure if Yeena is related to Auntie Doris. But then I realise once again, if we are sharing the journey, there is no reason we shouldn't all want to 'get it right'.

Finding the Words Finding the Way

The principles of collaboration through mutual recognition and respect, which can seem a struggle at times, now seem easy because they have so often proved effective and I recognise their value and efficacy. My understanding of the meanings of those words – participation, collaboration, mutuality, reciprocity – that have accompanied me along my career has deepened and grown. I still work with Bronwyn Vaughan with whom I started Pipi Storm some 40 years ago. The

shows we create for pre-schools still reflect a cultural diversity of music, narrative and visual imagery. In their development we work with practitioners from those cultural sources who are pleased to see their work brought to a young audience in a positive manner. When we sit down to incorporate participation in the show we always challenge ourselves by asking; Is this valid participation on the part of the kids? Does it provide them with opportunity to be engaged with the performance in such a way that they have an active say in the direction of the performance? We do not want to fall into the large-scale call-and-response of commercial pantomime. The quality of the experience of the performance is something we consider for such a young audience. When we think of creating shows for this age, we recognise this is likely their first live performance and it needs to be one they can feel a part of and not overwhelmed by, so we restrict the size of the audience, prioritising their experience rather than financial return. Also Bronwyn wants the show to be enjoyable for her as well; after so long performing, she wouldn't want anything else. The performer and the audience's mutual experience are equally important for us in working on these shows. In this era of the spectacular and large-scale event, we prioritise the intimate communication of our shows. This communication is core for me. In this thesis when describing CCD work, I have distinguished between working for, with, or alongside communities using the different words throughout. For me 'with' is the goal. Projects that are designed to be a shared journey and experience between equal participants bring outcomes beyond the end product.

A recent article about a CCD project in NSW caught my eye as it was passed around through Facebook pages. It was touted as a good example of how to present oneself as an arts practitioner working in socially engaged art practice. It was called 'The Artist as Disruptor' and chronicled a visual art project in regional NSW (McEwan 2016). The author explained his very principled commitment to "making art that engages with people and place in an ethical way…. to generate honest and clear communication through the process of our arts generation just as much as through its final outcome." Much of it reflected values and aspirations that I hold as my own. The language of the article was the language used in this thesis; empowerment, social change, participation, communication, consultation.

The project actually sounded quite good and going online to look at images from the project, the work seemed powerful and striking. However, the tone of the article worried me. The claims for outcomes and social change grew incrementally throughout the article. By the end the author was claiming connections with business, health, community (very loosely defined), education, now and into the future, all with remarkable positive outcomes and social change that saw better workplaces, more jobs, greater well-being and mental health for a more educated and complete community of the future. It delivered a utopian vision and solution to regional decline in outback Australia. In the best of all possible worlds I certainly believe creative activities can enrich and can in some cases bring about individual change and, on a very good day, contribute to societal change, but the grandiose claims of this article felt 'a CCD project too far'. It reminded me of a sceptical comment that went round about the expectations on CCD work in the early years, that 'it would fix all the social problems, and solve the Middle East crisis – and make a good cup of coffee, with time for a good rest at the end of the day'. I'm a tea drinker; it's slower. When we make claims that start to stretch our disbelief then I start to get suspicious, and when they become hyperbolic, I start to disbelieve. I do believe in the value of CCD work and the potential for both known and as yet undiscovered positive benefits for all those involved.

In the writing of this thesis I sent the Prologue and the sections relating to BHP to Aub Brooks, the custodian of the BHP workers' legacy. I asked him if what I had written seemed to reflect the experience as he understood it and whether there was anything he felt could be changed to better capture what occurred. He replied quite succinctly "Yeah that's it". Then he went on to tell me what he was doing now with the Newcastle Industrial Heritage Association, a website he maintains as an online museum and contact point for many of the old employees from BHP and the associated industries. He emphasised that it was here the story of BHP resided. Aub was one of the workers who played a very strong role in the content of the *Ribbons of Steel* events. He took great pains to be sure what was presented portrayed what he kept referring to as 'the truth'. Aub was always a star player and had been during the BHP project. For him it was always about having himself

occupy a central role in the narrative of events. But then, that is what has occurred for me in this thesis.

The Personal and the Community of CCD

And so, after videos, plays, performances, on stages, in theatres, in pubs around drinks, beside roads in outback Australia, in backyards, in community halls, in scripts, books, comics, I have now presented my stories in a thesis. I do this not simply so it's about me (though I don't think I am done with this work yet and I want to keep getting better at it so, yes, I want to change)- but to question myself and the practice and hopefully arrive, as I said in the beginning, at some deeper understanding of what drives the work and how we achieve the best results. Mike White in his book *Social Tonic* (White 2009) argues for the value of CCD practice and work. His long history with CCD lends a strong weight to his arguments. He rightly notes that the energy we expend in justifying our work and its efficacy and value, is energy we could be putting into the work itself. Our goal needs to be finding ways of how to do the work better. Sometimes this means returning to basics and questioning the principles our practices are founded upon. My focus in this thesis has been to cut deeper into the stories of my own work to greater appreciate those basic assumptions and principles. With CCD now finally a career option I want to make sure I am not a 'gammin' CCD worker.

If one is looking at being an authentic CCD worker, which has been the focus of this dissertation, then how one enacts the principles explored herein in a meaningful way is its core concern. Central to this is that all participants are able to contribute to these projects and events in a way such that their identities are respected and their voices heard as equal in the creation of the works. As Kester (2004; 2) says the "conversation becomes an integral part of the work itself. It is re-framed as an active generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities and official discourse". In such a case then the discourse becomes not only a process for arriving at an end to the project but a process for defining and refining the driving principles for the work and their implementation in practice. Kester's recognition of dialogue as integral (1985, 2004) is born out by the repeated importance of such dialogue in the examples

referred to throughout this thesis; from school children in a playground in Darwin, steelworkers in an industrial plant closing in Newcastle, to angry Pastors in a remote settlement in central Australia. They all require the establishment of an open and respectful 'conversation' as Kester would have it. In such situations it is not just the practitioner owning the principles and terms that describe the work but all participants who contribute equally. In such an equal discourse then all participants are active contributors to not just the cultural product but to the theory and defining of the practice. I have come to accept that such a dialogue and discourse needs to be implemented as best practice. Sometimes this dialogue means simply sharing the space as Bodyweather did by the successive visits to the coke ovens to physically assimilate and absorb into their own bodies the experience of the BHP workers.

Much of our work as CCD practitioners requires us continually being asked to establish new relationships mindful of these ideals of communication. The alternative finds us working in the communities in which we live. Long term embeddedness either through recurrent residencies or permanent residency in a community alters the relationship between the practitioner and the communities we work with. The conversations become ongoing and can be part of a larger, broader dialogue about living together. Like any family who may only gather for the annual family gathering such as Tibooburra, or the quotidian concerns of living in the same suburb it changes the relationship and blurs differences and divisions. It can generate a mutual knowledge and understanding of each other and a raising of the engagement stakes, that is shared between both parties as a unified experience.

Effective CCD work relies not just on one of these principles but a commitment to a matrix of values that are core to CCD practice. A critical reflection upon one's work through the paradigm of all these principles is necessary to assess and evaluate it that we may improve our practice. These principles need to be more than simply espoused; they need to be challenged and questioned in practice by all participants. It is up to us, the CCD practitioner to integrate this knowledge as lifeblood for it to become standard operating procedure and not a reassuring sop

or comfortable excuse they too often become in the CCD workers' narratives and reports.

Where CCD workers such as Big Hart and Back-to-Back Theatre, are committed to a critical examination of their practice as part of their process, then a richer more meaningful practice is arrived at. It is this same approach that I have attempted in this thesis. If such practices become innate, second nature, if not instinctual then the essential substance of CCD work is the living experience made manifest in a community partnership.

As Uncle Doug Archibald said recently in an interview as part of Ngarrama Productions on-going Wisdom Project - "It's listening, yea just listening, that's wisdom".[1]

On From Here

I live in West Wallsend, a small mining town on the fringes of Newcastle. When I moved there I drove a brightly coloured van with the name of the theatre company Freewheels painted on the side. I was quickly identified as the Artistic Director of Freewheels. I was the arty one in a town of miners. Over the years the town itself has changed little. The main street and shops hasn't expanded and the old shops still stand, though the tenants change. We have a greengrocer who still drives his truck around town and does his trade from the back of it, rather than a shop – many of his customers are elderly. Recently a new building is going up where the old Chinese take-away burned down (another story, see epigraph at beginning of chapter) and word around town is a new café will be built. Also, I no longer drive a brightly coloured van. When I moved there it felt like a village. That I can walk around the entire settlement when I go for a walk, defines its size. However, urban

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[1] This project working with Elders and representatives of the younger and upcoming generation of Aboriginal leaders in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie is exploring the nature of and understating of what constitutes wisdom.

sprawl is now encroaching rapidly, and developments have seen new populations move in, retirees and some new families buying cheaper housing on the outskirts of the city. There has always been a community centre building in town – The Sugar Valley Community Centre (Sugar Valley was the original name of the area rather than West Wallsend). It is where the seniors' groups, mothers' group and Newcastle Reptiles and Frogs Association meet. It has a part-time office as an information resource for social services and financial information. Bronwyn and I have often rehearsed our shows there. It is well within my 'one square mile'. It occurs to me, I want to pick up my laptop, pens and papers, and my career in CCD, and walk down the road to the Community Centre to ask if they would like it if I set up a writers' group there, or maybe nothing so formal - a storytelling group, a 'yarn' space: a set time each week when I would take up 'residence' in their centre. It would be open to whoever wanted to drop in. We could share stories about whatever we wanted. Who knows where it could lead (again, see epigraph at beginning of chapter)?

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