

**EXTRA! EXTRA!****EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Malcolm Whittaker

**SUB-EDITOR**

Emma Darragh

**EDITION #2 CONTRIBUTORS**

Matt Abotomey, Clare Britton, Collective Trace, Drew Fairley, Amber Jones, Ian Sinclair, Lucinda Thompson, Scott Wrigg.

**EDITION #2 COVER ILLUSTRATION**

Emily Johnson

**PINCH PRESS DESIGN &****PRODUCTION TEAM**

Ian Shoobridge, Alisa Croft

&amp; Mieke Lindebergh.

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**PACT TEAM**

Nuala Furtado, Scarlett Di Maio

&amp; Tom Doyle.

**PACT DIRECTORATE**

Amrita Hepi, Malcolm Whittaker, Natalie Randall, Sarah Houboult & Tulleah Pearce.

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**PACT**

CITY OF SYDNEY



# ON PROCESSING PROCESS

Years ago, I heard artist, festival director and arts advocate Robyn Archer talking on a panel at the Australian Performing Arts Market. My memory is Archer joking that we are much better at explaining process when it comes to sport than when it comes to art. An avid AFL supporter, Archer was talking about checking in weekly with her team's stats, training and injuries, and this engagement thickening her experience of her team's victories and defeats. Communicating about process gave context and meaning to the live event. Sports audiences take into account intangible things, such as home ground advantage, the mental and physical health of the players on any given day, and team politics. Sporting audiences in Australia know how to access the catharsis the spectacle is offering.

In the cultural arena, a show, artwork or exhibition is also a product of years of development, research and training. I know my enjoyment of engaging with art is deepened by watching the call and response between old ideas and new ones, as well as seeing artists hone their craft over time. In this article I reflect upon experiences I have had in the theatre, rehearsal room, gallery and studio. These reflections are intended to open these spaces to advocate for the contributions that art and creative processes can make to both generating and disseminating knowledge, as well as consider the role that such processes might play in creating solutions to complex problems.

Nat Randall and Anna Breckon's work *The Second Woman* saw Randall perform a short excerpt from the John Cassavetes film *Opening Night* on a loop for 24 hours, with a different male volunteer each time. My experience of seeing *The Second Woman* began when Matt Prest woke me up at 3am and said that I had to go in to Carriageworks to watch it. I drove across the empty city streets and approached the theatre in the dark. I joined the other people sprawled out across the seats enthralled as the work hypnotised and lulled us with its majestic, funny, damaged loops. When I was hanging out clothes the next day, I thought, "shit. She's still going." *The Second Woman* was immensely satisfying. Without reading an essay or attending an artist talk, I knew that *The Second Woman* was critiquing the way that the value of women is so often determined by men. I know that it was about being stuck in toxic loops, but also about the history of film and theatre, about endurance, gender, intimate relationships, vulnerability, power and objectification. Their proposition, spatially, visually, temporally and performatively, invited me in, held me there and gave me the space to reflect.

In the rehearsal room for *The Fox and the Freedom Fighters*, artists and activists Aunty Rhonda Dixon-Grovenor and Nadcena Dixon made their way through box after box of recently released ASIO surveillance files on their father and grandfather, activist Charles "Chicka" Dixon. They contained long black lines of redacted information and photos of airports, protests, the 1967 Referendum, the Tent Embassy, China, and meetings in America with the Black Panthers. Then, like now, culture was travelling between Australia and America as African American workers on ships docked in Sydney Harbour and exchanged civil rights information and strategies. Dixon was a worker on the docks and a member of the Maritime Union of Australia. The MUA supported equality and protested alongside Indigenous people seeking voting rights in Australia. The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation documented Dixon's life's work. ASIO played more of a role in my education about Indigenous History in Australia than the NSW Department of Education. It has been in Australia's galleries, theatres and rehearsal rooms that I have engaged with Australia's history, systemic racism and my implication in those systems.

*The Transit of Venus* was an exhibition of the work of artist Daniel Boyd, curated by Matt Poll and Zanny Begg. The show was held at the Tin Sheds Gallery at Sydney University to coincide with the 2012 'transit of Venus,' an astronomical



Callan Park studio, Sydney College of the Arts. Photo: Clare Britton.

event observed by Captain James Cook in 1769, as he made his way to Australia. The next transit of Venus will occur in 2117. Displayed in the gallery were objects Boyd selected from the University of Sydney's Macleay Collection, presented alongside his own painting and video work. One of the objects chosen was a ballast stone from the Endeavour, which was used to weigh the ship down and remain upright in order to complete the long ocean voyage. This particular ballast stone was carried from England to Australia in the hull of the Endeavour and found its way into the Macleay Collection, then into the gallery for the exhibition. Boyd made paintings on boxes that had, sickeningly, transported skulls of Indigenous people from Australia to England. *The Transit of Venus* drew attention to Indigenous remains and objects that were stolen and have not been returned. *The Transit of Venus* reached out of the gallery, through time, across oceans, across cultures and, through Boyd's celestial painting and videos and the transit of Venus itself, into the night skies. *The Transit of Venus* created dynamic tension between the weight of colonisation and the vastness of time and space.

Australia's current Prime Minister loves the Cronulla Sharks Rugby League team. He loves them so much that he wanted to delay the onset of pandemic restrictions so that he could see them play one last time. Scott Morrison understands sport, but it is possible he has been entirely untouched by art. Announcing emergency funding for the arts this week, Morrison framed the support for the arts as being "as much about supporting the tradies who build stage sets, or computer specialists who create the latest special effects, as it is about supporting actors and performers in major productions." This is concerning because there is no value attributed by the Prime Minister to the content of the work or the creative processes that produce the work. We need creative processes right now. Having taught in the Design School at the University of Technology for five years, one of the challenges we have with first-year students is that they often want to move straight from getting the brief to finishing the assessment with no new learning in between.

*Creative process gives us tools for being comfortable with not knowing. It breeds empathy (because it asks you to see the world from other people's perspectives and consider your own assumptions), humility (because there are so many failures) and tenacity (because you need to train yourself to keep coming up with possible solutions to the problem at hand).*

There is a gathering and much needed public conversation about equality in Australia. Scott Morrison emphasises his disdain for art to brand himself "one of the people," but he is an elite whose policies on the environment and construction are short term and support other rich people. It feels

like there is a resentment of open-ended learning, ephemerality, sustainability and play expressed in the allocation of funds away from the Environment, Art, the Humanities, Universities, renters and casuals towards more material endeavours. Creative process is immaterial, but it helps us understand the problems that we need to solve.

Sydney College of the Arts values studio-based practice. In 2016, I commenced a PhD at the college and was able to move out of the shed in my backyard and into a new working space in a studio on campus. Having a studio has allowed me to put down my work in the middle of an idea, come back the next day and find my way back into that same thought. It has created a physical space for slowly forming new knowledge. Six months into my degree, all students received an email saying that Sydney University was going to close Sydney College of the Arts. Protesting students occupied the administration building at Callan Park for two months. One of the most meaningful moments of the protests for me was hearing representatives from the Maritime Union of Australia advocate for the value of art. Sydney University ultimately listened to the protests and advocacy and have renovated the Old Teachers College as a new home for SCA. I have just moved into a new studio at the new site. If everything goes to plan, I will graduate in September. I am heartened to know that students studying art at Sydney University will continue to have studio space.

I met artist Therese Keogh while studying at SCA. She had the studio next to mine. One of the many insightful observations that Keogh made in her graduating paper was in regards to the physical form of the paper itself. She designed it in landscape orientation, allowing each page to fit perfectly on the screen for her presentation. Engaging with Keogh's work made me look again at my computer and realise that PDFs don't fit on the screen. We still pretend that PDFs are pieces of A4 paper. This kind of observation is so obvious once it is pointed out. Observations like that come from having the time to reflect, see the world anew and respond to the current paradigm, rather than just proceeding with business as usual. We need creative process right now. It is from creative processes that innovation is born. We need spaces that are dedicated to playfully creating and imparting new knowledge like studios, rehearsal rooms, galleries and theatres. We need insight into our history and the problems at hand, or we will be working very hard making the wrong things.

Clare Britton



Clare Britton is an Australian artist interested in landscapes, collaborative practice and artworks that are visceral and sensory. Clare's PhD, *A Work on the Cooks River*, is currently under examination at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney. Clare has worked at PACT as an artist, mentor and technician. [www.clarebritton.net](http://www.clarebritton.net)