

21 – 25.05.2019

В игре да в попутъ
людей узнают

L'habit ne fait pas
le moine

WHO

तुरुतः प्रवेल्स

ARE

Die Türkei ist schon
fremd, aber Deutschland
noch nicht Heimat

WE?

يوم غسل و يوم بصل



COUNTERPOINTS.



TEMPO

“IN THE NIGHTMARE
OF THE DARK
ALL THE DOGS OF
EUROPE BARK,
AND THE LIVING
NATIONS WAIT,
EACH SEQUESTERED
IN ITS HATE”

W.H. Auden ‘In Memory of W.B. Yeats’ (1940)

Strong collaborations
begin simply.

The collaboration between Counterpoints Arts and The Open University was initiated over a cup of coffee and a conversation about the dynamic of art, migration and social change. That was in 2016 and we are now in a third year of collaborative programming. The title Who Are We? was aptly coined in initial project meetings when we explored interconnected themes of identity, belonging, migration and citizenship through the prism of the arts and audience participation.

We did not fully anticipate the resonance of the project title and the provocative question that it continues to pose in 2019. And W.H. Auden’s quote has carried us through the last three years as a stark reminder of what might happen in the most difficult of times and with decreasing democracy.

We are certainly going through turbulent times, where boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are being highlighted, and many people find their claims to belonging are questioned. Not only when navigating their social and political rights but also in everyday encounters. While, in principle, these practices of creating and reinforcing borders affect us all, they very clearly, re-inscribe xenophobic ideas of who

can and should be allowed to participate. Against this backdrop, asking ‘Who Are We?’ challenges the increasing exclusions of nationalism and racism, while exploring how we create ideas of justice, citizenship, participation and belonging within a moving world.

What is distinctive about Who Are We? is its core methodology of bringing artists, academics and activists into direct dialogue with audiences through different levels of participation. Each year we have connected artists in the Counterpoints Arts’ network – many of whom with first-hand experience of displacement and/or who work alongside communities of place – with The Open University academics working across the Social Sciences, Law, Humanities, Politics, Languages and Education rather than solely within the Arts.

It has proved to be a rewarding meeting of minds and energies, resulting in the rich dialogues evident in this publication and in the critical reflections and creative commissions produced primarily for Who Are We? This publication illustrates a small slice of the last few years’ unique approach to co-producing and experimental commissioning and programming. You’ll find more content on our Who Are We? website, where we’ve archived the outputs in full.

As in previous years, we continue our shared focus on identity, belonging, migration and citizenship. With

specific focus in 2019 on living archives, the power of popular culture and crossing borders; migration, mobility and citizenship; and the politics of cultural policy, language diversity and translation. You’ll experience these themes being choreographed and performed across the Tate Exchange floor through installations, workshops, symposia and Learning Labs.

Artists’ rights and freedom of expression are at the fore in 2019 and urgently so, as are the political potential of the neighbourhood-led co-operative commission and the local/global re-building of arts/culture and civic infrastructure. We’re welcoming guest participants from Beirut, Berlin, Casablanca, Cuba, Dublin, Istanbul and Madrid – to explore the comparative processes of cultural democracy and new models for artistic production and collaborative, socially engaged practice.

Thanks to our many partners over the past three years, who have made Who Are We? such a lively forum and space for interaction and exchange.

We hope you enjoy and will join in in the Who Are We? programme and that this collaborative way of working has relevance for you wherever you are located.

Counterpoints Arts and The Open University



WHO ARE WE?
TATE EXCHANGE 2017



Who Are We? 2017 was a cross-platform event, designed to facilitate the co-creation, co-production, and exchange of knowledges among artists, academics, activists, and diverse publics around the multiple crises of identity and belonging in Europe and the UK. The week of activity was specifically designed for Tate Exchange reflecting on identity, belonging, migration and citizenship through arts and audience participation.

Auden's homage to Yeats conjures an uncannily resonant image of contemporary Europe, a Europe increasingly divided, fending and fastening its borders against real and imagined 'others'. Guided by Auden's quote and inspired by the open dialogue of the Tate Exchange initiative looking at art and its importance to society, Who Are We? explored what it means to be civic, creating a space for encounters between people and communities often kept apart by binaries: artists versus audiences, academics versus artists, migrants versus 'natives', and activists versus publics.

What is becoming of Europe and the UK?

What are we forgetting, and with what consequences?

How does our colonial past connect to today's migratory movements?

Can the creative uses of media, technologies, logistics, visual art and performance show us a glimpse of another Europe, another 'We'?

The 2017 programming team comprised Counterpoints Arts and The Open University, in association with Loughborough University and Warwick University, with contributions from Goldsmiths University of London, the Stuart Hall Foundation, Universal Design Studio, Graphic Thought Facility and with support from the Swedish Embassy London.

Artists and practitioners from countries including England, Scotland, Poland, Finland, Iraq, Italy, Germany, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Slovenia, Romania, Greece, Spain, Israel, USA and South Africa were commissioned to contribute to the debate through a week long public programme. They included Alia Syed, Alketa Xhafa Mripa, Ania Bas & Season Butler, Antti Tenetz, Behjat Omer Abdulla, Bern O'Donoghue, Dawid Górny, Elena Boukouvala, & Knut Bry, Eva Sajovic, Gil-Mualem Doron, JC Niala, Jillian Edelstein, Juan delGado, Laura Malacart, Laura Sorvala, Lucia Scazzocchio, Natasha Davis, Dana Olarescu & Bojana Jankovic, Richard DeDomenici, Nele Vos, Lizzy Willmington, Arithmus Project, Citizen Sense Project, Stuart Hall Foundation and Peirene Press.



WHO ARE WE?

I

What does it Matter?

“...you don’t worry about dirt in the garden because it belongs in the garden but the moment you see dirt in the bedroom you have to do something about it because it symbolically doesn’t belong there. And what you do with dirt in the bedroom is to cleanse it, you sweep it out, you restore order, you police boundaries, you know the hard and fast boundaries around what belongs and what doesn’t. Inside/Outside. Cultures/ Uncivilised. Barbarous/ Cultivated, and so on.”

Stuart Hall on discussing anthropologist Mary Douglas and her ‘Matter out of place’ theory



I remember an empty seat next to me on a crowded train, my breath a plague. I remember walking easy in a quaint French village before being interrupted by the wrinkled nose of a passerby; tu viens d’où, alors? reminding me that foreign follows me like an old cloak lugging around my neck. I remember the breeze in Kerry’s voice telling me, I don’t like the really dark black people, but you’re alright, the way horror grew in my chest like ivy that day. Its leaves have still not withered. I remember Year 6, the way my teacher shuddered at a picture of my profile, how I first understood revulsion without knowing its name, tucking my lips into themselves to make them smaller, if only for a little while. I remember the pointing, the questions of whether I could read whilst holding a book, being looked at too intently to be thought beautiful, but blushing all the same. I think this is a love, but the kind we have been warned to run from. It owns a gun, yet it will not speak of its terror. Obsessive in every curl ofmy hair, the bloom of my nose, the peaks and troughs of my breath. I’d tell you who I am, but you do not ask for my voice. You’ve already made up your mind, haven’t you?

II

Hostile, a definition:

Bitter; windrush citizen: here until your skin is no longer needed

Cold; migrants sleeping rough will be deported

Militant; charter flights, expulsion as a brutal secret in handcuffs

Unwilling; women charged for giving birth after the trafficking, after the rape

Malicious; Yarl’s Wood is locking away too many hearts, will not let them heal Warlike; landlords,

doctors, teachers conscripted for border control

Argumentative; hard Brexit, soft Brexit, Brexit means Brexit

Standoffish; do not fall in love with the wrong passport

Resentful; black and brown forced to prove their right to free health care

Unwelcoming; the number of refugees dying to reach you

Afraid;

Afraid;

Afraid;

How long must we make a case for migration? recount the times it has carried this country on its neck so this nation could bask in the glory of its so called greatness? how loud should we chant our stories of beauty of struggle of grit? write all the ways we are lovely and useful across our faces before we become a hymn sheet singing of desperation? what time left to find a favourite café and a hand to hold? to lie on the grass in the park and spot clouds whose shapes remind us of the things we’ve lost? the souvenirs we can’t get back?

III

Who are we to one another: a dirty secret

Here’s the thing we forget as we age; we’re not so different. Yes, there are some people whose clothes will never start a riot, those who will never know the grief of having a face made synonymous with a thug (the trauma of this deserves its own word). It is true that the things we experience are wrapped up in the life we are given. But when it comes to who we are, down to our most intimate core; aren’t we all just a bit lonely, a little scared? Asking questions no one truly has answers for?

Consider this; many of us did not want to get up this morning, some of us couldn’t. There is that dazed place we all inhabit seconds before fully waking that has no border, needs no passport. When the temperature drops to a chill, our body becomes its own shelter, shoulders round into a cave protecting itself. Some of our worse fears will come true, others won’t. We are all still chewing on words we wish we’d said to someone, somewhere and longing to swallow back the ones we’ve said in temper. A first love will make our bodies speak languages we didn’t know we were fluent in and we all carry the heaviness of loss. How did we forget that we’re all deeply connected on some level? Revealed only in moments, like when a stranger falls ill in public – the way most will flock to help them, to remember ourselves.

Every day my computer scrolls through a news feed of angry people drunk on their ability to put others back in their place. There is a growing army of the righteous who tell us that there is a correct language to speak, an exact way to love, one acceptable altar to pray on. I watch a video of a man on the top deck of a bus screaming at another with a boiled kettle rage. He is all fist, spit in your face, my-grand-dad-didn’t-win-the-war-so-your-kind-could-piss-it-all-away. I’m not sure it matters who the person on the receiving end of this rage is. In the video he is a chilling quiet, the kind many people of colour will recognise. It is a calculated silence, one where you are bargaining for your survival (and this too needs its own word). It does not matter whether he has a job, how hard he works, the taxes he does or does not pay, if he tips generously, whether he is kind. That’s the point, right? Racism does not look for nuance, only the audacity of our skin. I wonder if with a different lens these two could be lovers. Could be sitting as strangers on the same top deck but next to each other, realise they are listening to the same music, how this one track makes them each feel a particular kind of giddy as the bass drops, how as the bus jolts a headphone would fall from each ear and they would turn to look at each other and smile.

IIII

What words have been left for us?

Words tell lies. This is difficult pill to swallow for a writer, but it is sometimes true, I think. The reality is we’ve inherited childish terms that shape the way we interact with one another. ‘Black’ and ‘white’ are, at their heart, nonsensical terms that have been artificially packed with history and, all too often, given too much meaning. Blackness, therefore, will know about knife crime and rap, whiteness the best schools to get into, obviously. Words are also roped off for certain bodies; the language of terrorism reserved for people of colour, whilst more noble and redemptive words such as lone wolf and misunderstood for white acts of violence. How boring this, but these terms of reference are as scorched in our minds as a national anthem. How then, should we come to understand ourselves with the words we’ve been given? To find meaning and truth in words that are the scraps of the dictionary?

Give us our tongues back and we’ll give you an answer. It may not be a sound you’ll recognise but it will be ours, all ours.



WHO ARE WE?
TATE EXCHANGE 2018

The 2018 programme explored the production of people and place with a rich range of connected sub-themes: housing, displacement, memory and migration, movement, politics of language teaching, the design of a hostile environment, rural, regional and urban ecosystems, food, environmental and racial justice.

The 2018 programme included the following artists: There There, Rachel Ashton, May Murad, Isabel Lima, Mohammad Barrangi Fashtani, Hamid Reza Yavari Shoer, Farhad Berahman, Marcia Chandra, Lisa Alexandra, Natasha Davis, Selina Nwulu, Juan delGado, Sapphire Goss, The Consul, Varvara Shavrova, Susan Stockwell, Mohammed Sami, Bards Without Border poets – Laila Sumpton, Hamdi Khalif and Edin Suljic, Hostile Environment Collective, Where Do We Get Off, Migrating Proverbs, Sonia Tuttiett, Zia Ahmed, Knut Bry and chefs from the Welcome Kitchen project.

2018 focused on the slow production of cross-border solidarities, relationships and innovations being practiced by artists and arts organisations alongside local communities and neighbourhoods. Via the interdisciplinary research and commissioning work of b-side Festival, Dorset; Deveron Arts, Huntley; Art House, Wakefield; Cultural Spring, Sunderland and South Tyneside; D6: culture in transit, Newcastle; Museum of Movements, Malmö; CREATE, Dublin and many more.

The 2018 programme also featured a series of collaborative artist/academic projects at different stages of experimental production, including a ‘Stitch in Time...’; ‘Are We Data’; ‘Syrian Cultural Index Project’ and ‘Migrating Proverbs’.

For Who Are We? 2018 we commissioned a series of bespoke films focusing on the often-invisible modes of production underpinning the making process. These films along with others guided visitors across the floor.

In 2018 we worked with Stance Podcasts and University of York Migration Network. Lizzy Willmington, PhD researcher at Cardiff Law and Global Justice, Cardiff Law School, worked with us on designing a ‘Hostile Environment Tour’ commission, which included a guided ‘walk’ through Liberty’s ‘A Guide to Hostile Environments’ publication, and a series of participatory workshops facilitated by a Collective of activists, artists and campaigners.

TRIGGER WARNING

Writer Vesna Maric reflects on There There’s piece, ‘Trigger Warning’, presented as part of ‘Who Are We?’ 2017 programme at Tate Exchange.

How does Britishness become, well, Britishness, and what does it, in fact mean to be British?

There There, a two-part artistic project from Romania and Serbia, have endeavored to explore that idea through the curious mix of stereotypes about Eastern Europeans and British village fete games.

When they first arrived in the UK, seven years ago, Dana and Bojana found themselves overwhelmed by the number of ready-made prejudices about their Eastern European origins; in fact, they say, they

didn’t even consider themselves Eastern European until they arrived to the UK.

‘We found ourselves burdened by this common heritage that we couldn’t escape – and that’s quite harrowing. And we started to think about national identity, of what it’s like to be labeled a foreigner, and what it actually means to identify yourself as an immigrant. Things you don’t think about normally, unless you actually emigrate.’

Their piece, Trigger Warning, based on the anxieties around post-Brexit Britain, breaks down stereotypes about Eastern Europeans in the media and in political discourse by placing them into the light-hearted environment of popular games. So there’s ‘Snatch a Job’, which is all about hooking a rubber duck out of a gummy pond, the Wheel of Benefits, and attempting to get an EU passport by chucking five teabags into a tea pot from some two-metre distance – a feat, which, having attempted it, I must say is not an easy one. I say this to them; the games are not easy! ‘That’s the whole point,’ say Dana and Bojana, ‘all this stuff they say comes easy to Eastern Europeans isn’t easy

at all. It has nothing to do with the reality in which we live.’ But why games?, I ask. ‘Well, the idea of being identified as an Eastern European and having all these characteristics and intentions stuck on to you by the media, is like adopting a role. And when we play games we take on a role, so it seemed like a natural way to go about exploring these stereotypes. Also games are all about being welcome to participate, and suddenly, after Brexit, we don’t feel so welcome anymore.

So the game idea is something of a paradox. It’s also a great way to hook the audience in, people like games; when they first see the games, they don’t think it’s going to be about immigration. And when they start, they realise that they have been hooked. And they have to think about their ideas. We have invigilators from Eastern Europe who can perhaps tackle these issues and talk about them, share their opinions with the participants.’ And indeed, the atmosphere is lively, lots of laughter goes on while people try to snatch those jobs and get the benefits; but once the meaning behind the games is uncovered, an uncomfortable pause sets in for many. The stereotypes stand bare, meaningless, ridiculous. ‘Trigger Warning’ performs its trick well – the



Envisioning Solidarity: Pikpa Refugee Camp, Lesbos

Our work explores the new forms of solidarity have emerged in the aftermath of the “migration crisis”. Pikpa refugee camp on Lesbos offers shelter and psycho- social support to the most vulnerable refugees. Participatory arts projects are central to their work in tackling trauma. Our book of co-created photos and poems Communities of Solidarity: The Story of Pikpa Refugee Camp offers an intimate visual portrayal of life in the camp. It offers radically different representations of refugees to those in mainstream media where they are frequently objectified. It shows how we can be in relation to others. It is available to buy at <https://lesvossolidarityshop.org/products/the-book-of-pikpa-refugee-camp>, and all proceeds go directly to Pikpa Refugee Camp.

Marie Gillespie, The Open University

WHO ARE WE?
ART, MIGRATION AND
THE PRODUCTION
OF DEMOCRACY.

‘The issues are different
this year.’

Coming together with Counterpoints Arts and The Open University (OU), to consider the second iteration of ‘Who are We?’ at Tate Exchange, it was impossible to ignore the fact we were living in post Brexit Britain. Or the new realities facing organisations working with refugees and migrants: increasingly needing to deal with escalating racism and xenophobia, austerity politics and the stringent enforcement of Teresa May’s ‘hostile environment’. How, as Sara Jong from OU asks, do we define, who the ‘we’ is, in such divisive times?

‘Who are We?’s resulting decision to work more closely with smaller, site-based organisations inside and outside London, from Art House, Wakefield, to Deveron in Scotland to b-side arts, Dorset, was important. Not only did it offer possibilities to challenge the dominance and centrality of the capital, it also ensured different experiences, knowledges, and understandings of migrant communities were shared, offering visitors a sense of the rich diversity of practice across the UK.

Art House, Wakefield’s reconstruction of its Studio of Sanctuary, was a powerful example of what it means to be an organisation supporting migrants and asylum seeking artists. Including the need to take on a more long-term, active civic role. Printmaker, Mohammad Barrangi Fashtani’s blend of Persian calligraphy with



laser photocopying and collage, and the collaboration between tailors Hamid Reza Yavari Shoer and Helen O’Sullivan, were testimony to the exciting cross-cultural art forms emerging from such exchanges.

Working with Iranian photographer and artist Farhad Berahman and his kamra-e-faoree (Afghan Camera), b-side arts created a space for reflection, built around the time the camera takes to capture and print an image, Where audiences and participants are quietly drawn into conversations around identity, memory and home as well as wider concerns around displacement and migration. While visitors were often attracted by the ‘object’, the camera itself, Berahman noted the development process opened up deeper conversations about ‘other’ cultures and meanings of time. For Berahman himself, the project held particular significance, sensing, like many of the migrant artists involved in ‘Who are We’, that his life experience, as well as his practice, was given a new validity through his presence at Tate.

Hosting a ‘shared lunch’and conversation, between artists working in the rural market town of Huntly in Scotland and their counterparts in Gaza, Deveron Projects allowed invited guests, and passing Tate audiences, to engage with the realities of making work in a place where travel is impossible. The impact of an organisation committed to ‘acting local’, whilst using its understanding of place to recognise and respond to larger global realities, was palpable in the exchange that took place.

‘Humbling’ was a word used
by more than one member of
the audience.

Isabel Lima’s Wooden Horse project, an incredibly powerful response to the displacement of migrants to some of the poorest and most embattled communities in the UK, emphasised the growing importance of the socially engaged artist in creating space for conversations across fractured communities, between those ‘abandoned by the system’ and those who are its latest victims. Lima’s focus on building and making together is slowly opening up the possibility of different narratives for communities who have been ‘written off’; even by their own local authorities. Invited to make plant boxes from wood taken from the dismantled horse, visitors not only engaged with communities beyond the gallery space, but began to understand some of their challenges.

Asked how long she had been working on this project, Lima’s response was significant, ‘Not long. Only two years’. The critical role of ‘time’, was further highlighted by Marcia Chandra’s film for Cultural



Spring, Groundwork. Recording some of the work Cultural Spring’s partner, Sangini, has undertaken with women asylum seekers in Sunderland, it underlines the importance of arts organisations being prepared to start in people’s own surroundings. A moving example of the delicate negotiation involved in building confidence and trust with those whose relationship with the harshness of the immigration system has left them isolated, Groundwork raises questions about the gallery context and how Tate Exchange might capture and share the long-term, dialogical nature of much collaborative arts practice?

Many other ‘off-site’ interventions were also time focused, some present for only fleeting moments. Yet Reem Charif and Catalina Pollack’s Migrating Proverbs project with Syrian refugee women negotiating daily life in Ankara, created immediate resonances with other projects in the room. In particular the power of metaphor to open up conversations, ‘somewhere between subjectivity and play’, and the painful ‘fight for space’ in cities where migrants have fled or been displaced. Welsh theatre performance, ‘Where do we get off?’ left audiences with a briefest, fragmentary sense of what it might mean to not know ‘who we are travelling with or quite where we will end up’. Sharing stories of flight that draw on their own biographical material of surviving perilous journeys, performers, Ali Goolyad and Bevin Magama, turned the Blavatnik Building lifts into ‘a metaphor for a psychological state, the back of a lorry, another kind of journey.’ Wielding mop and bucket, or the uniforms of the security guards, the artists made themselves indistinguishable from the migrant workers who ‘take care’ of our cultural institutions: challenging notions of whose narratives enter our public spaces.

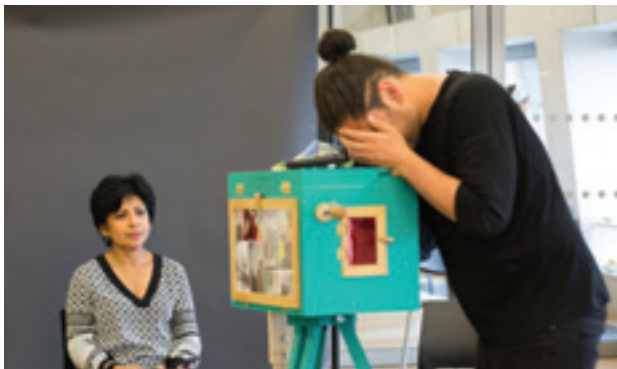
Other brief sojourners, Bards without Borders and Counterpoints’ commissioned spoken word artist, Selina Nwulu, wove themselves and their words in and out of the space, each responding to what they saw on the floor or heard in debates. Artists as observers, recorders and respondents, they re-defined the issues and re-stated some of the questions. ‘how long must we make a case for migration?’ ‘how loud should we chant our stories of the beauty of struggle of grit?’ ‘write all the ways we are lovely and useful across

our faces before we become a hymn sheet singing of desperation?’ The ‘gone as quick as....,’ presence of Filoxenia’s participatory poetry relay, written in felt tip on the windows of the fifth floor, underscored the instability and precariousness of the experiences they were speaking of: bringing together vivid but momentary recollections of flight, other shores, hospitality, movement and home into the liminal space between Tate Exchange and the world outside. Like the thoughts of the spoken word poets, they shared the powerful immediacy, as well as the haunting impermanence, of live performance.

Time, as exemplified in the ‘endless waiting rooms’ of the migrant experience, also threaded its way vividly through the two musical interventions, offering visitors a powerful sense of ‘limbo’ that is part of the asylum seeking process. Music in Detention shared music created with those who are ‘imprisoned’ within ‘invisible’ immigration removal centres up and down the country, despite being guilty of nothing other than seeking sanctuary. And in doing so enabled visitors to understand something of music’s power as ‘a survival technique’; offering a way of coping, a voice and a sense of a world beyond incarceration.

The inhumanity of the faceless, bureaucratic labyrinths of the asylum process is also at the heart of Gian-Carlo Menotti’s 1950 opera, The Consul. Partly metaphoric, but often terrifyingly overt, The Consul was originally a response to post-war displacement and dispossession. Taking Menotti’s words and music as their starting point, Opera Machine’s response to the issues involved weaving personal narratives of those under-going such journeys today, with Menotti’s powerful exposition of the personal cost of seeking sanctuary and refuge. Breaking through the silence that often informs our gallery experience, the impact of live voices close-up left visitors visibly affected. As they later responded by sharing lullabies in their own language and script, it became clear how diverse an audience ‘Who are We?’ had drawn into the space, and for how many of them the themes of displacement and exile had resonance.

Workshops/symposiums in the Southwark Room were in constant dialogue with work on the floor. The final symposium: ‘Are we a Movement?’ bringing many who



rather than the migrant communities: especially
those disenfranchised and alienated by austerity
and its resulting marginalisation?

had been part of the week-long residency together with others working in the context of displacement and dislocation in a Long Table. Among them Platforma, Ultra-Red, LA, thinker and writer Mary-Anne de Vlieg, the Museum of Movements, Malmo, the Study Room in Exile, Liverpool, ISIS Arts, Newcastle, the Syrian Cultural Index Project from Berlin, Studio for Media Activism, Toronto and CREATE Dublin. Asking participants, ‘Where do you see the shifts, the chinks in the armour, the possibilities for change?’ the session investigated the capacity of the arts and culture to not only create empathy and understanding for the migrant experience but also, ‘to rouse us, urge us, goad us, incite us, stimulate us, stir us, provoke us – into action.’

In a conversation ranging from examining the ‘politics of gratitude’ imposed on migrants in Canada to the ‘politics of participation’ in the UK, guests questioned whether ‘art has any purchase any more?’. And considered what might be needed for it to regain its potential for radical traction within the institution, when so many communities feel ‘side-lined’, or ‘door-stepped,’ by those in power. Speaking of the need to see ‘movement’ as urgent, durational, tactical and strategic, CREATE Director Ailbhe Murphy argued mass participation without change in policy is little more than activity.

There is an urgent need
for a radical critique of
participation. ‘Communities’,
as someone noted,
‘don’t want to ‘participate’ –
they want power!’

Tate neighbour, Ismail Einashe, wondered how we begin to manage those ‘difficult conversations’ in a building whose colonial history still weighs heavy and in the context of the ‘invisible’ workers whose stories are rarely heard. ‘How’ he asked, ‘do we challenge the ways in which art, and its institutions, have so often been used as a tool to placate our working class communities?’ And, ‘How we might work with our

institutions to let go of that last bastion of western hegemony, the aesthetic?’

Speaking about the continuing ‘weight of the institution’, Ultra-Red, shared experiences from the AIDS crisis in California, while ‘The Museum of Movements’ in Malmö presented a contemporary response to institutions in their refusal to start with a building, instead taking ten years to work with its communities. Challenging the very concept of the museum as a fixed source of knowledge and ideas they intend to create ‘a space that responds to the world around us, not with objects fixed in time and space but as flows and potentials.’

These offers of alternative institutions raised questions of what might happen if we started our engagement with the issues of migration from somewhere different. And whether in doing so we might begin with settled rather than the migrant communities: especially those disenfranchised and alienated by austerity and its resulting marginalisation? The need for a popular education movement, grounded in notions of class, political struggle and social transformation entered the conversation.

Examining ‘What is Possible?’ we spoke about the criticality of encouraging cultural institutions to ‘let go.’ Not only in terms of a radical re-visiting of hierarchies and infrastructures, but in daring to relinquish control of the aesthetic. We spoke of cycles of resistance and resilience, and the urgency for solidarity across the arts, academia and activism. But, in accepting the transience of many of our interventions, we proposed as a potential Trojan Horse; part of an iterative, open-ended process rather than an end in itself.

The week ended with as many questions as it had begun, and a recognition of the importance of constant questioning as well as continued ‘movement’. Speaking at Open Engagement, Angela Davis notes, ‘Art can push us to travel...to places animated by freedom and justice, not in discovering the fact of freedom once and for all but of discovering a motion, a constant movement that is both comforting and troubling, a sense that wherever we land we have to continue to move...’ The struggle, she reminds us, is a long one.



FROM A DISTANCE: ON THE ETHICS OF REPRESENTING THE REFUGEE CRISIS

What would it mean to experience our own privileged lives as inextricably tied up with the exposed lives of less fortunate others elsewhere in the world? A conversation between Umut Erel and Behjat Omer Abdulla.

UE: Behjat, your piece 'From a Distance' shows portraits inspired by a story you heard about the tragedy besetting a refugee family during their journey. This is a powerful work, which draws in the viewer and opens up a very different way of relating to the subject. Oftentimes in media representations we see refugees during their journeys in an extremely vulnerable situation, we see their suffering and they are often fixed to a subject position as 'victim'. This evokes a one-way gaze from 'us' (who are not – at this moment – refugees) who can decide to look at the suffering of refugees or indeed turn away and not look at them. This one-way gaze, especially if it fixes refugees in this role as 'victims' – or conversely as 'threat' to our borders and security allows for a very limited relationship with the people depicted. Your work seems to create a different, more complex and very intimate relationship between viewers and the people depicted.

BA: Choosing the people who are refugees as subjects for this project I had a big problem. Because I could have gone and found the mother (whose story inspired the drawings) but then I thought: 'No, that mother is not there to be a subject of my artwork'. But then I thought I want to go to the refugee camp in Sweden to talk with people to undertake some background research. But again I thought: 'No, these people are not here for the sake of this project that I want to do.' Then I thought about how I could make this – and then I looked at my daughter and I thought it's my own child, completely connected and there was nothing more connected to me than my own child to talk about this whole experience. And I thought, maybe I could do that. And that's what I did. I took her out of the bed at night and I just documented her as delicately as possible. She was asleep, she had no idea what happened. It was like a dream for her in some way.

UE: In telling or representing the stories of refugees there is a risk of re-inscribing the boundaries between the people who can look, who can watch and reflect and grapple with the ethical and political dilemmas as an 'us' as opposed to the refugees themselves who can be represented as simply posing these ethical and political issues, rather than being capable of engaging in reflection and action to address political and ethical issues.

BA: One thing I wouldn't want to show is refugees in



Although you feel that these people are vulnerable, there is another exchange, that you are the witness of something that spurs you to act. I quite like the idea of people being witnesses to something rather than looking at something. When you look you are far away, but when you witness you are too close to avoid it

their vulnerable situation. When you look at the work you haven't got a clue what you are looking at. I want to make the work as beautiful as possible. I want people to come closer, to just see 'Ok, what is this work about?'

A visitor is reading the story next to "Head of child I" drawing.

UE: Yes, I agree, the pictures are very beautiful and draw you in.

BA: Although you feel that these people are vulnerable, there is another exchange, that you are the witness of something that spurs you to act. I quite like the idea of people being witnesses to something rather than looking at something. When you look you are far away, but when you witness you are too close to avoid it. When you are witnessing a situation you are responsible. You are responsible for a lot of things, you are responsible to help – I don't know how you would help. But you are in a situation where you really have to think about where you are standing. You have a huge responsibility on your shoulder.

UE: I really like the workshops accompanying the piece where you ask audiences to take an ID sized photograph as they are viewing the pictures to register their reaction to the story and the images. You mentioned that for many there is a strong immediate reaction of shock. You call this a '180-degree reversal of the gaze', where the viewers become part of what is being looked at. Then you collect these ID sized photographs on a security blanket such as they are distributed to

refugees by humanitarian helpers. On one side of the security blanket you collect these ID sized photographs of audiences, on the other, you collect their short statements in reaction to your work.

I think this is another way of creating a relationship, rather than a one-way gaze between the viewers and the people depicted in the story and the images. You are inviting the viewers to become part of the story and the images. Can you tell me what made you think of using the security blankets for this workshop?

BA: The blankets are in silver-coloured reflective material, so the audiences could see themselves reflected, refracted in the blankets. These blankets are a product that has saved thousands of lives if people were able to receive them at the right moment. The blankets also follow the idea that there can be a 180-degree reversal of the gaze away from the images and towards the viewer. Indeed, usually it is the blanket that covers a person, but this time we cover the blanket with images of people. Putting the blanket on the floor, rather than hanging it on the wall, allows me to keep the project open-ended. When it is on the floor you are not hundred per cent certain what will happen.

Behjat Omer Abdulla was born and lived in Kurdistan until 1997 when war forced him to flee to England, where he faced an 11-year battle to gain recognition as a refugee; he currently lives in Sweden. Haunted by these experiences, his art explores concepts of identity, displacement, uncertainty and falsification.

A FLAG FOR EVERYONE: SEASIDE SNAPS

The first time I saw "Welcome to the New Union" by Gil Mualem-Doron was at Turner Contemporary in Margate as part of the Platforma South East Exhibition last summer.

From the moment I arrived until the time the gallery closed, he was busy taking photographs, positioning sitters and, most importantly, engaging people in conversation. As Gil explains elsewhere on this blog the New Union Flag is a reworking of the Union Jack featuring textiles connected to people from different ethnicities and national backgrounds.

Gil's installation, created especially for the show, was based around a large reproduction of this flag in front of which he invites people to be photographed on a small set featuring New Union Flag adorned hats, mugs and other paraphernalia.

Margate seemed like a perfect location for this work.

In a gallery that looked out onto the ocean, it was a humorous take of the traditional seaside photograph featuring both deckchairs and umbrellas. And Gil went about his work like a traditional seaside photographer – friendly, engaging, occasionally cajoling in order to get a good shot.

What fascinated me was the public response. Before seeing the installation I had viewed the New Union Flag as overtly political, a textile takeover of the central symbol of British colonial identity, a direct challenge to the ongoing imperial narrative.

In the Turner Contemporary, however, Gil's work was not a polemic, it was an open invitation to participate.

In the first place, I think, it is the beauty of his flag that attracts people. It is a stunning object. Bright, cheerful and optimistic. We might be aware that it is a subversion, but who could be offended by something so beautiful?

The installation then directly invites audience engagement. The props, the dressing up, the riot of colour and patterns – few are able to resist. And then there is Gil. He has, of course, considered this installation very carefully. Inviting people in, being generous in taking their photo and offering them a free

digital copy, is central to the work. Because he also talks to them. They ask him questions about the flag and his answers require people to think again about what a national flag means and what it could mean. And, therefore, what national identity means and could mean.

The exhibition in Margate took place shortly after the Brexit referendum. Among the crowds of visitors was a local UKIP councillor. Gil spotted her. And noticed her do a double-take as she considered what her response should be to his work. She did not seem inclined to be offended but perhaps wondered if she should have been.

Her grand-daughter showed her the way, first busy playing with a New Union Flag jigsaw and then eager to be photographed sitting in a New Union Flag deckchair, wearing a New Union Flag sunhat.

"Welcome to the New Union" lends itself to such moments because Gil is such an accomplished and subversive artist. And because as a person and an artist he has such integrity.

At a time when national identity is being used so divisively in political contexts, the New Union Flag, is an idea that's time has surely come.



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ARTIVISM: CHARGING ACTIVISM WITH THE WILD IMAGININGS OF ART

Diverse groups came together to regenerate an arguably exhausted political language. At a fraught moment, the project repeatedly asks: who are ‘we’? Who gets to decide? What does it mean to belong?

“What can be expected of...[art] in politically fraught times?” asks reviewer Hili Perlson, commenting on the recently launched Istanbul Biennale (running from 15 September to 12 November 2017). With its open-ended yet pointed theme, ‘A Good Neighbour’, the Biennale invited artists and audiences to reflect on the tenuous concept of ‘co-existence’ together with questions of otherness, identity and belonging. Predictably this Biennale received much commentary given the backdrop of current human rights violations in Turkey plus ongoing media censorship. The notion of what is ‘politically fraught’ has taken on disturbingly local dimensions across the exhibition space that is Istanbul.

Biennales and art fairs seldom remain unscathed. Their warp and weft are dependent on the hospitality and political fabric of the host city and its diverse inhabitants. Yanis Varoufakis’s fierce critique of documenta 14 illustrates this curatorial challenge in his adamant refusal to separate grand themes – no matter how progressive-sounding – from the everyday, harsh realities of local economies: “documenta took a great deal more from Athens”, says Varoufakis, “from both its private and public sector – than it gave. Adding the veneer of a left-wing narrative against neoliberalism to a purely extractive neocolonial project that’s framed as a gift to Greece is adding insult to injury”. For Varoufakis, the space between artist and audience at documenta 14 was overshadowed by a complex set of colonial and neocolonial tradeoffs, and, in this case, ‘art’ and the geo-political apparatus driving it, was hardly a benevolent mediator.

“documenta took a great deal more from Athens, from both its private and public sector, than it gave.” – Yanis Varoufakis

Varoufakis’s invocation of a more ‘equal’ exchange between curators, artists, international audiences, local Athenians and civic infrastructures begs the question of whether structural inequity is inevitable despite attempts to redress the balance through

democratic aspirations of collaboration, participation and co-production.

This was also a question and challenge for the recent Who Are We? project at Tate Exchange, from 14–19 March 2017. Tilting the axis to a politics of dialogue – admittedly on a much less grand scale than a city-wide Biennale or International Quinquennial – we invited artists and audiences to take part in a series of exchanges and performative conversations about rights, identity, migration, global displacement and citizenship, in a popular context particularly coloured by Brexit.

Who Are We? began as an ambitious experiment, as several Tate Exchange associates, such as ourselves at Counterpoints Arts and The Open University, who together with the universities of Loughborough and Warwick formed a collaborative arts platform that was made richer with support from Universal Design Studio and Graphic Thought Facility and contributions from Goldsmiths University of London and the Stuart Hall Foundation. More ‘programme’ than ‘exhibition’, twenty-two artists contributed to a week aimed to evoke and provoke lively discussions and co-productions – to create something new out of an arguably exhausted language of politics and public policy. To this end, Who Are We? was and is in its fothcoming iteration (in 2017/2018) asking what it means to belong – across and within borders. In a moment of global movement, connection and dis-connection, the project repeatedly asks: who are ‘we’? Who gets to decide?

A primary aim of Who Are We? was to eschew the white cube gallery setting and create a hybrid library/lab space – allowing visitors to linger and engage with content and artists. With light installations, site-specific work, live art, learning labs, screenings, workshops and seminars, the programme was designed to encourage open debate and dialogue. We set out – at least on paper – to critically navigate the connections and tensions between arts, activism, audiences, advocacy and academia, seeing how and where social exchange or change might or might not happen along the way.

But it’s often one thing in theory and quite another in practice. In our ongoing work at Counterpoints Arts we straddle the fluid lines between commissioning, mentoring, curation, production and learning; and, at the same time, we encourage and facilitate collaboration and partnerships across different sectors. The question of what to ‘expect’ from art and artists is not easily answered; nor is it easy to discern where and how social change comes about. Who Are We? was and is not heavy-handed in its prescriptions. Art as a magical salve or a vehicle for social change, when loosely bandied about, remains an empty slogan.

That said, many of the artists in Who Are We? with whom we work at Counterpoints Arts have long stepped into the imaginative breach and vacuum where politics

appears to have failed. What’s exciting is that it’s almost impossible to pin these artists down using the usual art-speak and art-formulae. Much of the work was and is fueled by what playwright, Eve Ensler, calls ‘artivism’ – “the ingredients of activism... charged with the wild creations of art”. Somewhat romantically put yet Ensler is on to something: ‘artivism’, she says, is ‘where [the] edges are pushed, imagination is freed, and a new language emerges altogether’.

Two artists, in particular, (among others at Who Are We?) are radically pushing at these edges.

‘Refugees Welcome’ by Alketa Xhafa Mripa, took the form of a Luton tail lift van and was parked outside Tate Modern. Having this work located outside Tate Exchange was an important marker. We wanted to make a public statement and to draw people in and up to the 5th Floor. Otherwise how might people know about the programme given the vastness of the building and its capacity to absorb and distract visitors.

There’s gentility and steeliness to ‘Refugees Welcome’ and its simplicity is deceiving. Mripa invites people into the van and evokes memories of being warmly welcomed from Kosovo in the late 1990’s as a prompt for conversation; but is this performance, agitprop, site-specific installation or activism? She embraces all these labels and more. The symbolism of the van is itself a statement. It’s a folksy living room – kitsch in its choice of furniture yet stark in its use of metal hooks with letters hanging on each side, spelling out ‘Refugees Welcome’. Evoking perilous passage across borders and deadly claustrophobia, the anomaly of the Union Jack on the back wall – framed like tapestry or wallpaper – is offset by the neon sign spelling ‘Hope’. In each object we read playfulness, irony, and metaphor not least of all triggered by the ‘tea for two’ props providing a conduit for conversations.

Since Who Are We?, Mripa has been traveling around the UK to different locations – literally taking her show on the road. ‘Have a cup of tea with a refugee’ is an easy catch phrase for journalists covering the installation. Yet for Mripa the seeming banality of the tea ritual speaks volumes about British hospitality and its recent, even cruel demise – questioning in each performance what has happened to that collective welcome and widespread hospitality. Little by little, conversations in the Refugees Welcome van paint a picture of people’s fears, anxieties and hopeful desires about what it means to live in Britain or call oneself ‘British’ in Brexit times.

Almost none of the work at Who Are We? was or is easily consumed; instead objects and installations acted as triggers for public engagement.

In some instances, the political meaning was overtly evident. Bern O’Donoghue’s installation, Dead Reckoning, literally performed Santiago Zabala’s



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argument in Why Only Art Can Save Us Now:Aesthetics and the Absence of Emergency.

‘Instead of inviting us to contemplate its beauty, a work calls us to respond, react and become involved’.

Dead Reckoning is heart-achingly moving. Day after day O’Donoghue laid out hundreds of miniature origami boats representing the lives of missing migrants lost in the Mediterranean en route to Europe. These small objects strewn across the gallery floor in the form of a participatory installation made an incremental statement. Visitors were invited into the process of crafting the artwork: each tiny boat represented a migrant lost at sea and an individual’s life story – transforming the abstract statistics and data into something embodied and human. Co-production was dependent on exchanges facilitated by the artist who persistently asks questions and dispels myths – not letting us off the hook. O’Donoghue managed to steadily steer the sensational media narratives about ‘refugees’ and displacement into a more intimate space of learning and solidarity.

Like Mripa, Dead Reckoning is entirely reliant on



participation in order to make sense. And, echoing Zabala, the installation worked at a visceral and ‘existential level’. As one participant puts it: ‘It’s only when you put these [boats] out that you realise that this is a person. It really concentrates the mind to think that it is actually somebody who drowned’.

It’s possible to calculate in quantifiable terms the impact of Who Are We?. Footfall metrics approximate 5,300 visitors throughout the week with on average a forty-minute engagement or stay on the floor. The quality of the exchanges is harder to evaluate yet fascinating to observe in the accompanying short films shot by filmmaker, Marcia Chandra, throughout the week and featured here. O’Donoghue’s active journeying across the roles of ‘Artist, Educator and Facilitator’ evokes the potential value and sliding scale of exchange and of what to expect, in part, from ‘art’ in these tumultuous times. For as she puts it: ‘It is in the small and the simple where human scale may be found, where one mind is changed, and we begin to change the world’.

Did we challenge structural inequity? Who Are We? is a much more modest endeavor than the great global beast that is Documenta 14 caustically critiqued by Varoufakis. At very best we began to open up spaces for difficult conversations, since many of the artists, activists and academics at Who Are We? are committed to drawing audiences into work exploring identity, citizenship, displacement, rights and belonging. The sustained dialogue which developed between artists

and academics opened up unique avenues and ways of reciprocal thinking and sharing/learning in the lead-up to the programme. This coupling of artists with academic partners – whilst not overtly evident in the final physical curation – played a pivotal role in the exploration of multiple, parallel research themes and agendas underpinning the work (instances of these dialogues are published in this series). Arguably the added value of cross-sector exchange resulted in a shared commitment to engage wider audiences through a range of compelling art forms and media. Reviewer, Chrissie Tiller walks us through the degrees of social and public impact in her participant-observation of the eclectic richness of installations and participatory approaches.

Like all experiments Tate Exchange is in its infancy and thus productively flawed. It has, however, opened up opportunities for collective exploration via a testing ground for ideas and projects. Detractors will rightly say that such well-intentioned experiments about art and social change remain separate from the wider infrastructure of Tate Modern – indeed only happen on the 5th Floor. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges in Year 2 for Who Are We? at Tate Exchange will be to imagine the creative methodologies in other gallery spaces across the Tate. To encounter them, as Tiller says ‘curated alongside Wolfgang Tillmans’ critique of Blair, or Rauschenberg’s images of late 20th century political turmoil’. The challenge will also be to situate the work beyond the boundaries of Tate Exchange and Metropolitan London.

THINKING AND FEELING : MIGRATION DIFFERENTLY

Bern O'Donoghue and Vicki Squire.

VS: Hi Bern. I'd like to start our dialogue with a personal question for you, so as to understand more about your installation, Dead Reckoning, and what it means to you. Who is Bern O'Donoghue, and why does she care that people are dying at sea in boats?

BO'D: I am a visual artist based in East Sussex who makes socially engaged work. The more I explore societal issues, the clearer it is to me that lives and actions across this planet are interconnected. It follows that we could all benefit from understanding and engaging with events in the wider world, as well as those within our immediate community. It's my belief that how we choose to respond to what's happening outside our own bubble, including to desperate people risking their lives in flimsy boats, is a measure of how emotionally healthy society is and that's something I care about deeply.

more clearly depict the loss of life month by month, highlighting how changes such as weather, season or policies surrounding migration in Europe might affect the number of people who have died.

VS: So, you literally make your work in your kitchen to draw connections between your daily life and relationships, and those of the people on the move who your artwork represents? That is really interesting because it brings the experiential dimension 'back home', so to speak. Academics examining migration and more broadly working across the social sciences have done a lot of analysis of the meaning and significance of home over recent years, and have also increasingly paid attention to the importance of understanding the experiential dimensions of migratory journeys. This is also something that our project seeks to draw attention to – the experiences of people on the move. By focusing on these experiences, we seek to re-humanise people making the journey across the Mediterranean Sea in the face of dehumanising policies and media coverage that

summer approached and deaths increased, thousands of boats amassed around our home and discussion in the news became ever more polarised. All I could think was, 'These are all someone's son or daughter' and began marking each boat with a relationship to another person. By this time I realised that I wanted to campaign for safe passage and to use my work to challenge myths surrounding the refugee crisis.

VS: That resonates a lot with our concerns. In Crossing the Med we also wanted to challenge the assumptions that misrepresent the journeys, lives and aspirations of people on the move. We decided to carry out in-depth interviews with people making the journey across the sea so that the complexity of different stories could be documented. More than this, we also wanted to give people arriving to the European Union the chance to share their stories in a way that could in some way counter the dehumanising treatment the faced along the journey and on arrival. Of course, we don't want to overstate this, yet giving people time and space –

For me, producing work with a view of justice for all is critical because it disrupts the tendency for us to perceive our lives in isolation from others.

VS: That reminds me of Martin Luther King's statement that "justice is indivisible". He says that we cannot think about justice for ourselves without paying attention to justice for others. I find this insight very important and it has been background inspiration for our research on the project Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat, which looks at the struggles of people who are move under precarious conditions. For me, producing work with a view justice for all is critical because it disrupts the tendency for us to perceive our lives in isolation from others. This tendency could be understood as a 'root cause' for xenophobia, which I see as closely connected with an economic rationality and a colonial tradition that divides people from each other and discards those deemed to be unworthy. Scholars like Achille Mbembe talk about this in terms of 'disposable lives'. Is this a helpful way to describe what the boats in the Dead Reckoning installation represent for you?

BO'D: 'Disposable lives' is a very apt term if we look at the collective ambivalence that is shown to the deaths of refugees and migrants at the borders we've created around Europe. Each boat in Dead Reckoning 2016 represents an individual who has been recorded as drowned last year in the Mediterranean Sea en route to Europe. I use data collected by IOM in their Missing Migrants Project. Every one of the 5,083 paper boats symbolises a loss of someone significant: a daughter, son, neighbour or friend. I've deliberately chosen to work on the project in my kitchen, where my own family gathers most, using water and fragile materials to construct a work which identifies some of the most basic similarities we share with refugees and migrants. Throughout 2016 I hand marbled and dried hundreds of pieces of A4 paper, before turning them into tiny origami boats. I used twelve different colour combinations to marble the paper to

so often dominate. This is not only a driving concern of Crossing the Med, but also another project I am working on, called Human Dignity and Biophysical Violence, which looks at the ways that border deaths are tolerated – and even produced – by policy and the collective ambivalence that you mention. I am particularly concerned here in the ways that, despite occasional rhetoric to the contrary, respect for the dignity of each person's life is wholly disregarded in Europe's current agenda on migration. So, what was the driving force for you to carry out Dead Reckoning in its current form?

BO'D: I originally began this project mid April 2015, when two news reports six days apart showed that boats carrying refugees had capsized off the Libyan coast. I was stopped in my tracks by the fact that 1200 people had drowned. It was so shocking and distressing such a huge number of people had died in this way, but equally troubling was the pejorative language used by certain politicians and sections of the media in response to the accidents.

I found it disturbing to see numbers used as a means of distancing people living in safety from the human tragedy and felt compelled to make some work to bridge that distance and began researching the refugee crisis. As the crisis continued to unfold, living and dead seemed to be afforded little dignity or compassion. The language was coarsening by the day, which was frequently overwhelming.

I started marbling paper with no clear idea of how to it might be used, other than I intended to make something reconnecting the viewer to the humans hidden behind statistics. Folding the paper into boats came from thinking about how vulnerable people were in the sea. As

not only to share their stories but also to voice their concerns and demands – has proven very powerful in various ways. Rather than numbers, our research is about stories – not the stories of victims but the stories of people who can and do speak back to policy makers and 'host' societies to challenge some of the assumptions that lead to detrimental policies and negative societal responses in the first place. It's not a comfortable process to go through, to sit face-to-face with the people that we interview or to look at the data that our research is producing, but we still think it is important. Can you say a bit more about how making and installing the paper boats help you to deal with the horror of increasing numbers of border deaths – not only at sea but also across other sites across and beyond Europe?

BO'D: That's a hard question.... there are times when I don't feel it helps me at all! Looking at deaths in the Mediterranean has produced so much work so far, I feel as if I've only just begun to scratch the surface. It's very wearing to think continuously about trauma so drawing for it's own sake in the studio can sometimes seem incredibly tempting, but I have a sense that watching terrible events unfold and feeling anger or sadness and not using that energy to help in some way is a waste of that experience. So, I make Dead Reckoning and engage in widening the debate. As an artist, I'm in the privileged position of being able to look at challenging ideas and present information in a manageable way. It seems reasonable that if I ask my audience to engage with the installation and experience difficult feelings, I too must be prepared to feel some of those difficult emotions, else how can I expect them to? How I feel, how someone terrified in a boat feels, how someone unwilling to help refugees feels, can all be imagined

and channelled alongside presentation of the facts to interrogate and understand the overlap of 'us' and 'them'. These are the components of the creative toolkit I use in Dead Reckoning in an attempt to foster connection, so that empathy and nuanced discourse might follow.

VS: That's very interesting. This question of how to engage emotions – not avoiding the discomfort it involves but mobilising and productively transforming pain and anger – is an idea I started exploring in my last book, Post/Humanitarian Politics Between Mexico and the US. I was looking at different humanitarian responses to migrant deaths in the desert in the US, and I found the work of scholars such as Miriam Ticktin on the politics of care, and Claudia Aradau on the politics of pity, very important as critiques of humanitarian politics. Since humanitarianism involves an unequal relation between people who are privileged (that is, humanitarian actors) and those who are not (people actually undertaking the precarious journey through the Sonoran Desert), it is highly problematic. But I was also interested in the ways that some humanitarian actions involved anger rather than pity, or simply respect for the life and demands of another. Does this involve a different type of politics, that acknowledges a position of privilege while also challenging such privilege through actions

the electorate, so if they choose to reinforce borders and be economical with the truth about migration as opposed to presenting a balanced picture or defend the rights of refugees, it's hardly surprising that public opinion hardens too. It is a very normal response to push away other people's misfortune and focus on self-interest when under pressure, but legitimate concerns about employment and the pressures locally are not the fault of migration or refugees. Too often there is a lack of political courage to say this or to speak out against populism, which emboldens the far right groups to exploit anxiety and conflate refugees with terrorism.

VS: That's a good point. There is now a long history of approaching migration as a security issue linked to terrorism. In my PhD – which I did a long time ago now! – I looked at the ways that asylum seeking in the UK and across Europe was presented as a security problem post-9/11. But even at that time I was very struck by the work of International Relations scholars such as Jef Huysmans, who point to a longer history of what is called in political science 'the securitisation of migration'. I think that we can see the legacy of this history today in policies such as Trump's recent attempt to ban the entrance of refugees to the US, as well as in EU efforts to prevent migrants from entering the territory of states within the Union. Of course, we have also seen this in



Brexit debates in the UK, highlighting the problematic legacy of irresponsible linkages of migration, terrorism and more general concerns about 'foreigners' as 'threatening others' over a number of decades. When you have dialogue with people through Dead Reckoning, what sort of responses do you get? What is the most negative/positive reaction that the exhibit provoked and how did you deal with this?

BO'D: Generally very good, unless I'm deliberately working in a community where people are hostile to migration. Children are always more emotionally open than adults, often showing empathy and I believe this is because they are encouraged to practice values led thinking. I get a mixed response from adults, partly because we have learned to control our responses and also because adult values are often conflicted by the compromises that we make. In terms of the most positive response, there have been lots, but one that stands out is a conversation with the deputy headmistress following workshops with Year 5 pupils in a school. The children had been making welcome boats with me to share locally, discussing language and how to be welcoming. In the class was a Syrian child who had joined the school a few months previously and who had been very reserved. A few days after our workshop, he began to talk with his classmates for the first time about some of his experiences as a refugee and the children were in turn very supportive. Staff said this was very good progress for the boy, convinced that the workshops had promoted a safer environment and that all the children benefited as a result. I think the most challenging example was when I expressed concern about language Government ministers had been using on

the refugee crisis and migration with a Conservative MP, who attempted to distance himself and to identify as an MP with a real interest in helping refugees yet who also needed to respond to his constituents...

VS: It is really interesting hearing you talk about this. As a research team we often feel a pressure to make an 'impact' on the audiences of our research – and of course, policy makers are often a prime audience for social scientists. Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat has taken its particular point of departure the European policy agenda, and we have done a lot of work to try to point to the problems of the assumptions that this involves. For example, our evidence does not support the assumption that deterrent policies work, and rejects the divide between political and economic (forced and voluntary) migrants. This resonates a lot with what you are talking about, and from the start we wanted to reach wider audiences to challenge the assumptions that inform bad policies – in particular by raising awareness of the impact of such policy on the experiences of people on the move. We emphasise that without taking these experiences seriously, policies will continue to fail. It is serendipitous for us that this opportunity to collaborate with Dead Reckoning arose, because it helps us to reach wider publics as we have always wanted to do with this research. We have

developed an online story map to facilitate this, where people can follow individual journeys to understand more about the complexity and challenges of migratory experiences.

BO'D: I'm looking forward to using the interactive map with the installation. It will be interesting to see how visitors respond to the stories of real people when confronted with the thousands of boats. It's a gentle reminder again that every one of those people who've died have a story about why they leave and why they're significant. Collaborating with Crossing the Med as part of Who are we? feels like a very natural fit for many reasons. As a starting point, we both look at border deaths and want to see change. I want to draw attention to our ambivalence in Europe towards refugees and migrants. What does that mean for us as civilised human beings? Your work attempts to make sense of how of death has become a normalised dimension of border control in privileged regions. We both want to see this transformed and through collaboration we might find a way of communicating the benefits gained by this. I want to develop work with Crossing the Med which explores the mutual value of connection and empathy outside our immediate circles. I'm looking forward to finding ways of bringing to a wider audience the stories the project has collected and show the benefits of interdependence. When I first started this project, I envisaged a year's work, maybe two, but the more I uncovered, the more I felt this might be the focus of my work for many years to come. Now Brexit, Trump and the rise of the far right are amplifying tensions felt around the world, there's even more need continue tackling myths and presenting data in accessible forms.

THE HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT TOUR

Most people have heard the term by now. The Windrush scandal dominated the media and political debates after it emerged people from the Caribbean were barred from working, free medical treatment and some were deported after arriving to the UK as children, who were British citizens. They spent a lifetime building a life, a family and working here. The brutality of the immigration system came into public view on a larger scale than before, and the callousness of Home Office processes shocked many who have not been following for years.

Many think the term has been made up by campaigners or politicians critical of the governments approach to keep their promise to reduce immigration to the tens of thousands. In fact, it was the Prime Minister during her time as Home Secretary; “The aim is to create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal migration.”

In 2013 Theresa May publicised her aim, shaping the governments forthcoming immigration policy. A year before the Hostile Environment Working Group was set up, which was changed to the Inter-Ministerial Group on Migrants’ Access to Benefits and Public Services. The purpose of this group was to tighten the existing rules and restrictions that prevented people accessing public



deemed to be undocumented. This shows we can win this.

services, social support and employment who didn’t have legal status.

As suggested, this approach to controlling immigration goes a lot further than previous attempts. Instead of having the border at traditional entrance and exit points, such as air and land ports, the hostile environment brings the border inside to public and private services. In order to do that, it means people who work within these services have to perform immigration checks and effectively control these internal borders and as part of their jobs.

Services people interact with on a daily basis have become sites of the border. In order to access higher education, the NHS, banking, housing, a driving licence, employment, and social support people have to justify and prove their immigration status. Children’s country of origin and nationality have been collected by the Department for Education and shared with the Home Office. Even people who are sleeping rough or going about their daily lives at work or home they could be subject to street stops and raids by immigration enforcement teams.

The hostile environment has largely been implemented through two immigration laws in 2014 and 2016. While these laws criminalise undocumented migrants and incentive or demand collaboration with surveillance, enforcement and the denial of necessary services, the foundations these Acts are built on go back much further. Decades of increasingly restrictive immigration laws and policies have been justified through dehumanising rhetoric in the media and politics.

Production of people and places

As part of the Who Are We? Project a group of activists, artists and academics came together to participate in The Hostile Environment Tour. Responding to the theme of production of people and places, the tour took people to some of the key sites where the hostile environment is enacted; making some people border guards and criminalising others, all the while collecting and sharing peoples personal data with the Home Office to create a web of immigration controls and surveillance in our daily lives. The areas focused on were supported by Liberty’s A Guide to the Hostile Environment. They were schools, higher education,

health, banking, housing, driving, employment, migrant families and social support, rough sleeping, street stops and raids.

Two walking tours animated the hostile environment further. The first tour was led by Corey Stoughton, the Head of Advocacy for Liberty, and the second tour was led by Yasmine, a former detainee and Hunger for Freedom striker and myself, a PhD researcher who coordinated the project. Both days a committed group who had come to see the Who Are We? Project walked around the Tour, taking between 45 minutes – an hour. Together we shared our knowledge and understanding of the hostile environment, with people asking questions and chipping in their experiences. For most people it expanded their understanding beyond the one or two areas they knew, for others they were alarmed at the collaboration between organisations and the Home Office – saying they were going to ask more questions at the organisations they worked with. After the walking tours, we ran a poster making workshop. People joined in using the stencils, paints and felt pens to get making. Some posters responded to the hostile environment as curated in the tour, some were anti-detention posters to take to the next Shut Down Yarl’s Wood demonstration while some were about migration generally. Both the tour and the workshops were an opportunity to discuss the design of the hostile environment beyond what was exhibited in the tour. There was also opportunities to discuss ways people could challenge the hostile environment. Its implementation requires communities to enforce and comply with the rules, breaking down relationships and trust within workplaces, schools, hospitals and in communities. It can be as simple as refusing to give your address or challenge why someone needs to see your passport or driving licence before providing you a service. There are also many grassroots activist groups who you can support or get involved with. There have been three significant wins that have been chipping away at the hostile environment in the last few weeks. The Department for Education has stopped collecting country of origin and nationality data on students as part of the school census, NHS Digital has promised to stop sharing data with the Home Office, and bank accounts will no longer be frozen if the account holder is deemed to be undocumented. This shows we can win this.

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ILLEGAL HUMAN

by Hamdi Khalif

‘I see you’ve brought your colours’ they hiss
and I shrunk under my technicolored coat
I know what they really mean. Why isn’t my soul as dark as my skin?
And I wonder what they picture when they think darkness
Is it a starless night
Or perhaps the backs of their shoes
Or is it ants drowning like black bodies in the Mediterranean
I wonder if they see me. Or if they see a leech. A monster. A piece of shit. Something. Anything.
Other than human
‘Why are you here?’ they ask
I know they don’t care. The jingling in their pockets remind me of this.
And their tone...
I don’t even have a word for this.



Is there a word worth less than worthless?
I shift uncomfortably under my coat. Even though it’s chilly. I’m sweating under pressure.
‘You’re an illegal immigrant’
‘Do you understand what this means?’
Their words wound
The syllables like shots
Just one of the many my heart has endured
‘Take off your coat’ they order
And I instinctively cross my arms around my chest
‘Take it off’
My sealed lips say ‘no’
They yank it off me
They shouldn’t have done that
My soul spits out words
they’ll never understand

FROM TROY TO
TEESSIDE:
CONNECTING DIVIDED
COMMUNITIES

Questions about the role of narratives, art and work in constructing communities structured my conversation with Isabel Lima at the Tate Exchange’s “Who are we?” project. We sat beside a wooden cart with some wooden plant holders (some with young vegetable plants in). These, it emerged, were some of the remains of a Wooden Horse — like the Trojan one but with a dramatically different purpose.

While other blogs in these series replicate the format of conversations with artists, activists and curators, this one is more of a reflection on a conversation that circulated around the theme of the transformative potential of art and performance. We began by talking about the relationship between the Trojan Horse and Isabel’s project Gresham’s Wooden Horse, and encompassed what artists do, how communities can

be divided or connected, how those with power can facilitate or frustrate others, how art-works can have afterlives, and much more in a remarkably short time.



First of all, the Gresham horse. Well, first, Gresham. Isabel reminded me of the stark moment when the British media disseminated the news that the places where migrants and refugees were being housed in the Middlesbrough’s Gresham neighbourhood all had red doors. They were therefore easily targeted by those hostile to outsiders. In this area of social deprivation, tensions were high. Isabel conceived the notion that a new wooden horse could be a way of taking control of territory. Just as in Troy but with an ambition to connect rather than conquer. There is a trick here: a conceit that public art work (work to produce, display and engage with art) can be for the public good. Rather than the deceit of hiding power and purpose, or the

pretense of withdrawal to allow locals to flourish, the Gresham horse was an aspect of an investigation of the responsibilities of artists (perhaps especially those with public funding). In a context of precariousness (a condition of our time), Isabel aimed to facilitate and co-produce means by which the community could increase its self-representation as well as self-understanding.

This begs the question, “What community?”. So, the real trick was to get people involved together. The co-construction of a large structure, its movement through the streets to an area damaged by the effects of global processes (financial, military, climactic and other), and the shared celebrations of its success were all stages in making a community for which this could become a community project. And it did not end with the celebration of the horse’s arrival in a space made in the demolition of homes. The horse became a cart because the council refused to allow it to become a permanent installation. The cart, however, re-assembles the wood, the labour and the community by providing a means of sharing plants, coffee and other things.

In short, Isabel and I talked about the political and social roles of art, theatre and performance. Even ancient tales — like that of the Trojan horse — have an archetypal power. They capture imaginations and can, when told or performed in suitable ways, do more than entertain. As Isabel puts it, they can be listening acts not only speech acts. Art works to make us even as we work to make art. And making things together not only brings people together, it re-assembles communities with confidence that more can be done.

In my research I explore forms of violence refugees experience while seeking sanctuary in Europe. My case study is Lesvos Island which since 2015 has been the epicentre of the refugee crisis. Since 2015, the EU’s response towards refugee crisis is expressed through hostility, proliferation of borders, fences and controls instead of safe passages. Borders are hostile and violent terrains which have also proved to be fatal. Those hostile responses challenge the self-understanding of EU and raise questions regarding the values “we” have as Europeans. If hostility instead of solidarity becomes the core of our values then Who Are We and who are we becoming?

Evgenia Iliadou, The Open University

THE ARTIST IN THE
DRESSING GOWN:
ENCOUNTERS WITH
RICHARD DEDOMENICI

I first met Richard DeDomenici at a retreat on arts and social change organised by Counterpoints Arts at Dartington Hall. He made an impression by announcing he would attend the following morning’s activities in his dressing gown... and then actually doing so.

I also remember Richard’s rapid-fire presentation of his work (he took the three-minute time limit very seriously), which took us from boybands and Channel 4 to shopping centres and balloons – avenues not always visited when journeying in the ‘art world’.

Four months later, I was welcoming Richard to the Refugee Week 2017 Conference, where we’d invited him to deliver what had become bizarrely known in our office as a ‘balloon icebreaker’. Stood on stage in front of 200 Refugee Week organisers and supporters from around the country, Richard presented Free Balloons, a work which sees him giving away balloons emblazoned with subversive messages in public spaces, ranging from the queue at Dismaland

to a newly-opened mega shopping centre in Liverpool.

The concept, he explained, came from a frustration with traditional protest, alongside a realisation that ‘people will always take a free balloon’ – even if it says ‘bored of shopping’ and they are gearing up for a day of serious retail therapy.

We were bleary-eyed after long journeys and (in my case) late nights, and perhaps a little shy, but Richard soon had us all creasing with laughter in our seats (the slogan “my Marxist feminist dialectic brings all the boys to the yard” read out with poise and finesse by a delegate from Northern Ireland was one of my favourite moments of the day).

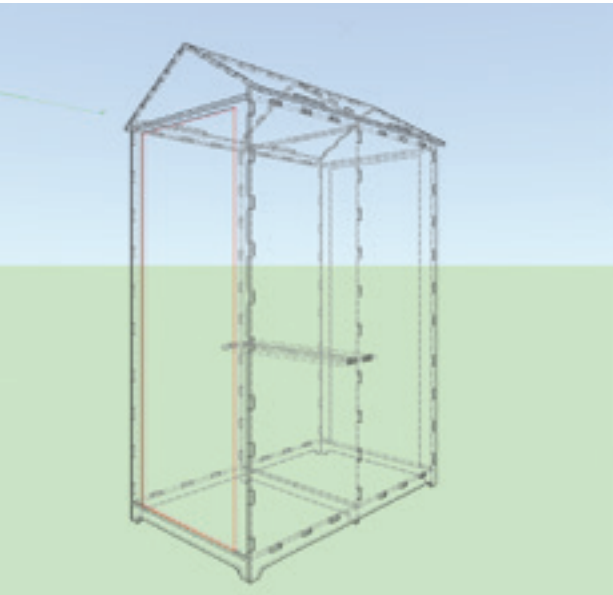
It wasn’t long before the ice was well and truly broken and we were working together to come up with our own balloon slogans, before voting on a shared favourite, which Counterpoints’ co-director Almir had boldly promised would be printed on real balloons for Refugee Week (‘They’re Here Because We’re There’ won the top spot).

The session exemplified what is great about Richard’s art: it was subversive and funny, it came from a political place but was unintimidating and felt easy for everyone to engage in and come together around.

What I like about Richard’s work is the way it blurs boundaries between art, activism and popular culture. It says: Art and activism can be funny; engaging with popular culture can be political. It is that wild or ‘silly’ thought you have while sat on the train or watching

daytime TV, played out in reality: What if I founded a boyband of asylum seekers? What if I gatecrashed the Olympic torch relay with a homemade replica torch? What if I protested gentrification by reimagining London’s skyscrapers as satirical sex toys?!

For Who Are We?, Richard is exploring a new ‘what if’, one first imagined at the arts and social change retreat where he wowed us all in his bathrobe: What if, in the context of deepening social divisions, we facilitate encounters in a shed, where people are invited to share their fears through the protection of a dividing wall? What if, after the conversation, they are given the choice of walking away through their separate doors, or daring to meet face to face?



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BEYOND THE BABBLE: A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE ART OF LISTENING

Beyond The Babble is an interactive and participatory audio focused installation, exploring questions of identity, belonging and the fragile nuance of power-shifts around the impact of the collective and individual voice beyond the babble of social noise.

As a ‘Social Broadcaster’ Lucia Scazzocchio has been exploring how individual storytelling and voiced ‘declarations’ not only empower the narrator as they articulate them, but can create shared empathy and deeper understanding for the listener when heard in the right context, often providing insight into wider stories and current debates. Lucia is in conversation with GiotA Alevizou from The Open University – exploring ways in which creative acts, identity and collective action intersect with the politics of and mainstream representations of austerity and the migration crisis.

GA: You describe yourself as a Social Broadcaster and community facilitator or mediator. Can you elaborate, and link to the ways in which these connects to ‘Beyond the Babble’ installation at Tate Exchange as part of the Who Are We project?

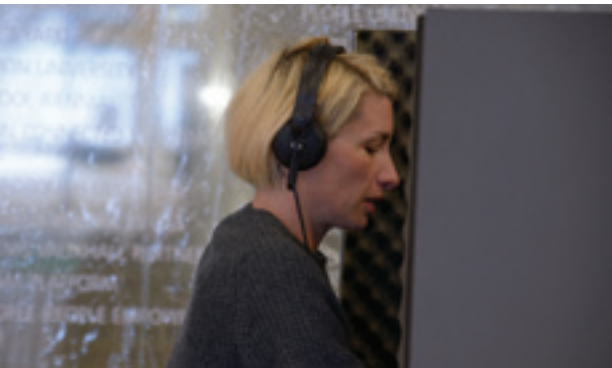
LS: Participants are invited to record personal thoughts, stories and experiences around questions of individual and collective identity as well as collective action. Over the course of the exhibition each recording is integrated into a living and growing sound installation. When heard all together these voices are an unidentifiable babble, however by tuning into a specific channel, each individual voice can be properly integrated, cutting through the noise, and generating its own impact as part of a collective.

GA: Certainly the questions will be open, but they can link to existing research and debates inviting participants to record personal thoughts and assumptions, stories and experiences, declarations and commitments or questions around individual

and collective identity: Who am I? Who are we? How Can I act?

LS: It could be something along the lines of ‘How do you identify yourself? What influences your identity? How and why has this changed? Then, who do you identify with? and what do you do in terms of acting for what you believe in?

GA: Can you describe how these participants experience expressing themselves across these issues with examples from your previous projects?



LS: By inviting people to reveal personal journeys and stories you get to understand how they got to certain conclusions or situations, where they’re at in their thoughts; why a certain place is important and how they’ve adapted, or what they have become in order to fit in or not and what has become important or why; and in order to come to that point, you have to get to the more personal story ... it’s more a process of revealing through a conversation ...and as they talk, they’re almost working it out – they may not have really thought like that until they are in this sort of conversation; so it’s the asking little questions to get people to reflect. It’s almost becomes a monologue, it’s like thinking out loud...

GA: You mention that this is about inviting and getting people to reflect deeper about certain things, moving away from the ‘superficiality’ of voice in places like say, twitter In a sense it’s an opportunity to express themselves in confessional and autobiographical narratives in a different format, without having to worry about issues of exposure, breaches of privacy and surveillance that have become more prevalent these days...

LS: Yes, exactly. So the other part of these installations /interviews is juxtaposing the individual and collective and how they can work together; when the individual story can become part of a collective story This is not relevant in the interview per se, but that’s where we are getting to in the process.

GA: And yes, that element of process is important; I see it in the way you’ve described it, that individual interviews are part of a process of a [collective] co-interrogation, a performative autobiography; the collective is encountering common voices, which I think is an interesting aspect. I am wondering, what do your subjects feel about the process – a process that I feel is quite emancipatory...

LS: It’s quite interesting, because it’s very similar to therapy. Neither I nor participants come to the conversation with that in mind, (and I make it clear that I am not a trained therapist) but often it becomes that because you’ve got somebody interested in you, someone who’s actively listening to you, and there’s something that happens; so the more someone is interested, the more you want to reveal and so – it’s often very emotional; In the last project Something to Declare about half of the people that participated, had an emotional moment, some held back tears. Once people have the opportunity to be listened to, they open up and let go... Yet there’s this revelatory moment, where you ‘can hear something click’, people find it exceptionally rewarding, this the process of being listened to/heard...

GA: Is the fact that the conversation is recorded for a ‘sonic’ installation important in that part of revelation – especially because it can be anonymous – or also part of a radio broadcast. And how do people feel about the output? Is it more the output or the process then?

LS: A lot of people after an interview have said they enjoyed the process and learned a lot about themselves through these self narratives ... But a lot goes into the editing people come back to me and say That they felt that when they were speaking, they were all muddled up and confused and they were surprised how clear they sounded. So in the edit I find the thread and find the essence in what they are saying to produce a clear story And so people are surprised at how eloquent they come across in the final piece. Some people respond to the broadcast and repost it and share and are very proud, or use it to promote what they are doing; Others do nothing about it, in some ways they are working out who

they are, and I am synthesising who they are at that moment...

GA: Could Beyond the Babble be used as an installation to raise awareness about the importance of different stories or as a ‘meditative exercise’ to media literacy? How does your role as a social broadcaster then relate to this? And how is it different from say, a social media facilitator?

LS: The ‘social’ in social broadcasting doesn’t refer to the ‘social’ of social media; it’s about the individual story and it aims to help us understand the wider social context through this story. So the social, focuses on the idea of a voice within society, rather than a sharable piece of content; that’s an important distinction. Social media is good in terms of surface content and immediacy; you see a picture and you like it or share it, but often you don’t go beyond that. So I am trying to go beyond that. It’s very hard to go deep and these conversations are about giving a bit more context – understanding the journey and experience of what someone has been through, what they are doing and who they are . You know when someone enjoys cooking – silly example I know – but you are not going to find out about the memory of a smell that inspired them without having an intimate process and going a little bit deeper, and I think that the audio interview is a very effective and efficient way to get to that. With a video interview, you need a long time [and training] to feel comfortable (in front of the camera) and people are often very self-conscious, or obsessed about how they look, or whether they are portrayed the way they want; with audio you get passed all of that; it’s interesting because you see that even when people are very practiced at interviews [like celebrities] they take much longer to get passed that practiced façade and you get to a wall ... but people who are not used to it, often get passed that very quickly – people are very willing to reveal and open up when you show an interest in them.

GA: Let’s talk about other aspects of your work... In parts of my research, notions of cultural and digital citizenship often connect with different articulations of memory and attachment, particularly around the ways in which people communicate aspirations or claim rights to a place and or when they are performing creative rights to ‘make place’... In your previous projects, you also have worked with a variety of publics and especially people in local communities. What does place and belonging mean to the participants in your previous installations? And how is affinity to place and living together expressed through oral declarations? Have there been any particular themes?

LS: Isolation and urban environment ... Memory and nostalgia... You have to differentiate between nostalgia and real memory; I have done a lot of projects around the East End – a recent one was around the Afro-Caribbean community living in and around the isle of Dogs Backyard – Reflections of Home and Belonging) It’s a very small community, but the whole project was about this identity within the East End; it was interesting because even across four generations, there was a similar sort of nostalgia about a distant

sense of community and how people used to know their neighbours and how everyone used to be in and out of each other’s others houses ... I got the same sense of nostalgia from an 80 year old and an 18 year old – how they missed this sense of community that they had when they were growing up and that its not there any more; sometimes these glossy nostalgic feelings get in the way of memory... But there were of course also the unpleasant memories of racism and discrimination] and how it affects a person and how they dealt with that ... there’s the recounting of facts and stories and then there’s the affect /effect of nostalgia.

GA: It is really interesting what you are saying, because the element of affective, emotional nostalgia goes beyond, and often against factual memories, or indeed factual evidence; this particularly interesting in the recent rise of populism, I think and in current campaigns against Hate, Common Values which can go either way.

LS: I’ve thought about this a lot – and it relates to how you are trying to give context to something; I will have the individual stories as separate stories and then I will create the ‘audioscape’ as a distinctive piece – a lot of the stories will be interwoven to become one piece – as a collective group – they only become a story because they are grouped together based on



a common thread, although individually listening to each story is also important. They create something quite different when they are interwoven. For example in Backyard -Reflections of Home and Belonging – each person has a story and on the website, you can hear them individually, but collectively as an audio piece, they give a more complete sense of four generations, of a community, of a place; it’s about a very specific experience of a group of people living in the East End but not just specifically there ... you also get the context and meaning of black identity through different moments in history in the UK (from the 50s to now) and also what it means to be a Londoner and a Eastender as well as part of specific community within the EastEnd...You wouldn’t get that from the individual stories, you get that when they are all together.

GA: This is an interesting story about stories of identity and belonging; It’s the interwoven layers of the different stories that matter in generating this form of affective knowledge I guess ... how would that work if they were intersected with each other?

LS: In a sense that’s what I do with these audioscapes; it’s about using the different sounds to punctuate what they are saying; it is becoming more of an artistic piece rather than straightforward oral history (or series of interviews); so the sounds, the music and the sound effects are all there to help us understand and tune into the story and to feel something– to give it emotion. It’s not just about listening to straightforward interviews. ... a story is revealed.

GA: And I guess that takes social broadcasting within and beyond social media; I see it having the potential to augment affective narratives and situate oral history in Britain within a new genre of sonic art. I think this could be an innovation. How do you feel about that? What are you aiming to communicate artistically and as a media professional?

LS: In the same way that a cinematographer will use beautiful settings to tell a story better in film, or a writer will use descriptive words – it’s a medium. Sound is my artistic medium and I am a storyteller and I am telling real stories – it’s not fiction; and the audioscaping side of things is my creativity – it’s my fiction. I’m using these tools to tell a story in the most emotive way, to get the audience interested, to get them engaged. Someone may film a landscape out of their window, but if you add music and a voiceover it becomes a different story...It’s these layers of creativity that I am interested in adding to punctuate the emotions and also making something interesting – you are more likely to remember it this way.

GA: Is it the blending of your identity as a journalist, broadcaster and ‘artist’? and would this type of work be something like an oral history archive or a sonic documentary?

LS: It’s funny because I’ve never really thought of myself as an artist, but why not? What I’ve done so far is more journalistic, but this audioscaping work is more artistic and abstract. I am interested in people and what they have to say. Everyone has something interesting to say and I want to enable them to say it better ... I am interested in stories of belonging and identity. So the idea of the collective is interesting (to me), because I like putting things in groups and giving context to the stories and addressing them in the oral, sonic context ... The difference is that news or journalistic work has a temporal significance, I’m listening to a personal story and putting it in context so that you can think for yourself. What’s important through what I am doing (audioscaping) is that I am revealing what they’ve revealed to me, what is important to them – almost like a flashlight; but it is very subtle and open to interpretation.... Yes it’s an oral/sonic documentary, but I am not trying to make a point or convey a particular message it’s the voice (or voices) of the participant(s) that do this and sometimes this is very much for the participant(s); its the people involved who sometimes gain more from the process; other times it’s the broadcast as an outcome that is more important as a means to tell and ‘broadcast’ an individual or a collective story.

It’s quite interesting, because it’s very similar to therapy. Neither I nor participants come to the conversation with that in mind, (and I make it clear that I am not a trained therapist) but often it becomes that because

you’ve got somebody interested in you, someone who’s actively listening to you, and there’s something that happens; so the more someone is interested, the more you want to reveal and so – it’s often very emotional.

REIMAGINING GOVERNMENT DATA

Citizens have a right to actively participate in making knowledge about the societies of which they are a part and opening them to democratic contestation, intervention and reinvention.

The ‘Who Are We?’ programme provoked us to intervene in fundamental questions about who decides, classifies and ascribes who are ‘we’ as Europeans. Our contribution approached these questions in relation to digital technologies and data, which are increasingly part of making up who we are and how we are known by governments, corporations and software and app developers. Our contribution brought together our different interests and approaches to this issue.

For Evelyn, a sociologist, how European Union member states are mobilising new digital technologies and data to innovate statistical practices in order to know the ‘European population’ is a focus of her current research project, ARITHMUS.

For Dawid, a digital designer, how digital interaction and design enable people to participate in the making of data and visualisations is a concern of his various projects. We brought our interests together by imagining a digital installation that could respond to a question provoked by the programme: how do we know who we are?

Some initial premises

Europe is imagined and visualised as a series of containers of national populations rather than as a space of flows, exchanges and mixing of different peoples that dynamically compose it.

To move from this question to a design we first formulated two premises. One concerns the relation between the European project in our ‘moving times’: that the freedom of movement in the EU – one of the pillars of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty – provides the promise of not only free movement and settlement and the making of a single European economy but also the possibility of forging a people as a polity. Yet, the promise of a common space of citizen movement has been countered by increasingly complex and restrictive legal regimes of member states that constrain the movement of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. These two legal orders are part of making Europe a morally and politically differentiated space of movements, mixes, and flows of people within and beyond its borders. These conflicting legal orders and tensions between freedom and constraint have arguably articulated a question of ‘Who has a right to Europe?’ as a defining question of our times.

Of course, Europe has always been a space of movement, as is evident in the massive migrations

of people in and out and within Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And such movements have also been matters of politics and governing as evident in moral panics reinforcing border regimes and calls for better measuring and counting bodies in our moving times. The ongoing struggle in the UK about the counting and inclusion of international students in migration statistics is a telling example. Moral panics about non-EU students overstaying their entitlement continue despite there being no evidence of this as an issue, as reported in a recent study by the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS). This controversy has revealed how the method of measurement – large-scale exit checks or the International Passenger Survey (IPS) – makes a difference in population numbers reported.

That there are different ways to define, measure, collect, interpret and disseminate population data is also evident in often incommensurate methods that member states use to capture the movement of people in and out of their territories. Debates about these methods typically focus on how they differently address practical problems of counting movement. However, a fundamental source of this practical problem is that settlement and residency constitute the pillars of population statistics and in turn who are the people of nation-states. The movement of people is thus a ‘problem’ for methods that understand populations as ‘stocks’ of people and statistics as fixed ‘snapshots’ of volumes of people contained in and exchanged between the borders of states. This conception is materialised in the dissemination of population statistics in familiar visual forms of tables and histograms. In these ways, Europe is imagined and then visualised as a series of containers of national populations rather than as a space of flows, exchanges and mixing of different peoples that dynamically compose it.



The state held a near monopoly over knowledge of populations for almost two centuries, now being challenged by corporate innovations.

A second premise is that ‘how we know who we are’ is increasingly mediated by the availability of large volumes of digital data (or Big Data) accumulated through the internet by governments, corporations, and software and app developers. While numerical and textual analyses and representations have been dominant, digital visualisation is increasingly deployed for making sense of Big Data. Both developments are

disrupting traditional practices of government data collection (e.g., censuses), statistics (e.g., counts), and modes of representation (charts). Arguably, the state held a near-monopoly over population knowledge for almost two centuries, which is now being challenged by corporate innovations in the digital tracing and visualising of the movements and activities of people. In a time of alternative facts, what constitutes legitimate knowledge and expertise about populations are thus evermore sites of political contention.

Governments tend to approach this as a competition that they can win through claims about accuracy and quality or by adopting the latest methods of data analysis and visualisation. However, for us, the challenge of alternative facts is not simply about technique. It concerns the normative and political choices about how to collect, sort, organise, categorise, represent and interpret data. That is, practices that generate statistics are not simple reflections of a who we are as Europeans. Rather, through decisions and choices about what and who counts as European to various techniques of making and analysing data, practices are part of defining Europe. As such, ‘how do we know who we are?’ is not only a practical but also political question. It also concerns relations to people through which knowledge of societies is generated and legitimated: as unknowing subjects of data collection or as active participants in its making? Indeed, and more fundamentally, what is at stake is the right of citizens to actively participate in making knowledge about societies of which they are a part and opening statistics to democratic contestation, intervention and reinvention.

Translating premises into designs

We translated these two premises into reflexive questions about the relation between the design of our installation and the politics of how we know who we are:

How might we explore visualisations as not simple reflections but actively participating in generating political imaginaries of Europe and Europeans?

How do visualisations imagine people as passive or active participants in the making and interpretation of how we know who we are?

How might visualisations participate in imagining not the movements of ‘others’ – refugees or asylum seekers – but imagining ‘us’ or ‘Europeans’ as already ‘moving peoples’?

How might visualisations trouble static concepts of Europe as a collection of nations by capturing patterns of movement where borders are not the organising frame?

How might visualisations engage people and make explicit that data is a collective accomplishment and imagine another ‘we’, another Europe?

How might the relation between data and visualisations be demonstrated and the ways they perform how we know who we are?

What we want to emphasise here is that to answer the question ‘who are we?’ requires simultaneously answering ‘how do we know who we are?’

Reflecting on our premises and these questions, we designed the installation to reimagine Eurostat migration data from 2008–14 on the country of birth and residence of people included in the European population. We first visualised the data not as numbers but as different sized and coloured shapes. We referred to these as ‘data traces’ where the number of shapes reflects volumes and the colours – derived from selfies posted on Instagram – reflect how Europe is made up of a multi-coloured collection of spaces composed by the in-movement of people from different countries.

Movement is visualised as appearing and disappearing trajectories.

In these ways movement is visualised as appearing and disappearing trajectories of lines connecting countries of birth and residence and their multiplication is proportional to the volume of movement from within and beyond Europe. ‘Recomposing’ Europe is thus visualised as a series of dynamic multi-coloured spaces and lines that traverse national borders. We then invited visitors to interact with and recompose the visualisation by donating their data traces on country of birth and residence. To ‘populate’ the anonymous shapes of Europe we invited them to also add their ‘data faces.’ This involved interacting with an algorithm that generated the outlines of their faces based on a mixture of lines from the topographical borders of their countries of birth and residence. To these the algorithm added coloured shapes based

on the mix of their country of birth and residence. In these ways, the data traces and data faces of visitors to the Tate Exchange contributed to reimagining and recomposing Europe.

This is but a summary of how our premises and reflexive questions came to shape our final installation, which involved many iterations. As part of our reflexive practice, we have documented these iterations on a storyboard that specifies in greater detail how the installation was designed and the final version generated. What we want to emphasise here is that to answer to the question ‘who are we?’ requires simultaneously answering ‘how do we know who we are?’

Re-signifying Refugee Waste: Death, Survival and Solidarity in Lesvos

My research investigates Europe’s ‘refugee crisis’ as an ambivalent space of death and survival drawing our attention to lives laid waste not only by wars and violent conflicts but also by the policies of European neo-liberal security states. Based on ethnographic fieldwork at Pikpa refugee camp in Mytilini, the capital of Lesvos, it focusses on the Safe Passage Workshop where the life jackets discarded on the beaches of Mytiline after often treacherous sea-crossings to the island are upcycled and transformed into fashionable bags that can provide income for refugees with art, design and craft skills. The Safe Passage workshop allows us to glimpse the ways in which cultural creativity and production can help restore some level of hope and dignity in lives lost. Bags can be bought at <https://lesvossolidarityshop.org/collections/> handbags and all proceeds go directly to Pikpa camp.

Marie Gillespie, The Open University

HOW AN ARTIST-ACADEMIC COLLABORATION WORKED TO AMPLIFY MIGRANT WOMEN’S VOICES

Artists and researchers collaborated with migrant families to address complex, politically and emotionally challenging issues in a nuanced way

As home secretary, Theresa May set out to create a hostile environment for people from other countries, to make life unwelcoming for those deemed to not rightfully belong. The effects of this are increasingly felt by migrant families. Yet migrant families, through their everyday lives and social and political actions, create their own sense of belonging and contribute to changing meanings of citizenship.

As part of a project called Participation Arts and Social Action in Research, we used participatory theatre and walking to better understand how migrant families in London create such a sense of belonging and participate in their communities. Artists and researchers collaborated to gain a multi-layered understanding. The strength of this collaboration was its potential to address complex, politically and emotionally challenging issues in a nuanced way, allowing different and at times contradictory voices and experiences to be heard and reflected on.

To do so, we worked with three groups. One comprised migrant mothers of primary schoolchildren in north London, some of whom did not speak English very well. They shared their experiences of racism, the effects of gentrification on their neighbourhoods and the sense of gendered and racialised insecurity. All had stories to share about feeling scared or intimidated when out at night.



All had stories to share about feeling scared or intimidated when out at night

We also worked with a group of 13-year-old girls from migrant backgrounds, and heard their stories about being stereotyped as potential shoplifters or troublemakers when in public. The third group were Black mothers who were subjected to the government’s ‘no recourse to public funds’ rules, which prevent people who are “subject to immigration control” from receiving income support, housing support or child benefits. Even though all these women were well established in the UK and in their communities—they had all been in the country for more than ten years, and had a firm sense of belonging established through their workplaces, neighbourhoods, church groups and family networks—when they experienced a personal crisis such as illness, unemployment or homelessness, they were not entitled to state support for themselves, but only for their children. The available support is often set at a level far below the needs of a family—one single mother and her daughter in our study received just £25 per week—it was very difficult for the women to get access to even this. However, alongside these structural and policy obstacles, we also explored the sense of belonging that the migrant mothers and girls created within their everyday lives.

The creative methods of participatory theatre and walking that we used were key in allowing us to better understand both aspects of their belonging, as a lot of the experiences they shared went beyond verbal expression. Some of the young girls and mothers did not have the words to express their experiences, sometimes because they did not feel confident in their English language skills or because addressing researchers in an interview can be intimidating. However, another important problem was that naming and discussing experiences of racism and sexism is often taboo when

talking with researchers and therefore they found it very difficult to talk about these things.

That is where the collaboration between research and arts was able to contribute new layers and ways of understanding through images, characters and embodiment. Our research team consisted of: Umut Erel, a sociologist; Maggie O’Neill, a criminologist and long-time practitioner of ‘participatory action research’ and creative walking methods; Tracey Reynolds, a social policy scholar; and Erene Kaptani, a research fellow who is an anthropologist, drama therapist and theatre practitioner. We worked in partnership with Counterpoints Arts and film-maker Marcia Chandra.

She had insisted on wishing a good morning... as a challenge to both racist exclusion and lack of social connection

The theatre and walking methods in the project built on Kaptani’s participatory performance practice, physical theatre and psychosocial arts-based exercises and O’Neill’s research into walking as a participatory arts-based and biographical method.

Our team addressed issues of collaboration across arts, group work and research from the beginning, allowing us to integrate the research questions with the arts methods and vice versa. For example, we asked the mothers of primary schoolchildren to share with us what it means to be a migrant mother in their everyday life; this was then recreated by a group of actors using the technique of playback theatre. The images, physical theatre exercises, movements and gestures prompted reflection on how they are seen in public spaces and how they in turn also contribute to making new

The strength of collaboration between arts and research lay in the depth of engagement between researchers, participants and groups of practitioners. This collaboration also became a way of enacting citizenship, as it allowed us to go beyond roles as researchers, artists or participants to create not only new ways of knowing, but also new political interventions.

communities and create new ways of socialising in a multicultural context.

One participant shared a story of social isolation and how she had challenged it against the backdrop of racism. She had insisted on wishing a good morning to her neighbours and to other parents she encountered at school or in the playground, as a challenge to both racist exclusion and lack of social connection. Defiantly greeting her neighbours was also a way of creating a sense of belonging and community for herself, her family and the neighbours.

The girls’ group showed us their experiences of belonging and un-belonging through images of what they termed ‘friendly’ and ‘scary’ neighbourhoods. They reflected on the ways in which a park, for instance, can be both a friendly area where they meet friends and enjoy family time, and also a risky place of potential violence by older boys.

In both these groups we quickly learned the power of theatre and walking methods to address challenging issues and facilitate reflection, and to allow for the articulation of collective knowledge. We found that these creative methods allowed a sharing of experiences across ethnic, social, generational and political differences. Participants could value their own experiences by creating performances for each other. The group work created a sense of conviviality which contrasted with the devaluation of migrant families as potential obstacles to social cohesion. Going beyond verbal expression was also helpful in uncovering the many ways in which migrant mothers, even where their English language skills are limited, are making important social and cultural contributions by bringing up their children and enacting a sense of multi-ethnic belonging, citizenship and conviviality in their neighbourhoods.

The work with mothers subjected to the ‘no recourse to public funds’ policy was challenging, as most of our participants were experiencing acute crises. As a result we worked closely with our partner organisations Praxis, who provided practical support and advice, and Runnymede Trust, who ensured that the research would reach practitioners and policy-makers.

Here, the collaboration across arts and research was helpful, to overcome the isolation, shame and sense

of not belonging that ‘no recourse to public funds’ had imposed on many participants. The arts methods allowed participants to share very painful and difficult experiences with each other and the research team. Over four months, the participatory arts process, led by the drama therapist, created a space where these experiences could be held and contained and shared within the group.

One such experience was that of becoming homeless and having to stay in friends’ houses. This was even more difficult for a participant whose son is autistic, with behaviour that was at times challenging for their hosts. While having to explain and justify herself to her hosts, the mother also felt torn as she could not explain to her son why they had to move so frequently, or why they had to share a bedroom when the boy realised he needed his own space to feel calm and well.

Sharing these extremely painful experiences through arts-based methods opened the way for the group to challenge how the ‘no recourse to public funds’ policy builds on discourses that blame them as mothers and as migrants. Indeed, the women highlighted the significance of colonial and post-colonial ties to the UK to challenge the ways in which immigration policy considered them as outsiders who do not belong and are not entitled to welfare.

The arts-based methods allowed us to explore a range of sites where this policy created a sense of non-belonging, such as the workplace and immigration reporting centres, as well as social services. Being able to show these experiences through a short theatre play—Performance by the Mothers with No Recourse to Public Funds Group—helped the group to take their stories to practitioners and policy-makers, followed by discussions and workshops.

The play was first shown at a policy day in February 2017 and then at different policy, practice and academic events. It resulted in an invitation to show the group’s work at the House of Commons, sponsored by Kate Green MP as chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Migration in December 2017. In the work with this group on a concrete, urgent policy issue, we found that collaborations across academia, art, policy and practice can create not only new knowledge, but also become part of an intervention into policy on who should and who should not have the right to

belong and bring up their family with dignity.

Collaborating across arts and research also contains tensions, of course, between the requirements of group work, research rigour and artistic integrity.

For example, the group work required us to focus on group processes, which can be long and slow, particularly when working with participants in crisis. Yet this is necessary for creating an environment where all participants feel welcome and able to contribute. On the other hand, artistic considerations can pull the project to optimise the aesthetic and dramatic side of the work, especially when it will be shown to audiences outside the research workshops, while researchers need to focus on the questions they set out with.

However, collaborations can generate more nuanced and multi-layered understanding, as different partners bring their own expertise and lenses and are a rich source of learning and insight. The strength of collaboration between arts and research lay in the depth of engagement between researchers, participants and groups of practitioners. This collaboration also became a way of enacting citizenship, as it allowed us to go beyond roles as researchers, artists or participants to create not only new ways of knowing, but also new political interventions. This enabled us to bring a complex policy issue—that of families subjected to the ‘no recourse to public funds’ rules—to a wider audience and ensured that those affected had an opportunity to share their views and experiences.

ACTIVE INTERPRETATION:
AT THE MEETING PLACE
OF RESEARCH AND
CREATIVE PRACTICE

The concept of hospitality was central, as audiences engaged with imagined and ‘real’ others, while the gallery space extended a welcoming invitation for public participation, creative re-interpretation and multi-vocality.

In the time since the Brexit referendum, and in the midst of an alleged “refugee crisis”, when our social fabric is becoming increasingly divided and ‘protective’ against an imagined invasion of ‘others’, Who Are We? – A Tate Exchange project, which welcomed more than 5,000 visitors in its 6 day incarnation last March – responded to processes of othering and division. It emerged as a collaborative exploration of notions of identity, belonging, migration, and citizenship.

Located on the fifth floor of Tate Exchange and at the periphery of Tate Modern, the exhibition space became a civic landscape where viewers were encouraged to physically navigate a shared space and become – as Rancière would argue, active interpreters inventing their own translations of the artworks. A collective of twenty-two installations addressed different facets of migration, inviting audience members to respond to important questions around belonging, human rights and (im)mobility.

Writers including Claire Bishop (2006), Grant Kester (2014) and Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) have contributed to our understanding of participatory, collaborative and relational art and the potential of socially engaged art practice. As Bishop suggests, the artist should be understood as a collaborator and a producer of situations where audience members become involved in shared knowledge-production processes. Equally, the curatorial framework of Who Are We? was invested in translating complex social issues into an engagement experience, facilitated by artists and activists, during which audiences transitioned from passive consumers of art to critically-engaged participants.

By embracing creative modes of the “responsive artist” and “post-studio practice”, the Who Are We? programme facilitated democratic participation by

inviting audiences to become engaged with the exhibition’s programme as well as with the artists themselves.



In doing so, the programme challenged the ‘borders’ between art and spectatorship, by letting audiences in and asking for their opinion. Audience members participated in a series of activities including sharing stories, creating artwork as response to posed questions as well as discussing the meaning of hospitality and welcome.

In his work titled “Engaged with the Arts: Writings from the Frontline”, John Tusa reminds us that “The skill of arts management is to turn the awkward, obfuscating and bureaucratic into a language that truly serves the arts and their audiences.” As museologist Jan Jelinek argues, museums can “only fully develop their potential for action when they are actually involved in the major problems of contemporary society. Museums are institutions intended to serve society and only thus can continue to exist and function.”

Such an understanding of the museum as an institution which should share power and knowledge with communities is further explored in creative consultant and reviewer Chrissie Tiller’s piece on the role of the gallery or the museum, in not only ‘making things visible’ but also becoming a platform for social change.

The partnership between Tate Exchange and Tate

Exchange Associates was therefore invested in the recognition of the gallery as a space that pushes the boundaries of representation, and instead involved the public in the interpretive process, thereby challenging the gallery’s authority and supporting its role as a space for meaning-making, learning and activism. The installations therefore served as points of departure for audiences to respond to, reflect and interrogate the complexities of a seemingly ‘simple’ question: Who Are We?

In particular, the interactive and participatory audio-focused installation ‘Beyond The Babble’ – by broadcaster and artist Lucia Scazzocchio – engaged participants in meaning-making processes by inviting them to record personal thoughts, stories and memories around questions of individual and collective identity. Such processes occurred within the surrounding gallery space as participants ‘tuned into’ particular narratives emerging from the ‘babble of noise’; within the installation’s ‘audio booth’; and finally, within the social media sphere, as participants sent ‘audio postcards’ (audio tweets).

During their participation, audiences became engaged in personal declarations while also reflecting on the role of social media as spaces for learning and knowledge exchange, also functioning as ‘echo-chambers’ that can vindicate particular dominant narratives and solidify ‘louder’ public opinions. For others, the embodied experience of ‘speaking up’ allowed them to reflect on the mediated nature of social media and their effect of reducing often complex social issues into simplified ‘Newsbytes’ that lack analytical depth. In their co-authored reflective piece, Alevizou and Scazzocchio, investigate how the installation instigated instances of digital citizenship by inviting self-reflective individual declarations that emerged within the ‘noise’ of social media and created shared empathy for listeners.

Another example of collaborative meaning-making processes emerged through Alketa Xhafa Mripa’s ‘Refugees Welcome’ mobile installation, which comprised a Luton tail lift van, a neon sign of ‘Hope’ and metallic letters spelling out ‘Refugees Welcome’, positioned alongside the van’s interior and seeking to extend a ‘British Welcome’ to audiences.

Participants responded to Mripa’s kind invitation by sharing their personal understandings of ‘welcome’ as well as reflecting on their (hi)stories and social ties to Britain. Through combining self-reflection and memory exchange, ‘Refugees Welcome’ interrogated popular understandings of the van as a symbol of illegal border-crossing and instead re-imagined a space for hospitality and welcome, invested in the recognition of our shared humanity.

The Who Are We? project, also serves as a case study illustrating what can be achieved through a multidisciplinary creative synergy between academics and creative practitioners, as the latter were paired up during the project’s research and development phase, leading to the final exhibition. As Counterpoints Arts Co-Director Áine O’Brien argues in her review piece

“Hospitality” is perceived as a question of what arrives at the borders of encounter; in that initial dynamic of contact with an ‘other’, a ‘stranger’, a ‘foreigner’ or ‘someone without a name’.

included in this series, the collaboration between artists and academic partners “opened up unique avenues and ways of reciprocal thinking and sharing/learning.”

Who Are We? allowed multiple collaborations as it brought together a group of artists working in response to a particular question while also enabling collaborations between different disciplines and art-forms. As Kester reminds us, collaboration carries with it an “implicit ethical orientation in relationship to differences” by moving away from the model of the solo artist and instead evoking an art practice that is “defined by open-ness, listening and intersubjective vulnerability.”

Equally, an ethical orientation towards difference, dialogue and exchange, was evident in the creative methodologies of the Who Are We? project, which resulted in powerful creative interpretations of social issues underpinned by academic insights.

By positioning social issues at the forefront, Who Are We? explored the emergence of new commodified forms of citizenship as well as the reshaping of old ones. It also shed light on the prevalence of prejudice and stereotyping in everyday life encounters and encouraged viewers to reflect on the role of borders and decision-making frameworks determining who is allowed in and who remains out; not just from national borders, but also from our hearts and minds.

Since the beginning of the “refugee” or “migrant crisis” the media agenda has been “flooded” with stories of thousands of individuals traversing across European borders, alarming audiences with the prospect of an

unstoppable “wave” of “illegal migrants”. As always, it depends on who is talking, and whose point of view is represented. The employment of inundation metaphors such as “waves” or “flows” often reduces displaced individuals to a generic ‘tide’ of human bodies and robs them of their humanity, while supporting a culture of fear and disbelief.

“This is a fear of the unknown: a fear of the other, a fear of the future.”

According to the 2017 Demos report Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself? this is the same climate of fear that has long permeated the public imagination in the UK and whose consequences we witness in the UK’s vote to leave the European Union on June 23, 2016, as well as across a Europe pockmarked by the growing rise of ‘populist’ right-wing and Eurosceptic political parties.

Following the Brexit referendum, the UK has witnessed a critical rise in hate-crimes and racist attacks, introducing to the public domain a rhetoric on full national sovereignty, freedom and control, thus re-solidifying binary divisions of “us” versus “them” and creating a hostile social environment that has become embedded politically and culturally.

In an increasingly mediated society, we are surrounded by a plethora of media all posing important questions about who we are as a society: What does it mean to belong to a nation, to Europe, to the UK, to the world?

Who has the right to a better life and who doesn’t? Who is allowed in and who remains out? Whose decision is it?

These are some of the questions to which Who Are We? responded to, through creating a platform that challenged dominant discourses. It initiated much-needed conversations between artists, researchers and activists, exhibition spaces and diverse audiences, and art institutions and curators. The project adopted a multi-layered participatory model rooted in dialogical methods of co-production and exchange, bringing together a wide range of expertise, viewpoints and experiences.

For Derrida and Dufourmantelle “hospitality” is perceived as a question of what arrives at the borders of encounter; in that initial dynamic of contact with an ‘other’, a ‘stranger’, a ‘foreigner’ or ‘someone without a name’. The concept of hospitality was central to the project as audiences physically and subjectively engaged in different moments of encounter with imagined and ‘real’ others, while the gallery space extended a welcoming invitation for public participation, creative re-interpretation and multi-vocality.

By resisting traditional linear pathways of knowledge transmission, Who Are We? invested instead in actively listening and responding to important questions about our changing social sphere, while also inviting diverse audiences to become part of the project’s discourse and legacy.

I have the privilege of researching with Indigenous people (especially Maori, Sámi and North American First Nations people). I am interested in the ways in which inherited rituals and stories can be used to create and share powerful responses to contemporary issues such as climate disaster, colonialism and migration. The vitality and adaptability of cultural practices is matched by the sheer generosity of communities which are often marginalised. The Who We Are project included fine examples of the use of stories (such as the Iliad) and of rituals (e.g. shared walks in significant locations) in creative responses to contemporary challenges.

Graham Harvey, The Open University

FIFTY ROOMS – JOURNEYS BETWEEN BODY, MEMORY AND LAND

A conversation between
Natasha Davis, Alena Pfoser
and Sara de Jong

AP / SdJ: You have been a very prolific artist in the last years since you moved from production to being an artist yourself. Your previous performances, Rupture, Asphyxia and Suspended, have been presented as each constituting one part of a trilogy. How do you see the relation between your current work and these previous works? Could you tell us something about the artistic trajectory that brought you to your current piece for the Tate Exchange Who Are We? project?

ND: In my research process for Rupture, Asphyxia and Suspended body was the starting point. I was interested in the impact of trauma of displacement on the body, what is stored in the body, what the body remembers. A lot of the experimentation with ideas involved stretching the boundaries of the body. In the consequent three performances (Internal Terrains, Teeth Show, and Fifty Rooms), the starting points in developing work were the space and objects more than the body, so the interest in memory became more architectural and cinematic. Again, each piece had an additional thematic focus. Internal Terrains was about forty addresses in less than four decades. Teeth Show used teeth as a metaphor for roots to reflect on the bio-political rights of migrants. Fifty Rooms is about migration and ageing, using stem cells and martial arts as reference points. Fifty Rooms (installation), which is my contribution to the Who Are We? project at Tate Exchange, is linked to the performance Fifty Rooms, premiering at Rich Mix London and Colchester Arts Centre in the same week.

So for years I have been exploring the themes that Who Are We? focuses on during this week of events in the context of Tate Exchange. What is also common across all my performance pieces is their interdisciplinarity and sculptural, installational dimension, which makes it a very suitable base for the work I developed for the Who Are We? project. I have always been very interested in the physical defragmentation of the original performance material and its metamorphosis into something new, such as an installation, which resembles the process of integration into a new environment when displacement gradually gives life to a new form.

AP / SdJ: Could you tell us how your work speaks to and addresses the question Who Are We? that

is the framing theme of this exhibition? Who is the ‘We’ you interrogate with your work, and how do you do this?

ND: The ‘We’ that I am interested in my work in general, but also in the installation that I am presenting as part of this fantastic project, are our diverse shared histories, backgrounds and experiences, displacements, our shared autobiographies. How we progress through life, deal with difficulties, what happens to us under the impact of traumas, how we recover, how our bodies age. I am interested in the body as a container of knowledge. I am also interested in the spaces we occupy, whether shared, communal spaces or private homes. I am interested in shared memories, significant pasts, presents that are out of balance, desired or feared futures. Where do our memories meet, how is the shared imagery formed in our collective histories, what objects, smells, situations and people do we remember? Personal experiences are a tool that I use, but I shape them in the way that they can be easily identified with. When I work with participants around the issues of displacement, I look at this issue rather broadly, not only in terms of geographical displacement. For someone the displacement will be within their own body because of some changes they are going through, such as menopause or becoming deaf, for someone else it will be the displacement due to having a difficult family background or history of abuse. Someone else will have been in prison for a decade or two and the displacement will be around re-learning to live in the world that has changed since they last actively participated in it.

My installation for Who Are We? is a modified piece of furniture, it evokes a bed, but also a coffin, or a box in which somebody with a contaminating disease might be placed in the past to be transported between surgeries. As part of this weird bed there are also mini installations in its drawers, and these reflect, sometimes abstractly, sometimes more directly, on specific places, episodes from my past, situations I have been in, a place where I stayed or how I experienced my body at the time. There will be spare drawers for audience to engage in and make their own mini installation, as a personal visual comment on a particular moment in their lives, now or in the past, using the available materials and anything else they have with them on the day, such as items in their bags, a piece of jewellery and similar. These will be photographed and compiled for an online collection.

I am hoping to achieve the

balance between the personal and the general, between the familiar and the strange, and for the personal material to be experienced in the context of the political and the cultural.

AP / SdJ: While your work has an autobiographical dimension, it transcends the individual and particularities by addressing larger questions of (non)belonging, citizenship, precarity, trauma and displacement. How, if at all, do you respond as an artist to current predicaments, times of political turmoil, which some have called ‘crises’ of various kinds?

ND: Whilst I mention specific places in my work, such as Serbia or Syria, they are there in the function of ideas or experiences, such as fleeing a country in war on the last train, losing citizenship, getting ill, surviving a difficult situation by using unexpected resources, having to visit a dentist in five different countries, separation from the loved ones, living in several different countries without ever changing address, and so on. I try to work around these ideas so that they are experienced by the audience emotionally and empathetically, I want it to come across that people who find themselves in a migratory or exilic situation, wherever they are from, are just like us, it could happen to anybody. But I do not want to be didactic about it, I don’t wish to prescribe how the audience should feel. I prefer to ask questions and set up performative provocations, rather than provide answers.

Any work that I have made, for example, in reference to the fall of Yugoslavia, relates easily to any other military conflict around the world. Bombed buildings in cities around former Yugoslavia bring to mind bombed and ruined buildings in other parts of the world, such as Iraq and Syria. Any personal stories around crossing borders and being a stateless citizen correspond directly to what Syrian refugees are currently experiencing, without me specifically making a direct reference to it. At any time or place in the history, the stories of being unwanted, as if one carries a contagious disease, are repeated whenever there is a large influx of migrants from a country in war.

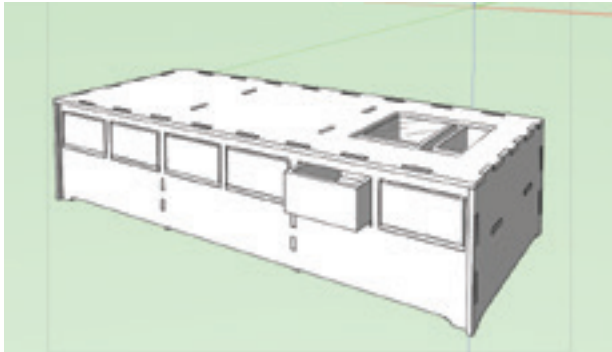
As audience we can attach ourselves to personal,

individual accounts of lost homes, vulnerability, pain, we can identify with these experiences on an emotional level. And the personal is, of course, always political.

Personal stories are also good for eliminating the notion of victimhood and bringing about the strength needed to survive, the strength that the majority of us will find when we absolutely need to be resourceful. In that way sharing autobiographical experience becomes on one hand a tool to draw attention to specific events or crises, and on the other a celebration of life and our ability to not just survive, but also thrive in precarious situations. Crossing borders, living in exile and in-between homes can be a difficult and traumatic experience, but it can also be an incredibly fertile space in which one can reinvent oneself. It is important to say, however, that basic human conditions in terms of shelter, access to work and medical, educational and social resources need to be satisfied first in order for the condition of exile to start balancing more healthily between the pain and pleasure, as George Lamming and Edward Said wrote about, or between the loss and liberation that I often focus my interests on.

AP / SdJ: You describe in the essay ‘Rupture: Things that Throb in our Insides’ how in the late 2000s you started to explore and work on the relation between your own decaying body, and the decay of the land that once constituted Yugoslavia. The body as a metaphor of land, of a body politic, of a country has been significant throughout your work. How do you use your body, as well as manipulation of the body, and the relation between technology and the body, in your current work?

ND: All three earlier pieces, Rupture, Asphyxia and Suspended, were interested in the notion of the body being out of balance, literally and metaphorically. I delivered texts, songs, episodes while balancing on a wobble board, on a layer of constantly moving apples, suspended from the theatre rig to which my hair is attached, and so on. But each of them also had a very specific focus that differed from each other. In Rupture this was cancer (the body falling apart in relation to the country falling apart). In Asphyxia this involved the breath, how the body performs when the breath is restricted and what can make us feel out of breath, such as crossing borders, family background, exilic history and so on. Suspended focused on the visual, there was very little text in it, the audience shared the performance space with me – in a way, together, we physically performed a migratory journey, which took us from one installation to another, some of them were participatory. Less text also meant that I focused more on choreography and that’s something that I took with



As audience we can attach ourselves to personal, individual accounts of lost homes, vulnerability, pain, we can identify with these experiences on an emotional level.

And the personal is, of course, always political.

me strongly into the next three pieces of work.

Lately I have been more interested in the choreographed body movement in relationship to objects, whether that’s a lighting installation, an exaggeratedly long dress or a piece of modified furniture. I animate my own body in relationship to objects, sound, image and the space I occupy as a performer – in the service of the subjects I explore. This is enhanced by technologies I use in my performances, whether that’s sound, film, an interactive object operated by a remote control device, smoke machine, loop station etc.

AP / SdJ: Your work has an autobiographical dimension, drawing on your own experience of forced migration and exile. You have been called an ‘exilic artist’ and commentaries on your work often refer to your migrant subjectivity. In how far do you feel that labels such as ‘migrant artist’ or ‘exilic artist’ are meaningful categories in general? Do you think that the category is adequate to describe (part of) your practice? In how far do you see this category as enabling and/or as constraining?

ND: It’s true that my work has sometimes been described like that, but I haven’t experienced that negatively as labelling, especially when it’s useful to describe my work in those terms. As long as this doesn’t prevent me as an artist from showing work in other contexts. And this has never been the case. I have toured my performances, films and installations extensively across the UK and to five continents internationally. The work has often been programmed at venues as part of their general seasons, and at festivals that do not only deal with migration or indeed even with only socially engaging work, although personally I am much more interested in performing in venues and festivals that are progressive and political. And to be fair I have also been ‘labelled’ a live artist, multi-media artist, visual artist, emerging, established, British, Croatian but often I am just simply described as ‘an artist’. Personally I do not mind any of the above adjectives to describe any artist’s work, as long as they are used descriptively and not designed to pigeonhole them, devalue their work or put them in a specific box from which there is no way out.

AP / SdJ: What is your artistic approach in developing a new piece of work? Where do you draw inspiration from, what can function as points of departure, and how do your ideas take shape in the process of production?

ND: The interest in a subject and a specific artistic tool allowing me to explore it often appear at the same time. More practically, in terms of the layers of the work, methodology and tools, as I mentioned in one of the previous questions, sometimes I start with the body, sometimes with an object or objects, or with a sound, sometimes with text. For example in Teeth Show text came first, in Suspended text came last. Suspended started with a clear visual image of me suspended in the space, with my hair attached to the theatre rig, unable to move until the audience cut the strings of my hair and release me into movement. Asphyxia started with the physicality of breath. Internal Terrains started with a lighting installation – twenty cables with a lightbulb at the end of each cable, all connected to the central dimmer, which I control on stage.

The rest of the material then develops around these central elements that define each piece, give it a shape and a reference point. I also work with collaborators. My regular collaborators for years have been Marty Langthorne for light design, Bob Karper for original sound, and Lucy Cash for movement and choreography. I usually do the initial research into the ideas on my own and bring raw material to them, which we then develop together in the rehearsal room, and they essentially help the material grow, they constantly provide feedback and ideas, and act as outside eyes. Through the whole development period and in parallel to everything we do together, I also work on photography and films, and I write and develop all texts.

I am inspired by everything around me: current affairs, political situation, geographical references, landscape, but also by historical events, relationships with people, films, books, dance, visual work, autobiographical experiences, other people’s stories; everything really.



THE CITIZENSHOP: SHOPPING FOR CITIZENSHIP

Conversation between
Nele Vos (Designer/Artist)
and Agnes Czajka (Te Open
University). Agnes asks Nele
about her installation
and the issues she hopes it
raises about the relationship
between citizenship, migration
and neo-liberal economics.

AC: Nele, you describe yourself as a `narrative
experience designer`. What does that mean? Do you
`design experiences`? How do you do that?

NV: In my practice, Goller&Vos Narrative Experiences,
which I started together with Alexander Goller here in
Berlin, we combine spatial and narrative theory and
use it as a foundation to design visitor journeys and
the environments around them. Our projects have
ranged from designing corporate narratives for fairs to
reinventing the foyer space of a theatre, the foyer being
an essential part of a contemporary visitor`s experience.

AC: Tell me a bit about `The Citizenshop`. How does it
work as a `narrative experience`?

NV: `Citizenshop` is a piece that I developed as part of
my master`s thesis for an MA in Narrative Environments
at Central Saint Martins in 2016. At its heart, it`s a
spatial strategy that functions as the current status of
citizenship and how it`s changing through, for example,
the increasing number of countries offering citizenship
for a price. Everyone who enters the space of the
`shop` gets a `Passport to the Republic of Nowhere`,
which gives them access to a collection of data on
current `citizenship by investment` offers in
place worldwide.

AC: Before we continue, I just wanted to clarify for
those who might know what we mean when we talk

about `citizenship by investment` offers, or `buying
citizenship`. Many countries in the world – including
the UK, many European countries, the US, but also
non-`Western` countries – effectively `sell` citizenship
to those who can afford to invest a specific amount of
money in that country by, for example, buying a certain
number of government bonds, or purchasing property.
Basically, those who can afford it can `buy` citizenship.
And of course, the more money one has, the more
`desirable` of a passport one can acquire – with the
US or UK, for instance, being more expensive than say,
Pakistan. And so what has emerged is what we might
call a `citizenship by investment industry`.

What can you afford in Citizenshop?

NV: Yes, some governments have special departments
that one would apply to for these kinds of programmes.
But it`s more common to have this done by a private
consultancy firm that can process your request without
you even entering the country. In the UK, for example,
you have to either invest in government bonds or real
estate. It`s one of the most expensive programmes
– at least for now. You don`t really need to have any
language skills, there`s no income tax you have pay, and
you don`t even need to have any business experience.

If you think, for example,
from the perspective of a
Chinese businessman who
wants to access the EU
market then Malta currently
offers the quickest and least
expensive programme,
with a cost of 690.000 Euros.

All of this started with a series of small island states
such as Antigua, Barbuda, Dominica, St. Lucia, Grenada.
Those islands faced the problem of not having enough
export products, so they discovered the passport as a
tool to get more foreign direct investment. And this was
then adopted by more and more Western countries,
specifically after the big credit crunch in 2008.

AC: Getting back to `The Citizenshop`, then. At least
one of the objectives of the installation is to enable
visitors to the `shop` to experience the way in which
this industry works. Once visitors enter the space, they
access an online `shop` where they can browse through
and purchase various citizenships.

NV: Yes. In Bethnal Green, where the installation
was originally located, it literally took on the spatial
characteristics of a shop that was located on the High
Street of Bethnal Green. The shop window displayed
some the passports one could purchase in the shop. On
entering the store, visitors would access an online shop
where they explored the prices of various passports
and the conditions that guided their purchase. All of
that information was based on data I acquired from
private consultancy firms that facilitate these kinds of
transactions. This part of the experience was framed
by the question: `What can you afford to buy in The
Citizenshop?` Most visitors didn`t know you could `buy`
citizenship in this way, and one of the goals of the first
part of the installation was to make this transparent,
to try to make public what was happening behind
the closed doors of private consultancy firms, and
the expose some of the ways in which states have
commodified citizenship.

Having explored the online citizenship, visitors were
then invited to the back space of the installation, where
the tone of the experience changed from a personal to
personal, the light changed from warm to white, and
the `prices` of citizenships are replaced by statistics
showing the numbers of people in need of citizenship.
In this second part of the installation, the role of the
visitor also changed. Visitors transformed from being
consumers – of the experience, but also of citizenship –
to being active participants in the installation, and they
were asked to reflect on what meaning citizenship had
for them.

AC: What will the installation look like at the Tate
Modern? Will it offer people a similar experience?

NV: The installation at the Tate will be adapted to
the open exhibition space, so instead of entering a
physical shop, visitors will have direct access to the
online shop on the main exhibition floor. It will also
focus more on dialogue, and the personal reflections
of the participants after they have explored the
online citizenshipshop will play a more important role.
These personal reflection will actually become part
of the installation so that visitors can exchange their
viewpoints with others coming at different times
or on different days. The final thing that will change is
the question the visitors will be asked to reflect on.
The question I asked in Bethnal Green was, `What does
citizenship mean to you?` After the Who Are We?
co-production workshop [that included dialogues
between the artists and academics involved in the
programme I decided to change the question to `What
Makes a Good Citizen?`.

AC: How did you become interested in the question of
`buying citizenship`?

NV: Well, global inequality has reached the point at
which the richest sixty-two people are as wealthy as
half of the world`s population. This inequality is
created and maintained by the super wealthy, and
governments are catering to them. This is an old story,
of course. But I also think that `national thinking`
when it comes to movement of people and
`global thinking` when it comes to trade and finance
contributes to this inequality.

I see this installation as a way
of provoking new thinking,
and hopefully, as a tool that
helps disconnect, at least
mentally, the notion that
citizenship is about a particular
connection between an
individual and one nation-state.



I also think it is important to understand the different
mechanisms that are currently in place for the
disadvantaged and advantaged people of our global
society, and that is something that the installation also
tries to reveal.

AC: Citizenship, migration and asylum are very much on
political agendas in the UK, in Europe, in North America.
But we haven`t heard much debate or concern about
acquiring citizenship through investment. Why do you
think this is the case?

NV: That`s a really good question. I think one reason
might be because these programs are targeted to a very
wealthy segment of the global population, an audience
that lives in a world that is closed off, in a way, from
the wider public. I`m afraid another reason why it`s
not discussed much is because most of us got used
to the fact the governments are adapting the logic of
the market, and that this is fuelling injustice. But at the
same time, there is actually information about these
programmes out there, and a lot of advertising for
these programmes. Friends of mine have been seeing
advertisements from countries in in-flight magazines on
airlines such as British Airways just flying economy class
and seeing advertisements about these programs in
Britain and elsewhere. There is also a lot of information
online. You can find advertising videos for conferences
that are promoting these `citizenship by investment`
programmes worldwide, which means it`s a booming
market. At one of these conferences, you can see the
Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis standing on stage
explaining to his potential future citizens where his
little island is. But in fact the private investors are not
really interested in spending time on that island, but
rather, want to profit from the tax perks that come from
holding dual or triple citizenship as part of the offer.

AC: What do you think the idea of `buying citizenship`
reveals about the relationship between citizenship,
migration and neo-liberal economics? We often talk
about cosmopolitan or global citizenship, but it seems
that the vast majority of people have very restricted
access to citizenship, whereas the very privileged few
can basically purchase `global citizenship` like they
purchase vegetables at the supermarket.

NV: I think the existence of these programs highlights
the dual and differentiated nature of citizenship. One

THE MUSEUM OF MOVEMENTS

I participated in a ‘Long Table’, a conversation among artists, academics, curators and others, held as part of the ‘Who Are We?’ 2018 programme. The events organised by the Open University and Counterpoint Arts at the Tate Exchange, in London. The events of which this was but one small element, were organised to highlight questions of belonging, identity and democracy in relation to migrants and refugees. As part of that, I met Fredrik Elg and Roxana Ortiz to find out more about their project, ‘The Museum of Movements’ which is based in Malmö, in Sweden.

The Museum is a combined initiative of the national and city governments, and it plays on at least two senses of the word ‘movement’: firstly, the movements, mobilities and flows of people and things, conjuring senses of displacement and dislocation but also of speed and interconnectivity and the crossing and transgressing of alternately porous and solid, boundaries and borders.



Second, movement as in political, social and religious movements articulating, for example, global demands for climate justice, indigenous rights that transcend the borders of contemporary nation-states (for instance, the Sami, who live above the Arctic circle in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia), but also

populist, so-called alt-right movements seeking to close borders and restrict flows to protect an imaginary purity, in denial of the hybrid bricolage of all cultures, everywhere.

Museums have been likened to sacred spaces and described as temples to Enlightenment reason, their displays carefully ordered to reflect the apparently all-seeing gaze of knowledge. Their collections are classified not according to the imperatives of the cultures and societies from which they were acquired – often in dubious circumstances – but according to taxonomies deeply implicated in the iniquitous historical relationships of the West with the wider world. The Museum of Movements constitutes a challenge to the traditional idea of the museum, embracing less the idea of a temple of knowledge through which visitors move acquiring pre-packaged facts and information as they go. Instead, the Museum of Movements engages its publics to create spaces less about already-curated knowledge and more about communities of practice in which collections, classifications and taxonomies are themselves on the move, ready to be improvised in new ways and into new forms, a museum less about demonstrations of knowledge than experiences that challenge what is known, to become something new. It will be a museum that challenges established senses of collections, curating and display, asking us to see ourselves and the world around us not as objects fixed in time and space but as flows and potentials.

The British asylum system is labyrinth of policy and law – it is incredibly difficult to navigate. People seeking asylum have often experienced multiple forms of violence and oppression before they even arrive. For the past decade, my research has focused on the impacts of the system on the lives of survivors of violence, domestic and sexual violence and torture, specifically on the lives of women. My research highlights that there is very little support for survivors of abuses, that the complex and difficult circumstances people are subjected to – often the outcomes of law and policy – can compound other social, emotional or psychological problems.

Dr Vicky Canning, University of Bristol (formerly The Open University)

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Lisa Pilgram and Alena Pfoser in conversation with visual artist Laura Sorvala discuss how story-telling techniques can be used to tease out questions of belonging and community and how outputs can challenge simple ideas of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

AP&LP: On your website you describe yourself as an illustrator and visual facilitator. How do you see these roles in relation to your artistic practice– in what sense do they inform your art, in what sense are they separate? What is the advantage of being a visual facilitator and an artist?

LS: I find that different areas of my creative practice tend to overlap and sometimes merge and I don’t think this is a particularly rare phenomenon. There is a distinction, however: when wearing the illustrator or visual facilitator hat I work for other people and use my skills to help them communicate complex ideas. When I put the artist hat on, I delve deeper into the issues I personally care about and look at different ways of developing my practice. As an artist I also like to work more with exploring narrative structures and weaving together individual stories that show a snapshot of emotions and opinions at a particular point in time. For this it is the particular skill of listening and visual translation that my illustration and visual facilitation work really contributes to. A way of tuning into what is being said under the surface and what resonates. As for an advantage, I would say it is my lengthy experience in visual thinking and spotting how to communicate ideas clearly – I used to be a graphic designer in my “previous life” and, also being Finnish, a pull towards functionality with beauty is a given.

AP&LP: For ‘Who Are We?’ you’re currently developing a piece called ‘Outside the Box’. Could you describe what you’re planning to do and what brought you to the idea?

LS: People recounting their individual stories prompted by a simple question, whether it is about guilty pleasures or how people feel about their local neighbourhood, fascinate me. Previously I have worked on big two-dimensional surfaces but I have wanted to

shift the direction of the work for a while now. Initially I thought about building a “totem for Europe” from people’s values and what symbolizes them. However, after discussions with you, Alena, and reading some of the material you sent me I began to understand the problematic nature of “Europe” as a single entity.



So I realised a modular approach would work much better in the context of the ‘Who Are We’ project. ‘Outside the Box’ is a new piece of artwork that I will be constructing before and during the exhibition. I am asking people to contribute a story about a personal experience of an act of kindness or solidarity that I will then draw on a side of a cardboard box. These illustrated boxes will be stacked as a colourful sculpture, reminding us that we witness empathy in our everyday lives regardless of religious, ethnic, religious or cultural expressions.

AP&LP: What kinds of stories are you after?

LS: I’m interested in the personal and sometimes intimate experiences of acts of kindness or solidarity – the encounters or incidents that might happen on public transport, in a shop, gym, workplace or on a street corner. It can be easy to be inspired and share online articles about community initiatives, petitions or activist campaigns, but the role of the individual and the small actions get easily overshadowed. I believe in small actions contributing to change and trying to empower people to take whatever small steps are suitable to them at the time. Not everyone can take part in marches or withstand crowds and meanwhile the difficulties we face in our society or our personal lives carry on with their own challenges. I want to encourage people to pay attention to their everyday situations, perhaps start instigating small acts of kindness. And sometimes it only takes asking a

question and listening to uncover these stories and enable people to appreciate what brings us together.

AP&LP: What significance does storytelling have for your artistic practice? What in your view is the power of stories and storytelling?

LS: I think individual stories are becoming increasingly powerful and you can see them being used more in journalism and advertising. Perhaps it is due to the assault of information we face daily that people yearn for meaningful content, the kind they can relate to on a personal level. This is nothing new but I see the connections between individual stories and inspiring social change becoming stronger.

I have always been interested in narratives that challenge us, whether it is with powerful writing or unusual format. I’m fascinated by what happens inside someone’s head viewing different stories as a whole: how do they make connections and how might this affect their thinking? This is why modular formats and outputs have been a core part of my practice. With the visual language of comic books you have not just pages but also panels and it is between those panels that I think magic happens as our mind fills in the gaps. Similarly with these boxes, even though they are individual stories, seeing them side by side can make us see positive connections, a larger story t hat might be slightly different for each person.

AP&LP: How does your piece respond to the question ‘who are we?’?

LS: I want to challenge strict binaries like “us” versus “them” that are being used strategically to drive politics, public opinion and website clicks. I see “we” as a constantly shifting amalgam of diverse individuals, not inherently good or bad. I’m tired of the media and politicians in Europe and western countries using migration as a decidedly Bad Thing@ that our pristine superiority is still defined against, after centuries of colonization and oppression that our countries have caused!

If we look at belonging to a community, who really gets to decide whose presence is more “valuable”: the actively involved international student versus inactive British born citizen? Is this really the right way to weigh our worth as individuals? With the trend of enforcing boundaries between groups of people, countries, ideologies I feel we need to balance the fear mongering with positive and real connections and this is what I’m hoping to start with this new artwork.W

I believe in small actions contributing to change and trying to empower people to take whatever small steps are suitable to them at the time.

A STITCH IN TIME...

For a week in May 2018, using fabrics and threads in different colours, and words in 15 different languages, embroiderers, language teachers and members of the public created a multicultural coat and headwrap, with artist Sonia Tuttiett and community embroiderers from East London Textile Arts.

The resulting garments feature 120 sayings participants discussed and embroidered as they shared stories across languages and cultures: conversations captured by visual ethnographer Marcia Chandra and filmmaker Sam Bland as short films.

Given the transformative and pivotal role language teachers have as creative mediators between diverse languages and everyday cultures, the exhibition was an opportunity to explore ways of disrupting language teaching in contemporary Britain. By placing teachers in a public, open space and asking them to engage with multi-ethnic embroiderers, visitors and artists in unscripted, quasi-performative ways, traditional boundaries were pushed and new zones of development opened across the diversity of experiences and backgrounds around the collective task. The project was funded by Language Acts and Worldmaking, a flagship project supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Open World Research Initiative.

The East London Textile Arts group of embroiderers included Lorna Lambert, Sindy Jackson, Vernita Cooke, Radha Rajan, Rani Lotay, Marianna Finlayson, Daphne Hinds, Kang Sing Fung, Mary Spyrou, Sophie Ramsay, Karen Harris, Sameena Kazmi, Rakshanda Fazaldin, Lyn Cranfield, Iona Ramsay, Celia Ward, Carmel Widdowson, Reka Patel and Carys Orphan.

The language teachers were Najwa Kadhim, Raúl Suárez, Elina Vilar, Barbara Wojtczak-Poll, Junko Kasai, Inma Pedregosa, Nadine Buchmann, Sabrina Osborne, Britta Giersche, Bozena Wislocka Breit, Fenny Amalo, Paula de Santiago, Isabel Simoes Rodrigues, Natalia Lyons, Pallavi, Nadege Dorion, Kevin Despierre, Isabel Cobo, Ariel Kernberg, Verena Day, Lubna Sohail, Silvia Fischer, Anna Costantino, Angelique Arts, Dorothy Ferary and Qumrul Hasan Chowdhury.



STITCHING MIGRATING PROVERBS

Laila Sumpton

When you darned you wove in this
to warm my soles-
knowing I'd walk away:
'if you are a stranger, be polite.'
When you lit candles we heard this
as the wick took light
from somewhere-
'the river always
reaches the sea.'
When women offer
silted coffee
I trade cardamom
parcelled in headlines,
here- let me sprinkle
some Grandma wisdom
to perfume any bitterness
you harbour:
'knock on the door and you will
hear the response.'
It takes me back to the carpet
I still trace with my toes,
the tassels I wove into braids
as you told me
'he who leaves his house
lowers his value.'



Now you bring a teaspoon of
orange blossom
for my pillow. Where you grew
light slanted a different angle
your spheres a different tinge
and we compare tinctures-
similar fragrance,
varied words
but still declaring:
'women are half the
society,
and they bring up the
other half.'
Before you travel
take this one-
'do you want the grapes or
killing the guard?'
What will you do for grapes?
Don't worry it will leak,
no matter how many bags you wrap
around
to guard it's saffron drip. Show me
your hands-
yes, you've held this one too long.

'The Consul'

A collaborative response by musicians, singers, performers and creative facilitators to the powerful themes of displacement and dispossession at the centre of Gian-Carlo Menotti's intense 1950 opera, The Consul. The team included opera singers: Becca Marriott and Marie-Claire op ten Noort, Iranian composer Shohreh Shakoory, choir-leader Naveen Arles, Musical Director, Andrew Charity and Director, Stephen Tiller from Opera Machine & Kent Opera – working alongside a chorus of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees from Sanctuary Voices.

With more displaced people in the world than ever before, this 1950 opera has never been more relevant as a case for human rights. Limelight Magazine, Oct 2017.



LULLABIES AT THE CONSUL

Laila Sumpton

Vem kan segla förutan vind?
Vem kan ro utan åror?
Vem kan skiljas från vännen sin
Utan att fälla tårar?
Has anyone ever seen the consul?
As impossible as rowing
without oars
or sailing without wind.
I ask for your help
and all you give me is papers-
what is your name?
What is your name?
My occupation is waiting.
I sing as I wait for
the consul to wake,
I sing to send my baby to sleep
both are silent, and I am lost-
only holding my song
and a suitcase of papers
answered wrong.

The sea the only cradle I can rock
tide by tide on the shore
until I see the shade of you-
a far sail heading where
I cannot go.
The sea is dark with mother's tears
the waves move with our song-
praying you reach slumberland,
praying your father comes home.
Sleep my young one, sleep,
sleep on the red bed
father and mother will come.
Chicken, don't cry-
the baby may wake.
Sun, little sun come to see me
because I'm cold.
Soon the morn will break again
over hill and lea,
and when you will wake again,
you'll dance on Daddy's knee.

Counterpoints Arts’ Team: Dijana Rakovic, Justin O’Shaughnessy, Áine O’Brien, Marcia Chandra, Almir Koldzic, Tom Green, Emily Churchill Zaara, Nike Jonah and Chrissie Tiller

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