InsUrgency in Community 
Arts

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Statement of original authorship

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student:

Date:
Acknowledgements

Love and respect...

...for all kinds of unscratchable in words intellectual, political, emotional, or the holding of my sweaty and annoying self over these years,

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Beginnings

Thought struggles with screaming flesh, throbbing holes of hunger, the buried silence of depression or that “personality in shreds.”\(^1\) and with the tragedy of an ass planted on the television, watching as if they are the problems of some other time and place.

Right up until the completion of this dissertation, it remained a mystery. If I try to codify how I wrote it, the techniques and methods used for writing, I fail. Compressed, and other times combusting, sparsely there, abstractly present, seductive and ugly.\(^2\) A lot of the time I struggled to find the pieces of it. At other times they chased me down. As a complete piece of work, it kept itself secret until it was necessary to appear.

Take it. This is the only copy, safely spirited out. The rest have been burnt to nothing, leaving no chance for zionists, other imperialists, local businessmen and war mongers, all notorious for their mass destruction of doctoral theses, algebra homework, science projects and kindergarten paintings.

Rose Nakad
Community arts worker, youth worker and x doctoral student
Lebanon (and back to Sydney) 2009-2016


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Abstract

The following is a theoretical attempt to kidnap community arts. There is no ransom or prisoner exchange because community arts has chosen to stay with a time, place and people away from humanitarian interventions, pacifying art practices and the oppressive mimicking of standardised representation.

Contrary to some of the popular ideas about socially engaged or participatory art, there will be a return to the object of art. The object is understood as a possibility, a launching ground for action rather than the artefact of reified, elitist or commercialised legacies. Focus turns away from aesthetic reception, towards critical possibilities of production within a training context. The becoming of object into existence is broken down into a series of strategies, guided by philosophical and artistic concepts taken from anti capitalist and anti colonial bodies of thought, in particular the work of Amiri Baraka and Theodor Adorno. Central to all concepts is an urgent need for art and culture to become autonomous and self determined phenomena, aesthetically disruptive of real life and its methodologies of control.

The production of art holds at its heart two major sentiments. The first is an urgent commitment to resist the tendency in community arts to re/describe the real: usually the lives of participants. This research is not satisfied with “show and tell,” and aims to offer ways to interfere with the ability of material suffering to reign supreme within the logic world of art. The second is the equally urgent commitment that training and production assert the right to, and joy of experimentation with form: form as a weapon against normalised and oppressive race, class and gender representation, and as a way to make process unique to the time, place and people of any given project. Form, speaking with the local and familiar as content, helps create a self determined process, unhindered by definitions of low art or high art, attempting to struggle for its own new and resistant specificity.

This research-as-dissertation is one of how, rather than what. It attempts to find new strategies that refresh and re/commit community arts practice to oppose and resist, away from normalised slogans of social change and transformation.