

Holding the space: the Seagrass Model

Ian Cuming

Abstract

Artists in partnership with research and evaluation professionals hold the key to a new paradigm of context-tailored, multi-method methodologies that may assist in better understanding the nature of culture. In the Seagrass Model, artists and local elders collaboratively develop cultural programs that address complex social issues and articulate evolving community value systems. Narrative, puppetry, music, dance and pyrotechnics combine with Indigenous sacred ceremony to engage local communities in producing ecology-based community celebrations. This practice-led research methodology uses the arts to envision, scope, implement, evaluate and report the community engagement process.

Keywords: arts, research, evaluation, puppetry, Indigenous, ecology, celebration, cultural, practice-led, community, engagement, Seagrass

To commence this article I wish to recognise the Bunurong people, on whose traditional lands I now live and work, and pay my respects to the elders past and present of the Kulin Nation and the wider community of Indigenous Australians. Honouring and connecting with our elders and our Country is sacred cultural business and constitutes the foundation of my life's work.

This article is dedicated to the living memory of artist and cultural activist Edward Baxter, my friend and mentor who died in June 2007.

The Seagrass 90 Life Cycles event was the final episode of a trilogy of community programs developed in Hastings, Victoria between 1987 and 1991. That project and my subsequent relationship with Ed has focused and propelled my whole career.

News of Ed's death came on the day I submitted my application to the Australia Council Community Partnerships Board for a fellowship to conduct research and projects in community arts and puppetry. My role as executor of his estate also commenced that day and with it a deep resolve to

continue the cultural work we had been doing together since 1990.

At the end of 2007 the Australia Council notified me that my application for a fellowship had been successful. The Seagrass Model¹, which was central to my fellowship application, identifies healing, ecology, the arts, indigenous culture and global culture as the essential elements of a holistic, intuitive approach to community cultural development (CCD). The aim of my research was to explore the potential for this model to generate a CCD evaluation methodology. This article reports on the two-year fellowship, explores the relationship between the fields of research, evaluation and community art, reflects on my career as a whole and looks at a few recent projects that may help in framing a model.

As a CCD methodology, Seagrass has its roots in a suite of idiosyncratic, arts-based community engagement processes. These in turn are based on the products and by-products of personal reflection and creative ideas tested repeatedly in community settings over decades

Over the last 30 years, the field of research has undergone a significant methodological metamorphosis. Quantitative analysis has opened up to qualitative evaluation, expressing in words what numbers alone can't capture. Target group participation has become a critical ingredient to authentic research practice, defining the parameters for action research. Growing out of this, practice-led and practice-based research proposes an exponential expansion of arts-based methodologies. The Seagrass Model is effectively practice-led research or practice-based research and may be infused with other more conventional quantitative methods – including surveys and head counts – and qualitative methodologies, combining methods such as most significant change, narrative inquiry, and photo and video narrative. What Seagrass specifically proposes is a 150-year research timeframe, with ongoing evaluation of all aspects of the program being based on cosmic rhythms including sun and moon cycles.

The title of this paper, 'Holding the space,' refers to the role played by artists as cultural development specialists maintaining a creative presence whilst mediating real community issues face-to-face with real people in real time with real deadlines and expectations in terms of the art process and product. The 'space' is one of vision and trust, willingness and openness within which a vulnerable creative unfolding occurs and out of which the voice of freedom speaks in the multiple languages of art. The finest evaluation occurs with all the senses present and that means being there to see, hear and feel what is happening.

Peter Schumann

One essential thread of my Australia Council fellowship research was undertaken overseas where I met with a couple of significant mentors, each

1. 'Seagrass' is a registered trademark. 'The Seagrass Model' is a trademark.

of whom had inspired me as I was just getting going in this business. The first of these was Peter Schumann who, with his wife Elka, established Bread and Puppet Theater in New York during the sixties. The second of these was John Fox who, with his wife Sue Gill and others, established Welfare State International in Ulverston in the UK during the seventies. The purpose of elaborating here on these visits is to evidence the value of personal presence in order to reflect on subtle and complex layers of form, and how momentary meetings may have significant long-term – even life-changing – effects.

In visiting Peter and Elka, I was blown away by their beautiful life-dedication to Bread and Puppet and was extremely fortunate to meet two waves of people moving through the completion of one summer program to the commencement of another. I arrived just in time to catch Elka's museum tour, in which she talked about the origins of the company in Peter's vision and its root in his Silesian ancestry. The tour started outside at the wood-fired oven that bakes the bread that feeds the company and the audiences. It then covered three floors of a huge, post-civil-war era barn that houses their incredible collection of puppets clumped wall to ceiling in exhibition spaces that once housed the farm's animal population over winter. The tour was passionate and exhaustive – covering the themes, icons and story content of their work over nearly five decades – and came to an end only as we heard the shouts and bugle calls that announced the commencement of the show across the road.

The show was performed by first-time interns from all over the USA and beyond, combined with local community and company employees. Its title was the *Sourdough Philosophy Circus and Pageant*, a political satire and performance art spectacle staged in and around an old gravel quarry on their 90-acre Vermont property. The performance commenced with small vignettes presented by the interns as a part of their training. The circus itself had evolved from an earlier incarnation of the show, titled *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus*, which grew over a couple of decades to become an annual event attracting up to 30,000 people by the end of the 1990s. Comprising a series of scenes threaded together circus-style with an MC, a band and novelty acts, it used language and images to raise questions and make fun of the most serious issues facing contemporary America. Being pre-Obama, it included some election strands and a solid and poignant whack of material related to the Iraq war.

Similarly, the pageant component of the performance had a history of development over many years and took the form of a parade with flags and drums into a pine forest, where an over-sized, election-stew recipe book was read and enacted, punctuated from time to time by a bugle and ratchet and overseen by a six-metre-high puppet 'wall' of be-suited men. The pageant then proceeded back out into an open field, where a bureaucratic butcher in bloody apron mowed down the common people before they rose in

song and then in silence blew down the four metre high wall of suits. Small groups of pilgrim people in costumes and masks then emerged to light small fires and play music, hang up their washing and point to the sky as an old clown (Peter) and his apprentice picked up the wheelbarrow of human sacrifice and led the way off to an uncertain future. Culminating in the serving of heavy, dark, freshly baked sourdough bread dipped in a strong garlic and parsley aioli the audience were left to 'chew over' the art.

One significant affirmation in terms of my own arts practice was to register that Peter's images, themes and form have evolved steadily over a lifetime. In talking with him in between his theatre making, bread baking and family time this general professional reflection became immediately more personal. The last time we had spoken was following a Bread and Puppet performance at the Adelaide Festival in 1978. That event was formative in my choice to have a go at making large-scale outdoor theatre. I shared with him that my professional trajectory had been substantially propelled by his work and subsequently by that of Welfare State International. As he settled back with a beer to talk with me, Peter expressed interest in the work I was doing with Indigenous elders and community in Australia. I thanked him for his time and let him know I would be going next to the UK to visit John Fox and he asked me to convey his regards.

My visit proved to be a time of detailed reflection on the differences and similarities between Peter's political protest art and my own celebratory, science-based art. Through conversations with the many trainees and 'devotees' I was able to garner decades of perspective via their points of view and access the wealth of information each of them brought in to the Bread and Puppet frame. As an exercise in evaluation a couple of features stand out: first, simply being there afforded me the opportunity to dwell on and deeply contemplate the work of a most endearing, intelligent and courageous artist; second, the fact that Bread and Puppet owns its own real estate means that the company can sustain itself and maintain artistic autonomy on donations and fees alone without recourse to government grants or corporate sponsorship.

John Fox

John Fox founded Welfare State International (WSI) after seeing Bread and Puppet in the sixties. With a background in visual art, John was inspired by Peter to explore large-scale outdoor spectacle theatre with an up-front political agenda. WSI did that for over three decades. In 2006 the company was 'archived' following a point of departure between John and the community board running their facility and program. John and Sue now operate as The Dead Good Guides, continuing their respective and shared practices.

For many years I have referred to their work via Baz Kershaw's *Engineers of the imagination: the welfare state handbook*, a book full of images of powerful community activism using huge puppets, music and fire. My first encounter

with John occurred in 1979 over dinner in the group house I shared with a bunch of Victorian College of the Arts clowns. On that occasion John had piped in the dessert with a recorder – a simple but memorable ritual. This sense of ritual and a feeling of warmth was there again as I arrived at their beachside ‘weather station’ home perched on the edge of an extensive mudflat just south of Barrow-in-Furness. I conveyed Peter’s greetings to John and he replied that he regarded Peter as one of a few mentors in his life.

John’s clearly stated preference was that our conversation focus on current work rather than past projects. During our meeting they told me about a recent festival where they set up and operated a radio station, of Sue’s work in the field of life ceremonials and of an ongoing project called the ‘Rag Tree’, a low tree with many branches to which they had attached a collection of beach detritus in a sort of celebration of junk. John told of how they arrived one day to find that the whole tree had been neatly packed up and the ‘rag’ bundle placed nearby. He referred to the notion of ‘art by stealth’, giving the example of the Rag Tree and how he and Sue took that bundle and simply re-dressed the tree.

Following a sumptuous lunch I wandered up the beach to film the Rag Tree before sauntering back to the house for a meeting with a junk puppet elk and a glimpse of the studio. As I boarded the bus that waited while John drove back to retrieve my spray jacket, I was sad to be leaving. I was intensely grateful for the encounter and felt satisfied for having threaded a line of connection back through three decades from the USA to the UK to Australia. My time with John and Sue was limited but the critical principle of direct engagement enabled me to absorb by osmosis a quality or essence of their work that nourishes me still.

Seagrass Project

The Seagrass Model owes much to John and Peter but also to others who have introduced me to methods and dimensions of CCD. Neil Cameron and John Bolton had both worked with Welfare State prior to emigrating to Australia. In 1983 I worked with Neil and John on a street rally for People for Nuclear Disarmament (PND). We constructed large puppets to represent political caricatures for the Burke Street event. During that project I learned how to split and bend bamboo. I also experienced how art as new knowledge can pose a threat to the status quo as I witnessed PND asserting an anti-uranium message over one about land rights and favouring an autocratic process over one that respected personal vision. I formed a deep resolve to honour the intuitive space of spirit in my work ahead of superficial political agendas.

My CCD practice has as its central identity the curious art form of puppetry. Parallel practices that have always been a significant part of my creative life include writing and music, t’ai chi and gardening. This is important since the industry tends to favour specialisation. This breadth of expression is

essential for maintaining personal and professional equilibrium. As activists it is this internal cultural diversity that informs the way we think and act.

My chosen profession calls upon a unique infusion of skills and vision, guided by the influences of many mentors. These include: Lorraine (Lorrie) Gardner of the Gardner Puppet Theatre, my first employer and the person who introduced me to glove, rod and string puppetry in 1976; Peter Oyston, who was the founding dean of the VCA drama school where I trained as an actor/animateur; Nigel Triffit, with whom I worked on several black theatre 'spectacle' productions here and overseas using large-scale imagery for an adult audience; the late Aldo Genarro from Chile who directed the Arts Access Society's Theorem Project, featuring wheelchair puppetry at the Melbourne Concert Hall; Jonathan Fox, founder of Playback Theater, NY, in whose presence I first tested playback puppetry (not to be confused with the aforementioned John Fox, UK); and so many other colleagues along the way who have all informed my work and resourced my CCD toolkit, shaping a mythic journey through a diverse landscape of form development. These experiences as a contracted artist in turn grow out of more personal solo work.

In 1979, after seeing two impressive solo acts in Adelaide, I created the Puppet Tree, a solo walkabout performance and the first of an extensive series of ecology-based projects. In 1983 a studio performance, *The Ant, the Universe and Einstein* – a study of improvisation using objects moved in silence without a preconceived story – featured the Sugar Ant marionette, a scaled model of an ant from the Mornington Peninsula: another ecology concept. By 1987 the Seagrass Project Hastings fused spectacle with music and clowning in a series of community-based foreshore fairytales that aimed to raise awareness about the ecology of Westernport Bay. Through this initiative I was beginning to come to terms with the complex, big-picture challenge of modelling a healthy culture for my own hometown. In the Seagrass Model, the participant creator's attention is focused on an external metaphorical 'ecology' whilst evoking an internal capacity for empathy. In the context of a community project this collective dynamic of active caring opens a space for personal growth and insight whilst engaging the spirit and bringing people into committed and productive relationship. Despite being born decades ago, it is still a relatively new CCD approach and of particular relevance in addressing issues of personal health, social justice and environmental awareness.

The Seagrass Project itself proved to be a personal watershed for me as I worked in partnership with my dad, Dr Brian Cuming, an industrial scientist turned environmental activist and a dedicated campaigner for transparent and properly informed planning. Auspiced by the Westernport and Peninsula Protection Council, Seagrass was a three-year collaboration between a group of artists including musician Greg Stebbing, theatre director Meme Macdonald, pyro-technician Neil Cameron and visual artist

Simon Normand. One by-product of the Seagrass Project was a television documentary co-produced with Open Channel, which had the effect of projecting local sentiment onto a global stage. Seagrass also provided significant inspiration for others: Meme MacDonald facilitated a raft of projects, including *Waderbirds*, in which a series of community events were developed along the flight path of the migratory Eastern Curlew; in 2003 Mornington Peninsula Shire Council won the inaugural Best Australia Day Celebrations award, engaging ten community organisations in a parade of endangered species and redefining the day as a celebration of over 50,000 years; in 2007 the Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement and Museum embraced CCD in *Trading Places*, a moving cross-cultural expression of solidarity with the stolen generations; currently the Hugh D. T. Williamson Foundation, in conjunction with the E. O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation in San Diego, are developing arts-based citizen science programs based on this foundational work; the Torch project recently joined with the Victorian Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation and the Bunurong Aboriginal Co-op in Dandenong to enhance the state-wide netball and football carnival by engaging the community in a grand final half-time entertainment; Pelican Expeditions are working with Parks Victoria and others on the Two Bays project, combining science and cultural activities; and Lake Bolac Eel Festival are nurturing a new celebration as a part of their weekend format. All of the above have grown out of the Seagrass Model.

The Seagrass Model celebrates personal space, home culture and global ecology via artist-driven cultural programs that engage community participants in an ongoing research process in which the over-arching metaphor is ecology. This is represented using puppetry and such art forms as the community might propose or embrace. The purpose of celebration is differentiated from that of protest in order to establish inclusivity. The power of this approach can be disconcerting for some as the core subject matter is inherently problematic.

The Seagrass Model was used in the *Trading Places* project in Swan Hill in 2007. This project, funded by Festivals Australia, involved working with Indigenous elders towards a community celebration that aimed to tell a local story about the Murray River. The project referred to the history of human commerce and settlement in the region. Wirajiri elder Uncle Bruce Baxter established the idea of corroboree as a part of the story form and Wadi Wadi elder Aunty Elvie Kelly proposed the telling of the story of the 'Stolen Snakes' to honour her nephew's memory and his purpose of raising awareness about the stolen generations. This story served as a core reference for the community contributions that followed. Ken Stewart, manager of the Aboriginal Health Service, offered a workshop venue and assisted with Wemba Wemba permission protocols being met. Two critical issues in that project that required a firm stand on my part as coordinating artist were: (1) that the *Stolen Snakes* script stand unedited as the project framework; and (2) that we conduct the celebration in a circle rather than as a conventional

concert 'performance' with a defined stage. These choices enabled us to gather and share stories from pre- and post-settlement. Very recent refugee stories about journeys to Australia from Sudan, Afghanistan and Iraq were told with painted story-lanterns accompanied by the beat of a single hoop drum. The space held by the community was of active witnessing, not only of the art, but of each other. The newness of this space for the community was palpable and in post-project follow-up it became evident that responses of gratitude from some were contrasted by reactionary denial from others. Positive change in these situations is not always comfortable for everyone.

Even working with familiar forms the specifics of each new project demand fresh attention from the artist. Extracting the science upon which to base the art, mediating the demands of a community agenda and school curriculum, managing multiple new relationships and going with the flow of complex protocols and expectations can be soul-searing.

Eel Festival

The Eel Festival describes itself as a 'boutique' festival, combining a market and music festival with an art exhibition and science forum. It is exceptional in its central purpose of re-memembering the traditional eel harvest that followed the autumn rains. In 2008 I was invited to develop a Twilight Celebration component for the festival, made possible by Festivals Australia funding. The program comprised myriad practical tasks undertaken by many people working together over many months. In such a process passion is an essential ingredient in the work of the artist and provides the foundation not only for the art making but for the facilitation of a collective emotional release. This expressive purpose encompasses both internal-external and personal-collective aspects of the work and constitutes the core content of the community engagement process. The art itself and any environmental awareness-raising are a by-product of a deeper, heart-felt, energetic cultural exchange. Effective monitoring and evaluation of such a labyrinthine process may best be done by an ongoing intuitive synthesis of all levels simultaneously.

Louise, the Lake Bolac P-12 school librarian, offers a view from close proximity to the main project construction venue:

I had the privilege of witnessing the creation of the puppets and appreciated all the blood, sweat and tears that went into it. All the while quietly curious as to how the whole thing was actually going to come together on the night. Well, it completely exceeded my expectations! Casting my eyes around the audience I saw a large group of people that were literally spellbound – you could have heard a pin drop! A great team effort for a wide cross section of community members and students resulted in a very thought provoking, powerful production. One of the best bedtime stories I've ever had!

The process of art-making for me is essentially one of objectifying inner realities or intuitive knowledge via the art product. It is unashamedly mysterious and open in its form while providing recognisable reference points for people who may be unfamiliar with the looseness of structured improvisation or collaborative ritual.

Richard Cooke, the Eel Festival project musician observes:

The rich combination of Indigenous dance/ceremony, huge scale puppetry, pyrotechnics, shadow puppetry, original live music and narration set in the vast, desolate and beautiful lake bed made for a mystical experience that was unanimously accepted as artistically unique and unforgettable. Words cannot do any justice to this event but [I] encourage others to seek out video/photographic and audio documentation to gain an impression of the rich layers of art forms, culture and expression experienced by the performers and audience alike.

The Seagrass Model and product is a celebration of local ecology. So the metaphor for culture comes from the environment. The metaphor for self is also informed by this same ecology. In form the celebration may be a parade or concert format performance with discrete community elements that come together in a circle. It may borrow from *commedia dell'arte* in that certain physical business is pre-rehearsed and located within a linear scenario. It may derive from Playback Theatre or homespun studio work that supplies approaches to image and action, soundscape and other interaction. The outcomes may be 'performance'-based or incorporate exhibitions and installations. Whatever the form, we're talking about art providing the impetus and the framework for a new kind of research, one that permits plurality of experience and admits to the subjective viewpoint. Through CCD fundamental questions are being generated about the nature of democracy and the processes that underpin human well-being. As artists we are putting ourselves on the line as cultural canaries in the high-risk venture of establishing the viability of extracting knowledge from the source of self in-community.

In the Seagrass Model, deep, life-long processes and global references are at work. As already mentioned, the puppetry forms themselves derive from decades of conscious development tracing back through Hastings, Victoria from 1988 to 1990, to the UK and the USA of the sixties and seventies. These forms then date back to earlier traditions in Europe dating back through traditions such as the Punch and Judy of the seventeenth century to neolithic cave art. Of course, the outcome around that sacred fire on the Lake Bolac shore in 2008 is the pointy end of an even deeper and longer-term process that has taken place over maybe 60,000 years or more. Integral, then, to the power of this contemporary festival event is Indigenous song, dance and story-telling.

Uncle Ted Lovett, in his welcome to country that night, said:

We do not own the land, the land owns us, therefore we must care for it to provide us and our generation of children with a future along with the flora, fauna and aquatic life. The law of the land is the very heart of our existence ... that is what land means to us. We nurture our children to take the roles of the custodians and carers and eventually elders. There's one human race in this world and we are it, so let's bind together as one and show the world that we can live in harmony together with our lands.

Jamie Thomas, in his introduction said:

Our ceremonies are something that are very sacred to Aboriginal people. The dances that you see tonight, they come from our people, from our hearts, from our spirits ... we wake the land up with this corroboree, with this *karween* ... let the old people know we are here.

Neil Murray, musician, author and Eel Festival committee member comments:

I felt that I had just witnessed the birth of a new creative direction in performing Indigenous story and dance. The implementation of puppetry was embraced by local Indigenous artists and dancers as a way of amplifying and accentuating the meaning of their stories. In effect it evoked for the audience the magical and timeless spirit of the Dreamtime. It was wondrous to witness the grace of five-metre-tall brolgas prancing alongside painted-up dancers. The appearance of a gigantic eel from out of the darkness, swirling around the dancer's campfire, seemed to emanate from the very heart of Lake Bolac.

Aron, a student from Mortlake Secondary College wrote: 'I had fun making the Kangaroo. I would like to do it again sometime and also really enjoyed making it and I had fun playing with the Kangaroo. I've never made anything like it before'.

The challenge for me of creating authentic works of genuine beauty is rewarded many times over as the work speaks for itself and the burden of longing is set down. Whether the art is instrumental in serving other purposes matters not as a powerful latent community spirit is released. The many forms that come together in this fleeting way evidence the diversity of cultures within the community and the possibility of their harmonious co-existence. In terms of the festival's objective of remembering the eel harvest ritual, the event itself is the evidence. Along the way everyone brings their own personal particular to the collective ritual warmed by the fire and contained by the circle. In that circle for that moment it is possible for everyone to be recognised and celebrated. Practical pluralism is what it is: secular and sacred all at the same time.

The ethical framework for the Seagrass Model grows out of respect for indigenous cultures as the foundation for all human culture. We all come

from somewhere and as we inhabit that 'somewhere' our roots develop, along with our detailed associations with landscape, our law and our spiritual constructs. Migration is no less valid; however, there is an unavoidable loss that accompanies relocation and with it a common deficit in the capacity to imagine holistic stability personally and collectively. Front-line colonists and their descendants may sacrifice dignity in order to retain identity and compromise truth in order to establish new order. Prime Minister Rudd's apology to Indigenous Australians for years of systemic abuse was broadcast on the day of our first secondary school workshops for the Eel Festival and provided the basis for music and puppetry workshops starting that day.

One Indigenous colleague said to me over the phone a few weeks after the event: 'We're dreaming together now, brother.' For Indigenous participants in the Eel Festival, *that* ceremonial of the Twilight Celebration in 2008 was age-old and inherently spiritual. Wariness was expressed by one of the dancers, who said just prior to the Twilight Ceremony: 'We're not going to be part of any *performance*. This is sacred business.' From there it was necessary to confer with the elders and acknowledge the order of things. This is an Indigenous space governed by age-old ritual and protocols beyond my knowing and, despite considerable prior consultation with Kirrae Wurrung, Wauthurung and Gunditjmarra elders, not everyone felt comfortable about the idea of linking the traditional space with a contemporary celebration. Nick Hayne, who had been working with me on the Twilight Celebration from the outset, ensured that we completed all the necessary consultations and that the basis for our work together was sacred ceremony, letting go of any *performance* intention. This need not be a limitation but it does require an unusual reversal of expectations.

In the context of an event such as the Lake Bolac Eel Festival the process of mediation for the purpose of celebration is undertaken by the artist or cultural activist as the one with expertise not only in playing with form and content but the one with a known talent for active dreaming. For the artist, vision dwells in the heart. We evaluate from this position. We research this internal reality first, framing the inquiry with mystery and establishing reason in the context of soul. We exploit our own capacity for compassion before, during and after our dependence on any other resource – human, material or financial. This is the work of the artist.

Ways of knowing

The way we construct culture is ultimately unknowable. It is far too complex and buried in the minute micro-processes of life as we live it on a daily basis. Through the Seagrass Model, however, I am attempting to anchor an approach to the task, a methodology. What the artist does to get us within 'cooee' of an understanding of culture is to embody multiple forms of knowledge and produce evidence that appeals to the senses and is therefore accessible. Training in many disciplines passed on by many mentors over

many years leads to the creation of new forms that necessarily refer to and carry on traditional forms. Multiple forms comprise the ground out of which any art product emerges and out of which meaningful dialogue may result.

Evaluation in its organic form is something we all do continuously and instinctively in order to survive and to maximise the utilisation of our existing personal resources. Applied to the context of cultural development, where the concerns are both local and global, evaluation may be considered as a process of acknowledging or attributing diverse specific values as a basis for allocating resources. The work of artists as cultural mediators, for example, could be the subject of an evaluation scoping, implementation and reporting process towards recognising the real value of the artist's actual contribution to culture. The same could also be done in relation to the work of corporate, government and NGO program evaluators as cultural mediators looking for new ways to engage end-users in meaningful dialogue about the effectiveness of community-based program initiatives.

Through the Seagrass Model, therefore, I propose that research and evaluation professionals might embrace the work of the artist as a collaborator not only in arts projects but in other endeavours. In this way researchers might then accompany the artist as cultural initiators – and vice versa – and focus research efforts on gathering data about the changes occurring on the fringes and in the shadow of the art-making without disturbing the inner sanctum. By doing so we stand half a chance of finding out what's going on in the hearts and minds of our least likely creative champions and thereby informing a reasonably interesting and productive cultural future.

Ian Cuming, artist and Australia Council Fellow, is currently undertaking research and projects in community arts and puppetry as a part of his fellowship in which he seeks to articulate an evaluation methodology for community cultural development practice.

Recommended reading

Wilson, R., *Bringing them home: national inquiry into the separation of aboriginal and torres strait islander children from their families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, April 1997.