

PLAY

Where is the art in Arts Front? Everywhere: The gathering was an amazing piece of art, a performative event, a struggle for the soul of our practice, our shared values, our unifying dissonance, to continue defining how we stand together and where we need separate strategies. Hundreds of people dared to play and co-create a shared vision, and we stumbled and met.

EXCHANGE

To be stuck, a weird, painful joy, the agony of complex collaborations, so many voices, so little time to walk through conflicting needs. And the inherent violence, the divide and rule of our lived competitive processes we have embodied and champion. The absurdity that we are still learning how to talk to each other to define a language in which to address the fire that is burning down our home – it's a journey, are we there yet?

COMMONS

What's at stake is enormous. Our ability as diverse people living on this continent, to collectively imagine, reflect, disrupt and reframe. Our existence is under threat, and that threat divides us.

Atomized, our livelihoods are taken, defunded, not defended – and the privileged myth 'it won't hit me' plays on... Across space and time humans have experimented with humane, human exchanges, this unprecedented, amorphous assault of privatized, globalised, neo-colonial extractivist, commodified debt slavery is a relatively new arrival and it is fallible. Our imagination, our stories are commons... under the pavement, the beach.

SYSTEMS

Everything is connected. The political and environmental quakes are shaking the very ground we speak on – no planet, no play. The new Magic Helpers, the Trumps and their battalions of enablers are coming at us fast and steady, to hear their war drums droning - be scared, be ready, activate. The arts are at a rupture point, and the gaps are widening. Why have all our creative attempts for change contributed to this? How effective and relevant are our structures and narratives?

MINDFULNESS

We are not justified by our say so, when we gather, what informs our feet? We need to constantly negotiate, and that is frustrating and time consuming, the less we train it... We need to relearn to negotiate, practice it, welcome failure, play again – then press repeat. Privilege is an obligation, not a blame-and-shame fest, but a responsibility to be humble and roar: to lead is to serve, to represent publicly is to communicate transparently what we have negotiated equitably. Sweet words, and so poisonous if we don't live them, and question what they really mean to ourselves and others. No magic bullet meditation, justice is lived practice.

IDENTITY

As artists we negotiate values, frames and the messaging from the unknown. There is power in our art, but if we forget there is also privilege, we run into the fair-world fallacy, that my sense of identity and good intentions can't possibly lead to bad process and outcomes. Art is not an inherently progressive value, neo-cons make 'excellent' art and neo-nazis run well organised community art campaigns, too.

IMAGINE

They don't need to burn the books if there are no courageous writers. We ignore at our peril that the elites don't need or want us any longer. They may invite some of us in to deliver pacifying projects in desperate places, or soothing diversions of inclusivity, and yes, some conservatives want arts and education in their privileged halls... but will they pick me, will I accept, and how will I refuse, disrupt and reframe?

CONTRIBUTE

We have all become experts at neo-liberal practice...yet we use imaginative language to achieve much of anything - so let's bring our Philosopher-Poets out of retirement, strip the commercial gloss from our paintings, take the defensive architectures out of our sculptures, and review the pseudo-inclusivity in our community engagement. And have the courage to fail gloriously.

LIBERATION

'How is your liberation bound up with mine?' is not a one-way street, it is a reciprocal process, a mutual obligation, as a desired and actionable equity. Children negotiate - if you don't play well with me, I will walk away. And we need to call out structural and direct violence and say no way. So much goodwill is lost when we fail to negotiate equitably and transparently. At Arts Front two hundred skilled, passionate, creative, disparate, frustrated people felt hurt and noticed they need to frame their shared values and discuss power and privilege. Self determined play is risky, we need to agree on our terms of respect and reciprocity, they are not givens, if we want to rebuild the eroded trust between us all.

SOLIDARITY

We left with a sense of inspired despair, so much to do, so little time. For those of us who are not silenced yet, use that privilege, use that time well. And before we get scared again and bunker into cozy echo chambers of techno-strategies, let's consider the unknown and the absent, the legal defense funds we will need when artists take real risks, the new justice economics, the open access unions we need to assemble, to arrive at solidarity. We can join other people's efforts and make our practice part of the overall global struggle. But let's also use the enormous skills and passion present in the Arts Front space, to make work that links those struggles, that communicates and questions our values and actions, to play in the unknown world we want to co-create, be scared, be exhilarated, activate.

