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Design educators reflecting on the call for the decolonisation of education

A Decolonial Academy? Addressing the Oxymoron: How a Series of Performative Art-Science Creative Encounters Might Serve as a Toolbox of Ideas

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Abstract

Disciplinary practitioners are challenged to respond urgently and positively to calls to decolonize the academy. There is an expectation that the learning experience as well as the curriculum content needs to be fundamentally reshaped in response to the socio-political-economic realities of this century. To add to the complexity, as daily newscasts confirm, outside the ivory towers there is a growing sense that all is not well with the world, and that there is a need for radical social change.

So what toolbox of possibilities is there to draw on as we set out to collectively re-imagine the future, as we attempt to envisage the oxymoron – the Decolonial Academy? As de Sousa Santos phrases it, how do we address ‘the paradox of urgency and civilizational change’ and at the same time make a hope-filled ‘wager on another possible world’.

Writing from an Autoethnographic perspective, we describe an ongoing cross-disciplinary project that has seen artists, scientists, students and academics, community activists and disciplinary practitioners engaging with one another in a series of place-focused off-campus encounters. In these various configurations of the ‘un-like-minded’ have set out to see the world through one another’s eyes and address vexing problems.

We have made use of both arts-based and scientific methodologies – whatever best allows us to explore, think, share, and express our ideas and solutions. We do not meet in plush conferencing surrounds - our locations are intentionally discomfiting. In the course of the encounters we have been exposed to a multiplicity of unsettling realities but we have also rekindled our embodied connections with the real world, away from the ivory towers, and established new and vibrant networks with one another and across disciplinary divides.

In the paper we position the art-science-place encounters within a performative-research paradigm, as situated practices integrally connected to socio-cultural contexts and to place, and we map them against the literature. We maintain that this immersive embodied approach provides a positive and flexible model for participatory engagement, one that shifts the ownership of knowledge away from the ‘disciplinary knowers’ and places it in the hands of the entire collective of explorer-participants. We suggest that the approaches that we espouse in the encounters are transferable, and we hope that they will be of use to colleagues in the creative disciplines, as we all set out to ‘wager on another possible world’.

Keywords: *art-science; place; performativity; decolonial; transdisciplinary; pluriversity*

Introduction

Disciplinary practitioners are challenged to respond urgently and positively to calls for the decolonization of the academy. There is an expectation that the learning experience as well as the curriculum content needs to be fundamentally reshaped in response to the socio-political-economic realities of this century. To add to the complexity, as daily newscasts confirm, outside the ivory towers there is a growing concern that all is not well with the world, and that there is a need for radical social change.

So how can the dual curricular transformation and emancipation project be moved forward creatively? What contribution can people like ourselves legitimately make, people who operate from within the university as it exists at present, and who, despite our sharp criticisms of its failings, have to acknowledge our possessive investment in the places in which we work?

As we are part of the 'old system' we have to ask ourselves: What is our agency as social actors? (Archer 2004, p. 12). What can we bring to the process of re-visioning and reshaping the academic world that we inhabit? How can we engage purposefully, and how do we navigate the terrain between academic rigidity, compliance, and chaos, without us having a reassuringly predetermined destination clearly identified for us prior to our departing on the journey?

It is a given that we need to share innovative ideas and resources as we set out to *facilitate the paradigm shifts* that will be required if today's universities are to be repurposed as pluriversities that can serve a different tomorrow, if disciplinary programs and curriculums are to be re-conceptualized, if disciplinary hierarchies and silos are to be challenged and dismantled, and if that oxymoron, *the Decolonial academy*, is to become something more than an elusive pipe dream.

There are increasing numbers of academics whose thinking we can draw on, people who are adopting insightful and alternative ways to approach curriculum renewal and inter- and transdisciplinary practices, or who challenge their fellow academics to think differently and, like Nomalanga Mkhize (2015 online), explore the possibilities that are to be found in 'disruptive' pedagogies and the 'delicate combination of teaching through nurturing and teaching through disruption'. We hope to add a creative contribution to this growing body of work.

We write from an Autoethnographic perspective, which, as Ellis, Adams and Bochner tell us (2011, p. 3) means that we 'retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity'. They explain that this approach, whilst it acknowledges and accommodates the researchers emotionality, subjectivity and influence on research, 'rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist' (2011, p. 2), also requires us to write analytically as we use 'personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make [the] characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders' (2011, p. 3).

We describe an ongoing inter- / transdisciplinary Art meets Science meets Place project that we are part of. This is a project that has seen artists, scientists, students and academics,

community activists and disciplinary practitioners engaging with one another in a series of discomfiting and place-focused off-campus encounters, with various configurations of the 'un-like-minded' setting out to see the world through one another's eyes. Our hope is that in so doing, the participants, ourselves included, will begin to see the world differently, with new understandings of its enormous complexity and of the multiplicity of ways of knowing and being that are possible, and that this will empower us all to address our challenges creatively, and differently.

We draw on the writings of the decolonial theorist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and on those of Catherine Odora-Hoppers and Howard Richards, whose focus is on the radical 'rethinking' of academic thinking, and we take a position regarding our own agency as participant-facilitator-learners, when we express our commitment to collectively exploring the world outside our own narrow disciplines in order to find ways to contribute to a different, decolonial and pluriversal academy. We consider how the project continues to evolve to accommodate new participants and different contexts, and we endeavor to frame the emergent practice and its methodologies in relation to the literature, mapping it to a range of writings focused on performativity, participation, arts-based methodologies and embodied presence in relation to place.

Exploring the rethinking of the academy

We are interested in the question of how to address the academic oxymoron and we hope that our encounter methodologies might serve some purpose as people set out to address their disciplinary dilemmas, therefore, before we reflect in any detail on the project it makes sense for us to pause and draw briefly from the theorists who have informed our understanding of the crisis of the present, and who have provided insights to us.

Sabelo Nhlovu-Gathsheni sees decoloniality as the future of Africa. He states (2013, p. 16) that he, along with like-minded thinkers, focuses on foundational questions around power, epistemologies and ontologies as he looks forwards towards a future pluriversality. Achille Mbembe, writing from a postcolonial position, also espouses the notion of a pluriversity, visualizing an academy that supports a process of knowledge production that is open to epistemic diversity and that facilitates the re-founding of teaching practices in a way that transcends the current disciplinary divisions. As a way of moving forward he suggests that we should be imagining alternative ways of constructing knowledge in a reinvented 'classroom without walls in which we are all co-learners' (Mbembe 2015, p. 19). In their embrace of pluriversality and the pluriversity, both Gathsheni and Mbembe acknowledge Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and it is to the writings of Santos, and those of Hoppers and Richards, that we turn here for theoretical understanding.

Thinking about 'Rethinking Thinking'

Hoppers and Richards (2012, p. 4) focus on the need for a radical rethinking of thinking. They observe that cultural and epistemological alienation appears to be the order of the day, and they suggest that the status quo is untenable and unsustainable in enumerable ways. They propose a 'transformation by enlargement' (2012, p. 35) within the university, with the opening up of the traditional knowledge paradigms. Referring to the intractable challenges that face society, they point to an irony – the fact that the enormous accumulation of

different knowledge that has been accrued over time and that is readily available to us simply does not provide solutions to humanity's problems (2012, p. 39). So how can the status quo be overturned? As a way to embark upon the process of rethinking thinking they recommend the formation of what they refer to as a meta-methodology, one that involves 'forming discursive coalitions' (2012, p. 40) that restore the knowledge connections that history has shattered and that put forward ways to move from the uneasy present toward new territories.

Reappraising our own positions: acknowledging our 'learned ignorance' and recognizing our need to 'wager on another possible world'

Boaventura De Santos, addressing the possibilities of epistemological change, points out that over the centuries, despite the seemingly monolithic nature of the Eurocentric canon, there has been a range of knowledge paradigms, concepts, theories, arguments and ways of constructing understandings of the world that have been discarded, marginalized or ignored. This, as he points out, is because ways of thinking simply did not fit the socio-political agenda of Western modernity, with its twin narratives of colonialism and capitalism. He focuses our attention on four interlinked concepts: Nicholas of Cusa's 'learned ignorance', the 'ecology of knowledge', the 'artisanship of practices' and Blaise Pascal's 'wager on another possible world'. These are concepts that we believe will help us as we set out to question and reappraise our assumed wisdom as 'disciplinary knowers' (Santos 2009, p. 103).

Santos (2009, pp. 114-118) explains the concept of 'learned ignorance' and suggests; 'to be a learned ignorant in our time is to know that the epistemological diversity of the world is potentially infinite, and that each way of knowing grasps it in only in a very limited manner'. This leaves the learnedly ignorant one with something of a dilemma. How do you know enough to know what you do not know, and how, having realized your ignorance, do you set about addressing it, carrying the new knowledge that there is an infinity of ways of knowing the world? Santos suggests that the only way to grasp both 'the possibilities and the limits of understanding' of each way of knowing is by comparison, and that this requires the construction of what he refers to as 'ecologies of knowledge'. The learnedly ignorant one has to engage in what Santos describes as an 'artisanship of practices'. Through acts of crafting and construction an 'epistemological dimension' is established, one that creates understandings and 'new kinds of solidarity among social actors or groups'.

Finally Santos (2009, pp. 119-120) looks, as we do, towards the uncertain future, and how we can best approach it. He refers to Pascal, who, wagering on God's existence despite having no concrete proof of it, elected to lead a contributive life, whilst accepting that there was no guarantee of a passage to Heaven and the hereafter. Santos presents the wager as a metaphor – we have to start from a radical uncertainty, and work to contribute to a future that will be better than the present or the past, with no guarantees provided as to what that future might bring with it, in terms of possessive benefits for us. What we have in common with Pascal, as Santos tells it, are the limits of rationality, the precariousness of calculations, the awareness of the risks and the willingness to make a hope-filled 'wager on another possible world' (2009, p. 103).

Drawing from these writings our understanding is clear: there are other ways of doing things, other ways of constructing knowledge, and we should not remain shackled to the past, despite the fact that the future trajectory is uncertain. For us as academics operating from within different disciplines, determined to assume some form of responsive agency as social actors (Archer 2004, p. 12) in a precarious time of change, our consistent point of reference in this project as it moves forward, has to be the acknowledgment of our own 'learned ignorance', our admission of what we do not know or understand about the world beyond our disciplines and outside our campuses, and our willingness to acquire new understandings, to work to 'see' the world differently, through the eyes of others, through the eyes of students and members of the wider communities, and to engage with its challenges in new ways.

Positioning the Art meets Science meets Place Project

The beginnings

In 2013 we met for a discussion, two practitioner-theorists from the Visual Arts, a prominent research-seasoned Botanist, and a postdoctoral fellow from the Department of Botany. We agreed that we are living in discomfiting times, ecologically, socially and epistemologically, and that humankind, is in a 'bit of a jam'. Our thinking was clear and simple, and not at all original: these challenges would not be solved if the disciplines, including the sciences, the humanities and the arts, keep working in isolation. We agreed that establishing a creative working connection between our two disciplines was a starting point, however small.

We were aware of the literature, of the established art-science collaborations operating across the globe, and of Art-Science focused publications like *Leonardo*. But there were none of those collaborations in existence at our institution, and where there had been any interest in cooperation expressed over the years, it had tended to revolve around offers to allow visual arts students to 'illustrate' science.

Our initial discussion focused around our understanding that whilst artists and scientists may share the same underpinning curiosity, and harbor the same concerns about the state of the world around them, the routes they take in their investigations seem to lead them to widely different and discipline-locked constructions of understanding of that world, and widely differing ways of addressing its challenges. Despite knowing that not all our colleagues saw the same value that we did in this newly forged alliance of the disparate, we embarked upon our planning, and we envisaged our project as a small step in the right direction.

The project trajectory

Since 2013 we have facilitated four 'formal' Art meets Science meets Place encounters. In addition we have been able to apply our methodology and facilitate adapted encounters in other spaces, including at an institutional level Teaching and Learning Retreat focused on curriculum renewal and transformation held in June 2017. We have a further two activities planned for the second semester of 2017.

Thus far over 160 people have contributed to the four 'formal' encounters, in different disciplinary permutations. These include both under-graduate and postgraduate students drawn from the visual arts, media studies, architecture, education, the humanities and the

natural and social sciences, along with academics, visual arts activists, community members, botanists, historians, environmentalists, architects, urban planners and international scholars and students.

An outline of each encounter presented thus far is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Details of Art meets Science meets Place Encounters, 2013 -2017

2013: Encounter One: Kaboega Journals: The presence of absence (Pilot project)	
Programmatic approach:	Pilot cross-disciplinary encounter with place - 'Seeing with new eyes'
Focus:	Semi-structured lecturer-driven site-specific art and science activities, experiments, discussions, 'performative' activations and collective and individual art-making in response to place
Place and duration:	6 Biome wilderness area with adjacent degraded thicket restoration project 4 days on-site stay accommodation in a rudimentary barn
Participants:	Academics: 2 Visual Arts, 2 Botany, 1 Historian, 2 International 1 Visual Arts practitioner-activist, 1 documentary photographer, 1 writer
Outputs:	Students: 19 Honors, 9 Masters (Visual Arts, BAS, Botany, Zoology, Social Sciences, International) Curated institutionally-sponsored exhibition of creative and academic research outputs Generation of ideas and research questions for honors, masters, and doctoral projects
2015: Encounter Two: Mapping Kaboega: Journeys back in time	
Programmatic approach:	Experimental, open-ended cross-disciplinary encounter with place –addressing ecological and social challenges, and the notion of deep time and its relation to the histories of place
Focus:	Semi-structured student-driven site-specific art and science activities, experiments, discussions, performative activations and collective and individual art making in response to place
Place and duration:	6 Biome wilderness area with adjacent degraded thicket restoration project 4 days on-site stay with accommodation in a rudimentary barn
Participants:	Academics: 2 Visual Arts, 1 Science, 1 Historian 2 Visual Arts practitioner-activists
Outputs:	Students: 14 Masters, 2 PhD (Visual Arts, Botany, Zoology, Sustainable Development) Generation of ideas and research questions for honors, masters, and doctoral projects Planned cross-disciplinary exhibition of outputs could not be staged due to lack of funding
2016: Encounter Three: Baakens Valley Urban Exploration: Bringing nature back into the city	
Programmatic approach:	Open ended cross-disciplinary walking encounter with place - seeing with new eyes - area of civic, historical, ecological significance, plagued by crime, at risk ecologically - followed by full day collective making workshop, with feedback from student facilitators
Focus:	Semi-structured student-driven site-specific art / science activities, discussions, performative activations, conceptualization, designing, collective and individual art making in response to place
Place and duration:	Inner city: civic precinct and adjacent indigenous green lung nature reserve 2 days: 1 day encounter and 1 day workshop
Participants:	Academics: 2 Visual Arts, 1 Botany, 1 Historian 1 Visual Arts practitioner-activist, 2 Visual Arts community activists, 1 urbanist
Outputs:	Students: 23 first degree, 5 Honors, 4 Masters students (Visual Arts, Architecture) Community: 25 artists Generation of artworks. Presentations of design ideas focused on the re-centering of nature and the indigenous in the inner city. Video
2017: Encounter Four: Deconstructing the Square: People, place and time	
Programmatic approach:	Walking encounter with place -- dialogues around the relationship between humans and nature - human settlement and its consequences, the natural environment pre- colonial to the present.
Focus:	Semi-structured student-driven site-specific art / science activities, discussions, performative activations, conceptualization, designing, collective and individual art making in response to place
Place and duration:	Inner city square: Park civic precinct and adjacent indigenous green lung nature reserve Half day: presentation, encounter and workshop
Participants:	Academics: 2 Visual Arts, 1 Botany, 2 Mathematics, 1 Education
Outputs:	Students: 24 first degree, 5 Honors, 2 Masters, 1 PhD student (Visual Arts, Science, Education) Collective drawing using lime chalk, cardboard. Workshop: Collective scribing of reflections on the experience of 'being in place'. Video

Some detail on the places and the processes

The two earliest encounters were staged in a unique six biome tract of land where the natural wilderness environment has been harshly impacted upon by human activity, and where there are now ecological restoration projects in process. There, with diverse groups of participants from the sciences and the arts, we focused on issues related to land, ecology, history, human migration and creativity. We explored 'place' in an embodied way, walking, observing, conducting 'experiments' that drew on one another's methodologies. We shared conversations about our different ways of understanding and we engaged in collective 'art' making processes, (and all of this in a geographic location where there is no cellphone reception, which changed the group dynamic in multiple interesting ways).

More recently we have focused our attention nearer to home, and closer to the 'real world' that exists as an uneasy parallel reality immediately adjacent to our academic spaces. Thus far our encounters have taken us into inner city streets and besieged green spaces, into

places that enjoy 'bad reputations', places that many of the participants have acknowledged they usually drive through with their car doors locked. There we have walked and engaged with place performatively, not as academics and students gathering data, not as scientists making observations about the 'terrain', or social scientists examining the behaviours of its inhabitants, but as Autoethnographers, immersing ourselves in the collective experience of being *in* place and at the same time being *out of* place, scrutinizing and acknowledging our own disciplinary and subjective ignorance and bias.

Each encounter with place has culminated in an intensive participant-driven collective workshopping process, with the emphasis being placed on the sharing and visualising of ideas and understandings, drawing on arts-based and participative methodologies.

Positioning the Art meets Science meets Place Project in relation to the literature

There is a flexible methodological underpinning to the project, one that has emerged over time and one that we think aligns with the literature. What is common to all the encounters is an enormous energy, as we set about the business of participative, collective and creative engagement with the materiality of places, the 'handling' of material and some form of process-based art making that is *not about the creation of pretty artworks*, as part of an active process of connecting disparate groups of people. What is also common to the encounters is a degree of unease, and discomfort, and the acknowledgement of 'not knowing'. Carolyn Palmer, Reinette Biggs and Graham Cumming (2015, p. 52) draw attention to the positive generative potential of the discontinuities, discomfort and unresolved tensions that participants' experience when engaged in research across and beyond the disciplines, as well as the 'aha' moments and the insights and the learning opportunities that these projects afford them. This has been our experience.

Explorations of transdisciplinarity and pluriversality

The project had its origins in our desire to explore interdisciplinarity. Allen Repko and Rick Szostak (2016, p. 26) explain the approach as one that draws on and integrates different disciplinary insights in order to facilitate the consideration of complex and mega problems. Transdisciplinarity, they tell us, extends that integrative approach, and involves the participation of social actors and agents from spaces outside the academy. By now, as the project continues to develop, we prefer to position the encounters in the space of transdisciplinarity, as tentative explorations of the pluriversal, with the writings of Santos, Hoppers and Richards, Gathsheni and Mbembe informing our understandings. Our interest lies in the expansion of the project into the world beyond the university, not just in terms of its sites, but also in terms of its engagement with members of the multiple communities of knowledge that operate outside the orthodox paradigms of the academy. By engaging with social actors from outside of the academe, we are striving to create an epistemology that transcends the multitude of borderlines that we humans have created.

Challenging the disciplinary optics through performative, process-focused and participatory creative engagements

Students who enter the university do not usually arrive as fully formed disciplinary actors. They are inducted into their chosen area of study through an engagement with its conventions. Over time they learn to understand the world through a particular disciplinary

'lens' or 'prism', and in doing so they may very well leave substantial aspects of their own identity out of the equation, and be disinclined to acknowledge the possibility of ways of knowing other than those within the disciplinary canon. Academics, as the 'disciplinary knowers', are somehow complicit in this process of enclosure, acting as both gatekeepers to and fellow prisoners within the disciplinary silos.

We have attempted to position the art-science encounters within a performative-research paradigm, as democratizing and situated practices that are integrally connected to socio-cultural contexts. Brad Haseman (2006, pp. 8-9) explains performative research 'as that which is initiated in practice'. In the case of our encounters, it is initiated in the field, as questions, problems, and challenges are identified as an outcome of the engagement between practitioners; and where 'the research strategy is carried out through practice' using re-purposed established methods from diverse research traditions. In our case the collective of researchers used visual journals, cellphone cameras, scientific observation methods, and reflective discussion and the sharing of personal experience, 'to complement and enrich their investigations'.

We maintain that this immersive embodied approach provides a positive and flexible model for participatory engagement, one that shifts the ownership of knowledge away from the 'disciplinary knowers' and places it in the hands of the entire collective of explorer-participants.

Encounter participants engage in creative dialogue with 'others' and with the place in which they find themselves. In theorizing the project's approach, we draw on and repurpose Judith Butler's writings (2007, pp. 192-193) on performativity and identity. She focuses on how gender identities are constructed, maintained and accepted (by the actor her / himself and by the societal audience), through 'a stylized repetition of acts'. She points out that the 'phantasmatic' affect of an abiding identity', is actually 'a politically tenuous construction'. Identity, she suggests, is in reality not fixed at all. It can be reconsidered, realigned and re-performed. She proposes performative configurations that operate outside restrictive *gendered* frames.

Art-science participants are invited to 'disrupt' their own *disciplinary* optics and to challenge the supposedly fixed frames of their *disciplinary* identities, through participatory and process focused 'creative play' that draws on both sets of disciplines for inspiration. The focus is placed on seeing differently, on re-considering and re-engaging, on immersive participation and on exploration. In his writing Lesley Le Grange (2016, p. 9) proposes an emphasis on the performative side of *knowledge creation*, (along with a related de-emphasis on the representational side), arguing that 'this focus on the performative decentres dominant knowledge systems and produces third spaces (spaces in between) where seemingly disparate knowledge's can be equitably compared and function to work together'.

There is ample literature that supports our understanding that collaborative, creative participatory practices contribute to the establishment of new social dynamics; so, for example, Claire Bishop (2006, pg. 12) points to the possibilities, observing that that the approach both emerges from and produces a positive and non-hierarchical social model, one

that can help to restore social bonds through a collective elaboration of meaning. Paul Carter (2004, p. xiii) states that working in creative collaborations fosters a unique set of inter-subjective collaborations, that lead to changes in the social relationships of the groups concerned (Carter 2004, p. 11).

Over time we have accumulated an archive of 'visual evidence' from the encounters, including photographs, videos and artifacts. However it is in the performative creative process itself that the richness of the experience seems to reside. As Barbara Bolt (2006, p. 5) suggests, in the process of art-making, the *handling* and the engagement with the materials becomes a means to an end, with the process creating 'an opening, a space of tacit knowledge in which we are forced to consider the relations that occur in the process or tissue of making life'.

The encounter with place

When we meet in site-specific locations tailored to each encounter context, we consider the question: what does *this* place want from us? Place in all its complexity, as a trans-temporal discursive nexus, in its intangibility as well as its materiality, is central to the encounter processes. For the majority of participants the collective engagement with place appears to provide a critical point of connection with the other people in the encounter, with their differing viewpoints and different life experiences. But conversely place it is also the point where we have found ourselves furthest apart from one another in terms of our 'disciplinary' constructions of understanding of the world around us. So having found the human connection we have been challenged to address the disciplinary and conceptual divides and acknowledge our 'learned ignorance'.

In setting out to understanding why it is that the experience of being *in place* and being *out of place* plays such a pivotal role in the encounters we turn to Bruce Janz, (2017, pp. 27-28) who proposes place as a text, suggesting that whilst we construct meaning from it, it is also the context in which meaning happens. Like a written text a place is open to interpretation, so the same place one person experiences as being sinister or exclusionary, another person might read as being welcoming and benign.

Tim Cresswell (2004, p. 8) says that when we *engage with place* we learn 'a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world. When we look at the world as a world of places we see different things. We see attachments and connections between people and place. We see worlds of meaning and experience [...]. To think of an area of the world as a rich and complicated interplay of people and the environment - as a place - is to free us from thinking of it as facts and figures'. Irit Rogoff (2000, Kindle edition, place 554), who researches in the transdisciplinary area between human geography and cultural studies, suggests that 'there is a mediation required between the concrete and material and the psychic conditions and metaphorical articulation of relations between subjects, places and spaces'. She cautions that although place is always viewed from a particular position, this is often a 'positioned spectatorship'. She recommends an alternative 'active unlearning' about place, suggesting that the mobilization of 'unease' should be the driving force behind the need to arrive at new articulations and understandings.

Participant reflections

What has become clear, based on informal conversations with and unsolicited feedback from our fellow participants, is that the creative encounter approach and the moving out into the uneasiness of the 'real world' has struck a chord with them. There is a welcoming of the opportunities to think differently, to engage with place and to connect across the disciplines, that this project has afforded. So a participant (2013, pers. comm. 23 June) writes: 'The experience made it very apparent that only through inter-disciplinary engagement out in the real world are we able to realise the true complexity of the forces at play in a particular context, be it physical, cultural, socio-economic or historical. It challenged us realise that often our particular discourses are incomplete in allowing us to fully realise the complexity of the factors which we are all required to respond to, whether directly or indirectly'. A second participant (2017, pers. comm. 25 July) speculates positively on the juxtaposition of different ideas and the possibilities for new approaches to learning that this dissolving of the classroom walls and this integration of the disciplines brings with it.

So, as participant-facilitator-learners, what lessons have we personally drawn from this series of encounters?

The scientist

'As a scientist I am conditioned to perceive space in a deterministic paradigm of ecosystem decline. My experiences on our encounters of how different disciplines and individuals perceive contested space, have stripped me of my comfort: there is more to perceiving space than quantitative and qualitative relationships between the myriad of ecological drivers (fire, soils, herbivory) that shape pattern in nature. My exposure to diverse perceptions and epistemologies has kindled new curiosities, which likely transcend disciplines. Out of this messy space I have emerged more humbled, more aware of my own emotional constraints on how I view the world, and hence, more able to 'wager on another possible world', one we desperately need for our survival.

The visual-arts activist

'The act of engaging in different disciplines and space through a participatory intervention is a way of researching that has afforded me new insights into the reflections of others on that space and into our diverse approaches. This acknowledgment of the personal conditions that bring about the way one reads a place is often more important than the teachings of a discipline, and yet it is often the last approach that is given status. By experiential engagement and personal affirmation of each other's unique perspectives, the layered experience we share becomes a powerful tool for learning'.

The visual arts practitioner-theorist

'The aspect that continues to intrigue me is the significance of place in all of the encounters. So much of the experience seems to hang on our willingness to be 'present', to be 'mindful' and to immerse ourselves in the places we find ourselves in. The actual lived experience of being out and about in disconcerting spaces, engaging with people who have different ideas from me, leaves me with a sense of being out of my comfort-zone and immersed in a 'real' world that is outside my 'ken' and outside my 'control,' be it disciplinary or psychological'.

Positioning the Art meets Science meets Place Project in relation to the theme of this conference - so where to from here?

As participants in these encounters we have rekindled our embodied connections with the real world, in places away from the ivory towers, and we have established new and vibrant networks with one another and across disciplinary divides. We have operated in what is essentially a classroom without walls (Mbembe 2015, p. 19). Along with our fellow participants, we have reaffirmed our roles as social actors, (Archer 2000, p. 253). In community, we have co-created a series of 'moments'. We hope to take the encounter approach further, and into new spaces, at our own institution. We think that an expanded project could serve the transformative and decolonial agendas of the university well, in terms of teaching and learning, research and engagement.

What are the takeaways we can offer to people who are interested in exploring our approaches?

We suggest that the approaches that we espouse in these creative encounters with the materiality of place are transferable, and that projects such as this one, which operate in the real world, can serve as a useful 'toolbox of ideas' for the range of people from across the academy who are challenged to 'wager on another possible world' (Santos 2009. p. 103) and embark upon a radical rethinking of the academic status quo. Our thinking is that the project methodology is adaptable to suit *different* sets of encounters with *different* groups of people setting out to engage with *different* sets of issues and challenges.

On both a micro (disciplinary level), and at a macro (institutional) level, creative place-based encounters between un-likeminded participants can serve as a means of surmounting hierarchical barriers and facilitating difficult conversations, be these about minor curriculum shifts, or about the more fundamental transformation of approaches to knowledge creation within the disciplines and the university that is being called for at the present time.

Visual arts practitioner-academics, with their disciplinary knowledge of arts-based and process focused creative methodologies, are well placed to step up and play powerful and meaningful facilitative roles at the very centre of academic transformation initiatives, and in doing so, they will be assuming responsive agency and acting to help realize 'another possible world'.

We can envisage encounters offering new pluriversal possibilities, ones that move beyond the current engagements between art and science; ones that, drawing on the approaches we have referred to in this paper, set out to explore the interconnections between students and lecturers, between 'outsiders' and 'insiders', between indigenous knowledge systems and science, philosophy and human geography, mathematics, ethics, liberation theologies, human rights, feminist theory, mysticism, law and lived experience....the list of possibilities seems endless.

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