

The New Town Culture programme 2018-2020

Art, Creativity and Care

A report by the Department of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London



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Research team:

Rachel Hughes
Tom Henri
Louise Villeneau
Professor Adam Dinham
Professor Chris Baker

Report author:

Rachel Hughes

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Introduction

New Town Culture is an ongoing collaboration between arts and social care agencies which was funded between 2018 and 2020 by a London Borough of Culture award from the Mayor of London. The collaborators during this period were the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, the Serpentine Gallery and the Foundling Museum. The overarching aim of the programme is to explore how artistic and cultural experience can enhance the work of social care practitioners¹ and thus help to support adults and children in need of social care services. The programme has pursued three strategies for achieving this aim. Firstly, it has increased the arts offer to young people and adults using social care, who live in one of the most deprived boroughs in London. This has been done through the direct provision of new arts-based workshops and clubs. Secondly, it has attempted to embed this offer within local authority social care, making arts activities an integral part of the local authority's offer to its residents. Thirdly, it has promoted a cultural exchange of ideas and expertise between the arts and social care sectors. To facilitate this, the programme has been curated from within the local authority's culture department, and social care practitioners have participated in the design of the programme. A knowledge exchange programme has also been planned, although delayed in its implementation due to the impact of Covid 19. In summary, New Town Culture has sought to go beyond existing endeavours² by pursuing an agenda of systemic and structural change in addition to one of change for individual participants.

The programme has had two strands: 'In Your Time', focusing on work with young people and social care practitioners working in the local authority's Children's Services department, and 'Radio Ballads', focusing on work with adults and social care practitioners in the local authority's Adult Services department. 'In Your Time' was curated by Marijke Steedman, who is also the overall curator for the programme and Radio Ballads was curated by Amal Khalaf and Lizzie Graham of the Serpentine Gallery. Due to the impact of Covid-19, the Radio Ballads programme is still ongoing. Programme activities have been led by experienced and award-winning artists with a background in socially-engaged art. Groups have taken place in local venues familiar to participants (e.g. local social care offices and a local arts centre – the White House) but also have also included visits to spaces designed to inspire (the Council Chamber of the Town Hall, the Tate Modern, the Foundling Museum, and the headquarters of Google).

This report has been written on behalf of Goldsmiths, University of London (Department of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies). The research for the report was carried out by a team of social work academics. The team was commissioned by the New Town Culture curator, Marijke Steedman, to identify and map the creative processes taking place across the entire programme, and to devise ways to share these processes with social care practitioners through knowledge exchange³. This report identifies five such processes: 1) 'hopeful disruption'; 2) 'radical hospitality'; 3) 'ceremony'; 4) 'unlocking culture/s'; and 5) 'not knowing'. These are all processes which we see as having relevance and potential within social care.

In recent years, a considerable literature has developed which highlights the benefits (and challenges) of socially-engaged art (see, for example, Barnes, 2018; Gibson and Edwards, 2015; Camic et al, 2018). This report may add to that literature by providing further data to demonstrate the positive impact of art on the wellbeing and sense of belonging of marginalised people. However, this is not the main purpose of the report. Rather, the report has been written so as to tell a story about what art can do in social care. This is not a story of what art and artists can do for social care users and practitioners. As will be evident in the report, some

¹ In this report, the term 'social care professionals' refers to professionals with a range of training backgrounds who work for the local authority's Children's Services and Adult Services departments. A large number of these social care professionals are registered social workers and the models of practice in local authority social care departments are shaped by social work theory and research and guidance from the Chief Social Workers (in England). This is why, at times, we refer specifically to 'social work', rather than 'social care'.

² See Barnes (2018) review of projects with Children Looked After and Arts and Culture for an overview.

³ It is important to note that we have not been commissioned to evaluate the programme but the research presented in this report will go towards the programme evaluation.

social care practitioners already incorporate artistic ways of working in their practice and social care leaders have developed their own arts-based projects within their services. Rather, we are interested⁴ in how art can be integrated in social care, becoming part of the ‘core business’ of social care practitioners, and, put simply, a way of doing social work.

Our research

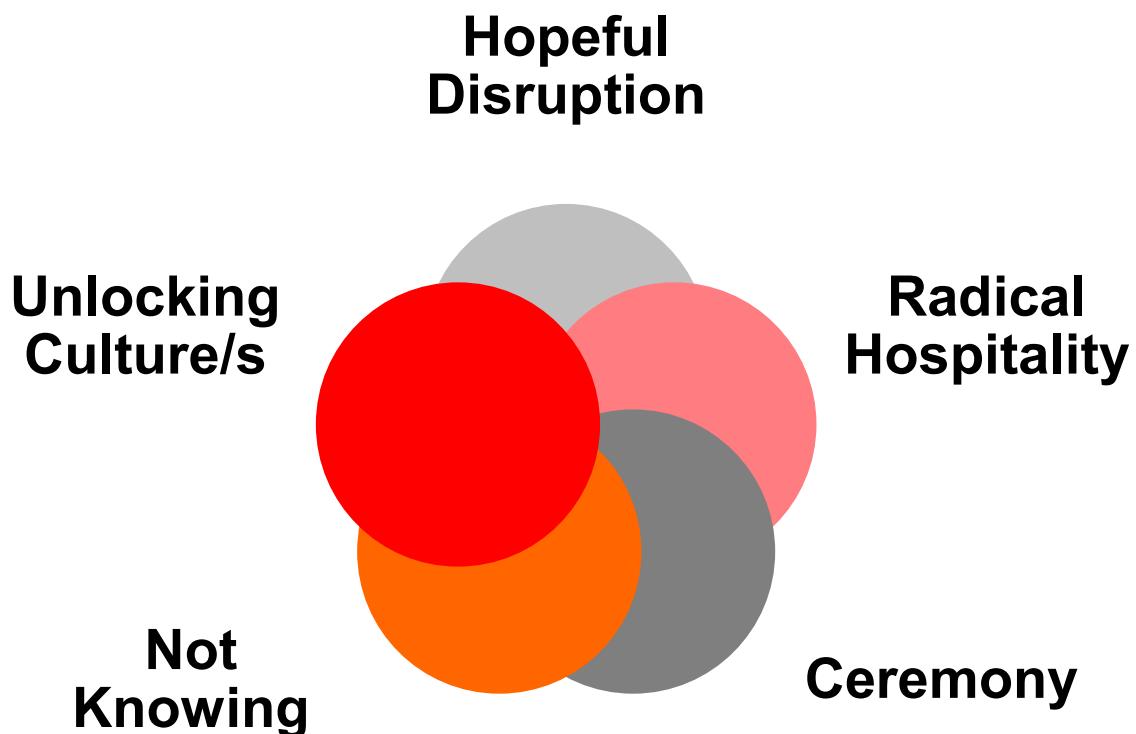
In order to complete our work, we attended and participated in four art groups, with looked after young people, unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people and foster families (two different groups). In addition, we received data (in the form of the artist’s session plan and a recording of a debriefing session) from one further group, with young women at risk of exploitation. We also attended one workshop run by an artist for social care practitioners from the local authority’s Youth Offending Service. We had detailed one-to-one conversations with nine artists and shorter conversations with social care practitioners attending the groups. We attended routine debriefing sessions which took place at the end of groups. We looked at photos from the groups (including photos of artwork). Four of the artists shared written reflections with us, in the form of session plans, reflective diaries and progress reports. We also had a large number of meetings with the programme curators and social care managers and senior leaders, which were instrumental in the identification of the five processes discussed in this report.

We talked to group participants (young people) during the course of groups, including, when appropriate, asking them for their views on the groups but we didn’t speak to them one-to-one as we did with the artists. This was a conscious decision based on our view that one-to-one discussions were likely to be negatively associated with bureaucracy and official power. We felt that using these methods could negatively impact on creative processes and on the creation of the right kind of space for these processes to take place. We also felt that they were ethically problematic, given the fact that a significant number of participants were likely to have suffered traumatic interviews with officials in the past (for example, unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people’s meetings with border officials). The risk of re-traumatising young people through intrusive questioning is highlighted in qualitative research methods literature (see, for example, Hopkins, 2008 and Connolly, 2008, cited in Children’s Society, 2018). All participants, or their parents or carers, had given permission for Goldsmiths’ involvement when they signed up for the New Town Culture programme. To ensure that participants understood our role as fully as possible, we also distributed picture/symbol-based information sheets in English and four other languages (Arabic, Vietnamese, Albanian and Amharic) and/or gave short talks to participants at the start of the art groups. We have taken care to conceal the identity of the individuals who feature in the case studies in this report, including changing personal characteristics where we felt this was necessary.

While the scale of our data collection has been relatively large, it nonetheless represents only a sample of the data we could have collected and our account of the programme is inevitably incomplete (particularly given the impact of Covid 19 on the Radio Ballads strand of the programme). Nevertheless, our discussion with programme curators and social care leaders give us confidence that the five processes we have identified as significant were ongoing across the whole of the New Town Culture programme.

⁴ Along with others – for example Huss and Boss (2019)

Five creative processes



One: Hopeful Disruption

At a time of great and dispiriting disruption in the world, it feels odd to be writing about ‘hopeful disruption’. However, this was an important creative process in the New Town Culture programme and in the local authority more broadly⁵. We arrived at this term via the term ‘positive disruption’, to which our attention was drawn by senior social care leaders in Barking and Dagenham, who use the term themselves (see also UCFSW 2019). By ‘hopeful disruption’ we mean artistic acts, carried out by artists or social care practitioners, which challenge conventional ways of talking and acting within both social care spaces and spaces of ‘high’ culture such as museums and galleries. Such disruption can be orchestrated or spontaneous but it always emerges from an attitude of hope, and it can generate further hope. We begin with this process because the New Town Culture programme as a whole could be viewed as an example of orchestrated ‘hopeful disruption’. To set out to make art and culture part of the core business of local authority social care services is indeed to challenge the current way of doing things, which is to outsource cultural provision to voluntary sector providers (Hickmore, 2019). Another reason “hopeful disruption” is fundamental is because, from a socially engaged perspective, all art is, or should be, a form of disruption (Thompson and Sholette, 2004; Helicon Collaborative, 2017).

In the work of the New Town Culture artists, there were many instances of orchestrated disruption. For example, in *Alien Staff*, the artist Albert Potrony, working with curatorial assistant Nephertiti Oboshe Schandorf, got participants – trafficked and asylum-seeking young people - to take photos of each other’s faces. He printed these out and distributed bamboo sticks for them to mount them. Participants carried these staffs on a journey on the Tube to the Foundling Museum in Bloomsbury, Central London. At the Foundling Museum, Albert asked them to form up in a parade and proceed to a room full of portraits of the founders and patrons of the Foundling Museum. Here, they placed their photographic self-portraits alongside those of these wealthy eighteenth century philanthropists. This activity was inspired by Albert’s previous work *Alien*, a piece he made when he moved to London for the first time. He printed photos of his head and stuck them on large sticks, which he planted in various locations across London, as if trying to take possession of this city with his presence.

We also observed hopeful disruption in the actions of participants⁶. In *Sound Mirrors and Loudspeakers*, (fieldnotes in bold below), the activities with the loudspeakers give the young asylum-seeking people a voice within a public space which is not always open and welcoming to them. The young people play with the boundaries of the activity the artist has devised and he plays along, according them agency within the interaction.

Sound Mirrors and Loudspeakers

In the morning, Albert shows the young people images of the Second World War giant concrete sound mirrors used in the work of the artist Amalia Pica and Tacita Dean. He provides the young people with cardboard, tin cans, string, scissors and glue guns and encourages them to make their own communication devices. They engage in this activity with their usual focus and openness. After lunch we take the DIY communication devices into the street outside the social services building. The young people are relaxed and up for having fun. The sound mirror becomes a hat, which is offered to others, including me, to be tried on. Albert asks the young people to give him words in their own languages to shout into the improvised loudspeaker. One young man causes great merriment among his co-nationals by supplying Albert with words which are almost certainly

⁵ We would like to acknowledge Tim Fisher, a social worker and social care manager, as ‘co-author’ of this term. Tim works closely with the Future Matters Collective and the activist group Reframe (@Re_Frame_). He has collaborated with them on ‘To Love is to Act’, a travelling banner taken into different spaces of care, and it was this work, as well as the NTC programme, which inspired our discussions about disruption and hope.

⁶ In this report, we use the word ‘participants’ to refer to the young people and adults – social care users and local residents – who accessed the New Town Culture programme’s offer.

rude. Albert gamely shouts them out. There are a few amused glances from passers-by. I am not sure if they understand the words or are simply taken by the fun the young people are having.⁷

By playing along with the young man here, Albert showed that he did not see the disruption as problematic. On other occasions, we saw Albert and other artists noting with pleasure instances of disruption initiated by participants. When, at the end of the week's workshop, Kevin, a quiet and apparently shy young man, picked up the sculpture he had made and 'played' it like a saxophone (picture below), Albert commented:

"Wow! People surprise you!"⁸.

Running a workshop for foster families, the artist Rebecca Davis, working with curatorial assistant Alice White, handed out lumps of clay to be used as bases for the paper flower decorations which participants had made (picture below). Seeing what the participants started to do with them, she commented:

"Oh, you're making different shapes out of them! – I didn't imagine you would do that."⁹

Hopeful disruption is not without risk. One young female participant in the programme described her experience of visiting the Foundling Museum (with a separate group of young people looked after by the local authority) as "gut wrenching" because of how the history of the museum resonated with her own personal experiences. It is evident from the artist's reflective diary entry for this day that the visit marked a turning point in his and his assistant's relationship with the young woman and consequently in her engagement with the work of the group, which ran regularly for six months.

"Overall Letitia had a really good day. She interacted with the young people, joined in with the activities and was engaged throughout. This was in spite of her finding the history of the museum 'gut wrenching' (her words in a text later on) because it resonated with her own personal experiences. . . The story of the Foundling Museum helped Letitia open up about her experiences of care. This felt like an important step in sharing and opening up to us¹⁰".

The generative power of "hopeful disruption" may be similar to the power of a crisis, such as that which Letitia experienced. Crisis intervention is an established model within social work, which still features in textbooks (Trevithick, 2012), but has lacked a recent evidence base for some time (Parker, 2007). The individualisation of risk within society (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), and the dominance in local authorities of a bureaucratic audit culture where "*new ideas are seen as problematic*" (Munro, 2019, p126), may be responsible for the marginalisation of crisis intervention.

Disruption, when orchestrated by a service user, may also be seen as a form of resistance rather than something which carries the constructive potential of a crisis. In her work for the Radio Ballads strand of the New Town Culture programme, the artist Helen Cammock, a former social worker herself, began to explore the concepts of resistance and resilience within art and social work. Disruption may be seen as a form of resistance, which is often negatively evaluated within social work (as in 'resistant families'). Helen suggests that the most resistant families and individuals can also be the most resilient.

We did not see or hear enough from social care practitioners within the groups to judge whether or cultural ambivalence towards disruption, resistance and crisis was an issue in practice in Barking and Dagenham but, as we have mentioned above, the term 'positive disruption' is in use at a senior leader level in Barking and Dagenham. As well as using this term, senior leaders also talked about instances from their own practice which fitted well with our notion of 'hopeful disruption'. For example, at a meeting with Principal Social Worker, Russ Bellenie and the borough's consultant social workers (the most senior social workers within

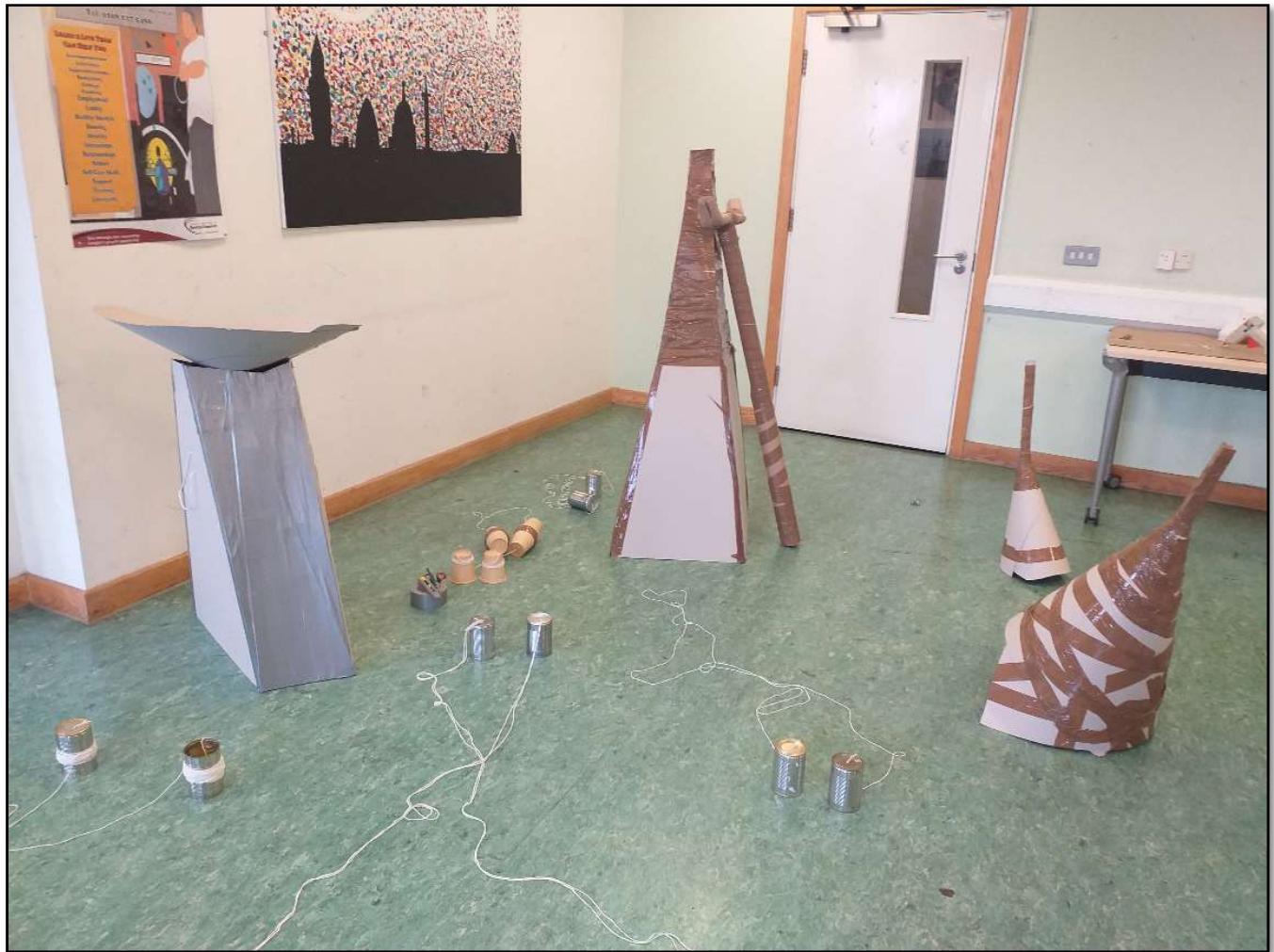
⁷ Researcher's fieldnotes April 2019

⁸ Artist's verbal communication to observing researcher April 2019

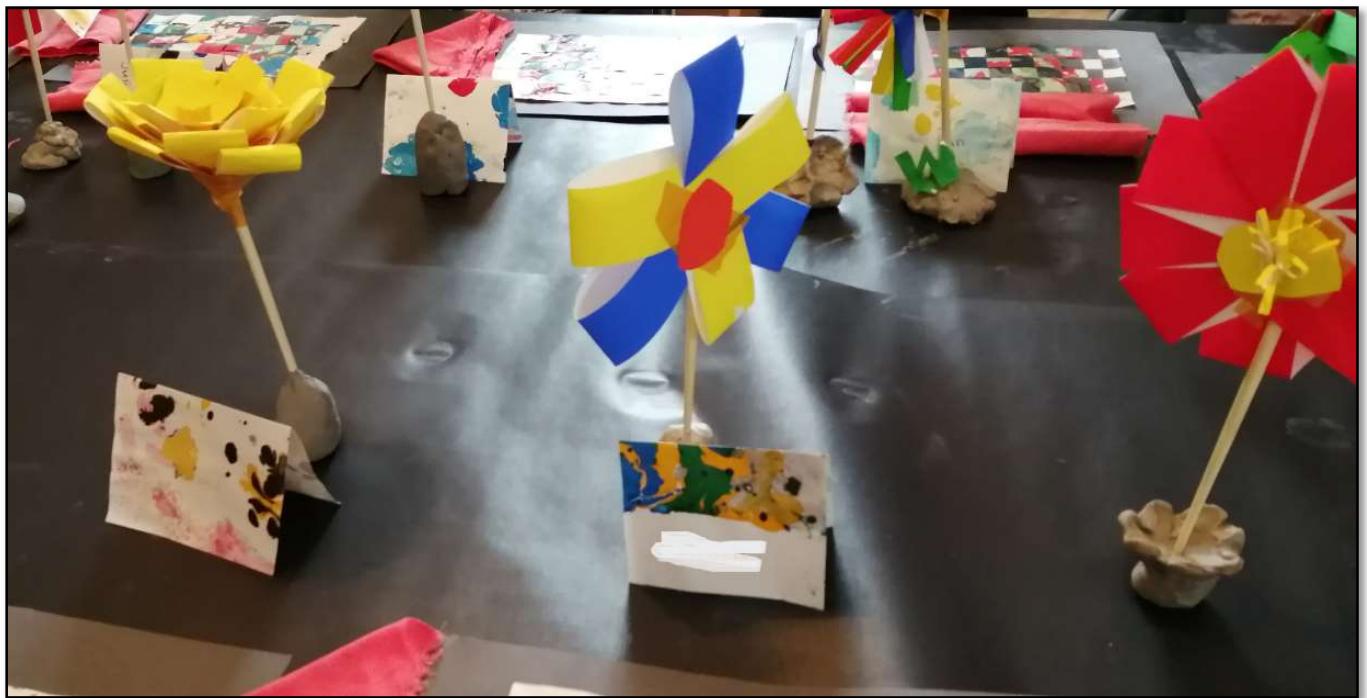
⁹ Artist's verbal communication to participants in presence of researcher February 2020

¹⁰ Artist's reflective diary 18th June 2019

each team) in December 2019, we invited the social workers to tell us about the ways in which they were creative or used the arts in their work. Russ told us about a time shortly after he was first qualified when he was working with a family who would not allow social care practitioners beyond the doorstep. Concern for the welfare of the child – a boy of eight – was rising and the local authority was on the brink of taking more interventionist measures. Russ decided to make one more attempt to gain access. He went to the family's address taking his guitar with him and began playing it in the communal area outside the flat, asking the parents inside if the boy would like to learn how to play or listen to a few songs. Russ could then hear the boy's voice inside, asking his parents to let Russ in. Russ continued playing and eventually the front door opened and he was invited in. This example is particularly interesting because it is also an instance of Russ sharing something of himself and his own creativity in his practice; a subject we turn to next in our discussion of 'radical hospitality'.



The sound mirror-cum-hat (left) and other DIY communication devices made in 'Make Your Own English'



The variety of clay bases participants made for their paper flowers in the Perfect Party workshop



Kevin's 'saxophone'

Two: Radical Hospitality

“You guys were really friendly, you always made sure we were ok, you always spoke to us, ‘do you need this? do you need that?’, if you’re not feeling well you don’t have to do that. Just really sweet and kind.”¹¹

The feedback received from participants in the New Town Culture programme as well as our experiences as participant observers, offers convincing evidence that most participants felt welcome and cared for in the groups. The ability to convey a sense of being cared for and, more fundamentally, create a sense of safety, is, at root, a tacit, embodied one. It is there in the light touch of approbation on a shoulder, in the steady timbre of the voice and in the beaming smile. The artists we observed were skilled facilitators who possessed this ability.

The idea of ‘radical hospitality’, however, goes further. We first came across the term in the artist’s plan for *Transform Yourself*, a five-day workshop run for young women at risk of exploitation. At the start of the workshop, the artist, Albert Potrony, provided participants with beanbags, duvets, cushions, rugs and gold foil fringe curtains and asked them to transform an area of the room they were working in into a place to relax and take care of themselves. This space was maintained during the whole week as a space for rest and conversation. Reflecting in correspondence with us on how he had come to give this activity the title of “Radical Hospitality”, Albert said:

“I thought that it could be a radical thing to do for these young women at risk of or being abused to experience hospitality in a safe environment, to take care of themselves for the sake of it, without an ulterior motive or benefit to anybody else. By doing so, hopefully, the act of self-care could help them to value themselves for who they are, in their own terms, and not by what someone else wants them to be. To take control of their own care.”¹²

Albert’s intention resonates with the thinking of the philosopher Derrida. Derrida distinguishes between ‘conditional hospitality’, which is constrained by the dynamics of power between the host and the guest, and ‘absolute hospitality’. The latter “is not only about welcoming an Other unconditionally, but about giving them the possibility to control and alter the relationships between host and guest, self and stranger” (Batchelor et al, 2019, p.5). Derrida calls this ‘giving place’ to the other, something which Albert did in both a figurative and concrete sense, when he set aside space in the workshop room for the young women to make their own.

In the *Perfect Party*, a three-day workshop for foster families, the artist Rebecca Davis, working with curatorial assistant Alice White, also gave the participants the possibility to control and alter the relationships between themselves as hosts and the participants as guests. The form of collaboration – the preparation and enjoyment of a ‘perfect party’ – was chosen by the participants at the outset. Activities included the planning and preparation of table mats, table decorations and the food for the party, including a centrepiece of bread dough spelling out ‘Perfect Party’. Through these activities, the participants became ‘hosts’ alongside the artist.

Control over food is a very basic form of agency not infrequently denied to people in state care (McIntosh et al, 2010), and New Town Culture participants appreciated it when it was accorded to them:

“You get food...and the fact that we had a choice...instead of people picking for you...it was nice.”¹³

¹¹ Participant’s comment in a debriefing session after the *Transform Yourself* project, August 2019

¹² Correspondence between the artist and the researcher (Rachel Hughes), August 2020

¹³ Participant’s comment in a debriefing session after the *Transform Yourself* project, August 2019

Choice of food is an important signifier of identity (Fischler, 1988)¹⁴. As part of *Your Future*, a six-month-long project for young people in the care of the local authority led by the artist Paul Crook, the young people and artists went out into Barking to interview and film members of the public in restaurants and cafes. Paul reflected in his diary that it:

"Was a good experience going out and visiting the restaurants. Faisal took pride in making the introductions and speaking to staff. . . We all felt that we had seen parts of Barking we would not normally see."¹⁵

Here, one of the participants, Faisal, was able to act as host to the artists and his fellow group members, because he had been placed in a situation where he had something to offer (language expertise and food). Indeed, in this way, Faisal had the opportunity to share and offer something of his very self. This was possible because Paul and his co-worker Dela were willing to relinquish their role as hosts and accept Faisal's hospitality. Derrida holds that 'absolute hospitality' "emerges when we give up control over our sovereign spaces" (Batchelor et al, p.5) within which he includes our selves. This is a generosity of the self; a kind of radical openness to others¹⁶.

Maria's keyring, which features on the cover of this report, and below, exemplifies such openness and generosity. It came to our attention in the same meeting with consultant social workers at which we heard about Russ's guitar. Maria, who is a consultant social worker in the local authority's children's services, explained that when she visited children and families at home she would put her keyring down next to her (it has her car key on it). Being such a large and striking one, it attracted the interest of the children or the parents, or both, and became a conversation starter. It did this so consistently that it became an integral part of her practice. This is not to say that Maria 'uses' her keyring in her practice. Indeed, Natasha's keyring is powerful precisely because it is not a tool of her trade, but an expression of herself.

In social care both currently and historically there are powerful implicit and explicit rules¹⁷ which govern expressing or sharing anything about oneself with 'service users'. In social care environments influenced by neo-liberalism and an audit culture – that is, most social care environments – these can tend towards avoiding sharing oneself and preserving distance from service users. In a workshop with social care practitioners from the local authority's youth offending service conducted in February 2020, the artist Helen Cammock, working with curators Lizzie Graham and Amal Khalaf, asked participants to think about how their bodies manifested in their work. One practitioner, with training in domestic violence work, talked movingly about how she tried to control her body to prevent it revealing her feelings – "**we call it emotional leakage**" - when she was listening to both perpetrators' and victims' accounts of violence. Another practitioner talked about how, although he helped run a football session for the young people he worked with, he never offered one of them a lift, even though this felt hard to do when it was raining. Warner (2020) frames these issues in terms of proximity, arguing that, from the early twentieth century onwards, there has been a tension within social work between practitioners who aim for objectivity and distance, and those who believe in closeness and the value of personal relationships. While social work over the last twenty years has been in a phase where objectivity and distance have been more highly valued, over the last five to ten years, it has taken something of a relational turn. This is evident in the gradual incorporation of models such as 'relationship-based practice' (Ruch et al, 2018) and 'contextual safeguarding' (Firmin et al, 2020) into practice, as well as in research which suggests that when practitioners are not allowed to show their compassion through touch and self-disclosure they burn out (Tanner, 2019).

¹⁴ An exhibition on 'radical hospitality in contemporary art' held at the University of Chicago's Smart Museum in 2012 was one of the few uses of the term 'radical hospitality' in the art world which we came across. The exhibition was entitled 'Feast' and looked at 'artist-orchestrated meals' as a form of radical hospitality. See <https://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/exhibitions/feast/>

¹⁵Artist's reflective diary June 2019

¹⁶ Such as is discussed in the work of Levinas – see Ben Ari and Strier (2010) for a social care-friendly account of Levinas' ideas.

¹⁷ Such as the standards issued by the social work regulator, Social Work England:

<https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/standards/professional-standards/>

Several of the practitioners who participated in Helen Cammock's workshop had great proximity to their service users in the sense that they themselves had grown up and still lived on the East London estates where they now worked with young people. In one case, the practitioner has been involved with the same gang culture with which his service users were now caught up. This practitioner told of a time recently when he had encountered members of a rival gang to the one he had been a member of. Despite being a qualified practitioner in his formal shirt and trousers, he had to take to his heels and run for his life (his phrase). “**My body took me back**” he said. “**In that moment, I was fourteen again, and running.**” Clearly, there are circumstances under which the version of radical hospitality which the artists in the New Town Culture programme were able to extend is not appropriate or not safe, and could even lead to (re-)traumatisation of the practitioner. This does not mean it is not a concept worth holding onto; the question is rather what kind of hospitality social care can offer. One of the strengths of the New Town Culture programme is that its activities have included and will (Covid permitting) include further groups with social care practitioners in their own right, as well as groups with young people and adult social care users. This opens up the possibility of future worthwhile discussions about the potential and limits of radical hospitality.



The centrepiece of the Perfect Party



Maria's keyring

Three: Ceremony

Ceremony was integral to the work of the New Town Culture artists and curators. By ceremony we mean a process of saying, thinking or doing which 1) unfolds in an ordered sequence (while still having room for spontaneity), 2) involves repetition, 3) makes use of objects in a symbolic way, and with attention to aesthetics and 4) has a collective dimension (that is, a social significance, whether or not they actually involve groups)¹⁸. We might think of ceremonies as large-scale events, such as graduation ceremonies or award ceremonies. The New Town Culture programme was to include a number of such events, including a film showing, an exhibition and a conference. Due to Covid-19, these events have not been able to take place. However, what we could call ‘everyday ceremony’ was also an important part of the work the programme artists did with young people in groups and workshops. Some of these ‘everyday ceremonies’ were familiar ones within Western cultures: for example, the presentation of certificates of achievement at the end of each group, routine ‘warm-up’ exercises, and ‘countdowns’, such as this ‘jelly ceremony’, part of the *Perfect Party*:
“Are we ready? Five, four, three, two, one – yeah!” (lifts the mould off the jelly)¹⁹

Ceremonies like this have aesthetic appeal which was recognised by the artists - and they can be fun! This may be why artists sometimes incorporated spontaneous moments of ceremony in their activities (below).

Rebecca: “I liked that moment when we got them to lift the flowers and the place mats and we rolled back the paper”

Rachel: “Mm, me too, I liked the crackling of the paper.”²⁰

Others ceremonies, like the powerfully evocative *Tokens* (below), an activity with unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people, were less familiar in their format and carefully crafted, rather than spontaneous.

Tokens

In a room in the Foundling Museum, we stand in a circle holding our objects. In turn we go forward and place our objects on the floor in the centre of the circle. A small pile accumulates. I see Albert’s father’s spectacles and a picture of Muhammed’s worn wristband woven in the colours of the flag of his home country. It has been on his wrist throughout his journey to the UK. There are the photos of the painted nails of the girls, Celestine and Mahmooda, who had not known what to contribute, because they had nothing to bring. It was their social worker, Amina, who suggested they could photograph their beautiful nails. Ibrahim comes then, and only then, to place his printed-out verse from the Qu’ran on the top of the pile. When it falls slightly to the side, he returns to adjust its position. It is important – essential – that the photo remain on top. The pile looks like a small heap of offerings. In the rooms above us, glass cases contain objects – tokens - left by women as markers of identity for the babies they entrusted to the care of the Foundling Hospital.²¹

In *Tokens*, we see the psychosocial importance of ceremonies: they are processes or rituals which express and reinforce values, assist with life transitions, and signify cultures (ref). *Tokens* (above) was a celebration of who the young people were – their identities – as well as where they had come from - their cultures - and their journeys (their transitions from one culture to another, and from childhood to adulthood). Within trauma theory, there is recognition that, “*if transitions are insufficiently marked and integrated, they may continue to be sources of pain, stress and dysfunction*” (Laird, 1984, p.126; Levine, 1997). Moreover, it is maintained by some trauma therapists that social recognition of an individual’s previously unrecognised transition can be healing, even when it is belated (Levine, 1997).

¹⁸ This definition is based on Moore and Myerhoff’s (1977) definition of ‘ritual’. We thought about using the term ‘ritual’ instead of ‘ceremony’ to describe the creative process we are referring to but decided against this. In Western societies ‘ritual’ still tends to be associated with religion. Moreover, since 1977, we have become aware of ‘ritual abuse’ of children and young people and the word ‘ritual’ may carry this connotation for some readers.

¹⁹ Researcher’s fieldnotes, *Perfect Party* group with foster families, February 2020

²⁰ Conversation recorded in researcher’s fieldnotes, *Perfect Party* group with foster families, February 2020

²¹ Researcher’s fieldnotes, *Make Your Own English* group, April 2019

What is the relevance and potential of ceremony in social care practice? Social workers also make use of ceremony and ritual in their work but their use of ceremony may celebrate or reinforce different things. At the end of the *Tokens* ceremony, Amina, the social worker who had joined the group for the day, asked the young people to say in turn what they had learnt that day. This was unplanned and caused some inner consternation for both the artist and the researcher who was observing. It felt rather as if the ceremony was being taken over and changed into a ceremony designed to reinforce the importance of intellectual development as an outcome of any activity. However, the young people themselves showed no consternation and readily complied. Was this because it was what they expected from a social care practitioner? Or perhaps learning and development was something which the young people themselves – all ambitious for their lives in the UK – valued and wished to celebrate.

There are, in fact, many ceremonies within local authority social care practice; indeed, the work of practitioners is largely organised around them. These ceremonies – local authority processes - include review meetings, case conferences and transition planning meetings. They have their own form of spatial ordering (often, round a table in a local authority office), their own symbolic objects (written documents of pre-determined format) and they unfold in particular sequences, time and time again (Joyce, 2005).

One practitioner, reflecting back to social care practice in the past, expressed concern about the extent to which local authority processes drive social care and social work practice today. This concern was mirrored in the talk of some senior leaders in the local authority who talked about rooting out ‘procedural’ practice.

“We weren’t as process-driven. We were able to spend more time. It was unheard of it was a child’s birthday not to give them a card and take them out for lunch. We need to get back into that place where children feel that if they’re special to anyone then their social worker is among those people.”²² ..

This practitioner seems to be saying that there are some processes – local authority ceremonies – which drive practice to such an extent that there is less time for celebrating a child’s birthday. As a consequence, a child may not feel that they are special in the eyes of their social worker. Of course, some social care practitioners are able to take children out on their birthdays and to send them cards (other social workers in this local authority told us they did this, and one senior leader told us he absolutely expected this to happen). The point here is that, for some social workers, it feels as if this kind of personal celebration is not central to what they are supposed to be doing. This may have been the experience of some social care users. One New Town Culture participant told us:

“Even though my social worker is nice, it’s always kind of ‘business’. I feel like they have so many children to care for and look after and sometimes, after a while, you just get tired of going through the same procedure over and over again, loads of kids, can you imagine that...”²³

We think that the work of the New Town Culture programme points to the vital importance of ceremonies which celebrate the young person’s identity and culture – birthdays and more - and to the importance of social workers being part of these ceremonies. This is not necessarily to say that the ceremonies – case conferences and review meetings - we referred to earlier should be got entirely dispensed with. These ceremonies have been devised and have developed in order to get certain things done – objectively important things, like assessing risks of harm to a child or planning for their future education and employment. The importance of some of these ceremonies is reflected in the fact that they are statutory processes – they have status in law²⁴. However, there may be ways – perhaps new composite ceremonies- which can achieve the same ends whilst also celebrating the individual whose interest they have been designed to serve.

²² Practitioner talking as part of a debriefing session with the curator and artist for the *Transform Yourself* workshop August 2019

²³ Participant in the *Transform Yourself* workshop August 2019

²⁴ As in the Children Act 1989, the Care Act 2014 or the Mental Capacity Act 2005



Young people in the Council Chamber, in a ceremony at the end of a week's workshop. The white paper sheets have words in their own languages written on them which the young people read out in turn, because it was important to hear the sound of the languages resonating in the council chamber.

Four: Unlocking Culture/s

By unlocking culture/s, we mean opening people's eyes to new possibilities - to new ways of thinking, doing and being - with the aim of giving them new sources of belonging and self-worth. There were many dimensions to this work within the context of the New Town Culture programme. In the arts literature, this process is sometimes referred to as increasing 'cultural literacy' or 'cultural capital' and the culture referred to is arts-based culture. 'Culture' can also, of course, refer more broadly to a shared set of ideas, practices and material objects, which could be associated with ethnicity or nationality (as in 'British culture', for example) but could also be linked to class, religion, gender, age, sexuality, dis/ability, employment status and a whole set of other variables. The New Town Culture programme has tried to work with and think about culture in both senses. It has also had a concern with unlocking culture not only for participants but also for social care practitioners. Finally, its approach to unlocking culture has entailed both bringing participants and social care practitioners into the arts world and taking up opportunities and invitations to enter their worlds. Given all of these different dimensions, it is not surprising that this area is still very much a 'work in progress' for the programme. Nonetheless, there have been some important successes so far.

In the *Your Future* group, participants learnt new skills in film-making and production. Two participants, in particular, formed strong relationships with the artist and curatorial assistant leading the group (Paul Crook and Dela Anderson), as well as connecting with the New Town Programme curator. One of these two participants, in particular, is now very interested in trying to build a career or his own artistic practice in this area. In addition, both participants have both now decided to become part of the Advisory Group for the New Town Culture programme going forward. This is a considerable commitment for one of them, as he has a paid job working long hours in order to meet his daily living costs.

One of the ways in which the programme attempted to unlock artistic culture for its participants, was by supporting them to visit prestigious cultural institutions, such as the Tate Modern and the Foundling Museum. Another was by introducing them to major works of art (through showing films or pictures of them) and giving the participants the opportunity to create their own works of art in a similar vein. In the *Make Your Own English* group, a combination of these strategies were used. Ibrahim was an eighteen years old Somali man who, like all the participants in the group, was polite, respectful and willing to 'have a go' at all the activities. At the same time, like many other participants, he was there because he had been told to attend by his social worker. At the start of the week, when asked (as part of a baseline evaluation exercise) why he had decided to come to the group, Ibrahim had seemed embarrassed and agitated:

"I don't know...maybe about training...but still I don't know really about this training still. I don't understand why I come here. Still not explain for me too much. The question, it's hard it . . . I cannot answer this question."

Later in the week, along with other participants, Ibrahim made a cardboard and plaster sculpture using similar techniques to the artist Franz West. The following day, the group visited the West exhibition at the Tate Modern. Standing in front of a case of models, Ibrahim commented:

"This is interesting. . . very interesting. Yesterday was fun, but I thought it was nothing. Now I can see."²⁵

Hearing Ibrahim say this felt like witnessing a small epiphany. Looking back over the week (as a researcher/observer), it was perhaps the moment when Ibrahim shifted from being a young man simply complying with his social worker's instruction to attend the group, to being an active thinker and maker within the project. Of course, there is nothing in Ibrahim's words to tell us whether or not he thought that what he was looking at in that moment – Franz West's work – was of particular worth or not. Perhaps what we can say, though, is that he recognised the 'unlocking' which the artist was trying to facilitate. Ibrahim understood

²⁵ Participant conversation with the researcher, *Make Your Own English* group, April 2019.

that he was being offered a way of connecting to something which was valued in the new society he found himself in, and he appreciated this.

During the course of the meetings about the New Town Culture programme, we noticed that the curator was sometimes advised by social care practitioners to organise the content of art clubs around particular aspects of young people's culture – for example, particular kinds of music that practitioners perceived the young people as valuing. In general, the curator held off from doing this, explaining that what was important was the relationship between the artist and the young person and what emerged from that²⁶. We observed that the artists created opportunities for the young people to share their own cultures. Simple activities like giving a young person the task of creating a play list or hosting a game of charades, as included in the *Perfect Party* by Rebecca Davis, allowed young people to share the music they liked or their favourite films, for example. Sometimes this didn't always go as planned

One of the aspirations of the New Town Culture curator was that social care practitioners would come to see the opportunities associated with art and culture; and see unlocking culture as a routine part of their work. To this end, social workers were invited to attend the group sessions with the young people they supported. Some did, and subsequently expressed how “**seeing what it looks like**” had given them a better grasp of the programme and helped them communicate what it was about to young people thinking of participating. Overall, though, attendance of social care practitioners was much lower than hoped for. The issue of why social care practitioners were not attending and participating in the groups alongside the young people they looked after was one which was of considerable interest to us at Goldsmiths, since we had been commissioned to design continuing professional development for social care practitioners, based on learning from the New Town Culture programme. In conversation with the programme curator, one practitioner attributed non-attendance to the need to complete written work to meet organisational targets.

“You have to have permission to go. Because the pressures to meet the daily requirements of the tasks are vast... I've got a conference report, my assessment is due, I'm red on the dashboard that tells us how we're performing, so it is about having permission to spend time.”

Reflecting on what the practitioner quoted above had to say, we were struck by their use of the word ‘permission’. We didn’t think they meant ‘permission’ literally, since the NTC programme had the support of social care managers within the borough. Rather, we felt what we were encountering was a particular mindset, or culture of participation (Davies, 2020)?²⁷ Perhaps, within a certain mindset, social care practitioners see themselves as people who arrange art groups but don’t join in with them. When we ran the group with unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people, the team manager arranged a roster of social workers covering each day of the group. Two workers joined in all of the group activities on their allocated day, but the other workers simply came in briefly to ask if the group was going well and whether there were any behavioural issues, perhaps seeing themselves as curators more than artists.

During the course of our research we also talked to workers who were very committed to relationship-based practice (e.g. Ruch et al, 2018) and to arts-based work in their direct practice with young people. Some were involved with the arts in their own lives and chose to bring that into their practice with young people; others had trained abroad or in the UK before neoliberalism came to dominate practice.²⁸ These ‘relationship-based’ workers were not necessarily joining in with the art groups any more than their colleagues who may have had a more neoliberal mindset. One worker, very committed to relationship-based practice, commented that

²⁶ The curator’s stance is also an illustration of our fifth process ‘not knowing’ (page 26 below)

²⁷ Drawing on the work of Muschamp, Bullock, Ridge and Wikeley (2009), Sarah Davies uses this phrase when discussing why young people from more economically disadvantaged backgrounds participate in extra-curricular cultural activities to a lesser extent than their more affluent peers. She suggests that there are psychological barriers as well as practical and financial ones; young people get fixed in a ‘mindset of participation’ at an early age which is hard to change once established.

²⁸ In fact, this was the case for the practitioners quoted above, which demonstrates that the cultures we were noticing were not discrete groups of people but rather, we might say, discourses invoked by different workers in different situations.

attending the groups would be a '*luxury*'. We could see this: if you are very busy and you already know some of what you think there may be to learn from attending a group, then it could seem like indulging yourself!

Engaging in greater depth with the culture(s) of social care services in the borough through discussions with social care practitioners led to new thinking about the continuous professional development aspect of the programme. We – Goldsmiths and the New Town Culture curating team - have now shifted from talking about 'continuous professional development' to speaking instead of a more equal 'knowledge exchange' between social care practitioners on the one hand and artists/curators on the other. We are developing a new methodology for this knowledge exchange, a group reflection method which we are calling 'Interdisciplinary Intervision' (Hughes et al, 2020). In addition, the curators and artists of the Radio Ballads strand of the programme are planning more workshops focused on engaging with social care practitioners in their own right. In this way, the task of 'unlocking culture/s' will be progressed in the next phase of the programme.



Franz West Exhibition at the Tate Modern, April 2019 (photo courtesy of the Tate)



Case of Franz West models (as observed by Ibrahim)



The sculptures made by the asylum-seeking young people

Five: Not Knowing

“We don’t know their case history - are they aware of that? Does our not knowing change our approach in how we communicate and interact with them?”²⁹

With this remark (from his reflective diary), artist Paul Crook asks, does ‘not knowing’ the case history of the young people he and his co-worker Dela Anderson are working with, change the way he is with the young people? Implicit in his comment is also the question of whether the young people may be different with Paul and Dela because they know that Paul and Dela do not know their case histories. In short, what is the power of ‘not knowing’? Paul certainly felt that it was a significant part of the creative process within the *Your Future* group he ran with young people leaving care; he further commented in his diary:

“Letitia telling us about her experience being in care or Faisal speaking about his difficulties when first living in the UK. These are conversations that could have only happened in the context of the project and were a response to what we were doing.”³⁰

Paul is talking here about participants revealing aspects of their identities and their personal histories which were sometimes unknown to their social care practitioners. During the course of the *Make Your Own English* group, there was another, particularly striking example of this. Celestine, a quietly spoken young woman of sixteen, was introduced to the *Make Your Own English* group by her social worker as a new arrival in the area who spoke very limited English. The social worker explained that Celestine spoke only a minority African language and that the team had as yet been unable to find an interpreter in London who spoke that language. During the course of the week the group ran for, there were a number of activities designed to celebrate the many languages spoken by the participating young people. For example, the young people taught each other the names of animals in all the languages they could think of. They photocopied their hands and then wrote onto the photocopies all the languages they spoke. At the end of the week, they wrote their evaluation of the week on mini-whiteboards, which they held up in the Council Chamber, reading out the words so that the different sounds resonated around the chamber. Through these activities, it emerged that Celestine actually had a good knowledge of two major African languages, as well as her own minority language.

Celestine’s social worker, Amina, was quite delighted at this unexpected development. She explained to us that it can be very difficult to find out key information about the young people because they are reluctant to talk about themselves: “We refer them to CAMHS³¹ but they don’t always want to go or they don’t want to talk”. Sometimes, young people have been explicitly instructed by traffickers not to share information and sometimes they have a mistrust of officials, built up during their journey to the UK. Amina felt that it was due to the nature of the space which the artist had created in the *Make Your English* group that Celestine felt it was alright to share information about herself. Albert Potrony, the artist who ran both *Make Your Own English* and the *Transform Yourself* groups commented that:

“These sessions are a social space in which you can see this person in a slightly different light. A space where another type of relationship can come up... still a professional relationship... (but) where different things can be learned.”³²

His remark was echoed by one of the social workers for the participants in the *Transform Yourself* group, who had attended some of the sessions:

“When I came to the group, I saw different children. A more natural environment. They weren’t sitting in an office, trying to explain why they’ve been arrested. . . I do think it humanises children.”³³

²⁹ Reflective diary, artist Paul Crook, May/June/July 2019

³⁰ Reflective diary, artist Paul Crook, May/June/July 2019

³¹ CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

³² Debriefing session for *Transform Yourself* group, August 2020

³³ Debriefing session for *Transform Yourself* group, August 2020

'Not knowing' is a process which may allow young people to be seen in a different way and therefore opens up the possibility for new relationships. The New Town Culture programme curator played a key role in sustaining 'not knowing' because she had to take decisions about what information about young people to share with commissioned artists. Social workers also played a role, since they were points of contact for artists if they had any concerns about young people. Is 'not knowing' then a privilege of artists? Or is it a process with wider relevance and potential in social care practice?

In fact, the potential of 'not knowing' in social care practice has been recognized for some time and has renewed prominence as a result of the recent revival of systemic theory within local authority social care practice (Messent and Pendry, 2019). One prominent systemic theorist, the family therapist Barry Mason, has developed the concept of 'safe uncertainty' (Mason, 1993; Mason, 2019). Mason argues that 'clients' or social care users want to feel safe and may come to practitioners to help them do this. Practitioners can do this leading the individual to a position of safety which the practitioner already knows. However, this is unlikely to be a sustainable position. Instead, the practitioner can help the individual to a place of 'safe uncertainty' by using their expertise to open up space for new meaning to emerge. This involves allowing different stories about who the service user is, to exist alongside each other. It means not leaping to 'understanding' the service users and their experiences too quickly.

Ben Ari and Strier (2010, p. 5) make a related argument, on the basis of the work of the philosopher Levinas: "*We do not have to know in order to serve the 'Other'...for knowledge does not necessarily lead to the right actions or even to a more ethical action. It is not only that knowledge is not enough but that, under certain conditions, it can even be harmful. It is because when we think we know the 'Other', when we, based on our knowledge, think we understand the Other, there is a risk that we are totalizing or reducing the Other, according to the partiality of our understanding.*" They go on (p. 10) to argue that "*Social work practices should challenge the notion that knowledge is a precondition of working with diversity and should seek to create opportunities for experiential encounters with the Other.*"

This was in fact New Town Culture curator Marijke Steedman's position when it came to planning the content of groups (page 23 above) and 'experiential encounter' were exactly what the New Town Culture programme art groups were able to offer. But how can opportunities for such encounters be created within social work, which is, in its present state, a predominantly verbal and written form? In Barking and Dagenham adults services, a new project was launched by senior social care leaders alongside the New Town Culture programme which we think could provide such opportunities. The 'Stories' Project asked social care practitioners, with support from the Principal Social Worker for Adults, to write a story about one of the older or disabled people they were currently working with and held an event where these stories were shared. We think that writing and reading such stories can facilitate a kind of experiential encounter with the service users. The stories must meet agency information gathering requirements so they cannot and do not omit the kind of 'case history' details to which artist Paul Crook was referring (above), but these details are embedded in a wealth of rich description. In this context, 'not knowing' does not mean ignoring important information about a person but rather not allowing that information to stand for the whole person. As the New Town Culture programme continues, Radio Ballads curators and artists will be working closely with adult services' practitioners and there is great potential here for a positive confluence of ideas and practices.

Conclusion

In this report on the New Town Culture programme 2018-2020, we have written about five creative processes which we observed in the work of the programme, and discussed their relevance and potential in social care practice.

Hopeful Disruption refers to artistic acts, carried out by artists or social care practitioners, which challenge conventional ways of talking and acting within both social care spaces and cultural spaces such as museums and galleries. During our research, we observed and heard about examples of acts of ‘hopeful disruption’ initiated by artists, social care practitioners and participants themselves. We feel this is a creative process which has great potential in social care, as well as in socially-engaged art.

Radical Hospitality is about welcoming others warmly but also about giving place to them. This means sharing control over relationships and spaces, including even the boundaries of our selves. Socially-engaged artists and social care practitioners both do this in their practice. However, it is a creative process which entails risks as well as having huge potential. Future New Town Culture groups with social care practitioners may be an important space within which the limits of this concept, as well as its potential, can be explored.

Ceremony is a process which involves sequencing, repetition, the use of symbols, attention to design or beauty and to the wider social significance of what is being enacted. Ceremonies can and should be integral to everyday life. The work of the New Town Culture programme points to the importance of ceremonies which celebrate an individual’s identity and culture. The challenge is to find a way to make these a central part of social work practice, and to integrate them with existing statutory processes.

Unlocking culture/s means opening people’s eyes to new possibilities - to new ways of thinking, doing and being - with the aim of giving them new sources of belonging and self-worth. There were many dimensions to this work within the context of the New Town Culture programme and it is still a work in progress. There were considerable successes in unlocking new forms of artistic culture for the participants in the programme and some challenges in doing so for social care practitioners. This has prompted a shift to a more equal form of ‘knowledge exchange’ between social care practitioners and artists/curators, which we see as having great potential in the next phase of the programme. Finally,

Not Knowing means allowing different stories about who a person is to exist alongside each other throughout the work with them, and seizing every opportunity for direct encounters with individuals. In the New Town Culture programme, the process of ‘not knowing’ enabled richer, more dynamic accounts of the identities of the participants to be created. This is a process which is already acknowledged to be of importance in social work and initiatives which utilize this process are already underway in Barking and Dagenham. There is a real opportunity for New Town Culture to work together with like-minded practitioners in Barking and Dagenham, on the idea and practice of ‘not knowing’.

In our introduction to this report we presented a diagram which showed all of these processes intersecting with each other (page 6) and suggested that they were best understood as lenses. We asked what we might see if we look through the intersection of the lenses. We would suggest that that what we see is **relationship-based practice³⁴**: this is the focus which results from combining creative processes in the way which the New Town Culture programme has done.

³⁴ Ruch et al, 2018

The way forward

We would like to offer some thoughts on the way forward for the New Town Culture programme and the arts sector more broadly, and also for the social care sector. Our ideas about how the programme could be progressed have developed gradually over the past year, through conversations with the programme curator, Marijke Steedman and through our research. Writing this report, four months after the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK, we have had to consider whether these ideas still have applicability. We feel that they do, since they relate to the fundamentals of social care practice, as well as of socially-engaged art, and these remain true in our post-Covid world. There is some overlap between the thoughts and suggestions we offer for the different audiences. We are excited by this. As we suggested earlier, we feel that there is a positive confluence of ideas and policy agendas at this moment in time (Hughes et al, 2020), which will give momentum to the New Town Culture programme as it moves into its next phase.

Thoughts for the New Town Culture programme and the arts sector

- 1.** In future work, we suggest it will be important for the programme to explore new ways of bringing artists/curators and social care professionals together, including the Interdisciplinary Intervision groups which are being planned but also other methods, which could help build communities of practice. In planning this work, it will be important to consider social care/social work culture and local authority culture. It is also likely to be valuable to make use of the existing research base on knowledge exchange and utilisation in social care and social work (e.g. Staempfli, 2020)
- 2.** The art groups and projects run in the 2018-2020 phase of the programme were mainly short intensive workshops (the *Your Future* project being an exception to this). However, some young people and adults attended more than one group and, as a result, built relationships with the curator and the programme as a whole. These relationships became important sources of belonging for some participants, as evidenced by their readiness to join the young people's advisory group being set up for the next phase of New Town Culture. We wonder whether there could be other ways in which a sense of belonging to the programme as a whole could be supported for the young people. Social media accounts could be one way of doing this or alternatively a virtual membership card or newsletter.
- 3.** One of the unique strengths of the New Town Culture programme is that it is curated from within the local authority, by a curator based in the local authority's culture department. We recommend that this integration of the curation of the programme is developed further if future funding allows, with other local authority-based posts, including posts in the social care department if possible. This is a recommendation which we feel has wider relevance for the arts sector. There is a real challenge for museums, galleries and arts programmes in working in areas where museums and galleries do not exist, or barely exist (like Barking and Dagenham). In our view, based on our experience of working and researching with marginalised young people and adults, the primary site of belonging and zone of activity for many remains a geographic one, not least because poverty prevents travel. We do not think there is evidence that Covid-19 has changed this, as access to technology is also limited among some marginalised groups. Basing an arts programme in a local authority, as with the New Town Culture programme, is one possible solution to this dilemma and worth pursuing more widely.
- 4.** There may be a need for the programme to think anew about 'unlocking' the culture(s) of the young people and/or vulnerable adults participating in the programme. It is clear from the artists' reflections that their understanding of the young people's backgrounds grew as they were able to spend more time with them. We understand that a more personalised approach, such as creative mentoring (Parker, 2020), is already in the

planning and we would thoroughly endorse this, as we think it could help artists to engage more with the young people's own cultures.

5. Similarly, any future research on the programme and the programme's evaluation needs to find new ways of enabling young people to contribute their views on the programme, taking account of all the factors which may inhibit young people from sharing their feelings and experiences frankly. As we noted in our account of our research methodology, this is a major challenge but one which should still be faced head on.

Thoughts for the social care sector

1. Social care practitioners may be inhibited from making use of their own creative abilities and cultural capital in their work with young people, adults at risk and their families because of fears of disclosing too much about themselves and breaching professional boundaries. There is a need to explore how professional boundaries can be safely (re)-negotiated in order to enable the sharing of cultural capital.

2. Social care practitioners work under immense pressure and can struggle to see how they can have time to engage in creative activity. Many practitioners are open to the idea of using more creative means to work towards existing social work goals. For this to be possible in practice, existing ways of recording, of organising meetings, of fulfilling targets may need to be rethought in ways which seem radical but may ultimately be fruitful. Could a review meeting take the form of a meal in a cafe, for example? Or could the information needed to put together a pathway plan be gathered through informal conversations in an art group, rather than a pathway planning meeting?

3. Within social care and social work, there is a growing awareness of trauma-informed approaches. Much trauma theory tells us that trauma impacts on the whole person – mind, body and spirit. We would encourage social care leaders to attend to the embodied aspect of trauma, as experienced not only by service users but also by their own social care staff, in the form of secondary trauma. Supporting the use of artistic and creative methods may be an important way in which local authorities can nourish and strengthen their own social care staff.

4. The open-ended nature of artistic processes we have observed as part of the New Town Culture research allows young people to express themselves in ways which many social work processes – frequently transactional in nature – do not always permit. This is a particularly relevant finding for young people who, for various reasons, may be alienated by one-to-one discursive forms of intervention. Social work leaders to consider whether practitioners can make more use of open-ended, non-transactional ways of working in social work, including, for example group work.

5. People using social work services can get trapped within fixed narratives. These narratives include the narrative of their trauma (for example, the story of how they came to be a refugee in the UK) and the narrative of their future life (shaped by standardised questions asked by social workers 'what job would you like to do?' 'what would you like to study?'). These narratives become fixed within bureaucratic forms of recording which both standardise and reduce the identities of young people. The artistic processes we observed enabled the young people to set aside these standardised narratives of themselves and create new dynamic ones, through their interactions with others within the art group. Barking and Dagenham adult social care department is already exploring ways in which dynamic, rich accounts of identity can find a place in social work practice through their Stories project and also through work within children's services on recording formats. We hope that this work can be extended and shared within the local authority and beyond.

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