

Initial thoughts for project 11/08

The first thing that came to mind when thinking about possible directions for the project was my community theatre. I like the idea of doing something within my own community and particularly with an organisation that I have had involvement with. I did a play with my local community theatre 'Pymble Players' a couple of years ago, so I do have some contacts with the group. I briefly looked at their website, which gave a very quick overview of their history. They have been around since 1957 and have done over 200 productions since then, so there would be a wealth of archives including photographs and costumes I could work with. I could perhaps offer to do a more comprehensive history for their website or even make a film for them. However, I'm hesitant to make contact before researching other options. The thing that is stopping me is that I know what this project will look like before starting it. The dramatic club is a North Shore establishment. The people involved all come from the same upper middle class, Anglo-Saxon background and the plays they have chosen since 1957 very much reflect this. I think this course is already prompting me to reflect upon the importance of public history and who it serves. I found hearing Bruce speak this week interesting, he is using the history he makes to preserve parts of our culture through the protection of important historical sites, thus his history is serving a larger, practical purpose and is not of solely academic interest. Ideally, I'd like my project to similarly not only serve the organisation but a wider public with whom the organisation is involved with.

Michaela Cameron 7/09

Michaela spoke in class today and was incredibly inspiring in her talk and work. It was possibly one of the first times I've seen how I could apply my own skills that I have in history and even social media and make a career out of it. Listening to her, I realised that I could very easily go on the same path. Particularly interesting was her use of social media, something so simple as using Twitter and Instagram to present history in a different way has taken her on an incredible journey and opened so many doors. I was also shocked at the fact that I hadn't heard much about the female factory or the existence of walking tours in Sydney. This course is opening my eyes to the fact that people are actively engaged in public history outside of the traditional realms where I'd placed it.

Powerhouse Youth Theatre 10/09

So I knew that I wanted to do a project with a theatre group, as that's what I'm passionate about and I feel it would offer amazing historical opportunities. After talking to some friends from SUDS (the University dramatic society) one of them mentioned Powerhouse Youth Theatre. I investigated a little and loved the look of their work (from what I saw on their website). Basically, it's a theatre group, which are based in Fairfield in Western Sydney, and they alongside an ensemble group of youth actors engage artists in residence to create works that articulate the voices of Western Sydney. It's socially inclusive theatre and in the past they have staged works like 'Cabramatta Story' that was based on interviews they did with residents from across the area. So the organisation seems to be already

playing with the idea of public history in an interesting way which is really exciting. I like the idea that they are empowering voices that aren't necessarily heard in theatre in Sydney – that is immigrants and youth.

First contact with PYT 22/9

After receiving a phone call from Caitlin last week, I've been in contact with Powerhouse Youth Theatre about doing some work for them. They're very open to having me on board but have taken a while to work out what form they would like my work to take. They are now talking of me coming on board for one which is in very early stages of development. It's called 'Tribunal' and in its very nebulous form right now is aiming to hold a performed 'tribunal' with an interactive audience on the place of the refugee and immigrant in Australian history. Caitlin and Karen (the Artistic director) think that I could provide some historical research for the show.

Meeting with PYT 7/10

Today I finally met in person with Karen and Caitlin to work out details of the research I'll be doing. The main thing that they want from me is a variety of media and sources including film, visual arts, podcasts etc. From these sources I should be aiming to detail a couple of case studies as examples of Truth and Reconciliation commissions and tribunals including in South Africa and ideally Asia, perhaps East Timor for example. Karen stressed that the research should be aimed at creatives and not academics. I think this will be a challenge for me, after

being so accustomed to a particular type of academic research, the freedom is a little overwhelming. Suddenly each and every source is available. In one way it will be more difficult, I'm going to have to be very deliberate with my choices as I don't want to overwhelm the artists. Also knowing that the end product is a theatre piece changes the direction of my research. I want examples that prompt thought and which will relate to the broader idea of public history, of re-writing our history which is what the 'Tribunal' theatre project will be aiming to do. On one hand my personal background is driving me towards academic sources as I think they'd inform the work in an interesting way – particularly discussions of just war theory and Giorgio Agamben's work. But on the other hand I'm aware that the artists don't want to get bogged down in this, that the history that serves them best may be sources which present it in a creative and thoughtful mode such as documentaries or podcasts.

The form of my research 22/10

After receiving my marked proposal, Mike has prompted me to think more carefully about the form my research will take. He has suggested Tumblr which I think would be a perfect platform. I mentioned it to Karen this week and she loved the idea. Tumblr will mean that I can post videos, links and articles on the same site and allow the artists to post their own research, meaning the blog can continue after I've finished. Perhaps it can also be part of the advertisement for the show, so audiences too can turn up a little more historically informed. I also like the idea that on Tumblr I can post summaries of articles and then further

links for the artists to follow up themselves, this way they are not overloaded with information and can pick and choose what is relevant to them.

Blog posts 1/11

I'm finding it difficult to dilute all the information I have read into short and snappy posts. Particularly for the case-studies where I'm drawing information from dense reports. I think I may have to end up deconstructing them into different posts, such as background, results and discussion around the truth and reconciliation commissions. I'm also aware that first person accounts could be very valuable to the artists who are interested in the voices of those involved, so am searching for interviews to supplement my analyses. My biggest anxiety is losing the complexity of the cases but I am also aware that it is easy for me to get caught up in the details rather than drawing out the larger ideas which are applicable for the artists. It's a difficult balancing act, which is taking even more thought than I had anticipated.

Reflection on the course 2/11

This course has been one of the most valuable courses I've done at university. It is the first course where I've been asked to apply my skills and knowledge in a non-academic setting. This was terrifying at first and still is in that I'm accountable to professionals and not just an academic. But it has made me aware of the multiple directions my academic background in history can take me. Just even the other week with Catherine Freyne I found myself thinking of the ways I

can reconcile my creative interests with my academic ones as she talked of her involvement with Radio National. Catherine like so many of the speakers reminded me of the pervasiveness of public history, we are engaging with it all of the time and it is valuable to every individual, every community. I've started thinking differently about the history I've engaged with, at university this has been mainly Renaissance and Early Modern history. I've loved studying this period but as I've been prompted to think about the different purposes and facilities of history I'm beginning to think of how I can engage with a more local, Australian history. I will definitely be looking at the continuation of my work with PYT as the start.