

How might we as the Centre for Dramaturgy and Curation start to bring people together?

The Centre for Dramaturgy and Curation is a research space and a consultancy service, through which we are connecting with people from across our creative networks with an interest in these two distinct fields investigation. A lot of these connections are on a one-to-one level, as people take up residence or meet with us about a specific idea or project.

In creating a space that houses both these fields, we want to find strategies for facilitating exchange between dramaturgs and curators. We also want to start to de-centre ourselves (Mark and Arie), and highlight the range of expertise across the network.

The plan is to hold an event every quarter, each one dramaturgically and curatorially considered and distinctive, and see what grows. A community is starting to form around the Centre, and we needed to explore what role the events might play in relation to other activities, and what we and the community might want from an event.

The theme in the back of our mind here was 'beginnings', as we tried to work out where to begin. It wasn't so much a curatorial concept, but an inherent question that came with keeping it simple and working with what had already presented itself in the first four months of the Centre's operation.

We prepared a spread of food, and guests were invited to bring creative offerings to share with the group – an intervention, a proposition, a prayer, an experience, an experiment, a gift. A week out from the lunch they gave us a rough idea of what they would do, and we were able to shape it into a running order that best supported the individual offerings, and also took the group on a journey, with each offering like a course in a degustation meal.

The lunch took place on the day after the election, and we were wary of how that context might dominate the lunch. Guest Emilie Collyer has been part of the 'Campaign And After' play-a-day playwriting project (@CAfterplays), so we decided to bite off the context directly and invite her to share her work first. After what turned out to be a crushing election night, this gesture really cleared the air, and the lunch became much more relaxed, and a nourishing way to work through the negative feelings a lot of our guests walked in with.

Vidya Rajan and Xanthea O'Connor tested their performance project *The Lizard is Present*, Naomi Velaphi led a discursive exercise around the notion of courtesy, Nicole Breedon and Kiera Brew Curec shared outtakes from their ProPrac podcast, and Emma Hall put her research question around foyers to the group.

A series of blindfolded performances finished off the event, with Ben Landau guiding us through a listening and naming exercise, before Ceri Han and Lynda Roberts conducted a sound bath over the group. Out of this, Mark delivered a poetic monologue incorporating fragments of each of the offerings, tying the event back together around the notion of beginnings and the Noh theatre principles of Jo-Ha-Kyu.

This event was a valuable prototype for future CDC events. We needed to find out how best to work together conceiving and producing events, and this was a discrete but effective way of finding our process.

A major learning has been that we work best in response to the researchers we work with, letting their needs and interests guide our vision. Once we had the first offerings in place, we could start to make some creative decisions and build the event around it.

We definitely saw the value of bringing this community together for discrete, generous engagements, and some of the offerings and conversations from the lunch are now helping us conceive a range of future events. Beginnings are hard, but necessary.

The event has also brought me back to an old question of mine – where does community happen? We do it in foyers and exhibition openings, but these engagements become so tied up with the context of being someone's presentation outcome. I think there's value in creating new spaces, away from the art, to make new connections and share with each other. On the morning of this event the post-election blues seemed overwhelming, but something quickly thawed as this new grouping of people started making these tiny offerings with each other.

This first event was organised by invitation, but the next ones will be bigger in scale and open to all. So if you're interested in coming along please drop us a line and let us know.

Mark Pritchard.

