

Diversity and Inclusion

Building the Good Life in Australia

Jeremy Neideck

Queer(y)ing the Australian Way of Life

Morwenna Collett

More Risk, More Play: Creating an Inclusive
Culture

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About this Issue

In this issue we have avoided italics, bold and centred text in order to make the text accessible for readers with vision impairment.

Terminology

Deaf and d/Deaf: Deaf is capitalised when referring to members of the Deaf community (typically Auslan users), and d/Deaf is used as a wider term that also encompasses people who may be deaf but do not consider themselves to be members of the Deaf community.

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, people of colour.

CALD: Culturally and linguistically diverse.

Cisgender or cis: A person whose gender identity aligns with their identified sex at birth.

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Contents

Introduction to Issue No. 5	2
Queer(y)ing the Australian Way of Life by Jeremy Neideck.....	4
Acknowledgements.....	5
Introduction	6
Hoping and Dreaming in Australia	9
Nationhood as Creative Practice	10
1. Justin Shoulder.....	15
2. Sarah Stafford	20
3. Joel Bray	26
Endnotes.....	29
More Risk, More Play Creating an Inclusive Culture by Morwenna Collett.....	32
Acknowledgements.....	33
Author's Note	34
Introduction	35
1. The Case for ADEI.....	37
2. Case Study: Spotlight on Disability.....	41
3. Why Bother: Reasons to be Inclusive.....	43
4. Who Cares: Who Does ADEI Affect?	45
5. The Global Context: How Does Australia Stack Up?	49
6. Carrots and Sticks: Encouraging ADEI Success	51
7. Quotas and Targets	55

8. Why It's Hard: Challenges and Failures	60
9. What Does It Actually Look Like? Doing the Work	62
10. What's Next	64
Endnotes.....	67
About the Authors.....	69
Morwenna Collett.....	69
Jeremy Neideck	70
Complete List of Platform Papers.....	72
Platform Papers 2004–2021	72
The New Platform Papers 2021–.....	75

List of Tables

Table 1: SBS Inclusion Targets: Unscripted	58
Table 2: SBS Inclusion Targets: Scripted.....	58

Introduction to Issue No. 5

What does the 'good life' mean for Australians now? We have come a long way since George Caiger described a life of masculine leisure in 'The Australian Way of Life' in 1953. That life was built on female domestic labour and 'a kind of good-humoured casualness towards other peoples'—except when it affected their economic interests. But behind this idyll, in Russell Drysdale's haunted landscapes and the savage wit of Barry Humphries' housewife Edna Everage, Australians were wracked with deep anxieties. The 'fair go', on which all their good fortune rested, also fed the fear that they could lose it all. Today, nostalgia for those 'relaxed and comfortable' days has heightened both the fear and the fantasy with polarising effect in Australian society.

In 'Queer(y)ing the Australian Way of Life', performance maker Jeremy Neideck proposes that liberation from this fantasy can be found in the work of queer artists. The good life, he argues, is a combination of the moral, the intimate and the economic. By exploring these three dimensions simultaneously in their professional and personal lives, he argues, queer artists are engaging in a process of 'nationhood as creative practice'. Three artists: Justin Shoulder, Sarah Stafford and Joel Bray, are his interlocutors. In the worlds they create on stage and the lives they have created for themselves in society, as parents, friends, lovers and creative practitioners, they are using queer ways of being, knowing, understanding and animating the world, to remodel the good life. The example they set dissipates the national fear of loss by exploding the false ideal of cultural homogeneity and making room for us all.

In the second essay, 'More Risk, More Play: Creating an Inclusive Culture', arts consultant Morwenna Collett asks what Australia would look like if we actually embraced diversity 'in all its glory'. When we talk about diversity, race and gender immediately spring to mind, but it is much broader and more complex than that. Writing as a proud disabled woman, she argues that the truth is we all have 'accessibility issues': it's just the way we design our world that

makes it easy for some to enjoy our culture and hard for others. Access is just another way of describing ‘the good life’, because it is the essence of belonging and community. The choices we make—economically, geographically, linguistically, socially, architecturally, technologically—put Australian culture in or out of reach. Ultimately, access and its associated values of diversity, equity and inclusion, are about ending discrimination by examining very closely the way we treat each other in all of our relationships.

There is a lot of work to be done to bring the good life in Australia into the present, but before we create the institutions and legislation that will make it a reality, we have to do the imaginative work of nationhood, by exploring our moral, intimate and economic worlds through the sensory experiences of creative practice. And if we are to succeed in this venture, we all need access.

Harriet Parsons

Editor

May 27, 2023

Queer(y)ing the Australian Way of Life

by Jeremy Neideck

Acknowledgements

In my first essay for Currency House, 'The Cost of Cultural Ambition', I wrote about the love I have for the extended family of artists who are negotiating a good life between South Korea and Australia. To the family I have chosen to share this working life with: REM Theatre, LATT Children's Theatre, Motherboard Productions, Offset Art, Imaginary Theatre, Staff Seoul, Ten Spoons, Kiosk and Company Bad. Thank you for collaborating on what at times has felt like an impossible dream.

To the family I have chosen to share my personal life with: Nathan, Fi, Thom, Bec, Maisie, Flora, Younghee, M'ck, Dave. Although we are once again spread out across the globe, I can't wait to be with you again. Thank you for everything.

To the family I didn't choose: thank you for your love and your pride.

To Julian Meyrick, Harriet Parsons, and the team at Currency House, thank you for investing in my development as a thinker and as a writer.

To Joel Bray, Justin Shoulder and Sarah Stafford: thank you for showing me many of the ways that queers can live a good life in so-called Australia.

Introduction

This is a work-in-progress.

I wonder if, by the time you read this paper, any clarity will have emerged from the messy and incoherent desire-lines that urged me to pitch it to the editorial team at Currency House.¹

My starting point is a hunch:

There is something queer about the past, present and future of life in Australia.

Messiness is queer. I'm queer. I find value and pleasure in exploring ways of forming knowledge outside of the hierarchies of institutions.² Avoiding mess, for me, is a futile business. But I am beginning to wonder if some clarity can be found in the messy and incoherent desire-lines that have shaped my life in so-called Australia.

Lauren Berlant has written about something she calls cruel optimism—an affective state where we confuse the struggle to attain the good life with the good life itself.³ It is the point at which we lose sight of the good life, and the daily grind and the crushing weight of living under late-stage capitalism perversely becomes our goal in and of itself. One way to think about the good life is that it is a combination of the moral, the intimate and the economic, underpinned by the principles of enduring reciprocity that hold people together in relationships as couples, families, political systems, institutions, markets and businesses. When conditions are such that these relationships begin to fracture and fail, cruel optimism seduces us into attaching ourselves to myths and fantasies that are harmful or even impossible to achieve.

In a 2022 opinion piece celebrating the launch of the Centre for the Australian Way of Life at the Institute of Public Affairs, former Prime Minister Tony Abbott wrote that there had 'never been less racism and never been better

treatment for minorities' in this country.⁴ Ghassan Hage had skewered Abbott's vision when he was writing about his predecessor, John Howard, nearly two decades earlier, in 2003:

The Prime Minister has publicly declared himself 'offended' on many occasions; he even went as far as being 'outraged' once when faced with the term 'racism'. More offended by it than by the sight of the dehumanising concentration camps he has used to cage third-world-looking asylum seekers. In fact, in Australia today those offended by the term 'racist' almost outnumber those offended by racists.⁵

The landscape of Abbott's fantasy was first mapped out in 'The Australian Way of Life' by the editor George Caiger in 1953. He described Australia as a nation of people who were 'engaged in remoulding an inherited tradition in a fresh environment', a people yearning for a greatness but frustrated by an 'insistence on equality and uniformity', whose society was dependent on the 'heavy domestic demands upon the womenfolk' and who demonstrated 'a kind of good-humoured casualness towards other peoples except where economic interests are affected'.⁶

The cruel optimism of the pursuit of the Australian way of life has become a serious impediment to the wellbeing of our nation. For straights there is liberation to be found in queerer ways of being, knowing, understanding and animating the world. Tracing these desire-lines has become one of my obsessions. Company Bad is a collective of performance makers who are my lovers, friends and collaborators, that has been developing transcultural performance practices over a decade in queer space and time. A driving force behind Company Bad's approach is the negotiation of points of transition and transformation between audiences and performers as they create new worlds together.

The 2010s was a period of sustained resourcing of new and emerging performance makers in Queensland. Queer world-building became a cherished

part of this independent theatre boom, which has been described by Hannah Brown as the 'new new wave'.⁷ To understand why, Nathan Stoneham, Younghee Park, Mick McKeague and I have been re-evaluating 지하 Underground, the formative work we made during that period.⁸ This paper builds on that critical reflection, and looks further afield to the ways in which our friends elsewhere have been contributing to queer ideas of Australia.

Julianna Schultz writes in 'The Idea of Australia: The Search for the Soul of the Nation':

In seeking to articulate an idea of Australia that is now fit for purpose, there is a need to... isolate and cauterise the unexamined and unlovely DNA that will otherwise pass epigenetically from one generation to the next. Transformation is at the heart of the Australian story, though rarely celebrated as a guide for the future.⁹

For those who find themselves queer in Australia and at odds with the 'unexamined and unlovely' aspects of nationhood, no amount of speculative isolation and cauterisation will make their lives commensurable with an environment soaked in cis-straight fantasies.

That initial hunch of mine is becoming stronger now. It's a proposal:

Patterns of potential for the future of the Australian Way of Life are encoded in the work of queer performing artists and, through them, the diverse hopes and dreams of their communities.

Hoping and Dreaming in Australia

I was a twink for about nine months in my twenties, bald by thirty and skipped both the twink and hunk stages to settle on the flabby side of daddy at nearly forty. I'm sitting in my 70s red brick flat surrounded by vintage earthenware; printouts of this week's lecture slides and lesson plans strewn across a pile of coffee table books full of artistic nudes. Paintings and prints and ceramic tiles are neatly arranged on the walls around me, displaying messages like 'REST YOU BEAUTIFUL, BUSY IDIOT'¹⁰ and 'HOW TO MEET HORNY MARRIED DADS IN YOUR AREA IN A GOD-HONOURING WAY'.¹¹ I take a moment to scroll past unread messages from ex-lovers and ex-students on my phone as I once again cancel plans for dinner with one of three friends I have in Perth, the city I moved to twelve months ago to take up my dream job, leaving behind my young family of almost a decade.

In 'The Decay of Lying', Oscar Wilde unsettles Aristotle's concept of mimesis by asserting that it is life that imitates art: art creates an ideal version of the world that life attempts to copy.¹²

Art shapes the way we perceive reality.

But who would buy a ticket to watch the cruel optimism of an anxious, nervous, husk of a man writing and then deleting the same six sentences over and over all weekend?

Is it that art is my life, or that life is my art?

Fuck it. Clarity is for straight people, and I am sick of straight people.

Is this a sudden heterophobic outburst or the product of some deeper angst?

Living queer and in Australia seems incommensurable, and I am sick of worried straight people. Sick of the blatantly queer-phobic delusion spouted by right-wing ideologues, that gays are grooming children by reading them stories in drag. Sick of the subtle handwringing of left-leaning Gen Xers who fret about how they could possibly talk to and about trans and gender non-conforming

Zoomers. Sick of watching a screenplay about the bent nature of queer love and relationships die the death of a thousand straight cuts at the hands of executives who lack the imagination to invest in anything that contradicts the cis straight fantasy of the hero's journey.

I am appropriating Hage's thesis from 'White Nation' in this harangue. One passage has reached out and shaken me from my malaise:

If there is a single important, subjective feeling behind this book, it is that I, and many people like me, am sick of 'worried' White Australians—White Australians who think that they have a monopoly over 'worrying' about the shape and the future of Australia.¹³

Substitute 'cis-straight' for 'white' and that 'single important, subjective feeling' is what I am experiencing right now. It is a topic that occupies my conversations with friends, ex-lovers, ex-students...

There are many people for whom worrying is the last available strategy for staying in control of social processes over which they have no longer much control.¹⁴

My argument may prove tenuous or even problematic, but at least my hunch is finding its form:

The fantasies of Australia as a cis-straight, white nation are being actively dismantled by certain artists who are engaging in a project of nationhood as creative practice.

Nationhood as Creative Practice

I want to give a wide berth to what David L. Eng has described as the colonial dynamic of 'white folks (straight and gay) saving brown homosexuals from

brown heterosexuals',¹⁵ and the instruments of assimilation and destruction which, as Sandy O'Sullivan (Wiradjuri) reminds us:

gaslight every historic iteration of gender diversity and sexuality outside of the heteronormative, and every Indigenous iteration of kinship that challenged the western patriarchal system.¹⁶

White folk have done enough damage here, and in this country non-Indigenous queers have much to learn from Indigenous critiques of the colonial project. I am white. I benefit from privileges inherited from successful intergenerational navigation of the penal-coloniser-settler industrial complex. I am not the one to lead us down the desire-line trod by O'Sullivan and others, but I do want to beat a path alongside it, that weaves around it, that intersects with it.

Whitney Monaghan has written that the queer notions of the good life that young people aspire to do not follow the same milestones as their hetero and homonormal peers and they are not often celebrated.¹⁷ Over one in five participants in the '2021 Australian Youth Barometer' survey aged 18 to 24 identified as a member of the queer community;¹⁸ and, compared with the general population, they were more than twice as likely to declare that sharing a similar ethnic or cultural background with others was 'not at all important for them to feel like they belong'.¹⁹

In 2022 Tony Abbott was writing that 'our school students deserve better than politically correct brain-washing, with every subject taught from an [I]ndigenous, sustainability and Asian perspective'.²⁰ What would happen if we abandoned the cruel optimism of cultural homogeneity and searched for the good life in queer models of reciprocity?

There is important work being done right now in representing and illuminating queer lives, histories and practices for a wider audience. In 'Queer Performance', a special edition of 'Australasian Drama Studies', the editors, Jacob Boehme (Narangga, Kurna), Jonathan Bollen, Alyson Campbell and Liza-Mare Syron (Birrbay) offer to:

trace the LGBTQI+ desire-lines linking artists and audiences—
crossing social, cultural, political and regional boundaries and
reaching out queerly across time and place.²¹

Zoë Combes Marr and Nayuka Gorrie (Kurnai/Gunai, Gunditjmara, Wiradjuri, Yorta Yorta) recently led a parade of Australian LGBTQI+ personalities across our screens in 'Queerstralia', facilitating conversations that unsettled the dominant narratives of Australian culture and identity while celebrating its contemporary queer life. The parade continued in our streets and on our stages as some of those same personalities appeared at 2023 World Pride in Sydney. Rising above the crowd was Tiwi sistergirl Crystal Love, an icon of Indigenous queer people in Australia who uses her platform to highlight the challenges they face and their opportunities.

This paper is a work-in-progress that is messy, personal and in transition. It uses queer modes of 'associative argumentation and evidencing'²² to braid together analyses of Australian life provided by authors such as Ghassan Hage, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Chelsea Watego (Munanjahli and South Sea Islander), Sandy O'Sullivan and Julianna Schultz, and landmark works on American life by José Esteban Muñoz, Lauren Berlant and Jack Halberstam

It will paint a series of scenes that describe the affect of three contemporary queer performance makers: Joel Bray (Wiradjuri), Justin Shoulder and Sarah Stafford.

Berlant writes that:

affective atmospheres are shared, not solitary... bodies are
continually busy judging their environments and responding to
the atmospheres in which they find themselves.²³

There isn't space here for a close reading and analysis of the work of these three artists, but by exploring the worlds they inhabit bodily on stage, and the atmospheres they conjure up, these aesthetic interlocutors may act as guides for readers through the dense and sometimes obscure affect theories that underpin a lot of queer studies.

Through the use of thick description, I propose to show that these artists are engaging in a project of nationhood as creative practice, or, to borrow from Álvaro Luís Lima, that they are imagining 'queer nationalism by attempting to complicate the representations of power'.²⁴ In doing so, I want to make space for future projects that archive and critique the work of artists who are contributing to the contemporary canon of queer performance in Australia. Above all, I want to witness, love, and celebrate the work of Joel, Justin and Sarah.

It's late September. The best time of the year to be in Brisbane. Festival time.

JOEL: 19 SEPT 2019 4:06 PM

Hey babes! Can't wait to see you next week! Two things though...

1 - I need a fresh guy as an audience plant in each show. I would love if you would be the one.

2 - If you know any other guys who would be good, could you suggest some?

Anyway, hope you are super well and can't wait to see you!!
Drink after the show?

Babes. Fresh guy. The one. Other guys. Can't wait. I'm nervous. Joel Bray is coming to Brisbane Festival.

I haven't seen Joel since last year. I was in Melbourne for a conference and I smoke-bombed on an afternoon panel session to meet him at a pub for dinner. On our agenda was talking business, art and love. Swapping the kinds of stories that would shock our mothers but are part of daily life for certain artistic queers. Rich fodder for Joel's new work 'Daddy'. The pretence for our meeting however is that our friend Justin Shoulder is in town with his latest show, 'Carrion'. We're excited. The reviews are delicious:

A costume of bones is prepared in reverent solitude, knuckles clattering on the floor in the quiet. That endearing yet unsettling masked figure becomes riotous, and tears down a cloudscape so that it lies in a heap in the rising smoke. A pink, flouncy enormity rises up, the size of a house, burping, gluttonous, like a spirit gorging itself, and then sinks back down into the earth.²⁵

I'm full of expectation. I haven't seen Justin since 2010. We were in Seoul creating dancing creatures for the inaugural Roger Rynd International Cultural Exchange. The 'pink, flouncy enormity' sounds suspiciously like a beast that manifested as a pile of pink tissue paper under a Christmas tree in the foyer of Seoul Art Space_Mullae. I can't wait.

He carefully dresses himself, transforming before our eyes into a masked creature with bones on the outside of his skin, at once insectile and birdlike. Around him is a jungle of mechanical parrots that imitate speech—I see you!—in between their recorded whistles. He makes bird noises: is he trying to speak to them? Is he simply curious?²⁶

I'm suddenly regretful. I now remember that I spent the last night of the Cultural Exchange drinking an entire bottle of vodka in a taxi and making out with a straight friend in an alley on Homo Hill before making a menace of myself at the Wolfhound, a notorious Irish pub. I woke up in a strange bed with no memory of how I got there. I was so late to check out of our accommodation that we had

to sprint through Incheon Airport, desperate to make our flights home. It's been years though. I'll be fine.

And then he's a giant pulsating polyp, or perhaps a partially sentient intestine, that grows a human face. Then he's the masked bird-insect-human again, bereft of words, at once sinister and innocent. Hungry. Predatory.²⁷

Even though I am desperate to prolong my engagement with Joel, I can't hang out after 'Carrion' because another mate is also in town, and he mentioned that he might want to catch up for a drink.

No, it's not like that.

No, he's straight.

No, I haven't heard from him.

No, I don't know where we are going to meet.

Well, you know how it is...

How these straight boys always have us in a chokehold...

No? Ok, I guess I'll see you next time.

This is a good life.

1. Justin Shoulder

For the last decade and a half Justin Talplacido Shoulder has been occupied with a project of transformation that has seen him mutate into fantastic creatures—fabulous beasts—that explore his ancestral Filipinx mythologies and speculate on future possibilities for humanity. His esoteric, archetypal and exquisitely sculptural performance personas gestated in Sydney's subaltern queer nightlife to be birthed onto stages across the country and around the world.

‘Carrion’ was his first foray into the post-human. It showcases a creature that sometimes writhes, sometimes stalks, sometimes inflates, in its quest to reveal the role humanity is playing in the Earth’s destruction. ‘Carrion’ has evolved from a work of theatrical performance into a transmedial saga, its shapeshifting form challenging the binary opposition of human and animal, natural and artificial, life and death, in a rich exploration of alternative modes of being and belonging. It destabilises the myth of progress that, as Alison Croggan pointed out in her review, is built on crippling trauma and the human capacity for forgetting:

We’re also very good at making myths. This, like most human capacities, is both marvellous and catastrophic: myth-making is one of the ways we make narrative sense of the worlds we inhabit, and often how we learn to see more clearly. But some of our most pernicious myths, the myths that are undoing our very existence, are invisible.²⁸

The queerness of ‘Carrion’ isn’t just in the way that it fucks with binaries and unsettles deeply held myths about humanity, it’s also in the creative process that fucks with the boundaries between Justin’s professional and personal lives.

Growing up closeted and deeply Pentecostal on Queensland’s Sunshine Coast, I had no role models or mentors to point me towards queer patterns for a good life that strayed outside the heteronormative. The closest I got to coming out to my parents was telling my mother at 16 that I would never give her grandchildren.

In ‘Gender Trouble’ Judith Butler discusses the idea of ‘the refusal’, a personal rejection of participation in the binary performances of gender that are expected by our societies.²⁹ In ‘No Future’, Lee Edelman take this even further by arguing that because queers have historically been excluded from participation in reproductive models of the future—a society built around the fulfilments of the child—that we should embrace what he calls the ‘death drive’, and refuse to invest in the future and instead focus on the present.³⁰ As a young

person, I saw no positive examples of refusal, and had no language to express the death drive that was taking root in me.

Queer young people can have markedly different experiences of belonging and exclusion from each other.³¹ Benjamin Law's book 'Growing Up Queer in Australia' starts with a list of things he yearned for as an adolescent: nice clothes, clear skin and 'wavy hair like the local hot white surfer boys'; three things, however, proved hard to find: queer people, queer stories and depictions of queer sex, 'and I craved them with a desperation that bordered on hunger'.³² The importance of representation for marginalised groups in the media, arts and cultural production is well understood, but what comes after representation?³³

Representation wasn't especially helpful to me as a guide to living in the early 2000s. One of my overwhelming memories of being with my first love, Nathan, is that it felt like we had discovered something special and unique. In a time just before we had the entire corpus of human knowledge at our fingertips: we were inventing everything for the first time. Flirting. Sex. Breaking up. Reconnecting. Seeing other people. Seeing the same people. We binged 'Queer as Folk' and I internalised the mortal dread of turning thirty—an age which would render me worthless. Season one featured a soap-operatic parenting narrative about a one-night stand between a gay man and a lesbian that resulted in an unexpected pregnancy and was further complicated by a convoluted and dramatic IVF storyline in season two. And so, I promised my best friend that if we were both still childless by thirty we would get out the turkey baster and she could keep the kid. In season four, when a gay comic store owner and his academic partner foster a teenaged HIV-positive sex worker I thought that maybe that would be an option for me. But thirty came and went, as did any prospects of a family life—being, as I was, an independent artist with crippling credit-card debt, share-housing with strangers in a run-down inner-city workers' cottage.

The first concrete model of queer family life I had was in my late twenties, getting to know Justin and hearing him talk about life with his partner and collaborator, Matt Stegh, a prolific designer and costumier. Hearing about ways

they thrived as co-parents in a non-nuclear living arrangement, and inside a community in Sydney that is constantly organising and reorganising itself to accommodate families in flux, radically expanded my horizons.

Justin's creative family extends from the Glitter Militia—the politicised and avant-garde artist incubator he inaugurated with Matt in 2008—to Club Até—the collective he formed in 2014 with Bhenji Ra, contemporary dancer and Mother of the Western Sydney vogue house Slé. Club Até's most recent work is 'In Muva We Trust', a community-led intergenerational event that poses the question: 'In the face of an uncertain future, how do we, as queer communities of colour, cultivate hope and create possibility?'³⁴ For Justin, extending his work into forms accessible for children and families is an exciting and important part of his creative practice.³⁵

Justin's work embraces the forces of negativity, irony and disruption to rehearse strategies, born out of the rich, transgressive alterity of his personal and social lives, that imagine the world on the other side of the looming apocalypse—whether it manifests as a climate emergency, a nuclear tragedy or a disaster generated by artificial intelligence. His refusal to accommodate or assimilate to the social and symbolic orders of the cis-straight nation fantasy of Australia cultivates a vision of hope and possibility that is inspiring and should be celebrated.

By 2015, my first love and I were romantically independent. In Brisbane we got to know networks of queer and BIPOC families whose adults were arts and cultural workers and whose children benefited from collective caregiving. Two of our best friends, Fi and Thom, found a large home that none of us could ever afford alone and pitched an idea of moving in together. Nathan and I would have separate floors and there was enough space for us all to work from home and raise children when the time came. It was a milestone I could never have imagined as a child and would certainly never have thought of it as a good life, but when the opportunity arose, it was an easy proposition to say yes to.

It's late September. The best time of the year to be in Brisbane. Festival time.

JEREMY: 20 SEPT 2019 AT 09:41 AM

Hey. I would love to be your
plant... I'm coming along on the
Friday night. 😊
Can't wait to see you.
I'll put my feelers out for other
willing boys.

It takes two minutes to walk directly out of my office, across the street and catch a band, some stand-up, indie theatre, cabaret, performance art, my housemate DJing for an outdoor dance party.

This year the festival is bigger than ever. 'Revels, Revelations and Romances', the marketing screams. 'Music! Theatre! Fire!' the headlines read. The Artistic Director is going out with a bang.

JOEL: 21 SEPT 2019 AT 08:49 AM

Thanks so much!

This month I've rarely been at home. I am busy teaching. Rehearsing a show. Wrapping a show. Planning a show. Today I'm meant to check in on Sarah Stafford at the bowls club. She was one of my first students when I took on teaching work during my post-grad. By some twist of fate, it turns out that her high school drama teacher was my best friend. Now Sarah is one of my best friends. The queer circle of life. She is at the bowls club three afternoons a week, wrestling hours of family video into something truly iconic. I'm her outside eye. She didn't really listen to me when she was my student, and she isn't really listening now, but I am just happy to be coming along for the ride.

My big housemates only see me if we catch a show together, bump into each other at the artist bar, make the trek out to the suburbs to watch the

expensive festival centrepiece. We rename our group chat in homage to the experience. My little housemate only sees me during our morning ritual: she sits on the bottom step with me as I put on my shoes, checks that I have everything in my backpack, confirms that I am walking and not taking my car, reminds me that today mum is going to work and dad is staying home with her.

'Bye uncle!', grandma sings out as I head into the street.

This is a good life.

2. Sarah Stafford

Sarah Stafford is the doyenne of Brisbane's queer club performance scene. She performs her signature mashup of absurd mundanity, grotesque clown and vain arrogance as Amaro Mayfair in the band 'The Architects of Sound' with her long-term collaborators David Stewart (Valencia Low-Fi) and Sampson Smith (Sutro). They describe their sound as being forged 'in a Bray Park garage during a fierce electrical storm in 2012',³⁶ but, as one reviewer has noted they aren't musicians: 'they're far more important, far more conceptually insightful and artistically refined, percipient guardians of the zeitgeist'.³⁷ The 'Architects' are a mainstay of the 'new new wave' of independent theatre in Brisbane, but Sarah has for the last couple of years also been striking out on her own.

At a solo performance in a packed nightclub one night in 2019, I watch her paint her nails while eating discounted lobster tails from a plastic deli bag, attempt to assemble a \$59 IKEA Grimsbu bed, then give up and take a nap on the mess she has made.³⁸ Sarah's most popular creation, the heavily pregnant Donna Jane Lesbian Lee (she insists you MUST call her UK DJ LESLEY), rides a hoverboard while snorting a bag of flour before giving birth to a packet of Arnott's biscuits.³⁹

Sarah's work took a gothic turn in 'Again, You Have Trusted Me', a camp, gritty, and violent portrait of her working-class family in Queensland's deep

north that powerfully reanimates the intergenerational trauma that has left lasting scars on the women in her family:

Look at them, aren't they gorgeous? That's my family. My mother's side. That's Nanny. Jacqueline is my mother. Ugh beautiful feisty little cow. Gayle, we love her. Toni, beautiful Toni. Karen, hello Karen. And Poppy, bless his soul.

A FAMILY PHOTO APPEARS

Mum told me this photo was taken because Nanny (Ivy) was going into emergency surgery and everyone was freaking the fuck out so they decided to sit for this portrait in case something happened while she was under. I think that's the story but also I wasn't really listening so I could be wrong. And actually, I haven't asked again/decided not to fact check that so...⁴⁰

These are the battlers whose mythologies animate our image of the Australian way of life. They are riven with internal contradictions that, as Juliana Schultz writes, lull us into complacency by defying analysis 'so that we don't have to take responsibility'.⁴¹ 'Again, You Have Trusted Me' is a prime example of the 'anti-social'⁴² nature of queer storytelling and the 'temporal drag'⁴³—adopting a persona that switches times rather than genders—that exposes Peter Dutton's 'forgotten Australians' to the antiseptic of the theatrical spotlight.⁴⁴ Nadia Jade wrote in her review of the show when it was remounted by Backbone Youth Arts in 2022:

What is Australian gothic when you drill down into it? When you discard the sports jokes and the cliches of white suburban life? Is it a reckoning with the incongruity of us, broken people from a hundred countries, all chasing a better life, trying to find ourselves in this red desert land where the true way of life is completely foreign to our limited understandings? Alongside the lucky country jibes the colony offers us up the very darkest of

gallows humour. Is it the callous truth that ours are scarred people? Maybe we're white trash just trying to hold on with both hands to whatever joy we can scrape out of the colony. What is shocking to a people immured in generations of violence?⁴⁵

Through her work Sarah is rebuilding Australian nationhood in an act of creative practice. Whether she is providing live commentary on a home video of the women in her family moments before they come to blows, or using a home-made green screen to recreate Australian Olympic gold medal wins in a pub,⁴⁶ or hoverboarding onto a nightclub stage to sit on a discounted Woolworths mud cake,⁴⁷ or stringing together all of her greatest hits in a red clown wig as a truly unhinged durational Pauline Hanson parody,⁴⁸ Sarah embodies the absurdity of Australia's suburban, working-class pantheon of battlers in ways that even Chris Lilley could never pull off.

In 2021 she was interviewed on a Brisbane talk show that was livestreamed from an inner-city ex-Government building. The host seemed to think that his laddish charm would be enough to elicit a meaningful conversation, but Sarah was deeply uninterested in discussing 'what else is going on in your life' or 'where does your mind go when you get into character'. So thoroughly and uncomfortably confounding were her answers that he was repeatedly forced to apologise, finally admitting, 'I'm just jamming my foot in my mouth tonight'.⁴⁹

This wasn't a difficult interviewee letting the vain arrogance of an on-stage persona bleed into her personality off-stage. Her queerness—her ability to play on the podium of a nightclub on a Saturday night and on the field of a suburban soccer club on a Sunday morning—allows her to confidently occupy the complicated social and political landscape that seems to worry so many of her straighter contemporaries. So, Sarah wasn't being difficult, she just wasn't letting him get away with falling back on cis-straight fantasies as the default mode of social interaction.

Most recently, Sarah has recently been working with All The Queens Men to facilitate the Brisbane chapter of their 'LGBTIQ+ Elders Dance Club', bringing

multiple generations of our community together to share social space. For its participants, this this is a life-changing project that is happening on a local scale.

It's late September. The best time of the year to be in Brisbane. Festival time.

JOEL: 27 SEPT 2019 AT 5:03 PM

Hey babe,

Agh! Forgot to ask you. Could you arrive at 8:40 today for a quick onstage briefing? Just make yourself known to FOH and they'll bring you through.

x J

It's Friday and my workmates are off to the pub, but I need to be back in tomorrow. A day full of work before Sarah's birthday party extravaganza at Ben's Vietnamese in Woolloongabba. I should be sensible.

I have a show to go to.

JEREMY: 27 SEPT 2019 AT 5:03 PM

Yeah no worries.

The pub. A much needed debrief and a glass of prosecco. A bottle of prosecco. Two bottles. I'll order tapas, that'll slow things down.

JOEL: 27 SEPT 2019 AT 8:16 PM

Legend!

I have a show to go to.

Let's all go for a walk. Prosecco is on special at the bottle-o. I can definitely act sober enough to be served at the bottle-o. Just one more drink.

I'm not fooling anyone.

JEREMY: 27 SEPT 2019 AT 8:30 PM

Hey babe. I am so sorry... I am not going to be able to make it back tonight... I know this is going to totally put you out RE the audience plant. All the best. Xxxx

No reply.

I'm on the veranda of a Queenslander, and everyone agrees that I should stay. Wait. That was unprofessional. I made a promise. Shit.

I have a show to go to.

JEREMY: 27 SEPT 2019 AT 8:31 PM

Lies. I'll make it! I'll just be late.

No reply.

I have nine minutes. Will it be quicker to sprint down the hill or get an Uber?

No reply.

Eight minutes now.

JEREMY: 27 SEPT 2019 AT 8:32 PM

Ok. I'll make it!!! But like 4 minutes late.

I am at front of house. I give my name. Act sober.

I'm not fooling anyone.

The room is hazy. The lights are dim. Joel is beautiful in a bath robe. Now he's telling me what I'll have to do. It's hard to focus, but I've got this. It's a couple of simple cues. At some point he'll give me a signal, the crowd will part and we will dance. Was I meant to part the crowd or would that just happen? I can wing it. Act sober.

I'm not fooling anyone.

He tells me it will be sexy, intimate. He'll put his hand on my head and I'll pretend to go down on him. It is an important moment of audience interaction. It is meant to look spontaneous, but he has thought it all through and wants it to be safe. Safe, and sexy. OK. Act sober. I can do safe. I can do sexy.

I'm not fooling anyone.

JEREMY: 27 SEPT 2019 AT 10:48 PM

That was so beautiful.

I have to be at work at 7:30 tomorrow morning so I had to run.

You're a fucking star. Xxxxx

I order an Uber. Confess to the producer that I think I ruined the show. I was not contributing to making a safe space... And I was definitely not sexy.

I'm home. My keys are at work. I climb the back fence. Quietly. The little one is sleeping. Break in through the veranda door. No noise upstairs. Sneak to the fridge room. Uncle Jeremy's fridge, aunty Bec's fridge, side-by-side under the stairs. Find an egg. Fill a pot. Open the ramyeon. Turn on the stove. Set off the fire alarm. Wake the whole house. Shuffle to my room. Pass out.

JOEL: 28 SEPT 2019 AT 12:11 AM

Thanks babes. Love ya! 🥰

This is a good life.

3. Joel Bray

Joel Bray is a Wiradjuri dancer who performed in Israel with some of its most dynamic contemporary dance companies for a decade, before returning to Australia to forge a new practice as a choreographer and performance maker. We first met at the National Indigenous Dance Forum in 2017 and bonded over our shared experiences growing up regional, Pentecostal and queer.

As Bray sees it, pre-coming out, queer kids learn to live two very distinct lives. The straight-passing one that helps navigate parental and peer expectations, 'the good son, the boyfriend to the girls at school' and the queer internal life: 'On the inside you're indulging your fantasies. When you watch a Disney film, it's Prince Charming you're looking at.' It's this dual life, he believes, that set him, and many queer kids like him, in good stead for a future in performance.⁵⁰

In 'Considerable Sexual License', Joel recontextualises his familial history in an immersive dance-theatre experience which weaves together storytelling and audience participation to 'ponder a past (and perhaps an imagined future) of the sexual ecology of Australia before the Coloniser and the Bible'.⁵¹ The work unsettles the mythology of what Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls the 'Good

Indigenous Citizen’—an identity in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders willingly conform to colonial norms—and undermines its false doctrine that Indigenous cultures were homogeneously heteronormative at the time of first contact. Troy-Anthony Bayliss (Jawoyn) has also challenged this notion:

It is as if history has constructed Aboriginality as being so pure and so savage, so purely savage, that if tainted by the complexity of sexuality, mixed ethnographies, mixed geographies and mixed appearances, the whole look would be ruined. Aboriginal people would be regarded as not pure, not savage.⁵²

Juliana Shultz asks ‘what does it take to acknowledge the past, make amends and forge a new future?’⁵³ According to her, the main challenge is how to ‘synthesise ancient and modern ways of being, both temporal and physical’ to resolve the fundamental contradiction on which this nation is founded, but Joel’s answer is different.⁵⁴ ‘Considerable Sexual License’ foregrounds the queerness of incommensurability to show that living in the tense space between black and white, in and out, godly and blasphemous, is not a place to ‘settle’, but a place where we may thrive.

The stark reality is that those who live at the intersection of Indigeneity and queerness here in so-called Australia have never been afforded the things that the cis-straight white fantasy of Australia lives in terror of losing: loss of status, loss of wealth, loss of opportunity, loss of respectability. Does that make us any less Australian? Do we even want to be Australian? Should nationhood even be an endeavour queers engage with? Writing of South Africa in the wake of apartheid, at the intersection of art, queerness and national identity, Álvaro Luís Lima argues that ‘a queer consideration of nationhood already implies the... subversion of what nationalism can mean.’⁵⁵ My long-time collaborator M’ck

McKeague said to me on reading this paper, 'I don't know any queer people looking to the future, who are tied to Australia as part of their identity.'

Australia is a work-in-progress. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and cultural workers, their communities and leaders have started to make sure that any work made in and on this country respects their histories and is responsive to their futures. And Australia is also a country steeped in mythologies. Some of these mythologies nourish the people living here and help them to sustain their communities, and some of them are frustrating, if not downright destructive: terra nullius, the Aussie battler, the migrant threat, the idea of progress itself... All of these myths ignore and deny the complexity, diversity and contingency of human experience. But I think that we might have a chance of breaking the shackles of cruel optimism that bind us to the cis-straight fantasy if we pay keen attention to those artists who are devoting their lives to the project of nationhood as creative practice. If art shapes the way we perceive reality, then it is artists who are shaping the world that we live in.

Schultz says that a spirit of transformation lies at the heart of the Australian story, but it is rarely celebrated as a guide to the future. My response, I guess, is it depends whose celebrations you are going to.

Endnotes

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More Risk, More Play
Creating an Inclusive Culture

by Morwenna Collett

Acknowledgements

This paper was written on unceded Gadigal Country, which always was and always will be Aboriginal land. I pay my respects to the traditional custodians of this land, to their Elders past and present and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. First Nations Peoples are the oldest living culture on the planet, with over 60,000 years of history and continued connection to the land, sea and sky. Australia's arts and cultural sector is built on this foundation and is richer for it.

I'd like to acknowledge the leaders, artists, audience members, staff members, board members, volunteers and other stakeholders from under-represented groups engaging with the arts and cultural sector. Their continued advocacy, activism and action is shaping us into a more inclusive industry which is producing better art. Thank you for everything you do and for allowing me to walk alongside you, learn from you and play my part in supporting you.

I would particularly like to acknowledge my trusted advisors and friends, Tandi Palmer-Williams, Sherryl Reddy and Trish Adjei, for providing invaluable guidance and support in the development of this paper. And lastly but not at all least my editors Julian Meyrick and Harriet Parsons—thank you for showing me the ways of a Platform Paper and for helping to bring out my voice in an authentic and, I hope, engaging way.

Morwenna Collett worked in management roles at the Australia Council for the Arts between 2010-17 and senior leadership roles between 2017-2020. She played a key role in disability policy and the development of the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework (2019) and oversaw the development and implementation of the Disability Action Plans (2017-19) and their dedicated

funding programs, All information about Australia Council programs in this essay is derived from sources available in the public domain.

Author's Note

The writer acknowledges the variety of language and terminology used in this field which is rapidly evolving, shifting and changing. Language preference is a personal and a political choice. I have chosen to use language that resonates with me, and specific language used by those I am quoting or referencing. However, there are widening views on language preference in Australia and internationally.

Diversity and ADEI (Access, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) are used interchangeably throughout this paper. The collective term ADEI is explained in detail within the essay.

Introduction

Content Warning: This section describes an example of racism towards First Nations people. Please take care when reading.

It's the opening night of my first show of the year, at one of Australia's best known and loved festivals. The house lights have gone down, we're all settling in and a First Nations Elder is invited to the stage to offer the Welcome to Country. There is some mumbling from the seat behind me, but I'm concentrating on the words and taking a moment for quiet reflection. At the close, someone behind me starts booing. It's horrific. Others in the audience think so too and we all start booing the heckler. My heart goes out to the Elder leaving the stage and the trauma this will cause her and the performers waiting behind the curtain to begin their show. The heckler doesn't leave and the show goes on. It's incredibly uncomfortable and we're in shock that this has actually happened. It's 2023 and sitting in that theatre, I realise, wow, there is still so much work to do.

Fast forward to the last show I see at that festival. It is in a recently re-opened performing arts centre. It has been significantly upgraded and includes new accessibility features. The venue management has chosen to re-open with a First Nations show, and not only that, it's one for kids. My three-year-old loves it, as does everyone else. It's delightful and spine tingling: a sign of great things to come in the program.

For many, the Welcome to Country at the beginning of a cultural event helps to ground us in our surroundings and provides an important moment for reflection and learning. It might be a child's first experience of art or their introduction to First Nations history and culture. The arts have the power to shape and change hearts and minds. They allow us to see the world from different points of view. They give us time and space to reflect and focus on important issues and think beyond ourselves. This is a small illustration of how

the arts has the power to create spiritual and political shifts in our society—to point us towards a more accessible, diverse, equitable and inclusive future. Our theatres, galleries and other arts spaces should be inclusive environments and spaces, where everyone feels welcome.

We're on the brink of a global shift towards equity and social inclusion. Movements like #MeToo and Black Lives Matter (and Indigenous Lives Matter here in Australia) are showing that we can no longer ignore the injustices happening around us. Slowly, this is translating into stronger diversity requirements in government funding programs, the appointment of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Managers in organisations in Australia's arts and cultural sector, and more discussion about diversity and inclusion issues in our national forums and our culture as a whole.

But is our sector truly ready for this coming change around access, diversity, equity and inclusion (ADEI)? Many of our large arts institutions still appear to be run by white, able-bodied people, often men, from metropolitan, middle-class backgrounds. In 2021, the Australia Council's 'Towards Equity' report showed that only 3% of the current cultural leaders of major arts organisations receiving multi-year investment were d/Deaf or disabled; and only 16% were culturally and linguistically diverse, compared with 18% and 49% respectively of the general population.¹ Why should we bother with these issues anyway? Is it out of genuine commitment or just because we feel like we should? And are arts organisations only complying because funding bodies are starting to demand it?

In this essay I argue that celebrating diverse perspectives and embracing other kinds of lived experience is essential if the Australian arts and culture sector is to remain relevant, continue to produce exceptional art and sell more tickets. What will it take to do ADEI successfully, whose responsibility is it, and how could it inform the hearts and minds of arts practitioners and audiences across the country? I explore what the arts sector has found hard about embracing diversity in the past, and where it has failed to answer important questions. I look at the increasing appetite for meaningful diversity across the

mainstream arts sector and how we've got to where we are today, just how inclusive our current practices really are, and where we need to get to in the future. In short, I ask how ADEI can have an impact on all stakeholders in the cultural sector, empower artists, arts workers, audiences and the wider public—and get more bums on seats.

I write as a proud disabled woman and an experienced practitioner. I have worked in the arts and for arts funding bodies all my adult life. That's taken some doing and I acknowledge my good fortune in being able to do it when the barriers for many others are too high. My views have been shaped by my own experiences and those of the people and organisations I've worked with, and I'm sharing now the things I think we need to think about, and what the future could look like if we act.

As the Australian arts sector recovers from the impact of COVID-19 and responds to the government's latest National Cultural Policy, 'Revive', I want to paint a picture of what could happen if we did, truly, prioritise diversity. What would it look like if we supported and nurtured it in all its glory? What sort of art might we make? How do we 'walk the talk' and make space to do things differently? What steps can individuals and institutions take to make meaningful change?

It is important to note that contemporary ADEI is very much a 'live' issue and the discussion is rapidly evolving. There's a chance that some of the issues I raise here may quickly become obsolete. That's okay. Some authors write for all time. I write this essay with the hope that, in the not-too-distant future, it will be redundant.

1. The Case for ADEI

Across Australian society we've got a lot of 'isms' relating to marginalisation, and sometimes it can feel like these are growing rather than shrinking. Forms of discrimination which are currently alive and well include racism, ableism,

ageism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, intersex discrimination, social stigma and many others. Put simply, difference is not something everyone is comfortable with, and some may view diversity as 'background noise' rather than an issue that is genuinely important.

Access, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are essential to Australian culture, not just in the arts but in everything we do and everything we are. It's about fairness, it's about basic human rights, it's about representation and most of all it's about belonging and community. Ultimately, ADEI is about ending discrimination by finding its root causes in the way we treat each other. It's about recognising that people have different needs and building workplaces that work for everybody by removing barriers to participation—it's common sense and responsible business practice.

Most of us would consider these values as the basic components of a just society, so why is ADEI still an issue in 2023? What's holding us up?

'Towards Equity' provides some basic principles for supporting diversity in and through arts and culture:

- Participation in arts and culture is a human right.
- An arts and cultural sector that reflects all Australians will drive positive outcomes, including a more inclusive, cohesive and just nation and great art.
- Inclusive leadership is critical.
- Data and reporting support action and accountability.²

These principles are a useful starting point for explaining why action is needed and to help us to think about what sorts of incentives and regulations might best support these actions.

'Diversity' and 'inclusion' are being used frequently now, along with 'equity', 'belonging', 'access' and 'representation', but what do these terms actually mean? One of the obstacles to transparent discussion is the terminology which is loose, changeable and poorly understood. If we're not careful, we can spend

more time trying to articulate what we're doing, rather than getting on and doing it. I use the definitions proposed by ADEI scholar Dr Antonio Cuyler:

- 1) Access—removing barriers to participation (this is about who is included or not).
- 2) Diversity—qualitative and/or quantitative assessment of human difference and representation (this is about how people are represented).
- 3) Equity—fairness in addressing the historic injustice of underrepresenting certain groups (this is about policies and practices to ensure success).
- 4) Inclusion—belonging, one of many measures of quality of life (this is about people feeling welcome).³

When we talk about diversity, who exactly is under-represented? Because of the lack of overarching equality legislation in Australia, and the fact that much specifically ADEI legislation is outdated, this is not something that can be definitively expressed. 'Towards Equity' focuses on the following demographic cohorts:

- First Nations
- Cultural and linguistic diversity
- Disability
- Gender
- LGBTQIA+
- Regional, rural and remote
- Children and young people
- Older people.

Class (social and economic) as well as religious affiliations and beliefs could also be included in this list. All these groups have experienced marginalisation in various ways, both historically and in the present day. But people's lives are also multi-dimensional—we all have many facets to our identities—and it is important to recognise that these groups overlap as well. We know for example that 45% of First Nations people⁴ and 39% of LGBTQIA+ people aged 14-21⁵

experience disability or long-term health conditions. This can have a compounding effect on the disadvantages and discrimination one individual experiences. In 1989 Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term ‘intersectionality’ to describe how the various aspects of a person’s identity may expose them to multiple forms of marginalisation.⁶

It is impossible for anyone to speak for all under-represented groups. Our lived experiences of the world are different. This is partly why working in the ADEI area is so challenging. In fact, when invited to write this essay, my first response was to go out and interview a range of diversity leaders in the cultural sector to give voice to their views and opinions. It makes me slightly uncomfortable to rely only on my own experience and the ADEI conversations and programs in which I have participated. Having made that caveat, I do my best to take a helicopter view—to be inclusive about the issue of inclusion.

Some initiatives for engaging with equity issues for under-represented groups in the arts are common and foundational, such as targeted outreach and engagement activities to welcome specific communities. Others are more bespoke: working well with the Deaf community requires a tailored and ideally Deaf-led communication approach.

As arts organisations, we should question whether to approach inclusion for these groups all at once, especially when each demands tailoring and thought. Do we want to be a jack of all trades and potentially master of none? Or do we want to start our ADEI journey by focusing on a few areas first? Can we create a ‘one-stop-shop’ overarching Diversity Plan, or do we also need to have specific plans such as a Reconciliation Action Plan, Disability Inclusion Action Plan and Gender Equity Action Plan?

There are no simple answers and no one way of doing things.

But the ABC’s Diversity Plan 2019-2022 is a good model:

To enable us to make some real, sustainable and accelerated change with the resources we have available, this Plan will focus on five key diversity areas:

- Cultural and linguistic diversity (CALD),
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,
- Disability,
- Gender,
- LGBTQI+.

However, the initiatives and actions set out in this Plan focus on fostering an inclusive work culture and practices for everyone. Other diversity markers, such as age, geographic location and socioeconomic status, are also very important to the ABC. This work will benefit all under-represented groups—and the workforce as a whole. An inclusive and diverse workplace is better for all of us.⁷

A long shopping list of under-represented groups can be overwhelming for an under-resourced arts organisation. Just knowing where to start can seem like an impossible task, but it is better to dive in and get on with something, than sit back and try and figure it all out in advance while doing nothing at all.

2. Case Study: Spotlight on Disability

Having provided a brief overview of ADEI and under-represented groups, I want to focus on a specific area to clarify some of the issues involved and to illustrate these through the lens of my own experience of disability. This is a key part of my identity, which has shaped my relationship with the arts over twenty years. I live with invisible disability which I hid for many years to avoid social stigma, only 'coming out' as disabled in the arts sector once my career was well established. Disability became part of my life when I was studying music at university. Due to the lack of accessibility provisions in the classical music industry twenty years ago, this changed the course of my career from performer

to administrator. Meeting other incredible disabled artists and administrators gave me the courage to do so, and now I couldn't imagine my life without it.

Disability is a very broad category. According to the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities', it includes those with 'long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.'⁸ The international symbol for disability, the blue wheelchair, doesn't help holistic thinking. Only 4% of people with disability are wheelchair users.⁹ Eighty per cent of us live with hidden disability,¹⁰ including myself, raising complicated issues about identity and disclosure. Disability can include groups such as people living with mental health conditions (which have risen exponentially since COVID-19¹¹), people with neurodiversity and people from the Deaf community, who, if they are sign language users, may identify as culturally and linguistically diverse.

It is not always helpful to think of people with disability as one group. There are many different barriers to access that people with disability can experience, and many different types of solutions—and in some cases, these may even compete with each other. For example, a captioned video or performance that works well for someone with hearing loss may be distracting for someone with cognitive disability. Our needs are so different and, in an arts context, targeted engagement strategies are required to reach different pockets of people with different access needs.

Disability can sometimes get left out of diversity and inclusion conversations and thinking. That's one reason I like the acronym ADEI—it gets access in there, nice and early. When we hear the words diversity and inclusion, our minds may initially gravitate to People of Colour or First Nations or women, which are vitally important underrepresented groups. However, diversity is broader than race and gender, and disability is often an afterthought or forgotten altogether. It's challenging, because disability requires practical and sometimes expensive changes to ensure access, such as capital works or booking access service providers like Auslan interpreters. For these reasons, disability can find

itself left in the ‘too hard’ basket, particularly in Australia where much of our arts activity takes place in inaccessible heritage listed buildings. Disability needs to be prioritised and supported with appropriate financial technical and human resources—it’s the only diversity area which we can all become a member of at any time!

People with disability have a keen interest in the arts and are in fact more likely to create art, volunteer in the arts or even give money to the arts.¹² Sadly, this high prevalence of engagement doesn’t translate through to the professional artist community, with only 9% of professional Australian artists identifying as disabled in 2017.¹³ Accessibility hasn’t become an embedded priority in the sector as much as other diversity concerns.

People with disability are an important, culturally engaged group and we’re all missing out if we don’t plan for accessibility for our diverse communities. If there’s one thing we can all do straight away, it’s to start talking about access and get comfortable with it. The simple question ‘Do you have any access requirements?’ gives people permission to say what they need and takes away the emotional labour of wondering whether I’m being a pain if I tell you I need a seat at your standing gig, or a wheelchair accessible toilet. Ask everyone—artists, audience members, staff, any of our stakeholders: it is a question that can open up a new conversation. Ultimately, it’s that conversation that will push us to meet the demand for an accessible and inclusive arts sector.

3. Why Bother: Reasons to be Inclusive

As an arts consultant specialising in ADEI, people come to me for help and advice for a range of reasons. Sometimes it’s because they know government legislation is changing or their current action plan will soon expire, and they are looking ahead. Or it might be because a complaint has been made against them, perhaps through a body like the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Sometimes there's a genuine desire to do better, and sometimes it's about how to make it all go away.

No matter the reason, I love working with everyone on ADEI solutions. I often find myself playing the role of 'critical friend' or guide, as we work through the barriers together to resolve them, with the help of various communities. Whether I'm helping to set priorities, develop a strategy or action plan, provide practical advice on programming and audience development, deliver training or run a diversity program, it's all working towards building more ADEI competent and confident organisations.

From my vantage point, I have observed five main reasons arts organisations want to address ADEI:

1) Moral principles

Because fundamentally, most of us see including everyone in our work as the 'right thing to do.' It's about values and being good human beings.

2) Funding and legislative requirements

Arts organisations are realising that funding agencies are starting to make this a priority and addressing these issues may make them more competitive. As a result, more organisations in the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework grant program now have ADEI related plans. New legislation is also on the radar. Victoria will be introducing a new Disability Inclusion Act in the next 12 months and some organisations are already on the front foot to respond to it.

3) Artistic potential

A reason not frequently cited, but to my mind the one that is the most important, is to ensure that we are telling diverse stories that are told by diverse artists. Not only is it ethically important that our stages and screens reflect the world we live in, but the art is bloody good. Diverse artists are making some of the most exciting, interesting, relevant, risk-taking, experimental work on the planet. Some organisations are starting

to realise that they are missing a trick if they aren't showcasing diverse artists in their programming.

4) Business Case

The notion that being inclusive is good for business is slowly gaining traction. Economic arguments for inclusion are cited more often overseas, with places like the UK measuring the spending power of disabled households: in 2020, the 'Purple Pound' was estimated to be worth £274 billion.¹⁴ If even a small percentage of that amount is spent on arts and cultural activities, that's a significant investment in arts institutions. In Australia, the most recent Audience Outlook Monitor research shows that in Australia, 26% of audiences were affected by access issues in some way in 2022: this included people who were disabled or immunocompromised, or close to someone who was).¹⁵ That is a big part of the market.

5) Diversifying our workforce—arts organisations are currently experiencing high levels of staff turnover, burnout and 'quiet quitting' across the country.¹⁶ Attracting and retaining staff and volunteers is essential and their long-term viability depends on their ability to recruit people from all backgrounds.

At the end of the day, there are many reasons to take ADEI seriously, including innovation, wider talent pools and happier staff and customers. To do the work of diversity, we need to use our heads, our hearts and our hands.

4. Who Cares: Who Does ADEI Affect?

ADEI issues can impact multiple people in multiple ways. They affect the entire cultural sector, including audiences, artists, boards, volunteers, staff and other stakeholders. Sometimes when ADEI is in the responsibility of a 'People and Culture' team, it can get focused mainly on actions relating to staffing rather

than audiences, artists, and other stakeholders. In areas of ADEI that seem harder to tackle such as disability, there can be a tendency to start with audiences.

Audiences

Audience diversity is tangible. For Deaf people, it is easy enough to book an Auslan interpreter for a show and ‘tick it off the list’, but it is much harder to build a relationship with the Deaf community and encourage them to attend. The company needs to choose the right show and the right session to interpret and the audience development work needs to be ongoing and meaningful.

Artists

While starting with audience diversity is good, artists are the heart of arts organisations. Some of the most transformative experiences come about when diversity and inclusion are considered from an artist’s perspective. Working directly with artists is personal, so it can humanise ADEI work. Seeing more diverse artists on our stages is important, particularly in high-quality works of scale. This is a powerful act of inclusion that can shift perceptions, both at a societal level and by providing role models for underrepresented communities: ‘you can’t be what you can’t see.’ I remember a story shared by a disabled colleague who said that for years she just assumed she wouldn’t survive until adulthood because she’d never seen a character with her impairment who was an adult. Cultural representation conditions expectations.

When Wendy Martin was working on the inaugural Unlimited Festival, as part of the Cultural Olympiad for the Southbank Centre in London, as part of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, she developed relationships with some of the world’s most talented disabled artists. This experience and the artworks they made stayed with her, and her pitch for her next position as the Artistic Director of the Perth Festival featured artists with disability. This priority has remained permanently embedded in the program beyond her tenure. The ripple

effects of transformative experiences like this can be felt by individuals and organisations for years to come.

I attended Wendy's second Unlimited Festival in 2014, having negotiated to work as the program's first International Intern. It was the most impactful and transcendental arts experience of my life. I saw more work by disabled artists in one week than I was able to see on average in a year in Australia, including work by internationally renowned disabled artists. I saw work so powerful that it still moves me today. I met artists who have become lifelong friends. I saw a major mainstream cultural organisation showcasing work by artists who are so often forgotten by the mainstream theatres, and audiences flocking to see the work. I saw what was possible when barriers are removed. It was this arts experience that led me to start identifying more openly as disabled when I got back home to Australia.

In respect of programming and diversity, there is debate about the benefits of the spotlighting or targeted strategy (e.g. The All About Women festival, centred on female identifying speakers and topics) versus an inclusive mainstream approach (a general festival which includes artists/speakers from underrepresented groups, without making this the sole focus). In my view, both have a role to play. Spotlight events like the Unlimited Festival at London's Paralympic Games can elevate the profile of d/Deaf and disabled artists in an unprecedented way. High quality mainstream events can promote diverse artists to a wider audience and avoid the 'preaching to the converted' syndrome that can be present in the ADEI field. Artists need both sorts of opportunities—as do their audiences.

Administration

We are beginning to have discussions about the importance of diversifying Boards and governance structures, though too often the focus is on gender alone. In fact, the Governance Institute of Australia and Watermark Search International only include gender, cultural background, age, skills/experience

and tenure/independence in their annual Board Diversity Index.¹⁷ That doesn't sound particularly diverse to me.

Diversifying our boards means going beyond lawyers and accountants, and appointing members who have a variety of types of lived experience, including working with diverse communities. In the last 12 months, the Australian Institute of Company Directors has created scholarships for people with disability, to ensure that more of us are represented on boards in the future.

We're talking about Skills Matrices on our boards, but we need to be talking about Diversity Matrices as well. While there is some acknowledgement within the business sector that boards need to represent the breadth of the communities they serve, in the arts, many boards are still not as diverse as they should be. Many good, diverse board members from minority groups are being stretched too thin across too many commitments. If we want to see real change, this is where it starts—every ADEI related plan should contain actions around board diversity

Kate Larsen Keys has been conducting some excellent research into how we can re-think arts governance and start to do things differently and better by moving away from current hierarchies based on industrial, patriarchal and military structures imported from overseas as part of ongoing colonisation. Diversity is a core component of this and a 'decolonised board could embed access, equity and anti-oppression into its structure, composition and fabric.'¹⁸

Staff, Volunteers and other Stakeholders

When it comes to staff and volunteer diversity, capturing data regularly is critical—and not just at the recruitment stage, when someone may be uncertain about disclosing. Explaining the purpose of such data, how it will be used and alleviating concerns about privacy is also important. One mechanism for monitoring which recruitment measures are actually working, is to track diversity data through regularly administered staff engagement surveys. The next level is transparency: publishing the data, targets and progress.

Finally, diversity needs to be a consideration across all other stakeholder groups. People from diverse backgrounds are our contractors, donors, sponsors and suppliers. Having proactive and diverse protocols, to procure services from Supply Nation for example, helps shift us towards a more equitable sector.

5. The Global Context: How Does Australia Stack Up?

How does Australia compare with the rest of the world, when it comes to the arts and ADEI? Confession time—sometimes I just really want to go and move to the UK. Brexit and other issues aside, they are at least very aware of diversity issues and talk about them out loud. As someone with hidden disability, when I visit the UK, I feel seen as a disabled person: arts organisations ask me what I need in order to participate. This is thanks in part to the Equality Act which legislated in 2010 to protect people against discrimination and promotes a fair and more equal society. It replaced more than 116 pieces of anti-discrimination legislation with a single Act, making the law easier to understand and closing loopholes. It lists nine protected characteristics specifically: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. It is a handy list that provides clarity around the meaning of the words ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’. Naming things helps us to understand what they are, and where our focus needs to be.

The UK also puts its money where its mouth is. Arts Council England has had a ‘Creative Case for Diversity’ since 2011, and regularly reports on what the sector is doing across a range of legally protected characteristics including Age, Disability, Race, Sex and Sexual Orientation. As part of the organisation’s new Inclusivity and Relevance investment principle there is a stronger focus on workforce, leadership, governance and how organisations become more relevant to the communities they serve to complement the ongoing commitment

to the Creative Case. The shift has also seen a stronger focus on socio-economic background and class in addition to responding to the Equality Act.

Historically National Portfolio Organisations (multiple-year funded organisations, or NPOs) were required to provide Equality Action Plans and... drum roll... have responding to the Creative Case for Diversity mandated into their funding agreements. The new National Portfolio announced in the autumn includes more organisations across the country that are either Disability or Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse led including significant awards to We Are Unlimited, Autograph ABP, New Art Exchange and Bradford Literature Festival of £1m or more annually. The significant increase in funding to diverse-led organisations responds directly to the organisation's equality objective ambitions to address historic inequity in the distribution of public funding. The 2023-26 funding round also addressed the need to diversify investment geographically to increase the level of funds available to organisations based outside of London. These decisions show that Arts Council England realises that if nothing changes, then nothing changes when it comes to ADEI. The Creative Case for Diversity has been around for so long now, that it's well known by the sector—and for the most part, they are just getting on with responding to it. At a forum in London in 2022, Tarak Elmoutawakil, Artistic Director of Browntown Abbey made the comment that the Creative Case for Diversity is now 'closed.' This is a great example of a funding agency guideline, which has led to sector-wide change.

Another interesting example of leadership in ADEI policy is in the USA. Americans are notoriously litigious and, there, the fear of being sued is a key driver for taking action. The conversation around race is live and constant, and for gender as well. They're big on 'compliance'—I've even walked past a fishing platform that boasted compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. I can't imagine seeing anything like that in Australia.

The UK and USA offer two different approaches to ADEI that Australia could follow. There's lots to like in our new national cultural policy, 'Revive'. It provides significant new funding overall and offers hope for improving ADEI, with a new

First Nations-led board, and \$5m for a new and well over-due National Arts and Disability Plan. While ADEI is not one of the five Policy ‘pillars’, there are several principles and programs that target diversity, many with funding attached. This is a promising start to our next chapter of cultural awakening.

6. Carrots and Sticks: Encouraging ADEI Success

Power and privilege lie at the heart of any discussion on equality. In the arts, we need to take control of decision making, programming and the purse strings, and be consciously responsible for who has advantage and influence over others. Those in positions of power and privilege can utilise their advantages for good. Although I am a disabled person, I am still white, middle class, cis, heterosexual and based in a metropolitan city—so I try to use my advantage to amplify the voices of others, to be an ally and champion to lift them up. According to the ‘2022 Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report’, Australia has the highest median wealth in the world,¹⁹ but we are currently 23rd on a list of 34 countries in respect of supporting culture.²⁰ Those in charge of money, commissions and employment can lead the agenda.

When we think of power in the arts in Australia, we often think of government and funding bodies, even in what has been a shrinking arts funding landscape over recent years and decades. Ultimately, for ADEI in the arts to succeed, governments have to play a significant role. Change will only be possible if it is built into our government systems and structures and supported with funding.

Funding bodies define the selection criteria, the composition of selection panels and mandate the conditions of the grants that shape what sort of art is made, how it is made and who sees it. The City of Sydney, for example, recently mandated that funding they provided to an arts festival had to contribute towards a certain number of accessible performances and exhibitions. The festival in receipt of this funding then did not have a choice as to whether they

would prioritise certain kinds of access—which, luckily, they were already planning to do—the funder took the tyranny of choice away. They had to do it, if they wanted the money.

The funding framework for Major Performing Arts Organisations changed in 2019, for the first time in twenty years. The new National Performing Arts Partnership Framework that replaced it refers to diversity for the first time:

“Priorities may include but will not necessarily be limited to...

- iii. Developing First Nations arts and increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation within programming, new works, organisational workforce and leadership;
- iv. Addressing barriers and improving performance across key diversity areas (including disability, gender, LGBTIQ+, age and cultural diversity) in arts practice, programming, employment, education, training, engagement and participation.”²¹

While I would like to see this language strengthened, arts organisations now have to stop and think about ADEI—some perhaps for the first time. It sets a government expectation that barriers to participation will be addressed. The proof will be in the pudding. We will see whether the performance of these organisations on ADEI has an impact on their funding in the future, as it did for the applicants to Arts Council England. Only time will tell.

Every arts funding body has a different approach to ADEI. Creative Victoria not only has a First Peoples stream for assessment, but also one for d/Deaf and disabled people. Through Creative Victoria, d/Deaf and disabled creative practitioners can also apply for additional funding, on top of the grant category amount, to cover any specific access costs to help remove the barriers involved in their project. All grant applicants are actively encouraged to think about and include costs associated with making activities accessible to d/Deaf and

disabled audiences. This is an example of a funding body using their power to create cultural change and equity across their sector, and a government giving them the money to do so.

Other key influencers with power (and money) in our arts community are programmers and commissioners. They choose what appears on our stages and on our walls. They have immense influence and the ability to curate trends and encourage others to try work that they might not otherwise have seen. Festivals and commissions can provide diverse artists with opportunities to make works of scale that would not be possible without their support. Making works of scale, and having bigger budgets increases the chances of high-quality work being produced which will resonate more strongly with audiences. They are an opportunity for artists to learn and grow.

Under Wesley Enoch's tenure, the Sydney Festival ran a three-year arts and disability programming initiative. By committing to this area of practice over a significant period of time, the Festival gave a platform and voice to some of the most marginalised artists in the country.

The Melbourne Fringe has been championing diversity and inclusion for a long time. It had already been employing an Access Coordinator for three years before it announced a new Radical Access Program in partnership with Arts Access Victoria in 2022.²² A ten-year program for social change, it moves the conversation beyond the provision of access services to one of cultural equity and imagines a radical version of best practice accessibility for the independent arts sector. It includes commissioning big, bold new works for d/Deaf and disabled artists, providing research and development opportunities, running workshops, masterclasses, mentorships and employment opportunities, with the aim of significantly increasing access and inclusion for d/Deaf and disabled artists across the independent arts sector. Chunky Move has come on board as a co-commissioning partner for a \$40,000 new work for a d/Deaf and disabled artist by Fayen d'Evie.²³ What an excellent carrot to dangle!

In 2013, the Australia Council estimated that less than 2% of program applicants identified as having a disability. Acknowledging the under-

representation of disabled artists in programs, the Council developed targeted arts and disability initiatives in 2014. However, due to substantial changes in investment, decision-making and data collection limitations outlined in 'Towards Equity', direct comparisons between 2013 and current data are not possible. Nevertheless, there is evidence indicating that disabled artists' participation and engagement in Australia Council programs have significantly increased over the past decade.

The 2018 report 'Creating Pathways: Insights on Support for Artists with Disability' showed that the number of artists with disability interacting with the Australia Council and those actually receiving support had increased. Sixty-six per cent of the applicants to the dedicated funding program were first time applicants and of these, 12% were successful. Those who had previously applied to the Australia Council had a 25% success rate.²⁴

Outside of the dedicated arts and disability funding programs, 'Towards Equity' showed that the number of individual applicants with disability had risen from less than 2% to approximately 7%—perhaps not yet on par with the population but a significant improvement on a decade ago.²⁵ And amazingly, while it has morphed and changed over the years, the Australia Council's commitment to dedicated funding in this area has remained strong, showing there is still a great need in a group traditionally locked out of funding opportunities.

These days, we are used to seeing positions advertised for First Nations people. Identified positions carve out a space for under-represented groups which are usually accompanied by support and education. New positions are also cropping up in disability and others areas. By making space, we invite change. It takes thought and planning to prepare someone for success. When there are so many barriers to accessible and inclusive employment pathways, internships and traineeship programs such as the Create NSW Createability program are very useful.²⁶ This program matchmakes talented interns with disability across the arts and screen sectors to work with major organisations who provide support, advice and training. Some interns have gone on to secure

ongoing roles with their host organisation and many others have secured work in related organisations. The benefits of programs like these are not just for the interns—they demonstrate to mainstream organisations that employing staff members with different access needs is not as hard as it may seem. As a learning opportunity, it can lead to more diverse staff being employed across our sector in the future.

However, for these positions to be effective, they have to be real jobs that are interesting and designed in consultation with the community. Otherwise, they simply ‘tick a box’ that gives the appearance of doing the ‘right thing’ with little care for cultural safety. So often, diversity-specific employment is for entry level positions. There has to be room for growth and employment beyond the position. We need to see more support for promoting people from under-represented groups into leadership positions. In both closed diversity-led organisations and ‘mainstream’ programs a gap remains around capacity-building and development. In recent years, the Australia Council has expanded its Leadership Programs and taken practical steps, such as providing targeted information sessions and workshops, to significantly increase the diversity of participants. Following these interventions, the number of First Nations applicants to the Future Leaders program increased from 1 in 2018 to 7 in 2020, and the number of CALD applicants increased from 11 in 2018 to 53 in 2020 (an increase of 382%).²⁷ The Australia Council also delivered the Sync Leadership Program that specifically catered to the needs of d/Deaf and disabled artists and arts workers. These strategies for diversifying our leadership were long-term investments in the leadership of our industry.

7. Quotas and Targets

Quotas often confuse and divide people. You might love them or hate them but there’s no two ways about it, they force change and ultimately lead to a different outcome.

Time for my second confession: sometimes I wish I worked in the screen industry. While it's not perfect either, it is a place where diversity and inclusion are regularly discussed and action is taken. The release of Screen Australia's 'Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on Diversity in Australian TV Drama' in 2015 acknowledged that our screens were looking a little 'same same' and the authors wrote it with the goal of providing useful benchmarks for the industry on questions of diversity:

It also explores some of the potential barriers that have limited change. We know this is an issue that will require an industry-wide approach. The support for this study across the industry has suggested a great willingness to engage with the issues—we seek to carry this enthusiasm and momentum forward.²⁸

The recent second iteration of this report, covering the period 2016-2021, shows that things are changing but the pace remains slow. Levels of diversity had increased since 2016, including higher representation for First Nations people (7.2%, up from 4.8%), disabled people (6.6%, up from 3.6%), LGBTIQ+ people (7.4%, up from 4.5%), and non-European people (16%, up from 6.9%). However, several Australian communities remained under-represented on-screen compared with the general population and disability representation in particular remained critically low.²⁹

Data is a powerful tool and measuring demographics allows progress to be tracked. The Everyone Project initiated by the Screen Diversity and Inclusion Network (SDIN), a group of major Australian broadcasters, screen funding agencies and trade organisations, provides a methodology for measuring and reporting on diversity in the Australian film and television industry. In its latest 'Everyone Counts' report for 2021-2022, it counted 2,811 cast and crew working on over 70 film and TV productions across 201-2022.³⁰ Some broadcasters have taken this a step further: in 2021, both the ABC and SBS released equity and diversity-related commissioning guidelines. The SBS guidelines included some hard targets for people who identify as culturally and linguistically diverse,

First Nations people, people with disability, LGBTQ+ people and women in order to increase the representation in front of and behind the camera across its commissioned programs.³¹

Table 1: SBS Inclusion Targets: Unscripted

	On Screen	Off Screen
Culturally and linguistically diverse	35-40%	25-40%
First Nations	3-5%	3-5%
People with disability	5-10%	5-10%
LGBTIQ+	8-12%	8-12%
Women	45-55%	45-55%

Table 2: SBS Inclusion Targets: Scripted

On Screen Meet all three categories	Off Screen Meet all three categories	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Main characters to include at least two CALD and/or First Nations people 2. Broader cast to include <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) 33.3% from the four groups & (b) 50% women 	<p>If the series focuses on a particular under-represented community:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Writing team to include at least <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) two key roles for people from this community & (b) 50% women 	<p>If the series does not focus on a particular under-represented community:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Writing team to include at least <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) two key roles from the four groups (including one CALD and/or First Nations writer, to align with our SBS Charter goals as Australia’s multicultural and Indigenous broadcaster) & (b) 50% women

On Screen	Off Screen	
Meet all three categories	Meet all three categories	
<p>3. Inclusive casting. Producers to demonstrate best efforts to</p> <p>(a) Practice open casting for all characters who are not specifically written to be Anglo-Celtic &</p> <p>(b) Cast extras that are from the four groups.</p>	<p>2. Other Key Creatives: Directors/ Producers to include at least</p> <p>(a) one other creative from this community e.g. At least one producer or at least one director &</p> <p>(b) 50% women</p> <p>3. Production team to include at least</p> <p>(a) one Head of Department (HOD) 8 from the four groups &</p> <p>(b) 50% women</p>	<p>2. Other Key Creatives: Directors/Producers to include at least</p> <p>(a) one other creative from the four groups e.g. At least one of the producers or one of the directors is CALD, First Nations, a person with disability and/or LGBTIQ+ &</p> <p>(b) 50% women</p> <p>3. Production team to include at least</p> <p>(a) one Head of Department (HOD) from the four groups &</p> <p>(b) 50% women</p>

Are those numbers reflective of the general population? Not at all, particularly when it comes to disability, but at least it's a start. When we take action, some things begin to shift, and while targets do make some people uncomfortable, these will change who is making the work shown on SBS for years to come. Imagine the impact such a change could have on the performing arts sector if festivals used diversity guidelines for commissioning new work or by funding bodies used them for multi-year funding decisions? I guarantee the sector wouldn't look the same in a decade if we were brave enough to use this sort of incentive.

Is dangling a carrot in front of an arts organisation enough to lead to actual change right now? Is it juicy enough when there are so many other things to worry about? What's more, as our carrots have been getting smaller, the sticks

have been getting bigger. Perhaps the carrot and stick are complimentary strategies that work best in tandem. Both help set higher standards. We need tastier carrots AND heftier sticks. And we need these incentives and deterrents to be there right at the beginning, when things are funded, commissioned and programmed. Adding requirements as an afterthought is acting too late.

8. Why It's Hard: Challenges and Failures

If there are so many great benefits to ADEI, why doesn't the Australian arts sector have it sorted? What makes it so hard? Where do we fail? And what can we learn from this?

When the pressure is on, it can become harder for arts organisations to do things like ADEI voluntarily. Intentionally or not, agendas and priorities are cast aside or slip through the cracks, unless they are mandated. If our systems won't support it, to what extent is change even possible? As a consultant, I've seen a lot of willingness to do better when it comes to ADEI on the part of organisations, but without funding avenues and support, how can they make practical changes?

Here are some of the common ADEI obstacles I have observed from experience:

1) Fear

I believe the number one challenge around ADEI is fear—fear of getting it wrong, fear of missing the mark or being inappropriate, fear of using the wrong language (is it CALD or People of Colour or multicultural? Is it people with disability or disabled people? Is it Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or First Nations?). And fear freezes us—it stops us in our tracks because many of us would rather do nothing than feel the embarrassment of getting it wrong. We don't do failure well, and this can lead to inertia and reluctance to experiment and take risks as we figure things out.

2) Lack of knowledge

ADEI issues can be overwhelming. How do we know where to start? There's so much to tackle. Lack of knowledge can be a real block. Should we be trying to do everything all at once or is it OK to go softly, softly? How do we know what's right and appropriate for our organisation? If we add something into our program about diversity, could this highlight all the other ways in which we're failing? If I'm not an expert in ADEI and don't have lived experience myself, how do I know I won't get it completely wrong?

3) Time and resources

Arts organisations were stretched before COVID. Now we're trying to do even more with less. Making up for lost years and trying to support communities of artists and audiences who've been in fires, drought or floods, it can seem as if no one has any time for anything, certainly not anything 'additional' that might cost more or worse, require a significant outlay. Sometimes people say they're interested in ADEI but they just don't want to do the work. It's not high enough up the list of priorities. I had a recent experience working with a range of different organisations to improve their accessibility as part of a wider project. At the outset, all of them were very excited and waxed lyrical about how much it was needed, but when it required action from them—actually tweaking their websites or completing a survey—nothing happened. It didn't make it to the top of the priority pile.

Yet ADEI presents us with is a rich tapestry for learning and growth. Some years ago, the Sydney Festival received a complaint via the Australian Human Rights Commission from a wheelchair user unable who had been unable to access an event in its program. Sadly, it is not that uncommon for Australian festivals to program events in venues that are inaccessible to wheelchairs, but instead of trying to make it all go away, this festival did something remarkable: they listened, they reflected and they learnt. The experience led them to becoming

one of the first festivals in Australia to have their own Disability Advisory Committee, made up of people with lived experience, to provide them with feedback on their program and production considerations. They now produce a more inclusive festival which more of us can enjoy and continue to set new and higher ADEI standards.

Ultimately, we need a little more risk-taking, a little more experimentation and a bit more play when it comes to ADEI. We need to learn from people with lived experience and pay people to share their expertise with us. We need to prioritise this work, carve out space for it and provide the resources to actually do it. Arts organisations aren't going to wake up tomorrow and become magically more diverse. It requires purposeful action. Otherwise, cultural homogeneity will remain our status quo.

9. What Does It Actually Look Like? Doing the Work

Each of us has a role to play in building a more inclusive arts and culture sector, whether we have lived experience of diversity or not. Individual actions can lead to organisational step-changes that create cultural shifts from which there is no turning back. There are a million tips and tricks and cheat sheets out there, from how you can make your website accessible for screen-reader users, to what words to use in your Acknowledgement of Country. That's not the purpose of my essay. I want to point to the high-level changes that individuals and organisations can take to truly prioritise and celebrate ADEI.

Be a good ally

Read, listen, watch, converse. Educate yourself and learn. Lead by example. Call things in and call things out. Create space for others—if you're not someone with lived experience of diversity yourself, ask whether someone with lived experience has been booked for the panel you've been invited to speak

on and if not, recommend someone—offer to give up your seat. Think about how things can be done differently, more fairly and more inclusively. A beautiful ally-friend recently told me how she'd applied for a job she really wanted, but, conscious of the value of that leadership role, she proposed a job share with a diverse artist in the interview. That's an example of a good ally to me.

Plan for it

Benjamin Franklin was onto something with his aphorism, 'by failing to plan, you are preparing to fail.'³² ADEI progress doesn't happen overnight, only if you chip away at it over time. Develop a strategy, policy or plan—whatever floats your boat. And take inspiration from others. We don't have to re-invent every wheel. There's much to love about the Sydney Opera House's Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy.³³ I'm sure they won't mind if you borrow a bit.

Resource it

If you want to do things, they might cost some money. Has your organisation got a line for accessibility and DEI projects in its budget? Get people behind it and the budget line so that action happens. There can be debate about whether you need a Diversity and Inclusion Director or Manager (please don't make them an Officer or Coordinator—this stuff is hard). OR ... do you just make ADEI part of everyone's role? Both options can work, and there's no right answer. What I like about the defined job is that someone is paid to focus on the issue. That means something gets done. Appointing everyone to a task can be a dangerous game with no one ultimately responsible, but you also have to keep an eye out for the dangers of 'siloeing': 'I don't have to do that ADEI thing in my area that is actually my job, because our D&I Manager should do it!' None of that, please.

Find the carrots and sticks

Consider where you can actively encourage diversity and discourage homogeneity in your workplace. Identify both incentives and disincentives. Set

quotas, targets or KPIs for diversity in your work. Can you offer an opportunity to someone or a group of people from an under-represented background? Can you expose a lazy department or division that has got its head in the sand when it comes to diversity? Be creative: we're arts organisations after all.

In the end, just start somewhere. It doesn't have to be perfect on day one. We're all learning, but take responsibility and ownership for the things you can control and look for opportunities to influence others. That's where sector-wide change really takes hold.

10. What's Next

It's 2033, a decade from now. Australia looks different. We have our First Aboriginal Prime Minister, and she's a woman. Creative Australia is run by a person of colour. 30% of our National Performing Arts Partnership Organisations have a CEO, AD and/or Chair who is from an under-represented group, and a few are on Fair Notice for failing to meet their diversity and inclusion KPIs. The fourth iteration of the 'Towards Equity' report shows that we've at least doubled all statistics since 2020. Our small to medium sector is continuing to push boundaries and program ground-breaking diverse work—and it's accessible. Most festivals have stopped presenting work in physically inaccessible sites and are regularly providing major commissions to diverse artists. Diverse artists, arts workers and leaders are supported across all parts of the arts ecology. Pathways to training and employment have opened up. It's exciting, and the art is good. No, it's better than that: it's great.

That's what it could look like if we all got to work on building an inclusive future for our Australian arts and culture sector right now. Take a moment to imagine what might happen if we truly prioritised diversity in all its glory across our sector. What might it look like? Who might we become? What sort of art

might we make? How might arts organisations, and artists, have shifted their imaginations?

Those in positions of power need to help us do this work. Because change won't be possible unless our systems and processes support it. In an industry with competing priorities, we need to be encouraging and celebrating good diversity work. We need to put our money where our mouths are—offer those commissions, provide those jobs, open up those targeted funding programs and set those high expectations to exceed our KPIs and quotas. How about a tiered accreditation system to help organisations improve their accessibility? The sky is the limit for what we might invent and the avenues we might create to provide support and encouragement.

To those who have the power to take things away: Even though it's hard, you need to be bolder.

To funding bodies: imagine the change you could create if you mandated that all grant applicant budgets need to show at least a 20% spend on ADEI-related costs. Heck, you could even design things so that 50% of your organisational project funding one year (or one decade?!) goes to diverse arts organisations. Both carrots and sticks are useful, and we shouldn't be shy to use them—they can help nudge us along and show us the way. Why should a \$40,000 commission for a d/Deaf and disabled artist be called radical? It really shouldn't be. Let's hope it's not by 2033.

The time for ADEI has come and the arts now needed to respond through incentives and disincentives, because that is what it will take. We need to encourage genuine commitments from individuals and institutions to ADEI that are embedded in their practices. We need transformation from the top down and the bottom up—from those working on the ground, to our leaders at the helm. According to Diversity and Inclusion expert Sherryl Reddy, 'the change we need rests in leadership composition, intention, lived experience and exposure.'³⁴ The arts and culture have the power to change hearts and minds and drive societal change. To ensure that Australia's future is an inclusive one, let's lead with diverse (and great!) art.

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About the Authors

Morwenna Collett

Morwenna Collett is an accomplished leader, consultant and facilitator with fifteen years' experience in government, the arts, not-for-profit and university sectors. She has worn the hats of CEO, Board Director, senior leadership team member, project manager, lecturer, researcher, trainer and advisor.

As a senior arts consultant specialising in access, diversity, equity and inclusion, she is deeply committed to working towards a future where everyone has equal access to participate in arts and culture and in society more broadly. A champion of inclusion, Morwenna is an agent for change who is sought after nationally and internationally for her expertise. She has worked closely to support a range of large and small organisations to help them improve their practices, acting as a critical friend, challenger and cheer leader. She has positively impacted many organisations, changing hearts and minds via her work on strategy, planning, policies, evaluation and through thought leadership, discussion and training.

Morwenna has a background as a musician and works across all artform areas. Recent consulting clients include the National Gallery of Australia, MONA, the Sydney Opera House, the Australian Chamber Orchestra, the National Library of Australia, Opera Queensland, the Australia Council, Sydney World Pride, Diversity Arts Australia, People with Disability Australia and Taronga Zoo.

She is the Chair of the Sydney Festival's Access Committee and helped establish committees for Perth Festival, Sydney Fringe and Sydney World Pride. She is also a Director of Arts Capital, an arts centre management company in Canberra, and a member of the Contemporary Music Board at Create NSW. She is an Affiliate of the Association of Consultants in Access Australia (ACAA) and a member of The Inclusion Circle network.

She has previously been the CEO of Accessible Arts, the Chair of the Sydney Arts Managers Advisory Group and has held various management roles at the Australia Council. In 2020, she completed a Churchill Fellowship, exploring inclusive music programs, venues and festivals which actively engage disabled people across the USA, UK and Ireland. Her work is influenced by her own lived experience as a musician with disability. Read more at www.morwennacollett.com.

Jeremy Neideck

Jeremy Neideck is a performance maker and academic who has worked in Australia and South Korea for the last two decades. His work models inclusive social realities on stage by interweaving cultures at the intersection of queer identities. His productions include ‘지하 Underground’, co-written with Nathan Stoneham for Motherboard Productions; ‘Deluge’, an experimental dance theatre work; and ‘Shimchong: Daughter Overboard’, a re-imagining of the traditional Korean tale of Shimchong which combined pansori, poetry, and political satire. He currently works with Company Bad, an international collective of artists that experiments with transcultural collaboration and friendship as a methodology for facilitating arts and cultural projects.

He has been awarded scholarships by Aphids, the Australia-Korea Foundation, Asialink and Brisbane City Council and residencies at the National Art Studio of Korea, the National Changgeuk Company of Korea, and the Necessary Stage, Singapore. As an academic he lectures and tutors in the areas of contemporary performance theory, post-dramatic theatre, queer identities in performance, intercultural studies, independent theatre production, event and festival production, directing and performance in digital spaces. He taught at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) for a decade before taking up his current position as the Course Coordinator of the Bachelor of Performing Arts at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), Edith Cowan University (ECU), in Boorloo (Perth).

He is the co-convenor of the Queer Futures Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR). 'Queer(y)ing the Australian Way of Life' is the part of the research project 'Fabulous Heroes' which has been awarded pilot funding by the ECU Early Mid-Career Researcher Grant Scheme.

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