

From Human Anatomy to the Global Banking Crisis: Exploring Warwick Arts Centre's Commitment to Artist-Academic Collaboration



Rachel Turner-King and Baz Kershaw

Abstract This chapter examines the emergence of transdisciplinary learning out of two distinct but interrelated collaborative education projects commissioned by Warwick Arts Centre (WAC), UK. WAC invited eminent University of Warwick academics from the fields of biomedicine and economics into partnership with regional and national artists and theatre-makers to engage with young people living in socio-economically deprived and ethnically diverse areas of the city of Coventry. We argue that these projects could be indicative of radical challenges to conventional partnership-working in the Arts and Sciences and they could also signify the democratic, convivial potential of transdisciplinary approaches to research dissemination and public engagement strategies in the context of higher education.

Keywords Artist-academic collaboration · Regional theatre · Internationalism · Transdisciplinarity · Knowledge exchange · Public engagement · Audience development · Conviviality

1 Establishing Collaborative Partnerships Across Disciplines

New epistemologies are developing as a result of collaborations between theatre-makers and scientists that redefine the relationship between theatre, performance, public engagement and experiential learning. (Nicholson 2011, p. 177)

Warwick Arts Centre (WAC) is embedded in the University of Warwick's campus, which is located on the borders of the city of Coventry and the county of Warwickshire, in the region of the West Midlands, UK. This chapter examines the 'new epistemologies' that have emerged out of two distinct but interrelated examples of educational collaborative practice commissioned

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by WAC: *Skin, Blood and Bones* (SBB) in 2008–2009 and *Bank On it* (BOI) in 2013. WAC invited eminent University of Warwick academics from the fields of biomedicine (for SBB) and economics (for BOI) into partnership with regional and national artists and theatre-makers to engage with young people living in socio-economically deprived and ethnically diverse areas of Coventry. We explore the knowledges that emerged through these subject disciplines, shared professional expertise and pedagogic practices. We contextualise the methods and purposes of these collaborations by focussing on the complexities of WAC's relationship with the University of Warwick, its geographical disconnect from Coventry and its attempts to foster long-term interactions with under-represented communities. We analyse why these particular collaborations might signify a productive shift in the ways WAC engages with its network of professional artists and audiences of young people.

By exploring the ways such collaborations are mutually beneficial to both WAC and the University, we hope to address wider, concurrent debates in educational research and cultural policy about the potential value of 'transdisciplinarity' in teaching, learning and research. Kershaw proposes that performance and theatre especially can access transdisciplinarity because they routinely occupy 'the yet-to-be defined intersections between disciplinary fields' (Kershaw 2011, p. 66). In light of this, we suggest that both WAC projects offer insights into the ways the 'Arts' could be included as a component of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education to become 'STEAM' (Arts Council England 2014; The Warwick Commission 2015). We also suggest that both projects could be indicative of radical challenges to conventional partnership-working, research dissemination and public engagement strategies in the context of higher education.¹ But first we describe the dynamics and particularities of WAC's location in its regional, national and international environments.

2 Context of WAC: Between the 'International' University and Its Local City

Celebrations of the 'cosmopolitan' can suggest an unpleasant posture of superiority toward the putative provincial. (Appiah 2006, p. xiii)

Since opening in 1974, WAC has established itself as the largest multi-arts hub outside of London, presenting to audiences of 'over 300,000, a range of 2300 events a year' (Warwick Arts Centre 2015a) and describing its offer as 'a curated, *international, inter-disciplinary* and multi-art form programme of *high quality* work from orchestral music to contemporary theatre and visual arts' (Culture, Media and Sport 2014; emphasis ours). Given that WAC is owned and partly financed by the University, its programming, commissioning and education activities understandably reflect the ethos of this research-intensive institution.

As part of the 'Collaborative Doctoral Award' (CDA) scheme of the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council, from 2007 to 2010 Rachel King was funded to investigate the ways in which WAC engaged 'positive multiculturalism' in its pro-

¹For example, King's Cultural Institute (2015) in London has set up a diverse network of collaborations that connects industry professionals with academics to enhance 'public engagement' with research. Please see Reference list for webpage.

gramming, commissioning and education activities.² At the time of the study, the University made explicit its aspirations to be recognised as a leading *international* research centre within an increasingly competitive globalised market of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In 2009, for example, the University launched its new strategy, ‘Vision 2015’, pledging its commitment to ‘embedding internationalism into every area of the University’s mission’ in order to ensure its ‘global presence’ (The University of Warwick 2011). As Michael Shattock reports, ‘in the last decade the University has comprehensively grasped the global agenda and has moved from being opportunistic to strategic in its approach’ (Shattock 2015, p. 72). Thus in its public documents and marketing materials, WAC reflected the intrinsic worth of ‘internationalism’ and ‘cosmopolitanism’, arguing that:

Presenting the work of artists from other countries and cultures ... brings us many benefits; new understandings of contemporary culture, knowledge of other cultures, new perspectives on our own culture and an exploration of life in a global world (Warwick Arts Centre 2007).

Whilst WAC’s positive characterisations of ‘cosmopolitanism’ were appropriately congruous with the University’s mission, King’s research discovered that these orientations were in tension with its relationship to *local* and sub-regional audiences (King 2013). WAC’s location on the outskirts of Coventry and in the centre of University of Warwick’s campus meant that it was sometimes perceived by city-dwelling audience members as geographically disconnected from the city. So though WAC may justifiably adopt the positive rhetoric of ‘cosmopolitanism’ and celebrate its reputation as a ‘world-class venue’, its location has produced perceptions that it is ‘distant/removed’ and ‘elitist/posh’ by infrequent and non-attenders living in some local districts of Coventry. This accords with alternative conceptions of ‘cosmopolitanism’, which frame it as an exclusive proclivity that can only be afforded by those who have access to “knowledge, cultural capital and education” (Vertovec and Cohen 2002; Binnie et al. 2006, p. 8). Hence, as Chris Haylett (2006, p. 187) suggests, in some respects “the language of cosmopolitanism does not readily conjure images of the black or white working class, or of poor immigrants or refugees”.

WAC has had to navigate such class tensions throughout its history. For example, its 1998 application to the Arts Council of England’s ‘Arts for Everyone’ scheme demonstrated its awareness of such issues:

WAC recognises that, despite the facts of good transport links, friendly and welcoming staff and a wide-ranging programme, it is still perceived as being inaccessible and even perhaps *elitist*. Research indicates that there are still lingering perceptions of the Centre as somewhere just for the University, or a ‘certain type of attender.’ (Warwick Arts Centre 1998)

In order to encourage a greater diversity of engagement, WAC has to balance the University’s emphasis on an “ambitious intellectual strategy” (Warwick Arts Centre 2008) with its commitment to “widening participation and enabling the more disadvantaged members of society to share in the best of artistic production” (ibid.). As a

²Baz Kershaw and Alan Rivett (Director of WAC) were co-supervisors of this CDA project.

result, audience development strategies have partly been the responsibility of WAC's Education department. Their work aims to counter negative perceptions by working in its localities and fostering more inclusive relationships through its projects with local schools. Thus this very active department has evolved "a vigorous strand of education activities participated in by over 87,000 young people annually" (Warwick Arts Centre 2015a). To achieve this it has worked with a network of regional and national artists from across art forms to design a series of short and long-term bespoke educational projects that serve WAC's local schools and communities.³ Director of Education, Brian Bishop, explains that their mission is "to stimulate young people's creativity, spark their imaginations and broaden their horizons" through "ambitious" and "challenging projects" (Warwick Arts Centre 2015b). Hence, as well-tried traditional models of outreach and partnership-working mostly had characterised much of its output, the SBB project signalled an especially significant innovation for WAC as, according to Bishop, it was one of the first long-term engagements between a University researcher, an artist and local schools.

In 2008–2009, Bishop brought together Peter Abrahams, Professor of Clinical Anatomy at Warwick Medical School and Jo Buffery, a local artist-practitioner to work with two Coventry primary schools. Funded mainly by the bio-medical research organisation, the Wellcome Trust, this science-based project explored the human body through visual art, dance and performance.⁴ SBB was also funded by The Higgs Charity, a Coventry-based foundation that aims to help disadvantaged children and young people. Bishop targeted two contrasting primary schools located in different areas of Coventry: Leigh Primary school, a small, predominantly white, Church of England school on the outskirts of Coventry, and Frederick Bird, a large multi-ethnic, multi-faith inner-city school. Although contrasting in their ethnic and cultural diversity, both schools are located in areas identified as "deprived" and "disadvantaged" due to their socio-economic conditions (Ofsted 2006, 2008). As will be detailed below, one of the key aspirations of SBB was to provide these schools with a well-resourced, intricately planned year-long project in which pupils would gain regular access to the knowledge and expertise of an eminent University scientist and an experienced artist.

In 2011, WAC received 3 years of Arts Council England (ACE) funding to commission further artist-academic collaborations in a pioneering initiative titled *This_Is_Tomorrow*.⁵ In its inaugural year, WAC invited three artists from across art forms into a weeklong residency with University academics from the departments of Physics, Law, Economics, Business and Mathematics. Sue Buckmaster, Artistic

³WAC work across eight local authorities in the West Midlands – Coventry, Warwickshire, Solihull, Worcestershire, Sandwell, Dudley, Shropshire and Staffordshire.

⁴The Wellcome Trust is an international charity funding a range of projects in biomedical research and medical humanities and allocates £10 million annually to 'support projects that encourage people of all ages and from all walks of life to be informed, inspired and involved' by issues relating to biomedicine and bioethics (Wellcome Trust 2010).

⁵This funding from ACE supported WAC's new commissioning initiative called 'Transform'. This was headed by Alan Rivett, Director of WAC, but led by Matt Burman, Head of Programming and Audiences and Paul Warwick and Ed Collier (China Plate).

Director of Theatre Rites, was one of the invited artists and was inspired by researchers from the Economics department to create *Bank On It*, a site-specific and interactive performance that gave children as young as 5 years old the opportunity to make sense of the 2008 global banking crisis and the subsequent economic recession. Alan Rivett, former Director of WAC, articulates this move towards artist-academic collaboration as an indication of WAC's growing desire to be recognised as a cutting-edge, dynamic creative organisation:

It's about an encounter between today's artists – the most exciting artists we can find – and academics at the University of Warwick who are investigating what tomorrow is. (Warwick Arts Centre 2013)

Though fostering this reputation is fundamental in attracting funders and praise in national press, we explore how WAC could further reinforce the ways this work has the potential to radically challenge perceived notions of intellectual elitism by creating collaborative, convivial spaces for the emergence of transdisciplinary learning. Informed partly by interviews with key participants as well as participant-observations, our analysis of SBB and BOI focuses on the ways knowledge was generated, transferred, exchanged and – crucially – challenged during these projects. Hence we highlight the emergence of 'transdisciplinary un-learning' and we indicate the possible implications of this for WAC as a broker of collaborative learning and public engagement between the University's 'world-class' academics, WAC's artists *and* its local communities.

3 Skin, Blood and Bone: Creating Collaborative, Convivial Spaces for the Emergence of Transdisciplinary Learning⁶

Transdisciplinary thinking helps people deal with the complex, wicked societal problems that require knowledge across all aspects of society: academic research disciplines, communities, civil society, industry and governments. (McGregor 2015, p. 102)

In its early planning stages, SBB was designed as an *interdisciplinary* project: knowledge about 'skin', 'blood' and 'bones' was explored within and between the disciplines of human physiology, visual art and dance. In the autumn term of 2009–2010, Peter Abrahams introduced pupils from Key Stages 1 and 2, their teachers and Jo Buffery to relevant scientific terminology and explanations about the multiple features of skin. Buffery responded by working with the teachers to create a series of related visual art and dance activities. During the 'skin' phase, for example, the pupils explored and embodied the elasticity and flexibility of skin by choreographing movement using stretchy materials. They also investigated skin pigmentation and found their own skin colour by experimenting with colour-mixing techniques. As Fig. 1 illustrates, by the end of this phase, the children had created a tapestry of enlarged 'skin patches', a transportable installation that toured Coventry primary schools:

SBB was also designed to inspire learning across other subjects in the curriculum. For example, as a result of the colour-mixing activities described above, notions of racial difference were discussed in Personal, Social and Health Education.⁶

⁶Over the course of each phase, the teaching staff produced a series of learning materials that



Fig. 1 Installation of the children's skin types. Photograph released with permission of WAC

As an experienced teacher-artist, Buffery was aware that integrated arts projects are often criticised for lacking specificity and rigour, so it was paramount to her that neither scientific content nor artistic activities were compromised:

The science needed to be accurate, well communicated and reiterated and revisited over and over again but the art also had to be all of those things too – it was about the integrity of both. (Buffery, personal interview, February 2009)

Buffery continually elucidated and reinforced the intricacies of scientific concepts, whilst simultaneously finding appropriate parallel art and dance forms through which to communicate and explore them.

Whilst these interdisciplinary and cross-curricula features were integral to SBB, we argue that this artist-academic collaboration was also a catalyst for 'transdisciplinary' teaching and learning. Basarab Nicolescu (1997, paragraph 1) defines transdisciplinarity as that "which is at once between the disciplines, across the different disciplines, and beyond all disciplines". As we detail below, Abraham's performative and provocative style of engaging the participants plus Buffery's non-linear and inclusive ways of working with the teachers contributed to an unexpected and critical incident towards the end of the 'skin' phase in Leigh Primary

detailed other possible curriculum innovations. These were made into a SBB booklet that was sent to Primary schools in the surrounding areas.

School, in which the boundaries between subject disciplines were transgressed to produce “a new social and cognitive space” (Marshall 2014, p. 105) for learning.

In order to understand how transdisciplinarity emerged within SBB, it is worth attending to the pedagogical conditions that characterized this project. In the SBB evaluation, Peter Abrahams’ contribution was consistently described as “an inspiration” by the teachers and children (Warwick Arts Centre 2009). Bishop emphasized that they were particularly lucky to have found Abrahams in the University, as he was able to communicate his vast wealth of complex scientific knowledge to this younger age group. Furthermore, his hands-on, charismatic and idiosyncratic style of teaching seemed to delight the pupils. For example, following one of his interventions on ‘skin’, a group of Y6 children relished telling us about Abrahams’s vivid and “disgusting” descriptions of skin wounds (Fig. 2).

This playful, performative and active approach to teaching is increasingly rare in formal education. As Joe Winston argues, the considerable pressures and demands of assessment in formal education often results in predictable modes of instruction:

Focused objectives must be written on the board at the beginning, effectively condemning children to the same genre of narrative ... no mystery, no suspense, no surprises. (Winston 2010, p.136)

Nevertheless, whilst Abraham’s role in SBB was integral to its success, Bishop was keen to avoid the hierarchical implications of positioning him as the ‘academic expert’. Another key feature of SBB was the system of knowledge exchange established between Abrahams, Buffery and the teachers. Bishop did not want to frame Buffery as the mere conduit of Abraham’s scientific knowledge and the teachers as passive recipients of Buffery’s creative activities. SBB was designed to include the teachers “early on in the planning of the project structure” (Bishop, personal interview, February 2009) to ensure they “had a stake in the project and its success”. The teachers also stated that Buffery’s rigorous yet experimental pedagogic approach inspired them to synthesise new connections between subject areas. Bishop explained that Buffery was “thoroughly prepared and did have a plan but there were huge gaps to trust the children on where to go ... it’s an organic and non-linear form” (Bishop, personal interview, February 2009). She continually emphasized the importance of ‘experimentation’ and encouraged the teachers to explore unknown aspects of the curriculum.

When discussing other cognate integrated arts and science projects, Ralph Levinson and colleagues explain that a “lack of linearity and certainty ... has not always been recognised in forms of education that have favoured rather more measurable and predictable outcomes” (2008, p.4). The WAC team was acutely aware that the project had to meet the demands of the curriculum otherwise they would risk losing the support of the teachers and possibly the pupils’ parents. Therefore, they worked with the teachers to ensure that there would be sufficient time and space to move beyond “measurable and predictable outcomes” of the curriculum. The following radical intervention by one of the teachers is indicative of the rigorous yet flexible structure of SBB.



Fig. 2 Professor Abrahams working with primary school pupils. Photographs released with permission of WAC

During Abrahams' introduction on 'skin' to the Leigh pupils he made reference to humankind evolution, which was at odds with some of the teachings in this Church of England school. Abrahams' talk left some of the Y6 pupils with a series of philosophical questions about the origins of life. Such questions could not be readily answered within the notional interdisciplinary space between 'arts' and 'science'. As Nicolescu (1997, paragraph 2) suggests, "transdisciplinary education can open the way towards the integral education of the human being which necessarily transmits the quest for meaning". Unable to provide them within a definitive 'text-book' answer and inspired by their curiosity, the Deputy Head teacher at Leigh responded by deciding to host a public forum. Along with the school community, he invited a range of other notable figures from their local community, each with varying perspectives on evolution. Professor Abrahams attended, along with a priest from Coventry Cathedral and a bio scientist from Coventry University, who explained that he was also a practising Christian. The Y6 pupils were put in charge

of the debate, which began with them asking, ‘How was the world created?’ As observers of this event, it was interesting to note that, earlier that morning, the school hall had been used for communal prayer, and in the afternoon, it had become the site of a controversial, vibrant public debate in which this diverse, intergenerational group of people explored cultural and religious differences. In light of this, perhaps the apparent transdisciplinary ethos of the event could have been extended and enriched further by inviting the multi-cultural multi-faith Frederick Bird Primary to participate in the debate. Nevertheless, Bishop cited this unexpected event as a highlight of SBB, explaining that staging a debate on the origins of life was not a ‘learning objective’ that could have been pre-planned.

This event raises questions about the potential of WAC’s artist-academic collaborations to bring about radical civic engagement opportunities within its communities. Levison and colleagues (2008, p.5) argue that collaborations amongst artists, scientists and educators have “encouraged young people to become informed citizens” because they gain access to a range of critical perspectives and unfamiliar ideas that challenge, inform and shape their understandings. So perhaps this encounter is particularly significant, given that the school is located in a socio-economically deprived area of the city. In James Beane’s investigations into the relationship between creative learning and curriculum integration, he suggests that learner should be “engaged in seeking, acquiring and using knowledge in an organic – not an artificial – way” (2011, 193, p. 196). Beane argues that this learner-centred approach is better suited to “those from non-privileged homes” (ibid) because the knowledge they encounter is more directly connected to their lived experiences. Critically, as this particular intervention demonstrates, the desire to learn more about evolution came directly from the pupils. Furthermore, the teachers *and* pupils mobilized this public event and this could be indicative of a growing sense of agency. Therefore, if WAC is to counter perceptions of ‘intellectual elitism’ by bringing its academic-artists collaborations into its local communities, it needs to remain open to innovative modes of knowledge exchange *and* the un-knowing of transdisciplinarity to continually create spaces for contributions from *all* of its participants.

4 Bank on It: Reaching Beyond the Campus to Create Convivial Interactions in the City

Bank On It was a 90-min site-specific interactive theatre production by the critically acclaimed company Theatre-Rites. It premiered in July 2013 at the Barbican’s Rose Lipman Building in London and transferred to Coventry city centre in October 2013.⁷ Targeted mainly at primary school groups, it was a resounding box office triumph with over 4480 audience members in London and Coventry. According to

⁷ *Bank On It* was co-produced by the Barbican, London.

Bishop, feedback from children, teachers and families was “fantastically positive”. It also received consistently high praise from the national press. *The Guardian* theatre critic Lyn Gardner described it as “a show that has its heart, conscience and imagination in the right place” (Gardner 2013) and Rachel Halliburton from *Time Out* praised it as ‘a delightful, stunningly visually inventive show (Halliburton 2013). This positive reception was notable for the unlikely partnership between Theatre-Rites and the University’s Economics department. As former Head of Department, Professor Abinhay Muthoo, noted, “children’s performance art and academic economics occupy two distinct worlds that seldom converge” (University of Warwick’s Economics Department 2013). Most likely it could be the first collaboration of its kind.

As noted in our introduction, WAC’s *This_Is_Tomorrow* commissioning programme gave an opportunity for new collaborative and ambitious initiatives, in particular to bring artists and academics together to “explore and illuminate contemporary thinking and research about the human condition and key issues that face humanity and society” (Warwick Arts Centre 2013). WAC’s former Head of Programming Matt Burman was insistent that invited artists were not to be positioned as translators of academic research. He was keen to resist the often limiting format of output-driven commissioning models and gave the artists freedom to determine the focus and direction of their creative process. They had time mull, gestate and play around with their emergent ideas in a non-linear way. As a mid-career artist, Buckmaster praised these experimental and nurturing features of the scheme, explaining that it was particularly rare to be given the time, space and resources to learn from new disciplines and take risks in one’s practice.

WAC’s emphasis on discovering the synergies and disconnects between disciplines was embraced by Buckmaster. She was drawn to working with the Economics department precisely because it was ‘unknown’ and ‘uncomfortable’ territory:

Arts and economics ... they’re almost enemies to each other ... economists want us to validate the arts as a commodity and artists do not want to base their work on outcomes and value in monetary terms. (University of Warwick’s Economics Department 2013)

Buckmaster felt compelled to grapple with these tensions, “that’s what I’m paid to be an artist for – to tackle the things you wouldn’t necessarily think children even want to hear about” (Buckmaster, personal interview, November 2013). She was intrigued by the unexpected ways Muthoo and his colleagues reframed the discipline of economics:

It is not necessarily about money ... it is about the allocation of scarce resources ... it is about how to put to best use the most valuable and finite resource of all: our time. (University of Warwick’s Economics Department 2013)

Following conversations with Andrew Oswald, a pioneer in the field of economics, happiness and well-being, Buckmaster became interested in the complex, slippery notion of ‘value’. Buckmaster felt instinctively that this concept would also resonate with young people. She interviewed groups of school children to explore these ideas from their perspective. What struck her most was that, for them, ‘value’ was directly connected to notions of “sharing and charitable thinking” (Buckmaster, personal

interview, November 2013). She responded to this expanse of ideas by creating a theatrical experience that aimed to inspire children (and adults) to *reevaluate* what really matters and what makes them happy. As with SBB, this acute openness to disparate and surprising events may be a pre-requisite for transdisciplinary explorations.

Bank On It took place inside an old, disused gym in the city centre of Coventry. As the audience gathered around outside a mock cash point, a group of customers arrived to discover that they were unable to withdraw any money as there was none left in the bank. When the befuddled and embarrassed bank manager eventually appeared, he invited the audience on a journey into the depths of bank's hidden vaults (Figs. 3 and 4):

A significant section of the performance was dedicated to a series of practical group activities in which the actors interacted with the children. The audience were led into the bank's safe to discover a series of intricately designed installations that each represented an environmental issue. For example, there was a large cupboard stacked with jars with coral-like organisms inside, illuminated to dazzling effect (see Fig. 5). It soon became evident that the coral was made out of discarded plastic bags. Audience members, now reconfigured as fellow 'problem-solvers', were asked why the reckless disposal of plastic bags had a detrimental effect on ocean life.

When discussing this aspect of the production, Buckmaster explained that she felt a responsibility to communicate a clear message to the audience, "if we keep spending like this, it *will* cost the earth" (Buckmaster, personal interview, November



Fig. 3 'Mr Regulator' informs the bank manager that there's no money left. Photograph released with permission of Patrick Baldwin



Fig. 4 The bank manager invites the customers and audience into the safe. Photograph released with permission of Patrick Baldwin



Fig. 5 A coral reef collection made of plastic bags highlights human pollution in the oceans. Photograph released with permission of Patrick Baldwin

2013). However, despite these clear and worthy intentions, this innovative attempt to engage the young people in heuristic learning was somewhat compromised by the 15 min timeframe, resulting in a reductive form of instruction. As Lyn Gardner suggested, there was a sense that it was designed to ‘tick the boxes of the national curriculum’ (Gardner 2013). A bold and beautiful scenography seemingly well set

to open up 'space' for transdisciplinarity became fragile and inaccessible for want of a just a little more time, perhaps.

Theatre-Rites has a long history of tackling unusual and challenging cross-disciplinary subject matter with young people. In Joe Winston's analysis of *The Thought That Counts* – a production exploring the interconnectedness between the solar system, mathematics and social learning – he notes the company avoids trying “to teach children how to add up or explain how gravity works” (Winston 2008, p. 43) by creating lively, immersive and “striking aesthetic experiences” that “inspire wonder and leave the children with plenty for their imaginations to dwell upon after the show” (Ibid.). Alongside Winston (2010), James Thompson (2009) argues that the affective dimension of arts education is often misunderstood and neglected due to an over emphasis on the “impacts and outputs” of learning (p. 118). As a result, “the terrain of sensation, the aesthetic concerns for beauty, joy, pleasure and astonishment have been overlooked” (ibid). Following the spirit of these critiques, we briefly explore the potential of *Bank On It's* final sequence to realise Buckmaster's aim to provoke reflection about irresponsible spending, not by teaching or preaching about notions of 'value' and 'well-being', but rather through creating a joyful participatory experience with esoteric, sensory and affecting qualities.

The audience was invited to enter a large chamber at the centre of the bank where a wishing well was revealed (see Fig. 5). In a ritualistic sequence, each audience member was given a penny to drop into the well to make a wish for something they valued. As each wish got made the space became filled with operatic refrains from a live singer while shimmering lights and luminescent bubbles appeared and a series of jewel-like objects were lowered mysteriously above the well. These “dizzying” and “giddy” (Trueman 2013) effects produced a strong atmospheric aesthetic which Buckmaster hoped would create “an original way of gazing at the economic crisis” (Buckmaster, personal interview, November 2013). Amidst various gasps from the audience, we heard a young girl call out “I could stay here forever”. In these fleeting moments, Theatre-Rites had transformed this old, disused gym in an abandoned part of the city of Coventry into an enchanting, convivial and hopeful space. One that in some ways might even reach beyond the theatrical affects that theatre scholar Jill Dolan names as an “intense experience of utopian performatives” (2005, p. 10). So perhaps the time which was lost to 'tick boxes' was much more than recouped through an entry into performing the wholly reletavistic and relational time-spaces of transdisciplinarity (Fig. 6).

Tellingly, Abinhay Muthoo was surprised and impressed by Buckmaster's creative interpretation of their initial conversations, explaining that the production “far exceeded the reach of the data, graphs and mathematical equations that are the standard lexicon of economics” (University of Warwick's Economics Department 2013). Perhaps this vouches for the potential of collaborative partnerships to engage a transdisciplinarity that can generate new epistemological discoveries and ontological experiences that, as Sue McGregor suggests, “could not have emerged if everything remained separate and disconnected” (2015, p. 103).

In a fresh attempt to bridge the perceived distances between WAC and Coventry communities, it has recently started programming and commissioning more work



Fig. 6 The wishing well invites participants to drop a penny in and make a wish. Photograph released with permission of Patrick Baldwin

beyond the campus building. So *Bank On It* played an unexpected yet welcome role in developing a positive ‘presence’ for WAC in the city, including its centre. As an experienced practitioner of site-specific theatre, Buckmaster held a strong creative vision in her responses to that particular environment:

I really like bringing a bit of beauty of Coventry, it feels quite grey. I’m looking out of the window at graffiti and an area that should be a playground. (Buckmaster, personal interview, November 2013)

This observation regarding Coventry’s neglected urban landscape directly relates to a wider narrative about the city’s economy. Since the 1960s, “the economy of Coventry has declined steeply” and this has resulted in an “estimated total economic output per head of population 8.5% lower than the national average” (Shattock 2015, p. 40). Whilst we can only speculate about the possible effects of *Bank On It* on the central part of the city, it is worth highlighting that the production was made possible partly through generous financial support from the Economics department. Perhaps this unexpected investment by an academic department in a children’s theatre production could be indicative of the unpredictable ways collaborative theatre-making can influence and affect positive change in its surrounding localities.

5 Reflections and Possibilities

The development in WAC's relationship with University departments is representative of a wider movement to create mutually beneficial, sustainable intra-, inter- and cross-institutional partnerships between HEIs and cultural organizations (Gilmore and Comunian 2015). The *Enriching Britain* report recommends that cultural organisations such as WAC “share resources, devise partnerships that will unlock financial savings and generate income benefits” (The Warwick Commission 2015, p.16). In times of financial uncertainty and significant cuts to arts funding, WAC has turned to the University's academic departments as potential sources of investment. This has coincided with national changes to HEI policy that emphasize “new or stronger partnerships underpinned by HEIs' adoption of public engagement strategies” (Arts Council England 2012, p.4). STEM-related disciplines, in particular, have been encouraged to embed public such strategies into their teaching, learning and research activities (ibid. p.3). In this context, WAC has found a receptive academic audience who seem to recognize its potential as an intermediary between their research and non-academic publics. Muthoo explained that being involved in *This_Is_Tomorrow* gave his department distinctiveness in a saturated international market of HEIs. Moreover, he was intrigued by the intrinsic social values of the project, explaining that working with artists allowed the department to dispel ‘the ivory towers’ image of higher education and enable them to “engage with different sections of society to answer the big questions of the world” (Muthoo, personal interview, January 2014).

Holding a debate about humankind's evolution and finding beauty in an imaginary bank in Coventry city centre were notably unusual outcomes of WAC's innovative academic-artist collaborations. This chapter has argued that these “extra-disciplinary effects” (Kershaw and Nicholson 2011, p.7) manifested as a result of the processes of knowledge exchange established by WAC (Monk et al. 2011; McGregor 2015). Moreover, WAC's new models of collaboration have enabled Burman to create what he called an “invisible umbilical cord” between WAC and the publically under-represented areas of Coventry. WAC may programme work that resonates with the University's international agenda, but these local commissioning projects can play a crucial role in developing its positive presence in and around Coventry city and altering perceptions of ‘distance’ and elitism.

When discussing the possible sites for transdisciplinary collaboration, Nicolescu (1997, paragraph 4) recommends that HEIs should attempt to “organize regional ateliers for transdisciplinary research”. This resonates with McGregor (2015, p. 103) who suggests that transdisciplinarity requires “hosts ... that cluster at the edges of borders, with the potential to connect ideas across people”. Following this, WAC could be configured as an ‘atelier’ or ‘host’ for transdisciplinarity. Its unique location between a research-intensive institution and at the borders of Coventry means it has the capacity to act as a potentially progressive, open and hospitable site for convivial interactions between academic departments, regional and national artists and its multiple and diverse communities.

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