

## Helena Grehan and Olivia Rousset

### Expanding Networks of Care:

### The Humanitarian Storytelling of Olivia Rousset

*Olivia Rousset has made a major contribution to independent journalism in Australia (and beyond) for more than twenty years. She is a woman of integrity, deep humanity, and thoughtfulness. Her work positions the reader, listener, or viewer directly in front of the often-hidden subjects—people, lives, stories—that the current neoliberal technologised West covers over. Olivia’s work uncovers, opens up, and invites us to consider and to consider deeply what it means to participate in the status quo and to imagine what it might mean to do otherwise. She asks those who engage with her work to take action, not just to empathise. She makes space for the subjects of her work to speak directly to her audience, to call on their humanity, and to push them to do more; to take action and to make change. In the Australian context, her work strives for recognition of the rights of asylum seekers and refugees and their advocates, amongst others. Hers is a powerful Southern voice; yet in this era of speed, of citizen-journalism, and of sound bites, it is not easy for makers such as Olivia to find a platform, to continue to urge audiences to listen, and to listen carefully to the stories they need to encounter.*

*This interview aims to provide readers with the opportunity to understand and to value the significance of her contributions to the nation and its stories, and, for those new to Olivia’s work, to have the opportunity to engage. Her body of work is a gift to us and one that deserves wide engagement. It is a salve for the times. It does not fix the problems we encounter but it urges us to resist their continued obfuscation. In fact, in this interview, Olivia’s lived experience as a documentary maker and journalist draw attention to the difficulties of reporting trauma and its response in powerful and sometimes unsettling ways.*

*Olivia and others like her work in an increasingly precarious industry that wears people down. There is no certainty and significant personal investment—emotional, financial, and psychological—is made in each work produced. This context of precarity combined with the profound nature of her storytelling inspired me to want to spend time with Olivia and to share her stories with you for this issue of Performance Paradigm.<sup>1</sup>—Helena Grehan*

**Helena Grehan:** I read that you see yourself as an outsider. What does it mean to be an outsider and how does that function both in terms of the kinds of stories you tell and the ways in which you go about capturing these?

**Olivia Rousset:** Being an outsider means I have my own voice and as a freelancer I'm not an employee of an organisation or body. Being an outsider also reflects my focus on finding a place for the story that I want to tell the way I want to tell it, and for the reasons I want to tell it. To survive as a freelancer, I pitch to various places or get a backfill position on a program for a few stories and then I try to make those stories mine. Over the past few years I've freelanced at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) where I've tried to find a place for my stories, however, I'm not always successful. I love the flexibility and freedom that being an outsider offers, but it's exhausting to be constantly researching and pitching stories that may not get made—and it's also a very financially precarious position to be in.

**HG:** What is the animating theme or focus for the kinds of stories that you like to tell?

**OR:** I'm interested in stories of injustice, in giving voice to the voiceless. Injustice doesn't make sense, but it is often justified by reducing people to a kind of economic module or element, and in doing so it denies or has the potential to deny their humanity. I try to take a humanitarian approach and engage the audience through a personal story, which is not always easy.

For example, the other day, there was a five-year-old boy with cystic fibrosis whose parents are permanent residents of Australia. He was born here and they're going to send them back to Ireland because he is "a burden." This story is getting a lot of attention. He's a white boy from an Anglo culture. This happens often to people seeking asylum in Australia, or people who have been living on temporary visas here, being sent back to their point of departure. Yet the same attention is not paid to refugees and asylum seekers in similar circumstances. I'm interested in what it is about our society that prioritises and allows us to empathise with one story and not another.

**HG:** Your focus then, as I see it, is to actually open up the stories that get covered over but that need our attention.

**OR:** Essentially it is about taking people who may appear on the surface to be very different to Australia's relatively privileged mainstream and showing the commonality of the human experience that we all have being alive on this earth. Trying to make people care as another human, or as human to human, not Australian to vulnerable refugee, etcetera, but aiming to find a commonality between all people. You know, the older I get the more I realise how ridiculous it is that we have—though there are countless reasons why we do—borders and boundaries between nations. We are all part of one earth and one system, and we have to share and to ease the load for other people. I know I'm sounding very idealistic. But it is important particularly in the context of our current climate emergency.

I was doing an art fundraiser years ago for Syrian refugees. My son was quite young at the time, and he was talking to me about it and I was explaining to him that these people are just like us. They're doctors and they're the children of people who work in offices. I was trying to get him to draw this common thread. His response reflected what I think is the main problem for most Australians. He listened to me and he understood everything I was saying but then he said, "but it will never happen to me."

We think it will never happen to us and I think that's one reason why the marriage equality campaign was successful.<sup>2</sup> It had such a movement behind it because everyone knows someone who is gay. Everyone feels as if it could be their cousin, their friend, or it could be within their family, it's within our community; but with refugee issues people think, well, that wouldn't happen to them, so they don't identify too closely because they are not impacted directly. I really believe that people have to feel, sadly, somehow personally threatened to then go out of their way to care for other people who are experiencing misfortune.

Last year I was working on a radio documentary about kids on Nauru. Really, really sick kids and young adults who were starving and in very bad conditions. I was talking to a friend who is very supportive of my work about this while I was working on the documentary and she just said: "I can't read it anymore. I can't listen to it," and that's the dilemma. I knew I was making something unlistenable and unpalatable. The challenge is how to make people care. You end up inevitably taking away sixty percent of the pain and suffering and telling just a part of the story that will engage people just enough. I understand. I have periods in my life where I tune out when I can't actually engage with these serious issues, for my own emotional health and welfare.

**HG:** I think it's a fine line because, as you say, if you push the reality of the awfulness of the situation so far across you risk alienating the reader or the viewer so they just switch off or they can't cope. You have to make a choice about how much, as you say, that you're going to be able to give. To almost seduce or entice them into the story. The question is then, what might they do with this story? Is knowing about it enough?

**OR:** I think these days that's the problem. We feel moved, we feel "activated," and that the simple emotion of feeling activated and caring is enough. But it isn't. There's this relatively new approach to journalism called solutions-focused journalism.<sup>3</sup> It is a kind of storytelling that includes, within the story, possible solutions to a known problem by citing policies or positive outcomes that have worked in similar situations. If all we are left with is the capacity to be moved, or to know and share the information, it's no longer enough. I think that there is potential with solutions-focused journalism to offer modes of response or action for those who are engaging with the story.

**HG:** But, then, on the other hand, if you do solutions-focused journalism do you run the risk of people just ticking the box and saying well, I've given my five dollars to this.

**OR:** Possibly. Perhaps the five dollars is enough. If everyone gives five dollars because not everyone can do something practical, then that would be a start. However, we don't want to just give people things to do so they feel good about themselves. While solutions-focused journalism is relatively new, social impact documentaries have been around for a long time. And now they have a specific social impact producer attached to them to develop a comprehensive plan for how a particular film or program is going to travel in the community and effect change. Broadcasters are also starting to hire social impact producers. They'll have screenings in parliament, for example, or for community groups and leave them with some information or some kind of plan to get involved in a broader movement for social change. For instance, the documentary *Blue* (dir. Karina Holden, 2017) that was made about plastics in the ocean and overfishing had its home within community screenings, so the audience is given the tools and ideas to get together and have an activated response to the problem from where they live.

**HG:** I think this links back to the previous point, which was that we are so overwhelmed with the volume of information now that we often know things on the surface rather than in any detailed way. Perhaps this is why we now need that extra step from just knowing about something, to knowing how to activate a response to it?

**OR:** Yes, yes. There is an added complexity here. As both a documentarian and a journalist I am caught between being measured in my reporting (as a journalist) and advocating for change (as a documentarian). I find this very troubling because often you are required to give time to statements which are not true for the sake of "balance" in situations where there is clearly a gross injustice. For instance, with the story I did on sick kids on Nauru I had to include the government's response to certain allegations, and sometimes the information given in these responses wasn't correct based on what I knew from several sources, but I still had to give it airtime.

**HG:** In what context do you mean?

**OR:** I was making that story for an investigative current affairs program. They knew that I was very passionate about the issue having witnessed offshore detention firsthand and that I believe it's not a good policy and it can't be justified. So, I was constantly reminded to be balanced and impartial. And, for me, being balanced is to look at what's happening and report the truth, not to report what one side says and then what the other side says as if this alone will reveal the truth. As a journalist I have to report the official take on what I'm reporting, and sometimes there isn't the time or means to explain the nuances. But if I left out the official response because I knew it to be false, I would be accused of a lack of balance or advocating for a particular side. It can be an exhausting accounting of statements and facts and it's sometimes hard for the truth not to get lost in that.



**Figure 1** (left). Sunset Lombrum Detention Centre, Manus Island PNG, November 2017.  
**Figure 2** (right). Graffiti, Lombrum Detention Centre, Manus Island PNG, November 2017.  
 Images: Olivia Rousset.

**HG:** So, it's a tricky line to run, between uncovering and sharing what you found as truth and also following the rules that you're required to follow?

**OR:** Yes. I understand why balance in the pursuit of truth is important, but a sort of balance for accounting of “sides” having a hearing or airtime shouldn’t be. And when I repackaged that documentary for a US audience on the Centre for Investigative Journalism program Reveal, it was much more straightforward because I wasn’t tripping over myself trying not to upset the Australian government.

When I was rewriting the story for the US public broadcaster they would ask, “but why is it like that?” Or “what’s the history of this?” And I could just explain it in very straightforward terms, and they’d say, well, that doesn’t make sense and no, we don’t need to put in these government disclaimers if the evidence shows otherwise. So, it was just very matter of fact. That’s the problem in reporting, I think, within a government-funded broadcaster essentially.

I think that’s getting more complex now with the years and years of funding cuts to the ABC and SBS and the recent police raids and the changes in whistle-blower protection laws.<sup>4</sup> The government is overstepping the line and actively trying to influence the type of reporting done as well as the capacity of the broadcaster to do good journalism. The nature

of our government has changed, and this inevitably has an effect on how journalism is practised. We have to be very careful in how far this is allowed to go.

**HG:** Let's go to the issue of refugees because we started this discussion by talking about you and your focus on seeing the human in the human and seeing beyond the boundaries and the borders and understanding that it's crucial to make a connection with and between human beings. We also talked about the need to move beyond just emotive responses. But let's go to the specific issue of refugees and your work with the documentation of refugees in offshore detention and anything else about that topic you would like to raise here.



**Figure 3.** Sunset Lombrum Detention Centre, Manus Island PNG, November 2017. Image: Jarrod McKenna.

**OR:** I suppose it started in 2000 when I was working for Dateline and travelling. I did a bit of postwar reporting in Eritrea, in Kosovo, in different countries where I'd go to IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps which were basically for refugees within the country and I saw just how vulnerable they were. Displaced people are the most vulnerable. IDPs are not unexpected in war zones, postwar zones, and disrupted environments and I knew that those people would mostly be relocated or find their way back when peace came. It was a natural phenomenon within an unnatural environment.



In the Australian context I first visited a detention camp in 2005 and then again in 2017. The stories of asylum seekers before they make it to Australia are usually full of extraordinary suffering and often years and years of trauma. But of all the people I've spoken to in detention, they've never talked about the war or persecution they've fled or the boat journey where they may have seen people die. The trauma they talk about is the trauma of being in detention and how they are treated there. Perhaps that's because the trauma of the journey, the war, can be understood. It is an experience that is precipitated by some kind of humanitarian catastrophe. But it doesn't make sense in an Australian context where there is a clear choice of whether or not to inflict more trauma, or to help them. People don't see who the refugees and asylum seekers were before the trauma, nor do they see what they've gone through to seek freedom. They're reduced to being helpless, hopeless, and then treated as if they're criminals.

I went to Manus Island in 2005 where I met Aladdin, a stateless Palestinian man from Kuwait, who was in his early twenties. He had been in the detention centre for well over a year, and for ten months of that time he was alone, with no other people except for Papua New Guinean guards around him. Even though he was born in Kuwait he could never have citizenship. He had to apply for permission to basically exist there, to work, to do anything. He had a younger brother and sister and he left so he could make a better future for his family and get away from the harassment he was suffering.

When I arrived at the detention centre, he was mentally very unstable, he'd been on Xanax for a long time. He was very paranoid. I spent four days there and I did most of the filming in the first day or two, but I just kept going back because it was clear that he needed human company and we became friends. He knew I cared, and we talked.

He wanted to be an aeronautical engineer. He spoke Indonesian, Arabic, and English very well. He would be an amazingly productive member of any society had he not been psychologically and emotionally broken by that time in detention. Soon after I did my story, with the help of lawyers, he was released into Australia and given permanent residency. I don't think they have brought his sister over here yet, but he was fighting for family reunification and under the laws he applied to have them brought to Australia; but for years nothing happened. He told me he thought the government was deliberately punishing him. His brother killed himself in the interim, and I don't know if his sister ever came.

I remember calling my parents from my little motel room on Manus Island and saying, I don't understand why you would break a man like this. He's just a young man who's really smart, really capable, really keen to contribute somewhere somehow and just wants to be free. I don't understand why you would sacrifice a human being to make a political point. Now I feel incredibly naive saying that, but I don't want to feel naive. I want to still feel that sense of injustice.

Aladdin was eventually released. He was in really bad shape when he came to Australia, but he was free. But it was never okay, and he struggled. He wants to leave Australia. He hasn't been able to find peace because of what happened to him in detention. Not what

happened to him as a stateless man in Kuwait or on the dangerous journey here. When I told Aladdin's story for Dateline I featured his adopted cat, Honey. Everyone cared about his cat. People raised money to bring his cat from Manus Island to Melbourne. He said to me, people care more about the cat than me and it was like, yeah, they do. As he came here alone, everyone said, what about the cat? Let's pay four thousand dollars to get the cat here. He didn't need his cat. It would have been adopted by someone else on Manus. Aladdin just needed freedom, but Australians could identify with the relationship with a pet so that was important to them.

I had children soon after that and didn't do overseas stories because it wasn't practical. When they started detaining people en masse and I knew that they were in the same centre, I had a terrible feeling knowing it's not one man, it's 2,000 people, it's 3,000 people. That really had an impact on me, and I spent a long time not knowing how to do stories about refugees in detention for Australian media outlets, and I still find it difficult. I still carry a lot of guilt about the fact that I should be doing more. I felt a responsibility as I had been there. I had a sense of responsibility to try to tell their stories. I thought, if only Australians knew, they would be outraged. Over the past few years I've pitched several stories about offshore detention, but they've mostly been knocked back. Someone quite high up in an editorial position at a broadcaster said to me, "we've heard all of these stories before, what's new?" There is so much the public doesn't know, but there is no appetite for it.

**HG:** Perhaps, as you have suggested, we don't think it is up to us to take responsibility for the situation.

**OR:** There is a community of amazing advocates who are keeping these people alive. Who are their absolute lifeline and who are behind every single court case that got the kids off Nauru. The Australian government didn't bring kids off Nauru willingly. Most of the removals were fought in the Federal Court. But, to get them to court, it took months of advocating by a large group of mainly women volunteers. They were the ones on the phone to the asylum seekers and refugees on Nauru and Manus talking them down from suicide. On the phone trying to get the medical care they need. Simply being a friend, someone to listen. The asylum seekers and refugees often call these advocates their Mums or Sisters. These women can tell us their stories, but they are dismissed.

**HG:** Have you pitched a story on these advocates and their relationships with people on Manus and Nauru?

**OR:** I did; before I did the investigation into sick kids on Nauru, I pitched a story about these advocates, and I've pitched it elsewhere since then. One day I'd like to tell the story of these advocates, the unofficial Mums and Sisters. There's one woman who is also a nun, Jane Keogh. I follow her on Facebook and she posted something the other day about this guy who she talked to throughout the night. I'm including it here with her permission.<sup>5</sup>



One young Manus man was up and about and talking to me on the phone late tonight into morning. I am up keeping vigil in case he rings back.

He couldn't sleep or keep still and couldn't stop shivering and crying. He said "What is the matter with me? I think I am dying."

I told him to go back to his room and get a blanket and I waited while he did this and went outside again as he couldn't sit still.

He said his head was hot. Possibly a fever. I asked him if any friends might be around to be with him. He said no one and I could hear the shaking and crying. I said, "do you want me to find someone to take you to the hospital?" He said, "No doctor is at the hospital at night."

He cried some more and kind of moaned and I listened a while occasionally saying, "It's ok. Just breathe." We breathed together for a while and his walking around slowed down.

I asked about any medication and about drinking water and he told me he was fasting. I told him he was sick, and the Quran says you don't need to fast when you are sick. He found his Panadol and took two with water. He talked about dying. I talked about taking time to grieve and about hope. He protested the hope. He said he can't do this anymore. I said no he can't do this alone, but I and many Australians would be here with him and hold the hope for him till he could feel it himself.

I told him about the Greens in the Senate and some Independents who would make sure he got medical help through this crisis. I told him about my activist friends who work all day for his freedom. I told him confidently we would win.

The shivering uncontrollably continued. And soft moaning. I asked him if he would go back to his room and rest. He said he would keep walking. Should I phone and find someone to be with him? No, he said.

We made an agreement he would find someone in the morning to go with him to PIH.<sup>6</sup> He would write down all his symptoms including the strong pain in his bladder he often experienced, his shivering, his inability to sleep or stay still, the wanting to die, the long-time feeling depressed.

He couldn't remember when he last felt happy, years he said. Since Saturday night he hadn't left his room or talked to anyone. But this was not new he said. No one comes out now.

He agreed to phone me in the morning. I told him I would wait by my phone if he wanted to talk again or if he felt worse.

In the morning he would take his paper to the doctor. To make sure it was on his record. He said he went to the doctor last year with his bladder pain, but the medicine wasn't any help.

I hoped there would be enough on his record to prove he needs medical help. He will never recover on Manus. I think he just needs love and care. And hope.

And it's seven a.m. and I did try to sleep with my phone at my pillow.

And it's a privilege when someone in crisis trusts you to accompany them.

And I feel grateful for my many activist friends who keep both panicked and peaceful vigils many long nights. And for brave Manus friends who stand by each other with kindness.

And I curse Dutton and Morrison and every single member of the LNP who "take every possible means" to make this suffering continue.

And I curse the Australians who voted for them.

But not so strongly because many are good people who have never learned to think beyond their own needs, and many were deceived.

And I feel too deep a sadness for what Australia has become.

(Jane Keogh, 21 May 2019)

I know, as a journalist, the burden that I bear telling these stories for short periods of time. These people have been doing it for years. I'll continue to try to tell their story because they really are heroes and deserve to be recognised.

**HG:** So, let's think about this a bit. On the one hand, we have the problem where we have a nation of people who either haven't heard the stories, don't want to hear them or don't feel it's up to them to take responsibility for them. On the other hand, we have a whole

army of advocates working to support the detainees. Are they operating independently of one another? Are they part of a group?

**OR:** They are independent of one another, but they have formed an informal network. There is one woman who does medical advice and referrals. I spoke to another woman who helped me a lot behind the scenes with the Nauru investigation. When I first spoke to her, she'd just talked a fifteen-year-old Sri Lankan boy down from suicide on Nauru and that's when I first thought, oh my God, this is the coalface.

**HG:** We have different things going on here. We have the lack of information, lack of ability to connect or a sense that we can't connect, and then we have this secret army of women advocates there helping. What are we going to do about all of this?

**OR:** I don't know! There's definitely a risk that we've normalised offshore detention. People seem to have accepted that this happens. That there's no other solution. That's why we need solutions-focused journalism to show alternatives. Scholar and public intellectual, Robert Manne, wrote a piece saying boat turn-backs are effective so you can stop all offshore detention and a lot of people took issue with that because boat turn-backs are also very cruel and these people are ending up being refouled or in the same situation but out of our sight in Indonesia.<sup>7</sup> So, where do you draw your lines of compassion? Where do you draw the line of accepting what is inevitable within our political system or within our society?

**HG:** I guess what we're coming to is that we can no longer accept the argument that it is normal. We have to resist differently. We have to intervene in new ways because once it becomes, "oh it's terrible but that's the way things are," then there's no hope.

**OR:** I think the people in detention see us and our community more clearly than we do. They have a terrible but clear perspective and know that as a society we don't care. Not enough. I'm in regular contact with a man I met on Manus. He doesn't ever want to come to Australia. He's been waiting for over a year to find out if he's been accepted to the US. He just sits alone in his room all day doing nothing. It's his only hope of having a future. He can't go back to his country. He recently took a serious risk and threatened to kill himself. This is a man who was one of the smartest, calmest, and most together men I met there. He just can't hold on anymore. You probably heard someone swallowed seven needles, fifteen needles, whatever it was, the other day. I was told that before that he was one of the most stable men there. I don't know how we tell these stories. I resist the idea that we need to say, "imagine yourself in their shoes." Isn't it enough to say we don't want others to suffer like this? I don't have solutions.

**HG:** I think we have to help mobilise people in more creative ways. I mean, it's tricky because you don't want them to know the full scale of everything too early. A lot of people are already grappling with climate change and going on strike and worrying about that. I think that we do need to come up with a way to get people involved that is more active.

Perhaps one good example is the fact that people can now sign up to supply mobile phones and phone credit for refugees and asylum seekers so that they have a lifeline whilst they are held in detention.<sup>8</sup>

**OR:** That's awesome, isn't it?

**HG:** Yes, but not enough people know about it. That you can just donate, and your donation means someone is in contact with someone else.

**OR:** Yes. The refugees and asylum seekers then have a literal lifeline with the Australian advocates who are trying to save their lives. The last time I went to Manus I went with Jarrod McKenna, a pastor from Perth. His mother, Faye, is in contact with tens if not hundreds of people in detention. When they realised who Jarrod was, they started talking about "Mama Faye." "Oh, she sends me these photos every day!" And they all started talking about her and how much they love her. And I realised then what a lifeline these women are. In that place they were everything. Those things are important, those connections. People say, "I can't do anything," but at a minimum that caring is what the detainees need to stay alive. We can do that.

**HG:** This seems to link with the idea of solutions-focused journalism. It's a very small practical thing but it expands the network of care.

**OR:** These networks exist and it's whether or not we can afford the time or effort or think we can to actually say in an old-school kind of community way, "I'm going to go and form a relationship that might be difficult and see what I can do." And we don't do that these days. We do the ones within our echo chamber where we get reinforced. I think it goes back to the idea that once you see systemic mistreatment as something inevitable even if you think it's wrong, then there is acceptance. I can't help but think if this was happening in another country our media would be covering it more fearlessly. When I worked at Dateline we would go in undercover and break laws in other countries to expose human rights abuses. We would enter a country without a journalists' visa and film undercover to expose something like child sex trafficking or other human rights abuses. Human rights abuses have been happening here for years and the broadcasters haven't taken all the necessary risks to properly expose these.

**HG:** Is it that we've been sold the idea that this is not something that can ever be solved because our sovereignty is under threat if we don't take the really hard line?

**OR:** We all know how easy it is to take over this country with a bunch of boats, right? I think that's a deep-seated thing, this misplaced idea that this is ours to protect and I think it comes from Australia's insecurity with sovereignty or with our right to be here. It's all wrapped up in who we see ourselves as being and whether we can accept other people. Since colonisation Australia has always tried to control how people come here as migrants and even refugees. Some would argue that's worked for Australia. Now I'm sure we could

come up with a more practical way to do this that isn't about creating a political contest. But it's not about how to help these people. It's about dog whistling and trying to present ourselves as being strong to garner votes and feed fear in our community. So, I suppose until we stop having a politics of fear, we won't just see it as a problem that needs to be solved.

The last time I went to Manus it was during the standoff,<sup>9</sup> and despite the situation I felt elated. I felt that now we can get in there, albeit unofficially, the journalists are just going to flood in. I said that to Behrouz Boochani as I was leaving, we're just the beginning.

Guardian reporter Ben Doherty had been there and the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) and a Get-Up contingent and I thought, "it's inevitable, people are just going to come now from all media outlets because they can." And they didn't.<sup>10</sup> They didn't go, and it wasn't hard. Again, it must have been my naivety to think, at every turning point or escalation, "this has to be it, this has to be the point where it's going to change, it can't go on." And I really thought that then. And here we are nearly two years later, and people are still there.



**Figure 4.** Refugee Abdul Aziz Muhamat and Olivia Rousset, Lombrum Detention Centre, Manus Island PNG, November 2017. Image: Jarrod McKenna.

**HG:** Thanks for such a thoughtful discussion Olivia. I wonder if we could bring things to a close, for now, by me asking you one last question? That is, if budget and access were not an issue, what interview or documentary would you really love to do?

**OR:** It would have to be going right now to Manus and Nauru to show how the men and women there are living, making real the effect of indefinite incarceration; the neglect, the torture of living under abusive—or malign—bureaucracy, as well as the resilience and relationships that grow despite such horrific experiences. Basically, showing the insanity of continuing to make people suffer unnecessarily and making these people more than a concept, number or shadow. And the other story I would tell would be inside onshore immigration detention centres. There's another black hole where people are losing their lives and being forgotten.

Other than that, there are so many stories that I'd like to tell about how to live in an increasingly unfriendly world that I find it hard to choose. Obviously, there are all the things that make people have to flee their homes. The effect of the global climate emergency should be the top of every storyteller's list. I don't think my stories alone will lead to any substantial change, but I hope they add a drop to the bucket. I need to tell these stories for myself as well. To say it's a form of therapy wouldn't be too far from the truth—it's almost like self-harm and therapy all rolled into one!—but I would hope it would lead to some sort of change for us all, if not systemic, then beginning in peoples' hearts.

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## Notes

1. This interview took place at Murdoch University on 27 May 2019.
2. Legislation to allow same-sex marriage was passed into legislation by the Parliament of Australia on 7 December 2017 following a voluntary postal vote.
3. It is important to note that this concept and mode of practice is contested and there are many different views on its efficacy. Nonetheless, the idea of providing tangible guidance for readers, viewers, and listeners is something that I feel is potentially very useful in this era of information overload. See: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/academy/entries/be8991c7-c1c7-42e6-a371-f40278838fa2>; <http://solutionsjournalism.org/about/what-we-do/>.
4. See Christopher Knaus, "Whistleblower protections 'a sham,' says lawyer whose leaks led to ABC raids," *The Guardian*, 6 June 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2019/jun/06/whistleblower-protections-a-sham-says-lawyer-whose-leaks-led-to-abc-raids/>.
5. Jane Irene Keogh, "One young Manus man was up and about," Facebook, 22 May 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/janeikeogh/posts/1555806507886534/>.
6. The Pacific International Hospital (PIH) in Port Moresby is contracted by the Australian federal government to provide health care to asylum seekers detained on Manus Island.

7. See Robert Manne, "It's time to rethink asylum-seeker policy," *The Monthly*, 28 February 2018, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/blog/robert-manne/2017/28/2017/1488253944/it-s-time-rethink-asylum-seeker-policy/>; and "This pains me, but it's time to compromise on Australia's cruel asylum seeker policy," *The Guardian*, 22 September 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/23/this-pains-me-but-its-time-to-compromise-on-australias-cruel-asylum-seeker-policy/>.
8. For example, <https://giftsformanusandnauru.org.au/> and <https://www.pc4r.org/>.
9. See Ben Doherty, "Decay, despair, defiance: inside the Manus Island refugee camp," *The Guardian*, 16 November 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/16/decay-despair-defiance-inside-the-manus-island-refugee-camp/>.
10. See <https://www.asrc.org.au/> and <https://www.getup.org.au/>.

### Olivia Rousset Selected List of Works

- Reveal*. "Five Years on Nauru." Aired 16 February. Reveal, the Centre for Investigative Reporting, in collaboration with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2019. Audiorecording. <https://www.revealnews.org/episodes/five-years-on-nauru/>. Radio documentary about the neglect of refugee children and teenagers on Nauru.
- Compass*. "Lou's Place." Aired 26 May. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2018. Videorecording. <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/watch/compass/lous-place/10248156/>. A thirty-minute documentary about "Lou's Place," a drop-in centre for homeless women in Sydney's King's Cross.
- 7.30 Report*. "The Incredible Reality for Young Carers." Aired 31 October. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2018. Videorecording. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Blb\\_k6hp0Rc/](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Blb_k6hp0Rc/). Story for ABC TV about young carers.
- Compass*. "The Yazidi—People of the Peacock Angel." Aired 30 August. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2016. Videorecording. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4YPaM4pTAo/>. A thirty-minute documentary on the Yazidi in Northern Iraq.
- ABC Arts*. "Behind *The Second Woman*." Aired 8 January. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2017. Videorecording. <https://iview.abc.net.au/programs/behind-the-second-woman/AC1724H001S00/>. A thirty-minute documentary for *ABC Arts* about the cult feminist performance, *The Second Woman*.
- Dateline*. "State of Despair." Aired 9 May. Special Broadcasting Service, 2007. Videorecording. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHVh0uBUfY0>. A feature about Iraqi refugees exiled from their country, struggling to survive in Jordan. Walkley Award Nomination for International Current Affairs; UN Media Peace Prize; screened in competition FIPA, France.
- The Passion of Gina Sinozich*. Aired 11 September. Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Vagabond Films, 2007. Videorecording. An observational documentary about the life and art of Croatian Australian Gina Sinozich. Gina began painting at seventy as an attempt to work through the events of her traumatic life. Screened at Dendy Awards, Sydney International Film Festival; Melbourne International Film Festival.



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*Dateline.* “Abu Ghraib Trilogy.” Aired 9 November 2005, 15 February 2006, and 8 March 2006. Videorecording. Special Broadcasting Service, 2005.

<https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/video/240417859815/abu-ghraib-lifting-the-hood>;

<https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/video/11731011515/abu-ghraib-the-sequel>;

<https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/video/240417859814/abu-ghraib-a-torturers-tale>;

Three stories about the notorious Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq featuring interviews with the tortured and the torturers, revealing the full impact of what went on inside the Iraqi prison. Walkley Award for Current Affairs, Feature or Documentary; George Munster Award for Independent Journalism.

*Dateline.* “Inside Indonesia’s Sex Trade.” Aired 1 June. Special Broadcasting Service, 2005.

Videorecording. Filmed for a month undercover on Batam Island, Olivia followed two fourteen-year-old girls who were sold into sexual slavery and a daring attempt by social workers to get them out. Walkley Award for All Media—Asia Pacific Region; UN Media Peace Award; screened in competition FIPA, France.

*Dateline.* “Iraq, Sweet Iraq.” Aired 20 August. Special Broadcasting Service, 2003. Videorecording.

<https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/video/341076547744/iraq-sweet-iraq> Olivia spent six weeks in Iraq immediately after the US invasion following Hassan Janabi, an Iraqi Australian water engineer who was tortured and exiled during Saddam Hussein’s reign. Hassan returned to work for the US forces and was reunited with his family. This moving and insightful observational documentary offers a personal and conflicted view of a nation on the brink of radical change. Screened internationally including on the British Broadcasting Corporation and Canada Broadcasting Corporation.

*Race Around the World.* Winner, season 1. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1997.

Videorecording. Eight young filmmakers travelled alone to ten countries in one hundred days. They conceived, shot, and edited (on paper) a mini documentary in each country without preparation or support.

### **Refugee Support Services and Resources—for readers**

Australian Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC)

<https://www.asrc.org.au/>

ASRC is an independent non-for-profit organisation focused on empowering people seeking asylum in Australia.

Centre for Asylum seekers, Refugees and Detainees (CARAD)

<https://www.carad.org.au/>

CARAD is an independent, community-based organisation providing advocacy and welfare support to asylum seekers, refugees and detainees in Western Australia.

Phone Credit for Refugees (PC4R)

<https://www.pc4r.org/>

PC4R is a service that provides phone credit to refugees and displaced people all over the world.

Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA)

<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au>

The national body for refugee and people seeking asylum support services.

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Refugee Rights Action Network (RRAN)

<http://rran.org>

RRAN is a political activist group based in Perth that organises assistance, support and community outreach programs to help end mandatory detention.

STARTTS

<https://www.startts.org.au>

STARTTS provides culturally sensitive clinical support for the treatment and rehabilitation of torture and trauma survivors in NSW.

Writing Through Fences

<http://writingthroughfences.org>

Writing Through Fences is an open space for many writers and artists who are, or have been, incarcerated by the Australian immigration detention regime.

Gifts for Manus and Nauru

<https://giftsformanusandnauru.org.au>

An organisation that supports asylum seekers and refugees in PNG and Nauru by providing phone credit, medical and dental treatment and professional trauma counselling.

GetUp!

<https://www.getup.org.au/campaigns/refugees/manus-and-nauru/manus-and-nauru>

GetUp! is an independent movement working towards a more progressive, democratic Australia that campaigns for human rights in Manus and Nauru.

HELENA GREHAN *is Professor of Creative Arts at Murdoch University. She has published widely on performance and politics, spectatorship and ethics, and new media dramaturgy. Her most recent books include: The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Politics (co-edited with Peter Eckersall), New Media Dramaturgy (with Ed Scheer and Peter Eckersall) and William Yang: Stories of Love and Death (with Ed Scheer). She is Associate Editor of Performance Research.*

OLIVIA ROUSSET *is a two-time Walkley Award-winning documentary filmmaker and video-journalist. She also won the George Munster Prize for independent journalism and two UN Media Peace Prizes. She has a strong engagement with stories of social justice. Olivia spent seven years reporting, shooting, and producing stories for Dateline, SBS TV's flagship international current affairs program. Working alone, she delivered award-winning stories from all over the world. Since then Olivia has directed several documentaries for the ABC and SBS TV. She is currently story producer and field director on See What You Made Me Do, a three-part documentary series about domestic violence and partner homicide for SBS TV.*

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