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"We Know...":

Collective Care in Participatory Arts

In 2008 I was invited to watch a creative reminiscence session in Sutton House, a Tudor building belonging to the National Trust in Hackney, East London. Sutton House is open to the public, but also has a long tradition of community engagement, including a weekly creative session for older people from the neighbourhood. The session I watched was led by actor/musician Lizzie Lewendon, who had worked for some time with a group of local older people. On this occasion, Lewendon was using material from the history of Sutton House to provoke memories of the group's experiences of London in the 1980s. When invited to share their own stories, woman after woman spoke about their own marriage break-ups in that period. While most of the group sat to share stories, one woman stood, and as she began to speak, started to cry painfully. I saw Lewendon begin to get up from the piano where she was seated, but at that moment the woman's neighbour in the circle began to stroke her arm, saying, "It's alright. We know, we know." Lewendon returned to her seat, and the standing woman slowly stopped crying, sat down, and was then able to sit and listen to others, her hand held firmly by her neighbour. This moment stayed with me long after the workshop ended. Thinking more about it, I realised that this moment of kindness and empathy, demonstrated by a fellow participant, pushed me to think differently about the nature of responsibility and care within participatory practice.

Understandings of responsibility and care in participatory arts often focus on the role of the facilitator and their relationship with the participants. However, this moment in Lewendon's workshop demonstrated *collective care*. It was an important reminder that care can be mutually held, a shared responsibility. The idea of "collective care" resonated with my own experience, principally in intergenerational arts practices. The word "collective" evokes a sense that everyone is needed, and everyone has something to offer, in both the social and the aesthetic aspects of a project; the Cambridge Dictionary gives us *of or shared by every member of a group of people* (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Without articulating it clearly to myself, I realised that the quality of relationships among participants had become a marker for me of the success of a

project. It is true that socially engaged arts practice demands a multi-skilled approach. This means a high level of attentiveness to the nature of the exchange between an artist/facilitator and the participants, and an ability in those responsible for framing and leading the group to respond and adjust. A considerable body of work considers the multi-layered and skilled work of artists and facilitators who work in these collaborative ways (Johnston 1998; Preston 2016; Hepplewhite 2020). Additionally, an examination of care ethics and the performance of care has added to scholarship on both the practice of and the embedded values that characterise ethical practice (see Stuart Fisher and Thompson 2020) and an awareness of group processes is implicit in the work of, for example Geese Theatre, and Kazzum Arts. What has received less attention is the part played by the participants in the maintenance and development of their own well-being, and that of the group. I propose that this is intimately connected to the capacity of the facilitator to foster effective participation, knowingly and intuitively, by what they do, and what they refrain from doing.

In 2017 I set out to further research the idea of how collective care manifests in practice, by reflecting on my own work, and by talking to other artists, organisations and participants. I wanted to discover whether and how they saw collective care at work in their own methodologies and in the life of their projects. I looked for the identification of moments from practice that revealed interdependence, mutual care, and a sense of autonomy among participants. Knowing that participatory arts are often aimed at participants who have been identified by their needs, as "vulnerable" or "isolated," I was interested to discover what conditions fostered other-focussed behaviours. Where and how does collective care occur and what conditions are needed? What I witnessed in the example from Sutton House suggested that two things were necessary: trust and empathy within the group, and the artist's ability to step back and not have to be the one who knows what to do. This led me to explore understandings of kindness, the performance of care, and the idea of negative capability (Keats quoted in Rollins 1953, 193) a state of acceptance of not knowing, of accepting to be in a place of uncertainty in order to let "unimagined creative possibilities to emerge" (ibid).

Kindness, care and stepping back

People United is a UK Arts organisation which underpins all its work with the concept and practice of kindness. Research conducted by People United proposes that *kindness* (which has its roots in the old English noun *cyne*, meaning kinship, family) "arises from a sense of people being connected by force of common humanity" (Broadwood 2012, 3). People United suggest that kindness is fundamentally pro-social, using Penner et al's definition of pro-social as "an action that helps or benefits another person" (ibid. 4). They suggest that art-making's offer — to listen and take in the stories of others, to expand one's knowledge of oneself, to imagine new possibilities, to face up to inequities and challenges, to shape and to share, and to develop empathic skills — is an offer to enter a space where interconnectivity can be fostered and can flourish. Their thinking is rooted in action, and the company articulate the practice of kindness as "strong, profound, brave and often challenging" (Corri 2019, 5). This underlines the understanding that the act of care is active and robust, and that it challenges values of individualism and competitiveness.

Care ethicist Joan Tronto (Tronto 1993, 2011, 2013a) argues that caring is central to our lives and that it should be "viewed as a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible" (Tronto 1993, 103). This places care at the heart of any relational activity where there is a desire to "maintain, continue and repair" (ibid). The placing of care in social life as central rather than incidental suggests that this other-focussed behaviour is latent in most groups. Knowing this must affect how facilitation is enacted. Looking back at my own practice, I suspect there are times when my intervention in a tricky situation may have impaired the group's capacity to perform care itself; laying sole or superior claim to the caring role may have removed agency from others. For example, I can recall members of a group being far more effective than I was at persuading a fellow participant not to leave, but only after I had put a lot of effort into attempting to rescue the situation. In this instance I can see that it was better to have encouragement from the collective, the participants, than from the "other" — the facilitator. Tronto herself was concerned to address "a relationship of asymmetry: of someone who is in need and someone else who is helping them" (Tronto 2013b, 18) suggesting "[p]lurality, communication, trust and respect: solidarity – caring with" (Tronto 2013a, 35). This troubles fixed notions of the artist as the care-giver and the group as the cared for, especially if "caring with" is seen as potentially active in all the members of the group. In the example with which I began, the moment of "caring with" was very clear. One participant comforted another. The context is that of a group of older women, many of whom have shared the same experience. In her act of care, the woman stood in for the others, just as the weeping woman may have been expressing the grief of others. This connection between the self and the group suggests that the building of trust and a sense of common purpose are foundational to the growth of capacity for kindness and mutual care within a group. As well as the impact of the group sessions, singing and remembering together had created new bonds; there were connections between the women in the group at Sutton House that they brought in with them. This particular reminiscence session foregrounded an experience shared by many; they had "been there."

In the workshop at Sutton House, Lewendon started to move towards the woman who was crying, but then sat down again. Being able to step back and knowing when to share responsibility was, I suspect, an intuitive decision that she trusted because of knowledge and experience of working with this group. Her response, I suggest, may be read as an expression of "negative capability", a concept drawn from a letter written by the poet Keats to his brothers in 1817, "I mean Negative Capability, that is when a man (sic) is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (Rollins 1953, 193). This expression was taken up by psychotherapists, (see Bion 1970, 131) to describe the capacity of a therapist to stay with uncertainty while holding boundaries. Borrowing this notion to illuminate Lewendon's action highlights her capacity to both know what to do and to allow *others* to know what to do. She held back from being the expert in the room, creating a space of uncertainty and making way for the knowledge and skill of another. Psychotherapist Diana Voller describes this way of allowing inaction to be creative as being a "double agent." She writes:

> In the sense that psychotherapists have to be both unknowing and demonstrate
> clinical expertise/knowledge, have to be emotionally resilient and also be open

> to being discombobulated by the client, they need to develop an ability to work
> as double agents (Voller 2010, n.p).

This describes a delicate balance of holding and letting go. If I relate this to the way a group and a facilitator might work within the context of an applied theatre project, I suggest that the facilitator needs to attend equally to what not to do as to what they want to do. This requires them to be in a place of "negative capability," and not always "in control." Theatre scholars Monica Prendergast and Julianna Saxton's list of desirable qualities for a facilitator concludes by profiling "the kind of person who…is able to "de-centre"; in other words to see the work as about and coming from the participants rather than from him/herself" (Prendergast & Saxton 2013, 5). This "de-centring" is not "care-less," rather it removes the facilitator from the controlling centre of the work, placing them into the network, as part of it. It suggests that the facilitator needs to be care-full, and alert, in order to be able to let go. While Prendergast and Saxton are looking particularly at the creative project, this ability to let go can be present in all aspects of the work, the social time, the arrivals and departures, and the scaffolding of the project. In 2010, I worked as lead artist on performance project "Dressing Up!" for [Magic Me,](#) an intergenerational arts charity based in London. The group of 16 women aged between 14 and 80 explored how women's clothes express and define them, and in one session enjoyed a glorious day of dressing up, trying on clothes from a huge collection owned by guest artist Auriol Ramsay. Ramsay first asked people to choose an outfit for themselves, and to then choose something for a partner, to "dress them up." The second exercise was much harder; it meant really thinking about the other person, and negotiating issues of image, anxiety and identity. Free to observe, I watched as pairs of women carefully came to and from the dressing up box, trying things out, but also encouraging one another to be adventurous, to try something new. The care exercised between these women was robust as well as sensitive, and it struck me that this exercise carried a metaphor for participatory arts work. It moved between inviting people to "Show us who you are," and asking them, "Why not try this new thing?" The participants moved between self-direction, self-articulation and accepting the invitation to go beyond who they thought themselves to be. All of this was possible because Ramsay stepped back and allowed the group, indeed expected it, to exercise collective care. This is not the same as absenting oneself. Ramsay, myself and our co-facilitator, Surya Turner, were fully present, being "double-agents" as Voller puts it, who are holding the space while ready and willing to be surprised by what happens in it.

Collaboration and collective care: three case studies

All three case studies I have chosen have structures and values that encourage shared responsibility and care and are run in relational mode (Held 2006). Talawa Theatre Company's partnership with Kindred (a mental health project) was a new project, while both Entelechy Elders Company and Women for Refugee Women's drama group are projects that run long-term, although the participants may change. All three groups had recently worked on creating performances for the public, and all the artist/facilitators expressed a commitment to creative processes that fostered dialogue and centred participant experience. All of the participant groups — black adults with mental ill-health, elders, and women who are refugees and asylum seekers — have ongoing relationships with caring professions, medical, social, charitable and legal. Aspects of these relationships and the transactions they occasion enter the creative space

and are acknowledged and provided for in different ways; care can be enacted in practical ways (providing travel expenses, working flexibly with hospital appointments, connecting individuals to services), but is also evident in an ability to work with the whole person and what they bring into the room. In order to contextualise the case studies, I want to situate them geographically in their urban setting.

Most of my own work and the work that I look at here takes place in London. The capital city of the UK, London is a sprawling conurbation with a population of more than 9 million people. Steen Eiler Rasmussun, writing in 1937 described London as "The Unique City," arguing that it was different from all other European cities because of the lack of city walls (Rasmussen 1988). This has allowed the city to grow and expand, adapting, and absorbing people from all over the world, and from throughout the UK; to be home to a vast settled community. According to the London Councils' website, London's population is younger than in the rest of the UK, nearly two thirds (63 %) of Londoners are aged under 44, compared to just over half (53%) in the UK as a whole. The city is ethnically diverse, with settled communities who are white, black, South Asian and South East Asian in origin, as well as incoming migrants from all over the world. At the time of writing, its vibrant economy has been profoundly affected by the impact of measures taken to combat the effects of Covid19. 2020, an extraordinary year, also saw the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in the USA and the subsequent robust resurgence of anti-racist movements, and the final stages of negotiations to finalise the UK's departure from the European Community. In addition, we have seen a global rise in populist rhetoric, often marked by misogynism, racism and homophobia. While my research took place before all of these events, an understanding of London as a place of both belonging and dislocation is contextually important. In his study of London and Londoners, Professor Peter Hall found Londoners to be, overall, rather apathetic, politically. But he found that real engagement in community was evident on the local level. He describes this as "an extension of motherhood, and, in some cases, a way of getting involved in local community by people who […] feel a need for greater integration" (Hall 2007, 460). I suggest that his use of a gendered term, "motherhood" is shorthand for care, a quality and an action which I want to explore in my case studies. Creative projects are a space and place in which care can be localised, and enacted within the brackets of a time frame and a purpose; where there can be a focus on "a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible" (Tronto 1993, 103). The projects that I researched were all creative endeavours marked by this quality — a desire to maintain, continue and repair. In addition, they explicitly reference terms such as "creativity, care, wellbeing & community" (Entelechy 2021). Women for Refugee Women "has a strong emphasis on building confidence and community" (W4RW 2021), and Kindred Minds offers "mutuality, shared learning and friendship" (Kindred Minds 2021). While all the projects are built around a commonality — of age, ethnicity, gender, health, or refugee status — it would be wrong to assume homogeneity. In all three projects it is possible to see that there is an intention to build connection, and to experience "temporary community" (Mayo 2013).

Women for Refugee Women – hosting and guesting

Women for Refugee Women, (W4RW) is a charity and campaigning organisation that supports women who seek asylum in the UK. Rebecca Hayes Laughton set up weekly drama sessions in 2016, and has run them ever since, using the drama to improve the women's English, to build confidence, and also to create impactful performance. Whilst there is a strong sense of the responsibility taken by the organisation for the care of the women who come to the group, it is

also possible to see their attentiveness to one another. This springs partly from the shared experience of forced migration, but also because of choices made in how the work is run. Hayes Laughton describes her role not as leading, but "hosting." In an email exchange she wrote:

> I like to "host" drama sessions because for me it implies a respect and awareness of the guests' needs and identity. Whilst etiquette and manners can of course be excluding and discriminatory, for me it's a more ancient/fundamental and self-effacing way of hosting that I'm evoking: the status of the guest whose needs must be acknowledged, and the attendant responsibilities of the guest in answering the host (Personal communication Hayes Laughton 2017).

Visiting the W4RW drama group, I was struck by the importance of greetings. Each woman who arrived was greeted by everyone else there, whatever time they came. It was as if each person was named as they arrived and their proper place in the room confirmed. Crucially, the "hosting" was spread between the group members. While the word host implies welcome, it can also imply centrality. Whoever hosts is saying, "this is my house." What I saw was the whole group welcoming, and therefore co-hosting. As Hayes Laughton explains. "A drama workshop can provide space to play with who is hosting and who is a guest: in asking participants to lead/host their own activities (where I become a guest) we can share the pleasures and responsibilities of both roles" (Hayes Laughton 2017). Hosting and guesting are terms that are freighted with meaning for refugees and asylum seekers. They are present in the micro-realities of daily life, the macro narratives of displacement, and the constant negotiations with immigration officials, local councils, housing officers and Social Services. One woman, with whom I talked during a workshop, told me that she got told off where she lived for clearing up too much and told to sit down and relax. She explained that she was temporarily housed as a guest with a host family. Having been someone who managed a whole household in her home country, it was hard to now be permanently in the position of guest. Her host family's desire to "look after" her accentuated need and not capacity. However, in the world of the drama group, she was able to experiment more flexibly with the roles of guest and host. The flexibility was possible because Hayes Laughton was prepared to step back. While clear about her responsibility to hold a space for women whose lives may continue to be unsettled, despite nominally having reached a place of sanctuary, Hayes Laughton also took the risk of letting go of certainty. This structural embedding of a flexible hosting was evident. When one woman came with her tiny baby, she had a roomful of "aunties" to hold her little girl when she needed to get up to join in the drama. This was done with ease and no fuss. At another point, when the group were evaluating a recent public performance, the discussion was robust and critical. There was no shutting down of conversation about challenges that had emerged within the performance, and the group showed no sign of needing to "perform" unity and togetherness. No-one was being asked to behave like a visitor; instead, the whole group was taking responsibility. This brought the possibility for everyone to experience moments of discomfort as well as confirmation and learning, thereby building resilience and capacity. As Sarah Fox from People United notes, "People and projects thrive when there is space for disagreement and difference, but it needs to be handled with care and compassion rather than distrust, bias or even exclusion" (Fox 2019, 31).

The interchangeability of the roles of host and guest can bring a disruption of certainties with it. Alison Jeffers in Refugees, *Theatre & Crisis: Performing Global Identities* (2012) writes: "Hospitality involves risk, and for it to work both host and guest have to enter into a risky

relationship in which each poses a potential threat to the other because both host and guest have to enter into the "uncomfortable and sometimes painful possibility of being changed by the other" (Rosello, 2001 in Jeffers 2012, 51). This relationship is very much alive, rather than being known and fixed. In an exchange with Hayes Laughton after the workshops, she posed several important questions about this risky space, and the asymmetry of the relationship, asking:

> Can a theatre practitioner simply provide and then hold a space in a spirit of willingness to host conflicting, simultaneous, potential identities, and use the creative language of drama to explore them? How can seemingly unfathomable ruptures in human interrelation be explored through theatre and performance? There are several reasons why 'theatre as charity' may not provide this fertile and flexible space: charity can mean many things but here I use the term to mean a one-way interaction, an asymmetrical dynamic, where one party is seen as "in need" and the other party supplies an answer (however temporarily) to this need (Personal Communication, Hayes Laughton 2017).

In seeking to redress the balance, and look towards collective care, the W4RW group seeks to be a place that allows an iterative process of exchanging moments of care-giving and care-receiving. Hosting is recognised as a role that can be inhabited by many people, not a singly held responsibility. At the same time, the participants know that the organisation and the artist facilitating them are providing a space, a place and a structure that supports them. This is a space where skills and knowledge, balanced with alert uncertainty is one that makes room for collective care.

Kindred Minds: capacity focussed practice

Another project where the participants have clearly identified needs, in this case mental ill-health, is Talawa Theatre Company's work with Kindred Minds, a user-led project for black mental health service users. Talawa is the UK's primary Black Theatre Company. In addition to its touring shows, it offers a wide raft of work encouraging and developing black creatives, and leads work with marginalised black communities, with the aim of amplifying their stories and experiences. Like W4RW what is evident is an emphasis on capacity as well as need, which in this case was embedded in the structure of the project. In my interview with Gail Babb, then Head of Participation for Talawa, about her work over three years with Kindred Minds, she drew my attention to the fact that in the case of this project, Kindred Minds were the instigators and the hosts.

> The way the relationship worked was that they hosted us, as facilitators. Each week we arrived into them setting up tables and food for us, and the rest of the group. They requested that each session began with them bringing their news from the week, which took forever! (Personal communication Babb 2017)

The group already had a clear sense of identity before the project commenced, and members of the drama group met each other during the week in other sessions, doing other activities. This meant a level of knowledge about one another in the context of a lived experience of the mental health system, which engendered a deep level of acceptance. Babb and her co-facilitator, Arji Manuelpillai didn't set these frameworks. Instead, they worked with what had been established by the group, because the group knew what they needed and had established clear ground rules.

> There was great acceptance of whatever version of themselves arrived at each session. You could come and sleep, watch or join in. One person's meds meant that he would regularly have a week of lockjaw and slurred speech, before he returned to his normal self, and this was accepted by the group (Personal communication, Babb 2017).

The group's knowledge of one another and their shared experience of mental ill-health and the health system is the "we know" spoken by the woman who comforted her fellow participant in the opening example from Sutton House. Babb and Manuelpillai followed the lead of the participants; if they accepted many ways of participating, so should the artists. The values demonstrated by the host group showed a sense of alongside-ness, of solidarity, of not saying too much, of recognition and understanding, of witnessing. There was also a very clear understanding of who was bringing what to the group process. In an article for *Open Mind* magazine about the project, one participant wrote, "They, with their theatre expertise, would teach and facilitate, while we, with our mental health expertise, would set the agenda" (MIND 2012). The participants knew what they were bringing to the table.

> Gail and Arji had not worked with mental health service users before, while most of us from KM (Kindred Minds) had never worked with theatre people before. Learning was clearly going to have to be fairly rapid and two-way but knowing this from day one helped generate a sense of mutual respect, equality and commitment (MIND 2012).

This sense of exchange is a reminder that the facilitator cannot share all of the life experience of the participants. What is clearly important is that the knowledge and lived experience of the participants is recognised as expertise. The facilitator brings their skills and the participants bring theirs. However, Kindred Minds approached Talawa specifically because it is a black-led company. Not having to explain experiences of racism was crucial to the creation of a space where vulnerabilities and strengths could be shared.

> With everyone in the room being black or South Asian, participants could freely celebrate and laugh about aspects of their cultures, knowing they would be understood. They could share experiences of racism in and outside of the mental health system knowing they would be believed. Our shared identities took away, or at least minimised, the work of having to explain, the fear of being dismissed, and the pain this often causes. This connection and understanding were a crucial baseline for the relationships we created and the work we did together (Personal communication, Babb 2020).

The Talawa/Kindred partnership was built on a declared exchange of skills and understanding of needs, as well as a mutuality of experience. This required of them all, artists and participants, an active movement between what they already knew and what they wanted to know, creating a criss-cross of relatedness. While Kindred had made the invitation and were clearly the hosts, they needed the expertise that Talawa could bring in to increase their skills and knowledge and their ways of being together. Babb acknowledges that it was hard at first for the participants to play. "We played tentatively at first, returning to the same games each week – practicing playfulness. As the group relaxed into the games and developed their play muscles, they were able to take this into the devising process" (Personal communication, Babb 2020). Devising the performance meant that the group was always in charge of the material. "They had created the

piece together and they could recreate it if they wanted to" (ibid). I was interested to know more about how the facilitators had been able to encourage this sense of ownership, and I asked Babb what she had actively needed to do to foster a strong enough foundation to be able to work towards public performance.

> If you are creating from your head and your heart you need to set an atmosphere, ground rules. But you need to make it a group responsibility. I'm not sure how I do that. Modelling? Showing that I am not uncomfortable with discomfort, focussing on the collective (Personal communication, Babb 2017).

It's possible to see here a direct link between the way of developing work and the journey through to performance. The participants need to carry what they have learned in developing the work in a playful way into the more structured setting of a final performance. The making period of the process brings with it a structure that holds the shape of the group's work for a period of time. Once the scaffold of rehearsal is taken away, the sense of belonging and shared responsibility within a group is tested. When the artist/facilitators have stepped back, the performers are in charge. This can be a nerve-wracking moment for the artist/facilitators; a real moment of negative capability, "being in uncertainties" (Keats 1817 quoted in Rollins 1958). It is perhaps, quite simply a moment of trust. The trust is built on the experience of all the moments of collaboration and playfulness, and the skills learned. Nonetheless, the artists let go. Babb's example shows how the group continued to exercise collective care and responsibility within the public performance.

> Throughout the project one woman had said no to performance, but on the day of the show she decided she wanted to do it. The group agreed — they were genuinely excited that all members of the group were going to perform together. During the show, without warning, she stepped out of her place in a queue for medication in the fictional on-stage hospital, and did an impressive, improvised monologue. The group froze, waited for her to finish, and then restarted when she was done. When she began to sing during the curtain call, they all joined in. Not only was there acceptance of each other, there was celebration (Personal Communication, Babb 2017).

This ability to respond within the frame of the performance, I suggest, grew out of the care and co-working nourished within the group during the creative process. To echo Hepplewhite (in Preston 2016, 167) through the devising process the group had developed a sense of attunement to one another. They were able to act together without discussion, displaying anticipation and adaptation to a sudden, onstage development. They had awareness of one another and of the integrity of the performance, and respond-ability, learning from their first adaptation to the surprise of the monologue and responding again to the singing in the curtain call. Hepplewhite is writing about a facilitator's skills, but here these have become collective. They are evidence of a group who have inscribed the space with relatedness; individuals with significant health issues who know their own expertise and demonstrate collective care for one another and for the work they have created; they had shown that the space was theirs when they welcomed Gail and Arji in and they showed it again when they performed. As Amanda Stuart Fisher writes "[…] relationships of trust and openness are foregrounded, revealing how performance can generate a caring togetherness and a performed sociability, which implicates a group of individuals in a fluid exchange of responsiveness and mutual support" (2020, 61). In the case of Kindred that "fluid exchange" was already present and demonstrated through the performance.

Entelechy: the body of trust

Poet Pádraig Ó Tuama uses the Irish saying 'It is in the shelter of each other that the people live' as the basis of the title of his autobiographical reflection *In the Shelter: Finding a home in the world* (2015). This saying sums up what was noticeable in all the case studies, where a sense of belonging emerged in relation to the organisation, the project and also to one another. This was perhaps most clearly expressed by members of Entelechy's Elders Company. Entelechy Arts is a participatory arts company based at The Albany Arts Centre in the London Borough of Lewisham, that aims "to place arts practice at the heart of a process striving to achieve more equal, connected and engaged communities" (Personal communication, Slater 2017). According to AgeUK Lewisham is the fifth largest inner-city Borough in London, where 38% of pensioners live alone, and one in four older people live in deprivation. The organisation works with a wide range of participants, with projects including the ongoing "Meet Me at The Albany," a weekly creative event for isolated older people.

In November 2017 I met with nine members of Entelechy's Elders Company, all local older people, and Artistic Director David Slater. A theme that emerged immediately was their sense of being a company. They spoke about a strong sense of belonging, built through continuous creative challenges and the attention the organisation paid to individual needs and desires. Out of this shared sense of connection flowed identification with Entelechy. Significantly, they were not introduced to me as participants, but as Entelechy artists, which immediately positioned them not as the receivers of care and intervention but as co-creators within a process. In our discussion they spoke about there being "no stars" and "no individualism." At the same time, I was struck by many accounts of support for individuals when they needed it. The group told me that one reason why their group identity was so strong was that if someone could not attend (a performance, or a workshop they were leading), others would then step in. The project, the performance, the workshop, it seemed, was held up as the most important thing, and individuals worked towards this common goal. Nonetheless, each individual was important. As Slater pointed out in an email exchange about the project: "It's important that we have knowledge of each other. We're all here when we're not all here. Someone may have to be in Guy's Hospital or Lewisham Hospital but somehow your name is still in the room. If you can't make it, you are part of 'the body of trust." (Personal Communication 2017). "Body of trust" is an expression coined by one of the Company, Gwen Sewell, who likens the relationship she feels exists among group members to that of siblings. This is more than just a loyalty to an organisation, but also a responsibility for it and for its values. This feeling of belonging is reciprocal. It is not only about participants being "in the shelter of" Entelechy, but also in the shelter of each other. The group spoke about new performance ideas being thrown onto the table and then tackled and debated and sorted by everyone. "It's like a jigsaw puzzle; we all have an opportunity to join it up. The end product is never what we started with!" (Personal communication Kurban Haji 2017). The care is not created by a risk-free involvement with one another, but rather, a sense of adventuring together, with support. Through their long engagement with Entelechy, and repeated experiences of creating and performing together (and sometimes standing in for one another), the group have built the sense of collective care.

Entelechy has generated not only caring relationships but rather a network of collective care. As Tronto writes, "Care rarely happens between two people, only" (2013a, 153). Entelechy has established a shared sense of care that includes everyone. The network goes beyond a series of dyadic encounters and instead draws each and every member together within a web of mutually held responsibility and support. There was an acknowledgement of mutual need; not because they were more in need than anyone else, but because it was permitted to talk about need. "If

you don't talk, you'll die. We phone each other, we talk, we give hugs" (Personal communication Gwen Sewell 2017). The attention to relationship within the company, and the understanding of the importance of care and attention does not seem to make them inward looking. Instead, they are passionately committed to social justice and the spreading of an understanding of collective care into the systems and structures that deeply affect the lives of individuals. The group's performance work is a testimony to their passion to engage with systems and structures, and not just to the personal and quotidian. In their innovative work *BED* hospital beds, each containing a performer from the company playing a fictional older person, are wheeled out into public places, where the public can engage, or simply walk by. An audience member commented:

> Well, it's upsetting. There are a lot of people who are in that position and they
> are perhaps not visible and by having this interactive artwork on the high street
> it makes that visible to people. It brings it onto the high street in a way that you
> can't ignore. And in that sense, it's both a very successful artwork and distressing
> when you interact with it (BED Marketing Pack, Accessed 2020).

I met up again with Entelechy in 2018 to talk about another project, to discover that some old faces had moved on and new faces had joined. It struck me that what seemed to matter most, in terms of belonging, was not what people were told about being part of this company. More important was the way that it functioned, its way of life, when they were together. The performance of belonging, not its description, was what made it possible for the group to absorb new members and continue to show the same signs of embeddedness. "The body of trust" remained, even as the individuals in it changed. The company practice the "joyous affective solidarity" described by Thompson (2015, 440) that counters the isolation and disregard that many older people's experience.

Conclusion

I suggested at the start of this article that a sense of belonging and connection can strengthen participants' capacity to be confident in performing care, and that the artist's capacity to step back makes more space for this to happen. What emerges through the case studies is a richer, more interconnected picture. The sense of belonging and the growth of trust are interwoven with understandings of hosting, and the potential fluidity of the role of the host and therefore the guests. A focus on capacity and expertise among participants disrupts the carer/cared for dyad, and collective care offers an alternative to individualised, atomised ways of being. Collective care needs to be recognised and valued, in order to rebalance asymmetrical relationships. Solidarity is one of the words used by Tronto when she articulates her fifth ethical value of care, caring with (Tronto 2013a, 35). Solidarity carries a sense of investment in one another. Everyone involved in the project, the group, the temporary community can be a giver and a receiver, and everyone will need to be both at different times. This does not erase important differences; often some people in the space are paid and others are not; facilitators may carry recognised and unrecognised privileges, and any group member may be facilitated by access support. But this doesn't confine care to a particular donor, or to a relationship of saviour/victim. The notion of solidarity reclaims the collective and the desire to support others. This in turn can generate the conditions of potential empowerment. The performance of collective care is emotional, practical, supportive, encouraging, protective, vocal, and tacit. It demonstrates solidarity *with* others, and a respect for difference. Collective care is revealed in an acceptance of one another, as well as in a striving for excellence. When we don't make the space for the group to perform care for one another and for the facilitator, what is being

impaired? Voller suggests that the position of negative capability means "keeping a space for what is unique to emerge, rather than slipping into well-meaning, but premature understandings and solutions that avoid the discomfort and effort, but also the potential, involved in embracing uncertainty" (Voller 2010, n.p) Knowing that everyone in the endeavour is needed is the foundation for "collective care." What is important for those of us working in collaborative arts is the reminder that collective care challenges care relationships that inhibit the skills, knowledge, experience and sense of responsibility of the participants. Although I have begun to articulate the conditions and actions that can encourage this, I would also suggest that it is often happening, but we don't always notice it. The important growth in understandings of the complexity of the artist's role must not divert us from the capability and expertise in those we work with. When the woman in Sutton House said to her neighbour, "We know", she was voicing her expertise and capability, and the artist stepped back, trusting that the right person was taking responsibility at the right time.

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