

POSTSCRIPT. A CULTURAL RESPONSE TO CARE AFTER COVID-19

BRADFORD, 2020

It is December 2020 and like so many others, my work and family life has changed radically since the outbreak of Covid-19. While news of a vaccine has offered some much-needed hope, there is a great deal of uncertainty about the long-term impact of the pandemic. One thing that feels likely is that Covid-19 it will significantly change the way in which we look after people in care homes and the opportunities to bring arts practices into care spaces. The priority for care homes is protecting staff and residents, and the re-introduction of artists is something that will have to be negotiated safely and gradually. When artists do return, creative approaches may look different. Many of the practices outlined in this book such as tactility, object work, singing and hand to body contact may need to be re-imagined.

In response to social distancing restrictions, many practitioners are finding new ways to maintain relationships with care home residents during lockdown. Artists whose work was previously characterised by intimate encounters inside care homes have adapted their practice, creating work virtually, digitally, outdoors, up against windows, and through the post. In Milwaukee, *Timeslips* practitioners have organised, among other initiatives, the exchange of creative postcards which share ‘a hopeful poem, a

drawing, or a ‘beautiful question’. In Berlin, a group of ‘socially distanced clowns’ have taken to performing in courtyards outside residents’ bedrooms. In London, the intergenerational arts charity Magic Me have sent creative care packages to residents each month, and there are numerous stories emerging of residents being entertained by singers, dancers and poets outside doors and windows.

As well as demonstrating the commitment that artists have to maintaining relationships with care home residents, these small-scale interventions demonstrate the possibilities of a more physically distanced but equally as creative response to care. As artists learn more about the possibilities of ‘Zoom Theatre’, adapting theatre for podcasts, creating digital content and live streaming performances, there is the potential to bring a broader range of high-quality theatrical experiences to residents. This of course, requires technology such as tablets and a reliable internet connection—something which a lot of care homes do not yet have, but the impetus to fund technology in care homes, both as a means of social contact and access to creative activities, has never been greater. By exploring the perimeters of socially distanced live work in care homes, performance practitioners and residents may experience a range of new spaces such as courtyards, car parks and gardens, as creative spaces. With imagination, there is also the potential to create micro creative spaces indoors. A care home in York has been among the first to install a Covid visitor pod with an airtight glass screen and an intercom system to allow residents to meet their loved ones again. Strange as this might have sounded before the outbreak, inventions such as this may enable new creative spaces to emerge, and for artists, care staff and residents to interact in new ways.

These examples of practice offer a glimpse of how relationships between people and things may still be nurtured and maintained artfully in the context of social distancing and other infection control measures. We don’t have to look far for examples of community solidarity during Covid, and it is, in many cases, creative acts of care—the making of music on balconies, the curation of care packages for neighbours, the homemade rainbows for NHS workers—that has brought people closer together. Socially distanced relationships can never replace the sense of connection that comes with physical contact, but the pandemic has, perhaps, taught us something new about the art of care. As we look to heal and rebuild

communities of care after Covid, the notion of interdependence has never been more critical. The hope and connections that have emerged during the pandemic reiterate the importance of the arts in building and sustaining mutually caring relationships—both inside and outside of care settings.

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