



# **COUNTERFUTURES**

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Left thought & practice Aotearoa

**FOUR**

2017

# We don't have to be the building

Siân Torrington

**T**HE IMAGES INCLUDED in this issue are from a project in 2016 called 'We Don't Have to Be the Building'. In this project I researched diverse community stories about sexuality and activism producing assemblage art and writing in the light-boxes on Courtenay Place, Wellington.

I used a model of whakapapa for community histories from Homosexual Law Reform to today, and an informed consent model for participation. The research focused on lesbian, bisexual, queer, trans\*, takataapui, and female-identified activists, and ranged from archival research, drawing people, and workshops with discussions, drawing, and note taking.

I was interested in how, as queer and trans\* people, our activism comes through our bodies—in how we use them, present them, and are allowed to do so. One of the participatory activities was called 'Drawing it Out', where I invited people to what I called 'fully consensual life drawing'. People were invited to spend two hours each, in my studio, and they could move or

change pose wearing whatever they liked. I wanted to try and change the power dynamic of artist and model, placing agency and control with the person being drawn, and appreciating the privilege of drawing them.

I developed a variety of creative methods of inclusion: how to tell others' stories with consent, agency, and authenticity through a public art project. I worked with Tash Helasdottir-Cole to photograph a space we built at 'Out in the Park', where people could tell me their stories in exchange for the drawing I would make for them. All the way through I trusted other peoples' creativity to help me tell the stories.

In all of the content generating activities for the project the audience were also participants, with over 100 people involved, from historical voices speaking through the archives at the Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand at the Alexander Turnbull Library, to embodied creative research. Direct involvement, through contributing stories and experiences, created a powerful sense of ownership. This connected experiences to the history of this place, resulting in an interconnected open access art project.

## The search

I am an artist, queer, gender-queer, female. I have been taught to be quiet and frightened, to distrust my body. But it is the body we are building. Ways in, ways out. We build with what we have learnt, upon our history, our herstory.

It is fragmented with battles and silences. We don't know it. We look for it in fits and starts. We reinvent how to build and be warriors. We don't know how to hold each other because we forget how we didn't in the past. Our people teach us if we will listen.

## Calling

**5 March 2016—Drawing it Out** invites lesbian, bisexual, queer, femme, butch, takataapui wahine, trans\*, and female identified people to participate in an embodied research project on our sexuality. If you have experience of female identified sex, now, in the past, or would like to in your future, then this is for you! I'll draw whatever people offer me. It might be your finger, arm, dildo. The resultant assemblage drawings will help form a sense of what we want to show/conceal.

Seven people came; seven people were drawn; everyone came for a reason. Because they wanted me to draw fat bodies, trans bodies, bodies in which two genders live. Because they wanted to move; because they wanted to sit; because they were healing; because they were strong; because they still identify as a punk. Seven people. Two hours each. A space of sacred intimacy, in which our bodies and everyone they hold can get a chance to come on through.

This is us together.

## Creating space

In March 2016 we built a queer shelter at the 30th anniversary event 'Out in the Park', and people offered their wishes for our queer and trans\* futures.

I asked people to tell me a story—any queer or trans\* story. Lots of people said I don't know what to say, or I don't have a story. But as soon as they sat down, out it came. I drew what they told me. I put it on the page, and gave it to them afterwards. Because it belongs to them.

Who can help us to tell our stories?

There are so many things that we cannot say in everyday life. We need a church that is not a church. We need a place that says I hear you, I want so bad to hear you. Everything that has happened to you matters, what do you dream for our world? Everything about your twelve year-old self and how you survive the bullying. Everything about your secret name and everything you remember and everything you don't.

We need artist priests, matakite, witches, prophets, healers, seers. We need sacred places to hold that which is painful and precious and necessary. We need psychics and feelers and the transformation of art. We don't need any more white art church galleries with white walls and rules. We need responsive, temporary, open art sacred spaces where you are allowed to be. We need it to matter. We need to be believed.

I wanted to try and find a way.

## Communing

### **Let's Talk About Sex—2 March and 23 March 2016, 7.30-9pm Thistle Hall, Wellington**

A space to talk about our sex and sexuality in creative, sex and body positive ways.

The Homosexual Law Reform was about changing the law around sex for men. Many queer people of diverse identities protested and came together to work for that social change. The ways that I have sex have never been legislated against, but patriarchy did an effective job of controlling and silencing my sexuality.

If you are lesbian, bisexual, queer female identified, trans\*, mana wahine, takataapui, then this is for you. I have

more than one identity, and they have changed over time. Maybe yours have too.

We will talk, draw, and move together. I am an artist, and uninterested in interrogation. My life theme is expression, and that's what I want to do in this space. You will not be questioned about your self identification. You will not need to explain why you are here.

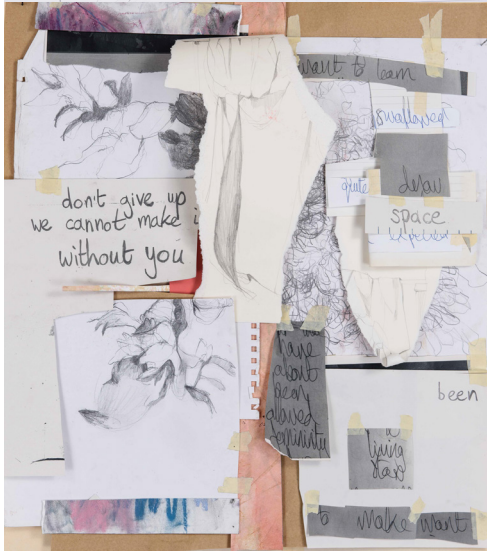
## Resisting

On 14 February 2016, the LGBTTTQI audience at Auckland's 'Big Gay Out' shouted and booed Prime Minister John Key off stage. Miss PinkkAlicious was at the front of that crowd.

Days earlier, in protest at the TPPA, a woman threw a dildo at Steven Joyce, and thousands of people marched across Aotearoa.

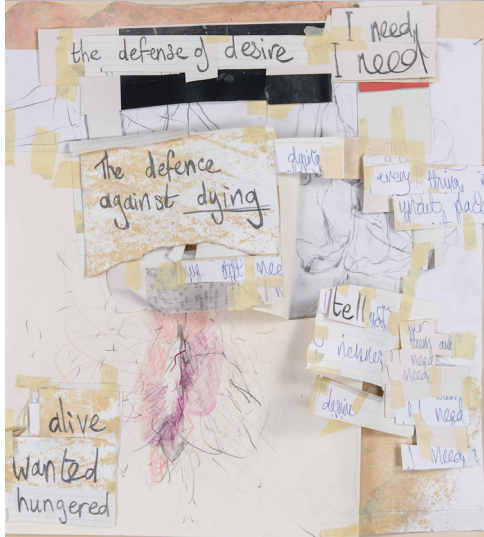
## Working

Today, I did my job as an artist. I created a space, invited people, and trusted what would happen.











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