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Poetry meets design pedagogy in The WoW Project: Collaborations on 'The Moving Poet' to 'start the conversation'

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Abstract:

The WoW Project – Words on Wheels; Words on Water – is a public transport poetry venture in development, seeking to bring poetry to Sydneysiders (and then others) commuting to work – on buses, light rail, trains, and ferries. The project attributes its genesis to two major public transport schemes in London and New York, where established and legacy poetry is displayed on posters throughout each city's public transport system. Locally, while upholding established and legacy poets, the project seeks to support new and emerging poets. Additionally, and importantly, the poetry in this project is interested in igniting social justice, equity, and advocacy issues – poetry to start a conversation.

'The Moving Poet' is the pilot product of The WoW Project, a collaboration between University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Creative Writing staff (former and current) and UTS undergraduate Visual Communication students. Throughout one semester in 2020, Creative Writing staff became clients of the students' simulated design company Salt Studio, collaborating at the intersection of text, image, and place. Staff stepped into a space unknown to them as the students designed 20 posters, thematically and conceptually framed, of poetry by eight Australian poets; developed social media interfaces; and produced teaser videos of the concept for pitching to potential funders and supporters. The collective goal, underpinning both practice and pedagogy, is to use these artefacts to provoke conversation about social injustice in a bid to incite discussion, particularly in an Australian context; to surprise commuters by 'scattering' poems in public places; and to generate further interactions from these poems through social media and digital responses.

Drawing on both the field of creative writing and its place within a design education context, this article traces the project from its inception, including its positioning within similar projects internationally, to writing and design collaboration, to its final stage of presentation of deliverables. It outlines the project's next steps, namely engaging with industry and community partners for full execution.

Biographical notes:

A journalist for more than forty years, working in Australia and the UK, Sue Joseph (PhD) began working as an academic, teaching print journalism at the University of Technology Sydney in 1997. As a Senior Lecturer, she taught in journalism and creative writing, particularly creative nonfiction writing. Now as Associate Professor, she holds an Adjunct position at Avondale University, is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of South Australia, and is a doctoral supervisor at the University of Sydney and Central Queensland University. Her fourth book, *Behind the Text: Candid Conversations with Australian Creative Nonfiction Writers*, was released in 2016. She is currently Joint Editor of *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics* and Special Issues Editor of *TEXT Journal of Writing and Writing Courses.*

Dave Drayton was an amateur banjo player, founding member of the Atterton Academy, and the author of *E, UIO, A: A Feghoot* (Container), *A Pet Per Ably-faced Kid* (Stale Objects dePress), *P(oe)Ms* (Rabbit), *Haiturograms* (Stale Objects dePress), and *Poetic Pentagons* (Spacecraft Press). He teaches at the University of Technology Sydney and Western Sydney University.

Dr Sarah Attfield is a lecturer in creative writing at the University of Technology, Sydney. Her scholarly work is focused on the representation of working-class experience in literature and popular culture, and her creative work draws from her own working-class background. She has published a book on working-class film, *Class on Screen: The Global Working Class in Contemporary Cinema* (Palgrave, 2020) and is currently working on a book about working-class representation in contemporary Australian literature. She is the co-editor of the *Journal of Working-Class Studies.*

Professor Craig Batty is Dean of Research (Creative) at the University of South Australia. He is the author, co-author, and editor of 15 books, including *Script Development: Critical Approaches, Creative Practices, International Perspectives* (2020), *The Doctoral Experience: Student Stories from the Creative Arts and Humanities* (2019), *Writing for the Screen: Creative and Critical Approaches (2nd ed.)* (2019) and *Screen Production Research: Creative Practice as a Mode of Enquiry* (2018). He has published book chapters and journals articles on the topics of screenwriting practice, screenwriting theory, creative practice research, and doctoral supervision.

Keywords:

Public transport, community, advocacy, conversation, public spaces, poetry

Introduction

'The best poetry belongs quite naturally in a public space.'

—Chernaik (2013b)

The WoW Project – Words on Wheels; Words on Water (perhaps one day, Words on Wings) – came into existence towards the end of 2019. Inspired by a staff member's trip earlier that year to New York and a stumble across a beautifully illustrated poem by Arthur Sze called *The Owl*, mounted within a subway carriage on its way from Brooklyn to Manhattan, the idea to exhibit poetry throughout the New South Wales (NSW) train system grew. It was pitched at a Creative Writing staff research meeting, with the authors of this article coming on board as team members, along with former colleague Adjunct Professor Debra Adelaide as creative consultant. Adelaide had already developed the project Empathy Poems (2021), which took a similar social justice stance to that of this project. Inspired by the potential of poetry to move readers, especially towards conversation and potential action, public transport – and specifically, the NSW transport region – became a powerful platform for the project to develop. This project concurrently contributes to the practice of public transport poetry and our aim is that it will launch further development.

The WoW Project gladly attributes its genesis to two Transport Poetry schemes – London's Poems On The Underground, established in 1986, and New York's Poetry in Motion, starting in 1992. While other poetry in place projects exist –the Poetry on the Wall scheme in Leiden and Belgium (1997–2005); and Papatheodorou and Dimitriadis' 2012 poetry hunt through the streets of Athens, enabled by QR codes (Papatheodorou & Dimitriadis, 2013, p. 11) – the London and New York transit-based projects are the impetus for The Moving Poet.

As an ongoing collaboration between the London Underground and The Poetry Society in the UK, Poems On The Underground is called 'one of Britain's most successful public art projects' (The Poetry Society, 2021). This collaboration includes public meetings, publication of poetry anthologies, and merchandising. In the 10th edition of *Poems On The Underground*, the editors write:

> When we began to scatter poems in public, we had no idea how people would respond … poetry thrives on paradox, and the poems seemed to take on new life when they were removed from books and set among the adverts. (Benson et al., 2001, pp. xxv-xxvi)

Likewise, in New York, Poetry in Motion is a collaboration between the Metropolitan Transport Authority (MTA) of New York Arts and Design and the Poetry Society of America. The Poetry Society of America claims: 'Poetry in Motion® is today one of the most popular

public literary programs in American history' (2021, para. 10). Through these antecedents, transport poetry is now global. Benson et al. write: 'poems on trains and buses are now part of the urban landscape in cities across the world' (2001, p. xxvii). Later they explain:

> …travellers, whirling through the dark to their destinations, may discover consolation or diversion from a poster displaying, quite simply and clearly, a poem. Once transported back to earth, they may emerge with a lighter heart, stronger and richer for the experience. (Benson et al., 2004, p. 14)

There have been transitory schemes in Australia (see Literature Review, below), but these schemes have been relatively short-lived, sometimes based around a specific festival or annual art event. Further, none of these have had a specific mandate to invite commuters to engage in social justice issues, especially in spaces such as train carriages, usually used for advertising. As such we set out to establish a potential permanent scheme in NSW, starting with Greater Sydney. The first two well-established transport poetry schemes, firstly in London and then New York, promoted well-known and legacy poets. For our pilot project, we decided that it would be more interesting and innovative to combine established poets with emerging poets, celebrating new voices as well as recognised voices, and always selecting poems that have a strong social justice underpinning.

Working from within the academy, the opportunity for collaboration firstly within our own institution, then outwardly with government agencies, was a natural vision. In order to achieve both a brand/vision for the project and a set of materials that we could use to pitch for financial and in-kind buy-in, we decided to set up a cross-faculty collaboration with the School of Design; specifically, with students of one of the capstone subjects in the Bachelor of Design in Visual Communication. In order to be engaged as a client of this subject, we pitched to take part in a Student Community Coursework project run by UTS Shopfront, located in the Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion.

The pitch was successful and in August 2020, we began work with six Visual Communication students – Salt Studio – who designed and developed The Moving Poet as the pilot product of the WoW Project. We presented The Moving Poet to the NSW Transport Public Art Working Group (PAWG), and from there to Create NSW. We are currently working with Create NSW to take The Moving Poet pilot forward.

This paper first looks at transport poetry worldwide, before then unpacking our collaborative processes within our institution, including with the students, and finally with government agencies. Our venture was not without its challenges and disappointments, coinciding as it did with the onslaught of Covid-19; but even this offered opportunities for discussion and persuasion in negotiating a space and place for poetry throughout the transport system of NSW. We see this project as a rolling, longitudinal collaboration between the tertiary sector and major

cultural and government bodies. As Benson et al. write: 'It is strange to think that a project that began so casually is now part of urban history, the subject of academic theses and government surveys of Great Art For Everyone' (2009, p. xviii). Accordingly, we believe the project has scope to grow, creating links between industry and academia, government and creative practice, with the potential for unique and ongoing cultural collaborations and outputs for social change, perhaps nationally.

Literature Review

This literature review focusses specifically on global transport poetry. It was presented to the Salt Studio students in a bid to demonstrate to them the breadth and depth of international engagement in the field, so as to firmly contextualise and then inspire their design aspirations. The first of its kind, London's Poems On The Underground program has run continuously since 1986, when it launched with an event at Aldwych Station on The Strand. As Crawshaw writes, the launch was met with 'fulsome plaudits by the London Press and has continued to elicit the affectionate enthusiasm of Tube travellers ever since… The idea has done more than strike a chord. Its appeal has been global' (2015, p. 2). While much of the information about the project and its launch is recycled in the introduction to various anthologies released throughout the years, these forewords provide a snapshot of the various related projects that have emerged.

In the Introduction to the inaugural anthology, *Poems On The Underground* (1991), just five years after the program's launch, the editors note the impact of its success and early imitations and partnerships: 'Similar projects have sprung up elsewhere in Britain and abroad, with poems riding public transport systems in Newcastle, West Yorkshire, Dublin and Stuttgart, and decorating bus and railway platforms in Vienna and Melbourne' (Benson et al., 1991, p. 16). By the time of the eighth edition of the anthology more cities were added to the list: New York, Paris, Dublin, Stuttgart, Barcelona, Athens, Shanghai, Moscow and St. Petersburg, in capital cities in Scandinavia and Australia (Benson et al., 1998, p. 19). The most recent anthology adds to this list: '…offering poetry to a mass audience on public transport has spread to cities across the world, from Dublin, Paris, Stuttgart, Helsinki, Stockholm, Vienna and Madrid to Prague, Warsaw, Moscow, Melbourne, Shanghai and Beijing' (Chernaik et al., 2015, p. xxiii).

Earlier editions, published by Cassell, include a *Notes to The Poems* section, which gives further insights into the various collaborations, competitions, and offshoots of the program throughout the years. These include but are not limited to performances (a twelve-hour Remembrance Day reading at St James's Church, Piccadilly in November 1986; annual readings at the British Library as part of the Stefan Zweig series, and at various other venues including the Barbican Library, the London Transport Museum, Conway Hall, the Italian Cultural Institute, Keats House, the British Library, St Michael's Church Highgate),

exhibitions (at the University of London Library), workshops (workshops at schools, libraries, and other public places and institutions), collaborations (with the Apollo Chamber Orchestra [new poems for a performance of Saint-Saens's *Carnival of the Animals*; musical settings for love songs by W.H. Auden and Maya Angelou; a rock score for a reading of Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market', performed at the National Portrait Gallery and videoed for the British Library; new arrangements of 'The Cries of London' by Orlando Gibbons, and Sir John Betjeman's London Poems, with music by Jim Parker]; with City of London Festival for Evelyn Ficarra's London Cries), competitions (for school children; for poems on Urban themes; for young poets), and extensive publications (regular print anthologies, freely downloadable PDF chapbooks of themed selections, and CDs) (Benson et al., 2001; Benson et al., 2004; Benson et al., 2006).

Launched in 1992 in New York, Poetry In Motion, the North American equivalent of Poems On The Underground, has sporadically spread to other US cities including Washington, DC, Chicago, Los Angeles, Portland, Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore, Boston, Dallas, Fort Collins, Houston, Iowa City, Philadelphia, and Pioneer Valley. Like Poems On The Underground, this program also publishes anthologies of the work displayed on public transport (Quinn, 2017; Paschen & Fletcher Lauer, 2002; Peacock et al., 1996). Currently, the program is active in New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Nashville, and Providence (Poetry Society of America, 2021).

The consistent delivery, reach, and extensive global collaborations of the London and New York approaches make them the most recognisable and successful English language public transport poetry programs to date. Chernaik writes:

> It's a simple idea that appeals to a wide swathe of the travelling public, an implicit contradiction of the assumption that poetry is an elitist art… The tube poems are popular because they offer an escape from the combined pressures of advertising and daily work. They invite the traveller to share the dreams and visions of another human being, speaking across time and place. The best poetry belongs quite naturally in a public space. (2013b, para. 9)

Elsewhere in North America, and inspired by Poetry In Motion, programs are also run in Canada: Halifax and Calgary (Al-Hakim, 2019; Walton, 2018), and in Vancouver, where the Poetry In Transit program has run for 24 years (Association of Book Publishers of British Columbia, 2021).

In South America since 2000, the Chilean city of Santiago has run Santiago en 100 Palabras, a competition for stories of 100 words or less about life in Santiago, with winners published on metros and trains. Started in 2004 in Bogota, Colombia, the Libro al Viento program provides a free anthology of short literature and poetry distributed on public transport networks

(Schwartz, 2016). That same year a similar program, titled *Para Leer de Boleto en el Metro*, launched in Mexico City (Para Leer en Libertad, 2021).

Poetry also appeared on buses in the Chinese cities of Chengdu, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Nanjing in a 2017 British Council sponsored project that included classical and contemporary British and Chinese poetry (Luo, 2017).

The Australian situation has seen a more sporadic implementation of mostly short-term programs placing poetry on public transport in different regions. Moving Galleries, funded by Connex, the Department for Infrastructure and the Committee for Melbourne, was launched in 2007 following a pilot the previous year, and throughout three years provided emerging and established Victorian artists and poets the opportunity to display work on Melbourne's trains. During the 2008 program only one type of poem, the three-line 'rooku' (an Australian variant of the Japanese haiku) was chosen: 36 poems were selected from more than 1000 open submissions (Francis, 2008).

More recently, the Red Room Poetry organisation facilitated a number of projects incorporating the display of poetry on public transport. In 2017, as part of the New Shoots program, poems by Maria Takolander and Bonny Cassidy were published for a few weeks on trams near the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria (Red Room Poetry, 2019a; Francis, 2017). In 2018, the Tumbalong Gatherers program saw work by First Nations poet Joel Davison displayed on five Sydney trains from June to August (Red Room Poetry, 2019b). The Student Poetry on Buses program, run as part of Red Room's Poetry In First Languages initiative in both 2018 and 2019, saw poems selected from entries by school-age participants in facilitated workshops, displayed on the back of buses (so not readable for bus-riders). In 2018 poems were created in workshops on Dharawal Country and displayed on five buses throughout the Illawarra region. The 2019 poems were displayed on buses on Gundungurra Country in the NSW Southern Highlands (Huntsdale, 2018; Primmer, 2019).

To differentiate from the above Australian examples, our project aim is to create ongoing transport poetry collaborations with stakeholders, and as mentioned above, to celebrate both legacy and emerging writers. We also aim to extend beyond NSW and collaborate with other universities, modelling our pilot project as a prototype.

Process

We began this project with a series of meetings with the Creative Writing staff team, discussing what we wanted to actually 'say' and achieve. We decided we were all interested in the concept of a social justice through-line – we wanted not just the aesthetic power of the poetry on display,

but also the capacity of the words to effect change in some way; at least contribute to and further discourse and discussion, a concept which developed into what became the WoW Project's tagline, to 'start the conversation'. We each set about choosing two to three poems for the pilot: 'When you walk this land do you notice the tracks of my people', Elizabeth Hodgson; 'Municipal Gum', 'Understand Old One', and 'A Song of Hope', Oodgeroo Noonuccal; 'Don't@me', Alison Whittaker; 'Oh, Sydney' and 'Train', Jill Jones; 'Poem', Martin Harrison; and 'Feeling free looking divine', Michael Farrell. To these we added two poems from the Empathy Poems 'poems of compassion for refugees and people seeking asylum around the world' project, curated by Debra Adelaide. She chose 'Bodrum Beach' by Danny Vendramni and 'In Flanders Field' by John McCrae. Then, we set about getting consent from the poets, and estates of our two deceased poets, Oodgeroo Noonuccal and Martin Harrison.

Each of the chosen poems depict a specific tone and evoke intense visual elements, techniques we believe would attract and hold commuters' attention. As Hubbard et al. write: 'The inclusion of art and aesthetic elements in a coordinated approach can enhance the transportation infrastructure and its contribution to the community' (2010, p. 168). We want the specific contribution of our selected texts to engage people and inform them, hopefully making them think about burning societal issues and start conversations with friends, workmates, and family. As Baker tells us: 'Poetry has an elite and ephemeral representation and reputation, whereas actually it can be very accessible and real. Times change, but the power of poetry as an educating and emotive art form doesn't' (2013, para. 7).

Negotiating public space with NSW Transport to curate a selection of poetry posters was never going to be easy – particularly as this coincided with the Covid-19 storm in 2020. Our first real contact with Transport NSW was 16 March 2020, when we met with Gina Groves, Senior Manager – Customer Environments at Transport for NSW. That was also the day the university was 'paused' in order to manage ongoing logistics brought on by government protocols regarding Covid-19. The following week, campus was emptied and everyone was working and studying from home on Zoom.

But we persevered. The first step was to pitch the idea of the WoW Project to academic Nicola Hardcastle, coordinator for the past four years of the capstone subject Socially Responsive Design, run in Spring semester as part of the Bachelor of Design in Visual Communication at UTS. This subject is one of two core subjects in the final year of the undergraduate degree. We met in May and the coordinator explained the procedure, suggesting we could become one of the clients for the Socially Responsive Design subject, and put us in touch with Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion, which runs the Student Community Coursework projects via its UTS Shopfront entity. UTS Shopfront has worked with the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building on student projects for the past 25 years. We had to pitch our ideas – project description, concept, aims, expected outcomes, and vision – in an official application to

Shopfront (May 8). This was a competitive pitching, with 35 applications. Thirty proposals were accepted, four from within UTS and 26 externally. Mehal Krayem, Operations Manager at Shopfront, explains the criteria used to select clients:

> The organisation needs to be 'small to medium' not-for-profit, or, when it comes to internal projects, they must have a strong social justice focus. For internal projects, they cannot have large amounts of funding attached to them. If they do, we encourage you to pay for the services. This is also why we don't work with larger not-for-profits. The project must offer reciprocal benefit to the organisation and to the students. This means it needs to fit with the learning outcomes of a Shopfront subject. (M. Krayem, personal communication, February 11, 2021)

The project had to be practical enough to complete within the 12-week semester, and pitched at an appropriate level for undergraduate students – not too hard or complex; not too simple. On June 24, Krayem contacted the team to let us know we were accepted as a client, and sent a briefing form to fill out, explaining further our project for the students, including target audience, what we hoped to achieve with the project, budget, and resourcing needs. In early July there was further correspondence setting out dates for meetings with the students and what was required of us for some of these meetings – for example, the Clients' Support 'Immersive Experience'.

We were contacted by the student team leader David Thane on July 30. He introduced us in his email to his team – Georgia Urie, Kayla Gilbert, Jiayao Wang, and Yake Zhao – attendant with our first team Zoom meeting invitation for the following week (August 6). From this point, we met each week with the students, at the same time, for approximately one hour on Zoom. The students' academic coordinator Nicola Hardcastle came to the first meeting for a short time to meet our team.

The student team, soon to be known as Salt Studio, immediately began researching transport poetry, and came up with the concept of The Moving Poet. The student team wished to rename The WoW Project, offering us four names to choose from, more readily identified through social media. But the academic team instead wished to retain The WoW Project, and chose The Moving Poet as its social media product. The Salt Studio narrative for The Moving Poet was:

> This name leaves us room to get playful and invent a kind of archetype around who the moving poet is. It allows us to define the audience in our own way, positioning them as the poets themselves, encouraging collaboration and connection. As well as this, 'moving' encapsulates all kinds of transport, yet could also refer to more than the literal sense, as it could mean moving in terms of progression, development, shifting etc – the very aim of WoW (August 12).

And so The Moving Poet was born.

The following week Salt Studio presented us with a Reverse Client Brief, describing what it felt we were aiming for with our project, and relaying back to us what it thought our vision was. There was a chance to edit and to refine their understanding of what the academic team was aiming for with the Wow Project, then we all signed.

Each week Salt Studio presented the academic team with its research and concepts, including discussing issues such as audience and competitors, prototyping, and branding including logo and tagline, font size, colour palette, collateral, visual elements, and social media ideas. The tagline of 'start the conversation' was inspired, honing it to the core of our aims. The students identified four themes from our selection of poetry: Indigenous land, refugee situation, environment, and the human experience. They set about designing 20 posters, breaking some of the longer poems up across two or three, all connected by a dynamic design based on the outline of the Sydney rail map (see Figure 1).
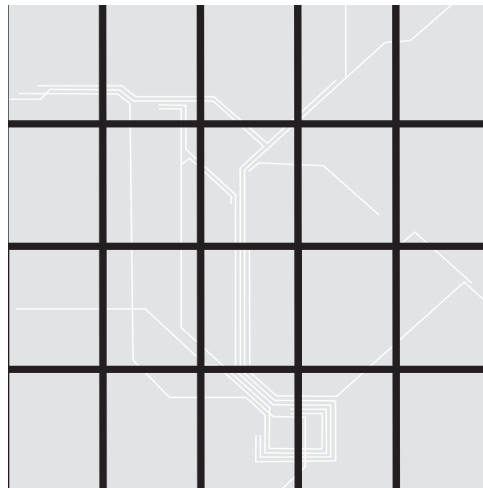

Figure 1. Sydney rail map overlays 20 poster grid

On October 1, the students presented their interim progress, including the poster design and its versatility. The poetry posters were designed for use in portrait as well as landscape, to be static, rolling, or digital, and also billboard adaptable (see Figure 2).

This poetry poster work was also adapted for a future social media campaign, with dynamic video and sound effect, across Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. As Chernaik writes:

> I like to think of tube travellers today stepping on to a train, reading a poem and then aiming their phone cameras at it – allowing these words to reach an even wider circle of family and friends, long after the journey's end. (2013a, para 6)

Figure 2. The posters

Social media is an ideal medium for the potential spreading of the WoW Project and The Moving Poet, to reach further and deeper into the community at an intuitive and organic pace (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Instagram mock-up

The final presentation and deliverables hand-over was on October 22, held as a group seminar on Zoom, where we had the opportunity to view other student work as well as our own project.

Salt Studio made a professional, polished, thoughtful, vibrant, and creative presentation. All five students received a High Distinction.

Collins explains to Quinn how taking up advertising space on public transport with poetry changes the space. He says:

> The poem is clearly different from everything else on the train. The advertisements, of course, are selling all kinds of things, but the poem is not selling anything except itself, declaring its own existence right there before your eyes. The poem is not a pitch, but an offering, a gift. If its singular presence, not in a book with other poems but on a subway car, seems incongruous, it's because it stands apart from the business of 'getting and spending'. The poem is free – in more ways than one. (Collins as cited in Quinn, 2017, p. xvi)

We intend to utilise this space with the power and lyricism of poetry to 'start the conversation', aiming to engage the public in discussion and debate about burning issues of the day. We hope to refresh the poetry selection each year.

After the hand-over on October 22, we were invited to make a presentation to the NSW Transport Public Art Working Group (PAWG). We worked with one of the students from Salt Studio, Georgie Urie, from November 5 onwards, to develop a 10-minute presentation. On November 18, we made the presentation to the PAWG Committee, and from there, were invited to re-present The Wow Project's Moving Poet on November 23 to Create NSW. Create NSW is a state government agency, within the Department of Premier and Cabinet, missioned to further the NSW government's vision 'for NSW to be known for its bold and exciting arts and culture that engages the community and reflects the state's rich diversity' (Create NSW, para. 2).

Outcomes/future

From the beginning of the conception of the WoW Project, the staff team discussed the potential partners to facilitate its realisation onto public transport. The project needed space on train carriages or buses and we planned for this space as in-kind support by relevant organisations. The team brainstormed possible partners and stakeholders and identified a number of potential organisations, and set about finding contact details and organising meetings. Benson et al. tell us: 'London Underground was surprisingly responsive to our suggestion that they provide unlet spaces for free for this civic purpose' (1991, p. 13). We hoped for a similar response from NSW Transport.

Our initial lead was a Senior Manager in the Customer Environments at Transport NSW. We met on 16 March 2020 and presented our idea, which at this stage was still in the concept phase. The manager was interested. Our argument was that poetry on public transport was of benefit to passengers and was also an excellent PR opportunity for Transport NSW. Schwartz writes: 'These programs insert stories into public space to enhance social interaction and develop a positive sense of local belonging. Literary reading is harnessed as a socially embedded practice that can facilitate change' (2016, p. 181). Another idea we pitched was about the cognitive nourishment that poetry can provide. Louis-Dreyfus, talking about Poetry in Motion, tells Paschen and Fletcher Lauer: 'the poems are like resting places along the road, each with its own portion of intimacy, calm, wisdom, and nourishment. In their display and gathering, poetry has found an additional use' (2002, p. xxii). This sentiment also furnished part of our pitch to Transport NSW.

The senior manager committed to taking the idea to the marketing team for a budget breakdown. But the week we met was also the week Australia began its lockdown due to Covid-19. As mentioned above, on the day of this initial meeting, UTS notified staff and students that all face-to-face teaching was 'paused', to resume the following week online. Academics and supporting staff had a matter of days to convert their on-campus classes to online and this work was prioritised over all other projects.

Despite this interruption, we eased our way into our new 'Covid normal'. We tried to contact NSW Transport several times throughout the next few months again but without success. Eventually the senior manager did respond, only to tell us that the time wasn't right for such a project due to Covid restrictions and the current uncertainty. We understood that this lead would need to be put on hold. As Hubbard et al. explain: 'in a climate of tight budgets, most agencies are looking for ways to reduce the scope of projects ... In a climate of severe fiscal constraint, it may be difficult to initiate a new art initiative' (2010, p. 170). This is like stating the obvious but was more than pertinent for our team. The disruptions caused by Covid were unique and monumental, ravaging business models worldwide. Clearly, there were few passengers using public transport during the lockdown in Sydney, devastating NSW Transport resources. But in October 2020, we had a chance conversation with a casual academic at UTS, discussing our project and the problems we were facing with securing a commitment from Transport NSW. The colleague mentioned that she had a contact at Sydney Metro, an offshoot of Transport NSW, and put us in touch with a Senior Manager of Urban Design there. We spoke to the senior manager and once again, interest was sparked. As a result, we were invited to the November meeting of the Transport NSW Public Art Working Group (PAWG) to make a presentation on behalf of the WoW team. This was followed with an invitation from the Senior Manager of Strategic Projects and Engagement with Create NSW (the NSW government's arts policy and funding body) to present the WoW project idea at a Create NSW meeting. The identification of these potential partners was motivating for the WoW Team. We presented the project to Create NSW on November 23, 2020.

This process and timeline highlights the often serendipitous nature of success. As Benson et al. write, 'poetry thrives on paradox' (1991, p. 14). Paradoxically, in line with this sentiment – if the chance conversation about the project with the casual colleague had not happened, the further contact with Transport NSW via Sydney Metro, and then Create NSW might not have happened.

Other changes occurred directly related to Covid disruptions. By the end of 2020, three members of the WoW team were no longer employed by UTS. Two found opportunities elsewhere and a fixed-term contract was not renewed for a third team member; he returned to casual academic status. This change in staffing meant a rethinking of the project and how the team would manage the potential partnerships. There is a certain level of privilege that comes with an academic position, beneficial when seeking access to relevant organisations and government departments, but it is hoped that the relationships built by us with Transport NSW, Metro Sydney, and Create NSW will continue. One academic moved from Sydney to Adelaide to take up a new position, providing some possible opportunities to broaden the initial scope of the project outside Sydney sooner than we first thought possible. These all need exploration and new leads identified. The changes might have slowed the progress of the project at the time it was gaining momentum, but the disparate team remains committed to the idea of placing poems on public transport and using the products created by the student team, Salt Studio. As Hubbard et al. cite from a 1995 circular about the use of design and art in transit projects:

> … good design and art can improve the safety of a facility, give vibrancy to its public spaces, and make patrons feel welcome. Good design and art will also contribute to the goal that transit facilities help to create livable [sic] communities. (2010, p. 169)

We would like to add that liveable communities include those where individuals engage with art and begin talking to each other about deep issues of the day, both in person or via social media. As Benson et al. write about their poetry scheme on the London Underground:

> We have been credited in official Government surveys with inspiring a renewal of the art and appreciation of poetry; more people are writing poetry than ever before, more poetry titles are published, more poets performing in pubs and shopping malls, reciting alongside jazz bands and string quartet. (1998, p. 19)

This too would be an achievement for a team of creative writing academics – reinvigorating the love of poetry in society.

Conclusion

While this is still a project in development notwithstanding its student outcomes, collateral produced, and connections with potential sponsors, we feel that it provides a good model for others looking to collaborate with non-creative writing departments and faculties, and to further develop the field of practice of public transport poetry. Certainly, for the staff members involved, seeing the poems transform from text (and spoken word) to fully executed design brief was an experience in and of itself. While all staff members involved have been published and produced widely, working with designers specifically – who were able to distil the core thematic aims and translate them into a visual product that went far beyond mere illustration – added a new level of understanding and appreciation of the potential of another discipline to take words into a new realm. Indeed, designing a product that would allow the words to start a conversation.

Partnering with UTS Shopfront and the Socially Responsive Design class provided this evolving project with the support and inspiration needed to get it off the ground, as well as creating a strong teaching and learning approach for the student team (and by proxy, the Creative Writing team). We needed to create a pilot to inform future grant applications to continue this project annually. Public Transport poetry is found throughout the world – we really believe it should be here in Australia, in order to nourish commuters and travellers and showcase and honour the importance of the creative arts. Once people begin to use public transport again post-Covid-19, we hope these poems will bring some joy and enrichment to an otherwise fraught public space. As Benson et al. write, 'Indeed, it could be argued that people turn to poetry even more when their usual assumptions about life are overturned … [poetry] often offers ways of understanding the troubled present and its relation to an equally troubled past' (2006, p. 11).

And as Hubbard et al. remind us, not only does art add a human dimension to transit, it may also 'help build ridership, enhance the acceptability of transit services as a positive element in neighbourhoods, moderate community concerns about disruption due to construction, improve passenger comfort and safety, and reinforce the spirit of the community' (2010, p. 170). For this project, which we hope will be fully executed and grow to other transport networks in Australia, the need to start a conversation about issues important to the nation's cultural and political fabric is never more pressing, and what better way to achieve this than putting poetry on the move.

> Such unexpected encounters with poetry can provide a sudden sense of mental and even spiritual nourishment by connecting us with the deeply human realms of love and loss, joy and death, as well as reminding us that beyond the routine of our daily travel there

lies the wider world of clouds and onions, plums and antelopes, rivers and hedgehogs – the great sensorium of human experience. (Collins as cited in Quinn, 2017, p. xvii)

Acknowledgements

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