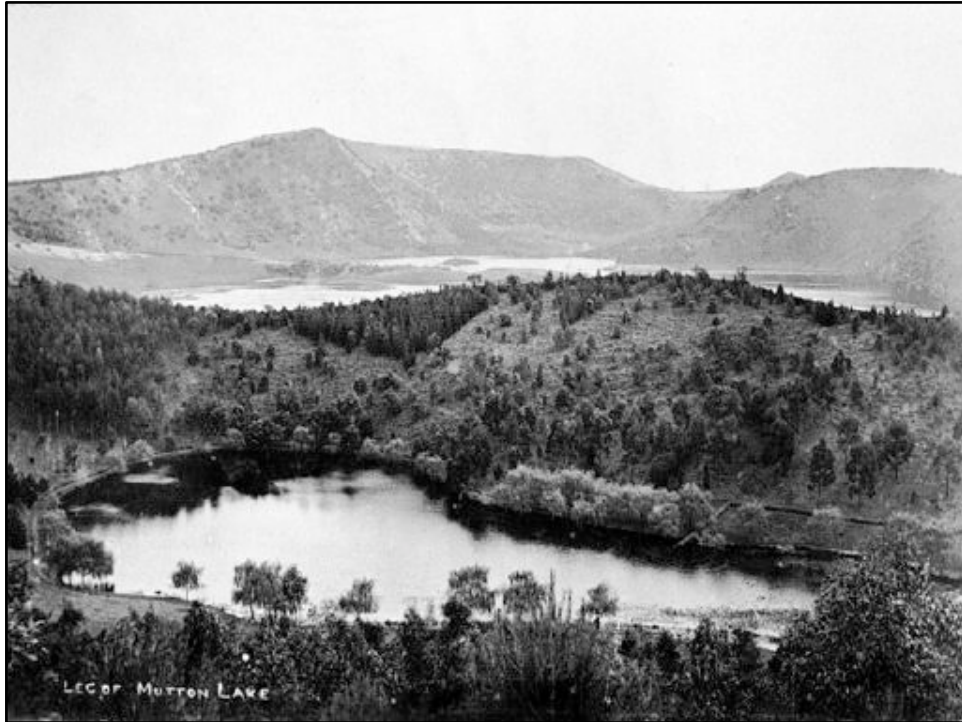


Speculative Culture

Weather Lore



I grew up at the foot of an dormant volcano, it is just sleeping, it could wake up at any time...Mt Gambier..

So as a child the threat of impending environmental disaster and change in my world felt quite close. Each morning I opened my curtains to the site of the small mountain on the horizon... I checked that it hadn't exploded in the night.

More uncertain—but possible—outcomes of an increase in global temperatures include increased risk of drought and increased intensity of storms, including tropical cyclones with higher wind speeds, a wetter Asian monsoon, and, possibly, more intense mid-latitude storms. (**The Impact of Climate Change on Natural Disasters** http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/Features/RisingCost/rising_cost5.php)

Currently the media blames climate change for almost every natural disaster. So in times of increasing climate change, my eye is now rarely off the volcano – I am using the volcano as a metaphor for catastrophe of course ... (Volcanoes have of course been studied for their negative impact on the environment)



During my residency with foam last year I had intended to look at how people tell themselves stories to find meaning in the world around them. Especially in respect to understanding natural disaster in connection with weather. I am specifically interested in the emergence of new stories that describe our world in a time of climate change. So we started with ancient myths, creation stories, folk lore and weather lore then moved on to sci fi and cli fi. I came to focus on Weather lore as the stories or rhymes are often very creative or poignant and the proverbs have a profound tone whilst being based in practical observations of weather systems and the natural environment.



The residency with foam – who are a cultural lab based in Belgium, took place in Istria Croatia in a mini castle on the edge of an ancient forest. Although the landscape in Istrian and South Australian hills might share similarities of climate and topography, the flora and fauna, stories and cultures that grew from them are quite different. Inspired and informed by the landscape, the weather and the (hi)stories of both places, as well as our own experiences as inhabitants and migrants, we're looking into the relationships between storytelling and the environment, particularly when dealing with unpredictability, turbulence, 'uncontrollability', as well as full-blown natural disasters.



During my time with foam I was also included in a European project – Future Fabulators. I attended a series of workshops on future forecasting and imagining future scenarios. This methodology and the potential for building very imaginative speculative narratives around climate change, pulled my project together.

The Future Forecasting methodology is in four stages: Posing a question, scenario building, enacting the scenario and reflecting. The scenario building takes a minimum of a day and has plenty of potential to engage a community in information sharing and expanding ideas for possible futures. What I love about it is that it is a tool through which to develop stories about possible futures with a community.

The part that I am equally fascinated with is the enactments or prehearsals. Because ideas are fleshed out through experience. Whilst I feel that it is an artist's role to imagine and manifest the future... the idea of being sensitive to the present to inform the future is utilized by many others.

In sport there is positive visualization or mental rehearsal techniques.

Pilots use stimulators to rehearse their flight paths.

The mindfulness culture has meditation

We have disaster drills for fire, earth quakes and war...

Children's games are full of played out 'imagine if' scenarios. Imagine if I could fly, imagine I was a fairy, imagine if there was a volcano....

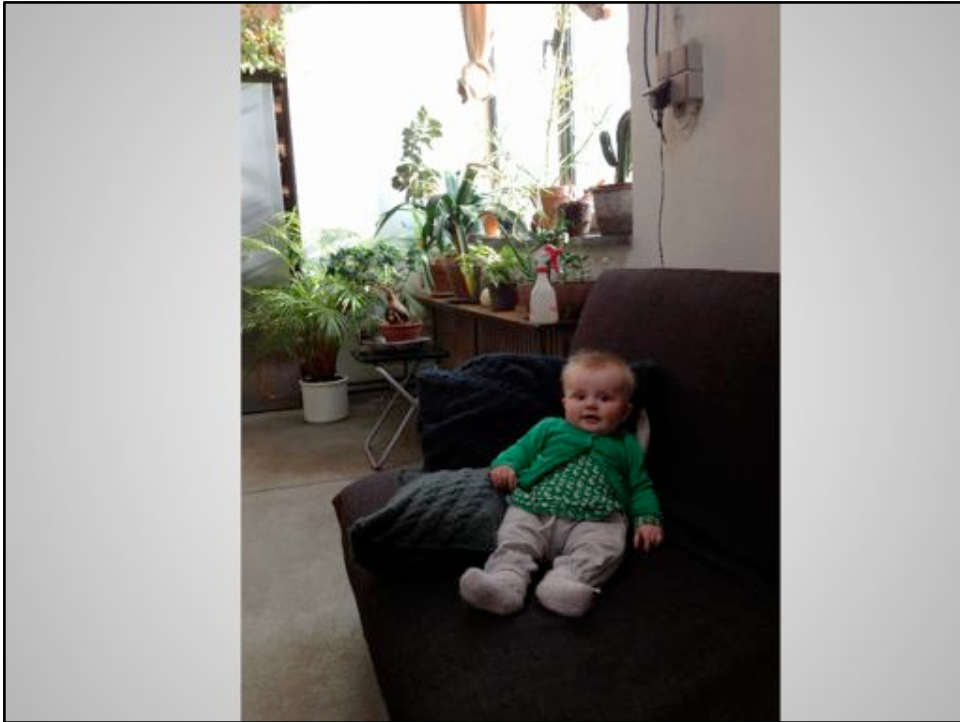
And in theatre we have improvisation. (some of this reminds me of Boal and more recently I have been introduced to Play-Back theatre) But I have also started to reflect on my own use of improvisation techniques in dance and wonder if I spent more time proposing than responding in movement – wouldn't I be a braver performer?

Anyway...

It goes without saying that futurism and strategic foresight don't have a monopoly on looking with eyes open. However, there are some things that remain ungraspable unless we experience them with our own skin. For us – we are obviously inspired by the 'what if' games our children are playing as well as bringing my experience in dance and theatre improvisation as well as Matt's expertise in working with simulators and human interaction with these devices.

So... We can try to predict or calculate how we may experience a certain moment, but when it arrives it often differs from our expectations. We can complain and get frightened that we can't know what to expect, or we can open up to a sense of wonder and excitement as we used to do in make-believe games.

To quote Bruce Stirling *The future is a process, not a theme park.*



So that baby is Florence when she was 5 months old at Times Up in Linz and here is another pic of her at foam in Brussels. The residency with foam was a 'Family in residence,' a model which the Vitals team have kindly adopted to allow this project to develop here at Adhocracy. Foam offer 'family in residence' for artists .

'- as a cultural operator, we see it as our role to explore ways of living and working as creative processes. Researching and producing 'eco-art' or 'social design' or other forms of resilient culture is not enough if we continue to produce them in conventional ways - where an arts organisation hosts artists who produce the works, for example. At FoAM we prefer to put the artwork, the artists and all the elements that make up the arts organisation itself into the same pressure-cooker of daily life, and see what comes out.'

'- what happens when 'work' can't be constrained to a neat nine-to-five job, and when the funds aren't sufficient to pay for kindergartens and nannies? Surely the creative sector is an ideal place to explore alternative forms of life and work that can bring children back into the warp and weft of creative life...'

<http://fo.am/blog/2013/08/30/generous-generalists/>



This is how I have come to be delving into the areas of speculative futures and weather lore. I am interested in foresight methodologies that respond to observations of our natural environment and which encourage creative thinking about possible futures.

And I feel very strongly that foresight springs from direct insight into and observation of the world around us. Similar to the techniques I learnt through Butoh dance in the 90's whereby I learnt to feel deeply not only my internal body weather but to move with the actual climatic atmosphere.

And most excitingly it gives opportunity to engage directly with communities and invite artists to dream forward, engage their imaginations and experience possible futures.



As I mentioned before, recently there have been a multitude of inconsistencies in weather patterns measured by scientists, reported in the media and observed first hand. In the past Weather Lore proverbs were born mostly from observing regularities. So my question as an artist is -how do we form stories in times of rapid climate change? And how are they represented? I love this question as a creative challenge.



During this residency we will be enacting the Pre-hearsal Nature as Cult, Nature. This is a scenario for a speculative future based on the question of 'What is the legacy of Future Fabulators?'. A print out of the scenario is here if you'd like to look at it... Through this scenario my family will be exploring how we might live in a world...post Climate chaos, whereby society as we know it has collapsed and has done so at a rate faster than that which we could have implemented renewable and green energy. So we are in survivalist mode. Living in a small microcosm of the family unit (a life boat so to speak – to reference a quite well known Permaculture Future scenario) – growing our own food, working with remote contacts, investing locally....Please visit us to find out more...

We will play out a variety of creative activities from cooking and playing with the children to working on creating new weather lore proverbs, working on digital story books/ transmedia story worlds and sketching out ideas for an interdisciplinary almanac for climate chaos.



Possible outcomes of research... I hope will firstly be a better understanding of how to connect the project with the community. I am wondering how ‘visitors’ will feel about participating in our scenario (if the visitor model is workable..) and what insight people might bring.

I am also interested in whether any of the creative products that emerge through the enactment have potential for further creative development - particularly art and performance that could work towards building our transmedia almanac for Climate Chaos...

and lastly I am looking forward to reflecting on how we felt to test drive this particular speculative future. After all self sufficiency is a kind of romantic ideal – but how do we feel about it after all?

http://lib.fo.am/parenzana_residency_notes

We will continue to blog our research, experience, ideas and when this weekend ends – our reflection on the prehearsal on the foam wiki – you are welcome to follow us -



Sunday I'll be speaking more about Weather Lore, specifically the research and creative development undertaken in this residency.



Monday I'll share more about Future Forecasting, give more of an over view of the field and explain more about foam's specific methodology. Nik and Maya will also skype in.