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SPECIAL ISSUE

A/r/tography and the Visual Arts

Volume 3 | Issue 1 | 2013

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Guest Editors *Rita L. Irwin*
Anita Sinner

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ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

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Special Issue: A/r/tography and the Arts

Guest Editors

Rita L. Irwin | Anita Sinner

THEME

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create relational and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work are often rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess, which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others (see <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/>).

This special issue of Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts invites original creative and scholarly inquiry that engages in critical debates and issues regarding a/r/tographical methodologies; are exemplars of critical approaches to a/r/tographical research; and/or extend the boundaries of inquiry-based research. Contributions are welcome from disciplines across the arts, humanities and social sciences and in a wide range of formats including articles, essays, and artistic interludes, which explore diverse forms of the arts from drama, dance, poetry, narrative, music, visual arts, digital media and more.

Indigenising research through a/r/tography

A case study of a collaborative filmmaking project in Papua New Guinea

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the use of a/r/tographic methodologies within the context of an indigenous research approach in the South Pacific nation of Papua New Guinea. The visual arts have played a prominent role in Papua New Guinea's cultural history. They have served social functions of establishing and expressing community relations and of collective decision-making processes. In the West however, Papua New Guinea art has been interpreted differently. Its social function is often ignored, removing objects from their context. Similarly, research in PNG, impacted by the introduction of an Anglo-European educational model during the time of colonization, has lacked engagement with artistic forms of knowing and learning.

Through the case study of a filmmaking workshop with teaching students in their roles as artists/researchers/teachers, I will explore how artistic process can enhance the way research is undertaken with Papua New Guinean communities. A Melanesian way of filmmaking is proposed and explored, while examining values of relationships, reciprocity and collective memory. These values are played out in the collaborations of artists and their relations with members of the participating communities.

The paper proposes a/r/tographic research as a way to de-westernise research methods, and to engage in a process that gives voice to indigenous communities. Student researchers/artists are engaged in producing artistic collaborations that reflect Papua New Guinean community life. The documentary films produced through the project counter dominant representations of Papua New Guinean rural communities and propose new ways of thinking about how research is undertaken in Melanesia.

KEYWORDS

trust, creative process, a/r/tography, pre-service teachers, confidence, aesthetic experience

INTRODUCTION

In many indigenous cultures the arts play a pivotal role in community communication and the maintenance of social relationships. When research is undertaken in indigenous communities, however, the way artistic processes are integrated in community life is often not accounted for, and they are not recognised as processes of knowledge creation. An increasing body of literature around the arts as research presents new opportunities for indigenous communities as it acknowledges the artistic process as engagement in understanding knowledge creation and social relations (Knowles and Cole 2008; Sullivan 2005).

This paper examines the use of a/r/tographic methods in the context of Papua New Guinea. It proposes that a concurrent focus on artistic process and pedagogy holds a great deal of potential for questioning and indigenising research approaches. Filmmaking is considered as both an artistic and a research practice. Processes and material recorded through the filmmaking are reflected on in order to investigate culturally appropriate media making processes. It is argued that a/r/tography, with its focus on collaborative and embodied processes and living inquiry, provides a unique framework for research undertaken in a country where media and research continue to suffer colonial influences.

FILM AND RESEARCH IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is known for its artistic variety and its many diverse cultures. Due to colonialism and relatively late discovery of many parts of the country, photographs and films produced have predominantly been by outsiders, who have often rendered Papua New Guineans as an 'exotic other' in narratives for overseas audience consumption (Stella 2007). Such representations can be found in research, films and other media. Further, media institutions have been set up and controlled by European colonisers, leading to this 'othering' occurring even within PNG (Hau'ofa 2008). While there is no lack of Papua New Guinean visual representations, the effect of the perspective of the 'other' to a larger public audience is problematic, and Indigenous people have been largely denied a say in their own representation.

Likewise, research in PNG largely follows an Anglo-Saxon model. Since colonial times and after independence in 1975, education and teaching in Papua New Guinea has followed an outsider's model without consulting local indigenous understandings of learning, knowing and teaching (Mel 2000; Papoutsaki and Rooney 2006). Colonial conceptions of Papua New Guinea as less developed and lacking understanding of education processes led to an undervaluing of local practices and the potential for bolstering both education and development. The complexity of Papua New Guinea's diverse culture may also have presented too great a challenge for colonial powers. In general, however, the view that education offered an avenue for the extension of colonial power is a more common conception of the relationship (Smith 1999).

Michael Mel has argued that the multiple forms of expression in Papua New Guinean art do not simply serve an aesthetic purpose; they re-instate relationships with the land, ancestors, the environment and family members (Mel 1996). Western perspectives tend to render Papua New Guinea art as tribal art, expressive of primitivism, with art often removed from its social context and placed in a museum to study its 'object' features. This fails to take into account the context of the work's production, a vital component for its creators. Mel (1996) has further argued for an understanding of Papua New Guinean performance as a meaning-making process through which communities enact and re-enact their collective identity. Performance becomes a space for social confirmation and transformation. Mel explains that while there is a personal aesthetic to the often finely decorative components of Papua New Guinea art, the process is a collective one that positions people in relation to their communities and their environments (Mel 1996).

PROJECT DESIGN

The Yumi Piksa project took place at the University of Goroka, one of six universities in Papua New Guinea, the only university in the Highlands region, and the leading teacher training institution in PNG. Twelve training teachers (predominantly arts teachers) were recruited to participate in a six-week filmmaking workshop, through which they would produce three short documentary films, while exploring a Melanesian approach to filmmaking and research. In addition to learning the technical and conceptual skills around filmmaking, the workshop participants collaboratively designed a culturally appropriate and community-responsive approach to filmmaking (Thomas 2011). The project sought to create an environment for learning and collaboration in which participants and facilitator would exchange ideas to learn, change, understand and interpret (Springgay et al. 2008, p. xxv) PNG values within the context of filmmaking practice, rendering the filmmaking process the 'living inquiry' championed by *a/r/tography*.

As an outside facilitator, I was looking for a methodology that would allow us to collaborate, minimising my own tendency to fall back into colonial understandings and interpretations. It was important to form a space where creative ideas could come together freely, led by cultural understandings. The arts, as a creative engagement, demand an approach that captures the emergent nature of collaboration and art practice. *A/r/tography* provided a suitable methodological frame for this study as it emphasised the artistic process, regarding theory as practice - conceiving of the two

as inseparable. As such, “theory is understood as a critical exchange that is reflective, responsive and relational, which is continuously in a state of reconstruction and becoming something else altogether” (Springgay et al. 2008, p. xx). This focus on emergent processes and outcomes that spring not from an already existent ‘researcher’ or ‘participant’ but from the dynamic *combination* of these groups to form a third, distinct group, further identified it as a suitable framework to reflect on the *Yumi Piksa* processes, particularly in the specific Melanesian context of this project.

COLLABORATIVE WORKSHOP PROCESSES

At the beginning of the workshop, the aims and objectives of this collaborative project were discussed. *Yumi Piksa* sought to counter stereotypical representations of Papua New Guinea by developing a uniquely Melanesian approach to filmmaking. This approach would account for community values and perspective, investigate how these could be integrated into the filmmaking process, and work toward using these processes to acquire increased understanding through the process of art making (Irwin and Cosson 2004). The coming together of artists, teachers and researchers created a space to discuss and bring together various expertises in order to undertake research through culturally appropriate media making processes.

During the first two weeks much time was spent learning technical filmmaking skills, as workshop participants had not yet worked in the video format. An initial process of working with communities was designed.

- Identification of elders
- Agreement from elders to undertake the project
- Public community introduction
- Re-framing of our research ideas and community assessment
- Informing the community about our research process
- Involving specific individual community members in the visual research process
- Asking the community participants for feedback on the material
- Incorporating feedback into the editing process
- Approval of edited product from community participants
- Approval from elders to screen the finished product
- Invite everyone to a public screening, acknowledge the community and participants and provide a DVD copy of the material produced
- Return to community to discuss their experience of the process

Much of this process relied on obtaining appropriate consent at each stage of the process. This 'cultural' process was intertwined with the filmmaking practices. Here, it was decided that our team would respond to what communities wanted to do, while at the same time engaging them in a learning process about filmmaking itself. From the initial group, three smaller groups were formed, each of which chose a community to work with. Communities were chosen based on existing relationship of team members. Once agreement from the community was obtained, through confirmation from elders and a public introduction, each team started to work with their community and with a particular group or family within the community. Experiences and ideas about processes were continually brought back to the workshop and discussed in the team.

As this article focuses on the process and negotiations between researchers, community members and facilitator, and the way in which a/r/tography can be used as research practice, I will not discuss the actual content of the films. It is interesting to note, however, that two of these films were about traditional art making. *Levekuka Clay* (13min, Director: Dilen Doiki) is about the process of making a clay flute, and *Nokondi's Morning Call* (9min, Director: Nafaor Ere-Epa) is a film about a traditional myth narrated by PNG painter George Sari.

Art in our perspective, the Melanesian perspective, it's sacred and outsiders don't just come in, intrude and [...] just obtain this art. There has to be some respect, there has to be a relationship built with the elders, trust, so that this art can be obtained. We don't just give this art for nothing.

- Edie Halaba, workshop participant

Forming relationships with the artists was a prerequisite for them to participate in a film. Both artists regarded this as an opportunity to preserve their artwork and art practice. The role of art and art practices in Melanesian society is a unique and significant one. Paying appropriate respect to these practices and their representation was important in gaining the approval of the subjects and their communities to film. For many of the practitioners, the films offered a means of preserving their traditional knowledge in a way that engaged younger generations in thinking about these endangered art forms. Identifying this benefit and allowing the participants to guide the films towards an outcome they viewed as important helped strengthen relationships.

As we moved in and out the different communities it proved invaluable that we had attended the community introduction as a team inclusive of everyone, as members swapped within their teams depending on their availability. Overall, this created a positive environment of collaboration, with student researchers engaging with a range of communities, stories, and research and production roles.

As director I realise that it is hard work, I need to ask many questions, why, how, where etc...and then more questions come up...from Judah [character] as well. I am happy that I am the director, but it is with the others in the team that we can make that film.

- Franky Rissanimo, workshop participant

The collaborative work in the workshops and in the field enabled the project to engage in cyclic reflections being enacted through the project. Our experiences occurred as a team and were later reflected on and discussed, creating the kind of shared space of inquiry on which a/r/tographic inquiry relies. Reflection was provided by screening the visual material back to the team and further exploring possibilities of improving our work, both in terms of the visual techniques and the story narratives. In this way, the learning of the students was ongoing, the focus on reflection and knowledge transfer and development of the workshops being carried through each phase of the project. After the workshop Edi reflected back, having gained a better understanding of everyone's skills:

I think after six weeks I think I have a fair idea and this is my personal opinion I think I know who is capable of doing this and the roles that we are going to play and how we can work together because some of us talk, are very good at talking, some of us don't, some of us can commit ourselves to some things and some of us don't, so I think we can all complement each other in this team and I think we are a great team and it will work.

- Edi Halaba, workshop participant

It was consistently important to operate as a team when working with the communities. As Edi described, different skill sets were needed in order to undertake visual research and filmmaking with the communities. Talking was one of the ways in which we (particularly the student researchers) negotiated relationships and the representation of content. Student researchers that were from the communities were key figures in this process as they could speak the local language and were able to express many subtleties that English could not. The process of working with the community through filmmaking in this way was one that relied on teamwork, and challenged some of the individual artists in negotiating processes. These processes were held together by our common agenda, to understand Melanesian values in the context of filmmaking and to develop community-responsive approaches. Reflecting on the process a/r/tography provided the links in working and learning collaboratively through a living inquiry that captured the daily lives of the communities. Through this process key ideas emerged that hold particular relevance in regards to de-westernising dominant approaches to research in Papua New Guinea.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Traditionally, learning in Papua New Guinean communities occurred through story telling, understanding oral history, watching others and working together. When formal education was introduced in Papua New Guinea, this changed rapidly. Through the prescriptions of the Australian colonial power and missionary work, teaching focused on developing the individual rather than the group, and learning became an individual exercise. Many PNG scholars articulate this disparity and have worked to find their way back to their own communities, realising that their indigenous teachings were valuable in the first place (Hau'ofa 2008; Mel 2002). At their heart, Papua New Guineans could be described as collaborative learners. Within the Papua New Guinean system of higher education, however, individual performances are prioritised in relation to collective outcomes, forming a deep rift between traditional 'learning' and 'Education'.

Artistic practices, and in particular video methods, offer a space for collaborative learning. Filmmaking in particular often necessitates collaborative work, due to the handling of various technologies. Much of the success of the *Yumi Piksa* workshop and its ability to develop and discuss cultural concepts relied on the individual's ability to think of others while working. This was evident during small exercises, where people assisted each other in using the technology and approached the team as a community in itself. Collaborative learning, in our case, allowed for flexibility and a sharing of experiences, necessary to plan the next steps. In fact, reciprocal relationships could have not been entered into, as they were, had we not been working iteratively and collaboratively, recognising ourselves as community.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SHARING

Key to the confidence with which the students started to occupy their roles was the meaningful engagement with their own communities. Artistic practice provided an inviting space for community engagement, which in return created research of higher value to the students. Because the students were working with an audience in mind and valued the audience's opinion, they were additionally motivated to overcome the challenges of the project. Arts-based research practices provide a means of strongly engaging audiences and this interaction, in turn, provides a means of validating the research. For example, asking questions such as 'what new connections does an artwork establish', or 'how are relations played out by engaging with the artwork' is useful in assessing the outcomes of the research.

The artistic engagement allowed for flexibility in engaging with communities in a responsive way. The openness and flexibility, in contrast to more traditional research approaches, allows researchers to engage meaningfully and innovate the research process. "Arts-based inquiry cannot be governed by pre-established rules and cannot be judged according to predetermined criteria. These rules and categories are in part what the work is looking for." (Sullivan quoting Diamond (1998, p. 392)). While the striving for rules and categories is often what is trying to be achieved in research, the unparalleled diversity of Papua New Guinean communities requires a flexible approach if cultural and societal structures are to be respected. Hence the co-construction of a shared space is not only necessary between facilitator and student researchers but between researchers and community members. Artistic practices create this shared space, where emotional responses can be elicited, and discussed.

A HOLISTIC AND APPROPRIATED APPROACH

Through a more collaborative and open research engagement, artistic practices provide opportunities for a more holistic presentation of the communities' experiences, as argued in indigenous research concepts (Cardinal 2001; Weber-Pillwax 2001).

I can see that my ancestors were professors and doctors in their own rights, in the arts, in the knowledge that they had and skills that they had. They only needed their environment and their land to survive using the skills and knowledge they had... The

approach of traditional education was a holistic approach, so now that I can see when we go through established formal education then we are specialising in one area and we are lacking in the other. Traditional knowledge I can say it's the foundation, building a person's foundation to live his life.

- Nafaro Ere-Epa, workshop participant

A more holistic approach makes the integration of indigenous concepts into research practice possible. Artistic practices often avoid standardising and categorising, offering an opportunity to move beyond the boundaries and rules of traditional disciplines. They seek to evoke and challenge perceptions and experiences, accounting for our emotional involvement that does not fit simple categories, but requires examination in the moment and in relationship with people and environment. As Cole and Knowles (2008) argue, rigorous arts-informed research develops a strong and consistent relationship “between purpose and method (or process and form)” rather than following linear or previously determined structures; material co-exists as ‘data’ and representation. The students in *Yumi Piksa* occupied multiple roles as students, researchers, artists, community members, collaborators and family members. This holistic quality allowed a culturally appropriate and responsive approach to be developed, and built on the collaborative nature of the project.

Work in the arts is not only a way of creating performances and products; it is a way of creating our lives by expanding our consciousness, shaping our dispositions, satisfying our quest for meaning, establishing contact with others, and sharing a culture. (Eisner 2002, p. 3)

The ability for artistic processes and products to retain embedded cultural and social practices makes them favourable in contrast to objective research approaches. The way the academic system interprets knowledge, it has been argued, is not how we “experience and process the world” (Cole and Knowles 2008:59). Policy-making that is informed by objective research runs the risk of neglecting the value of culture in our lives. This particularly impacts on the lives of indigenous peoples, who traditionally emphasise relational, collectivistic and holistic approaches to knowledge creation and transmission. In Papua New Guinea, the re-integration of artistic approaches into learning and education holds considerable potential to better comprehend the impact of cultural and social structures in daily life and decision-making processes.

On-going dialogue and transparency are much-needed ingredients in maintaining positive relationships with the communities, and great care needs to be taken in explaining the potential consequences of distribution of community stories. The approach that has been presented here deals with these tensions and negotiations through embedding them in decision-making processes when producing media content. The idea of media production, and in particular with an aim of ‘intercultural viability’ (Elder 1995) as set out by *Yumi Piksa*, challenges makers/researchers to take into account multiple processes and their impact on audiences.

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Feedback from audiences provided further understanding of the potential impact the final productions and the *Yumi Piksa* methodology had on viewers and participants. Students collected audio and video feedback after screenings and handed out feedback sheets at overseas screenings and at local screenings. In the two films about Papua New Guinean art practices and mythical stories, the communities were able to see a direct impact of the films, as it provided a space for intergenerational engagement. Dilen Doiki, the director of *Levekuka Clay*, comments on the visible results of the film in his community.

When we launched the video at the University of Goroka in the presence of the community it stimulated much interest amongst the youth. I have witnessed young boys digging clay as a result of this documentary. I hope this is only the beginning and that we will be able to document many more important cultural issues from our communities on film.

- Dilen Doiki, workshop participant

Levekuka Clay had this immediate intergenerational impact, engaging youth through video in the art of making clay flutes. For the students, who began to realise the potential to represent stories on film about Papua New Guinea, the films they made garnered respect from their communities and they were proud they had made it to the end of the workshop. The relationships they formed had a lasting impact and many later highlighted their increased awareness of what community life is all about.

This workshop brought me into communities and it shows me that our communities have lots to tell and by words we won't value that but through video we can value them. Words will fade away and change but through video we'll value those stories...They really made me think because I was thinking of myself and not them but when I get into the community there's lots to tell and working with them is like they are developing me up and I really like that.

- Stella Lukula, workshop participant

The reactions and interpretations of the films differed between the international and national audiences. The international audiences tended to focus on the representation of indigenous people and the 'insight into real people and their lives'. They also commented that the films were 'intimate' and 'heartfelt'. Local audiences commented on local representations of specific groups and on the capacity building aspect of the project in regards to the training of upcoming artists and filmmakers. For the makers it was important to create a counterforce to dominant representation in the country. The reception of their films with audiences reaffirmed their initial agenda. As workshop participant Klinit Barry explained to an audience in Sydney:

...you could see the family all together they saw themselves, they watched other people making films you know they take them to the house in PNG we have CD house all over in the village and we watch and say that's my hero, now we make our own films and they watching it in their house and they are thinking oh we are the hero... we want to tell more stories, there's lot to tell and we want to remove those foreign stories in our community, in our place and we want to show our own story, our own heroes.

-Klinit Barry, workshop participant

Working to create these networks through which feedback could be received was a pivotal part of the *Yumi Piksa* process. Both in terms of stimulating relationships between participants, researchers and communities, and in terms of creating new spaces of reflection through engaging wider audiences, the screenings and feedback sessions proved extremely valuable to the inquiry.

A/R/TOGRAPHY AND INDIGENOUS CRITICAL PRACTICE

Perhaps the strongest characteristic of linking a/r/tography with an approach that incorporates indigenous values is the idea and prioritization of a relational paradigm (Bickel et al. 2011). Indigenous scholar Shawn Wilson draws attention to the fact that dominant research paradigms understand knowledge as an individual entity whereas “an indigenous research paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational” (Wilson 2001, p. 76). For Wilson ‘relational accountability’ is a central element of an indigenous research methodology for research that is meaningful and beneficial to participants and communities, integrated with the idea of lifelong learning. As indigenous scholars have argued in recent years, this requires a paradigmatic shift in methodological approach, so the worldview of indigenous people is incorporated into the actual methodology (Bishop 2005; Gegeo and Gegeo-Watson 2001; Nakata 2008; Wilson 2008). What Gegeo and Gegeo-Watson (2001) describe as ‘indigenous critical practice’, Nakata describes as ‘indigenous standpoint theory’ (2008). Nakata argues that indigenous knowledge is not enough, nor is incorporation of indigenous content without understanding of the indigenous standpoint within a theoretical conceptualisation of the complexity of relationships and relational processes.

The relational nexus formed by an artist-researcher-audience loop allows participants to critically reflect on these relationships, resonating with Nicholas Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics paradigm (Bourriaud 2002). For Bourriaud, collaborative art and media making provide a space to explore relationships and our identity as it evolves through them. The focus here is not on media objects, but on relations. A collective aesthetic then means, “our values are embedded in our physical and affective relationship with the world” (Leuthold 1998, p. 16). A/r/tographic practice as a living inquiry appreciates the incorporation of lived and relational experiences embedded within social and cultural contexts. As an inquiry it is relational, collaborative and holistic and as such responsive to the existing and the emerging context (Bickel et al. 2011). This embedding of values in the artistic product becomes particularly significant in the context of Papua New Guinean communities, who are eschewed in dominant media-making and research practices in the country, historically lacking the opportunity to represent themselves to these wider audiences.

Performances of every day life transfer social knowledge and memories, and allow people to negotiate their identity. As Diane Taylor (2003) suggests, the function of ‘performance as an epistemology’ is that ‘embodied practices offer ways of knowing’. The value of visual recordings for the researchers can be understood as that of a collection of histories, contributing to the social and cultural identity of the community by preserving important performative elements of local cultures. This recording of a cultural repertoire that expresses itself through performance integrates

the components of a predominantly oral culture with the new technologies that are beginning to filter into PNG life.

The a/r/tographic practice during the *Yumi Piksa* workshop demonstrated a means of engagement by the students and communities that provided a shared space where meanings and representations could be negotiated. Such environments offer artists/researchers/teachers a platform to reflect on learning processes and processes that allow for indigenous understandings to be incorporated in the emerging research process. This process can have a significant impact on research approaches in Papua New Guinea.

It must be noted that the proposed incorporation of a/r/tographic and indigenous research approaches does not abandon established research methods; it rather means a refocus towards the inclusion of indigenous understandings and their incorporation in all aspects of the research process (see Papoutsaki 2006). Papoutsaki has highlighted the need for locally informed curricula and for the teaching of research methods that bring students back into their communities, ideally at undergraduate level. It was evident during *Yumi Piksa* that researchers gained new perspectives on themselves and their own practice. The engagement with their own communities through artistic practice provided a platform for change and emphasised the communities' relevance for research undertaken in PNG.

The establishment of communities of a/r/tographic practice and inquiry can provide a heightened involvement in locally appropriate practice and a means to challenge established research and education approaches. The outcomes of this involvement are ultimately emergent and unpredictable. In PNG, the continuation of such engagement in a/r/tographic practice requires a commitment not only from artists, researchers, teachers and communities but also from institutions to support artistic and creative practices to be applied in educational and indigenous research.

CONCLUSION

This case study has demonstrated how an a/r/tographic approach has the potential to contribute to indigenising research. By bringing together artists and teachers to explore a Melanesian approach to research and filmmaking, a space has been created to develop greater understanding of how communities and PNG knowledge systems function. Participants' links to communities were established, unsettled through media processes exploring relationships and different forms of expressions. Creative methods allow deeper investigation into what Melanesian values are and how they are played out in the daily experiences of Papua New Guinean communities. As such, research holds significant potential for communities to articulate and discuss their position on wider national and international stages. By combining the use of art-based methods and the current media landscape, a forum for Papua New Guinean audiences to share and acknowledge their own past, present and future is provided, challenging post-colonial or urbanised representations currently dominating the media.

Building on the vast history of PNG arts, the open approach of a/r/tographic inquiry brings with it new forms of understanding PNG-based research. It minimises processes of 'othering' and allows both facilitator and workshop participants to enter a collaborative relationship based on achieving creative outcomes together. This collaboration was extended by the participation of community members whose understandings and communication processes were integrated into our a/r/tographic approach. Examining processes of learning and creativity could prove invaluable in the field of development, and in increasing understandings of indigenous values.

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