



RESEARCH REPORT

Prue Wales and Charlene Rajendran

BOTH SIDES, NOW: LIVING WITH DYING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We all share the common fate that one day we will die.

Though death is a natural part of life, many fear discussing it.

(Both Sides, Now, 2014)

This executive summary reports on a qualitative research study carried out by Drs. Prue Wales and Charlene Rajendran from the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University on the immersive arts event *Both Sides, Now: Living with Dying*. *Both Sides, Now* was an inter-disciplinary community arts project, produced by ArtsWok and Drama Box, set up to engage the general public in conversations about issues of death and dying. It was held at two outdoor public spaces, the basketball courts opposite Khatib MRT and Toa Payoh Central, over two weekends in September 2014.

The study aimed to investigate the efficacy of *Both Sides, Now* as a community arts project, and its impact on audiences, artists, stakeholders and volunteers who attended or were involved in its construction. Specifically, it sought to examine how members of its audiences, as well as artists, stakeholders and volunteers involved in bringing the project together, perceived and responded to the event. Moreover, the research endeavoured to identify what artists, healthcare workers, academics and stakeholders could learn from immersive arts experiences like *Both Sides, Now* to inform future such projects.

Data collection was carried out during and after the event. During the event the researchers attended the site to observe audiences interact with the artefacts, and to speak with volunteers and members of the creative team. They wrote fieldnotes and took photographs to capture specific moments, artworks and episodes. Eleven interviews were conducted with audience members at this time and arrangements for two more in depth interviews were made to be taken after the event. After the event interviews were conducted with two funding bodies and three participating health organisations, two volunteers and thirteen members of the creative team. In all thirty-three interviews were conducted generating over twenty-six hours of audio recordings that were transcribed. Over 600 pages of transcriptions were then coded and analysed for themes and patterns to generate findings. Artefacts, including publicity and planning materials, as well as artwork constructed by artists and members of the general public for and during the event were also collected. This included exhibit displays, photographs of exhibits and events, video recordings of performances as well as media articles and promotion materials. These too were all coded, categorised and analysed.

Grounded theory was drawn on during data analysis which looked for codes, concepts, categories and theories. Open, substantive and axial coding was conducted prior to analysing ideas through memo-ing, sorting and writing up findings. From this the following insights became apparent.

The Event

Both Sides, Now was deemed a successful inter-disciplinary community arts event for stakeholders, artists and audiences. The topic clearly resonated with many audience members who not only showed a willingness but also a desire to talk about the issues of death and dying. Particularly evident was the diversity of opinions, comments and perceptions, demonstrating how communities are able to accept and negotiate multiple and conflicting thoughts and feelings about the topic.

Creating a safe space

The creation of a safe space by the creative team and facilitators emboldened audiences to confront the issues and share their thoughts, feelings and ideas either by bearing witness to the processes or by co-creating artworks.

Leadership and collaboration

The success of the cross-sector partnerships between creatives, funders and healthcare workers was seen as central to the efficacy of the event. Credit for an effective partnership must be given to the producers who acted as intermediaries between the funders, agencies and artists. Their ability to mediate what stakeholders wanted to achieve and what artists thought conceivable helped lay the groundwork for effective communication, and smooth any misconceptions or misunderstandings. Also hugely helpful were the clear demarcations of performative roles assigned to *Both Sides, Now* within each stakeholder and artistic organization.

The Venue

Holding *Both Sides, Now* in public open-air spaces made the event easily accessible for locals who used the areas as thoroughfares. The familiarity of the surroundings was seen to make the event less intimidating to those who would not normally attend a performance or go to an art gallery, and help the public make connections between the subject matter and everyday life. However, there were issues regarding the weather, which are discussed in the next section.

Logistical challenges

The outdoor spaces became problematic particularly during daylight hours as the guides and members of the creative team spent many uncomfortable hours in sweltering heat. Rain became another logistical issue with holding the event outside. Questions arose about whether the event should have just been held in the evenings, when it was cooler, but this may have meant that seniors who were bussed in from homes could not attend at those times, due to staffing issues at their centres. During the analysis the researchers discussed the possibility of linking the outdoor public venues with indoor ones, such as the Toa Payoh library, so daylight events could be held in air-conditioned rooms. Another suggestion was to explore options of air-conditioned pavilions. However, both these suggestions would require the allocation of more funding. Thus, this is an issue that needs continued thought and action.

Diversity of Audience

The diversity of audiences, in terms of both age and culture, was surprising. Audience members ranged from young children to seniors, with significant numbers of young adults actively participating, and enthusiastically engaging and dialoguing at the event. Some audience members and guides spoke about the need to take this kind of work into schools so that young people could openly discuss issues of death and dying in unthreatening but supportive ways.

While the project attempted to be culturally inclusive to different cultural beliefs and backgrounds, the languages used were predominantly English and Mandarin with some dialect. This meant that those who did not speak English or Mandarin were disadvantaged. Questions on how to address greater language capacity were raised by the creative team but limited resources meant that the focus needed to be on the older Chinese population, which was the chief concern of the stakeholders. It necessitates notice however, that there is a great interest in the topic within the wider community.

Follow up and sustainability

The need for follow-up to keep discussions on death and dying flowing and sustained after the event was highlighted by guides, as well as creative team and audience members. Audiences clearly experienced a highly affective encounter with issues of death and dying, as evidenced through artworks and conversations. However, concerns were expressed for people's wellbeing after dealing with such emotional content, and this is something that needs further action. Follow-up was seen also as a crucial step to artistic, organisational and content understanding between artists, producers and stakeholders, including senior centres, community homes, hospitals, agencies and funders. Strong follow-up could facilitate community building and help all parties reflect on the processes, outcomes and primary goals of the event, providing a space for deep critical reflection to inform possible future iterations.

The Artworks

The choice of a brightly coloured backdrop to the installations, predominantly yellow and white with black child-like sketches, conveyed a quirky playfulness to the event that contrasted with the dark associations usually made towards notions of death and dying. This carnivalesque setting invited audiences to take risks and playfully experiment with the pieces of work, such as stepping inside a coffin or responding dramatically to the piece of forum theatre. Moreover, the open-ended nature of artworks encouraged audiences to forge their own connections and make their own meanings as they participated and interacted with the installations and each other.

The range of artworks designed for *Both Sides, Now* aimed to appeal to broad audiences that may not be inclined to seek out arts events or art making activities in their daily lives. This diversity of artworks also enabled different kinds of engagement in *Both Sides, Now*, whether solitary and reflective, or more community based dialogic interactions at the site. Audiences were able to engage with and participate in activities at their own comfort levels.

Accessibility of Art

This broad appeal and playfulness made the art highly accessible and relevant to the general public, who showed that they wanted

to think, talk and engage in the issues, and learn more. Rather than something to be admired, art was presented as something for individuals to interact with and make meaning from their hopes, fears, beliefs and experiences.

Impact and Understandings

Relationships

In their responses to artworks and interviews, audiences expressed the universal importance of relationships in making their lives meaningful and happy and even at times disappointing or sad. Audiences conveyed that their relationships with family and loved ones were what they most valued in life and what they were equally afraid of losing, through death.

Potential to Generate Change

The stakeholders articulated their recognition of the arts' ability to facilitate valuable exploratory processes. They saw the potential for transformation in both the general public's attitudes towards death and dying, and through the advancement of a civic society that takes responsibility for these kinds of issues expressed in *Both Sides, Now*. They believe *Both Sides, Now* has the potential to effect real change. In addition, audience members discussed how *Both Sides, Now* impacted their thoughts, feelings and beliefs about issues of death and dying. They pointed to the importance of creating a safe, reflective and creative space to initiate conversations about end-of-life issues,

The Arts as Language

Stakeholders and some audience members began to recognise the arts as a form of communication that invited people to talk, think, and express themselves in real and abstract ways. Their appreciation focused on the *functional* use of the arts rather than any real aesthetic sense of understanding. Some artworks were considered too 'arty' and less accessible, demonstrating the need to cater to diverse audiences in terms of cultural and artistic forms of representation.

The Arts as a Unique Dialogical Form

The presentation of arts installations and art-making activities fostered conversations and the exchange of ideas through intense reflection and dialoguing. The creative team, stakeholders, volunteers and audience members who participated in the research all felt that *Both Sides, Now* opened a space for important discussions. As a result, it proved to be highly effective in delivering the messages it set out to do. The stakeholders expressed a desire for the work to attract bigger audiences through online exchanges. However it became clear from the interviews that it was the very liveness of the event, the real-time interactions and conversations, that initiated the authentic and open conversations.

Applied Arts as Informal Education

Both Sides, Now became a site of informal learning. As a knowledge-based event, *Both Sides, Now* relied on rigorous research by stakeholders and artists. This involved research about health, law, social and cultural issues, and the arts. As a result, *Both Sides, Now* became a site of informal learning where participants could choose the kinds of knowledge and learning experiences they wanted to delve into – whether it was about advanced care planning, making a will, or their own thoughts and feelings about death and dying. Through the artworks and talks they could investigate what they wanted to know, what they did not want to know, or wanted to avoid knowing, as well as what they wanted someone else to know. This form of arts practice generates valuable pedagogical resources.

Qualities of Arts Practitioners Undertaking this Work

If immersive community arts work like that of *Both Sides, Now* is to continue and flourish then there needs to be an understanding of the qualities, skills and traits artists need to successfully implement this kind of practice. These include:

- Considerations and understanding of cultural differences and multiplicities within cultures

- Sustained interest and knowledge in community arts issues
- Strong collaborative and interpersonal skills, including being adaptable, having active listening and negotiation skills
- Ability to recognize and address challenges of community art making, such as fostering genuine inquiry, critical and reflective thinking
- Ability to research deeply
- Ability to think innovatively and conceptually
- Ability to think and talk through issues and problems in open and non-threatening manner
- Awareness of and ability to question ethics of own and others' ideas and practice

Human resources and budgeting issues

There is a need to develop the skills of artists to undertake this kind of community work so as to build capacity. This requires a budget to not only train artists in this kind of community work but also to employ them.

Recommendations

Fostering Community Building

Both Sides, Now was a community building event. It prepared diverse audiences to participate, intervene and mediate on important an community issue, their relationships towards death and dying. This was done via a non-threatening intervention that provided audience members with agency to express their opinions and beliefs, and explore notions of death and dying at their own pace and in their own way. Thus it is personal but safe, individual and collective.

Sourcing facilities

Locating *Both Sides, Now* outdoors negatively impacted audiences, artists and guides during daylight hours due to weather conditions. There is a need for some kind of durable air-conditioned tent or pavilion that artists can hire when undertaking this kind of work. If the National Arts Council had access to several mobile tents that could be air-conditioned and are conducive to

art-making processes, this would be a way to traverse this problem. This could operate as subsidised venue hire for companies and artists working in large scale community events.

Further Research

There have been two iterations of Both Sides, Now, one at Khoo Teck Phuat Hospital, and the other discussed in this research. There is potential for future iterations. We recommend the National Arts Council and stakeholders undertake a longitudinal study investigating further iterations that focus on how the project develops and transforms through time, and identifies the accumulated learning and challenges of audiences, arts practitioners and stakeholders.



Photo: Members of the audience talking to each other, and with performers, after the forum theatre performance and interventions in Toa Payoh. Audiences often talked with people they knew, and with complete strangers as well.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Both Sides, Now: Living with Dying was an immersive arts experience that engaged the public in contemplating, confronting and conversing with and about issues of death and dying. This was done through a range of interactive arts portals, public talks and open-air performances. It was held over two weekends in September 2014, at two outdoor public spaces in Singapore, namely the basketball courts opposite the Khatib MRT station and Toa Payoh Central, an open area between public housing blocks, the library and a shopping area for residents. Three large yellow and white pavilions, called Life, Living and Dying, were constructed in these sites, within which the various installations and activities were housed. The inter-disciplinary, arts-based community project, was produced by ArtsWok and Drama Box.

The purpose of *Both Sides, Now* was to normalise different conversations, concerns, fears, sorrows, and other responses to death. Death is a particularly taboo topic in Singapore, which has a majority ethnic-Chinese population who tend to believe that discussing death can bring bad luck. As a result, conversations about death and dying are often deferred till a crisis occurs, by which time many options are precluded and intense negative emotions dominate the dialogue. *Both Sides, Now* aimed to create a safe yet play-ful space in which audiences of varied ages and backgrounds could consider opinions, images, sounds and sensations that pertain to end-of-life issues. Each response and participation, while imaginative and non-threatening, was an opportunity to

rethink personal and communal views of death, and thereby review one's own prejudices or anxieties.

Presented by the Lien Foundation and Ang Chin Moh Foundation, who have spearheaded the work of advocating for more open and constructive dialogues on end-of-life issues in Singapore, *Both Sides, Now* also aimed to raise consciousness about Advanced Care Planning. This is an area of work that both foundations have been actively involved in prior to *Both Sides, Now* – which began in 2013. The project was also supported by the Ministry of Health, and the National Arts Council, together with a range of other community partners. This widespread support for the project points to Singapore's growing awareness of the need to address the needs of an aging society, in a highly urbanised context that has witnessed diminishing family ties and decreasing support for the elderly and ill.

As part of the project, *Both Sides, Now* also toured the puppet performance, *The Wind Came Home*, about an elderly couple grappling with illness and isolation, to several senior centres around the island, where conversations with elderly audience were held about Advanced Care Planning and how to obtain social service support when needed. This catered to those for whom the public spaces may not have been accessible due to ill-health, fragility or distance. While the audiences who attended *Both Sides, Now* were from a broad spectrum of ages and backgrounds, and this mix allowed for varied views to be encountered, the space did not offer the focus and safety for the elderly, compared to the senior centres and nursing homes, where their voices were more readily heard.

FRAMING THE RESEARCH

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH

In 2012, Singapore's Arts and Culture Strategic Review called for the 'galvanization' of community arts projects that channel and foster the interests, ideas, knowledge and understanding of the arts (ACSR, 2012). Participating in the arts can benefit people at both individual and community levels (Reeves, 2002; Matarasso, 1997; and Ruiz, 2004 in Ewing, 2010). The arts have been recognised for their ability to bring people together to share their experiences (ACSR, 2012:10). They are a vehicle for constructing and disseminating a community's collective memory (Ibid) as well as for facilitating social and emotional benefits including personal development, social unity, community spirit and health and wellbeing (Ewing, 2010; Costes Onishi, 2014). The arts can generate new thoughts and ideas that ignite possibilities of transformation and

change. As Australian academic and arts education specialist Robyn Ewing tells us,

a community's habits of thinking, seeing and behaving can be transformed through active participation in creating processes, debate, identification of divergence and so on, to produce new ways of seeing, knowing and acting in the world. (2010:47)

Moreover, a community's experience with the arts can help develop an appreciation of the arts (ACSR, 2012).

However, there is a need to be able to identify when and how the arts impact a community's ways of 'seeing, knowing and acting in the world' to help inform and build arts practice. Director of the UNESCO-NIE Centre for Arts Research in Education (CARE), Lum Chee Hoo reminds us that '[t]he meaning in any art form is tied closely to the context in which the arts-making happen' (2013:xii). To understand the impact of community arts in Singapore we therefore need to examine the context in which it takes place. Gene Segarra Navera (2013:17) stresses the need to develop an awareness of Singapore's strengths and weaknesses in the arts. Self-examination, he tells us, is essential. The research conducted into the immersive arts event, *Both Sides, Now* aims to do just that.

There is little published on research examining community-based arts projects in Singapore. Researchers from UNESCO-NIE CARE have investigated Reminiscence Theatre (Wales & Tai, 2014) and community drumming (Costes Onishi, 2014) projects, and Community Cultural Development (Singapore) has investigated the needs of seniors in participatory arts programmes, as well as arts programmes in health and education sectors (CCD, 2016). But these case studies of community-based work differ considerably in content and form to the multi-dimensional, multi-modal processes or outputs employed by the *Both Sides, Now* creative team. A deep analysis of the immersive and participatory arts aspect of the *IPS PRISM* project (National University of Singapore, 2012), which was an exploration into Singapore citizenship and governance, initiated by the Institute of Policy Studies and created and produced by Drama Box and ArtsWok, is yet to be published. However, while this work took a similar approach to immersive

and participatory art making, *IPS Prism* differed in theme and audience focus. Consequently, this study into *Both Sides, Now* fills a void.

THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The researchers aimed to document the unique process of the immersive arts experience and analyse its unique practice in *Both Sides, Now*. Research into *Both Sides, Now* not only sought to examine the event's impact on the community, but also fill a gap in Singapore-based research on community arts. The researchers wanted to identify the strengths and weaknesses of *Both Sides, Now* and consider what other community arts projects can learn from it.

The study planned to investigate the impact and achievements of the second iteration of *Both Sides, Now* which was conducted at open-air public spaces in Khatib and Toa Payoh from 19 – 28 September 2014. Specifically, it was designed to examine the ways in which *Both Sides, Now* was perceived by all parties involved in the planning, creation and running of the project. In addition it also looked at those who attended it. It sought to understand and identify the ways in which communities responded to the work. Central aims were to identify what artists, healthcare workers, academics, and stakeholders could learn from immersive arts experiences like *Both Sides, Now* and pinpoint what elements of the event engaged the attending communities. Moreover, the study inquired into the creative processes of the creative team in the development of the organizational, administrative and artistic work that went into the event. Consequently, data was collected during and after the event making it immediate and unfolding as well as reflective and retrospective.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

Four key questions were posed to unpack the research aims. These focused on the creative processes, the communication of the subject matter, the impact of the event, and the way the event galvanized action and pushed forward into new areas. The following questions were asked:

1. What are the multiple ways life and death are conveyed within the event?

This included investigating:

- The kinds of messages (texts & subtexts) communicated about life and death?
- The kinds of conversations that opened up through the multiplicity of expressions of death, dying and living at the event

2. What is the impact of *Both Sides, Now* on audience members/attendees and stakeholders?

This facilitated inquiry into:

- What people took away from the event
- The thoughts and ideas the work provoked
- The questions and discussions it raised
- The ways in which the event built understandings and knowledges about living and dying
- The ways in which the event changed attitudes about living and dying and possibly led to action

3. In what ways has *Both Sides, Now* achieved (and moved beyond) the aims of the senior stakeholders (creative team, funding bodies, and hospital management)?

This sought to inquire into:

- What the stakeholders hoped to, and did, achieve
- Their thoughts and feelings about these achievements
- The ways the work moved beyond their expectations
- The kinds of opportunities the work opened up

4. What are the processes of the creative team in the development, installation, implementation and reflections of this work?

This included looking into:

- Their research on the subject matter
- The dramaturgical and developmental processes
- The ways they applied that research
- The kinds of creative and aesthetic decisions they made

Research Approach, Methodology and Limitations

A qualitative research methodology was undertaken using the Case Study model. An empirical form of enquiry employed across a broad range of disciplines, particularly in the arts and social sciences, Case Study research examines a contemporary event or phenomenon in its 'real-life context' (Yin, 1994). As a single case study, this research investigated and examined the complexities of a particular event, the immersive arts experience *Both Sides, Now*, which was presented in two locations (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). The two researchers, both academics at the National Institute of Education (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore) approached the study with personal and social interest in the work. One of them, Charlene Rajendran, was Dramaturg on the project and had been involved in its planning from the early stages.

Data collection

Incorporating ethnographic methods of data collection, data was gathered from primary and secondary sources. This included: i) interviews with audiences, creative team members, stakeholders, and guides; ii) researcher observations on the art-making processes, installations and performances held at the event; iii) researcher's field-notes & logbooks; iv) artefacts constructed for the event (e.g. film), as well as those constructed and collected during the event (e.g. pinwheels); v) publicity, promotion materials, and press coverage, as well as letters to the research team from audiences and volunteers.

Observations

During the event the researchers attended the site(s) on most days, usually for between two to four hours. During this time they moved around the site and observed different groups of people, interacted with the artefacts, spoke with members of the creative team and guides as well as audience members. Field notes were taken during the observations, as well as photographs to help recall specific moments, artworks and episodes. These were analysed and coded

against other data (interviews, surveys, artefacts) to help crystallise the findings (Richardson, 2000).

Interviews

A primary source of data was a series of 29 interviews with audience members, stakeholders, volunteers and the creative team. Of the 29 interviews conducted, 7 were conducted with pairs – this was because the two were either work partners or collaborators, or were attending *Both Sides, Now* with a friend or spouse when they were approached to be interviewed – the remainder were one-on-one interviews.

Interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of the shifting and perhaps diverse aims and goals, thoughts and feelings, understanding, knowledge and reflections of the art event. In addition, interviews sought to gather a multiplicity of perspectives and viewpoints. Consequently, the interviews were semi-structured and conversational, allowing for loose conversation to occur and people's perspectives and subjectivities to emerge (Kitzinger, 1994). Questions were designed to stimulate and 'steer' the conversation towards pondering on the central areas of inquiry (Kang, 2012). Open-ended questions were asked to provoke explicit and detailed responses.

Approximately 26 hours of interview data was collected. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed before being coded and analysed for key concepts and themes. In addition to the interviews the creative team met for reflective debriefings of approximately 4-hours duration. These too were transcribed and analysed.

Audience Members – Audience members were generally chosen at random and interviews were conducted in English or Mandarin. 13 interviews were undertaken with 17 members of the general public who attended the event. 10 interviews lasting approximately 10-15 minutes were conducted with 9 attendees on site at Khatib and Toa Payoh. However two in-depth interviews were undertaken with four audience members about two weeks after the event.

One was with a husband and wife, and the other with two friends, all of whom had spoken to the researchers informally at the event, and told them they had been so affected that they come back with family members.

Guides – Guides came from a range of backgrounds. The majority were sourced through Drama Box’s network of guides. However, guides who had no prior experience with Drama Box or community arts projects also participated. 2 interviews were conducted with 2 guides from this latter group. One had been a social worker, who now worked in business. The other was a senior citizen, who kept active and social by volunteering for a range of organisations. These interviews, conducted several weeks after the event, were in-depth and lasted for approximately 1 hour.

Stakeholders –5 interviews were conducted with stakeholders, representatives from funding bodies and participating health organisations. 2 foundations were interviewed and 3 healthcare organisations. These interviews were conducted after the event and each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. All the interviewed stakeholders had attended *Both Sides, Now* but some had only come during the day and so had not seen the forum performance which was held during the evenings.

Creative Team – Creative team members were chosen and approached to be interviewed because of the varied role/s they played, which was felt would add a broad range of perspectives. 13 members of the Creative Team were interviewed. This included the Artistic Director, the Producers from ArtsWok, the Co-producer from Drama Box, the Assistant to the Artistic Director, the Filmmaker, the Design Team, the Dramaturg, a Puppeteer, three Actors, and a forum theatre Joker (who facilitated the interactive drama). These interviews ran from 45 to 90 minutes. All were conducted within a month of the event ending.

Artifacts

Drama Box collected and stored publicity and planning materials as well as artworks constructed by the audience members and artists for and during the event. The artifacts became part of the research team's data. They included:

- The exhibit displays including, pinwheels (*Turn Turn Turn*), resting places (*This Is Not A Coffin*), cards of positive and negative experiences in life (*Life Journeys: Ups And Downs*), and photographs of people's messages to death (*My Message To Death*).
- Photographs of exhibits and the event
- Video recording of the forum theatre, film and puppet performance
- Media articles and promotion material
- Analysis of a survey conducted by the production companies, and their report

The artifacts were sorted through, documented and catalogued into ideas, concepts and themes; particulars of participants, gender, age etc. as well as design concepts. The researchers drew on but were not be limited to a grounded theory framework for basic data analysis. Data was analysed for codes, concepts, categories, and theories. Open, substantive and axial coding was conducted within the analysis, followed by the theorizing of ideas through memo-ing before final sorting and writing up of research findings.

Overall, the purpose of the methodology was to embolden the creative team to self-examine and reflect on their creative processes, and provide them with a platform that could inform their thinking about ways to refine their approach. It sought to encourage audience members to make explicit their thoughts and feelings about the event; urge guides to contemplate their role and purpose; and advance the stakeholders' thinking about the efficacy of the arts in community events. Finally, the research aimed to build knowledge and understanding of the landscape of community arts practice in Singapore as well as the possibilities of interdisciplinary collaborations between creative industry and healthcare professionals.

ANALYSIS OF ARTWORKS

The artworks created for *Both Sides, Now* can be understood as forms of engaged art, in which there is a 'call and response' approach that enlists audiences in a participatory process. In engaged art the work foregrounds the opportunity for audiences to interact with the work. This is meant to be an exchange of ideas, and thus the artworks are not intended as finished objects that are simply to be admired from a distance. Instead, audiences are meant to add to the work and in some cases leave their marks, remarks or ideas behind, in the form of writing, photos or drawings. In addition, they can also participate on stage in dialogue with the performance. This form of engaged art 'foregrounds the *relationships* (our emphasis) at the heart of making art with such aspirations, and dependence on a genuine exchange between artist and community such that one is changed by the other' (Cohen Cruz, 2010: 3). In the analysis of the artwork we examine how these relationships were produced and the kinds of exchange that occurred.

Forum Theatre: Exit

DESCRIPTION: The forum theatre performance was held every evening at 7.30 pm on a stage under the Life pavilion in the site. A short ante-play entitled *Exit* was presented in English, Cantonese and Mandarin, with surtitles in English and Chinese. The story is set in a hospital ward and portrays the life of two families struggling to cope as they confront chronic illness and death. After the ante-play (a 15-20-minute scripted play that ends in unresolved conflict) there was a short discussion led by the facilitators (also referred to as Jokers in forum theatre). Then audience members were invited to go on stage, and take on particular roles at choice moments in the play when they felt something else could have been done to improve the situation. This is an opportunity for them to change the actions and decisions characters make to alter the outcome of the play. After the performance, audiences were invited to stay on and continue the discussion. Round tables and chairs were available for this purpose, and facilitators were present to engage the public in these Community Conversations.

AIMS: The performance confronts audiences with the complexities of decision-making when dealing with terminal illness or aging. It focuses on how family members, caregivers and medical personnel are often caught in difficult situations when having to advise, persuade or decide what needs to be done next. Characters are seen as struggling to cope, and audiences develop empathy for different persona by listening to their story, and encountering their dilemmas. The audience interventions are then opportunities for audiences to participate in reshaping the behaviours, attitudes and relationships that result.

By choosing to replace a character in a moment of conflict, audiences can try out options that revise the outcomes and challenge socio-cultural norms. This empowers the audience to revisit ways of problem-solving by recognising there are options that could lead to more positive outcomes. It also highlights the need for skills of negotiation and dialogue that become apparent through improvisation and careful listening. The purpose is not to prescribe an ideal solution, but develop understanding of different choices that can be made.



Photo: An audience member (far right) takes on the role of a mother and talks with the character of her son about medical choices for his father who is in a critical condition. The ante-play is reprised at a moment of crisis in the story, to allow audience members to try out their versions of how the characters could rethink and rework initial choices.

ANALYSIS: Most audiences who attended the forum theatre were visibly captivated by the performance, and many had comments to make during the discussion after the performance as well. All the seats were filled and many people could be seen standing around to watch as well. They were of mixed ages with a significant number of young adults present at each performance. Thus even though the target group was an older population, the work clearly appealed to a wider demographic, underlining the value of conversations on death and dying for all sectors of the public.

Audiences responded in English and Chinese languages, and conveyed a range of perspectives that reflected multiple beliefs and convictions. Both seniors and young adults participated in the interventions, and this led to a rich variety of interactions at each performance. Even though the topic was of death and dying, there was little sense of taboo. Instead audiences demonstrated a keen interest in the complex and inconclusive negotiations between family members, caregivers and medical personnel.

Discussions were focused around the need for Advanced Care Planning and questions about how to prepare for death and dying. More complicated issues, such as the right to choose how to die, and the lack of family and institutional support, were also broached. These were clearly aspects that resonated with many present. However even as the use of the Advanced Care Planning form was integrated into the ante-play, this became less significant than the desire to improve communication with family members and feel supported through difficult choices. Audiences identified and engaged with characters having to deal with difficult circumstances, and their interventions aimed to help resolve some of the tensions in these relationships. This repeated theme points to the critical need for more conversations among family and caregivers, with opportunities to develop skills and reflective capacities when dealing with sensitive situations.

At times the discussions became intense, and these were often carried over into the Community Conversations that occurred after the forum theatre event was over. Having tables and chairs placed near the pavilions, and facilitators on hand to steer discussions, made it conducive to talk or simply listen. Many stayed on and strangers who had never met were seen talking animatedly about issues that arose through the evening. This pointed to the capacity for forum theatre to engage in community dialogue through the fiction of characters and stories that are not real, but speak eloquently to the real.

The issue of performing to a multilingual audience was dealt with by having surtitles on stage and bilingual facilitators to translate during the discussion and intervention. This meant that those who were fluent in English or Chinese languages were catered to. However, the surtitles were not clearly visible and this made reading difficult. In addition, those whose main language was Malay, Tamil or other languages had less access to the work. In addition, the two families portrayed were Chinese, and while this catered to the main target group and majority population, it meant that other cultural frames were largely excluded from the discussion. Since culture is critical in dealing with highly personal concerns about life and death, this may have limited the scope of the work. Nonetheless, as a performance that sought to deal with specific problems, this particularity was also a strength because issues were tackled in depth.



Photo: Actress Wah-Wah Hung Chit Wah (centre, in pajamas) plays an aging character talking to a young boy whose father is critically ill. Audiences of mixed ages can be seen standing around, watching, on the side of the stage.

Puppet Theatre: The Wind Came Home

DESCRIPTION: The puppet performance, *The Wind Came Home*, was performed from 6.30-7.00 pm in front of the Life pavilion, which housed the stage. This occurred just before the forum theatre performance. (*The Wind Came Home* had been performed in 20 senior centres earlier that year.)

The story, seen through the eyes of a stray cat, is of an elderly couple who struggle to make difficult end-of-life choices. When the old man is diagnosed with cancer, he has to plan for the care of his wife, who suffers from dementia. In dealing with social workers and an absent son, he also confronts his own fears of dying and loneliness. The play was performed mainly in Mandarin, with some dialect. It was performed by a solo puppeteer, who transformed her voice to depict the many characters in the play. The puppeteer was visible and stood behind a raised platform on which the puppets performed.

AIMS: The puppet performance was geared specifically towards an older Chinese population, and portrayed a situation that reflected recurrent problems, key concerns and knowledge gaps that emerged during prior research for the

project. It thus educated the audience on a range of important aged care and end-of-life issues such as available support services for the elderly, how to contact relevant agencies, what needs to be done in an emergency, and who to call on for help – which were seen to be crucial areas of need. However, the heart of the story focused on the deteriorating health of an old couple, and their sense of isolation and helplessness. As this is a very sensitive issue, the choice to use puppets created a gentler and more humorous approach for audiences. Instead of watching live actors deal with these problems, they encountered colourful and quirky puppets who were less ‘real’. This made the themes and topics less ominous.



Photo: Puppeteer Tan Beng Tian (left) with a cross-section of the Khatib audience that included people of mixed ages.

ANALYSIS: The puppet performances were an effective way to gather audiences in preparation for the forum theatre performance. Since the work was initially created for small groups in intimate settings, namely at the senior centres, it was not as appropriate for the open-air settings in Khatib and Toa Payoh. Thus visibility of the puppets was limited for these large audiences.

However, the show did attract young audiences including children, who gathered close to the puppets and watched enthusiastically. This was a good way to engage families with young children in the early evening, and introduce a

difficult but important topic to young audiences as well. It was clear from this that some families were very open to talking about death and dying with young children, as seen in the willingness of parents to get children to make the pinwheels, colour the paper coffins and participate in other interactive portals as well.

The puppets were made from everyday household objects such as a thermos flask, table lamp, mini rice cooker and washing sponges. This choice made the puppets endearing and playful. They also linked the puppets with ordinary life, making them relatable and entertaining to audiences. When a functional item at home, such as a rice cooker, is transformed into a character that relates to the audience, it generates a sense of fun while dealing with serious and painful concerns. The quality of materials suggested a domestic space and references to the past – familiar to seniors and reminders of an everyday life that is often overlooked, neglected and taken for granted.



Photo: Puppeteer Regina Foo performing in one of the senior centres. The use of ordinary objects, like the rice cooker and thermos flask created humour and familiarity with the characters.

Film: Time of Our Lives

DESCRIPTION: The film, *Time of Our Lives*, was a sensuous and captivating collage of images that showed details of the human body in various stages of life – infancy, childhood, adulthood, end-of-life. Close-up views of various parts of the body, such as eyelashes, elbows, the neck and feet, were then linked to stories told by some individuals about their relationship with an illness or living with pain. This video was played on a loop from 10.00 am till 10.00 pm in the Living pavilion, within an enclosed booth that allowed for audiences to sit and watch the video undistracted.

AIMS: The film showed how the use of this medium could engage audiences in very intimate views of the human body, which are not possible otherwise. The enlarged images of bodily hair, nails or skin, often looked like landscapes or physical textures that were non-human. These resembled a grassy terrain or crumpled fabric, to create a guessing game about what was being viewed. This could also be seen as discomforting or puzzling to begin with. But in so doing, audiences who are less inclined to watch art-movies or visit a gallery, were given an opportunity to experience an artistic interpretation of the human body, and rethink normative ideas about what is beautiful, healthy and desirable.

ANALYSIS: The film was presented as somewhat separate to the rest of the installations, as it was viewed within an enclosed booth in the Living pavilion and thus not visible from the outside. This was necessary in order to limit the amount of light, and thus make the film watchable. But as a result it did not have as much connection with the broader landscape of interactive art-portals.

However, the film had a strong aesthetic, of considerably higher quality than most of the other portals. It was slick and captivating, pulling audiences into a visceral sense of the human body in a public setting. In this regard, it offered an effective mode for reminding audiences about the corporeal aspects of death and dying, within an artistic frame. Here the art-form rendered what is otherwise unseen, such as images of skin on a person's back, available for viewing, yet respectful of privacy.

The stories told, and the soundtrack used, were very contemplative and encouraged audiences to pause and consider how the human body is often dismissed as ugly or imperfect when going through processes of aging, or grappling with chronic illness. The need to revise these notions as part of the conversation on death and dying was effective through the medium of film. It allowed for private and personal reflection, leading to inner conversations about what one thinks about beauty and health.

Yet, the framing and aesthetic was also a possible deterrent for more conservative audiences who may find the close-up views of the body distasteful or unacceptable. Also, the fact that audiences had to step out of the public space into a private enclosure may have been attractive to those already familiar with watching art-films, but less savoury for those accustomed to popular films and videos. Thus the film was less appealing to the target audience, and more successful with younger and more liberal audiences.

Life Journey – Ups and Downs:

Your life's journey thing. I think that is so, so, very good. It's very reflective. It helps, uh, people, you know, uh, think of their life. Beginning till now, at this point in time. And to trace what they had gone through. It's a very good exercise in uh, reflection lah. (Audience Member)

DESCRIPTION: In this interactive portal, audiences were asked to identify the highs and lows of their life, and then chart these using a string, which represented a lifeline. Participants were given small white cards on which to write two significant high points and two low points in their lives. These could be the proudest or happiest moments, and most painful or sad events in their lives. Then, using a string and pins, audience members had to decide on how high or low their significant events were, and pin their cards in relation to other cards already on the free-standing white wall. The board had markers for every decade of life, and participants had to pin their white cards in relation to which decade each of these events occurred in as well as how momentous they were, which were indicated by how high or low they were placed. Participants were not asked to reveal their identity and remain anonymous.

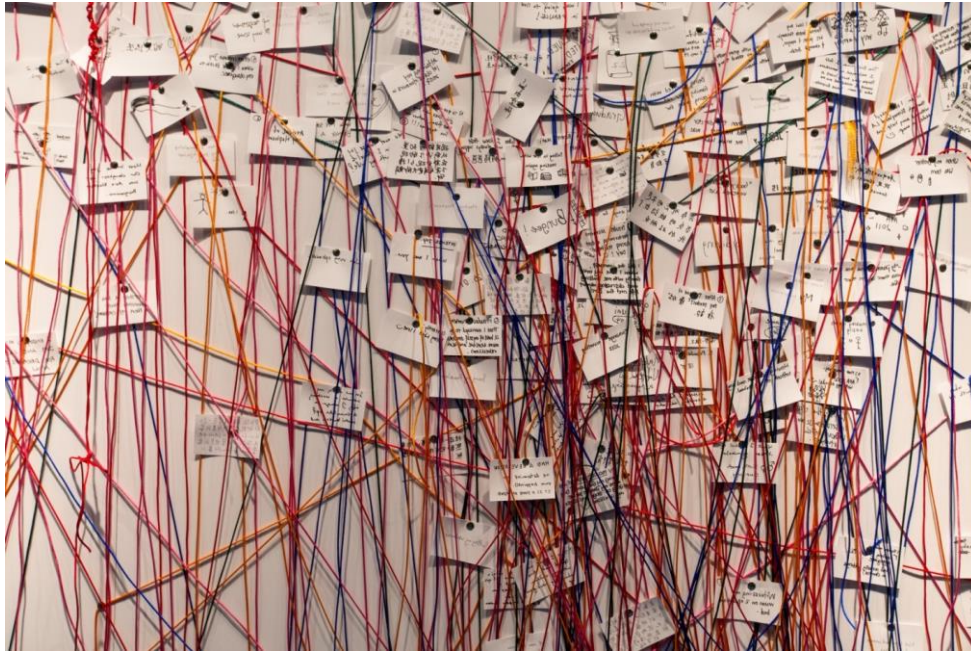


Photo: The *Life Journey* board at Khatib, after a few days of contributions, showing the complex intersection and overlap of different life journeys.

AIMS: The activity engaged participants in thinking about what they considered to be significant life events, which meant acknowledging the presence of ups and downs in every life. This entailed making choices about what is deemed difficult and painful, in comparison with that which gives pleasure and pride. It creates a reflective space for looking at one's life journey, and then making links between the individual and community. When looking at how the individual strings are part of a larger composite of highs and lows, participants see how each life intersects and overlaps with others. They can also observe how the similarities and differences demonstrate the diversity of perspectives, and these provide graphic depictions of how life journeys are constituted of shared events for the individual and community. Questions can also arise about what happens between the highs and lows, where nothing is marked, but life goes on.

ANALYSIS: When the responses were examined, it was clear that relationships formed the main focus of how people gauged the value of life. This included relationships with family, friends, life partners and the divine. High points were largely associated with the birth of a child, marriage and finding faith in God, while low points pointed to betrayal of trust, the loss of a loved one and the break-up of a family. Thus even as material success is deemed a major preoccupation of urban and developed society, in the context of this interactive

artwork people seemed to give prime value to the intangible and socio-emotional dimensions of living.

Another key aspect was the importance of academic and career success, and the fulfilment of expectations in relation to these goals. Doing well in examinations, getting a good job, and being promoted were seen as positive achievements, which then corresponded with losing a job, business failure, and getting poor exam results as markers of failure and causes for regret. These were significant indications of Singapore's emphasis on education and the need to have a stable income and professional identity.

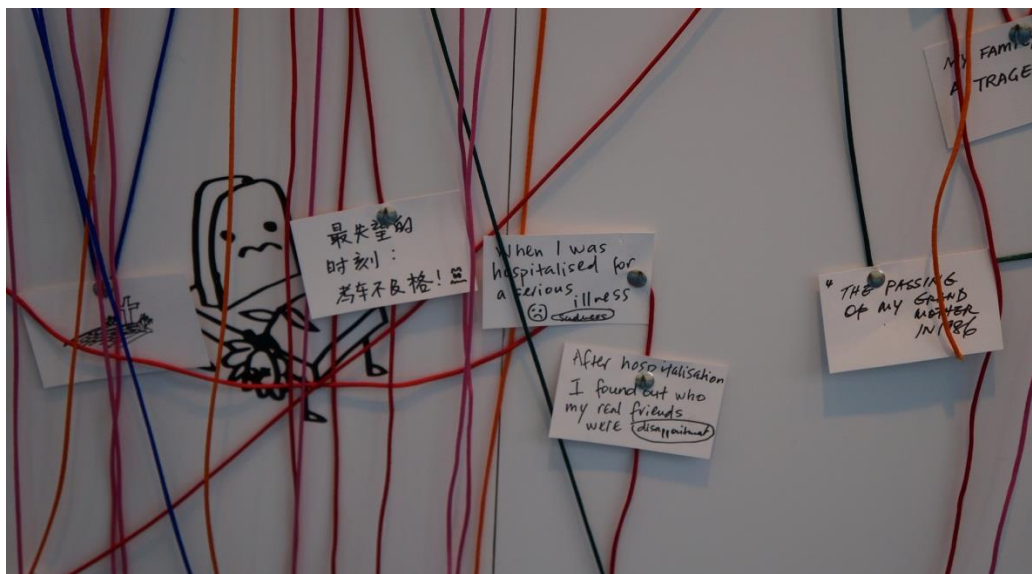


Photo: Close-up of the *Life Journey* board at Toa Payoh. This section of the board was in the lower half, which meant that the moments pinned here were considered the low points or the 'downs'.

While some participants noted illness and death as significant lows, these were often framed within a relationship rather than seen as isolated events. It was the death of a spouse, parent or child that was significant, rather than death itself. Contrastingly, illness was seen as 'regret' or 'failure' rather than a condition that could be shared. This could reflect the concerns about the high price of medical treatment, and the notion that dependence is 'failure' and a major cost to caregivers in Singapore.

In placing the highs and lows of life on a shared board, participants were effectively charting themselves in relation to others, and thus making community life part of their individual reality. Even as the theme for the overall event was

death and dying, this portal located death and dying as part of a broader view of life rather than isolating it. This meant that people could see tangibly how the pain of loss and illness are part of an individual's and community's process of living. Furthermore, giving value to both the highs and lows can offer perspectives on people's apprehension of life.

Life Lessons

DESCRIPTION: This installation consisted of large portrait photographs of senior citizens, with statements from the seniors about the value of life. The portraits also included the names and ages of the seniors, to identify them and communicate their identity as part of an aging society. These were printed onto large banners and hung from the roof of the Living pavillion.

AIMS: The installation engaged audiences in reflecting on the importance of attending to what seniors want to say about life. Each portrait said something different, and conveyed a particular person with a specific perspective that gave insight into how a person reviews living and dying, and is able to communicate this in words. It was geared towards showing the beauty and dynamism of individuals who are aging, while depicting an inner spirit that is evident through the expressions captured, and words printed.

ANALYSIS: The banners were well-designed and each portrait captured something unique, vibrant and endearing about the seniors who were photographed. They conveyed a strong sense of the vitality and character of each individual, which was further enhanced by the statements made. These were largely lessons about life or philosophical notions about what life should be.

However, because the banners were hung from the roof, and swung a good two-and-a-half to three meters from the ground, they were difficult to look at closely. It would have been better if the banners were larger and made with heavier material so that they did not move around as much when the wind blew. Alternatively, the banners could have been placed closer to eye-level so that audiences could engage more closely with the portraits.

Since the portraits were all of seniors, to celebrate their presence in society and underline the value of their views, it would have been more strategic to make the banners accessible to seniors in other ways as well. Perhaps having them placed in the other pavilions, or having life-sized stand-alone cut-outs to present them among the audience, could have led to more effective use of the portraits.

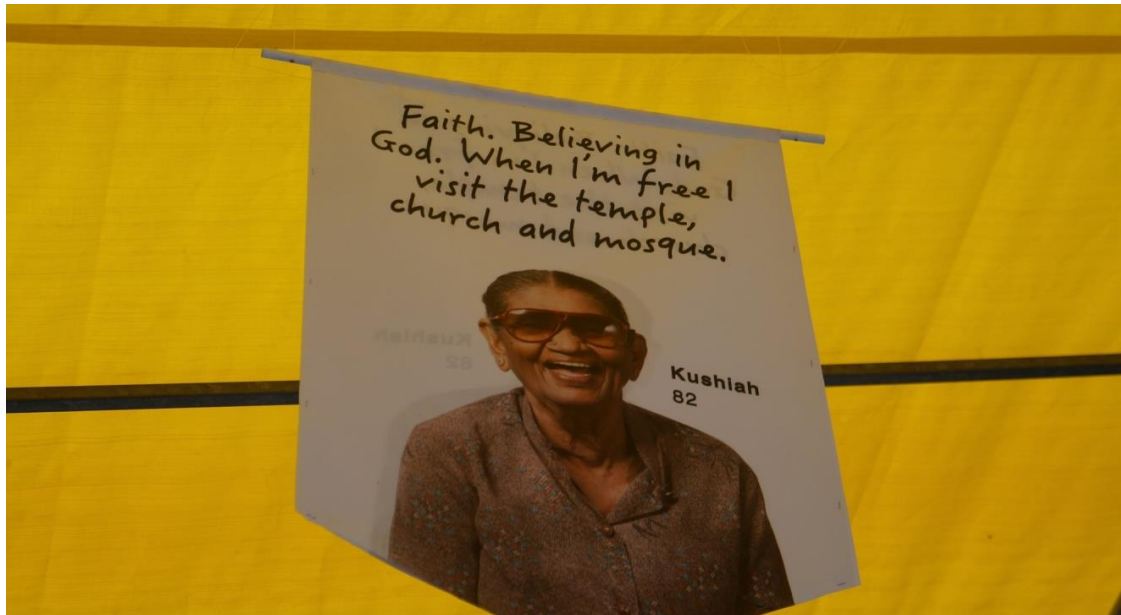


Photo: A smiling portrait of 82-year-old Kushiah hangs from the tentage at Khatib, where her philosophy of life is encapsulated in a statement.

A Life Remembered

DESCRIPTION: This interactive installation consisted of a white wall in the Living pavilion that was gradually filled with colourful post-its. Audiences were invited to write how they would like to be remembered or what they thought their legacy would be. Once they had written something down, they could then add their post-it to the rest, forming an ever-expanding collage of statements from the public.

AIMS: This simple activity gave audiences an opportunity to leave a trace / note that was simple yet significant to them. As the notes were anonymous, this could be seen as a way of engaging individuals in thinking about how they want to be remembered, as well as expressing an aspiration for how they want to live well. While other interactive portals demanded deeper levels of reflection and

engagement, this one allowed for audiences to do something relatively easy, yet connected to the broader event.



Photo: Image of *A Life Remembered* with close-up of one of the post-its. Some contributions, like the one in the image above, suggested the motivation to leave a positive mark.

ANALYSIS: The post-its could not be collected at the end of the event because they were firmly glued to the wall so there is no detailed analysis of the comments made. In general people wrote in a range of languages, and drew some images to illustrate their meaning. The messages ranged from humourous and quirky, to serious and contemplative, suggesting a diversity of responses and ways of viewing how a life could be remembered. There were also sentimental expressions that suggested a romanticised notion of life. What came through was how the nature of the activity allowed for the more ponderous and heavy messages to be placed alongside the more light-hearted ones, underlining how there are no absolutes when it comes to issues of living and dying.



Photo: Another image of *A Life Remembered*. The contributions displayed a variety of expressions, written and drawn, showing optimism and hope, as well as contemplation and reflection.

Turn Turn Turn

DESCRIPTION: “What would you like to take with you and leave behind when you die?” Participants were invited to reflect upon this question by inscribing and constructing ‘do-it-yourself’ paper pinwheels that they could take away or attach to the black wall of the Dying pavilion, leaving them to spin in the breeze. The pre-cut pinwheels, yellow on one side and white on the other had four blades. Each blade represented a category, namely what participants would like to i) Forget, ii) Let Go Of, iii) Remember, iv) Hold On To, when they died. Audience members were instructed to respond to each category by writing on the inside of each blade. When folded and pinned, these inscriptions were no longer visible but contained within the pinwheel, giving privacy to the participant’s wishes.

AIMS: A paper windmill is an object of simplicity, function and energy. It conveys innocence and childhood, is celebratory, playful and carnivalesque. Pinwheels symbolise the way in which lives spin and turn. They invite us to consider how life consists of ‘riding the wind’, being caught up in cycles, of stops and starts, the need for energy (wind), to just keep moving, and how the wheel of fortune can

spin round and change our luck. This activity encouraged participants to reflect on what is really important to them in the larger scheme of things and what they are holding on to and wish to forget. The placement of pinwheels against a black fabric-lined wall from which they could catch the wind and spin, invites reflections of release and freedom. It enabled participants to see their pinwheels amongst others, to recognise the collective dimension of being part of a larger community that is consciously reflecting on issues of death and dying.

ANALYSIS: There were a range of responses among the 197 pinwheels collected from Khatib and Toa Payoh. Many of these were written, but some had drawings and in some cases the pinwheels were left blank. People who participated in constructing and pinning pinwheels revealed the importance of memories, emotions, relationships, religion, accepting (and denying) death, and the impact of their own and other's actions in their responses. Cultural and spiritual references revealed the importance too of ritual via notions of acceptance and forgiveness, duty, family and traditional rites. Among the written comments were:

We come in empty hands, we also leave in empty hands.

Remember the good times I've blessed others & the times others have blessed me.

Throw the ashes to the sea/wherever the ashes go. Throw when I die.

Memories, unsurprisingly, were things people said they wanted to both release and cling on to the most. A fair number of pinwheel makers wanted to forget and/or let go of memories while others wanted to remember and/or hold on to them. In some cases, memories were perceived as 'bad', 'painful', and made people 'sad'. These were due to 'grudges, and being in the 'past' and were mostly associated with disappointments and failures. Those memories people wanted to remember and hold on to were generated by positive emotions like happiness, love, goodness, and joy, and were associated with positive personal feelings and actions like sacrifice for and spending time with loved ones.

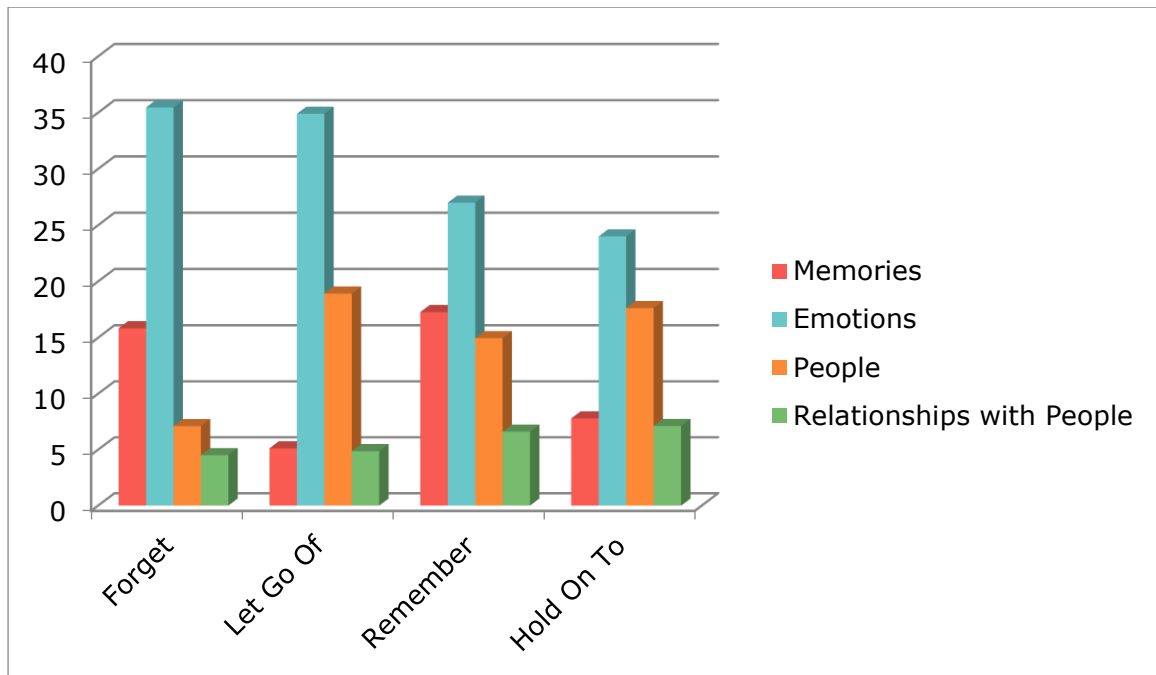
Emotions emerged as a significant responsive trigger for what people wanted to leave behind and take with them after death. A significant number of participants

in the pinwheel activity wanted to forget and/or let go of emotions. This mainly consisted of negative emotions like anger, stress, worries, pain, unhappiness, bitterness, and regret. Interestingly positive emotions like love, peace, goodness and happiness were also sentiments people wanted to forget and let go in death, perhaps because they felt it would be easier to 'pass on' by releasing the feelings they clung on to in life. Positive emotions were also sensations people desired to remember and hold on to in death.

The only thing perhaps I feel I could have done better in my life was to be a better daughter.

Participants' relationships with and feelings for people featured regularly on the pinwheels. Attachment to loved ones resonated powerfully in the pinwheels through desires to forget, let go, remember, and hold on to those 'people' who would be left behind after death. Participants revealed they wanted to let go of their families but not forget them on passing. They also wanted to hold on "to my loved ones", to "people and trust", to "family and lovers and friends" and forget "people who hurt me", and the things they could have done better. Relationships with family and friends, as well as with others, were seen as highly significant in the lives of respondents. Pinwheels revealed people's connectedness to their loved ones through their desires to forget past 'hurt', 'harm' and 'pain' and hold on to moments of 'love', 'kindness' and 'joy'. A number of pinwheels revealed participants' acceptance and denial of death connected to people's relationships; both earthly and spiritual. Some spoke of struggling to detach from their families and loved ones, while others talked of their readiness to leave this world, their religious beliefs, their faith in God/Creator/higher being's plan.

There were a few cases where participants proffered opinions and guidance in their pinwheels. "Hold on to hope! Tomorrow will be better", one writer recommended. Another philosophically expressed the inevitability of death saying, "Live, grow old, get sick and face death", while yet another suggested we needed to "Forget about staying alive and just live."



Patterns revealed that people reflected on their need to release their shortcomings and grudges, their disappointments, regrets and failures. It also made space to contemplate and release their pain and the pain they had caused others. Ambitions, possessions, and inhibitions were also points of desired release. What people wanted to hold on to and remember were their loved ones, their positive experiences, and their sense of personal worth. The time taken to fill in and think about these four categories suggests a desire to think about what really matters in living, and how mortality confronts us with having to let go. The interaction enabled participants to identify what matters to them and express this in ways they were comfortable with. This willingness to engage in reflective artworks points to a capacity among the public to review deeply held motivations and attitudes about living and dying. The opportunity to do this within the wider context of *Both Sides, Now* allowed for connections to other ways of processing the work of holding on and letting go.



Photo: Audience member at Khatib reading the comments written, and image of the pinwheels on the board at Toa Payoh, pinned alongside the contributions to *This is Not A Coffin*.

This is Not a Coffin

DESCRIPTION: In this interactive art-making activity participants were asked to create their ideal resting place on a paper template, designed to be folded into a small rectangular coffin shaped box. Provided with coloured pens, markers and pencils, participants were invited to consider, draw and inscribe desired and imagined realms and dimensions they would want to inhabit after death. After participants had decorated their paper coffins/resting stops they were pinned to the black fabric-lined wall of the Dying pavillion and displayed with the pinwheels.

AIMS: The activity invited audience members to think about their own mortality and end-of-life issues specifically to do with their final resting place – which for many in the Singapore context is a coffin. In undertaking this art-making activity participants were provided with a space to imagine and consider their thoughts, feelings and beliefs about their own death and a possible afterlife. Thinking about an ideal resting place could evoke visions of a future rite-of-passage, and

allow participants to reflect on their legacy as well as the life they want to live before they 'rest'.



Photo: A close-up of a pinwheel and a paper coffin and the words written: "This is my Garden of Rest. Tranquility."

ANALYSIS: Five key themes appeared in the ways participants viewed and constructed their paper coffins. They were perceived as rites of passage, allusions to paradise, resting places, homes, and allusions to being dissatisfied with life.

Many of the paper coffins were created as a rite-of-passage pathway that took people into a different realm or dimension. Here the paper boxes were transformed into portal-like objects such as a Tardis (a popular culture reference to the television series *Dr Who*) or other types of time machine, a door, or a spaceship to go to distant and far off lands. Some of these objects had referenced the divine with images, such as that of a cross, demonstrating that while participants viewed their resting stop as a vehicle to other dominions and territories, they were still connected to the celestial and God.

Ideas of finding peace and happiness in the afterlife, through allusions to paradise, were also strongly featured on the decorated paper coffins. Images of flowers, gardens, the sea and music featured on many of these resting places, building a sense of celestial music, the Garden of Eden, and the sound of waves

against the shore: all idyllic spaces. These fantasies of paradise demonstrated people's lean towards hope and faith; that death was a new beginning.

The most prevalent theme, perhaps not surprisingly due to the title of this art-making activity and the instructions provided, was of coffins being presented as resting places, usually as a bed to lie in. Home also featured on the designs which conveyed the idea that one's loved ones would stay connected despite death, or one could meet loved ones who had already departed this world. Both these themes provided a sense of comfort, peace and love. For those who drew beds, there was also an impression of solitude and quiet, of the world stopping.

While most of the paper coffins conveyed ideas of a positive transition from this world, some people's resting stops displayed allusions to being dissatisfied with life. Indications of regret, philosophical statements, desires to start a new adventure, or leave a worthwhile legacy behind suggested that some people needed something more from life. Images and words on these coffins expressed a need to ensure a life well lived, or at least the completion of something worthwhile. Others sought to leave a mark by making a difference or looked forward to something new, indicating dissatisfaction with what they have. Resting places expressing a desire to move on to new pastures carried a sense of depression and sadness. However, considering the concept of designing your final resting place might seem quite morbid, it was interesting to note that the overwhelming majority of paper coffins were filled with warm, gentle images and words.

The paper coffins showed again that people were willing to engage in thinking about their own mortality and what they hoped for. We observed that some of these 'resting places' were done by children, who came with parents, perhaps keen to engage in conversations about death and dying as a family, and from an early age.



Photo: Two participants taking time to work on imagining their ideal resting place by writing and drawing on the paper coffins at Khatib.

Rest. Stop

If comes the day I'm going to lie there (in coffin), like physically I might be dead but what's important in my spirit, you know, then I was thinking, like because I look in the coffin and saw my mom's dead, my mom's face, my grandma's face, and just now when I was lying there, and I imagine when I look out, I just want to see my love ones. And I just want them to be happy. And I think that's what I'm like right now. So I think I'm ready to go. It's liberating.
(Audience Member)

DESCRIPTION: The Dying pavilion housed *Rest.Stop*, an interactive installation. A heptagonal terrarium-like feature filled with fresh fruit, that slowly rotted and decayed over time, placed on a black plinth, stood at its centre. Jutting out from this was a three pronged, three dimensional sound and vision triptych: three spaces that represented a wake, a kopitiam, and a living room. Each space was dressed: the wake with a coffin; the living room with a chair, drip stand, sideboard and blank television screen; and the kopitiam with crockery on a table, a few chairs and boxes. Different audio soundscapes in which people discussed the demise of a friend or loved one were played on a loop in each of the three spaces. Audience members moved into each space where they could stand or sit

on the chairs, and/or interact with the coffin – touch, stand, sit or lie in it. They could then listen to the dialogue in each soundscape, which was underscored with music and/or sound effects to denote the venue.

AIMS: To many Singaporeans death is considered a taboo topic and rarely dealt with in public circumstances that entail large groups of people. The installation challenged audiences to confront the ordinariness of death, and make connections with the physical and emotional impact of death. It also invited conversations about death and dying, and cultivated a connection between the living and the dead through the selection of spaces curated for the installation. The audio soundscapes of friends, family and loved ones talking about the imagined deceased aimed to convey the banality of death, the everyday nature of death. The installation endeavoured to strike an emotional chord and elicit discussion. Audience members were confronted not only with the sounds of people talking about death but also its physical manifestation signified by the presence of an open coffin. The coffin's presence sought to shock audiences, to contest any ideas of death and dying being a forbidden and unlucky topic. The installation empowered the audience to tackle their prejudices, to try out the coffin, and face the inevitability of death.

ANALYSIS: The *Rest.Stop* contained multiple representations of the inevitability of death. Aesthetically, the installation consisting of the coffin, kopitiam, home and terrarium, was not about the 'beauty' of the objects but the relational aspects that led audiences to interact with and interpret the assemblage. The connections were forged through placement and association, and these were then understood and responded to, according to each person's background and experience.

The terrarium placed in the centre of the installation, from which audiences could pivot into the three different 'sites' contained fruit that slowly putrefied, becoming insect ridden, and decomposed over several days. This was a physical manifestation and reminder of the certainty of death. While people did not linger here, and tended to gravitate towards the wake, housing an empty coffin, this was no less a significant reminder of the 'absent' bodies in the other spaces.



Photo: The rotting-fruit display at the centre of *Rest.Stop* in Toa Payoh. The juice from a rotting fruit resembled a bleeding wound, a stark reminder of how flesh is weakened with time, and is vulnerable to damage.

The open coffin drew the most vivid and powerful responses, compared to the kopitiam and living room. Occasionally people sat down, most generally stood, and listened to the audio in these two locations. However, the wake rendered the most intense reactions as it was deemed most unusual. Audience members responded to the coffin in diverse ways, varying from shock and horror to trepidation, fear and even playfulness and joy. Some looked but did not approach it. Others complained about its presence to guides. Passers-by were observed shaking their heads as they walked by only to come back and affirm what they had seen.

The composition of the coffin and the soundscape at the wake pointed overtly to death and burial. A coffin exists to house a dead body, to be buried or cremated. However, the coffin's emptiness offered a space to occupy, and for audience members to 'try it out'. This emptiness or void encouraged action: hands ran fingers over the wood, and tested its strength by leaning against it. Able bodies stepped inside it to sit and/or lie down in it. Some climbed out with relief while

others jumped out wearing huge smiles. In some cases, the coffin appeared to humanise and softened the blow of death.

Audience members talked about how they were surprised by its comfort and its ability to provide a space to slow down, stop, rest and sleep. Yet for others it symbolised an ill wind that simply had no place there. Diverse feelings were elicited from the installation of the wake. It pushed the boundaries and challenged people's perceptions. It confronted, titillated, surprised, and frightened some people while others found it unexpectedly revealing and even comforting and liberating. It became clear that master narratives about death being a taboo conversation have been mythologised; many people want spaces to explore their ideas and feelings about death and dying.



Photo: A participant tries out the coffin at *Rest.Stop*. This installation produced many visceral reactions, of which surprise, apprehension and curiosity appeared to be the most frequent. It also elicited a sense of play.

My Message to Death

DESCRIPTION: In this work audience members were asked to think about what they would like to say to 'Death'. They were first requested to write their messages to 'Death' on a piece of A4 paper. Then, people held up their messages facing a computer while a volunteer took a photograph using Photo Booth

software. The image was then printed, and audience members were invited to pin the image to a wall on the Life pavilion.

AIMS: The central question in this work was: If you had a chance to speak to Death, what would you say? Audience members were called to stretch their imaginations, personify Death and leave Death a note displayed on a message board. The activity provoked audiences to reflect on their thoughts, feelings, behaviours and attitudes towards death. They were provided an opportunity to express how they wished to depart the world, consider questions they might want to ask about their deaths, identify what was important to them when they died, and what it would mean for them to leave this life and their loved ones behind. The activity proposed that a 'wall' of images would grow over the days of the event and demonstrate multiple attitudes about death that could initiate conversations and thoughts about the moment of death.



Photo: A senior visitor examines the Messages to Death at Toa Payoh, and looks closely at what was written and the expression on the faces of those holding their messages.

ANALYSIS: The 'Messages to Death' engaged people from different nationalities, races, genders and age groups: participants included infants to older seniors. Photo Booth provided a seemingly playful, visual way for audience members to express their thoughts to and about Death. Messages were interpreted from the photographs as a whole, rather than simply what was inscribed on the paper.

People's posture, facial expressions, and the way the message was held in each photograph were considered as well as the inscribed messages.

Some of the messages were:

I want a happy death – no suffering if possible.

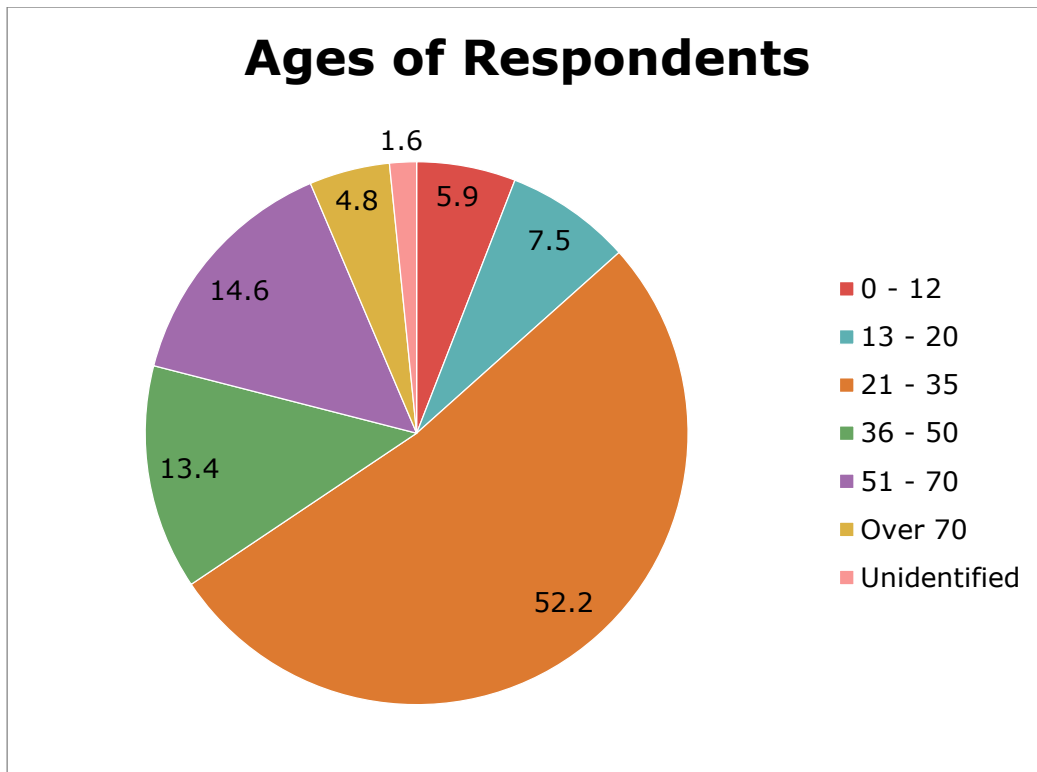
I hope you won't find any one of us in this World even though I know it's impossible.

Go & Die! Hahaha.

My Message to Death was a popular activity with young adults. Participants were empowered to express their fears directly, show acceptance, and express displeasure and denial of what lay in their futures. During the event the display wall never really filled up and the images appeared isolated. This installation may have been more impactful if the photographs had been bigger. Overall the Messages to Death did not represent the entire demographic of those who attended *Both Sides, Now*. However, the analysis revealed that the messages were documents of an ongoing conversation with Death and about death. The diversity of responses allowed for audiences to observe the multiplicity of views on Death, and make their own conclusions about the kinds of attitudes to Death they wished to take on.

The vast majority of people who engaged with the Messages to Death were young people, in the 21-35 age group. They contributed just over half of the messages, with those in the 51-70 and 36-50 age groups participating much less. (See diagram on the next page)

Several possibilities were inferred from the predominant age group of the contributors. Firstly, there is a trend among young people towards taking Selfies and Wefies, thus they are at ease with the task. Secondly, they are also more accustomed to interactive art-making processes. Thirdly, younger people may exhibit more bravura about dying, feeling less fragile and vulnerable. In addition, older audiences tend to display more respect and reverence towards death. Thus they may find this activity undesirable.



Participants tended to treat Death as a person or an event. Most people personified Death, although interestingly no one over 70 years of age did. It was surmised that this was likely due to older seniors feeling closer to 'death' and expressing fear and/or respect to 'death' as a possibility, a topic, and/or a person. The personification of Death was apparent mostly in the use of pronouns in people's messages. A few people identified Death as 'God' when they addressed 'Him'.

The analysis revealed people pleading with Death, asking for something or making demands, as well as making seditious and disrespectful comments. The ways people posed and held their messages indicated a range of emotions about the concept of Death and people's relationship to the concept of dying. People covered their faces, as if hiding in fear; they smiled shyly as if in appeasement; and grinned perhaps courageously or in ignorance as they challenged Death irreverently.



Photo: The pavilions at Khatib, flanked by HDB blocks and an open field. The work created a sense of a fairground that was accessible to all and welcomed anyone interested and curious.

As engaged art that produced multiple exchanges and a range of connections between audiences and the production team, the work managed to transform the location and thus generate a space within everyday settings in which to think about and review norms and beliefs about death and dying. This is a process that is crucial to healthy and positive living. It prods audiences to enter a new space, and consider their views in relation to those of others around them, leading to conversations, inner and outer, that were the objective of those who made possible the work.

ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

Audience Responses

Overall Impact of Event

As *Both Sides, Now* was located in a public space, with a range of people walking through and interacting with the work in diverse ways, it is hard to ascertain exactly how many people attended and participated in the event. The producers estimated approximately 6500 people who came through the installations over six days. Of these, about 3000 people attended the performances and talks. From the seventeen audience members interviewed, we can observe some shared and repeated responses. It is worth noting that all these interviewees attended the events in the evening, and that the overall experience was significantly varied at different times of day: the audiences in the evening were generally larger as performances were held then, and thus they spent more time engaging with the artworks than those in the day.

The majority of the audience interviewees felt that after participating in the experience, their attitudes on death and end-of-life care had been impacted or changed in some way. In particular, there was a broadening of views, such as indicated in this comment:

Takeaway message...Like what I said lor. To consider the perspective of the patient lor. I used to only consider my stand lor. (Audience Member, translated from Mandarin)

The audience engagement worked on two distinct levels. The first level was that of connection, where they felt engaged because of having similar personal experiences. This was crucial in motivating audiences to rethink norms and behaviours, which in turn led to the second level. The second level was that of action, where they felt engaged to the point of telling others about *Both Sides, Now*, and taking steps to discuss end-of-life care with their loved ones. One interviewee went so far as to indicate the urgency of the issue by saying this:

I do, I will do... to my wife first. I plan to go hometown to visit my parents, uh, also I, I'm planning a, a discussion with my sisters, brothers, together, I introduce what I learnt from this event. We, we do planning for my parents. Have to. (Audience Member)

Thoughts and Ideas about Specific Artworks

The Forum Theatre: Exit

It's, it's um, it's really good, because it brings all the issues to life, you know, and it allows people to see, to hear, to participate, to reflect, um, that's why I really enjoy forum theatres. They become very real to life lah. The impact is there. (Audience member)

Audience members discussed how the forum theatre performance and post-show dialogues presented opportunities for empathy, dialogue and reflection, as

audiences indicated they were prodded to think through multiple perspectives of the same dilemma. The situations that were performed challenged their notions of right and wrong choices, good and bad attitudes, strong and weak approaches to dealing with problems of end-of-life and critical illness. By getting audiences to contribute their versions of how to improve the situation, they watched each other. This participation increased their level of involvement and raised the stakes of how they much they were willing to invest in the issue. They also took on the risks of trying something out but not always succeeding as planned. As such, the issues were not merely felt and experienced as fiction on stage, but worked through in conversation and improvisation when audiences enacted their ideas on stage.



Photo: A senior participant (in striped shirt) takes the mic in the forum theatre performance at Khatib, and talks about how he would manage the conflict differently from the characters in the play.

The Puppet Show: The Wind Came Home

The puppet show left interviewees with a strong impression of the difficulties of aging. Audiences were drawn to the story and felt a deep emotional connection to the characters. This led to their willingness to identify with the conflict and

struggle of the main characters who were dealing with end-of-life issues. For this reason, audiences were willing to analyse the story and contemplate reasons for the difficulties faced by the characters,

Uh, the show- my first thing is very interesting, uh, but in my mind, I think the topic is very important, not just interesting. (Audience Member)

The puppet show actually triggered much of my emotions. Because the father did call the son. Um, his son, regarding that he had cancer, but the son was too busy to hear him out. Um, I was almost- I was almost about to cry. (Audience Member)

Rest. Stop

One part of the installation entitled *Rest. Stop*, namely the part with an empty, open coffin, was most efficacious in eliciting strong responses. With the coffin, it was the directness of the presentation and the unusual placement of a real coffin in the middle of a heartland thoroughfare that intrigued many audience interviewees. Despite the conventional superstitions surrounding coffins, some of them were curious enough to approach, examine and even step into and lie in it. This provoked a range of responses about notions of death being taboo, and how the normalizing of objects related to death can diminish some of these boundaries.

But um, my wife tried it. She tried to sleep in, inside the coffin. To me, I'm quite surprised of that. Um, then I asked her about her experience after that. She told me that it's quite enjoyable, it's just like you're sleeping, that's all. Yup, so, it opened up my, my so-called, the way I looked at death now. (Audience member)

In comparison, the other two areas in the installation, the living room and coffee shop elicited less attention and response. They were perhaps deemed more commonplace and thus did not provoke a challenge. Nonetheless one audience member felt it was 'quite foreboding' and thus she 'was very hesitant to sit in them'. This interviewee read the living room as a hospice and thus felt it was less

welcoming than the coffee shop. This points to the value of artworks that can combine both the safe and risky within a shared space, making the entry point less daunting as there is both familiarity and strangeness working in relation to each other.



Photo: A young man tries out the coffin while his companion looks on. Many participants were curious to find out what it would feel like to sit in a coffin. Some needed encouragement, in the form of other participants daring to sit in it first.

Other Artworks

Apart from the performances and the installation, audiences also spent time observing and participating in the other artworks. Writing how one wants to be remembered on a post-it or reading what others wrote in their Messages to Death created a reflective space that encouraged audiences to take note of their views of death, and how similar or different these may be to others in the community.

I think it will help, because it always helps people to reflect and think twice about, you know... and if there's such events that make them think twice and look at what others write on top, you know, and they could actually experience the experiences that they never got,... (Audience Member)



Photo: Two audience members read other participants' notes on how they wish to be remembered. Of the younger audience members interviewed, several mentioned returning with their parents, and having sometimes awkward conversations with them about preparing for the future.

There were several kinds of responses in the writing and drawing that became part of the artworks (see Artworks Analysis section). Audiences were attentive to the details of these comments and noted how they could be helpful in reflection and education.

*Your life's journey thing, I think that is so, so, very good. It's very reflective. It helps, uh, people, you know, uh, think of their life. Beginning till now, at this point in time. And to trace what they had gone through... and I was saying that this should be done in school where you have young people...
(Audience Member)*

Audience responses were also varied, and allowed for difference. For example, some interviewees enjoyed the film, and found the close-up images of human bodies helpful in thinking about the aging process, while others found this disturbing. This points to the difficulty in dealing with diverse audiences, while making it possible for different views to co-exist.

The Talks

Some audience interviewees attended the various talks by professionals. The talk by Patrick Tan of the Law Society of Singapore was found to be particularly useful, as it dealt with Wills and Lasting Power of Attorney. Also informative and engaging was the talk by Sim Lai Kiow, a palliative care nurse with Khoo Teck Phuat Hospital. She spoke about advanced care plans with reference to personal anecdotes and experiences.

This nurse's explanation is good. And this means we can, we have, uh, uh, the time to write how we want to die. (Audience member, translated from Mandarin)

Locating these talks within the art event was significant as this underlined the fact that there is no separation between the artworks and the everyday issues surrounding death and dying. Effectively this communicated that talking about



Photo: Sister Geraldine Tan, administrator and nursing director of St Joseph's Home, speaks to the audience about end-of-life care. Several talks were given by professionals dealing with the process of death.

the nitty-gritty issues related to end-of-life can be enhanced by first engaging with interactive art portals and thus becoming more open and reflective about the practical issues that need to be attended to. Art was thus a frame within which sensitive and painful topics are rendered less daunting. Audience members could potentially have written down thoughts on death in the pinwheels or Message to Death as part of their participation and reflection.

Overall Thoughts about the Event

A running theme in audience feedback for *Both Sides, Now* was the generous way in which each of the artworks provoked thought: they presented the topic of death without specifying a “correct” way of viewing death. A deeper implication of this is that audiences, regardless of their level of artistic knowledge, can sense and read artifice. This approach broadens their view as the artistic intention is not reduced to mere propaganda, which tends to prescribe a fixed outcome. Instead *Both Sides, Now* engaged the audiences’ imagination and encouraged them to feel involved in a meaning-making process.

Another recurring observation among the interviewees was of spontaneous community building. Conversations among neighbours, without initiation or intervention from the guides or facilitators, would happen in the course of the experience. They occurred most often after the forum theatre, and after the talk by the guest speakers. The simple opportunity to share views on a relevant topic was embraced without fear or hesitation.

It does, in a way, it actually engages the community as well. Like finally nowadays I see more of this community activities happening. It does bring people along and you never know, you might meet some neighbors that you get to know and it bonds the community. (Audience Member)

The environment created by *Both Sides, Now* was seen as non-threatening and a safe space to ask questions about sensitive issues, share personal experiences of

grief and loss, and broach difficult and awkward discussions about family conflict and tension. There are several implications that arise from this.

Firstly, when audiences are sufficiently prepared for an encounter like this, the wealth of information, experience, questioning and sheer shared humanity that emerges is significant. Secondly, and specific to this topic, many have found these conversations easier to have with strangers than with their own loved ones. So a public arts experience like *Both Sides, Now* provides them with a much-needed avenue for reflection and acceptance that is difficult to find or recreate elsewhere. Finally, because the environment of the event allowed for all sorts of questions to be asked, it was a good opportunity to dispel many of the myths surrounding death, and provide essential information, without shaming the participants.

Questions and Concerns Raised

Both Sides, Now was clearly oriented towards encouraging audiences to develop acceptance and preparedness for end-of-life. With this in mind, audiences were constantly prodded through the materials and conversations to view the experience with an open mind. They were encouraged to listen to others, and thereby rethink their own views.

One audience interviewee mentioned the difficulty of talking through difficult experiences with one's family, as compared to sharing with friends. Hence the opportunity to 'write such things' was a process that could help them to 'actually move on better'. She felt that because talking openly could involve mentioning conflicts at home, it would be awkward to have one's family members there to witness.

However, avoidance was also a prevalent attitude, as audiences were sometimes unwilling to take on the demands of preparing for end-of-life issues. Even for individuals who expressed a philosophical acceptance of death, it emerged that real concrete measures such as writing a will or completing an Advanced Care

Planning form had not been undertaken. This suggests that although *Both Sides, Now* can offer a change in perspective, it cannot guarantee it. This also indicates that a person's feelings towards death are often conflicting and inconsistent. One possible way to address these issues is to accompany the experience with systematic follow-up and ongoing programmes.

Another interviewee admitted that it was not something all audiences could manage, and talked about her friend being 'afraid' and not willing to attend because she 'doesn't' like to talk about death when we're still living, *choi!* Hence not all barriers can be instantly brought down, and the work of educating a public about death and dying must be continual. This same interviewee also said she would talk about her experience with her friend, despite the initial resistance. Thus time is essential in allowing for change, and expectations from those involved in similar projects need to be tailored accordingly.

There were also interviewees who were either personally unmoved by the experience, or mentioned loved ones who were unconvinced by it. The commonality among these people was their age – all of them were over 50. This suggests that it is harder to persuade older folks to change their minds about deep-seated issues such as death. It may also be due to fact that seniors have already contemplated their notions of death, being more aware of their mortality, and thus events such as these are more about having avenues to talk about their views, rather than have them changed.

One audience interviewee spoke of her mother's reaction to the forum theatre, and the agitation with which she insisted the hypothetical situation was unrealistic. It highlighted the limitations of the project, in that no amount of dialoguing will ever fully prepare one for the reality of death when it happens. It also points to the variety of cultural backgrounds and generations of people present. Nonetheless, the fact that the conversation occurred between mother and daughter is promising, and must be acknowledged.

In response to the question of how else *Both Sides, Now* could be developed, there was general agreement that the work should be continued as the conversations and provocations to think about death are needed. Continuity and keeping the conversation going was a priority as getting used to having such conversations was thought to be a challenge. This was reflected in decisions to recommend the event to others, as well as bring friends and families to the event, and start ongoing conversations about death.

Follow-up. Ya. It's good to raise awareness. It's good to, to what do you call it, to stir the hornet's nest. That's wonderful. But at the same time, you must also be responsible in what we have stirred up. (Audience member)

One interviewee suggested that the project be conducted in schools, as children especially need a safe environment in which to talk about death. Even younger audience members felt that 'this event actually made me kind of grow up a little bit regarding this issue of death' and acknowledged the need for how the work can be extended. Some children in attendance shared their experiences of death – often involving them being unable to cope with the loss of a loved one, because the adults around them could not talk to them about death.



Photo: A forum theatre facilitator engages with a young audience member. The forum theatre saw a wide age range of audience members, and several young ones who were eager to share their thoughts and feelings.

Guides' Responses

The Guides

The guides involved in *Both Sides, Now* can be broadly categorised into two groups. The majority were seasoned volunteers with Drama Box. The rest were people interested in participating and helping with the project, who then were given some training by the production team about the work that needed to be done. Of the minority, two were interviewed for the purposes of this study. Guide A, a social worker in her 30s, was interested in seeing how the arts could help raise awareness of social issues. Guide B, a retiree volunteer in his 70s, was interested in volunteerism in general. While their views may not be representative of all Guides, the contrast between them is worth examining in detail.

The role of the Guide was to help audiences navigate through the event, and offer explanations and instructions where needed. They were present at the senior centres, as well as Khatib and Toa Payoh. They took shifts and thus were around from morning till night, with more being present in the evenings. Being observers and facilitators, their views straddle both the viewpoints of the audience as well as the perspectives of the creative team and performers. Some of their most interesting observations came from that liminal position of being between things.

Responses to the Event:

Both Guides felt strongly that the project tackled an important issue, and thus warranted their efforts and the attention of the public. They were both convinced that the arts was a useful approach to a sensitive issue, and given their experience as individuals interested in social wellbeing, they were eager to advance more such opportunities and events.



Photo: Two guides assist an elderly participant with the *Message to Death* exhibit. Generally, audiences seemed receptive to such encounters with art and difficult conversations.

Guide B emphasised the need for better marketing of such events and felt that the work needed to be made available to wider audiences. Having gained much from the event himself, he became a strong advocate for the work. In his view:

This is such an important project, why should we apologise to anybody and why is it not marketed to the community centres?

..if I may say so, I'm one of the one that is, uh, fully benefitted and uh, absorbed...Definitely everybody that went through, even though they don't want to think about it, will be impacted in varying amounts.

Guide A was attentive to how the public event could have been better designed and facilitated in some areas. She felt the installation *Rest. Stop* needed more intervention and could have benefitted from allowing for more privacy. She felt that being too exposed meant that fewer people would feel at ease about listening

deeply and responding to the work, as they would be watched and thus made highly self-conscious.

Her experience as a social worker also led her to prod some audiences, including children, to take time to participate and engage, signaling the importance of Guides who are able to make connections with people and draw them into the event. In her view this process contributes to the 'maturity of society', and moves towards a 'more socially conscious' community, less focused on material wealth and able to grapple with difficult issues. Events such as *Both Sides, Now* then become part of a wider ground-up movement towards better self-awareness and civic consciousness. In her view, *Both Sides, Now* was:

Experiential. Revelatory. Like there's revelations and you're learning things your yourself? Learning things about an issue that you never thought about, yah. So it is an event that makes you think. Not just experience, yah.

Reactions Observed

In the senior activity centres, the elderly audience members had diverse reactions to the puppet performance and after-show discussions. Guide A encountered two types of reactions: enthusiasm and apathy. Some of those expressing apathy also found the after-show discussions futile. Guide A also observed that many seniors in the audience had no families or close friends, which contributed to their feelings of futility. She felt that beginning a discussion with such people about end-of-life care requires consistent follow-up, in order to deal with initial resistance.

... I think that in many issues, to create change, we need to do repetition, you know like you just keep on harping on it, harping on it and then people just, it just hits them okay maybe this is something that I really need to think about. (Guide A)

Both Guides felt the audiences who got the most out of the heartland experience of *Both Sides, Now* were the ones who were genuinely interested and curious about

end-of-life issues. This seems to contrast with some who were bussed in, and interacted less with the art-portals and thus appeared more reluctant to engage.

They also agreed that an arts experience like this is more interactive and meaningful than other means of conversation. This is because it is naturally harder to remain detached in an emotional or affective encounter, than in an intellectual or cerebral one.

I think for one it really convinced me about the impact of using arts to communicate social issues... It's interactive, I think that definitely would have left people thinking a lot about this issue rather than just "thank you for the information"... (Guide A)

I think using art is a superb medium because people are going, first of all, it gives them an attraction... And the fact that both the puppet show and the forum theatre are done so professionally, it justified their time. Even you consider that as an event, without a message, it's even worth going. (Guide B)

Reflections

Both guides gave suggestions to help improve the scope and extent of *Both Sides, Now*. Guide A recommended extending its outreach to other non-profit organisations, besides those that focus on the elderly. Guide B thought a greater marketing effort could have been made, with a specific view to engaging community centres. Both Guides agreed that greater support from government bodies, like the Community Development Councils and the relevant ministries, could go a long way.

What I think is that there should be more balance and example, they should, why should Lien Foundation and Ang Chin Moh be the sponsors? There are so much funds around. How come... number one, there's good, there's plenty of money and if the money is put here by the government, it's put to good use. (Guide B)

Guide A's comments demonstrated her deep engagement with the issues present in *Both Sides, Now*. The relevance of her social work background was also clear. In

comparison, Guide B's reflections showed him to be focused mainly on his involvement as an active senior, and what opportunities presented themselves to him. Thus they had different motivations for signing up, as well as different personal expectations of what the project would accomplish. Consequently, their judgements of the final outcomes differed as well.

The Guides in this immersive arts experience are similar to docents at a museum, in that they need sufficient knowledge and conviction in order to fully serve their purpose. The nature of such a role simultaneously makes them advocates for the issues raised, and a means through which the community itself gets involved. In this way, they become a critical resource for other similar projects in the future. However, as can be seen with the examples of Guides A and B, they fulfil this role to varying degrees of effectiveness. As a result, they can affect the tenor of the entire undertaking.



Photo: A Guide facilitates the post-show discussion with some audience members. On the whole, audiences at the senior activity centres found the puppet performance engaging and moving, and were thus willing to engage in conversations afterwards. Guides were most helpful in facilitating and contributing to these discussions.

Stakeholders' Responses

... we need to create awareness... transform, I mean change how people think. And amazingly once you change how people think, the society will change, the dynamics will change. (Foundation Representative)

Stakeholders Interviewed

The stakeholders interviewed for this study included two persons from sponsoring foundations, four from the hospitals involved, and one from the Agency for Integrated Care. On analysis, the views and reactions from the healthcare professionals were similar to each other, while the responses of the foundation representatives were distinct to their areas of interest. One explanation for this is that in healthcare, beginning discussions about death and end-of-life care is part of a larger system. For the foundations, these discussions have more of a standalone significance as they are involved in a range of projects.

Beliefs, Motivations and Aims

All the stakeholders interviewed aimed to develop conversations about death and end-of-life issues. This was a common objective they shared with the Creative Team of *Both Sides, Now*. Individually, each organization had its own reasons for taking part in the project. These included: filling gaps in public awareness about death and end-of-life issues, advocating for greater literacy about resources and support systems, trying out new methods of discussion, and changing negative perceptions and prejudices about death and aging.

There's no language that we have for end-of-life issues. It's just not part of the everyday conversation or speech. We don't have the lingo. So using the arts, whether it is visual art, photography, anything at your disposal... [it is useful]

for people to think a bit more. To engage on the topic. (Foundation Representative)

The driving forces behind these objectives were the need to change the mindset of the public about death, as well as build awareness about the need for end-of-life planning. Most interviewees mentioned Asian culture as a barrier to this process as death is often regarded as a taboo subject for conversation. One exception was a foundation representative, who felt people do want to discuss death, but lack the language and opportunity to do so.

...we did the research, public survey, and the people who want to have a conversation and want to know more about palliative care are the elderly. But it's mainly the family dynamics ... they're standing in the way. (Foundation Representative)



Photo: Forum theatre facilitator, Rei Poh (on the right), listens as an audience member at Toa Payoh responds to questions about death and dying, that emerged in the performance. Other audience members listen closely and then participate in the dialogue.

All stakeholders interviewed agreed that attempts to raise awareness had been greatly boosted through the application of the arts. In fact, it was the very nature of the arts that led some of them to think the arts was the best option for opening

up the conversation. The arts was recognised as being able to deal with complex issues and sensitive topics in safe and conducive spaces, by using symbolic and fictional representation to say what would otherwise be too confronting.

Arts has a way of connecting and bringing issues out and giving the voice to certain issues and certain people. (Healthcare Representative)

The arts was also acknowledged as capable of dealing with contradictory views, and thus the open-endedness of the artworks allowed for conflicting emotions to co-exist without having to be streamlined. The experiential and affective qualities of participatory artworks then made it possible for conversations to take off from these encounters, and lead towards new ways of thinking and feeling about end-of-life issues.

...that's the role of the arts, because they are licensed in a way. Maybe to challenge and to re-present normal topics in a different way. And maybe we don't have that lah. (Healthcare Representative)

In addition, the arts was clearly regarded as a platform and process to provoke responses that would lead to action. Changes of behavior and attitude that would enable participants to become empowered with options for Advance Care Planning and Social Support were the objectives in mind. Thus conversations and reflective spaces through the artworks, that educated and encouraged audiences towards these ends, were applauded and appreciated. In particular, the fact that there were multiple disciplines presented in the work, enhanced this capacity:

... it was so multi-dimensional, it really exposed me to the different dimensions of arts and how we need these many different forms of arts. And it works for different people with different things. (Healthcare Representative)

Observations of the Event

Overall, the interviewed stakeholders were unanimously impressed with the outcome of the event. They attributed most of the credit to the use of arts as a vehicle or language to enter into conversations about death. The arts were seen as a license to experiment and try new things. It was regarded as an effective and affective tool for communicating ideas, and thus identified as a powerful way of engaging people's hearts and minds.



Photo: Audiences at the evening performance in Toa Payoh, many of whom stayed on for Community Conversations after the performance was over.

Commenting on the strengths of the production, the interviewees felt these lay chiefly in the ability of the artworks to connect to the audience and generate conversations, with each other and with the artists.

... Healing is not always about curing that person. It is about awareness of some kind of self. How you get to know yourself, your life, your own consciousness better. So you use arts as the medium, your tool, for you to find that awareness. (Foundation Representative)

Comparisons were also made between the previous methods of giving out brochures and the *Both Sides, Now* method of using interactive artworks to create awareness. The difference in engagement was significant. Even if the numbers were not as large as hoped, the depth of impact was recognised as valuable.

It's one thing to just get the numbers. It's another thing to actually convert hearts and minds. (Healthcare Representative)

Due to the fact that some interviewed stakeholders came to observe the event during office hours, their observations were chiefly of activities in the day, and in some cases, of the performances in the senior activity centres. As a result, these individuals did not see the forum theatre, which was performed only at night, and at which there were more people. The differences in their comments, and concerns about numbers, are indicative of the differences in the day and night experiences.

The interviewees who managed to see the forum theatre felt that it was a good method of getting the audience to think critically about the situation performed, and reflect on how they would handle it themselves. It was also helpful that the forum theatre gave audience members the chance to share their views and give suggestions on how to address the issue at hand. One foundation representative felt moved by the forum theatre, and considered that the audience could relate to, and feel very strongly about the piece.

I must also thank the actors, actresses... you know through their voice and through their research. Where they get the real stories to act it out. So that really connects you and makes you think. And we have reached the objective, to make you think. (Foundation Representative)



Photo: An audience member (with back to the camera) joins the cast of the forum theatre, in a scene involving characters from the medical profession, a patient and caregiver, to negotiate how their characters can approach the situation better. This engagement aspect – the main characteristic and crux of forum theatre – was arguably the main reason the audiences could engage so deeply with the issues at hand.

Stakeholders were impressed by how the puppet performance made use of everyday objects and dialect languages such as Hokkien. This created a strong sense of the vernacular and produced a sense of familiarity for older audiences, while being a form of theatre that attracted children as well. It thus drew in a wider mix of audiences which was crucial to developing conversations across boundaries of culture, age and beliefs.

It appeared to me that even though the puppetry show was mainly in a dialect language, there were Malay and Indian elderly people watching in the audience. They were able to, I guess, empathise with the way, with the emotions that were being performed. (Healthcare Representative)

Working Relationships

The stakeholders interviewed felt that collaboration, with artists (eg. Drama Box) and intermediaries (ArtsWok Collaborative), was both timely and necessary in order for something like *Both Sides, Now* to work. The ability to work together for

urgent concerns such as aging and end-of-life, would significantly impact outcomes with added resources, skills and expertise. Foundation and Hospital Representatives acknowledged the need for artists to become involved in work that needed the imaginative and creative capacities of their disciplines. However, the ability to collaborate, and work with different perspectives, was crucial to the process.

So it's about collaborations. I think ultimately [it] will come to that. And willingness to collaborate and see that the issue cannot just be defined based on one perspective - which is where the funds are coming from. (Healthcare Representative)

All the same, interviewees recognised that the extent to which collaboration was possible depended on a range of factors. Availability of funds, navigating through different perspectives, and willingness to experiment with new approaches were crucial. One foundation representative viewed artists as 'activists' of a kind, who felt passionately about the need to bring about change in society and question prevailing structures. This openness to trusting and respecting the artists was crucial in allowing for new and unconventional processes to occur. Nonetheless, dialogue and reciprocal listening to each other was a key part of the working relationship and the stakeholders felt their voices had also been heard.

The foundation representatives felt that the Ministry of Health could play a greater part in supporting this kind of project. As the state has access to much greater resources in terms of financial support, strategic connections and other platforms from which to launch similar initiatives, it was felt that this would be valuable in developing long-term and sustained projects.

There's a Chinese saying that "xian you guo cai you jia". So you need to have a country before you have a home. So country should be the big brother. The rest can do small... what we call "guerrilla attacks", in a positive way - a positive, impactful way to the community. But after all someone has to take ownership. (Foundation Representative)

Community Concerns

The interviewed stakeholders articulated the importance of building community through the project. Some saw end-of-life issues as being a community concern that required the community to educate and support one another. Thus opportunities for individuals to come together and talk with each other were helpful in developing a sense of belonging and willingness to be supportive.

... I think one of the things about death and dying is that we... it's always comforting to know that there are many people going through what you're going through. And that while you may think that you are, [in] the worst state ever, um, it's some comfort, maybe not a lot, to know that there are people that may have gone through worse things than you... (Healthcare Representative)

Still, there was a concern about how to increase the number of people attending such events and thus maximise its impact. One suggestion was to make the puppet show available online so more people could watch it. Although that would completely exclude the live dimension, it would make the work a resource for more interactions.

...my hope is that this, this should be uh, this should be continued yah. So beyond the, the, the locality you know. Beyond what we are reaching out [to]. So in a way that is easily accessible. (Healthcare Representative)

Personal Reflections

Interviewees reflected on how they saw the arts as a highly creative way of dealing with an area of work that generally evokes resistance. Due to the way the arts can manage contradictory emotions, conflicting views and different perspectives, most interviewees felt this was a much needed approach. In their view, within the broader ambit of an immersive arts event, thoughtful storytelling (eg. puppet and theatre performances), interactive artworks (eg. *Life Journey* and *Message to Death*) and spaces of blatant provocation (eg. an open coffin) could open up

conversations otherwise deemed too risky. The arts were seen as ‘lightening the conversation’ and thus making it easier to deal with anxieties and fears of death and dying. Hence the collaborative process was crucial.

Foundations can spearhead but we need the arts people to come in this aspect to deliver, to communicate. Because the arts people are the expert, we are not. (Foundation Representative)

Nonetheless some stakeholders also voiced apprehension about whether the work was at times ‘too artsy’ and thus inaccessible. Their concern was that the thinking required may be ‘too deep’ and thus off-putting for those more inclined to prescriptive modes of learning. As this was an unusual event, it could take time for the public to get used to more reflective modes of interaction, rather than simply being given information and instruction.

So the way it was done, depending on the environmental context and the type of people that are going to be walking through, it needs to be taken into effect. And I guess now we know lah, what works and what doesn't. (Healthcare Representative)

Interestingly, some of the stakeholders interviewed had not yet done end-of-life planning for themselves, despite being strong advocates of it. Some had attempted the conversations with their families, but others had not even thought about it.

... like I've known about ACP for the longest time, uh and it's still a struggle for me to, to,.. I mean I don't have my own ACP done yet, alright... And I'm trying to get the whole family to, to do it, including my parents. (Healthcare Representative)

Creative Team Responses

Creative Team Interviewed

Members of the Creative Team interviewed for this study included the artistic director, artists, designers, dramaturg and producers, as well as key facilitators and performers. While the team constituted a complex mix of individuals, their prior experience of working together helped to ensure that they shared a common focus and philosophy of collaboration. This also enabled them to transcend difference and deal with problems as a team.

Beliefs, Motivations and Aims

Each individual had particular motivations for working on the project. These ranged from a deep interest in the issue, to life-transforming personal encounters of death. It also included the desire to develop dialogic engaged art processes, and motivations to work on multi-disciplinary community arts. Interviewees also spoke of their personal attitudes and questions about aging and end-of-life concerns, such as the loss of close friends and family, and the struggle to cope with caring for loved ones who were aging or battling serious illness. There was discomfort and restlessness, as well as an openness of mind, if not curiosity, about the topic.

There was an over-arching desire to develop arts projects that were able to challenge and affect prevailing attitudes, while also empowering audiences to participate in the imagination of alternatives and development of agency. The interviewees articulated a keen interest in experimenting with multi-disciplinary forms, particularly in an engaged arts event that focused on the sensitive topic of dying. There were specific points of interest, such as film-maker Jasmine Ng's desire to explore artistic processes with interactive frames, something that the medium of film rarely accords. Also, puppeteer Tan Beng Tian was keen to use dialect and solo puppetry in community performances, and collaborated with

Artistic Director Kok Heng Leun for these reasons. With high aspirations for the work, the team were also cognisant of its limitations and aware of the need to persist and develop the work through time.

I think it hasn't gone to the point whereby the community comes together. I think it only started with building a kind of resilience within the individual in the community.... And to provide this community [with] certain information so that they know where to go to. (Artistic Director)

Aspects of Production

Within the creative team, the distribution of roles led to different kinds of responsibilities. The producers had to liaise with stakeholders and thus bore the bulk of managing expectations in relation to different goals and ideals. The artists had to ensure their works would engage the audience on the necessary themes, while fulfilling artistic quality and aesthetic value. This meant negotiating between different vocabularies of professional understanding about issues of death and dying, as well as working sensitively and creatively through the arts. Much effort and energy was spent working out how the project could be shaped to produce efficacious processes that would achieve desired outcomes.

The central figure holding the various threads together was Kok Heng Leun, artistic director of Drama Box and overall artistic director for *Both Sides, Now*. His role was crucial in developing the overarching concept for the work, and providing leadership in shaping the processes of engagement and interaction. He also curated the team of artists, taking pains to ensure those involved were both socially engaged and willing to work on a multidisciplinary project. This led to a complex team of individuals, and led to many hours of dialogue and discussion about how to make the project work. It also involved researching the issues, and examining the field of work. It meant visiting senior centres, examining possible sites for the project, talking to medical professionals and health-care givers, etc. It also involved being innovative, strategic and open to suggestion and change, such that logistical and budgetary constraints could be accommodated, while sustaining artistic rigour. His skilled leadership was emphasised by interviewees

as a significant factor in the working relationship among the team, and the capacity to negotiate multiple stakeholders as well.



Photo: Kok Heng Leun speaks to an audience about advanced care planning. The rest of the creative team cited their deep trust in his leadership, and respect for his working style and creative philosophies.

For the rest of the team, each person had to work out their roles and develop a capacity to participate accordingly. This meant being able to listen to each other, and also engage in the research and development of literacy about end-of-life issues. Becoming familiar with the systems and resources already available was necessary. Participating in the work of understanding how and why these needed to be made known, what were the hurdles, and how the arts could contribute to change, was critical to developing ideas for the project.

I think personally being part of the team who produces this project, we are the most involved and most influenced by the topic that is being discussed. Or rather, we are engaged the most deeply if we are talking about the level of engagement. So I think personally it has also opened my eyes and mind to this topic itself and how I would approach it personally in my own life. (Producer)

Challenges in Development and Execution

The primary challenges faced by the Creative Team were to do with managing expectations. Other challenges were related to this central concern, such as communication issues, weather concerns, accessibility (both artistic and linguistic) and budget constraints.

Managing Expectations

In a project that involves many different stakeholders and artists, it is difficult to manage the expectations of all the involved parties, and ensure everyone is of the same mind about the aims and limitations of the work. The producers noted a key difference between stakeholders and the creative team in attitudes towards work processes. Producer Tay Jia Ying remarked that different agencies had their own ways of working and prior assumptions about what best practices are. These caused some friction and required negotiation and thoughtful compromise.

The producers and artistic director were pivotal in resolving these issues and navigating through what was doable and what was desirable. This meant working through shared vocabularies for the project, and determining workable goals as well. The task of networking fell primarily to the producers, who had to ensure the different agencies were kept informed about the progress of the project, as well as developing strong connections for ongoing interactions and future collaborations. This was recognised as a crucial part of the larger community building. The role of ArtsWok as an intermediary organization was acknowledged as critical to being able to manage the complex relationships across different sectors. Drama Box's vast experience with community agencies was also crucial.

The work of networking or bridging that needed to be done with stakeholders and community agencies, was grappled with and underlined as a key aspect of the project. In this regard, the producers of ArtsWok were particularly focused on the process of 'understanding what the artist is trying to do' and communicating this to partners that are unfamiliar with these processes. This was a form of

‘translation’ work that contributed towards the artists being able to focus on their work, and also understand the needs and expectations of stakeholders.

I think a lot of non-arts fields somehow have difficulty understanding what the artist is trying to communicate... I do see us [ArtsWok] coming in quite a bit to unpack how the artist expresses and communicates certain ideas and approaches in languages that might not be understood by a funder or community partner on the ground...what we do a lot is also translating the concepts and the rationale behind a particular artwork into a way that the public can unpack and understand the purpose of the artwork. (Producer)

Communication Issues

As with managing expectations, the task of handling communication issues and negotiating differences fell largely to the producers, because these involved ongoing interactions with stakeholder organizations. It often came down to understanding motivation and specific ways of achieving objectives, and the processes of dialogue then helped to steer the focus towards shared goals. This was recognised as an important part of the community building process, and a valuable foundation on which to build further projects.

So like for example the network that we formed between Tan Tock Seng Hospital and the community homes, and between the homes and AIC. Actually we need this. And [it] makes them want to work more. That’s community building. However, it was not because they were doing the art, but the art brought the thing (network) into focus. (Artistic Director)

As the engaged art process depends on the artwork being able to articulate clearly to the audience, the emphasis on how to present the work most effectively was a major concern as well. Designers, writers and artists involved in developing the concepts had to spend time working and talking through different versions of an idea, to consider their best options and to dialogue through the problems that emerged as well. The work needed to be thoughtful, deep, and yet simple, and this

basic principle of communication was one that the team had to figure out as they proceeded.

Weather Concerns and Location

The weather was a key factor in determining how long people chose to remain at the event. During the day, the heat kept many at bay, and affected the Guides who were on duty at the location. It was also partly the reason there were more people in attendance in the evening. In this vein, the wind and rain were also a concern for the artists, who had to bear it in mind when deciding on how to design the pavilions and what materials to use.

In addition, the question of location had to be dealt with in relation to the demographic of people in the area. Khatib and Toa Payoh are significantly different sites – the latter having more affluent residents with generally higher levels of education. Thus planning work that would suit both spaces was a challenge. The team was aware that by being located in very specific locations, they would be effectively excluding residents in other estates. This is a problem that emerges in community arts work, that tends to occupy highly localised sites and thus be limited to people who frequent those areas. The decision to tour the puppet performance to senior centres came out of this awareness, and a desire to make at least some aspects of the work more widely available.

Accessibility (Artistic and Linguistic)

The desire to have a varied array of artworks raised questions about which approaches would be most suitable and how to design these. Instead of being focused on one style, or one form, the team decided to engage with multiplicity as a method of drawing in different perspectives, and allowing for diverse thresholds of comfort and ease. From the more controversial (eg. the open coffin) to the more private (eg. the film), the more narrative (eg. forum theatre) to the more visual (eg. *This Is Not A Coffin*), the audience experience was intended to be mixed. Thus the team had to think through how these came together, and what made them

accessible. They also had to work out how to make links between them so that there was a clear rationale for the Guides to refer to as well.

A key question that had to be dealt with early in the project was the issue of language. The eventual decision to use only English, Mandarin and Chinese dialects in performance was driven by the fact that this would cater to a majority population. Translation was provided for the forum theatre in the form of surtitles in English or Chinese, but not other languages. This was acknowledged as necessarily excluding some members of the public.

While this was a frustration in terms of limited accessibility, it also pointed to the question of how a public event in a multicultural society attempts to accommodate all audiences. Translated brochures were available for Malay and Tamil speakers, but the creative team admitted that this would not bridge the gap sufficiently. The overall ethos of the project was geared towards a majority Chinese population, and thus those outside this demographic would struggle to identify with some of the frames and perspectives presented. The team felt that a larger budget would help towards broadening options, but were not denying that even so, the question of multiple languages, religious beliefs and cultural values would make it difficult to be representative of all elements in society.

Actor-translator Adib Kosnan noted his own frustration at seeing audience members who did not understand Mandarin or Chinese dialects come for the performances, only to discover they would not be able to follow. Being Malay himself, he sympathised with their sense of feeling left out, but he also recognised the inherent difficulties of trying to cater to every language group within the same event.

This question led to considerations of how else the work could have been composed and framed, to include a diversity of value systems and beliefs. Interviewees felt that more possibilities can be created, depending on the resources and understandings available.

Budget Constraints

The budget was also a challenge as the scale of the production was large in comparison with the resources available. Several artists stated explicitly that had they been allowed a greater amount of money to work with, their concepts and artwork could have been greater in scope and vision.

Well of course if there were more money, it will be quite different. I guess because we probably... for me, I will conceive entire the project to be quite different. Maybe perhaps in terms of weather management, we could use different, maybe larger structure of materials to cover more... [it] could be, maybe, a little bit more exciting I guess. (Designer)

The possibility of developing more extensive engagements, and touring the work to more locations was part of the consideration. But more immediately, it was the reality that the creative team had to manage other projects and jobs, as it was not sustainable to only focus on this event. Thus apart from the choice of materials and personnel, it also meant that allocation of time and energy had to be managed in relation to how much money was available.

Evaluations and Reflections

Overall, the Creative Team found the event successful in terms of how it encouraged and supported engagement with audiences. This was evident when audience members kept returning to the event, often with family or friends. The questions and conversations that the audiences had with the Guides also indicated that they had been prodded positively to rethink their views and attitudes about death and dying. Some were also surprised by the impact it had on their own family and friends.

Ya, my family is those kind of families that we will not talk about death. My greatest breakthrough is I asked my mum to come and watch the show. Especially just right after my uncle passed away. And I was surprised by the

effect. She's like, end of the day, when we went back home and I talked to her. She said, "If I pass away, or if I'm in such a condition, just let me go. Don't waste money on it." This was the first time in my whole life, my family, my brothers or myself has ever talked to my mum about it. (Facilitator)

The Creative Team acknowledged different kinds of satisfaction and disappointment about the event. On the one hand, there was pleasure in watching audiences respond and participate in diverse ways. On the other hand, there was also frustration that more people did not turn up during the day. Also, while the event was effective in reaching out to a mixed group of people, questions did arise about how else the artworks could have been improved. Given the limits of the budget, the team felt the work was effective as a starting project that used a public space. Hence they expressed the need to keep on doing work such as this in order to learn more about the process. While the team felt the project had achieved most of its objectives, they acknowledged that without proper follow-up, it was hard to tell how useful the work really was.

The creative team articulated different kinds of learning processes through the project. They admitted to having their own preconceived ideas about working in public spaces and dealing with end-of-life issues challenged. As such they were attentive to how each artist brought different ideas and concepts to the work, and what it meant to be adaptive and open to possibilities. Creating a shared aesthetic and evolving an understanding of how the different components of the project came together was crucial to this process.

This included the importance of clear communication and dealing with the various challenges faced by individual artists in executing their artistic process. Calibration was required in designing the artwork and catering to the targeted audience group. Overcoming differences within the Creative Team was also crucial, as good working relationships meant being able to accept comment and critique when discussions occurred.

For facilitators and performers in the forum theatre and puppet performance, negotiating the different kinds of possible dialogues and scenarios was

challenging. They had to be able to respond spontaneously while remaining true to the role or character. Being part of an immersive arts experience then made the performance one aspect of a larger event, and this led to performers also questioning their views on the issue. They observed audiences who were responding to the interactive artworks and noted that some of these left an impact on them. They became involved in the topic, and realised how much they were affected by choices made by audiences. They expressed how this was significantly different to performing in a regular theatre production.

Yah, this project was really one of those that I didn't expect I would be so, uh, that it would be so heightened everyday...But then this show was like mentally and emotionally exhausting. And normally I try to distance, so that the audience is not there to watch you cry. But then this one really cannot help it. I was really surprised lah. (Performer)



Photo: The audience at one of the puppet performances in Khatib. A significant number of people both in Khatib and Toa Payoh were frequent visitors, returning day after day to look at the artworks or watch the performances.

Several of the creative team were also surprised at how responsive and appreciative the audiences were. In part this was due to the deep level of engagement the audience had with the artworks, and a larger atmosphere of

openness and welcoming that elicited reciprocal expressions of gratitude and appreciation.

...one of the audience actually came knocking at the storage room. And he was at the doorway and he actually bought me this Roche, Almond Roche chocolate. He said he wanted to get me something because he was so touched by the show. But the shops have already closed so the nearest he could get was the supermarket near the McDonalds there. So he quickly grabbed something, whatever he could get. I was so touched! (Puppeteer)

With regards to future developments and plans for the project, the interviewees expressed concern about the availability of resources to support these kinds of work. Artists who are interested and able to collaborate, funders who believe in these processes, and agencies who are willing to cooperate and engage in the work, need to be nurtured and cultivated so that the work becomes smoother and easier. As the engaged art process is relatively new in Singapore, there is a need to encourage artists to participate in such projects, yet questions arise as to how these artists can be helped and educated to produce work that meets the needs of the community and fulfills the aspirations of the artist.

Many felt that doing work like *Both Sides, Now* was definitely the beginning phase of an ongoing development in community and engaged arts. It contains the potential to become a bigger framework or model with which communities can tackle issues together.

I see this, arts based community development work, as being a platform for people to get comfortable, expressing different opinions and all that. But that's just the first phase of it. It's just that I felt kind of stuck at when it was most interesting. When actually, then, the question is, what then are you going to do about it, collectively?... So I, I'm curious how far we can push it, in [the] future. (Producer)

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Event

As a community arts project that presented inter-disciplinary interactive installations and performances, with a range of critical dialogues related to issues of death and dying, *Both Sides, Now* was a successful event for stakeholders, the creative team and audiences that participated and attended. This is primarily because the artworks were effective in demonstrating how this is a topic that resonates deeply and warrants attention. This was particularly evident among those who were willing and keen to talk openly about this sensitive and complex aspect of life in an aging society. Traces of this were also seen in the written, photographed and drawn responses that became part of the artworks in the space. What was striking was the diversity of discussions, images and comments that emerged through the course of the event, depicting how the community was able to convey their ideas without having to conform to a singular idea or prescribed solution. As a result, even those who did not participate actively, but simply observed and watched, were able to witness how

a diversity of views can co-exist in a shared space, and multiple beliefs about a sensitive topic are worth listening to.

Creating a Safe Space

The event succeeded because it generated a safe and thought-provoking space for several kinds of conversations around what is often considered a taboo topic, death and dying. This was one of the key objectives of the project. The installations and performances, as well as the talks held, galvanized a process of leading audiences to contemplate reflective dialogues within themselves, and discussions with those around them about end-of-life issues. This prodded a greater awareness of the need to confront questions of Advance Care Planning and preparations for end-of-life, while being open to discussions with family and friends about what is needed to prepare for death. Basically, the overall frame for the event and the dialogical artworks created, offered a safe space in which to do this. Some of these approaches were more popular than others, but nonetheless the diversity allowed for audiences to be involved according to their disposition and comfort levels. Some audiences were bold and took on a character to perform during the forum theatre talkback, while others wrote down thoughts quietly and shared these on a wall or pinwheel. Some merely watched and observed what others did, but this cannot be discounted. They were involved as witnesses to the process and the work co-created between artists and audiences.

Leadership and Collaboration

A key reason for the event's success was due to the efficacies of the cross-sector partnerships. Despite some communication issues about objectives and motivations, the partnerships between different agencies, funders and artists proved to be highly effective. This was in large part due to the clear roles assigned to different bodies. The foundations, health institutions, and arts groups had appointed people to lead their organisation through the planning and communicate with other parties. The producers assumed the roles of intermediaries, acting as go-betweens and negotiators with stakeholder

organisations and the artists. They sought to mediate between what the stakeholders wanted and what the artists thought was possible. This clear line of communication was crucial as it kept misunderstandings to a minimum. The collaborative nature of the work meant that it was critical for all parties to trust, respect and listen to each other, be prepared to negotiate with an open mind, and be willing to experiment and try new things. The producers' ability to be intermediaries, and thus articulate ideas, translate artistic concepts into relevant terms of reference, and develop strategies of cooperation, enabled a community building process based on active listening, dialogue and respect. This left all parties feeling satisfied by the outcomes of the event.

The Venue

The venue, which consisted of public and open-air spaces that are regarded as local thoroughfares, made the event easily available to people in the vicinity. This was crucial in order to draw in those who are unlikely to attend arts events in conventional spaces such as galleries or theatres. As a result, people attending were mostly in familiar territory and this contributed to making the event less intimidating for those unaccustomed to engaged art, in which participation is crucial to the value and efficacy of the work. Volunteer guides and members of the creative team were present to assist, listen to stories and respond to questions when needed. Thus, conversations about death and dying could occur through the artworks, as well as in dialogue with strangers. Being in spaces that were close to home, literally and metaphorically, made it conducive to generating links between the event and everyday life. These conversations were sometimes brief, and at other times lengthy, occurring in a range of languages that included English, Mandarin, Hokkien and Cantonese.

Diversity of Audiences

The fact that there were significant numbers of young people who attended, participated in, and were completely engaged by the event, points to the appeal of this topic for a wide range of people. Audience members and guides expressed the need to take this kind of work into schools and provide a platform for young

people to think and talk about difficult issues in non-threatening ways. They felt that young people are increasingly having to deal with serious illness and death. Taking a version of *Both Sides, Now* into schools could provide a safe space for them to begin to converse about the topic. Hence there is a need to broaden the focal group and allocate resources to encompass the generational and cultural differences that exist.

Not only is Singapore an aging society, but also a multi-religious and multi-ethnic one, with considerable generation gaps that warrant attention. Through open discussions and spaces for interaction across cultural borders, opportunities for community building can occur. This was evident in a couple of instances during the event, such as when a Malay man articulated his story about family tension during the passing of a loved one during the post-forum discussions, and a young Malay woman who participated in the forum acknowledged the value of this platform despite its cultural specificity. It points to an openness in the Singapore populace for being part of an event like this, and indicates potential for further exploration.

However, despite the project's attempts to be inclusive of different cultural backgrounds and beliefs, language was a difficult issue to manage, as Singapore is a multilingual society. Thus while the event catered primarily to the needs of Chinese and English speakers, those who were not fluent in these languages were disadvantaged. This meant that Malay and Indian language speakers were less able to relate to the work and may have felt minimally engaged by the content as well. Questions of how to improve on the capacity to address more language speakers emerged for the creative team, but due to limited resources the decision was made to focus on the main target group, which was an older Chinese populace. They were identified as the focal concern of stakeholders.

Logistical Challenges

What did become a serious challenge to the reach of the work were logistical problems that developed due to being in outdoor spaces. During the day, especially when the weather was very hot or wet, it was uncomfortable for guides to spend many hours in the area, and for audiences to access and engage

with the artworks. The spaces seemed somewhat vast and empty during these times. This was particularly unsuited to seniors who were bussed in during the day, as they also missed out on the performances, which were held in the evenings. Stakeholders reported that they often visited during the day as well, and thus were not present for the most significant aspects of the event, namely the performances. Questions emerged about whether the activities should be limited to the evening, or there could be link-ups with nearby venues such as the library in Toa Payoh Central or outdoor air-conditioned pavilions. These locations could then host daytime events in sheltered and cooler comfort. This also pertains to questions of budget, as a pavilion with options for air-conditioning or better ventilation then demands much higher allocation of financial resources.

Follow Up and Sustainability

Audience members, guides, and the creative team all spoke of the need for continuity and sustainability; the importance of following up on the event to keep conversations flowing, reiterate them, sustain them, and move them forward. Follow-up was deemed significant in order to ensure wellbeing after what could have been a highly affective encounter with the issues of death and dying. As one audience member told the interviewer, a person has an obligation to follow through on another's wellbeing after stirring 'up a hornet's nest'. Moreover, follow-up enables the effects of deep discourses to build and the impact on audience to develop further.

Follow-up was regarded as an imperative step to artistic, organisational and content understanding between artists, as well as between the creative team and stakeholders, including senior centres and community homes, hospitals, agencies and funders. This can facilitate community building, helping stakeholders and creatives to reflect on their attitudes and processes, and evaluate the delivery of aims and objectives to inform further iterations of the project. Follow through can help all parties move away from assumptions and develop deeper understandings of each other's practice and needs.

The Artworks

Both Sides, Now was created for communities who are assumed to have little inclination for actively seeking out arts events as a mode of gaining insight and understanding about crucial everyday issues. Thus it was essential to have a range of artworks purposefully designed for the event that took this into consideration and generated ways to entice audience participation. The choice of objects, images, materials and sounds used appeared to generate familiarity and connect with the community, such that people gravitated towards the installations and showed interest. With the diversity of approaches used, audiences could navigate through the event and decide how much, and in what ways, they wanted to participate and watch. They could be engaged in solitary and reflective activities such as *Turn Turn Turn* and *A Life Remembered*, or they could be more vocal and dialogic, performing in the forum theatre or participating in the talks and dialogue sessions. Based on their comfort levels they could then participate with confidence, while still taking risks that they felt suited to their thresholds. The diversity of works also enabled the very young to participate, either watching *The Wind Came Home* (puppet performance) or designing a coffin in *This is Not a Coffin*.

The choice to design the outdoor installations using bright cheerful colours, namely yellow and white, created a positive effect as this contrasted with commonly held grim associations of death. Quirky and child-like drawings of tombstones and coffins with hands and legs, that were scattered through the pavilions, added to the sense of play without diverting from the serious focus of death and dying. This created an ambience that was similar to a fairground or night-market, in which people are attracted to the jollity of the event, making it less threatening and foreboding. Using these simple yet provocative frames, audiences are teased to become curious and discover the underlying meaning to these artworks and their relevance. This potentially encouraged them to do something unusual such as climbing into an empty coffin to lie down for a while, or writing a message to death. In so doing they explored different ways of

negotiating their fears and anxieties, hopes and aspirations, in relation to concerns about death and dying.

Unlike a campaign, which is broadly associated with a prescribed message, the artworks were open-ended and thus invited multiple interpretations. They not only engaged audiences with the symbolic and the real, allowing people to draw on their personal experiences, but also to play with inventive fictions. This playfulness provided a space to explore the pain of death and dying without getting too personal or morbid. While the seriousness of the issue was not reduced, there was room to examine options because it was not literally happening. The creative team had produced an environment in which audiences could stretch their imaginations and play with their thoughts, feelings and ideas safely. In this space they were not judged or ridiculed for their thoughts, beliefs and desires. Audiences were encouraged to experiment with options they would otherwise perhaps not think possible. This ranged from being a character on stage to designing one's own coffin.

Accessibility of Art

In this context, art was made highly accessible and relevant by being attentive to the vocabularies and objects that are familiar to the public, while working symbolically to generate multiple meanings and ideas. Art was not presented as something alienating and highbrow but rather as a space for anyone seeking to engage and be engaged. The lifelines in *Life Journey: Ups and Downs* depicted personal stories about individual lives, yet these became co-created collages made up of strings and paper that articulated how living consists of the criss-crossing and overlapping of ups and downs, highs and lows. The messages in *Turn Turn Turn* were indications of aspirations and anxieties, hopes and fears, yet constituted of a wall of spinning yellow pinwheels that depicted how the wind, like time passing, blows through our desires and anxieties. These metaphorical representations of life and death became reflective of how ordinary lives are imbued with multi-layered meanings that impact on how we deal with the pain of loss and joys of living. Audiences could then relate to how shared

experiences help them reflect on their own conflicts, and thus become empowering moments.

While each artwork was related to the rest, they were nonetheless distinct and thus some art works stood out more than others. It appeared that some works were more demanding and complex, such as the forum theatre, while other works were surprising and thus shocked audiences, such as the open coffin in *Rest.Stop*. Some were highly reflective and less performative, such as *A Life Remembered* and *Time of Our Lives*, while others were more playful and interactive, such as *Turn Turn Turn* and *My Message to Death*. Some of these may not even have been considered as 'art' because they were not visually enticing objects that were completed and set-up to be looked at or admired. Instead they were portals for interaction, which were incomplete and required the inputs of the audience. Some audiences responded well to this, while others were visibly unimpressed.

With regards to how these artworks were evaluated, some audiences were taken by the way they prodded thought and dialogue. Stakeholders were impressed with the way they elicited conversations and artists were interested in how different kinds of work drew a range of responses. Clear patterns emerged in the works that requested audiences to leave traces, such as statements or photographs, and these are discussed and analysed in the Analysis of Artworks section of this report. What stands out is how these traces convey multiple ideas about end-of-life issues that can be further studied for deeper understanding of how people engage with death and dying. While these may not be dramatic statements such as those performed by individuals in the forum theatre, they are valuable in capturing a sense of a wider cross-section of the public.

Impact and Understandings

Relationships

Patterns in the data analysis revealed that what audiences deemed most important in their lives was their relationships with others, particularly with loved ones and family members. The regard people placed on their relationships

was a prominent and recurring theme in many of the art works including *My Message to Death*, *Turn Turn Turn*, *A Life Remembered*, *Life Journeys: Ups and Downs* and the forum theatre interventions. Many people talked and/or wrote about relationships as significant achievements in their lives, whether it was with a partner, as a parent, sibling, friend or other. In a few cases people expressed great disappointment in the failure, break down or dissolution of their relationships, including through death. These expressions of audience members' social values were not generally about status and success, financial or otherwise. Although some expressed professional and educational recognition and failures as significant 'ups' in *Life Journeys: Ups and Downs*, the high points were overwhelmingly about having and experiencing empathy, care and the ability to live life well in the company of others. The thing people feared most was losing those relationships through death.

Potential for Change

The stakeholders, recognising that the arts can facilitate a valuable exploratory process, felt *Both Sides, Now* has the potential to effect real change. They saw the potential for transformation in both the general public's attitudes towards death and dying, and through the advancement of a civic society that takes responsibility for these kinds of issues. They expressed an interest in possible further iterations of *Both Sides, Now*, and a willingness to continue to support the project. This suggests a realization that the work needs to be sustained and not just sporadic, enabling artists and the wider community to develop ways to connect and converse about death and dying through the arts.

Audience members also talked about how they had been affected by the event, and how their thoughts, feelings and attitudes had been transformed. Their views point to the importance of having safe, reflective and creative spaces in which to learn about the need for preparedness, and to be encouraged to participate in an ongoing dialogue about end-of-life. An atmosphere of play and openness made it conducive because they were not intimidated, and this led to new awareness through curiosity, interaction and listening. Audiences were also

struck by how the event led them to rethink norms and thus revise particular fears and anxieties about death and dying.

The Arts as Language

It became clear through interviews with the stakeholders and some audience members that they had begun to recognise the arts as a language, a form of communication, that invited people to talk, to think, to communicate abstractly, and through which to take risks. However, this appreciation focused on the *functional* use of the arts rather than any real aesthetic aspects; the application of the arts rather than the form. Hence the arts as a language was enjoyed and valued as a medium that facilitated a process towards particular outcomes – namely preparedness for end-of-life issues. How to become more adept in using this language and developing suitable vocabularies for a Singapore context is a question that needs to be further considered.

Stakeholders and audience members acknowledged that the arts had affected their thoughts, feelings and ideas about the issues explored in *Both Sides, Now*. However, they articulated that they valued some of the art practices more than others, and their responses to what they appreciated differed. Some artworks were identified as ‘too arty’, too deep, or not accessible. This conveyed not only the need to cater to diverse audiences, in terms of cultural and artistic understandings and representations, but also the lack of exposure some Singaporeans have to the arts. Building understanding and capacities in the arts would help in making the arts a multi-faceted language in community arts, that is not limited to communication, but also expression, interaction, contemplation and philosophical interrogation.

The Arts as a Unique Dialogical Form

The funders conveyed an awareness of *Both Sides, Now* as a specific and specialised kind of work that addresses particular issues for the varied needs of the targeted audiences, and one that responds to a particular kind of site. In moving forward into further manifestations of the work, the researchers found that the stakeholders need to further understand the unique and unusual

qualities of the arts, and be willing to engage in multiple ways to work with the arts. This means being open to wider experimentation that enables arts practitioners to develop short- and long-term projects. It also entails developing inter-disciplinary collaborations in which diverse expertise is brought together to help in the design and implementation of these projects. The arts is then a process and a product, which is informed by other fields of knowledge and thinking.

The research revealed *Both Sides, Now* is not, and cannot be packaged as, a template if it is to appeal to diverse audiences and engage them in rich conversations. Each iteration requires unique innovations to appeal to and draw in an exchange of ideas. Some stakeholders expressed a desire to reach wider audiences and suggested exploring ways to use new media platforms to achieve this. However, that does not recognise the importance of liveness in such an event, and the significance of live presence and real-time interactions to initiate open and authentic discussions. Thus the expansion of the project in terms of numbers can potentially reduce its efficacy, unless there is the corresponding effort to ensure the enlargement is not merely about numbers, but about productive ways to transfer what has been learnt to other mediums, processes and sites.

Two key aspects of *Both Sides, Now* that impacted audiences were the creation of a safe space to explore issues of death and dying, and the 'liveness' or immediacy of the event. While people might have participated alone when they attended *Both Sides, Now*, they were collectively in a space that had been made 'safe' and without judgement. Here writing on a wall or voicing a difficult thought was rendered permissible and normal. Through this they were able to physically embody and inhabit knowledge and understandings of the issue. People were moving and doing, thinking and acting, remembering and reconstructing in real time and space as they moved about the site of *Both Sides, Now*. As a result, audiences were prepared and willing to engage in the issue of death and dying in whatever way they desired.

Conversations and exchanging ideas were key to *Both Sides, Now*. The frame of the art-based space elicited a desire to comment and discuss. During the event people were able to have conversations that they never had before about death and dying, and they often delved into how it affected them and their loved ones. Conversations were had with guides and the artistic team as people moved around the site. Audience members absorbed the content of the event and then brought friends and family back to experience it. Some audiences talked about having conversations about the issue with family members overseas. *Both Sides, Now* went beyond those who came to the event, to affect those who were not present as well. People came back night after night to re-experience and discuss the issues further. Some even travelled from Khatib to Toa Payoh to see and experience it again. There were people who stayed beyond the performances to have conversations with others and listen. This provided them with the opportunity to gain a perspective of their own values and feelings and compare and contrast them with others. What this showed is that people not only want to discuss the issues, they want permission to discuss it without being judged. They appreciate the facilitation that occurs in these discussions, and they value the normalization of death and dying in a society where cultural taboos have made it difficult to talk about these concerns in the everyday context. Setting apart a space to do this was a call to which many audiences responded heartily.

Both Sides, Now has proved to be highly effective in delivering the messages and creating the conversations that it set out to do. The creative team, stakeholders, guides and audience members who participated in the research all felt that *Both Sides, Now* opened a space for important discussions. But there is a need for this work to continue. The research into *Both Sides, Now* is not extensive. While the researchers may not have gleaned a full understanding of what the work of *Both Sides, Now* is, this study has begun to document, transcribe and make sense of it. What it has revealed is that all kinds of values and questions have arisen that need to be worked through in order for expertise in this kind of community work/building capacity to be gained.

Applied Arts as Informal Education

Both Sides, Now applied the arts as a vehicle for thought, dialogue and reflection. Its participatory nature invited audiences to create, present, and respond to art works about the issue of death and dying, and through the process learn about themselves and others. They became aware of thoughts, feelings and beliefs, as well as specific facts, laws and procedures. A knowledge-based event, *Both Sides, Now* drew on substantial research undertaken by the creative team and stakeholders. This involved research about health, law, social and cultural issues, and the arts. As a result, *Both Sides, Now* became a site of informal learning where participants could choose the kinds of knowledge and learning experiences they wanted to delve into – whether it was about advanced care plans, making a will, or their own feelings about death and dying. Through the artworks and talks they could investigate:

- what they wanted to know,
- what they did not want to know,
- what they wanted to avoid knowing,
- what they wanted someone else to know.

The spontaneous and creative nature of the event provided a space for participants to choose knowledge they wanted to acquire. For instance, many people talked about things they had learned from the forum theatre about hospital procedures. Audience members talked also of revisiting *Both Sides, Now* with family members they wanted to discuss the issue with, but some of those members resisted any opportunity to talk about the issue. In such instances, more events such as *Both Sides, Now* would make it possible for these conversations to occur in the future.

Ideal Arts Practitioners for this Work

In creating *Both Sides, Now*, the artists were challenged to rethink ways of making artworks for the community and generating art-making activities for the public. The question that needs to be considered for ongoing work in this area is: i) who is qualified to make this kind of work? ii) what are the traits these arts

practitioners need? iii) how can these arts practitioners gain skills and expertise in this area of work?

Arts practitioners (artists, designers, dramaturgs, producers, etc.) who develop and participate in work like *Both Sides, Now* need to be prepared for a complex and intricate process that entails much discussion and interaction across multiple sectors. They do not need paper qualifications in this area, but they must care about the community and the issues being explored. They need to be able to consider cultural differences and multiplicity within communities and cultures, and avoid falling into stereotyping or looking for quick fixes. They need to be able to deal with multifarious issues and not try to simplify them but accept the complexities therein.

The traits needed fall into three broad categories: interest and sustained engagement in community issues; knowledge and ideas about community arts locally and internationally; and strong collaborative and interpersonal skills. These are crucial in developing insights about community work and engaged arts processes, because they contribute to the kinds of works created as well as the relationships built among the different stakeholders and partners.

Artists have to be cognisant of and able to address the challenges of community art making. Community art is not about creating high art. It is about encouraging people of all abilities to feel comfortable expressing themselves through the arts. Artists working in community arts need to consider fostering an aesthetic that is suited to community art work, promotes critical thinking and avoids dumbing things down while maintaining a high quality that appeals to the masses. The artists need to be able to initiate modes of inquiry and reflection through art-making activities.

Finally, arts practitioners working on projects like *Both Sides, Now* need to have powerful personal and social skills. They need to be ethical and have conviction that the issues they are working on matter. Artists not only need to feel comfortable putting forward their ideas, but also in listening to the ideas of others in the working frame. They need to be able to research and innovate forms and meet the demands of the work. They need to be able to negotiate and

also be willing to adapt to other people's ideas such as producers and stakeholders. Most importantly, they need to be able to think through issues and solve problems in a non-threatening and open manner.

Human Resources and Budgeting

Finding artists with skilled expertise in these areas is not easy. There is a need to develop the skills of artists who are willing to take risks and are deemed capable of undertaking this kind of community work so as to build capacity. Without it, interdisciplinary, participatory arts projects like *Both Sides, Now* will not be able to prosper. But how can this be achieved? There is no current training in community arts in Singapore, and this is sorely needed. Fostering the further development of skilled community artists provides a pool of human resources to draw from. However, this requires a budget not only to train artists in this kind of work but also to employ them.

Future recommendations

Fostering Community Building through the Arts

Both Sides, Now was concerned with capacity building in regards to citizenship and community. The event prepared audiences to participate, intervene and mediate on important community issues. Participants were encouraged to listen to each other, share their stories, work collaboratively, problem-solve, and think through issues collectively as they watched, created and presented art-works that fostered life skills for issues pertaining to living and dying. In the process participants developed a certain literacy in symbolic meaning-making and an understanding that there are diverse and conflicting views and perceptions about the difficult issue of death and dying. The study shows there is great potential in the processes applied in *Both Sides, Now* that are not to be limited by statistics but looks at communities holistically and as diverse entities.

We see further opportunities for other collaborations between community-building stakeholders and arts practitioners. The kind of work produced in and for *Both Sides, Now* is a non-threatening intervention that provides audience

members with agency to express their opinions and beliefs, and explore the issues at their own pace and in their own way. Thus it is personal but safe, individual and collective. Events of this nature invite Singaporeans to take on difficult, complex, sensitive issues without anxiety and to talk to other members of their community who have differing perspectives. This can open their eyes to diverse beliefs and ideas, and promote tolerance and empathy. It embraces intercultural and interdisciplinary thinking. Stakeholders who appreciate and want to nurture these values might be encouraged to consider investing in arts-based processes for the exploration of other issues that are not easily predictable when they wish to have a deep and rich impact on the communities they are dealing with.

Sourcing Facilities

It was clear that locating *Both Sides, Now* outdoors negatively impacted the creative team, volunteers and audiences during daylight hours due to the weather. Holding an event like this indoors is problematic because of lack of space in neighbourhoods and/or not picking up passers-by. For arts practitioners undertaking such an event, there is the need for something like a durable tent that includes possibility of air-conditioning. However, to purchase something like this demands huge financial resources that companies and artists cannot always afford. Drama Box's *Goli* is an example of a mobile arts space and it generates work that otherwise would not happen due to weather. Artists working in the community need some form of infrastructure for certain kinds of outdoor arts work, like festivals and showcases. If the National Arts Council had several mobile tents that could be air-conditioned and are conducive to art-making processes, this would be a way to traverse this problem. This could operate as subsidised venue hire for companies and artists working in large scale community events. This is not about a permanent structure but one that can move around, and that will attract people to come in.

Further Research

So far there have been two iterations of *Both Sides, Now* – 2013 and 2014. There is the potential of future projects. This research recommends that the National Arts Council and stakeholders undertake longitudinal studies of further iterations of projects such as *Both Sides, Now*. These studies should focus on how the project develops and transforms through time, and investigate the various accumulated learning and challenges of audiences, arts practitioners and stakeholders through the different iterations. It would be useful to investigate the varied strategies of collaboration with the artists, producers and intermediaries, to understand the developing arts processes and the longitudinal effects of this work in fostering conversations about death and dying on the community.

Final Thoughts

Working to Improve on the Model

The research has shown that *Both Sides, Now* is effective as a platform to engage audiences in discussing issues of living life, death and dying, but how can it work better? How can such an artistic social event and pedagogy be normalised and made available in all Singapore neighbourhoods, and provide opportunities for all people to feel free to question their thoughts, beliefs and assumptions about these important issues? Because *Both Sides, Now* is a new kind of creative and cognitive work there is a sense among the creative team of a need to iron out the wrinkles by creating further such events and spreading the message more widely and effectively. In this way *Both Sides, Now* stops being novel to become familiar to Singaporeans, opening spaces for diverse conversations and community building.

The questions for the creative team and others seeking to embrace this kind of work include: i) How can the arts be engaged to build the coherence of community? ii) What arts-based pedagogies and strategies are needed to increase awareness and understanding of critical issues in society? iii) How can

the state, agencies and stakeholders become ongoing collaborative partners in the development of arts-based community projects?

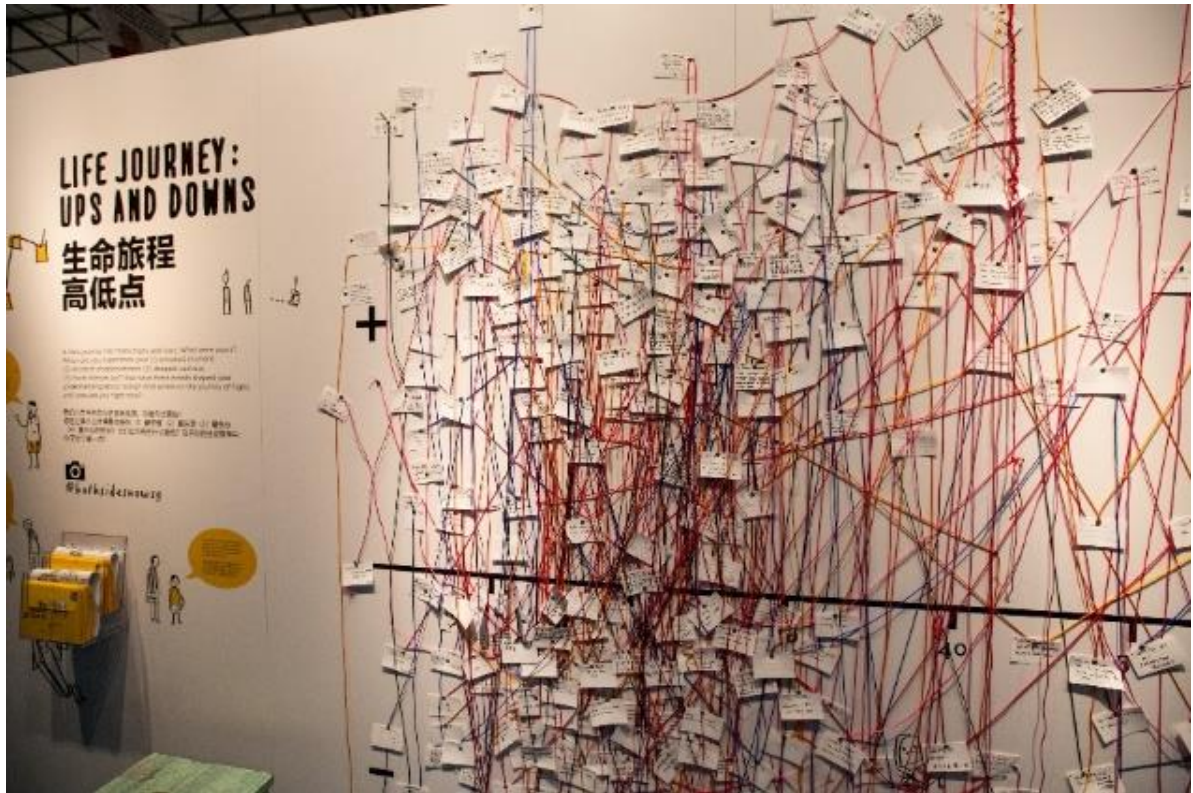


Photo: The mapping artwork at Khatib, after a few days of audience input. This form of engagement required the audience to map significant events of their life on the board. The implicit interaction came in the form of viewing others' life journeys on the same board.

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Photo: Two of the stand-alone frames that were placed on the fringes of the pavilions at Khatib.