Proposal for Performing Care: Sue Mayo

December 15th at RCSSD

The Gratitude Enquiry

Throughout 2016 I have been running a series of pilot projects, as part of my research into what connects participants to one another in the participatory arts. I became interested in Gratitude in my search for a deeper understanding of what I understood to be transactions between people in groups with whom I worked. While people were sometimes only attracted to projects because of what they might learn, gain, or explore, as individuals, I often observed, and certainly desired, the creation of bonds between people, in ways that could deepen and enrich the personal learning and discovery. Research into Gratitude emphasizes the pro-social aspects of the ability to feel thankful and express thanks. Jo-Ann Tsang (2006) describes Gratitude as ‘other-oriented’, which ‘supports the pro-social and inhibits the destructive’[[1]](#footnote-1) Emmons and Shelton , quoting Streng ’89 point to a wider sense of belonging. *[ ] people recognize that they are connected to each other in a mysterious way that is not fully determined by physical forces but is part of a wider or transcendent context[[2]](#footnote-2)*

These researchers suggest that the ability to feel gratitude, that is to acknowledge that one needs something from others, is absolutely crucial both to mental health and to the formation of social bonds; relationships, communities and mutuality.

In this paper I will explore the learning that arose from the three projects: *I live in it*, a dance project exploring thankfulness to the body; *Fanmail,* a visual arts project creating Fans and turning them into Thank you letters, and *Bread*, and exploration of how baking together unearths stories, and enacts a creative process that is full of reciprocal gestures. I will endeavour both to articulate what I observed happening, and what was explicitly explored, in the reciprocal dialogue of offering, receiving and acknowledging gifts and needs.

1. Tsang J. Gratitude & Prosocial behaviour: an experimental test of gratitude 2006, Cognition & Emotion 20 (1) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Emmons R.A. and Shelton C.M. , Gratitude and the Science of Positive Psychology 2002 handbook of Positive Psychology p6 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)