

Schedule

<p>Welcome to Country by Gheran Steel Welcome by Wendy O'Neill Introduction by Keith Greaves Keynote Professor Jill Bennet</p>
<p>BREAK – 10 minutes</p>
<p>Performance of excerpts from <i>Genius</i> Q&A with Summer Metley & Jo Dunbar Workshop with A_tistic Q&A with A_tistic</p>
<p>BREAK – 45 minutes, light lunch provided</p>
<p>Performance by Stéphanie Kabanyana Kanyandekwe Conversation with Stéphanie Kabanyana Kanyandekwe & Santilla Chingaïpe</p>
<p>BREAK – 10 minutes</p>
<p>Open discussion Closing remarks Guests are invited for a drink at Bombini Buzz bar</p>

The Deep Dive

14 February 2018

10am – 4pm



Photo by Amelia Ducker

Neurodiversity

By Jill Bennet
UNSW 2018

Neurodiversity is a radical social movement, grounded in the idea that natural variations in the human genome (as well as acquired characteristics) position us all on a nuanced neurological spectrum. We are not, as previously envisaged, consigned to one or other side of a binary divide, distinguishing the 'normal' from the 'abnormal' or those with a 'disorder'. We are simply within the neurotypical [NT] or neurodivergent [ND] range, potentially combining characteristics of both. No longer viewed as a deviation from the norm, neurodivergent experience such as autism may now be espoused in its own terms, as a positive identity. Yet the term 'neurodiversity' (coined by Judy Singer in 1988) has taken thirty years to permeate mainstream consciousness. Its radical implications are still to register in a culture where neurological difference, like mental illness, is deeply stigmatized.

Autism activist John Elder Robison highlights the scale of the task:

"campaigns to accept diversity in race or orientation were simpler...With neurodiversity we must change beliefs at the same time we find ways to solve significant functioning problems."

But who defines a functioning problem? The neurotypical body, associated with certain capacities and sensitivities, is marked outwardly by certain kinds of behavior and self-regulation. Its pre-eminence has been ensured by constructing every possible social system to accommodate such a body—and with a sleight of hand that makes it appear as if the NT individual is neither helped nor privileged but is instead a model of self-sufficiency, gliding effortlessly through social spaces without need for special provisions. Yet as any neurodivergent learner knows, systems and practices, buildings and public spaces are designed quite specifically to facilitate the neurotypical—not necessarily the smartest, most sensitive or creative but the *normalized*, to whom the rituals of sitting, attending, engaging and reciprocating come easiest.

Sensing relatively little, tuning out background noise to attend to single channel, verbal communication with reassuring amounts of eye contact, the neurotypical, we are led to believe, excel at so-called 'social-emotional reciprocity'.

But only with those of similarly narrow perceptual range. Like any unchallenged elite, neurotypicals have little insight into the lived experience of others. As the autistic blogger, Mel Baggs points out:

"Because language has mostly been created by nonautistic people, there's not necessarily an easy way to show the things that autistic people are better at perceiving and prioritizing than nonautistic people are. Because there are often literally no words for the experiences until we invent them".

Hence, the greater sensory-perceptual range and intensity that characterizes the mental life of many autistics is perceived as a failure of attention. Body styles or behaviours that appear oblivious to the NT social world are perceived as maladjusted. Autism advocate, Dawn-Joy Leong makes a point of calling this the neurotypical empathy deficit in tribute to the theory that labeled autism with this deficit.

Dawn is an autistic artist. Think for a moment (given the above) about what that entails:

"there are often literally no words for the experiences until we invent them"; "campaigns to accept diversity in race or orientation were simpler"; "we change beliefs at the same time we find ways to solve significant functioning problems..."

Neurodiverse arts are, by such measures, always radical. They invent languages to convey diversity of perception and embodied experience. They find ways to communicate across a spectrum of difference. They politicise that difference, which is to say they challenge the assumptions and privilege of NT culture. They activate new environments and social settings. They create spaces in which people can function better; what Dawn calls 'clement spaces' in the midst of inclement sensory environments. They establish the foundations of the neurodiverse-city.

It is the unique potential of such art to simultaneously imagine, invent and intervene in the interests of social change. It is the potential of institutions and wider publics to be transformed in this process.

Presenters



Keith Greaves, Co-Founder and Director, MosaicLab

Keith trained as a Science in Society Facilitator and spent 12 years with the Science Museum in London connecting scientists and the public through dynamic conversations around big dilemmas in our society. Keen to see a culture of better practice in our society, Keith is driven to share knowledge and learnings, giving back to the field that he loves.



Professor Jill Bennett, Australian Research Council Laureate Fellow, Director, The Big Anxiety and Director, National Institute for Experimental Arts, UNSW

Jill is Founding Director of The Big Anxiety: festival of art + science + people. She holds an Australian Research Council Laureate Fellowship and is Professor and Director of the National Institute for Experimental Arts at UNSW Sydney. Her research Lab brings together art, psychology and immersive visualisation to investigate the lived experience of mental health, trauma, neurodiversity, memory loss and ageing.



Jo Dunbar, Independent Artist, St Martins Youth Arts Centre Inclusion Coordinator

Jo is a choreographer, director and facilitator. She founded Australia's first dance company for deaf and hearing performers, The Delta Project, performed with renowned arts companies Strange Fruit and Restless Dance theatre, as well as taught dance and physical theatre workshops. Born profoundly deaf and bi-lingual in both English and Auslan she is passionate about all things diverse, experimental, inclusive and the good things young people bring to this world.



Tom Middleditch, Actor/Writer/Director/Dramaturg/Philosopher and co-founder of A_tistic

Tom is a co-founder of A_tistic (2015), a company dedicated to telling neurodiverse stories, and developing an Autistic Aesthetic, with the goal of developing empathy for neurodiverse humans. His play, Alexithymia was selected to open the 2017 Poppy Seed Theatre Festival (Co Production with Citizen Theatre, Dir Jayde Kirchert). Tom has been selected as a playwright in year long residency with Lonely Company for 2018



Jacinta Anderson, Stage Manager, A_tistic

Jacinta is a Melbourne based Stage Manager for Theatre and Performance. Jacinta is also a core member of A_tistic, a theatre company devoted to creating neurodiverse works, specialising in creating Autistic spaces for enhanced empathy and understanding. She was involved with Alexithymia, with A_tistic at Poppyseed Theatre Festival recently, and presented at Drama Victoria.



James Matthews, Theatre makers, advocate and co-founder of A_tistic

James is a Melbourne-based theatre maker and autistic self-advocate with a particular focus on structural thinking and systemic power. He is a founding member of A_tistic theatre company.



Stéphanie Kabanyana Kanyandekwe, composer and multidisciplinary artist

Stéphanie is a Rwandan-British composer and multidisciplinary artist. Through her viewpoint as a synaesthetic 'third-culture kid', her research-based art practice focusses on the composition and archiving of culture within the framework of transcription through artistry.



Santilla Chingaipe, journalist and documentary filmmaker

Santilla is an award winning journalist and documentary filmmaker. She spent nearly a decade working for SBS World News which saw her report across Africa and interview some of the continent's most prominent leaders. Her work explores contemporary migration, cultural identities and politics.