



Podcast Transcript

Creative Responders: in Conversation with Alex Kelly

August 2020

Scotia: Hi I'm Scotia Monkivitch,

Welcome back for another episode of Creative Responders: In Conversation; our monthly interview series where we hear from people on the front lines of the arts and emergency management sector as they prepare, respond and recover from disaster.

If this is your first time joining us, welcome...this interview series is just one part of our podcast offerings.

We also have a documentary series that you can find in episodes one to four of the creative responders podcast feed where we unpack one case study in each episode - visiting impacted communities, speaking to people with lived experience of disasters and bringing in a range of perspectives on the power of the arts and creativity in disaster management.

We are currently working on Season 2 of the documentary series and look forward to sharing that with you later in the year.

But for now, these one on one interviews have been a way for us to spend time hearing from some of the key creative thinkers across both the arts and emergency sector and we hope you have been enjoying the conversations so far.

Today's guest is Alex Kelly.

She is an organiser, artist and filmmaker committed to social and climate justice and her work takes on many forms in both the arts and activist space.

Most recently, she has spearheaded a speculative futures practice in collaboration with David Pledger which took shape as a series of digital gatherings called Assembly for the Future.

Alex has a range of documentary producing credits and for the past few years has been working closely with several Arnernte families and director Maya Newell to support the impact goals of their documentary feature film, *In My Blood it Runs*. The film is currently available to Australian viewers on ABC iView.

We cover so much in our discussion but one of the things that really stayed with me is the idea of the importance of creating a robust space for imaginative and nuanced dialogue around possible futures, particularly in this moment in time when we are questioning many of the power structures that have been so rigid for so long.

I hope you enjoy this conversation with Creative Responder, Alex Kelly.

Welcome to Creative Responders, Alex, thanks so much for joining us today.

Alex: Hi. Great to be here.

Scotia: Well, I am on Jagera Turrbal country today. It's a pretty crisp or autumn day. We have what's called the Ekka winds coming through Brisbane, Queensland at the moment so cold toes, but clear blue skies. How is it where you are?

Alex: I'm on Dja Dja Wurrung country in regional Victoria and it's overcast, but there's a bit of sun peeking through and it's pretty cold.

Scotia: Yeah, it's funny. Interesting how we talk about cold here and there's a very different cold down where you are.

Alex: Absolutely. I think I think there's a slight eye roll when people, you know, north of Sydney talk about cold weather for those of us who are down south.

Scotia: So, Alex, you've had a very rich and varied career, some of which I've been following and connecting in along the way, projects involving activism, the arts, filmmaking.

We'll talk about some of your specific projects in a little while. But I thought we might start off by looking to the future, given that's what you've been spending a lot of your time thinking about lately.

So I'm talking about the Assembly for the Future project that you're in the midst of at the moment, a digital gathering presented as part of Bleed Festival at the Arts House and the Campbelltown Arts Centre.

I was fortunate to join in the two gatherings you've had so far, and I've found it incredibly thought provoking. For our listeners who may not know this project, could you tell us a bit about what the Assembly for the Future is and what you hope to achieve through these gatherings that you're holding?

Alex: Sure, I'm so pleased to hear that you're able to be part of them as well, because I think that they are something to be experienced. They're kind of hard to describe.

I mean, I can I can describe the design but, yeah, I'd be interested to hear about your experiences as well.

Scotia: Yeah, it's a kind of an immersive experience and fed by a whole range of people who are participating. That's very right.

Alex: Yeah. And I think every different every single person's experience would be quite different based on the rooms they end up in as well.

So initially I had been working over the last sort of four or five years developing a series of works under the banner of practice that I'm calling The Things We Did Next, collaborating closely with David Pledger from Not Yet It's Difficult, a theatre and performance maker and writer. And we were on the verge of premiering our live performance work in June.

Back in March, we realised that given the now growing awareness of what the pandemic meant, that we wouldn't be doing the live work. So like many people, we had to decide what it was that we were going to do. And we decided not to try and necessarily replicate that work in an online environment, but actually to create something new that was responsive to the material conditions of the times.

And so we really decided that we would keep we would stay with the ideas of futuring and world building and so on, but that we would flatten the project and make it as democratic and participatory as possible, because we thought that the opportunity to do futuring and world building and imagining other possible futures was something that we all need so much right now.

So it takes place on Zoom. We did look at a whole lot of other platforms, but we decided on Zoom partly for its familiarity and also because it's actually the best platform at this stage in terms of bringing in access services such as Auslan interpreters and captioning, and so it's a meeting on Zoom.

It runs in that format. And it starts with a provocation from a first speaker, followed by two respondents. You're welcomed to the event by Digital Usher to the future, Robby, and I am the Keeper of Time who steers us between 2020 and 2029 from where the first speaker delivers their provocation.

After this kind of triangulation of discussion between the first speaker and the two respondents, after a short intermission, all of our participants who we deem to be future builders, go into 10 different breakout rooms, each with a moderator, and they're encouraged to generate other possible futures based on the provocations.

Each of those moderators then publishes a dispatch from the future. We also have two artists in residence who take place and participate in the assembly. And then we also have some future archivists who are making sound pieces.

So after these three assemblies for the future, we will have had around 350 people participate in them and we'll be generating 50 different dispatches, artworks and archives from the future.

And we hope that they are contradictory and contested and messy and very, very different in form and style and content, because we're very interested in multiplicity and complexity and really opening up lots and lots of different stories, because the real genesis of the project and the kind of sort of driving aspiration is that we start to consider the many, many futures are possible because we believe that if we practise that art of imagining many, many possible futures, it's going to service us better in the present to pursue those other kinds of futures rather than the seemingly inevitable paths that we're on.

It's interesting to work in disaster management as you know, we we in the sector, they often talk about the cycle of disaster or disaster management.

And there's nothing in there is sort of a term which is called preparedness. But I'm kind of interested in how you understand that term "practice" rather than necessarily preparedness and what you think might be the difference. So you talk about this project as in practicing good futures or looking at ways how we practise more positive outcomes or hopeful outcomes or more united and accessible futures for people.

How how do you sort of understand that in what we might in disaster measurement called preparedness?

Alex: I think and forgive me that I don't have a great depth of knowledge about the definition of preparedness in that context. But I think perhaps practise allows us to think in an open ended way and perhaps we're not building towards a particular set of scenarios rather, we're trying to sort of open up to more and more possibilities.

I'm also interested in practise because it sounds like something that is on a continuum that never finishes, whereas for me, preparing sounds like we're preparing for something that might be more clear, already defined and perhaps linear.

Of course, I know that within disaster preparedness, people understand that all sorts of unexpected things can happen.

Scotia: Yeah but often our preparedness is, as you say, quite specific and it's interesting at the moment with all of these different cascading issues that we're dealing with, we certainly we haven't necessarily projected ourselves or practiced multiple impacts.

Alex: Absolutely. And it's I think when we think about practice as something that is continual and think about things like things being a process and always in process, I think we can try and let go of the idea of anything ever being finished or complete or fixed.

And ultimately, that also pushes us to let go of certainty and arrival and and absolute safety and security and fixed-ness and all of those things are very hard for us to let go of because we have instincts towards wanting to pin things down and know them and those natural human instincts have been, I think, really sort of negatively encouraged by neo-liberalism and capitalism and now with surveillance capitalism, where everything is sought to be measured and contained and controlled and, you know, made surveyed and understood and pinned down and so on, which is very different from the way in which...

Scotia: Well, it's a totally different than life, isn't it? Life doesn't frame us like that at all.

Alex: No, that's not how the natural world works. It's not how ecology works. It's not how bodies and humanity and our experience works.

But it is natural, I think, for us to aspire to be able to understand and control and be safe.

But I think actually, if we can practise letting go of certainty and instead learn to look towards each other in the uncertain and to trust our relationships with each other in the face of uncertainty, that's a very different impulse to turning inwards towards, you know, a false sense of certainty and no ability.

And so this idea of multiple futures, some that intersect, some that contradict and lots of different voices and forms is sort of it is an exercise in practising complexity and practising uncertainty.

Scotia: Yeah, in a container of what we're calling a kind of an art project.

So what is it you think that the creatives bring to this space that we may not necessarily see, for example, in disaster management or within other sections of our life? What do you think it is that we as artists bring into that space to enable us to open up this sense of possible different futures or safe spaces to be able to unpack that?

Alex: Well, I certainly notice in my own inner worlds that, you know, I have a very strong interest and pull towards the intellectual. And, you know, I read a lot and I watch a lot of documentaries and I and I want to understand and I seek to know and reflect and analyse and, you know, I have that kind of way of thinking. But when I'm engaged in both experiencing art as a participant or an audience member, and certainly when I'm making art, there are moments where I can move outside of that. And it's not necessarily comfortable to sit in a space that is more mysterious or open or unknown or fictional and that, you know, I feel that tension internally, you know, the tension to analyse and articulate and clarify, pushing against explorations of something that words don't fit something deeper about who I am or who we are and how we are together and connection to country and futures and histories.

So I think artists, not always, but can bring an opening to, you know, something bigger and wider and more mysterious than, you know, day to day, narrower or perhaps ways of engaging with the world and with ideas.

Scotia: Magic of the heart, perhaps.

I know you've been working closely in the past with author and social activist Naomi Klein.

And I've been particularly interested in this idea of disaster capitalism that she wrote about in her book, *The Shock Doctrine*. And I know that work that you've collaborated around has influenced a lot of your work. How do these ideas she brings through some of her writing influence choices around how you make a piece of work like the *Assembly for the Future*.

Alex: Actually, just in terms of the way things circle back and circle back on each other in our second Assembly for the Future. Scott Ludlam said that a friend of his said in times of a disaster, the first person with a plan on the table wins.

And that's essentially what Naomi Klein was talking about with the Shock Doctrine as well, that in moments of shock or disaster or upheaval, it's a moment when it's a huge opportunity for people to push forward.

Scotia: A door opens to enable what isn't necessarily possible previously, positive and negative.

Alex: Exactly. And for the last sort of 40 years or so, neo liberal capitalists have had the plan ready to go on the table every time, whether it's Hurricane Katrina or a war in Iraq or, you know, a fire or a tsunami.

They are ready. The way that schools get rebuilt, roads get rebuilt, public infrastructure becomes privatised. Large companies are ready. They're ready to do the rebuilding. They get the contracts and often, you know, big, big reforms towards particularly privatisation or, yeah, corporate management of particular systems that may have had serious opposition in the past suddenly swept in and often underwritten by public money in the under the kind of, you know, disaster recovery spend.

And so I suppose I really started thinking more and more about the fact that we - we as progressives - that want to see the future bend towards justice, were lacking a plan, a really, really comprehensive plan.

And I think we see really exciting glimmers of these possible plans emerging in the shape of a green new deal in the US and other build back better pushes and people's recovery pushes now that people are articulating around the pandemic but they're not as thoroughly embedded across universities and within, you know, the business sector and pushed out by economists and think tanks, etc. in the way that the right and these neoliberal forces have done and have consolidated their plans in the last 40 years.

Scotia: We don't have a we don't have a kind of deep, resonant kind of platform which to jump.

Alex: No, we've got I mean, we've got millions of people articulating other visions, whether that's through NGOs or social movements or artists or writers, and that we do have think tanks and we do have researchers and but it but it's it's not as connected and it's not as, we haven't built as much power and so many of our institutions have become neoliberalised and conservative and hierarchical in how they run but they're not fit for purpose, for driving, you know, visionary, transformative change towards social change, real justice and liberation.

And I suppose when I was really thinking about that, I thought a lot, you know, I think a lot of us that that spend our lives working for justice often, you know, have these big moments where you thinking am I doing the right thing? You know, should I be writing? Should I be researching? Should I be campaigning? Or what combination of all of these things are? Where do I put my energy and who do I collaborate with?

And I really started to think that the space of practising the imagination of working in speculative fiction could be one way of contributing towards the development of the plans, because I feel like our imagination has been so cowed by by this neo liberalism and the arts and the arts sector itself.

I mean, what has happened to our festivals and our major arts institutions and, you know, the kind of work that gets funded, you know, in the more high profile and more well resourced parts of our sector are not what we need right now.

You know, we need really challenging, visionary, unusual work that comes from all kinds of different makers and in in all kinds of forms.

I mean, we see incredible and creative and vibrant and challenging work emerging in the tiny and the small and medium sector in DIY arts community and in fringe community and in self publishing,

particularly from First Nations artists and the queer and trans artists and people of colour across the country and it's so incredible some of the work that's coming out of those communities, but it's not reaching the mainstream.

And we still see, you know, we see the same people in middle management and in artistic directing roles and the same shows get programmed and tour through our festivals and our performing arts venues across the country.

And you know, it's sort of like how is the arts, why is the arts sector lacking in imagination? How did even the arts become so kind of neo liberal like, this is the...

Scotia: We're not we're not practicing our own practice

Alex: No, it's a disaster. So this is a

Scotia: Well, it's kind of, it is interesting because in the area of disaster management, there's a lot of new research that's coming out and kind of highlighting as if it's a kind of surprise that the things that keeps communities building into stronger futures is actually that social capital, the connections that people have, the relationships they have.

And it's through that rather than any other intervention that occurs, that people have capacity to build into what we might call recovery or some sort of more hopeful future after disaster.

So I think, you know, we we don't necessarily, as individuals or communities have a feeling of success in that space.

And I think the interesting thing about your project or maybe the potential of a project like yours is to allow us to have feelings of some success so that we know - is it the practice of success or is it a practice of experience that kind of builds us into on more of a connected relational community?

Alex: Yeah, I mean, I think that whenever we turn towards each other, whenever we have a reason to meet our neighbours, whether or not that's because we've all been forced to make it through a disaster or whether or not we've pre-empted that by, you know, organising into mutual aid groups or whether we've been invited to participate in some kind of assembly, we are often amazed by the wisdom that is around us, like, wow, oh, wow, I've got this neighbour who's this psychologist or knows about the water flow while this person grows the most amazing food or this person is this particular kind of soil scientist or this person used to work in aged care or this person's written a book or, you know, this person speaks three languages and they came to Australia in their 50s and learnt their fourth or whatever it is, and we we we see the amazing wisdom and creativity and knowledge that is in all of us and always and very close to us. And I think that that's a really big part of preparing and for what we know is going to come.

I mean, you know, Arandhati Roy says the pandemic is a cuddly teddy bear compared to what we can expect with the worsening impacts of the climate crisis. And that is such a daunting metaphor.

Scotia: Well, it's such a kind of double whammy isn't it - it's like a warm hold and then a punch in the stomach at the same time.

Alex: It's a very intense statement to contemplate but I think it's really I think it's really important.

The other reason I'm quite interested in futures is and it's something that Naomi Klein talked about in her book, *This Changes Everything, Capitalism vs. the Climate*, which is the project I worked on her with, which was she talked about the way in which the environmental movement had really sort of let us down by sort of saying, look, you don't have to change a lot, you know, we just have to, you know, adjust a few things.

And part of this, again, was because up against the neo liberal capitalist machine. And so they felt that they couldn't scare people like, oh, we have to give people hopeful narratives. We have to tell people that it's gonna be okay.

And I think we've got to find a new way of talking about not just the future, but the present. And again, going back to this idea of uncertainty and holding difficult things with beautiful things like that.

That's kind of the truth of life. You know, things die. We all die and think, but things live and there is joy as well.

And so I think it's about moving beyond hope and fear.

And it's complex because when people are really traumatised or, you know, in the immediate face of a crisis, you want to offer the comfort of security and safety and future hope.

You know, that that this idea of like you will move past this crisis, you will move past this trauma. And it's it's a it's the right offer, I think it's the right instinct to offer that but I think we need to be more robust, more honest and more capable of saying to each other, you know, good and bad will always exist.

And we are going to be facing horrible crises that are going to have terrible environmental impacts. And we are going to see terrible fires and storms and pandemics.

But the the agency and the choice in that is about how we treat each other. And that those choices about how we relate to each other, how much we turn to each other, how much we remain open to each other that's going to be the difference between totally horrific and traumatising events and events where we can hold each other through those storms.

Scotia: [00:26:40] And potentially what Covid has offered us as a whole of community impactful experience is to start to understand that and that's often what we hearing, you know, that people are practicing, reaching out and practising how they might connect or understanding how vulnerable they are if they're not.

Alex: [00:26:59] And I think I've heard you talk about this before, that in the immediate aftermath of a crisis, there is this opening up and this wave of generosity and associated wave of happiness to connect with each other and recognition of the generosity,

Scotia: The heroic phase

Alex: But then in the next phase, when things aren't immediately resolved, and, you know, I think about those stories that we're not hearing enough of, about people who are still living in tents, you know, on the south coast of New South Wales and parts of Victoria that were affected by the fires this summer. What does it look like in the long haul?

Can you still turn towards each other when the crisis is longer and longer? And I think that's the challenge.

Scotia: Yeah and how do we how do we hold together when it is difficult?

And I think that's very, very real. And it's interesting when I think about your your Assembly for the Future and you talk about how do we get sort of collective thinking, well, you know, one of the big issues that we're all dealing with at the moment is working out how how do we come to the table, you know, as a communities or as impacted communities?

How do we come to the table and have an opportunity to hear all voices so that all voices can be part of decision making? And that's really our biggest challenge always.

And I think that that's sort of unpacked a little bit in the Assembly for the Future but also your other work on how can be truly be democratic in these processes of presenting options or presenting different futures so that we can get the sense of where we fit within this intersectional space that we all exist in.

Alex: Absolutely. And how can we elevate the voices of those that are the most impacted and have lived experience in particular areas?

Not necessarily, you know, in the immediate face of crisis, because people need space to breathe and reflect and articulate solutions as well it's not just, you know, your your immediate your wisdom of lived experience is not always easy to articulate when you're right in it in on the front line.

But, yeah, how do we create a public discourse and public narratives that have this multiplicity of voices and wisdom from ordinary people with lived experience? And how do we couple that wisdom with the wisdom of you know researchers and scientists and and, you know, it happens in all kinds of places, people already do this, but again, we're really up against very kind of centralised, narrow, unimaginative institutions that we've sort of built or turned our institutions into in the last sort of 30, 40 years.

So we've got a lot of work to do to to democratise our structures and our organisations, our media landscape and then obviously the way that we make decisions and work together.

Scotia: and I think a very big part of that is understanding the fluidity of time and that we can't structure around a kind of set timeframe, which is often well, is generally how emergency management or disaster is kind of rolled out this sectional time, it's not relational time.

Alex: Yeah. And it's I found that quite fascinating with the pandemic, actually, because initially there was this sort of sense of like, I mean, I think in our day today or for me, time changed a lot.

You know, I was glued to the news. I also had both my children at home, you know, like days felt very long and very full because of that.

And then I was also trying to do an enormous amount of things because I was very engaged and felt very urgent about this idea of, you know, having the right plans on the table and, you know, particularly when I saw the Covid commission pushing for this idea of the gas-led recovery and I was like, oh, my gosh, here we go, this is disaster capitalism 101 here we go.

And we haven't even, we're still asking each other how we're going and what are we doing about it while the gas industry is just barrelling ahead.

But what I have actually found quite surprising is that even though there's been a sort of quite a bit of, like, lifestyle writing about, oh, isn't it nice to make sourdough bread and rediscover home and all this sort of stuff that seem to be around in the start of the first wave, I've found very few institutions have actually changed their expectations for outputs or work in this time.

And it's it's been quite unusual. I think, you know, some of it I think is all of us trying to make sense of it by doing and by being busy and responding and I definitely have the urgency and impetus myself but, yeah, just amazing to me.

Scotia: [00:32:10] It's like digging the heels in and saying, no, we're going to just continue. It's not going to end. It's not going to make us change, we can resist. It's like that resistance of the disease or dis-ease that's been created in this space. Like, we're stronger than it rather than the fluidity of how we work around it.

Alex: [00:32:33] Yeah, like why didn't school hours change? Like, why didn't schools just, you know, especially for younger kids whose parents might have also been working from home, why didn't they say, you know, school hours are now 10 till two or there's four hours of work, but you can do it when's possible?

But but instead, all of these very rigid schedules and many deadlines and many events, everyone just kind of stoically pushed them online and carried on with the same deadlines even though we were suddenly all working in a much more distributed way and also grappling with a pandemic.

It's kind of like we haven't given ourselves the space to actually grieve or process and at this stage on this continent, we haven't had the massive loss of death that other countries have had yet but

do we just keep carrying on and charging forward if we start to lose thousands and thousands of people?

I mean, I think these are really important questions about time and how we respond. And again, I think returning to like, the rigidity of a timetable or a schedule is an impulse to have control and certainty and safety.

And I think we almost forget that we just made them up, you know, like the calendar is made up, the 24 hour clock is made up. The school week, seven days a week is made up the school, five days of work, you know, nine to 330, all of that. It's all invented and it's all adaptable.

Scotia: So we could RE invent it

Alex: We could - but we treat it like that's our foundation and everything fits around that rather than our humanity and our needs being the foundation and then our institutions fitting around us. So we we've got a lot of a lot of rebuilding and reimagining to do.

Scotia: Well, that's right. And going back to what say saying earlier this idea of practicing, practicing what we think is impossible.

And I think that's something that creativity brings into this disaster space and why I think it's so important that we work to ensure art or artists are part of these processes is that we can imagine or reframe the impossible through creativity.

Alex: Absolutely

Scotia: Nothing is set in stone, you know this idea of retelling stories.

I'd like to know this idea of retelling stories or telling stories and the power of the form of a story. And I think your work as a filmmaker is really strong in that space.

And I'd like to talk about how you use that as a way of looking for future change or future imagining.

You've been involved in producing several documentaries, but most importantly at the moment is the In My Blood It Runs.

So this is a film directed by Maya Newell and you are a producer on this project.

So for those who haven't seen it yet, it follows a story of a young Aboriginal boy called Djujan, and it gives a very intimate portrait of him and his family and their life.

And through this very personal story, it kind of taps into some really big issues around race, education, colonialism and particularly juvenile justice.

And so in terms of of using kind of form like that, how do you see that as a way of building on this picture of reimagining futures?

Alex: Well, I think that this film, the family, Djujan and his family have just been so incredibly generous with the making of this film and the choices that they made about what they shared.

For the majority of people who live on this continent, we wouldn't see the inside of a home on a Arrerente town camp in Alice Springs, the home of a young 10 year old boy.

And we wouldn't experience the world through his eyes and know what he was up against, but also know the joys and adventures that his life holds.

And so starting with that amazing, that amazing intimacy and that amazing access into his world, it's a very different proposition to then, you know, step back out of that experience of watching the

film and then think about what does education look like for a young First Nations kid in this country at this time? Or what is the experience of a young kid in the juvenile justice system?

I mean, one of the really poignant moments in that film is watching Djujan and his brothers watch the Four Corners report about Don Dale. And I remember when I saw that footage after Maya had filmed it that I thought, wow, I actually hadn't thought about what watching that footage would be like for other young kids in the Northern Territory.

And it was that was, you know, a really poignant moment for me when I was watching that.

So one of the things that Djujan's mother, Megan, spoke about, Megan and Djujan and his grandmother, Carol Turner, who's also featured in the film, and a whole lot of the rest of their family and some senior Arrerente advisors, all worked really closely with Maya around the creation of the film itself.

And then we've worked incredibly closely and been guided by their their goals, really, for what they wanted the film to do in the world.

And certainly there were things that they wanted to shift around, juvenile justice and education and racism but one of the things that Megan said very early on, and she's repeated many times in writing and media that she's done, is that she wanted people to know that Aboriginal families loved their children.

And to me, that is just such a powerful indictment on the state of things in Australia, so-called Australia, that an Aboriginal mother knows that she still needs to convince people of the fact that she loves her children.

And so when we think about other futures and other futures for Arrerente people and young Arrerente Garrwa kids like Djujan and the other, having the agency to self-determine their own lives to pursue education on country, to embed their own traditional language and cultural knowledges into their education system, they have to fight for permission to do that.

And part of it is about convincing the rest of, you know, so-called Australia and particularly policymakers that that they deserve to have the full expression of humanity. I mean, that's the basis of it.

And it's it's really appalling when you dig into it and realise that that's still where we're at. But the legacy of you know, racism and the othering of First Nations people that was done to justify invasion is still alive and well through policy and systems in Australia.

Scotia: And I think the big thing for me from that film was referring back to what you were talking about earlier, this idea of the potentiality or of transformation within this space of grief and loss and joy. You know, the sort of maelstrom of what is life and in Djujan's case, deep layers of life, but there's potential of transformation within that and it's very hopeful.

Alex: Absolutely. And I think, you know, we have to be...settler Australians have to be cautious about extracting, extracting, again, wisdom but I've certainly heard First Nations thinkers and writers talking about climate change and saying, you know, we've already experienced an apocalypse. We've experienced our worlds being completely upturned upended by the arrival of the invaders.

And I do think that that does speak to as well as tremendous loss, violence, trauma. It also speaks to extraordinary subversion, survival, cultural continuity, creativity, artistic expression, cultural expression, despite everything that was stacked against communities.

And I think that that's something that you see in this film. And, you know, resilience seems like it is kind of too, too thin a word, I think, because it it's not it's not as flippant as simply surviving. It's so complicated.

And yet, whilst I say that we can't simply hope to extract knowledge from that survival, I certainly think that we should be platforming the wisdom of First Nations people far more than we do. And not just because there's much to be learnt there, but because we've been in the way for so long.

Scotia: So much, so much to unpack for for everyone.

I'm just wondering for yourself, Alex, just in this midst of Covid and so much of your work is around the connection between your arts and your activism and these ideas of future thinking.

Can you tell us a bit about something that's occurred in your own life or your own community around how you would see yourself practising these better futures or how you've kind of put that into place with your family over the last little period of time or in your community?

Alex: Yeah, we moved a year and a half ago to a new place here on Dja dja Warrung land in Castlemaine and we've been we over the summer like many people, you know, I had friends all over the place that were trapped by fires and was very worried and out of contact with people for a few days at different times.

And we decided to call a first meeting of a mutual aid group. We call it West End Resilience. And we met there's a little hall around the corner from us called the West End Hall.

And we we met in February initially to respond to the bushfires, but very quickly continued meeting on Zoom very regularly in response to the pandemic. And it was also I was also really thinking quite a lot about I had a small child, my second kid last year. He's now 10 months old. Quinn was a newborn. And I was thinking about what's what does pram scale organising look like? You know, I've I've done lots of international travel flying around on a plane, what does it look like if I work within a few blocks of my house where I can walk, walk with a pram and take Quinn with me?

And so that's really the scale of our little organising project. We ended up thinking, we weren't sure how many houses there were in the surrounding blocks, but turns out there's nearly 500 when you actually walk around in letterbox because we had to keep printing flyers to cover them all.

Scotia: That's a lot, isn't it? We don't think about that in a numbers sense in terms of the streets that we live in, that's a lot of people.

Alex: Yeah. We've sort of thought, oh, maybe there's about 80 houses in these three blocks and these six cross streets.

But anyway, it turned out to be 500 and and we've got an email list and WhatsApp group and we meet every Tuesday night on Zoom.

And it's been really great. I mean, you know, a lot of simple things, swapping food and recipes and sharing knowledge and sort of just a lot of just checking in really about how we're doing. And that was really useful, I think, because for some people, older people whose kids have moved out, that they might have lots of time to practise hobbies.

And then those of us with small kids were like, wow, I can't imagine that. And then people living on their own were also very lonely when they would hear about families together.

So it sort of really built a sense of empathy, I think, across the different, different experiences and the different experiences between homeowners and renters and the different kinds of security and safety that people are experiencing.

Yeah, it's been really and it's made it it's really helped, actually, even though we haven't been seeing many people, we do see each other on the street and wave and see each other on Zoom and it's been very grounding

Scotia: building relationships and trust and the potential to grow that big word - or small word - resilience, which we all tout. Great. Well, thanks, Alex. It's been a really interesting conversation and we really appreciate your time. I know you're super busy with so many different actions going

on in your world at the moment. So thank you for coming sharing. I look forward to joining you at the Assembly for the Future for the next phase. And it's been really exciting to see what might come out of that and then how we might continue to grow those ideas.

Alex: Thanks and yeah. Thank you. It's always really useful to reflect on, you know, what what we're doing or trying to do and how and how it works. I really look forward to hearing how your audiences and networks respond because you have such deep respect for for your work. And I know that you work with some communities that have, you know, really struggled in in the last period of time. And, yeah, I send my solidarity out to your collaborators as well. Thanks, Alex.

Scotia: Thanks for joining me for Creative Responders: In Conversation and special thanks to Alex for sharing her insights and observations.

As I mentioned at the top of the show, the documentary, In My Blood It Runs, is currently available on ABC iview. They also have a range of campaigns you can support through the film's website.

If you'd like to know more about Assembly for the Future and access the dispatches from the digital gatherings, that project is part of the BLEED festival which you can find at [bleed online dot net](http://bleedonline.net)

We'll include links in the show notes to everything we have discussed in the episode and you can also find other resources and transcripts for all of our episodes on our website.

If you know a creative responder you think we should know about or would like to share any feedback with us about the show, you can email us at [comms - that's COMMS - at creative recovery dot net dot au](mailto:comms@creativerecovery.net.au) or connect with creative recovery on facebook, twitter or instagram and send us a message.

This podcast is produced by me, Scotia Monkivitch and my Creative Recovery Network colleague, Jill Robson. Our sound engineer is Tiffany Dimmack and original music is composed by Mikey Squire. Special thanks to Jess O'Callaghan and the team at Audiocraft.

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