

This is a 14-page preview of the 152-page Think Tank Workbook, including:

- Cover
- Contents
- Full introduction
- Four sample pages of writing in the Workbook
- One full exercise

# **PACITTI COMPANY**

# **THINK TANK WORKBOOK**

**Edited by Robert Pacitti, Lucy Walker & Deveril**

**What role can live performance play in starting conversations, or even building new communities? What might heritage mean? Is theatre still useful in our digital age? What about those artists that undertake radical experiments in their practices, that strive to take risks, and grapple with the really big stuff of our age? Can complicated questions be asked, or answered, in ways that are accessible? Our thoughts are that it's more useful to share the discussion than merely tell you what we think.**

**At the Think Tank, Pacitti Company welcomes broad audiences to a curated rolling programme of local, national and international events. These activate thinking and discussion around live art, performance and wider cultural topics. The Think Tank offers accessible, affordable public events, led by artists and experts from a range of diverse fields.**

**This book of texts and creative exercises is for artists, students, researchers, archivists and policy makers. Welcome to the Think Tank Workbook.**

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**PACITTI COMPANY**



**Live Art UK**



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ENGLAND**

## THINK TANK WORKBOOK

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ROBERT PACITTI, LUCY WALKER and DEVERIL

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# INTRODUCTION

## ROBERT PACITTI

Welcome to the Think Tank Workbook, a volume of writing, thinking and creative exercises from the Pacitti Company Think Tank. Housed within the specially refurbished Victorian Wing of the Ipswich Museum and Art School Gallery, the Think Tank is a building-based resource for the ongoing exploration and study of live performance and radical praxis. It is also a new type of community centre, fusing arts and heritage with just about any other territory someone might bring to the table.

Pacitti Company welcomes broad audiences at the Think Tank, to a curated rolling programme of local, national and international events. These activate thinking and discussion around live art, performance and wider cultural topics. The Think Tank offers accessible, affordable public events, led by artists and experts from a range of diverse fields.

The Think Tank is also an incubator space that enables artists to spend time in residence, investigate crossovers between experimental art practices and culture at large, and to engage with peers and members of the public. Through its work at the Think Tank, Pacitti Company cultivates relationships between artists and participant audiences by activating fresh forms of public discussion.

These events and sessions are recorded by various means, so that a cumulative body of research and knowledge extends beyond the experiences of those present, into territories that serve researchers, students, archivists, practitioners and policy makers.

This publication brings together a range of people who have been involved with the Think Tank since its beginning. Think Tank Associates Lucy Walker, John Bowers, Johanna Linsley and Deveril have all made insightful and inspiring contributions – my sincere thanks goes to each of them. I am also indebted to the many extraordinary artists that have taken part in the programme to date, and who have given their permission for elements of their work to be reproduced here in written form.

This book is co-published by Pacitti Company and Live Art UK – a national network, bringing together key promoters and facilitators to support and develop the Live Art infrastructure for the benefit of artists and audiences. I thank them for their support.

As well as being the person that curates and facilitates the Think Tank I also remain an avid audience member and participant of the events that take place onsite. I can still easily be moved by radical ideas and unexpected connections – especially those that linger and subsequently impact on my worldview. I hope this book extends some of that potential to you. It is the result of many conversations – big and small, planned and spontaneous – between all sorts of wonderfully opinionated, questioning folk. I find their provocations and ideas inspiring, and hope you do to.

Robert Pacitti  
October 2014

Defining 'EXPERT':

The Oxford English Dictionary describes the noun expert as:

*'A person who is very knowledgeable about or skillful in a particular area.'*

The Think Tank then celebrates that each of us is the world's leading expert in our own life experiences, beliefs, skills and knowledge. From this position, all views are valid.

## AUDIENCE AS PARTICIPANT

### DEVERIL

I am writing this essay as the most recent Associate to the Think Tank. I have known Robert Pacitti for many years; we were at the same school, albeit in different years. We both grew up in Ipswich in the 1970s and '80s, and because our younger siblings were in the same class at school, we knew one another. We were both alternatives: sporting make-up, wearing jumble sale clothes and listening to punk, new wave and indie music, in a place where to be seen as an outsider and different was slightly risky. I became more and more 'gothic' and troubled, beaten up on more than one occasion for how I looked, and Robert escaped Ipswich for elsewhere. Our lives were heading in different directions, but it was to be live art and performance that brought us together again.

Fast forward a decade or more to the late-1990s at an emergency meeting to discuss the state of live art in the UK following a cut to Forced Entertainment's funding. We met again at the welcome desk, where Robert was behind it greeting attendees to the event. We recognised each other, and later realised from where: Ipswich. After this meeting, we served together on the initial steering committee of the New Work Network. And then our lives drifted to other places again, but thanks to social media we reconnected.

Recently, I moved back to Ipswich with my family, inspired greatly by Robert and his cultural stirring-up of a town that I think I heard Spike Milligan on *Pebble Mill at One* derisively describe as a place where the dead walk above the ground (it should be noted that Milligan said similar things about a lot of places).

The Think Tank, housed in a building that was once part of the art school, is situated in the centre of the museum complex, although not part of the museum *per se*. The first event I attended at the Think Tank was The Shadow Museum. It was highly evocative for me, as in 1979 or so I had been a regular attendee of Ipswich Museum's Saturday morning museum club: an ahead-of-its-time children's workshop which both educated and entertained, and allowed for young people to run free in the museum.

Seeing Robert in this setting, bespectacled and bearded, while being asked to participate in a museum-related installation was a very emotive event. It sealed my decision to stay in Ipswich. Following a couple of informal meetings with Robert at his offices, I was asked by him and Lucy Walker to be the filmmaker for a small project: a short experimental film called *THREAD* (about which more will be said elsewhere).

I have seen some of Robert's previous work, and I am sympathetic to many of his artistic aims. I have been honoured to work with him and pleased to share some thoughts and ideas inspired by Think Tank events and documentation of those events.

What follows is written largely in an academic voice, as that is what I know best, and is intended to be an enjoyable and informative overview of some key theoretical debates sparked by the Think Tank participants and their contributions, especially relating to the themes:

- Evolving communities
- Atypical practices
- Ethics of participation

## HERITAGE IS POLITICAL: IT BELONGS TO US

LUCY WALKER

As an archaeologist and landscape historian, I am associated with the Pacitti Company Think Tank in Ipswich to explore how we can meaningfully engage with the physical remains of past lives. I am particularly interested in how we can use our heritage resources as a prism through which to view contemporary issues relating to how we live today. My main question concerning heritage resources is: Can we enable a wider range of communities to engage with them in order to encourage multiple perspectives?

### **FINDING A VOICE: MAKING SENSE OF THE PRESENT**

In the first instance I look to the ground: the landscapes around us which hold the physical and emotional 'memories' of many times and places. The physical remains of past lives surround us, in our daily trajectories, in our streets, in the countryside around our towns and villages. Generally we walk on the surface; often unaware of how these past lives and events shape the ground we walk on. They inform the contours of our actual terrains and our mental maps – our journeys home, to work, to friends, to the pub, our walks along the rivers and canals, the footpaths through our

woods and fields.

This is really brought home by the patterns revealed in landscapes when seen from the air, captured in aerial photographs. Traces of ancient settlements, track ways, buildings and burial grounds may determine the shape of present boundaries, or show up in the contours of the land or as marks in fields where crops grow differentially over ditches, pits and walls. The shape of our fields and the morphology of our towns and villages reflect past patterns of activity, economic and social relationships of power or survival.

Field archaeologists see this all the time when excavating the ground: layers of physical matter – the output of human activity now transposed into sediments and soils – may survive under the plough soil. In towns, even more complex occupation layers are superimposed on each other beneath our feet, representing centuries of life and death. In the City of London, you can expect to dig through at least 3 metres of 'stratigraphy' – the word we use for the compressed, physical layers of occupation – representing nearly two millennia of human debris, before getting to the earliest anthropogenic layers which signal the growth of a new, Roman town in the newly conquered Britain.

In 1955, William Hoskins engagingly demonstrated the possibility of reading the history of human activities in the contours of the English landscape.<sup>1</sup> His readership was trying to make sense of their lives after two devastating world wars which had destroyed more than could ever have been dreamt possible. People wanted to find roots or physical and emotional meaning in what was evidently a radically changed world.

This post-World War II consciousness of loss and change, combined with the huge project of rebuilding modern Britain, led to the formation of archaeology units around the UK (and also in Europe) employing people to excavate sites about to be obliterated by new roads and building developments, even whole landscapes reshaped by bombs or gravel extraction. This was called 'Rescue Archaeology'. In 1979, new legislation framed the idea of preserving or

<sup>1</sup> William Hoskins (1955), *The Making of the English Landscape*, with many reprints and later editions.



## PROVOCATION

Season Butler was tasked with creating and presenting a performative response to displays at Ipswich Museum, as part of Performing Collections.

At her Salon, writer, performance artist and activist, Season Butler explained:

I wanted to challenge authority and representation; who tells the story. I wanted to make a collection and see how we start to define all these things. How we use these objects within a 'meaning making' matrix. I spent time in the Nigeria gallery and want to shed light on the explanation of things displayed [...] manikins with heads but no faces and no hands, labels in the present tense, not given a history. There is a conversation to be had.

Reflecting on her Salon later, Season wrote:

Museums are one of many kinds of place where we can go to see ourselves, both in the (hi)stories in which we recognise our own lives, and in things that feel so remote that we recognise ourselves in relation to this difference. I found both operating in the Ipswich Museum.

The resulting "Shadow Museum" was a collection of objects, sounds, moving and still images which I collected from unseen or unnoticed parts of Ipswich, a kind of negative (in the non-pejorative sense) constructed to show the place back to itself. With this I was also able to play with the politics of representation that informs Victorian museums. I wanted to see what would happen in a museum about this place in the contemporary moment – rather than a museum about Others and Elsewheres – and how the audience would react to the storytelling element falling into different hands than the traditional authority of museum curators. Visitors to the Shadow Museum were encouraged to write the captions for the collection's pieces, while the "curator" (my animation of, and homage to, the Nigeria Gallery mannequins) sampled and retold the visitors' own stories.'

## MAKING EXERCISES

Are Museums ruling class institutions? How do stories go from point of origin through to museum tag beside an object?

Visit your local museum and choose a gallery to spend some time in. Look at the objects, consider how they are displayed and read the captions.

- Write alternative captions of your own then compare them with those on display. What's different?
- Consider whether any cultural values are being conveyed by the displays. Note them down. Are they implicit or being made explicit?

Go out into the landscape and gather an alternative collection of your own. Decide on a method of display, including any categories, create a visitor introduction, and write captions for each item.

- Consider what has been revealed about your contemporary landscape
- How might it be different if other people had made a collection?

**See more on this event:**

[www.pacitticompany.com/event/performing-collections-1-season-butler](http://www.pacitticompany.com/event/performing-collections-1-season-butler)

**Artist Website:**

[www.seasonbutler.com](http://www.seasonbutler.com)

**Further reading:**

Pamela Roberts (2013). *Black Oxford: The Untold Stories of Oxford University's Black Scholars*. Signal Books.

**See also:** Adrian Piper / Christian Boltanski / Coco Fusco / La Pocha Nostra / Lyndall Phelps