

Radio Adelaide interview with [ANAT Ideate 2020](#) recipient, [Virginia Barratt](#) and interviewer, Dr Naomi Hunter and Pheobe Christopfi, 26 Aug 2020.

Hunter: You're listening to Festival City on 101.5. And recently, we had Melissa Delaney, the new CEO of ANAT giving us a little chat from isolation in Sydney. And we decided that we would have a chat with some of the Ideate residencies that were happening around the nation, and we are so lucky today to have in the studio with us, Virginia Barratt. So welcome to the studio.

Barratt: Hello, and thank you.

Hunter: Thank you. So, I notice that this collaboration, or this particular residency, there's three artists involved. I would love to hear a little bit about yourself, and maybe if you want to tell us about the collaboration that you have with the other artists as well.

Barratt: Sure. So, I've been a practicing media artist and a performer and writer. Currently, hopefully completing my PhD at the [University of Western Sydney in the Writing and Society Centre](#). So, I guess that makes me a writer also. I guess I would say I've been an arts worker for three decades or more. And in Adelaide, I lived here in the 1990s and worked with a collective called [VNS Matrix](#), which was a cyber feminist collective back then. And so I've had a long history, I haven't lived here for a long time, I've lived here twice for short periods in my life, but they've always been significant kind of art making periods. And one of my long-term collaborators, Francesca da Rimini lives here, and it's one of the reasons I came back here to live, so that we could be closer, to continue working together. Collaboration is really not just part of my practice, but it's actually my practice. I think collaboration is a really strongly political position to take in these times of precarity. Artists at the moment are incredibly beleaguered and struggling, and collaboration is a really fantastic way where it's mutual aid, where we can lift each other up and support one another, work together and bring our skills together and so on. Jessie and Linda, Jessie Boylan and Linda Dement, who I'm working with for the ANAT Ideate residency, we've been working together as a, kind of a formal, I suppose, collaboration since 2018, but I've known Linda like forever. Linda is amazing. An amazing coder, an amazing artist, an amazing writer. And...

Christopfi: And she's only saying that because Linda is listening.

Barratt: Linda had worked with Jessie and they were working on a Maralinga project for quite some time. And then started working on something around the idea of geo-trauma. And this is called [Rupture](#), this project. And given that my PhD research area is panic, it seemed appropriate that they bring me into the collaboration. So, Linda introduced me to Jessie, and we are so strong and we love working together, and it's really always exciting and fantastic to work with them. And it was just so great to get this ANAT residency. It feels like it's been a long time coming, and this year has been so hard for everyone in terms of grants and just moving forward with projects and stuff. It's nice to have something to move forward with.

Christopfi: So, can you tell us about the final product of the collaboration?

Barratt: The one that we're working on now?

Christopfi: Yeah, absolutely.

Barratt: Well, I'm not sure that I can tell you what the final product is, because this component of it is really about speculative research. So, the ANAT Ideate kind of proposition around this residency is that it's pure research. And so what happens at the end of that is that we present our research findings, so we know what we're working towards. And I will tell you. We're working towards, or we're working with rocks. So, we're working towards an idea of listening to rocks. An idea of deep listening. So, I suppose that brings into the mix an idea of listening to the different stories of the land. So, when you're working with rocks, you have these kind of Euro kind of geology stories, and then you have these dreaming stories and First Nations origins stories. And how do those two things intersect, and what are the strategies we can use to actually listen to rocks. And when I say listen to rocks, I mean listen to rocks. So, is that through dance? Is that through, I mean, putting them in your mouth and, I don't know, absorbing the rock? Fundamentally I think it's about sonics and about time. So geological time is obviously a really different idea of time than human time.

Hunter: Absolutely.

Barratt: And the anthropocentric kind of idea of time, clock time, measured time, minutes and so on. What's a minute? What's an instant? You know, what is now? So, I guess we're trying to work with these ideas of time. We're trying to work with the idea of slowing down time in order that we can kind of step sideways out of anthropocentric time, out of Chronos, or clocked time, and into deep time and attune with these kind of geological formations. And why? We want to attune with the land so that we can care for the land. And so, I guess care is also another really important component. So, we're working with sound technologies and Luke Harold from, Dr Luke Harold from the Elder Conservatorium has worked with Linda and Jessie quite a lot. He's fantastic and so he's going to be working with us and has given us some fancy mics and things like that to listen to rocks with.

Hunter: I was hoping you would say something like that. We had someone not so long ago talking about listening to sound in different spaces and hearing that and converting it into frequencies and music. And then we were also talking about an Adelaide artist that did some listening of the trees in the Botanic Gardens, and used some equipment to actually record the sound of the trees, and it's amazing, the different sounds. So, I'm really curious to hear whether there would be an opportunity for the public to hear, see, experience any of the outcomes. Because I understand that it is speculative research, so the research is the work that you're doing. It's not an expectation that there has to be a public component, but from the curious...

Barratt: We're into outputs. We love making stuff. If there's not a symphony orchestra large kind of performative aspect, I'd be surprised.

Hunter: How long is your project destined for? I know, how long is the ANAT component of your project destined for? Because a lot of these things go on indefinite.

Barratt: The Ideate project I believe ends in December. Hopefully we'll get to do some field trips to Broken Hill and places like that. I've been going down to Hallett Cove, which

is like an amazing geological site. If you haven't been to Hallett Cove, you should go to Hallett Cove, and look at all the glacial dumped rocks, the come-latelies and the foreigner rocks. All these strange terms that people use to describe these. There's chatters and things like that, which is very appropriate to an idea of the rocks talking or listening to rocks. Chatters is like a scraping that's on the side of a rock face.

Christopfi: I just had shivers just then when you said that. I'm just picturing that kind of grinding, and for some reason that just always makes me go [shudders].

Barratt: The glacial grinding along those kinds of geological strata is just amazing. And you can see it, it's like you can read the history by just looking at it. And especially down there at Hallett Cove. It's quite amazing. So yeah, where was I? Oh yeah, the outcomes. Yeah so, December for the ANAT end. And then I understand that we'll probably continue to work with the ANAT crew to look at how to move those kind of research findings forward towards whatever the next stage is, whatever the next outcome is. We'd really, really like to have people feel, see, hear it.

Hunter: The question that I wrote down earlier, because I was thinking about the fact that you're here in Adelaide and Linda and Jessie are...

Barratt: Jessie is in Teuton, in the Goldfields area in country Victoria. And Linda is in Sydney.

Hunter: Aha, so my question I wrote down here, don't forget to ask, how is it doing collab at a distance?

Barratt: I mean, I'm really used to doing collab at a distance. I kind of live online. I have done for decades. It's fine. We're good. We really make time for one another. We make time to meet. We meet at least once a week. We do reading groups together, we help each other understand the theoretical frameworks we're looking at. And then we just give each other, we work out our areas of responsibility and we just go forward and do that. And it's very much a fluid thing, because we all have really cross-fertilizing skills. And if at any time somebody feels like they want to, they're not a sound maker but they feel like they want to play with making sound, then that's totally fine. Or if somebody is not a writer, not that any of them are not writers, they're amazing writers. But you know, we really just, there's a freedom to do whatever.

Christopfi: Now, I'm really interested and curious as well about the piece that you wrote, which is called *Rupture* as well.

Barratt: Yes, well I mean, that was a piece that was initially Jessie's piece, and Jessie got a grant to do that through the Bendigo Art Gallery and a program called Going Solo. But Jessie is just a collaborative person, so it was a bit weird trying to work in this framework of this idea of a solo artist moving their career forward as an individual, when we are just collaborative people. So, coming into that, there was a bit of struggle to get the institutional spaces to see me and Linda, and to understand that it was a collaboration. But it was about, the reason I was brought into the project was because of my PhD research on panic, and a lot of my research looks at the ideas around geo-trauma, or how the body and the world are connected. And not even just connected but inseparable, inextricable. The body is the world and the world is the body. The flesh is not just this casing of this meat suit, but it's also the

world, the skin of the world, and all the networks. So, the ideas that also that ecological traumas and woundings resonate in the body, and similarly that the body responds to floodings, and fires. But this is also systemic, so it's a wounding across all ecologies, human, non-human and systemic. And so, this work was really the performance part of the work, was based on some of my writings around panic, for my PhD. And Linda and Jessie and I also worked on sound and video for that. And it ended up being a performance at the [Big Anxiety Festival](#) last year in Sydney. And hopefully we've got some things on the boil for it to happen here. The [ADT](#) is supporting it, Garry Stewart is a darling, and hopefully we're going to also be seeing *Rupture* here in Adelaide. And also, I have to say that my local yoga studio, Power Living, have a fantastic little community fund called The Ripple Effect, and they also put some money towards putting *Rupture* on in Adelaide. And my heart is with mutual aid and community funders. So yeah, it was really nice to get that support.

Hunter: I think there's a lovely synchronicity there when we're talking about the arts and sciences, because there's a lot of talk of separation, but it's so intermingled from way back when, that to separate and say these are different practices, it is quite ironic. Especially when you start to hear from sciences, well yeah, relationship to place directly affects physical bodies. When people say that I have a strong intergenerational link with a particular area, it's in the physicality of the beings that have actually been in that area, and although people say it's a cultural thing, well it's also a science thing. It can be shown, proven through the foods that have been eaten, the minerals that have been absorbed from being on the site, the practice that have occurred within that space over the generations. I think it is beautiful to see these types of collaborations becoming more and more prolific and I think they're very important.

Barratt: Yeah, yeah.

Christopfi: Now, I believe you've also brought a piece in to read.

Barratt: Yes, I...

Chrstopfi: An excerpt?

Barratt: Yes. I will read an excerpt. Now, this little excerpt is a bit of writing about the *Rupture* performance that happened at the Big Anxiety Festival. So, I shall read. "A low, drone sound rumbles in the dark space. Its vibrations shake the walls. At times, it makes one feel queasy. The audience members enter through a side door, and walk down a narrow, dark hallway, guided forward by red strip lighting on the floor, like aircraft emergency lighting, such that you might see if the plane was going down. Will this plane go down? At the end of the hallway is a body, pinned with its back against the wall by an unseen energy, knees bent in a constant tension between flight, fright and freeze. Hands flicker, grasp, fly. The breath is audible. Gasps, sighs, noisy exhalations. Pauses. Breath held. The gaze is elsewhere. The members of the audience have to come face to face with this body before entering the performance space proper. This uncomfortable proximity to the body against the wall might make laughter bubble up, or eyes drop. Might make steps quicken to pass. Why do I have to pass this? Inside, stools are messily arranged, quite close together. The house lights are dim with a reddish tone. There is a softness to the lighting, but also a foreboding. People take their seats. The audience members chat

with each other in quiet voices. There is a long, landscape-oriented screen along the wall they face. To the left of this is a tall, portrait-oriented screen, and a hanging shelf with a device on it. This arrangement of screens is roofed by what seems to be a black sky. A lowering cloud, or the roof of an underground mine. It is black and textured, and has some shimmering edges. It flickers irregularly with lightning, or the flash of a headlamp perhaps. Above the heads of the audience, a body moves slowly in mid-air, falling upwards, flying downwards through undifferentiated space, limbs slow flailing, never landing, never disappearing. There is some grace in this flight, and also some horror. Always falling, never landing. The dim house lights fall, leaving some shards of red light, as if shining through bars. The flickering lightning and some twinkles. The body from the hallway weaves its way through the audience slowly, haltingly. Stopping and starting erratically, or moving as if through something thick. Perhaps the smoke outside has come in with them. The audience is bathed in the eerie sound of coughs calling, high pitched whistles, winds and atmospheric noise. They can hear the breath of the body if it pauses beside them. The body takes its place on the stage in the dark. A voice enters. Now, I remember. Now, I remember.”

Christopfi: Damn, I loved that! That was incredible. Oh, my goodness.

Barratt: Thank you.

Christopfi: You had me. I was just looking at you that whole time thinking, oh my God. Oh my God. I don't know, you just, you had me. I'm sold.

Barratt: The performance itself is extremely effective.

Christopfi: I can imagine. If that's all it took just then for you to capture me like that (clicks), I can imagine itself would be incredible.

Barratt: Yeah, I mean it's really, the atmospheric affect is really heightened by the beautiful visuals that Jessie has made, and that Linda has made, and the incredible sound as well. It's really an immersive space, full sensory immersion.

Hunter: The descriptive nature of what you were saying, I was imagining and trying to relate to my previous experience and I went to see the [James Turrell act in Tasmania](#). In a little cube, massive lights, then walking down into the dark. And the description when you said the little runway lights, that's what it was like when we were going into the room that was dark. I could see flickering lights, which was the memory on the old retinas, but coming down this darkened hallway. And then when you were talking about the scattering, the imagery was just so vibrant that my head was filling in all of those pictures for me. So yeah, I was there with you.

Barratt: Good, good! I mean, it's supposed to be a performance of affect. It's really supposed to be like communicating something that you can't communicate just through ordinary speech. It's about what falls outside of language. It's those things that are on the periphery of your vision. The noumenal, the things that you can never know, but you somehow know.

Hunter: You do. You know. The world outside words. I'm thinking Merleau-Ponty here.

- Barratt: I've just been writing about Merleau-Ponty this afternoon, so yes.
- Hunter: We'll have a chat after. So, something that I wrote down a little earlier is the word cyber. So nowadays, if we were to hear someone use the word cyber, I'd say nine times out of ten, I'm hearing someone say to me things like cybersecurity. How would you define, for the purposes of your performance, the component that you would use that would be cyber?
- Barratt: I guess I think of cyber as just being another ecology. So a digital ecology, that has all its aspects of top down, governance, but also very much the underground and the resistance, and all of the capacities to bloom and network in ways that are kind of unexpected and adventitious, and also machine learning, obviously and AI, which I'm super keen on, and Linda is particularly keen on. Linda's a mad scientist, she's fantastic. But yes, so I suppose for me now, I'm thinking that cyber is really a kind of a carry all prefix which mostly really is associated with cybersecurity, you know, more commercial, I suppose, I'm thinking in terms of the idea of cyber. But for me, I would use instead probably the term digital ecologies.
- Hunter: I think that there has been such advancements in what creatives can use in the digital platforms and availability of being able to articulate yourself in that media, it's sort of really blossomed and it's become more attainable for more people. And so sometimes I can remember years ago doing studies, and the word cyber was there, and we were all sitting there going, most of the people in the class had just got a mobile phone. Now people are having meetings all around the world and no one is working in an office anymore. Things are changing so much, so that earlier my watch was saying, sorry I don't understand that, because I tapped it the wrong way. I think there's been a real development, but I also think it allows us different ways of experiencing.
- Barratt: Yeah. I mean I have a really long relationship with the cyber. In 1991, the VNS Matrix wrote the [Cyber Feminist Manifesto](#) and that was the coining of the term Cyber Feminism. And right then, the valence of cyber was a lot different to what it is now.
- Christopfi: Absolutely, yes. Now, on the topic of cyber, if anybody listening wants to go out and learn any more information about the collaborations or yourself, where can they go to see that?
- Barratt: Multiple places. So ANAT, there's a little [blog](#) up on the ANAT site, the ANAT Ideate site, which is our putting notes down, taking photographs - our [research blog](#). So, you can go there to follow what we're doing. We'll probably just be writing stuff about 'Oh, I got this fancy microphone today and I'm trying to capture infrasonic sound between the cracks in this rock or something'.
- Christopfi: Wonderful, amazing. We're like, we're there.
- Barratt: There's also bone dirt has a site called [bonedirt.net](#) and each of us, Jessie Boylan, Linda Dement, Virginia Barratt have our own websites, with .net after each of them, I believe. Virginiabarratt.net., lindadement.net and so on. And you know, just google us.
- Hunter: Use the googles, people.

Barratt: Use the googles, yeah.

Hunter: Use the cyber. This is my guilty little pleasure, because I love hearing about art science collabs and so having this opportunity to have local artists come in and have a chat with us, and also we've been having phone conversations as well, and apparently next week we're going to try and do a - I haven't told Phoebe, she's looking at me really strangely - we're going to try and do a conversation three way with someone that's in Mexico.

Christopfi: Yeah, I'm just looking forward to that with the tech. I'm not tech savvy, so, the idea of that, I'm like "oh God, this is above my paygrade!"

Hunter: So yeah, thank you so much for coming in and having a chat with us.

Barratt: Thank you, it was fun.

Hunter: I'm always up for hearing about interesting and new ways for us to experience, especially when you were talking about place, and the relationship between us and the earth. I'm really looking forward to seeing what evolves from this.

Barratt: Yeah, cool.

Christopfi: Thank you so much for joining us.

Barratt: Thank you for having me. It was really sweet.