

*Reimagining Australia at the cosmopolitan intersection*

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**Abstract:** Living with difference is an unavoidable part of living in Australia. How we live with difference, therefore, impacts how people imagine and reimagine Australia. This paper considers the matter of reimagining Australia as a phenomenon that is located within the microecology of our everyday urban spaces. It is interested in knowing about these spaces and how they can contribute to the reimagining of Australia at the microlevel of society. It considers two examples of spaces that engage people in this task and advances the notion of the cosmopolitan intersection, framing reimagining within Anthony Kwame Appiah's vision of cosmopolitanism and Jean-Luc Nancy's vision of coexistence.

**Key words:** cosmopolitanism; coexistence; everyday urban; storytelling and dialogue.

## **Introduction**

Interrogating how Australia has been imagined shines a light on the ways that people and communities engage in variegated processes of knowing, being and doing as they *imagine* Australia. It illuminates how Australia: functions as “something we carry around in our heads” (White 1997, 13); is something that we have “imagined as a society, a culture and a nation” (Carter 2006, viii); and has been dreamed and invented over generations (White 1981, 1997; Carter 2006). Because Australia's imagining involves such a dynamic intermingling of elements, we should not only attend to how Australia has been imagined but *how* and *where* it could be reimaged.

Living in Australia teaches us that “living with difference is an unavoidable part of social experience” (Ang 2008, 230). It illustrates Australia’s increasingly cosmopolitan nature and should alert us to the need to develop habits of coexistence (Amin 2012; Appiah 2006). This, however, is not always the case and it is all too easy to gather examples that represent Australia’s unease with “the ‘rubbing along’ of strangers in public space” (Noble 2013b, 33; Amin 2012, 59) and the subsequent need to develop “habits of living with difference” (Noble 2013b, 34). For example, while Australia comprises people who embody multiple identities, some Australians prefer to continue imagining an Australia that is “White, male-gendered, Christian, and heterosexual” (Louis, Barlow and Greenaway 2012, 88) and to render invisible the indelible marks that injustice and violence have visited, and continue to visit, upon its most vulnerable people. This is manifest in many ways, including how people use the macrospatial terrain of our towns and cities as well as the many everyday urban spaces within this terrain.

This has raised my interest about how our everyday urban spaces can be used to contribute to the reimagining of Australia. In response, I offer the notion of the *cosmopolitan intersection* as a way of examining how spaces can contribute to reimagining Australia at the microlevel of society. I develop this thesis by discussing four areas of knowledge. Firstly, I introduce two projects that demonstrate a link between people’s everyday spaces and storytelling and conversation. Secondly, I frame reimagining within Anthony Kwame Appiah’s notion of cosmopolitanism and Jean-Luc Nancy’s vision of coexistence. Thirdly, drawing on scholarship that examines elements within the macrospatial terrain and the microecology of everyday urban spaces, I consider how this knowledge informs how we appreciate the way spaces function in our cosmopolitan societies. Fourthly, using the knowledge that has been gathered in the first three sections, I discuss some ways in which the two projects demonstrate how the notion of the cosmopolitan intersection can contribute to the reimagining of Australia at the microlevel of society.

## **Reimagining in spaces for stories and conversations**

My previous research into an anti-prejudice strategy, which used one-on-one dialogue, known as the Human Library (Human Library 2016; Abergel et al. 2005) put me into contact with groups that use storytelling and/or conversation for a variety of objectives. This raised my curiosity about the allure of storytelling, especially as a strategy for community engagement. My initial investigation into groups in Perth, Western Australia, revealed a wide variety of projects and an equally wide variety of objectives. These included such things as local oral history projects, diversity awareness initiatives, and stand-up comedy and storytelling classes. One group, Tales of Times Past Senior Storytellers (henceforth, Tales) (Tales of Times Past Senior Storytellers 2016b), aligned more closely than the other groups with the Human Library because their strategies include processes of sharing personal stories through face-to-face dialogue. The following introduces these two strategies which will be used to discuss how the cosmopolitan intersection can contribute to the reimagining of Australia.

Human Libraries aim to engage people in “conversations that challenge stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue” (Human Library 2016). The conversations at Human Libraries usually take the form of thirty-minute, one-on-one dialogues, which are referred

to as 'readings.' To achieve this, the Human Library Organisation (HLO) invites people who have experienced prejudice and negative stereotypes to volunteer as Human Books. The volunteers are people who identify as belonging to a wide spectrum and intersection of minority groups. For example, Human Books are people who identify as: living with physical impairment or mental health issues, LGBTIQ, surviving as a refugee, practising particular religions, surviving domestic violence, as well as other identities. They are people who are willing to talk about any question or topic associated with their self-created title and description; no question or topic is taboo—in fact, such questions are encouraged. The Human Books' titles form a catalogue from which people (members of the public) make a selection and choose to become the Human Book's 'Readers.'

Human Libraries take place in a wide variety of settings. They are found in local libraries, festivals, schools and any location that organisers think will allow them to achieve the aim of reducing prejudice. Each Human Library is organised and run as an environment that is safe and encourages frank and respectful dialogue. This is established via three rules: 1) a Reader may ask her or his Human Book anything they wish; 2) a Human Book may ask her or his Reader anything they wish; and 3) either person may decline to answer any questions or discuss any issues that are raised, and the reading may end at any time at the discretion of either participant.

Using this method of face-to-face dialogue, the HLO aims to provide people with opportunities to meet and speak with other people with whom they may not normally meet and speak, especially about matters that are often made silent or invisible because social norms define them as inappropriate. The intention is to work at the micro-level of society to enable people to confront their prejudices, increase their knowledge about other people and difference, and raise people's respect for diversity (Watson 2015, 2017).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The metaphor of the Human Library and the term Human Book deserve some comment even though space does not allow for extended discussion. I, therefore, acknowledge the opportunity for a deeper examination about the exchange *between* subjects that is provided by the interaction between Human Books and their Readers. 'Human Book' alerts us to the risk of objectifying embodied subjects. This indicates a substantial terrain demonstrated by studies that examine the numerous ways this is manifested, including: the disruption of embodied norms (Drabinski 2014; Frie 2011; Jolles 2012); the bipolar system of 'masculine' and 'feminine' (Athanasiou 2012; de Visser 2009; Potgieter 2006); the unsettling of mind-body dualism (Chadwick 2012; Karin 2014; Van Laere et al. 2014); and how 'self' is examined through embodied practices (Johnson 2007; Lodge and Umberson 2013; Piran 2016). Elsewhere, I examine and discuss the role of the Human Book and several issues that relate to objectifying embodied subjects (Watson 2015, 183-192; 2017); here, I offer one point to demonstrate how people who volunteer as Human Books regard their participation. Human Books (re)construct their own titles and descriptions to express how they perceive themselves. In doing so, they challenge the disembodied labels and descriptions that have been applied to them and they engage their Readers in a dialectical process of thinking about human nature as "a social project more than a presocial given" (Donnelly 2013, 15). These discussions are dynamic encounters of "shared and negotiated knowledge of what it means to be human, how humans expect to be treated and how humans should be treated" (Watson 2015, 189). They challenge labels that are used to distinguish between "true humans and the pseudohumans" (Rorty 1999, 67) and they contribute to the wider project of expanding the "reference of the terms

Tales has some elements that overlap with the Human Library method, but apart from that the two strategies have no connection.

Tales is made up of local groups of volunteer senior citizens who use heritage storytelling in school classrooms as a way of sharing knowledge about “the old ways of living” (Tales of Times Past Senior Storytellers 2016a). Tales commenced in 1995 and was implemented in 26 Shires, Towns and Cities in Perth and country Western Australia (Tales of Times Past Senior Storytellers 2016c). At present, there are about seven active branches in Perth and Mandurah, Western Australia.

Tales aims to help “current generations learn about Australia’s ancestors, old values, and the rich cultures that have shaped today’s communities” (Tales of Times Past Senior Storytellers 2016a). The storytellers encourage interaction “to promote lively discussion [...] a sense of belonging and to establish a connection between old and new generations” (Tales of Times Past Senior Storytellers 2016a). For example, when the Senior Storytellers visit students they normally bring personal artefacts that illustrate the stories they share. These artefacts include photos, old games and household items and other items that the Senior Storytellers used in past years. This method engages the children in discussions with the storytellers about the stories that have been shared. This dialogic method, employed by the Human Library and Tales, has contributed to the methodology I have used to develop the notion of the cosmopolitan intersection.

Participants in Human Libraries and Tales have provided the knowledge that forms the data used to develop the discussion section of this paper. The data are semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Human Books, Readers (45) and Senior Storytellers (12). The discussion has been developed in the interpretive tradition and uses constructivist grounded theory as its lens for focusing on its subjects (Crotty 1998). Constructivist grounded theory regards data and analysis as products of the shared experiences of researcher and participants. This approach engages the research participants in interpreting their experiences and the researcher then interprets the participants’ interpretive work using qualitative coding to label segments of data in a way that emphasises what is occurring within the scene being coded. These codes are developed into analytic categories that are used to construct theoretical concepts (Charmaz 2006, 2011, 2014).

The discussion above explains how the Human Library and Tales include people in processes of storytelling and dialogue that encourage them to reimagine what they have previously imagined about people who are different within the context of modern cosmopolitan Australia. The following discusses Appiah’s cosmopolitanism and Nancy’s coexistence to develop a framework for understanding what we mean by *reimagining*.

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‘our kind of people’ and ‘people like us’” (Rorty 1999, 74). This is demonstrated by Readers who describe their face-to-face conversations as having a “humanising effect” (Watson 2015, 189). This dynamic helps people challenge the way in which some people, often represented by Human Books themselves, are often objectified as disembodied Others and assigned to predetermined social categories (Parekh 2007).

## Reimagining as cosmopolitan coexistence

Appiah offers a way of thinking about what we mean by *reimagining* via his notion of cosmopolitanism as a response to the clash between the two ideals of “universal concern and respect for legitimate difference” (Appiah 2006, xv). He illustrates the practical importance of this concern when he explains that “if we care *about* others who are not part of our political order—others who may have commitments and beliefs that are unlike our own—we must have a way to talk *to* them” (Appiah 2007, 222, original italics). Appiah’s notion of cosmopolitanism seeks to resist the sharp distinctions between moral and cultural cosmopolitanism (Jeffers 2013). This invites us to stretch ourselves beyond our “ties of kith and kind” (Appiah 2006, xv) and to regard particular human lives seriously by “taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance” (Appiah 2006, xv).

At the heart of Appiah’s cosmopolitanism is the belief that “exposing ourselves to the varying ways of others can enrich and ameliorate our lives” (Jeffers 2013, 492). This belief is advanced via several convictions: cosmopolitans know that people are different and that there is much to learn from our differences; cosmopolitanism begins with the idea that humans “need to develop habits of coexistence” which Appiah refers to as conversation understood as association; and cosmopolitanism requires “conversations across boundaries” because such conversations are inevitable (Appiah 2006, xx). Conversation is Appiah’s “chief metaphor and organising theme” (Jeffers 2013, 495). It is central to developing “habits of coexistence” (Appiah 2006, xix) because it highlights the need to get people thinking and talking about the meaning of difference and shared humanity which makes it harder for them to divide the world into *us* and *them* (Appiah 2006, xxi).

Given that habits of coexistence are at the heart of Appiah’s cosmopolitanism, it is germane to consider coexistence in a way that helps us appreciate the types of habits that might be useful for counteracting the *us* and *them* divide otherwise expressed as “the binary of sameness and alterity” (Watkin 2007, 51). Nancy (2000) provides this in his fundamental ontology of Being Singular Plural.

For Nancy, existence is coexistence: there is no being without ‘being-with’; the ‘I’ does not come before the ‘we.’ He explains that

*Being Singular Plural* means the essence of Being is only as co-essence. In turn, co-essence, or being-with (being-with-many), designates the essence of the co-, or even more so, the co - (the cum) itself in the position or guise of an essence [...] Therefore, it is not the case that the ‘with’ is an addition to some prior Being; instead, the ‘with’ is at the heart of Being. (Nancy 2000, 30)

‘I,’ therefore, is simultaneously Being Singular Plural. As the ‘I’ is incapable of being diminished to anyone else, it is always singular and because the ‘I’ must always be understood as being with others, it is plural (Bertland 2011). Nancy’s coexistence challenges the way in which ‘being-with’ has been subordinated by ‘subject’ or by ‘being’

and it enables us to recognise that the “primal ontological conditions of our community” are “with,” “relationality” and “between” (Devisch 2000, 244).

The centrality of relationality demonstrates how ‘being-self’ is ‘being-together,’ characterised by mutuality and sharing rather than mere reciprocity. Nancy explains that self “does not mean in itself, or by itself, or for itself, but rather ‘one of us’” (Nancy 2000, 66) which might also be expressed as “self-as-relation” (Watkin 2007, 54). Humanity, therefore, cannot be grasped through one isolated human, separate from all others (Bertland 2011). Consequently, community does not embody some pre-given identity which we own or possess; rather, community is our being-in-common through the act of sharing a world. Devisch (2000, 245-246) illuminates the potential that this offers for developing Appiah’s habits of coexistence, explaining that the “question of our coexistence or being-with becomes therefore the ontological question to be posed in the development of a social ontology and the rethinking of the political space.” Understood in this way, habits of coexistence must be understood as habits of being-with that exclude any acceptance of some pre-given identity. Such habits would recognise the self-in-relation (being-with-many) acting to create political spaces (being-in-common and sharing a world) of mutuality and sharing, including Appiah’s conversation as association.

In addition to the metaphor of conversation, Appiah advances a number of elements which add greater depth to what he means by habits of coexistence. These elements are part of the skills which “allow us to live together as the global tribe we have become” and they benefit from a number of ideas in *Being Singular Plural* (Appiah 2006, xiii). They include: seeking consensus is futile; the importance of stories and values; and the practice of cosmopolitan curiosity.

Firstly, it is futile for humans to try to achieve complete consensus. We enter into conversation without the promise of final agreement and there will be times when “we can at best agree to differ” (Appiah 2006, 11). This illustrates the “irreducible plurality of coexistence” (Watkin 2007, 51) and it is why Nancy holds that humans are never able to fully communicate, are only capable of speaking in fragments, and their communities will never be fully unified (Nancy 1991). Rather than seeking consensus, people should seek to “share of themselves without trying to unify” (Bertland 2011, 1). The way that humans discuss stories and values adds to this fragmentary dynamic.

Appiah (2006, 29) asserts that stories are so central to what it means to be human that we “wouldn’t recognise a community as human if it had no stories.” In addition to that, the way that humans respond to stories and discuss them contributes to the maintenance of the social fabric because this activity “reinforces our common understanding and the values we share” (Appiah 2006, 29). Values shape our responses to stories (for example, we can describe things as murderous, wasteful, courageous, dishonest, oppressive) and this helps us make decisions about how we feel about the stories we hear and how we act in the world beyond the story we have just heard. This is enriched if we consider stories and values through Nancy’s (1991, 35) view of human sharing which he asserts “is always incomplete, or it is beyond completion and incompletion. For a complete sharing implies the disappearance of what is shared.” The incomplete nature of sharing always operates as part of who humans are and it defines how communities function as dynamic and enriching places (Bertland 2011). The incomplete nature of sharing is also demonstrated

by Nancy's explanation of voice in which he "hears a multiplying of voices" and "a polyphony at the heart of each voice" (Devisch 2000, 248). This incomplete sharing is enriching, however, due to the dynamic it embodies. To exist, to communicate, we need to address ourselves to another but even though the voice is never assured of reception "each voice trembles onto another voice" and this makes us aware that existence does not leave us to "tremble alone in the desert" (Devisch 2000, 248-249).

Thirdly, what we achieve begins with a deed; "practices and not principles enable us to live together in peace" (Appiah 2006, 85). Conversation is a metaphor for experiencing other people and their ideas; it acts as a method that encourages us to take other people seriously. It is what Appiah (2006, 97) refers to as "cosmopolitan curiosity" and it is illustrated by the phrase "to walk a while in another person's shoes." Cosmopolitan curiosity does not require that we begin by searching for traits that all humans share; it can be enough to look for small things that the two people in the conversation share and that enable them to cross boundaries. We should learn about other people, not because it will bring us to agreement, but because "it will help us get used to one another" (Appiah 2006, 78) and to understand one another which does not require that we come to an agreement. As Appiah (2006, 97) explains, this "is one of the payoffs of cosmopolitan curiosity. We can learn from one another; or we can simply be intrigued by alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and acting."

This resonates with Nancy's vision of the human community and its inability to fully communicate, meaning that it will "never function as efficiently as a community of machines" (Bertland 2011, 1). The result is that people will always live with gaps between them. In response, some scholars argue that Nancy would encourage us to "stop trying to control the future" and recognise that the best we can achieve is an inoperative community which will allow us to "be open to possibilities in the future" (Bertland 2011, 7). This makes it reasonable to suggest that Nancy would welcome Appiah's admonition to embrace alternative ways of thinking, feeling and acting as a means for providing spaces for being-in-common in which "the future will develop in surprising ways, and members of the community [may] reflect on how they exist with others without trying to predict the future" (Bertland 2011, 7).

Each of these elements can be united by Appiah's assertion that one of the things that people require most to begin talking and learning from one another is enough "*overlap*," especially if this indicates our being-in-common in mutuality and sharing (Appiah 2006, 57; Bertland 2011; Devisch 2000; Jeffers 2013, 495; Nancy 1991, 2000). This understanding of an *overlap* brings together the various elements discussed above and demonstrates what I mean when I refer to *reimagining*. Moreover, this resonates with the methods adopted by the two groups introduced above. This is seen especially in the way that they enable conversations *between* people, who would not normally meet, that encourage curiosity, relationality, mutuality and sharing, and working to diminish *us* and *them* distinctions and highlight our existence as a "being-with-many."

Given the importance that Appiah assigns to an *overlap*, the following considers the complex nature and function of space within our modern towns and cities. It pays particular attention to the way in which certain forces act on particular spaces and impact, both positively and negatively, their potential to act as spaces of overlap at the microlevel of society. The knowledge that I gain from learning about these spaces, along with the

framework for reimagining that Appiah's cosmopolitanism and Nancy's coexistence provide, will be used to develop and advance the notion of the cosmopolitan intersection.

## **Spaces of the everyday urban**

The macrospatial terrain of the world's towns and cities is increasingly experienced as a context defined by difference and the public spaces within this terrain are often spaces of "visibility and encounter between strangers" (Amin 2002, 967). Policy makers often focus on this broad terrain and implement political programs in an effort to foster greater social cohesion and interpersonal ties within neighbourhoods and communities. An increasing number of scholars, however, are raising concerns about this approach (Amin 2012; Noble 2013b; Wise 2013). As a result of these misgivings, other scholars have turned their attention to studying the interconnection of everyday spaces and intergroup relations (Alexander and Tredoux 2010; Dixon and Durrheim 2003; Durrheim et al. 2004;). Ash Amin (2002, 2012) is one scholar who voices such misgivings and has raised the need to attend to "the micropolitics of everyday social contact and encounter" (Amin 2002, 959). The following discusses some of the scholarship that has examined the everyday urban, the microecology of everyday spaces and how these relate to the cosmopolitan challenge.

The spaces of the everyday urban include our streets, parks, malls and cafes, and they are often described as shared spaces of freedom, mingling and serendipitous encounters. However, as will be discussed in greater detail below, while spaces such as these can place people from diverse backgrounds and groups in close proximity, it is important not to overstate their effectiveness in helping people overlap and engage in crossing boundaries or in mutuality and sharing (Appiah 2006; Bertland 2011; Noble 2013a; Priest et al. 2014; Valentine 2008; Wise 2013). This is the case because these are often territorialised by particular groups, subject to the intense focus of surveillance, or "they are spaces of transit with very little contact between strangers (Amin 2002, 967). As such, these spaces do not naturally serve people's need to negotiate their everyday encounters with difference and they do not offer the overlap discussed above (Amin 2002; Amin and Thrift 2002; Amin, Massey and Thrift 2000; Appiah 2006; Rosaldo 1999).

This does not mean that these spaces offer nothing at all to the pursuit of the cosmopolitan ideal or that they are of no value as spaces for reimagining; rather, it alerts us to the need to work with these spaces in ways that help us unsettle and shift how some spaces perpetuate negative and habitual socio-spatial norms which encourage avoidance instead of practices such as taking other people seriously, getting used to one another and negotiating difference (Appiah 2006; Alexander and Tredoux 2010; Clack, Dixon and Tredoux 2005; Dixon and Durrheim 2003; Durrheim et al. 2004; Wise 2013). Scholars who have turned their focus to examining the microecology of segregation in people's everyday spaces provide some ideas regarding how we might go about unsettling and shifting socio-spatial norms.

Examining such spaces as public beaches, university class rooms, school cafeterias, playgrounds and local libraries has enabled scholars to developing their appreciation for how people interact in their everyday life spaces (Alexander and Tredoux 2010; Clack,



Dixon and Tredoux 2005; Dandy and Pe-Pua 2013; Dixon and Durrheim 2003; Dixon, Tredoux and Clack 2005; Durrheim et al. 2004; Priest et al. 2014; Thomas 2005). In particular, it has highlighted a number of ways in which members of different groups “share proximity and co-presence” (Clack, Dixon and Tredoux 2005, 2) and engage in informal practices that uphold barriers (Alexander and Tredoux 2010; Dixon and Durrheim 2003). For example, people were observed sharing the public spaces listed above in ways that enacted segregation along lines of race, ethnicity, age and gender. The way in which people practise acts of informal segregation in these public spaces illustrates how intergroup contact in many shared spaces is more “illusory than actual” (Dixon and Durrheim 2003, 2). This demonstrates how people’s habitual everyday spatial practices can (re)instate borders around difference and act as sites in which “informal segregation practices can be enacted and reproduced” (Priest et al. 2014, 32).

The illusory nature of the way that contact functions is illustrated more clearly by everyday spaces in which people spend a significant amount of time; these everyday spaces can be referred to as micropublics (Amin 2002; Noble 2013a). They include our places of work and study (schools and colleges), youth centres, and sports and recreational clubs. Micropublics function as spaces of habitual engagement, interdependence and “prosaic negotiations” (Amin 2002, 969). For example, many people attend their place of work or study on a daily basis and they are required to interact with colleagues on a regular basis and to use various forms of social etiquette. In this way, micropublics often bring people from diverse backgrounds and identity groups together in spaces that require them to interact with people who are different. It would seem reasonable, therefore, to surmise that micropublics act as spaces of overlap that encourage colleagues to get used to one another, take each other seriously and understand each other (Amin 2012; Appiah 2006; Noble 2013a, 2013b; Wise 2013). This idea underpins the assertion that “strangers stop being strangers through collaborative work” (Noble 2013b, 32-33). While this is appealing, in practice many factors stop this occurring and so they function as inoperative communities marked by incomplete sharing (Bertland 2011; Nancy 1991). For example, social norms often deny colleagues the opportunity to speak about issues associated with difference and identity because it is regarded as impolite or inappropriate, or because some topics are labelled as taboo. In this way, micropublics demonstrate that “co-presence and collaboration are two very different things” (Amin 2012, 59).

This discussion acknowledges the many ways in which our everyday spaces lack many of the elements required to provide enough overlap to enable conversations in which people think and talk about difference, and avoid reinstating divisions between us and them. Bearing these problems in mind, many of our everyday spaces still embody elements that are useful in advancing the notion of the cosmopolitan intersection.

## **Discussion: The cosmopolitan intersection**

The following advances the *cosmopolitan intersection* as a way of constructing spaces for people to engage in the reimagining of Australia at the microlevel of society. It regards the cosmopolitan intersection as a space of conversation that enables people to engage in practices of *coexistence* and *overlap*. In advancing this notion, I draw on participants’

perceptions and interpretations of their involvement at Human Libraries and Tales and consider how this knowledge, together with what we know about everyday urban spaces, demonstrates what cosmopolitan intersections look like and where we might locate them as alternative spaces to people's other everyday spaces which do not serve our efforts to reimagine Australia. I offer the notion of the *cosmopolitan intersection* and this discussion, not as a definitive answer or template for addressing the challenges that reimagining Australia presents, but as one way of contributing to this ongoing task.

### **Spaces of coexistence**

Spaces act as cosmopolitan intersections when they enable people to “develop habits of co-existence” (Appiah 2006, xx), understood as habits that support our being-with in ways that exclude any acceptance of some pre-given identity (Bertland 2011; Devisch 2000; Nancy 2000). Habits of coexistence, therefore, recognise the self-in-relation acting to create spaces of mutuality and sharing. This occurs when people can cross boundaries and experience other people beyond the divisions of *us* and *them*. As discussed above, our everyday spaces do not naturally encourage contact between strangers; they often function to (re)instate borders around difference and to perpetuate segregation along lines of race, ethnicity, age and gender. Human Libraries and Tales provide two examples of spaces for coexistence because they bring strangers together and enable them to cross boundaries, erode divisions and challenge practices of informal segregation.

Readers at Human Libraries explain that it is possible for them to meet people within this space in a way that is not possible in public spaces. They explain that they see people who are different in the street and at shopping centres but they feel that they cannot approach them and speak to them. One Human Book illustrates this by sharing an encounter with a Reader who attended a Human Library and explained that he had never met a Muslim, a Jew or an Aboriginal Australian and that he heard he could do this at the Human Library, and so he decided to visit it to meet and speak with people from these groups (Watson 2015, 126). In addition to this example, Organisers explain that Human Libraries provide them with a strategy for bringing people from the margins of society to its centre so that they can meet people they normally do not meet and speak with, such as community leaders, public officials and policy makers who often decide on how to deliver programs that impact people's lives who live on the margins of society (Watson 2015, 124-125).

Senior Storytellers explain that they spend most of their time with people who are similar, especially regarding age and ethnicity. Their participation with Tales provides them with a space that enables them to move beyond the boundaries of sameness. As such, Tales brings strangers together from a variety of identities, including age, gender, ethnicity, nationality and (dis)ability. The Senior Storytellers illustrate the impact that this space has on them by using such phrases as: putting me back in the world; I am recognised and not invisible; I feel reconnected and engaged; I am not redundant, I am flesh. They also perceive that this space of coexistence makes it possible for them to interact with the children so that they can reimagine how they regard older people. They believe that they do not seem so alien to the children as a result of meeting them in this space. They also explain that because they are able to meet children from a diverse range of identity groups,

which does not happen in their other everyday spaces, they increase their knowledge about, and appreciation of, the diversity of their local communities. The way in which these spaces challenge boundaries and divisions associated with difference also helps to challenge practices of informal segregation.

Human Libraries and Tales do not only provide spaces of coexistence within themselves, they also act as spaces that challenge practices of sophisticated strangerhood because they are located within other public spaces and can be used to disrupt social transit and parallel lives. For example, Tales achieves this by providing an alternative space within the micropublic of the school, which is a space that is very strictly designed to only include children and some adults. Similarly, Human Libraries are often embedded in public spaces such as festivals, fairs, local libraries and so on. One Reader demonstrates the significance of this when she explains that she stumbled upon a Human Library at a food and wine festival and, as a result, engaged in a dialogue with a Human Book. Organisers also speak about running Human Libraries in other public spaces and events which enables them to invite and encourage passers-by, who would normally avoid people who are different, to stop and talk with a Human Book (Watson 2015, 127-129). By placing Human Libraries and Tales in spaces of social transit and the micropublic of the school, they can be used to disrupt practices of sophisticated strangerhood and challenge practices of informal segregation.

### **Spaces of overlap**

Spaces act as cosmopolitan intersections when they enable people to overlap. This occurs when people are able to share stories and values, develop curiosity, take people seriously, walk a while in another person's shoes, and be intrigued by alternative ways of thinking, feeling and acting. Again, our everyday spaces do not naturally embody or encourage these practices. They tend to offer spaces that are illusory and superficial, and embody forms of social etiquette that allow proximity and 'rubbing along,' but not mutuality and sharing.

Participants at Human Libraries and Tales discuss what happens within these spaces and demonstrate how they enable people to engage in a space of overlap. Each of the spaces is defined by a methodology that is built around stories, curiosity, mutuality and sharing, conversation and encouraging people to take other people seriously. The Senior Storytellers demonstrate how they practise this by explaining what happens when they tell stories about what life was like when they were children. The children are: intrigued by the freedom the Seniors had as children; curious about how the Seniors lived without today's technology; able to develop relationality when they recognise that they share certain things in common (being-in-common and sharing a world), such as having played the same games, experiencing what it is like to be an immigrant, having lived through hardship and now using the same forms of technology.

Readers at Human Libraries discuss their experiences of the way in which the rules that structure readings allow them to walk a while in another person's shoes and to be curious about topics and questions in ways they feel they cannot in the other spaces of their lives such as the workplace, school and social gatherings. One Reader illustrates this when she

explains that she avoids people with disability in other everyday spaces but within the space provided by the Human Library she felt able to push herself to engage in dialogue with a Human Book with acquired brain injury (Watson 2015, 130). Another Reader explains that she often sees immigrants from African countries in her local area but never speaks to them. When she attended a Human Library, she felt able to have a conversation with a Human Book who is from an African nation. Other Readers share similar experiences and explain that at Human Libraries they have been able to speak to Human Books about what it is like to live with an eating disorder, to be gay or lesbian, and to be an immigrant or a refugee and that, as a result, they are able to appreciate how people who identify in these ways experience marginalisation, lack of safety in public, and feel voiceless and invisible (Watson 2015, 151, 165, 174, 176-183). Furthermore, these Readers explain that the conversations they have in readings at Human Libraries are much deeper than the superficial conversations they feel able to pursue within the confines of their everyday micropublics such as the work place, school or recreational club (Watson 2015, 202-216; 2017). As spaces of overlap, Human Libraries and Tales provide spaces for being-in-common that enable people the opportunity to walk a while in another person's shoes and to enter into what it means to coexist, understood as being-with, rather than simply rub along in an illusory and superficial manner. In doing so, they enter into spaces that counter their other everyday spaces which so often exclude mutuality between people who are sharing a world.

## **Concluding remarks**

At the outset, I offered a reminder that living with difference is an unavoidable part of living in contemporary Australia. How we approach living in this context of difference will shape how we imagine and reimagine Australia. For some people, this task will be defined by a desire to reimagine what has always been imagined; their desire will be to live within an Australia that is predominantly White, male-gendered, Christian, able-bodied and heterosexual. For other people, this is a task that offers opportunity and hope and a chance to reimagine Australia anew. They exhibit an awareness that existence is coexistence, that there is no being without 'being-with,' and that people have much to learn from being-in-common.

My contribution to the matter of reimagining Australia has been motivated by an interest in appreciating *how* and *where* this reimagining occurs. It is also shaped by a preference for what goes at the microlevel of society rather than attending to the macrospatial level, often favoured by policy makers and bureaucrats.

The outcome of this discussion has been to advance the notion of the *cosmopolitan intersection*. It is not offered as a template or a program for ameliorating the numerous negative practices, habits and socio-spatial norms that render many of our everyday public spaces incapable of advancing the cosmopolitan project of living with difference. It is offered as one way, which has been tested and demonstrated by the ongoing activity of two groups in particular, that we might like to consider as we seek out spaces in which we may continue to reimagine Australia.

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