# ARCSHS Oration & Forum transcript

**Recorded on Thursday, 7 November 2019, at Rydges, Melbourne.**

## 00:00 – Introduction by Adam Bourne

**Adam Bourne:** Good evening, everyone. Good evening. For those who don't know me, I'm Adam Bourne, and I'm the Deputy Director of the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University, and on behalf of the Centre and the University, it is my privilege to be the first to welcome you this evening for this oration. I extend a particular welcome to those who have travelled from interstate.

I'd like to start by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and I pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging, and I extend that respect to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders who may be in the room with us today.

We are fortunate to have a highly esteemed and very capable chair to guide us through this evening's events. Associate Professor Helen Keane is head of the School of Sociology at the Australian National University in Canberra. Her research focuses on drug use, including pharmaceutical, recreational and illicit substances, working in the realms of feminist theory and gender studies. Internationally recognised for her contribution to innovative thinking on issues of addiction in culture and society, Helen is the co-author of *Habits: Remaking Addiction* with Suzanne Fraser and David Moore, and this book builds on her earlier ground-breaking work, *What's Wrong with Addiction*, a very widely cited monograph that appears on curricula for university subjects in Australia and across the world, encouraging students to think critically about the use of drugs in society. Helen's innovative work and critical eye have had a significant influence on the sociology of drug use, and this, along with her interests in the broader conceptual issues in this evening's event make her especially well-placed to chair today's proceedings. Everyone, please welcome Helen Keane.

## 02:09 – Introduction by Helen Keane

**Helen Keane:** Hi everyone, thank you for that really lovely introduction, and it's wonderful to see so many people here tonight for this great event, and I have to say, this room is full of some of the people I most admire in Australian academia, and also some of my favourite people in the world, so it's lovely to see you all here today.

So, we've got a full agenda tonight, so without any further ado, I'd like to introduce Professor Suzanne Fraser, who is the star of tonight's event. Suzanne is the director of the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, and that's the reason we're all here, to mark this exciting new era for the centre. Suzanne is also a Visiting Professorial Fellow at the Centre for Social Research and Health at UNSW, and Suzanne's PhD is in Gender Studies, and her research focuses on the body, gender, health and the self. She's the author of a number of books on these topics – her most recent book is *Habits: Remaking Addiction*, co-authored with David Moore and with me, and her previous works cover a range of topics across these issues of health and the body. Her first book, *Cosmetic Surgery, Gender and Culture*, was based on her PhD research, and her later works have focused on methadone maintenance treatment – and that was a book she wrote with kylie valentine, called *Substance and Substitution* – she's also written a book on hepatitis C, titled *Making Disease, Making Citizens*, co-authored with Kate Seear. She's very good at choosing co-authors, you might have noticed. [Laughter] She's also written on the body and the self, in a book called *Vanity: 21st Century Selves*, with Claire Tanner and JaneMaree Maher, and she's also the co-editor of a collection of essays on drugs and addiction, called *The Drug Effect: Health, Crime and Society*, with David Moore. So, please join me in welcoming the new director of ARCSHS, Suzanne Fraser. [Applause]

## 04:25 – Oration by Suzanne Fraser

**Suzanne Fraser:** Thank you, Helen, for getting through all those books, and I'm sorry they were all listed there like that, but you did a great job, thank you so much. And thank you to everybody who's here this evening, especially given the poor weather, it's very much appreciated that you've come out this evening for our event. I personally feel like it's a real pleasure and privilege to be here, in the role of Director – I know since I've started I haven't met a better, more dedicated, smarter set of people than at ARCSHS and I'm just really enjoying the job. Okay – I'd also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we're meeting this evening, and the traditional owners of the land on which the research that I'm going to be talking about tonight was conducted across Australia.

For some of us old enough to remember undergraduate days in the 1990s, it looms as a time of immense intellectual challenge, and change, in the social sciences and humanities. Feminist scholarship was raising new questions and bringing into the realm of academic debate new issues and methods. Postmodernism was in full flower, and the linguistic turn – the re-orientation to the power of words, speech, language to shape and delimit thought and therefore social and political possibilities – was playing out. At the same time, intrepid souls continued to race ahead, sensing the limitations of this turn to language, feeling their way beyond it into new ways of bringing the body and other kinds of matter back more clearly into consideration in ways that still honoured the linguistic turn’s rejection of biological determinism. A significant part of this work emerged out of, or in engagement with, feminist issues. Researchers and activists worked hard to articulate the problems that came with treating biological sex as a valid basis on which to decree women’s place in the world and constrain their opportunities while also trying to keep the body in view. For them, the physical world wasn’t just there, replete with self-evident meanings on which we should base who we are and can be, nor was it just a fantasy, spun and crystallised from sugary words, ready to dissolve in a moment.

As one of the leading feminist scholars of the day and now, Donna Haraway, put it in her book, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, “The world neither speaks itself nor disappears in favor of a master decoder. The codes of the world are not still waiting only to be read. The world is not raw material for humanization. The world encountered in knowledge projects is an active entity. Acknowledging the agency of the world in knowledge-making” – this is still Haraway – “makes room for some unsettling possibilities, a sense of the world's independent sense of humour. Such a sense of humour is not comfortable for humanists and others committed to the world as a resource.”

Of course, the 1990s were also an incredibly significant and poignant time for gay politics. HIV is probably the last thing that could be described as evidence of the world’s sense of humour, but it definitely reminded us of the agency of material entities beyond, if not inseparable from, language.

At this crucial juncture, political projects of social transformation came together with scholarly thought and practices to initiate a series of conceptual developments that form the basis for what I want to talk about tonight. Now called variously the ‘ontological turn’, or, sometimes, ‘new materialism’, these developments offer a great deal in thinking through our topic for this evening, which I've styled as 'Constituting social problems: the role of social research in defining and addressing social issues'.

What I want to do in the next half an hour or so is talk through these ideas in the context of research activities underway at ARCSHS at present, as well as past work in related areas over the years, to foreground the role of research in constituting, not just reflecting, realities. In doing so, I’m also going to ask how we are to think about which social problems we want to constitute and how we can best frame and address social issues.

As we all know, facts have come under especially concerted attack in recent years from those seeking to undermine progressive causes. Climate change scepticism, anti-vaxxism, various kinds of Trumpism – if that's even a thing – we have reason to be concerned about the undermining of the authority of facts and truth.

At the same time, though, valid questions have been raised in the social sciences and beyond about knowledge, how facts are made, and the status of the reality usually said to underlie real facts. In these deliberations facts have been re-thought as actively made under complex and emergent conditions.

Of course, facts have been used to oppress and marginalise just as lies have. In this respect they must be seen as entanglements of always political practices of knowing, socially situated assemblages of events, matter and ideas, rather than as natural entities waiting to be discovered. Importantly, though, this isn’t to espouse relativism. Instead it’s to understand the specificity of the conditions in which facts emerge, and to recognise those conditions as always politically animated.

Examples of the way politics operate through facts, not just outside them, are never too far from hand. The *Guardian* reported just the other day on a warning issued by the head of the UK’S NHS, Simon Stevens, about vaccination ‘myths’. Complaining about the conversations happening among parents when dropping off and picking up children at school, he wrote in the *Daily Mail*, “In this way, the school gates themselves can be a breeding ground for harmful myths to catch on, spread and ultimately infect parents’ judgment”. While Stevens knows enough not to use the words ‘mothers’ or ‘mums’ in his article about the school gates, his comments are heavy with gendered implications. And his notion that minds become infected with falsehoods is especially jarring and patronising in this gendered context, I think. Myths, gender, expertise, impurity and infection – the politics of making facts can’t be ignored, and it’s also difficult to ignore the possibility that the superior tone that accompanies some such claims may be contributing to the anti-expertise discourse still obstructing meaningful progress on climate change and other desperately urgent matters.

Along with these issues come questions about how research should be done. If facts are constituted within knowledge practices, we need to acknowledge that the problems we seek to address with research are also constituted within knowledge practices instead of underlying or preceding them. Given this, part of the responsibility of researchers becomes how to decide how we should constitute problems, and which problems we should constitute, even as we stand behind the reliability and robustness of the knowledge we produce.

These are issues familiar in one way or another in the fields of research investigated by ARCSHS over the years, as well as in my own research history. To explore these issues a bit more closely, I’m going to use three research resources. The first is the work of physicist and feminist philosopher Karen Barad – her discussion of materiality and research and the example she takes from quantum physics to discuss the nature of materiality and the role of research in relation to reality is the basis for what follows. This work took the conventionally logical question, “Is light a wave or a particle?” and re-posed it in response to new thought about this role. Quantum physics and the nature of light might seem very remote from the concerns we are addressing tonight, but I hope you’ll indulge me while I make the connections Barad invites us to make between the physical and social sciences.

In the second research resource I want to say a bit about is one that arises out of some of Australia’s early social research on HIV prevention, work done by leaders in our field – Sue Kippax, and ARCSHS’ own Gary Dowsett and their colleagues. This work introduced the idea of 'negotiated safety' into the research context of safe sex, rethinking what seemed the correct logical question at the time: “What can be done about so-called condom use ‘relapse’?” As we’ll see, this research posed a different question, informed by a different politics of gay sex, pleasure and trust, producing different results, highlighting that facts are specific to research concepts, communities, populations, and practices.

The last resource comes from my own research, which was conducted prior to taking up my role at ARCSHS, but, I think, is akin to the work I’ve just mentioned – this time on couples who inject drugs together. This work re-thought a seemingly logical self-evident question too, which was, at the time, “How can we stop people transmitting hepatitis C to their partners?” – to again recognise and work with relationships, and also to consider the role of material objects in articulating and reproducing our assumptions and stereotypes.

To begin with my three examples, I want to turn to the work of Karen Barad. Emerging simultaneously from the feminist science studies tradition and from the discipline of physics, Barad’s work synthesises and builds on aspects of recent feminist theory and science and technology studies to formulate theoretical tools that tackle the very questions in play here – what is reality and how should it be understood? How should we research reality, and what is the status of our results? What are facts and what can we do with them?

Broadly speaking, Barad’s work is indebted to and contributes to Foucauldian scholarship on the regulatory and disciplinary exercise of power through individual populations and bodies. Foucault argues that at the end of the eighteenth century, there was the emergence of a new form of power, a ‘biopolitics’ of the human race, in which new apparatuses of observation and treatment were applied to the population as a means of shaping it politically. In this way, political problems became biological problems. Medicine is also formed as a regime of power here, producing discourses on sexual perversion, delinquency, ‘unreason’ and criminality, thereby also acting to constitute all manner of political subjects, especially gender and sexual minority subjects.

To illustrate her ideas about power, research and the nature of reality, Barad draws on an example from physics: the wave-particle duality paradox.

Famously, the distinction taken for granted in conventional Newtonian physics between wave and particle is problematised in quantum mechanics. Experiments on the nature of light have become emblematic of this tension. As Barad explains, early twentieth century experiments found that, despite expert conviction that waves and particles are mutually exclusive phenomena, light possessed the attributes of both waves and particles, depending on how it was measured. This is called the wave-particle duality paradox.

In 1998, Barad used the work of physicist and philosopher of science Niels Bohr, and feminist philosopher Judith Butler, to elaborate on the issues posed by this paradox. Following Bohr’s efforts to reconcile the paradox, she argued that contrary to much thinking, ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ (such as observers and light) do not pre-exist as such, but are constituted, through and within particular practices. So, if one uses certain methods and techniques, light emerges as a wave, and if one uses another set of methods and techniques, it emerges as a particle. Both these outcomes are facts.

Related to this, she argued that the scientific experimental approach constructs a ‘cut’ between the ‘object’ of study and the ‘agencies of observation’ such as research methods, apparatuses and so on. This cut is what allows us to think in terms of a pre-existing world out there waiting to be explored, and the processes and equipment used to explore it. In this way, distance is created between the knower and the known.

Pursuing her interest in the practices of science in another piece, she also discusses the status of scientific apparatuses, which she argues are all too often seen as stable, pre-formed objects that ‘sit atop a shelf’, waiting to be used in experiments, to produce stable, objective measurements of this supposedly pre-existing reality. On the contrary, she says, following Bohr and others, they are ‘neither neutral probes of the natural world nor structures that deterministically impose some particular outcome’. Instead, they are non-determining, but active, agents in the production of the realities investigated.

So, according to Barad and the quantum physics she draws on, realities, including material phenomena such as particles – or we might say, bodies – are enacted in and through the research used to understand them. This means, she points out, that questions of research are also questions of responsibility for the world we create as well as the world we explore. Barad’s account incorporates this issue of responsibility, especially for, as Joseph Rouse puts it, “Recognising one’s own participation in the reproduction of power relations, acknowledging its consequences, and holding oneself accountable to those for whom one’s actions are consequential.”

With Barad’s work dating back to the late 1990s, you might be forgiven for wondering whether this paradox, this wave-particle duality paradox that she describes, still stands. Perhaps it has been resolved and reality is again legibly singular, waiting fully formed to be observed? Interestingly, in 2015, researchers at ANU conducted experiments similar to the original ones, but using helium instead of light, and they came to the same conclusions. As the lead investigator on that project, Andrew Truscott, said at the time, “Measurement is everything. At the quantum level, reality does not exist if you are not looking at it.”

So, it seems our friends over in physics are deliberating on issues very like those in play in the social sciences, and the two traditionally quite separate domains are overlapping in some places, with social scientists picking up the connections Barad draws about physics, experimentation, matter and reality to explore innumerable social issues in new ways. Barad's work has had an enormous impact in the social sciences. Importantly, this isn’t to collapse quantum-level issues with human social issues. Rather it’s to point to some cognate conceptual concerns across fields and to highlight that easy distinctions between the so-called hard and soft sciences when it comes to the real are not viable. Given it’s often observed that philosophy and physics increasingly address the same issues – so, time being another example – these developments are perhaps not surprising.

In my second example of the ways in which research practices are instrumental in the constitution of realities, I want to go back to the early years of the HIV epidemic. In the early 1990s, Susan Kippax, soon director of what would become ARCSHS’ sibling centre, then the National Centre in HIV Social Research, Gary Dowsett and their colleagues took up the sociological concept of practice to think through safe sex advice and conduct in new ways.

This work offers an example of the relatively early role of practice approaches for understanding health. At this time, the advent of the HIV epidemic created urgent demand for effective but equitable and respectful public health campaigns. Condom use was the key prevention message at the time, a practice initiated first by gay community activists in the 1980s, with health educators promoting the advice to “Use a condom every time”. Over time, though, researchers identified changes in men’s adherence to this maxim, with some men choosing not to use condoms in certain circumstances. Having collaborated with gay community partners and following quantitative research on HIV transmission among gay men with qualitative studies enriching interpretation of the data, these research partnerships conceived of practice-based concepts such as ‘negotiated safety’ and, later, ‘strategic positioning’, to understand gay men’s decisions about condom use under epidemic conditions. In this work, ‘negotiated safety’ articulated a practice of agreement to dispense with condom use within the primary HIV-seronegative partnership, that is, where both partners do not have HIV, but retain its use in encounters with other partners. This work foregrounded the social meaning of sexual choices in a broader political context that tended to deny the possibility of trust and reasoned choice in gay intimate relationships, and dispense with the value of pleasure for this marginalised group. This approach and the ideas it afforded offered a very different, effective, and also more respectful, account of what was otherwise being labelled ‘relapse’ in gay men who were not always using condoms.

In thinking about the role of method in constituting realities, thinking back to Barad's apparatuses, this work highlights the effects of combining different research methods, qualitative and quantitative, and questioning standard discourses and units of analysis, to connect elements that together produce and sustain practices, suggesting innovative initiatives beyond taken-for-granted interpretations of data, such as 'relapse'.

As Kippax, Connell, Dowsett and Crawford explained in their 1993 book, *Sustaining Safe Sex*, “The field of HIV / AIDS research was colonized from the start by medical discourse – a discourse of 'cause' and 'cure', of 'prevention' and 'treatment', of 'intervention', 'monitoring', 'risk groups' and 'risk categories' and so on. Had the question of social action been dominant from the start, we might have had a different mix.” Social action is critical in dealing with the HIV epidemic and, in consequence, social research should have a major role in policy formation. The social sciences need to pursue more boldly what is distinctively social in the issues surrounding HIV and AIDS, to have the courage of their own concepts and their own diversity of methods.

The concepts and methods used in this research treated HIV as a material phenomenon made socially and politically, not just as a self-evident biological object ‘transmitted by individuals’. As Kane Race put it in his 2018 book, which provides an extremely valuable account of this period, this research is useful to look at in part because of what it can, quote, “tell us about what it takes to participate as social scientists in a dynamic, constantly evolving field of everyday, intimate, sociomaterial experimentation.”

The third example I want to give is from a project I was involved in led by Carla Treloar. This project took the unusual step for sociologists of questioning material objects in thinking through the role of research in making realities. As also suggested by the wave-article duality paradox, we know objects (such as experimental apparatuses) help constitute particular realities. This idea can be extended to other objects too, leading us to look with fresh eyes at key objects such as the standard safe injecting Fitpack distributed to aid hepatitis C prevention. In this project, we decided to consider the role of the material object of the Fitpack in framing blood-borne virus prevention dynamics and responsibility among people who inject drugs. Previous research suggested that a significant proportion of injecting equipment sharing occurs among sexual partners, but that sexual partnerships among people who inject drugs tend to be ignored in health settings, treated merely as relationships of convenience, or at best as flawed, ‘co-dependent’ imitations of real loving relationships. Importantly, the design of conventional safe injecting equipment materialises these narrow assumptions and judgments in that it’s designed around the singularised individual. In our project we used our past research to design and 3D print a novel safe injecting Fitpack aimed at couples rather than individuals – nothing too complicated, just a different kind of box with more chambers, more equipment and a perforated, breakable join – along with new labels and messaging that spoke directly to couples, their relationships and the positives and negatives of different kinds of ‘sharing’ within relationships.

All this development was based on a large qualitative study that explored relationships among people who inject, and the prototypes were then tested by couples in a later sub-study. I don’t have time to say a lot about this project except to add that it set off from the ideas outlined a minute ago – that material objects such as Fitpacks are neither neutral tools sitting ‘atop a shelf’ to be used as humans see fit, nor are they determining machines that shape us and our actions in predictable ways. Material objects help make realities, have agency, even if their actions vary and the results are unpredictable. As philosopher of science Bruno Latour observed, “After poststructuralism and constructivism had melted everything that was solid into air, it was perhaps time that we noticed once again the sensuous immediacy of the objects we live, work and converse with, in which we routinely place our trust, which we love and hate, which bind us as much as we bind them.” These objects, he argues, can be regarded as the ‘mass’ – the materiality – of particular ‘moralities’ or ethics and politics.

So, just to sum those three examples up, material objects such as safe injecting Fitpacks can work to remake ideas and practices of, for example, healthcare and harm reduction services for couples. They can enact legitimacy, reshape health conversations about partnerships, alter injecting practices and remake hep C epidemics themselves.

As we explained in an article written about the work, 'In this project we actively consider[ed] our role in affording more respect and acceptance for couples who inject together, more recognition of the ways in which better support for preventing hepatitis C transmission can be materialised through innovative technological objects and, in the process, researchers’ inevitable entanglement in that which they aspire to understand.'

For me, the examples I’ve given of the early HIV work, as well as the Fitpack work, are useful because they remind us that problems such as viral epidemics are not primarily acts of nature; they are not natural problems merely waiting to be discovered then contained by or responded to with political and social decisions and actions. They are realities thoroughly materialised in our political and social knowledge-making practices, decisions and the actions that follow. A different approach makes a different epidemic, and even a different virus.

And looked at more broadly, together, the examples I’ve given remind us that how we do our research helps create certain realities. Importantly, this isn’t a question of deciding objectivity in research doesn’t matter, conceding to the merchants of doubt (who say, for instance, that climate change is not real), and suggesting that what’s being proposed is a free-for-all in which we can simply choose the results we want and conduct our research accordingly. Many of us have heard this kind of objection before. It misrecognises the issue, I think, which is to say, across a range of disciplines, the nature of objectivity as it’s traditionally formulated has come under scouring criticism and is no longer credible nor can stand as the ideal in making knowledge. Instead, many consider it counterproductive in that it encourages a belief that the research processes can to an increasingly large degree, if only we keep trying, be separated from the findings. We need to think beyond this approach to identify more nuanced ideas of objectivity and of method, ones that recognise that research findings are achievements of complex moments of encounter between countless objects, subjects and dynamics and acts of observation and measurement. Understanding that complexity helps us understand the contingency of the facts we produce, without giving up on the role of rigour in what we do. Indeed, thinking through questions of this kind is part of ‘rigorous’ research.

The politics part remains, of course. Whether and how we consciously choose to do the research we do, and, in turn, make certain realities. In the examples I’ve just given, the political questions animating them were more or less immediately visible. Was the real, material world, for example, of light or of helium, out there waiting for us to discover, fully formed, incontrovertible, or was it made over time and in practice, open to remaking according to new processes, insights and values?

Was gay sexuality comprehensible as legitimate enough to warrant the preservation of its pleasures, and the recognition of its capacity to include reasoned choice-making, and were we able to accept gay men’s relationships to the extent that we could acknowledge they entailed valid forms of trust?

Lastly, could we look beyond stereotypes about addiction and chaos to recognise that people who inject drugs form and maintain genuine relationships of care and trust, and how might these relationships be articulated more effectively in the technological objects – the mass of morality – available to them for practising safe injecting and caring for their health?

The chronology of the issues, projects and insights I’ve covered here is not simple, and I haven’t attempted to follow a very closely arranged timeline of ideas here. This is a messy terrain in which ideas, theories, methods, collaborations and outcomes have accreted and mixed for different reasons and at different rates, but the impulses of scepticism about received wisdom, inclusivity, responsibility and originality have been there from the beginnings of this period, including the very seeds of ARCSHS’ work in Gary’s early collaborations with Sue Kippax and colleagues.

In many ways, the projects currently underway at ARCSHS now bring to mind these issues for me as well. Our work on LGBTIQ ageing highlights the material effects of conventional assumptions about sexuality and ageing, and their specific and highly problematic interactions with homophobia and assumptions about the value of LGBTIQ relationships in, for example, aged care facilities. Researching these relationships in the context of ageing, brings into being new realities of ageing and the value of relationships of all kinds. By exploring young people’s experiences of their sexualities and identities in terms of their capacities, strengths and resources as well as their challenges, obstacles and struggles, we bring into being new realities of LGBTIQ youth that problematise, not them, but the broader social conditions and attitudes that need change. By developing mechanisms for facilitating and measuring peer participation in service provision and policy development, we afford new realities able to realise, value and facilitate this involvement and all the benefits and changes it necessarily brings. In these ways and many others I don’t have time to talk about here, I can see ARCSHS and colleagues here this evening at work identifying topics, developing research questions, designing methods, analysing and communicating findings in collaborative ways, not just to know the world better, but to contribute to materialising new, more inclusive, more equitable realities by design, conduct, analysis and engagement.

What new combinations of concepts and methods should we be using in composing research problems in the future? This is a question for our panel too. Some key areas of ongoing relevance, I think are deep research partnerships with affected communities mean better formed problems and methods; attending to the direct but non-determining role of material objects and technologies in making realities – here I can think of PrEP, hepatitis C long-acting antivirals, take-home naloxone, online digital technologies – attending to these material objects means different problems and stronger conceptualisations of the origins and dynamics of issues. Humility about facts means awareness of their reliance on practices of knowing. This humility is undoubtedly uncomfortable in a context in which facts are disputed by sceptics relying on weak knowledge, or by trolls, but it may be our only way back from the distrust that can arise when scientific claims are made too confidently and without due attention to the revision that goes on in science on a daily basis.

So, in short, we continue to need to understand and enact the real in our work, and to talk about this process of knowing, even in the face of the risks that come with stepping out from within the fortress of positivism. This is how Karen Barad posed the stakes two decades ago: “How reality is understood matters. There are risks entailed in putting forward an ontology: making metaphysical assumptions explicit exposes the exclusions upon which any given conception of reality is based. Yet, the political potential of this kind of analysis lies not in the simple recognition of the inevitability of exclusions, but in insisting upon accountability for the particular exclusions that are enacted and in taking up the responsibility to perpetually contest and rework the boundaries.”

In Kane’s book he talks about the professional courage it would have taken to present the findings on negotiated safety I talked about earlier. There were risks then, and there are risks now, but asking these questions, perpetually contesting and reworking the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, constituting better problems and taking responsibility for the realities enacted in research are really all central to social research today, not only in terms of its accountability, but also in its potential to serve humans and others on our troubled, but infinitely precious, planet. Thank you. [Applause]

## 38:15 – Thanks by Helen Keane

**Helen Keane:** Thanks so much, Suzanne, for a wonderful oration, and I think really highlighting the responsibility that we have to the complexity of the world, and reminding us of the political questions which animate our work, and also, I think really importantly, highlighting the collective nature of knowledge production – as I say, when I look at this room, that's what really comes home to me. So, I think now it is time for us to have a short break, and enjoy a beverage and a little snack, and then we'll return and hear from our three panellists, Carla, Kane and Gary. Thanks. [Applause]

## 39:02 – Introduction of Gary Dowsett by Helen Keane

**Helen Keane:** OK, I've been told to get the show back on the road again, so I'm going to do that. So, now we have our three wonderful panellists, who are going to respond to Suzanne's talk. And it's really wonderfully fitting that our first respondent is Professor Gary Dowsett, because without Gary there is no ARCSHS, I think it's fair to say.

Gary is Emeritus Professor at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, and he's a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. From 1997 to 2019, he was the Deputy Director of ARCSHS. He's a sociologist, who has a long history in sexuality research – not that long, sorry [laughter] – particularly in relation to the rise of modern gay communities. And since the 1980s, he's been researching the HIV epidemic, especially in Australia's gay communities. And he's worked on a lot of international HIV/AIDS and sexual health projects – again, over decades. In 2003, Gary was elected to the International Academy of Sex Research, and then in 2006 he was appointed to a personal chair in Sex Health and Society at La Trobe University. He's also Adjunct Professorial Fellow at the Centre for Social Research and Health at UNSW. Thank you, Gary. [Applause]

## 40:40 – Response by Gary Dowsett

**Gary Dowsett:** Thank you. Many thanks, Suzanne, for inviting me to be part of this panel, responding to your oration and offering some comments to foster discussion this evening, as we celebrate your appointment as the new ARCSHS Director. Many thanks also for your stimulating address, which not only offers us some challenges in thinking the way ahead for all concerned with this great research centre, but which also tells us something about you and the way you think. Forewarned is forearmed. [Laughter]

I was interested to listen to your account of negotiated safety. As one of the co-authors of the original 1993 paper – we were then based at Macquarie University – I well remember the controversy the term generated globally, and the fury of our US colleagues, who editorialised in the pages of the Journal AIDS that we were promoting 'negotiated risk'. Our British colleagues were a tad more supportive, but somewhat miffed that we'd beaten them to the punch.

Negotiated safety was not just a new coding of the world waiting to be read, to paraphrase your quote from Haraway – even if it was prompted by observable patterns of practice, revealed in responses by gay men to two surveys, conducted in 1987 and 1991. It was also a deliberate recoding of those patterns into a disarmingly coherent and novel term. As you noted, the term described agreements on sex practices and sexual relations between HIV-negative seroconcordant gay men in primary or regular relationships. Of course, most of the gay men whose answers to the many survey items comprising the data that led to negotiated safety as a concept would never themselves describe their decisions or actions as “agreements on sex practices and sexual relations between HIV-negative seroconcordant gay men in primary or regular relationships”. [Laughter] Try putting that on Grindr. [Laughter] That too was a recoding by the research team.

The fact of negotiated safety is, as you noted, not fact at all, but an assemblage emerging from the entanglements of material bodies in sex, the recent rise of gay men as a recognisable social category, and the consequent discursive repositioning of sex between men as a collective refusal of abjection – and also the immediacy of the viral epidemic at the time, the research technologies utilised, the politics of second-wave feminism and queer theory, and I could add more, were I to cast the net even wider. It was a complex moment. You had to be there. But there was one more element I want to explore a little, and that is the specific research team behind the coining of the term. Between six and eight researchers were involved in the core teams that conducted those two studies, and there were nearly thirty research assistants, too – mostly gay men. The core teams comprised three feminist psychologists, all heterosexual women; three left-wing sociologists, one a heterosexual trans woman, and the other a heterosexual [cis] woman. And three gay men, who were academics, too – one a university librarian, one a politics lecturer, and one a pre-doctoral would-be sociologist – who were also founding members and at times office holders of the AIDS Council of NSW, and long-time gay liberation activists dating back to the early 1970s. There is a lot to those two studies that derived from the interests and abilities of those team members, not least being the intimate knowledge of gay sex, and emerging gay sexual cultures, contributed by the three gay men. Those gay men were not just academically interested in gay sex and those sexual cultures – we were actively making them happen in practice. Too much information maybe. [Laughter]

I raise this research team's contributions to add to Suzanne's challenge on how we understand what we do as researchers, and as intellectual workers, engaging with all that is materially agentive, in the phenomena we research. We work in a vocation, but also an industry, which prizes discovery, and is not well-positioned to have its way of understanding knowledge and research challenged. I'm not sure that we are all that keen ourselves, because there is something that we like about the idea of discovery. How do we proceed with, quote, "a humility about facts, and an awareness of a reliance on practices of knowing" – end quote, to paraphrase Suzanne? Well, I wonder if one task we face today is repositioning the specific researchers and the specificities of research centres. For example, the other major HIV research teams in the UK and the USA all had academic and activist gay men involved, at the time that negotiated safety was published. But they didn't discover it. That says something about the Australian research team, because the practices of negotiated safety were certainly occurring in those countries at the time. What are we to do with this idea? Well, I think it asks us to think about the human in the production of knowledge – for there is a humanist that remains in me, courtesy of the great sociologists who are central to my discipline, particularly those whose work on gender and sexuality have changed the way we think. I'll name just one tonight, Ken Plummer, whose symbolic interactionist account in rethinking sexuality was never afraid to claim something for the human. He could never be simply classified with, quote, "humanists and others committed to the world as a resource," end quote, to paraphrase Haraway again. I'm also encouraged to reposition the human, at least somewhat towards the centre again, by thinking about novelists first. I have been following the great excitement attending the sequel to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale.* We could reframe the original and the sequel in a complex of resources and enticements; discourses in historical antecedents; practices and cultural specificities; communication technologies and so on. That would be perfectly adequate. But where, and how, do we account for Margaret Atwood herself?

On Tuesday, I saw the film *Joker* – while the rest of you were working at ARCSHS, by the way [laughter]. Many of us would know the character from Batman comics in the 1960s TV show, with Cesar Romero originating the role. Well, those of us old enough to remember. And the posthumous Oscar awarded to the late Heath Ledger for his portrayal. Nothing prepared me for Joaquin Phoenix's performance. Film, even more than novels, is so clearly an assemblage of its arts and sciences – its actors, directors, designers, its technologies, and the history of performance, and to film itself. But that doesn't explain Joaquin Phoenix, just as it doesn't explain Margaret Atwood. On Monday night, as I listened on the wireless to the great cellist Yo Yo Ma, perform from memory all six Bach cello concertos, live from the Sydney Opera House, Bach loomed large, 269 years after his death – but Yo Yo Ma's embodied manifestation was materially central. I wish I was here to hear him perform at the Coming Back Out Ball this weekend, here in Melbourne. And as we celebrate the end to climbing Uluru, I note that the rock itself expressed no opinion. Its complex significance for the Mutitjulu people is what ultimately won the day.

So it's a simple point, really; as we rise to the challenge Suzanne posed for us in relation to, quote, “The responsibility of researchers, in how to decide how we should constitute 'problems', and which 'problems' we should constitute,” end quote, I want to position the researchers centrally – not just as a social category, or one agent in the entanglement, but as real people, whose lives, subjectivities, experiences, strengths, weaknesses and consciousnesses is centrally in the mix. This idea is not new; the long-standing discussions in the sociology of knowledge on reflexivity have been exploring a version of these issues for nearly ninety years. This is of particular concern to research centres such as ARCSHS, whose foundational commitment to community-engaged and embedded research has produced some unique achievements. To me, it's the people who constitute ARCSHS who make its contribution unique – just as that Macquarie University team changed the way the world thought about HIV in the early 1990s, and Suzanne, Carla and their colleagues significantly reframed the relations and practices of injecting drug use through the Fitpack project. As ARCSHS enters its 28th year, revisiting the critical engagement we researchers have with the worlds we research will be central to meeting Suzanne's challenge of a conscious and renewed consideration of what this group of researchers, and this research centre, does. But hey, I've retired, so – good luck with that. [Laughter] [Applause]

## 50:16 – Introduction of Carla Treloar by Helen Keane

**Helen Keane:** Thank you, thank you so much Gary, for a wonderful response, and I think a very thoughtful account of a kind of negotiated humanism, which I think is very useful to put into the mix. And also, first mention of the Joker, so I'm now optimistic that we'll have MCU mentioned at some stage [laughter], and maybe even Martin Scorsese. But that's a bit of a tangent.

So, my job now is to introduce our next panellist, and it's a great pleasure to introduce Carla Treloar. Carla is a Scientia Professor at UNSW, and she is the director of two centres – one is too easy for Carla [laughter] – so she's the Director of the Centre for Social Research and Health, and also the Social Policy Research Centre at UNSW. Her work crosses a number of disciplines – health psychology, sociology, public health and health services research – and the fields that she's worked on – drug use, hepatitis C, experiences of incarceration and Aboriginal health. And everyone, I think, in this room will be aware of Carla's phenomenal publishing record, and her record in getting grants and producing amazing work, but here I just wanted to highlight that she's been a member of more 50 advisory committees for government health agencies and non-government organisations, and I think this really speaks to Carla's commitment to the translation of research into policy and practice, and to ethical and respectful conduct of research in close collaboration with affected communities. So, please welcome Carla. [Applause]

## 52:01 – Response by Carla Treloar

**Carla Treloar:** Thanks so much, and thanks Suzanne and the ARCSHS team for the opportunity to be here, and facilitating everything so nicely for all of us today. Suzanne and I have worked together since 2002, and man, it's been a trip [laughter] and what I've so enjoyed about working with Suzanne – and hope to do that in the future – is that absolute sharpness and integrity that she brings to everything. And you know, I'm a bit of a happy puppy – you know, [whispers excitedly] "Oh, that sounds good, let's do that!" and Suzanne is so good at establishing what we know, how we know it, and where we can press the boundaries of those to move into really exciting, innovative, and take scholarship and application forward. It's so exciting to work with you, and I just can't wait to see what happens with ARCSHS with you at the helm. And you and I both walk in the footsteps of very hallowed feet – I think I've mucked that up [laughter] – but we do have a lot of legacy to acknowledge and work with and take forward in our own way, so congratulations on the appointment and look forward to all that comes next.

So, firstly – an undergraduate in the 1990s [Carla laughs] [laughter] ...that's hopeful. [Laughter] I feel a bit old. But one of the challenges that Suzanne put out in her oration was deep partnerships with affected communities, and my gosh, I've so enjoyed that part of my work, and I wanted to credit, just 'cos he's here, Sione Crawford, in the audience, and how much I've learned from working with Sione – again, over many years. And there's a great story, which is a bit too long to talk about, the word 'earn', that Sione pulled me out of a dark hole, I was thinking 'earn' meant something completely different, like a coffee urn, in this focus group that we were running together, and afterwards he had to chat me and say, "That's not what was being talked about." So, the power of the linguistic turn, of just even one word, is so important.

And the way that language can be so powerful in conceptualising what we understand – in my introduction, the work around Aboriginal health was mentioned, and I've worked – again, for about twelve years – with Auntie Claire Jackson. She can't call herself an elder, because she was – her father, who was Aboriginal, and her mother was European, but the father removed them from South-East Queensland for fear of the Queensland Protection Board, and so she grew up in King's Cross, and she graduated from Sydney University with an Honours degree in sociology before she was counted as a citizen.

And in working with Claire for twelve years or so, it's been such a journey, again, to learn, and to have that trusted relationship with people who take you into their confidence. We were writing, you know, some kind of commentary on colonisation as a big event in the history of contemporary alcohol and other drug use among Aboriginal people in contemporary societies, and I'd written something, and Claire corrects my grammar, but also, just gives this sparkle of insight. So I'd written something like, "The majority culture blah blah blah," and she said, "No, no, it'd be the *now* majority culture." And I was like, "Oh. My god. That is so clever." And these moments of inspiration where you take on and you absorb and you co-create this knowledge is so important.

A couple of other examples, you know, I've started working in the last few years around prisons and drug use, and there was a great comment made – again, at a community forum – where someone was moaning about the lack of needle and syringe programs in prison, and someone from the community sector said "Well, actually there is a prison needle and syringe program – it's run by the prisoners." Like, oh my god! Again, so powerful. To really bring and highlight these different notions of what constitutes our world, and what our responsibilities are to use different language, to use different methodologies to understand and communicate that.

There's one moment that comes from the fortress of positivism that I've been able to use quite effectively, and you know, in hepatitis C we're all about elimination, and again in the prisons thing, oh, you know, there's a school of thought that treatment will deal with elimination in prisons, we don't actually need prevention, just treatment will take care of it all – and going back to read what is actually written about the epidemiological definitions of elimination is so powerful to throw back at those – at various audiences. The epidemiological definition of elimination means that you cannot do that without prevention services. So, just to be able to cut that conversation off and say, you know, the classic texts tell us we cannot do elimination without prevention. Don't need to discuss it any further. How are we going to do prevention to support our elimination goals.

So, moving into the prison world has been such a new moment for me, that cut, that Suzanne talked about I think, and understanding realities I tried to bring in from my work int he community sector into prison blew up in spectacular but very productive ways. And one of my papers – which I love so much, I just can't understand why it's not more highly cited [laughter] – is about the economies of needles and syringes in prison.

So, you know, that notion of the work we did on the Fitpack that a needle and its container is not a neutral object, it carries meaning – for people who use it, and for people who dispense it, and for people who have to dispose of these things, it carries meaning. And in the prison system, there's huge meaning attached to a needle and syringe, because they are such rare things to come by. And you know, again, using words that Suzanne had in her oration, walking into this field I had to work hard to dismantle myself from understanding the needle and syringe as colonised by a risk framework – that people would decide how to use this needle and syringe depending on their understanding of risk.

We know in prisons that many people can use the same piece of equipment, because they are so rare. But my wonderful paper that hasn't been cited enough [laughter] we were doing these interviews, and the interviewer was a research nurse who'd worked in prison on a cohort study for ten years – so, had known these men and women, some of them for that whole ten year period through continuous sentences, or people who'd come in and out of the New South Wales prison system. He had great conversations with them, and we started to get really interested in this monetary value attached to a needle and syringe.

There were two ways in which you could use it: you could hire it, or you could buy it... or sell it, or be the hiree – the person who hires out the needle and syringe. And so people started to talk about these numbers. I'm teasing it out for you, you know, to tell you how much it actually cost – but people started to tell us these numbers, these cash amounts that people would hire a needle and syringe for, or purchase it. And we didn't quite believe it at first, so I asked Luke, the interviewer, “Can you keep pressing on this?” and he did it, and we did interviews with people from all over New South Wales prisons. Thirty different prisons. And kept coming back – “Yes, of course, it's an economy, it's based on supply and demand,” and so prices do range, depending on supply and demand. And when you hire a syringe, the general going rate is $50\. When you purchase a syringe, it can range – depending on the level of security of prison, all that kind of stuff – from $50 to $350\. So the meaning, the freight of that needle and syringe – yes, it's about risk, yes it's about access to use of drugs, which people want – but it's also about looking after all the things that go to structure that economy, both inside and outside the prison, and the movement of currency in various forms through those different parts of the economy. So, you know, we come at it from a public health view, perhaps, we know that people care about their health and that they want to use clean equipment in the prison when access to sterile equipment is really so hard, they want to do that, but they also want to look after their wellbeing in bigger ways, which means looking after the investment they've made in this bit of equipment. It isn't a neutral object, by any means.

I just wanted to finish on one more point, which was about how we constitute our realities of what we know, and in the HIV world that's bled into the hepatitis C world a bit, is this maxim of 'Know your epidemic,' and you know, that's really useful, because we know that strategies that worked here might not work over there, so you really need to know what you're doing. But that question Suzanne posed to us is, 'How do we know? What are the methodologies that we're using to know, and how do they themselves construct the knowledge' – is really useful. And at the beginning of... this century? [Laughter] God. [Laughter] I was working in London at Imperial College with Tim Rhodes and Jerry Stimson and I wasn't doing anything on drugs, but they were doing heaps, and it was just as they were doing all these rapid assessments of the emerging Eastern European countries and HIV epidemics amongst people who use drugs in those countries, and they were flying in and out of London to these exotic locations, it was all very glamorous, and this RAR – this rapid assessment and response, I think the second R is for – became its own way of knowing the epidemic, which was challenging the hegemony of what's an epidemiological surveillance – or even a 'bio-surveillance' – understanding of HIV, was bring new methods into the mix. And was interesting to see how that kind of got consolidated itself, as a way to do things, it was modularised, it was sent out to people and translated into different languages, and I think working very closely with Tim, who's also an appointment at our Centre, he's started to dismantle that way of knowing itself and understanding really deal– dea– de– um – ugh, there's that red wine, just hit me, but – [laughter] digging deep into critiquing the notion of what is an intervention, and what is the field into which it's placed, and it's really – just having observed this on the outside, it's amazing to watch this track of ways in which we understand the world play out itself through close contact with colleagues. So, I'm going to leave it there, thanks very much for your time and thanks again, and congratulations Suzanne. [Applause]

## 1:03:39 – Introduction of Kane Race by Helen Keane

**Helen Keane:** Thank you, Carla, for some lovely stories and for reminding us about the enabling relationships that allow us to do the work that we do, and also the different systems of value that we intervene in in our work. So now, it's my great pleasure to introduce our final respondent, Kane Race. Kane is Professor of Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney. His work has explored embodied engagements with medicine across various different contexts and cultures of consumption, including HIV, sexual practice, drugs (both licit and illicit), digital cultures and bottled water markets. Kane is the author of *Pleasure Consuming Medicine: The Queer Politics of Drugs*, and this is – a beautiful pink book [Kane laughs] and it's beautiful inside and out, and I have to say, I deeply love this book, and I think there are people in this room who do as well. He's also the author of *Plastic Water* with Gay Hawkins and Emily Potter, published by MIT Press, and last year he published *The Gay Science: Intimate Experiments with the Problem of HIV*, and that was in Routledge. So, thank you very much, Kane. [Applause]

## 1:05:02 – Response by Kane Race

**Kane Race:** Thanks very much, Helen, and thanks for having me. So, let me begin just by congratulating Suzanne on her appointment to the directorship of ARCSHS. I think it's a really exciting appointment and an inspiring development for research on sex, health and society in Australia.

I first met Suzanne almost twenty years ago when sh... heh. [laughter] Now I'm wearing glasses! [Laughter] ...when she took up a role at what was then the National Centre in HIV Social Research at UNSW. And, in the years that have followed, I've been filled with admiration at the leading role she has played, building the field of critical drug studies, both in Australia and internationally, and she's done this through her own influential research, which has chartered a path for empirical health researchers, from conventional social constructionism to science-studies-oriented approaches, based on the idea of ontological politics, and the insights of new materialism – and many of those ideas she's been discussing today, of course.

But she's also done this through her field-building work – leading, for example, the Social Studies of Addiction program, as well as the key role she has taken on for the journal – and the international conference – Contemporary Drug Problems. The Contemporary Drug Problems conference is, in my experience, one of those rare spaces, cultivated by Suzanne and David Moore, of academic community that is crucial for sustaining innovative thought and practice. It's a gathering of researchers whose work is at once empirically engaged and dedicated to experimenting with concepts and approaches that seek, not simply to address and solve, but also to reframe, contemporary drug problems. And I've always thought – it's such a great title, because it sort of undoes itself, in certain ways. That is to say, contemporary drug problems are staged, not simply as self-evident and given, but as shared matters of concern that are open to redefinition, reposing and reframing through multiple forms of engagement and experimentation. So, there is really a politics of knowledge in play, and those who gather together at this conference know very well that how a problem is framed matters, and makes a difference. That is to say, they share the view that researchers and others seeking to address social problems should not simply accept the definition of problems produced by what Paola Moratti calls 'the administrative archives of the state' – they should consider how problems come to be constituted, and the effects of these problematizations.

So, like Gary, I want to base my remarks today on the example that Suzanne has raised and discussed, of the construction of negotiated safety. This was something that took place some years before I joined the National Centre in HIV Social Research, so really, this is just wild speculation rather than the sort of embodied lived experience that Gary's given us such great insights into. But this moment was really undoubtedly part of my academic formation, part of the local research legacy that I inherited, and it's something that I've kept returning to – even though it happened over 20 years ago, and I wasn't even there. [Kane laughs] [laughter] But it's certainly informed the research proposal that I developed with Susan Kippax and went on to work with – work on, sorry – with Marcia Rosengarten, on gay men's understandings of clinical markers in sexual practice, in the new context of – in 1997 – anti-retroviral therapy, and viral load testing. So, we're very much informed by the model of negotiated safety, because if gay men had used HIV diagnostic tests to devise and negotiate new practices of safety, what were they doing with these new instruments of viral suppression?

Now, the reason I want to return to the construction of negotiated safety – yet again [laughter] – is to draw out a certain feature of the constitution of problems, that I think tends to be lost in some less ontological critical approaches to problematization. I want to consider it as a particular example of how problems can be reconstituted, and the role research can play in the rearrangement of problems and practices of government.

In critical social science, problematization is increasingly taken to refer to a method of analysis following Foucault – a procedure to be followed by researchers. The task of analysis on this view is to call into question taken-for-granted assumptions and interpretations of material circumstances, to expose the contingency of the apparently stable and taken-for-granted definitions of problems found – for example, in policy practices. Now, there is of course much to be said about the value of asking what's the problem represented to be, in existing governmental discourses and practices, to insist that problem definitions are an effect of historical processes, social practices and political strategies. But I also think this procedure tends to limit the researcher's role, in some incarnations, to debunking the appearance of ontological fixity in given policy formations and practices, and I actually think that negotiated safety did something more than – or in addition to – this. In particular, I think it took the risk of positioning those who would ordinarily be treated as the objects of government, and the passive recipients of governmental solutions, as active players in the experimental process of problematization. It accepted, in other words, that preventing transmission of the virus was a matter of concern for them, but that they were capable of devising responses to the situation that had yet to be recognised.

So, another of the really radical things about this response, to my mind, was the implication that gay men still cared about an experience that had been officially ruled out for them, in the interests of their own survival and public health – the simple experience of anal sex without a condom. In place of this consecrated object – the condom – some of them were experimenting with other objects, technologies and relationship formations to make this experience safe in certain contexts. One of the important dimensions of this development – this invention of negotiated safety, in other words – was that it gathered together cares and concerns that were hitherto presumed to be at odds with each other. To use the terminology of Latour, it staged matters of fact as matters of concern, and care, and insisted on a plurality of possible responses. So, this was not simply a matter of researchers inventing, or making, or framing a problem – though choices were certainly made about whose practices to acknowledge as legitimate, and whose concerns to take into account. It was a matter, rather, of expanding the process of problematization to incorporate the inventive experiments of those who were affected by the situation, but not necessarily inclined to be involved in formal processes of policy-making.

Problems are commonly regarded as an obstacle to be overcome, or, in critical social science more recently, a representation or configuration to be exposed, but they can also be approached as creative responses to situations of uncertainty, as that which sets thinking, knowing and feeling in motion.

So, one of the frustrations I have with problematization as a method within critical social science, and one of the things I like about the way Suzanne talks about problematization, is that one of the problems I have with the framing – the normal framing in critical social science – is that it confines its scope of engagement to formal policy documents. And I think Suzanne gives us a much more expansive sort of approach to the constitution of problems, because the reason I still find negotiated safety provocative – and interesting, and relevant, in the age of PrEP and HA SP, as an example of articulation – is because it takes the risk of constituting members of affected communities as experimental actors; of opening up the problem to those directly implicated in it.

The question of how to constitute problems can, in this sense, be regarded as a question of articulation; of whose concerns and responses are taken into account, and how. This is, I think, especially important when it comes to the minoritised subjects of sexuality, gender and drug research, whose practices, passions and perspectives are prone to be written off as invalid, or capricious, or irrational, or unfounded, and who are most likely to feel alienated from services on this basis.

In her work on modern science, Isabelle Stengers has asked, 'What makes these human beings, these producers of the knowledge we call "experimental,' become active?' In other words, what is the uniqueness of the adventure in which they have become engaged; what matters to them; what does success mean to them? It seems to me that qualitative research, for example, which involves the really painstaking work of interviewing scores of people about their situations, understandings and practices, might usefully be conceived as one of a number of opportunities – and I think Carla has given us insight into several more sorts of opportunities – to explore and re-present what matters to our participants, as part of an ongoing process of re-assembling or re-configuring problems. Now, this process is never perfect or complete; it is always partial, and necessarily haunted by those concerns and situations it has yet to register. But, to me, the example of negotiated safety is an interesting one, because it pushes back a little against the idea that researchers have this sort of unfettered ability to pick and choose between problems, or devise problems in terms that suit them, or suit society. Research does have a role in constituting problems, to be sure, but today I've tried to argue that constituting should be understood in a kind of – constitutional [laughs] sense, as a process of assembly, as a matter of gathering together the relevant parties and becoming sensitive to their concerns, to expand how the problem is developed, and who or what it becomes relevant for.

As Martin Savransky has argued, “Problems are real, but they are not for that reason finished, complete or closed; events happen whether we want them to or not. Events pose problems, but they never determine how those who are faced with the problems they pose will come to develop them. While the problem demands solutions,” he argues, “these must be produced by the collective practices of those who partake in the task of determining its sense.” Constituting problems may, therefore, be about an art of gathering – of devising new forms or modes of togetherness – and I think that Suzanne, with her really impressive history of collaboration and institution-building, not only within academia but beyond it, is really extremely well-placed to foster such collectivities. [Applause]

## 1:17:14 – Panel Q&A

**Helen Keane:** Thank you, Kane. And I think that reminder, that problematization is an experimental process rather than just this endless exhaustion of critical analysis is a really productive way to end this part of the proceedings. So now, I think we have about ten minutes for questions, and I invite Suzanne to rejoin us up here – and I'll change my glasses – so – questions, comments?

**[background, quietly, unclear]:** Might have to kick it off?

**Helen Keane:** I might have to kick it off! [laughter] I have a question here, which was about asking the panelists to reflect a bit more on Suzanne's idea that – thinking about what kinds of worlds we want to research into being? You know, if our research does in fact create the world rather than just discover or describe them, what kinds of worlds do you envisage as wanting to bring into being? Just an easy question. [laughter]

**Gary Dowsett:** Shall I start? Shall we just go down this way?

**Carla Treloar:** Sure. Thinking time for the rest of us.

**Gary Dowsett:** I want to frame the question in relation to political and social purpose, because I think if we take the mission of La Trobe University seriously – that's its recommitment to questions of social justice, that's been re-articulated from the original founding principles of this university, lost for a long time and now re-articulated by the current administrative team that runs the university – then I think that makes a big difference to why we're trying to constitute a problem, and why a researcher might want to constitute a problem, to think about, and in the end that's related to social justice – and that's a code word for many other things, such as equality, empowerment, all the other words we can think of that just fit into that term. And that, to me, raises for ARCSHS a particular kind of problem, because when the Centre, a few years ago, kind of acknowledged its much longer history as a place of significant contribution to the circumstances and wellbeing of LGBTIQ communities in this country – work we'd done for a long time, but never positioned in the strategic plan, as named, as a focus in some way – it raises the question of our articulation to what is LGBTI community, or communities, and how – if we are researchers, constituting problems and recognising the power that constituting a problem offers us, how do we then examine critically that relationship to the people we will participate with in constructing a research project, as distinct from seeing them as an object who will be researched – which has never been the ARCSHS model. But it does suggest that a critical relationship requires precisely an answer to the challenge that Suzanne's paper registered – this research community, this community of practice that is ARCSHS can't simply just reflect what is the current fact of LGBTI communities, because that current fact itself is not a fact. It involves some kind of participation and critical relation to that community – in much the same way I tried to talk about the role of the three gay men in contributing something to negotiated safety all those years ago, I think that's the major challenge on the way forward for this centre, and for this team of researchers, and for other researchers around the country at the moment. Because what is currently that community or communities is not itself a fact, but a compilation of contested ideas and circumstances, and that itself needs to be critically addressed if we are going to do anything useful in terms of officiative social justice in our work.

[clunking noises]

**[Speaker unclear]** Ooh!

[Laughter]

[Loud microphone click]

**[Speaker unclear]** Destroying the joint.

[Laughter]

**Gary Dowsett:** Sorry about that!

[Laughter]

**Helen Keane:** So, Carla!

**Carla Treloar:** Thank you! I think it's...

**Helen Keane:** Is it... Has Gary broken it? [Laughter]

**Gary Dowsett:** It's an assemblage of technology, and me... and all... sorry about that.

**Carla Treloar:** Great. Not sure if that's still going, but... I mean, I want to get a bit angry about the research we do, and the world we're creating from it – or where we miss opportunities, and New South Wales just said this week that they're going to pass, through both houses of Parliament, a law that will require mandatory blood-borne virus testing for people who assault first responders. No evidence for this. Nothing. And the amount of stigma this will drive in various ways is just... disgusting. I'm not sure how to do it, but this is not something our sector faces alone – you think about the trolling of the climate science – you know, that's kind of hard stuff, let alone the soft stuff that we do – how dare people... I don't know where I'm going with this [laughter] but you know, how dare people, I just want to be angry about it, and say, there's been such huge investments in the work of researchers around the world, and so much of it is disregarded, or indeed insulted, by this blood-borne virus mandatory testing policy in New South Wales. Like, where do we – it's a long-contested position, of where does research stop and advocacy start, and you know, do you lose something by becoming an advocate when you can't – when you take those kind of positions. But perhaps the time has come, when we reignite those passions, and say, 'This is enough. You have wasted our time, our resources, and our lives, we need to get the job done in different ways.' [Applause].

**Helen Keane:** Okay! What sort of world do you want to bring into being?

**Kane Race:** Well, I actually think that this power of methods or researchers to bring worlds into being is really overstated.

**[Speaker unclear]:** Mmmkay.

[Laughter]

**Kane Race:** Uh... heh. I do think that methods participate in the making of the world, but you know, when you read people like Yuri and Law talking about the performativity of methods and methods producing realities, it seems to me to be a bit... you know... it sort of puts research out of the head of... [laughs]**Helen Keane:** You think it's stealth humanism?**Kane Race:** In a way. I mean – I think that it's... I think that it doesn't pay attention to the fact that research is one way of exploring and intervening in a world that actually exceeds research, that there are lots of other things going on in it. And this is borne out, you know, with HIV research, for example, where you know, you might bring certain realities into being, like negotiated safety, but that isn't the end of the problem – and in fact creates a whole bunch of new problems, like, you know, are people going to start discriminating against other people on the basis of their HIV status, what do we do about that. So I'm really much more in favour of an idea that research certainly makes a performative intervention into the world, but that doesn't create a whole reality – it participates in the making of realities that exceed research, and therefore, we have a sort of constant responsibility to be vigilant on how things play out. **Helen Keane:** Yeah. Thanks for that. Suzanne, do you want to continue?**Suzanne Fraser:** I think I've said a fair bit about the kind of worlds that I'm interested in creating. I guess, probably the most central thing that comes to mind is some kind of guiding insight – like the indispensability and value of difference – that would be the kind of fundamental idea that I think would be a productive way forward, that is not too specific to be relevant to different contexts, but has some kind of substance to it – because I think it's difficult to balance those things. So that's what I would say, I think difference is a huge resource, as much as it is the terrible bane of our existence at the same time, depending on the kinds of difference we're talking about – I'd like to think Donald Trump is very different from me, but [laughs] and that's the kind of unhelpful difference. But there are other differences that we absolutely need, you know, in order to create any kind of progress. I think Kane is right about having to be careful about the ways in which we think about the constitutive power of research, and I guess, in a way, I think some of the theory that informs this discussion now, comes on the tails of some practice-based recognition of the responsibility of researchers for constituting different accounts of the world that have performative effect. And so, in our world, in our research context, certain ideas are quite familiar to us, about the need for responsibility, the performative power of different research, methods, different research pronunciations, pronouncements, and I think the context for a lot of that theorisation, the kind of way of talking about it, is another quite dominant model of thinking about research, which is, 'We shall find the facts, and let the chips fall where they may,' you know, that kind of approach to research that doesn't foreground the responsibility of researchers in what they ask about why they're asking those questions, what will they do with the findings once they've asked them, and you know, do they understand themselves, and why they're conducting the research that they're conducting. So it's kind of, I think, probably animated by concern about research that mightn't actually be as close to the kind of research that we do, as to other perhaps less intrinsically responsible research, so I think that's kind of where it's coming from, myself.

**Helen Keane:** OK, thanks, those were excellent responses, it's not like I'm interviewing for a job or anything [laughter] but it just felt a little bit like that when I asked you all to... [laughter]

**Carla Treloar:** And who do you think did best? [laughter]

**Helen Keane:** They were all marvellous, and so now I think I only have three very nice jobs to do – one is to thank our eminent, and gorgeous, and eminently gorgeous panellists, and Suzanne Fraser, the new director of ARCSHS, so please join me in thanking them. [Applause] And I'd also like to thank the team involved in putting this event together, I know there's many people who've been involved, I know Steven played a key role, and other people too, Emily Lenton got me here, anyway – so thank you everyone who helped put this event together. And finally, thank you for your attention this evening, and please join us for another round of drinks and further conversation. Thank you. [Applause]