

LOCAL GLOBAL

Identity, Security, Community

Volume Seven, 2010



ReGenerating Community

Art, community and governance

LOCAL GLOBAL

Identity, Security, Community

Local-Global is a collaborative international journal concerned with the resilience and difficulties of contemporary social life. It draws together groups of researchers and practitioners located in different communities across the world to critically address issues concerning the relationship between the global and the local.

It emphasises the following social themes and overarching issues that inform daily life over time and space:

Authority-Participation

Belonging-Mobility

Equality-Wealth Distribution

Freedom-Obligation

Identity-Difference

Inclusion-Exclusion

Local Knowledges-Expert Systems

Mediation-Disconnectedness

Past-Present

Power-Subjection

Security-Risk

Wellbeing-Adversity

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Spirit Birds on Big Rock, M2M Journey's end (image: Andrea Rotondella)

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Excellence in civic engagement

Kathy Keele
 CEO, Australia Council for the Arts

I am pleased to present the foreword of this special edition of *Local- Global*. The articles in this volume evolved from the ReGenerating Community Conference held in Melbourne in September 2009. This conference featured presentations from the landmark Generations project, a three-year initiative supported by the Australia Council for the Arts that involved five councils from three Australian states. Martin Mulligan and Pia Smith's article presents findings from their research on this complex and far-reaching project. The other articles, keynote presentations, research papers and articles from practitioners are developed from presentations at the conference on topics relevant to local government and the empowering of local communities in and through the arts.

A key question at the ReGenerating Community Conference, and one which local governments and the Australia Council are working to answer, was: how can community relationships be built across the divide of those who govern and those who are governed?

Throughout Australia's history local governments have played a vital role in supporting Australia's arts and cultural infrastructure. From the local library to the neighbourhood centre, to galleries and performing arts venues, local governments are those best placed to understand the needs of their communities. They know best the types of cultural assets and programs needed to develop and express that community's cultural and artistic life.

The Australia Council has a long and rewarding history of working with local governments. Since the early seventies we have been funding cultural development officer positions in councils across the country. In the 1980s we took the different approach of funding policy and projects through the Australian Local Government Association and other federal agencies. Both approaches brought degrees of success. It's hard nowadays to find a local government which doesn't at least talk about the need to develop local arts and culture.

In 2006 a scoping study for the Australia Council's new Community Partnership section identified the need for our council to work more closely with local governments if we were to achieve our aim of building culturally vibrant communities.

As a result, Community Partnerships is now highly-attuned to the opportunities of working partnerships with state, territory and local governments. This truly is 'co-operative federalism'. It is all three spheres of government pooling its limited resources to support excellence in the arts, to strengthen culturally vibrant communities and to allow more people to explore the intrinsic benefits of being involved in cultural activities.

In the three-and-a-half years I have been at the Australia Council I have witnessed the growing commitment with which the organisation has embraced the role arts and culture play in community wellbeing.

It is a myth to suggest that this commitment is incompatible with council's other commitment: to support excellent art. Artistic excellence can be delivered by artists working with communities as well, and there are countless examples.

What's more, artistic excellence can be actually enriched by facilitating this community process of art-making. The exciting thing about community partnerships is that it can open our eyes to new notions of excellence. They can create new Australian narratives around individual and community relations.

The Australia Council's engagement with civic wellbeing, and the use of art-making to achieve it, is built on research which in turn shapes our strategic priorities.

The five local councils involved in this conference identified key issues that continue to challenge the governed and the governing. How can we increase a sense of belonging for Australia's ageing population? How can we engage marginalised and culturally diverse youth, or empower Indigenous communities? How can we give regional Australians the opportunity to participate more fully in the arts? How, for example, in a polarised community, can we create a space for debate about climate change or identity?

As one of the conference's keynote speakers, Anmol Vellani, writes, 'The arts make it possible to stimulate development from within cultural contexts, and integrate processes of development with processes of cultural change'.

The arts do provide communities with the tools to challenge established values, beliefs and perceptions. It is the place where authority and its established meanings are often contested, the place where a culture is tested, stretched and reworked.

The arts are a means of animating democracy to get everyone participating in our national life.

The editors are pleased to present this special edition of the *Local-Global* journal developed out of presentations made at the ReGenerating Community Conference in Melbourne in September 2009. This volume has been a year in gestation, being published almost exactly on the anniversary of the conference.

The ReGenerating Community: Arts, Community and Governance National Conference, jointly organised by the Cultural Development Network and RMIT University, attracted more than 400 participants and featured almost 80 talks, presentations and workshops. A major aim of the conference was to reflect on the outcomes of the national, three-year Generations Project which was funded by the Australia Council for the Arts and arts funding bodies in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. This project aimed to explore the ways in which carefully planned and implemented community art projects could strengthen local government in Australia. Presentations were made at the conference on behalf of parallel projects that occurred in Geelong, the Latrobe Valley, Wangaratta (all in Victoria), Liverpool (Sydney), and the Charters Towers region in northern Queensland. This volume includes a report by Martin Mulligan and Pia Smith on key findings of the research on the Generations Project (pp. 34–41). Those findings are presented in much more detail in a 134-page research report, titled *Art, governance and the turn to community*, available from the website of the Globalism Research Centre at RMIT (www.rmit.edu.au/globalism/publications/reports).

The conference featured a wide range of keynote presentations, research presentations, artistic performances and exhibitions, and workshops which combined to present a kind of overview of the ‘state of play’ for the community art/community cultural development field of practice in Australia.

Many of the presentations were made available from the Cultural Development Network’s website soon after the conference. However, this special edition of the *Local-Global* journal is intended to create a more enduring legacy. The editors worked with authors presented here to shape oral presentations into essays and also research papers that meet the standards for credible academic publications. In many cases, these papers have been developed in response to feedback offered by conference participants or in more formal academic reviews.

Australians often look to the UK or USA for inspiration in regard to community art/community cultural development work. Certainly there is a parallel history in the development of these fields within these three nations and we can continue to compare experiences. In this volume there is

a paper based on the conference presentation by Lyz Crane from Partners for Liveable Communities Project in the USA. However, it was also refreshing to hear some non-western perspectives on community art from guest presenter Anmol Vellani, the Executive Director of the India Foundation for the Arts. Australia has much to learn from community art traditions in India and Vellani presented the fascinating story of inspirational community theatre practitioner K.V. Subbana (pp. 42–53). Also presenting at the conference was Kathleen Irwin from the University of Regina in Canada. Kathleen contributed a research paper (pp. 120–133) on the work of theatre company Knowhere Productions that she established in Saskatchewan, Canada.

Robyn Archer was invited to open the ReGenerating Community Conference because she has vast experience as an artist, director and producer working with a wide range of communities in Australia and internationally. Robyn delivered a deeply reflective and typically thought-provoking address (pp. 18–29) which set the tone for the conference. We also present the response to Robyn’s address that was made by Jane Crawley, the Manager of Arts and Culture for the City of Melbourne. Many conference participants felt that Jane’s comments built nicely on some of the points that Robyn had made, while also presenting a refreshing view from a local government staff member.

The organisers of the ReGenerating Community Conference were delighted by the number of people wanting to present papers on their research in community art, community cultural development or ‘socially engaged art’, as Marnie Badham calls it (pp. 84–99). Perhaps the growth in scholarship represents a certain coming of age for a field of practice that has grown quite dramatically in Australia over the last 30 to 40 years. As Badham makes clear, the Australia Council has tried to respond to this growing field over that time without ever really knowing what to make of it. It is time for deeper scholarship that can enable this practice to take its rightful place alongside other art traditions. Several papers in the Research Papers section of this edition analyse examples of practice (Gibson, Irwin, Khan and Ditton). Iris Curteis offers an innovative contribution on ways in which storytelling can extend ‘communality’ (pp. 150–163) while Kim Dunphy presents a detailed review of recent experiences in regard to evaluating this field of practice (pp. 100–119). It is interesting to note that several contributions are from people who are currently undertaking PhD studies related to this field of practice, while others have recently completed their doctorates. We can look forward to hearing more from such scholars in the future.

This volume is not able to do justice to the many performances, exhibitions, and workshops that were made by practising artists at the ReGenerating Community Conference. The journal contains only contributions that could be adequately captured in the form of essays and papers. The post-conference postings on the Cultural Development Network website

(www.culturaldevelopment.net.au) convey some of the flavour of other presentations through word and image. We have, however, included two essays that strongly reflect the experience of art practitioners in a final section, titled Practitioners' Perspectives. Ian Cuming discusses his experiences as a recipient of a prestigious Australia Council Fellowship, which gave him the opportunity to reflect on his decades of experience with puppetry in relation to the work of leading international practitioners Peter Schumann and John Fox (pp. 186–197). The essay by Cuming nicely complements Kim Dunphy's earlier paper on evaluating community cultural development work. The final contribution, by Myfanwy Powell (pp. 198–207), helps to bring scholarship and practice together by reflecting on an innovative collaboration between theatre students at Victoria University of Technology in Melbourne and the well-established City of Voices community theatre group.

We hope you enjoy this selection of presentations from the ReGenerating Community Conference.

Martin Mulligan
Globalism Research Centre, RMIT University

Kim Dunphy
Cultural Development Network

Lead essays

Finding the golden mean: the middle path between community imagination and individual creativity

Anmol Vellani

In the western intellectual tradition, dichotomies play an important role—for instance the dichotomy between the mind and the body, or the self and the other. Indian thought gives less weight to the idea that I am this and not that, but says that in reality I am neither this nor that. In political thought a significant dichotomy exists between individualism and communitarianism. They are regarded as competing or rival political ideologies. For a long time a major debate has raged between thinkers who believe that protecting individual rights and interests should override all other values and concerns in determining how societies should be governed and the principles of justice with which they should operate, and those who believe that societies should give primacy to the rights of the collective and the values of citizenship and community life.

We know that individualism and communitarianism have their darker sides. In its extreme forms, individualism promotes selfishness and self-advancement, perfectly at ease with the idea that people should look after their own personal interests and not feel any responsibility towards the wider society in which they live. Individualism, in this version, combined with fundamentalist capitalism, advocates an impoverished idea of freedom. It sees the value of freedom as lying in the ability to make material choices, and the key role of political and economic systems as expanding the range of the things that people can consume and buy. The idea of freedom is individualism's calling card; the source of its allure. But in the darker version of individualism, freedom loses its liberating potential because inadequate emphasis is placed on the freedom to ideate, to envision, to create, to realise one's full potential or to pursue alternative lifestyles.

Communitarianism too has its darker side. Stressing the rights of the community to the exclusion of all other considerations divests communitarianism of the ability to critique any collectively enforced 'consensus' on exploitative arrangements, hierarchical systems or medieval practices that most of us today would find deeply repugnant. Nor can it

question the growth of parochial attachments or the hardening of identities in communities. It is not easy for a radical communitarian to argue against the rising tide of inward-looking, change-resisting or xenophobic societies.

Speaking from the better sides

Both individualism and communitarianism, therefore, need to speak securely from their better sides. Unfortunately, though, neither communitarianism nor individualism appears to have the internal intellectual resources to check the possible rise of their respective darker sides. And we cannot expect either political ideology to look to the other to discover a sense of balance and resist collapsing into its darker side: implacable ideological opponents will not seriously contemplate 'sleeping with the enemy', so to speak.

But perhaps we should not even try to urge individualists and communitarians to speak in their finest voice by accommodating what is best in each other—which takes for granted that they are rivals in the ideological space of politics. What we might want to do instead is convince both sides that when they *do* speak with their best voice they *in fact* end up accommodating each other, and thereby position them as possible allies rather than competitors.

In an implicit critique of what I have called the darker side of individualism, social scientist Shiv Visvanathan has remarked, 'We read diversity through the logic of individual consumption, not through the logic of alternatives which speaks through the prism of culture.'¹ Now individualism, in its narrow, diminished sense undoubtedly valorises individual consumption and cherishes an impoverished idea of the self—one which attaches significance only to whatever can be ingested or devoured. But the domain of self-interest can encompass a larger universe of meaningful choices. It cannot be individualism's case that the freedom to choose strawberry over chocolate ice-cream is worth protecting but not the liberty to choose between alternative forms of living.

There is no reason, therefore, why individualism, in its expansive version, would resist embracing 'the logic of alternatives which speaks through the prism of culture.' 'Culture', I have elsewhere suggested, '... sets the limits to our ascription and production of meaning and value in the world ... We do not pursue culture as we pursue happiness; rather culture determines the boundaries of what we might regard as a life worth pursuing.'² Individualism inspires when the primary freedom it stresses is the freedom to lead the kind of life one finds worth pursuing. And 'alternatives', Visvanathan reminds us, 'deals [*sic*] with the plural ecologies of culture and livelihoods. It emphasises the community.'³

Communitarianism inspires because it upholds the virtues of mutual support, shared responsibility and unity of purpose; it disillusiones when it encourages insularity, tribalism and feudalism. However, to be able

to speak in its best voice, communitarianism must come out in support of freedom of choice. K.V. Subbanna – an inspirational community art worker in India – believed that the imagination of the community and the creative powers of the individual must work in tandem: ‘Neither would be complete without the other ... communities bereft of the life-giving touch of individual genius are turning barren and ... individuals are losing their way without the caringly guiding hand of their community.’⁴ Without pioneering and imaginative minds – minds that envision and undertake creative interventions – communities quickly become decadent, he said. In other words, communities must value and provide space for the exercise of the conscience and creativity of the individual to ensure that they do not collapse into their darker version, developing an over-determined sense of themselves and a pathological notion of the other.

Self and community evolving together

Mahatma Gandhi captured this idea when he spoke about the self and community evolving together. For Gandhi, in Subbanna’s words, ‘progress or development was ... an all-inclusive holistic process. Here, every human being would be able to blossom ... in consonance with his fellow men, to gradually and completely flower out in fulfilling self-expression. He termed this process Sarvodaya – the ennoblement of all, together at the same time.’⁵

In the end, any sane society must esteem the values that both individualism, in its best sense, and communitarianism, in its best sense, espouse. The freedom to create, envision and lead self-fulfilling lives must be cherished alongside the values of reciprocity, interdependence, co-operation and shared purpose. If societies strike a golden mean between individualism and communitarianism, each will curb the other’s immoderate propensities. Embedding both types of values in society will induce both individualism and communitarianism to speak in their best voice.

National governments can be expected to promote policies and arrangements that protect individual freedoms and provide opportunities for all to lead self-determining lives. They are less good at fostering a sense of community, or guiding a process of constructing or revitalising communities. Local governments must assume this vital responsibility because they are closer to the ground, closer to where the action is.

And there can be no doubt that the arts, which create narratives of belonging and shared meaning, are the most powerful agency for community building and regeneration. Artists can reshape community stories into larger narratives ‘in a way that helps to reshuffle the deck of the teller’s self-understanding to reveal more agency, more creative power, than the teller may ever have imagined.’⁶ Through the arts, communities and individuals can treat their past as open, and create new, altered or refocused narratives of what went before to serve them better in the present.⁷ ‘A society which has an inventive idea of memory,’ Visvanathan says, ‘builds its own

safeguards against obsolescence and erasure’.⁸ It does so, I would add, through its bards, storytellers and performers. And communities that have been traumatised by natural disaster or human action can, through artistic practice, reframe and retell their stories, thus rejuvenating the meaning of their lives and giving birth to the possibility of healing.

Anmol Vellani has been the Executive Director of the India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) since 1995. Before joining IFA he worked at the Ford Foundation, holding responsibility for grant-making in the performing arts, folklore and philosophy in South Asia. He has been active as a theatre director and actor for the last 35 years. anmolvellani@gmail.com

Endnotes

1. S. Visvanathan, ‘Silly ideas on knowledge, choice are destroying us’, in the *Deccan Chronicle*, July 27, 2009, accessible at <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/op-ed/silly-ideas-knowledge-choice-are-destroying-us-298>.
2. A. Vellani, ‘Development without culture’, in *Infochange Agenda*, issue 16, 2009) accessible at <http://infochangeindia.org/Agenda/Multiculturalism-and-intercultural-dialogue/Development-without-culture.html>.
3. S. Visvanathan, ‘Silly ideas on knowledge’.
4. K.V. Subbanna, ‘Theatre and community’, in N. Manu Chakravarthy ed., *Community and culture: selected writings by K.V. Subbanna*, Akshara Prakashana, Sagara, 2009, pp. 65-66.
5. K.V. Subbanna, ‘Over the rivers into the seas: speech at the presentation of the magsaysay award’, in N. Manu Chakravarthy ed., *Community and culture: selected writings by K.V. Subbanna*, p. 36.
6. Arlene Goldbard, ‘The story revolution: how telling our stories transforms the world’, accessible at http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2005/01/the_story_revol.php.
7. As Goldbard underscores in the essay cited above.
8. S. Visvanathan, ‘Silly ideas on knowledge’.

Contemplating community: notes from a singer on the road¹

Robyn Archer

Let me begin by thanking Aunty Joy Murphy for her welcome and I wish to pay my respects to the Wurundjeri and Bunnerong peoples, the traditional owners of this great meeting place where we gather, and to their elders past and present.

As you can imagine, it is a daunting prospect trying to find the right pitch to open a conference like this, filled as it is with genuine expertise and experience of working in and with community. What can I possibly offer? While most of you are considering and drawing from quite specific examples – which each make clear what is meant by thinking of it as a particular community, mostly defined geographically as towns, cities, regions or suburbs – I find myself thinking about the very notion of community and how we still need to be on guard about the term itself. I want to sit with that for a moment.

For a gypsy who is not Romany – that is, not surrounded by fellow travellers – the notion of community is strange. For more than 30 years of rarely spending more than five consecutive nights in any one place, I have very little personal sense of community in a geographical sense. Things that come easy to many members of a community are often quite hard for me. Trying to rent a DVD anywhere, or give a reliable street address without seeming like a criminal, pretty much puts me in a refugee status. Even finding the nearest after-hours grocery shop can be challenging on a day-to-day basis. And as for doctors, forget it! I'm glad I so rarely need one.

It is no surprise, I suppose, that I am starting to think and speak more and more about valuing the ephemeral, about championing the transitory. I am a gypsy traveller without a home and – as most of you know – I am, by trade, a singer. I have learnt, without tuition, to fashion the air coming from my lungs to create sound waves which resonate on your skulls and reach your ears. The actual thing I make is gone the minute it leaves me. Its efficacy relies on memory. Believe me, having the recording is not the same thing, it is just what is left over, as much as we might enjoy those remains for many years afterwards.

Multiple communities

I suppose if I craved a sense of belonging, or felt a need for community, I could try a number of communal avenues – the gay and lesbian community or indeed women in general, although I have never been a club or party goer. Community through gender is a possibility or identifying with Australians anywhere, that might be another form of community. These are both globally connected communities with fairly high levels of shared interests, histories, views and values. But I don't crave these connections. Why? Well, firstly, I enjoy being alone, adventuring alone, letting my nose lead without having to consult anyone. However, the real reason is that I belong to a community that is so widespread and evident that it is actually quite hard to escape, anywhere in the world. This is the community of art and artists. Wherever I am there is evidence of that community; it is my joy, my solace, my sadness, my intellectual engagement on every level. Of course it has been my particular privilege also to connect with individual members of that community all over the world and there are few cities and towns – far and wide – where I would have many friends and colleagues which that community has yielded me. However, it is a community of the intangible. It saturates the world and provides billions of entry points. And it is surely why artists, art, and artistic processes have such a role to play within more geographically defined communities – precisely because we can be, and are, everywhere!

It is always interesting for me to find that in continental Europe there is no sense of community as we know it. It has been explained to me more than once that in France, for instance, the very notion of community would upset the notion of *égalité*; one cannot properly speak of 'gay' rights or 'ethnic' rights, because, of course, the theory there is that everyone has exactly the same rights. Therefore you will not find a Department of Community Arts anywhere in France. What you will find, however, is the survival of President de Gaulle's decentralised model of the arts: throughout France all citizens have access to the very best of dance, theatre and visual arts and attendant programs of education and participation through the Maisons de la Culture, liberally spread throughout the country. This works brilliantly for audiences outside the major cities and also for artists whose audiences are vast and who have an appetite for new work.

This does not mean that art in community doesn't exist in the way it is being discussed at the ReGenerating Community Conference. It just doesn't go by that name; it is largely stimulated by patterns of migration, which are familiar throughout Europe. As the old Empires have struck back, European countries have experienced the influx of large numbers of citizens who, because of the colonial experience, speak the same language, yet their cultures, ethnicities and personal histories have been vastly different from those of French citizens, born and raised in France, for example. In a city like Marseilles there are many art projects which seek to proactively engage the

many North Africans who now live there. And it is the same in Berlin for Turkish ‘guest-workers’ and now for their children who were born there. It is the same in Brussels for migrants from Arabic countries.

Jacques Martial at Parc La Villette

There was nothing accidental in the appointment of the actor and activist Jacques Martial as the first black man ever to head up one of the major cultural institutions in France – as President of Parc La Villette, which is situated in the 19th arrondissement, just inside the walls and very close to one of the main sites of racial explosion. This has possibly been less a case of a community needing regeneration and more about neighbourhoods needing recognition and reconciliation. While his stature as an artist and brilliant advocate would be qualification enough, one sees in his massive exposition on the Outres-Mers (Outlying Dominions), his intent to reach out to the people who live nearby in an effort to bring them inside the cultural activities that the Parc La Villette produces. In the past they may have used the park’s grounds for strolling and playing with the kids while the cultural institutions sited in the park – Cite de la Musique, Cite de la Science, the Grand Halle, etcetera – have been visited only by those from the white European majority. This, then, is a major institution taking as the central theme of its major annual exhibition, the histories and culture of the people who now live closest to that institution; histories and culture that have been, and often still are, in conflict with mainstream France. In 2011 the intention is to focus on disability, also a departure in Parisian art circles.

However, all this is done without overt art and community programs. In France it seems that those who would normally fall outside the statistical norms – in terms of age, race, ethnicity, language and ability – are enticed through manipulations of the mainstream programs, rather than through the creation of special programs outside the mainstream. Whether it works or not on a practical level I cannot say but you can spot the difference in perspective. For a start, geography is not such a consideration – art is everywhere and is funded to be everywhere. This is probably more in line with Article 27 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights, which reads: ‘Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.’

The theory operating in a country such as France is that a community program is not necessary because everyone must have access to art. Art is not just for those who have the location, education, time and money to enjoy it but also for those who don’t have those things. Significantly, art is also thoroughly integrated into school education and so children grow up expecting that art is a natural part of their lives. Now, I don’t want you to think that I believe that community art should be just about taking art to communities, where they become passive audience receptors. I know that is

not the sort of ‘community art’ that is being discussed at this conference. Of course, we all understand the value of active arts participation in the lives of those who may feel marginalised, or disenfranchised, or despairing, or simply excluded. As an opening speaker I might be expected to do a kind of ‘rallying cry’ to get things started. However, I only have to look at the program to see that you already have faith in the efficacy of artists, art and artistic processes for participation in the rebuilding of communities and you don’t need any such case studies from me. You will get inspirational case studies in bucketloads and they will be superb. Hearts get ready. You will get evidence and statistics and good anecdotes about projects that have brought communities alive again. Head get ready. I just wanted to start by making some comparisons that might serve to question some of the basics

It is also not my role to hold up any particular government policy as being ‘heroic’. We can talk about a European ideal but I know that it has taken individual courage from Jacques Martial, for example, to put that into practice. It has also taken individual courage from Frie Leysen, as artistic director in Antwerp and Brussels, and Alain Platel, as a creator in Belgium, and many others like them, to create such models for us to examine. In Australia we have had to argue long and hard for the support of those special programs and I suspect it was because the feeling was that the mainstream programs were not including them. It was, and is still felt – despite many improvements in formal touring programs – that those who are not in big cities simply ‘miss out’ on most of the artistic output of our artists. Our small population, vast country and the rather remote outer suburbs of big cities clearly make decentralisation much more difficult and more expensive than it is in Europe.

‘Artists from the outside’ still struggling for recognition

Not much hard thought been given in Australia to the ways in which audiences or artists from ‘the outside’ might change mainstream programs. We have categories for artistic activities – such as ‘major performing companies’ and major ‘art institutions’ but to what extent – even now – do these companies and institutions take their stories, perspectives, artists, and ideas, from the geographic, racial, ethnic, philosophic ‘edge’? Indeed not much thought has been given as to what actually constitutes mainstream art. I guess we have now added film and music to visual art, theatre and dance, and all of them amount to more than opera and ballet. But that has probably happened without a lot of thought.

There is a kind of inverse financial principle that art companies who already have the most resources, while being most remote from those who are perennially excluded, get more than small companies that are more likely to get out into communities. Yet we are seeing excellent work from outfits such as Urban Theatre Projects, Big hArt or Back-to-Back. However, there are still not enough of this kind of work for any of us to feel comfortable about ceasing our pleas for the kind of resources which would allow the ‘outsiders’

and the 'outlanders' to use art as one of the tools for empowering themselves and their 'communities' (however you might define them).

Mind you, I think Australia has done extremely well with special programs and perspectives. We have come a long way since the inception of the Australia Council, and it later became the first national cultural institution in the world to have a unit dedicated to community art. I still have the gnawing feeling that we would be better off with fewer divisions at the Australia Council in order to ensure that funding can reward jaw-dropping creativity, innovation, hard-won skills and finesse on the one hand, and art in community on the other. That is still the elephant in the room. But it is not the fault of those doing excellent work. Part of the problem is that the more we argue about the utilitarian benefits of the processes of art—either for the profitability of creative industries or the wellbeing and confidence of special sectors of the 'community'—the harder it becomes to argue the case of art for art's sake. We like to champion elite artists and art companies—just as we have a passion for producing elite sportspeople. But as artists we all swim in the same river and 'binary thinking' tends to silt up the river for us all.

One of the best aspects of the Australia Council's 'Community partnerships', for instance, is that it insists on genuine community cultural development as well as excellent art. One of the saddest aspects is that we feel we have to lay out what community cultural development is; to 'insist' on spelling it out like that.

Striving for a holistic approach

Personally I am not sure I can claim to be a 'genuine' CCD practitioner—as officially defined—in any of the activities where art has taken me. However, I know that a holistic approach has always governed my choices, from the inside rather than through the pursuit of any official currency.

Clearly, in my twenties, when I was writing and recording songs like *The Menstruation Blues* and *Old Soft Screw*, I was not driven by a need to have a Top 40 hit but rather by a need to express certain things. My motivation was both personal and political but I can't be sure that this made me a great contributor to 'cultural development'. I realise that my songs were always trying to foster different understandings in the community that surrounded me—albeit unconsciously, not militantly, yet in a very bold and, as it happens, totally fearless manner. Imagine my surprise now when young men come up to me to say they were heavily influenced by those songs because their mothers never stopped playing them. I know the instinct was right and later I was able to devise commercial successes which also served as vehicles for political comment—in shows such as *Pack of Women* or *A Star is Torn*. At the height of my most disciplined achievement in singing—that is the repertoire of Brecht/Eisler/Weill/Dessau and occasionally Muldowney and Zobl—my work was still imbued with a strong political view from the past which always resonated, and still resonates to this minute, every time I

sing that work. While this is a passive audience artform, its content can often inspire or reinforce activism. This seems to have come naturally to me.

It has been similar, too, when I moved into my artistic direction of various festivals. While these were all events in which I had a brief to bring major international arts into each of the cities where I worked, I always brought in community arts projects as well, activating them in the cities and finding ways for the festivals to reach out for participation in regional areas. I have been able to bring all manner of Australian Indigenous art to centre stage—quite literally. These things are all a very natural part of my curatorial process. I did not need a 'cultural policy' to order me to do it although I have to admit that my experience as the Chair of the Community Cultural Development Board (CCDB) at the Australia Council did influence me quite a bit.

Maybe there are artists who require the 'push' of the special program and many local governments still need a push to value the work their community produces. However, many artists just need a space and an invitation to create innovative work. When Kate Brennan—the CEO of Federation Square where we are now located—asked me to think about something which would use the space here as a showplace for innovation, it did not take us long to come to agreement about how that would also interface with diverse communities in Melbourne. For Kate too it is just a natural part of the way she thinks about the arts. After three years—with no federal or state arts funding, just heaps of genuine support from the City of Melbourne—we have just started to see this year something of the kinds of activities we envisaged. For *The Light in Winter* project—featuring an interactive light installation—we clicked those who walked in to participate and it came to 50,000 people in four weeks. That event targeted thirteen different communities in and around Melbourne and I *would* call that community cultural development.

The point about that particular project was that it aimed for the very best achievements in the art of twenty-first century lighting and digital interactivity, and, at the same time, and very naturally, it allowed for the participation of diverse communities, some rather fragile, where they could have their say and make their presence with a range of artists and professionals in attendance. In the cases of the most fragile new social networks—such as Afghan, sub-Sudanese, Ethiopian, for instance—I might still not use the word 'regeneration' since these are groups actively engaged in establishing new communities, relocated into the sophisticated urban fabric of twenty-first century Melbourne. They have brought building blocks in terms of shared cultural traditions, values and histories, but this is more like generating community rather than regeneration.

The 'regeneration' of developers

Let me pause for a while on that term 'regeneration'. In my view it is a term that is rather thoroughly abused these days because it has become a catch-phrase for developers, especially in Britain. As far as I know, it rose to prominence in the UK and then spread to Canada as a program for 'improving' degraded urban areas. These were most often places of formerly dense concentrations of industrial activity rendered obsolete through more recent technological change. The mid-century surge of demolition was halted in favour of breathing 'new life' into these areas, and the most effective means for doing this was gradually found to be through design and the arts. Now old wrecked buildings responded appealingly to a contemporary design makeovers and this can create new 'arts industries'. There is a lot to be said, for example, for the once deserted wharf area in Quebec, where you now find a stimulating mix of artistic endeavour and student activity. But as much as there are appealing examples we have to acknowledge that cultural banners have often been used to disguise the simple thrust for new development, much of which leaves very little room for art or community despite the rhetoric. It is taking a long time to 'create' community in places such as Docklands here in Melbourne or in new developments in East Perth, Port Adelaide, or the 'eastern corridor' in London. Too often 'regeneration' is used to disguise a developer's paradise. Anna Minton has written an excellent book on this called *Ground control*². As she put it:

... a word which came into use during the 1980s, and means 'rebirth' in Latin. Rather than the more prosaic 'redevelopment', it conjures up the image of the phoenix of Canary Wharf and the new economy rising from the ashes of Docklands and Britain's industrial past. Yet despite the pioneering zeal of their supporters, when they were built Broadgate and Canary Wharf were controversial, perceived as high-security enclaves of wealth surrounded by some of the poorest communities in Britain.

Minton went on to suggest that some of these redevelopments served a purpose, but:

They were also exceptional places—areas where business modelled the area in its own image in what are, after all, financial districts. Now, a generation later, what began specifically to serve the needs of business has become the standard model for the creation of every new place in towns and cities across the country. Previously the government and local councils 'owned' the city on behalf of us, the people. Now more and more of the city is owned by investors, and its central purpose is profit. The credit crunch may have slowed the sell-off, but every former inner-city industrial area is trying to emulate this model, from the waterfronts of Salford Quays and Cardiff to the controversial demolition programmes of the old industrial northern cities. This is the architecture of post-industrial New Labour, a government which witnessed the

largest amount of construction in Britain since the post-war period. But just as the tower blocks and arterial roads of the industrial 1950s and 1960s sliced through cities and communities and failed to stand the test of time, the consequences of many of these grand schemes are disturbing.³

Now I also know that this is not the kind of project that most people here have in mind when they use the term 'regenerating community'. Rather you are likely to be thinking of small fragile systems in danger or under threat—perhaps on the fringes of cities or in remote areas. You are probably thinking of communities which have undergone profound change because of larger movements in cities themselves, in cities around the world, in changing economic fortunes, or through things like climate change or even government priorities. Perhaps there was once a geographic community in which the word community meant so much more than just that geographic location. There may once have been a complex ecosystem of dialogue, decision-making, shared values and quality of life and dignity which that community had the power to articulate and defend. Perhaps that has been lost and it your goal has been to bring it back; to regenerate for a new era some of those things which have been lost; to rectify the sense of failure and isolation, even injustice and exclusion from a fair share of what the majority believes is their twenty-first century birthright.

But Minton is very much on about this too—in the East End, for example—and I have no doubt that in your various ways many of you also encounter the doublespeak of regeneration which may in the end only mean profit for developers and entrepreneurs and very little for the very communities whose health you wish to help restore. Whenever we use big banners such as 'Community' and 'Regeneration' it is always worth being picky about what they really mean in any particular context.

Anna Minton came to Liverpool in 2006 when we ran a program called City in Transition in the lead up to the celebrations of Liverpool being named the European Capital of Culture. She gave some fairly alarming warnings then about the construction of Liverpool One, the biggest of all the private gated shopping/office and residential complexes in the UK (covering what used to be 34 streets of old Liverpool but now controlled by the corporation). Minton lauded the effort being made by local parliamentarian Claire Curtis to save Quiggins—'an indoor market which had been a cultural icon in the city for a generation, launching the careers of musicians, designers and playwrights.' Minton warned against the privatisation of streets, saying '... we view with very real misgiving the associated proposals to privatise the thoroughfares of the new area and police them with so-called "quartermasters" in what appears to be a bid to sanitise the area'. Unfortunately, her pleas went unheard; the site was forcibly purchased and Quiggins was demolished to make way for Liverpool One. Its opening coincided with Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture, and, predictably, Minton observed, it had 'shrunk down to a monoculture of shopping and spending.'

At the same time, Minton noted, Liverpool *remains* the most deprived district in the country according to the government's Indices of Multiple Deprivation. So, we do need to be alert to some claims that 'culture' unequivocally serves processes of 'regeneration'. Minton is already looking into similar claims for the regeneration of the Eastern Corridor as the 'legacy' project of the 2012 Olympics in London. She claims that it is common knowledge that Olympics will be the largest security operation ever undertaken in the UK and that the new development, Stratford City—a Westfield project—will be one of the highest-security private 'communities' yet built.

Beyond Europe

Turning to something more positive now, I am currently involved in a pitch for a program about a theatre company from Vanuatu, which is celebrating a rather remarkable twentieth anniversary this year. The company, called Won Smolbag, was actually initiated by two white amateurs from Zimbabwe, and while this might sound to the uninformed like a colonial exercise, those two people have worked in exemplary ways to allow the company to develop on its own terms. The company still uses drama as its medium, and is so popular that it has its own TV drama series, but its reach from Vanuatu now extends widely to other islands in the Pacific and it dares to touch on the most dangerous taboos—such as HIV and health, for instance—and issues such as domestic violence which is sometimes advocated by church and state as a legitimate avenue to 'domestic stability'. Clearly this is art working in communities. But is it regeneration or survival?

In Mildura, where I have spent time over the last few years, I could scarcely call the work I do regeneration. Mildura is changing rapidly. It is a genuine candidate to become one of the first major generators of drought refugees in Australia. Alfred Deakin and then Ben Chifley had a dream of creating an Australian Los Angeles in the desert and now families have been there long enough to feel as if they were always there. Yet poor up-river management and climate change have turned the dream into a nightmare. People walk off the land into mental health care—if they haven't taken their own lives—and they are officially counselled to leave the area. Fortunately, a new solar electricity generation 'farm' might take the edge off burgeoning unemployment, yet you would pick Mildura as a town in desperate need of help. But, curiously, regeneration is not the word I would use there. Recently it scored extremely highly in a happiness evaluation, in comparison to other river towns starting to experience the same sense of despair about water from the Murray River or as manna from heaven. This was largely attributed to a sense of wellbeing related to the effectiveness of the arts in their town. It seems that the arts got the jump in Mildura, springing largely from the personal efforts of Stefano di Pieri, his wife Donatella, and a small group of their friends who were determined to ensure that geographic isolation would not prevent them from enjoying good food, music, wine and coffee. They could not contemplate a world devoid of art.

Current arts activity in Mildura has grown and diversified way beyond that small circle of friends, and in the face of gloomy futures, Arts Mildura's suite of five festivals and the activity of its Arts Centre and other institutions—such as the new At Vault—is keeping the spirit alive. Again my plea is less for regeneration and more for maintenance and sustenance. Mildura offers a terrific example of how communities under stress can keep their chin up.

In North East Arnhem Land the plea could never be for regeneration precisely because the culture of the Yolgnu people is incredibly strong and proud. The word regeneration does not describe what they need—it's more like cultural maintenance. What they need is respect and acknowledgment for who they are and what they do. They already have a strong sense of who they are through art and culture; what they now need is the ability to maintain that in their own lands, on their own terms.

Regenerating Canberra

Finally, I turn to my latest project which is located in Canberra and, surprisingly perhaps, this is where the word 'regeneration' probably applies best.

I recently heard that India's founding prime minister, Nehru, remarked at the opening of the northern capital of Chandigar, designed by the architect Le Corbusier, that the planned city 'expressed the nation's hope in its future'. No doubt those who posted the competition for a bold design for the post-Federation capital of Australia shared those sentiments. Yet, for all kinds of reasons, that kind of faith needs to be rebuilt. We need to regenerate pride in the national capital. Of course it was established through the pain of displacement and yet there are now many people who have lived there all their lives. Such people have worked hard to make sure that the city can host a government for all of us and, in the process, some remarkable collecting institutions have been established to house many of the nation's treasures. It takes around 330,000 to make the national government run and there are a further 100,000 people in the city now. That means that Canberra has a population that is roughly equivalent to that of Tasmania. Yet very few people would think of Canberra as a great centre of culture. And we don't have the sense, as a nation, that all the diverse communities of Australia—urban and remote—are represented in Canberra and that all the artistic work we do both in Australia and internationally is showcased there. As I mentioned earlier, The Light in Winter project here in Melbourne's Federation Square drew diverse communities—including some that are still fragile and some that are outlying—into the heart of their city. In a way, it is hard to imagine why new and fragile communities want to be present at the heart of this twenty-first century city. But they do. There is a statement about survival and resilience in this. At this point in time, it is hard to imagine something similar happening in Canberra. There is a deep ambiguity about who owns the city.

So I am just starting to work on a project related to the centenary of Canberra in 2012 and it will run through to 2013. And the challenge is to bring together local, national, and international dimensions and do something that could create new pride in the nation's capital. We need to regenerate a vision of the capital. And, in a way, that brings me back to the start of my journey, talking about the ephemeral and the intangible.

When they worked on their plans for Canberra, the Burley Griffins understood that it was all about symbolism. For them Canberra needed to be more than just a functional seat of government. They wanted it to show the very best of what Australia could be and they wanted it to be a cultural capital. They asserted that it is only through culture and the arts that a nation can assert a claim to greatness. Now it is time to revisit and regenerate that kind of vision. I am very glad that Canberra is a twin city with a Japanese city and with Dili in Timor-Leste because we can start to build international linkages.

It is not lost on me either that regeneration is happening in a literal way on the hills surrounding Canberra following the devastating bushfires of a few years back. On those hills, 100 forests have been planted as part of the National Arboretum project. In this project preference is being given to endangered Australian plants but there are also gardens for the planting of seeds that have been carried from other parts of the world. I like the symbolism of that. I love the vision that extends beyond terms in office of particular governments or even one's own lifetime. In all your endeavours – sung and unsung, large and small, practical and symbolic, finding favour or provoking aggravation and action – you are also working for a vision of the nature we can all be proud of and I hope you will see some kind of reflection of your work in Canberra's centenary celebrations. I wish you all the best in your deliberations.

Robyn Archer is an internationally renowned singer, writer and artistic director who has performed throughout Australia and the world. Her artistic directorships include the National Festival of Australian Theatre in Canberra, the Adelaide Festival in 1998 and 2000 and Melbourne International Arts Festivals in 2002, 2003 and 2004. She was made an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2000, and holds honorary doctorates from Flinders and Sydney Universities. Robyn is also an adviser to RMIT University's Globalism Research Centre and the Global Cities Institute.

Endnotes

1. This essay is based on the opening address by Robyn Archer to the ReGenerating Community Conference.
2. A. Minton, *Ground control*, Penguin, London, 2009.
3. *ibid*, p. 5.

Life is more than a set of commodities: response to Robyn Archer

Jane Crawley

I have been asked to respond to Robyn Archer's keynote presentation, but given the range and density of her paper I'll restrict my response to a couple of areas. I would like first to acknowledge Robyn's work in breaking down some of what she has correctly referred to as the binary thinking inherent in our framing of the arts – the either/or of excellence and community, contemporary and worthy.

I first met Robyn in 2001 when she was coming on board to direct the 2002 Melbourne International Arts Festival. It was at a meeting she convened with Peter Sellers, who was then the Artistic Director of the 2002 Adelaide Festival. Peter was, and probably still is, a figure of great controversy in Australian arts circles in that he championed a lateral – or some might say 'blow it up' approach – which saw contemporary artists and curators commissioned to produce major community projects – thereby upsetting the community arts sector – and programming that neglected to profile key local performing arts companies and sufficient international companies – thereby upsetting everyone else. This meeting that Robyn convened involved the then Cultural Development Network Director Judy Spokes and me, and we were there to discuss *The Art of Dissent* – a conference focusing on the arts and social activism, which was conceived by Judy and which took place as part of both the Adelaide and Melbourne Festivals. Both Robyn and Peter championed *The Art of Dissent* and it was a rare confluence of interests that saw this particular project interact with the two festivals. Robyn championed several other projects – such as Big hArt's *Not at Home* – that brought long-term community cultural development projects into the Melbourne Festival in a new way. Rather than just putting on events, Robyn was interested in artistic processes that could invite interaction between audiences and people passing by with the producing communities.

However, I think it is also true, as Robyn said in her paper, that these efforts – that is, artistic directors being open to community-based work – are mostly driven by a very few individuals and in the majority of cases

community-based and -driven work is not seen as being of sufficient quality to be worthy of mainstream programming.

Working to a formula

To some extent I think the pressure to assure quality a furphy, if only because I think I have experienced at least as much bad non-community art as I have bad community art, possibly even more, which is really saying something. There is a sort of formula or pattern for international festivals that sees the program have its requisite international dance, music and theatre components (with visual arts generally towards the back of the program) and the percentage of each is determined by the individual artistic director. Then you get the usual 'local components'. In Melbourne it might be something like *Chunky Move* for contemporary dance, *Back to Back* for contemporary disability, *Black Arm Band* for Indigenous, and at least one compulsory marginal community outcome, often on a public housing estate. I am not inferring that any of these are either bad or boring; indeed I have been proudly involved in either funding or producing many of these programs, both community and non-community. However, I think this says something about festival programming; that it remains essentially consumerist. It is about global 'shopping' for best value product, and that there is now a sense that at least a small proportion of the goods needs to be from 'the community'.

On the other hand, the reality is that major international festivals are not necessarily the most appropriate vehicle for the bulk of the arts to be situated and the context needs to be questioned. Speaking very broadly I think one could argue – or perhaps I should say I believe – that abstraction and challenge are increasingly unpopular; that art is increasingly perceived as a form of global entertainment and that our culture (in the broadest sense of that word) is increasingly commodified as our values are increasingly materialistic. Given this, our major festivals, venues and companies are under increasing pressure to provide and produce desirable commodities with shrinking budgets.

The hankering of community-based artists and producers for mainstream recognition and the age-old pressure to justify the small resources committed to community-based work have led us to appropriate conceptual frameworks and language belonging to the powerful. Like migrants or refugees we feel inherently out of place, or not at home. We feel we are speaking a second language, that we are somehow trespassing and hoping we won't be thrown out. We want desperately to be accepted, but at the same time we only feel truly comfortable in the ghetto.

Working with borrowed language

As a local government bureaucrat I am intensely familiar with the borrowed language of the powerful. As in the rest of the world, in local government, money is power and economics is the dominant language. Adopting this

'second language', we learn quickly to speak of the multiplier effect of funding, of 'creative industries' and the 'creative class', of arts-led urban regeneration and economic sustainability. We know that for an idea to fly it needs to satisfy certain economic imperatives: it will not only employ artists, it will kick-start local cafes, clear up unwanted graffiti, provide career pathways for disaffected youths and have neighbours chatting happily to each other whilst their blood pressure goes down and their desire for cigarettes disappears. We also know that these too must be quantified. Everything has a cost, everything can be bought.

There is also the dominant, and equally opaque, language of the arts. We want our community arts projects to not only deliver economic outputs but also manage to 'interrogate prevailing cultural paradigms', preferably by engaging marginal communities in new technologies whilst delivering a culminating product that can be sold on to multiple other communities and other 'key buyers', replicated in other locations and festivals (hopefully internationally).

It is important to have a sense of international context for our work, if only to realise that on many levels it is almost impossible to compare cultures. I was in Germany a few years ago on a residency and was based for part of the time at the House of World Cultures, which focuses on non-German, non-Anglo artists and contemporary dance, with a clear and stated focus on the racial 'other'. Outside the House, Turkish families were barbecuing in the park and never the twain did meet. I also spent time with the Workshop of World Cultures and many other community-based, migrant and refugee cultural groups and the problems and dilemmas were much the same as here; worse in fact, if one takes into account the huge levels of funding directed to the arts in Germany and the dreadfully low amount directed at anything vaguely 'community'. However, I could not really reconcile Berlin with Melbourne in meaningful ways; in terms of the complexities of local government, funding environments, social realities, and so on. I recall having to give a talk when I returned, and to the audience's consternation I had to confess that I did not really understand anything and what I most appreciated was relinquishing the desire to establish parallels.

Questioning the basics

I think Robyn is absolutely correct to ask us to question our basics, and that includes words like 'community' and 'regeneration'; in fact any word that we find ourselves using repeatedly without much thought. It is important to stop and question anything we find ourselves doing or saying or believing automatically. I know for a fact that the economic and social benefits of the arts – and in this instance, community-based arts – are established, and I do not mind using the associated language when it is needed. I do not even mind spending money on economists to prove these outcomes if push comes to shove.

Yet it is important to remember that the economic framework is one among many and that in many ways the language is borrowed and the framework has at its heart nothing to do with the arts, the community, creativity or the power of expression and visibility. We need to understand, and perhaps internalise, multiple languages so we can operate in, and relate to, multiple worlds. Above all, we need to remember, as Robyn has reminded us today, that there is nothing wrong with art for arts sake. It is a human right to express oneself; it is important to create things for no purpose other than the act of creation; it is good to not understand; it is OK not to make sense to everyone; it is fabulous to be confused. It is, indeed, immensely liberating to let go of the either/or.

Life is more than a set of commodities.

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Art, governance and the turn to community: key findings from the research on the Generations Project

Martin Mulligan and Pia Smith

*'... community is not simply the territory of government
but a means of government'*

Nikolas Rose, 2008

As an 'action research' project over a period of more than three years, the Generations Project was remarkably successful in finding out what it takes to ensure that community art practices can enrich the practice of local government in Australia. This comes at a time when the building of resilient and inclusive local communities has become even more clearly part of the 'core business' of local government internationally. Indeed, local government authorities that do not find creative ways to constantly build more inclusive communities will pay a considerable 'price' in having to deal with growing social division and conflict, often reflecting much broader, global developments and tensions. While sociologists from Emile Durkheim onwards have long been predicting that notions of 'community' would be replaced by a broader sense of belonging to society in the conditions of modernity, writers such as Zygmunt Bauman, Gerard Delanty, and Nikolas Rose have more recently noted that the desire for community has actually been increasing in global conditions of flux and uncertainty; conditions that Bauman has called 'liquid modernity'. Delanty and Rose, in particular, have provided valuable explanations for why there has been a 'turn to community' in the context of globalisation. It has long been understood that community art projects and programs can help to create a sense of community and for this reason they can enhance the 'core business' of local government provided local government leaders understand that good practice in community art involves considerable skill and a deep understanding of artistic processes.

The national Generations Project was first conceived in 2004 by Cultural Development Network Director Judy Spokes and the former CEO of the City of Port Philip Council (in Melbourne) Anne Dunn. By that time a wide range of local government authorities (LGAs) across Australia had sponsored significant community art and cultural development projects and events and it was evident that successful artistic and cultural activities could build a stronger sense of community at a local level. Indeed, many people in local government could see that the arts had a vital role to play in creating more coherent and dynamic local communities and yet this kind of work remained marginal in local government structures and processes. Spokes and Dunn came up with a proposal for an action learning project that could address questions such as: What would it take to convince LGA leaders to take community art and cultural development much more seriously? and Where should this kind of work be situated within LGA structures and processes?

A wide range of LGAs were invited to participate in designing and implementing – over a period of three years – a program of artistic activities that could help the LGA address a significant and pressing social challenge and the project was implemented in the following LGAs: City of Greater Geelong, Latrobe City, Rural City of Wangaratta (Victoria), Liverpool City (in Sydney) and the Charters Towers Regional Council (Queensland). Although the project was initiated before the Australia Council established its Community Partnerships program it was suspended until that program was put in place and so the action learning project was ideally placed to inform the Community Partnerships committee on ways of working with LGAs for enhancing community cultural and artistic development.

Research aims and methods

The Globalism Research Centre at RMIT University in Melbourne was commissioned to conduct research on the benefits for local government of projects in the five participating LGAs, which were to be funded by the Australia Council itself, Arts Victoria, Arts NSW and Arts Queensland. This research was undertaken by the current authors and we used a range of quantitative and qualitative research methods, including surveys of Council staff, observation of the unfolding projects, extended interviews with project designers and participants, interviews with senior staff within the participating LGAs, and interviews with those who had helped to fund the projects and who watched them unfold. This resulted in a lengthy research report which can be accessed through the Globalism Research Centre website (www.rmit.edu.au/globalism/publications). Recognising that few people will read the full report, the authors have picked out a concise set of 'key findings' listed below. Of course such a concise summary can hardly do justice to the diverse experiences that unfolded within the five locales and regions over a period of more than three years and we recommend a reading of the full report. This 'introductory' paper also includes the

recommendations made to the Australia Council as a result of the research, because these suggest what could be done to strengthen the community cultural development sector in Australia. At this point in time the sector hardly has a sense of being a sector, with most practitioners feeling isolated and under-valued. We hope that research such as ours can play a role in promoting the sector and in making the argument for a bigger 'investment' in the development of bigger pool of skilled practitioners.

In some ways the research was able to go beyond the particular focus envisaged by Generations Project initiators Judy Spokes and Anne Dunn. However, the emphasis on local government was fundamentally important and the research was designed to respond to the following three key research questions:

- What can be learnt from the Generations Project about what it takes to encourage LGAs to place more strategic importance on cultural development as a praxis across diverse sections and operations of Council?
- What can be learnt from the Generations Project about forging more effective partnerships between artists, arts organisations, community groups, and LGAs?
- What can be learnt from the Generations Project about ways in which arts-based projects and initiatives can enhance the capacity of LGAs to engage with their communities across diverse areas of Council work and responsibility?

Comparative research

The opportunity to compare experiences across five diverse LGAs made it possible to respond in a meaningful way to these questions those responses make up three chapters of the full report. The comparison worked out well because the projects across the five LGA areas certainly unfolded differently and had different levels of success in relation to the overall aims of the national project. While the leaders in each of the LGAs reported to Anne Dunn, near the end of the project cycle, that their projects had significant local outcomes, it is the comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of the five local projects which makes the investment of time and money in the overall national project worthwhile.

The research report drew on international literature to make the point that the constant creation of strong and inclusive local communities has become a key responsibility of local government in the contemporary world. Indeed, at a time of great flux and uncertainty, as mentioned earlier, there has been a 'turn to community' at the level of public sentiment and the English social and political theorist Nikolas Rose has suggested that 'community is not simply the territory of government but a means of government'.¹ A sense of

belonging to community cannot be taken as a 'given' in the contemporary world and there is a vital role for artistic explorations of place and identity in forging a more conscious and inclusive sense of belonging to community. Conversely, as mentioned earlier, a failure to attend to the creation of inclusive local communities can lead to a rise in social tension and conflict in a world in which local and global influences can no longer be disentangled. It should be noted that the review of international literature helped to frame the analysis of experiences in the five LGAs participating in the Generations Project and the key findings reflect that 'local-global framework' as well as the analysis of the research data.

Of the five local Generations projects the most successful were those which employed skilled and experienced community cultural development (CCD) workers in key artistic direction roles. A key learning for the LGAs that hosted the most successful projects was how to strike the balance between giving the artists enough 'space' in which to work creatively while, at the same time, ensuring that the work was fully embedded in relevant structures and processes of Council. Our report concludes that Australia has acquired rich resources in regard to community art practice and that LGAs are well placed to support the further development of the field of practice at both local and regional levels. However, it is critical for LGA leaders to have a good understanding of what good practice really looks like, and this is the subject for discussion in the final chapter of the report.

Good practice in this field requires a set of diverse skills, which must include a good grounding in forms of artistic expression and representation. The work should not be taken lightly and there is no easy 'recipe' for success. The Generations Project confirms that while project outcomes are not always easy to 'measure' – certainly not in the short-term – there can be a wide range of short-term and more 'slow-burning' outcomes that can help LGAs address some difficult and even entrenched social challenges.

Key findings

1. The constant creation of inclusive communities has become a core 'means of government' in the contemporary world and this is especially the case for local government.
2. In a world of flux and uncertainty a lack of attention to the creation of inclusive local communities will result in a rise in social tensions and conflict.
3. In the era of 'network government'² LGAs must enhance their capacity to work with individuals and organisations who have very different assumptions and ways of working (in other words, different cultures).
4. Creative projects that can capture and celebrate a diversity of stories related to life in communities will build a more inclusive sense of community identity and also allow for many more voices to be heard.

5. Artistic projects can only shift perceptions and attitudes in a meaningful way if they have a 'wow factor' related to an inspirational artistic vision and/or the clever crafting of diverse and well-targeted activities.
6. Australia now has an extraordinary artistic resource in terms of local artists, travelling artists and new technologies. However, this makes it even more important to make clear and effective use of such diverse resources.
7. LGAs should ensure they retain a capacity to carry through effective and ambitious community art projects by: documenting experiences; ensuring skill development for relevant staff; employing staff with relevant skills and experience; and writing a commitment to such work into strategic documents with associated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
8. LGAs should constantly evaluate their community cultural development work to ensure improved performance and organisational learning but such evaluation must be based on a good understanding of creative processes and the use of a range of empathetic evaluation tools.
9. The Generations Project was artificially constructed (as in the selection of participating LGAs and issues to be addressed), however, LGA leadership 'buy-in', significant time for creative development, and national framing and co-ordination have ensured that the 'experiment' created a very valuable educational resource which should be widely disseminated.
10. Of course, it makes sense to provide experience and training for local people interested in CCD practice. However, there is no guarantee that such practitioners will stay within the local community and there can be a useful role for skilled 'outsiders' in enhancing local projects. The aim should be to nurture the development of a much bigger pool of skilled CCD practitioners who are available to work in or with LGAs right across the country. In particular, there is a need to support the emergence of more practitioners who have the skill and knowledge to work effectively in remote rural communities. It is important to draw a distinction between local artists and skilled CCD practitioners (who may or may not be based locally). Good CCD practitioners will have the ability to work with a wide range of local artists.

Recommendations to the Australia Council for the Arts

As mentioned earlier, the Generations Project was conceived at a time when the Australia Council for the Arts abolished its old CCD Board and eventually set up its new Community Partnerships program. This involved a shift of emphasis from funding specific projects to forging partnerships with LGAs and other community-based organisations that could nurture the growth of community and regional art in Australia. Our research certainly confirms the strategic importance of LGAs for fostering the development of community and regional art, particularly when LGA leaders see that support for the arts can also enable them to pursue some of their strategic objectives in creating more effective local governance. Obviously, the state arts funding agencies, under the direction of state governments, have an important role to play in enhancing the nexus between local government and art development, as seen in the New South Wales government's strategy for art development in Western Sydney. However, the Australia Council is best placed to provide national leadership in this area and to ensure that federal funding for the arts is used effectively to build local capacity.

Recommendation 1:

The Australia Council Community Partnerships program should further emphasise the importance of LGAs and local government representative bodies in building stronger community and regional art sectors in Australia and in enabling the growth of a bigger and stronger network of skilled community cultural development practitioners.

Recommendation 2:

In the field of community cultural development, Australia Council should continue to emphasise the creation of strategic partnerships, however the word 'partnership' is much abused in the contemporary world and the emphasis should be on partnerships which are clear about the common ground, result in common work, and are sustained through human relationships.

Recommendation 3:

Australia Council grants directed through LGAs should specify the need to employ appropriately skilled CCD practitioners in artistic director or creative director roles.

Recommendation 4:

Australia Council should give preference to funding arrangements that allow for two to three years of project development and implementation.

Recommendation 5:

Australia Council should actively support initiatives aimed at developing a stronger network of CCD practitioners in Australia to ensure that individual practitioners have access to better knowledge, resources and infrastructure.

Recommendation 6:

Despite the existence of the Ros Bower Award and the Kirk Robson Award, Australia Council should review its practice for rewarding good practice in community cultural development and consider an annual awards ceremony to better promote good practice.

Recommendation 7:

Australia Council should build on its investment in the Generations Project experiment by ensuring that the research findings are widely disseminated.

Recommendation 8:

Australia Council should fund a follow-up study in the five participating local government areas to investigate the longer term legacy of the five local projects.

Creating a stronger CCD sector in Australia

Our research makes it clear that Australia has acquired impressive expertise in regard to diverse and effective CCD practice and yet many practitioners—especially outside urban areas—still work in isolation and without much acknowledgement of their important work. There are probably three generations of CCD practitioners who are still active: those who began their work in the 1970s or who are heavily influenced by social and political movement theory that emerged in the 1970s; those who were able to take advantage of new professional opportunities for CCD practice that emerged in the latter part of the 1980s and early 1990s; and those who have taken advantage of new media and new technologies that have emerged within the last decade. While it is encouraging to see that the practice is being renewed and reconceived by a younger generation of practitioners, it is important that the hard won knowledge and experience of CCD ‘elders’ is not neglected in the training and development of new practitioners.

More should be done to foster inter-generational dialogue about good practice and more can be done to ensure that all practitioners have access to the best knowledge and resources, reflecting both Australian and international experience. There is room for networks, associations, conferences, and publications to share and discuss experience. It is in everyone’s interest to nurture the development of the sector as a whole rather than rely heavily on the work of a relatively small number of rather isolated practitioners.

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Pia Smith worked closely with Martin Mulligan in conducting fieldwork for the study of community arts and ‘wellbeing’ for VicHealth that was completed in 2006. She conducted the fieldwork for the evaluation of Regional Arts Victoria’s Regional Cultural Partnerships Program in 2007 and she conducted the fieldwork for the research on the Generations Project in the five participating LGAs.

Endnotes

1. N. Rose, ‘The death of the social? Re-figuring the territory of government’ in P. Miller and N. Rose, eds, *Governing the present: administering economic, social and personal life*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 2008, pp 84-113.
2. For discussion of the concept of ‘network government’ see M. Haus, H. Heinelt and M. Steward, eds, *Urban governance and democracy: leadership and community involvement*, Routledge, New York.

The world in the village: lessons from K.V. Subbanna's inspirational life in theatre and community

Anmol Vellani

In this essay I will be telling you the story of a life in the theatre—a life lived in a village called Heggodu in the hills of Karnataka, one of the southern states of India. Kannada is the language of the majority in this state. Heggodu is a short one-hour drive from Shimoga, the district's capital. K.V. Subbanna was born in Heggodu and this is his story—the story of how community, modernism and individual creativity were triangulated in his life, thinking and work.

In one of his essays, Subbanna has quoted D. R. Bendre, the greatest annada poet of the twentieth century, in describing his 'dream-theatre':

A thousand audience-families should join together and form a performance-space. The visionaries among them should write plays; the creative constructors should give them a concrete shape; the artistically endowed should enact them; the sensitive respondents should suggest possible improvements; all in all, each and every artist should contribute to this process, on or off stage, in one way or another. All in all, everyone, man and woman, skilled or otherwise, should as one single family ... evaluate the production. A play which gains maturity in such a milieu then becomes a vital instrument of finding life-fulfilment...I am, I admit, an optimistic poet.¹

Subbanna worked tirelessly to translate Bendre's dream into reality. Today, the people of Heggodu are the sponsors, producers, performers, audiences and critics of what is essentially a modern theatre and art practice. Actor, director and editor, Sudhanva Deshpande was 'witness in Heggodu to a conversation between a tea-stall owner and a taxi driver, discussing with great enthusiasm the latest production of *King Lear*, while comparing it with a Lear production of some eight years ago, as well as Kurosawa's *Ran*.'²

How did this come about and why is it important?

Opening act

Subbanna studied at the University of Mysore (which is Karnataka's second largest city) but he then chose to return to his native village. This was somewhat unusual in itself. People in India who go off to the city to get a higher education most often do not return to their place of origin; the opportunities that open up in the city are very difficult to resist. For village people in India, the journey to modernity is normally a journey away from home to the city; it means cutting ties with whatever shaped their early selves, those formed in childhood and adolescence.³ Subbanna took the opposite path: he journeyed back to his village carrying modernism with him. His return to Heggodu was the first act of what was to become his life-long project—to bring the city, the region, the nation, and the world to the village. Subbanna passionately believed that modernism could revitalise even a tradition-bound, feudal community, but only if modernism could take root and be fully integrated in the community. The forces of modernity and modernism were a threat, he felt, only when they cut off individuals from their communities, because this severance produced other divisions—between the village and the city, between the region, the nation and the world—which he fought a lifelong battle to surmount.

Subbanna engaged in this battle primarily through the Sri Nilakanteshwara Natya Seva Sangh, better known as Ninasam, which he established with some of his friends in Heggodu 60 years ago. What started off as 'an amateur cultural organisation', as Subbanna called it, is today a theatre institute, a film society, a travelling repertory company, a foundation, and much else besides. Ninasam's campus presently houses a 530-seat auditorium and another more intimate space for performance that doubles as a seminar hall. There is also an informal open-air theatre, a rehearsal hall, a library, hostels for students, a guest house, a dining hall and kitchen, and an administrative office. There is no boundary wall separating this cluster of low-cost structures from its surroundings. In Deshpande's words, 'You could ... easily miss a remarkable institution, so seamlessly does it merge, architecturally and otherwise, into the local landscape.'⁴

The Ninasam campus did not come up all at once; it has evolved gradually, in step with Ninasam's growth over many decades. Subbanna was a master of timing: initiatives were introduced when he felt that the institution and the community were ready for them—never too early, never too late. 'It is one of Subbanna's qualities as a leader', cultural scholar Rustom Bharucha has remarked, 'that he knows exactly when the work should be mobilised, and when it should continue at a steady pace.'⁵ One reason why Subbanna knew the right timing was that he was constantly in conversation with his community and, therefore, always had his finger on its pulse.

Milestones

Let me mark, at this point, some of the important milestones of Ninasam's journey to the present:

1949: Ninasam established, with a focus on amateur theatre.

1973: Ninasam Film Society (Ninasam Chitra Samaj) launched. It has organised regular screenings, film festivals of world cinema for rural audiences since 1977 and film appreciation courses for the local community since 1979.

1980: Ninasam Theatre Institute founded. The Institute offers an annual diploma course to 20 students from interior Karnataka. Some of its alumni have gone on to establish theatre groups in their home towns and villages; some others have recently been appointed as drama teachers in government schools.

1983: Janaspandana initiated. This three-year project took Ninasam's plays, film screenings, theatre workshops and film appreciation courses to other parts of rural Karnataka. Some 5,000 people attended the film appreciation courses and 200,000 people watched the films and theatre performances.

1985: Ninasam Tirugata started. The Tirugata – meaning 'travelling around' in Kannada – is an itinerant repertory company, which consolidated the activities of Janaspandana. It also connected meaningfully with the work of the Ninasam Theatre Institute, since the plays are performed by its alumni. Travelling for four months every year, the Tirugata takes four plays and a set of films to almost every corner of Karnataka. It has stopped at nearly 200 locations in the state over the years and given some 2,000 performances. The total audience numbers are approaching 1.5 million.

1987: *Ninasam Mathukathe*, a quarterly newsletter, launched. This carries versions of lectures delivered at Ninasam's workshops and Culture Course (see below) and, occasionally, short essays on relevant issues. It also reports on Ninasam's various activities and announces forthcoming events and new books published by Akshara Prakashana (see below).

1990: Ninasam Culture Course inaugurated. This one-week course expanded the scope of the Theatre and Film Course, introduced in the previous year, which itself had replaced the Film Appreciation Course. Drawing on faculty from all over India, it is conducted with a different theme every year in Heggodu. Interdisciplinary in nature, the course covers film, theatre, literature, the visual arts and issues of culture and politics.

1992: Ninasam Foundation (Ninasam Pratisthana) established. Subbanna created the Foundation's corpus with the cash prize he won along with the Ramon Magsaysay Award for journalism, literature and

creative communication art in 1991. The income is used exclusively for outreach programs – cinema and literature appreciation courses and theatre workshops for young people – conducted in rural and semi-urban locations across Karnataka. In 2003 the Foundation initiated Anusandhana, a series of art appreciation courses held in five colleges in Shimoga district.

In 1956, this time independent of Ninasam, Subbanna established the publishing house, Akshara Prakashana, which shares with Ninasam the goal of disseminating culture and the arts. Its publications on theatre, cinema, literature and the arts in Kannada support Ninasam's work.

The new and the old

What inspired Subbanna and his friends to start Ninasam? He once said in an interview:

We were thinking of building a new India by ourselves because the Britishers [sic] had gone. This is how we started this institution ... we thought theatre was the most appropriate means because it appealed to our community ... We were interested in breaking with tradition and creating something new. Ours was actually a confrontation with tradition – an effort to quarrel with our own tradition.⁶

In the same interview, Subbanna went on to describe Ninasam as 'a continuation of the freedom movement, the social consciousness, the desire for creating a new kind of theatre and a new society.'⁷

Given his emphasis on change it should not come as a surprise to learn that his relationship with his community was not entirely harmonious. He wrote that 'many of us of my generation were in fact infuriated by the poverty, passivity, inequity and superstition around us. We felt that we could not find fulfilment without first kicking away the deadwood of the old ways of life.'⁸ He further observed:

Returning to my home village after a university education, I found it as much impossible to ignore my community as to merge myself with it. I could not live without it, but then I could live with it only by continually quarrelling with it. That is how it has been for scores of years now ... living a life of adversarial coexistence with our community. We have thus never been able to believe that we could articulate ourselves through traditional art forms ... Our sole concern ... has been to evolve a new theatre language voicing a new kind of life.⁹

Nevertheless, the traditional performing art forms provided Subbanna with insights into the relationship between artistic expression, community life and the wider world, and inspired his efforts to root modern theatre and art in his community. For example, he observed that Yakshagana – Karnataka's centuries-old community theatre form – was 'a natural and indispensable part of everyday life' and 'daily routine life, interaction, daily speech and

collective and individual memory carry unmistakable echoes of the rhythm and diction of *Yakshagana*.¹⁰ Such theatre engages the community in an intimate dialogue with itself. Most significantly, the community treats theatre not as an option but a necessity. It is never a mere object for viewing, but a regular ritual in which individuals participate as social beings and meaning acquires a communitarian dimension.¹¹

Subbanna noted, secondly, that the different older and modern forms of theatre in Karnataka have not remained insular. They have drawn 'influences and inspiration from each other, always bringing about a strange admixture or a meaningful and creative confluence'.¹² Yakshagana has remained contemporary also because it has been equally alive to the influences of cinema and television. Popular film melodies, stage settings, electric lights, sound system and make-up alien to Yakshagana have been adopted. Secular texts, Shakespeare and Greek plays, as against texts about deities and divine figures, have also been done in the Yakshagana style.¹³ Indeed, assimilation and integration have marked the history of Kannada theatre, but also more generally the language and culture of this region of India. Tracing the evolution of the Kannada language, and the varied cultural and religious influences on the region, Subbanna concluded that '*Kannadigas* ... have absorbed almost all people, communities, tribes, religions and castes of the world, and Kannada ... has assimilated innumerable languages of the world. Thus, ours is not Kannada of narrow dimensions, but is a world of Kannada, a universe of Kannada.' What is true of Kannada, Subbanna added, is true of 'all the communities and languages ... and they are all, respectively, beings of the world and languages of the world.'¹⁴

Because he felt that communities in Karnataka had absorbed influences from far and wide, Subbanna probably saw no reason to think that the people of Heggodu could not make something hitherto as alien as modern theatre their own — a theatre, moreover, that could be regenerative in 'voicing a new kind of life', stimulating new thinking and spurring new conversations in the community. At the same time, Subbanna firmly believed that we must absorb the influences around us in our own terms: 'We have to accept some of the [modern] technology and assimilate it into ... our lives; but we must not let technology master us!'¹⁵ He was fond of quoting Mahatma Gandhi's lines: 'I will let the winds from all corners blow freely through my house, but I refuse to be blown off my feet.'

Yet how could modern theatre mimic the role of community theatre? How could it become a necessary ritual, an 'indispensable part of everyday life', as natural as the food the people eat? And was there not the very real danger that it would devastate community life instead of strengthening it? Subbanna had no doubt that a community form of modern theatre could not emerge unless the processes of theatre are integrated and aligned with the processes of community. He pointed out that:

... theatre activity in a small community ... naturally entails a dimension of close, intimate communication and communion. In such little communities one has a foreknowledge of one's co-artists as well as one's audience. One's choice of a play to enact, the style to employ, the interpretation to be provided are all governed not merely by one's own personal preferences but more by the collective conscious or unconscious of one's community ... It is thus not a mere theatre context but a collective socio-political-cultural context where individual choices have to be tempered with a genuine and profound respect and empathy for ... co-beings in the very midst of whom one has to live out one's life, and act out one's convictions and concerns. This dual commitment, on the one hand to one's own self, and on the other to one's environs, is, in fact, what transforms the seemingly mundane act of staging a theatre piece into a socio-cultural process, one which is ... helping to evolve one's own self as well as one's community. It thus becomes a living dialogue ... a 'communion' involving every single individual.¹⁶

In speaking about the reciprocal evolution of the self and the community, Subbanna was again echoing Gandhi. For Gandhi, Subbanna noted, 'progress or development was ... an all-inclusive holistic process. Here, every human being would be able to blossom ... in consonance with his fellow men [sic], to gradually and completely flower out in fulfilling self-expression.'¹⁷ With this as a guiding principle, Subbanna turned his back on certain things one associates with modern theatre. For example, there was no place for 'great' art in his scheme of things. Community theatre cannot idealise excellence, Subbanna felt, and it must reject unrestrained individual creativity and the artist's claim to complete autonomy.¹⁸ Instead, '[b]uilding up ... [Ninasam] ... and even a detail like the selection of a play became a process of coming to an understanding of the community ... [It] has been confrontation, discussion, quarrel, and a striking of balance between ideas.'¹⁹

In Subbanna's view, however, there was place in community theatre for the artist's signature, although individual visions needed to develop in step with the community's consciousness and thinking. He believed that the imagination of the community and the creative powers of the individual must work in tandem: 'Neither would be complete without the other ... communities bereft of the life-giving touch of individual genius are turning barren and ... individuals are losing their way without the caringly guiding hand of their community.'²⁰ Indeed, the pioneering ideas of the individual did not emerge from a void; they were already present in the community, but hidden from view:

As spears have points and milk has cream, communities have imaginative, initiatory individual minds. These intellects stir, tease, taunt the community ... and thereby rejuvenate it. Wisdom is not something that these individual talents produce on their own and distribute among the community. On the contrary, it exists subconsciously, deep-rootedly,

as much in the collective psyche as in the individual psyche. It is like some treasure only waiting to be discovered, and drawn from. The pioneering minds of a community ... through their creative interventions agitate and churn the entire collective. Thereby they bring it a renaissance [sic] life and help disclose the deep-hidden wisdom. Wherever such regenerative interventions are lacking, societies tend to descend into decadence very quickly.²¹

It follows that communities can be regenerated only by interventions from within. The insider-agent of regeneration – in this case Subbanna – had to site the medium of regeneration – modern theatre – in the community. The idea that communities could be revitalised by theatre initiatives inspired from the outside had no place in Subbanna’s way of thinking. It is not likely that he would ever have seriously considered inviting directors to develop ‘awareness-building’ theatre productions with his community; nor would it have crossed his mind to have external facilitators introduce Augusto Boal’s workshop techniques and modes of play making in Heggodu. ‘Ninasam is not radical in that manner,’ Subbanna noted, ‘We have no radical messages to give people, nor do we have the objective of uplifting people. I am not arrogant to say that I have some solutions for my community and will deliver it to them ... My theatre is just a dialogue among members of the community’.²²

If not ‘progressive’ messages and solutions, what could modern theatre offer the community? It could offer new narratives, Subbanna believed, and influence how the community constructed its self-image. The village that is in dialogue with the world can imagine itself differently and it can develop an inclusive sense of its identity. In one interview Subbanna lamented that the world had lost ‘inclusivist’ wisdom, ‘the ability to distinguish, and integrate in the most life-giving manner, the differences and similarities between *Myself* and *Us*. If this inclusivism is part of our exclusivism, of our sense of identity, then the problem of the Self and the Other will not crop up.’²³ He also explained how Ninasam’s approach and practice embraced this idea:

We have decided that we are committed only to Kannada theatre, Kannada language. At another level, we also want to make plays that are hundreds, even thousands, of years old, our own ... We need Shakespeare, we need the ancient Greeks, and we need the ancient Sanskrit playwrights. We stage Kannada plays, translations of plays from other Indian languages as well as plays from other parts of the world.

... [W]hen we stage ... [Sanskrit plays] ... we feel we can take certain, well considered, liberties with them, including rewriting them. However, we do not do that with playwrights from outside India, for the reason that we want Kannada to grow not in an inward looking manner but to grow outwards, to open out to the world.

We do not want every experience to reach our audiences through characters named Rama or Krishna or Beera. We want a Ferdinando or a Hamlet too to speak to our audiences, and to do [so] as Ferdinando and Hamlet.²⁴

Subbanna held the view that ‘theatre, amongst all the arts, is most potent in showing us the unity of different communities as well as their mutual diversities.’²⁵ As he saw it, modern theatre was the most powerful artistic vehicle for bringing the larger world to Heggodu and for frustrating the formation of a hardened, exclusivist identity. Rigid identity construction, he knew, provided the feeding ground of fundamentalism and Kannada chauvinism, and deprived communities of the elasticity to reinvent themselves and adapt to a changing world.

There is another reason why Subbanna would have thought that modern theatre was better aligned than any other artform to the purpose of expanding the consciousness and discourse of his community and providing it with new points of reference. Apart from their passion for theatre, he said, ‘Our communities tend to regard the “actual reality” of life and the “virtual reality” of theatre as essentially undifferentiated. For them, theatre-reality is as much an integral element of their total consciousness as is everyday routine reality.’²⁶ However,

It is not as though these people consider theatre as a mirror of life. On the other hand, even as they make a practical distinction between the two domains, they regard them both as equally valid kinds of realities. Precisely because of this awareness, they, in shaping their world view, draw their influences and images as freely from one sphere as from the other, finally fusing them together seamlessly. Whenever making abstract formulations, or using points of reference, they quote instances as much from theatre as from real life, investing the former with as much authenticity as the latter is deemed to have.²⁷

Subbanna exemplified this point – that life on stage influenced the thinking and actions of people of the community just as profoundly as life in the world – by narrating an incident from a village performance:

... [T]he Ramayana was being performed. Eventually it came to the point when Rama had to set out for the forest. He said he would go alone, and that Sita should stay back in Ayodhya. She, on the other hand, argued that it was her duty to follow him wherever he went. The argument grew, with both actors presenting their views in the form of improvised lines of dialogue as is typical with folk performances ... Rama seemed to be winning the exchange, since the actor playing his role had better debating skills. Then ... the actor enacting Sita pulled out his last weapon, and said, ‘You may pontificate as much as you wish. Nevertheless, you cannot but take me with you, since in no ‘Ramayana’ that is as yet known does Rama leave Sita behind. You simply have no precedent for doing so.’ Needless to add, that clinched the case.

... When he [the actor playing Sita] found himself losing the dispute at the level of logic, he turned on the strength of precedent which belonged to the sphere of the virtual reality of art. Rama had no option but to concede the point, and bow to precedent.²⁸

What Subbanna did was to ensure that modern theatre came to occupy a pivotal place in the cultural life of Heggodu, vastly expanding the array of virtual realities from which the local people could 'draw their influences and images', and thereby develop a more catholic sense of identity, a sense of belonging to a larger world – a world encompassing the region, state, nation and the globe. It is thus, in critic and commentator Sadanand Menon's words, that 'they emerged as world citizens'²⁹, and as social scientist Shiv Visvanathan has put it, they are citizens who are 'full of a multiplicity of times, full of diverse others as possible selves'.³⁰

However, Subbanna's vision encompassed much more than the questions of identity and belonging. 'He was', as Menon has put it, 'a visionary and a pioneer of a way of being ...'³¹ Subbanna remarked that the idea of community was too flexible to be precisely defined; it referred to an imaginary reality and hence was not available for physical verification.³² What was critical, he felt, was how the idea of community was imbibed in the way one lived one's life and influenced others to live theirs. It was only through one's own example and acts of will that the idea of community in one's inner world could be realised – and that too imperfectly – in the real world.

This thought resonates with Gandhi's exhortation, 'Become the change you want to see!', and Subbanna expressed it most forcefully in an article he wrote in response to the horrific communal riots in the state of Gujarat in 2002. He observed that the minority and majority communities all over India harboured the kind of animosity and prejudices towards each other that was at the root of the violence in Gujarat. There was, in other words, a Gujarat within all of us and it was necessary to:

... first create my Gujarat within my own self, explore it and try to comprehend it, however frightening the process might be. Any cleansing is possible only in this inner sphere ... If I can achieve this, that experience would stir up my will-to-action to an indomitable degree. Such a will would then begin to suffuse my family and my community. It would ... force them to clearly perceive the community-wisdom latent in them and thereby spur them to responsible action. I am not helpless, if I can feel the Gujarat within me ... I can influence and change my own person and my people ...³³

Although Gandhi was one of his sources of inspiration, Subbanna's idea of community was very different from Gandhi's. In the autonomous village republic that Gandhi imagined, prudence, restraint, self-reliance and self-governance were emphasised. It was a community envisioned through

the lens of economics and politics, not culture. Poets were not banished from these village republics, as they were from Plato's Republic, but no essential place was articulated for them. They were, in effect, dispensable. Shiv Visvanathan has pointed out that Subbanna's village was inescapably incomplete. Unlike Gandhi's village, it was not self-contained but 'at home in the world and at home to the world'.³⁴ Nor was it self-sufficient, because 'it needed a continuous flow of storytellers and performers'.³⁵ According to Visvanathan, one can best understand the difference in these two perspectives on community if one considers that language, literature and theatre provided the models for Subbanna's idea of community, not religion, technology or politics. 'Translation emphasises reinvention, rewriting and retelling. It recognises that just as a self needs a surplus of others, no story is complete till it is told in two languages. The translator sustains both similarity and difference. He emphasises in a Godelian sense, the innate incompleteness of any community.'³⁶ Subbanna's theatre, which translated the world for Heggodu, was built on recognising the innate incompleteness of his community.

For communities to see themselves as a fragment, as a part of an unrealised whole, seeking a wider domain of meaning, is a very powerful idea. Such communities are unlikely to fall prey to a pathological notion of their other. As long as communities recognise their essential incompleteness, they will remain open to dialogue and reinvention, to fluid transactions with the world beyond, and will be able to shape a future for themselves as free agents.

Subbanna passed away in 2005. However, Ninasam, which he nurtured for 56 years, continues to prosper and thrive and it is not hard to see its relevance in the contemporary world.

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The great good neighbour: expanding the community role of arts organisations

Lyz Crane

Today I want to share with you some experiences that arts organisations in the US have had in working with communities. However, first I have to establish my credentials by telling you a bit more about myself. I work at an organisation called Partners for Liveable Communities, whose mission is to improve the liveability of communities by promoting quality of life, economic development, and social equity. We are thus an organisation that is focused on community outcomes rather than the arts. However, we do have had a program called Culture Builds Communities for the last decade and a half, and we strongly believe that arts organisations are one of the most underutilised assets communities have for addressing critical social issues.

My own belief in the capacity of the arts to help communities face major social challenges has been reinforced by what I have heard in this conference over the last two days and I wish I could take all your stories and plant them in community and economic development conferences back home in order to strengthen the argument that investment in the arts is critical. I work in an environment in which we just do not have government support for this kind of work; we certainly don't have 'cultural liveability officers' that I have heard about here (and I love that term). So I was beginning to wonder what I had to offer in the context of this conference. I cannot give you examples in which government support has made the difference but I can tell you about 'community art projects' in which arts organisations, working with unique resources, have made a difference. I will tell you about 'neighbourhood projects' in which arts organisations have been heroic. Not all of this will be relevant to the Australian experience. However, some of the values and processes can be translated and made useful by your creative and brilliant minds.

Working in the neighbourhood

Now I want to focus on two examples of the work that might inspire you. The first is ARTS at Marks Garage, which is the key community project

of the Hawai'i Arts Alliance. Located in Honolulu on the seam between Chinatown and the downtown Financial District, the area immediately surrounding Marks Garage has been gathering momentum as an arts and cultural district for Honolulu. This has led to increasing interest by a growing number of people and very rapid change for the area. The primary challenge for the community has been to ensure that the businesses and residents that were in the neighbourhood prior to the rise of the arts and culture district both have a voice in the changes to their community and find ways to benefit directly from those changes. This includes ensuring that neighbourhood businesses are able to tap into the new arts and culture patrons and that neighbourhood residents are able to participate in the new arts and cultural offerings in the community. The latter involves making sure that the arts organisations focus on serving traditionally underserved populations.

To address these goals, ARTS at Marks Garage developed a far-reaching strategy that included the creation of a community organiser position to work full-time on building bridges and increasing awareness of the opportunities that the organisation's art space provides for dialogue involving developers, civic leaders, artists, long-time residents, and other community service organisations. By incorporating new business interests with older ones and helping to negotiate a new and fair process for the downtown/Chinatown re-identification, ARTS at Marks Garage is responding quickly and creatively to the changes facing the community. Examples of their work include their Bright Ideas project, which provided an opportunity for community groups to win \$4,000 mini-grants for arts-community projects, and the Talk Any Kine Festival, which provided people who speak a range of different languages with a venue and a process for more easily involving themselves in the community planning dialogue with civic leaders.

The second example I want to draw your attention to focuses on the work of the International Sonoran Desert Alliance (ISDA), which is located in Ajo, Arizona. Ajo is a former copper mining company town in the heart of the Sonoran Desert. It is about 160 kilometres southwest of Phoenix and 62 kilometres from the US/Mexico border, and nearly adjacent to the Tohono O'odham Indian Nation. Originally Ajo was built as three segregated towns for miners and their families. There was 'Indian Village', where the homes were very small, 'Mexican Town', where the homes were slightly larger, and the Ajo 'Townsite', with the largest homes. While housing is no longer segregated, the three communities have continued to live rather separately and painful memories of the early days were just below the surface for the older Native American and Mexican American residents.

ISDA represents an alliance of the three separate communities. It works primarily to support Ajo's collective economic development through arts-based programming, the development of housing for artists, and branding

Ajo as an arts and cultural destination. However, the organisation has also been working to support the integration of formerly neglected voices into Ajo's narrative. The group's work has resulted in multiple partnerships with arts organisations and youth groups based in Ajo itself, in Mexico, and on the Tohono O'odham Nation. The Alliance has also acquired and developed a large school building which plans to incubate arts-based microbusiness, provide affordable housing for artists and artisans, and house a range of cultural programs. Not long ago the Alliance also purchased the Ajo town square, long ago abandoned by the Phelps Dodge mining company, and it is filling the empty storefronts with much-needed arts businesses, thus bringing jobs, reviving the tax base and providing services to residents.

I do not need to tell you that arts can have a transformative power for communities, or that cultural development and cultural policy should be an integral part of every social, economic and physical development plan. We in this conference take those truths for granted and believe very strongly that what we do as artists can create positive change for the world. However, we are not only artists but also leaders of arts organisations and so we have to ask ourselves if our presence alone, coupled perhaps with standard forms of 'community outreach', is enough or whether we could do more to create unique physical and thinking spaces within our communities. How do we step outside our walls and become not only a beacon for creativity but also a good neighbour and steward of the values of democracy, inclusion, and upward mobility? Or, how can we, as individual members and leaders of communities, challenge our arts organisations to become more engaged in the life and times of their surrounding community? This applies to those organisations that see themselves as 'community arts' organisations as well as those who may have a more 'professional' orientation.

Ford Foundation program

I am here at this conference because of the Ford Foundation's Shifting Sands program, which was established in 2002, not by people involved in Ford Foundation arts programs but by the Asset Building and Community Development department of the Foundation. The founding program officer, Miguel Garcia, was an economist who saw the unique contribution that arts organisations can make to community change processes. The mission of the program was to build common vision, create tolerance and respect, and boost economic prospects in rapidly changing, yet previously neglected neighbourhoods.

Community change is an important focus of this initiative and this helps to explain the 'Shifting Sands' name. Of course, there are many different types of change processes, whether we are talking about urban or rural communities; the United States or Australia. However, the fact of the matter is that when communities change there is always going to be some underlying tension: some section of the community that wants one thing while another wants something different; some group that is driving the

change while others may be resisting it. Furthermore, it is rare that the voices of all affected by the change are actually heard. When significant changes occur, the best champions a community can find are going to be people located in the community who have the capacity and resources to tell all the stories and make sure all voices are heard.

Many arts organisations serve needs within their neighbourhoods by, for example, reaching out to youth with after school programs, or to older residents with programs to prevent isolation, or to residents whose first language is not English. These are often excellent programs and vital to the wellbeing of neighbourhoods. However, it is common, even for enlightened arts organisations, to see neighbours as 'audiences', rather than as active participants in creating the cultural vitality of the neighbourhood. Consequently, arts organisations are often turned inward, serving their arts and 'outreach' goals without really cultivating relationships with their closest neighbours. So our program at the Ford Foundation asked if organisations with considerable experience in advocating for the needs of 'marginalised' artists could benefit by engaging more directly with their local communities, even to increase their audiences. Our assumption was that art and culture can help to organise and empower communities, and, of course, all of you at this conference understand this in a deep way. Our aim was to draw on the creativity and resourcefulness of arts organisations to turn tensions within changing communities into meaningful interactions. Because we are talking about community and economic development we focus on change outcomes rather than just expression or exploration. And we have found that arts organisations have been able to leverage their resources this way to gain new audiences, gain more political support, and gain a better seat as an important stakeholder in development negotiations.

Assessment project

However, it is one thing to espouse certain practices and another thing to demonstrate that they work, so we have conducted an assessment of the work of eight community-based arts organisations – ranging from galleries and museums to community cultural centres – that were all working in neighbourhoods undergoing significant changes. All of these organisations had responded to our call to step outside their walls to become a 'great good neighbour'. To be more specific, the organisations were all trying to address five important questions related to our adopted themes:

- Neighbourhood identity: Who is this community and what is the common understanding of its assets and values?
- Social integration: How do we all work together despite our differences?
- Upward mobility: How can we improve our prospects as a community by generating new economic opportunities and

increasing the enterprise capacity of businesses and residents?

- Community development: What physically needs to change to make a place consistent with that vision?
- Community empowerment: Who needs to hear our voices to make sure that happens and how do we open the channels between the grassroots and the powerful?

Of course, this kind of orientation challenged some prevailing assumptions of artists and arts organisations, as you have been discussing at this conference. The challenges included:

1. Getting comfortable with the idea that arts and culture is something that can be a tool and not just something that is beneficial solely on its own
2. Recognising that while aesthetic value would always be important (and we never asked our arts organisations to compromise that), double or triple bottom lines that involve community outcomes are even better, and sometimes there are trade-offs and that is also OK
3. The world of community development has a language entirely different to that of the arts and for many of the organisations we worked with we had to teach them a whole new lexicon for them to even be able to understand their own natural inclinations to help others
4. Money, money, money, board wishes, staff capacity, keeping the doors open; the things that all arts organisation have to worry about constantly, meaning that they continue to focus on what is going in inside the walls even as they step out into the neighbourhood.

On the other hand, arts organisations have some unique resources and capacities that enable them to stretch themselves. These include:

- Understanding how to animate public space
- Physical spaces – sometimes seen as ‘neutral’ or even ‘secular’ spaces – in which difficult topics can be addressed
- An existing tendency to delve into complex social issues
- Cultural sensitivity and a sense of ‘cultural democracy’
- Relevant practical expertise in areas such as graphic design and printing
- Access to power structures resulting from past dealings with funding bodies, real estate agencies, and more.

So we challenged the eight selected organisations to consider what they could do to preserve important community assets through processes of change and foster more meaningful dialogue about the direction and management of change. It was important to us that the organisations did

not try to arrive at their own vision for what the neighbourhood should look like nor try to identify the most pressing issues on which to focus. We told them that until you know the community as an insider, you need to listen to other people by going to neighbourhood meetings, hosting local residents in conversation, and getting out onto the street. You should not select the critical issues; they should become apparent to you from what people are talking about. You are a ‘steward’ or ‘curator’; managing things according to the community’s wishes in order to attain the best possible results for the community as a whole.

We call this process of engagement a ‘social sculpture’ because it might be analogous to looking at a piece of wood or marble, seeing the assets within, and helping to carve it into what it ‘wants to be.’ As any sculptor knows, trying to carve something that was not already contained within the starting material will result in frustration and failure.

After many fits and starts in working with the eight organisations we came up with what we call the ‘triangulation paradigm’ to help people think about processes of community change. The first step in this is to create some sort of art project that can generate dialogue on community topics; something like a digital mural purporting to capture the diverse faces of the neighbourhood, or an arts festival with themes related to health and local health services. The second step is to involve as many local entities as possible, from local businesses to government agencies, social services and schools. Three of the participating organisations hired dedicated community organisers – practically unheard of in the arts world – and all of them employed community organising techniques. By engaging entities from the very powerful to the practically powerless they opened up new channels of communication on topics of critical importance to the community. The third step is to get involved in the change process by bringing local organisations together, ensuring that all voices are heard, and by providing training or resources for the development of ‘micro-enterprises’ that can help to generate change.

By the way, the organisations found that when they were ‘pounding the pavement’ in this kind of activity they were actually gaining new audience members because people who had never stepped through their doors in the past were now seeing that these organisations were doing things that were relevant to them. The more you do, the more momentum you gain, the more community ‘ownership’ you can generate, the more your ‘social sculpture’ comes to life.

Testing assumptions

So what did we find out from this process of engagement about our own starting assumptions? Let me illustrate with some examples.

Our first assumption is that arts and culture organisations can act as curators of neighbourhood identity; that they can help protect the ‘soul’ of

the community, and broker and celebrate an identity as it evolves. Well, this assumption was supported by the work of the Ashé Cultural Arts Center, located in the centre of the city of New Orleans, which faced the situation in which Hurricane Katrina had decimated local neighbourhoods, leaving many of them relatively empty and with little or no community services, gathering places, leadership structures, etcetera, etcetera. Prior to the hurricane, Ashé had already committed itself to working within its surrounding community, and after the storm it was one of the few organisations that kept its doors open. As a result, it offered space that became a 'kitchen table' of the community, where meetings were held and gatherings organised to build hope among those who remained in the neighbourhood. The organisation served as a central contact point for former residents who had fled the city, to ensure that their voices would be heard when the rebuilding began. It was important, of course, that the city centre did not just become what the developers wanted, so Ashé led an initiative to research the history of empty properties in the black-dominated neighbourhood in order to create a 'cultural corridor' that reflected the values of those who had been living there before the hurricane hit. They aimed to preserve a cultural heritage that many feared would be lost in the redevelopment.

Our second assumption is that arts and culture organisations can encourage meaningful social integration, not just by mixing people together through events but also by promoting dialogue between disparate forces. I have already mentioned the work of the International Sonoran Desert Alliance in this regard. However, let me dwell on that example a bit more because it was no easy matter to overcome a mistrust and segregation in the old mining company town. As mentioned, ISDA created an important arts hub in an old school building and it also revitalised the old town square as an arts and cultural precinct. It also reclaimed an historic church that had once been the centre for Native Americans and was then turned into a museum that did not reflect the heritage of its previous owners. The museum has now been returned to the community that had once gathered around the church. At the same time ISDA set up a Memory Project, which has brought together the Native American population, the Mexican-American population and the Anglo population to help preserve the history of Ajo in a way that acknowledges past separations but also seeks a new solidarity within common experiences.

Our third assumption is that arts and culture organisations can help promote upward mobility for all people. They can do this, in part, by helping to provide workforce training and by providing access to financial and political capital to get things done within the community. One good example of this is Nuestras Raíces organisation that is based in the small town of Holyoke, Massachusetts, which has both long-term Anglo and long-term Puerto Rican communities that were often at odds with each other. The Puerto Ricans were often excluded from the economic sphere of the community.

A man called Daniel Ross created Nuestras Raíces to help the Puerto Rican community in Holyoke reconnect with its agricultural roots and take leadership within the broader community in regard to 'community farming'. The organisation's Tierra de Oportunidades program is a business incubator for teaching farming skills and for enabling small farm-related businesses to begin and flourish. Farms that have been supported by this program have now become an important economic asset to the community and the program has the support of many sectors of the wider community; the young and the old; Anglo and Puerto Rican, residents and politicians.

Our fourth assumption is that the creative methods of the artist can be applied to community development; that these organisations can inject their creativity into solving problems between competing development agendas by focusing on shared community assets. A good example of this is Project Row Houses, in the 'third ward' of Houston, Texas. This community was considered to be 'blighted' and was largely left out of the social and political world of one of the largest cities in the US. In the late 1990s local artist Rick Lowe began renovating 'shotgun houses' into artist studios, thus cleaning up the neighbourhood and bringing in new audiences. As an arts organisation, Project Row Houses eventually spun off its own community development corporation to help preserve local heritage and ensure the availability of affordable housing within the changing neighbourhood.

Our fifth and final assumption is that arts and culture organisations can help all voices to have a say in the shaping of neighbourhood change. A good example of this is the Talk Any Kine festival run by ARTS at Marks Garage in Honolulu, which I discussed earlier. Another good example is the Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana (MACLA) which has advocated on behalf of both Latino and Vietnamese 'renting' communities to enable them to join neighbourhood associations set up by Anglo land-owners. A third and important example is provided by the Queens Museum of Art in New York. The Queens Museum has focused on a neighbourhood called Corona, which is home to a staggering diversity of peoples, and is a 'majority minority' neighbourhood with Latino immigrants (the biggest proportion) mixing with South Asian immigrants and the African American and white European homeowners who represent Corona's recent past. The biggest challenges in this area are the lack of services for immigrants within the community; a lack of safe, usable and attractive public space; poor health; and a crime rate higher than in most part of Queens and New York City. It is important to note that Queens Museum located in the middle of the old World's Fair site, with major highways keeping it disconnected from the nearby Corona neighbourhood. However, the large and respected cultural institution has taken a bold step with its Heart of Corona initiative, in which the museum works with community partners to improve the health of community residents, beautify the neighbourhood and activate the public spaces in the area.

After programming numerous health fairs, 'clean up' days and public art projects around the area, Queens Museum was recently asked by the New York City Department of Transportation to become the managing partner of Corona Plaza, the central square. It has released cookbooks of healthy recipes from local restaurants, signed up over 1000 people for health insurance through a partnership with a local insurer, and taught English to hundreds of people through arts-based curricula. The museum has become a trusted voice in a neighbourhood in which many people who qualify for government services were not using them. The Heart of Corona initiative has not detracted from artistic excellence of the museum; indeed it has been able to attract more resources and funding for its other programs, and more people are coming through its doors than ever before. The commitment to working in the neighbourhood has permeated Queens Museum – from the most junior staff up to the chair of the board – and, importantly, the institution found it could now access non-traditional 'pots of money' for arts activities. As well as having more people coming through the door they gained more volunteers and more attention. Furthermore, when development decisions are likely to affect the museum itself, the organisation no longer has to scream to be heard; rather it is invited to the negotiating table without having to ask.

Determining the benefits of neighbourhood engagement

An important question is how can you measure the benefits of this kind of neighbourhood engagement? We have worked with the Center for Creative Community Development at William's College to come up with economic impact quantifiers for this kind of work. I am not going to go into all that here because there is a relevant toolkit available through a website set up William's College at www.c-3-d.org. I just want to mention that it includes a unique 'social network analysis' which can be used to estimate how enmeshed an arts organisation is within its surrounding community.

I think the Executive Director of MACLA, Anjee Helstrup-Alvarez, has put it well when she said:

Why do all this work? Why invest staff time, resources and money into a neighbourhood? Most arts organisations do not leave the confines of their four walls. We did it and continue to do so because we now have the trust and history with our neighbours, residents and businesses alike to initiate the tough conversations. We are doing a better job of bringing artists, business owners and renters to the table in order to continue to round out the discussions. However, we will continue to push ourselves to do so. This is creating, much to our surprise, a more unified ... voice that influences development in and around our neighbourhood in a manner that brings the best outcomes for residents and business owners.

For many arts organisations – kind of work is a tall order, and, frankly, not all arts organisations *should* be doing this work. The power of arts on their

own is astounding and this should not be forgotten. However, there are plenty of organisations on the tipping point. They might have extensive outreach programs and they already incorporate community outcomes into their missions. For them there are great and positive lessons coming from our experience, and we encourage such organisations to continue to strive to be a 'great good neighbour'.

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Research papers

Mapping culture, creating places: collisions of science and art

Chris Gibson

Abstract

The arts have much to offer the reinvention of places: generating new forms of employment in cultural work, contributing to public culture through festivals and events, and appropriating spaces in the built environments of our cities and towns for artistic expression. Filtering artistic attempts to re-make places are three key competing pressures: first, the demands of regional development managers, treasury bureaucrats and council general managers for accountability, 'hard data' and measurable outcomes; second, desires of local residents, non-profit organisations and community development specialists to use the arts as a means to promote social inclusion and recognition of social difference; and third, professional concerns of artists themselves to produce creative expressions that advance practice, experiment, and/or challenge prevailing norms. Often, these pressures are thought of as irreconcilable or incorrigible. I will discuss examples from two key projects – one on using new computer mapping technologies to trace the relationship between creativity and the city, the other Australia's largest-ever study of rural and regional festivals – that show it is possible to re-make places in creative, challenging ways as well as improve social outcomes – and even to speak to bean-counters in the language of 'hard data'.

Keywords: regional festivals, cultural mapping, regeneration, placemaking

The arts have much to offer the regeneration of communities: creating new forms of employment in cultural work, contributing to public culture through festivals and events, and adorning spaces in the built environments of our cities and towns with expression. Filtering artistic attempts to regenerate communities are three key competing pressures: first, the demands of regional development managers, treasury bureaucrats and local government leaders for accountability, 'hard data' and measurable outcomes; second, desires of local residents, non-profit organisations and community development specialists to use the arts as a means to promote

social inclusion; and third, professional concerns of artists themselves to produce creative expressions that advance practice, experiment, and/or challenge prevailing norms. Often, these pressures are thought of as incorrigible.

In recent research projects I have explored whether it is possible to re-make places in creative, challenging ways through culture and the arts, as well as improve social outcomes, and even speak to bean-counters in the language of 'hard data'. These research projects span multiple fields of social sciences, humanities and creative arts, but the key approach I have brought to unite them is a geographical one. This means using a spatial perspective – focused on questions of 'where' and 'why' cultural and arts activities occur in places (and what meanings communities attach to them) – and a range of methodologies geographers have pioneered, including new computer mapping technologies and qualitative ethnographic methods. I cannot pretend that in these projects I have been able to meet all of the competing demands described above. There is no silver bullet. However, in my experience it appears possible to speak to different audiences through research that adopts a geographical approach: addressing familiar questions of community, culture and creative expression, but doing so developing a spatial perspective that until recently sat outside accepted practices and methodologies in arts management and applied social research.

Mapping culture

Cultural mapping has become a popular phrase in policy circles recently. Essentially, it describes a methodology undertaken to audit whatever aspect of local culture is under the spotlight (creative industries, local community networks, relevant arts and community organisations, and so on). Cultural mapping of this sort can be useful in building up a picture of how communities operate in places, how new media technologies are accessed by communities and the functional linkages that operate within the arts and cultural industries.¹

As a professionally trained geographer, it seemed somewhat odd that in many cases of 'cultural mapping', *actual maps* rarely featured either in the methodology or in published findings. 'Mapping' instead referred to a certain kind of auditing activity – sometimes represented visually through flow-diagrams or in tables of data obtained through documenting the phenomena at hand – aimed at capturing the actors and interactions between them that constitute cultural, social and economic activities.

The absence of maps in many examples of 'cultural mapping' signals a missed opportunity. Maps provide powerful ways to communicate to diverse audiences – a means to represent phenomena spatially. Maps have an extensive history linked to the very course of the expansion of western scientific discovery and colonialism, but also to the building of Islamic intellectualism as early as the ninth century.² Maps are a seductive means

to draw the world (literally 'cartography'): they are loaded with cultural meaning, shaped by power relations and infused with the biases and perspectives of their makers.³ But beyond their power as a discrete form of documentation, and their historical relevance as artefact of scientific imperialism, maps have more recently been explored for their potential as creative means to engage communities, to enable participatory research and to facilitate the articulation of voices otherwise silenced – especially via Web 2.0 technologies, 'where users become part of web-enabled collaborative publishing consortia'.⁴ The technology enabling this kind of interactive mapping – Geographical Information Systems or GIS for short – is what sits at the heart of GPS technology in mobile phones and car sat-nav gadgets. GIS enable users to compile, store, interrogate and manipulate geographical information electronically. In a fully fledged GIS, layers of mapped data (of whatever it is one wishes to map) can be layered together much as road, rail, street name and council boundaries might all feature together in a map on a car sat-nav screen. In a fully operational GIS, the user can manipulate all those layers manually, add or delete information, tag information to geographical features, accumulate data from many sources for the purpose of analysis, or compare geographical data layers in order to answer research questions.

Historically, GIS have had high barriers to entry (cost and skills), and been the domain of environmental scientists, engineers and planners who used them to model physical environments, natural hazards, land use and property ownership. Increasingly though, researchers in the humanities and social sciences are experimenting with GIS as a tool to answer particular kinds of research questions. To work with maps, and enable communities to participate in their construction, makes possible a creative, non-verbal means to capture the richness and diversity of everyday life – hence their recent adoption by feminist ethnographers⁵, community-based urban planners⁶, gay and lesbian academics⁷, and indigenous land rights advocates.⁸ Maps, in other words, have been newly re-made as 'social and dynamic' texts.⁹

In recent projects I have sought to apply GIS to cultural research, in the context of projects with aims to understand local cultural activities and how culture might factor into strategies to regenerate communities and re-orientate regional development goals. The context is the ever-increasing popularity of the arts and cultural industries as arenas of policy-making for economic development, employment and place-branding.¹⁰ But cognisant of critiques of boosterish creative industries policy-making as being too often horribly neoliberal, and unacquainted with the texture of local cultural activities¹¹, in these projects the aim was to use maps as a means to engage communities. Maps became our route to capture everyday or 'vernacular' geographies of cultural activities. Survey and audio data generated via interviews, focus groups and stalls at festivals (for example, spoken word recordings) were accompanied by maps, drawn by research informants in their own individual way on a 'blank' base map.

These maps are capable of being computed spatially and presented for research and public advocacy purposes – again in map-form – accompanying analysis of interview and survey content. Maps combined with interview, survey or focus-groups results provide a conduit for communities to express views, for artists to articulate their stories about creative and intangible expressive practices. Such stories accumulate within a research project in the hope that an alternative form of data capture and communication can better integrate the arts and cultural activities into urban planning and policy-making.

Cool Wollongong

One example is a cultural mapping exercise undertaken as part of an ARC Linkage Project entitled Cultural Asset Mapping for Regional Australia (or CAMRA for short), which seeks to understand how communities value cultural assets in the places they live (see <http://culturemap.org.au/>). In this project, we wanted to know how residents in key case study towns (including Wollongong, where I work) create cultural meaning in places. We also wanted to speak to artists and creative producers of diverse backgrounds about the vernacular cultural activities taking place there (and which might otherwise be missed by formal planning and economic development strategies). Using various modes of inquiry the CAMRA project aimed to build a grass-roots picture of what might constitute cultural assets in places (thus adding to a broader community regeneration agenda).

One method developed for this project was the launching of a public campaign around one simple question – 'Where is cool and creative Wollongong?' The campaign involved distribution of a postcard (Figure 1) designed to draw attention and pose the key research question, and to alert people to the possibility of having their say by a variety of means: by coming along to a festival stall or to a focus group day to participate in a cultural mapping exercise, or by contributing online to a blog or Facebook discussion (see Figure 2). At our stall at the annual Viva La Gong Festival – staffed by CAMRA researchers over the course of a day of the festival – hundreds of people participated, giving us a very large dataset to analyse (160 A3 maps and nearly half a gigabyte of MP3 recordings).

Overall there was a very warm response from the community, indicated by the large number of participants we recruited and the manner in which people responded. Very few people seemed uninterested; virtually no-one said 'no' outright when approached. Most interestingly, a kind of 'learning curve' was observed among many of the participants: to begin with, people struggled to think of what places were cool or creative (because it was a geographical question, not a 'who' type question) but, as participants started drawing on maps, 'spatial reasoning'¹² started to emerge, and by the end of each interview/mapping exercise, people were freely talking about Wollongong's sites and cultural activities using the map as a constant visual prompt. Scores of interviews that began with short and difficult answers

to our one research question ended up lasting for ten, 20, even 40 minutes. Hard-copy paper maps evidently play a role in cementing detailed spatial cognition about a place.¹³ Maps were initially an interruption to people's thought processes – they caught newly recruited informants by surprise and stopped people in their tracks. But eventually maps become a solid foundation for more detailed and insightful comments than might have been the case without them (Figure 3).

Creative Darwin

In Darwin, I was part of another research team that sought to use a cultural mapping approach in understanding the creative industries – how they tick, where they are located and what opportunities and constraints are present in that unusual, tropical savannah.¹⁴ Our philosophy was to try and build a picture of Darwin's creative industries from the grassroots up, based on widespread consultation and interviewing with creative workers, and then from this compile stories to communicate to policy-makers about what matters to the creative industries in Darwin. Beyond assisting the creative industries per se, the project had wider questions about diversifying Darwin's labour market and making Darwin a more liveable place by promoting cultural vitality.

An extra difficulty was that the creative industries in Darwin are small and invisible when compared to those in big cities.¹⁵ Statistical analysis of employment in creative industries revealed a mere fraction of the total cultural activity taking place in Darwin.¹⁶ Interviewing enabled us to find creative workers otherwise 'hidden' in statistics, and snowballing from one informant to another expanded the sample of creative workers included. But interviews alone – qualitative conversations in narrative form – could not generate the kind of 'hard' data that would enable decision-makers beyond the arts sector to be convinced of the efficacy of creative industries. Mapping provided a solution.

Creative workers (about 100 of them from diverse backgrounds and fields) were interviewed about all aspects of their creative lives and pursuits, but woven into the interview were questions prompting them to draw on paper maps of Darwin: 'where do you work?', 'where do you go to source supplies, meet clients, perform or exhibit?', 'where is Darwin's creative epicentre – and why?', 'where do you go to gain inspiration – and why?' These questions were qualitative in nature, but produced individually crafted maps of creative activity in this city that could be aggregated in a GIS to produce a single composite map showing data that appears quantitative when presented in map form. In other words, maps provided a way to quantify otherwise qualitative interview responses ('where I work', 'what I do') for communication with policy-makers and other audiences (Figure 4).

Figure 1. 'Where is cool and creative Wollongong' postcard campaign, November 2009

(image courtesy of Wollongong City Council and the ARC CAMRA project)



In some ways the results were unsurprising: Darwin's city centre, which has the bulk of the city's live music venues, galleries and cafes, showed up prominently in our maps. But also revealed were patterns of activity and inspiration amongst creative workers that one simply could not glean without talking to creative workers and have them record their answers on a map. For example, the low-density suburb of Parap came through most strongly as Darwin's creative epicentre – where creative workers in Darwin most commonly thought creative activity was centralised in the city. Parap is home to a couple of galleries and art supply stores but, crucially, it hosts a weekly outdoor market popular with arts and creative industries workers. Our composite maps presented data able to communicate to bureaucrats – in quantitative terms – the value of such a place for the city's creative industries; its value as a site of community-building. Those qualities, which social researchers know intuitively to be valuable – that certain locations are important because of their atmosphere, their ability to gel community together – can, through qualitative interview maps, be captured in a form of data able to speak to decision-makers otherwise insistent on more mathematical forms of 'proof'.

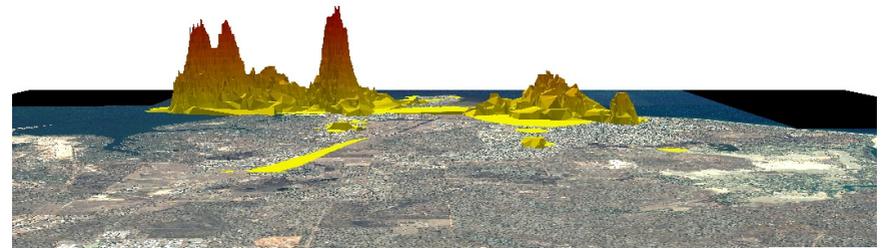
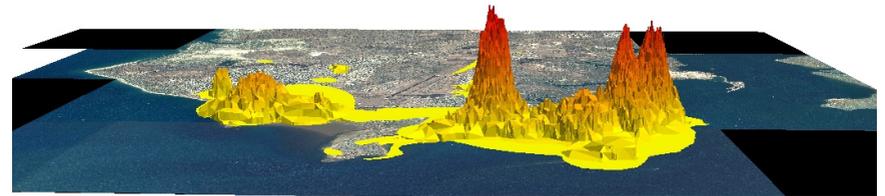
Rural festivals—from obscurity onto the map

My final example comes from an ARC Discovery Project that sought to measure the extent and significance of festivals in non-metropolitan areas. The background to the project was that there had been plenty of work done on the economic and social contributions of festivals to places, but problems persisted in several areas: a perennial metropolitan bias; a poor sense of the overall, cumulative contribution of festivals to regional economic development; and, in the economic impacts of festivals literature, a dominant, blinkered perspective reliant on monetary measures, based on sliding scales that posit massive festivals with big profits as 'more' successful than small community events.¹⁷ Our opinion was that previous literatures missed the point about how festivals could connect people within rural, often small communities, catalysing all kinds of economic relationships based on logics other than profit-maximisation (sharing resources, swapping services, in-kind contributions, quid-pro-quo relationships), and failed to estimate what this might aggregate to as a 'sector' of the economy when considering the breadth and diversity of all festivals in rural areas.

Driven by such dissatisfaction with the relativist and ideological shortcomings of previous research on the social and economic impacts of festivals, we sought a different approach, built on a first phase where we developed a map database of literally every rural festival we could locate outside capital cities in three Australian states (New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria). The purpose of this was to generate an overall picture of the prevalence of festivals outside capital cities, and to enable spatial analysis of their distribution, regional clustering and differentiation. In this map database we included every festival we could find (once parameters for what

Figure 4. 'Where is Darwin's creative epicentre?'

Results to this question are presented here in 3D map-form, as a culmination of nearly a hundred separate interviews where creative workers were asked to identify on a map Darwin's most creative place. The highest 'peaks' are those locations drawn most often by creative workers in interviews with the research team.²² (Maps reproduced with kind permission from Chris Brennan-Horley).



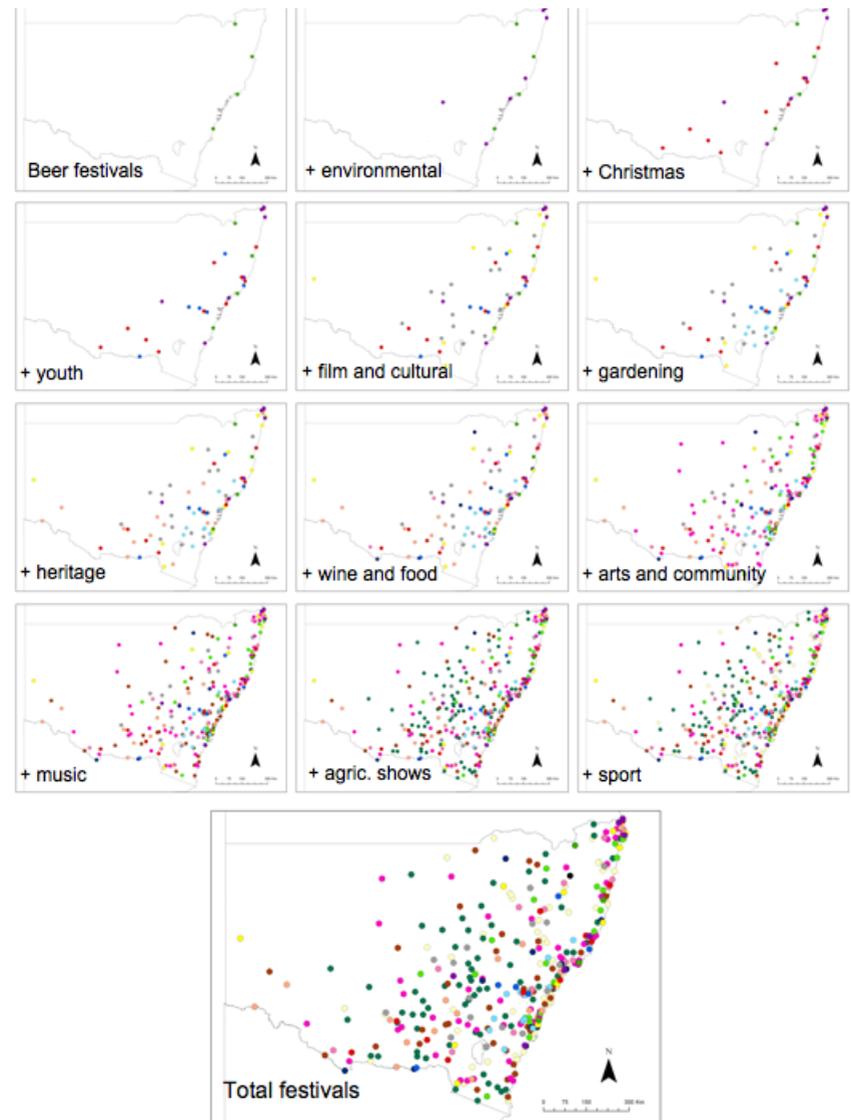
defined a 'festival' were defined¹⁸) – whether small, large, obscure, bizarre. In one calendar year we identified over 2800 festivals taking place outside capital cities of the three states. We then undertook close survey analysis with help from the managers of 480 festivals, and in a third phase of research pursued detailed field work at individual festivals: the Parkes Elvis Revival Festival in New South Wales, Chillout in Daylesford, Victoria (Australia's largest non-metropolitan gay and lesbian festival) and Opera in the Paddock in Inverell, New South Wales.

From these second and third phases it was possible to glean qualitatively the networks, relationships and dynamics that enable festivals to gel together rural communities, but also, crucially, we generated overall measures of impacts for the whole rural festivals sector. It was clear from our map database that festivals were diverse and geographically scattered throughout rural Australia (with particular patterns, such as a greater per capita concentration of festivals in the New South Wales Riverina region than in other parts – see Figure 5). Our survey revealed that the bulk of rural festivals are small, run by non-profit organisations and not principally about making money. Yet from surveys, and from close fieldwork at the selected individual festivals, we were also able to calculate impressive statewide statistics on employment, incomes and volunteerism. These statistics illustrated the point that while most rural festivals are modest, socially motivated (rather than profit-motivated) and not especially geared to tourism, their significance is worth serious recognition from governments because of their sheer quantity and geographical ubiquity.

We generated data (compiled in a glossy report designed as an accessible, public document – see Figure 6) that could convince hard-nosed economists and planners of the value of events that otherwise seem to be small or insignificant. In their proliferation, and in the extent to which they support an intricate network of related support businesses in their towns, rural festivals are a prominent feature of regional economies. Reaching this conclusion was not so much about calculating numbers of tickets sold or through multiplier analysis estimating how much money was ploughed back into the community from an individual event, but more about how, through a mapping approach, it was possible to locate events and track how they congeal across the annual calendar of activities in regions to secure a part of the local economy. A geographical perspective centred on finding and characterising cultural activities across a wider scale made such analysis possible.

Figure 5. Rural festivals, New South Wales, 2007 – by type, cumulative map

(source: ARC Rural Festivals Project—see <http://festivalsproject.uow.edu.au/index.html>).



Endnotes

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12. Elwood, 2009.
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The case for ‘socially engaged arts’: navigating art history, cultural development and arts funding narratives

Marnie Badham

Abstract

Over the past 30 years of community cultural development policy and practice in Australia, artists and communities have been stimulating dialogue and developing cultural expression through collaborative and creative practice. Growing evidence has been collected regarding the instrumental benefits, such as increasing ‘social capital’, economic development and health outcomes. However, there remains little critical attention paid to the intrinsic artistic values of this practice. This diverse field is inherently interdisciplinary, and, like traditional art forms, follows particular principles and ethics. Without a clearly articulated aesthetic, it is often overlooked as non-professional art practice. This paper argues that more attention needs to be paid to the artistic merits of this field as socially engaged arts practice, and to do so, three inter-related lenses for the practice are considered: an art history context, cultural development theory, and the ever-changing Australia Council’s community arts policy.

Keywords: socially engaged arts, community cultural development, artistic merit, cultural democracy, Australia Council for the Arts

Introduction

In an increasingly uncertain world, societies are facing mass migration, climate change and economic collapse. Artists and communities are addressing these global issues at a local level through practice known as community cultural development, community arts, or socially engaged arts practice. Over the past three decades, there is mounting international evidence from health, culture, and social science fields linking arts engagement and cultural participation with increased democratic participation and enhanced community wellbeing¹, alongside other instrumental values of the arts. More challenging to describe are the

intrinsic values of arts engagement: aesthetic enlightenment, communicative processes, and contributions to public sector capacity. Rather than relying on the more easily measurable instrumental descriptions, this paper advocates a new framing of the practice as socially engaged arts within an art historical context, placing more value on the artistic integrity of the work, a key factor of the success of this practice.

McCarthy et al’s *Gifts of the muse* (2005) sheds light on the roots of this challenge: the lack of attention to the intangible and difficult to define intrinsic benefits of the arts:

They lie beyond the traditional quantitative tools of the social sciences, and often beyond the language of common experience. Although many advocates of the arts believe intrinsic benefits are of primary importance, they are reluctant to introduce them into the policy discussion because they do not believe such ideas will resonate with most legislators and policymakers ... the arts community is expected to focus on tangible results that have broad political backing, such as improved educational performance and economic development.²

This paper argues that if the artistic merit in this field is overlooked we will lose the social impacts. It proposes that the field of community cultural development, and to be more specific, socially engaged arts practice, requires a more rigorous inquiry of relevant arts based conceptual frameworks, to be grounded as a legitimate art form. While other art disciplines are positioned within the historical trajectory and protocols of specific art mediums, this practice is inherently interdisciplinary. The practice has traditionally responded to locally perceived realities or injustices, with artistic leadership guiding the application of social and cultural aesthetics. As a result this field of art practice is informed less by its own historical context and more by its shared principles and ethics³. To support these claims, this paper provides a descriptive chronology of the field’s development in Australia, read through the context of Australia Council funding language and how it sets up the relationship of the art or artist to ‘community’. This reflects a shift from ‘democratisation of art’ to ‘cultural democracy’. The second narrative of the paper will be a more general placement of the field into art historical context, attempting to draw attention to the aesthetic theoretical relevance of the work. The last thread, a cultural development perspective, is explained through processes of cultural change: cultural intrusion, creativity, and dialogue. Ultimately, the paper concludes that continued critical and conceptual discourse is required for not only acceptance of this practice as a professional art form, but to also sustain an innovative and resilient community of practice.

Socially engaged arts practice

Despite a more than thirty-year history of community arts in Australia, practitioners engaging in transformative practice, and government support

for projects, there is no definitive understanding or comprehensive theory.⁴ The practice is known by many names: community art, participatory arts, community-engaged arts, socially engaged arts, arts for social justice, artist and community collaboration, relational or dialogical art, applied aesthetics, and community cultural development. By extension, folk art, ethnic art, outsider art, collaborative art making, circus arts and grassroots arts are also at times included in this 'too hard to define' basket. This extensive 'shopping list' is presented here to underscore the fleeting language and jargon created by policy makers. For the purposes of this paper, the term socially engaged arts will include all of these community and cultural development art processes that intend positive social change and facilitate individuals and communities in active participation in their cultural identity. To clarify, this paper uses the more focused term 'socially engaged' arts practice, which is seen as residing within a much broader landscape of community cultural development.

Over the last fifteen years in Canada, and now in Australia, my practice has been as an artist and amateur in numerous communities and mediums: outdoor site-specific dance projects in remote communities, prison art workshops, art installations at housing estates, experimental video created by sex workers, and so on. These examples are cited only to illustrate the diversity of my practice, as this is a theoretical paper and will intentionally not locate specific projects as case studies. My own practice has resulted in instrumental community outcomes of social, justice, educational and health impacts.⁵ This paper will not argue against such benefits, but it does raise the concern that artistic integrity is often undermined or overlooked. Too often, the challenge of articulating and qualifying the artistic becomes too complex and we resort to the more easily expressed translation of social policy outcomes. The exclusion of the essential role of the artist and aesthetic commitment in project development and production may be overlooked in the broader field, if the critical dialogue lacks this inclusion. Therefore, this paper will attempt to strengthen the case for artistic merit within this social practice.

Practitioners and theorists have been unable to define a particular style, form or aesthetic in socially engaged arts, but, like any other art forms, it is approached by particular principles and ethics.⁶ Interpretation by the artist *and* community of these principles (collaboration, hybridity, creativity, innovation) inform the process, form and outcomes of the field. These principles have shifted over the last few decades from the democratisation of culture: a 'top-down' welfare-like approach of *helping* disadvantaged communities, to the embracing of cultural democracy: the recognition of unique, valuable and plural communities' right to control the creation and trajectory of their own culture. Cultural democracy upholds the rights of authorship; representation and dissemination of this new balanced collaboration between artist and community.

This is a particularly interesting shift: from democratisation to democracy. A corresponding shift in Australia Council for the Arts⁷ ideology can be illustrated through examples of changing public funding language of federal agencies, from the time when the Community Arts Board was established in 1973.⁸ The titles of funding programs have regularly changed, however distinctions are made between art *for*, *by* and *with* community. These tiny prepositions might seem insignificant but they alter the meaning substantially in regard to power relationships and ownership of voice, aesthetic and artistic content. *Art for community* can be explained as work that has been developed for an audience, and in this context, typically an expansion of the archetypal audience, for example, sponsorship of a children's music festival for workers and their families. *Art with community* suggests work that is made through collaboration between professional artists and non-arts groups, as seen in 'workers theatre' or artist in residence programs in health, educational or justice settings. Lastly, *art by community* suggests that the makers of art, and the understanding of what art even is, need to be reconsidered, questioned and ultimately, reinterpreted.

Arts for community

Dr Penny Tripcony of the Ngugi people has noted: 'There is no one word in any Aboriginal language for the term art. Art forms are viewed as an integral part of life and the celebration of life.'⁹

While artists have been working in the context of community since the beginning of time, many indigenous languages do not even have a separate word for art. Culture, engaging in day-to-day life with ceremony, ritual, music, and dance, is not separated from everyday life. Western societies have typically placed the artist on the outskirts of society, regarded rather as genius and author of creative commodities, objects or staged performance. This has made the task of defining the role of the artist within the field of community art an enduring challenge, with models ranging across this spectrum of token engagement to authentic ownership of creative projects. Generally speaking, early publicly funded community arts (from the early 1970s in Australia) reacted against the tradition of art for the elite. The content of community art, at this time, changed to include glimpses or stories of everyday life, but the form remained the same: that is, object-based art, staged art, and art that required an audience in a purpose designed gallery or theatre.

In early funded community arts programs, the predominant style was Realism, a residual of colonising practices, which encouraged an 'objective' perspective and a somewhat detached position from the artist or author: documenting history and shedding light on reality. Social Realism was a movement that emphasised the faithful representation of social reality. While not all work of this time presented a strictly Realist perspective, American critics Greenberg and the younger Fried, spoke of this work as *literal*. They favoured Modern Art over the literal, as Modernism did not

provide an illustratively accurate depiction of the world. Much of this early publicly-funded community art focused on the plight of the working class, called for social reform, and the end of racial and social injustice. Traditional mediums – such as *workers theatre* – can be seen as an aesthetic and politically left ‘hangover’ from the American Depression in the 1930s and on a broader scale it reaches back to the Realist movement of the late 1800s in France and in Germany.

As mentioned earlier, the Community Arts Committee was established at the Australian Council of the Arts in 1973. This was part of the global policy movement towards the ‘democratisation’ of culture, with a commitment to providing access to the arts for all, particularly for those who experienced economic, social and cultural barriers to participation. As Duland has put it: ‘Dissemination was the key concept with the aim of establishing equal opportunity for all citizens to participate in publicly organised and financed cultural activities’.¹⁰ This objective of cultural democratisation could be seen as the aesthetic enlightenment, with a focus on educating the general public. Within cultural policies of many western worlds, culture and the arts are seen as a public good that betters society through an egalitarian approach.

This particular paradigm was met with resistance from the other traditional art disciplines (performing arts, visual arts, etcetera), which challenged the status of community arts as a professional arts practice. This resistance, in turn, received criticism from community arts comrades, who saw it as an attempt to extend access to the *already* privileged or elitist art forms, such as regional touring of symphony orchestras or giving free tickets to the national art gallery for ‘at risk’ youth. Either way, the debate was about art ‘for’ community to participate in as audience. This global project of democratisation aimed to propagate a mainstream aesthetic and the values attached to it, and to disregard other notions of plural culture(s) as being marginal or less important. In other words, democratisation was about extending access to, not ownership of, cultural products for all.

At this point, we need to take a step back from community arts policy descriptions to more seriously consider the concepts of culture and development. Socially engaged art can be seen as *a tool for change*. Culture, as understood in broad terms, relates to how we both engage in, and make meaning of, the world in which we are immersed. Culture gives us ‘tools’ to make sense of the world. This accumulated repertoire of knowledge, assumptions and beliefs is comprised of both history and heritage – documented traditions and achievements – and new and changing ways to interpret the world through experience, learning and socialisation.¹¹

Change can be called ‘development’ if there is a sense of adaptation or updating of culture. However, such cultural change can occur in a variety of ways and three distinct processes can be identified. The first process can be called *cultural intrusion*, and this is when cultural change is imposed from the ‘outside’. This can probably be seen most clearly in regard to colonisation,

when one group – or cultural entity – imposes an external cultural *inheritance of meaning* on another, forcing them to give up control of their historical cultural trajectory. Gramsci described a process of cultural ‘hegemony’ in which diverse cultures and values can be dominated by singular rule, when people become unaware of the larger structures that impose prevailing cultural norms. As Miller and Yudice (2002) have put it, cultural hegemony occurs when ‘the dominant culture uses education, philosophy, religion, aesthetics and art to make its dominance appear normal and natural to the heterogeneous groups that constitute society’.¹²

A relatively small, elite segment of society is often seen as imposing its tastes and traditions on the choices and courses of action that people come to believe they have. As Stanley has noted, this process is not always as ‘drastic as the conquistadors showing up on your doorstep’¹³, rather, it is experienced through the adoption of new worldviews, outside information, and adaptation to new meanings. Homi Bhabha has described this process more bluntly as ‘the barbaric transmission of culture’.¹⁴ He has suggested that the intrusion results from an injection of new meaning by subjects of the intrusion; that it is not simply oppression, but an acceptance of new meaning. This helps to explain why the Realist phase in community art adopted a mainstream aesthetic.

Arts with community

The Australia Council for the Arts first introduced the term ‘community cultural development’ in the mid-1980s, in order to acknowledge a shift in the practice of community art, now focused on broader cultural, economic, and social outcomes and the inclusion of new voices and forms that were previously unacknowledged. This can be seen as the second of three processes of ‘cultural development’. However, this broader and more inclusive reach of practice seemed to have very flexible boundaries for outlining the field. Indeed the shift was accompanied by a number of very long and very verbose ‘definitions’ of the new inclusive practice. In a nutshell, it was proposed that community cultural development can be explained as a community-based creative practice, which engages artists and communities in processes of cultural development and self-determination. Further, the field was seen as encompassing a diverse range of activities and practices aimed at providing communities with opportunities to tell their stories, build creative capacity, address social agendas, express identity, and participate directly in the development of their own culture(s).¹⁵ This far-reaching agenda could include a spectrum of activities ranging from subversive political art interventions to local government cultural planning, such as ‘place making’.

Artists interpreted this as cultural activity *with* community and also art *by* community. A conscious shift was made from the ‘democratisation’ of culture (as access) to a notion of cultural democracy in which communities were seen to have more control of their own cultural trajectory. They were

now in charge of their own representations, their own production of culture and its applications. American writers Adams and Goldbard (1990) have said that the concept of cultural democracy involves three components: equality, participation, and democracy. In their words:

Cultural democracy is not a complicated idea, though its applications can become very complex. It encompasses several interrelated concepts. First, it posits that *many cultural traditions co-exist* in human society, and that *none of these should be allowed to dominate* and become an official culture. A second component of the idea of cultural democracy is *participation*. Cultural democracy proposes a cultural life in which everyone is free to participate. And finally, a third component of the idea of cultural democracy is that *cultural life itself should be subject to democratic control*. We need to participate in determining the directions that cultural development takes.¹⁶

The more inclusive strategies for cultural 'development' resulted in the word 'art' being replaced by 'culture' and 'artist' by 'arts worker'. This new paradigm linked art skills to the service of a community, whereas previously the artist was considered to be either a skilled technician or a conceptual genius. Artists were now seen as working *with* community, rather than *for* community and this shifted the perception of ownership to an emphasis on partnership or collaboration. It is important to understand the mechanics of such partnerships: it is not a funding relationship, nor simply an artist teaching a class in community, rather, it is a collaboration in the production of art. The inclusion of the word 'with' suggests a relationship of shared risk and, in terms of culture, a new process of engagement and exchange of ideas that will have substantial impact on content, process, decision making, and ultimately the new aesthetic developed from this coming together. With an increase in the development of participatory models, communities now became both creator and producer, not just audience. This certainly led to a broadening, and perhaps a deepening, of community art practice across Australia, Canada, the UK, and the USA.

Previously, within prevailing conceptions of community art, cultural change was the result of an intrusion: the domination and imposition of one particular cultural form. This new conception of community cultural development was seen as enacting cultural change through creative processes. Hence, creativity was seen as a process of evolution that actively challenges old meanings and creates new meanings or representations, and this could apply to innovations in art, science or philosophy. In this paradigm, citizens, scientists, artists and philosophers create new meaning through education, debate, and interpretation.

In the 1990s, Australia saw the start of growing research interest in the impact of community cultural development on mental health, community wellbeing, and social inclusion from a variety of sources including philanthropy, health organisations and universities. This is also when a

crisis in confidence developed regarding the value of artistic outcomes resulting from the new forms of practice. Australian writer Graham Pitts has suggested that: 'The function of community cultural development became less the production of art and more the consolidation and development of dynamic communities as purposive coalitions able to act in their own best interests.'¹⁷

What was once considered highly charged and political art was perhaps becoming more a means of disseminating a social welfare model. Had community cultural development dropped art in its pursuit of social outcomes? Or were practitioners and the broader cultural community just lacking the language to discuss the new aesthetics? Gay Hawkins' polemic, *From Nimbin to Mardi Gras: constructing community arts*¹⁸, presented this as a challenge, suggesting that the field had become a construction, or invention, of an arts policy aimed at achieving social outcomes.

From 'grassroots' community arts—such as the painting of murals to social realist theatre—to government planning, this practice was once again presented with the challenge of defining itself in terms of artistic excellence. Unfortunately, those who were faced by this challenge, in particular those requesting this designated arts funding, were hampered. First, they were limited in their ability to represent an adequate understanding of the history of their field of practice. Individual artists working in more traditional art forms can resort to aesthetic principles and technical skills derived from the history of their art form. For example, people working in theatre or visual arts are broadly aware of the trajectory of art movements in their fields and their work is reviewed by other 'professionals' in the light of such histories. When artists in the field of community cultural development request funds their requests were not reviewed by a jury of their peers, but a range of those who presented, administrated and partnered in this practice. The challenge for those working in the field now called community cultural development was to articulate new aesthetics emerging from local cultural realities; with some practices being literal, some more symbolic, some traditional and some new hybrid forms. To be more precise, this was the challenge for the cultural democracy movement which had prompted the shift to the language of community cultural development.

This may have also presented a challenge for those who had a primary interest in the social policy outcomes of socially engaged art. The message for those who might want to employ artists to achieve certain social policy outcomes was 'Don't lose the art'. In other words, socially engaged arts are inherently transformational because they are collaborative and engaging, especially when lead artists are determined to uphold the artistic integrity of the work. However, it is the art more than the social policy outcome that results in transformation, yet there has been limited discussion in the literature on these kinds of artistic processes.¹⁹ A debate between Bishop (2006) and Krester (2004) has noted that it is difficult to be critical of art that

helps to make people feel good about themselves because art that has taken a 'social turn' is resisting the notion that there is such a thing as 'bad art.' This 'social turn' in art practice has been criticised as a way of providing social services on the back of artists with the result that the work of artists is diminished. The ability to critique such art practice is also complicated as it is difficult to critique work that appears to be of social merit, even if it does lack innovation.

By contrast, Mulligan and Smith, who undertook an extensive three-year research project in this field, argued that: 'Artistic projects can only shift perceptions and attitudes in a meaningful way if they have a 'wow factor' related to an inspirational artistic vision and/or the clever crafting of diverse and well targeted activities.'²⁰

Mulligan and Smith conducted detailed research on significant creative community collaborations located in five local government areas across Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, to see how effectively the arts projects had aided the local governments concerned to address pressing social issues in their areas (for example, aging population, disengagement, indigenous land claims). Successful projects, they concluded, were those in which lead artists made particular aesthetic choices, rather than simply focus on community participation. This echoes points made in a handful of significant studies in both UK²¹ in the US²² which have argued that 'intrinsic' values of the arts are at least as important, if not more important, than instrumental values. In other words, art needs to be judged in terms of aesthetic merit and its ability to communicate or inform the 'public sphere' in order to understand the contribution it can make to social policy. Clearly, this touches on a larger discussion about the role of art in society but it can also open up the discussion about the impacts of socially engaged art. When the instrumental values of this practice are overstated, the intrinsic values are overlooked, endangering the commitment to artistic integrity. Yet, as Mulligan and Smith suggest, the shift in public attitudes is likely to be connected to inspirational artistic vision in practice.

While some might consider Modern art to be a far stretch from forms of art that reflect this 'social turn', there are, conceptually, a number of elements within the historical development of Modern art that provide insights into the challenges now faced by socially engaged art. The philosophy of Modern artists – stretching across most of the twentieth century – was experimentation and new ideas regarding ways of seeing, the nature of materials, and the functions of art. Indeed, Modern Art even became critical of itself, offering self-consciousness about aesthetics and social debate. American curator, Lucy Lippard (1985), was one of the first who named conceptual art of the 1970s as Modernism's 'de-objectification': a letting go of the object, gallery or the stage that identified art as art. She also wrote extensively about feminist art, another movement that could be qualified less by a predominant aesthetic of a particular medium, but informed

more by particular principles and ethics. This changed the way art was experienced; the audience was not as much at a distance and were now engaged in creating meaning based on alternative contexts. Lippard speaks of community arts and cultural animation within a frame of public art and notions of place, as a way to stimulate local dialogue, with artist seeing themselves as facilitators of community and ideas, rather than interpreters.²³

Art by community

In the 1990s in Australia, new voices began to emerge as art makers and as recipients of arts funding. Multicultural arts and indigenous arts were now on the agenda, with policy makers forced to recognise other essentially Australian aesthetics that had been previously overlooked by the mainstream. The criteria of 'artistic excellence' had to once again be redefined with work that was now being more clearly created *by* community. As indicated earlier, this involved a conceptual shift that challenged more literal art forms; with new voices being heard and new cultural forms acknowledged. The shift from 'community art' to 'community cultural development' eventually resulted in reorganisation at the Australia Council, when a new 'community partnerships' program replaced the earlier program administered by the now-abolished Community Cultural Development Board. While many practitioners worried that the new program might be little more than a marketing strategy for the Australia Council, the shift is now widely seen as reaching beyond, and perhaps deeper, than the program run by the CCD Board. The Australia Council notes that its primary role is to help to articulate the 'national story', and now that story is clearly about cultural pluralism. This involves redefining who an art maker is and who creates culture. The new focus on community partnerships reflects a move away from short-term 'one-off' projects. There are now new collaboration models, inter-sectoral partnerships including non-arts organisations, new entrepreneurial models with diversified and self generated revenue sources, and longer term projects embedded in community in order to build local capacity. There is a new rhetoric of helping to build self-reliant and resilient communities.

'Community partnerships' appears to be more than just a new funding model because it suggests a movement away from formal art traditions and an embedding of practice deeper into institutional culture. It is hoped that partnerships involving non-arts organisations – in areas such as health, education, or housing – will serve to embed CCD principles more deeply within society. However, the challenge, once again, is to define aesthetic integrity within a practice that often gets lost in its social policy rhetoric. Without a strong commitment to artistic processes and outcomes, the merits of creative collaborations and their 'social impacts' will suffer. While the expanded mandate of Australia Council within the field of 'community partnerships' does not necessarily mean that artistic integrity will suffer, there is a clear danger of diffusion. The artist is expected to be at the service

of a community and become a community development practitioner. The emphasis is less on creative outcomes and more about 'capacity building' for communities.

Once again we can turn to conventional art history to get a better understanding of the new challenges facing socially engaged art in Australia. In promoting a model for socially engaged art that emphasises dialogue without diminishing a critical reliance on the inspirational vision or direction of the artist, we need to look at art movements that have had the capacity to shock us out of complacency and see the world anew. This brings us to artists who, in words of Clinescu, have seen art as 'the most immediate and fastest way to social, political, and economic reform.'²⁴ Twentieth century avant-garde – from Dadaist irrationalism to the constructed situations in the Situationist International²⁵ – falls within the tradition of the previously discussed movement, Modernism. It shared with Modernism the aim of changing culture, attitudes and mentalities, and individual and social living conditions. Artists in the avant-garde tradition reacted against authority, including working without funding, and they sought to engage with a broad audience in this reactive stance. Within the tradition there was also Fluxus, which encouraged a 'do-it-yourself aesthetic' which valued simplicity over complexity. Fluxus included a strong current of anti-commercialism and an anti-art sensibility, disparaging the conventional consumerist art world in favour of creative processes. Working with materials at hand, from the local context, Fluxus artists were collaborators and they certainly shared principles inherent in contemporary socially engaged art. Once again, we can focus on an acknowledged art tradition that has challenged notions of 'high art'. A number of contemporary art critics – such as Grant Kester, Lucy Lippard, Claire Bishop or Hal Foster²⁶ – have discussed art traditions that fit within an unconventional niche of 'political' or 'activist' art. However, they have been interested in the reputation of the individual artist and less the aesthetics of the more dispersed authorship in the community context.

Within the field of socially engaged art much debate has focused on process versus product, and ethical issues related to the spectacle or perceived exploitation of sensitive populations, as well as the debates about intrinsic and instrumental benefits of participatory art practices. There is growing discussion about the aesthetic quality of collaborative art forms. However, the field's practitioners and informed critics are often disregarded as 'bleeding hearts', or, worse still, propagandists for the political left. It is frustrating that a whole field of practice can be so easily disregarded within the contemporary art world. Like activist art as an organising tool and a source of aesthetic expression, Lippard explains 'advocacy criticism' is subjective to the writer's political views and the social context:

What I am calling and advocacy critic ... works from a communal base to identify and criticise the existing social structures as means to locate and evaluate the social and aesthetic effect of the art.²⁷

Bourriaud's 'relational aesthetics' also describes artistic practices that consider human relations and social contexts. Each of the defined styles, discussed above, had moved away from the private space, stage or the object. These attempts at redefinition sought to not only democratise the arts, but challenged elitism and the how aesthetics were considered.

This brings us, finally, to the third process – beyond cultural intrusion or transmission and a focus on creativity – to an emphasis on dialogue. In this process, culture involves both the communication of 'inherited meanings' and well as the creation of new meaning. Authentic experiences of cultural dialogue can provide the means for communicating values, traditions, beliefs and experiences, which can result in better understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. Exchange can affect the way we create meaning within our own culture and provide an opportunity for new hybrid art forms. While mainstream notions of 'social inclusion' have become popular on political agendas, the concepts of cultural democracy and mainstream diversification reflect developments within contemporary art practice.²⁸ In a pluralist society, it is only ethical that value be given to self-determination – that is, the ability to control the trajectory of one's own culture – and this can also promote reflection on diverse traditions and beliefs.

Cultural dialogue is both the opportunity and means for mutually beneficial communication among people of different cultures. The value this places on dialogue, then, is based on the premise that to be able to live together well, people need to be able to communicate and understand one another's culture. As Terry McKinley has put it:

Cultural diversity should be respected, but what is most desirable is a flourishing, interactive diversity, in which people of differing cultures are able to communicate their values, beliefs and traditions to one another in an atmosphere of mutual respect and learning.²⁹

McKinley's work with UNESCO illustrates the value of socially engaged arts practice that provides an opportunity for this kind of exchange, leading to new forms of cultural transmission and new, hybrid, art forms developed between traditional and contemporary cultures. Cultural dialogue and exchange – like artistic merit, transmission and creativity – should be seen key factors in socially engaged arts practices.

Conclusions

In the attempt to theorise the field of socially engaged arts, within a context of the arts more broadly – rather than solely focus on its instrumental outcomes – this paper has provided three new perspectives: 1) a perspective gained from art history, 2) a perspective gained from the examining evolution of practices related to 'cultural development', and 3) a perspective gained from analysing shifts in policy and practice at the Australia Council for the Arts. From the perspective of art history, we have seen that an understanding of social realism, Modern art, avant-garde art and activist art

helps to provide a broader reference for shifting practices, emphasising the important creative role of the artist. An examination of changing practices in relation to 'cultural development' reveals the shift from cultural intrusion to creativity *per se* to the emphasis on dialogue. The paper has not endeavoured to present a preferred model of practice, but it has tracked the arts funding trajectory over the past three decades in Australia, which has moved from 'community art' to 'community cultural development' to 'community partnerships'.

Due to a lack of resources and, perhaps, confidence, socially engaged art in Australia has traditionally lacked formal critical self-reflection. However, the problem is more than just a lack of time and resources because many practitioners probably fear that even talking about creativity could result in the loss of its inherent ephemeral and organic processes; that the underground will become exploited and misappropriated by the mainstream. This is an unwarranted fear and we need to be more aware that practice has been, and will continue to be, informed by policy, while policy will continue to be informed by practice. Socially engaged arts practice has existed for centuries, largely outside funding paradigms, and it will continue this way into the future. Artists and communities will continue to engage in practice which addresses complex global issues at the local level through creative engagement activities. It is this type of self-determination – through processes of creativity – which has been driving human development since the beginning of time.

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How can the impact of cultural development work in local government be measured? Towards more effective planning and evaluation strategies

Kim Dunphy

Abstract

The field of cultural development in local government is relatively new, with most councils only having dedicated staff or teams within the last ten to fifteen years. Challenges are associated with that newness in the areas of planning, goal setting and formal evaluation of achievements in relation to goals. How can the best decisions be made about what is needed? How can the outcomes of that work be evaluated? What should be measured and how? This paper explores these challenges and presents some solutions. Program Logic is introduced as a methodology for effective planning and evaluation of cultural development work in local government. The need for both performance and outcome evaluation of cultural development work is discussed, as are the levels of evaluation required; considering the contribution of individual workers, departments, whole of council and the overall community outcomes. Factors beyond the influence of local government, which impact the outcomes of arts initiatives, are also considered in arguing that more sophisticated evaluation processes are required.

Keywords: cultural development, local government, monitoring, evaluation, Program Logic, arts indicators.

Introduction

The field of cultural development within local government in Australia is relatively new, with many councils only establishing dedicated teams within the last ten to fifteen years.¹ Cultural planning in local government is, therefore, a relatively recent practice, corresponding with the increasing scope of local government responsibility for provisions of services and opportunities for its citizens beyond the traditional 'roads, rates and rubbish'. Some councils have only developed and implemented one or two

versions of an arts or 'cultural' plan. There are as yet no specific training courses in cultural development for local or other forms of government and many workers come to this field with little specialised training. While these staff often bring valuable expertise in related disciplines – including arts practice, event management, community development, museum and curatorial studies and arts entrepreneurship – the variations in their professional backgrounds leads to many challenges, including a lack of shared values and practices. This is unlike other sectors of local government – such as urban planning – where council staff mostly have sector- or context-specific training, leading to more easily agreed values, standards and frames of reference.

At the same time, the fields of evaluation and indicators related to culture and the arts are also emerging; with almost all of the literature produced over the same ten to fifteen year period. The lack of common backgrounds and the newness of work on evaluation create challenges for the establishment of planning, evaluation and indicator frameworks for cultural development in local government. Without a set of shared values from which the field operates, it is very difficult to establish a universal planning framework that has a cogent theory of the link between goals, activities and outcomes; an evaluation framework that can measure the outcomes of activities and an appropriate set of indicators that can allow comparison between different Local Government Areas and an evaluation of work over time.

This paper proposes some solutions to these challenges. Suggestions for more effective cultural development planning are made, along with information about evaluation in the local government context, considering both performance and outcome evaluation. The importance of evidence-based decision-making is discussed, as is the value of data in decision-making. The contribution that local governments can make to communities is presented within a framework that considers a range of other influences; state and federal government, civil society, individual and global factors. Program Logic is recommended as a useful planning and evaluation methodology for cultural development in local government in Australia. Some Program Logic tools, suitable for use by cultural development practitioners, are presented. Although the focus in the present paper is on local government, the proposed evaluation techniques can be applied to other forms of local development and planning.

Terminology

Of course, it is important to be clear about terms being used. In this paper, 'arts' is defined as any form of visual, performing, media, literary or interdisciplinary arts, made by or for any members of any community at any level of skill and intention. There are many, and contested, definitions of the word 'culture'. Cultural researcher John Holden, for example, defines culture as, 'the arts, museums, libraries and heritage that receive public

funding'.² This definition corresponds with the major concerns of arts bodies of state and national governments in Australia and in some countries internationally, particularly England. In the wider government context, and also in local government in Australia, the terms 'arts' and 'culture' are often used interchangeably.

Australian cultural analyst Jon Hawkes – in his seminal work the *Fourth pillar of sustainability*³ – discusses the many meanings of the word *culture* and has offered a much broader definition. For Hawkes, culture is

... the social production and transmission of identities, knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes and understanding; as well as, the way of life, including customs, codes and manners, dress, cuisine, language, arts, technology, religion and rituals; norms and regulations of behaviour, traditions and institutions. Therefore, culture is both the medium and the message – the inherent values, means and the results of social expression.⁴

This paper applies Hawkes' broad definition of culture – which includes the arts as one dimension – to the work that cultural development workers in local government are primarily concerned with. However, the terminology used by other authors and practitioners is respected, even when the definitions used contradict this perspective. Local government departments, for example, are often named 'Arts and Culture', when, in fact, they are primarily concerned with the arts, and the other aspects of culture – particularly cultural diversity, sport and religion – are the responsibility of different areas.

It should also be noted that a framework of arts indicators for local government is being developed by the organisation I work for, the Cultural Development Network. This framework is currently being discussed by councils across several Australian states and will be trialled in some areas before a recommended framework is presented publicly. For this reason, indicators will not be discussed in detail in this paper and those interested should refer to another paper I have written.⁵

Monitoring, evaluation and indicators

Over the last decade there have been significant developments in evaluation of arts practice, including within the work of local government. Currently, most Arts and Culture departments undertake some kind of monitoring process, checking regularly that activities outlined in council plans are being implemented as intended. Often they also undertake performance evaluation of their own work, examining their inputs and outputs against the goals of their Arts or Cultural plans. At the end of a period of activity or the life of the plan – often three to five years – a process of reflection or evaluation about progress towards goals is undertaken. Did we do what we set out to do? Did we reach our targets and our goals? This is the easiest kind of evaluation, where measurement of what was expended or done (inputs) and what happened (outputs) is made. However, for this level of evaluation

to be achieved, plans need to have targets named and quantified. How much of what was planned occurred, by when, to or with whom, and for what purpose? Rigorous measures of success can only be achieved if quantifiable and time-related targets are applied.

In an effective planning process, the following well accepted SMART planning principles are applied. According to this, program plans and goals need to be:

Specific

- Well defined
- Clear to anyone who has a basic knowledge of the project

Measurable

- Know if the goal is obtainable and how far away completion is
- Know when it has been achieved

Agreed upon

- Agreement with all the stakeholders what the goals should be

Realistic

- Within the availability of resources, knowledge and time

Time based

- Enough time to achieve the goal
- Not too much time, which can affect project performance.⁶

It is important to draw a distinction between 'monitoring', 'evaluation' and 'indicators' as follows:

- **Monitoring** is an ongoing process of collecting data and watching over project progress, primarily focused on activities and outputs.
- **Evaluation** is a systematic analytical assessment addressing important aspects of a program or policy and its value, and seeking reliability and usability of findings. Evaluation is carried out to improve decision making by providing better information. The purpose is not to replace judgements or politics in decision making but to make them more informed, taking into account past experiences.
- **Indicators** are measures used to determine amount of change.

It is also important to be clear about what we mean by 'inputs', 'outputs' and 'outcomes' in relation to local government. In this context *inputs* are the resources used to produce outputs; *outputs* are the goods or services (usually the latter) that government agencies provide for citizens, while *outcomes* are the effects on society of outputs from governmental entities.⁷

A particular form of evaluation is 'outcome evaluation', in which the outcome of an activity on an intended community is considered. This type

of evaluation asks, how is the community changed as a result of the activity? Outcome evaluation requires a fully thought-out and logical relationship between actions and goals, and a clear understanding of causal relationships between these. The Victorian Auditor-General's Office specifies that performance measures for local government need to include both 'technical efficiency' – including measures of inputs, process and outputs – and also 'outcome effectiveness', which includes outcome measures. In commenting on this, the office notes that, 'the output/outcomes model lends itself readily to measures for time, cost, quantity and quality of services provision ... Outcomes are harder to measure ... this is not a reason to ignore outcomes or not attempt to define measures for outcomes'.⁸

Outcome evaluation occurs less frequently within the cultural development sector, because, as noted by the Auditor-General and confirmed by local government staff⁹, outcomes of arts activity are often considered more difficult to measure. Consequently, the task of evaluation can be seen as too onerous. However, as the Community Indicators Victoria project advises, councils must focus attention on outcomes for communities rather than on the means to those outcomes: 'The tool used to deliver improvement – whether services, programs, capital projects, advocacy, grant funding etc – is far less relevant than the outcome, or real difference, experienced by the community'.¹⁰

For this reason, evaluating only what has been done – that is, performance evaluation – rather than the outcome this has had for the targeted community, is not enough.

To illustrate the difference between performance and outcome evaluation, let us consider a particular scenario. In this scenario, the staff in an arts department of a particular council want to increase the participation of people from CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) backgrounds in community cultural activities. The arts staff decide on strategies to address this goal; the removal of entry fees to the art gallery and a new question in grants for the community gallery about applicants' strategies for including people from CALD communities. The team achieves its performance goals; they remove the gallery's entry fee, thus making events ostensibly financially accessible to the target group, and change funding guidelines so that applicants must describe strategies for inclusion of people from CALD communities and report implementation of these in acquittals. However, these strategies may not actually work if people from CALD communities do not respond, or if they do not address the barriers experienced by people from CALD communities in arts participation. The strategy may not make any difference to the original problem. If this were the case, arts staff would need to rethink their ideas and develop new strategies that are more likely to lead to desired outcomes. A completely different approach may be needed; perhaps arts programming that is more relevant to local CALD communities or the establishment of a new venue in a different area.

Evidence-based decision-making

To choose effective strategies, councils should research relevant literature to inform their planning decisions. Plans that use evidence as a basis for decision-making are much more likely to be effective than those made for other reasons, such as business as usual, staff preferences or political objectives. Evidence-based decision-making and reflective practice is increasingly common in other areas of local government and other fields, including health¹¹, education¹² and international development.¹³ As yet this is not a well-established practice within the cultural development field.

In the scenario mentioned above, evidence-based decision-making would have required research about strategies that have previously been effective in increasing gallery attendance of people from CALD communities. Some of the literature about venue entry fees indicates that overall attendance numbers do increase when fees are reduced, but the demographics of audiences often does not change.¹⁴ Other barriers are at least as significant as price, to people from CALD communities, and, therefore, changing the price will not necessarily remove such barriers. Research of the literature would have alerted council that removing entry fees to the gallery was not likely to have a strong impact on the identified issue, and therefore it may not be a very good investment, given the amount of revenue likely to be lost. Research on the impact of changes in community group's attitudes to participation of people from diverse communities might have encouraged the council to think of a different strategy.

A recent research project instigated by the Victorian Government's Office of Disability, and undertaken by the Cultural Development Network¹⁵, sought to encourage the use of evidence in strategies for increasing participation in the arts for people with a disability. A search of the relevant literature suggested that while financial barriers are significant, as are access barriers (physical and interpretive), the aspect of people's experience that most restricts their participation in the arts is the attitude of arts providers towards people with a disability. This finding indicates that a strategy likely to improve participation in the arts for people with a disability is disability awareness training of arts providers, especially if the training is undertaken by all staff involved, including artist leaders and teachers, venue staff and management. However, for such disability awareness training to have a positive outcome, it must effectively change behaviour and attitudes towards people with a disability to those more conducive of arts participation. To prove its effectiveness, a training program would need to be able to demonstrate that participants generally had a different view of people with a disability and possibilities for changes they could implement in their own workplace, after the training. Implementation of effective training should result in policies, programs and venues that are more accessible and, even better, they could ensure that the relevant staff are proactive about participation by people with a disability.

Using data in planning and evaluation

The extent and quality of data used in planning and evaluation is important. To determine whether strategies have been effective, it is important to know what the situation was before their implementation (pre-test) and afterwards (post-test). If it were responding to the issues raised in the arts and disability research project discussed above, a council might want to know how many people with disabilities currently participate in the arts. What data could be found about this in the municipality? How does this figure compare with rates of arts participation of others in the community? If new strategies are implemented, how could it be determined that change has occurred? If there is change, has this been in the direction intended (increased participation)? If so, how could it be determined if this is a result of anything council has done rather than being due to other factors?

Furthermore, an additional level of evaluation could be undertaken by those wishing to find out more about the outcomes of arts programs for participants with a disability. For example, how are people's lives changed as a result of their access to arts opportunities? Is their quality of life enhanced? Do they feel happier, more socially included or healthier? Does their participation lead to new recreational, educational or employment opportunities?

There is a growing emphasis on the use of data in decision-making for government and non-government organisations all around the world. This change is promoted and supported by organisations such as the US-based Root Cause which has developed a suite of tools to assist those wishing to better understand the outcomes of their work.¹⁶ This use of data is also changing within the cultural development sector in Australia, as recent studies by the state government authority Arts Victoria, and statewide network Regional Arts Victoria, attest.

A joint project between the Victorian Department Planning and Community Development (DPCD and Arts Victoria examined the impacts of the funding initiative Arts Development for Communities and Arts Residencies.¹⁷ Data was collected through focus groups with artists, community participants and partner organisations. Findings indicated a range of positive outcomes of funded projects such as community strengthening through engagement of hard-to-reach populations including youth, ethnic and socio-economically disadvantaged communities. Cultural outcomes included creative opportunities for the exploration of community issues and aspirations and the creation of new and diverse artistic work and cultural experiences.

Similarly, Regional Arts Victoria instigated an evaluation of the Regional Arts Development Officer Scheme, in which research was conducted by Martin Mulligan and Pia Smith from RMIT University.¹⁸ A series of qualitative interviews with RAV staff, RADOs and partner organisation representatives, and quantitative information about the scheme provided

the data on which the evaluation was based. Findings indicated that the program was effective in a number of ways; participating regions were more successful in obtaining arts funding, government arts initiatives were better co-ordinated, regional networks were stronger, links to statewide networks and resources were better and there was new thinking about the strategic importance of investment in local arts development.

Unlike other areas in local or state government, cultural development departments at the local government level often do not have staff with expertise or responsibility for research and evaluation. However, even with modest resources and expertise, it is possible to undertake informative evaluation. Some kind of evaluation should be a component of every activity, in order to understand impacts of the work and inform future decisions.

To illustrate this, let us consider a scenario in which a council seeks to raise community awareness of local Indigenous culture by holding an event during the NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration) Week. In the first place, relevant staff could consult relevant literature and reflect on previous experience about the types of events that have been successful in contributing to community awareness about Indigenous culture. Then, once an event has been planned and implemented it would be easy to conduct a simple survey of participants, using just two questions and a Likert scale for subsequent analysis, as follows:

Survey questions

How much did you know about local Indigenous culture BEFORE you attended this event?

Nothing at all	Not much	A little	Quite a bit	A great deal
1	2	3	4	5

How much did you know about local Indigenous culture AFTER you attended this event?

Nothing at all	Not much	A little	Quite a bit	A great deal
1	2	3	4	5

Responses to this simple survey could provide much useful information to council. For example, it would reveal whether or not the event reached people who did not have previous knowledge or awareness of Indigenous culture, and whether or not the event offered a new perspective, both for those who had and did not have previous awareness. If it were discovered

that only people who were already well aware of Indigenous culture attended the NAIDOC Week event, then efforts would need to be made to attract people who were not already aware, to future events. If audience members did not report new awareness as a result of their attendance, then the content or presentation style of the event would need to be reconsidered. Additional questions about aspects of the event that might have increased awareness would help to inform council to build on the experience. This would lead to the best results in terms of both effective community change and the most efficient use of council resources.

Why evaluate?

While there is progress towards data-based evaluation, a lack of information about the outcomes of arts initiatives still provides a challenge for the cultural development sector. For example, the absence of evaluative studies impacted the above-mentioned art and disability research project. While the burgeoning international interest in arts participation for people with a disability was evident – as the lengthy bibliography attests – many of the citations were of research projects that were working to identify barriers to participation. Others were based on statistical data about rates and types of participation. However, the majority were policy documents that recommended action, yet very few provided any real evidence regarding the effectiveness of the proposed action strategies. The absence of evidence-based studies means that recommendations for action could only be speculative.

As discussed above, undertaking evaluation is important for a council's own processes, to understand what has occurred, why and how, and whether resources have been well spent. However, evaluation can also be important for attracting other resources, especially when funding allocation is being made by decision-makers who use evidence-based research as a basis for their decisions. This is illustrated in the following example.

Prevention scientists at the University of Washington conducted a US-wide evaluation of programs for young people to determine their effectiveness in achieving particular positive outcomes.¹⁹ Although a number of arts initiatives were originally included in the study, none made it through to the final list of recommended programs. The researchers found that arts programs were being implemented all around the country, many with the ostensible goal of contributing to positive outcomes for young people, but only some were being evaluated. Of those that were evaluated, none were evaluated with sufficient methodological rigour for the researchers to determine whether or not they made any real difference. It was therefore considered not possible to undertake cost-benefit analyses of the arts programs to find out how much change in outcomes for young people was made per dollar spent on programs, in the way that it was for other, more rigorously evaluated, programs. This study was intended to assist funders and policy leaders make evidence-based decisions about programs that are

effective in achieving change for young people, and, sadly, none of the arts programs examined could be recommended.

Research findings of this nature may lead to a devaluing, or perhaps even defunding, of existing arts programs, and, possibly, reduced interest in future programs. At the same time, this challenge also points to opportunities. The research data from the US study did not necessarily indicate ineffectiveness of arts programs. Rather, it was the lack of evaluation or ineffective evaluation that led to the discounting of possible benefits of the arts programs. Therefore, the challenge is to produce evidence-based evaluation that will be considered to be rigorous by researchers from other fields of research. This suggests the need for improvement in both the amount and quality of arts program evaluation.

At the same time, the sector can learn from evaluation practices in other fields and so we turn to Program Logic, a planning methodology used increasingly in government and service delivery contexts for goal setting and evaluation of progress towards those goals.

Program Logic approach to planning and evaluation in local government

The Program Logic approach helps create a shared understanding of program goals and methodology between stakeholders, relating activities to projected outcomes.²⁰ It demands systematic thinking and planning to better describe programs. Effective evaluation and program success rely on the fundamentals of clear stakeholder assumptions and expectations about how and why a program will address a particular issue, generate new possibilities, and make the most of valuable assets. The US-based Kellogg Foundation advocates the use of Program Logic because it can improve both planning and evaluation processes and allow for increased community participation;

Developing and using logic models is an important step in building community capacity and strengthening community voice. The ability to identify outcomes and anticipate ways to measure them provides all program participants with a clear map of the road ahead. Because it is particularly amenable to visual depictions, program logic modelling can be a strong tool in communicating with diverse audiences – those who have varying world views and different levels of experience with program development and evaluation.²¹

A backwards planning process is used in Program Logic. The first step is not a decision about what action to take but rather a reflection on the bigger question of what is valued and what could be done to realise those values. The process moves incrementally backwards, from ideas (values, desired goals and theory of change about the relationship between proposed actions and goals), to what we are wanting to happen (conceptions and measures of success, targets: how many, how much, for whom, when and why, potential data collection strategies and an analysis of the current situation), then to

possibilities for action (what could be done, what has previously proved effective and available resources). It is only at the end of this exhaustive process that a decision is made as to what should be done. These steps are pictured below.

Figure 1: A Program Logic model for planning and evaluation

OUR IDEAS

VALUES: What matters to us?



GOALS: What are we seeking to achieve with this activity?



THEORY OF CHANGE: What is our theory of change about the relationship between our values goals and actions?
What is the evidence for this: do we have previous experience or evidence that this is correct?



WHAT ARE WE WANTING TO HAPPEN?

CONSIDERING SUCCESS: How would we know we have reached our goals?



MEASURING SUCCESS (indicators):
How would we measure this achievement or progress towards it?
What are we aiming for (targets: how much, when, where, for whom?)



DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES:
How can we find the answers to our questions? Where are we now?



DECISIONS ABOUT ACTION

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS?



WHAT HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE PREVIOUSLY?
What do we know from research or previous experience?
How can we use this information to assist with our planning and action?



WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE? (Current or future)



THEREFORE, WHAT WILL WE DO?

Within this broad planning and evaluation framework, program evaluation experts have developed some excellent tools to assist others to plan and evaluate their work more efficiently. Four of these suitable for use in cultural development contexts are introduced in the box below. All four are easy to use and they reduce the need for councils to create their own evaluation tools. All are available freely, downloadable from the internet.

Recommended evaluation tools

1. Logic Model Development Guide, Kellogg Foundation, USA²²

This comprehensive tool provides clear advice and directions for the whole planning process, from conceptualisation, through to implementation, evaluation and dissemination of results.

2. Guide to Evaluation, Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD), Victoria²³

This resource is ideal for councils and arts organisations that seek to evaluate their overall strategic processes and outcomes. It uses Program Logic to provide a very comprehensive explanation of evaluation processes, broken down into the following steps:

Thinking

- Decisions about the purpose of the evaluation
- Decisions about who the evaluation is aimed at
- Consideration of budget and timeline

Planning

- Definition of objectives
- Establishment of evaluation questions
- Identification of information required
- Identification or creation of data sources

Collecting data

- Collection of information needed
- Development of budget and timelines
- Consideration of ethical issues

Communicating

- Utilisation of findings

3. Guide to Evaluation, Department of Treasury and Finance, Victoria²⁴

This tool is less comprehensive than DPCD's, but more policy focussed and may therefore be more useful in a local government context.

4. Guide for Evaluating Community Arts and Community Well-Being, VicHealth²⁵

This guide provides a logic model for the evaluation of community arts projects. It includes comprehensive detail, in worksheets and tools, so is simple to use even for novice evaluators. It has been used successfully for some years by arts organisations and councils who seek to plan and evaluate arts projects more strategically.

Measuring progress

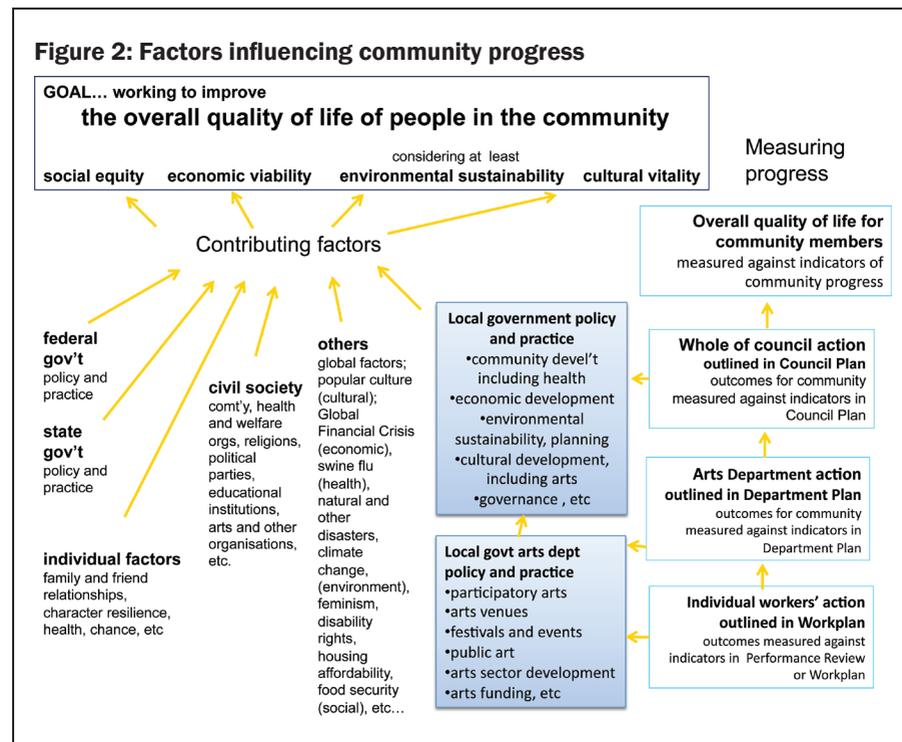
There are four levels of evaluation that need to be considered when councils measure progress in quality of life of communities (see Figure 2 below). These are:

- An evaluation of individual staff contributions, most often measured through work plan and performance review processes. How did this person deliver what they were hired to deliver (performance evaluation) and what outcomes were there for the community as a result of this work (outcome evaluation)?
- An evaluation regarding the achievement of goals of a specific department or section against their plan. In the case of the arts, how did the work of the arts department deliver against the Arts Plan (performance evaluation) and what outcomes were there for the community as a result of this work (outcome evaluation)?
- An evaluation with an even wider scope, asking how successful the whole council was in achieving its goals (performance evaluation) and what outcomes were there for the community as a result of this work (outcome evaluation)? What contribution did the arts department make towards achievement of these goals?
- An evaluation focusing on whether or not the quality of life of people in the municipality changed during any specific period. What contribution did the arts make to residents' quality of life? What factors contributed to an improvement in quality of life?

Program Logic should be applied to planning and decision-making at the first three levels of evaluation in order to increase the likelihood of initiatives leading to desired changes. The combination of well considered evaluation strategies with reflective practice is likely to result in

- plans that are based on goals representative of the values of the council and their communities,
- programs that most effectively and efficiently reach their goals,
- judicious use of resources, and
- best outcomes for communities.

As Figure 2 suggests, the fourth level of progress measurement relates to aspects of a community's experience both within and outside of the influence of local government. Outcomes at this level of focus are best considered through the application of community-wide indicators. At such a broad and diffuse level, it may be difficult to determine specific causal factors. As mentioned earlier, Community Indicators Victoria has developed a set of indicators to measure all aspects of community progress²⁶ and the Cultural Development Network is creating a framework of indicators more specifically to consider the contribution of the arts²⁷ to the wellbeing of communities.



Factors influencing community progress

Even when SMART principles are applied in planning processes, when relationships between goals and activities are clear and logical, and when decisions are evidence-based and proper evaluations using data are undertaken, there are still many other factors that influence the quality of life of communities. These include federal and state government policies and actions, activity of civil society – including religious, political, health, and welfare sectors – and a wide range of other factors, ranging from the personal to the global.

Cultural development workers need to be cognisant of all of these factors contributing to change, even though most of them are outside the influence of local government. While these factors are not able to be considered when councils evaluate their own work, they need to be considered in indicators of community progress. Again, let us consider a set of scenarios to illustrate this point. In this case we will focus on a participatory arts program aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of young people living on a public housing estate.

In the first scenario, a council arts team decides to address the health and wellbeing of young people on the estate by running a community dance

project. This idea is based on strong evidence that participation in creative physical activity in a community setting is likely to contribute to increased well-being for people in a target group. Resources are invested in the project; good plans developed, a venue organised, a skilled leader hired and promotion undertaken, yet the project does not attract the targeted group. Instead young people from a neighbouring area who do not face the same wellbeing issues are the only participants. Thus, even though the council made good plans and executed them well, the project did not create desired changes for the target group. A performance evaluation may suggest that council achieved its goals in terms of running a participatory dance project for young people in the targeted area, but an outcome evaluation would indicate that desired outcomes of change in the wellbeing of the targeted young people was not achieved.

Let us imagine that six months later, the same program is organised with a different outcome. This time, a popular TV show has increased the community's interest in dance, and the program is well attended by young people from the housing estate. The same resources are invested in the program and a better outcome for the target group is expected. This time, however, the well-skilled leader is suddenly not available and a replacement is recruited at short notice. The new leader does not adhere to council's policy of a smoke- and drug-free environment for young people, and the dance program is run in an atmosphere that condones smoking and drug use. Some young people who were previously not engaging in these behaviours are introduced to them. Consequently, the benefits of the young people's dance participation may be outweighed by the harm of smoking and drug use.

In this second scenario, the council's opportunity to provide a wellbeing-enhancing opportunity for the target group has been aided by external factors (indirect promotion via TV). However, because of a faulty internal process (staff training and management), the result is a negative health outcome for the targeted young people. A performance evaluation of this project might indicate success; council ran a suitable program and attracted the target group who participated with enthusiasm. However, an outcome evaluation would indicate that the desired health improvements were not achieved. Indeed, the project may have produced negative health outcomes, by creating a detrimental peer environment.

The third time this project is attempted, the dance program occurs at a time when the local high school has been running an effective drug education program. As a result, dance participants perceive that the behaviour of the program leader in condoning drugs and smoking is not appropriate and they feel empowered to discuss their concerns with council officers. These council staff respond quickly and skilfully, leading to a resolution of the problem and changes to the dance program that make it appropriate to the needs of the young people. Ultimately, the health outcomes for participants are even better than expected because they see that their own advocacy for

their health needs has created a positive outcome. Along the way, there has been lively discussion among the young people involved and this, in turn, strengthens the drug education program in the high school. In this case, the dance program manages to create a healthy peer environment and this has been influenced by factors that are both within and outside the council's sphere of direct influence. We can imagine that the success of the program has led to important learning for the program leader on how to be an effective mentor, and it has informed council on ways to enhance youth training and leadership. In this case, both performance and outcome evaluations would indicate the success of this program.

These different scenarios indicate that change may occur:

- as a result of what council does (either in or away from the intended direction)
- regardless of what council does (change occurs, but it was not council's initiative that made the difference)
- in spite of what council does (the desired change does occur, even though council's initiative does not make a positive contribution), or
- perhaps most likely, as a result of a confluence of these factors.

It is challenging to evaluate initiatives when factors at play can be so complex. Expert evaluators, like those involved in the large US study mentioned earlier, undertake randomised controlled trials to determine which particular factors are influential. This is a level of evaluation unlikely to be considered by cultural development workers in local government. However, more effective evaluation can be achieved through the application of ideas and tools outlined above. Every step towards a more sophisticated process is likely to result in significant benefits for councils and their communities.

Conclusion

Clearly, the local government cultural development sector faces significant challenges in improving its planning and evaluation processes. The concepts of performance and outcome evaluation help to highlight the purpose of effective evaluation and link evaluation to program goals. Furthermore, this paper has demonstrated that effective evaluation needs to be based on real evidence and quality data. Program Logic has been introduced here as a useful planning and evaluation methodology for cultural development in local government in Australia, and some associated planning and evaluation tools have been described in order to make the point that relevant resources are already available.

Scenarios discussed in this paper highlight the fact that many different factors – some of them beyond the influence of councils – come into play when considering what can bring about positive change for local communities. While this makes effective evaluation of particular programs and initiatives even more difficult, it highlights the need for more

sophisticated approaches to evaluation. Unless the local government cultural development sector can meet the challenge of producing convincing evidence for success, it stands to lose funding and support from both government and private sector organisations.

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Remembering and un-remembering a century of prairie settlement: community-triggered performance

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Abstract

This paper discusses *Windblown/Rafales*, a community-triggered performance produced by Knowhere Productions in Ponteix, Saskatchewan, Canada in 2007, to commemorate the town's centennial. As *lieu de mémoire*, Ponteix provided a rich site of investigation, discursive field and performative space for deconstructing/reconstructing identity. Site-specific performances used material traces and built heritage to investigate and interrogate the past. The result was fragmented and ambiguous, reflecting the environment's multiplicities. Ponteix provided a unique set of circumstances: a French-speaking, Marian community founded by immigrants from the Auvergne, the town is landlocked and time-locked, its language and culture challenged by pressures to change and assimilate. Now, at a crossroads, the community looked to Knowhere Productions to examine its collective memory and to illuminate options and new directions. Using the terms of place making and sustainability, this paper outlines the creative tensions that arose as artists and citizens collaborated on a performance that stretched and perforated the community's sense of itself.

Keywords: place-making, urban regeneration, site-specific performance, community interaction, performance collaboration, devised performance

Introduction

*There is a tremendous complicity between the body and the environment and the two interpenetrate each other.*¹

Since the 1970s, initiatives taken by urban planners and community activists have resulted in a plethora of rhetoric around *place making*, a term that links the building of new environments on which to focus public attention and the reclaiming of deteriorating heritage structures with the idea of understanding and celebrating local identity. In these terms, place making is about the materiality of places, the experiences they make possible and

the consequences they have in our lives. It is also about experiencing places through social encounters, through immersion in the sights, sounds and atmosphere of locales and in the traces of thought, memory and imagination that have guided their use over time.

Place making is frequently seen as a practical tool for addressing socio-economic issues and coalescing communities around development projects as a means of multi-levelled regeneration. The preservation and remediation of the historic, built environment, and the positive influence that place making may have on a range of local activities – including housing, education, economic development and community engagement, cohesion, inclusion and activism – is underscored by cultural workers, community development officers, academics and, of course, artists, who are frequently the foot soldiers and champions of place making.

Increasingly, local government evokes it as a panacea for an array of perceived social ills and a silver bullet for ensuring community wellbeing. Re-use of the historic environment with artistic involvement as an important supplement is seen to be at the heart of creating sustainable communities, adding abstract value as well as underpinning the local economy through spin-offs in employment in retail and tourism.

Grassroots involvement in such activity can be a vital medium for nourishing communities through simple acts of sharing memories around certain places. Frequently, urban theory refers to the built environment as a stage upon which individual identity and a community's sense of itself is acted out through quotidian activities and in periodic celebration or spectacle associated with acts of remembering. In this regard, place making is about reinforcing normative histories and building myths around places and events.

Memory links who we are to where we are and exemplifies how we identify ourselves through the experience of place. However, in the age of transnationalism, hyperconnectivity and global culture, the idea of articulating or performing one's place in the world – the idea of place making – may seem anachronistic when considered against the fractured reality, isolation and seclusion of the various communities that inhabit the twenty-first century. Yet place making or, more specifically, place stating is where we frequently begin when we want to articulate who we are and who we are not; who we were and who we desire to become.

Place making and play making

This brings me to the focus of this paper – *place making* in *play making*. Referencing *Windblown/Rafales*, the most recent event produced by Knowhere Productions Inc. – a company I co-founded in 2002 in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada² – I will provide a partial record of the process that informed and realised the event. Specifically, I will discuss the responsibility of artists in performing another's place in the world. Tangentially but

significantly, the paper will also address the role of watching in the site-specific, community-interactive process; indeed, how the nature and ethics of looking – what it means to watch well while being well-watched – is at the heart of place making.

It is, perhaps, noteworthy that I am writing from the perspective of a theatre artist: I am a scenographer, and in that role I help create the visual aesthetic of a given performance as a text that may reinforce or contrast with other texts, such as the play script. As such my analysis will, in some ways, veer away from the positivist language of creative community interaction and regeneration and towards an investigation of the nuances and specificities of that interaction: about what happens, metaphorically, in the space of the glance between the artist and the local teacher, business person or parent who is all things – co-creator, research subject and spectator in the site-specific undertaking.

While there has been much written about the gaze, in researching this paper, I was surprised at how little was written about the reflexivity of watching in the context of site-specific performance: how the exchange of the look within the theatrical experience alternates endlessly between subject and object, and how this relates to the creative dynamic when working within a discrete community.

In her book, *Visuality in the theatre*, Maaïke Bleeker uses the word ‘visuality’ to discuss how the illusion of objectivity – the notion of vision as true and objective and the possibility of seeing someone or something ‘as it is’ – is the central paradox in theatre.³ This observation provides me with a place to start my discussion of place making through the production referred to here, and the situation in which Knowhere Productions found ourselves when invited to produce an event commemorating the founding of Ponteix, a rural town of 329 French-speaking inhabitants in the remote southwest corner of what is now (although not historically) an English-speaking and under-populated province. The brief was to see the town ‘as it is’, to look beyond the stereotypical images of the place, and to perform ‘what we saw’ on the occasion of its centennial as a remedial strategy for a community stressed by the global economic downturn and climate change.⁴

Knowhere Production’s mandate is to explore – through multi-performative means, media and installation – the relationship of a local and frequently marginalised population to a particular place and time. Our productions, typically site-specific and devised, emphasise themes, stories and events that reveal the complex relationship between our physical environment and ourselves. In Ponteix, the opportunity to consider place making through the lens of hegemonic and colonial practices and the urban/rural dichotomy was appealing and relevant. The issues that have marginalised this population resonate strongly within Canada and indeed the world, where the drift towards globalised agricultural networks and the rise of corporate farming have decimated local economies and dispersed rural populations

to urban centres. Those who remain struggle to reconstruct an identity from fragments of memory and nostalgic imagery premised on the way we perceive and represent our immediate surroundings and how we record them (for example in photographs) as sites we hold dear.

However, as cultural geographer Rob Shields suggests, the images and their stories are partial, piecemeal and able to be prised open. He writes, ‘Place-images, and our views of them, are produced historically, and are actively contested. There is no whole picture that can be “filled in” since the perception and filling of a gap leads to the awareness of other gaps’.⁵ Figuratively speaking, Knowhere Productions inserts its performances into these gaps.

How and when did this process begin? In the spring of 2006, the Catholic Diocese of Notre Dame d’Auvergne and the local Rural Municipality (RM) jointly commissioned the production. It is significant to note there is much overlap between these entities. Nothing is accomplished without the support of both, and the parish priest and the mayor bless and launch each community event. The RM does not have a systematic or policy-driven approach to funding the arts, rather it provides ad hoc support to initiatives that align with its intent to celebrate shared language and heritage.⁶ While the diocese does not directly support artistic activity, it hosts concerts, performances and exhibitions. In this instance, parish priest Father Keith Heiberg, familiar with our earlier community-based work through extensive regional television coverage⁷, approached the company proposing a mutually beneficial relationship. The town, he suggested, would gain insights into its own situation through the filter of Knowhere Productions’ lens and we, he assured us, would gain access to a unique historic locale at a crucial and transitional moment. His goal was to focus attention on an under-represented, isolated but vital community through the generative force of the arts. Through his efforts, an information session was organised in July to bring together the community stakeholders in a discussion that weighed options, gathered input and assessed the relative pros and cons for Ponteix and for Knowhere Productions alike. At the end of that meeting, all agreed to move tentatively forward.

Memory and identity

In theoretical terms, as *lieu de mémoire*⁸ Ponteix provided a rich site of investigation, a discursive field and performative space for deconstructing/reconstructing the town’s identity. Significantly, it also provided a polyphony of voices – a rich counterpoint to the normative historical record. The texture was evident in the heritage buildings for which the town is known, particularly the impressive, well-proportioned Catholic church, built to accommodate a congregation three times larger than the current size of the town and still operating as the heart of the community. Re-erected first after being razed by fire set allegedly by members of the Ku Klux Klan (1923), and then by cyclone (1929), Notre Dame d’Auvergne is a synecdoche

for the town's century-long struggle to thrive despite the oppression of the dominant English Protestant culture. Adjacent to the elm-shaded church, the parish hall – designed to house the faithful while the church was under construction – is a proud, well-preserved building that symbolises a communal will to survive. On the west side of the church, the Convent of the Sisters of Notre Dame, a solid brick edifice, sits on a manicured property. Nearby is the oldest of the buildings, the Gabriel Hospital, erected in 1918, in time to treat homecoming World War 1 veterans and Spanish influenza victims. These historic sites represent the town, and their images are reproduced everywhere – on calendars, postcards, websites and brochures.

As the blueprint of the performance took shape, we determined that the performance would start at the church steps, move into the nave, then proceed to the hospital, through the convent orchard and next through the town (in a quasi-religious procession reminiscent of the congregation's annual Marian celebration⁹), before ending at the parish hall. Mapping this physical trajectory through the town's built environment represented our first response to the material environment, and from there we began to rough in the other details of the event. These included the integration of puppets, an epic poem written for the occasion, an original musical score, dance, and sound and sculpture installations.

It may be helpful here to describe how Knowhere Productions begins to interact with communities – a process sometime fraught with skirmishes and littered with red flags. Indeed, much of what is written on such creative collaborations focuses on the perceived binary of insider/outsider, and many artists and critics offer caveats in regards to the complexity of this relationship. In *One place after another: site specific art and locational identity* (2004), Miwon Kwon references art historian Hal Foster's critique of the interaction between artists and local communities: 'community-based artists may inadvertently aid in the colonization of difference ... in which the targeting of marginalized community groups ... leads to their becoming both subject and coproducer of their own self-appropriation in the name of self-affirmation'.¹⁰

In his essay 'Opponents, audiences and constituencies', Edward Said considers alternative and collectively imagined ways of approaching cultural work that avoid the inevitability of neutralising or misrepresenting the multiple voices of the community. He writes that his use of the terms employed in his title 'serves as a reminder that no one writes [or creates] simply for oneself. There is always an Other; and this other turns willy nilly into a social activity'.¹¹ Said further problematises the issue by calling into question the make-up of the constituency: namely who is excluded and what is claimed in their name. This argument, reductively evoked here, lies at the heart of the matter. In the end, difficult questions must be asked of those who work as artists under the banner of site-specific, community-based activity and place making: how does it get made; for whom, by whom, to

serve whose agenda; what are the intentions; are the intentions fulfilled; and, importantly, who is speaking? Finally, is it art?

An emphasis on art

While Knowhere Productions understands that the community work we do is frequently therapeutic and recuperative, our primary role is as artists rather than social workers or activists. Although sensitive to circumstances and histories, tensions and personalities, we avoid work that directly responds to the pressure of agendas that spring from local contingencies and politics. We do not typically produce shows that are narrative, linear or realistic. Rather, our method is to seek out a historically layered location, negotiate the terms of its engagement and use its material traces to explore the actualities of its past and present. In so doing, we provide occasions in which performers and spectators reflect, define and redefine themselves collectively and alone, engage myths and putative histories and consider alternatives. The results frequently replace a normative reading with a disjunctive representation of the pluralities that an environment provides. Here, we looked to the site itself and to the living members of the community for alternative narratives and tapped the collective memory for resources that might create options and new directions, might regenerate the struggling town.

Historically Ponteix provides a unique set of circumstances. It was founded in the early twentieth century by French-speaking Marian adherents from the Auvergne driven by economic necessity and a utopian desire to dedicate a new community. Situated on a rise overlooking a meandering river, the town is laid out in a small modernist grid with the church, the parish hall, the convent and the hospital forming an organic unity and a signifying centre. The core is flanked to the north by a spore-line and to the east by a main street that once flourished with stores and services. The facades of many of the buildings hide empty shells, thus rendering the town a fertile place to critique the terms of place making and question the promise of sustainable communities.

From its beginnings, Ponteix has withstood by dint of faith and hard work. However, Spanish influenza, prairie fires, bitter cold, drought, the Great Depression, isolation and parochialism have tested its endurance. Well-weathered, the town recognises that it is at a crossroads. Landlocked and time locked, in many ways the lifestyle it affirms is unaffected by the contingencies of the twenty-first century. However, its language and culture are increasingly pressured to change and assimilate. The invitation to us to craft an event was driven by the people's desire to hold up a mirror, to capture and record the town's so-called authenticity before technology and global trends flatten local particularities and cause intact customs to become meaningless.

We soon realised the extent to which the offer represented a bilateral commitment with reciprocal rights and responsibilities; by no means was it an example of *l'art pour l'art*. Assuredly, the integration of arts activity into the weave of public life is never merely an end in itself, although the result may be pleasurable, provocative and entertaining. Nor is it merely a measure of culture and an indicator of wellbeing, although it sometimes accomplishes this work as well. It is a subtle negotiation across a range of agendas and it is frequently an intervention between groups set at odds. It requires honest and transparent communication and a practiced ability to listen well and hear nuance. As a working methodology, Knowhere Productions has developed strategies to deflect any unrealistic expectations that may exist at the initial stages of a project and upon which we may run aground during the process. We are clear that we do not want to recreate, necessarily, an accurate historical moment or a series of costumed vignettes; we suggest counter-narratives that draw on half-memories and encourage a phenomenological and interactive relationship with the site through walking and looking. Ethically, we understand that this process cuts both ways. We watch and we let ourselves be watched. We gaze, scrutinise and glance.

A few thoughts on watching and being watched

In *The world at a glance* (2007), phenomenologist Edward S. Casey suggests that while the gaze is methodical, solitary and uni-directional, the glance rests lightly on surface detail. However, rather than being merely superficial, the minutiae of everyday life are fascinating and revealing. He writes:

By glancing we investigate the layout of surfaces in our immediate environment; we get close to these surfaces, so close as to be virtually at one with them ... Always taking in new surfaces, [the glance] discovers novel approaches and directions...[I]t sees ahead, albeit in a tentative and uncertain manner, by trying out new pathways.¹²

The glance, he suggests, darts out from the eye of the beholder and is reciprocated, is sent back, by the one who is glanced at. However, in that blink of an eye, the nature of the glance, the exchange itself, is transformed into something else; and it changes both parties. Likewise, community interaction is enacted through reciprocal looking—but, this is not as simple as it sounds. As Bleeker has said 'Seeing appears to alter the thing seen and to transform the one seeing, showing them to be profoundly intertwined in the event that is visibility'.¹³

Day by day, as we worked our way further into the community, the process presented modalities of watching. For example, our first step was to observe the community's sense of itself and its place in the world. This was bound up in the built environment, its isolation on the Canadian prairies, and a sense of its spatiality. Local lore has it that the ambit of the community is defined by the bells that ring the hours of daily worship from the tower of the church.¹⁴ The circumference within which the chimes are audible

delineates the border between home and away/location and dislocation. The inhabitants have mythologised the notion of the town as a bastion of French culture, an island in a sea of rolling prairie. Thus bounded, however, the town appears, to outside eyes, insular and inward looking—a few square kilometres, a few hundred people, a few hundred miles from the next significant community.¹⁵

Understanding how Ponteix defined its own identity was not difficult. We were given access to the town's archives, replete with diaries of immigration and arduous homesteading. A local poet, novelist and playwright¹⁶, a fiddle band, the Sisters of the convent and the parish Father provided us with the flavour of a rapidly disappearing way of life, an idea of the cycle of the church calendar and how its progression once marked time as surely as the church bells delineated space. The tourist centre provided brochures illustrating how Ponteix now markets itself as a retirement community using the terms of place making to describe its commodifiable assets—a friendly, well-serviced, historic community with strong values. Much of what we gleaned—the music, the bells, the traditions—was drawn into the performance as it slowly took shape.

However, as we watched, the greater the distance appeared between what we read and were told (in other words, the normative reading of the town's founding) and what we thought we saw. Holes in the mesh became apparent. As we worked in rehearsal, devising the event from the collected materials, the notion of subverting the accepted narrative compelled us and grew stronger as we went about the daily business of observation and research. Casey writes that—once the glance is cast—it goes out only to 'return to the subject who emits it, unsettling it in turn'.¹⁷ This is the underlying paradox of its very subversiveness. He adds, 'the subversion effected by the glance is thus twofold: both by way of im-plication (that is, folding of the outgoing look into the object) and of the re-implication (re-folding the look back into the subject)'. The glance cast does not go back to the same but to a continually changing subject: the subject who once glanced is now changed.

During the four weeks that we were embedded in the community, our own lives became increasingly the lens through which we focused our observations. Reflexively, we wrote ourselves into the event. We were aware of watching ourselves watching—a phenomenon that produced an uneasy sense of *mise-en-abîme* that affected the process of constructing, or rather deconstructing, the performing of the town. We became unsettled, began to lose our bearings, to lose the sense of the town 'as it was'. We wondered if our watching was perhaps more voyeurism than research. Who was watching whom was unclear.

As newcomers, our daily comings and goings had been closely monitored. Within a week, however, the townspeople became accustomed to seeing the costumes, puppets and props as we introduced them into the rehearsals.

Friendships grew and we were encouraged to roam and ask questions. The parish priest provided meals at his home, and neighbours hosted barbecues where we gathered gossip and shared jokes. Indeed, a key element of the process was the incorporation of these anecdotes into the performance script. Details gathered from sidewalk conversations frequently contradicted the overarching narrative of the Catholic community suggested as our original focus – the hardworking, devout settlers, the pious, charitable Sisters; they supplied alternative stories. These accounts were of outsiders and outcasts whose lives were not always aligned with the majestic church, the historic convent and the Gabriel Hospital. Rather, they were set in the bar, the coffee shop, the bank, the now defunct businesses and deteriorating buildings on the main street; iconic sites seldom photographed and never reproduced on cards and calendars. We observed that the town's built environment, in all its facets, delineated, differentiated and was a metaphor for the social strata of the community. This was place making of another register and it fed the performance in interesting ways: the procession of actors through the town was amplified in scope as monologues were scripted for performances on street corners and in alleys. When these were performed on the day of the centennial celebration, the audience saw themselves reflected both in the store windows and through the actors' reiteration of their own stories, the representation of their own lives.

Conclusions: the limits of memory

In conclusion, I want to retreat to my position as a theatre practitioner and return to the nature of the interaction between community and artist in order to posit some ill-formed thoughts on ethical watching and how it is lodged within the performer-audience interaction, how it asserts itself in the practice of site-specific, community-based performance and how it is intrinsically tied to place making.

Philosopher Paul Woodruff writes:

... the art of watching is as important in life as it is in theatres. Learning how to pay attention to others is basic to living ethically ... A good audience is capable of doing this for themselves – to see themselves for the human beings they are and take responsibility for their part in the ongoing drama of being human.¹⁸

He makes the case for theatre as a unique form of expression that, at its most powerful, can change lives. He reminds us that 'we are all in this together'. When theatre is done well, when it accomplishes its purpose of making human action truly worth watching, we come to care about the characters. This is a good and worthy practice because it is not just a matter of theatre; we are better members of the human community if we know how to see other people as careable-about.¹⁹

Maaïke Bleeker's understanding of *visuality* in the theatre is helpful here as well. The observer is embedded in a system of conventions and

limitations, but so too is the one who returns the gaze. Each is a product of cultural practices that condition how one sees, and these set up interesting oppositions and gaps. Hence, one will always see less than is there. At the same time there is always the potential for the seer to see more, to recognise his or her place in relation to what is seen.

What *Windblown/Rafales* gave us, as artists, was an opportunity to watch and be watched by a compact and functioning community such as is seldom open to scrutiny, at a time when the Internet has fundamentally redefined conventional social networks and occluded much face-to-face interaction. Before we journeyed back to our own lives, the community taught us lessons that challenged our notions of otherness, of how centres exist only in relationship to something else and of how margins speak. The process was not always smooth sailing – community interaction rarely is. We were mutually unsettled by it. It involved working out tensions as we met eye-to-eye with a tightly knit group of individuals defined in relationship to a language, a faith and the specific challenges of a unique place and time. While their experience was largely very different from our own – ours more fragmented, dispersed, defined by digital networks – we all participated in tangible acts of self-definition, place making and community building.

Woodruff writes: 'Theater is most theater ... when it is not theater at all, when the arts of watching and being watched merge and give way to shared action, shared experience, a shared moment of transcendence, beyond theater'.²⁰

Bleeker sums it up in this way: 'It is through looking that modern individuals are understood to gain insight into themselves and the world, to such an extent that the "I" of the looker and his or her eye almost become conflated'.²¹

We who were given the opportunity to collaborate with the citizens of Ponteix in reconsidering who they are and how 'it is' came to a better understanding of the importance of place making and play making in considering who we all are, where we come from and where we are going. It also underscored, I suggest, the importance of embedding the creative enterprise within municipal policy in order to reassert local identity, experience communal catharsis and begin to imagine new ways of being in the world – and to do this on a regular basis. Memory and how it is put to work is important here in fashioning futures. Rob Shields writes that space is critical in the process,

... remembering that the spatial is more than the historically and spatially specific ontological arrangements through which we live our lives, and by paying attention to the specific technologies of manipulation and formation of everyday spatial notions and practices, we can build a base in theory from which to criticise these arrangements, other worlds, and even different experiences of the lived/body.²²

This too is the foundation of good, critical art making.

The date the event was performed, 15 July 2007 (exactly one hundred years after the founding of the town site), was bright and clear. About two thirds of the community gathered at the front of the church at 2.00 pm to commence the journey that would lead them through their much-loved heritage buildings and down the main street. Despite the heat and the age of the audience (many were retired and some negotiated the route using canes and wheelchairs), all enthusiastically stuck with it and ended the day at the church hall in a reflective but celebratory mood. When the last fiddle tune ended and the dancers regained their seats, there was an understanding that they had been well seen and heard. Many such comments were relayed to us by word of mouth, email and letter.

On our part, despite a year of preparation and four weeks of living and working closely with members of the community of Ponteix, the members of Knowhere Productions came to few definitive conclusions about the creative process we shared with the town. It was clear, however, that by sometimes working at cross-purposes and sometimes to the same end we had stretched and perforated the community's sense of itself and inevitably tested our own eyesight. The event marked a moment in the town's development and will be introduced into the town's record as, if not a turning point, then as a significant act of remembering, sharing and creative place making.

Ephemeral observation, anthropologist Clifford Geertz writes, takes on new meaning through the very process of inscription and reinscription. This leads to the production of a new text or narrative, which can then be opened to examination, revision and interpretation.²³ Shields writes, 'In this manner, new experiences are aligned with past experiences and old, known verities'.²⁴ While place making is about recuperating pasts, it is also about looking carefully and critically, and its concern is with present contingencies and future considerations.

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Endnotes

1. R. Shields, *Places on the margin*, Routledge, London and New York, 1991, p. 14.
2. The company's founding members (2002) included Kathleen Irwin, Associate Professor in the Theatre Department, University of Regina; Andrew Houston, Associate Professor in the Department of Speech and Communication, University of Waterloo; and Richard Diener, 3rd Eye Media.
3. M. Bleeker, *Visuality in the theatre: the locus of looking*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York, 2008, pp. 2–3.
4. Studies done by H. W. Cutforth in 2000 suggest that climate change in the semi-arid prairie of southwestern Saskatchewan has accelerated in the past 50 years, with statistics showing an overall drop in annual precipitation. The study suggests that a further decrease in precipitation will occur if global warming continues. See H. W. Cutforth and D. Judiesch, 'Saskatchewan: temperature, precipitation, wind, and incoming solar energy', *Agricultural and Forest Meteorology*, vol. 145, no. 3–4, August 2007, pp. 167–175.
5. R. Shields, *Places on the margin*, p. 18.
6. Within the broader provincial picture, the Saskatchewan Arts Board funds community arts development initiatives and does so on a project-by-project basis – as it did with this project.
7. In 2002, Knowhere Productions Inc. produced *The Weyburn Project*, a large-scale, site-specific event in an abandoned mental hospital in Weyburn, Saskatchewan (http://uregina.ca/weyburn_project/). The event was captured in a video documentary entitled *Weyburn, Archaeology of Madness*, produced by 3rd Eye Media Productions in association with Wolf Sun Productions Ltd. and broadcast repeatedly on SCN (Saskatchewan Community Network). See *Weyburn, Archaeology of Madness*, 3rd Eye Media Productions in association with Wolf Sun Productions Ltd., 2008; *Weyburn Project: The Archaeology of Silence and the Discourse of Madness*, <http://uregina.ca/weyburn_project, accessed 3 March 2010.
8. *Lieu de mémoire* represents any significant entity, material or otherwise, which by human will or the work of time becomes a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community. The term is taken from P. Nora and L. D. Kritzman, eds., *Realms of memory: rethinking the french past. Vol. 1: Conflicts and divisions*, Columbia University Press, New York and Chichester, 1996, p. xvii.
9. The procession, a thanksgiving ritual initiated in the troubling years of the Great Depression, is staged annually on 16 July throughout the town of Ponteix. Led by the parish Father, it involves the entire population. Throughout the event the Sisters of the Convent of Notre Dame sing and the bells of the church are rung. A wooden sculpture of the Pieta (early eighteenth-century France), seated with a recumbent Christ across her lap, is carried by the church dignitaries. The sculpture, brought to Canada in 1907, has several apocryphal stories connected to it including the claim that when the church was razed in 1923 the fire stopped at the feet of Mary.
10. H. Foster quoted in M. Kwon, *One place after another: site specific art and locational identity*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2002, p. 139.

11. E. Said, 'Opponents, audiences and constituencies' in H. Foster, ed., *The anti-aesthetic: essays on postmodern culture*, The New Press, New York, 1998, p. 157.
12. E. S. Casey, *The world at a glance*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2007, p. 146.
13. M. Bleeker, *Visuality in the theatre*, p. 2.
14. The four bells were cast in Annecy-le-Vieux, Haute-Savoie, France by Paccard Foundries, known worldwide for the clarity of their bells. They were named to commemorate the first three parish priests: Albert (founder of the parish, 1903–22); Napoleon (second parish priest, 1922–41); Louis (third parish priest, 1941–60), and Gabriel (the Sisters of Notre Dame de Chambriac).
15. Citing modern measures of centres and margins, electricity arrived in Ponteix in the 1950s following the passing of the Saskatchewan Rural Electrification Act in 1949, and high-speed Internet arrived as recently as 2006.
16. Yvette Carignan, an eighty-five-year-old daughter of one of the original settlers, was a storehouse of information and provided a wealth of historical details. She generously gave us hours of interviews, some from her hospital bed.
17. E. S. Casey, *The world at a glance*, p. 147.
18. P. Woodruff, *The necessity of theatre: the art of watching and being watched*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 142.
19. *ibid.*, p. 105.
20. *ibid.*, p. 229.
21. M. Bleeker, *Visuality in the theatre*, p. 114.
22. R. Shields, *Places on the margin*, p. 8.
23. Rob Shields cites Clifford Geertz (1973) as cited in Jackson and Smith (1984) in *Places on the Margin*, p. 21.
24. R. Shields, *Places on the margin*, p. 15.

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Creating a profile: reworking ‘community’ at Footscray Community Arts Centre

Rimi Khan

Abstract

The recent history of Footscray Community Arts Centre, based in Melbourne, Australia, reveals a significant shift in focus: from its traditional emphasis on engaging with local ‘community’, to addressing the ‘community’ of the professional artsworld. In trying to lift its organisational profile, FCAC has reconstituted the sorts of community arts activities it undertakes – namely, by privileging ‘artistic outcomes of excellence’, and narrowing the sorts of ‘community engagement’ it facilitates. This is partially a response to arts policy changes in the last decade, but is also due to the problematic nature of community arts itself – particularly, the expansive nature of the term ‘community’, and the resultant need to limit the types of community arts activity the organisation oversees. These dual imperatives – to engage with the ‘local community’, and to build an organisational profile within the arts sector – situate FCAC in a difficult conceptual and practical space.

Keywords: community arts; community; Footscray; ‘quality arts’; arts policy.

Introduction

‘Community’ and ‘culture’ are totally contested words. ‘Art’ is also a contested word, and so is ‘development’. So you always have to deal with that. My personal belief is that a community arts or CCD organisation sits in a really difficult place ... [I]t’s always in a really dodgy area between all these words and their definitions. This makes it the most interesting area too. You can’t get away with not having to deal with any of those words, because you’re actually dealing with stuff that’s happening on the ground with real people’.¹

In the future, our focus will continue to be on that ever-evasive word ‘community’ while contributing to wider arts practice through initiating, developing and presenting the best possible work within this context.²

This paper examines the difficulties in pursuing a community arts agenda via an analysis of recent organisational changes that have taken place at Footscray Community Arts Centre (FCAC), based in Melbourne, Australia. Interviews with current and past staff and board members of the organisation, as well as reviews of annual reports and other program documentation, have helped to construct a partial history of the Centre. This has revealed much about the Centre’s changing approaches to community arts practice, the shifting agendas and priorities informing its work, and the terms in which these changes are justified by the Centre’s decision-makers.

In the last fifteen or so years, FCAC has shifted its focus from an emphasis on engagement with the ‘community’ of Melbourne’s western suburbs, its traditional constituency, to a different kind of ‘community’ – that of professional artists and arts policymakers. While its stated mission is to lift the region’s profile by working ‘with the communities of Melbourne’s West’³, this frequently amounts to lifting the profile of *the organisation* in the context of the broader arts sector.

It is this latter imperative which motivates much of the cultural practice that the Centre facilitates. In trying to improve its organisational positioning FCAC has controversially reconstituted the sorts of community arts activities it undertakes – namely, by privileging art and ‘artistic outcomes of excellence’ over other kinds of cultural practice, narrowing the breadth of ‘community’ with which it engages, and limiting the sorts of autonomy that community participants are granted. It is argued that this is partially a response to policy changes in the Australian community cultural development (CCD) sector in the last decade. However, it is also due to the problematic nature of the notion of community arts itself. In particular, it is a result of the dilemmas raised by the expansive nature of the term ‘community’, and the resultant need to draw parameters around the community-based arts practice the organisation sees itself as responsible for. These dual imperatives – to engage with the ‘local community’, and to build an organisational profile within the arts sector – situate FCAC in a difficult conceptual and practical space.

From ‘culture’ to ‘art’: contextualising community arts

In accounting for the changes that have taken place at FCAC it is worth thinking about the terms in which community arts has traditionally been defined. Gay Hawkins’ *From Nimbin to Mardi Gras* provides a useful history of the development of community arts in Australia, particularly as a policy formation of the Federal government.⁴ The Community Arts Board (which went on to become the Community Cultural Development Board) of the Australia Council, Australia’s peak arts funding body, was responsible for setting the terms on which community arts projects were funded and evaluated, and has also, historically, been FCAC’s biggest funder. In a review of projects commissioned by the CCD Board of the Australia Council, Mills and Brown describe community cultural development as: ‘the

collaborative and empowering processes by which participants engage with creative activity'.⁵ Importantly, these processes are participatory, and Mills and Brown, in their discussion of some of the impacts of CCD, emphasise the potential of these processes to achieve 'active citizenship' and 'to foster the greater involvement of citizens in government processes'.⁶ These processes are also envisaged as collaborative ones – the relationship between the community participant and the artist is seen as 'a partnership rather than the "expert" sharing with the "amateur"'.⁷

The breadth of the notion of 'cultural development' is significant here. It means that the sorts of activities brought together under the rubric of community cultural development are wide-ranging, involving 'visual arts, film and video, writing, oral history and storytelling ... public art to festivals, theatre and dance performances, exhibitions, publications and seminars'.⁸ There is also much speculation on the scope of CCD's outcomes – both in Australian and international discussions of community arts – which are believed to include artistic, social, economic, psychological, educational, and environmental benefits.⁹ It is these impacts of community-based arts, particularly in the context of a perceived 'loss' of 'community' in an increasingly globalised world, which informs influential texts such as Adams and Goldbard's edited collection, *Community, culture and globalization*.

In Jon Hawkes' influential work, *The fourth pillar of sustainability*, it is the ubiquity of the term 'culture' that makes it strategic to policy development: 'it brings together a range of concepts and issues that have, thus far, developed in parallel: wellbeing, cohesion, capacity, engagement, belonging, distinctiveness'.¹⁰ Yet, he argues, cultural policy development in Australia has tended to be limited to arts policy and 'the main focus has been on the role the arts can play'.¹¹ This slippage between 'culture' and 'arts' is important and, as we will see, it has historically enabled, yet complicated, the work of FCAC. It is also this tension between community arts' traditionally broad social agenda and the practical necessity of setting limits that informs the current dilemmas facing FCAC.

Expanding community arts at Footscray

Footscray Community Arts Centre was established in 1974 by the secretary of the local meatworkers' union, and it was oriented, largely, towards bringing the arts to working people. The Centre set out to service Melbourne's western suburbs, so 'community' was defined geographically; however, this eventually expanded to servicing other 'communities' that were defined in terms of their perceived cultural marginality. As Hawkins points out, in policy terms, 'community implied diversity', and one of the effects of the Australia Council's Community Arts Program was to generate 'a proliferation of new constituencies', ultimately compelling a recognition of cultural difference.¹² Throughout the 1980s the Centre worked with young people, women, disabled people and, with the appointment of one

of Australia's first 'ethnic arts officers', it began working with some of Footscray's diverse ethnic communities. One staff member describes this time as an experimental period – both for FCAC and for arts policymakers. The main aims of the Centre were, he says, 'what we now call community development'.¹³ But at the time:

We had to work out a philosophy on where we fitted because it was all changing so quickly ... We didn't have the vocabulary. Because it was all being made up. And the thing was, from the funding authorities' point of view, we were useful as a place to experiment.¹⁴

Such an extensive scope gave FCAC the flexibility to work with a range of groups in a variety of contexts – both at the Centre and in the form of outreach work.

Many of those associated with FCAC during those years believe that one of the strengths of this ad hoc approach was that it gave the Centre a certain flexibility and responsiveness. The Centre's artswriters were granted a significant degree of autonomy. Over time, and into the 1990s, the organisation developed an artform-based structure – where a coordinator was given responsibility for visual arts, music, ethnic or multicultural arts, writing, or theatre – and the Centre developed according to the personal agendas, interests and expertise of each of these coordinators. They brought with them a fairly loose definition of who their constituency was and it depended largely on the relationships people had, or developed, with particular groups in the area. One person suggested that this organic approach meant that, 'people actually came to us and said, I've got this good idea, does it work? Can it fit in here? So people were actually coming to us with ideas'.¹⁵ So groups came in and set their own agendas, and the Centre was able to respond to these demands in various ways.

By the early 1990s FCAC was growing at an unprecedented rate. In the Centre's own view they were regarded 'as a major organisation by State and Federal funding bodies', and were offered triennial funding from Arts Victoria.¹⁶ The 1994 *Annual report* outlines ten aims for the Centre, including facilitating a 'diverse and vital Australian culture', providing access and enhancing people's 'appreciation of the arts', encouraging group participation and autonomy, artistic excellence, and driving social change.¹⁷ There was a sense that these varied goals were in fact quite commensurable – they reflected the conceptual frame implied by the definitions of community arts referred to above – and it was felt that the Centre was appropriately positioned to pursue them.

It might be suggested that the development of the Centre at this time took place in a somewhat unstructured way. In addition to the Centre's main organisational goals, each artform department also had its own set of aims, and the relationship between these specific objectives and the Centre's overall vision was never clearly articulated. The aims of the multicultural

arts department and gallery included developing a base for multicultural arts in 'the West', providing access for 'Non-English Speaking Background'¹⁸ people to the arts, and promoting cultural exchange; the goals of the theatre department encompassed exploring a diversity of community theatre models, responding to issues of social justice, and creating high-standard theatrical works; the music department aimed to 'challenge populist views of music', to encourage music appreciation and participation and develop cross-artform exchanges.¹⁹ There were also writing, visual arts, adult training and women's circus programs, each with their own aims and agendas.

As well as the ambitiousness of its conceptual scope, the Centre also spread its resources broadly – in 1994, 27 resident art groups and 57 other arts and community groups used their facilities regularly.²⁰ As their funding base grew over the next few years, so too did the numbers of groups and projects they became involved with. By 1998 the organisation reported that 93,000 people had visited the Centre as participants or observers of events or classes in that year.²¹ By 2002 the expansion of Centre's activities meant that it struggled to contain operations within its budget, and it started to face financial difficulties. Finally, in 2003 the Centre was put 'on notice' by the Australia Council, who stated their intention to terminate the triennial funding they had been awarding the Centre since 1997. By this stage, funding from the CCD Board of the Australia Council amounted to almost \$200,000 per annum²²; losing this funding meant that the Centre would have to do without a critical component of its operational and programming budget. The Centre was in crisis and was forced to undergo a difficult process of overhaul and restructure, including the redundancies of a number of long-term program staff.

Addressing the crisis: responding to policy

Some of those involved with the Centre at the time provide a number of insights into how this situation came about, and the effect of this crisis on the subsequent development of the Centre. To some extent, it is argued, the process of upheaval that was forced upon the Centre was a necessary result of broader policy changes and trends. I will also suggest, however, that the redefinition of the Centre's priorities that took place was a response to the problematic nature of community arts itself, and how it had traditionally been put into practice throughout much of the Centre's history.

In 2004, as mentioned, Footscray Community Arts Centre lost its core triennial funding from the CCD Board of the Australia Council. While the reasons for this were never made completely explicit, it was obvious that the Centre had become dependent on funding from a body whose basic funding criteria they were perceived to be no longer meeting. There is a general sense among Centre staff that, in pursuing its ideal vision of community arts, the Centre did not have a clear sense of its own purpose, and so could not make itself accountable. A major renovation and building project, which had been a focus of the Centre's efforts for the last four or five years, and

for which the Centre had raised over one million dollars²³, had also been forcibly abandoned, leaving the Centre looking directionless and ineffectual. As a consequence of the funding crisis, an internal organisational review was conducted, resulting in 59 recommendations to streamline the Centre's financial processes, restructure the board and management, and to develop a coherent business plan, artistic vision and more unified 'corporate image'.

These changes were largely prompted by broader policy shifts of the time. A month after the Centre lost its funding, the CCD Board of the Australia Council was also defunded, and it was clear that the language of community cultural development, at least in the context of federal arts policy, had fallen out of favour. In Australia, debates in the arts have been caught between economic and humanistic rationales, at least since the mid 1970s.²⁴ Lisanne Gibson offers a useful description of government's gradual withdrawal from direct funding, and the 'attendant pressure on cultural organisations to develop practices which will enable them to be economically self-sustaining'.²⁵ It could be speculated that community arts, as it was traditionally envisaged and practiced by FCAC, did not meet the expectations of professionalism and accountability that were being increasingly required.

The Centre went on to remodel itself before new funding criteria had been set for it by the (then yet to be formed) Community Partnerships Program of the Australia Council. Over the next two or three years, the recommendations of the Centre's internal review were put in to place, and there was a complete turnover of the board. The Centre eventually became one of only two arts organisations in Victoria to return to triennial funding from the Australia Council, and named as one of eleven 'key producers' of the Community Partnerships Program – suggesting that it had, in some respects, preempted the Committee's new funding priorities. These changes, as I will go on to explain, had significant implications for the parameters the Centre set around its work and, ultimately, its conceptualisation of 'community arts'.

Re-evaluating (the arts) 'community'

Historically, FCAC had given community members relatively free rein over use of the Centre's space, with a view to affording these participants a sense of ownership over the Centre's activities. By the late 1990s some of the groups involved with the Centre were developing a significant local reputation. Groups such as the Women's Circus and Vietnamese Youth Media were considered a success not only because they produced dynamic, locally relevant art but, for many at the Centre, they exemplified one of FCAC's key objectives at the time: to 'encourage democracy, self-sufficiency and eventual independence' of community groups.²⁶ These groups demonstrated the potential of community arts as it was traditionally envisioned – as a space for authentic and empowering community engagement.

Over time, however, this also presented the Centre with a significant dilemma. As some staff members reported, it meant that the space was being used for objectives that were not being defined or determined by the organisation. The Centre became bound by its pre-existing obligations to these groups, preventing them from establishing new relationships or directions. Negotiating these relationships was also time- and resource-consuming, and all of this had the effect of limiting other possibilities for the Centre. Some at the Centre believed that in trying to be all things to all people, it had lost a sense of its own artistic objectives and was no longer able to set its own agenda. According to one past staff member:

The centre ... evolved without a clear vision of a whole ... I think that it was a great thing, in some ways, and there were some great people [working there], and fantastic things happened but I think in terms of being an identity that had a vision and basically could compete in ... the current funding and social sort of climate, it just needed to be better at articulating a unified vision.²⁷

He goes on to say that while the old model of community engagement practiced at FCAC meant that 'brilliant things happened', it was ultimately 'not sustainable'.²⁸

Throughout much of FCAC's history there have been two forms of 'community' underpinning its agenda, and to whom the Centre's activities were targeted. One 'community' was the people of the western suburbs of Melbourne, who comprised the participants and audience members of the Centre's programs (including, of course, smaller sub-groups, defined along lines of ethnicity, gender, age or ability, that made up this larger community). The other was the arts sector itself – that is, the 'community' of professional artists and policymakers who were involved in the programs themselves, as funders or as artists, and who provided an ongoing point of reference for the development of the Centre's vision.²⁹ As the organisation's Chair states in the 1999 *Annual report*, the Centre had a role 'in the delivering of creative opportunities within our immediate community and throughout the community arts movement nationally'.³⁰ What this demonstrates is an awareness of the context of reception of the Centre's activity – that it worked not just to meet the local community's needs but also sought the continual affirmation of the wider community arts sector.

It is possible to read the crisis at FCAC, then, as a partial result of the Centre's historical privileging of the needs of the local community of arts participants over the 'needs' of the arts sector. In addressing this crisis, one of FCAC's key strategies was to redress this balance by improving its standing within the broader arts establishment. The dissolution of the Australia Council's CCD Board also cleared a space for FCAC to recast itself as an *arts* organisation, rather than as a community cultural development organisation. This has had a number of continuing impacts on the Centre's work: it has meant a shift away from local priorities and a narrowing of

its participant base within the community. It has also entailed a renewed emphasis on the production of artistic 'excellence', which has ultimately limited the autonomy of program participants.

From community art to 'quality' art

With the name 'Footscray' in its title, and having received more or less continuous program funding from the City of Maribyrnong local council, the Centre has always defined its constituency geographically, as Melbourne's western suburbs. 'The West' has historically been seen as culturally 'disadvantaged', or at least 'marginal', and one of the aims of the Centre was to bring opportunities for creative expression and participation to these communities, reducing its sense of isolation from what it perceived as the cultural mainstream. More recently, however, there has been a discernible move away from the local. Several ex-staff and board members commented that during the period of upheaval five or so years ago, there was some discussion over whether to even keep 'Footscray' in the Centre's name. It was thought by some that the Centre's association with the western suburbs no longer brought the Centre credibility, and would not help it to build a strong regional and national profile.

There are now, also, fewer locally based people on the organisation's board, and while the Centre continues to work with schools, there is substantially less outreach work undertaken with some of the further reaches of the West. One past board member believes that the organisation does not, 'interact with the local community terribly well. If you ask a cross-section of people, even a mile from here, many of them would not know where the arts centre is'.³¹ Also, while there is considerable focus on the changing cultural diversity of the area, there is less acknowledgment of the socio-economic disadvantages of the region. The Centre was originally founded to bring art to the working classes but some staff suspect that the Centre's arts workshops and school holiday programs are now priced out of reach for many.

Significantly, the new focus of the Centre, rather than being about servicing cultural 'needs' or 'disadvantage', is about being an arts producer. As a recent Operations Manager explains:

From an artistic point of view what we did was we set in place a curatorial framework, so we said, well, what can we do and what can't we do. Because I think there was an expectation that the organisation would be all things to all people ... I suppose we moved towards more emphasis on producing our own work and working with quality artists in a community context ... and making decisions about what we would support, and wouldn't support, so that it gave our artistic profile, and the things that we were creatively producing, a greater level of rigour, artistic rigour. It allowed us to stand up, rather than to be pigeonholed as a community arts organisation.³²

Maintaining this level of rigour, or artistic quality, requires the Centre to establish criteria for inclusion and exclusion. And it follows that some at FCAC believe that this means narrowing the Centre's participant base. As one past board member said:

To work in a community centre, you have to have some skills to be able to do that. You have to be able to work with other people; it's not a drop-in centre, you have to be motivated to work as a group. So there's probably a lot of misconception about what the Centre does. A lot more people could be using the Centre, but on the other hand there's a limit to how many people can.³³

The need for the Centre to set limits to who participates in its programs, and to reassert the terms on which people actually do participate, has been a significant aspect of the Centre's restructure.

Debates about the place of artistic quality or 'excellence' in community arts are not new. A number of commentators have pointed out the elitist tendencies of the funding category of 'artistic excellence', particularly in an Australian context.³⁴ Whether or not the Centre actually achieves the standard of 'excellence' it sets out to is, of course, a contentious one, and an issue that is not within the scope of this paper to consider. What is worth noting here is the Centre's rationale for aspiring to artistic 'excellence'. It is suggested that the Centre's main motivation here is a desire to move away from instrumentalisation of community arts, which are seen to compromise its more intangible and 'intrinsic' value. However, what tends to go unacknowledged in this renewed emphasis on 'intrinsic' value, is that even this rationale has an instrumental aspect – in this case, to raise the profile of the organisation, including the professional profile of Centre staff, and improve its standing among the wider arts establishment.

Contemporary policy debates about the value of art tend to swing between intrinsic and instrumental justifications for its existence.³⁵ Rationales for community arts have tended towards the latter, but this has had the effect of at times overstating the 'outcomes' of community arts – for example, in enhancing community wellbeing, or promoting social inclusion. Mulligan et al., in their review on literature on the impacts of the arts, demonstrate the difficulty of establishing a clear correlation between arts and community wellbeing, and question the credibility of a number of apparently 'evidence-based' accounts of these connections.³⁶ They suggest that the outcomes of community arts may, in fact, be more modest. Art, they argue, enables people to 'develop narratives of meaning', which in turn might help them to make sense of their world and hopefully provide them with some agency.³⁷ Community arts can still claim to have tangible outcomes – which may be 'multiple, deep and enduring'³⁸ – but it may need to circumscribe the sorts of claims it makes for itself, and acknowledge the complexities of what it can realistically achieve. Emphasising 'the instrumental value of the arts', they argue, 'leaves out a host of more intrinsic values that simply cannot

be understood instrumentally'.³⁹ It is this thinking that seems to underpin FCAC's new emphasis on 'quality arts', and its apparent shift away from its previous 'community cultural development' agenda.

In reorienting itself as an arts producer, the Centre aims to reposition community-based arts in relation to the rest of the arts establishment; to lessen the divide between 'community' arts producers, spaces, and audiences, and 'mainstream' ones. It is believed that this can be achieved by producing 'outstanding art', and by recasting the Centre as an innovative 'contemporary community-based arts producer'.⁴⁰ It was hoped, by the Centre's director at the time of the restructure, that this approach would also transform FCAC's reputation into an organisation that is regarded as desirable for professional artists to work with, and hopefully present new possibilities for the politics of contemporary art. The case could certainly be made that contemporary art is itself on a trajectory where it is calling itself into question, and thus more open to a diversity of forms and themes. While previously, as one artsworker said, 'the snobs wouldn't come near us'⁴¹, the Centre now seeks to encourage an openness to 'community-based art' among the arts establishment; and this might help to shift the class politics of art that have historically positioned community arts on the margins.

Those in the Centre responsible for this new emphasis on producing 'quality art' do not see it as conflicting with their obligations as a community arts organisation. FCAC staff frequently cite *The Go Show* as an example of how the two agendas might be reconciled. The project – a partnership with the Western Bulldogs football team – was structured around a 'cultural tour' of Footscray, and is described as follows in its program:

Welcome to *The GO Show*, a suburb-sized performance around and about the inner West, celebrating the way a shared activity can unite us, inspire us and reveal something significant about us ... As you jump on our *GO Show* bus and venture to Whitten Oval (home of the Western Bulldogs Football Club), Maddern Square (a public space in the Footscray CBD) and Footscray Community Arts Centre (the heart of the arts in the West) you'll be meeting actors, video artists, sound designers, musicians, hip hoppers, cover bands, krumpers, Vovinam practitioners, umpires, historians, sports experts, boat captains, Western Bulldogs fans, professional artists, enthusiastic amateurs and everything in between.⁴²

The show was promoted under the monikers of both 'community' and mainstream contemporary art; it first ran in 2006 and, in 2008, was included as part of the Melbourne International Arts Festival, attracting sell-out audiences. Jerril Rechter, who was director of the Centre during this period, states that one of the 'challenges' of the show was to 'lift' the standard of performance and elevate it from a mere community arts project to something with broader appeal.⁴³ Although there were some participants for whom the show instigated a positive and ongoing involvement with the Centre, this

was not an explicit objective of the program. Rather, the main outcome of the project was the show itself, and the ways in which the performance might shape audience's perceptions of Footscray and, importantly, of the Centre.

The direction of the show entailed the careful management of its diverse performers, including the level and type of their participation. For example, while the program documentation states that the project was 'purposefully inclusive', artists were approached who 'embodied a very specific politic', or 'brought a sensibility appropriate to pushing the work's context and how we engage with artistic experiences'.⁴⁴ While the contributions of *The Go Show's* many participants were allowed to develop with a degree of flexibility, the Centre also had a very specific artistic vision for the show. Rechter states that the conventional belief, that community participants should be able to work with the Centre on their own terms was naïve and 'really problematic' – particularly so, she says, for 'an arts organisation'.⁴⁵ That is, traditional ideas about community participation are considered incompatible with FCAC's contemporary organisational identity. Letting 'the community' set the agenda resulted in a 'passive' mode of community engagement, rather than the more 'proactive' one Rechter regards the Centre to have taken in recent years, and exemplified by the artistic direction of *The Go Show*.⁴⁶

The Centre's key focus at the present moment is the construction of a new performing arts centre at its current Footscray site – and it is somewhat unclear whether this new space is aimed at providing local people with their own dedicated performing arts hub, or whether it is more concerned with attracting people from other parts of the city to the West. It could certainly be argued that the building project is a timely attempt to capitalise on the recent gentrification of some of the western suburbs, and perhaps part of a strategy for building new local and non-local audiences. At the same time, such an initiative, along with the Centre's recent collaborations with the Melbourne International Arts Festival, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, and other non-community arts organisations, are directed at bridging the divide between the city's centre and the West, and between the arts establishment and its margins. It is in this way that the Centre is working to lift the profile and 'esteem' of the people of the western suburbs, while also enhancing its own organisational profile in the context of the broader arts sector.

While the Centre builds its reputation as an 'artistic producer', it continues to negotiate its traditional community cultural development agenda. This is particularly the case because it is still influenced by the assessment criteria of its key funders – not just the Australia Council and Arts Victoria, but non-arts organisations such as Department of Human Services, VicHealth, the City of Maribyrnong, and Adult Community and Further Education. The Centre has to justify its work, and the art it produces, in line with the agendas of these disparate organisations, and this complicates its efforts

to produce 'quality', 'excellent', or 'rigorous' artistic work. One past board member summarises the Centre's predicament:

Look, they haven't changed in one sense, not dramatically. I mean we still want to produce arts, we want to be inclusive, we want to react to our multicultural community, we want to involve as many people as we can, reaching out into the community. I think the change has been that they want to be a little bit more than just a Footscray arts centre. That's my view. They want to be seen as an organisation, certainly in the West, but reaching beyond its current parameters.⁴⁷

It is this dilemma – between 'reaching out into the community' and wanting 'to be seen' as more than a community arts centre – that continues to inform the work of FCAC. In its pursuit to set limits to the type of community engagement it undertakes, the Centre has set itself a new challenge: to be both a community arts centre, and an arts producer of excellence; to be an organisation with local connections and relevance, but also one with a national profile. It remains to be seen how successfully the Centre mediates between these often-conflicting imperatives, and how it goes on to incorporate these agendas into its redefinition of community arts.

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Endnotes

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 11. *ibid*, p. 7.
 12. G. Hawkins, *From Nimbin to Mardi Gras*, p. 23.
 13. R. McCracken, personal communication, 27 April 2009.
 14. *ibid*.
 15. *ibid*.
 16. Footscray Community Arts Centre, *Annual report*, 1994, p. 5.
 17. *ibid*, p. 2.
 18. This was a term used in policy discourse to refer to migrants of non-Anglo-Celtic background. It has since been displaced, in an Australian context, by the descriptor 'Culturally and Linguistically Diverse', although they are, arguably, used to refer to the same constituency. See W. McLennan, *Standards for statistics on cultural and language diversity*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 1999.
 19. Footscray Community Arts Centre, *Annual report*, p. 20.
 20. *ibid*, p. 34.
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 22. Footscray Community Arts Centre, *Annual report*, 2003, p. 23.
 23. Footscray Community Arts Centre, *Annual Report*, 1999, p. 26.
 24. See G. Hawkins for an account of the ways in which the CCD Board had been somewhat institutionally isolated within the Australia Council, primarily because it was not aligned with the agenda of artistic 'excellence' that defined the organisation.
 25. L. Gibson, 'Creative industries and cultural development: still the Janus face?', *Media International Australia*, vol. 102, 2002, p. 26.
 26. Footscray Community Arts Centre, *Annual report*, 1994, p. 5.
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 28. *ibid*.
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 30. Footscray Community Arts Centre, *Annual report*, 1999, p. 2 (my emphasis).
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 32. S. Masters, personal communication, 29 April 2009.
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 35. See E. Belfiore and O. Bennett, *The social impact of the arts: an intellectual history*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2008; M. Mulligan, et al., *Creating community: celebrations, arts and wellbeing within and across local communities*, Globalism Institute, RMIT University, Melbourne, 2006.
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The hindrance of holding a raw egg¹: storytelling and the liminal space

Iris Curteis

The aim of my creative research is, as far as possible in written form, to show how the creative process of oral storytelling can engage and mobilise individuals and communities towards positive social change by enabling questions of social responsibility through arts practice. The intention of this paper is to argue for the *efficacy of the arts*, particularly in relation to the creation of liminal space, as:

Art enables us to develop an enriched imaginary, to think differently about our human situation; it can work against ‘immaculate origins and unnegotiable destinies’ to create sustainable myths which depict how identities form through social and personal relations that are ‘actively invented’, and thence such myths enable us to relate in new ways to ‘degraded environments’ and ‘displaced others’. By displaying the complexity of the human situation, art performs its role ‘in the ethical project of *becoming* (collectively and individually) *oneself in a particular place*.²

The act of telling and listening to a story fulfils an intrinsic human need in increasingly complex and mediated societies. Storytelling allows creative interaction in a time-space continuum, and by doing so forms community without establishing proscriptive structures. When I run storytelling workshops my key focus is to provide an experience of traditional storytelling: a story told from mouth to ear, a living malleable thing, woven into the fabric of the air breathed by those who share the tale.

By following the storytelling with a conversation – as described below – the audience and I together build an awareness of individual points of view, and an experience of communal cohesion based on respect and imagination. When those engaged in conversation engage in something greater than the sum of their parts, conversation becomes art, as we create new possibilities beyond our personal limitations.

Handing out raw eggs

The women in the traditional story *Fitcher’s bird* are given a raw egg to ‘hold and keep’ at all times. To aid workshop participants in their own experience of the circumstances the characters find themselves in, I place an intact raw egg in the hand of each. Holding the egg impacts on how we do things, how we move and how we think. Simple but necessary things, like using a knife and fork, or using the toilet, become complicated while holding the egg. Its fragility gradually seizes control, not only of our physical mobility, but also of our creativity – creativity becomes inhibited because part of our consciousness has to remain with the egg in our hand. The fluidity of our thoughts is interrupted by intrusion: concern for the egg. It is also a constant reminder of the authority of the person who gave it to us to hold and keep: even though they may be far away, they have an impact on the quality of our life. The hindrance of holding a raw egg inhibits our freedom, it disables us and makes us less capable than we are, or could be, and, as we come to understand the story: we recognise that the egg is a tool of surveillance, a means of ‘remote control’. I encourage workshop participants to experiment: to carry the egg around, if possible over a period of days, and to record their thoughts. The results are revealing.

As I hand out the eggs I begin to tell *Fitcher’s bird*. The story is comparable to *The robber bride*, *Blue beard*, *The tiger bride*, *Mr Fox* and many others found in every culture in various forms. It goes as follows:

Under the earth I go,
On an oak leaf I stand,
I ride the filly that was ne’er foaled
I carry the dead in my hand.³

Once upon a time there was Fitcher, and Fitcher is a master of the darkest arts – he only needs to touch the hand of a girl and she jumps into the long basket he carries on his back, never to be seen again. Disguised as a beggar, he appears weak and in need of alms. So he comes to the house of a man who has three beautiful daughters. He comes when the eldest is alone. Feeble-looking, starved and bedraggled, he begs for a morsel of food. The girl fetches some bread and milk, but as she offers it, he clasps her hand and, bereft of her senses, she leaps into the basket.

With long strong strides he carries her away to his house deep in a dark forest. Here he no longer appears as a beggar but reveals himself as a potent magician. He tells the terrified girl he will be generous; she will have whatever her heart desires, and he gives her the keys to all the doors in his vast household. He places his wealth at her disposal; she has permission to look into every chest and closet, to open all. All but one: the door the smallest of keys unlocks. He forbids her to open it under penalty of death and so saying places into her other hand an egg, unmarked and whole: ‘You must carry this with you at all times, for if any harm should come to it great misfortune would befall you’.

She promises to do everything as he asks. Fitcher tells her he must leave for a time.

The girl is left behind, held in a cage of her own fear, hardly daring to move; but soon she decides she must make the best of her circumstances. She explores the house, opening the doors one after another. Each room contains treasures beyond measure: gold, silver, precious gems, spices, silks and damasks, furniture wrought of the rarest of timbers ... Her path leads her to the door the smallest of keys unlocks. She resists, but curiosity takes hold, winding its tendrils around her skirt hems, tugging at her senses. Finally she relents, deciding she will not enter the room, just unlock the door and open it a crack, a nail paring, a slit as narrow as the sickle of a new moon, so she can peer inside. But as soon as she inserts the key it turns in the lock, the door springs wide and she is drawn inside.

A large, bloody basin stands in the centre of the room wherein lay the hacked and hewn bodies of many dead girls. Close by is a large chopping block; an axe lies glistening upon it. So terrified is she that she near faints and the egg slips from her hand to land in the midst of the basin. The poor girl thinks her life is forfeit if she does not reach into the blood and gore and pluck the egg out. Quickly she seizes it and runs to wash off the blood, but to no avail, for the bloody marks always reappear. She wipes and she scrubs, but she can't get rid of the stain.

Soon enough, Fitcher returns. He demands the keys and takes them from her trembling hand, and then he demands to see the egg. The girl falls to her knees begging for mercy, but Fitcher seizes her by the hair and drags her to the bloody chamber, saying: 'Lady whence you went against my will, I'll take you now against your own'. He pins her head to the block and hews it off. He hacks her body to pieces and throws them on to the pile. Once his handiwork is done he makes himself ready to fetch the second sister, and her fate is no better than that of the first.

Not long and he fetches the youngest. But she is of a different character. She too is given the keys and forbidden to open the door the smallest of keys unlocks. Then she is given the egg to keep with her at all times, and again the master of the dark arts leaves. The youngest takes the egg and places it where it will be safe. She takes the keys and unlocks all the doors; hesitating not a moment as she come to the forbidden chamber, she inserts the key and turns it in the lock. She too finds the hacked and hewn bodies and recognises her sisters. She weeps and she mourns and takes their limbs and lays them out as they were in life. She draws water from a spring and washes them, and both return to the living.

The sisters embrace and the youngest hatches a plan; she hides the girls in a closet and tells them she will come for them and see them home, but as soon as they are safe they must send her help. The sorcerer returns, bellowing for his keys; the youngest hands them to him with a smile. He demands to see the egg, and she places it in his hand. It is unblemished.

Convinced that she is completely obedient to his will, he asks her to marry him. She consents on one condition: he must take a basket of gold back to her father's house—he must carry it himself and not stop to rest or tarry upon the way and return with out delay. She, in the meantime, will invite the guests and prepare the wedding feast. Fitcher agrees; the youngest runs to the closet and bids her sisters to climb into the long basket. As she covers them with gold she tells them her plan. She calls the sorcerer and tells him she will watch from the turret window to make sure he keeps his word. He heaves the basked onto his back and sets off.

It is a hot day, the basket is heavy, the straps cut into his shoulders. The sorcerer stops in the shade of a great tree. The oldest cries out: 'I see you from my turret window; be on your way'. The sorcerer, thinking it is his bride calling, trudges onward and is soon plagued by a great thirst. He comes to a stream and stops to set the basket down and drink. The second sister calls out: 'I see you from my turret window; be on your way'. The sorcerer, again thinking it is his bride calling, trudges onward. As soon as he sets the basket down by the father's cottage, he hurries back.

Meanwhile, the youngest cleans the house from the bottom up, lays the feast and prepares the cup, and invites all the sorcerer's evil ilk. From the bloody chamber she takes a skull, adorns it with jewels, and veils it with silk. She sets it in the turret window for all to see. Quickly now she strips off her clothing, dives into a vat of honey, and slitting an eiderdown rolls in the feathers until she looks like a wondrous bird. So disguised, she leaves the house and turns homeward. Soon she encounters the wedding guests.

'Fitcher's bird from whence comest thou?'

'From yonder house there over the brow'.

'And where may the young bride be?'

'She has cleaned the house from the bottom up,

She has laid the table and prepared the cup,

Look up and you shall see

Her smiling a greeting and waiting for thee'.

The guests bow to the skull, thinking it is the bride, and continue into the house.

Soon after, the youngest meets Fitcher himself, he too addresses her:

'Fitcher's bird from whence comest thou?'

'From yonder house there over the brow'.

'And where may the young bride be?'

'She has cleaned the house from the bottom up,

She has laid the table and prepared the cup,

Look up and you shall see

Her smiling a greeting and waiting for thee'.

Foiled, he too salutes the skull as his bride to be, and hurries toward the house.

In the meantime the sisters have raised the alarm and called together their kith and kin and made their way to the house of the sorcerer. As soon as they see the youngest is safe and that the sorcerer and his ilk are in the house, they stop all the doors and block all the windows and set it ablaze. Embers cool and smoke is carried on the wind. In time the sisters marry men of their own choosing, put the gold to good use and live happily until their days' ending.

Conversation

The root of the word conversation lies in the Latin *conversationem*: to live with, to keep company with; it literally it means *to turn about with*. As such it also – perhaps more by implication – means to share a direction with others and, in an extended sense, refers to the manner of conducting oneself in the world – which paths we share and with whom; which paths we travel alone. In the following section, I will provide examples of some points or questions raised during these after-story conversations.

Comments are often made on the apparent lack of fertility of the egg. It does not 'hatch' nor does it seem to contain magical powers as such. It never takes long before someone states that the purpose of the egg is surveillance: the egg, by falling into the gore and remaining stained with the blood of other victims, reveals that the holder was disobedient and entered the forbidden chamber. A thought that usually connects itself here is: the egg has no power per se, as once the youngest decides to place it away safely, she is free: the egg cannot force her to hold it. For workshop participants, this realisation usually leads to the recognition that herein lies the 'key to freedom'.

A further reoccurring point of conversation is the correlation between the image of the egg and the image of the bird: while the egg is part of the entrapment, the bird is part of the liberation as, by taking on the image of a bird, the youngest escapes. Questions may arise again here about 'hatching': whether she 'hatched', in some way or other, out of the egg – in the sense of a profound maturation, emotionally and spiritually – and thereby overcame the odds in a terrifying and dangerous situation.

The strange phenomenon of receiving 'a key' with a prohibition attached (not to use it under penalty of death) leads to similar reflections on human society and human relationships: questions of knowledge and power, as well as of knowledge and self-empowerment. The gift of a key is useless without the freedom or ability to use it. The key too, in its own way, becomes an inhibition and occupies our consciousness, as does the egg. However, the demand *not to use the key* stands in contrast to being mindful of the egg at all times – the only way not to use the key would be to forget its existence and thereby avoid the temptation to use it. This 'forgetting' would mean voluntarily relinquishing comprehension of and insight into the nature of 'the bloody chamber' and the 'master of the dark arts'. In conversation, participants readily agree that there is no safety in not knowing danger,

however frightening this knowledge may be. The solution is not to *forget* the key, but to separate it from the demand to carry the egg at all times, and to then use the key. Once this riddle is solved (in solving it participants identify with the youngest in the story), the power to re-member is also obtained, as played out in the image of the youngest reassembling and cleansing the dismembered bodies of her sisters.

The imagery of dismemberment compels us to ask: Why is death is not enough? Why must the bodies be mutilated? Or if the story is internalised, what lives within our emotions and thoughts that hacks and hews us to pieces? What inner resource do we have that is capable of re-membering – of putting back together again that which has been, in this case, brutally disconnected – and then, of dealing with oppression?

Participants also take note of the dark humour, not immediately obvious, but nevertheless contained within the story. For example, the wedding guests and the sorcerer greet the grinning skull as the bride – foreshadowing a wedding with death. Further, one moment the sorcerer thinks the youngest is completely obedient to his will, the next moment he must do all she asks and is harried along on his way by what he believes is the voice of his bride-to-be.

Finally there is the community as witness, the community as protector. The last deed of overcoming evil – finding the youngest safe, stopping the doors and blocking the windows, and setting the house ablaze – is a communal task. This imagery often raises questions ranging from issues of social responsibility and justice or even capital punishment, to effectively dealing with human predators externally and emotional 'predators' internally.

Not all questions developed during a workshop are listed above or answered within the session, nor is the unfolding dynamic within the conversation adequately represented, but what may have become apparent is the human engagement which takes place between people who are usually complete strangers, may vary in age and often have different cultural backgrounds. They are nevertheless willing to pose, and capable of grappling with, existential questions in an emotionally engaged and creative manner. The events so debated are unfolding in a story; therefore, according to conventional opinion, are not *real*. Why then do these imagined events suddenly matter enough to engage people in heated, passionate, and deeply insightful conversation?

Storytelling and the liminal space

Story can express what is integral to human experience, and comprehensive truths common to all humanity. In this sense, storytelling can overcome separation – particularly emotional separation that may be caused by cultural, social, gender, class, ethnic, familial, religious and national differences. Folktales globalise our feelings, at least for the duration of our engagement with the story.

Author of *The daemon in the wood: a study of oral narrative patterns*, David Bynum, states:

I know the chief use or function of fabulous narrative traditions everywhere is to make people adaptable in their minds, to enlarge the scope of their mental lives beyond the confines of their actual experience socially, physically, and in every other way. I am so far persuaded of this that I have come to think of fabulous storytelling and even of stories so told as proper aspects of human biology.⁴

Story resides inside our body, mind and spirit as an artefact of our humanity. Storytelling or hearing stories told places us on a threshold between two worlds: the world of our physical sense experience and the world of the story – this phenomenon of straddling two sets of consciousness is a liminal space.

Liminality is a phrase originally coined by van Gennep⁵ and later described by Victor Turner as a threshold, ‘betwixt and between the normal day-to-day cultural and social states and processes’⁶. Van Gennep⁷ determines rituals have a well-defined beginning, middle and end, and take place in a ‘sacred time’ separated from secular time by markers such as burning of incense, lighting candles, chanting incantations, ringing bells or singing. He specifies liminal time as that not controlled by the clock: ‘It is a time of enchantment when anything might, even should, happen’.⁸ The same qualities of time and enchantment are intrinsic to story telling. *Story time is liminal time*. The storyteller provides a mystery that has the power to reach within each of us, to command emotion, to compel involvement and to transport us into timelessness.⁹ Story functions as a mediator, via the storyteller, and places us on a threshold – in a liminal state of mind – where the inner world of the story has a greater reality than the sociological, physical, cultural reality of the individual listener. A storyteller, respectful of oral and cultural traditions, may employ a degree of formality or ritual – such as call-and-response openings that signal communal readiness – and mark the commencement of collective consciousness of the event of the storytelling¹⁰, thus marking the shift into liminal story space. Story time, like liminal time, is separated from the secular by markers such as openings and closings, which clearly define beginning, middle and end. The ‘calling over’ of the audience/listener via traditional story openings, has ritual qualities that signal that the storyteller knows the way through the story and offers a safe return – and, without doubt, a time of enchantment during which anything *does* happen. Formal closings signal the end of liminal time, the end of the telling, and bring the listener/audience back into real time, daily routine and normal consequences.¹¹

According to Masuyama¹², liminality is vital for the integration of knowledge, acquired through intuition, perception or reason, as it orders chaos and integrates stored memories, as well as helping to accommodate and assimilate these into *scripts*. These scripts are mental narrative

structures¹³ – inner conversations we hold with ourselves – that guide our social interactions and emotional responses, and form the basis of metaphor and simile in our thinking. In short, Story has the same quality and capacity and is of the same vital importance as liminality for the integration of knowledge, information, memory and the ordering of chaos. Stories, too, are ‘a way of knowing, understanding and remembering’ that restructures information and experiences into shapes or patterns we can commit to memory.¹⁴

Most importantly, the liminality provided through storytelling ‘provides a charter for individual behaviour and, by extension, for communal social behaviour’.¹⁵ This charter for communal social behaviour is sustained by *plural reflexivity*: ‘the ways in which a group or community seeks to portray, understand and then act on itself’.¹⁶ Story archetypes represent a high level of a culture’s awareness of ‘its own being, a people’s understanding of its humanness and individual self-awareness’.¹⁷ As this social behaviour is informed and inspired by Story in liminal space, it rests on the strength of imagination, not on the authority of prohibition: heroine and hero consistently break prohibitions – and must in fact do so – in the pursuit of their quest. This quest is in essence a pursuit of archetypal needs: love, security, forgiveness, knowledge, healing, generosity, honesty and so on. Stories provide a frame in which a culture or community can place ‘a piece of itself for inspection’.¹⁸ Since stories provide us with an abundance of archetypal images and symbols we can transcribe what has been ‘sectioned off’ and examine, revise, amend and improve it:

Public liminality stresses the role of collective innovatory behaviour, of crowds generating new ways of framing and modelling the social reality which presses on them in their daily lives. Here all is open, plurally reflexive, the folk acts on the folk and transforms itself through becoming aware of its situation and predicament.¹⁹

This public liminality is further supported through the inherent democratic principles of storytelling, as, ‘the narration of a story is the perpetually emergent form of artistic expression; in the context of storytelling the texture of the story emerges as narrator and audience interact’.²⁰ Within this frame, and in the liminal space in which all things are possible, ‘stories appeal to something profound and numinous that drifts on the edge between consciousness and the unconscious’²¹, leaving both audience and storyteller free to exercise their expectations for Story and stories.

The efficacy of storytelling

In *The wisdom of storytelling in an information age*, Amy Spaulding quotes Ursula le Guin: ‘There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories’.²² Spaulding further testifies to the importance of Story in ‘developing imaginative thinking skills ... in developing moral-ethical imagination, the ability to think in new and

unexpected ways, the ability to see parallels and relationships in which none had existed before, to see things not immediately in front of your eyes, to become at least dimly aware of the complexity of our inner selves.²³

At the present time, we are experiencing an unprecedented boom in information technology, which supplies us with more 'facts' than we can process; however, we are without adequate time, wisdom, or insight needed to interpret and integrate them into our lives. This global shift from 'knowledge-based' to 'information-processing' cultures makes creative thinking, creativity and the use of the imagination and metaphor crucial to the survival of humane societies. As Robert and Michele Root-Bernstein state:

As more and more information becomes available, we understand and use less and less of it. If society cannot find ways to make integrated understanding accessible to large numbers of people, then the information revolution is not only useless but a threat to humane civilisation.²⁴

Story structure provides us with archetypes and motifs that enable us to organise our thinking, interpret our experiences and act on them. By storying circumstances and events we increase coherence and achieve sensibility, overcoming isolated and disconnected incidents by binding them into meaningful cohesion. Innovative strategies for survival offered in folktales are:

... not primarily utopian, not dreams of the future but observations and aspirations for the world as we live in it now. In the hands of skilled tellers, these old stories have the capacity they have always had to identify and address the most basic human concerns and contradictions as they manifest themselves today.²⁵

Story extends communality of experience by generating a sense of belonging, in which the private becomes part of a greater collective experience. This in turn can facilitate important personal discoveries while bringing a higher level of comprehensibility to the things we do.²⁶ According to James Hillman, 'the more attuned and experienced the imaginative side of the personality, the less threatening and irrational, the less necessity for repression, and therefore the less pathology acted out in literal daily events'.²⁷ As we find our personal circumstances and behaviours reflected in the universal events of story, the liminality of storytelling allows us to access cultural resources, translate them into new social directions and ways of understanding, thereby facilitating creative thinking at its best:

In terms of human cultural evolutions we might consider stories as 'a mental opposable thumb allowing humans to grasp something in their minds – to turn it around, to view it from many angles, to reshape it, and to hurl it even into the farthest reaches of the unconscious'.²⁸

Although a storytelling may be planned, the actual telling of the story is an immediate experience, something that takes place at that moment, with those present, in a time and space continuum. Storytelling is *the* process that creates Story, even if the stories told are themselves ancient. This process engages equitable participation, which means the absolute shape of the story told in a specific setting and time is not predictable or controllable by the teller alone. Within this framework, all is both negotiation *and* predictability as individual listeners overlay their mental structure on storied content during the telling.²⁹ The community has therefore as much control over the story as the teller. The listener reconfigures the story within the liminal experience of the telling and organises the story relations by 'linking people, time and place, things and general context of given events', thereby creating an 'event chain of logical relationships'.³⁰ The shared nature of this process is a result of the dynamic between the teller, the listener *and* the story. In this sense, the audience – collectively and individually – owns the story.

Conclusion

Art that cannot shape society and therefore cannot penetrate the heart questions of society, and in the end influence the questions of capital, is not Art.³¹

Storytelling is grassroots, communal, oral-aural art that can take place anywhere, anytime without the need for elaborate structures or complex preparations. Storytelling is a form of cultural citizenship; by sharing and engaging in stories from around the world, we can engender greater understanding of cultural specificity and the universally human. Story extends the communality of experience by generating a sense of belonging, in that the personal becomes part of a collective experience and vice versa. This facilitates important individual discoveries while bringing a greater level of comprehensibility to the things we do – a vital asset in an age of the increasingly rapid development of information technology and economic globalisation, 'displaced others' and 'degraded environments'.³² Economic globalisation is taking place often at the expense and the destruction of local communities, while simultaneously imposing corporate paradigms on indigenous cultures. The price is the erosion of local identity, local diversity and commonality. According to Joseph Beuys: 'Only from art can a new concept of economics be formed, in terms of human needs, not in the sense of waste and consumption'.³³ Economic globalisation does not promote equality; it increasingly polarises people along economic lines that include a loss of access to natural resources, food and water, and habitable landscapes.

Environmental refugees could become one of the foremost human crises of our times ... The phenomenon is an outward manifestation of profound change – a manifestation often marked by extreme deprivation, fear and despair. While it derives from environmental problems, it is equally a crisis of social, political and economic sorts ... as such, the crisis could readily become a cause of turmoil and confrontation, leading to conflict and violence.³⁴

The above quote from Norman Meyer clearly indicates that we will need communities capable of meaningful social integration and of being flexible enough to accommodate multiple cultures and identities. Folktales are full of power struggles and raise questions of:

... individual autonomy verses state (and other) dominion, creativity verses repression (and thereby) stimulating critical and free thinking ... folktales harbour and cultivate the germs of subversion and offer people hope in their resistance to all forms of oppression and in their pursuit of more meaningful modes of life and communication.³⁵

We need, more than ever, the ability to think creatively, to explore and understand across cultural boundaries. The arts, and the methodology of creative exploration and research intrinsic to all artistic processes, can provide shared liminal experiences and make more humane societies possible – even in the face of an, at best, uncertain environmental future.

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Endnotes

1. Although widely attributed to and published by the Grimm Brothers, I first heard this story told by my grandmother, Margarethe Emma Voight, an avid storyteller and defender of oral tradition.
2. P. Carter cited in M. Costello, “‘Attention to what is’”: *Beverly Farmer, ecocriticism and efficacy*, 2010.
3. Traditional invocation to open the telling and call the listeners over into the state or space of Story.
4. D. Bynum, *The daemon in the wood: a study of oral narrative patterns*, 1978.
5. A. van Gennep, *The rites of passage*, 2004.
6. V. Turner, ‘Frame, flow and reflection: ritual and drama as public liminality’, 1979, pp. 466–614.
7. Cited in Turner.
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10. A. Pellowski, *The world of storytelling* R. R. Bowker Company, New York & London, 1977
11. *ibid.*
12. E. Masuyama, *Towards an understanding of Rakugo as a communicative event: a performance analysis of traditional professional Japanese storytelling in Japan*, 1997.

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15. E. Masuyama, 1997, pp. 181–182.
16. V. Turner, 1979, p. 446.
17. R. Atkinson, 1995, p. 1.
18. V. Turner, 1979, p. 468.
19. *ibid*, p. 478.
20. K. Stone, *Some day your witch will come*, 2008, p. 112.
21. K. Stone, *Burning brightly: new light on old tales told today*, 1998, p. 6.
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27. *ibid*, pp. 43–44.
28. Birch and Heckler quoted in K. Stone, *Burning brightly*, p. 7.
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34. N. Meyer, *Environmental exodus: an emergent crisis in the global arena*, 1995
35. J. Zipes, *Breaking the magic spell, radical theories of folk and fairy tales*, 2002, p. 21.

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Realigning community, culture and development in dispersed urban settings

Shanene Ditton

Abstract

As the office moves into the handbag and mass self-communication technologies proliferate, traditional notions of urban space and time are transfigured. Urban places and people are increasingly uploaded, downloaded and connected to the global, and the potential local implications of this are exciting. This article analyses the nexus between dispersed urban spaces, mass self-communication technologies and cultural development policy. In culmination it suggests a new term: culture-led redevelopment. It provides an analysis of key concepts within this cross-section and suggests a need for further emphasis to be placed on investigating and creating space(s) of mass self-communication with the dispersed locality in order to facilitate productive ongoing dialogue between cultural practitioners and policy makers. The local focus for this article will be Australia's Gold Coast, a postmodern city in which we can observe a range of conditions that exemplify the dispersion of contemporary living.

Keywords: cultural development, culture-led redevelopment, community, mass self-communication technologies, cultural development policy, networks

Postmodern urban dispersion emulates a shift in the way we communicate; we no longer think in linear time frames, and we certainly don't commune in conventional ways. Decentralisation is an increasing probability, if not certainty, for emerging cities—particularly coastal cities, where a city centre is substituted by an elongated stretch of beach. Although this dispersion is important to a city's sense of place, it can also hinder cultural production and development. For the dispersed and emerging coastal locality to produce, develop and sustain culture in the twenty-first century, it is crucial that we look now to more current modes of communication and to new points of articulation.

This article focuses on the nexus between cultural development policy, mass self-communication technologies and dispersed urban settings, with Australia's Gold Coast as an example. In a much broader context this article works toward the possibility of the creation of localised online space(s) through which dispersed cultural practitioners and policy makers might communicate, interact and form an ongoing dynamic dialogue with one another. But considering this broader picture, engaging local practitioners is no mean feat; identifying key cultural nodes for the sustainability and instrumentality of such a space is indeed complex, and tailoring online space(s) to the varied, ongoing needs and wants of local practitioners is intricate.

So, contrary to cultural policy frameworks, this article works backwards, and it takes as its point of departure the analysis of the local cultural practitioner. By analysing the local cultural practitioners and identifying their needs, wants and practices, we can begin to understand the challenges faced and the resources needed. Alongside this, this article examines cultural development policy terms in an attempt to expose the dislocation between local cultural practitioners' understandings of these terms and the processes of the policies aimed at them. All data presented in this article about Gold Coast cultural practitioners is preliminary and is informed by my observations as a local cultural practitioner and researcher, although there are some useful case studies which exemplify the relevance of this research.

Community, culture and development on the Gold Coast

On the Gold Coast, 'community' and 'culture' have frequently been taken as terms synonymous with 'desert'. Or so the story goes. A misleading and stereotyped depiction of a culturally devoid Gold Coast, and a Gold Coast with little coherent sense of a 'real' community, has long been entrenched throughout South-East Queensland and wider Australia, obscuring the actual situation and intensifying the hurdles faced by people who are, in fact, producing culture on the Gold Coast. The clichés and catchphrases about 'cultural desert' and lack of community spirit have become so established that visitors and even some locals begin to accept their authenticity. Accordingly, people tend to view the city as little more than a superficial destination and, therefore, do not seek out local cultural events and opportunities for richer engagement.

The Gold Coast's tale is one of struggle against the grain. Flourishing from its early days as a timber and sugar-cane port and turn-of-the-twentieth-century seaside resort to its current status as an emerging city with a growing residential population of over half a million, the Gold Coast now has a significant connection with a range of global activities beyond tourism.¹ Yet to many, the Gold Coast is a beach and a skyline of high-rises: entertaining, relaxing and phony. It is hardly considered a city and it is definitely not considered a cultural space. Not quite regional enough to get access to some federal and state funding targeting regions, but not quite city

enough to be taken seriously in national discourses about what cities have to offer, the Gold Coast is suspended in an inadequate space.

Lucky it's got the looks. Boasting extravagant beaches stretched along a fifty-seven-kilometre corridor of glistening sand, the Gold Coast is often portrayed as beautiful, glitzy, shallow and egotistical. Described by Bosman as a 'hyper-neoliberal tourist city'², the iconic beachside high-rise 'strip' tends to be positioned in terms of hyperbole, rather than discussed as an expression of urban postmodernity, let alone an architectural celebration of the increased desire to live closer to the clouds.

Nationally and regionally, sensationalised media reports depicting glitz, glamour, sleaze and crime largely contribute to the aforementioned negative preconceptions of the Gold Coast. Baker, Bennett and Wise note, 'The region's newspapers share a preoccupation with crime reporting, with the regional tabloid, *The Gold Coast Bulletin*, using 'big' crime to portray the city as having a dark underbelly on par with big cities like Melbourne'.³ While these popular representations are indeed damaging to local cultural production, the disconnection between residents increases these tensions and encourages the common preconceptions relating to culture and community.

In public discourses the emphasis is on excess – such as having the 'World's Tallest Residential Tower', which (however briefly) doubles as 'Australia's Tallest Building'.⁴ But resorts such as the Q1 in Surfer's Paradise are multivalent. They are actually locally called 'mixed-use developments' because their diversity of apartments represents a broad spectrum of people: long-term unit owners, medium-term tenants, and short-term tourists. These buildings also mould local life as well as tourist life through the elaborate entertainment, leisure and retail spaces created around their bases.

However, often abbreviated to just Surfers, the Gold Coast's fluorescent main drag of meter maids, seductive nightlife and disorderly partygoers is not a part of the urban space that the majority of locals choose to frequent. To most holidaymakers, 'Surfers' is indeed the first word that comes to mind. Ironically, just as many locals do not consume its nightlife, serious surfers rarely surf on its adjacent beaches. Nonetheless, Surfers' chic facade, its neon Pink Poodle signature and its redundantly tall architecture dazzle tourists.

The Gold Coast breathes tourism. Themed shopping malls, amusement parks and hotels are dotted around the city; restaurants tailor their menus to the tastes of their holidaymakers; many businesses market their products to a leisure audience; and hotels offer a rich menu of purely indulgent activities. In these and many other ways, the significance of tourism in Gold Coast economic life and sense of regional identity is obvious to locals as much as to tourists.

What many people don't realise is that the Gold Coast doesn't end at its tourist strip, beaches, theme parks and mega-malls. In fact, the Gold Coast extends far back through its sprawling suburbs, navigating 270 kilometres of waterways, to its semi-rural but increasingly developed hinterland comprising world heritage forest – some 77,250 hectares of natural environment, home to 1300 animal and 1700 plant species.⁵ From the highest parts of this hinterland, the spectacular city can be seen stretching down the coast right to the New South Wales border, and away towards Brisbane in the north.

Another perspective often missed is that there are 500,000-plus residents of the city, undertaking their daily lives, in the diverse kinds of clusters of suburbs, in the hinterland and in the high-rise strip. You may even find artists if you look hard enough.

That being said, the Gold Coast lacks the cohesion of a traditional centred city and fragmentation occurs. Its residents are dispersed across a decentred city, which is, in Soja's terms, an 'exopolis' – missing the traditional 'downtown' or city hub 'perched beyond the vortex of the old agglomerative nodes'⁶ and lacking the concentric, centre-focused formations of more conventional cities, not only in terms of geographical space, but also in terms of transport and services infrastructure.⁷ The Gold Coast forms residential and economic clusters but these are volatile, segmented, and not inclined to pass information through a common centre of communication. As Patricia Wise writes: 'The Gold Coast does not have a "downtown" financial district or hub of government, law, and cultural institutions, which are dispersed outside the dominant skyline of Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach'.⁸

This resultant clustering of residents dispersed along a narrow corridor creates fragmentation and, in turn, dislocation. So although there are indeed strong connections between groups of people, there are less superficial ties between groups, resulting in alienation. In a more practical sense, this means that two groups of people – or alternatively, two individuals – can be creating the same type of project with similar objectives on either end of the coast and never know about each other. Although there are several vibrant arts initiatives, an arts centre and a very active city gallery, over 80 other galleries, and cultural practitioners producing art in locations all over the coast, they are disconnected from each other⁹, and almost always invisible to people who tend to view the city as lacking in culture and cultural identity. This is problematic for cultural practitioners, and it indicates that a distinct type of network can be found on the Gold Coast.

The Gold Coast's network: a lack of weak ties

The Gold Coast's network is exemplary of modern times, and can usefully be understood using weak tie network theory. In his original study on the strength of weak ties, Mark Granovetter identified two types of ties between people in networks: strong and weak ties.¹⁰ He defined the strength of a tie

as 'a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterise that tie'.¹¹ Granovetter claimed that 'our acquaintances (weak ties) are less likely to be socially involved with one another than are our close friends (strong ties)'.¹² This worked on the principle of transitivity:

If A is connected to B and A is connected to C, then likely B is connected to C. Furthermore Granovetter noted that if the two ties A-B and A-C were strong, then B had to be tied to C, either strongly or weakly.¹³

In a study that surveyed people finding employment through weak and strong ties, Granovetter discovered that more people found jobs through weak ties than through strong ties. There were many reasons for this and some inconsistencies later discovered, but the general findings were that weak ties were important to a network's flow of resources and knowledge.¹⁴ He theorised that 'strong ties by themselves generate fragmentation, as subgroups in a locality become isolated from each other, and weak ties allow for integration, connecting these subgroups'.¹⁵

The Gold Coast's fragmented formation would seem to imply a network dominated by strong ties and lacking in weak ones, disallowing communication to flow further outward beyond each clique. In a more practical sense, two cultural practitioners operating within different cliques may be aiming to achieve similar goals, but never cross paths with one another. This is, of course, a hindrance in the area of cultural development. Granovetter noted that in order to connect two seemingly disparate networks, and hence the wider community, weak ties need to be *bridged*.¹⁶ Once bridges are formed between networks, communications and processes may flow more seamlessly, autonomously, and in a sustained way, so that the probability of resources flowing to all people in the community – rather than a select few – is increased.

Although the Gold Coast City Council acknowledges these processes of the Gold Coast, it is still grappling with how to enable more comprehensive connection and communication between locals as well as between Council and locality. This can be seen throughout policy.

Gold Coast cultural development policy

To understand Gold Coast cultural development policy and its processes more clearly, it is useful to examine how key terms are deployed in policy discourses. Wise notes that cultural development 'tends to be one of those givens of policy speak and public ideas'.¹⁷ The terms are in themselves rather ambiguous and their significations can slide about quite alarmingly depending on the context in which they are used. This is particularly prevalent on the Gold Coast, where the lack of connectedness between people further dislocates participation in the defining process.

Cultural development

The first term in the policy field that is of concern is *cultural*. Its noun, *culture*, has baffled great thinkers for a considerable period. The 'culture wars' have been going on since the word's conception in the late eighteenth century, and while they have been incredibly insightful, they are happily unresolved. Acclaimed theorist Raymond Williams once said, 'I've wished that I'd never heard the damned word'.¹⁸ Because of the term's ambiguity, it has infiltrated the media to describe a multitude of different processes, systems, practices and products: gay culture, cultural economy, cultural capital, cultural genocide, tissue culture, cultural evolution, popular culture, just to name a few.¹⁹

Toby Miller and George Yudice describe culture as being connected to policy in 'two registers: the aesthetic and the anthropological'.²⁰ They explain: 'in the aesthetic register, artistic output emerges from creative people and is judged by aesthetic criteria, as framed by the interests and practices of cultural criticism and history'.²¹ In contrast, the anthropological register describes 'how we live our lives [and] the senses of place and person that make us human'.²² So, the aesthetic refers to 'differences *within* populations' and the anthropological refers to 'differences *between* populations'.²³ In accordance with this, in my preliminary observations about cultural practitioners on the Gold Coast I've found that these two registers of cultural policy coincide with the two dominant perceptions of what cultural development is: some think it's loosely about art and others think it's about ethnicity or community. Countless times I've mentioned the term 'cultural development' only to be met with vague uncertainty about the assimilation of ethnic groups into the wider Gold Coast 'community'.

Cultural development could perhaps be implemented to cater for both the anthropological and aesthetic registers, but the problem is that this is not communicated clearly in cultural development policy nor clearly understood by cultural policy makers and workers. Gold Coast City Council defines cultural development as 'the coordinated and planned utilisation of the arts and other creative activities to improve local quality of life, community wellbeing and community engagement'.²⁴

This description doesn't match local practitioners' understandings of what cultural development means on the Gold Coast. Alongside this, the funding opportunities available through the Gold Coast City Council cultural development unit confuse the terms further. The two grants available are the Regional Arts Development Fund and the Rapid Response Cultural Development Fund. Both arts and culture here actually refer to the same thing (art and culture) except the latter is only awarded for recognised emergencies in retrospectively ongoing projects. But there is no apparent difference in the actual kinds of projects supported by either the arts or cultural grant.

The Gold Coast City Council, in the terms it uses, assumes that culture is understood by all Gold Coast people in the same way as it is defined in policy (and even this is confusing); and by implying that community is necessarily a group of people sharing a common interest and identity, and that this idea of community is desirable, which brings me to the second problematic term: community.

Commune(ity) or locality?

In recent times, the word *community* has had friendly connotations: as Raymond Williams writes, it's been 'the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships'.²⁵ The term has also led to lengthy debates though, such as those between liberalism, individualism and communism.²⁶ From the 1920s, 'urban communities and rural communities became laboratories for sociological examination of the breakdown of the cohesive values that sustained community and formed the basis of social order'.²⁷

From these investigations, models of community development were proposed and implemented as a response to communism.²⁸ Community is now referred to nostalgically, retrospectively, futuristically and presently. But Yúdice suggests that community's 'darker side' might be raising its head. He elaborates:

Much of the chaos which passes for post-socialist transitions (mafia-style capitalism in Russia), the disruption and dislocation of globalisation (the collapse of Argentina), and the proliferating violence and terror in the wake of the Cold War (September 11) presents a set of circumstances in which the darker side of community edges out the positive. While for Manuel Castells the network society is the spawning ground of innovation and urban renewal, largely rooted in the local, terrorist networks are also (re)new(ed) forms of imagined community.²⁹

Now, community has become such an over-used term to describe such a myriad of conditions that its use has become potentially dangerous. As Irving Goh notes, 'it is really the verbal reiteration of "community" – articulated endlessly without submitting it to critical thought, enunciated as if it could ever if not already give us that thing called "community" – that has so far contaminated any future possibility of thinking about community'.³⁰

To delve more deeply into contemporary understandings of community on the Gold Coast, it's important to illustrate the all-too-frequent superficiality of the term in regional cultural development policy. It is crucial to note here that although Gold Coast cultural development workers do not position themselves as community cultural development (CCD) workers, they do incorporate the term 'community' in their definition of cultural development: 'the coordinated and planned utilisation of the arts and other creative activities to improve local quality of life, community wellbeing

and community engagement'.³¹ The objectives are stated as understanding that: 'A well-managed cultural development program offers all members of the community the opportunity for creative expression, enhanced social networks and a sense of inclusion'.³²

Community is thus almost as confusing as *cultural* in this usage. It is deployed firstly in the sense of community wellbeing. This phrase is rather vague and could mean any one of a number of things: health, emotional stability, connectivity, and financial security, just to name a few. The second time it is used is in reference to engagement. But what kinds of engagements are being improved upon, how and why? The final mention of community is in regard to membership and this is also problematic.

Community membership implies inclusivity and a condition of belonging that, in turn, suggests exclusivity. This does not take account of contemporary recognitions of the plurality of communities and leaves little room for imaginative ideas of what makes or can make community. This policy does not describe an understanding of one of its key terms and it is restrictive in its usage. In contrast to this idea of community, Jean-Luc Nancy describes community not as a group of people sharing an identity or who have something in common, nor an essence, or even as a nostalgic term for some sense of a lost communion that must be rebuilt in the form of a project. Nancy describes community as something already inherent in our existence: our *being-with-one-another*. He states:

Being *in* common has nothing to do with communion, with fusion into a body, into a unique and ultimate identity that would no longer be exposed. Being *in* common means, to the contrary, *no longer having, in any form, in any empirical or ideal place, such a substantial identity and sharing this (narcissistic) 'lack of identity'*. This is what philosophy calls finitude.³³

It is this shared finitude that Nancy believes constitutes community because our finitude, our limit, is our only thing *in* common. He describes community as 'myth-interrupted' and explains that the only thing community has lost is itself as myth. Furthermore, society is not the result of a destroyed community; far from being what society has lost, community is the here and now, the act, the desire, the waiting. This rejection of a necessary shared identity is particularly refreshing and relevant to the aforementioned Gold Coast policy statement, which still appears to be aiming to produce a shared identity.

Taking into account the varied perceptions of what makes or can make community, I have purposefully moved away from using the term 'community' because of its various relations to notions of shared identity, nostalgic yearning for a 'lost' community or one that is based on commonality. I have, instead used the term *locality*, which describes a group of people living adjacently to one another. The final term in cultural development policy I'd like to discuss is development.

(Re)development

For the purposes of this article and in relation to cultural development, I understand *development* to be planning (based on experience and analysis) for a locality. In order to flesh out a potential theoretical framework for working *with* the locality (not to *create* community), it is essential to elucidate the connection between locality and the experience of the individual.

The being-*in*-common outlined in the previous section, would seem to correspond with a notion of *being-experiential*, drawing on the suggestion that people are experiencing each interaction with the world for the first time. Here it would seem appropriate to expand on this notion.

Being-experiential is a term to describe our being, within the moment it occurs. It expresses the *here* or the *now* of each interaction with the world, or the complex, finite and fleeting experience of each moment encountered. Experience, like an experiment, is new each time it occurs; it may feel or seem similar to a previous experience but two experiences are never the same. Raymond Williams noted the two dominant understandings of experience: experience (present); and experience (past).³⁴ He explains:

At one extreme experience (present) is offered as the necessary (immediate and authentic) ground for all (subsequent) reasoning and analysis. At the other extreme, experience (once the present participle not of 'feeling' but of 'trying' or 'testing' something) is seen as the product of social conditions or of systems of belief or of fundamental systems of perception, and thus not as materials for truths but as evidence of conditions or systems which by definition it cannot itself explain.³⁵

As far as the human imagination extends, we could claim that we have never been, and possibly will never, *be* in any particular moment again. In this sense, then, all *being* could be seen to be experiential or, as Williams terms, experience (present). Williams notes that

Experience past already includes, at its most serious, those processes of consideration, reflection, analysis which the most extreme use of experience present – an unquestionable authenticity and immediacy – excludes.³⁶

So with this understanding, if every experience we understood to be truth was not absolute, then nothing we learnt through these experiences could be considered fixed; and our *being* could be seen as potentiality. I do not wish to suggest that nothing can be learnt from experience but quite the opposite: there is everything to be learnt from experience. And if experience has taught us anything, it is that *anything* is possible.

Zygmunt Bauman's notion of 'liquid modernity' is relevant here.³⁷ Bauman explains how the solid modernity of the past 40 to 50 years, where life choices have had definitive outcomes, has moved to a liquid modernity, where fluidity and change are the constants, rather than the conflict. He explains:

For the first time in our history, we are confronted with change as a permanent condition of human life. So we need to develop the ways of behaviour, the ways of contact which are fit for living in this state of constant change.³⁸

Bauman also makes interesting discussion about the disappearance of the project as mode of development. He explains that a project denotes a fixed beginning and ending, whereas liquid modernity requires constant fluidity. This thinking has implications for models of planning and development for locality.

Traditionally in planning and development, we attempt to delimit our experiences by building on acquired knowledge gained from previous experiences. Williams notes that 'we project our old images into the future, and take hold of ourselves and others to force energy towards that substantiation'.³⁹ In *Planning Australia*, Thompson notes that 'all planners predict the outcomes of particular actions, as well as generalising from previous experience, and this pragmatic approach is necessarily contextualised by planning theory'.⁴⁰ Birch further notes that 'one of the greatest challenges [in planning] is defining the 'public interest' or common well-being'.⁴¹ But, as in the case of communism (or even Australian colonial history), trying to establish an 'essence' of community has dangerously led backward and, potentially, prevented new positive experiences outside our current imaginative capacity. In relation to the local context of cultural policy, Gibson and Kong suggest that 'the normative policy script of the cultural economy ... has the effect of closing off potential connections and dialogues that could occur, because it erases a lot of the messiness of culture'.⁴²

I agree, and suggest further that if development (of culture) is truly an imaginative activity, then strict planning based on previous experience might be futile. However, if policy makers together with locality could acknowledge the *in* of being-*in*-common or of their being-experiential, then they might also be able to comprehend that their experience with the world cannot and will not be delimited. From this perspective then, we restrict or even close down potentialities when we plan for certain or fixed outcomes rather than plotting careful points and letting some chance into the field. Here I turn to Deleuze and Guattari for further explanation.

According to its literal meaning, and as Deleuze and Guattari describe it, the rhizome is a bulbous plant stem with a decentralised, horizontal type of root system, not opposing but differing from the classic tree-root system. Rather than growing upward in a predictable, vertical manner originating from one point, the rhizome spreads its roots horizontally, and stems sporadically sprout from any point. Therefore the rhizome is not a tree. Deleuze and Guattari describe the rhizome as a 'multiplicity'.⁴³ Margaret Hagood states that 'Rhizoanalysis functions as an analytic tool for examinations of multiplicities, of ideas and concepts that move as emulations of rhizomes via subterranean flows of horizontal shoots'.⁴⁴

The principles of cartography and decalcomania suggest that the rhizome is 'a map and not a tracing'.⁴⁵ Hagood's use of the term 'Rhizomatic Cartography', which uses rhizoanalysis to map the workings of a rhizome, is relevant here.

As Margaret Hagood explains:

Two key components of rhizomatic cartography include maps and tracings, which Deleuze and Guattari liken to the surface tubers of rhizomes and the deep root structures of trees. A tracing serves as structure akin to a rooted, grounded, vertical, hierarchical arboreal history. A map, on the other hand, operates altogether differently. Maps are like rhizomes, not trees. They have no inherent deep structure. They are the middles that spread horizontally, and these middles connect in often unforeseen ways.⁴⁶

By this, Deleuze and Guattari understand the idea of structure to be 'an infinitely reproducible principle of *tracing*'.⁴⁷ They observe that a tracing only ever reproduces itself and that our tracings 'should always be put back on the map'.⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari note:

What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real ... It fosters connections between fields ... The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification ... A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back 'to the same'.⁴⁹

But both the map and the tracing are necessarily important: they are not binaries. Hagood explains:

Both are necessary in order to examine the multiplicities: the stabilities and shifts of ideas. Tracings are important because they show deep structures that ground ideas and that are always at work, while maps point to fissures, illustrating the instability, flow, and movement of ideas in different directions. Tracings on a map exhibit both deep and surface structures, what Deleuze and Guattari (1980, 1987) describe as 'lines of flight'. Rhizomatic cartography offers a means of studying a rhizome that morphs haphazardly underground.⁵⁰

Rhizomatic cartography is useful when trying to understand cultural policy, the cultural practitioner and development. To account for unaccountability, the rhizome necessitates that points are plotted and then folded back onto the map, to inform new points in a continual process of redevelopment. Rather than imposing pre-existing structures (tracings) in a calculated project-and-outcome-based process of development, it is important to gain an initial idea of what connections exist, put this back on the map, and then adapt the emergent map to make new connections.

Rob Pope further explains: 'Deleuze and Guattari see all this as a powerful image of genuinely creative thinking: resourceful, flexible and unexpected ("springing suddenly from anywhere, everywhere"), and developing by sudden transverse networks in unseen subterranean ways'.⁵¹ So this suggests that we might plan for certain nodes, intensities and directions for redevelopment but also remain aware that other unimagined, unforeseen, productive connections will be made.

This thinking could form the basis of a critical approach to culture-led redevelopment, one that would recognise community as inherent in our exposition, and one that would accommodate this, by explicitly acknowledging the being-*in-common* of community in its framework. By recognising these premises, (community) cultural development might become less a project (or work of art) in *community building* and more consciously a strategy of creating conditions for the *articulation* of the locality. One way of articulating the locality, in a way that enunciates the dispersion of the Gold Coast, is to create spaces of mass self-communication between local cultural practitioners and policy makers. It is important to elaborate on mass self-communication technologies but first I would like to demystify the term 'culture-led redevelopment'.

Culture-led redevelopment

I understand culture-led redevelopment to be the individual empowering and nurturing of all forms of expression and communication potentially for all individuals in a locality. I have purposefully used the term culture-led redevelopment to describe this process for three reasons. Firstly, it indicates a shift in thinking about planning from a hierarchical perspective, and not from an understanding of development as spawned from its poorer cousin, underdeveloped.⁵² Secondly, it recognises development as a process, not based on a quantifiable fixed set of predicted outcomes. And finally, it implies a more internal nurturing and adaptation of culture, as a natural – in the sense of ordinarily expected – and necessary part of human life. I would suggest that one possible way of enabling culture-led redevelopment – that is, of connecting and enabling the communication of locality – could be to provide access to relevant mass self-communication technologies and online space(s) through which community could be articulated.

Mass self-communication

The dramatic proliferation of communication technologies in contemporary times has led to a vast array of applications, the most recent of which can be described as *mass self-communication technologies*.⁵³ New technologies based on web 2.0 and the forthcoming 3.0, such as blogging and social network sites like Facebook and MySpace and other social media such as Twitter can be described as mass self-communication technologies 'because the production of the message is self-generated, the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-directed, and the retrieval of the specific messages or

content from the World Wide Web and electronic communication networks is self-selected'.⁵⁴ In a more practical sense Castells further explains that:

It is mass communication because it can potentially reach a global audience, as in the posting of a video on YouTube, a blog with RSS links to a number of web sources, or a message to a massive email list. At the same time, it is self communication.⁵⁵

Mass self-communication technologies have provided people with the tools and potential to make meaningful connections with a diverse range of others, and participate in a wider yet more concentrated dialogue than imagined in previous eras. They have also had a profound impact on urban formations.

In one sense, we might note that to a greater or lesser extent depending on settings, traditional spaces are becoming decentralised, as the workplace shifts from city centre to jeans pocket. On the other hand, considering current trends, it is likely that we will continue to physically live in geographical spaces together. Digital change has not necessarily produced the kinds of comprehensive dispersal of workers and workspaces that were envisaged in the internet's infancy. In relation to contexts of cultural production, Gibson et al note:

Factors that contribute to the tendency to agglomerate are linked to the rapid, ever-changing circulation of information, which ensures that there is a constant tendency to destabilization of prevailing norms and practices, and a certain propensity for new insights and new ways of seeking accumulation. To stay in touch with trends, producers must be 'close to action', in precincts where cultural consumption is concentrated.⁵⁶

That is, within the context of intense global change, people create and benefit from opportunities for co-located experience, even as they become increasingly more involved in larger, more dispersed networks. Or, as Castells puts it, 'the social structure is global, but most of human experience is local'.⁵⁷ Castells argues that mass self-communication technologies have appeared to strengthen urban relationships.⁵⁸ He asserts that rather than becoming a homogenous global culture, it is more plausible following people's tendency to agglomerate, that clustered localities will prevail, as well as continue to be strengthened on a local level.⁵⁹ He argues in relation to the blurred boundaries between online and offline practices:

With the prospect of expanding infrastructure and declining prices of communication, it is not a prediction but an observation to say that online communities are fast developing not as a virtual world, but as a real virtual reality integrated with other forms of interaction in an increasingly hybridised everyday life.⁶⁰

In developed economies, not only are mass self-communication technologies connecting the global, but they are also empowering the local by

demystifying connections between locals in a more *tangible* way than ever before. To exemplify the truth in this statement, I would like to turn to two brief case studies of Gold Coast online spaces of mass self-communication: GCBands and RADF (a Facebook group).

GCBands

Gcbands.com is a social networking site created by local musicians, for local musicians. Built from a basic Ning custom social network platform less than two years ago, GCBands has become the first successful localised music-focused social networking site on the Gold Coast to recruit and maintain an escalating membership of 800-plus artists (as of April 2010). Its main function is to provide a stage for local musicians: 'GCBands is about the discovery and promotion of new music and art from the Gold Coast'.⁶¹ But the site certainly doesn't stop there.

In fact, GCBands does almost everything Facebook does, minus the apps. It has a chat function; it enables members to share their music, videos and photos; it allows members to tailor individual profile pages; it promotes interaction between profiles by allowing wall posts and messages; it enables musicians to update the democratic gig guide; it provides space for a forum; and it features musicians on its home page. GCBands also sends out regular emailed newsletters and Facebook posts. For local musicians, this site is both informative and instrumental. Not only does it assist in cross-collaboration and music networking, but it also allows any music lover to access a comprehensive calendar of music events on the Gold Coast. And this is an important function, given the geographical dispersion. Thus, this site has been widely adopted by local musicians and is now considered simply a part of daily life for many Gold Coast music lovers.

RADF Facebook group

As well as this example, Facebook has many local groups created to benefit specific localities. One such group, RADF, is a group I created in November 2009 for the Regional Arts Development Fund on the Gold Coast, as part of my role as a committee member. The group attempts to promote RADF and to make funding more transparent for cultural practitioners. It includes links to application guidelines and updates members with important submission dates. It is perhaps no coincidence that in the round after this was established the committee received the highest number of RADF applications since July 2005, despite it being the typically quieter quarter. And not only were there more applications, but the standard had dramatically risen across the board.

So, both of these case studies are excellent examples of how cultural practitioners can be connected through a space of mass self-communication on a local scale to participate in meaningful, productive dialogue. They not only demonstrate an already identified need amongst Gold Coast cultural practitioners on a ground level for more connectivity and dialogue, but they

serve as solid examples of how local spaces of mass self-communication are *already* facilitating some productive outcomes. And we can learn from these.

Conclusion

While Gold Coast cultural development policy acknowledges the fragmented geography and social processes of the Gold Coast, its inability to solve the challenge of enabling communication between the locality probably stems from the fact that its aim is seemingly to amalgamate systems and produce a coherent community rather than to celebrate diversity and a lack of shared identity. As demonstrated in this article, mass self-communication technologies are instrumental tools for enabling the potential bridging of weak ties and connecting locality in a non-confrontational way, celebrating diversity and a lack of shared identity (as opposed to systems of amalgamation), and creating meaningful ongoing dialogue about culture-led redevelopment.

It is evident from this discussion that a greater focus must be placed on providing conditions for mass self-communication technologies to articulate the Gold Coast locality. Furthermore, through these mass self-communication technologies, it would appear that we need to collectively continue to analyse everyday terms in order to stimulate rich culture-led redevelopment. This process should be transparent and inclusive, and could be seen as a step toward the articulation of locality. By providing the necessary conditions for ongoing dialogue to ensue between locality and cultural policy makers, we may well see sophisticated cultural advances for dispersed and fragmented urban areas such as the Gold Coast.

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Practitioners' perspectives

Holding the space: the Seagrass Model

Ian Cuming

Abstract

Artists in partnership with research and evaluation professionals hold the key to a new paradigm of context-tailored, multi-method methodologies that may assist in better understanding the nature of culture. In the Seagrass Model, artists and local elders collaboratively develop cultural programs that address complex social issues and articulate evolving community value systems. Narrative, puppetry, music, dance and pyrotechnics combine with Indigenous sacred ceremony to engage local communities in producing ecology-based community celebrations. This practice-led research methodology uses the arts to envision, scope, implement, evaluate and report the community engagement process.

Keywords: arts, research, evaluation, puppetry, Indigenous, ecology, celebration, cultural, practice-led, community, engagement, Seagrass

To commence this article I wish to recognise the Bunurong people, on whose traditional lands I now live and work, and pay my respects to the elders past and present of the Kulin Nation and the wider community of Indigenous Australians. Honouring and connecting with our elders and our Country is sacred cultural business and constitutes the foundation of my life's work.

This article is dedicated to the living memory of artist and cultural activist Edward Baxter, my friend and mentor who died in June 2007.

The Seagrass 90 Life Cycles event was the final episode of a trilogy of community programs developed in Hastings, Victoria between 1987 and 1991. That project and my subsequent relationship with Ed has focused and propelled my whole career.

News of Ed's death came on the day I submitted my application to the Australia Council Community Partnerships Board for a fellowship to conduct research and projects in community arts and puppetry. My role as executor of his estate also commenced that day and with it a deep resolve to

continue the cultural work we had been doing together since 1990.

At the end of 2007 the Australia Council notified me that my application for a fellowship had been successful. The Seagrass Model¹, which was central to my fellowship application, identifies healing, ecology, the arts, indigenous culture and global culture as the essential elements of a holistic, intuitive approach to community cultural development (CCD). The aim of my research was to explore the potential for this model to generate a CCD evaluation methodology. This article reports on the two-year fellowship, explores the relationship between the fields of research, evaluation and community art, reflects on my career as a whole and looks at a few recent projects that may help in framing a model.

As a CCD methodology, Seagrass has its roots in a suite of idiosyncratic, arts-based community engagement processes. These in turn are based on the products and by-products of personal reflection and creative ideas tested repeatedly in community settings over decades

Over the last 30 years, the field of research has undergone a significant methodological metamorphosis. Quantitative analysis has opened up to qualitative evaluation, expressing in words what numbers alone can't capture. Target group participation has become a critical ingredient to authentic research practice, defining the parameters for action research. Growing out of this, practice-led and practice-based research proposes an exponential expansion of arts-based methodologies. The Seagrass Model is effectively practice-led research or practice-based research and may be infused with other more conventional quantitative methods – including surveys and head counts – and qualitative methodologies, combining methods such as most significant change, narrative inquiry, and photo and video narrative. What Seagrass specifically proposes is a 150-year research timeframe, with ongoing evaluation of all aspects of the program being based on cosmic rhythms including sun and moon cycles.

The title of this paper, 'Holding the space,' refers to the role played by artists as cultural development specialists maintaining a creative presence whilst mediating real community issues face-to-face with real people in real time with real deadlines and expectations in terms of the art process and product. The 'space' is one of vision and trust, willingness and openness within which a vulnerable creative unfolding occurs and out of which the voice of freedom speaks in the multiple languages of art. The finest evaluation occurs with all the senses present and that means being there to see, hear and feel what is happening.

Peter Schumann

One essential thread of my Australia Council fellowship research was undertaken overseas where I met with a couple of significant mentors, each

1. 'Seagrass' is a registered trademark. 'The Seagrass Model' is a trademark.

of whom had inspired me as I was just getting going in this business. The first of these was Peter Schumann who, with his wife Elka, established Bread and Puppet Theater in New York during the sixties. The second of these was John Fox who, with his wife Sue Gill and others, established Welfare State International in Ulverston in the UK during the seventies. The purpose of elaborating here on these visits is to evidence the value of personal presence in order to reflect on subtle and complex layers of form, and how momentary meetings may have significant long-term – even life-changing – effects.

In visiting Peter and Elka, I was blown away by their beautiful life-dedication to Bread and Puppet and was extremely fortunate to meet two waves of people moving through the completion of one summer program to the commencement of another. I arrived just in time to catch Elka's museum tour, in which she talked about the origins of the company in Peter's vision and its root in his Silesian ancestry. The tour started outside at the wood-fired oven that bakes the bread that feeds the company and the audiences. It then covered three floors of a huge, post-civil-war era barn that houses their incredible collection of puppets clumped wall to ceiling in exhibition spaces that once housed the farm's animal population over winter. The tour was passionate and exhaustive – covering the themes, icons and story content of their work over nearly five decades – and came to an end only as we heard the shouts and bugle calls that announced the commencement of the show across the road.

The show was performed by first-time interns from all over the USA and beyond, combined with local community and company employees. Its title was the *Sourdough Philosophy Circus and Pageant*, a political satire and performance art spectacle staged in and around an old gravel quarry on their 90-acre Vermont property. The performance commenced with small vignettes presented by the interns as a part of their training. The circus itself had evolved from an earlier incarnation of the show, titled *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus*, which grew over a couple of decades to become an annual event attracting up to 30,000 people by the end of the 1990s. Comprising a series of scenes threaded together circus-style with an MC, a band and novelty acts, it used language and images to raise questions and make fun of the most serious issues facing contemporary America. Being pre-Obama, it included some election strands and a solid and poignant whack of material related to the Iraq war.

Similarly, the pageant component of the performance had a history of development over many years and took the form of a parade with flags and drums into a pine forest, where an over-sized, election-stew recipe book was read and enacted, punctuated from time to time by a bugle and ratchet and overseen by a six-metre-high puppet 'wall' of be-suited men. The pageant then proceeded back out into an open field, where a bureaucratic butcher in bloody apron mowed down the common people before they rose in

song and then in silence blew down the four metre high wall of suits. Small groups of pilgrim people in costumes and masks then emerged to light small fires and play music, hang up their washing and point to the sky as an old clown (Peter) and his apprentice picked up the wheelbarrow of human sacrifice and led the way off to an uncertain future. Culminating in the serving of heavy, dark, freshly baked sourdough bread dipped in a strong garlic and parsley aioli the audience were left to 'chew over' the art.

One significant affirmation in terms of my own arts practice was to register that Peter's images, themes and form have evolved steadily over a lifetime. In talking with him in between his theatre making, bread baking and family time this general professional reflection became immediately more personal. The last time we had spoken was following a Bread and Puppet performance at the Adelaide Festival in 1978. That event was formative in my choice to have a go at making large-scale outdoor theatre. I shared with him that my professional trajectory had been substantially propelled by his work and subsequently by that of Welfare State International. As he settled back with a beer to talk with me, Peter expressed interest in the work I was doing with Indigenous elders and community in Australia. I thanked him for his time and let him know I would be going next to the UK to visit John Fox and he asked me to convey his regards.

My visit proved to be a time of detailed reflection on the differences and similarities between Peter's political protest art and my own celebratory, science-based art. Through conversations with the many trainees and 'devotees' I was able to garner decades of perspective via their points of view and access the wealth of information each of them brought in to the Bread and Puppet frame. As an exercise in evaluation a couple of features stand out: first, simply being there afforded me the opportunity to dwell on and deeply contemplate the work of a most endearing, intelligent and courageous artist; second, the fact that Bread and Puppet owns its own real estate means that the company can sustain itself and maintain artistic autonomy on donations and fees alone without recourse to government grants or corporate sponsorship.

John Fox

John Fox founded Welfare State International (WSI) after seeing Bread and Puppet in the sixties. With a background in visual art, John was inspired by Peter to explore large-scale outdoor spectacle theatre with an up-front political agenda. WSI did that for over three decades. In 2006 the company was 'archived' following a point of departure between John and the community board running their facility and program. John and Sue now operate as The Dead Good Guides, continuing their respective and shared practices.

For many years I have referred to their work via Baz Kershaw's *Engineers of the imagination: the welfare state handbook*, a book full of images of powerful community activism using huge puppets, music and fire. My first encounter

with John occurred in 1979 over dinner in the group house I shared with a bunch of Victorian College of the Arts clowns. On that occasion John had piped in the dessert with a recorder – a simple but memorable ritual. This sense of ritual and a feeling of warmth was there again as I arrived at their beachside ‘weather station’ home perched on the edge of an extensive mudflat just south of Barrow-in-Furness. I conveyed Peter’s greetings to John and he replied that he regarded Peter as one of a few mentors in his life.

John’s clearly stated preference was that our conversation focus on current work rather than past projects. During our meeting they told me about a recent festival where they set up and operated a radio station, of Sue’s work in the field of life ceremonials and of an ongoing project called the ‘Rag Tree’, a low tree with many branches to which they had attached a collection of beach detritus in a sort of celebration of junk. John told of how they arrived one day to find that the whole tree had been neatly packed up and the ‘rag’ bundle placed nearby. He referred to the notion of ‘art by stealth’, giving the example of the Rag Tree and how he and Sue took that bundle and simply re-dressed the tree.

Following a sumptuous lunch I wandered up the beach to film the Rag Tree before sauntering back to the house for a meeting with a junk puppet elk and a glimpse of the studio. As I boarded the bus that waited while John drove back to retrieve my spray jacket, I was sad to be leaving. I was intensely grateful for the encounter and felt satisfied for having threaded a line of connection back through three decades from the USA to the UK to Australia. My time with John and Sue was limited but the critical principle of direct engagement enabled me to absorb by osmosis a quality or essence of their work that nourishes me still.

Seagrass Project

The Seagrass Model owes much to John and Peter but also to others who have introduced me to methods and dimensions of CCD. Neil Cameron and John Bolton had both worked with Welfare State prior to emigrating to Australia. In 1983 I worked with Neil and John on a street rally for People for Nuclear Disarmament (PND). We constructed large puppets to represent political caricatures for the Burke Street event. During that project I learned how to split and bend bamboo. I also experienced how art as new knowledge can pose a threat to the status quo as I witnessed PND asserting an anti-uranium message over one about land rights and favouring an autocratic process over one that respected personal vision. I formed a deep resolve to honour the intuitive space of spirit in my work ahead of superficial political agendas.

My CCD practice has as its central identity the curious art form of puppetry. Parallel practices that have always been a significant part of my creative life include writing and music, t’ai chi and gardening. This is important since the industry tends to favour specialisation. This breadth of expression is

essential for maintaining personal and professional equilibrium. As activists it is this internal cultural diversity that informs the way we think and act.

My chosen profession calls upon a unique infusion of skills and vision, guided by the influences of many mentors. These include: Lorraine (Lorrie) Gardner of the Gardner Puppet Theatre, my first employer and the person who introduced me to glove, rod and string puppetry in 1976; Peter Oyston, who was the founding dean of the VCA drama school where I trained as an actor/animateur; Nigel Triffit, with whom I worked on several black theatre ‘spectacle’ productions here and overseas using large-scale imagery for an adult audience; the late Aldo Genarro from Chile who directed the Arts Access Society’s Theorem Project, featuring wheelchair puppetry at the Melbourne Concert Hall; Jonathan Fox, founder of Playback Theater, NY, in whose presence I first tested playback puppetry (not to be confused with the aforementioned John Fox, UK); and so many other colleagues along the way who have all informed my work and resourced my CCD toolkit, shaping a mythic journey through a diverse landscape of form development. These experiences as a contracted artist in turn grow out of more personal solo work.

In 1979, after seeing two impressive solo acts in Adelaide, I created the Puppet Tree, a solo walkabout performance and the first of an extensive series of ecology-based projects. In 1983 a studio performance, *The Ant, the Universe and Einstein* – a study of improvisation using objects moved in silence without a preconceived story – featured the Sugar Ant marionette, a scaled model of an ant from the Mornington Peninsula: another ecology concept. By 1987 the Seagrass Project Hastings fused spectacle with music and clowning in a series of community-based foreshore fairytales that aimed to raise awareness about the ecology of Westernport Bay. Through this initiative I was beginning to come to terms with the complex, big-picture challenge of modelling a healthy culture for my own hometown. In the Seagrass Model, the participant creator’s attention is focused on an external metaphoric ‘ecology’ whilst evoking an internal capacity for empathy. In the context of a community project this collective dynamic of active caring opens a space for personal growth and insight whilst engaging the spirit and bringing people into committed and productive relationship. Despite being born decades ago, it is still a relatively new CCD approach and of particular relevance in addressing issues of personal health, social justice and environmental awareness.

The Seagrass Project itself proved to be a personal watershed for me as I worked in partnership with my dad, Dr Brian Cuming, an industrial scientist turned environmental activist and a dedicated campaigner for transparent and properly informed planning. Auspiced by the Westernport and Peninsula Protection Council, Seagrass was a three-year collaboration between a group of artists including musician Greg Stebbing, theatre director Meme Macdonald, pyro-technician Neil Cameron and visual artist

Simon Normand. One by-product of the Seagrass Project was a television documentary co-produced with Open Channel, which had the effect of projecting local sentiment onto a global stage. Seagrass also provided significant inspiration for others: Meme MacDonald facilitated a raft of projects, including *Waderbirds*, in which a series of community events were developed along the flight path of the migratory Eastern Curlew; in 2003 Mornington Peninsula Shire Council won the inaugural Best Australia Day Celebrations award, engaging ten community organisations in a parade of endangered species and redefining the day as a celebration of over 50,000 years; in 2007 the Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement and Museum embraced CCD in *Trading Places*, a moving cross-cultural expression of solidarity with the stolen generations; currently the Hugh D. T. Williamson Foundation, in conjunction with the E. O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation in San Diego, are developing arts-based citizen science programs based on this foundational work; the Torch project recently joined with the Victorian Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation and the Bunurong Aboriginal Co-op in Dandenong to enhance the state-wide netball and football carnival by engaging the community in a grand final half-time entertainment; Pelican Expeditions are working with Parks Victoria and others on the Two Bays project, combining science and cultural activities; and Lake Bolac Eel Festival are nurturing a new celebration as a part of their weekend format. All of the above have grown out of the Seagrass Model.

The Seagrass Model celebrates personal space, home culture and global ecology via artist-driven cultural programs that engage community participants in an ongoing research process in which the over-arching metaphor is ecology. This is represented using puppetry and such art forms as the community might propose or embrace. The purpose of celebration is differentiated from that of protest in order to establish inclusivity. The power of this approach can be disconcerting for some as the core subject matter is inherently problematic.

The Seagrass Model was used in the *Trading Places* project in Swan Hill in 2007. This project, funded by Festivals Australia, involved working with Indigenous elders towards a community celebration that aimed to tell a local story about the Murray River. The project referred to the history of human commerce and settlement in the region. Wirajiri elder Uncle Bruce Baxter established the idea of corroboree as a part of the story form and Wadi Wadi elder Auntie Elvie Kelly proposed the telling of the story of the 'Stolen Snakes' to honour her nephew's memory and his purpose of raising awareness about the stolen generations. This story served as a core reference for the community contributions that followed. Ken Stewart, manager of the Aboriginal Health Service, offered a workshop venue and assisted with Wemba Wemba permission protocols being met. Two critical issues in that project that required a firm stand on my part as coordinating artist were: (1) that the *Stolen Snakes* script stand unedited as the project framework; and (2) that we conduct the celebration in a circle rather than as a conventional

concert 'performance' with a defined stage. These choices enabled us to gather and share stories from pre- and post-settlement. Very recent refugee stories about journeys to Australia from Sudan, Afghanistan and Iraq were told with painted story-lanterns accompanied by the beat of a single hoop drum. The space held by the community was of active witnessing, not only of the art, but of each other. The newness of this space for the community was palpable and in post-project follow-up it became evident that responses of gratitude from some were contrasted by reactionary denial from others. Positive change in these situations is not always comfortable for everyone.

Even working with familiar forms the specifics of each new project demand fresh attention from the artist. Extracting the science upon which to base the art, mediating the demands of a community agenda and school curriculum, managing multiple new relationships and going with the flow of complex protocols and expectations can be soul-searing.

Eel Festival

The Eel Festival describes itself as a 'boutique' festival, combining a market and music festival with an art exhibition and science forum. It is exceptional in its central purpose of re-membering the traditional eel harvest that followed the autumn rains. In 2008 I was invited to develop a Twilight Celebration component for the festival, made possible by Festivals Australia funding. The program comprised myriad practical tasks undertaken by many people working together over many months. In such a process passion is an essential ingredient in the work of the artist and provides the foundation not only for the art making but for the facilitation of a collective emotional release. This expressive purpose encompasses both internal-external and personal-collective aspects of the work and constitutes the core content of the community engagement process. The art itself and any environmental awareness-raising are a by-product of a deeper, heart-felt, energetic cultural exchange. Effective monitoring and evaluation of such a labyrinthine process may best be done by an ongoing intuitive synthesis of all levels simultaneously.

Louise, the Lake Bolac P-12 school librarian, offers a view from close proximity to the main project construction venue:

I had the privilege of witnessing the creation of the puppets and appreciated all the blood, sweat and tears that went into it. All the while quietly curious as to how the whole thing was actually going to come together on the night. Well, it completely exceeded my expectations! Casting my eyes around the audience I saw a large group of people that were literally spellbound – you could have heard a pin drop! A great team effort for a wide cross section of community members and students resulted in a very thought provoking, powerful production. One of the best bedtime stories I've ever had!

The process of art-making for me is essentially one of objectifying inner realities or intuitive knowledge via the art product. It is unashamedly mysterious and open in its form while providing recognisable reference points for people who may be unfamiliar with the looseness of structured improvisation or collaborative ritual.

Richard Cooke, the Eel Festival project musician observes:

The rich combination of Indigenous dance/ceremony, huge scale puppetry, pyrotechnics, shadow puppetry, original live music and narration set in the vast, desolate and beautiful lake bed made for a mystical experience that was unanimously accepted as artistically unique and unforgettable. Words cannot do any justice to this event but [I] encourage others to seek out video/photographic and audio documentation to gain an impression of the rich layers of art forms, culture and expression experienced by the performers and audience alike.

The Seagrass Model and product is a celebration of local ecology. So the metaphor for culture comes from the environment. The metaphor for self is also informed by this same ecology. In form the celebration may be a parade or concert format performance with discrete community elements that come together in a circle. It may borrow from commedia dell'arte in that certain physical business is pre-rehearsed and located within a linear scenario. It may derive from Playback Theatre or homespun studio work that supplies approaches to image and action, soundscape and other interaction. The outcomes may be 'performance'-based or incorporate exhibitions and installations. Whatever the form, we're talking about art providing the impetus and the framework for a new kind of research, one that permits plurality of experience and admits to the subjective viewpoint. Through CCD fundamental questions are being generated about the nature of democracy and the processes that underpin human well-being. As artists we are putting ourselves on the line as cultural canaries in the high-risk venture of establishing the viability of extracting knowledge from the source of self in-community.

In the Seagrass Model, deep, life-long processes and global references are at work. As already mentioned, the puppetry forms themselves derive from decades of conscious development tracing back through Hastings, Victoria from 1988 to 1990, to the UK and the USA of the sixties and seventies. These forms then date back to earlier traditions in Europe dating back through traditions such as the Punch and Judy of the seventeenth century to neolithic cave art. Of course, the outcome around that sacred fire on the Lake Bolac shore in 2008 is the pointy end of an even deeper and longer-term process that has taken place over maybe 60,000 years or more. Integral, then, to the power of this contemporary festival event is Indigenous song, dance and story-telling.

Uncle Ted Lovett, in his welcome to country that night, said:

We do not own the land, the land owns us, therefore we must care for it to provide us and our generation of children with a future along with the flora, fauna and aquatic life. The law of the land is the very heart of our existence ... that is what land means to us. We nurture our children to take the roles of the custodians and carers and eventually elders. There's one human race in this world and we are it, so lets bind together as one and show the world that we can live in harmony together with our lands.

Jamie Thomas, in his introduction said:

Our ceremonies are something that are very sacred to Aboriginal people. The dances that you see tonight, they come from our people, from our hearts, from our spirits ... we wake the land up with this corroboree, with this *karween* ... let the old people know we are here.

Neil Murray, musician, author and Eel Festival committee member comments:

I felt that I had just witnessed the birth of a new creative direction in performing Indigenous story and dance. The implementation of puppetry was embraced by local Indigenous artists and dancers as a way of amplifying and accentuating the meaning of their stories. In effect it evoked for the audience the magical and timeless spirit of the Dreamtime. It was wondrous to witness the grace of five-metre-tall brolgas prancing alongside painted-up dancers. The appearance of a gigantic eel from out of the darkness, swirling around the dancer's campfire, seemed to emanate from the very heart of Lake Bolac.

Aron, a student from Mortlake Secondary College wrote: 'I had fun making the Kangaroo. I would like to do it again sometime and also really enjoyed making it and I had fun playing with the Kangaroo. I've never made anything like it before'.

The challenge for me of creating authentic works of genuine beauty is rewarded many times over as the work speaks for itself and the burden of longing is set down. Whether the art is instrumental in serving other purposes matters not as a powerful latent community spirit is released. The many forms that come together in this fleeting way evidence the diversity of cultures within the community and the possibility of their harmonious co-existence. In terms of the festival's objective of remembering the eel harvest ritual, the event itself is the evidence. Along the way everyone brings their own personal particular to the collective ritual warmed by the fire and contained by the circle. In that circle for that moment it is possible for everyone to be recognised and celebrated. Practical pluralism is what it is: secular and sacred all at the same time.

The ethical framework for the Seagrass Model grows out of respect for indigenous cultures as the foundation for all human culture. We all come

from somewhere and as we inhabit that 'somewhere' our roots develop, along with our detailed associations with landscape, our law and our spiritual constructs. Migration is no less valid; however, there is an unavoidable loss that accompanies relocation and with it a common deficit in the capacity to imagine holistic stability personally and collectively. Front-line colonists and their descendants may sacrifice dignity in order to retain identity and compromise truth in order to establish new order. Prime Minister Rudd's apology to Indigenous Australians for years of systemic abuse was broadcast on the day of our first secondary school workshops for the Eel Festival and provided the basis for music and puppetry workshops starting that day.

One Indigenous colleague said to me over the phone a few weeks after the event: 'We're dreaming together now, brother.' For Indigenous participants in the Eel Festival, *that* ceremonial of the Twilight Celebration in 2008 was age-old and inherently spiritual. Wariness was expressed by one of the dancers, who said just prior to the Twilight Ceremony: 'We're not going to be part of any *performance*. This is sacred business.' From there it was necessary to confer with the elders and acknowledge the order of things. This is an Indigenous space governed by age-old ritual and protocols beyond my knowing and, despite considerable prior consultation with Kirrae Wurrung, Wauthurung and Gunditjmarra elders, not everyone felt comfortable about the idea of linking the traditional space with a contemporary celebration. Nick Hayne, who had been working with me on the Twilight Celebration from the outset, ensured that we completed all the necessary consultations and that the basis for our work together was sacred ceremony, letting go of any *performance* intention. This need not be a limitation but it does require an unusual reversal of expectations.

In the context of an event such as the Lake Bolac Eel Festival the process of mediation for the purpose of celebration is undertaken by the artist or cultural activist as the one with expertise not only in playing with form and content but the one with a known talent for active dreaming. For the artist, vision dwells in the heart. We evaluate from this position. We research this internal reality first, framing the inquiry with mystery and establishing reason in the context of soul. We exploit our own capacity for compassion before, during and after our dependence on any other resource – human, material or financial. This is the work of the artist.

Ways of knowing

The way we construct culture is ultimately unknowable. It is far too complex and buried in the minute micro-processes of life as we live it on a daily basis. Through the Seagrass Model, however, I am attempting to anchor an approach to the task, a methodology. What the artist does to get us within 'cooee' of an understanding of culture is to embody multiple forms of knowledge and produce evidence that appeals to the senses and is therefore accessible. Training in many disciplines passed on by many mentors over

many years leads to the creation of new forms that necessarily refer to and carry on traditional forms. Multiple forms comprise the ground out of which any art product emerges and out of which meaningful dialogue may result.

Evaluation in its organic form is something we all do continuously and instinctively in order to survive and to maximise the utilisation of our existing personal resources. Applied to the context of cultural development, where the concerns are both local and global, evaluation may be considered as a process of acknowledging or attributing diverse specific values as a basis for allocating resources. The work of artists as cultural mediators, for example, could be the subject of an evaluation scoping, implementation and reporting process towards recognising the real value of the artist's actual contribution to culture. The same could also be done in relation to the work of corporate, government and NGO program evaluators as cultural mediators looking for new ways to engage end-users in meaningful dialogue about the effectiveness of community-based program initiatives.

Through the Seagrass Model, therefore, I propose that research and evaluation professionals might embrace the work of the artist as a collaborator not only in arts projects but in other endeavours. In this way researchers might then accompany the artist as cultural initiators – and vice versa – and focus research efforts on gathering data about the changes occurring on the fringes and in the shadow of the art-making without disturbing the inner sanctum. By doing so we stand half a chance of finding out what's going on in the hearts and minds of our least likely creative champions and thereby informing a reasonably interesting and productive cultural future.

Ian Cuming, artist and Australia Council Fellow, is currently undertaking research and projects in community arts and puppetry as a part of his fellowship in which he seeks to articulate an evaluation methodology for community cultural development practice.

Recommended reading

Wilson, R., *Bringing them home: national inquiry into the separation of aboriginal and torres strait islander children from their families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, April 1997.

The inclusive aesthetic: inclusion is not just good for our health, it is good for our art

Myfanwy Powell

Inclusive theatre will be unlike other community theatre or professional theatre just as an inclusive society will be different from the one that we currently share.¹

By exploring our individual praxis as practitioners within community cultural development, we are asking where we locate our practice in connection to the theory and ideas surrounding our work. Asking the primary questions of ‘what do you do?’ and ‘why do you do this?’ raises many concerns about where I locate myself between what I feel are the often conflicting spheres of the performing arts, community and education. As a theatre maker, teacher and CCD practitioner I try to balance these roles, negotiating these various identities. I try to unite these through collaborations in the hope of finding new ways of developing, sustaining and understanding my work.

First and foremost I create opportunities for expression and inclusion through the performing arts. How and why do I do this? What motivates me to pursue ‘social inclusion’? I am drawn to working in this way for multiple reasons, selfish and selfless. It is immensely satisfying to make people feel included, to give the marginalised a voice and creative outlet. It gives both pleasure to them and pleasure to me; it is reciprocal. In simple terms I want to help create a fairer and richer community by making people feel worthwhile and giving them the pleasure of artistic endeavour.

Yet my desire to pursue inclusivity in the arts extends beyond this; I am drawn to a particular aesthetic, an ‘inclusive aesthetic,’ one that feels truthful, almost painfully real – an aesthetic that provides a more accurate reflection of the wonderful spectrum of our human existence, not merely a selective or superficial one. Inclusive theatre has the ability to show us who we really are. The role of art – to question, to reflect – is not subverted or

compromised by ‘inclusive theatre’, rather it enhances this ability. Inclusion is not just good for our health – it is good for our art.

Is the ideal of cultural democracy as beneficial to the world of art as it is to the greater community? To embrace our creative selves within the greater artistic community makes for a society with rich, multi-layered artistic appreciation and endeavour; a culture where each member of society has the pleasure and responsibility of taking part in community through art, where we share, celebrate, wonder and strive to make sense of our existence.

Social inclusion aims to provide greater equality and richer citizenship and I have used it within CCD to procure funding and seek justification, yet how does social inclusion relate to my practice of creative collaboration?

Before embarking upon my present CCD practice, the idea of ‘inclusive theatre’ was completely unknown to me. After my experiences with inclusive theatre practice over the last five years, however, I am convinced of not only of its benefit to society, but also its intrinsic aesthetic worth.

My current way of seeing the world came about by accident. It started with a problem of sustainability – by that I mean proper funding. I was given some invaluable advice: in order to get sufficient funds for my inclusive community theatre group the ‘City of Voices’, I needed to prove that what we did was *Art*. There seemed no doubt as to the positive outcomes of the process; however, the product needed to be perceived as culturally and artistically *worthy*. In order to get this cultural kudos, I was further advised to pursue *arts partnerships*. We could elevate our cultural and financial worth through collaboration.

City of Voices

City of Voices is an inclusive theatre company that celebrates diversity and welcomes people of any age, stage, ability, experience or disposition. We have members who are in their eighties, who live with mental illness such as schizophrenia, who have mild physical or mental disabilities, whose first language is not English and so on. The group have been going since 1992 and have established themselves as a top-rate community theatre group who create original and challenging performances for their local community.

It was strangely amusing trying to think of who we could collaborate with: who’d be interested in partnering with octogenarians, schizophrenics, down syndrome, Ukrainian refugees, to name a few, with no cultural or financial cachet to offer in return? Then I had a revelation: I could combine my two jobs. I could get a group of performance studies students from Victoria University, where I teach sessionally, to collaborate with the City of Voices to create an original performance together for the Melbourne Fringe Festival. The idea for an intergenerational, socially inclusive artistic collaboration was born.

The collaborations undertaken by the City of Voices during the last two years were an experiment in how artists and communities address inclusion within a community and cultural context raising the following question: can we engage in inclusive arts practice to celebrate diversity, promote citizenship and build mutual respect whilst creating 'good art'?

The first collaboration, The Reflections Project in 2007, aspired to build a relationship between the students and community theatre group, to give each the opportunity to share their specific and unique experiences as people, performance makers and performers. It aimed to develop a quality theatrical experience that challenged misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding people from all ages and stages, whilst being included into the greater artistic community by performing at a professional venue in the Melbourne Fringe Festival. This project was a wonderful success, in both process and product. It was a positive and life-affirming experience that benefitted both performers and audience. The group and students delighted in this collaboration, relishing the process and revelling in the outcome.

The Triumphs & Tragedies project followed in 2008 with a new, larger group of students culminating in *Of the Spirit, of the Will*, at the Fringe. We survived this project, but did not thrive as we previously had. Second time around, with greater support, funding, and resources, more preparation time and the previous year's experience to build upon – what went wrong? Essentially the students were unable to collaborate.

The 'greater' purpose of these inter-generational collaborations was to work towards an inclusive society, gaining fresh enthusiasm and satisfaction from contributing to the development across all age ranges. The collaboration was about building mutual respect between the performers as well as giving the wider community the opportunity to listen and celebrate the positive contributions made by the performers' efforts and achievements.

Admittedly the first collaboration was slightly biased as I hand-picked half the students. I was able to 'filter' and choose students whom I felt were able to be a part of the 'collective' and who would employ empathy, understanding, compassion. It worked; the collaboration was beautiful and authentic.

The second collaboration involved a larger number of students without any selection process. They were a lovely 'bunch of individuals' but as a collective they did not work. The collaboration was superficial and after the evaluation I felt as though the collaboration had not succeeded. There was an imbalance in the students' ability to detach concern for their creative and social 'self' and fully engage in such a collective collaboration. The majority of the student attitudes were untouched, they felt they had done 'a service' by working with 'these people' and their creativity had been compromised. Was there a generational factor affecting this? The twentieth century has developed an overreaching value of the 'self'; we have become to believe

it is all about who we are as individuals – the 'me generation' as described in UK filmmaker Adam Curtis' documentary, *Century of the Self*. Was there an inability for the students to detach from their 'self' to be part of the 'collective'?

Upon reflection, I became primarily curious about, *what would have happened if we'd got to them earlier?* Is there a need to develop the ability to engage in our creative collective identity within primary and secondary education? Is trying to employ this at a tertiary level for the first time too late?

Inspirational teacher

To go forwards, sometimes you need to go backwards. So I returned to my own experience of high school drama education, which had included an innovative collaborative program designed by Charles Slucki, who ran weekly drama workshops between Year 11 Drama students at Highett High (now Sandringham Secondary College) and the neighbouring Moorabbin West Special School (now Berendale College) since 1977. This collaborative program was inspired by the remarkable English drama educator Dorothy Heathcote, who created groundbreaking programs that extended drama beyond the classroom and the traditional notion of 'the theatre' to hospitals, schools for the severely handicapped, prisons for young offenders, youth groups and primary schools in poor areas. Drama became a catalyst, a conduit for giving voice to the individual and the community; students were open to a different type of expression, one phenomenally truthful, powerful and real.

Following Heathcote's vision of educational drama that also strove to 'develop social awareness and responsibility', Charles Slucki implemented a drama program that embedded the inclusive ideal, including touring shows to neighbouring special schools, workshops in Adelaide as part of the annual theatre trip as well as the weekly drama workshops in Year 11. Slucki believed that developing respect for all creative expression was essential to a comprehensive Drama education. This encompassed the students 'developing an understanding, and hopefully the ability, to relate to people with disabilities ... to understand that all people have a right to a worthwhile and creative existence'.² He felt that 'by using educational drama, we can develop a student who is sensitive, tolerant of others, imaginative and able to cope with the outside community, and also to be able to utilise (their) leisure hours positively.' Drama went beyond putting on the annual musical or comedy; it was about making the world a better place, about giving life direction and meaning.

As well as this inspired, inclusive curriculum, the drama program at Highett High held the reputation of providing one of the leading performing arts educations in the state secondary system. School productions were outstanding, fabulous shows, regularly attracting professional casting agents to pluck out the latest talent, and with many graduates following

into arts professions. Was it a coincidence that the school not only excelled in good community building and inclusive practice but that it also achieved extremely high artistic standards in mainstream performance? *Could this inclusive art practice actually contribute to greater creative ability?*

An Arts Council of England Study in 2009, 'Encourage children today to build audiences for tomorrow,' explored the relationship between childhood arts experience and arts engagement patterns in adulthood. The study – based on data from the 'Taking Part' adult survey (2005-06) – resulted from a collaboration between the Arts Council research team and Dr Tak Wing Chan from the Department of Sociology at the University of Oxford. It states:

The analysis confirms that being encouraged to engage in the arts when growing up has a significant impact on the chances of being an active arts consumer as an adult, even when a range of other socio-economic factors have been taken into account. The effect of childhood experience is very strong – almost as strong as the effect of education, one of the strongest predictors of arts engagement.³

Although I take a diversion here into the realm of audience building and appreciation of the arts, could the same principles apply to artistic ability? If we provide positive experiences of inclusion within arts education, could our children develop into better artists?

I had previously seen my various roles as conflicting rather than complementary; my roles as Teacher, Theatre maker and Community Worker were at odds with each other, incompatible. I felt these pulled me in opposing directions and struggled to reconcile these contradictions. So, I sought to juggle and balance the domains of education, performing arts and community cultural development by uniting them through these collaborations in the hope of finding new ways of sustaining, developing and understanding my work.

Suzi Gablik argues that through the act of creative collaborations we can make the 'strange become familiar'; that through the arts we can reconstruct the relationship between the self and the other. Gablik describes this world as a place where 'context becomes an open continuum for interaction, for a process of relating and weaving together – a flow in which there is no critical distance, no theoretical violence, no antagonistic imperative, but rather the reciprocity we find at play in an ecosystem, that is essential to skilful functioning'.⁴ This interaction and relating is central to the work of many CCD arts practitioners, but a cross over into the effect on 'mainstream' arts is already observed in the work of artists such as Liz Lerman.

Lerman suggests that we transcend the idea that we go into communities and do CCD just 'to do them good'. She declares that of course it does them good! However, according to Lerman it also does us good, not only as human beings but also as artists:

Over the years, as I bustled between concert work and community practice, I often felt I was bringing what I had learned from art making in the studio to my endeavours within the community. The equation seemed more weighted toward sharing concepts and ideas from our studio work with the communities we worked with, to their benefit. But in these last few projects, I have come to see how much my work in the community has emboldened me to make more cutting-edge work for the stage. I see that the freedom to work in so many different ways, with so many invested and excited people, has given me nuance and approaches I would never have discovered had I practiced choreography in isolation from community.⁵

In an article in *High Performance* magazine, Lerman asserts that the work she does within the community is as important as her 'art'. She states, 'teaching dance in a nursing home is just as important as performing at the Kennedy Centre'.⁶ Lerman feels that when we engage in CCD as artists, our range of artistic endeavour becomes infinite: 'the cutting edge is enormous. There is this extraordinary spectrum of artistic activity that we can live along'.

Despite the pioneering work of artists who also practice CCD, such as Lerman, Gablik fears that we cannot yet accept an aesthetic that supports this type of inclusive collaborative practice: 'perhaps we are not yet ready to be comfortable with art that embodies such feeling for others, that sculpts and shares the bond between'. However, in examining many of the performing arts practitioners who have shaped the practice of both the avant-garde and mainstream art in the last century, this practice is already embedded in the process of art and art making. In particular, the avant-garde, responsible for pushing the boundaries, navigating the cutting edge, has uncanny parallels with CCD practice.

Avante-garde

Historically the avant-garde has been described as the work done by small groups of artists and intellectuals as they open pathways through new cultural or political terrain for society to follow. Richard Schechner describes what he calls the 'intercultural avant-garde':

Works produced on or across various borders – political, geographical, personal, generic and conceptual – where universal values run against local values and experience ... People from different cultures interacting – some of this is uniting, some of this is conflicting. It is within this conflict where intercultural ruptures, philosophical difficulties, ideological contradictions and the disintegration of national myths lead to avant-garde performance.⁷

Mainstream and avant-garde theatre practitioners from Stanislavski to Boal agree that to be a good actor, to successfully express the gamut of human emotion and experience, an empathetic understanding of the self and the other is required. To become a conduit for the human experience,

therefore, it is highly beneficial to develop our ability to make the 'strange become familiar' and challenge our understanding of the 'other'. The most easily recognisable theatre practitioner to be aligned with CCD practice, Augusto Boal, asserts that 'when "I" is transformed to "us" we discover the discovery. We are able to speak of us, we become the sum of our relations and something more'.⁸

Like Boal, Bertolt Brecht spent his time developing a political theatre which sought social justice. Although often associated with a cold and detached aesthetic, fundamentally he saw the theatre's role as examining the relationships between people:

People have acquired new motives for their actions, science has found new dimensions by which to measure them, it's time for art to find new expressions ... Such is our time, and the theatre must be acquainted with it and go along with it, and work out an entirely new sort of art such as will be capable of influencing modern people. The main subject of the drama must be relationships between one man and another as they exist today and that is what I'm primarily concerned to investigate and find means of expression for.⁹

However, theatre and dance practitioners whose work was not as overtly political in nature as Boal's and Brecht's, those whose work focuses on the creation of 'art for art's sake' can also be connected to the inclusive aesthetic. Theatre practitioner Jerzy Grotowski worked towards a system of theatre which strove to create a 'holy' experience, creating opportunities for the actor and audience to transcend, unite and relate:

Art is the experience which we take upon ourselves when we open ourselves to others, when we confront ourselves with them in order to in order to understand ourselves ... in an elementary and human sense.¹⁰

From his Paris base, theatre practitioner Peter Brook has led his multinational company on a succession of epic journeys around the globe exploring what could be learnt about and through the theatre. These journeys include travelling through West Africa throwing away all the customary props of shared reference, performing stories outdoors on a carpet to audiences who had neither language nor social and cultural conventions in common with the actors, engaging in diverse cross cultural material and improvising sketches for strikers in California. Brook states: 'Theatre is not just a place, not simply a profession, it is a metaphor. It helps to make the process of life more clear'.¹¹ Brook's journeys have been a constant search for deeper ways of discovering the essence of theatre and its role in the development and reflection of our society.

Avant-garde dance practitioners such as Rudolf Laban and Anna Halprin have explored ideas aligned with CCD principals throughout the twentieth century and their innovative legacy still persists. Laban promoted the idea that dance was for everyone and his legacy still reflects this, with numerous

collaborative education programs based in the community. Halprin's work departed from dance into collective, community-based work that sought to heal and unite communities in 'the expressive arts healing movement'. She worked with terminally ill patients and investigated social issues through dance with her Circle of the Earth, a contemporary, community dance ritual confronting real-life issues facing participant communities around the world. Both Laban and Halprin are credited for their commitment and contribution to the Modern Dance Movements that are still alive and flourishing today.

Practitioners such as Brook, Laban, Grotowski and Halprin have been fundamental in developing the cutting-edge, art-based practices of theatre and dance. These are artists who employ collective goals and inclusive aesthetics because they feel it benefits the art. The artist, audience and society benefit from such art, not immediately recognisable as CCD – instead branded as the avant-garde.

As theatre maker, educator and community cultural development practitioner I came to wonder if a collaborative, inclusive aesthetic, recognisable within much avant-garde theory and practice, is essential to mainstream arts practice and curriculum?

Can we justify the inclusive aesthetic for art's sake?

Could the innovative, inclusive drama education I received at high school, where a shared desire to create individuals able to work in a collaborative and collective methodology, to create democratic cultural opportunities and engage in art making, be recognised as both community cultural development and 'Art'?

A 'reciprocal' learning experience involves collaborations where community members and artists learn from each other, re-evaluating their roles within society and the process of art-making. Our collaborations not only benefited the City of Voices by challenging and raising their aesthetic output, they also benefited the students, making them re-examine their view of the *other* and hopefully making them better art-makers in return.

Unfortunately, a prejudice and discrimination emerges when artists overtly seek to create in an inclusive, community setting. When avant-garde dance practitioner Anna Halprin moved into collective, community-based work that sought to heal and unite communities, she was re-labelled as a 'dance therapist'. Halprin, a pioneer of the postmodern dance movement, was culturally demoted when she explicitly chose to work with terminally ill patients or investigate social issues through dance.

This bias is also evident in this extract from a blog entry by a student from one of my collaborations:

The 'Mum' routine ... reminds me of a Year 9 exercise. Having said that, I think that the City of Voices clan do wonderfully and I am especially surprised at Kate's efforts for I had unfortunately stuffed her in the

'minimal responsibility' box because she is a Down Syndrome. I recall Myf commenting that she is a 'strong performer', but I honestly thought that she was just being polite: I now she what she means.¹²

In examining many of the performing arts practitioners who have shaped the practice of both the avant-garde and mainstream art in the last century, a collective, inclusive practice is already embedded in the process of art and art-making. I think we need to revamp our attitude to what art is and what art can be.

When I initially approached the course director of Performance Studies at the university I worked at with the wild proposal to put a group of university students and my community theatre group together I was received with apprehension. After some coercion I was given a studio class to run the program in, but instead of performance studies students, I was given education students majoring in drama. The course director felt that the learning opportunities and artistic direction of my proposal were more aligned with students who were studying to teach rather than be performers or artists. An assumed prejudice emerged: artists would not benefit from this as part of their artistic development. It was thought that the performance studies students wouldn't be interested or learn anything relevant from this experience. They couldn't have been more wrong: the education students stayed away in droves, and after more gentle pressure I was able to recruit some performance studies students who were intrigued and grateful for a change of perspective.

Interestingly, in semester two of 2009, the Victorian College of the Arts Drama Department employed a practitioner from Canada, Clem Martini. The University of Melbourne stated at the time that Martini was an award-winning playwright of social theatre, novelist and Head of Drama at the University of Calgary. Their website goes on to state:

Martini is collaborating with VCA students to develop a series of short dramatic texts and performances from a process of interacting with members of various communities in and around Melbourne, including bushfire survivors, members of the Stolen Generations, single mothers of Ukrainian descent and refugees. The objective is to develop the student's ability to make meaningful connections between their creative work and the society in which they live.¹³

Inclusive aesthetic

I find this inspiring: change is happening, but more needs to take place, major change, *attitudinal* and *institutional* to what art is and can be. An inclusive aesthetic needs to be engaged and recognised. We need *artistic inclusion!* Not just at a tertiary level but from our earliest educational opportunities and cultural experiences. Arlene Goldbard argues that 'curricula of conventional arts programs should include history, theory and practical applications of community cultural development, legitimising the work of community artists as part of the arts'.¹⁴ I want to extend this:

it's also *integral* to the study and practice of *mainstream* art. Social inclusion needs to breed. It needs to expand beyond health and welfare into the arts and education. More intersections and collaborations need to grow between community, art and education.

I aspire to an inclusive aesthetic, one that benefits society and also art. An aesthetic that moves with the times and reflects and examines our relationship with each other and the world in which we live, in pursuit of an inclusive theatre and inclusive society. We need to embrace our creative selves within the greater artistic community to create a society with rich, multi-layered artistic appreciation and endeavour. A culture where each member of society has the pleasure and responsibility of taking part in community through art, where we share, celebrate, wonder and strive to make sense of our existence.

The role of art, to question, to reflect, is not subverted or compromised by an inclusive aesthetic: I have been moved to tears and laughter, been challenged, amazed, seen beauty, truth, the depths of humanity played with and exposed by inclusive theatre. I believe that inclusion is not just good for our health—it is good for our art.

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Local–Global is a collaborative international journal concerned with the resilience and difficulties of contemporary community life. It draws together groups of researchers and practitioners located in different communities across the world to critically address issues concerning the relationship between the global and the local.

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