

THE NECESSITY OF ART: CLAIMING OUR RIGHT TO BE HUMAN

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Today I want to free you from the traps of habit and encourage you to move out of the realms of the rational and the materialistic and into the realms of idealism and the imagination as a kind of rehearsal for change.

I want you to join me in imagining what your life and work would be like if you had:

- The right to an education that developed your own creativity and instilled in you an appreciation of the creativity of others;
- The right to have access to your intellectual and cultural heritage;
- The right to have access to new intellectual and artistic works;
- The right to participate in cultural and intellectual life not just as a consumer, but as an active participant in the making and management of your own and your community's creative and cultural development.

We have no Charter of Human Rights in Australia. We do have a Bill of Rights in the ACT and I understand that there is talk of developing one here in Victoria, but that the thinking informing its development does not allow for cultural rights.

The great and unfortunately the late, Donald Horne was the author of Australia's first national statement on cultural rights. It can be found in the 1994 statement *Creative Nation* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994); Australia's only attempt to create a transparent national cultural policy, and asserts:

- The right of all citizens to engage with their human cultural heritage.
- The right of all citizens to engage with new intellectual and artistic production.
- The right of all citizens to engage in their own forms of intellectual and art production.

Donald was unhappy with the final policy statement which he felt had been '*trashed and replaced by the Prime Minister and his staff with the mishmash of glitz and technocracy that became Creative Nation*' (Horne, 2002). But the statement on cultural rights survived, even if it was relegated to the preamble.

Since then we have had our right to protect and promote our artistic and cultural life bartered away in the US – Australia Free Trade Agreement and seen Australia abstain, along with three other nations, from voting for an international treaty on cultural diversity. The United States and Israel voted against this treaty and the remaining 148 nations voted in favour (Throsby, 2005). But it's not only our political leaders who are to blame for this country's

denial of an essential part of being human. Many of us who live and work in the world of culture and the arts also fail to stand up for the necessity of art. In the last 25 – 30 years we have lost faith in the intrinsic value of the arts and developed rationalisations for government support for the arts which value their role in achieving government economic and social goals. As we enter the third decade of arguing for an instrumental role for the arts, a number of us are becoming increasingly uncomfortable with this situation.

In this address I put forward two propositions. Firstly, that we need to develop an awareness, a sensitivity and an appreciation of our cultures and what they mean in everyday life and apply this understanding to the way in which we plan for our society and our communities. Not in an instrumental way. Rather in a way which helps us recognise reality and change it. I argue that this is critical to us making any progress towards sustainability.

Secondly, we need to understand the necessity of art; how it is a large part of what makes us human, and the role that art and artists play in making the tangible expressions of our culture. This includes understanding and expressing our own creativity. We need to understand that art is more than individual achievement, that in our struggle to achieve sustainable communities, art making is our way of moving beyond the narrow concerns of individualism, our way of reconnecting with the communal and our way of understanding and experiencing the relationship between past and future.

I will also talk about what policy and operational implications these ideas have for local government, drawing on some examples of what some councils are doing. I would like to make a general acknowledgment of the extraordinary work being done by some councils. Time does not permit me to refer to all of you.

So, let me begin by talking about what I mean by culture and cultural sensibility.

Donald Horne described culture as: ‘the collective habits of thinking and acting that give particular meanings to the existence of individuals, or groups, or the public culture of whole societies’. Two other writers Peter Timms (2004) and JR Saul (ibid) echo this when they write about art as:

“a way of articulating cultural memories, ‘not to imprison us in the past, but to free us from the traps of habit’ (J.R Saul *On Equilibrium*, Penguin 2001, p 237). Art is...transformative – or at least it has the capacity to be.”

Creative processes and our critical engagement with the material culture these processes create that is, the arts, can free us from the traps of habit, help us to see things from a different perspective, suggest connections between varied subjects and transform communities and the way in which government agencies operate.

If this sounds far fetched, this is what some research I have undertaken with a colleague Paul Brown discloses. The research has been published by the Australia Council as *Art and Wellbeing: a Guide* (Mills and Brown, 2004). The former Community Cultural Development Board of the Australia Council commissioned Paul and I to identify where and how community arts processes enhance the efforts of government agencies concerned with community and individual wellbeing. In tackling this project we adopted a concept of

wellbeing which builds on a social and environmental view of health and which recognises the inter-relatedness of social, cultural, economic and environmental factors.

Our research has found that the understanding and application of the arts by government agencies in their work has focussed, for the most part, on applying the arts in an instrumental way. By this we mean 'let's implement policy using the arts as a tool.' In this sense the arts have, for example, served as a tool for promoting a city, as a way of educating communities about environmental issues or as a tool for civic enhancement. However, we argue that this instrumental application is only half the story.

We propose that there are transformational possibilities arising from engagement with the world of the intellect and the arts which move beyond these instrumental applications. By transformational we mean **'let's allow creative activity to help determine policy by developing and negotiating shared understandings of various policy challenges and mapping out solutions.'**

These transformational approaches can unlock new solutions to the challenges faced by all governments in achieving the wellbeing of communities. However, this will only happen if we stop thinking about art as a tool for dealing with the problems of the day, another form of therapy for the poor and dispossessed, and start to think about how every policy and plan we develop is a cultural policy or plan. We need to develop our cultural sensibilities; learn how to recognise the cultural dimensions of what we do, become more self conscious about them, if you like, and recognise how our habits of thinking, seeing and behaving can be transformed through our active participation in creative processes.

Policies on wellbeing – including environmental sustainability, economic viability, social equity and sustainability overall - which must achieve a balance between all three - all contain new policy paradigms. If these new policy paradigms are to take hold they will require, amongst other things, new habits of thinking, seeing and behaving. In our research we have found that transformational art processes can assist in engendering these new habits.

They can stimulate new ways of thinking through encouraging debate, extending knowledge, illuminating divergence and highlighting consensus around shared meaning, purpose and values.

An example of this, documented in the *Art and Wellbeing* guide (ibid), demonstrates how participatory community arts processes provide a working environment that is trust-building and shows how this atmosphere of trust allows hybrid knowledge, that is, knowledge synthesised from a diverse range of knowledge systems, to develop. The *Murray River Story*, a play devised by people from all walks of life, brought together lay, scientific and Indigenous forms of knowledge about the river. The community theatre processes involved provided a vehicle for conveying technical information about ecological sustainability and water management to the community and for projecting information about community needs and desires into the policy and management arenas of the catchment authority.

Transformational art processes can bring about **new ways of seeing** by connecting policy makers with those for whom the policies are intended.

BighART, an arts organisation working with marginalised young people, is very skilled in exploiting the opportunistic nature of policy development. BighART's work builds attachment to policy making into its whole methodology and approach – and specialises in bringing the policy makers into direct relationship with those for whom the policies are intended prompting the policy makers to see things in a different way.

Transformational approaches can also **stimulate new ways of behaving**. They can encourage organisations to be more innovative in their policies and programs. They can build and strengthen social capital between groups – even when those groups appear to have competing or conflicting interests. They can encourage cross sectoral and multi agency cooperation and even change the way in which agencies behave, making them more willing to take risks and experiment with new ways of working.

The *Murray River Story* is one example of how this can happen. Another is Cascade Place, a facility of the Cerebral Palsy League of Queensland which has, through the application of transformational art processes, changed approaches to disability services. As well as providing a means of communication with the general public, these creative processes have engaged decision makers and other agencies, transforming policy approaches and management.

Rather than seeing the arts as a tool for achieving government economic, environmental and social objectives, transformational approaches recognise that the arts make tangible the intangibilities of our culture. They are the language with which we articulate and challenge our habits of seeing, thinking and behaving. Transformational creative processes can help make visible the cultural concepts which underpin many public planning policies. If we can acknowledge culture and recognize it as a living, breathing part of individual and community life, then we can give new meaning and force to efforts to achieve sustainable economic, social and environmental development.

As you can see from these case studies, some governments and some organisations in Australia understand that cultural development can function **simultaneously** as a means of ensuring sustainable economic, environmental or social development through cultural development. For this reason writers like Jon Hawkes (2001) and cultural planners like me argue for the development of a cultural framework which can be applied to all aspects of governments' planning processes rather than the development of a distinct cultural policy. We are arguing for the development of cultural sensibilities, not cultural empires.

Let me give you an example of what I mean.

Take a street in Melbourne. Let's look at it from the perspective of the different planning disciplines brought to bear on its continued existence and the perspective that a cultural sensibility would give those planning disciplines.

From an **urban development** perspective a cultural sensibility would acknowledge that the scale and form of the existing built environment was highly valued by residents and take into account the impact that any new built form could have on these deeply held values.

These culturally aware planners will recognise and appreciate the significance that ‘the wonky bits’ have on this street’s character and peoples’ identification and involvement with the street: how the chaos of democracy, the graffiti – art in the wrong place, the fine texture of local laneways and pocket parks, the idiosyncrasies of local architecture and domestic decoration of homes and gardens make up what people know and love about the street.

June Moorehouse, manager of culture and recreation at the City of Fremantle in Western Australia, conceived this highly technical planning term: ‘wonky bits’ which is in fact a vernacular and particularly Australian version of an old Zen Buddhist concept of wabi sabi that celebrates the humble, the worn, the ambiguous, the shadowy and the derelict. Our culturally aware planners will be applying this concept from 16th century Japanese aesthetics to resist the almost universal impetus to replace the authentic places of our towns and cities with synthetic lifestyle and artificially themed environments.

From a **heritage** perspective, the street could become a site in which efforts are made to conserve site lines, scale and heritage features and to sensitise residents and visitors to the stories embedded in this place. For example, moving States for a moment, there is a place in the City of Parramatta in NSW which everybody I have spoken to about it, even the planners, refer to as ‘the bit outside the Town Hall’. This ‘bit outside the Town Hall’ has been a meeting and market place for thousands of years and remains so to this day. This is also the site where the first attempts at reconciliation between Aboriginals and Europeans took place – although this interpretation is contested. But there is nothing in ‘the bit outside the Town Hall’ which points you to or helps you interpret the extraordinary heritage of this public place.

Moving back to our street in Melbourne, our heritage planners are very excited because, with the redevelopment of this area, they now have an excuse to knock down what they categorise as an eyesore – the local pub, a rather tasteless conglomeration of architectural styles and materials. Needless to say they are surprised when one of their colleagues, the one with cultural sensibilities, argues passionately against this on cultural heritage grounds, citing the pub’s critical role since the 1950s as an industry incubator for Australia’s popular music industry. She argues: ‘This pub is one of the few in Melbourne which actively encourages live music – we can’t destroy that; it’s a vital part of our culture and cultural heritage!’

From an **economic perspective**, the planners may be preparing a briefing paper for their political masters on the impact of the development of a nearby shopping mall. They are documenting the impact that the mall’s enclosed environment, lack of active street frontage, privatised public domain and 9 – 5 operations will have on the vitality of the city and this street. They will be considering the impact that the mall will have on the local cafes and small businesses in our street. They will be asking what will happen to street life; what impact will the mall have on after hour’s activity? They will understand the cultural significance of the local cafes and corner stores as meeting places, opportunities for individuals to observe and connect with public life, share stories, build relationships, construct and maintain individual, group and community identity.

The **transport planners** may see our street as an important linking road in a local area road transport network and a cultural sensibility will make them aware of the impact that any upgrade of the road will have on the sense of place and identity of that community.

The **social planner's** cultural sensibility will lead them to want to find a way to develop trust and social capital between diverse groups of residents; to restore what Arny Zable spoke of as the fluidity between the houses and the street and between the houses. The community has changed since the 1960s when the labourers and tradesmen set up residence. Since then our street has seen the left wing intellectuals and artists move in during the 1970s, the merchant bankers move in during the 1980s and the commodity brokers and e-commerce executives move in during the noughties. For these different tribes, the street provides a neutral place for the development of bridging social capital, but it is the opportunity to experience the multiple traditions which inform these diverse cultures by making visible the hidden stories of these peoples which will provide the glue to hold these tribes together.

Arts workers with a cultural sensibility will not only see the street as a site for street festivals, parades or public art but as a site for placemaking, where residents have an opportunity to put their stamp on the neighbourhood through participatory design and public art projects which tell their stories, celebrate their traditions and enable them to shape a distinctive and unique place with meaning for them and for others.

My point is that each of these dimensions to government decision making has a cultural dimension and that rather than see the need to stake out yet another separate and distinct cultural empire, we should be striving to establish a cultural sensibility in all decision makers: a cultural framework through which all government planning and decision making can be evaluated.

Both in Australia and overseas there have been three main approaches to the use of culture in community development and regeneration. They are:

- **Culture-led** regeneration where the arts and/or the development of a major cultural facility is the catalyst;
- Culture **and** regeneration – where the arts are seen as an add-on to urban development and/or regeneration;
- Cultural regeneration. This approach **integrates** a cultural development approach into all aspects of planning and development for a community. This integrated approach ensures that the cultural component of development and regeneration is continuous, adaptable and less likely to fail than the culture-led or culture and regeneration approaches (Evans & alia, 2004). In order for this approach to succeed we need planners with cultural sensibilities.

What are the tools we can use in unveiling cultural sensibilities? How can we make those of us who work with local government more aware of the cultural implications of our actions? How can we get closer to an understanding of the cultures of the communities which make up our municipalities?

Some techniques and tools include:

Cultural Mapping:

This is a series of techniques for understanding how people are experiencing their place and culture and their relationship to community and place. Often this involves engaging specific communities in creative processes to map their environment, priorities, perceptions, experiences and identity. These processes are used to build understanding and dialogue within communities about these issues and contribute to an interpretation of locality and identity. These interpretations can be used to inform government strategies and plans.

Community Cultural Development:

This term is used to describe a process that generates social transformation through participatory arts. This often involves artists working with communities and using creativity interpreted in the broadest sense as a way of illuminating what is important to those communities in a way which may change people's lives. Like all good community development work, these community cultural development processes are designed to increase participants' capacity to continue achieving their own goals and development beyond the life of a particular project and the partnership with professional artists.

Place Making:

Placemaking is about 'turning public spaces into public places; places which engage those who inhabit them, places through which people do not merely pass, but have reason to stop and become involved; places which offer rich experience and a sense of belonging; places in short which have meaning, which evoke pleasure or contemplation, or reflection and, most importantly, an appreciation of cultural and environmental diversity.' (Ryan quoted in Winikoff, 2000). Placemaking often involves multi-disciplinary teams of architects, planners, designers and artists working in partnership with the people who inhabit these places to ensure that the design achieves meaning and a sense of belonging in their eyes.

Policies and procedures which embed cultural sensibilities into the ways in which councils think and act:

Parramatta Council is developing the City's self esteem and identity through public art which is responsive to sites, issues and communities. The development of cultural plans is now a condition of consent for development of those public and corporate spaces in Parramatta with a public interface. The policies require that these cultural plans reflect and strengthen the culture of Parramatta rather than lead to the installation of generic, international spaces.

Newcastle's Urban Strategy – focuses on the development of their suburbs as village nodes and looks at ways public art, placemaking and other cultural development activities reflect the unique identity of their different suburbs. Newcastle is encouraging developers to contribute 1% of any development over \$1million towards public art and placemaking. Newcastle is also developing a specific levy for public art. **Marrickville Council** has recently also amended its developer contribution requirements to include a levy for public art.

Fairfield's cultural plan is linked to a variety of other council plans including urban planning, economic development and education and training.

The **City of Port Philip's** strategic plan gives equal significance to cultural, social, economic and environmental dimensions.

Let's have a look at how these cultural sensibilities and tools can be applied in the recognition and expression of a people's and a community's cultural rights

1. The right to opportunities to develop our own creativity and an appreciation of the creativity of others

Since its inception in 1997, *The Torch Project* has evolved and developed an extensive program of community cultural development work in regional and metropolitan Victoria; blending powerful art with community mobilisation and empowering communities to act on difficult issues that often end up in the 'too hard basket', such as public education; the use and abuse of power at domestic, organisational and political levels; Indigenous issues and reconciliation; domestic violence; multiculturalism and substance abuse (Mills and Brown, 2004).

2. The right to have access to our intellectual and cultural heritage

Creating meaning, not themeing.

A town or a city's culture is the lived experience of its places and time; what is special about the place and its people and how its history can pre-figure its future. Our intellectual and cultural heritage can include this place's:

- Artistic or archaeological history
- Indigenous presence
- Landscape, topography, amenities and landmarks
- Attractiveness and the legibility of its public space
- Local products and craft skills, manufacturing and services
- Quality of retailing, leisure, sport and entertainment
- Cultural vigour and the vigour of its sub cultures
- Traditions of public social life, civic traditions, festival and rituals
- Skills in the arts
- An areas stories and urban myths.

Creating a successful partnership between the arts, culture and community development requires moving beyond a traditional focus on high or low art, community art and popular art. It means that a council's planners will need to develop an appreciation that it is how residents *experience* their city – their sense of place, identity and personal safety – which is the vital ingredient in successful urban regeneration. The *readability of the city* – its signage, opportunities to interpret its history, relate to and experience its natural and built environment are crucial aspects of successful planning.

A city's natural and cultural heritage is now recognised as a key factor in establishing identity and distinctiveness and in creating an ambience which is not imitative but draws on the unique nature of a place and its people. For example, the **Warali Wali Project** involved the planning, design and installation of a series of interpretative artworks and markers along the Prospect Creek Cycle way in Sydney. Artworks explore the significance of the creek and its environs to the local Aboriginal people and are being developed by artists of Aboriginal heritage. The interpretative artworks and markers will be sited and developed in conjunction

with planned 'stop and rest' recreation and feature areas along the cycle way, as well as bush regeneration works. (Graham, 2004).

Where cultural investment has created major tourist attractions, they have sometimes excluded local people on economic or social grounds. Similarly, many culturally led projects are often imitative and do not coincide with local needs, assets and aspirations. Tourism is increasingly aware of the need to create a sustainable product; one which enhances rather than diminishes local quality of life, recognising that it is the local audience that provides the bedrock of a successful initiative. The **Rediscovery, Convict Lumberyard Interpretive Artwork** is a large sculpture which celebrates the discovery of the Convict Lumberyard in Newcastle and depicts the wealth of artefacts uncovered at the site. This work is not only a drawcard for local residents and visitors, but has illuminated an important part of Newcastle's industrial heritage in a way that is accessible to all.

3. The right to have access to new intellectual and artistic works

In my work with local government where I mentor and coach councils in the preparation of their cultural plans, during the initial discussions on the scope of the planning process it is not unusual for me to ask why the art gallery, museum, performing arts centre and library are being omitted from the planning process.

The reactions are interesting.

- Do libraries have something to do with culture?
- Oh, the art gallery does its own thing – we want this plan to be for everybody.
- Oh – our art gallery and performing arts centre are managed by a separate board. We just give them money – we don't tell them what to do.

A culturally aware approach to planning can often expose the absences and silences in our communities. Museums have a commitment to cultural pluralism and are both repositories and activators for the stories, images and artefacts of the communities which are often unacknowledged by the dominant culture. The relationships museums have with these communities can provide a pathway for other parts of council to engage with other cultures.

Art Galleries can also present a community's aspirations in a much more compelling way than a Council's weighty report. When we use words and reports to describe arts and cultural processes not only do we change them, but we often short change them. Therese Kenyon's East End project used a range of visual arts media to tell the story of the culture and community of Newcastle's East End, an architecturally unique, tightly knit community which successfully resisted the attempts of developers and the local council to knock it down.

The Living Centres project of Planning NSW used BighArt, an arts organisation, to encourage residents to project a vision for the future of Kirrawee in Sydney's south. Artists, including Euan Macleod were also involved and a multi media exhibition of the vision entitled 'Curating the Future' was presented by the Hazlehurst Gallery.

Fairfield museum and gallery has recently curated an exhibition about its community's back yards, both illuminating and celebrating that particular suburban aesthetic and local identity.

Library's are, in my experience, often the most misunderstood of all cultural institutions in local government. Too often they exist in a world apart from the rest of the council and are seen only as places which lend books. This view seriously underestimates not only what libraries actually do but how democratic and accessible they are. We know that:

- 60% of Australians over 15 use libraries;
- Libraries have a high access and equity rating for women, the aged, young people, people of non-English speaking backgrounds, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (Bundy, 2003).

A recent study by UTS shows that libraries function to enhance social interaction and trust and that they foster a sense of equity within the community in which they are placed, which in turn contributes to social capital (Cox, 2000).

We know that libraries can and do offer pathways to:

- Universal access to the Internet
- Literacy and adult learning
- Points of engagement for hard to reach groups with local and central government services
- Community and civic values by providing welcoming, neutral civic places.

These characteristics make libraries an ideal focus for harnessing community input into planning, as well as offering other parts of council a pathway to hard to reach communities. Involvement by libraries in council planning processes can also help make the council aware of the true significance of libraries and the role they can and do play in tackling some of the cultural, social and economic issues confronting their city.

Access to information technology, particularly through a city's libraries is a key equity issue for communities as the growing economic implications of the information revolution and the pivotal role it will play in the success of local cultural and other industries is better understood.

Fairfield Council is determined to become a learning city – a city which can successfully compete in the new knowledge based economy through the existence of a flexible, creative and innovative workforce. This will entail broadening the capacity of Fairfield's libraries as learning centres – building on the great work they are doing in this area.

4. The right to opportunities to participate in cultural and intellectual life not just as spectators or consumers, but as producers.

National and international best practice advocates the critical role of the arts in creating an inclusive, distinctive and vibrant public domain.

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) has recently published an evaluation of their Art and Environment Scheme (VicHealth, 2004). This scheme aims to increase the capacity of councils to enhance public spaces by improving their accessibility and utilisation through employing artists as members of the design team and through community participation in the design process.

The research indicated that the following factors are critical to the establishment of successful public domains:

- Engaging city officials and community members early in the planning stages;
- Accommodating their ideas;
- Collaboration between urban planners, community groups and non-profit organisations to implement new urban design features that support social interactions and community stewardship;
- Fostering social cohesion through the creation of an artistic public gathering place.

The VicHealth study found that the symbolic aspect of the artworks themselves created a sense of identity for diverse communities, but that it was the processes used in the development of the works, namely community involvement in conception, refinement and, in some cases, the manufacture of the works that was critical. In addition, the scheme has had an impact on the processes of local government and the participatory processes which were used as part of the scheme are now being applied more generally across the work of councils in strategic, environmental and public health planning.

We can support our communities as producers of more than visual art. Communities can produce theatre, music and literature as exemplified in **Mayfield in Newcastle**. This suburb typifies the social and structural changes taking place in that city. Adjacent to the recently closed BHP, the suburb has a low socio-economic base and suffers from the perception of an undesirable place to be. It has relatively low-cost housing stock, and boarding house style accommodation catering for people with intellectual disabilities and mental health issues.

With the BHP closure and its low-cost housing stock, Mayfield began a phase of rapid gentrification. As a consequence there was increasing community anxiety about the changes taking place in their neighbourhood. A Social Plan for the area was developed with the community and recommended cultural development initiatives. The program, which was developed with the local community included an oral history project, the establishment of a community choir of people with intellectual disabilities and mental health issues, who wrote a song-scape about their experience living in Mayfield, an Aboriginal performance piece that told the Indigenous history of the area, school children involved in making puppets to tell the local stories and urban myths of the area and the final Celebratory Event - a twilight picnic and performance held in a park notorious for anti-social activities.

This extensive cultural program provided opportunities for the diverse Mayfield community to come together and formulate their own cultural development activities, to begin the

process to re-define a new sense of identity, foster integration and interaction as well as celebrate the unique identity of Mayfield – ‘soul, guts, spirit!’ (Anderson, 2004)

I’d now like to spend some time on my second theme; the necessity of art.

Art arose out of a need to have power over nature and was ‘a magic tool in the struggle for survival’. It was a way of understanding reality and imagining a changed reality (Fischer, 1959).

As society evolved the changing social conditions affected the way we understood art, the role we assigned to it and artists and how we saw ourselves in relation to it. Art has been seen as a means of overcoming the individual’s isolation by providing a way back to the collective, as a commodity divorced from social ideas, as a means for enlightenment and as a tool for propaganda.

Artists have been variously understood as the sorcerer or ‘progressive technologist’ (Smith, 1998) opposing nature, as the Renaissance artist-hero inventing original forms of expression in opposition to the rigid constraints of craft production and, with the industrial revolution, as someone engaged in an exceptional kind of play rather than an exceptional kind of work. The artists’ ‘play’ is to ‘sustain an old fashioned but human mode of production in an increasingly inhuman, increasingly inorganic situation.’ (ibid). This latest version of the artist-hero is now undergoing transformation. Take for example the lifelike yet anatomically impossible creatures of Patricia Piccinini, ‘*The young family*’ for instance, which depicts a combination sow/woman suckling her young; her feet a combination of human feet and hands. Piccinini does not make these things herself – she designs them and employs a team of technicians and fabricators to bring them into being (Timms, 2004). Given that this is a not uncommon practice, perhaps the new manifestation of the artist-hero is the artist designer. Rather than art works which are based on an organic process of discovery, trial and error, a dialogue between ideas and form through the application of hard-won technique we see products which are designed for a market. The finished result is all that matters, not the process of bringing it into being and art is reinforced as a commodity.

I guess what I am saying is that we have always justified art and its patronage whether by the individual, the Church or the State, according to the prevailing social and cultural values of the time. What is particularly pernicious about our own time is the commodification of art and the denial of its social emphasis. Creativity has become the new silver bullet – a quick and trendy way to solve social and economic problems. Creativity can provide a fast pathway to executive success – just read the books about creative intelligence (I don’t think we’ve quite grasped emotional intelligence yet, but when in doubt move on); creative industries will help restore struggling economies and the creative classes, whom Richard Florida (2002) defines very broadly to include managers and engineers, will come to our cities if we provide diverse, bohemian and unconventional environments. These creative classes will in turn attract investors in the new creative industries.

I am not objecting to Richard Florida’s ideas per se. What I am objecting to is the interpretation and application of those ideas by people who clearly haven’t read his book. People who think that a few coffee shops, some chic little galleries and a bit of public art scattered about will attract these thirty-something, upwardly mobile professionals from the so

called 'creative classes' to live and work in their area, who will in turn attract investment into new forms of creative industry, thereby solving unemployment and repairing urban blight.

There are a few things wrong with this picture.

Firstly; Florida is not talking about a few coffee shops, some chic little galleries and a bit of public art scattered about. He is talking about the fact that the professional classes like to live in or be close to diverse, bohemian and unconventional environments. He is talking about communities which welcome gay individuals and couples – London to a brick many of the senior local government officers I hear extolling Florida's virtues haven't got to that bit in the book. He is talking about grunge – wabi sabi – run down urban areas in which artists can afford to live and work. He is talking about communities which welcome peoples from other cultures.

On that point, in a recent report commissioned by the Melbourne West Area Consultative Committee (MWACC, 2004) and prepared by the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research, the authors have developed a 'creativity index' based on Florida's ideas and applied it to the western region of Melbourne. In developing this index a wide range of factors have been taken into account including: qualifications, country of origin and family structure; bohemian occupations; number of patents; and high tech output. A major factor contributing to a high creativity score for some areas was their rich multicultural history.

Let's remain in the western region of Melbourne a moment. How can the creative classes and the creative industries rescue this area from a less than promising economic, social and environmental future? What can the Western Region learn from what has happened to other areas which have registered high on a creativity index? Let's ponder how we might tackle the economic challenges for the Western region given what Florida is arguing. We know that the economic development of the region is dependant on the ability to attract the highly skilled businesses it needs and this, in turn, depends on its ability to attract a highly skilled workforce. We know that the overall skills base for the region is poor, with some sub regions, those already subjected to gentrification to a significant degree, performing better in this regard.

We know that whilst gentrification is happening in some areas of the West, the pace and the impact of these changes on the western region are likely to be different from those in other areas of Melbourne simply because the levels of social exclusion in the west are higher.

What will happen if gentrification proceeds, market forces do their thing and the area attracts a highly skilled workforce? Well – let's look at what has happened in St Kilda, in the West End of Brisbane, in Kings Cross, Chippendale and Redfern in Sydney and Fremantle in Western Australia. These are the areas that were renowned for their diverse, bohemian and unconventional environments. What happened is that gentrification displaced those generations who helped create those qualities which the incomers found attractive, such as vibrant streets, access to public transport and mixed development. What happened in these areas is that the poor, including artists, were displaced – priced out of the area they helped create.

How can we avoid this happening in Melbourne's west? Well, a response in some other States has been to establish subsidised studios so that artists can continue to work in that area, even if they can't afford to live there anymore. While probably a worthwhile initiative for the artists who gain access to these facilities, this response on its own hardly seems sufficient – it smacks of an 'artist as commodity' response – 'Instant bohemia, just add artists!' and ignores what is happening in the broader social and cultural milieu.

A broader, more multi-disciplinary and multi-agency response is needed; one which will ensure that some of the benefits available to these newly arriving people on higher incomes are redistributed to poorer excluded communities. The best means to achieve this will be to enhance the quality of social, environmental and cultural infrastructure ahead of these population and economic changes so that current residents and their children have the opportunity to earn more, enjoy increased amenity, are more readily connected to employment and develop their capacity to participate in the new and emerging economies, such as the knowledge economies.

One important building block to creating access to these new opportunities for local residents of the West is to engage these residents in planning for their community, not just so that we can tick the box that says community consultation, but so that we can build pathways to employment and provide improved amenity and opportunities that meet their needs and aspirations.

Footscray Community Arts Centre, the City of Maribyrnong and Victoria University have developed a partnership in order to create and implement a new framework for community consultation and engagement. This project departs from the all too familiar approach of evening meetings in dingy public buildings with stewed tea and stale biscuits discussing plans that sometimes even the planners have difficulty interpreting. This project uses a form of cultural mapping to help to overcome the unequal balance of power characteristic of many public forums, committee meetings and surveys and to create a more dynamic relationship and exchange with the community.

Specifically, the project aims to gather information to inform the cultural planning activities of the three partner agencies. In the case of Victoria University the information will inform how they will work with the community in arts and non-arts fields. What the three partner agencies are hoping to establish is a methodology for dialogue with the community; a process for conducting a two way conversation which will capture what is important to the communities of Maribyrnong and what implications this has for what and how these agencies are operating right now. In a sense the agencies are inviting community members to be the authors of their community and to continue the conversation through the agency websites and other consultation opportunities in the future.

The agencies have recruited volunteers from the community. Aged between 17 and 70 years, these volunteers have been trained to ask a series of open-ended questions as a lead in to the conversation, in this instance about arts and culture, to listen and then to reflect back to participants what they are saying so that there is greater ownership by participants of their responses. The conversations are taking place at a series of cultural venues and events; football matches, shopping malls, coffee shops and exhibitions held in shopping centres.

The partner agencies hope to create a prototype for community engagement which can be used to inform their planning in a range of areas, not only in relation to cultural development.

Another interesting attempt to apply these transformational processes is *Generations*. Described as a local government investment in arts-led civic engagement, *Generations* was initiated by the Cultural Development Network of Victoria and is a national program which kicks off early next year in which five Councils will, through the arts, nurture active participation within their communities in response to major local challenges and demonstrate the links between cultural vitality and community sustainability (CDN, 2005).

The councils of Wangaratta, Geelong, the Latrobe Valley (in Victoria); Liverpool (in western Sydney), and Dalrymple in rural Queensland are participating in *Generations*.

The authors of *Generations* describe it thus:

'It is in the nature of the practice of the arts (and therefore this program) to be expansive, exploratory, and challenging. This is doubly so in community based arts. The civic engagement vehicle of community cultural development (a process that generates social transformation through participatory arts) aims at social, economic and environmental outcomes as well as aesthetic ones. When these two aspects inform and affirm each other, and when communities themselves determine the direction of initiatives, best practice is possible. The key to ensure both lead practice and sustainability is the early engagement of community stakeholders in project development not just delivery.' (ibid)

To give you more of an idea of what is happening; let me give you a thumbnail sketch of what a couple of these councils are up to.

Green Expectations:
Latrobe City Council

Latrobe City's power companies generate most of the energy Victorians consume as well as employment for local people. Committed to promoting significant greenhouse gas reductions, the Council will foster a deeper, more sophisticated understanding of the challenges of energy efficiency conservation across the community, through the arts. The Victorian Government's decision to approve an extension of the Hazelwood Power Plant in the region has fuelled intense community debate about environmental sustainability issues in the Latrobe Valley. The Council is a member of the Cities for Climate Protection Program and has, in its Latrobe 2021 Vision statement, committed to fostering a deeper engagement of its citizens with local issues and decision-making. The Council looks to the arts to foster discussion among diverse sectors of its community in exploration of a pressing global issue whose impact on the regional economy and environment provokes intense and passionate debate (CDN ibid).

Connecting through 3 generations of time
Dalrymple Shire (QLD)

Dalrymple Shire's 3000 citizens inhabit an area around the size of Tasmania. The Shire surrounds, but does not incorporate, the town of Charters Towers. In three generations in the Dalrymple Shire the threads of positive connection between pastoralist and Indigenous

communities in this small rural shire have unravelled. A generation gap (from young to older) has also grown in both communities, partly as links with land are fragile. A long term community cultural development process will seek to rebuild these community connections by facilitating dialogue through creative, arts-based approaches. A key goal is sustainable employment opportunities for young Indigenous people, especially through re-engagement with their land. An equally important objective of strengthening community connections is the negotiation of successful shared land use agreements, an issue which is generating considerable interest in the region at present (CDN ibid).

I hope that I have managed to excite your interest in how vital culture and cultural development are to achieving sustainability. I hope that you are now more aware of the possibilities of transformational art processes. I hope that you are encouraged and supported in your belief in the necessity of art; connecting the individual with the communal and offering a way of understanding reality and imagining a changed reality.

However there are some subtle but important distinctions between what I have been talking about and the instrumental application of the arts to achieve social or economic objectives. We need to be aware of these distinctions so that our actions are informed by choice, not by accident.

Firstly, let us be clear about our intentions.

When we argue for the necessity of art in local government, what is it we are arguing for?

Are we trying to carve out an empire for artworkers? Jockeying to get a bit higher up the pecking order in local government, emulating the social planners who began more than three decades ago at the bottom of the food chain with an agenda for structural social change, many of whom now find themselves captured by the busy-work of managerialism, facilitating welfare solutions for the marginalised and dispossessed.

Are we trying to maintain the myth of the artist as hero – the sorcerer who can oppose or even triumph over the technocracy of our age, as long as we acknowledge their creative supremacy and the hierarchy of creative excellence touted by the art critics and arts mandarins?

Are we trying to establish new shopping opportunities, where the arts provide us with an opiate to divert us from the grind of reality? Do we see art as simply decoration, something we can use to distinguish our superior taste or position; something to give us social status and cache during some witty dinner party conversation? (Do you still have dinner parties in Melbourne - they don't seem to anywhere else).

Are we trying to turn our cities, towns and neighbourhoods into theme parks – employing artists as designers to create a series of markers or icons which will attract the upwardly mobile, and with them the investors, and make us feel sophisticated and smart?

Are we trying to divert our angry, our dispossessed, our alienated and our poor from acting out by providing them with art to sooth a savage breast? Is art used in this sense merely another form of social control?

Or are we trying to develop creativity, encourage our communities to be cultural producers and ensure community access to new artistic works and their cultural heritage?

Secondly national and international experience tells us that the identification and involvement of an individual, an organisation or a group as a champion of culture is critical to developing cultural sensibilities and cultural vitality (Worpole et alia, 1999, Landry et alia 1996).

Council can be a champion and assert a leadership role by facilitating, enabling, creating, establishing, providing a vision and by doing. Councils need to develop their own leadership role for cultural development and seek out champions in other organisations to partner them in this role. This should involve:

- Identifying a **champion of culture** within council's senior management at Director level. Get commitment from the top. Assign accountability for cultural development outcomes to senior management;
- Developing a **shared vision for cultural development** with key stakeholders in government and the community. Don't do it alone – engage other agencies;
- Ensuring that these individuals and organisations are part of the **stakeholders who are continuously involved** in development. Help dispel cynicism in public consultation practices by developing enduring relationships which outlast the requirement for formal public feedback.
- **Being multi-disciplinary in your approach. This will require changing your organisation's behaviour**

Solutions to the challenges posed in achieving community wellbeing require new forms of organisation, forms which allow for different parts of an organisation to work together, for different disciplines to work together and for government and non-government agencies to work together. These organisational arrangements require a willingness to permit a dispersal of power - a power sharing down the employment hierarchy - but also out into community based organisations through the development of mutually beneficial and mutually respectful partnerships.

Leadership by councils should also involve:

- Facilitating and encouraging the **development of local cultural resources**, including artists and cultural organisations;
- Supporting the **participation of residents as producers in the widest range of cultural activities**;
- **Establishing and implementing policies which take account of the cultural impact** of many of council's planning decisions;

- **Developing and applying the tools to help create a cultural sensibility among their officers and elected representatives;**
- **Integrating cultural development and cultural sensibilities into council's strategic planning, corporate planning and budgeting processes.** Don't be episodic and project orientated.

Our relationship to creativity and art must go beyond the narrow concerns of individualism, consumerism and commodity fetishism. We must acknowledge that art is what connects the individual with the communal. We must acknowledge and protect our rights as creative producers, and not be content with having our involvement relegated to the ranks of consumers; we must become actors, not spectators.

It is the direct, critical engagement with creative processes and the arts which are the most effective means of transforming the ways of thinking, looking and behaving of our policy makers, planners and politicians helping to create sustainable communities. The power of these creative processes lie in their appeal to the irrational, to our sense of wonder, imagination and curiosity and in their ability to help us make lateral connections and imagine new possibilities – for ourselves and for our society.

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