



THE CULTURAL JOURNEY

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My presentation is titled the Cultural Journey, subtitled 'Can bureaucracies change their ways?'

I have found this topic really interesting, actually completely fascinating, I too am a Fellowship holder from the Australia Council Community Cultural Development Board. I am only halfway through mine, so I only have to be half as good as June Moorhouse to be OK. But what I have found, as I suppose all Fellowship holders have found, is that the time that you get to think is quite extraordinary. It is the gift that you get with a fellowship - the chance to stand back from what you are doing and think about it and look at it. I've never seen myself as a contemplative person and actually I probably wouldn't have been if I hadn't broken my ankle. But the combination of Fellowship and the ankle has really made me quite reflective and the chance to put some of those things together in this presentation is quite exciting.

So let me start by just making my own statement about culture, which is not actually much different from the things people said, but I reckon if we all talked about what we think culture is, all of the time, then we would change the reality outside of this room.

So, for me, acknowledging and respecting cultures is my goal in life. Culture is at the heart of society. It's the five 'I's for me:

- identity
- inspiration
- independence
- interdependence and the
- ideals of values by which I live.

The respect and acknowledgement of that is indeed what I strive to do, in my work and in my interactions with other people. So having announced it as a goal, now I would like to consider the cultural journey as artists. It is the separation of the culture and arts topic which I find the most difficult. I understand why we adopted culture as an arts topic, but in fact, in the long run, we've done ourselves no favour at all, because culture needs to be understood by all sectors as being core to what they do and they need to see it not as an arts topic, but as something that is their own topic. Therefore, I talk as an artist, although I might have been a scientist, although I might be an environmentalist with culture as the goal. But I wanted to talk about the journey, my journey as an artist.

I am an artist who chose the public sector as her stage, and a wonderful stage it was too. Fortunately I got paid more than those of you who chose the community. So it's my journey. I think that's another thing about Fellowship holders, they talk about their own journey.

My cultural journey starts in 1965 when the arts were for fun. It was what you did after work, even if you were a professional artist, where people were exploring their creativity and talents and still at the same time, even then, bringing people together in communities. And arts practice at its most challenging was poking fun at government decisions that we thought we weren't engaged in. At the time, I was doing 'The Gondoliers', 'Showboat', 'Brigadoon' and various other performances of that ilk. But also doing things called 'Up Monato', 'Parks are for People', and various other community based review things, that were of the poking fun variety. Internationally, 1967 was the International Tourist Year, 1970 was the International Education Year. 1975, World Population Year. It was the beginning of there being a kind of international understanding by Australians. There were major events happening that were shaping our lives. The Vietnam War was happening, direct dial phones were introduced in this period, which connected us instantly to the rest of the world, which we can hardly remember now when you can pick up your mobile and do anything. Significant in this period was the transfer of indigenous responsibility to the Commonwealth and Martin Luther King was assassinated. These were major political influences on me. Also in this period, I was getting married, having babies and doing any job I could get my hands on.

Now, what was happening in organisations from the public policy perspective? The public organisations at all spheres of government were large and they were largely accepted by the community. They were expected to provide a full range of services, they were hierarchical. People who worked in them were compliant, seeing themselves as serving the public under a Westminster system. People described themselves as public servants and they meant just that. As artists, we were accepted as being reasonable people but it was outside the public sector realm, not anything to do with what was going on inside.

Big changes occurred in the next decade. Now we're demanding attention. Arts became the medium for protest and for

awakening rebellion, it became a way for people to listen to messages they didn't want to hear and a way to allow different people to have a voice. I was doing fantastic things like the 'Carolina Chisholm show', 'Chores', 'Frontier Follies', 'Our Schools Do It On Purpose', 'Redheads' Revenge', 'The Margin to Mainstream'. They're fantastic aren't they? 'Out of the Frying Pan' was the beginning of big community arts conferences where people came together and shouted mad speeches at each other- shouted at the converted. Used words I'd never heard before. People used to talk about the pedagogy of something or other, but generated a huge enthusiasm among each other for our capacity to change the world. With Bjelke-Petersen times in Queensland, there were artists in the streets everywhere in Brisbane, where people just took to the protest with a vengeance.

It reflected the international. 1975 was International Women's Year and a most significant event in my life. 78 and 79, International Apartheid Years, 1980 was International Year for Disabled Persons, so there was a growing sense that there were voices and people that needed to be heard.

There were major events. Entebbe happened in this period, my first brush with thinking about terrorism. The women's movement emerged and overtook my life and my understanding of reality. The first Aboriginal Land Rights act was passed in the Commonwealth Government and I marched at Pine Gap and saw myself in a really different way, as the beginning I suppose, for dealing seriously with environmental issues.

In the public sector, these changes were also being reflected. This was the time of huge public sector reform. Equal employment opportunity was wild. It was big and we made a meal of it. Heads of government departments in South Australia where I was, went from being permanent public servants to people on contracts and in performance agreements with their ministers. Indeed as I would describe it, the beginning of the breakdown of the Westminster system and the emergence of political relationships in the public service. We demanded attention and we as artists found that the public service was listening. So many of the shows, for example, emerged out of the organisations I was working in. So we found response, we did learn that arts were a way to make people listen to messages they didn't want to hear. For those of you who were old enough to remember, the Australia Council ran chairing workshops for women that changed the face of women's participation in arts organisations across Australia.

1985-1995: lots of variations. A decade is almost too long to describe, but a really interesting period. Arts now as a practice has moved on to being a really relationship building practice. In my experience, this is the period when arts became the vehicle for indigenous and non-indigenous people to listen to and really respect each other, to hear what they are saying. It was the emergence of non-Anglo theatre and arts becoming the way for people of non-English speaking backgrounds to explain their differences and our differences. We were beyond food and national folkdancing. This went into really artists' communication so that we could really understand each other. And there was a new-found audience for people with disabilities and an understanding that people with disabilities also had voices and needed to be heard.

So I was doing shows like 'Faded Genes', 'When I Die, You'll All Stop Laughing', 'Is This Seat Taken?' 'They Shoot Ferals Don't They' was not a show but a project that I was involved in, so much more serious and intense. But mind you, there was one called 'Onward to Glory' that seems overly optimistic when I look back. But we were much more serious and intense and using art to really explore new boundaries.

Internationally, 1986 was the Year of Peace, 1987, the Year of Shelter for the Homeless, 1993 Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples, so again reflecting where the international trends were. Major events, 1992 was Mabo, 86 was Chernobyl, 1991 somewhere there was the first Gulf War, Rajiv Ghandi was assassinated in this time, Mandela and the freedom in South Africa all emerged during this period. So very exciting international times, and very intense and passionate times certainly for me as a performing artist. So what was going on in the public service? Not the same level of passion, I don't think!

So now to Hawke and Keating. We're into Hawke trying to rationalise the spheres of government. We're into the beginning of the reduction of government as being central and core to all that happened in Australia. We've got new roles for CEOs. In most places, the central heavy hands of public service boards and central treasuries are being loosened. Departments are being given a new level of independence, able to hire and fire staff on their own. The State over local governments are backing off, being loosened and giving councils new freedom to develop in their own communities without referring back to the state government. So an emerging independence of units of government, independent local government, independent government departments at the state and commonwealth level, and a huge rationalisation and reduction. This is the beginning of the reduction of the public service.

So what are they thinking about artists? Well, we're in, actually, we're in. We're driving them mad, in there and marginalised but we are beginning to see arts officers in councils. We're seeing an emergence at the state and commonwealth level of the departments for the arts. There's not much arts practice going on anywhere other than in places that are called arts, so that's what I mean by marginalised, but we're in, and people have got real jobs and are starting to plan careers in the public sector.

And now to the last ten years. The activity level has not let up. And in fact, when you look at it, huge change has occurred when you look at the arts as part of what's going on. It has become a vehicle for local governments to build stronger communities. That's depending, more or less, on where you are. I was in a council the other day, where they've got huge problems between the indigenous and non-indigenous people in the town. I was proposing that there might be some discussion about it and we might look at some arts project that would assist that, and the CEO of that council told me that managing those relationships was not the Council's problem.

So there's that kind of view at one end, and at the other, councils who use the arts beyond their arts program. In the middle, there are a whole range of local governments who've got into festivals and who've got proper arts programs and use them arts programs as a way of achieving the Council's goals. There's been a big surge in creative activity and a way for the building of new economies, particularly in tourism and local history and local museums, and you can see that all over the country.

I loved it when arts become a way for people to be healthy. And you can see that around Australia. In Victoria, VicHealth have been absolutely fantastic supporting arts projects to do that, and in enlightened councils you can see in municipal health plans, how arts and arts activities have become part of what they do.

And, I'm being optimistic here now, when I am talking about the arts becoming a way for governments to solve problems. A project that Judy Spokes and I are currently working on, called 'Animating Democracy', is actually a project to demonstrate to local government that the arts as a practice is a way to help them solve really difficult problems. We (Cultural Development Network) are in a partnership with the Local Government Community Services Association of Australia and the Globalism Institute of RMIT. We're in association with the Australia Council and VicHealth, who have kicked us off with funding and we've got promises and interest from a host of other funding bodies. We'll be working with six councils across Australia to actually place an artist or artists for three years in a council to work on a problem other than an arts problem. So to work on bringing indigenous and non-indigenous people together. So to work on some issue of community identity, or to work on how to rebuild the CBD, or whatever is the biggest problem in the council. Artswokers will be located in the area of the council where the resolution of the problem lies, not in the arts and culture branch of the council.

And that's hugely exciting. So I've been really optimistic. During this period, there's been a really big shift for me in the things I've done as an artist. I've been associated with community gardens and artists, with workplace choirs, with the Small Towns Big Picture project, with negotiations with Feral Arts, with traditional owners, the Gugu-Badhun people, the pastoralists in and around Greenvale in Queensland.

I worked on the Regional Cultural Alliance, which is an alliance between national cultural peak bodies Regional Arts Australia, the National Libraries Association, Museums and the National History Association. They have worked together to turn themselves into a Regional Cultural Alliance and absolutely amazingly did such a wonderful job of lobbying and being part of the mainstream that they feature in the current government's regional election commitments. Who would have thought that what might have been described in the past as a small cultural project, would turn into a major commitment by the current government? And congratulations to those partners for achieving that.

In the world, 1995, the Year of Tolerance; 1996, the Year of Eradication of Poverty; 1999, the Year of Older Persons; 2000, the Year of Volunteers; 2001, the Year of Dialogue Amongst Civilizations. The same year, mobilization against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related tolerance issues. So internationally, we are moving and are into a period of understanding that people need to be included and part of what's happening, so I am hugely affirmed that our own arts directions are consistent with that. Of major events that have shaped our lives over the last ten years, the Millenium and the hype that was around that would be hard to ignore. The tragic republic debate and issues of identity and how that got sidetracked into being a debate about something else rather than who we are. The increasing anxiety about terrorism that started long before September 11th, but of course came to the fore. The growing awareness of our nearest neighbour East Timor, and our responsibilities and desire to engage with that country and last but not least, Australia going to war and a war that now, most Australians are afraid of.

So, that's what's going on in the world. There's one other thing that's happened in the world, but mind you it started before the last decade, but it happened significantly over this last decade. That's the rising of the topic of caring for the environment and the planet. So as well as those international years, we've looked at for example, 2002, the Year of Mountains, 2003, the Year of Fresh Water, and a million other things that have gone on in all of our lives that have brought to our attention, the question of resources and our responsibility to it. In 1999, I went to an International Water Conference in Sweden and I was vastly amused, and sent back to my council, humorous reports of seeing waterless toilets and vacuum toilets that separated faeces and urine at the source, so that one lot could be sent to one place and one to be sent to another.

And now when I look back to 1999, I don't think I was alone in not understanding that there was a water problem. Now such a short time later, it has been brought to our attention and we have had to address that as part of our core, our culture, we must be caring for the planet. Ian McPhail, Commissioner for the Environment, thinks that the environment is Pillars One, Two and Three. But I think that I've just reversed it on you. I think that I am saying we must embrace culture, the Fourth Pillar, as significantly as part of our culture as caring for the planet. And that is new for us, for most of us. It is not true for those people who have been conscientiously fighting this topic for twenty years and have had a parallel journey with mine. I feel that there has been fighting for communities and respect, but there's also been fighting for the planet. Now is the time when the two are able to converge.

Well, what's going on in the public sector? The public sector is bigger than just the public sector. Now we're in the public domain. Now we're into corporatization. Now we're into the rise and rise and rise and rise of CEOs, both in government and business. The terrifying rise of CEOs and the power of CEOs. We're into a loss of confidence in politicians and therefore people turning to look for leadership in other places. We're into bigger is better, local government amalgamations. Sue Natrass commented to me that the prediction is that within a very short space of time there will only be six multinationals in the world. They will have all coalesced, or merged or taken over each other and then we will have six very important CEOs running the universe.

The World Trade Organisation has emerged as more significant in international politics than the UN, able to control what happens in governments in particular countries. So I learned the other day, that currently the Canadian government had the World Trade Organisation say that governments will not place impediments in the way of free and proper trade with each other. The Canadian government introduced a series of environmental regulations designed to control water, and is now being sued for megabillions of dollars by a multinational using the World Trade agreement as the basis for that. So there is a direct interference now by large business in the role of governments in protecting both their people and their place.

We're in the hands of managers. Eve Stafford commented to me that, even the music industry is controlled by bar managers, which I thought was lovely! So government itself has less and less control. What's left of governments have more and more control over what's happening, and so we've got this terrifying prospect of the country looking for leaders, being unable to find them in our politicians, and the emergence therefore of CEOs who are people who have in the main, a responsibility to someone other than people in the community. Public servants no longer describe themselves as servants of the public. They describe themselves as servants of the government of the day.

So where are we as artists? We're in there and we're in the program. It's just that we are still not in charge. We manage to still be in the hands of people who largely do not share our values. Large corporations are serving their shareholders, public sector organisations are serving the government of the day, as is true in local government, serving the council, and in a way, this seems to me to be a kind of normal transition. I don't know where that will take us, but we need to understand that and see it as being a significant dynamic.

So, where are we going? Alright, I'm a dreamer. I've thought about what are the shows I'll be involved with over the next ten years: 'We of the Never Never'? No, 'Graceful Grannies'. What about 'The World is My Oyster'? I did a little workshop at a drinks table last night and I got some of these- what about 'Australian Idyll'? That was good!! We are so much into reality programs, what about 'Changing Lives'? We could get into that. So then I finally decided that it's 'When I Grow Up Im Going to Be a CEO'. Now mind you, I've had my turn as a CEO. This is the message I am giving to you. June Moorhouse and I again had a conversation about this and she said that the only way to change culture was to be in charge of it. And I suppose I was thinking that really, it's easier to change things, when you're the person in charge. Particularly at a time, when it's the person in charge who defines things. So organisational cultures are defined by the CEO of the organisation. Mind you, these people also are now, the chairs of arts boards and you have a look at where these CEOs are now. They're not just sitting in their corporations. They're running a whole range of things across the community.

I dream that in the next ten years, arts will become a normal part of organisational life, where cultures are acknowledged and respected. I dream that small again will become beautiful, where people can belong. And it doesn't mean that local government will be smaller necessarily, but that we learn that small is, in the main, how people relate. And we learn how to make small within the big. And where creativity is valued above all. And for us, that we have a common purpose and we say it's all of us, and it's about all of us. And that it's about the planet.

So when I look back over all these years that I choose not to add up, even though the public domain and public policy has changed and even though my own arts practice and that of people around me has changed in response to changing environment, and even though looming and threatening things have happened. And even though the things that have shaped our lives, I regret to say have been things like wars and assassinations and injustice, mostly, rather than things we could celebrate. In all, the thread

through all of that is, that the arts has found a way to celebrate that which is good and that which we strive for. That it's always, even when doing 'Brigadoon', about bringing people together, getting people to work cooperatively and giving people a sense of belonging. That's always been about releasing creativity, developing respect and understanding and that's always been exhilarating and daring. And I wish for all of us that this would be our future.

So here is our future: your future. It's got a tune, a tune you all know- my favourite tune because pretty much everybody knows it. So I am halfway through a Fellowship and I don't know what I'll think for the next year but what I think now is, on the cultural journey, which is the journey of building communities and caring and identity and inspiration and interdependence and independence, on that journey, we've done pretty well. And we've worked out how gradually to wheedle ourselves into the system. Not everybody, right? Not every CEO- don't tell me you've got a wonderful CEO, in your council. You might have one of the only five good ones. No, you might have a good CEO! I am making wild generalisations, but I am saying that there are people who now work outside the system whom I'm enormously respectful of, and there always were. But for those who are working inside the system, we're in a time, over the next ten years, where we need more people in authority making a difference, not just being passionate at the bottom. So I am trying to inspire you with grand thoughts of the future, because organisations will be changed by the people who lead them. Communities will be led by people with values if they're in those significant positions. So I am speaking to you, all those people under 50, budding leaders.

SONG:

Culture, culture, gives the world meaning and to our lives a core
Culture, culture, to you we'll be true ever more

We're working to build up Australia
As the land where we're all in the fold
We know that there's only one answer
We all must be strong brave and bold

Culture, culture, gives the world meaning and to our lives a core
Culture, culture, to you we'll be true ever more

We're artists and thinkers and dreamers
We work with our talent and heart
We're looking towards a great future
It's just not quite clear where to start

Culture, culture, gives the world meaning and to our lives a core
Culture, culture, to you we'll be true ever more

So gather your skills and your cunning
Be inclusive of both friend and foe
Set your sights on the future you're dreaming
And make sure that you're the next CEO

Culture, culture, gives the world meaning and to our lives a core
Culture, culture, to you we'll be true ever more

Thanks very much

Anne Dunn was a public servant in South Australia and the Northern Territory for 23 years, holding the positions of Commissioner - Public Service Board, Director - Department of Local Government and Chief Executive Officer of the Departments of Arts & Cultural Heritage and Family & Community Services. Following a period as the CEO of the City of Port Phillip, Dunn has returned to her consulting practice, working in the areas of facilitation, mediation, community consultation and organisational development.

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