

Angharad Wynne-Jones
CDN talk
May 2011

First some context, then a confession and then into what I'm doing with TippingPointAustralia and the City of Melbourne and the development of sustainability champions through dynamic conversations. Finally an update on the process for a commission in development called HomeArt.

The thing about Climate Change is that it's really really scary. It's not an issue, or a policy, or social agenda, it's a condition affecting our planet and all that live on it and it's caused by us.

And to make things worse only half of us believe either that it's happening or that we've got anything to do with it.

I would probably be considered by my friends and colleagues as a climate change activist amongst other things. But I'm not doing that much really. I'm probably not doing even 50% of what I could or should be doing with the information that I have, that I believe.

So why not?

Lethargy, denial, fear, boredom, paralysis, distraction, not enough time, not enough energy, not enough hope, not enough money, too much hope, no clarity about what could be done, should be done, where to take action, what kind of action, what the future could look like, how good it could be, how to get there, who to do it with, how much time we have got.

And I imagine these kinds of responses might be felt by many people who know that climate change is a reality and its impacts are catastrophic, activists, politicians and policy makers, bureaucrats, scientists, residents, business people, students, ... let alone those people who are in denial.

So it's a tough audience, without a doubt.

And then let's take the artists....whose sense of self worth (which is the most important kind particularly when you're getting a salary which is below the living wage, which is true for most artists) is often built on

centuries of enlightenment that places the artist as outside, the maverick, bucking the system, holding up a mirror, certainly not being co-opted in for some social engineering even if it is to save the planet... and whilst many artists have been working in different ways, with a different relationship with community and participation, it is still the old style arts organisations like the orchestras, the arts centres, the ballet and opera who hog most of the cultural limelight, and they're not exactly leading the sustainability agenda in Australia.

And then speaking personally, as an arts producer I have my own confessions:

I'm scared of being characterized as a fear mongerer, a weather botherer, that I'm jumping on an agenda for my own ends, that I've lost the plot. Scared that I'm too rabid. Scared that I'm missing the point, that technology or the carbon tax will fix the problem and all my worrying is unnecessary and a waste of time. Scared that I'll get knocked off my bike, that passive heating won't be warm enough, that I'll never stop wanting things. And that I'll look back at this Transition Decade and go, why wasn't I getting a real job and saving my super, so that I can retire comfortably and enjoy the view, even if the weather is a little scary sometimes.

Scared that my 9 year old will remember his childhood with a pall of fear, of my fear, that contaminated his ambition, his aspiration.

Scared that he won't have a future, that the world will be so fucked in 50 years, by an endless series of droughts, floods, storms, fires and famines that no economy will be standing, no welfare, just desperation and literally people fighting each other for survival.

And scared that I am not doing enough.

The reason that I am telling you all this is not only because it's an example of the kind of contexts and resistances that we're all working in and with, but also because I believe that getting to know each other better is one of the most important responsibilities we have in making a change. That to have spaces and places in our culture where people can be passionate, honest, scared, grieve, laugh, fight, hope and plan is the most powerful tool for change. That we need to take all of us, and

all the different bits of us,(professional and personal, scared and hopeful) on the inevitable adaptation and mitigation journey. We need to reward ourselves and others with gifts familiar in the current economic system (money, status) and get better at sacrificing, (money and status) but we also need to rehearse other kinds of giving and receiving.

My first experience of this kind of energized cultural space that really engaged with climate change was at a TippingPoint event in 2007. That space was created by honouring the power of conversation. TP was founded in 2004 and have been holding regular annual events in Oxford. Artists, scientists, policy makers, media and cultural commentators and others are invited into deep conversation with a carefully crafted series of facilitated exercises and use of Open Space over a 2 day residential conference. Open Space technology, is a self organising method to bring large groups of people together who set their own agenda, facilitate their own discussions and plan their own actions.

When I attended the event I met some of the best informed climate scientists in the UK and artists and producers like myself who wanted desperately to do something, to engage but didn't know how. I laughed, cried, learnt, listened, danced and came out feeling that I had experienced an integration of all of those parts and responses to the issue. I was able then to go back into my professional life with a sense of empowerment, collegiate courage and passion.

TP have held over 15 events for more than 1400 people. Not many people you might think, but if my experience is anything to go by, really deep impacts. Since 2009 they have been commissioning art works that respond to climate change.

When I returned to Melbourne after 4 years as AD of LIFT I invited City of Melbourne and Arts Victoria to partner with national funders RIAus and Australia Council and international funders British Council, to bring TippingPoint to the Malthouse, Melbourne. With support from Arts NSW and Arts Qld we also held TP events in Sydney at Performance Space and Brisbane at the Queensland Library's new digital cultural space The Edge.

In each city we held a 2-day event for invited delegates connecting with arts constituencies of the host venues - and a public event utilising Open Space methodology discussing different aspects of climate change – for instance in Melbourne our topic was What art do we need now? Which was a partnership with the City’s Melbourne Conversations program and 160 people attended the 4 hour event.

We also held a Leadership lunch with local, state and federal policy makers/funders with TippingPoint directors providing a presentation of what is happening internationally in the area of cultural policy and arts activity responding to climate change, to give some support and acknowledgment of the sustainability champions already in the sector and some professional development for potential candidates.

The events were incredibly well received. Of the 71 people who responded to the survey, 95% said the event met their expectations, 80% agreed that TippingPoint Australia provided new ideas for Art and Science Collaboration and 70% agreed it provided new ideas for making the arts more sustainable. 90% of those surveyed said TippingPoint Australia gave them new ideas for future research, planning and creation. They became, we all became climate champions.

Because of the nature of the event where participants take responsibility for planning and implanting actions, and because often it takes weeks if not months or years for relationships to grow from that first intense contact, the outcomes from the TippingPoint are far reaching and diverse:

Here are some of the examples of actions people committed to at the end of the TP Open Space session,

- Organise a public event to get rid of phonebooks
- Set up an artist’s fund for green arts projects led by Michael Kantor and Kristy Edmunds
- David Karoly, Monash Institute and TippingPoint Australia to begin planning a series of science/sustainability pechakucha events
- TippingPoint UK invited to Canada
- Ongoing conversation between artist Suzanne Kirsten and scientist Graeme Pearman
- David Karoly reported being approached for advice, networks and information by many artists since TippingPoint
- Creation an indigenous healing and sustainability centre

- Invitation to join newly formed arts alliance Climarte
- Artists involvement in ceremony for mass tree removal in City of Melbourne

Melbourne Participant Shelley Meagher said “I had several personal tipping points during the conference and am looking forward to pursuing projects and friendships with lots of people I met at it. The atmosphere was fantastic - friendly, stimulating, challenging, open- minded, dynamic and excitingly explosive”

I have heard of many more TP connections and projects that are being hatched out across Australia.

Alongside these spontaneous connections we also planned to facilitate some projects. The Climate Commissions:

The City of Melbourne had the foresight to join three other organisations to partner in the Climate Commissions launched at the TippingPoint Australia 2010 gatherings. Each year for 10 years, The Climate Commissions chart the journey of our transition from a carbon based society to a greener future, as we grapple with the impacts of climate change. A limited number of projects will be created over the decade across Australia and internationally with artists, scientists and others collaborating with local and global communities to explore and make evident the transition through conversation and art projects- a ten year program of artworks, responding to Climate Change.

In 2011 City of Melbourne supported Home Art, Australia Council and the IETM supported an international project with Kaaitheatre in Brussels and The Dara Foundation supported the Malthouse Climate Commission. All commissions are required to develop a sustainability plan and to be carbon neutral.

The City’s commitment to the conversational process of TippingPoint, both public and private, to enable people to become Climate champions and then to commission a project that engage with sustainability

operationally is I believe the most effective strategy to bring the sustainability agenda off the page and into a cultural space...

I'll now tell you a bit more about the specifics of HomeArt.

BTW If you want more information about whats happening in Australia in arts and sustainability please do download the Greening the Arts pdf from the [tippingpointaustralia](http://tippingpointaustralia.com) website....