

“THIS PLACE - THIS TIME - THIS CULTURE”

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This paper will argue that while great strides have been made in bringing artists into collaborative design processes there is a deeper and more fundamental cultural dimension that has not as yet been fully explored. Culture is a multifaceted construct varying from person to person with tangible and intangible dimensions associated with place. People have a multi dimensional understanding of culture and place depending on heritage, personal experience, social structures, spiritual experience and awareness of contemporary community values. Therefore one place may mean many things to many people. Culture and place are evolving concepts constantly absorbing or rejecting influences from other places and other cultures. Place-making that is sensitive to and informed about past and present cultural influences can therefore be a powerful expression of contemporary culture. By understanding cultural layering, place-making processes can lead to creation of physical outcomes that are culturally relevant and meaningful. The Paper will explore ways that Cultural Planning can provide an insight into these layers of meaning and underpin all planning and design activity.

Once upon a time ...

There occurred the Renaissance, a time of great culture and creativity, a time when civic places evolved, when culture was not the sole domain of artists and the cities were of their time and place and reflected the prevailing culture.

It is always interesting to look back at Renaissance Italy and see that much that we aspire to today was taken for granted then. There was strong expression of culture and total cultural underpinning of city planning and design. There are many examples of totally integrated artworks in the buildings and public spaces. The result of creative and culturally artists craftsmen and civic leaders who were of their moment in time and the resulting cities projected the prevailing culture to the citizens.

However all was not rosy and without trauma. In 1524 for instance the Pope had Michelangelo dragged to Bolona with a rope around his neck and kept here for two years till he cast a bronze statue of the Pope. The history of Renaissance artist's contracts as documented by Glasser reveals that there were many broken contracts and many that overran their agreed time lines often by many years. For example Leonardo is reported to have taken twenty five years to complete a project that was contracted to be done in two.



A time came when ...

The focus of artists shifted to greater personal expression and marketable moveable cultural product, with a corresponding decline in their involvement in the built environment. This resulted in the artwork being only available for public viewing in the Gallery.

Following the Second World War with major activity in the cities of the western world there was a push for artists to re-engage with the built environment. Commentators such as Read, 1948, spoke eloquently of the role the artist should assume in building a cultured city.

"The sculptor must come out into the open, into the church and the market place, the town hall and the public park; his work must rise majestically above the agora, the assembled people."

However perhaps Read's dream was not quite fulfilled. When we do see the artist re-engaging with the city starting in the early 1960-70's it results mostly in major stand alone sculptural works. The sculptors had emerged from their studios to contested the public space in front of and between the buildings arising from the Modernist movement.

The majority of these works, the large scale steel sculptures that still punctuate our cities today have increasingly come under criticism as Plonk Art, the Lipstick on the Gorilla or the Turd in the Plaza.

While it can be argued that the majority have little or nothing to do with the places they inhabit there are those that provided an interesting counterpoint to the Modernist architecture of its time. Despite the questions raised about varying success of these works they are clearly a manifestation of their time and it is difficult to see how the artist could have responded differently to the Modernist movement.



Robert Hughes in his book *Nothing if not critical*, 1990, slams the modernist public sculpture.

"American cities are now generously speckled with abstract ironmongery; sculpture that means nothing but is part of the perfunctory etiquette of urban development, most of it larger than it needs to be. Locked in a losing battle with the big-city environment, it manages to look both arrogant and depleted."
Robert Hughes 1990 - Nothing If Not Critical

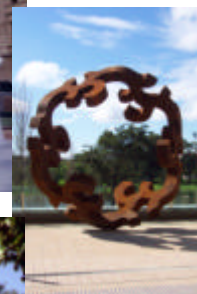
The other major criticism of the so called "Plonk Art" approach of the 1970's to today is that the works are highly personal works by artists who made little or no effort to engage with the site or the public. In many cases the same works were reproduced or were variations on a theme were produced with no apparent consideration of the local environment.

The art had come out of the gallery but only to utilise the city as a large scale exhibition space. As Alloway has stated:

"Owing to their specialization, artists' contributions to the environment of artefacts have been reduced in significance to the building of personal memorials."

It is important to state that while there may be an issue related to siting of works in most cases they are significant sculptures by important artists of their time. Therefore in the long term building an Outdoor Gallery collection of considerable civic importance can enrich a city.

Perhaps the real issue is that the placement of large scale sculptures dominated and was synonymous with the term Public Art for so long. Had there also been other active and highly visible area of public art practice at the time then these large sculptures might have been seen differently.



In recent times ...

Over the last twenty years we have witnessed the development of a significant public art and community cultural development movement around the world. This movement has been especially active in England and the USA. Some of the early initiatives were: the appointment of the first “town artist”, Scottish artist David Harding, the development of regional not-for-profit public art agencies in the UK and the introduction of percent for art legislation by US cities and states. These initiatives led the way in engaging more artists in urban development with a relevance to place and community.

Engagement with place and community manifested itself in a range of ways. For example public art has at times been the vehicle for strong political statement both on national and local issues.

In addition public art has been seen as a mechanism through which local history can be told as a place making tool. Sadly it is too often the case that the very thing being celebrated or remembered through the artwork was lost as a result of the development the art was commissioned for.

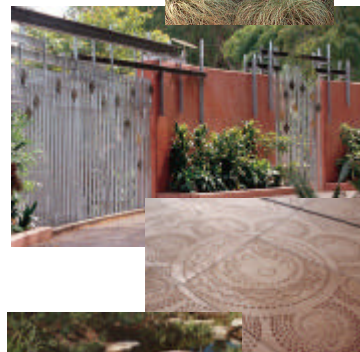
For example the Adelaide Fruit and Produce exchange moved from the East End to the outer fringe making way for an inner city residential and retail precinct. As part of the development project we asked the artists to create works that explore the past functions of the site and produced works that are evocative of the markets past activities and produce.

In Australia over the last few years governments at a state and local level have positively pursued the development of public art policy. In 2001 the Adelaide City Council adopted a new Public Art Policy which we had prepared for them that includes allocating 1.3% of the total capital works budget of the city to a pooled fund for public art. Perhaps the most significant of the current policies is the Queensland governments 2% for art policy Art Built-in. While this policy has its problems it is in its infancy and will be worth serious reviewing in a few years time. The policy requires the expenditure of 2% of all state infrastructure projects on public art and has to date included projects such as government administration buildings, courts services projects, community facilities, transit projects.

Also included in the Art Built-in program are landscape projects such as the recently completed Roma Street Parkland in Brisbane. The state government, using disused railway land behind the Roma Street station, developed this 14hectare site into a major recreational asset for the city.

The percent for art component for the project, managed by Brecknock Consulting, resulted in the commissioning of fifteen artists who created a range of artwork including stand alone sculptural works, functional design elements such as screens, gates and water features and a range of paving artworks. Due to the recent introduction of the Art Built-in program the opportunity for the artwork managers to be involved at an early stage of the project was not achieved.

By the time the art program got under way the PARC design team, comprising Gillespies, DEM and Landplan, had completed their design work and on site work was advancing at a rapid rate. The outcome was that all the artists concepts and commissioning took place over a six month period and with little opportunity to truly integrate the artwork. The result is however a credit to the PARC and artist teams for creating such a



wonderful public park and setting for the diverse outdoor art collection.

There is a growing awareness that major public art projects need careful planning and curating to ensure they can successfully build on a sense of place and maximise opportunities. As a company we are increasingly being engaged as part of planning teams to develop site master plans, art opportunities reports and conceptual frameworks for large scale projects, including work for the Melbourne Docklands and a range of residential developments in South Australia, Victoria and Queensland.

One of our current projects that shows a much greater level of integration and collaboration is Brisbane City Council's Regional Riverside Park project at Darra. This land which was once a QCL Cement works site with both a long river edge and a backdrop of bush escapement is being turned into a major regional park. Brecknock Consulting was originally engaged as part of a Hassell landscape design team in 2000 for the development of a master plan including an art strategy.

Council has now established a project team to implement the project and further develop the master plan with our Brisbane office is part of that team. This long association with the site and design development is allowing us to make a valuable contribution to the project and ensuring the resulting artwork will be highly relevant and an integral part of the overall park.



Now it's time ...

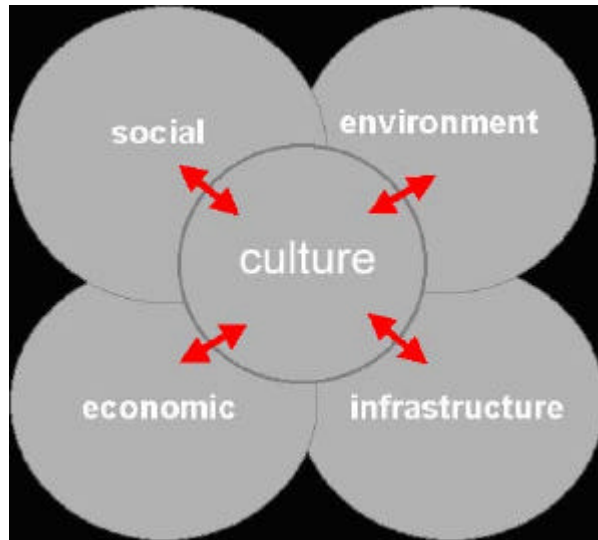
There are many more examples of successful public art outcomes around Australia and overseas and the area of practice has become a significant one for large numbers of artists and consultants such as our company. At the end of the day, even where there is a high level of integration, the artists are still most often creating clearly identifiable art objects. In the case of the truly integrated and collaborative projects there would be no discernible artwork only an enriched design outcome.

Don't get me wrong, I am not criticising the artist or denigrating the production of artworks as I believe the production of artefacts is vitally important in providing "cultural markers" for public places. What I am saying though is that art is not culture nor are artists the sole purveyors of culture. I believe that we should be seeking to bring the notion of culture to the fore in all aspects of place making. We need to plan and design culturally.

In his paper to the 3rd Delphi Encounters, 2000 *To save the city: the function of art in contemporary Europe society* François Matarasso explores the notion of culture and the role of the artist. Matarasso makes the following statement:

Culture is the expression of human values. When we express ourselves we create meanings where there were none, and consequently change the way in which we and others behave. In shaping European society, and the values of nations and communities within it, culture is of the utmost importance. It is, indeed, perhaps the only thing which can save the city.

The concept of Cultural Planning places culture at the centre of all thinking on urban development on the basis that as culture is what gives meaning to our lives then everything we do should have meaning and therefore requires a cultural response. Culture should therefore underpin thinking not just about our social or civic life but about the environment, infrastructure and economics.



It is in fact almost impossible to divorce ourselves from culture as it permeates everything we do and think about. However in the past the idea that culture is important in planning has been an after thought or luxury add on.

I find it fascinating that in a country with such a rich and diverse cultural mix we are not seeing much evidence of a changing approach to developing public spaces.

When individual cultural groups make their mark on the built environment it is often in cultural quarters such as China Town.

This phenomenon has created, in almost every Australian city a precinct with identical traditional gateway structures and clusters of restaurants. The origins of China Town date back to the early colonial settlement and gold rush days when the Chinese were forced to live in their own enclave.



However today they are little more than commercial precincts where the existing building fabric has been dressed up with a romanticised or historically frozen image of the old country that borders on an oriental Disney Land.



One of my great fascinations is that where ever I have travelled in the western world I have seen the obligatory Chinese pastiche leading to yet another Chinese restaurant, perhaps in a Baroque building in Prague, in the side street of Siena or across the road from the Vatican. These examples of "Cultural Cross-dressing", while photogenic, are obviously little more than cultural signage.

There are obviously many examples of "Cultural Cross-dressing" around Australia I believe we should instead be seeking to draw out the richness of our culture in a deep and meaningful way that would lead to the development of a uniquely Australian built form.

A more organic and genuine expression of community cultural expression can be found in local precincts such as Melbourne's Brunswick Street. Here the local community has gathered a critical mass of like minded people who have been attracted to a "Bohemian" street atmosphere. Local traders have expressed this sense of place through the style of shop signage, window display and merchandise range.



While there are artworks in the street they are no more important than the sign across the road that boldly proclaims the presence of "Totally Weird Shit" for those who seek the unique and unusual.

In his book "Spaces; dimensions of the human landscape" Barrie Greenbie, states:

"The essence of civilised life is sharing space with others without intruding or being intruded upon".

Greenbie use the term proxemic as coined by Edward T. Hall, to describe those places which have particular cultural resonance to individuals or specific groups of people.

Conversely, he uses distemic places as a term which pertain to cross-cultural behaviour on all social or economic levels, including the diversity of social and cultural experiences.

"Those parts of the city which are actively shared by people with diverse cultural values and codes of conduct must be readily intelligible to all."

The small village or closed community might only have proxemic space. Spaces which are full of meaning to locals, rich with personal and communal history and governed by very specific cultural mores. So much so that visitors from outside that community would find it hard to identify with the cultural context of the place and therefore feel alienated. Whereas the large city spaces tend to be generally distemic, where no one feels any sense of personal association with place. Obviously these concepts are not mutually exclusive, one can have a space which is distemic to the one time visitor while being proxemic to residents who use it on a regular basis, or are well aware of the historic importance of the place.

Both an urban village within a major city or an untouched medieval hill town in Tuscany can be highly proxemic for its residents and distemic for visitors. Indeed, Greenbie suggests, it will also be distemic even for its residents who provide the necessary services or sell commodities to the tourists who flood there in droves.

Likewise places such as war memorials can be both highly proxemic to those who were actually involved in or lost loved ones in the specific conflict while still being highly evocative and distemic to the average visitor.



Most people can not help but be conscious of the spirit of place when visiting a war memorial regardless of their knowledge of the events being commemorated.

To create more of a sense of place, or generate proxemic space, artists are often called upon to create work that is contextual or commemorative. However this is not always the answer. Some years ago I presented a paper at a Prague conference on art and public space. During the conference an American artist showed a number of mega public art projects in US civic plazas. Following this a Czech architect responded that in Prague they did not want to fill public spaces such as Wenceslas Square with art objects but keep them for the people, especially in case the people need to take to the streets again to change the political system.

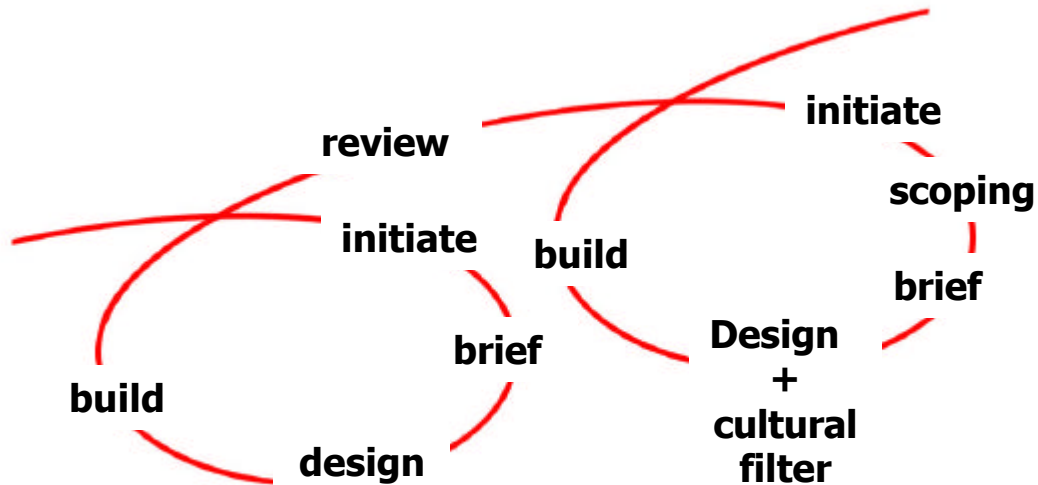
So how do we plan culturally developing spaces that can speak to many people at many different levels, express multiple cultures in ways that are not crass and literal?

The ability to read, understand and decode the subtleties of local cultures in a city is critical to developing cultural literacy. By seeing things culturally it is possible to plan with a cultural perspective which will lead to the development of more inclusive and culturally sensitive outcomes. It is essential that cultural literacy is gained by policy makers, planners and designers working at all levels in the city so that decision making is based on building cultural capital for the community through the processes of development.

To achieve these goals it is important that we turn the traditional planning processes on their head and see the role of cultural planning undertaking scoping and cultural layering studies as the first task required before a project brief can be formulated.

The following table shows the traditional approach of preparing the brief when letting a tender for the design and building of a development. The second part suggests a different approach, the cultural planning approach. In this model a cultural scoping study or cultural layering study

is done prior to the preparation of the brief. It also included the concept of a cultural filter at the design stage to ensure that the design is sensitive to the cultural issues identified in the scoping stage.



A current attempt at achieving a multi layered cultural outcome is the Victoria Square urban design master plan for the Adelaide City Council. This project led by Halliburton KBR and including Taylor Cullity Lathlean, Brecknock Consulting, Karl Telfer and QBE is perhaps one of the most challenging Adelaide projects given its central city location, civic importance and cultural complexity.

The City's urban design team and the project team have developed and agreed to a vision and set of outcome statements to steer the project

As the symbolic heart of Adelaide, Victoria Square should reflect our civic, democratic and cultural values and provide a special central place for people to gather, interact and celebrate as a community.

Victoria Square will achieve this by:

- *reflecting its historic, cultural and civic importance to the people of Adelaide*
- *recognising its special cultural importance to Aboriginal people*
- *reflecting the City's rich and diverse society*
- *being a welcoming, attractive and memorable place*
- *being a functional, safe and accessible gathering space for small groups, public demonstrations and major events*
- *being an effective part of the City's pedestrian and public transport network.*



One of the key components of the project is a cultural layering study that seeks to gain an understanding of the cultural significance of the square to the people of Adelaide. This process

is ongoing and aims to build up an understanding of the layers of meaning associated with the square. Including the significance for the local Kurna people of the Adelaide plains and also for the broader Aboriginal community that link into the city from across the state. Consultation has also been undertaken with a range of ethnic communities to gain an insight into the Squares significance to the different migrant groups in the city.

The indigenous consultation has been a relatively slow process partly due to the lack of adequate Council protocols for the sharing of cultural knowledge and also due to the diversity of groups needing to be consulted. It is also clear from the contribution of our project team member Karl Telfer that there are significant Kurna cultural sensitivities associated with the site that are not able to be shared. Therefore we need to acknowledge what we are enabled to know and to be sensitive to that which we cannot be told.

Despite the potential limitations on what we are able to know about the site we believe that the process will provide us with sufficient knowledge to develop a cultural filter that can be applied to all our design and planning decisions to ensure a high degree of sensitivity is achieved.

We must get beyond "Cultural Cross-dressing" and "Cultural Signage" and achieve what Kevin Lynch aspired to when he wrote:

"We need an environment which is not simply well organized, but poetic and symbolic as well. It should speak of individuals and their complex society, of their aspirations and their historical traditions, of the natural setting, and of the complicated functions and movements of the city world."

Reference:

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