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1. Introduction

Culture-making is a crucial aspect of Australia's social fabric. As outlined in the discussion paper, cultural activities support broader education goals, contribute to social cohesion and are fundamental to our success as a national economy (*National Cultural Policy: discussion paper* 2011, 23). It is timely to be considering strategies to support culture-making in Australia, as the current 'networked moment' is reconfiguring our cultural practices. The development of an Australian National Cultural Policy framework will therefore provide a contemporary foundation stone for culture-making over the coming decade.

My submission will argue that 'cultural democracy' should be a major consideration in the National Cultural Policy framework. The premise for this lies in Australia's rich history of creating opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to participate in arts and cultural activities. The historical context I will draw on to support my case is Australia's community arts sector. I will outline several considerations for nurturing 'cultural democracy' in the current cultural moment – the 'networked moment' led by computer and mobile device networks. These strategies have evolved from my PhD research into the issues surrounding sustainable culture-making in the networked moment.

My focus on nurturing 'cultural democracy' through government policy responds to the following specifics of the discussion paper:

Goal 1: "having the opportunity to participate in the cultural life of the nation" (*National Cultural Policy: discussion paper* 2011, 14)

Goal 2: "to encourage the use of emerging technologies that enable more people to access and participate in arts and culture" (*National Cultural Policy: discussion paper* 2011, 15)

Goal 2: to ensure "diversity is nurtured, supported and encouraged" (*National Cultural Policy: discussion paper* 2011, 15)

Goal 4: to ensure "education and training unleash creative talent and critical appreciation" (*National Cultural Policy: discussion paper* 2011, 17)

Goal 4: to ensure "arts and creativity are increasingly included in the mainstream of broader government priorities aimed at strengthening our society and economy" (*National Cultural Policy: discussion paper* 2011, 17)

Goal 4: "to deliver initiatives that build pathways in the arts to equip young Australians with the skills of critical thinking, innovation and design that are so fundamental to the modern economy" (*National Cultural Policy: discussion paper* 2011, 17)

2. Strategies

My overarching strategy for achieving sustainable cultural democracy in the networked moment involves developing literacies and competencies around participation in digital networks. My hypothesis lies in the notion that developing network literacies in turn develops network agency – having the capacity to be a critical network participant.

2.1 ‘Cultural democracy’ should be a major consideration in a national cultural policy framework.

The term ‘cultural democracy’ is historically associated with Australia’s community arts field, an area of practice that became one of the Australia Council’s core funding areas in the early 1970s. The elevation in policy terms of the community arts field can be linked to wider cultural developments happening in the 1960s and 1970s, including progressive social policies introduced by the Whitlam government (Hawkins 1992). Community arts championed ‘cultural democracy’ through rejecting the notion that creative practice was for the pursuit of ‘high art’ and the exclusive domain of the professional artist. Community arts practitioners emphasized “decentralization of the means of cultural production” (Roberts 1985, 551) and reframed ‘art’ as a practice available to anyone. The movement away from the artist as ‘expert’ also remarked on a wider shift that was repositioning art as something for the community to produce rather than consume.

Early developments in community arts in Australia were based on imported British and North American models. Although these processes evolved from radical activist perspectives, Australian practices were believed to be less oppositional than their international counterparts’. The field’s formative years as an administrative funding category meant its programs were influenced by government rationales (Hawkins 1992). Kelly (1984) describes the shift to government funded community arts programs as a migration from the cultural end of the activism spectrum to the cultural end of the welfare spectrum. Community arts practice in Australia has since become an umbrella category for activities ranging from grassroots folk festivals and participatory theatre to digital storytelling (DST).

Although many artistic fields have been renamed and reconfigured by the OZCO in its four major organizational reviews (1979, 1987, 1995 and 2004) the community arts program has seen the lion’s share of contestations of its agenda and practices. Hawkins (1992) describes the period between 1972 and 1992 of the Australia Council’s administering and funding of community arts as their *Community Arts Program*. This term allows for the multiple titles and various rebranding and repositioning exercises the Australia Council employed to construct community arts during this period. Within the OZCO the field was initially known as *Community Arts* (1972); it then became the *Community Cultural Development Unit* (1987); then the *Community Cultural Development Board* (1991); and is now represented by the office of *Community Partnerships*.

The second wave of Australian community arts involved the reinterpretation of “access” and “participation” in the early 1980s (Hawkins 1992, 156). This situated the field less as an antidote to cultural disadvantage, and more of a practice that nurtured cultural diversity. This moment in the community arts field echoed wider cultural concerns about the need to foster multiculturalism in Australia. The momentum for this shift is exemplified by the launch of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) television channel in 1980, whose remit was to provide multilingual and multicultural programming to reflect Australia’s multicultural society (Ang et al. 2008).

Following this period of self-assessment and an OZCO organizational review in 1987,

the *Community Arts* funding category became the *Community Cultural Development Unit* (CCDU). This change followed a Commonwealth Government decision to “elevate the status of community arts within the Council and provide a more effective integration with the art form boards” (*Australia Council for the Arts Annual Report 1987-88*, 20). Community arts practitioner Malcolm McKinnon saw this as a “theoretical and political repositioning intended to move beyond a ‘soft’ marginalized realm to a more central credible location within the larger cultural discourse” (McKinnon 1998, 7).

The move from community arts to CCD saw community ‘empowerment’ become the primary objective of funding. It had the effect of elevating cultural issues to the agendas of non-cultural organisations such as unions, migrant organisations, health and education institutions (*Australia Council for the Arts Annual Report 1987-88*, 20). It also led to what Hawkins describes as the “ultimate triumph of cultural development over community arts” (1992, 85) – the courting of local governments. This resulted in precedents being set for culture to be used as a *resource* in anything from “economic development to urban renewal” (Hawkins 1992, 85).

Many of the changes that occurred to the Community Arts Program in the 1980s happened under the stewardship of Donald Horne, who was chair of the OZCO from 1985 – 1991 (*Australia Council for the Arts Annual Report 1995-96*). Horne’s commitment to cultural democracy was central to his reforms of arts policy (Hawkins 1992, 82), as shown by this extract from his paper *Arts Funding and Public Culture* (1988, 5):

“Just as citizens have political rights, economic rights, social rights and civil rights they can also be thought of as having cultural rights. These cultural rights, which are a legitimate concern of the state, consist of rights of access to our common cultural heritage and to use it as we wish, a right to new art and a right for citizens to participate in their own art making. It is by the assertion of rights such as these that we can offset the monopolistic claims of public culture.”

As this mini-history has illustrated, Australia has a long and rich history of upholding cultural democracy through policy, and it is pleasing to see notions of cultural democracy well reflected in the proposed cultural policy goals.

2.2 Notions of cultural democracy must be situated in the current cultural moment – the networked moment.

The current moment is one where technology, society and policy are all co-evolving at faster rates than in previous periods. The rapid nature of this change can be attributed in part to computer and mobile device networks. This moment supersedes a time when telecommunication infrastructure was analogue and the flow of media transmission was one-to-many. This ‘network society’ – mediated, facilitated and brokered by microelectronics-based information technologies, software and communication networks – has brought with it new opportunities for human communication, and as the capacity of these networks evolve they continue to reconfigure media production and dissemination processes.

Networks have existed in many social, economic and governmental forms throughout human history. What is novel in the current networked moment is the rate of efficiency at which human networked interactions are taking place. This increased efficiency has enabled new ways of organising, in turn contributing to societal reconfigurations. These emergent forms of network operation mark a significant shift in the human condition, facilitating a “technological, economic and organisational transformation that allows us to renegotiate the terms of freedom, justice and productivity” (Benkler 2006, 27). This

supports the idea that the proliferation of networked culture presents a unique opportunity for cultural democracy. But in order to deliver on its potential, policies must be implemented that prioritise sustainable approaches to networked cultural democracy.

| CULTURAL DEMOCRACY | | SOCIO-TECHNICAL SHIFTS |
|---|-------|---|
| • participation in the arts | 1960s | • rapid social change |
| • regional Australian cultural representation | 1970s | • Whitlam-era social policy |
| • cultural diversity | 1980s | • multiculturalism • mass media |
| • digital storytelling & production | 1990s | • home computers • low-cost hardware |
| • sustainable uses of software & hardware | 2000s | • free + open source software • personal device production |
| • network literacy • network agency | 2010s | • networked communication • networked production |

Broad socio-technical shifts and how they have affected community arts and cultural democracy in Australia.

2.3 Sustainable access and participation in culture-making in the networked moment requires network literacy. Network literacy builds critical network agency.

The discussion paper proclaims that "Australia needs to adapt to a new generation of technology users and tools" (*National Cultural Policy: discussion paper* 2011, 18). My argument proposes that one of the most crucial 'tools' for culture-making is increasingly the network itself. So in order for people to engage in networked culture-making on an ongoing basis – sustainably – they should build critical literacy around everyday network participation.

The foundation for this position rests in the post-World War II period where print literacy became a measure of status for anyone wanting to function competitively in society (Hartley 2009). Important literacy capacities have since expanded to include knowledge generation and information processing (Castells et al. 1999) and having the capacity to network and create content” (Hartley et al. 2008: p61). But it is becoming increasingly important that we understand the techno-social underpinnings of the networks we use, as our ability to negotiate within and around network spaces affects how we represent ourselves and communicate with each other (Lovink 2005).

Developing network literacy capacity includes having the capacity to produce content for the network; being able to seek out content from the network; and having the ability to

broker information within networks. Building such capacities helps with the formulation of boundaries around network participation. This development of personal ethics creates opportunities for self-reflexivity, and could move the individual beyond merely having network literacy capacities, towards more considered, conscious action – having critical network agency.

Building network agency is inextricably linked to developing an awareness of network structures and dynamics; and this exploration begins with the consideration that technological development is not an autonomous occurrence, but rather a social, nonlinear process. The interplay between technology and culture is situated in relationships – both human and technological – whose complexities can be understood by considering their “articulations and assemblages” (Slack and Wise 2005, 109). This approach replaces the cause and effect binary with an appreciation of the matrix of actors, non-actors and liminal spaces that impact societal change. Having network agency also involves being conscious of the expectations we have around digital networks; understanding the implications of communicating over networks and sending content over networks; being able to participate in conversations within the network and about the network; and, developing an awareness of our network communication rights.

The notion of network agency moves beyond the dominant mode of addressing new media participants: from those who use networks, to those who understand networks. As digital networks become more ubiquitous in terms of culture-making, building network agency initiatives in to cultural policy will support the notion of cultural democracy.

3. Further Considerations

Over the last decade, culture has featured in ‘sustainable futures’ discourse. This idea circulates around *Agenda 21 (Earth Summit Agenda 21: The United Nations Programme of Action from Rio 1992)*, an action plan of the United Nations (UN) related to sustainable development. The forecast identifies three ‘pillars of sustainability’ to guide global, national and local activities: the economic pillar, the social pillar and the environment pillar. This “virtuous triangle” (Pascual 2008, 10) was contested in 2001 by Australian researcher Jon Hawkes’ in his document *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability – Culture’s essential role in public planning* (2001). Hawkes’ suggestion was that cultural vitality is as essential to a healthy and sustainable society as social equity, environmental responsibility and economic vitality. His ideas were taken up by Jordi Pascual, coordinator of the *United Cities and Local Governments’ Committee on Culture* (UCLG), who has since been campaigning for the formal recognition of *culture* as the ‘fourth pillar’ of sustainability.

The positioning of culture in ‘sustainability’ discourse is a rather new concept, but indicates policy should be considering the complimentary relationship between culture and sustainability.

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