The International Journal of DIVERSITY

in ORGANISATIONS,
COMMUNITIES & NATIONS

Wild Thing: You make our Art Sing

Tamsin Kerr

VOLUME 6
Wild Thing: You make our Art Sing
Reconciling Culture and Reinhabiting Nature
Tamsin Kerr, Griffith University, Australia

Abstract: Community cultural development, environmental and public art, and place-based festivals have the potential to re-engage community with nature, and reconcile indigenous and settler cultures, breaking down dualisms with creativity. This is not about audience development, but community embeddedness and cohesiveness - an art now, not an art later approach. Objects become more sacred and nature is part of us, not a separate resource. Community creativity builds human-animal-nature coalitions that change environmental interactions and build across cultures. There are so many examples around the world that they have become the feast of a new movement, rather than a quirky seasoning to dominant themes. This presentation draws on the regional example of the Sunshine Coast in Australia, but also visits South Korea, France, and Victoria.

Keywords: Community Memory, Festival, Creativity, Wild Nature, Environmental and Public Art, Community Cultural Development, Mythology

Introduction
Imagine a place for the wild; an active and spirited nature where creativity flourishes and the mythic abounds. A world in which communities collaboratively shape their landscapes through celebratory memoir and place memory. This world is already here. It lies within. It is local rather than expert, found in memory not history, in the mythic not the rational, in the arts not the sciences. Traditionally, it has belonged to colonised cultures. By scratching the surface, its underlying subaltern influence changes dominant practices to become more culturally and environmentally sustainable. The wild shapes the sometimes banal of the local to a more fearsome and active locale. We inhabit place as both prey and protector. By recognising the complex influences of the wild, we find ourselves embedded in the region, culture becomes wedded to nature. By remaining open to the innovative and tolerant of the other, the many cultured wild place breathes life.

This conversation with the wild is best expressed using creativity and imagination. Community cultural development, environmental and public art, and place based festivals are activities that have the potential to re-engage community with nature, and reconcile indigenous and settler’s multiple cultures. Emphasising place requires precise localised stories, based upon memory, mythology, and metaphor, rather than vague blandishments about land value or environmental ethics. To know the wild reflects Mark McKenna’s call for fancy and the fanciful in an Australian constitutional preamble, so as to respect ‘the land as an animate and spiritual force, drawing on indigenous notions of caring for country’ (2003: 190). But there is no uniform culture across the nation; each region imagines and creates their unique expressions of place. A detailed approach to fancy is necessary to connect community groups of smaller, more local regions.²

It is the wild and the regional that we embrace through place celebrations. While a focus on cultural identity enables bonding between like-minded groups, a focus on place has the potential to bridge and reconcile differing cultures within a local biogeography, between humans and across species. For example, in working with animals - real and mythic - the landscape becomes exposed as a multi-cultured human/spirit/animal/land continuum. This paper draws upon festivals and site specific art to define and demonstrate the importance of an art now approach to reconnect people to the wild. Indeed,

---


² Such a detailed approach is epitomised in John Hanson Mitchell’s Ceremonial Time: Fifteen Thousand Years on One Square Mile (1984). At the very least, it might incorporate a human-scale region rather than a less tangible administrative boundary or a political nation state. For instance, the broadly termed Sunshine Coast from Fraser Island to Kilcoy constitutes one such region – one that perhaps more closely approximates the boundaries of the Gubbi-Gubbi language groups or the geographic reach of the Bunya nut festivals than it does current local government boundaries.
there are so many art now examples around the world, that they form the feast of a new movement, rather than a mere quirky seasoning to dominant themes.

**Examples of Creativity to make the Wild Sing**

Festivals and community cultural activities celebrate a community’s landscape memoir. When visual and performing artists collaborate with a regional community to explore and expose collective memories and emotions, they create a mythic archaeology, a theatre of local identity. Artists create objects and performances in situ that give validity to and make concrete community memories and celebrations of place; they include the subaltern voices, the Other of community and land. By making contact with place, artists make contact with the specific layers of community memory in the land (ie the landscape). Community art events use spiritual and creative activity so as to break down either/or dichotomies; as Elisabeth Bronfen says:

> The ideal psychic, political and spiritual attitude consists in a unifying state of suspension between opposites ... (we) realise this privileged position by using spiritual and creative activity so as to be present simultaneously in the physical and the imaginative world. (Bronfen, 1999: 2-3)

Facilitators of creativity make art a part of everyday life. Individuals with passion and commitment act as key facilitators of a community’s cultural development. They work inclusively across the whole community on shoestring, one-off project budgets.² While there are products, it is process that opens other ways of viewing who and what constitutes community to include less dominant cultures as well as less human-centric separations from place. The following gives some examples of regional community festivals, environmental and site-specific art that show how a wilder creativity allows communities to become both place-immersed and culturally imaginative.

**Festivals**

Festivals articulate a region’s culture. Festivals, in the words of Joseph Campbell (1972), create *Myths to Live By* and link us to an Other and wilder state of being:

> The festival is an extension into the present of the world-creating mythical event … the whole purpose of entering a sanctuary or participating in a festival is that one should be overtaken by that state known in India as “the other mind”, where one is “beside oneself”, spell bound, set apart from one’s logic of self-possession … we enter the play sphere in the festival, acquiescing in a game of belief, where fun, joy and rapture rule and the laws of life in time and space dissolve.

Festivals create magical hybrids between nature and culture, between the physical and the imaginative, the sacred and the secular, and the past and the present. They involve both ceremony and ritual, using myth to link humans with the environment: ‘On its most integral level, ritual is the interface between nature and culture’ (Burnham, 1973 in Kastner, 1998: 256). Festivals happen outside of normal time; Lucy Lippard says:

> The animating element is often ritual – private or public, newly created or recreated through research and imagination (itself the breath of life). … Dance … with singing and music, it is the art most rooted in a continuing present, ‘Myths are things which never happen, but always are.’ Ritual takes place in the temporal framework of myth, in that Celtic ‘time between times’ of twilight, mists and hybrids (Lippard, 1983: 159 and 163).

Festivals help create Paul Carter’s notion of “the thick time of hearsay” (2004: 94) or John Hansen Mitchell’s “ceremonial time” (1984), less particular about a sense of past and future and hence less wrapped up in notions of progress and progression. JC Cooper (1990:11) says traditionally festivals: ‘involved the whole community, since there was no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, and they served a dual purpose in uniting both.’ This wildness (that lies between the most cultured of spaces) describes the process of festival. Creative place based festivals lead to a wilder spirit of place, an understanding of more muddy and confused terrains in culture, race, and environment. Bioregional festivals and ceremonies celebrate a specific sense of place, creating an experience, rather than just a representation, of country. Bioregionalism: ‘involves an intimate understanding by humans of the place in which they live and a close association with it, both in physical / biological and spiritual / aesthetic terms’ (Sylvan and Bennett, 1994: 119). We might re-imagine the landscape, re-animating it with the non-human or nature spirit. Such nature celebrations elevate the importance of

---

² On the Sunshine Coast these have included: Linsey Pollak, Kari from *Splash!*, Bill Hauritz of Woodford Folk Festival, Shelly Smith of the Nungguma Aboriginal Corporation for Women’s Business, and Terri Delaney and Florence Teillet from PAKTI (facilitators of multi-abled community theatre), among many others (see Kerr, 2002 and QCAN, 2003).
locale; it is the particular place and its (non/human) inhabitants that are revealed.

Two examples from the Sunshine Coast represent many such festivals. Linsey Pollak\textsuperscript{4} and her team exposed the subaltern diversity of place. In 2000, Linsey Pollak developed a multicultural component to the Gympie Goldrush Festival, with funding through Festivals Australia. Linsey chose Gympie precisely because of the assumptions about its beer drinking, country music culture. Large sections of community become marginalised into invisibility in such dominant stereotypes: as one example, when Linsey invited a Papua New Guinea dance group, it turned out that their relatives lived in Gympie. The 2000 Festival showed the diversity of Gympie’s hidden cultures, though rarely collectively recognised and celebrated.\textsuperscript{5}

The Splash! Festival near Maroochydore links Sunshine Coast people and the region’s environment. Splash! is a carnival of communities and waterways from the range to the sea – from many ripples to a Splash! (October 2000 Splash poster), held every second October. Small communities create their ripples in the Splash! waters over the five months leading up to the event. In 2002 for example, there were over 20 partner communities: Maroochy Waterwatch volunteers made ‘Swanitor’ (swan monitor) puppets and costumes; intellectually disabled groups made paper mache swans; Caloundra kids worked with Mooloolah Waterwatch; potters created water pots; Maroochy Council’s departmental heads made prayer flags; Noosa hearing-impaired kids made shadow puppet plays; Gubbi-Gubbi dancers performed the connections between animals and people; and Maroochy kids transformed into willy wagtails (predominantly a girl’s choice) or mudcrabs (for the boys). Splash! engaged and networked a wide range of groups, brought together in its culmination - a day of inclusive celebration and a peaceful evening as the moon rises over Chambers Island. Splash!’s coordinator, Kari, a local artist, musician, and environmentalist, was inspired by the Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival.\textsuperscript{6} Kari revisited the Kingfisher festival to be musical director and on her return, she established Splash! in association with Maroochy Waterwatch. Splash! and the Kingfisher Festival are now sister events; in 2004 the Sacred Kingfisher emblem made an appearance at Splash! whilst sculptures of the swan and frog, and a few prayer flags travelled south. Splash!’s emphasis on the river reflects the importance of ritual: Thomas Moore says, ‘To be in ritual is to be in the river … and ritual is like myth … A ritual sense gives life to the ten thousand things, to multiplicity unimaginable.’ (1983: 2-3)

Environmental and Site Specific Art

Site specific, environmental, and public art can produce place based and community sanctified objects. Some examples show its potential. In France, Jean Bojko ran 32+32=2000, in which 32 artists were wedded to 32 small villages; the wedding was

\textsuperscript{4} Other exemplars include the oft cited Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival and Lake Bolac’s Eel Festival in Victoria, the Mountains to Mangroves Festival in south-east Queensland; add your own regional variation – there is always a nearby (if hidden) localised celebration of place that includes the whole community, both human and non-human.
\textsuperscript{5} Linsey Pollak lives on the Sunshine Coast, running community workshops and giving multicultural concerts around the world. Linsey aims to bring out the music in us all – to-de-commodify the art of music. But, the current focus on audience development keeps the majority as passive consumers of musical spectacle. Opportunities for risk-taking and community music making are lost in the limited musics of the marketplace. Linsey dreams of a society that doesn’t have a word for musician, because everyone plays music (just as we don’t ‘breathe’ because we all breathe). In Music Alive (Luke Jaaniste, 1998), Linsey says:

I think that for me, music is an art form that’s got real power to bring people together, and when a community makes its own music, a musical and cultural life can be established that affects the creativity, diversity and energy of that community.

This is Linsey’s legacy: encouraging the joy of active and multicultural collaboration in the daily music of life. Linsey works to musically express the culture of the whole community and particularly less visible groups. Linsey develops community music that acknowledges and appreciates cultural diversity, because without it, community cultural change is not possible. Linsey uses the art of music to locate and express the subaltern voice, offering a new harmony to dominant tunes.

\textsuperscript{6} Festivals Australia is an Australian Commonwealth government group that seeds cultural activities on a one-off regional basis. While Gympie enjoyed the outcome of a more diverse Goldrush Festival, finding a source of repeat funding is difficult and takes up unavailable time, so the multicultural component now lies dormant.
\textsuperscript{7} The Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival is held annually in Melbourne. This festival collectively celebrates the return of the kingfisher to the restored riverine environment of inner city Brunswick. It is timed to coincide with the bird’s annual migration home. It is organised by CERES, a group that among many such environmental activities, also runs a city farm on the river to teach classes in an organic environment. Freya Mathews, writer and philosopher, is one of the organisers of the Festival. In her article on Singing up the city (2000), she says:

The Kingfisher festival brings hundreds of local performers of different ethnicity and cultural provenance – schoolchildren, dancers and artists – together with thousands of local residents, environmentalists and activists, in a cathartic, high energy celebration of place. Its dramatic re-enactment of the retreat of the kingfisher in the face of ecological holocaust and its return in response to the efforts of local people to regenerate their ‘country’ through revegetation and restoration, symbolises the beginning of a new ‘season’ of peaceful co-existence between the people and the land in this locality (www.freyamathews.com/CERES).
the first community event in a month of collaborative artistic creation finishing with a village feast. In South Korea’s ongoing YATOO, international artists create art in a public nature art park. The art incorporates both living objects and human forms, so that:

YATOO’s relationship with nature is based on traditional Korean viewpoint, and thus does not try to subjugate nature or objectify it merely as a source of utilizable materials. Themes, such as the circulation of life or stern order of nature are prominently featured in YATOO’s art. Thus YATOO’s work is both deeply natural and human, and has formed a mutually nourishing relationship between nature and man.

---

8 Thirty-two artists were invited to a rural station in France, given motorbikes to cross 90km of country so as to discover the place. They were then asked to dig graves and bury a symbol of their artist’s life: one artist, on all fours, sang his song into the grave. A granite tombstone reads: ‘Here, 32 ripe artists fell down from the trees to make love with 32 small villages’. (Now, surprisingly in rural France, tourists might stumble upon a cemetery of artist’s lives!) Artists were transformed into ‘craftsmen of common life’ allowing for a more collaborative community theatre between the population and the artists. The common activity in each village was a wedding between the artist and a villager (often the mayor). On 20 May 2000, 32 weddings took place in the region, with 9,700 actors and no spectators. These ‘plays’ suppressed spectators, demolishing the clear roles in Art of the ‘emitter’ and the ‘receiver’ (French philosopher Pierre Levi’s terms). Art becomes communication rather than commodification – ‘there is nothing to sell’ (any products, such as CDs and postcards were given away for free). The artist’s contract was to live a conjugal life with the villages, to eat in each house, and to be directed in their consequent art projects. When the work was made (Francois Davin, one of the participating artists, says ‘the children were born’), a village feast celebrated the process. The village in which Francois worked, Nane (of 101 inhabitants) now pays for 3 artists per year for 2 weeks (about $4,000), and works with contemporary art centres (asking to be associated with the village). The funding acquittal for 32+32=2000 was problematic (How many spectators? None. How much money earn? None, in fact could you give us some more?) More funding was given because the event attracted 250 media and a movie was shown on French national television. The media was not sought as publicity or spectacle; rather, it was hoped to stimulate discussion on the role of art, to ask ‘What happened here?’ and ‘What was the question?’. Jean Bojko, in his keynote speech ‘People as the central art material’ at the Creative Territories Conference in Noosa on 17 June 2005, says community art is not to solve the problem, but to point out the problem: ‘artists send signs from the lighthouse and the captain of the boat makes his own choice.’ Bojko has been involved in many fascinating projects as well as 32+32=2000; to glibly mention a few: imagining a new story by getting a village to throw coins in the river (to make the river, not the banks, rich) and the legend (a coin in the river will make you happy forever) becomes a tourist attraction; a cross-cultural project getting a famed Arab orator to read and sing Victor Hugo; an artist chef and four people each week are recorded to make a recipe book and a final conference of 52 chefs and 208 conversationists; 25 artists provide 50 old people with ‘Artist on Wheels’ and local families make films (given camera and training) of the process. Early in his anarchic community theatre career, Bojko was funded to produce a play for an opening. Instead he took the money and hired 12 poor for 3 months as professional poets (hundreds applied and the recruiting of people was already the play). 28 artists and philosophers worked with the 12 poets and 400 people came to hear the ‘factory of expression’ speak about poverty as a social and political problem. His conclusion is that this kind of art should always be a festival, rather than the sad sacrilegious whispers in galleries. As a community artist, Bojko’s (cultural and audience) question is: ‘How is Madame de société?’

8 YATOO’s name is based on Chinese characters, ya meaning field or nature and too meaning to throw or to express. This South Korean association of nature artists is based around the river, Geumgang and the city Gongju, started in 1981 by three artists to study what was then termed ‘site art’. From the early 1990s, they encouraged international exchanges and now hold a major biennial international art festival to encourage a nature friendly outlook (to contrast the more urban and human-centric stance of other Korean art). In 1995, the nature art festival involved 87 artists from 24 nations. Locals were surprised but interested, bringing ice creams and sweets to the artists and taking photos with their children. The consequent art is now in a public nature art park in Gongju. Ten years on, YATOO runs four workshops each year to mark the four seasons, inviting artists to sit in nature and find its seasonal meaning. Ko Seung-hyun, the president of YATOO, in his March 2005 letter to artists, asked: ‘How can contemporary art connect visions to the future of nature and human beings?’ Ri Eung-woo, a long-term participant, says nature is a site of creativity and disappearance, its continuous growing and dying always provides a different pleasure and interest; if you understand the eating rice (three times a day) culture, then you understand YATOO. See YATOO’s website: <www.yatoo.or.kr> and <natureartbiennale.org/eng/> accessed September 2005 and Ri Eung-woo’s presentation to the Creative Territories Conference on YATOO (19th June 2005). Ri Eung-woo is one of the better known South Korean nature artist, and has held many solo and international exhibitions of his work. Ri Eung-woo, like other South Korean nature artists often uses his body as part of the artwork statement, sometimes posing amongst rocks, lying on sand to form part of the setting sun’s path, or making hands reflect the shape of twigs. Much of Korean nature art involves living sculptures. Humans are a frequent part of the final product: body art extends the natural, a man and a cow eat grass together as animals; human heads emerge from caimns. Other animals form part of the art as well: living sea shells are placed in lines on the sand and their consequent movements back to more random patterns are photographed.

Nature is given an active part in art creations, allowing the wind to blow a large suspended brush across paper. Both an awareness of living objects and the human form are very much part of nature art in Korean philosophy. Nature and culture are strongly interconnected.

9 Bathing with Mary was a river art project organised in 2003. The Mary River is the major water source for the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast. Its coordinator, Francois Davin, drew upon his experiences in France to develop a process of artists and mentors working with landholders and farmers who bordered the river. While the Mary flows predominantly in Cooloola Shire (Gympie area), the Mary projects are run in conjunction with Noosa Council, piggybacking onto the availability of international environmental artists from The Floating Land. Four emerging artists worked with established artists to make site specific art on farmer’s land bordering the river near Federal.
artist, John Reid, created the mysterious Fishman who perhaps inhabits the rivers of southern New South Wales. Encounters are documented through John Reid’s mosaic landscape photographs, web site, on-line journal, exhibitions and lectures. John embellishes the picturesque landscape photo with the essential story of its making. In his journal entry for December 1995, John says:

Photographers are not renowned as desirable curators of the unknown. Wilderness landscape photographers, who prey on endangered places and who release their pictures to an expectant public without the story of their production, are among its most wilful violators. (<www.fishman.com.au/html/dom2a.html> accessed July 2005)

Fishman adds the potent gift of mystery that transforms the “specimen” of nature to a symbolic myth. The fishman story acts as agent in developing a sense of place, a pride in the southeastern NSW region and its rivers. It engages us in the well-being of rivers and forests. John Reid says (from the travelling show’s catalogue):

I knew all things were a construct of the mind: yet, my mind had constructed in Fishman something that knew me before I knew myself. Through my obsession with this creature, I discovered the power of silence. I discovered the power of advocacy. … I endured scepticism armed with nothing more than human testament. I attracted as believers people who value imagination as much as knowledge. I aggravated as detractors people who have been suffocated by reason. I repelled in twitches scientists who had lost their sense of wonder … I elevated Fishman from fact/specimen to fiction/symbol. I collaborated with journalists to build Fishman as super media myth … put to work in campaigns to save old growth forests; in promotions to save national parks. I have drafted an ethic pertaining to photographic

Wendy McGrath made ‘Mary’s bed’ using a coverlet of sewed camphor laurel leaves. Susanne McLean set up a place in which viewer/participants could write letters to Mary. Francois Davin created a white painted skeleton canoe of tree branches, hung at the height of the river’s original course to remember ghostly pasts. Sally Spencer mourned the rareness of the Mary River Turtle. She took bones of the turtle to local schools, asking children to replicate them in white porcelain clay, while discussing the environmental issues of rivers and rare animals at the same time. The bones – some fired and some not – were piled into a circular midden (the white bones gleamed like a spotlight in the midst of the dark forest floor) and white square flags of silk, painted with Japanese-style turtles were hung around the bones. Sally Spencer engaged many people in both the creation and the viewing of the work and it was developed into a larger body of work touring local sites and galleries. Bathing with Mary led to the Regional Arts Development funding of a later project, Farming in Mary in 2005, in which 10 Floating Land international artists were hosted by 10 farms to create sculptures from materials found on the land that celebrated the river. Four local artists also created sculptures on the four bridges in the Valley. A number of towns along the Mary (Imbil, Kandanga, Dagun, and Amamoor) each held collaborative celebrations to mark the winter solstice, dance, workshop, tour, eat with, and farewell, the artists over the last week in June 2005 in which the sculptures were on display.

John Reid is a landscape photographer and senior lecturer at the Canberra School of Art. He is interested in the visual arts as a catalyst for social change and developing a sense of place through cultural identity. John has also notably done artwork using defaced Australian currency, and performance pieces where his naked body becomes just another roadkill. He is the head of the ‘National Environment Bank’, issuing artistic landscapes as money to raise funds for environment organisations. John is also involved in developing a proposal called Engaging Visions taking 6 regional areas across southeast Australia and encouraging long-term relationships between visual artists and local communities. This proposal follows the success of ‘Special Forever’, a ten year community cultural development project of the Murray Darling Basin Commission.

The Fishman information comes from the website < www.fishman.com.au > and from an interview with and presentation by John Reid on 28 July 2005.

In January 1988, John Reid, Mark Boxsell, and Jenny Hillman went on a field trip with their new acoustically sensitive automatic orbital scan camera. They left the camera in the Wombeyan Caves and when developed, one photo dimly showed the bottom and legs of what they termed ‘Fishman’. They returned and gradually worked out Fishman inhabited the Deua and Shoalhaven watercourses, but only seemed to become visible through the camera. Alone at the Mongarlowe River, John Reid blacked out and the camera recorded Fishman again. Han Tran and Mark Fulkner also became involved in the search. While there was no evidence found in the upper reaches of the Murrumbidgee, John met Fishman face to face for the first time in the Murray. He decided that the Buddawangs (a national park) was ‘Fishman’s middle-earth’. Jenny Hillman lost interest in Fishman, declaring him ‘yet another white male incursion into the landscape’. John continued obsessed. John argued we need imagination as much as we need knowledge, citing the example of the Loch Ness monster. By walking in the wilderness, we heighten culture, showing how the view from the edge becomes a wilderness of greater mystery when seen as a non-human space. John refused the support of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, because he feared their science and technology would remove the mystery. Mark Boxsell left to go overseas, but he never arrived, his disappearance reported by New South Wales police. John thinks, in his last encounter, that Fishman’s face looked like Mark’s, now more alive on a journey in an environment unmediated by artefact. John says, ‘a journey into wilderness is a journey from which one never recovers’.

The mythology of Fishman engages and has attracted ongoing media interest. John promotes this in three ways: mosaics of 10x8 photos record the sumptuous detail of place, requiring careful examination to catch glimpses of the fishman (a travelling exhibition called Fishman of SE Australia - An Oral/Visual work); a 45 minute narrative on discovering/encountering the fishman (its presentation is summarised above); and, mass media and web extension. The web site documents journal entries and photos from the late 1980s and early 1990s about the fishman, creating an environmental philosophy of the arts. The fishman went public in September 1992 on Late Night Live and the 7:30 Report of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the story is still attracting media interest. On the 5th May 2005, the local ABC’s show, South East Mornings, covered the story as ‘Myth or reality? It’s all a bit fishy’.

TAMSIN KERR
practice in wilderness that is responsive to conservation concerns. Again, my art and teaching practice change.

Fishman represents an artistic and creative process to imagine and embody the wild and the irrational. The products are as much about social and environment change as they are about photos, websites, and exhibitions. The objects are a necessary part in the construction of the mythic and fearful story; the story celebrates and elevates specific details of a loved region and tells the cultural story of creativity. The human/animal/place of the fishman epitomises an individual’s Landscape Memoir. A society’s Landscape Memoir is often expressed through its public art, such as Sydney’s *Edge of Trees*. This is an example of a site-specific sculpture developed through an architecturally driven public art process for the entryway to the Museum of Sydney. In *Seeing the First Australians*, Rhys Jones (1985: 185) wrote:

The discoverers struggling through the surf were met on the beaches by other people looking at them from the edges of the trees. Thus the same landscape perceived by the newcomers as alien, hostile or having no coherent form, was to the indigenous people their home, a familiar place, the inspiration of dreams.

Curator, Peter Emmett picked up on ‘the edge of trees’ as a profound symbolic meeting place; the concept for the artwork was born. It was conceived with great knowledge about the history and the many layers of the site: originally a grove of trees, it became the first Governor’s residence and then the location for Sydney’s Museum. Like much of Australia, the place is contested ground: it combines both Indigenous and settler histories. The public art was commissioned:

... to create a counterpoint that speaks for other ways of knowing and remembering this place – the organic, the Indigenous, the romantic, the mutable ... a shared and contested site of environmental and cultural memory: alive, resonating with ghosts and demons, hopes and dreams; not settled at all ... a palpable imaginary place. (Emmett, 2000: 23)

The final award-winning work by Fiona Foley and Janet Laurence is many tall timber sculptures designed to be walked amongst with their recorded soundscapes (in Eora and English) and engraved texts. They reflect the skyscrapers of today, the building footprints from both the archaeological evidence and the present Museum, and the possibilities for a future reconciliation (as well as the edge of trees). It has become “the most loved sculpture in Sydney, probably Australia” (selection committee member, Joan Kerr, 2000: 43), representing ‘a more complex, layered, and inclusive understanding of the importance of place’ (architect, Richard Johnson, 2000: 98). It is, in the words of Janet Laurence, ‘a reflective space of both darkness and light’ (2000: 101).

**The Importance of *Art now***

Celebrating the unique particularity of place belies more mainstream notions, such as the capitalist assumption of the generic sameness of place. Place based festivals and site-specific art celebrate a community’s embeddedness and forge alliances with the Other of both culture and the non-human. Place based community cultural activities celebrate the many ways communities imagine co-habitation to build a regional culture’s landscape memoir.

This is not audience development, but community embeddedness and cohesiveness: an *art now*, not an *Arts later* approach. Subaltern theorist, Chakrabarty (1997, 2001) says it is a ‘democracy now’ rather than a ‘democracy later’ model that respects and expresses the subaltern voice. ‘Democracy later’ is associated with notions of history; it is an expert and colonialisat approach that believes people have to be educated before they are ready for democracy. Voting will only be effective after people are educated in politics, history, and democratic processes. ‘Democracy now’ instead believes that enfranchising people is the process of change. Democratisation lies in community memory; people already hold the skills and ability; they simply need to wrest access.

‘Democracy now’ assumes extant (or latent) knowledge (inexpert and memory based as it may be) that is equivalent to the prerequisite further education of the ‘Democracy later’ model. ‘Now’ assumes an inherent wisdom, ‘later’ presumes a lack and ignorance.13

In creativity terms, this distinction could be applied to community cultural development and the

---

13 This *democracy later* theory is demonstrated through an example of the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard’s push for citizenship tests in which he proposes that to become a democratic member of the community, migrants first need to demonstrate an education in Australian culture. The question of who defines or what constitutes Australian culture is a moot point, let alone whether there is any one generic Australian culture. Regional variations and different cultural groups across Australia make general definitions beyond that of geography or of universals which might apply to any country, difficult if not impossible. Officially, the debate is not scheduled for the Australian Parliament until September 2007. But debates on Australian national identity have been going on at least as long as from the creation of the federated Australian nation in 1901.
arts. Collective creative activities parallel the ‘democracy now’ model of change. It assumes that an artistic capability (and hence also appreciation) lies in every diverse participant; creativity is latent, not learnt. The ‘democracy now’ of art assumes that given tools and access, anyone can express their community’s culture and aspirations within an artistic format. But when creative outputs are ignored or rejected, arts administrators turn to audience development programs in the hope that greater visual literacy will, in time, improve art appreciation. Arts administrators transform perceptions of community from ‘creative participant’ to ‘receptive audience’. This common official approach fits with Arts later; art will only have its real impact on a community’s culture after the community has been educated to read and value the recognised artist’s message. For the same reasons, funding programs in the arts often aim to promote individual artists’ professional development, so artists are better able to express their message. The alternative art now model seems to work best, unsurprisingly, with collective art processes that are removed from government, away from the institutionalised and expert centre and often independent of ongoing Government funding. In contrast, government auspiced groups frequently use an Arts later model to justify their resource expenditure: either as some form of professional development for artists or to educate art appreciation.

An engaged place based art now experience requires story, object, and landscape site. It is this triptych that creates the most powerful of metaphors. However, in western society these are often separated and placed within the institutionalised Arts later expert context of museums and galleries. Historical objects – particularly as defining items of national or local identity - have conservatively been the preserve of museums. And contemporary objects d’art are found on the walls of galleries. Both reflect or (less commonly) drive the cultural metaphors of contemporary identity. Nick Thomas (2001) asks, how might we overcome such powerful institution’s mock re-contextualisation of the object within a smooth unitary (and often assimilative) narrative? The endeavour of museums is to tell better - more emotional, more spiritual, more imaginative, more engaging - stories about the object. But unless the object has been given context through a multiple voicing or curating, it remains within the dominant narrative of national identity. And without an in-situ placing, objects lose much of their connective power.

Perhaps art now might reanimate official objects by returning them to their place of origin (or place of use, association, or collection). There, objects re-engage communities and become charged with additional meaning. Communities tell new stories about the object - both previously unknown histories and memories, and contemporary practices motivated by the object’s presence. The object is enlivened, making stronger links between its community of place and a more national identity. Alternatively, place based objects might be (re)created by artists to service a particular community’s needs to ‘document’ their story. This re-contextualisation is accepted for indigenous artefacts, and there are a number of contemporary examples of objects returning to their communities and place of use.

The process can: engage the community in the identity-collecting work of museums, deconstruct the national through an emphasis on the regional, and strengthen the role of objects as holders of cultural value.

Traditionally in Indigenous society, objects were a critical component of celebrations. In Western Cape York, the Wik people (made famous through Native Title judgements) have traditionally made ceremonial sculptures, in clay and more recently wood, as centrepieces of dances. These tell important stories of different totemic creatures and mythic events that affirm both law and trustori in their culture, as well as explaining the Dreaming creation of the landscape. In the Northern Territory, the Yolngu made their ceremonial objects out of wood ‘so hard that they will gap the blades of steel axes’, so they would not rot when stored in the mud of sacred billabongs (John Rudder, 1999: 14-15). In non-Indigenous and more cross-cultural community traditions, objects also play an important role. From examples here, paper-mache black swans appear at the Splash! celebration in southeast Queensland and then travel to Melbourne’s Merri Creek. Environmental and public artists create site-specific objects to express the voices of the community and the land. There is even a role for the electronic object

---

14 It is tempting to simply use the term community art (or community cultural development) instead of art/democracy now. However much of community art (despite its rhetoric) parallels an Arts later model, and corporate or mainstream art practices sometimes offer a better modeling of art now.

15 This is a key reason why community cultural development (art now) and individual artist development (Arts later) should not be lumped together in the same funding package (as they have for example in Regional Arts Development Fund of the state agency of Arts Queensland) - they have fundamentally different goals and operate under conflicting paradigms.

16 Although, some museums have tried to reposition themselves over the last few years to be more than holders of objects and to move beyond covert biographies of collectors.

17 Examples include the returning of Aboriginal bones to regional keeping places or the National Museum of Australia’s re-place-ment of possum-skin cloaks to their maker’s community (possum-skin cloaks travelled with a curator to their making place and new cloaks were made by the place community).

18 Films of such (modified) celebrations were recorded in 1962 (see Sutton, 2003: 54-59).
and its representations through the internet (thereby overcoming issues of conservation and singularity, as well as accessibility). Place can be represented through story, mythology, the visual and performing arts, as well as through histories, geographies, geologies and maps. It is objects treated within a participative art now approach (rather than the educative Arts later of institutions) that are the most engaging. It is the accessible format of celebrations in active and particular places that combines both story and object to embody and enliven the heart of community identity.

The inclusive community wisdom of an art now approach is skilled at celebrating the subaltern. The act of celebrating an active landscape changes our cultural discourse of resource driven, human economic dependency upon the land. Positive celebrations of an active place change notions of the human environment from a passive dwindling resource to an active emotive influence. The discourse of scientific and logical predictions of doom has been an unsuccessful agent for change. Communities want more engaging, wilder, metaphors. The inclusive approach of art now exposes indigenous and other, always-present, subaltern elements of the wild, and evokes memory and emotion rarely expressed in expert constructions of nature/human relations. This is the role of art now: to draw upon the emotional memories and mythologies of wild and muddier places, and to create cultural change that reshapes social and environmental problems by instigating new discourses of the imagination. Art now allows communities to inhabit the space between physical reality and creative imagination, to imagine, construct, and celebrate the place previously considered as Other. Community creativity builds human-animal-nature coalitions that reconcile both environments and cultures.

But, the stated philosophy behind much community art continues to reflect the Arts later audience development rather than an art now community cultural expression; in funding applications and acquittals, justifications are as much about community education as community participation. So long as art acts as educator of culture rather than servant to community, it continues in the Arts later model. The local and the regional are subservient to an external imposition of ideals. For example, environmental art is often promoted as a process that encourages people to nature (developing an audience for the environment and perhaps for art), and is consequently limited by its romantic expression of ‘the natural’. But a site is more than its natural component; understanding the cultural particulars requires a long-term inhabitation of place (or a way to access, facilitate, and translate such local knowledge). Otherwise, the particularised wisdom and memory of each specific community is lost amidst generic practice. 32 + 32 = 2000 offers a structured challenge to elitist art practice (the artist’s life is buried and the artist marries the community); it demonstrates that the strength of villages lie in their sense of local identity, rather than in how it is expressed by the non-resident professional artist. The Fishman inhabits the community and the environment that is the subject of his mythmaking; his exposed art practice approaches the animal/human/land coalition as an indigenous inhabitant. Similarly, YATOO’s South Korean artists include themselves in the picture; the human animal brings culture back into nature.

Conclusion

Art as a whole does not automatically lead us to the wild. It is the belittled art now (in its festivals and community cultural development activities) that underlies and underlines our mainstream development. It is the collective collaborations of folk that hold the most promise (and the most banality) in expressing the metaphors of tomorrow. The power of community memory is that we remember (or re-invent) our wild connections to place: relying upon the mythic as much as the factual, upon the arts as much as the sciences. Wild thinking creates this archaeology of community memory, and allows it to be more inclusive. Communities approximate wild thought through the creativity of the arts. Jiří Zemánek (2003: 14-16) says it is:

... creative and compassionate perception that offers us a key to enter “the living world” ... the human “I” is much more all embracing than our rationally contemplating ego ... the loss of memory about our own roots, the memory of humanity, our nature ... they prefer participation and collaboration with nature ... the intact self-forming nature. This is about the voice of the archetypal wilderness in us that cannot simply be wiped out of the world like a tropical rainforest. This is reflected not only in the ecological movements, but it asks us the fundamental question that regards the quality of life, the character of our creativity.

---

19 By the time art is economically successful, it has been transformed into wallpaper art and blockbuster movies. It is capital A Art individually undertaken and popularly celebrated – such Art can only ever represent the tired metaphor of yesterday, rather than lie beneath the winds of change.

20 Jiří Zemánek is the Czech organiser of both a 2003 international conference on ‘Wilderness as the Phenomenon of Integral Culture’ and an exhibition on ‘Wilderness – Nature, Soul, Language’.
Art now puts us in the mud of the liminal between cultures, a place to experience authentic (as opposed to appropriated or reconstructed) culture, a place embodying a more active landscape. While the celebration of one particular place can be derided as local sentiment, a framework based on many such celebrations using bioregional and subaltern theory, offers an understanding of regional creativity as an important social movement; one-off ‘quirky’ events are united into a cultural movement for the wild.

Site specific art and celebration requires a cultural emphasis of community memory, an exposing of the artifact in art, and an acknowledgement of the human in the construction of the natural, as the work of the Fishman aptly demonstrates. Art now celebrates both negative and positive human relationships to nature, as expressed in the Edge of Trees. And best practice environmental art understands the impossibly of a separate natural, as the Korean YATOO epitomises.

Without the cultural, nature art loses the details of site specificity and the connection to its community. Communities remember the multi-cultured and full history of a site; their collaborations reflect the negative emotions of the wild as much as the positive of the environment. The value of voicing memories of place lies in their site specificity, the naming of the whole site, and a landscape memoir approach. The Edge of Trees is just one example that points the way to more complex and participative existing practices. Jean Bojko creates participants (rather than audiences) from the local community and its culture. YATOO and The Fishman create myth using their own bodies to comment on the notion of an artificially separate nature. Bathing with Mary celebrates the natural and cultural history as well as community memories of the Mary River site. Linsey Pollack brings together both settler and multicultural histories of a specific place through music. Splash! gives voice to minority and inexpert groups in a telling of land that embraces both indigenous and present day understandings of place. Such environmental art and festival avoids the romanticised nature good/culture bad dualism by embracing (fearful) history and culture as much as environment; the human becomes part of the natural. Art now is the practice of refusing despair in full community memory of both the positive and negative interactions of one locale.

This wild is lost amidst the discourses of both the nostalgic and the logical, just as the regional is lost amidst nationalism and globalisation. The specific is lost to the generic. In giving dominant status to science, economics, and history, we lose sight of the critical spirit of place; the wild is (again) made subaltern. By redescribing the wild as wilderness (separate, uninhabited, and pristine), we misplace its culturally inhabited essence of locale. As Eastburn & Milligan (1998) summarise, ‘The landscape is a repository of our culture, as well as a natural resource.’ For Pierre Nora (1989: 8), memory is living community, epitomised by festivals, whereas history can only ever be reconstruction. Tim Cresswell reminds us, ‘Place and memory are inevitably intertwined … public memory is inscribed in the landscape’ (2004: 85). Emotion and memory engage where science and history separate.

Rather than nationalistic jingoism that aims to be exclusively relaxed and comfortable, we could use regional celebrations of place memory to be inclusively wild and creative. The wild continues to lie within us, beneath these dominant paradigms: metaphor, memoir, mythology, and memory are where the wild lies; collaborative arts and inclusive place based creativity are how to find it. It is those arts that admit to more complex and messy histories that can unearth and re-surface the wild, and thereby transform the metaphors we live by. As Greg Dening (1996: 96 and 97) says: ‘The living need a history disturbing enough to change the present. … The history of places, especially in places of cross-cultural encounters, will take as much imagination as science to see.’ The best of community culture shows why and how we embed ourselves in place and how critical the regional and the wild are for long-term cultural and environmental sustainability.

---

21 This does not reduce the binary of nature/culture to simply culture, which as Plumwood says is highly problematic; she suggests ‘working out new terms for both the relata, both nature and culture’ (2001:26). In the meantime, I admit some culpability in ‘the post-modern tendency to reduce nature to culture’ (Plumwood, ibid), but only if culture is equally reduced (or enlarged by) nature. This is David Abram’s ‘more-than-human world’ (1996) and it is also Plumwood’s goal, reflecting my own desire for contextual and negotiated relationships of communication, balanced dialogue, and mutual adjustment between species, starting with our own, in what would be, in the old terms, a liberatory blending or meeting of nature and culture. (Plumwood, 2001:32)
The best of art now creates environmental objects and community performances that successfully celebrate more complex human/nature coalitions. The challenging anarchy of an art now approach epitomises the critical importance of the idea of the wild for reconciling cultures and re-inhabiting nature.

References

Barnhill, David Landis (ed) 1999 At home on the earth, Becoming native to our place, A multicultural anthology University of California Press
Campbell, Joseph 1972 Myths to Live By Penguin
Cresswell, Tim 2004 Place A Short Introduction Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Oxford, Melbourne
Dysart, Dinah (ed) 2000 Edge of the Trees: A sculptural installation at the Museum of Sydney by Janet Laurence and Fiona Foley from the concept by Peter Emmett Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney
Emmett, Peter 2000 in Dysart, Dinah (ed) 2000 Edge of the Trees Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Sydney
Kastner, Jeffrey and Brian Wallis (eds) 1998 Land and Environmental Art Phaidon, London
Kerr, Joan 2000 in Dysart, Dinah (ed) 2000 Edge of the Trees Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Sydney
Kerr, Tamsin 2002 Community Cultural Development frameworks (Stage I of QCAN 2003 Insights) Queensland Community Arts Network, Brisbane
Kerr, Tamsin 2004 “As if Bunyips mattered…” in Elizabeth Hartrick et al (eds) new talents write/ up Australian Research Institute and University of Queensland Press (Journal of Australian Studies 80): 14-27
Kerr, Tamsin 2005 “Pan place, Coyote space, and Bunyip country: planning for wild-ness and ecological imagination in the creative city” ISOCARP Congress ‘Making spaces for the Creative Economy’ Bilbao, Oct 2005
Laurence, Janet 2000 in Dysart, Dinah (ed) 2000 Edge of the Trees Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Sydney
Mathews, Freya 2000 “CERES: Singing up the city” in Philosophy, Activism, Nature 1: 5-15
Mathews, Freya 2005 Reinhhabiting Reality: Towards a recovery of culture University of New South Wales Press
Mitchell, John Hanson 1984 Ceremonial Time: Fifteen Thousand Years on One Square Mile Anchor Doubleday, New York
Mitchell, WJT (ed) 1994 Landscape and Power University of Chicago Press
Moore, Thomas 1983 Rituals of the Imagination Pegasus Press, Dallas
QCAN Queensland Community Arts Network (Judith Pippen and Tamsin Kerr (Stage 1)) 2003 Insights: community, culture and local government Queensland Community Arts Network, Brisbane
About the Author

Dr Tamsin Kerr

Tamsin Kerr is interested in cross-cultural (animal) mythology, landscape memoir, and community memory in imagining, planning, and celebrating place. Creative community arts and festivals re-embed us in nature and reconcile cultures. Previously a senior environment and social policy bureaucrat, Tamsin now lives in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, writing and researching under the view of the mountains. She has just submitted her PhD looking at the role of metaphor, memoir, mythology, and memory in community imaginings and celebrations of place. She runs workshops and seminars on creativity in strategic and institutional planning and lives with the well-known furniture designer maker, Ross Annels and their two creative daughters.
THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF DIVERSITY IN ORGANISATIONS, COMMUNITIES AND NATIONS

EDITORS
Mary Kalantzis, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA.
Paul James, RMIT University, Australia

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD
Ien Ang, University of Western Sydney, Australia.
Samuel Aroni, University of California, Los Angeles, USA.
Duane Champagne, University of California, Los Angeles, USA.
Guosheng Y. Chen, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.
Jock Collins, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia.
Bill Cope, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA.
Heather Marion D’Cruz, Deakin University, Geelong, Australia.
James Early, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, USA.
Denise Egéa-Kuehne, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, USA.
Amareswar Galla, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.
Barry Gills, University of Newcastle, UK.
Margot Hovey, Curriculum Designer and Writer, Toronto and Montréal, Canada.
Jackie Huggins University of Queensland, Australia.
Andrew Jakubowicz, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia.
Ha Jingxiong, Central University of Nationalities, Beijing, China.
Peter McLaren, University of California, Los Angeles, USA.
Joe Melcher, Xavier University of Louisiana, New Orleans, USA.
Greg Meyjes, Solidaris Intercultural Services L.L.C, Falls Church, VA, USA.
Walter Mignolo, Duke University, USA.
Brendan O’Leary, University of Pennsylvania, USA.
Aihiwa Ong, University of California, Berkeley, USA.
Peter Phipps, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.
Ronald Prins, Managing Director, Bos en Lommer Neighbourhood Council, The Netherlands.
Peter Sellars, Theatre, Opera and Film Director.
Michael Shapiro, University of Hawai‘i, USA.
David S. Silverman, Valley City State University, North Dakota, USA.
Martijn F.E. Stegge, Diversity Platform, City of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
Geoff Stokes, Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia.
Terry Threadgold, Cardiff University, Wales, UK.
Milliani Trask, Indigenous Expert to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for the Economic Council of the UN Assembly, Hawai‘i, USA.
Marij Urlings, Dean, School of Health Inholland University, Amsterdam-Diemen, The Netherlands.
Joanna van Antwerpen, Director, Research and Statistics, City of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
Grethe van Geffen, Seba Cultuurmanagement, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
Rob Walker, Keele University, UK.
Ning Wang, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China.

Please visit the Journal website at http://www.Diversity-Journal.com for further information:
- ABOUT the Journal including Scope and Concerns, Editors, Advisory Board, Associate Editors and Journal Profile
- FOR AUTHORS including Publishing Policy, Submission Guidelines, Peer Review Process and Publishing Agreement

SUBSCRIPTIONS
The Journal offers individual and institutional subscriptions. For further information please visit http://ijd.cgpublisher.com/subscriptions.html. Inquiries can be directed to subscriptions@commongroundpublishing.com

INQUIRIES
Email: cg-support@commongroundpublishing.com