



UNESCO Observatory
Multi-Disciplinary eJournal in
the Arts

Volume 6 | Issue 1 | 2020

CREATING UTOPIA

Imagining and Making Futures
Art, Architecture and Sustainability

Lorne Sculpture Biennale Inaugural Conference 2018

Editor | Lindy Joubert

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ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal that promotes multidisciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence. Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

ISSN 1835 - 2776

Published in Australia

Published by

The Graduate School of Education

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The University of Melbourne, Parkville,

Victoria 3010

COVER IMAGE

Leon Walker

Photography at

The Lorne Sculpture

Biennale 2018

EDITOR'S LETTER

The sixth Lorne Sculpture Biennale, March 2018, was a vibrant festival celebrating the best of Australian and international sculpture. The stunning Lorne foreshore became a picturesque pedestal for a curated landscape of sculptures, presented alongside an exciting program of events devoted to pressing global issues of nature and endangerment, under the distinguished curation and visionary direction of Lara Nicholls, curator at the NGA Canberra. The inaugural conference, *Creating Utopia Imagining and Making Futures: Art, Architecture and Sustainability* was held at Qdos Gallery, Lorne, as part of the Biennale's curatorial theme of 'Landfall, Nature + Humanity + Art'. Keynote and invited speakers – conservationists, visual artists, architects and academics – reflected on issues and processes of social and environmental degradation, transformation and regeneration. The presentations came from a diverse and thought-provoking range of viewpoints offering innovative, and well researched future directions to the world's mounting problems.

Creating Utopia examined the green revolution – greater than the industrial revolution and happening faster than the digital revolution. The speakers were introduced by the inimitable Design Professor, Chris Ryan, whose elegant and thoughtful comments to each presenter added a distinctive contribution. Mona Doctor-Pingel, an architect from Auroville, India delivered her keynote address, 'Journeying to Oneness through architecture in Auroville, South India', discussing the natural and built landscapes found in the unique, social utopia that is Auroville, with an emphasis on experimental building techniques using local materials and craft principles, inspired by biology. I would like to thank all the presenters for their valuable contributions and this issue, volume 6, issue 1 of the 'UNESCO journal, multi-disciplinary research in the arts' www.unescoejournal.com is testament to their important research and life's work.

The conference was considered by all who attended to be a wonderful success. Inspired by the beautiful setting amidst the gum trees and singing birds surrounding the Qdos Gallery. Sincere thanks to all who attended, the excellent list of speakers, the team - Graeme Wilkie OAM for his overall, tireless support; Lara Nicholls the LSB curator for her helpful ideas and professionalism; Gillian Oliver for the superb food; Laurel Guymer, the behind the scenes angel of 'La Perouse' at Lorne who managed the bookings and accommodation and our diligent rapporteur, Jeremy Laing. The excellent Deakin intern student managed all computer glitches, problems and presentation hurdles. A very sincere thankyou to Evelyn Firstenberg who generously and professionally edited all the conference papers and most importantly, a very special thankyou to Seraphina Nicholls who has tirelessly and superbly designed and managed the collation and publication of this special issue. These people and others, the LSB committee and particularly Deakin University who gave generously for the LSB Education Program, enabled the 'Creating Utopia' conference to make a significant contribution to issues relating to climate change, environmental and global futures and the role of the arts and sustainable planning.

Lindy Joubert

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Flux, Flow, Self and the World: Finding and trusting the voice of connection

Gregory Burgess
Architect

ABSTRACT

The world is one thing governed by reciprocity. Everything, including ourselves, is connected, interdependent and in relationship with everything else in a flux and flow of energy, movement and consciousness. Our personal biographies are important as our experience flows between our life and our creative work. The crises and challenges of our lives provide moments of awakening and deepening of consciousness resulting in a more responsively human architecture. We bring together our inner life and our work in the world, with our soul's search for wholeness. Process is always important. For example in working collaboratively on country with indigenous communities, a willingness to listen quietly and deeply, to sense into, improvise, and to initiate creatively and in a timely way, with the events, questions and opportunities of each day. This willingness creates a shared middle space for connection, trust, synchronicity and revealed meaning to manifest. Connectedness and relatedness lead to restoring and preserving, healing and redeeming the ethical relationships that tie us to each other and to our earthly environment. As artists and architects, we are called to respond to contemporary issues with greater depth and fluidity, rather than being preoccupied with aesthetic composition and bending to the tyranny of fashion. There is a need to re-envision space as a dynamic vehicle for our evolving consciousness. In our own interior space, our flux and flow of personal and creative crisis call on us to face and brave the darkness of uncertainty to find our own light

The world is one thing governed by reciprocity. There is consciousness in everything – God might be characterised as the development impulse in everything. Everything, including ourselves, is connected, interdependent and in relationship with everything else in a flux and flow of energy, movement and consciousness. The truth, beauty and fragility of this was brought home to us with the first photographs taken from Voyager I, looking back to the earth from space. Carl Sagan describes a memorable image of our time:

“Consider again that dot [Earth]. That’s here. That’s home. That’s us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every ‘superstar’, every ‘supreme leader’, every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there – on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.”¹

The earth is both home to our entire human civilisation – our home – and a tiny participant in the vast cosmos. As we near the earth, perhaps viewing it from the window of an aircraft, we become aware of the clouds and atmosphere, the flux and flow of weather, and our own place as creative contributors to the unfolding story.

Our buildings can be in a living conversation with people, place and spirit. Responsiveness and adaptability are helpful human qualities to weave into the flow of this conversation. Rudolf Steiner, the Austrian philosopher and spiritual scientist, once suggested that because buildings destroy or sacrifice part of the earth, sky and water system in their making, they could, perhaps, in their construction and use, redeem themselves by offering a healing quality to the world.² When we place a building in a particular landscape, we try to engage sensitively and sympathetically with that place, so that the building, even though recently introduced, feels like it belongs – flows with the natural topography and local ecosystems; complements the textures, colours and moods; responds to the climate; becomes an active participant and a positive contributor to life. We think of the way a plant shows innate intelligence and wisdom as it adapts to, and metamorphoses in, its microclimate, or the manner in which water streams when unimpeded, or eddies around an obstacle, always finding its way, changing its patterns.

A river estuary, whether seen from the air or up close, shows these patterns of flux and flow – pulsing rhythms of resistance and release. At times, when through carelessness and exploitation it becomes choked and toxic with waste, repair and healing are needed. Careful observation and deep listening help to discern what is required to clear, clean and reconnect and to maintain a healthy self-regulating environment. The estuary of the Adyar River at Chennai, Tamil Nadu, is an example of a drastically degraded natural system in the process of healing to a remarkable degree with ecological, educational and artistic intention. It has re-established its natural rhythm so that birds and fish have returned, and its meeting of fresh and salt water are again in dynamic balance.³

This flux and flow of natural systems includes us. There is great indigenous wisdom in Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann's notion of Dadirri or deep listening – a contemplative offering or healing gift to Western culture as a way of connecting empathically with each other and to the world.

“To know me is to breathe with me, to breathe with me is to listen deeply, to listen deeply is to connect.”⁴

There is a helpful and healing patience, peace, tenderness and care in this rhythmic breathing, a chance to hear the voice of connection in the silence.

Architecture connects – mediates – our body, soul and spirit with the cosmos. Light and gravity, spirit and matter are in play. A dynamic exchange is taking place: the mysterious creative process of materialising spirit and spiritualising matter.

Our first spatial experience is the womb. We are born into the world. A separation occurs, an exclusion, creating a longing in us to return to this state of unity or wholeness. The journey of return needs to be taken consciously. Through life experience, we gain a wider understanding of who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going. A picture shared by numerous cultures is that we descend from Spirit and are born into the world – embodied and ensouled in the material world. We live our life learning what it is to be human; we die and return to Spirit – a breathing in and breathing out. There is an enigmatic Icelandic etching on reindeer bone of a storyteller with one eye open, one eye shut, indicating the wisdom of remembering that the two worlds of spirit and matter, the inner and the outer, co-exist and interplay within the whole. This view doesn't have popular support in our secular and materialist world, creating fear, fragmentation and alienation.

Architecture's origins are in nature, the body and the soul, connecting spirit and matter, inside and outside. The tree is also a mediator, both rooted into the living earth and reaching for the light, with its roots, trunk, branches and leaves in constant exchange between earth and cosmos. The need to keep connecting our inner world and the outer world in a living relationship for the health of both, is expressed in a verse attributed to Goethe:

“Oh, I who long to grow

I look outside myself

and the tree inside me grows.”

Can an attitude of reverence, empathy, openness and inner quiet help to develop capacity for giving and receiving, for care and relationship with others, nature and the wider world? This requires consistent inner work and an evolving mindful awareness of our selves and our responsibility to the world. Our inner work – our ways of gathering ourselves through contemplation, meditation and other practices – is not given much attention in our education. Nor do we consider our full beings as body, soul and spirit.

Louis Sullivan, the great American pioneer architect of organic architecture, had some helpful insights into sympathy as an integrated feeling intelligence to open up a living relationship with our creative processes and potential for making a responsive and healing architecture.

“Sympathy implies exquisite vision; the power to receive as well as to give; a power to enter into communion with living and with lifeless things; to enter into a unison with nature’s powers and processes; to observe – in a fusion of identities – Life everywhere at work – ceaselessly, silently – abysmal in meaning, mystical in its creative urge in myriad pullulation of identities and their outward forms.⁵”

Architectural education could benefit by extending research, understanding and practice to explore this approach, and to encourage our deeper connection with the world and with nature in order to contribute to a more human architecture.

As human beings, we experience life-cycles of expansion and contraction, crisis and release, flux and flow, suffering and joy. If we can gather courage from our suffering, we can use our work, our art and our creative imagination as exploratory means for transformation, understanding and healing, nurturing the potential for personal development and social renewal.

I recall a period in my early to mid-thirties when I experienced a particularly difficult series of crises – I had a long-term relationship breakup, and my brother had suicided. Around this time, I was invited to exhibit my work with some friends, colleagues and fellow architects: Peter Crone, Norman Day, Maggie Edmond and Peter Corrigan (Edmond & Corrigan). This caused another crisis. Going public with my work after being in private practice for seven years, with neither a strong sense of my work’s worth or meaning, nor of my own sense of self, I was very anxious. In an attempt to free my blockages I decided to write in order to make sense of what I had been doing and to decide how to present my work in this exhibition. I wrote, in a flow of consciousness style, everything I could think of that interested me: what mattered to me, what I felt, my questions, doubts and hopes. This seemed to unlock something.

It opened my heart, mind and will. I was in flux and flow again with a fresh source of direction and purpose. I had found, and felt I could trust, my inner voice of connection for this important transition in my life, personally and professionally. I felt, and could see how, my inner life and my vocation as an architect could be integrated through personal development as a social and healing art. The poster for this exhibition had plans and drawings of seven years of buildings on one side, and a small image of me with 'Towards Integration' emblazoned below me. The front of the poster displayed images of the model of a recent house. The images wheeled like eagles over a black background, with the generating geometry for the house depicted in white.

At the gallery, there were a number of rooms for each of the practices to exhibit. There was also an empty room upstairs with a window and a fireplace. I had a strong sense that I should use this room to lay out my foolscap sheets of writing in concentric circles. Visitors could walk over the pages to read them if they were interested. Some commentators were critical of this decision, considering it indulgent to include such personal reflections, but I felt that it was important to show that I had been through a difficult process of liberating myself from a blockage in creative consciousness. I wanted to declare that I saw this as something to share – that architecture could be and should be about life, about the soul's struggle with that life. I wanted to demonstrate that architecture could hold and express the complexities, contradictions and transformations coming from these life encounters.

My writing, in essence, was about a search for integration, for wholeness, for healing through architecture, to reconcile the polarities of life. It revealed to me that humour, pathos and tragedy all have their place here. I regard this exhibition as a fulcrum in my life and work. From this time, I believe I began my real life's work. On a personal level, it also coincided with the beginning of a new relationship with my late wife, Pip Stokes, and the birth, soon after, of our twins, Kasimir and Sophia. Family life too requires a mindful attention to balance its needs with those of vocation – at times a highly challenging task.

Occasionally, as architects/artists we are invited to participate in exhibitions or to submit for competitions where we can explore what architecture can embody in terms of meaning – how it can speak. One such opportunity was an invitation for an exhibition called Architecture as idea at RMIT Gallery. This title begged the question of whether architecture can ever be just idea. At the time a neighbour of our country cottage was mercilessly clearing bush for his handful of sheep seeking to create his vision of an Arcadian parkland. I decided to salvage some of the branches, saplings and bark for my piece. It was the kind of 'making do and mending', transforming what is discarded and investing it with meaning, that we do with the damaged and cast-off aspects of life. My intention was to connect ourselves, nature and our work, to transform the 'idea' into a living presence and embodied experience, in space, light, colour and material. Taking the idea into reality is where the real work begins.

I created an installation of defoliated red gum bark, twigs and small branches which formed an entry-threshold, grafted onto a tall, twisting corrugated iron tube internally painted deep violet sky-blue and topped with a five-petalled skylight. Visitors could turn in through the bark threshold, duck under a low opening and stand upright. They had to reach for a solid glass orb counterweight suspended in the space and pull it. The skylight petals opened, flooding the visitor and the interior with light. I called the piece Enter, open, enter. I wrote a brief statement for the catalogue: 'The art of architecture, like the art of life, is a way of transformation. It urges us to reach deep into ourselves and high above ourselves so we can bear, celebrate and share the fruit of our journey.'

At Uluru in 1990, together with a small team of consultants, I lived and worked with the Mutitjulu community to design a cultural centre. It was to be an expression of the joint management of the Uluru-Kata Tjuta World Heritage National Park between Anangu and the rangers of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), celebrating a coming together of Western science and the wisdom of the oldest living culture on earth. The challenge here was to see, connect and facilitate the flow of forces and factors in a responsive and collaborative process in order to create a building which was a weaving together of living spiritual and physical connections with Uluru, the sacred country and its people. In such a situation, the tasks, responsibilities and risks of collaboration are significant. They involve bringing the totality of one's lived experience and capacity for discernment to the process. This demands a willingness to listen quietly and deeply, to sense into what is needed, improvise, and to initiate creatively and in a timely way with Anangu, following the events, questions and opportunities of each day. This willingness creates a shared middle space for connection, trust, synchronicity and revealed meaning to manifest. Early each morning, I established rhythms of contemplation, meditation and prayer, preparing myself to be fully present – tuned in to see, hear, participate in, and absorb what was needed to let the project unfold out of each moment, each encounter. As a team, we worked closely, joining daily to share our experiences and thoughts about how to keep the middle space alive, open and warmed.

On one occasion, while we were walking the site with Elder and artist Nelly Patterson, she began to talk passionately about the way the building needed to express the notion of Anangu and the NPWS rangers working together as one. In demonstrating this idea, she cupped each of her hands and curved them into one another like two interlocking arms of a spiral galaxy. This was a turning point. Her gesture startled me as I had been exploring these same dancing shapes in my early-morning drawings. I immediately sketched her gesture in the sand at our feet. This form became the leitmotif for the centre as a whole.

This gesture seemed to focus the shared process in a living picture which then became a seed for the unfolding design. The two spiralling arms holding the space between was a distilled and true picture not only of the rangers and the Anangu working together as one, but of our collaborative process.

Also, what underlies this simple but dynamic form is surprising and profound. The third space, the middle space, is where the polarities meet, conflict, are reconciled, and are held in dynamic balance. This is a space of reciprocity: potential transformation, creativity and healing. It is within this uncomfortable, complex and difficult space of polarity that the tragedy of community and cultural breakdown, the elements of all that has been lost and all that is waiting to be discovered in new ways, can be present if we are willing to listen deeply and to witness them. Whether we see the arms as being Liru and Kuniya (the two sacred serpents of Tjukurpa), Indigenous and non-Indigenous, new and old, inner and outer, spirit and matter, or one and two, they breathe into the shared space – they are distinct, complementary, interdependent, yet one.

This oneness, like the wholeness of Tjukurpa⁶, was a quality or characteristic of all Indigenous cultures. It integrated philosophy, religion, art and science. It is under threat, unravelling to varying degrees from the effects of dispossession of land; family and community fragmentation; and from cultural dilution.

The flow of connectedness is a vital principle of a healthy human life and a healthy planet. Bob Randall, an Elder of the Mutitjulu community of Uluru, expressed his sense of the sacred interdependence of all life encapsulated in the term *kanyini* — a Pitjantjatjara word meaning ‘connectedness’, saying ‘It’s the interconnectedness of my belief system, my spirituality, my land, my family ... I have to connect with each of these to be whole. Snip away any one of them – by supplanting religion, by undermining the spirit, by displacement from land or separation from family – and ... it all begins to unravel.’⁷

In the late 1990s, together with associates, we designed a major renovation of a three-storey building in Lonsdale Street in the Melbourne CBD for the Koorie Heritage Trust. To express and emphasise this indigenous presence in the strict street grid and among the ordered building boxes of the city, its earth colours, details and undulations attempted to make visible, and remind us of, the pre-existent nature and life of the area, now covered and blocked by concrete and bitumen.

A fine, rhythmically modulated steel façade of balconies, columns and balusters woven with traditional designs, twisted vertically upwards from the ground, reaching like antennae or trees towards the sky, and horizontally connecting with the flux and flow of the original topography of the Yarra River. In both directions, the strands of steel continued into space, the weaving incomplete. It suggested the ongoing, unfinished project of reconciliation, a gesture of the will and need to reconnect with nature and with non-Indigenous Australians. Tragically, the building was burnt down in an act of arson just a month before opening. Later, the Koorie Heritage Trust moved to King Street before its current premises at Federation Square.

We experience many lives and deaths, many changes and transitions, as well as periods of obstruction and times of flow within our lifetimes. If we have the courage to accept Goethe's challenge 'to die and become', we decide to join the flux and flow of life by letting go of old ways.

We open to, and trust, the inner voice of connection and discernment as we sense our way into the new beginnings meeting us from the future. As well as working hard and purposefully in the world, we need to allow time for reflection and contemplation, to be still and silent, to breathe with the world. We find our particular roles in the whole. The world is a reflection of ourselves – how do we re-create ourselves to help the world?

Finding and trusting the voice of connection in ourselves involves deep listening, gentle will and the courage and imagination to take initiative with care and responsibility. Because everything is interconnected, attention to being more conscious, present and responsive is critical for making a positive difference through our work in the world. Connectedness and relatedness lead to restoring and preserving, healing and redeeming the ethical relationships that tie us to each other and to our earthly environment. As artists and architects, we are called to respond to contemporary issues with greater depth rather than being preoccupied with aesthetic composition and bending to the tyranny of fashion.

There is a need to re-envision space as a vehicle for connecting consciousness. In our own interior space, our flux and flow of personal and creative crisis call on us to face and brave the darkness of uncertainty to find our own light – to live in 'negative capability' as Keats called it. Gottfried Richter, in his book *Art and human consciousness* describes architecture as an expression of the unfolding destiny of the human being, as we change from experiencing the world's creative centre outside ourselves to experiencing it within ourselves – a search for interior space⁸. The interior space has movement and energy that rhythmically draw in and enfold the outer world space – a massaging, a breathing of the membrane between worlds through our human consciousness. Goethe describes this archetypal figure, the lemniscate:

"Nothing's inside, nothing's outside,

for what's inside, also outside.

So, do grasp without delay,

holy open mystery.⁹"

We live in the midst of this mystery without our knowledge. It is the inner space of the earth, even though it is hidden in every flower, every stone, every leaf; in the depth of our being we sense it standing open, waiting. Through our human capacity for connection, we can reveal these mysteries in our lives and in our work.

NOTES

1 Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot: a vision of the human future in space*, (New York: Random House, 1994).

2 Kenneth Bayes, *Living Architecture* (Hudson, NY: Floris Books, 1994).

3 Geeta Padmanabhan, "Eco Warrior", *The Hindu*. <https://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/eco-warrior/article2087596.ece>. Accessed 19 July 2018.

4 Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, *Dadirri: Inner deep listening and quiet still awareness*. Accessed 19 July 2018. <http://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/about-dadirri/dadirri-text>. (1988)

5 Louis Sullivan, *A System of Architectural Ornament, According with a Philosophy of Man's Powers*, (New York: American Institute of Architects, 1924)

6 Tjukurpa is the foundation of Anangu life and society. It has many complex but complementary meanings, and refers to the creation period when ancestral beings created the world as we now know it, but also refers to the present and future. It encompasses religion, law and moral systems. It defines the relationship between people, plants, animals and the physical features of the land, how these relationships came to be, what they mean and how they must be maintained.

7 Jo Chandler, "Homelands essential for Indigenous Australians", *Sydney Morning Herald*. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/homelands-essential-for-indigenous-australians-20090602-bucp.html>. Accessed 19 July 2018.

8 Gottfried Richter, *Art and Human Consciousness*, (Great Barrington, MA: Steiner Books, 1985).

9 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, from "Epirrhema" cited in Gottfried Richter, *Art and Human Consciousness*, (Great Barrington, MA: Steiner Books, 1985), 213.