

**ARDMORE  
STATION**  
PLEASE..  
**NO HUNTING  
OR TRESPASSING**  
*THANK YOU*



**Dajarra, Queensland, residents Lamar and Desmond Armstrong, Thomas Ah-One, Thomas De Satge and William Major Junior gather at the Ardmore Boundary Fence, an example of some of the restrictions placed on Dajarra people.**  
 © Feral Arts and Dajarra Jimberella Coop, 1997.

**Sarah Moynihan** and **Norm Horton** together are the coordinators of Feral Arts, one of Australia's leading community cultural development groups, and one that has evolved since its founding in 1990, shifting focus as needs and conditions change. A primary focus for Feral's current work is Placeworks, a series of projects and partnerships focused on exploring the influence of place on cultural and community identity. One main theme of this essay is Feral's continuing work in the remote community of Dajarra, which is making innovative use of new technologies in community cultural development.

Sarah and Norm have the good fortune to live and work in Australia, which has the best-developed public apparatus for support of community cultural development of any nation on earth. As in all things, success

doesn't mean that problems disappear, simply that their character changes: along with continuing to lobby for resources, practitioners in Australia have established debates about community cultural development; for example: Where has the sector come from and where is it headed? Is it becoming rigid or unresponsive? Is it losing its edge or its authenticity as a result of professionalization?

As they pointed out in the online dialogue preceding the spring 2001 conference, their work is shaped by a conscious attempt to influence policy through practice:

*Feral Arts is a government funded, community based organisation. We take a long-term approach to work in a small number of communities, both urban and rural.*

*We work to develop models of practice to influence government policies and inform work by other people in other places.*

Thus the other main theme of this essay is the development of Australia's support structure. As they trace its trajectory, the authors suggest how decisions concerning policy and funding have helped to shape practice.

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# Protest or Participate?

COMMUNITY CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT  
AND GLOBALIZATION IN AUSTRALIA

by Sarah Moynihan and  
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It's early September 2001, and the globalization spotlight is heading our way. Brisbane is a modern city with a population of over a million. It is the capital of Queensland, a large, mineral-rich state in northeastern Australia. Next month the biannual Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) will bring half the world's leaders to town. Like the G8 summit group<sup>1</sup> and the World Economic Forum, CHOGM has become a target for the anti-globalization protest movement and Brisbane is preparing. A Commonwealth People's Festival with the theme of Connecting Communities is planned to run alongside CHOGM. But rather than connecting communities, the lead-up to CHOGM has brought to the surface differences among community groups, highlighting the complexity of relations between the government, community and corporate sectors and generating debate about the role of community cultural development.

Among the ranks of community groups opposing CHOGM, the e-mails are running hot. There has been much discussion over the aim of the protests and debate as to how to go about it. Loosely aligned factions have developed. The CHOGM Action Network (CAN) has advocated a protest march. The STOP CHOGM Alliance is campaigning for a full blockade of the Brisbane Convention Center where meetings will take place. Some indigenous community leaders working across these divides have sought to reframe anti-globalization protests, refocusing attention on the issue of colonization. Planning meetings have debated whether to accept invitations to meet with government-appointed mediators. Everyone struggles with the challenge of presenting a unified front while respecting the diversity of interests and agendas.

<sup>1</sup>Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union.

On the other side of the coin, about 100 community organizations from around the country have decided to participate in CHOGM. They will take up booths in the Brisbane Convention Center to promote their community work and participate in meetings, seminars, forums and conferences running alongside CHOGM as part of the people's festival. Participants include a number of key cultural, political and social-justice lobbyists and advocacy groups, who might just as easily be seen in the front row of the protest organizers' meeting.

The Queensland government finds itself in tricky territory. Having spent 30 of the last 40 years in opposition—sometimes even leading illegal marches—it must be seen to support the right to protest. The government has appointed a team of high-profile mediators in an effort to negotiate and plan for nonviolent actions. Brisbane has a history of large-scale protests over issues including the Vietnam War, apartheid and indigenous land rights. Public interest in the globalization issue is growing, and there is concern over the potential for violent confrontations like those experienced in cities around the world. New police powers have been invoked and big money has gone into security arrangements. The city has witnessed a series of extraordinarily public training exercises: paramilitary teams in helicopters hovering over the city center and rappelling onto rooftops. Protest organizers suggest these displays may have more to do with intimidation than preparing for CHOGM.

This scenario poses questions for the community cultural development (CCD) sector of which our organization, Feral Arts, is a part. Should CCD practitioners protest or participate—or both? Where should our skills and resources be directed? Where are relations between government, community and the corporate sector headed, and what roles should CCD be playing in responding to key issues like globalization?

### **ON ANOTHER FRONT**

Although much of our work is based in South Brisbane, where CHOGM is planned to take place, Feral Arts has prior commitments 2,000 kilometers away in remote northwestern Queensland. Dajarra is a small, isolated and predominantly Aboriginal township near Queensland's border with the Northern Territory. We are starting a four-week community cultural development program focusing on oral and community histories. The work is the latest stage of a 10-year partnership with the community and with the Waluwarra people, the main Aboriginal group living in Dajarra. The program is timed to coincide with annual rodeos in Dajarra and in Urandangie, an even smaller township 150 kilometers farther west on the Georgina River. Urandangie is a traditional meeting place for Waluwarra people. The rodeos have evolved into important contemporary community gatherings, one of the rare opportunities for family and community members to come together.

As in Brisbane the community in Dajarra is gearing up to protest—not about CHOGM but about water. After many years of suffering the consequences of an erratic, inadequate and increasingly saline water supply, they have recently written a letter, signed a petition and sent them to the government and the media. The letter relates:

We are a small but humble and contented community, living our life on a daily basis and coping with the rest of the world's problems, as one needs to in order to maintain their own self worth. . . . We must stand united and strong to fight with one voice so as the many deaf ears can hear our plight for a better healthier community and a brighter future for our children.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Barbara Dempsey, Dajarra Maintenance Services, Aug. 20, 2001.

<sup>3</sup>"The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples," Media Release (Cat. 4704.0), Australian Bureau of Statistics Online at [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au).

<sup>4</sup>Paul Memmott and Mark Moran, *Indigenous Settlements of Australia* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Aboriginal Environments Research Centre, 2001).

<sup>5</sup>From Memmott and Moran, *Indigenous Settlements of Australia*, cited on [www.ea.gov.au/soe/techpapers/indigenous/population.html](http://www.ea.gov.au/soe/techpapers/indigenous/population.html).

As we help set up new state-of-the-art digital equipment—a computer, video camera and editing software purchased as part of the project—it seems hard to reconcile the priorities of the community cultural development program with an issue as fundamental as water. In stark contrast to life in Australia's modern cities, conditions in some remote townships and communities are closer to the Third World. Health is a primary concern. Key indicators such as infant-mortality rates and life expectancy, for example, confirm that conditions for Aboriginal people remain well below those enjoyed by other Australians.<sup>3</sup>

But for many in Dajarra, oral- and community-history work is just as central to cultural survival and growth as water. European colonization over the last 200 years has displaced all but the most remote indigenous people from their traditional lands. These processes have been massively destructive to a continent made up of over 300 different cultural and language groups. Responding to the cultural impact of displacement is one of the community's highest priorities and has become a focus of our community cultural development partnership with Dajarra.

### DAJARRA

Approximately 85 percent of Dajarra's population is Aboriginal,<sup>4</sup> but it hasn't always been that way. The town grew up around the railway line and was shaped by its role in the cattle industry. For most of the 20th century, it was the westernmost point in the state's rail network. Drivers brought huge herds of cattle thousands of kilometers up and around the great central desert, across the top of Australia and down to Dajarra for transport to the coast. By the 1950s it was a thriving township and one of the biggest cattle-trucking centers in the world, shipping more cattle per year than Texas.<sup>5</sup>

It was not until 1967 that a national referendum granted citizenship rights to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Until then, a range of repressive and paternalistic laws tightly managed the indigenous population.



**Emily Marshall, Margaret Punch, Thomas De Satge, William Major and Desmond Armstrong try to find the goanna lizard someone spotted from the car on Urandangie Road in Dajarra, Queensland. © Feral Arts and Dajarra Jimberella Coop, 1997.**

The Aborigines Protection and Restriction of Sale of Opium Act of 1897 (commonly known as “The Act”) gave local police administrative responsibility and legal authority to control the lives of indigenous Australians. Most Aboriginal people were moved from their traditional lands to live in government- and church-run missions. Many in Queensland’s northwest were assigned to work on cattle stations for little more than food and shelter.

Seemingly innocuous changes have had significant impacts on cultural practices and cultural identities.<sup>6</sup> In 1950, for example, the police station in Urandangie was closed. Administrative responsibility for Waluwarra people passed to the Dajarra police, forcing families to move off traditional lands and into Dajarra. In some respects Waluwarra people fared better than most under this discriminatory system, if only because many still lived and worked in their home regions. Thus they were able to maintain important links with culturally significant places.

By the mid-1970s, massive semitrailers called “road trains” were transporting most cattle. Dajarra’s strategic significance to the industry waned: many of the white population began to move away; and few station owners continued to employ Aboriginal people once they were required to pay wages. Smaller family-owned holdings were systematically amalgamated into larger corporate properties. In the 1980s, the train line was pulled up and, like Urandangie, Dajarra slipped into decline, falling through the gaps of government funding programs and community-development initiatives.

<sup>6</sup>Rosalind Kidd’s research provides an overview of the role of government in the dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. See especially, *The Way We Civilise: Aboriginal Affairs—The Untold Story* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1997).

## STRAYS

Dajarra people sometimes relate stories about all the dogs that used to roam around town. Back when the railway ran, towns further down the line would put their strays on the returning cattle trains. Dajarra was the end of the line, so that's where the dogs stayed. Feral Arts was a bit like a stray dog when we first came to town in 1992. At that time resources from regionally funded programs were not getting through to Dajarra, and a youth worker from the neighboring town (150 kilometers down the road) had invited us to come up from Brisbane and run arts workshops with young people. We knew very little about the country or the people—so little, in fact, that when we stopped for a swim in a water hole on a deserted back road, we got our four-wheel drive vehicle hopelessly bogged. We wound up walking 25 kilometers in 40-degree heat (104 degrees Fahrenheit) to get help from the nearest cattle station house. We sat embarrassed and exhausted as the 70-year-old station manager dug our car out single-handedly! When we arrived in Dajarra a day late for a community consultation meeting no one seemed too worried, but it wasn't long before the community took us in and looked after us.

Initially, we received funding only to work with young people, but we soon came to understand that the program needed to involve the whole community. First, as suggested in the consultation meetings, we ran an intensive four-week open program in visual arts, music and video. Workshops options included screen printing, batik, painting, leatherwork, songwriting and recording, jewelry making, video clips, interviews and photography. It was standing room only in the old school hall: as more and more people turned up, the workshops spilled outside and into neighboring sheds cleared of snakes and cobwebs. An impromptu boomerang and didgeridoo<sup>7</sup> production line sprang up in the back yard. Workshops ran all day and most of the night; within a few days, pretty much the whole community took part in the program. It was exhausting, but also lots of fun and we quickly developed a productive partnership. The workshop program gave us a platform to build relationships and learn more about the community's cultural needs and interests.

<sup>7</sup>A didgeridoo is a long, hollow branch traditionally used as a musical instrument.

<sup>8</sup>Keith Marshall interview, transcribed from the video "Dajarra" (Dajarra: Feral Arts, 1992).

## THE GEORGINA

After the workshops settled down a bit, we were invited to visit some Waluwarra country on the Georgina River about 150 kilometers from town. As community worker and spokesman Keith Marshall explained:

A lot of the people [living in Dajarra] are from down that way—the Georgina River. The old people used to wander from up near Headingly [cattle station] right down to Roxborough [cattle station], right along the river. A lot of sites where they used to do the corroborees [traditional dances] are down there.<sup>8</sup>

Everyone got a good laugh watching us trying to set up our campsite and light a cooking fire. We went fishing and saw how people hunted and collected a wide range of foods including goanna (large lizards), kangaroo, wild turkey and grubs. We started to learn a little about the country and its rich cultural history and significance to Waluwarra people. More significantly we began to understand that place and cultural identity are inextricably linked. Nancy Ah One explained the crucial role place plays in cultural education:

With the kids, it is the only way they are going to pick up things [about their culture]—when you take them out bush. In town here, they just want money to go to the shop. But when you take them out bush, they walk around and they go, “What’s that on the tree over there?—oh, wild bananas.” Or they say, “Let’s go and get some grubs out of the tree.” There are permanent water holes all along there—Jimberella [a camping place on the Georgina River] has got the big permanent water hole. You can grow anything, as long as you’ve got a pump to irrigate the water.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Nancy Ah One interview, transcribed from the video “Dajarra.”

The community organized a series of video interviews addressing a range of key cultural and community issues including access to land, hunting, employment and cultural education. From the footage a short documentary was edited together. Community elder Joe Clarke explained:

Today the policeman stops us from killing the kangaroo. That’s our tucker [food]. We used to live on that before the white man come in this country. ... Now the station owners stop us. They say, “Don’t go on my property.” That’s not his property, that’s black fella’s property. Doesn’t matter how much he paid for it. That’s his money. But it’s still our food in there.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Joe Clarke interview, transcribed from the video “Dajarra.”

By the end of the six-week project we felt much had been achieved. Copies of the video were sent to the government to raise issues and lobby for resources and assistance. The community invited us to come back the next year after summer. We happily accepted, looking forward to what we might do together next time. We had little idea that 10 years later we would still be working with the community on things as fundamental as access to land and the water supply.

## LAND AND CULTURE

Over the years we gradually came to learn what the people of Dajarra had known for a long time: the wheels of change turn very slowly in Australia, especially when access to land is involved. The video campaign attracted some attention and generated some new resources for the community. But it failed to resolve the broad cultural and social challenges facing the community. All subsequent efforts to gain access to land for cultural or commercial projects have been blocked. Even a simple application to lease Jimberella for a market garden and cultural and community education projects with young people was rejected. Ironically, the main reason cited was the lack of a water supply!





Longtime Dajarra resident Joe Clark visits a mining project near his birthplace in Bing Bong, Northern Territory, as part of a video oral-history project. © Feral Arts and Dajarra Jimberella Coop, 1999.

These are local examples of a much bigger struggle. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have fought for justice and land rights since the arrival of the English colonists in Australia in 1788. In 1992, the Australian High Court finally delivered a precedent-setting decision for the Mer (Murray Island) peoples in the Torres Strait, off Queensland's northern coastline. The Mabo case, as it is commonly known, was the first to legally recognize uninterrupted indigenous title to land. The decision overturned *terra nullius*—the legal premise that the Australian continent was uninhabited when the English invaded. But this landmark decision did not result in land ownership being returned to indigenous people. In fact subsequent federal government legislation (The Native Title Act of 1993) upheld existing titles, determining only that limited native title rights would apply to national parks, reserves and areas deemed to be “unallocated” state-owned land.

Even so, reactionary forces conducted a protracted media scare-campaign, claiming “ordinary Australians” would lose their homes and businesses because of the Mabo decision. Some corporate investors, especially in the mining industry, used the uncertainty around native title rights as an excuse to claim government compensation for start-up costs when fluctuations in global commodity prices made projects less viable.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Communities like Dajarra are still feeling the effects of the backlash to the Mabo decision and the broader fight for land rights. Mabo put pressure on governments to deliver certainty to nervous national and international investors, especially in key land-reliant industries such as mining, farming, tourism and property development. In the mid-1990s, at the height of the native title debate, the Queensland government pledged to smooth the way for investment and provide blanket sureties through new state native-title laws. One of its initiatives was to declare the state's northwest (including Dajarra) a mining province, boasting that over 30 billion Australian dollars in minerals would be removed from the area in a 20-year period. But governments failed to balance this initiative by negotiating reciprocal obligations and responsibilities for investors on the behalf of communities. In many instances communities have been left to work out their relations to development projects as best they can.

Queensland Fertilizer Operations at Phosphate Hill, for example, is WMC (formerly Western Mining Corporation) Ltd.'s new mining project and fertilizer production facility. Although 50 kilometers from Dajarra, it is closer than the nearest town and therefore the community's closest neighbor. The Phosphate Hill project has already generated some vital local employment and enterprise opportunities.<sup>11</sup> In reality, corporations like WMC are one of the few potential sources for remote communities like Dajarra to get help with reliable infrastructure such as power, water and communications. Despite repeated efforts to gain government assistance in dealing with the water-supply problem, WMC was the first to put their hands in their pockets to offer assistance. But the Phosphate Hill project is also creating some concerns. The facility draws more than 6,000 megaliters per year<sup>12</sup> of underground water and is facing its own salinity and supply issues. Although all the studies show a separation between the mine's water table and Dajarra's, not everyone is convinced. The production process involves highly toxic substances<sup>13</sup> and WMC has its share of outspoken environmental critics in response to its track record on other projects.<sup>14</sup> Community representatives from Dajarra have been invited to be part of a regional Indigenous Mining Reference Committee. They are excited by the possibilities but also a little nervous about the responsibilities.

Government departments and nongovernmental agencies work hard to support local cultural development and the principles of self-determination through a wide range of policies and programs. Funding community cultural development is an example in itself. But programs like these sometimes find themselves swimming against the tide of a broader economic rationalism. During the 1990s for example, the overarching priority of Australian governments of all persuasions had been to encourage economic growth by attracting

<sup>11</sup> See *Community Development—Local and Indigenous Participation* at [www.wmc.com.au/sustain/community/16.html](http://www.wmc.com.au/sustain/community/16.html).

<sup>12</sup> Hill, Berry and Forrester, "Water Management for the Phosphate Hill Project," a report by PPK *Environment and Infrastructure*, 2000, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> The fertilizer-production process involves shipping waste sulphuric acid 150 kilometers from Mount Isa that combines with sulphate rock to produce ammonia phosphate fertilizer. In 2000, the process generated 3,241 tons of sulphur dioxide emissions, 424,469 tons of carbon dioxide and 1.114 million tons of tailings. These and further details from "Industrial Minerals and Fertilizers," the *WMC Business Report*, at [www.wmc.com.au/acrobat/busrep00/busrep00imf.pdf](http://www.wmc.com.au/acrobat/busrep00/busrep00imf.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> See comments on WMC at [www.greenpeace.org.au/toxics/archive/dioxin/qld\\_sources.html](http://www.greenpeace.org.au/toxics/archive/dioxin/qld_sources.html).

investment. In northwestern Queensland's case, this meant new mining projects, even though they might clash with the needs and interests of local communities. This is not to argue a conspiratorial line that government-funded initiatives such as community cultural development merely mask the realpolitik of global economic development. Neither is it to suggest that corporate investment through mining and other industry is necessarily a bad thing for local cultural and community interests. Rather, we are suggesting there are complex sets of power relations between governments, communities and corporations through which competing interests are played out. There are opportunities and threats, and community cultural development is part of the equation. But what is its role?

In the context of these complex dynamics, a policy of blanket opposition to globalization makes little sense. Like the CHOGM scenario in Brisbane, the situation in Dajarra presents challenges for local communities and for the community cultural development sector. Global development for many local communities is not just an idea that can be protested or opposed. It is already a reality in their back yards, presenting both threats and opportunities. What are the implications for CCD? We will look at how the community cultural development program in Dajarra has responded to this situation, and through that example build an argument that CCD practitioners should learn more about development processes and globalization, improving our capacity to respond effectively to the opportunities and threats they present.

#### **PLACE, CULTURE AND CCD**

Through our experiences in Dajarra we have learned that responding effectively to some of the more fundamental challenges facing cultural and community development—such as access to land and the relationship between place and culture—can be a slow process requiring a long-term approach. Over the last 10 years, the Dajarra community has worked steadily toward long-term objectives in arts and cultural development. Along the way this has included a wide range of activities including numerous oral- and community-history projects, visual-arts projects, music and song-recording projects, video clips, community gardens, and technical training and skills-development projects. Some of the videos and songs produced through the program have won statewide awards, but more typically the outcomes have been locally focused. For a number of years the community has been lobbying for resources for a cultural center to support local arts programs and to care for cultural artifacts and oral and community histories. Applications for this stage of the work are still pending.

But tangible arts and cultural products are not the only significant outcomes from the partnership with Dajarra. The CCD program also provides a platform to engage with some of the more fundamental cultural and social challenges the community faces. At the core of this process is the oral- and community-history program. Even on a local level in Dajarra there is an underlying sensitivity among some of the nonindigenous community to documenting cultural histories: it is seen as linked to native-title and land-claim processes and an unmasking of the colonial history. In reality, however, Dajarra's interest in oral and community history is fundamentally cultural—survival, maintenance and growth. Like many of the world's indigenous peoples, Aboriginal cultures are based on an oral tradition, passing cultural knowledge from generation to generation through song, dance and story-telling. Colonization of Australia significantly disrupted these processes. In terms of survival and maintenance, recording and preserving oral- and community-history material is a stopgap measure, potentially making way for the community to reinvigorate oral traditions in the future.

### **DIGGING DEEPER**

The work in Dajarra has also started to grow in new directions. Community members have begun exploring some of their non-Aboriginal heritage, revealing rich new facets of cultural identity and ways of engaging with other communities around the world. Chinese, Afghan, Scottish, Irish and English people have each had a significant impact on the rich cultural makeup of the Dajarra community, challenging some of the cultural stereotypes.

One example has come from tracing Dajarra's links to Tobermory, a small township on the wind-swept Scottish western Hebrides Island of Mull. You would scarcely find two more geographically different places than Tobermory in Scotland and its namesake on the Georgina River. Yet the displacements of indigenous people parallel each other in so many ways. In the 1850s, Mull was one of the last areas of subsistence farming or crofting. The indigenous population—the Muileach—fought English landowners in the crofting wars. Deciding it was more profitable to run sheep than allow the Muileach to continue to live and work on Mull, the survivors were shipped to far-flung corners of the world including Canada and Australia. Some ended up at Urandangie, eventually setting up a cattle station which they named Tobermory to the south on the Georgina River. Several Waluwarra families lived and worked around Tobermory Station prior to coming into Dajarra. Some of the European family names in Dajarra can be found in Mull genealogies, and several other Mull place names have been taken up by nearby stations. The community is in the planning stages of a series of exchanges with the Mull Museum.



**Lloyd Punch hoists the camera while he, Beverley Sam and David Punch do some video work at one of their favorite locations: the Dajarra wrecking yard. © Feral Arts and Dajarra Jimberella Coop, 1997.**

Oral- and community-history projects enable communities to explore beneath the surface of cultural stereotypes to get a better understanding of the actual cultural impacts of colonial and global development. These stories uncover many examples of culturally destructive—even genocidal—engagements. But they also reveal stories of partnership and sharing that have led to growth and development. Sharing and exchange through trade is fundamental to cultural development and economic sustainability. There are many examples predating the arrival of Europeans in Australia of trade and cultural exchange between Aboriginal people and other cultures—relationships based on mutual respect and sharing.<sup>15</sup> Colonization on the other hand reflects an expansionist ethic and a fundamental lack of respect for other cultures. Unfortunately, negative colonial values have become synonymous with broader global economic development. In responding to globalization, we need to be careful to remember that cultures are dynamic and evolving, not fixed or static. A significant part of cultural growth derives from sharing and exchange. Does simply opposing globalization run the risk of contributing to social and economic isolation and cultural stagnation?

<sup>15</sup>One example of direct relevance to members of the Dajarra community is the centuries-old relationship of trade and exchange between the Yanyuwa people of northern Australia and the Macassans of Celebes (present day Indonesia). In 1907 the Australian government outlawed these exchanges. See [geography.anu.edu.au/people/richard\\_baker/tek.html](http://geography.anu.edu.au/people/richard_baker/tek.html).

### **PLACEWORKS**

A significant body of oral- and community-history material has been generated through the community cultural development program in Dajarra. This material includes photos, videos, songs, interviews, paintings, T-shirts, digital images and documents, all of which belong to the Dajarra community. Typically this material might provide the research basis for a documentary video, a photographic exhibit or a publication, as had been the case in some of our earlier work. But in partnership with the Dajarra

community we have started looking beyond a research-production-exhibition-distribution model to engage with some other questions. How should this material be managed and utilized to be of the greatest community benefit now and into the future? Where should it be kept? How might it be used and by whom? Who are the audiences for the works produced? What can be shared with other places and people, and what needs to remain as family or community access only? What cultural and community protocols need to be considered?

Over the last few years we have begun to explore the use of new digital technologies in finding new ways of responding to these challenges. Working closely with the Dajarra community we have developed a prototype of a software program—Placeworks—as a new CCD tool. The Placeworks software operates as a digital museum or “keeping place” for personal and community histories. It uses maps of local places to interface with database material gathered through the oral- and community-history program. Placeworks enables users to store and manage cultural- and social-history materials through a computer workstation. The database is initially being developed for use on a local computer network and shared within the Dajarra community. In the next stage, an online version hosted on the Internet will allow the community to share work with other places. Placeworks is being tested and further developed as part of the current CCD program in Dajarra and through a parallel program in South Brisbane.

One of the main uses of the current Placeworks prototype is to scan and catalogue personal and family photographs. Photos are valuable commodities and are greatly treasured. Copying photos is expensive and the CCD program provides community access to digital scanning and printing equipment through a small media studio located in a converted storeroom in the community hall. Through this process people can get copies of their photos, learn new skills and, if they choose, contribute images to the Placeworks database. Another current project, Placestories, involves school children using scanners and digital cameras to work with community elders to involve them in contributing material to the Placeworks database. The project has been designed to combine young people’s computer skills with the knowledge and experiences of older members of the community.

### **CULTURE AND TECHNOLOGY**

The Placeworks software initiative continues to throw up a wide range of technical and cultural challenges. The software concentrates on putting control and management of this material firmly in the hands of the local community. Access to material is managed by a system of passwords so that personal material can be either shared or kept private, as required. One of the features being built into the software is the capacity for images of and

references to particular individuals to be masked or removed from the database at any time to meet with cultural protocols. There are few precedents for the use of digital media in these contexts and there are lots of mistakes to be made, so we work as carefully as possible. The key to success is ensuring that the local community guides the process.

For many in the Dajarra community, involvement in Placeworks is one of their first experiences of computers and the Internet, so a big part of the CCD program is about skills development and building a resource base. Much of the training is informal as people learn how to use the Placeworks prototype and to scan and print images, use software programs and produce multimedia materials including CD-ROMs, digital videos and digital prints. A local “Placeworker,” working as part of the CCD program, runs the studio and access facilities throughout the year. That worker and a number of other community members are scheduled to take part in more focused training and skills development, enabling them to operate equipment and to assist other people in the community. The aim over the next three years of the program is to put in place the skills and resources to enable the program in Dajarra to operate independently of Feral Arts.

Feral Arts’ four-week CCD workshop program is structured loosely. People choose when and how they want to be involved. People often work in small groups, sharing new skills and information. As always, the learning process is a two-way street. It is only through developing and trying out new tools like Placeworks that we get to understand what works and what does not—what new features might be useful and which things are less relevant. This information feeds back to the software-development team based in Brisbane to revise and update the prototype.

Beyond its role as a digital museum, Placeworks aims to improve the Dajarra community’s capacity to be an active player in cultural and economic development projects. The program provides a mechanism for the local community to engage in the planning and development processes of a project from the outset. The community history being assembled online provides a base of knowledge to inform governments, station owners, mining projects and others about development issues. Over time the history of layers of association will be gathered. The aim is that when projects like Phosphate Hill are on the drawing board, the community will be in a position to play a more effective role in negotiating with the development process to maximize the local benefits and minimize negative cultural, social and environmental impacts. The goal once Placeworks is fully developed is to make the software available to other communities nationally and internationally, developing online networks and information-sharing mechanisms.

The point is that the community cultural development program in Dajarra is not just about cultural survival—it is also about cultural growth and engaging

with the complex challenges posed by global development. The community is responding positively to the impact of displacement and building a platform for future partnership and collaboration. Local knowledge is a valuable asset—and if we are not careful, a nonrenewable resource! As Australian governments work to rebuild their economies around the new centerpieces of knowledge and technology, it is important to create opportunities to bring this knowledge to bear on the planning stages of development projects through real partnerships, not just through add-on consultations.

#### **WHAT ABOUT THE WATER?**

A couple of weeks into the monthlong 2001 program, the Dajarra community's letter to the media about water-supply problems is starting to get some results. A daylong meeting of key government department representatives has been called to address a long list of issues and do some planning for the future. Big numbers of government workers have made the two-hour trip from their offices in Mt. Isa (the northwest region's main town) to the Dajarra community hall.

At the end of the meeting there are some positive signs. Following their involvement in the meeting, WMC Ltd. is playing a role in a joint government, community and corporate strategy to dig a new bore and fix the community's water supply. They are also involved in another initiative to get a much-needed kidney dialysis machine for the region—a resource the community has been requesting for a long time.

The community's involvement with WMC and the Phosphate Hill Project is still in its early stages. These are small steps, and people still harbor concerns about the mine's environmental impact. No one is taking anything for granted, but they may provide the basis to navigate a strong relationship in the future.

#### **EXPERTS IN GLOBALIZATION?**

The challenges facing the small, isolated community of Dajarra are just one example of the complex mix of opportunities and threats facing communities across the planet. Even state and national governments do not always have the political muscle to effectively oppose global development, especially in the prevailing economic rationalist climate. CCD practitioners need to add some new strings to the bow; protesting is important, but by itself it is not enough. We need to be much smarter in our approach—building partnerships, informing change and guiding development. We need to improve our skills as go-betweens and negotiators. Perhaps as well as being expert protesters, CCD practitioners should become experts in development, providing examples to governments and the corporate sector of how development projects can be done better.



## CCD IN AUSTRALIA

The program in Dajarra is only one example of community cultural development in Australia. The sector is remarkably diverse: some suggest there are as many types of practice as there are practitioners. So what is the state of the community cultural development sector in Australia? Where has it come from and where is it headed? How ready are we to take up the challenges posed by processes like globalization and to engage more effectively in the complex dynamics generated in the intersection of the government and corporate sectors? Can we become experts in development and play an appropriate role in emerging international CCD networks?

The remainder of this essay will briefly explore these questions from our perspective and experience at Feral Arts. We will draw primarily from the debate at a national community cultural development symposium we ran in 1998. The symposium brought together 40 of the country's leading practitioners to discuss the past, present and future of community cultural development in Australia. Facilitator Anne Dunn described the day in these terms:

Where have we been, what is our history and, therefore, what can we create as a future for the work that we do—to really challenge the notion of the place of our work in the world? What are we doing, why do we do it, why is it important?<sup>16</sup>

The aim was to develop an agenda for broader debate in the sector. A number of the issues raised through those discussions may have general currency.

## A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In 1987 the Australian federal government's arts-funding agency undertook a shift from "community arts" to "community cultural development." Although (as we will outline) this was more than a simple name change, in broad terms the people, policies and programs that made up the community arts sector are the same as those in the community cultural development sector.

## GOVERNMENT SUPPORT—A SNAPSHOT

Arts and cultural funding in Australia managed somehow to survive the dark years of economic rationalism. One of the big achievements has been the continuity of federal government support for community arts and community cultural development for nearly 30 years. During that time the sector in Australia has come a long way, but it has been a difficult journey. More than once it has had to fight for its survival and contend with attacks—some coming from within the arts industry. Through these experiences the sector has grown stronger, more confident and better able to articulate its expertise and significance to the broader community.

<sup>16</sup> Anne Dunn, "Symposium" PDF, *They Shoot Ferals Don't They?* CD-ROM (Brisbane: Feral Arts, 1999), p. 9. Available at [www.feralarts.com.au/home.htm](http://www.feralarts.com.au/home.htm).

Community cultural development projects involve collaborations with a wide range of government and nongovernment sectors, responding to the cultural needs and interests of diverse communities. The CCD sector has developed unique expertise in partnerships and cross-sector approaches. It is firmly embedded in the infrastructure of the Australian arts industry and has been especially successful at influencing the policy and programs of other sectors of government such as health, social services and social planning, as well as other sectors within the arts and cultural industry. The continuity of support for CCD provides the sector with an opportunity to look at patterns in its development.

Community cultural development now operates in all levels of government (federal, state and local). The federal funding body—the Community Cultural Development Board (CCDB) of the Australia Council (the federal government’s arts-funding and advisory body) has been especially important to the sector’s development, providing much of the policy- and program-development impetus. Like the other boards of the Australia Council, the CCDB is a committee of industry peers drawn from each state. Its key aim is to enable communities to advance their artistic and social aspirations by working closely with professional artists.<sup>17</sup> It provides operational and project funding to artists and organizations across the country under a number of categories and priority areas, including strategic partnerships, professional development, fellowships, community environment art and design, critical debate, and presentation and promotion. The CCDB also works in partnership with the community cultural development sector to deliver special projects in response to particular needs, for example, national conferences, industry publications, training programs and a national Web site project, currently under development. It provides the sector with a national overview, enabling it to set strategic directions and develop responses to emerging opportunities within the cultural industries and beyond. In the longer term, the CCDB is working toward the full integration of community cultural development into Australia’s environmental, economic and social sectors. It promotes the role of the sector in research and development activity, and encourages innovation and experimentation.

<sup>17</sup> *Support for the Arts Handbook* (Sydney: Australia Council, 2001), p. 31.

On a state government level, Arts Queensland (the Queensland government’s arts and cultural funding agency) also provides strong support for community cultural development. Feral Arts, for example, receives joint operational support from both Arts Queensland and the CCDB. There is no specific Queensland policy or program relating to community cultural development, but a wide range of CCD work is supported through its existing funding mechanisms. Arts Queensland’s Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF) provides arts and cultural funding to communities through partnership with local governments across the state. RADF is a good example of a strategic approach to regional cultural development grounded in the CCD principles of local control

and self-determination, with local committees making decisions on how grants are allocated. Community cultural development projects are also supported through a range of non-arts government departments typically working in partnership with arts and cultural funding programs.

Relations between governments and the community and corporate sectors in Australia are on the move. Governments are looking to refocus economies around knowledge, research and information technologies.<sup>18</sup> The community sector (or nongovernment, civil sector) is being heralded as the new lifeblood of experimentation and innovation. Think tanks on both the right and left of politics are promoting the community sector as the core of new approaches to governance and service delivery. These new models aim to use the expertise of nongovernment community agencies in the vital middle ground between government and corporate sectors. They advocate a move away from centralized services toward locally determined models.<sup>19</sup> This situation represents an opportunity for the community cultural development. But how prepared is the sector to take advantage?

<sup>18</sup> A recent example is Labor's Knowledge Nation platform, developed for the 2001 federal election. See [www.alp.org.au/kn/](http://www.alp.org.au/kn/).

<sup>19</sup> Mark Latham and Peter Botsman, *The Enabling State* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 2001), pp. 3–5.

<sup>20</sup> Andrea Hull in *Meanjin*, Iss. 3 (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1983), pp. 317–320.

### DEFINITIONS

Debates around definitions of community arts and community cultural development have been part of the sector since its inception. In the broadest terms there are two camps: those calling for clearer guidelines and definitions to make it easier to work in partnerships, promote the sector and build its identity; and those advocating broad, inclusive statements of principle to ensure the sector stays flexible, dynamic and relevant. Reflecting on her time as head of Australia Council's Community Arts Committee in the early 1970s (a predecessor to the Community Cultural Development Board), Andrea Hull discussed their refusal to get involved in the "bind of definition":

The Community Arts Committee agreed that a single definition of community arts could not be sustained, that its program should be influential over a wide spectrum of arts activities. The Board has tried to be open and flexible. It takes the line that it is not the writer of prescriptions for the arts.<sup>20</sup>

The openness and breadth of the earliest funding guidelines meant an extraordinary range of cultural organizations and artists were attracted to the new fund, and accepted as community artists. Lacking the history of other arts-funding categories, the term "community arts" in effect came to describe whatever was funded as community arts. The Community Arts Committee also proved a convenient mechanism for dealing with the bits and pieces that didn't fit anywhere else in the arts-funding structure. This cumulative open-ended approach to policy development set a pattern for the future and the breadth of the sector continued to expand. For three decades the range of practice included under the umbrella of Community Arts and Community Cultural Development has continued to grow.

Has it become too broad? Speaking at a national CCD symposium, Australian practitioner, researcher and theorist Deirdre Williams expressed concerns about the amorphous nature of the practice:

I think we need to do some work in identifying what it is that our leaders are going to deliver, and with whom. We're talking about "the work"—well I don't know what it is. I don't know whether we're making art or whether we're making happy communities or whether we're making very powerful people who were once powerless or whether we're designing malls? I think that's really, really important if we're talking about community cultural development, because what we produce is going to directly relate to who's going to invest in us. If we don't know what it is that we can deliver, then we don't really know who we can go and sell it to, or even on whose behalf we're selling it.<sup>21</sup>

The diversity, adaptability and individuality of the sector and its practitioners are valuable assets. They ensure the practice stays relevant, flexible and engaged. But does the breadth of the sector come at a price? Does it also present an obstacle to its development, making it harder to promote the work and build our public identity and professional status to enable sustainable and productive partnerships?

In "Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development" (the predecessor to this volume), Adams and Goldbard identified a number of characteristics of community cultural development in the United States. They describe a field that appears:

... atomized and dispersed, with no clear identity as a profession. Constantly reinventing arguments to convince funders of the legitimacy of their efforts, constantly reframing their work to fit the guidelines of social service or conventional arts-discipline funders...<sup>22</sup>

Adams and Goldbard attribute this situation to the lack of infrastructure that could legitimate community cultural development as a profession. But despite the Australian sector's more developed infrastructure and continuity of support, remarkably similar concerns are commonly articulated. Introducing the Australia Council's 1997 publication "Not a Puppet," showcasing Australian CCD, former CCDF chair Lex Marinos related:

What emerges is the question of identity, of defining just exactly what the essence of CCD is. In a field where collaboration is the key and where partnerships are made between all manner of arts and non-arts organizations, it is important to distinguish the role of CCD relative to other organizations. The boundaries of CCD are wide but there are limits; it is only by maintaining focus and direction that the field can continue to deliver.<sup>23</sup>

These experiences suggest that the challenge of definition and building an identity may also be central to the work of emerging international networks.

<sup>21</sup>Deirdre Williams, "Symposium" PDF, *They Shoot Ferals Don't They?* CD-ROM, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>22</sup>Adams and Goldbard, *Creative Community*, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>23</sup>Lex Marinos in *Not a Puppet*, Marian Reid, ed. (Sydney: Australia Council, 1997), p. 7.

## PATTERNS OF DEVELOPMENT

CCD practitioner Eve Stafford has identified the cyclic nature of the sector's development in Australia. She describes the different phases in the cycle: moments of unity followed by long periods working in disparate settings at the edges of cultural practice.<sup>24</sup> Stafford's analysis suggests that after a time, the sector gets a bit isolated. It needs to come together to catch its breath, compare notes and check its bearings before again heading off in myriad directions. The sector has shown itself to be capable of presenting a strong and unified identity, but those moments of unity have tended to emerge only when the sector is under attack. The 1976 McKinsey Report (the result of a major national inquiry into arts funding) recommended devolution of community arts funding, posing a threat to the sector. A national conference held in early 1977 initiated a major campaign to defend community arts. Gay Hawkins relates:

The campaign also resulted in new categories. The "community arts movement" was the most significant because it effectively blurred the boundaries between the bureaucrats, whose job it was to administer community arts grants, and the recipients of this money . . . . This alliance was strategic; it highlighted the complex power relations between the funders and the funded. The illusion that all power lay in the hands of the state or bureaucrats was quickly shattered.<sup>25</sup>

Ten years later another major federal arts-funding inquiry—the McLeay Report (1986)—was released, again challenging the sector. Once again it led to a united campaign and a national conference, heralding a significant refocusing of the sector in the change from community arts to community cultural development. In the broadest terms, this transition reflects a shift from the aim of the democratization of culture (under community arts) to one of cultural democracy (under community cultural development). Policy statements released in the lead-up to the changeover related:

Community Arts is not a tool for increasing arts appreciation, audiences or purchases of arts products. These may be by-products of a community arts program. But it is a community's active intervention in its own cultural destiny, not a way to increase consumption of other people's cultures.<sup>26</sup>

In the 15 years since the transition to community cultural development, the sector has continued to grow but its status has remained marginal. The powerful alliance between funder and funded, which seems to be a key to the sector's health and vitality, has proved unsustainable beyond times of direct external threat. Outside these moments of crisis, practitioners have demonstrated a clear preference for getting on with their main priority—working with communities. Understandably, policymakers and program managers have been reluctant to intervene. But this leaves the sector vulnerable because the work is hard to categorize, hard to see and hard to quantify.

<sup>24</sup>Eve Stafford, "Symposium" PDF, *They Shoot Ferals Don't They?* CD-ROM, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>25</sup>Gay Hawkins, *From Nimbin to Mardi Gras* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993), p. 53.

<sup>26</sup>Community Arts Board 1986 policy statements, quoted in Gay Hawkins, *ibid.*, p. 75.

Descriptions of community cultural development are often grounded in the language of empowerment. There is a pervasive notion that good practice is largely invisible. A successful project is deemed one in which the community “owns” the outcomes. Credit passes to participants and the role of CCD moves into the background. This paternalistic framework dominates depictions of community cultural development practice and is in need of revision. Relationships need to be recast into ones of partnership and exchange, both between practitioner and community and practitioner and funder.

There is a tension between empowerment-based approaches and the sector’s own needs to promote its identity and secure its future. If the field is to grow, it needs to become more visible and more accountable. It needs to own its work and the outcomes (good and bad) in a public way. The sector needs to reflect on its failures as much as it promotes its successes. This requires leadership from experienced practitioners and policymakers.

The globalization issue provides the sector with an opportunity to promote its value and build its identity without limiting its scope through prescriptive guidelines and definitions. By sharing expertise and drawing together examples of practice from around the country and around the world, the sector could present a diverse but connected body of work. The CCD sector needs to further develop communication networks and information-sharing mechanisms to ensure that communities are better prepared for engaging with the processes of global development. The sector needs to instill respect for place and indigenous cultures, and to link local knowledge and expertise with models for environmentally and culturally sustainable growth and development.

But before this, the sector may need to rethink its stance on globalization, a stance we feel is limited by its blanket opposition. Sometimes circumstances will require us to protest and march in the streets, but we might just as easily be required to act as a go-between and work in partnership with governments and corporations. Now we need to talk about how this should work: How should community cultural development respond to globalization? What is our role and what principles should guide our responses?

#### **POSTSCRIPT**

Following the September 11 terrorist attack on the United States and heightened security concerns, the CHOGM meeting in Brisbane was postponed and rescheduled for 2002. The planned protest actions evolved into a march for peace, dissolving—at least for the time being—many of the factional battles previously in evidence. There is no doubt that this dramatic turn in international relations has made the goal of establishing an international community cultural development network even more vital.