Sydney harbourings, rehabilitations and the politics of procurement

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Abstract

In the last three years Sydney has been transformed to an unprecedented extent by public art projects, most of which have been developed by government instrumentalities, agencies or partnerships. The central city council has initiated a Sculpture Walk through the streets and around the rocky foreshores of the inner city; the Sydney Olympic site at Homebush Bay is home to a number of public art works; the government's water utility company has sponsored an annual, temporary art installation walk along a spectacularly rugged ocean escarpment linking several medium-density suburbs; another instrumentality recently established to oversee the reuse of abandoned heavy industrial sites in the harbour, has established the 'Promenart' program along fifteen kilometres of harbour foreshores; and a government-appointed statutory authority responsible for the redevelopment of an extensive and highly polluted former industrial site between the CDB and the airport, has worked closely with designers and artists to develop comprehensive briefs addressing environmental rehabilitation and social interaction. This impressive list is by no means exhaustive.

The surge in bureaucratic and artistic creative energy demands critical evaluation. In this paper I will contrast two sets of projects. This first concerns actual projects, in or near the spectacular Sydney Harbour setting, which are premised on placemaking principles and on the whole elicit actual or imagined histories for the delight and reverie of the promenader. Despite the popular and aesthetic success of these projects, one of them, the ambitious Sculpture Walk, is currently being re-evaluated. The second set, in more mundane suburban environments and centred on toxic waterways, concerns projects that at this stage are either being implemented or nearing commencement by interdisciplinary groups of artists, designers, engineers, environmentalists, community representatives, and other specialists. Their measure of success will include delight and surprise but must also include environmental and cultural sustainability

I will argue that the more environmentally challenging the brief, the richer the likely aesthetic outcome. This will be done by evaluating selected works against their relevant policies. These policies, in turn, will be evaluated against current 'best practice' policies in Australia and elsewhere.

Introduction

A turning point in Sydney public art came with *Edge of the Trees (*1995*)*, a collaborative piece by Janet Laurence and Fiona Foley, commissioned by the curator of the newly established Museum of Sydney. The title recalls a comment from historian Rhys Jones, who imagined the indigenous people observing the newcomers in 1788 'from the edge of the trees'.[1] Incorporating words in the local, pre-settlement Eora language, names of convicts from the First Fleet to arrive from Britain, and local botanical names, *Edge of the Trees* reflects the requirement that the artists engage with the historical archive. The significance of the project, located on Aboriginal land and on the site of First Government House, was that the art be required to deal with the poetics and the politics of place.[2] Within the public domain it was timely to address issues of occupation and of (tentative) exchange. In 2001 these issues remain at once urgent and delicate, as Australians seek to redefine themselves as a people who can own up to past atrocities.[3] In presenting this paper to an international audience I am mindful of an observation made recently by Australian anthropologist Ghassan Hage, that we Australians address the world in a particular way because we *know* we stole the country (and we want to ensure no other nation does it to us!).[4]

1 Dinah Dysart Ed.), *The Edge of the Trees. A sculptural installation by Janet Laurence and Fiona Foley from the concept by Peter Emmett*,:Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales,, 2000, p. 1.

2 That contemporary Australia has been built on Aboriginal land was not recognised in law until the 1992 Mabo Case in the High Court of Australia

3 . In 2000 tens of thousands of Australians marched for Indigenous/non-Indigenous reconciliation. However the Prime Minister of Australia still refuses to apologize on behalf of the nation for past Assimilationist policies that have destroyed social cohesion and resulted in widespread loss of language and culture amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

4. This comment was noted by the author during a discussion following the presentation of Hage's paper 'The Neo-Liberal Aesthetics of Australian Multiculturalism' to the Globalisation+Art+Cultural Difference: On the Edge of Change conference, presented by Artspace at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 27-29 July 2001.

71

The *Edge of the Trees* was transformative in terms of articulating a new address to place, whereby past and present were brought together in quite immediate ways. In the rhetoric of post colonialism, one could say that it created a 'third space' (Fredric Jameson), an 'interstitial space' (Homi Bhabha)[5], 'indeed', argues Homi Bhabha. ' something like culture's "in-between", bafflingly both alike and different' [6] - where indigenous and non-indigenous Australians work at working together. Translating these ideas into an Australian context, Indigenous Australian scholar, Marcia Langton has argued that:

> "Aboriginality" arises from the experience of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who engage in any inter-cultural dialogue, .. "Aboriginality" is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, imagination, representation, and interpretation.[7]

Edge of the Trees demonstrated how the urban environment could be enriched by these exchanges.

Part of the success of *Edge of the Trees* is that, in dealing with central cultural issues in Australia today, it avoided both stridency and sentiment. On entering the piece, a recorded voice recites random words from the now-extinct Eora language that had been noted by early settlers. The sense of loss of language, of ethnocide, is palpable, and yet the work speaks of reconstruction, survival, resistance, hope and ultimately of welcome. The 'trees' are made of the materials of the city centre: the yellow sandstone on which central Sydney is built, steel, glass and wood. Transformed by memory, by research, by dialogue, by labour and by natural weathering, the materials of the central business district speak to over two hundred years of cultural exchange.

I want to foreground this work because of the significant role it has played the in maturation of public art in Sydney and because it speaks of a cultural politics concerning possession, dispossession and perhaps reconciliation that lie at the heart of the contemporary Australian experience. The bulk of this paper, however, focuses on an examination of particular responses to the Sydney environment. The politics of post colonialism and of environmentalism are not only of immense importance in terms of local and global contexts, but constitute the most significant framework for the analysis of the art under discussion.

The three themes I will consider within a framework of environmentally-concerned art are urban land/scape, phenomenology and ecology. After introducing a few representative projects within each of these themes, I will then consider how one might evaluate them against their stated policies and best practice national policies on art and the environment.

Urban /Land/scape[8]

Sydney is built around a series of harbours and bays, some of its myriad waterways being captured in the now classic photograph of *Sydney Harbour seen from 16,000 feet* (1966) by David Moore. So spectacular is this setting that from the early nineteenth century planners, architects and property investors were quick to exploit the 'view'. When Sydney hosted the Sydney International Exhibition in 1879 the main

5. For Bhabha's critique of Jameson see Homo K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London & New York: Routledge, 1994, Ch. 11.

6.. Homi K. Bhabha, 'Culture's In-Between' in *Multicultural States: Rethinking Difference and Identity*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 30. See also D. Benner and H.K. Bhabha, 'Liberalism and Minority Culture: Reflections on "Culture's In-Between"', ibid.

7. Marcia Langton, *'Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television...',* An essay for the Australian Film Commission on the politics and aesthetics of filmmaking by and about Aboriginal people and things. Australian Film Commission, North Sydney, 1993, p. 81.

8 I use the slash to disrupt the word 'landscape', because in Australia the cultural (aesthetic, representational) baggage that accompanies the word is quire foreign to Aboriginal ways of thinking about 'land' as sites for embodied dreamings, as an agency for protection and reciprocal stewardship, and as the very foundation for the legal, political and spiritual claims for land rights.

building was called the 'Garden Palace', in recognition of the views to be had from the site of what is now called the Royal Botanic Gardens adjoining the CBD.[9] In Sydney, 'owning a view', translates as seeing the harbour from one's residence. Given that the demographic epi-centre of Sydney is in Parramatta, 30 kilometres west of the city cen-tre, where the land is relatively flat and suburbia interminable, few Sydneysiders actually get to own a view. This paper considers art on public land mainly in and close to the Central Business District (CBD). Here, the buckled landforms bounded by a deep and intricately-con-toured harbour, by cliff faces and beaches edging the South Pacific Ocean, and other waterways that boast some of the most spectacular pollution levels in the state, can be enjoyed by all comers.

Some of the new art in Sydney is embedded in the CBD and seeks to address the scale and toughness of the urban setting (Simeon Nelson, Lynne Roberts-Goodwin). Some of it consciously contradicts the received historical wisdom concerning enlightened architectural and urban design by the founding fathers of the colony, by interrupt-ing the masculinist civic virtues with work referencing the roles of women and servants who lived and worked in the city (Robyn Backen, *the Archaeology of Bathing*, Wooloomooloo Bay, Domain 2000; Anne Graham, *Passage*, Martin Place, Macquarie Street, 1999). Much of the art, however, takes the viewer away from the tar and cement, not so much to avoid the urban condition as to more fully enhance and reha-bilitate the experience of being in the city. This public art opens up the complexity of the urban experience and reveals that the city is more than the financial CBD. An impulse to reconnect city and landscape, and to affirm non-functionalist art within and around the hub of eco-nomic rationalism, may seem quaintly retro in our age of 'biocybernetic reproduction',[10] yet I think the suggestion of nostalgia in some of the new public art, the invocation of 'memory, history [and] identity', that underpins so much of the work, has been effectively countered by a culture of dissent that makes us look and think afresh about the city and perhaps the world in which we live.[11]

I am thinking in particular of the City of Sydney's Sydney Sculp-ture Walk project which dates back to 1996 when a policy was created to develop twenty place-specific works over a ten-year period and all within the ambit of the CBD local council.[12] According to the project brochure:

> Each artwork is site-specific and created directly in response to its location …and require[ing] artists to contribute in a dy-namic way to an appreciation and understanding of the city's environment and character. The art works deal with issues such as memory, history, identity, language and the environment and utilise a diverse range of materials including sandstone, glass, marble, solar power, steel, copper, terrazzo, fibre-optic lighting, fog, trees, sound and marine buoys.[13]

'Environment' is used twice, firstly as an exhortation that the art work address its urban setting and secondly, as I understand it, that the works 'deal' intrinsically with environmental issues – whatever they might be. The citing of the ten works currently completed range across ur-ban, landscaped and natural environments, and each piece draws as much attention to its setting as it does to itself (Bronwyn Oliver, *Palm*, Farm Cove, Botanic Gardens1999; Lynne Roberts-Goodwin, *Tankstream*

9. See Peter Proudfoot, Roslyn Maguire, and Robert. Free-stone, eds., *Colonial City Global City: Sydney's Inter-national Exhibition 1879*, Sydney: Crossing Press, 2000

10. W.J.T. Mitchell, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Biocybernetic Reproduction', The 2001 Power Lecture in Contemporary Visual Culture, Sydney, 14 August 2001.

11. City of Sydney , Sydney Sculpture Walk, brochure, undated [2000/2001]

12. The 'Public Art Policy' is published by the City of Sydney. In Australia there are three levels of government: national, state and local. The City of Sydney is the local municipal council with limited powers over the Central Busi-ness District and some inner city suburbs. The Sculpture Walk was to have comprised 20 commissioned permanent place-specific public art works in and around Sydney. After the installation of 10 works between 1999- 2000, and the significant development of several more, the program was suddenly terminated in mid-May 2001 following a decision by the Lord Mayor of the City of Sydney to redirect his arts budget towards propping up the financially-strapped Mu-seum of Contemporary Art. Alas his ambitions for the MCA were greater than any re-sources would allow. Having backed away from his majestic gesture towards the Museum, the Mayor has now replaced the highly-experienced former Curator with a Project Officer who sought to advise me that the completion of the project has not been 'axed' (my phrase in the initial abstract for this paper): 'Council is committed to the conservation and mainte-nance of existing works in the Collection, and marketing the SSW for wider recognition. While this period may be quieter in terms of installation of new works, it is an important period in evaluating the contemporary works and the process of their commissioning and installation thereof, in order for the imple-mentation of even better prac-tise when future commissioning of works take place' (Brigette Leece, Project Officer, SSW, in personal email 24 September 2001). It appears from this that there is a renewed emphasis on maintenance (a fundamental component of the commission

– *into the head of the Cove*, various city streets, 1999).

Two works have been selected to show the micro- and macro-understandings of the environment. One is Janet Laurence and Jisuk Han's *Veil of Trees*, where Red Forest gums are interspersed with steel and glass panels which themselves incorporate seeds of the plants that used to proliferate in the area. The work is in part a kind of regeneration of the landscaped environment – re-landscaped again to suggest, if not re-create, a sense of the pre-colonial setting. On coming in close to the panels, not only do we read the musings of Australian writers and poets on the land, but through the panels we take in something of the extended view across the water to the northern shore of the harbour. The engagement with the detail connects us to what Bachelard has called the 'felicitious amplitude' when we sense 'immensity with no other setting than itself'.[14]

W.J.T. Mitchell argues that we should ask 'not just what landscape "is" or "means" but what it *does*: how it works as a cultural practice. Landscape…is an instrument of cultural power [and] it naturalises a social and cultural construction'.[15] Mitchell is referring to representations *of* landscape, but his argument holds true for an analysis of public art *within* the environment. It would seem that asking how landscape functions as cultural construction informed Fiona Hall's *Folly for Mrs Macquarie* (2000). This work shifts the understanding of landscape away from the botanical and scenic to issues of complicity between the colonial settlers and their transformation of land into symbols of property and power. *Folly*, a near-circular stone 'seat' topped by an aviary-like cage structure, is placed on a spot where Elizabeth Macquarie, (whose husband was the Governor of New South Wales in the second decade of the nineteenth century) had erected a folly oriented so as to allow her to sit and look to the heads of Sydney Harbour through which she might one day travel 'home' to Britain. Daydreaming of home was a sentiment more than matched by her contemporaries' determination to control the land and all who lived there. Taming the land through axe and scythe was one strategy for asserting control; marking cadastral boundaries through (barbed wire) fences was another. The tensions that result from this brutal encounter are also echoed in the terror of the unfamiliar, seen here in the 'ceiling' comprised of the skeletons of bats, flying foxes and other nocturnal animals proliferating (almost to pest proportions) in the Royal Botanic Gardens where the art work is positioned. When sitting in this work we are reminded of both the natural beauty and the unnatural conquest that together underscore the profound sense of unease in the contemporary Australian response to the land.

Veil of Trees and *Folly for Mrs. Macquarie* show something of the range of the Sydney Sculpture Walk and its attempt to recover and project meaning. In different ways the cultural (Brenda Croft (*Wuganmagulya (Farm Cove)*, Farm Cove, Botanic Gardens, 2000), historical (Kimio Tsuchiya, *Memory is Creation without End*, Tarpeian Way, Macquarie Street, 2000), botanical (Bronwyn Oliver, *Palm*, Farm Cove, Botanic Gardens, 1999), political (Debra Phillips, *Viva Voce*, Speakers Corner, Domain, 1999), and to a minimal extent the sustainable/ ecological (Nigel Helyer's *Dual Nature* Wooloomooloo Bay, 2000 which uses solar panels to power the integrated sound system), landscapes are evoked.

ing process anyway) and marketing, but very little on the commissioning of new works.

13. City of Sydney , Sydney Sculpture Walk, brochure, undated [2000/2001]

14. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, [1958] trans. Maria Jolas, Boston: Beacon Press, 1994, pp.191, 195.

15. Mitchell, J.W.T., 1994, Introduction' in J.W.T. Mitchell (ed.) *Landscape and* Power, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 1-2

Similar attributes could be applied to the annual Sculpture by the Sea project, which uses the temporary installation of art works along a kilometre or so of rugged ocean coastline from the popular Bondi Beach and in so doing attracts record crowds of sightseers who enjoy the art as much as the scenic walk.[16]

Both the Sydney and the Bondi projects exploit the natural terrain. More significantly, I think they serve to reinforce how important and fragile are these public lands that have not yet succumbed to commercial and developer interests. Both projects succeed in making the land and the water's edge more visible to a wider public and at the same time showcase art that is fun, intriguing and compelling.

Phenomenological place

Australian playwrights, authors, and artists have perceptively noted the links between landscape, property and profit.[17] Yet surprisingly Sydney Harbour has retained a significant number of vegetated headlands free of residential development, thanks, ironically, to both defence and industry! Now, as major defence establishments are relocated to more strategically viable places, and as the Harbour loses its status as a port city to become a post-industrial site for cultural tourism, many headlands are being transformed into sites for both public access and private gain.[18] It is against this context that one might situate *Tied to Tide* (1999) by Jennifer Turpin and Michaelie Crawford.

Tied to Tide launched the newly-established Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority's (SHFA) 'Promenart' series in October 1999.[19] Promenart is the name given to site-specific contemporary art works commissioned 'for installation along the foreshore walk of approximately 15 kilometres'.[20] Situated on Pyrmont Point, *Tied to Tide* in part signifies the makeover of the industrial/working class inner city suburb into a site for intensive high-density residential development, in the middle of which is the flashy new Sydney Casino. The rehabilitated foreshore park cannot be separated from this reconstructed cultural economy yet, with astonishing deftness, *Tied to Tide* quietly asserts a different value system from both the profiteering around it and the overtly historical underpinnings of the Sculpture Walk. It affirms a phenomenological presence, one that is endlessly responsive to wind and water, to the moment of 'being there'.

Using white and vermilion crane-like forms that evidentially constitute the visual language of adjacent maritime industry, the work then shifts register to respond to the tides, waves and wakes of passing vessels, and to sea breezes and at times gale-force winds that carry the salt spray up the nostrils of the onlooker! From a distance *Tied* jauntily asserts its presence on the waterfront; close up, the never-still work invites a kind of stillness as we connect with the wind and water around us.

Tied to Tide more than meets the Promenart criteria of equity (in terms of projects and artists), responsiveness (to SHFA policies), location (interpreted as meaning places of high visibility); artistic excellence; and relevance to the SHFA's brief (which includes attention to contextual scale, socio-cultural history, public safety, maintenance, and budget): it exudes confidence and delight.

16 for more information see http://www.sculpturebythesea.com/index_home.html

17 I am thinking here of playwright David Williamson's 'Emerald City', and many authors the most recent of whom is Peter Carey (*30 Days in Sydney*, Bloomsbury, 2001). Visual artists who have satirised greed and land as possessions include Bob Clutterbuck and Ruth Waller. If we go back to the nineteenth century to see how artists have responded to the environment, we can find examples of those who were prepared to desecrate the land in order to see and record a good view, as well as those who put their considerable artistic skills to use in order to support those environmentally-active groups that sought to preserve the harbour-foreshore wilderness. For both these arguments see Tim Bonyhardy, *The Colonial Earth*, Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2000.

18 Since writing this, an article has appeared in the leading Sydney newspaper demonstrating the struggle on the waterfront between those who see Sydney as port city and those who want unrestricted residential development. See Geraldine O'Brien, 'The working harbour fights back", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 28, 2001, p. 13

19. The SHFA was established on 1 February 1999, Promenart on 29 October 1999. See http://www.promenart.com/2000p/promenartteam.html

20. See http://www.promenart.com/2000p/introduction.html, p.1

Ecology

My final set of examples aims to consider environmental issues through an ecological filter.

The first concerns a work at the Olympic site at Homebush Bay in Sydney. Homebush Bay is on the Parramatta River which flows east into Sydney Harbour. The heavily polluted land and its estuarine waterways led the Olympic Coordination Authority to adopt a 'green' policy for the site. Aerating fountains designed by the landscape architect George Hargraves express a sense of play and delight through soaring arcs of water. But amongst the bona fide art works, only one really attempted to address the politically sensitive issues of contamination, remediation and ecology. Janet Laurence's *In the Shadow*, (2000, in Boundary Creek, next to the Tennis Centre, Homebush Bay) is a piece that alerts us to some of the problems in the site. Its 'wands' suggest a monitoring of the pollutants in the water; the embankments, revegetated with casuarinas and the creek with bulrushes, actually assist in stabilising and filtering the water. The evocation of transformation is most fully felt when the mist machines help to fuse the disparate elements of bridges, embankments, water and wands. This work does not feature in the Environmental Reports on the site, but one could argue that its ecological contributions operate on a *symbolic* level by creating what the artist has called 'a poetic alchemical zone [functioning] as a metaphor of the actual transformation of Homebush Bay'.[21]

The second is a community and environmental project in the western suburbs around Fairfield, where strong pockets of ethnic diversity are interspersed between five degraded creeks. In an attempt to address both community and environmental needs, Fairfield City Council in 1994 commissioned the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) to develop proposals to restore urban stream corridors in its region. Named 'Restoring the Waters', the project was headed by a landscape architect who worked with hydrologists, fluvial geomorphologists, ecologists, engineers, and biologists to develop a design brief and concept plan.[22] Significantly the project team raised funds to employ artists Turpin and Crawford to work with the community so they might 'embrace a process of change and restoration'.[23] One result was *Memory Line* (1996), a meander of ryecorn grasses that brought to the surface the original course of Clear Paddock Creek which had long since been engineered into concrete channels.[24] The artists' translation of community aspirations into delightful – and visible – outcomes was crucial in leading to the implementation phase of the project. Seven years since its inception, Restoring the Waters has resulted in a partially-reconstituted creek, where grasses and young saplings reach down to the waters' edge offering residents a joyful experience of their recreation spaces.[25]

The final example, Alexandra Canal, runs 3.9 kilometres from near Sydney Airport on Botany Bay, through to the suburb of Alexandria [sic], finishing half way between the Bay and the city centre. Built in the 1890s as a jobs skills project during a severe depression, it was imagined that upon completion the canal might provide safe passage for boats needing to collect cargo from Port Botany, Sydney Harbour and the industrial estates in between. With an upturn in the economy, the Canal came to an abrupt finish just before Huntley Street, and its now heritage stone walls came to contain some of the deadliest indus-

21 Olympic Co-Ordination Authority, Public Art Program (brochure) November 1999, [p.3].

22 See report by Barbara Schaffer and Bronwyn Maelzer, 'The Australian Conservation Foundation: Restoring the Waters Project', Sydney: Australian Conservation Foundation, [1995]

23. See report 'Restoring The Waters Project; Clear Paddock Creek, Fairfield Sydney Australia', October 2000, supplied by Stephen Frost, Catchment Manager Coordinator, Fairfield City. I would like to thank Stephen Frost for his generous assistance in my research.

24 See Barbara Schaffer, 'The rehabilitation of Clear paddock Creek', *Habitat Australia*, December 1995, p.11, and 'Water Stories', ibid, October 1996, p. 30.

25 The first phase of the implementation stage was launched by NSW Premier Bob Carr on 17 September 2001.

trial waste in the state. In 1997 the northern section of the canal came under the jurisdiction of the just-formed South Sydney Development Corporation which shortly afterwards put some seeding funds into a University of New South Wales studio bringing together students from architecture, landscape architecture, interior design and art whose job it was to consider options for the communal and environmental reha- bilitation of the site. Most students made use of scientific research to remediate toxic sites, and proposed ways to maintain an improved watercourse as a vital centre to a new and rapidly expanding commu- nity. Attracting much publicity, it was anticipated that the new Masterplan would prioritise ecological imperatives to which design- ers, artists and others would need to respond. Indeed the just-released Masterplan (September 2001) is ecologically-driven, with a commend- able emphasis on clean water, access, land use, heritage and landscape as the key determinants for transforming the formerly huge industrial estates into lively interactive areas. Sadly, there is no special provision for artists, although their contribution is implicit in the document.

Ecologically- informed projects pose quite a challenge to artists. They demonstrate, as do the many projects covered by Matilsky and Gablik, that artists can be productive members of an art-science team, complementing the scientific knowledge with a capacity to symboli- cally express a complex range of environmental and cultural issues impinging on the site.[26]

Evaluations

Not a huge amount has been published on the works under discus- sion, and those articles that do exist, in specialist art and design maga- zines as well as newspapers, tend to be very enthusiastic.[27] I too revel in the intelligence and delight offered by the works: it is really some- thing of a treat to take the time look at the works and their too-easily overlooked settings. And yet I think it is worth asking whether there might be room in the art programs (although not for every art work) for some pro-active models of environmentalism. One way to begin such an evaluation would be to measure the works against past, exist- ing and future policies.

At a national level, it is hard to conceive of these new public art works as having been possible before the establishment of the Com- munity Environment Art and Design (CEAD) program initiated by the Australia Council for the Arts in 1989. This program sought to bring together aspects of both the Community Cultural Development Unit and the Visual Arts Crafts Board, by offering seed finding to inte- grated urban design projects.[28] A significant innovation was the re- quirement for environmental issues to be factored into community- based art and design. For over ten years the program helped generate ideas – but it stopped short of implementation assistance. Perhaps this is why no major study has yet been published on the success or other- wise of the environmental strategies proposed by the CEAD-funded projects.

The art works I have examined have all occurred within the last ten years, many within the last three years. All have been steered through by local government authorities or by statutory bodies estab- lished by the state government. Each of these authorities has chosen to demonstrate a commitment to the arts by developing and imple-

26. Barbara Matilsky, *Fragile Ecologies: Contemporary Artists' Interpretations and Solutions*, New York: Rizzoli International, 1992; and Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 1991.

27 See, for example, Sue Best, 'Immersion and Distrac- tion: Environmental Art works of Janet Laurence', *Art and Australia*, v. 38, no.1, Sept- Oct-Nov., 2000, pp. (84) –91; Courtney Kidd, 'Just Take a Walk', *Sydney Morning Her- ald*, 29 July 2000, Spectrum 12.

28. See C. De Lorenzo, 'Inte- grating Public Art, Environ- mental Sustainability and Education: Australia's 'Cre- ative Village' model'. *Journal of Art and Design Education*, 19 (2), 2000, pp. 153-160, and C. De Lorenzo, 'Discur- sive Spaces', in *Spatial Cul- tures: Conference Proceed- ings*, University of Newcastle NSW, June 2001, forthcoming.

menting relatively sophisticated policies addressing community, urban and cultural domains. The result has seen an exciting transformation of relevant Sydney public spaces. In contradistinction to the start-up-only funding from the CEAD program, all the instrumentalities discussed in the paper have the capacity for the implementation of environmentally-engaged art.

Much of the activity I have talked about was catalyzed by the Olympics. In the immediate future, it would appear that opportunities for new works, and works that address landscape, place and ecology, will proceed very slowly. The recent leadership exhibited by the City of Sydney has abated.[29] The Sydney Harbour Foreshores Authority is slowly progressing with its Promenart series.[30] The Office of Sydney Harbour Manager (OSHM), which for the last three years has acted as a kind of *agent provocateur* for new research on Sydney Harbour, is sympathetic to possible collaborations between artists and scientists but unable to fund proposals that come before it.[31] And the major new project by the South Sydney Development Corporation makes no overt commitment to public art. Against the sobering litany, the example given by Fairfield City Council is heartening indeed. It suggests that integrated environmental works can be achieved when the appropriate team of experts, including artists, is assembled, where mutual research underpins the (long) process, and where the expectation is that the artists are not brought in a five minutes to midnight.

Conclusion

I began with a story about a public artwork that addresses some of the significant issues of cultural politics in Australia today, before examining art that responded to various environmental issues. A truly sophisticated art policy would acknowledge the seamlessness of these goals. A lead has been taken in this regard by Mandawuy Yunupingu, of the Yolgnu language group of Eastern Arnhemland and lead singer/songwriter for the band Yothu Yindi who, in a nationally-broadcast radio talk, shared his traditional story of *Ganma* which interweaves the natural and the cultural through the metaphor of water:

> …*Ganma brings another image to my mind. A deep pool of brackish water, fresh water and salt water…In each of the sources of flowing water there is ebb and flow. The deep pool of brackish water is a complex dynamic balance. In the same ways, balance of Yolgnu life is achieved through ebb and flow of competing interests, through our elaborate kinship system. And I feel that in the same ways balance between black and white in Australia can be achieved.*

> *Ganma* is a metaphor. We are talking about natural processes but meaning at another level. *Ganma* is social theory. It is our traditional profound and detailed model of how what Europeans call "society" works.[32]

29. See fn. 12

30 The most recent information to date is that art proposals three new sites are being considered progress here is slow because of the complexity of stakeholders. New work must meet high standards set by the SHFA, and even then can only proceed when other development plans for the site are ready to be activated.

31. Nonetheless, some attention was given to these possibilities in the first Sydney Harbour Research Conference, held at the University of Sydney, 16 June 2000, See http://bearings.nsw.gov.au/resource/resource_content.html

32 Mandawuy Yunupingu, 'Yothu Yindi – Finding Balance' in *Voices from the Land*, Mandawuy Yunupingu, Dot West, Ian Anderson, Jeanie Bell,, Getano Lui (Jnr), Helen Corbett, Noel Pearson, Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1994, pp. 8-9.