

ANXIETY CULTURE AND THE FUTURE – THE VALUE OF ART AND CULTURE FOR CREATING EMPATHY AND HOPE FOR THE FUTURE – ADRIAN COLLETTE AM

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Anxiety Culture and the Future: The value of art and culture for creating empathy and hope for the future

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In his book *Man's Rage for Chaos*, Morse Peckham wrote: 'Art is the exposure to the tensions and problems of a false world such that man may endure exposing himself to the problems and tensions of the real world.' I came across Peckham's quote whilst listening to a lecture given by Brian Eno. Brian Eno, the man who made music Roxy, Talking Heads edgy, and U2 surrender.

A brilliant artist who describes art, indeed defines art, as '*everything we do that we don't have to do*'. I love this definition, and share Eno's belief that the things we don't have to do are fast becoming the things we need to do most.

Things that will help us do more than endure the tensions of a real world.

Things that will help us better diagnose and heal them.

Diagnosing the anxieties of the real world isn't easy. They're often hidden beneath the surface. Only made visible by art that gives shape to the tensions, that let us know they're there.

By art that can expose currents of anxiety, that at times risk becoming torrents - at times driven by things that give us good reason to feel anxious.

By an economic model that demands we keep moving.

By an environment that demands we slow down.

By populism and individualism.

By technology that's evolving faster than we can run.

By an ideology of choice, and a celebration of impermanence.

By a peer to peer erosion of authorities, already weakened by distrust.

By forces that are exciting for some.

Those able to travel at increasing speed across real and virtual spaces.

More isolating for others.

For those confined to spaces, and within systems that limit movement, the ability to connect.

But there's reason to be hopeful.

Art can help us navigate the white waters of a fourth revolution. By making us aware of obstacles beneath the surface. Symptoms of social ailments we might otherwise miss.

As amidst social turbulence, art creates eddies. Creative whirl pools that flow in opposition to the prevailing current. Pockets of clear water that allow us to see anxieties below. Fluid stepping stones into other worlds, that we can momentarily enter to look back and reflect on our own. Before re-joining the flow with more empathy, more understanding, Conscious of the greater role the arts can play. Of the greater public value the arts can deliver. We realised the arts in Australia needs to be untethered from narrow definitions of what art is. So, it can move freely to where it is needed most.

Our new vision is helping us loosen arts bonds. By focusing on arts function, rather than its form. On what art does, rather than what art is. On that which reminds us what it means to be human. On that which 98% of Australians engage with (whether reading a book, listening to music or taking a dance class....)

Our vision is 'creativity connects us'. A contemporary vision that responds to our fast-evolving creative needs. Emboldened by the belief that every Australian deserves to experience the cultural, social and economic benefits of living a creative life. A vision that looks beyond a culturally ambitious nation, towards a creatively connected nation. Towards greater health and wellbeing, towards future growth and prosperity. Shifting to a language of creativity has taken the conversation outside our echo chamber. To consider other forms, other disciplines, other points of view.

By public value we mean the social wellbeing of our communities. We mean the expansion and celebration of our cultural identity. We mean the importance of our creative sector in our future prosperity. To deliver greater public value. We are reconsidering cultural institutions as catalysts. Housing artists who can act as change agents. Important intersects between art and science. A healing third space for communities trying to rethink themselves. Bridging division with empathy, by allowing us to walk in another person's shoes.

We've only just started walking towards a creatively connected nation. Towards more socially engaged art. And a level of anxiety is perhaps a necessary part of our journey. A price we must pay for an ability to imagine an uncertain future. A lead indicator for artists, alerting them to social tensions below. But there is good reason to be hopeful, to believe in the future. To believe we can become a creatively connected nation. Because by broadening the conversation we're not walking alone. We're walking alongside others in this, the most multi-cultural nation on earth, with other ideas and, above all, other stories to tell.

We walk in the footsteps of others who are way ahead, of those who are already exploring the public spaces we want art to reach. In the footsteps of those who are already realising the public value we want art to deliver.

One of those is our next speaker Lynn Froggett. Someone I am honoured to introduce. Someone whose work has broadened my conversations and opened my eyes. To the real value of that which we don't have to do. To the value of art in an anxious world.

Lynn is professor of Psychosocial Welfare at the University of Central Lancashire and Co-Director of the transdisciplinary Institute for Citizenship, Society and Change. Lynn has also worked professionally in the field of mental health. Her cross disciplinary academic background in the Humanities and Social Sciences allows her research socially engaged arts in clinical, community, culture, arts and health and art science

