

## Introduction

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Australian governments, national, state and local, currently spend around \$2.5 billion year to support, assist and encourage activities in the cultural sector, broadly defined. Simple prudence suggests the advantage of looking into the medium term to attempt to foresee impending opportunities and threats. Even better if an imaginative and energetic plan would result.

For this reason, officers of the Australia Council, the Commonwealth's arts funding and advisory body, decided to fund a study of the arts segment of the cultural sector. I was commissioned to work part-time for nine months to identify the influences upon the arts over the next fifteen years. The subject matter therefore is potentially cosmic while I am only temporarily terrestrial. An accommodation has been reached.

Someone has estimated that the totality of medical knowledge is doubling every eight years. Can the reader actually conceive how much information that is? Could anyone read fast enough to keep up? even if it were their exclusive focus? How about the following eight years?! How could one practise as a doctor *and* stay current with relevant research?

The problem is not confined to medicine. It has been something of a revelation to the author that in some crucial areas of this study such as communications, change is so rapid that even to write about the *present* is almost impossible. What sets out to be an interesting and esoteric speculation about an arts future can easily turn into yesterday's newspaper articles before the ink is dry.

Another thing that becomes very clear is that while one can attempt to speculate on the circumstances of the arts in 2010, those very circumstances will depend upon decisions made now and over the intervening period. On what basis of knowledge can we make such decisions? While we may have a detailed knowledge of the past, the pace of change in a sense hides the present.

This is a terrible dilemma, only slightly ameliorated by the proposition of contemporary science that many of the big changes in the future are in principle unpredictable. We can see small individual changes taking place, but every so often a phenomenon emerges from their cumulative effect which is as different in kind and quality as steam is from water. On a more mundane level, we cannot predict reliably because events are ruled by chance as well as causality, or because the causality is very complex. Nevertheless, we have to accept responsibility for our present and future, and therefore must make decisions now for some future outcome.

So if this study has any contribution to make, it perhaps is not so much in any attempt to predict the detail of possible futures, as in some description of the relevant present and apparent trends, speculations about philosophies and structures, the sorts of issues which need to be addressed, who might be in a position to do so and in what circumstances.

As noted in the Acknowledgements, I talked with many people in the course of preparing this book. Whilst almost everyone could offer insights into the history and present circumstances of their own specialties, hardly anyone, even those in government policy bodies, looked beyond those borders of expertise or time. Goodness knows, it's not as though they don't have enough to do, so this is not surprising. And they were all very interested to receive whatever I can come up with. But unfortunately, none had done my work for me in advance.

Except back in Australia in the communications area. Particularly noteworthy is the work of the Broadband Services Expert Group, chaired by the former Director of the Australian Broadcasting Authority and now GM of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Brian Johns. And there are other players also, such as James Capel Australia, and the Centre for International Research on Communication and Information Technologies in Melbourne. Reports from these sources give a concise and intelligible basis for some speculations about possible consequences for the arts of the development of the communications highway.

Of course, there is the research in technologies relevant to arts, which is by definition of the future. People spend lifetimes of learning in small technological specialties, and a study wanting to bring all this to light might be an edited collection of essays rather than a one-man show. The chapter on arts and technology takes on some of these advances, but it only scratches the surface. It might be observed that although there is arts-orientated technological research which is heading towards definable goals, other developments are surprising and again could not have been predicted. For instance, a substantial stream of present computer-generated art originated, if the author understands correctly, with attempted computer simulations of chemical, biological, evolutionary and mental processes, some of which produced results which were at first totally surprising to their scientist designers. So in the scientific context the outcomes were not predicted or were in some cases in principle unpredictable. And in any case, who would have predicted that the method of experiments in biological simulation would become the procedure for the creation of art works?

The reader will discover that much of the discussion of the arts in this book turns on examples from music and its world. There is a simple reason. This is the world in which I have the most experience and can describe in some depth. I trust that readers will be able to extrapolate to their own areas of special interest.

The first chapter is given over to an exposition of some particular scientific theories which will serve as the basis for explanation and speculation throughout the book. Readers who are overcome by the need for fresh air or chemical relief by page 6 should instead leap to the summary at the end of the chapter. It might be sufficient to lend some scrutability to what follows.

The application of this scientific theory to the arts is explored most strongly in the second and third chapters, which look at the possible effects of rapid change on arts values, prospective policy responses to them, and the implications of a theory of cultural evolution in encouraging the development of a vital artistic community.

All of the subsequent chapters deal somewhat more conventionally with arts futures. Chapters 4 and 5 present population projections and statistics about the arts activities of various population segments, and extrapolate some future opportunities for arts development. The next two chapters describe likely technological developments that will affect the arts, firstly in electronic communications, secondly in new means of arts production. Chapter 8 further broadens the geographical perspective, firstly by examining the projected growth of in-bound tourism and the nature of the opportunities it offers, then proposing a particular approach to export of Australian arts and artists, a means by which Australia might more productively locate itself culturally in its geographic region, and a possible boost for multicultural arts within this international context. Finally, as a sort of cosmic culmination, the largest possible expansion of perspective argues for the particular responsibility of the arts sector in helping to sustain the biosphere.

There could be a companion book to this one, simply listing all the topics not included here. Given a bewilderment of choice, the above topics are the ones that struck me as the most important. I felt a need to discover a basis in fundamentals, and as explained in Chapter 1, found a pertinent one in a new stream of science that is bound to be very influential in explaining the workings of cultures, and also contributes directly to new arts technologies. One can hardly consider the future of the arts in a world driven by technological change without looking at the relevant specifics of imminent technologies, as in Chapters 6 and 7. The arts have meaning only through their reception by people, and Chapters 4, 5 and 8 tell us who will be out there in 15 years, both within Australia and internationally, and how they might be served.

My initial table of contents was longer. It became clear that time must draw a line. I regret in particular the omission of arts education, although on the other hand this is an area well endowed with other articulate protagonists and prognosticators. I have assumed rather than argued a role for the state, albeit disputing the virtues of the new vision of arts-as-industry. This too is a fundamental issue, but volumes have been written and the rest is politics. I have taken as read the special task of the artist in keeping us connected to our spirit and imagination as technology surges on. The prospective situations of special population sectors - women, Aborigines, ethnic minorities, the handicapped, the financially needy - all could well have been taken up in detail, but were not. There are other books to be written. Perhaps others will write them.

Usually, a work of this type, commissioned by an arts policy body to examine matters of arts policy, is austere, orderly, and very, very dry. I was happy to be asked *please* to make this one readable. I have tried to produce something clearly structured and logical, but allowed here and there an injection of colour or personality. Hopefully, you will get some pleasure from it.

One of the people who read a draft for the first chapters felt dissatisfied that I did not take some arguments through to the point of offering conclusions and recommendations. There no doubt are instances where my own thinking fell short. However, there is a purpose in the loose ends. I hope that this book can stimulate discussion. When I draw conclusions or make recommendations, the discussion will tend to be focussed on them. If I give as clear as possible an exposition of ideas but leave their reconciliation or consequences unresolved, there can be a much more free-ranging and fruitful discussion which could come to quite different conclusions, or even find that it is better not to have any.

I think especially of the proposal that arts bodies need to find a footing in some convictions about the fundamental values of the arts if they are to be able to come to terms with the art forms now emerging from the new technologies. I do not say what these values should be. In our conversation, my commentator kept offering examples of the values that absolutely must be included, and wanted to know why I had not made any such proposals. It seems to me that in fact this exchange demonstrated the usefulness of the approach: my commentator engaged with the issue and came up with values that I may not even have considered. It became his problem as well as mine. Especially in this instance, it is more important to engage with the issue than to reach a conclusion.

This procedure, you will see, is quite consistent with some of the phenomena of evolution and invention that emerge in the first chapters. Life on the edge of chaos (or order): as the book says, it's the best place to be.