

Speech notes by Rob Brookman, Executive Director/Producer at State Theatre Company of South Australia.

Presented at the '[Rally Against Arts Funding Cuts: Culture Counts](#)' at Parliament House steps on 19 April 2016.

I HAVE BEEN PONDERING FOR THE LAST THREE DAYS WHAT USEFUL THINGS I MAY HAVE TO SAY TO THIS GATHERING – HOW TO PROPERLY EXPRESS THE URGENCY OF THE SITUATION THAT WE FACE; HOW TO EXPRESS THE ANGUISH THAT MANY OF US FEEL; HOW TO CONJURE THE WORDS TO HELP PERSUADE AND CAJOLE OUR ELECTED GOVERNMENTS TO WIND BACK WHAT IS ABOUT TO BE A CRISIS IN THE ARTS IN AUSTRALIA.

CRISIS IS A SMALL WORD OF MAMMOTH IMPLICATIONS. IT'S ONE TO USE ADVISEDLY. IT'S THE WORD THAT CAN INVOKE STARVATION, EPIDEMICS, EARTHQUAKES, THE THREAT OF WAR AND TERRORISM. IT'S ALSO THE WORD OF THE LITTLE BOY WHO CRIED WOLF.

HOW DO WE FIND ROOM IN A PUBLIC DISCOURSE, WHICH IS DOMINATED BY CRISES OF EPIC HUMANITARIAN PROPORTIONS, TO TALK ABOUT A CRISIS IN THE ARTS? THE FACT IS, IT'S DIFFICULT. AND THE ARTS COMMUNITY IS RELUCTANT TO DO SO. OUR VERY EXISTENCE IS DEVOTED TO EXAMINING WHAT IT IS TO BE HUMAN, SO WE'RE CONSCIOUS THAT ESCALATING A THREAT SUCH AS WE FACE INTO THE PUBLIC DOMAIN MAY BE PERCEIVED AS A MINOR FIRST-WORLD PROBLEM SUFFERED BY A BUNCH OF OVER-EDUCATED, UNDER-EMPLOYED WANKERS.

SO WE'RE SLOW TO ROUSE. WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, WE MAKE DO. WHEN THE FINANCES ARE TIGHT WE ECHO THE POOR DELUDED BOXER THE HORSE FROM ORWELL'S ANIMAL FARM AND SAY "I WILL WORK HARDER". WE CROWD-FUND. WE PESTER PEOPLE TO GIVE US STUFF FOR FREE. WE SLICE AND DICE THE BUDGET. AND THE SHOW GOES ON.

BUT FOR SOME OF US, THE SHOW IS NOT GOING TO GO ON BEYOND THE END OF THIS YEAR. THE DISASTROUS RAID ON THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL INITIATED BY SENATOR BRANDIS LAST YEAR AND ONLY REVERSED TO THE EXTENT OF ONE-THIRD BY SENATOR FIFIELD IS ABOUT TO BECOME MANIFEST. IN A FEW WEEKS WE EXPECT THE WORST WILL BE KNOWN. WHAT EXACTLY THE WORST IS REMAINS TO BE SEEN BUT THE MATHS INVOLVED ARE STARK AND SIMPLE. UNLESS THERE IS SOME KIND OF MIRACULOUS LAST-MINUTE INTERVENTION , WE WILL MOST PROBABLY SEE ABOUT 40% OF THE SMALL TO MEDIUM ARTS ORGANISATIONS FUNDED BY THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL STRIPPED OF THEIR FUNDING.

FORTY PER CENT. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN HERE? FIRST OF ALL, COULD WE DODGE A BULLET? COULD THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL TAKE PITY ON A BUSTED-ARSE STATE WITH THE HIGHEST UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN THE COUNTRY? MIGHT THEY ASSUME THAT THE ARTS ORGANISATIONS IN THE EASTERN SEA-BOARD MEGALOPOLISES WILL HAVE A BETTER CHANCE OF FINDING A WAY THROUGH VIA COMMERCIAL INCOME, STATE SUPPORT AND PHILANTHROPY. AND CONJURE A STAY OF EXECUTION FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA?

THE ANSWER TO THAT IS "NO". THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL IS SCRUPULOUSLY FAIR AND TRANSPARENT. ITS PROCESSES WILL ENSURE

THAT THE PAIN IS SHARED PROPORTIONATELY. WE WILL COP OUR WHACK.

SO LET'S MAKE THIS TANGIBLE. LET'S GET LOCAL. LET'S NAME NAMES.

APART FROM THE THREE COMPANIES SUPPORTED BY THE MAJOR PERFORMING ARTS PANEL, THERE ARE 15 SA ARTS ORGANISATIONS TRIENNIALLY FUNDED BY THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL THEY ARE:

PATCH THEATRE

SLINGSBY

BRINK PRODUCTIONS

WINDMILL THEATRE

AUSTRALIAN DANCE THEATRE

THE AUSTRALIAN STRING QUARTET

RESTLESS DANCE

VITALSTATISTIX

TANDANYA

THE JAM FACTORY

ARTLINK

THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIMENTAL ARTS FOUNDATION

THE AUSTRALIAN NETWORK FOR ART AND TECHNOLOGY; AND

THE CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTRE SA

COUNTRY ARTS SA

FORTY PER CENT OF FIFTEEN IS SIX. WHILE SOME OF THESE FIFTEEN WOULD SURVIVE THE WITHDRAWAL OF THEIR FUNDING (WHICH WILL COME AT A MEANINGFUL CULTURAL COST), I ESTIMATE THAT ABOUT ELEVEN WOULD FACE CLOSURE. *SO THE MATHS SUGGEST THAT PERHAPS ABOUT FIVE OF THESE ORGANISATIONS WILL NOT BE ABLE TO SURVIVE BEYOND 2016.*

ARE WE OK ABOUT THIS?

IS THE COMMUNITY OK ABOUT THIS?

DO WE THINK WE HAVE AN OVER-ABUNDANCE OF ARTS ORGANISATIONS?

OR DO WE LOOK AT OUR CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND SEE SOMETHING THAT IS ALREADY BARELY ADEQUATE AND ABOUT TO GET EVEN LESS SO?

BUT, I HEAR IT SAID FROM DISTANT HALLS IN CANBERRA, THE MONEY IS STILL THERE! IT'S JUST IN A DIFFERENT PLACE CALLED CATALYST AND EVERYONE CAN HAVE A GO! WELL YES BUT....

CATALYST FUNDS ONLY PROJECTS, SO WILL PROVIDE NO LIFE-RAFTS FOR THESE ORGANISATIONS.

CATALYST HAS SPECIFIC PRIORITIES INCLUDING INTERNATIONAL TORUING, REGIONAL PARTICIPATION, CAPACITY BUILDING FOR GENERATING SUPPORT FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND INNOVATION. ALL GOOD THINGS OF THEMSELVES.

AS SUCH, WHILE A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF CATALYST FUNDING MAY REPLACE SUPPORT FOR ACTIVITIES PREVIOUSLY SUPPORTED BY THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL, IT WILL NOT PROVIDE CORE FUNDING .

SO FAR THE ANNOUNCEMENTS MADE BY CATALYST ALSO GIVE NO COMFORT AT ALL TO THE SMALL TO MEDIUM CLIENTS OF THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL THAT ANY SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF THE FUNDING AVAILABLE WILL FLOW TO THEM.

BUT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS ONLY HALF THE EQUATION HERE. OUR ARTS SCENE HAS FOR FORTY YEARS BEEN SUPPORTED ON A BILATERAL BASIS BETWEEN STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS. LIKE SO MANY THINGS IN OUR ENDEARINGLY WONKY FEDERATION, GOVERNMENT ARTS SUPPORT IS A PATCH-WORK, WITH SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AT ITS HEART.

AND HERE WE FACE WHAT WOULD SURELY BE THE CRUELLEST CUT OF ALL. A TELEGRAPHED PUNCH IN THE GUTS FROM THE STATE GOVERNMENT WORTH \$8.5 MILLION BY THE TIME WE GET TO 2018. IT MAKES THE \$1.6 MILLION LESS IN FEDERAL SUPPORT LOOK LIKE SMALL BEER!

NOT ONLY WILL THIS ENSURE THE DEATH OF A NUMBER OF THE ORGANISATIONS REFERRED TO EARLIER, IT WILL STEADILY ERODE THE ALREADY THREADBARE SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS, THE ADELAIDE FESTIVAL, OUR TREASURED NORTH TERRACE CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE FESTIVAL CENTRE. WHEN YOU CUT 7% OF THE ARTS BUDGET, NO AREA WILL BE IMMUNE.

BUT WHY? TO WHAT END?

WE ARE TOLD THAT THE ARTS MUST, LIKE ALL AREAS OF GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE, TAKE THEIR FAIR SHARE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S SAVINGS TARGETS. NOW AS A SOUND-BITE, THAT SOUNDS KIND OF FAIR – BUT LET'S UNPACK THAT.

SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT HAVE SAVINGS TARGETS? WELL, GIVEN THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY, OUR NATION-LEADING LEVEL OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND OUR CONTINUING RELIANCE ON THINGS THAT WE DIG OUT OF THE GROUND - WHICH OTHER PEOPLE NOW WANT LESS OF – THAT DOESN'T SOUND UNREASONABLE. ECONOMISTS AND POLITICIANS CAN OF COURSE ARGUE ABOUT THIS ONE - WITH SOME THEORISING THAT THIS STATE CANNOT SHRINK ITS WAY TO GREATNESS.

BUT LET'S ASSUME THAT WE SHOULD HAVE SAVINGS TARGETS. SHOULD THE ARTS TAKE THEIR "FAIR SHARE"? THIS IS WHERE THE SOUND-BITE AND THE COMPLEX WEB OF ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY BECOME DE-COUPLED. THIS DISCUSSION SHOULD NOT BE ABOUT "FAIR SHARES" AS THOUGH GOVERNMENT REVENUES ARE ALLOCATED ON THE BASIS OF VESTED INTERESTS. THEY SHOULD BE ALLOCATED ON THE BASIS OF NEED AND THE BASIS OF CONTRIBUTION TO BUILDING OUR SOCIETY.

LET'S RATHER APPROACH THE IDEA OF *WHY* WE ALLOCATE GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE TO THE ARTS, WHAT WE EXPECT TO SEE AS A RESULT AND HOW MUCH WE WOULD NEED TO ALLOCATE TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN.

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH IS CLEARLY A QUESTION THAT IS ANSWERED IN MANY WAYS. JUSTIN TRUDEAU HAS JUST ANSWERED IT IN CANADA BY ANNOUNCING THAT TWICE AS MUCH WOULD BE ABOUT RIGHT. SOME OF THE LOONIER TUNES IN OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM WOULD SUGGEST THAT ABSOLUTELY NOTHING WOULD BE ABOUT RIGHT.

THIS IS ABOUT THE PICTURE OF OUR COMMUNITY THAT WE HOLD IN OUR HEADS. IT'S ABOUT WHAT WE THINK, DREAM AND DISCUSS. IT'S

ABOUT THE STORIES THAT WE TELL EACH OTHER – EACH ADVANCING OUR GREAT NARRATIVE AND OUR CAPACITY FOR NEW THOUGHT.

FOR THOSE MANY OF US WHO HAVE NO DEEP RELIGIOUS FAITH, IT'S ABOUT HAVING SOMETHING THAT PROVIDES MEANING IN OUR LIVES. AND FOR THOSE MANY OF US WHO *DO* HAVE DEEP RELIGIOUS FAITH IT CAN ALSO BE ABOUT CELEBRATING THAT FAITH THROUGH ART.

WE TALK ABOUT VIBRANCY. WE HAVE A VIBRANT CITY STRATEGY. WHAT DO WE REALLY MEAN BY THIS? IS THE PICTURE IN OUR HEADS OF A VIBRANT CITY JUST ABOUT DESIGNER GIN, AMAZING BEARDS, IDIOSYNCRATICALLY DECORATED LANEWAY BARS, WORLD-CLASS COFFEE MADE FROM ORGANIC BEANS GROWN BY BUDDHIST MONKS AND SLOW-COOKED PULLED PORK ON A BED OF QUINOA WITH A JUS OF POMEGRANITE AND MUSK-RAT GLANDS? I DON'T THINK SO.

I THINK THE PICTURE IN OUR HEADS IS THE ONE OF THE PEOPLE IN THE DESIGNER GIN JOINTS, THE BOUTIQUE BARS, AND THE RESTAURANTS WITH MENUS THAT WE CAN'T UNDERSTAND ACTUALLY TALKING TO EACH OTHER. ABOUT STUFF. MAYBE IT'S THE FOOTBALL. MAYBE IT'S FAMILY. MAYBE IT'S WORK. MAYBE IT'S POLITICS. MAYBE IT'S ART. BUT WE'RE DOING SO IN CREATIVE SPACES. THAT'S WHY IT FEELS *VIBRANT!*

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT TO THE FABULOUS VARIETY OF THINGS WE HAVE TO DRINK THESE DAYS, IT'S THE VIBE THAT WE ARE THERE FOR. AND THE VIBE IS BASED IN DESIGN, IT'S BASED IN *ORIGINALITY*, IT'S BASED IN *CREATIVITY*.

IT'S BASED IN THE EXPRESSION OF WHO WE ARE. IT'S NOT SOME TEMPLATE THAT HAS BEEN DROPPED ON A KEY INTERSECTION WITH MAXIMUM FOOT TRAFFIC BY A MULTI-NATIONAL; IT'S THE PASSION OF

SOME CRAZY BEARDED PERSON WHO LOVES GIN AND WANTS TO CREATE A PALACE WITHIN WHICH IT MAY BE CONSUMED AND WHERE PEOPLE MAY TALK UNTIL THEY ARE DONE.

WHEN I AND MY COLLEAGUES STARTED WOMADELAIDE 24 YEARS AGO, WE DID NOT DO SO THINKING ABOUT TOURISM, NOR THE ECONOMY, NOR THE CITY'S VIBRANCY, NOR REPUTATION. IT WAS NOT STRATEGIC. IT WAS BORN OF A BURNING DESIRE TO SHARE MUSIC AND DANCE FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD WITH OUR COMMUNITY. IT WAS BORN OF A BURNING BELIEF THAT IF WE EXPERIENCED EACH OTHER'S CULTURES, WE MIGHT GROW AS HUMAN BEINGS. IT WAS BORN OF A LOVE OF THIS CITY AND THE BEAUTIFUL SPACES THAT IT PROVIDES IN WHICH TO MAKE AND SHARE ART. I LIKE TO BELIEVE THAT ITS GROWTH AND THE LOVE THAT PEOPLE HAVE FOR IT IS TO DO WITH PEOPLE'S UNCONSCIOUS RECOGNITION OF THE AUTHENTICITY THAT UNDERPINS IT.

OF COURSE IT'S BEEN SUPERBLY MANAGED BY MY COLLEAGUES AT ARTS PROJECTS AUSTRALIA OVER THE YEARS - AND THAT'S NO SMALL PART IN A DREAM TURNING INTO A REALITY. BUT THEN THE ARTS ARE, BY AND LARGE, WELL-MANAGED, *SO THIS SHOULD NOT BE TOO SURPRISING!*

OUR WAY FORWARD SHOULD BE TO INSPIRE SUCH RANDOM ACTS OF PASSIONATE ARTISTIC RECKLESSNESS. SOME WILL CRASH AND BURN, SOME WILL SUCCEED PRODIGIOUSLY, SOME WILL DO QUIET BUT IMPORTANT WORK.

THE PEOPLE WHO WILL DREAM UP THESE DREAMS MUST BE SUPPORTED. THEY MUST BE ENCOURAGED TO DEVELOP THEIR CRAFT

AND THEIR WORK HERE.THEY WILL NOT STAY IF THE CULTURAL LIFE OF THIS CITY AND THIS STATE IS DE-NUDED.

IF WE ACTUALLY BELIEVE IN THE SO-CALLED CREATIVE ECONOMY, THEN THE ARTS, WHICH ARE AT THE CORE OF CREATIVITY MUST BE SUPPORTED EFFECTIVELY.

I JOIN WITH MY COLLEAGUES TODAY TO SAY TO THE PREMIER, THE MINISTER, TO THE CABINET, TO THE BACK-BENCH, TO THE OPPOSITION AND CROSS-BENCHERS AND TO THE PEOPLE WHO POPULATE THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT, THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO CONTINUE THE PLANNED CUTS TO ARTS FUNDING.

RATHER, LET US IMAGINE WHAT THE ARTS AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES CAN DO FOR THIS CITY AND THIS STATE IF THEY WERE BETTER AND MORE PROPELY SUPPORTED.

THE REWARDS TO OUR COMMUNITY WOULD BE BOUNTIFUL.

ROB BROOKMAN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/PRODUCER

STATE THEATRE COMPANY SA