

## The New Brisbane:

*Stuart Glover and Stuart Cunningham*



**The glow in the sky. Orange streetlights. Outlying suburbs. It was beautiful. The highway turned onto the six-lane arterial. We came in through Oxley and Annerley, flowing with the traffic. Then the city high rises were in view, alight, multicoloured. Brisbane. It was impossibly beautiful.**

**Andrew McGahan, from his novel, *1988* (Allen & Unwin, 1995)**

Brisbane's coming of age has been announced a number of times: with the 1982 Commonwealth Games; with World Expo 1988; with the fall of Joh in 1987 and the National Party in 1989; in the city's re-invention in the 1990s as the ironically

cool Brisvegas; and, most lately, with millennial-expansiveness, in its claim to be the *Creative City* leading the *Smart State*. Over the past 15 years as the city has spawned new enterprises, a new generation of artists, new cultural policies, new public buildings, and a new sense of grace—alongside a chump-ish, crowing self-satisfaction. It has also spawned new narratives about itself. Only from time-to-time does the city capture the national gaze, but local media, and the state and local government, regularly present Brisbane as a city transforming upon a number of axes: artistic; cultural; economic; governmental; and lifestyle. These changes are sometimes seen as a party to globalisation, and to global change, and other times unique to the city's own "maturation". The iterations of these narratives reflect real change in the city—its size, diversity, economic base, lifestyle, its relations with regional Queensland, the rest of Australia and the Pacific-Rim—but also constitute a strategy for and a wish for change. Talk might be cheap, but it is also productive. To that end both media and government have acted to support a contained, but continuing, public 'sphericule' of debate about the city and its future.

The Brisbane City Council in its *Living in Brisbane 2010* vision document offers eight versions of the city: the Clean and Green City; the Accessible City; the City designed for Sub-tropical Living; the Inclusive City; the Active and Healthy City; the Smart and Prosperous City; the Creative City; and the Regional and world city. Swept up in its own development, Brisbane has become a dreamscape for change in

which culture, industry, lifestyle, education, and environment are woven together.

The narratives of the new Brisbane usually have a truncated beginning. Gestures are made towards an ugly past, which is left largely unexplained. Instead, the focus is on the present and the ambitions of the city. The new Brisbane Marketing campaign hesitates to say what the city is, only that “it’s happening”. This foreshortened history adds to the sense that the *New Brisbane* has been invented out of nowhere: not out of the lands of the Turrbal people; not out of a 170 year history of white settlement; not out of a service city for a vast state-wide agrarian economy; not out of a pioneering Labor town; and not out of 33 years of conservative rule and oppressive division. With its genesis ablated, the new city is born immaculate. The unmastered past, whatever its unstated shortcomings, is made right by change, and by the promises of the future. Paris, London, Cairo, and Melbourne are made exciting by their history; Brisbane is made exciting by its future.

But is the past really benign? While government and the mainstream media look to the future of the *New Brisbane*, over past ten years writers, artists, and a few historians have begun to look to the past as part of the task of fully inhabiting the city. This engagement has opened up stories, images, and histories of Brisbane that previously were painfully cauterised: you cannot master the past by forgetting it.

The creative community have been agents and beneficiaries of change. Some like novelist Nick Earls have become implicated in the new identity of the city. Change has

come; but what is real and what is chimera is hard to tell. The narratives of change in their force and proliferation have been as productive in transforming the city as new roads, new facilities, or the viral growth of coffee shops.

**The Unmastered Past: ‘You may think you’re through with the past, but the past isn’t through with you’ (*Magnolia*, P T Anderson)**

In 1984, at the end of his two-volume *A History of Queensland*—which remains the only substantial narrative and analytical history of the state—Ross Fitzgerald laments that he can think of only a few talented writers who remain ‘in the cultural wasteland that is Queensland’. This was a judgement that few would have debated then. The exodus of writers, artists and educated has been much remarked. Queensland can muster a glamorous list of cultural exiles: Peter Porter, David Malouf, William Yang, Tracey Moffat, Jeanette Turner Hospital, Thea Astley, Jessica Anderson, PJ Hogan, and Roger McDonald among them. Fitzgerald’s vision of Queensland as a wasteland must have been a comfort to those who left for more fertile pastures, but it has been little comfort to those stayed behind. The combination of internal persecution (Fitzgerald’s own *History* was initially pulped due to political-legal pressure) and the internalisation of the external view of the state as empty—as a joke—marked the careers of artists who came to maturity in the 1980s. The work of those who did not leave has been scrubbed of meaning except within a binary of oppression and

resistance. The histories of the decades before 1990s have been scrubbed of any other nuance. Henry Reynolds has commented that Queensland history has forgotten race—but those historians looking wider will see that much more has been forgotten besides.

It is not that there wasn't history and identity, just a quashing of historical imagination. Brisbane has not been represented under any rubric except that of political turmoil and cultural evacuation. History here remains the preserve of specialists and archivists, largely emptied of political, racial and cultural questions. While aspects of Brisbane and Queensland have featured in local and institutional histories—the stock exchange, the shearers' strikes, the Brisbane Broncos, the Brisbane Bears), small histories of older suburbs and townships that were gathered together by the Greater Brisbane Act of 1924—there have been few attempts at anything more syncretic and comprehensive about the city. Ross Fitzgerald has stated that writing Queensland history during the Joh years earned you the scorn of historians and the censure of government. It was a place left unexamined and unknown.

This lack has bred a hunger for stories and images about the place seen in the (unlikely) success of Rosamond Siemon's *The Mayne Inheritance*. An old fashioned telling of a tale of murder in the Mayne family—the founding benefactors of the University of Queensland—the book became a word of mouth best seller for University of Queensland Press. More histories have come but the change is piecemeal. In 2002 the Brisbane Institute mounted the *Seeing Brisbane* exhibition at the Brisbane

City Hall—based on a collection of photos and memorabilia from the twentieth century. The exhibition showcased a city that has historically been content to sit rather drably—as seat of government and port for hinterland produce—behind the PR curtains while the nearby Gold Coast and more distant Barrier Reef have been marketed to the world as leisure playgrounds. The exhibition is in a way an example of itself. Showcasing the public, official representations as thin, somewhat half-hearted, it was itself a bit thin. A welcome effort to place the city in a broad popular perspective, the exhibition and booklet also testifies to the long road toward a deep cultural engagement with city history.

Just as there is no overarching history of the city, there has been little attempt to place the city and state within the national history. Mostly Queensland is left out of these narratives. In the standard national cultural histories, it's 'Tinseltown' and 'St Petersburg' that get all the attention. Even in the general histories, Queensland tends to be the odd one out. In Manning Clark's *A Short History of Australia*, Queensland or Brisbane hardly rate a mention—Adelaide gets far more attention. And when, in the 1990s, it came time for a Queensland author to write about the deep culture of a whole city, the contemporary writer most likely to take up the task, John Birmingham, did it (in *Leviathan*) for Sydney This is despite the productive effects of writing history from Queensland. Henry Reynolds talks, in *Why weren't we told?*, of needing to have lived 'on the frontier'—that is Townsville—

that for decades for him to be able to tell the paradigm-shifting tales of frontier contact that he has.

This cultural obliteration has been a point of departure for artists, arts administrators, policy makers, and city makers over the past decade. Artists and writers in apprehending the city have done so with a healthy parochialism. That is, they have not rejected the outside in looking at themselves. There has been a restatement and reinvestigation of some dominant mythologies—Brisbane as wasteland, as conservative heartland, as race-divided, as the hedonistic tropical north, as city-state imprisoned by a redneck hinterland—but artists and writers have also been free to re-invent the city. Artist Gordon Bennett, performance artist Christine Johnstone, Regurgitator, and writers Venero Armmano, John Birmingham, Nick Earls, Andrew McGahan, Jay Verney, among many others, have attempted to say new things about the place. For Earls, Brisbane is a benign metropole; for Armmano, migrancy split the city into Anglos and ethnics; and for Birmingham, in *He Died with a Felafel in his Hand*, the city is a surreal melo-comedy of interwoven personality and incident.

In many ways Andrew McGahan's Grand Guignol hallucination of the billowing corruption of the Bjelke-Petersen era, *Last Drinks*, is the emblematic attempt to deal with the "old Brisbane". While something of a detective story, it summons up the cruelty of the town: Bjelke-Petersen's subsumption of Brisbane into an even more conservative Queensland. Like Debra Beattie's on-line documentary *The Wrong Crowd*, McGahan refuses to allow the ugly fifties, sixties, and seventies

to be hidden behind tales of later progress—our version of the Whig interpretation of history. McGahan and Beattie begin the process of retrieving Brisbane through the stories of the Valley, the police, the police state, vice, gambling and corruption. For Beattie, and other members of the radicalised left, it is a painful examination. She talks of her disgust at the current Premier Peter Beattie's *rapprochement* with Bjelke-Petersen. Premier Beattie has several times been to the bedside of the aging politician who led a police state based electorally on a massive gerrymander, presided over widespread official corruption, committed environmental vandalism, resisted education reform, maintained the lowest education participation rates in the country, and led a state that drained away many of its best minds and creatives. While it is good electoral politics for Premier Beattie to resuscitate the idea that 'whatever you thought of Joh, he was good for Queensland', it is an approach which air-brushes Bjelke-Petersen's harm and delegitimises efforts to master the past.

Of course, there are reasons for this lack. Ross Gibson, in his *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland*, writes a history of the Sarina-Marlborough 'horror stretch' north of Rockhampton in terms of a barely decolonised past. He reminds us of the work of Alexandre and Margarete Mitscherlich, in their 1970s social psychologies of the German nation (*The Inability to Mourn* and *Society without the Father*), which illuminate the pent-up problems of an 'unmastered' past and the decades-long and troubling work of coming to terms with it. In the past three years there has been much commentary in the re-

united Germany on the belated impulse to mourn including WG Sebald's account of the firestorms and destruction of Hamburg. Narratives of guilt that have dominated national discourse for fifty years are now twinned with a recovery of German sorrow at their own losses: flattened cities and war-time horror. This grief and mourning—the recognition of loss and devastation, alongside wanton destructiveness—has helped join divisions in the culture that were as marked and severe as the sovereign divisions of German territory. On a vastly different scale there are parallels here for Brisbane. While the city of government literature and the mainstream media is bountiful, slipping free of its history into a benign future; there are many for whom turning back is part of the way forward.

### **Creative City / Smart State**

One weekend in 2001 Brisbane's *The Sunday Mail*—among Australia's highest circulation newspapers—boasted of its effectiveness in dissuading the Queensland Premier Peter Beattie from his public plan to change the slogan on all Queensland vehicle number plates from the *Sunshine State* to the *Smart State*. The paper reacted in horror to such a contrived change in the state's branding and they encouraged readers to follow suit. The readers did so. Over two weekends many professed a profound attachment to Queensland's identity as the *Sunshine State*—a happy-go-lucky place—and mocked the idea of Queensland as the *Smart State* for the pretentiousness of the claim and for its very *unQueenslanderness*. The tourism

industry which, traditionally, has traded on a beach and bikini image—recently manifest in the *Where else but Queensland?* campaign—was the most perturbed. Unfortunately, the hubris of Beattie's claims seemed to be indigestible to the very communities he sought to transform. Queensland is not alone in this—witness the electorate's glassy eyes at Federal Labor's vision for a 'knowledge nation'. Eventually Beattie backed down; vehicle owners would be offered the choice of the *Sunshine State* or the *Smart State*. The *Sunday Mail* crowed in victory over George Street.

The episode illustrated a long known dilemma for any Queensland government. How can it act to overcome the shortcomings of the state's skill base in order to shift the economic structure from a mix of agricultural production, mining and services (including tourism) towards the production and trade in knowledge products and information services. Queensland has had lower levels of education than other states, and an uneven dispersal of education attainment between the South-East corner, regional centres and rural areas. Despite annual population increases of around 60,000 people a year, the state suffers a continuing brain drain to interstate and overseas. As one bureaucrat unkindly put it—a lot of people moved to Queensland in the 1980s and 1990s but not many of them were very smart.

It is not surprising then that the cultural and economic transformation of Brisbane in the past ten years has been marked by the heavy, determined—remedial even—hand of government. Institutionalised culture has developed swiftly. The

number of artists has grown rapidly, at about 6% a year; the climate of artistic circulation and reception has been transformed. Much of this change, however, has been state-ified. Government in Queensland has moved from an oppressor of culture—it was only in the 1980s that the state library shredded the Mapplethorpe books and *American Psycho* remains banned—to a champion of it.

Of course, a whole-of-government engagement in culture—high, popular and anthropological, or opera, television and footpath dining—has meant a broader role for the state in many if not most jurisdictions. But in Brisbane the efforts of government in creating and sustaining a realm of culture, ideas and public discourse has been particularly marked. In the 1970s the flipside to Queensland political oppression was a politicised and radical artistic culture. What wasn't "official" culture operated at the margins of power and thus admitted a range of voices raised in anger or intent on subversion. On one hand, the Arts Division of the state government supported a ballroom dancing program; on the other, the city spawned organically the proto-punk band the Saints, radical theatre companies such as the Popular Theatre Troupe and Street Arts Theatre Company, and the satirical magazine the *Cane Toad Times*. After the fall of the Nationals on 2 December 1989—the news of which was greeted with euphoria by a youthful audience at the Livid Festival—the reform of arts funding and the arts statutory authorities was a priority of government.

The 1991 review of arts funding recommended a mini-Australia Council (circa 1985) model. The introduction of

funding for professional arts practice, determined by peer assessors against criteria of artistic merit and social justice, was to be of enormous importance. There was little change in the structure of the performing arts: Kooemba Jdarra theatre company was born; TN! Theatre Company and Street Arts died. But the change in the visual arts and writing communities, following the introduction of funding for individual artists, was profound. Many of the key figures of the next decade: Luke Roberts; Scott Redmond; Hiram To; Hugh Lunn; Venero Armanno; and Nick Earls were the recipients of significant funding. Armanno, now arguably the senior novelist resident in the state, alone received more than \$250,000 from Arts Queensland, the Literature Board and the film funding bodies in the decade to 2000. Visual artists and writers who previously struggled to get Federal funding, and to circulate within the industry nationally, began to break through without leaving their home state. It was not, however, until the 1995 *Building Local Going Global* policy document that the state government placed any emphasis on the market and technological aspects of art and culture.

Queensland has, of course, missed the economic tide before. Gold in Gympie saved the state from bankruptcy in 1861. Mining saw the state through—but Queensland, unlike Victoria, never developed a sizeable manufacturing base, and, correspondingly, lacked a sizeable educated middle-class. It was not till much later, with a slide in the importance of manufacturing industries, that Queensland began to catch up—economically and educationally—although this change was

concentrated in the south-east corner and in tourism centres. In rural and regional Queensland it has, by contrast, been a story of continuing economic erosion.

By the late 1990s both the state government and the Brisbane City Council, together and separately, acted to support the city's knowledge economy and cultural development for bald economic reasons. Only a few years previously the Brisbane City Council had done all it could to limit the Livid Music Festival through punitive noise restrictions. Now Livid, and its spin-off music enterprises worth \$4million to the city, were seen as a model of creative industries development. The second Beattie Government has gone further: the *Smart State* rubric replacing the seven priorities of his first government.

At first the *Smart State* platform concentrated on bio-tech, but its five concerns—Education for Life; Building Job Opportunities; Foundations for Growth; Industry Development, and Culture and Community—quickly became a useful catch-all for the ambitions of government. It took time, however, for the bureaucrats to embrace the cultural and creative industries sectors as part of the *Smart State* mix. While at a national level the arts sector had immersed itself in economic policy rhetoric beginning with the Industry Assistance Commission reports on books and culture in the late 1970s, state government—on the whole—maintained a romantic view of arts as a social rather economic good.

At the same time as the state government and the BCC embraced the arts and economics nexus, they embarked upon a series of initiatives intending to create a sphere of public debate.

Habermas's idea of the eighteenth century public sphere was as a place for the circulation of ideas free from the intervention of commerce or the state. In Brisbane, the public sphere is, it seems, a creature of the state. In quick succession the state government and the BCC supported the creation of the Brisbane Institute as a think tank to serve the city and the Brisbane Ideas Festival as a biennial intellectual infusion. These created self-conscious debate about the city. Premier Beattie then went further. A \$150,000 suite of literary awards was not even enough. He later added a Premier's Drama Award for the play-script which contributed most to Queensland public life. The Queensland Theatre Company poster for the winning entry—*Road to the She-Devil's Salon*—features the peculiar image of Premier Beattie shining a spot light on the playwright Sven Swenson. The state illuminates art rather than the other way round.

In a one-newspaper town these interventions were strange but important. Introduced from above, they as much highlighted as relieved the sense of stilted debate. Brisbane was transforming economically and culturally, but marginalised from national discourse—and still thawing from its long cultural winter—it struggled to talk about itself in anything other than the glowing terms that developers favour. But the rhetoric and reality of change in the city was powerful. By the early 2000s, there were more than a few prepared to, if not, extol, then tentatively assert, the virtues of the *New Brisbane*. Former Australia Council Chair Terry Cutler, in a report for the federal

Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, has suggested:

Over the past decade Queensland has come from nowhere to being an energetic technology centre, mainly based around emerging small enterprises. It has anchored a lot of local film and television activity through the multinational studios on the Gold Coast. Brisbane has been building infrastructure in creative industries through a strong involvement by Government and the local universities. [...] There are strong personal networks and a climate of collaboration. There is, in fact, an actual buzz in Brisbane. [...] Brisbane is a good example of [Richard] Caves' point that creative industries are characterised by strong informal people networks. Some émigrés to Brisbane described the contemporary ethos of the place as comparable to Adelaide's cultural renaissance under Don Dunstan. There is strong local political leadership promoting the 'Smart State' built on knowledge and technology industries. There is not that overshadowing by dominant multinationals that occurs in Melbourne and Sydney. The Brisbane City Council, with its unique jurisdiction in an Australian context, provides an additional layer of strong governmental support for creative industries.

Recently both the Queensland government and the Brisbane City Council have developed landmark policy visions for the cultural development of the city and state. The city, state and culture have become indivisible.

The State Government's 2002 *Creative Queensland* sets new benchmarks for provincial cultural policies. Rather than dance, theatre, music, visual arts and the rest, it is structured around 'people', 'communities', 'places, collections and traditions', and 'creative enterprise'. It is radically cross-sectoral

and cross-discipline; places strong emphasis on the twin emergent elements of community development and creative industries; and alternatives to the grant and the edifice as the traditional struts of cultural policy are explicitly contemplated.

*Creative Queensland* may be a cultural policy makers' dream, but it could become the arts service providers' nightmare. It asserts the principles by which a whole-of-government approach may occur, but there is little new money or activity. While it announced a few initiatives, these were not budget-secured when the policy was released and are not costed in the document. Instead the *Creative Queensland* colonises other areas of government and, through the affinities between creative enterprises and the knowledge economy, seeks to place culture at the centre of the government.

Most of the document repackages pre-existing programs or initiatives from a range of portfolios (education, training, information economy, state development). A companion document, *Creative Government*, actually trawls through the entire suite of portfolios—in alphabetical order—enumerating what each already do for culture in Queensland. And that includes the Police, which has a pipe band! Even Treasury gets to be cultural because it's got a Gambling Community Benefit Fund.

The Brisbane City Council's *Living in Brisbane 2010* document is no less ambitious in setting out eight directions for the city: the Clean and Green City; the Accessible City; the City designed for Sub-tropical Living; the Inclusive City; the Active and Healthy City; the Smart and Prosperous City; the Creative



City; and the Regional and world city. In a place-competitive, globalised world where cities and regions are as much drivers of economies as nations, the *postmodern city* needs plenty of planning.

The concept of the postmodern city was originally used in urban planning, design, architecture and cultural studies to describe postindustrial renewal in depressed cities in the Midlands, and then to describe truly weird phenomena such as Las Vegas or hubristic glass monoliths like the Renaissance Centre in downtown Los Angeles. But it is now being used more widely to refer to cities that are trying to invent their futures, consciously creating or constructing preferred perceptions, images and futures. 'World' cities like London, Paris, Tokyo, New York, Los Angeles—maybe Sydney—have to manage their images but don't have to construct them. There are already many available—though not all are good ones. Another type of city, such as Beijing, Hong Kong, Rome, Singapore, Buenos Aires, Melbourne, are well known internationally and have much to attract world attention, but often have at least one significant downside—middling rather than dynamic economic attractors, human rights or environmental deficits, a perceived lack of 'culture', crumbling infrastructure.

Then there are those cities that have engaged in a recent and conscious construction of an image using an arsenal of modern management and marketing resources—'niche' cities. The image of Glasgow has gone from the Gorbals and grime to 'European city of culture'. There are now more Glaswegian

hairdressers than shipbuilders, and the gaudy colours of Rennie Macintosh give the lie to the image of the dour Scot.

Brisbane is a niche city seeking to create its image. In a globalising world fuelled by a knowledge-based economy, niche cities trying to create a space for themselves must plan, invent, create and manage expectation, massage the population, provide symbolic as well as real opportunities for feedback.

*Living in Brisbane 2010* speaks a language in which the future is just about to be achieved, where real challenges like overcoming the digital divide are only a short step away. The smart city will guarantee that 'all residents will have access to the internet and the ability to use it'. It succeeds as an aspirational document. We only see the merest glimpses of those who might not be on the fast train to a better future: a city of inclusive communities will pilot 'new ways of addressing homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health problems and anti-social and criminal behaviour amongst young people'.

Its embrace of the super-confident language of contemporary management-speak, of 'envisioning a preferred future', massages the difficult steps along the way. Short on data, it has little specific to say about any of the myriad aspirations, directions and ideas it canvasses. It also has no sense of scale: what are eminently achievable goals; what are tremendous stretches; what are, frankly, dreams? Its value is as an exhilarating theatre of choice. Brisbanites have been offered inclusive communities, and a smart, prosperous, creative, clean and green, accessible, regional and even world city. Brisbane is the future. What more could the postmodern citizen want?

**Nice place to live; wouldn't want to visit: 'Australia is the Brisbane of the world' (Barry Humphries)**

On the evening of the Academy Awards broadcast in March 2002, Brisbane Marketing began high rotation of a new television commercial titled *A Downtown Story* by Nick Earls, authored and fronted by lad fiction author Nick Earls. In the TVC the story of Brisbane's downtown is represented as a courtship between a male city, which is introduced in Earls's narration: "He is a regular Brisbane Guy" and a female tourist: "She is a young European backpacker heading home". The set-up reflects Brisbane's status as a stopover town rather than a destination. Earls's voiceover announces that: "He (the city) has twenty-four hours to win her heart." The accompanying visuals have the couple sharing intimate, charming or exciting moments in downtown Brisbane: their first encounter is over a water bubbler in the Queen Street Mall; the regular Brisbane guy then falls backwards off a couch at the Queensland Art Gallery; in-line skaters fly past the couple as they cross the Goodwill Bridge; they swim and smooch at Southbank's Breaka Beach; they dine at a downtown restaurant; they are handed a copy of Earls's book *World of Chickens* in a bookshop by the barely disguised author; they shop for women's underwear, visit an Asia deli, watch a dragon procession in China Town, walk through a Rain Forest at South Bank, gamble at the Treasury Casino, before ending up dancing in each other's arms in front of one of the big fans at the Press Club in the Valley.

There are many striking things about this campaign. For Nick Earls—who with a background in advertising is as expert a marketer as he is a writer—the campaign is a boon. Brisbane has always had a thin celebrity class: news-readers, politicians, sports people, and a handful of entrepreneurs. For a writer, rather than a sports personality like Wally Lewis or Kieran Perkins, to be selected as the face of Brisbane—and then to be able to narrate Brisbane as a romance akin to one of his novels—speaks of how carefully Earls has sought to construct himself as a 'Brisbane' writer and how much Brisbane in embracing him has changed.

The centre of Brisbane has, over the past fifteen years, been encircled by culture. An oblong-shaped ring of cultural industry related development and redevelopment now encircles the CBD and inner suburbs: mostly at about two kilometres distance from the GPO. The South Bank Parklands, which began its redevelopment with Expo 88, is home to significant cultural facilities: the Queensland College of Art, the Conservatorium, a 5000 seat live performance venue, and, mostly democratically, Breaka Breach a large artificial swimming beach and waterhole. At the western end is the heavy modernism of Robin Gibson's lego-like homes for the arts statutory authorities: Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Queensland Museum, Queensland Art Gallery and the State Library of Queensland. The Kurilpa Point section of this facility is soon to be leavened by the more tropical and tricky design of the Gallery of Modern Art (which will include the state's first cinemateque) and a major extension

to the under-resourced State Library of Queensland. Next door is lively West End, home to production and post houses, animation, photography, and various support services.

Across the river to the north, the Roma Street Parklands now unites a number of public spaces—the Rail Yards and Albert Park—which, while serving usefully as a gay beat, have otherwise formed a barrier rather than an entry into the city. The newest ring site is the Kelvin Grove Urban Village which, when complete, will redevelop the old Gona Barracks site as residential and university village including a creative industries precinct. The precinct will be new economy rather than old economy, and given over to the incubation of new industry activity such as multi-media, graphic design, film, television and music.

To the east is the Valley, which is the home of the city's night-time economy. It is here that live music is under threat from inner urban residential development. Running as a spur off the ring is a cultural corridor linking the Valley with its new Judith Wright Arts Centre for Contemporary Art and the 381 Brunswick Street Arts Building to the Powerhouse at New Farm Park. Finally from the Valley it is back across the River to Kangaroo Point with its cliffs, walkways, river frontage and public art—and a new footbridge to the botanic gardens and QUT's cultural precinct which attempts to make the campus a cultural corridor into the city.

The new cultural ring around the city offers a diversity of experience and caters to different groups: the Cultural Centre to the mink coats and starched shirts; West End to serious

audiovisualites; the Valley to young ravers; South Bank to families; The Powerhouse to experimentalists and the pink dollar; and Kelvin Grove Precinct to nerdy creatives with business attitude. This diversity of spaces and users would seem to be a good thing.

**“He’s a Brisbane author. She’s a city with a lot of stories. They’re made for each other.”**

Accompanying the *A Downtown Story* TVC was the city-wide distribution of an eight page brochure *Diary of a Day Tripper*, and a series of spot newspaper advertisements suggesting Brisbane locales as simulacra for more glamorous ones elsewhere. Under such a scheme Brisbane's featurelessness, *its weak brand identity*, becomes a virtue. If we squint, Moreton Island becomes Port Douglas; Brisbane Forest Park the Daintree; Manly Beach becomes St Kilda Beach; and Steve Irwin's Australia Zoo becomes Kakadu. What Brisbane really needed to transform it from a stopover city to a destination city was not new tourism features but to be re-narrativised.

Again it is a boon for Earls—the brochure is stuffed with photographs of him. For the first time since Hugh Lunn, and maybe since Steele Rudd, the city has a writer who is in sync with his city. Thus anointed, Earls can do more than write novels set in Brisbane, he can write the city itself. City, state, commerce, and artist join in mutual interest, much as they do around cultural tourism of major events. It sees a collapse of

any oppositional or interrogatory role for the artist. The writer is coopted by the city, and the city by the writer.

A new city/state identity has been written over, or at least contests, still active, older images of Queensland. As the Hansen moment reminded us, Queensland is often still seen, particularly from the outside, as a politically conservative, racially intolerant cultural wasteland. But narratives of Brisbane's post-Expo cosmopolitanism are increasingly dominant. A recent issue of *Black & White* magazine, for example, carried a now familiar "Brisbane—When did it get so good" story. The narratives seem to have something in common with those of the renaissance in Australian culture in the late sixties and early seventies which argued a rebirth in Australian film and theatre, and a transformation of Australian publishing and literature. We might contest here whether it is really *cosmopolitanism* at play—that is the importation and acceptance of the other. Instead what seems to be happening is a transformation and projection of the local. Brisbane's physical and cultural features are more forcefully projected and more eagerly digested.

There are, of course, competing narratives and realities. How much has the transformation of the city and its inner-suburbs translated into change for the outer suburbs? Despite having one of the largest unified local government authorities in the world, and the data suggesting that Brisbane displays less wealth asymmetry than the bigger capitals, recent elections and referenda have established that Brisbane's inner-city residents have more in common with those in inner Melbourne or Sydney

than with people in the outer estates of Brisbane. Hansonism was born just down the road in the Ipswich-Brisbane corridor—classic Alan Jones struggle street territory. Mark Latham's uncompromising Labor vision, *From the Suburbs*, foretells of an alliance between the left-leaning cultural elite and the right wing establishment against the majority population in the suburbs. He reminds us that federal elections since Whitlam have been won with a suburban strategy. Until the urban consolidation that has transformed inner Brisbane have worked its way through the suburban demography, the political benefits of these changes are unlikely to be seen.

The term *Brisvegas* is now official. The *Macquarie Dictionary* has entered it into its *Book of Slang*; The Brisbane City Council uses it on its website to describe the city, particularly the Valley, after dark. For young people, it offers the most popular alternative identity for the city. The origin of the term is contested. First used in print in *Time-Off* magazine in 1992, it is likely to have come either from Toowoomba or Rockhampton—where locals talked of going to Brisvegas. It later became part of the Brisbane lexicon, boosted by use on commercial radio and the street press. For the really cool there has been an attempt to supersede it with *Brisneyland*.

Both terms capture the playful, but ambivalent feelings many young people have about the *new* city: its fabrication, its promise and its ultimately limited ability to deliver. *Brisvegas* greets the city with celebratory irony puncturing any grandiose claims. As John Birmingham has noted, no-one cares about *cred* in Brisbane because no-one has any. Sitting outside of the

national logic, bright young people in Brisbane are as likely to look to San Francisco or Tokyo as to Sydney or Melbourne. The APT (Asia Pacific Triennial) and MAAP (Multi-Media Art Asia-Pacific) both dismiss southern links for bigger and more exotic game internationally. Perhaps the most interesting new art event in the city is SOOB: *Straight Out of Brisbane*. It was conceived in 2002 by Ben Eltham, Susan Kukucka, Louise Terry, and Cal Wilson as a Brisbane version of TINA: the *This is Not Art Festival* in Newcastle. This annual festival for emerging artists is as likely to set fire to an arts bureaucrat as to court one. Culture jamming exists here alongside contemporary music and spoken word performance. The *New Brisbane* and the *Smart State* were mocked by some participants, but mostly interrogated for possible phoniness.

Brisbane has changed: bigger, more diverse, more liberal, more colourful, confident and libertine. The *New Brisbane* is the enabled and enabling city of the future. Perhaps it will all come true.

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