Ecocultural Health and Resilience in Regional Australian Communities:

Mitigating the Psychological Distress of Environmental Crisis through Community Arts Participation.

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Typical human ecosystems are not our cities but our cultures, the intellectual worlds of our civilisations, societies, convictions about faith and knowledge, rationality and emotion.

We can now understand science and art, religion or commerce in a completely new way: as cultural ecosystems ... a culture that wishes to detach itself completely from its natural heritage because it does not acknowledge that heritage or underestimates its significance, cannot ultimately survive.

No culture that is capable of survival can be built against the rationale inherent in ecosystemic organisation and against the general conditions that it needs if it is to function.

What is needed is flexibility and readiness to change, controlled openness and the ability to constantly compensate for a lack of equilibrium, as well as striving for efficiency but also for sufficiency.

These are the characteristics of all systems organised for future capability, in nature and in culture.

We obviously still have a great deal to learn in this respect. Intuitions of this kind lie behind the great ecologisation processes that are taking place at present in many spheres of social and cultural life.

Science is only now providing an explanation for this.

Ultimately, a second vision was built on the ruins of the 20th Century’s mechanistic models of humanity: that of a form of artistic expression appropriate to the new ecological image of man [sic]

(Finke 2004: 105)

I declare that this is my own work and has not been submitted for any other assessment.
i. Abstract

By 2020, it is estimated that mental ill-health issues will be the greatest cause of debilitating illness facing developed nations (WHO 2010, Hamilton 2010). The forecast epidemic of mental illness is further complicated by the effect of environmental issues such as climate change on psychological coping and stress mechanisms in people and whole cultures (Speldewinde et al. 2009, Berry et al. 2008).

Psychoterratic (psyche- mind, terra- earth) distress is identified in the concept of 'solastalgia' (Albrecht 2007). Solastalgia is the loss of solace experienced in relation to negatively perceived environmental change in one's home environment, and is evidenced in mental health of regional Australians suffering the impacts of human-induced (artificial) and natural, negatively perceived environmental change (Albrecht 2005, 2007).

Community arts participation in regional Australian communities demonstrates positive correlations between participation and human health and wellbeing. As a corollary, this thesis proposes that community arts is a suitable vehicle to link the issues of environmental health and community mental health, by employing an ecocultural health perspective.

Ecocultural health is a framework which incorporates human health as a subset of ecological health from the scale of global health to the health of small communities. An ecocultural health perspective is employed to demonstrate the links between human mental health and ecosystem health in regional Australia.

Community arts can, it is argued, effectively seek to remediate local ecological health conditions and mental health issues within the community. On the policy development and services delivery level, the employment of community arts to mitigate solastalgia in a time of environmental crisis can be used as an upstream (primary), midstream (secondary) and downstream (tertiary) intervention for non-acute mental health issues. Through acting at multiple scales, community arts can alleviate the burden on poorly or inadequately resourced regional mental health services and regional public health promotion efforts. Community arts also has positive effects on pride and sense of place, which, in turn, has positive effects for social cohesion and policy development in regional Australia.

With growing evidence of causal relationships between decline in human health and detrimental environmental change, there is an emergent role for community arts in remediating negative psychoterratic conditions and environmental degradation.
ii. Acknowledgements

*Ngaala kaaditj Noongar moort keyen kaadak nidja boodja*. I pay my respects to the first people of this land. Deep, intuitive connectedness to country is knowing that inspires and informs this thesis. In another iteration, the honour of Mother Earth; Pacha Mama.

I would like to express gratitude and respect to my supervisor, Prof Glenn Albrecht, for his support. Glenn has endured my zealous deficit of attention and hyperactivity to concept variations throughout the year, and has been patient in offering guidance and clarification within my process of complicating and uncomplicating complexity. Allan Johnstone has facilitated administrative requirements particularly in my last weeks of physiological exhaustion to completion.

Through participation in this project, my mother Carmel is now a certifiable Patron of the Arts and Environment, if not prior to this event. Mumsy enabled the possibility of eating at various times in this financially deficient, Austudy funded course of study as well as a place to study all year and occasional solitary house sits. David Payne has been an invaluable support person in mutually flexible terms of employment this year. My housemate Jo supported me in friendship, and in my elusivity. My father, Brian has supported with Photoshop/ Illustrator magic and proofreading prowess. I deeply appreciate the enthusiasm and support of Ilka Nelson, Ailsa Grieve and Teresa Chilkowich through proofreading final drafts. Bear (Joanna) Shiell visited at key times to rework and realign the direction of the thesis, and her visual insight helped to enable formulation of the framework.

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I dedicate this work to healthy country, healthy community and healthy *being* in Regional Australia.
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v. List of Abbreviations

AAP  Australian Associated Press
ABC  Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABARE Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics
ABC  Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS  Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACE  Arts Council England
AIHW Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AIPA Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association
ARIA+ Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia plus
ANU  Australian National University
BRS  Bureau of Rural Sciences
CAAC Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Inc
CANWA Community Arts Network WA Inc
CCD  Community Cultural Development
CCDB Community Cultural Development Board of the Australia Council
CCDNSW Community Cultural Development New South Wales
C of A Commonwealth of Australia
CSIRO Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DADAA WA Disability and the Arts, Disadvantage and the Arts (WA) Inc
EDS  Environmental Distress Scale
EIA  Environmental Impact Assessment
EJF  Environmental Justice Foundation
ERL  Environmental Resources Ltd.
FPIC  Free, Prior and Informed Consent
GISCA National Centre for Social Applications of Geographic Information Systems
HIA  Health Impact Assessment
IAIA International Association for Impact Assessment
ICM-10 International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems
MDBA Murray Darling Basin Authority
NACMH National Advisory Committee on Mental Health
NHRA National Rural Health Alliance Inc.
NRM  Natural Resource Management
OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OzCo</td>
<td>Australia Council for the Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAPcH</td>
<td>Policy, Arts, Psychoterratic Conditions and Health</td>
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<td>RAA</td>
<td>Regional Arts Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>RANZCP</td>
<td>Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists</td>
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<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>Social-Ecological Systems</td>
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<td>SOC</td>
<td>Psychological Sense of Community</td>
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<td>SIA</td>
<td>Social Impact Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAI</td>
<td>The Australia Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>TD</td>
<td>Transdisciplinary</td>
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<td>UNEP</td>
<td>United Nations Environment Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>VicHealth</td>
<td>Victorian Health Promotion Foundation</td>
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