What about we hold another cultural festival? Negotiating cultural difference in local communities

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to discuss the ways in which cultural difference is articulated in local communities through the practices and actions of local individuals, groups and government. Both of us in our own research projects and practical experiences, have examined the relationship between residents and their local government. In particular, we are interested in the dialogues around cultural representation, social equity and justice that take place, and how these dialogues are articulated and enacted within the civic sphere. In particular, we are interested in the ways in which these dialogues are managed through policies of multiculturalism and the institutional arrangements of local government.

One of the main reasons for writing this paper is that much of the literature around enacting cultural difference such as via policies of multiculturalism, is presented in what we think is a dichotomous view of the frameworks and achievements that underpin such dialogues and action. Actions around issues of cultural diversity for example, tend to be represented either via discourses of inclusiveness and celebrated as ‘proof’ that Australia is a truly multicultural and tolerant nation - or criticised for the way in which these actions reinforce models of exclusivity and paternalism, and thus represent versions of what Ghassan Hage (1998) suggests is the overwhelming discourse of a dominant ‘white nation’.

Our research and employment experiences (albeit from a very particular reference point, given we are both from English speaking backgrounds) has led us to believe that neither response fully captures the ways in which cultural and linguistic differences are played out in Australian cities. We don’t agree that there is only a single discourse, outcome of dominance or version of celebrating difference. Our experiences are of a multi-dimensional engagement and changing terrain around the negotiation of cultural difference.

While it is fair to say that we do err on the side of hope in this debate – we do think that there are positive examples of how cultural and linguistic difference is negotiated - it is not in an uncritical manner. We want to use this paper as an opportunity to raise
questions and explore what we see, are the nuances of how difference is negotiated at the local level. In particular, we wish to explore the geographies of cultural difference that are articulated between the terrains of the institutional/civic sphere of local government and the civic/community/individual sphere of local places\(^2\). That is, the spaces and places where change is negotiated and the circumstances under which that happens at the municipal level.

We will draw on two urban based case studies for this discussion — the City of Greater Dandenong and Moreland City Council, both urban centres situated in Melbourne, one in the outer south east and the other to the north of the Melbourne Central Business District.

We would like to begin with reference to the popular mini series that addresses the machinations of local government, *Grass Roots*. This series could be argued to present a true, if somewhat satirized representation of local debates and local government’s capacity to engage with cultural difference and specifically issues around civic belonging through participation in a communal cultural festival.

Scene 1 EXTERIOR. ARCADIOA SURF BEACH. MORNING

A 1930s surf club that’s a bit rough in places, looks as if it needs some tender loving care.

SURF-CLUB MANAGER: [out of view] Without wanting to be too blunt about it Harry –

*Find Harry and the surf-club manager down on the sand. They conduct their interview conversation with eyes glued to the waves, reading the swell.*

... has the surf club got any hope of getting our cultural grant, or have we been shafted?

HARRY: No, no – You’ll be – I’m with you on this.

SURF-CLUB MANAGER: So you’ve told Col we want our annual sausage sizzle –

HARRY: My word.

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1 We use the notion of the civic sphere to represent the realm through which everyday material activities and actions take place. This is in contrast to what might be termed the ‘symbolic sphere’ which represents and encapsulates things like policies and institutional structures.

2 We define local government both in terms of the civic and the institutional sphere deliberately, because we don’t want to set up a false demarcation between that sphere and the community/public sphere (as that is far too simplistic).
SURF-CLUB MANAGER: - but the talk keeps coming back about this one big festival … Maybe you haven’t been clear enough.

HARRY: It’s all – It’ll never happen in a – Hot air.

SURF-CLUB MANAGER: The word we hear is, it will. All very elite and arty-farty and little groups like us end up with nothing.

HARRY: Col thinks he’s – His head’s in the clouds – Half the time he’s –

SURF-CLUB MANAGER: But are you, Harry, are you letting him know what the people think? The wife’s choir, too; they’re all up in arms.

*Harry considers whether he couldn’t do better.*

HARRY: Fair – Um – Right.

SURF-CLUB MANAGER: That’s your ear-bashing then.

*Harry knows he means that’s the end of the discussion.*

In we go.

HARRY: I’ll – In we go.

*Keen eyes assessing the surf, they both head down to the water.*


The Mayor of Arcadia Waters, Col Dunkley, is convinced that he needs to support a grand cultural festival with internationally recognised performers, as a means of putting Arcadia Waters ‘on the map’, and so to bring in a large audience — and their money. However, as highlighted in one scene, this is not what ‘the people’ of Arcadia Waters want. The Council’s money, set aside for cultural grants, is understood as being there for a sausage sizzle at the local surf lifesaving club, a long valued tradition that is in danger of being shafted if this other, grander, event proceeds.

What is of interest here is this divergence of views between 'official' takes on how a local community is represented through cultural performance, and the 'on the ground' view, which is usually about participation in activities that are meaningful to that group, activities that reiterate a history of particular traditions and points of reference.

**City of Greater Dandenong case study**

To understand some of the ways the City of Greater Dandenong address cultural and linguistic difference within its municipal boundary, two different theoretical conceptualisation’s will be drawn upon to think through how cultural difference is
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negotiated in one of the country’s most multicultural local government municipalities. First, feminist and human geographers’ notions of the interplay/inter-relationship between the physical and social relations of place will be explored. (Rose 1993, Hanson and Pratt 1994). Second, Chantel Mouffe’s notion of ‘agonism’ and the role of tension as a key process that helps transform democratic politics are discussed (1992a, 1992b, 1996).

Mouffe suggests that a more radical approach to understanding democracy and participation in community and society involves challenging the supposition that group identities are all-inclusive and harmonious (Mouffe, 1996). She suggests that notions of ‘just’ democratic participation and the actual dynamic experiences of that participation, could be developed if the notion of ‘tension’ is incorporated into our thinking. In particular, that there will never be a singular version of cultural rights or activity that will achieve just outcomes or social membership. Mouffe proposes that a productive part of the democratic participatory process is precisely the presence of disagreement and conflict, or what Mouffe calls ‘agonism’ (Mouffe, 1992a, 1996).

It is important to note from this perspective, tension and difference are not ‘antagonistic’ to each other. Rather, in conditions that assume the presence of difference and conflict, there is actually room for change, ongoing dialogue and thus, the representation and the participation of many more voices than in current understandings of democracy and the participatory experience. Tension can therefore be a tool through which to explore how the boundaries and scales of social membership are defined in a way that sees certain communities of interest develop and thus notions of cultural justice established.

This is very useful framework to think through some of the issues around cultural diversity because it enables us to acknowledge the implications of the messiness and tension in negotiating such differences and explore the practical outcomes of these factors in real life situations. By locating conflict and struggle at the centre of

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3 Melissa undertook some research for her doctoral thesis in this local government area and has also worked in the Council as the social planner and continues to work with Council now as a social planning consultant.

4 Exploring the notion of tension in the manner that Mouffe describes is, is not to argue for an inexhaustible set of possibilities, or, to suggest that all forms of conflict and disagreement are plausible. The notion of tension is firmly embedded in the idea of striving for a version of justice and
understanding these debates, the role played by informal processes and our reading of both conventional and less conventional sites used by citizens to achieve cultural recognition, can be specifically recognised and explored. Mouffe's arguments are somewhat limited, however, because they are aspatial and do not really take account of the geographies of socio-political relationships that, it could be argued, are a critical component in the negotiation of cultural difference. What is meant here is that there are socio spatial relations that define human interaction — the scales, spaces and the types and mechanisms that characterize those spaces through which relations take place. An understanding of ‘geography’ in this manner, can deepen our understanding of how it is that at the levels of tension and dispute and the forums where this happens, change occurs. Furthermore, via this idea of the various levels upon which social relations get played out, we can begin to understand how the types of environments and situations created or that spontaneously arise in the local government context, can actually create moments where a deeper level of engagement with cultural difference occurs.

In this case study, the central argument is that certain forms of activity that occur between Greater Dandenong Council and its NESB communities, create an important critical sphere of tension that engenders positive change in terms of making council practices more inclusive of and indeed, guided by, a variety of cultural and linguistic perspectives. The negotiations of cultural difference that occurred, helped work towards moving beyond the romanticism of cultural difference. In particular, the importance of the dialogue that occurred is that it is a means of validating, recognising and having people from non-English speaking backgrounds define programs and activities that met their needs and aspirations according to their frameworks and understanding of the issues, rather than having a set of needs and responses determined from the outside.

Specifically, what I wish to argue happens in this local government and community context, is on two levels, or across two spheres. First, change has happened dramatically in the internal social relations and culture of Council and officers. The less formal sphere of social relations of the community, the cultural issues and debates, have edged into Council's formal institutional structures. This has occurred because of the spaces of contestation that have been able to be created in this fairly democratic opportunity that is concerned with the establishment of political communities which
conservative institutional environment. These environments and encounters have changed the way things operate internally and have seen Council respond, and be informed by, its non-English speaking communities. Specifically, I think the combination of the following factors has contributed to this:

- The creation of policies that eventually Council has had to respond to in more practical and tangible ways,
- The development of programs that pass on important institutional knowledge to community members and leaders through leaderships training programs and workshops to inform individuals and groups about how to access government funding and become incorporated, and,
- The employment and presence of officers, both from NESBs or with experience working with a range of people and groups from cultural and linguistic perspectives, who support change through their own commitment to social justice and contact with individuals and groups require a different approach.

It could be argued that these changes are symbolic and represent overarching ‘statements of aspiration’ that take a long time to produce new and different approaches or never amount to change. Another reading, however, might be that these relatively ‘easy’ symbolic nods to cultural difference through Council’s diversity policies and programs, have created their own momentum and have reached a point where the only way forward is to deliver far more tangible institutional change and action. These programs, combined with the expectations and responses from the community which comprises over 60% of residents from non-English speaking backgrounds, have forced this Council to negotiate with the realities of cultural difference in the civic sphere, albeit reluctantly. Like the Arcadia Waters Council, the nice ideas of diversity and difference have unavoidably collided with the reality of actual people who represent part of the diverse community within which this local council sits.

Specifically, these somewhat small scale activities have provided the environment and learning so that individuals and groups from various cultural backgrounds, who were strictly located in the civic sphere, became confident and equipped via the assistance of local government, such that they are able to engage with its own
institutional frameworks and spheres of operation, they have been able to use the ‘system’ for their own benefit as a result.

A good example of this change is the process that brought about the re-development of Council’s interaction with NESB communities, through what were called the ‘Consulting without Insulting’ workshops. The process was brought about by a member of the Vietnamese community who also at that time, was the manager of one of the local Vietnamese support organisations. He was angry with Council officers for always coming to ask people in non-Anglo communities for advice in a way that he felt was offensive, superficial and where there was little feedback on the outcomes. Further, he was upset that the same individuals and groups always formed the basis of the consultation and that so-called ‘ethnic community organisations’ were also claiming to speak for people without necessarily consulting more widely themselves.

Now nothing could have come of this man’s complaint to the Council officers. Greater Dandenong receives many complaints from people who are not happy with the way council is perceived to operate. But, given council’s range of social justice policies and programs, the way it uses its multicultural identity to ‘market’ the municipality as an attractive area to live and work in and when convenient, champions its networks and links with different cultural communities as examples of how interactive it is with its non-English speaking community; Council could not really ignore the voices of those in the community who were challenging the extent of its commitment to engaging with those constituents.

Further, the officers, some of whom were from non-English speaking backgrounds themselves (but let’s not assume that means they were necessarily active in promoting such radical forms of engagement), also wanted to make changes around their consultation mechanisms. Some Council officers sensed a level of unfair engagement which undermined their work, so the process of developing a set of guidelines around engagement was seen to improve their capacity to develop and implement worthwhile and relevant programs in the community.

Five workshops were undertaken in Council chambers over a series of months. It was confronting, emotional and not much was left unsaid about Council’s institutional
and indeed, officers’ shortcomings. Over this series of meetings with forty-two different cultural groups represented, (organisations and individual leaders), the depth of inappropriateness and isolation that had resulted from the so-called consultation and participatory experiences with this institutional body, were revealed. Representatives from different groups took centre stage and led the direction and outcomes of this process, which made clear that Council was way off the mark.

From these meetings, a set of consultation guidelines and expectations was developed and it was agreed that a body that could at some level represent a range of cultural communities was also needed in the future. The idea for the South Eastern Ethnic Communities Council was born, a group now in existence and presenting a range of cultural communities, charged with assisting Council and other bodies in their change processes as well as being a vehicle through which organisations representing groups from NESBs can present their issues and aspirations.

I wish to argue that the ‘Consulting without Insulting’ process and the outcomes achieved, whilst small, represented critical changes in the culture of this local government, and in the way that both leaders and groups from NESB were engaged with. Council provided an environment of informal interaction where the spotlight was turned sharply the other way – from Council looking out at individuals and communities, to one where Council itself became the focus of the scrutinising gaze.

Most importantly, the process created a boundary, a positive line in the institutional sand of this local government that could not easily be washed away. The awkward and unsavoury dialogue that both councillors and officers did not necessarily want to hear, was clearly articulated and recorded within official channels and therefore further engagement, if to be legitimate, could only operate according to these guidelines.

It is fair to say that the actual changes in Council’s forms of interaction with NESB has been slow in some sections since these workshops but nor has the approach able to be the same. And it should be noted that anecdotally, the City of Greater Dandenong is considered to be one of the most progressive Victorian local government’s in relation to negotiating cultural and linguistic difference. It is also interesting to note that some of Council’s major critics from the various non-English
speaking communities, have also not necessarily liked the changes brought about by the ‘Consulting without Insulting’ workshops. Other groups and individuals are now included in Council’s consultative processes and these individuals are not necessarily the main representatives called upon for comment. The geographies of power in terms of representation around cultural difference in local government then, are not just about a flow of power defined by the ‘institution’ versus the ‘ethnic resident’. It is about more complex interactions across individuals, communities and the institutional arrangements that exist within them. The important point is the space that is created and the tension that is allowed to be expressed and worked through rather than hidden or muted. This space and opportunity represents a significant interface of change in terms of shifting power and asserting the validity of other voices and perspectives in the local government context.

The second important way the boundaries of cultural dominance are challenged and changed is in the way local government can be a site through which cultural recognition at the institutional level is led by the community. In these instances, the flows and boundaries of change are led from outside the institutional walls, as environments are created in which the demand for cultural difference be acknowledged.

An example of such negotiations is represented by the Muslim Women’s Forum, held by the City of Greater Dandenong a couple of weeks after the September 11 events in the United States in 2001. The manner in which this event took place and how Council responded, shows that at the very local level, local government can provide an interesting site through which the negotiations around the fear and anxiety of cultural difference, get played out in response to the needs and aspirations of its NESB communities.

The forum came about following an informal discussion with a male representative from one of the Bosnian communities, after a meeting of the Greater Dandenong Interfaith committee which had just discussed how the multi-faith group could represent its support for religious expression and condemnation of the violence of September 11. The community worker commented on the number of Muslim women he knew, who were afraid to leave their homes and had become very unsure about what community services they could now access which were safe and appropriate.
The community development officer took this information back to her manager at Council and the two decided to take the issue further, particularly since Council had been unsure of what to do post September 11 and how to respond to some of the underlying anecdotal tensions that were around in the community. The officers organised a morning forum in liaison with the original community leader, as well as other Muslim leaders and representatives from various mosques, services and organisations. The aim of the forum was to show respect and support for Muslim women in their local community and to provide practical advice about local services that were available and accessible to the women. The forum was also aimed at providing a space, at the request of the local Muslim women, where they could express their feelings in relation to the events of September 11 and how it was affecting their daily lives.

Nearly one hundred women attended the gathering. The number of women, the range of different cultural backgrounds and the presence of those wearing the hijab was unheard of at a Council function. It caused concern for some, with one of the senior managers heard to say “what are we doing having all these bloody women in their head gear here? We’re putting ourselves at risk by having these women here in our foyer”. His comment caused a significant level of consternation amongst staff and generated much debate. This was a good thing. The corporeality of this community had been brought to Council’s attention.

But it had also served a purpose because the morning was firmly embedded in the needs and aspirations of the women concerned. The local women had wanted to know where they could seek the required service provision without feeling afraid of victimisation. The morning had been designed in partnership with Muslim women to make sure it remained reflective of their needs. It had been a tangible opportunity for a whole range of people to come together at a very fraught time, especially local women. Just as importantly, however, it also enabled local service providers, including the police, to hear about real concerns and issues, so enabling a direct dialogue with these women, where previously few had had the opportunity to experience such an intimate and open environment where their issues could be expressed. At the request of the women attending, a follow up forum was held in conjunction with the local Dandenong Police and nearly three hundred women attended that meeting.
Whilst not over emphasising this moment or underestimating that it was the threat of public violence and emotional trauma, that inspired local government to act, it is an example of the critical relationship between formal and informal dialogues that are possible in local institutional environments like local government. It shows that local government can play a positive leadership role, maybe unwittingly so, in creating spaces of interaction and support for difference. The morning gathering did challenge people, and Council offices at Dandenong had never had so many women in its foyer, let alone those wearing the hijab. The feedback from Muslim women made it clear that it had created an important space where fear and hatred around difference could be worked through in a manner that was actually defined by the community and individuals themselves. The forum was about validation and negotiation of gender and culture at both the symbolic level of articulating an ‘in principle’ support for the women as well as about tangible negotiation and change on the ground, through the changes to service provision and the follow up information forum that was held with the police. The forum represented the positive interplay between a range of cultural norms. It represented the possibilities that can be created and the normative white framework shifted to a new, less dominant place.

As one of the senior managers at Greater Dandenong commented, this change operates both at an institutional and individual level and this should not be underestimated. As she commented:

“In a local government context, individuals, groups and even institutions are ‘forced’ at some point, to evaluate their standing because you rub shoulders with so many different people. You can’t help but become such a different person and this is ‘positive stuff’ and the ‘hope’ in terms of understanding how cultural difference can be negotiated. It is the people working in these boundaries that are the hope”.

**City of Moreland case study**

Melissa has introduced the importance of the physical body and its relationship to the civic space in her discussion of multiculturalism, something I will take up and elaborate. What I want to think through is the cultural festival as a site for localness, given the diversity within the constituents of local council. And, more importantly, how the performance site of such a festival is a space for an on-going dialogue between
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council and residents who are trying to negotiate identity that then goes into moving towards a framework of belonging. That is, the festival is a place of experimentation, and the structure of the local festival allows and enables such dialogue in potentially collaborative and innovative ways. But I also want to explore the materiality of the urban space and its significance on a framework of belonging. Therefore, I will pick out some key points that I found when looking at the community music festival as a site of identification and social cohesion, drawing on the Brunswick Music Festival. As in the Grass Roots excerpt, I am interested in what "the people" are doing with regards to identity and belonging within this framework of multiculturalism.

First, a brief background to the City of Moreland and of this festival. The City of Moreland, a northern inner suburban area of Melbourne, was created in 1994 and is an amalgamation of the older inner cities of Brunswick, Coburg and Broadmeadows. The demographic data illustrates this Council's constituency as an ethnically and culturally diverse population. The 2003 Social Profile of Moreland report recorded that 33.5% of Moreland's residents were born overseas, while 45% of Moreland's residents (aged five years or more) speak a language other than English at home, compared to 26% of all Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD) residents. Other socio-economic features also characterise Moreland residents – lower housing costs, a strong political involvement influenced by socialist ideals, and a high proportion of elderly residents. Yet, it is ethnic and cultural diversity — and notions circulating in the community of that diversity — framed within the idea of 'multiculturalism' that has come to be promoted in local government discourse as defining Moreland's character. And it is this ethnic and cultural plurality that also structures the current shape of the Brunswick Music Festival. An initiative of the former Brunswick City Council, the festival was first held in 1989. It grew out of a perceived need in the Brunswick community for economic and material support, particularly by local government, of music activities within this council's electorate (Smith 1987: 1-3). Numerous other festivals are held annually throughout this municipality, festivals that focus on specific resident cultural and ethnic groups, but it is this festival, with its emphasis on

5 This amalgamation process was two fold: the first occurred on 22 June 1994, with the joining of Brunswick and Coburg, while the second took place on 15 December 1994, with the inclusion of the southern Broadmeadows area (Moreland City Council 1996: 9).
6 Data drawn from the 2001 ABS Census of Population and Housing
7 These festivals include the Australian Arabic Festival held in February/March, the Chilean Festival held in October, the Pallacanion (Sparta), the Lebanese and the Greek Festivals, all held in November, and the African Music Festival held in December (Moreland City Council 1997: appendix 1)
multicultural performance as displayed through music, that has become the flagship for Moreland City Council. Moreover the festival is understood to function as a means to promote social cohesion and a sense of belonging (Manning interview 1998; refer also to Moreland City Council 1997b).

The key event which is understood by Council to fulfil these two functions, that is the display of cultural diversity and the promotion of social cohesion, is the Sydney Road Street Party, which opens the festival. For the occasion, Sydney Road is closed to vehicle traffic along a length of approximately eight hundred metres, from Union to Victoria Streets. A number of stages are placed along the closed street and numerous performers have between twenty to forty-five minutes of performance time, with starting times staggered over the afternoon. People are encouraged to move through this space and enjoy the music, food and goods on offer.

Within Council’s ‘festival framework’, the Brunswick Music Festival appears to be about a particular and bounded community — Moreland — and it is promoted by festival organisers, participants and the media in terms of the 'local community.' In the Tender package for the Brunswick Music Festival, one of the key responsibility areas for the festival's administration and management, is to ensure "local participation and a sense of ownership, by the community, in the Brunswick Music Festival and Sydney Road street party" (1997b: 16). This statement suggests that there is a clear and simple relationship between the Moreland community and its representation in the music festival, both in terms of participation and in the defining characteristics of the delimited community. That is, Moreland is ethnically and culturally diverse, so performing within the festival marks the participant as other to that of Anglo-Australian community. So, even in the ways in which the festival is promoted and discussed, this idea of the 'local,' one that is situated in a place, is unsettled by the festival's other defining feature, that it is about cultural diversity.

What I want to think through in this case study is the ways in which interactions and dialogue between the space, the council policy framework and participants bring into being some notion of social cohesion through negotiations of difference and belonging that are articulated within the performance space of a community festival. As Melissa has already stated, we are suggesting that we need to examine the importance of
understanding how symbolic notions of social justice with regards to cultural difference — that is, these policies of multiculturalism — are translated into the material and social spaces of the residents of local council.

Multicultural festivals are often criticised for their superficial dealings with difference, as the significant principle of multiculturalism in Australia — that of cultural pluralism — presents a rather limited view of culture. In particular, the performances that make up the multicultural festival are viewed as shallow representations of the complexities of cultures, rather than demonstrating their dynamic nature — as well as the response of groups to the dynamics of displacement and readjustment. In a "negative" reading of these dynamics, there is an underlying assumption that immigrants arrive in Australia as members of homogeneous ethnic and cultural communities that then struggle to maintain and preserve these various 'cultures' after arrival in Australia. The policy of multiculturalism supposedly helps preserve 'culture', so that the 'success' of this policy is measured by the level of cultural difference maintained and performed. Moreover, multiculturalism as a policy in this sense of 'spaghetti and polkas' festivals is seen to ignore other practical applications around social justice (Jupp 2003). Multiculturalism, in this sense, does not translate into economic security, access or equity, or where there is structural and everyday racism existing within the labour market, all of which contradicts the philosophy of multiculturalism.

A further criticism is that this performance of multiculturalism also assumes that there is a core national culture — an 'Australian' culture derived from a history of British and Irish migration. Further, it has been argued that within the concept of multiculturalism there is a plurality of 'ethnic' cultures which to some degree blend into this core culture, but which ultimately remain separate. Ghassan Hage argues that:

> [f]ar from putting 'migrant cultures,' even in their 'soft' sense (ie through food, dance, etc), on an equal footing with the dominant culture, the theme conjures the images of a multicultural fair where the various stalls of neatly positioned migrant cultures are exhibited and where the real Australians, bearers of the White nation and positioned in the central role of the touring subjects, walk around and enrich themselves (1998: 118).
Hage argues that Australian multiculturalism positions non Anglo-Celtic cultures in contained modes of operation that regulates these other cultures. Therefore multiculturalism is merely a different means of enforcing white power. Similarly, as for the ideals of social cohesion and communal identity, musicologist Graeme Smith and sociologist Judith Brett have observed that multicultural festivals are given meaning and cohesion through state and local government policies on multiculturalism (1998: 6). That is, the Brunswick Music Festival is defined in such ways that events performed within it are framed within this Council's imaginary of multiculturalism rather than what may be more reflective of the locality's lived experiences. Further to this, multiculturalism, as it has been critiqued in a number of arenas, appears to be about an aesthetics of multiculturalism. This display or performance of diversity is often perceived as just a play of difference rather than a politics of difference, a set of surface markers that remain subordinate to the workings of consumption. Difference is understood as a key element in "the aestheticization of city life" that "only ever marks the familiar, albeit now more instrumentally semiotic, appropriative force of postmodern capitalism" (Jacobs 1998: 253). Creating an urban environment that corresponds to a local character is, as cultural geographer Jane Jacobs argues, about the staging of ethnic and racial diversity within postmodern capitalism, yet, it is, in fact, a site of the political, disruptive potential of difference. As Jacobs argues, policies around the management of cultural diversity and cultural capital within the urban space do more than simply display difference. Ethnic and cultural diversity is a means of accessing capital because these sources of difference are a means to competitively mark out the distinctiveness of a place. We engage with, and acknowledge, the place of Moreland through consuming these multicultural displays.

When I first started thinking through these ideas with regards to Moreland's festival, I, too, read the festival space through these critiques of multiculturalism. For me, there were the unsettling questions around the relationship between Moreland residents and community identity, and the ways such a communal identity was managed by local council through these displays of cultural diversity. What I found striking about critiques of multiculturalism is the emphasis on the visual, the display of cultures, as these are music performances, a soundscape through which participants move. And it is thinking through the relationship between the space of the festival and the bodies of
the participants that has led me to rethink my earlier critique. I keep returning to the response of an interviewee, who, when asked what it meant to her to perform at this festival, replied:

I particularly enjoy playing at a street party in my suburb (Brunswick) because it changes the nature of the place where I conduct my daily life. Where I walk to pay bills/ do the shopping/ get to the pool/ CBD etc becomes as well a place infused with memories of people dancing/ playing music/ sitting in the sunshine chatting/ eating/ drinking/ meeting friends. It adds to the quality of life by adding a new and pleasant dimension to what Sydney Road means to me (and others presumably) (Harkin interview 1998).

So the festival transforms space, and makes it a more pleasant place to inhabit, but I would like to unpack the ideas expressed here further as a means to work through the dialogic relationship between place, policy and people.

The sociologist Richard Sennett, in his study *Flesh and Stone* (1994), traces through the history of our physical relationship to urban spaces, demonstrating that with shifts in belief about health and status, the material structure of the city is altered and with it the ways in which people interact with each other. Contemporary urban spaces are the physical idealisation of ideas about the necessity of constant movement and open space as strategies to counter disease, political conflict and manage difference through surveillance. Sennett argues that bodies in these urban spaces are individualised and discouraged from interaction with others because the urban environment is designed to encourage rapid movement through it. We are detached from space because of modern forms of travel, and these modes of travel further encourage us to disengage from our fellow travellers — and place — as we sink back into our seat and relax before beginning, or upon returning from, our tasks. We withdraw and dissociate ourselves from our surroundings. So in the contemporary world, space is devalued, and along with this disconnection to place, we also lose our sense of communality. When we do encounter difference, we operate through a process Erving Goffman (1971) describes as ‘defensive destimulation’ — we position ourselves in our movement through space so that we have as little physical contact with one another as possible.
When I first examined the street party of the Brunswick Music Festival, I felt that participants were encouraged to keep moving through the festival space, as they did in their everyday use of the street space. And I understood this constant movement as a less than ideal means of a practical multiculturalism, even as there appeared to be a significant difference between the communal identity that is constituted in the 'everyday' cultural diversity of Sydney Road, and the constructed multicultural display of the Brunswick Music festival street party.

While in everyday life one may catch glimpses of other cultural and ethnic groups, the street party heightens and intensifies this experience because cultural pluralism is laid out and performed before you. Moreover, you inevitably mix with people on the ground. Those attending the street party are encouraged to continuously circulate through this recreated, multicultural streetscape, and it is this movement through the performance space that gives shape to that space, as the pathways and connections made while walking result in a spatial acting-out of that place (de Certeau 1984).

Moreland Council suggests the urban space of Sydney Road is a site where participants can 'reclaim' and reconfigure the street, with the potential to remake the everyday scene into a place of community celebration (Manning interview 1998). The street party can therefore be understood as offering a format for festival participants to engage with Council's policies on multiculturalism. In this way, Moreland Council promotes the Sydney Road street party as a practical example of inclusivist ideals of multiculturalism that can help create a sense of community.

However, I have since found my focus on this apparent emphasis on movement problematic. As Sennett argues, the shaping of, and movement through, contemporary urban spaces encourages a discontinuous relationship with place and with others. Rather than accepting bodily movement and the resultant passivity that accompanies this individualised movement, Sennett suggests that we should incorporate human displacement into the everyday as a positive force on human interaction. In this way, our sense of place is not that of a peaceful, untroubled sanctuary, but a sense of place that is a "scene in which people come alive, where they expose, acknowledge, and address the discordant parts of themselves and one another" (Sennett 1994: 354), and also, of course the more harmonious things that arise out of such interactions. Thinking back to the comment of the participant, 'it changes the nature of the place where I conduct my daily life,' what this suggests is
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that the everyday street is transformed into something else, a space where participants act and engage with the materiality of the street, the physicality of others in that festival space and the musical events in which these interactions are contextualised. What I think is significant to this transformation of the urban space is the medium of music — which in the critiques of multiculturalism is an often just a shallow signifier of culture.

The significance of music in understandings of space and spatial relations has only fairly recently been studied. However music is understood to not only reflect the place in which it is created but that it helps shape the city, because music influences the social relations and activities of that place, people's concepts and experiences of the city, as well as the city's economic and material development (Cohen 1997). Similar ideas about music and place were expressed by those who attended this street party, and participants focussed on two features that they understood as key elements of the event: it was local, and it represented the numerous different cultural and ethnic groups residing in the area. It is impossible to see all the street party has to offer nor does it seem that this is the aim of this event. Rather the organisers have tried to provide a bit of something for everyone within an overall framework of diversity. This is a conscious celebration of Moreland's cultural pluralism but, in an ironic way, this celebration of community identity is activated through the lens of a bricolage. Participants interpret the juxtaposition of musical practices of the street party as signifying cultural pluralism. Respondents talked about the display of cultural diversity that can be seen in everyday Brunswick, that it is in Brunswick that one can buy different foods, hear and purchase so-called world music recordings and different types of clothing. The majority of respondents I spoke to lived in Brunswick, with many living within walking distance of Sydney Road. This appeared to reinforce the perceived local-ness of the music festival. It was something that the locals came across when out walking in their neighbourhood on a warm Sunday afternoon, when they could see and listen to the multitude of cultures that make up their own back yard. One way, then, of understanding the display of 'multicultural' music in Moreland's street party is that it encourages participants to comprehend difference as something to see, to be possessed, to be consumed and to embrace.

10 A youth stage was also present, with a wide range of music genres and styles performed. This music was not discussed by those I interviewed except for disparaging remarks about 'noise', particularly when bands performing thrash metal were programmed.
But the Street party is also about performance. Performance as a metaphor and performativity as a concept has been used in contemporary cultural, feminist and gender studies, and moves towards a non-representational approach to identity formation. Judith Butler's work (1990) has been important in my analysis. She examines gender as a performative practice, that is, the subject articulates a gendered identity through a set of expressive characteristics that come to stand for that identity. The performance of identity is an attempt to create a coherent, whole self where an internal core self is expressed through the external body. The assertion of this coherent self is produced through words, acts, and gestures, so that the body does not confer identity onto the subject, rather identity is attributed to the subject through signifying practices that create identity. The body is a "variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated" (139). Drawing on Butler's work, we might then think of the sonic, moving self within the festival framework as an expression of identity created out of musical sounds and gestures. And, in keeping with Butler, these are not the sounds of one essential identity; rather it is a response to other selves that are encountered. Further to this, as geographer Nigel Thrift proposes, performance is concerned with 'constantly unstable space, spaces of possibility, "as-if" spaces,' so one's engagement with music is a process that unfolds in time and space that then constitute subjectivity in ways that are 'a living demonstration of skills we have but cannot ever articulate fully in the linguistic domain' (2000: 234, 235). Music is important because through it, you can express yourself in ways that are unavailable in language.

The medium of music offers another form of engagement that is significant to social cohesion and communal identity, and this has some resonance with Sennett's ideas about urban and civic space. As musicologist Naomi Cumming discusses, subjectivity as it is experienced through music, demonstrates both emotional and bodily 'awareness of the feelings evoked by one's own pattern of movement and sound in a public space' (2000:13). Music shapes and creates our awareness of space both through its acoustical properties and its cultural codes, and the symbolic structures embedded within the way these sounds are assembled. As participants move through the space of the street party they come up against difference, and this difference is transmitted through a medium that taps into the emotions. This is

11 A finding also made by an independent market research company examining the street party attendance in 1999 (Stanley and Milford 1999).
significant to creating a sense of social cohesion as it is through music performance we experience the emotional in a more raw way that then influences how we relate to each other.

There is a further layer of what Sennett argues is a positive aspect that arises out of diversity, that of displacement, for these cultural performances emphasise the connections of the various communities that constitute this 'local' to the world of the outside. Moreland's various cultural communities and groups are faced with a sense of belonging in multiple sites, in the place of (imagined, multicultural) Moreland but also (imagined and remembered) homelands simultaneously. The cultural theorist Anne-Marie Fortier proposes that in the construction of identity, there is a relationship between place and what she calls terrains of belonging. She argues that the "practices of group identity are about manufacturing cultural and historical belongings which mark out terrains of commonality that delineate the politics and social dynamics of 'fitting in'" (1999: 42). The musical performances of the Brunswick Music Festival enact and re-establish the links between Moreland and the originating cultures and places of its residents. Participants, through musical, cultural and geographical connections, create a sense of themselves by positioning themselves in relation to places beyond the borders of Moreland.

What this means is that, although framed by official policies of multiculturalism, these 'on-the-ground' cultural activities which explore identity and belonging in many respects act in ways that differ to Council's civic narratives of social cohesion. The reflections of the interviewee quoted earlier on what performing at the street party means point to an intriguing contradiction. Official narratives suggest the relationship between place and identity is embedded along traditional lines of community. That is, Council objectives and people's perceptions draw on notions of an ideal community, one that is bounded geographically and in which social relations are characterised by small-scale, personal ties. Yet, the musical performances demonstrate a more complexly formulated identity, an identity that is created across boundaries and cultural vectors, that nonetheless is understood as constituting identity within a particular place.

So the engagement with the performances of multiculturalism within a festival framework does more than provide a set of stalls exhibiting the cultures of Others, a
‘spaghetti and polka’ experience for the white culture. As Sennett argues, we need the challenges of difference in order to be ‘alive’ and functioning within the public and civic space. The construction of identity is a response to difference, and, returning to the ideas of Chantal Mouffe (1994), the prime task of a democratic politics is not to eliminate the passions created out of difference, but to provide a means of mobilising them in order to strengthen society. The framework of the multicultural festival is one significant site for opening up a political dialogue to accommodate and incorporate the diversity of interests and aspirations within a culturally plural society.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have tried to propose some new perspectives on how cultural difference gets played out at the interface between government, individuals and communities in local areas. The case study of Greater Dandenong shows how the civic space is one of dialogue and negotiation. This case study also emphasises the spoken word and the physical body in the ways it is presented (such as in the wearing of the hijab) and so how it disturbs a supposed normative civic/public space. The Moreland City case study highlights the body in the urban space in perhaps a more sensual and performative manner, and how difference jolts us, as Richard Sennett and Chantal Mouffe suggest, into recognition and dialogue.

There are a number of messages that we hope this paper has conveyed. First, the significance of local community interactions for understanding some of the bigger picture questions about what is happening in Australian cities in relation to the reality of cultural difference and policies of multiculturalism. Local examples and interactions can provide powerful insights into the ‘nuts and bolts’ of national aspirations as well as fears around cultural difference. The ‘local’, as both a geographical location and the socio-spatial arrangements within it, is a site through which important struggles for cultural recognition and change take place. Such stories and examples, particularly the positive ones of change, need to be examined in order that planning and policy initiatives remain relevant and informed. Furthermore, that the discourses and policy developments around these issues are informed by and peppered with real examples of where new boundaries of engagement take place and change created.
Second, local government is a significant site in which the tensions of multiculturalism and cultural diversity get played out as people seek some security in this institutional structure in their everyday communities within what is perceived to be an unstable and less trusting world. Local government is a level of government where a dynamic interaction around the symbolic representation of difference takes place and is translated into specific, tangible outcomes. Its role and relevance for many people should not be overlooked or underestimated.

In raising these issues, we suggest that these tensions and struggles show how the local institutional/civic arena, provides important insights into questions around cultural difference and the future of Australian cities. In particular, how certain levels of tension are fundamental to changing our perceptions of difference as a threatening thing to social cohesion and the importance of the interplay between the formal institutional expectations and outcomes, and creating less formal and structured environments where people can come together. In an institutional environment that appears to be fixated with formal planning and the measurement of outcomes and often sceptical of the types of community development events we have highlighted, we argue for some careful re-evaluation of this approach. Risk is also part of the core components of planning and need to be actively encouraged by local governments who are well placed to value and initiate such approaches. In saying this, we do not wish to ignore the significant barriers that exist for some individuals and groups who wish to express their cultural identity in particular ways. Nor do we want to overlook the real resource limitations of local government. It is to say, however, that the ‘boundaries of hope’, the spaces where change occurs such as those we have discussed in these case studies, need to be recognised and supported. If not, the capacities of local government and indeed, of those citizens who use this context as a platform upon which cultural identity is negotiated, will be undermined. It is our contention that this would indeed be a regressive step in terms of creating more inclusive Australian cities.

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