LEADERSHIP IN SPACES OF INTERSECTION; Are we ready?

Arts lecture Faculty of Arts, Groningen University, September 5th 2017
Katherine Watson, on the occasion of being appointed 'Cultural Leader in Residence'

It is a pleasure and an honour to have been invited to give the 2017 Arts Lecture – opening this academic year and also launching a new Masters Programme in Cultural Leadership in which I am the Cultural Leader in Residence. I don't think that the excitement of the opening of a new academic year ever goes away – no matter how long ago, or how recently, one sat in such an auditorium. Thank you for allowing me to share this particular moment in time with you and to bring some reflections on the concepts of leadership, connectedness and interdependence in addressing the complex global challenges that we face.

The lecture's subtitle *"Are we ready?"* is explicitly a question to all of us, collectively - it <u>is</u> a provocation. I know that I cannot answer the question and I suspect – I hope - that my reflections will raise more questions in your minds. Learning, life-long learning, is a privileged space in which we can, and indeed we are encouraged, to ask questions – that is what learning is all about. Asking powerful and challenging questions is fundamental to 21st century leadership. Leading and learning – and unlearning - are two sides of the same coin.

Wasan Island

A week ago I had a happy experience in my own ongoing learning and co-learning when I was fortunate enough to gather with some 20 other "leaders" on an island in Ontario to consider how to facilitate and connect networks, networked ways of organizing and leadership in these networks. We learned a great deal together and it is our collective wisdom, and the wisdom that they (and I) carry from others who have taught us, that I look forward to sharing.

There is one definition and distinction that I would like to get out of the way at the outset – I am keen to talk to you about leadership - not leaders. Leadership is a capability, not a position. Leadership is a potent combination of ingredients and most importantly, leadership can come from anywhere – not exclusively "the top". In fact we need much more leadership and the recoginition of a full range of leadership attributes rather than exclusively searching and yearning for answers and direction from heroic "leaders".

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Dictionaries define a leader as one who *leads or commands a group, organization, or country.* And leadership as the quality needed to do so – the ends and means being one and the same. Language is peppered with words like: chief, head, principal, boss, commander, captain, figurehead, headman, director, manager, governor, ruler, big cheese, top dog, numero uno…… and the given antonyms are follower, supporter – firmly setting in place a binary relationship that we have accepted and confirm.

We also think in terms of the most likely winner – the leader in a race; or the most successful or "best in class" – a leading business or innovation. There is then the leading article in the news – the headline – the most important story of the day which we are "led" to read and against which to reflect on all of the other news. And in nature – a leader is a branch that shoots out eagerly from the main stem of the plant.

A leader, as we have come to understand it in our western 21st century context, stands out – is at the top, at the pointy end, the arrow head – the head of a line – so, in time and in place – first in a linear process. Everything and everyone else follows.

All very logical and embedded in generations of linear thinking – but is today's world really that linear? If we take that line and bend it around - it forms the edges of a space and the leader has become one with the space that results.

A few weeks ago I was sitting with my 5-year old granddaughter, with a pile of newly-sharpened coloured pencils (the coolest colours that we could find) and a new drawing book. She randomly drew a maze of intersecting lines to fill the page – a scribble some might say. After the intense and frenzied drawing she told me that she really didn't like the result. (I was not sure what she was aiming at and didn't ask). She wanted to tear the page out of the book and throw it away. However, what was in front of her (and me) was a page filled with opportunity – not to mention a treasure trove of coloured pencils. I suggested that she have another look and instead of looking at the lines to look at the spaces that her lines had created and to give each space its own colour.

This is a pretty common exercise in an art class – simple and satisfying for the most part. It is about taking a moment to look at things from a different perspective – to retrain our eye and to unlearn some things we have taken as given. The result is usually enormously changed from the original. She smiled a satisfied smile and the page stayed in the sketchbook….
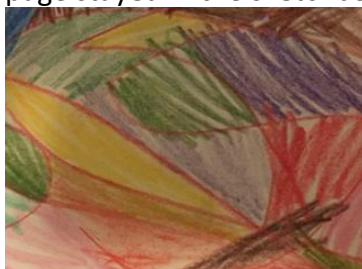
Granddaughter drawing

The arc of my reflection today begins with: What are some of the powerful influences that are shaping the world we live in? (What are the lines?) What energies do we need to harness in order to transition to a future that is equitable, sustainable and just for everyone? What spaces must we enter into – to colour and to be coloured by? And finally…. What is the nature of leadership that we need to unearth and nurture?

Certainly the digital shift has marked our recent past, our present and future – it was a phenomenal change for my generation but many of you – digital natives - have been born into it. In the wake of this shift, I would like to highlight four interrelated forces or influences: 1) Speed of change; 2) the increased scale of the global challenges with which we are faced; 3) movement and mobility; and 4) the potential of connectivity and interdependence to address our challenges.

The tyranny of speed
"Marshall McLuhan who first published *Understanding Media*, in 1964 and coined the concepts of "the global village" and "the medium is the message". He also notably said *"Today each of us lives several hundred years in a decade."* Speed is a consideration in this thought but also an increasing understanding of multidimensionality (as opposed to linearity) - the conflating of time and space.

Marshall McLuhan

This speed of change is indeed a characteristic of our times. And perhaps more unfathomable is that we cannot follow or ride this speed in a singular course, stepping from one thing, or state of being, to another and then another. We are confounded by a great leap-frogging ability – the action of skipping a step, routing around. In practical terms, you don't need to know how a computer works to fully utilize a tablet or a "smart" phone; nor a super 8 camera or video recorder to make a video on that same smart phone. You don't need to know about distribution, or pre and post production to upload your new video and share it with one or two friends or thousands or even millions of people – all in a matter of minutes.

McLuhan's media theories started with individual people - he defined media as "technological extensions of the body." My focus today is not on the tools that are now around us (as perhaps extensions of the body) – widely available and relatively accessible to you - but rather how the digital shift has permeated us, affected thinking, perspective and perception and the speed at which it has done so. Over the

past 25-plus years, technology has had a tremendous impact on our institutions, our knowledge building, our relationships (teacher-student, leader-follower, performer – audience and so on) and the linear value chains such as "invent, build, sell" or "create, produce, distribute". It is fair to say that technology has upended all of this and many people and organisations are still trying to come to grips with it. And it is also reasonable to say that you do not need to hear this from me – you live it.

This speed of this change has impacted the way we think, interact, experience and consequently we need to think about how education should change, how our public engagement changes, how our systems should evolve, how we can better problem solve, build and share knowledge – in far different ways.

Scale of challenges
The scale of challenges we face cannot be addressed in singular ways and by the institutions that have grown over the past generations. Alliances and alignment for impact – collective impact - is crucial. We cannot unpick the entangled global environmental, economic, political, and cultural crises – through simple cause and effect analysis. Past solutions are out of sync and the speed at which everything moves is overwhelming.

Speed of change and scale of challenges means that we cannot expect to research, gather information, reflect and make a clear and fool-proof analysis in order to arrive at fully informed choices - which is certainly how we have been accustomed to working and most definitely how much policy has been developed. Please do not misinterpret this as my saying that the time for research and reflection is past – certainly not. However, we need to make closer connections to practice and lived experience and we may need to make the best informed choice at any given moment – to risk more. And we absolutely need to be more inclusive in the perspectives we bring to any given problem.

Movement and mobility
Hand-in-hand with speed and enabling technologies, everything in our world is in movement or impacted by movement – people, ideas, goods, information, communication, organisations, institutions. This movement, by consequence, brings change – change that is rife with opportunities and challenges. You and I are privileged in that we move by choice and the systems that we have built have fostered the inherent opportunities from which we benefit. At the same time, global upheaval has resulted in unprecedented forced movement from peripheries to centres, from places of scarcity to places of abundance, from places of despair to places of hope.

Everything is in motion. Ideas and information are constantly on the move as well - we live in a world of always on and always connected. A current BBC slogan that made me smile is: *"Swipe your way through the news of the day."*

Martin Cooper, an American engineer credited with the invention of the cell phone in 1973 said: *"Given a choice, people will demand the freedom to communicate wherever they are, unfettered by the infamous copper wire."*

Where tethered technology meant that one was interacting, engaging, learning from a fixed place – mobile means that the engagement goes back into the real world. Mobile also means the complete merging of personal, professional, public – the compact, portable laptop or notepad holds the latest essay you have written, your email account, social media connections, telephone, the unfolding news stories, literature or a novel that you are reading, music to listen to, family photographs. All of your communications vehicles in one tool. We can order thinking and engage with others in ways not considered before – juxtapose, connect and relate – and construct meaning out of these relationships.

Connectivity
Movement and mobility brings intersections that have contradicting outcomes that we see in somewhat equal measure – connection and disconnection – convergence and divergence - collision and collusion. We need to recognize and understand these conflicting results – levering the positive and countering the negative - in order to benefit from the power of connectivity and the potential to address global challenges of such increased scale.

Movement has challenged and blurred (but not obliterated) previous boundaries, (nation, culture, class, gender, race, age, sector, discipline). Backlash against this and the change that it brings has hardened the lines for some and created new boundaries. The internet was a dream of many as a virtual space where ideas and people could connect, exchange, share, grow – a space of the commons, open and equal. There is certainly a degree of this but there is also an increasing tendency to coalesce in even narrower groups that feed on themselves and become even more exclusive and discriminatory – turning the potential of connectivity and intersection upside down, fostering filter bubbles and echo chambers.

Despite these inherent conflicts, the greatest potential of connection remains that it can help us to see ourselves as part of an ecosystem, a great network that is interdependent and requires systems thinking and systems acting. Connection has the power to move us from "I to we".

Spaces of intersection
Given that movement has facilitated our "relocation" – either physically or through ideas and concepts – it also allows us to interact and to enter into spaces of intersection.

This is the space "in between" – one can see this as an interstitial space, a gap - a space of transition – a space of "nothing", a buffer and in fact a deepening and widening gulf between the two (or more) spheres that are approaching one another.

Or – it can be a rich space of exchange where 1+1 becomes 3 – where the perspectives and differences of each bring a new reality. The artist Michelangelo Pistoletto presents this possibility as the "third paradise" - *"an evolutionary transition in which human intelligence finds ways to coexist with the intelligence of nature."* His powerful and evocative image is of the symbol of infinity stretching and morphing to reveal a third space between. There is excitement and possibility that grows in the spaces in between. We sometimes stumble into these spaces unexpectedly and need to figure out how to navigate them. But rather than happening onto (and into) them by chance, we should eagerly seek them out and boldly step in with a spirit of exploration, opportunity and experiment.
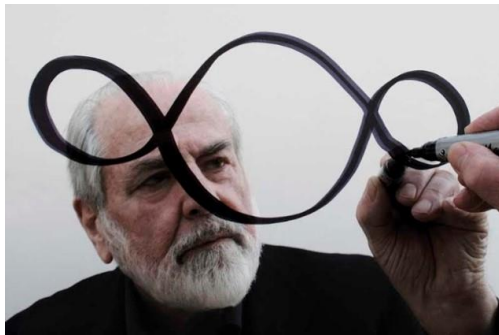
Pistoletto

Thankfully spaces of intersection are countless, and before turning to the leadership ingredients needed to foster and nurture these spaces I would like to mention a few very different examples to give a glimpse into the richness that is nurtured by such intersection and interdependence.

Interdisciplinarity
CP Snow's essay in 1959 *"The two cultures and the scientific revolution"* continues to be read and debated in its analysis of the distance between thought, disciplines and sectors and the valuing of any one discipline over others –specifically in Snow's reflection – the widening gap between science and the arts, or humanities. The ability to work across silos and the incredible potential and need for interdisciplinarity to find solutions is vital – the recognition that we live in and should lever a networked ecosystem within which we can and must contribute.

Ken Arnold, currently Creative Director of Medical Museion, Copenhagen and Creative Director at the Wellcome Trust, London was for many years the head of Public Programmes for the Wellcome Trust, a foundation dedicated to medical research and to public engagement with science. He remarked, in reference to his time with the Wellcome Collection, that *"what the Wellcome Collection tries to do is champion the sense that medicine and health is too big and too important to be left to medics and scientists alone. So every project we are involved with draws lines of connections: we are a venue of art, design, history, archaeology and magic. Almost anything you care to mention belongs to the Welcome Collection, but always joined by some sort of line, curved or straight to the worlds of science, health and medicine."*

The perspective that an artist brings to scientific research is more and more valued through for example artist in residence programmes. In the early 2000s I designed one such programme in Canada that facilitated artists to research alongside scientists in the many scientific research centres across the country. MIT has a long-standing artist in residence programme and CERN has also established one. As the Wellcome Collection, other museums and numerous science festivals show, artists' perspectives and processes also offer alternative ways to consider and engage citizens in environmental, health and social challenges. The art and cultural perspective needs to "be at the table" as we design solutions to meet the pressing needs of our communities and our societies.

Art and Science cross-overs are simply an example - thankfully we are seeing a growing understanding of, experimenting with and valuing of interdisciplinarity in knowledge spaces, like universities, and in the alignment of civil society movements around the big issues that challenge us - and even in some policy-making spaces.

Intergenerational experience
In our western world we are on the brink of the biggest generational imbalance and shift than we have ever faced. This is often described as a generation gap and a problem – a strain on resources – on the one hand, as people live and work longer and on the other, that younger people have limited opportunities. Most often we approach issues by setting up youth programmes or elderly programmes – but it would be more effective to co-learn and share wisdom, provide support and opportunities through an intergenerational approach.

For example, Santropol Roulant, in Montreal, Canada is *"an intergenerational community food hub that grows, prepares and delivers food. In doing so, [they] create a continuum of engaging services that help build a stronger social fabric, and increase food security and social inclusion for Montrealers."*

Every day, some of their thousands of volunteers package and deliver meals by bicycle to those in need in eight neighbourhoods of central Montreal – many recipients being isolated elderly residents. The meals-on-wheels programme is supported by Santropol Roulant's urban gardens, farm and a network of local producers. They regularly host workshops and community events that gather the community around themes related to food and intergenerational community building and also provide resources and expertise to volunteers motivated to lead collective projects in the areas of food security and social inclusion.

As they say themselves, "while the Roulant welcomes people of all generations and walks of life, our activities and programs benefit two groups of people in particular. The exchanges between these two groups, who would not necessarily meet in everyday life, lead to enriching intergenerational ties and a stronger sense of community.

Intercultural knowledge

Cape Breton College is located in Nova Scotia on the Eastern coast of Canada. Some years ago, in recognition of the decreasing number of First Nations students entering science programmes, Cheryl Bartlett, a professor at the college, began to work with the elders of the Mi'kmaw First Nations community – the first peoples of the land on which Cape Breton College sits - to design courses within an Integrative Science Programme that brought indigeneous knowledge and western science together. Elder Albert Marshall, is the "designated voice" with respect to environmental issues for the Mi'kmaw Elders of Unama'ki (Cape Breton) who brought forward "Two-eyed seeing" (Etuaptmumk) as a Guiding Principle for Integrative
Science and encourages its awareness across Canada and beyond.

To quote Cheryl Bartlett, *" …the gift of multiple perspectives is treasured by many aboriginal peoples and I have witnessed immediate resonance of the concept of "two-eyed seeing" with Elders all across Canada…. Two-eyed seeing encourages learning to see from one eye with the best in the indigeneous ways of knowing and with the other eye with the best in the mainstream ways of knowing, and most importantly learning to see with both eyes together - for the benefit of all. Two-eyed seeing is [now applied] in diverse places including collaborative environmental planning in Cape Breton, Mi'kmaw schools in Nova Scotia, land-based summer camps in Nunavut, drafting species at risk policy in Ontario, or underwater munitions in Hawaii…"*

This is a compelling example of the intersection of knowledge between two particular cultures – but the concept of two-eyed seeing can apply to all of our intercultural experiences and communities.

Intersection between policy and practice – citizens and politics
Last year the European Cultural Foundation published a series of case studies that showed the myriad of possibilities of meaningful partnerships between people and the institutions or political leadership of their communities, under the title: *"Build the City, How people are changing their communities".* It set out to bring greater understanding through practical examples of how direct involvement in the visioning, planning and governance of their communities leads to more robust, resilient and future-proof communities.

The 26 practices highlighted in the publication are civil-public partnerships based on principles of the commons, that is, enabling citizens and governments to share power, co-design and co-shape legislation, management or collective action for the common good – democracy in action through cultural processes.

The intersection of citizens and policy-makers allows a collective visioning for the city (or town or village) – people and the administrations and elected officials work together to create something <u>with</u> the community, not simply <u>for</u> the community. The result is an enabling framework for local actions.

One of these case studies comes from Rome, called "New life for markets":

This initiative aims at revitalizing declining marketplaces and to do this with all of the stakeholders (connecting the spheres of food production, local economy, health, social services, education). Marketplaces have traditionally been some of the most important public spaces, attracting people from the entire socio-economic spectrum. In the words of the intitiative: *In the past decades, however, they have gradually lost their role: while urban and metropolitan agriculture are flourishing, and an increasing number of enterprises work on short chain food distribution, many markets in European cities are abandoned or underused. The project explores the possibilities to renew markets as public spaces, by connecting them to new agriculture initiatives, by inviting various actors to play a role in their renewal, and by creating viable economic models for their maintenance and vitality, by including new social and cultural functions.*

Like market places, there are many and varied physical spaces of intersection and encounter: public spaces, green spaces and parks and tiny "parkettes", libraries, cultural spaces, museums, universities and places of learning – all local hubs in an inter-local ecosystem that is troubled by and seeking to find solutions to our global wicked problems – the scale of which I have already referred to.

Neue Nachtbarschaft in the neighbourhood of Moabit, Berlin is a self-organising community with self-empowerment at its heart. In the wake of the big changes that the neighbourhood was experiencing, as a result of both changed socio-economic conditions and many new people moving to the community, Berlin-based artist Marina Naprushkina instigated the re-use of an old bowling alley to be a shared community space. Neue Nachtbarschaft hosts regular community dinners, language courses, legal clinics, visual art classes, performances and celebrations. Its engine is a vast number of volunteers - old and new Berliners who are finding collaborative ways of living together, opening up culture's potential to contribute to a shared future. It is a space where all come together to actively shape the community as they want it.

The last example that I would like to share is that of Subtopia in Sweden a Nordic picture of independence and interdependence in balance – diy <u>and</u> do it with others

Located South of Stockholm, in the Botkyrka municipality, the creative cluster of Subtopia is where *"artists, film producers, circus companies, NGOs, bands and other creative people follow their dreams and try to make the world a little better."* Subtopia houses over 80 organizations, companies and educational institutions and 200 people work there every day. Subtopia is the hub in this network of people and ideas, facilitating innovation and incubating ideas. Subtopia embodies the intersection of four sectors: culture, business, education-research and social engagement.

Leadership in spaces of intersection

Given this understanding of spaces of intersection – who leads and how? I would like to illustrate and speak of "ingredients" for leadership, rather than qualities. Intersection and new practices that emerge from them demand new ingredients. 21st century leadership will both seek out spaces of intersection, fostering the exciting "spaces in between" and new forms of leadership will emerge from unexpected places within these spaces.

Leadership by necessity should follow purpose – purpose or value that is bigger than self, bigger than a single organisation, or a specific and focused mission and recognize where the actions fit in a larger ecosystem that is working towards change – leadership considers "we" and not "I". Leadership means not knowing the answer but asks vital questions – challenging beliefs that stand in the way of a better world. It galvanises people around the questions to seek shared answers – with others, not for others.

Jayne Ifekwunigwe in her essay, *"When commoning strategies travel"* wrote: *"We can build a shelter by ourselves, but we need more than two hands to make a home."*

Leadership recognizes where it can act but sees how this action connects to bigger issues. So even if the action appears to be on a very local or personal level it is committed to addressing global challenges and to achieving collective outcomes that are not "owned" by one person, or even one organisation. It recognizes the contribution to the greater whole, sees where it fits in a solution. Leadership does not think and act in silos and actively seeks to build bridges between silos. Leadership understands independence in an interdependent system. Leadership animates networks by being a hub in a wider ecosystem.

Leadership considers its value in terms of building social capital
To quote Charles Landry, *"With financial capital the more you spend, the less you have, with social capital, the more you spend, the more you get."*

Leadership is the courage to enter into the unfamiliar – to bring others along and help them in their own anxiety. But it also the willingness to be led when another opportunity presents itself.

In 1920 the poet Robert Frost wrote *The Road Not Taken*:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim

Because it was grassy and wanted wear,
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I marked the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Leadership facilitates visioning and becomes part of a shared vision, rather than being the vision, or owning the vision. Reaching that vision requires actively listening, empathy and the willingness to shift and adapt – seeing and following new pathways as they open up. It is responsive, flexible and adaptive in the face of the speed of change.

Leadership is recognising what you do not know – what perspectives can be brought to the table to bring knowledge that you do not have – it is open, inclusive and values and respects all perspectives equally. Leadership brokers knowledge – it is always learning and co-learning, rather than being the font of all wisdom.

Leadership trusts and knows that effectively working together and achieving shared impact moves only "at the speed of trust" (McConnell Foundation)

Leadership is curious, responsive and reflective - it recognizes patterns and sees connections and acts and engages on multiple levels.

Einstein wrote: *"Logic will take you from A to B; imagination will get you anywhere."*

Leadership builds agency – recognizes, shares and passes on leadership - everywhere that leadership is needed – be it setting out in new directions, "mainstreaming" and scaling, building bridges, translating and bringing change.

Leadership fosters the myriad of possibilities, not one view – what could be, not what will be.

Leadership is responsibility, action and "doing what you can".