



**Government
of South Australia**

**INTEGRATED
DESIGN
COMMISSION SA**
**IMPROVING
LIFE THROUGH
DESIGN**

Occasional address to UniSA

by

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In preparing for the privilege of delivering this Occasional Address, I was reminded of an extraordinary address at my own graduation some years ago at the University of Canberra. It was delivered by Prof Donald Horne, author and historian, critic and sometimes curse to government. He was unorthodox and brilliant.

He also failed to complete his undergraduate degree.

Donald Horne's most well known work - "*The Lucky country*" (1964) offered an ironic look at an Australia that had emerged from a contested and hard fought founding, a past that was essentially a military dictatorship. And yet evolved to a place that is still the world's oldest and most peaceful liberal democracy. Now, a blessed and prosperous place.

But in 1964 his work was a critique of a society held captive to its past; constrained by its heritage and unable to construct for itself a shared vision of a confident future.

This 'lucky country' was the story of a people that had *fallen* into their success; gifted with precious resources and unique geography, by location and self-sovereignty, rather than a set of strategic or considered moves.

This 'lucky country' may well have 'scooted through' the challenges of the industrial age; in what appeared to be endless continuum of unconstrained growth, industry and an empire economy. But would this 'luck' be enough to carry us into a more complex future?

Horne suspected that we would need more than 'luck'. At the time, his particular concern was in the lack of innovation in Australian manufacturing and professional services like banking (financiers take note!). Australia, to him, showed less enterprise than almost any other industrial society.

Horne believed that if Australia was to remain "a prosperous, liberal, humane society, we must be prepared to understand the distinctiveness of our own society'.

Innovation and a distinctive sense of self. Two themes that remain relevant today.

It strikes me that the observation made of Australia in 1964 shares some similarities with South Australia a generation later. We are a South Australia at a tipping point; with a momentum moving us to change. But also a South Australia that has, before now, relied on natural resources, traditional manufacturing and industry to arrive at this unique time of opportunity. This momentum asks us to embrace a future we're still to shape, that we're yet to fully articulate. A "distinctiveness of our own society" that we're yet to define.

When we imagine that future, I want to offer words to live by. They are not mine, but those of engineer, architect and futurist, Buckminster Fuller. In considering the future, Buckminster Fuller saw only one option when facing uncertainty. "The best way to predict the future," he said, "is to design it".

We are all a part of a shared future. And so we're all participants in designing that future. We know some of the challenges we face today, and we have some idea of those challenges yet to come. But what we do know is that 'design' will define the 21st century.

As Japan, and Libya show just this week, the world's energy future is clouded. Meeting the energy needs of 9 billion people world-wide asks us to step outside our traditional concept of statehood. A recent work by architects and the World Wildlife Fund suggests one answer may be a global energy masterplan; with the wind, wave and deep geothermal reserves of the northern hemisphere complementing the renewables of the south to service a post-industrial, energy-intensive world from a single, cyclical pool (refer http://assets.panda.org/downloads/101223_energy_report_final_print_2.pdf).

Reducing waste in fabrication, recognising the emergence of information technology as an essential tool for connection and community; enhancing the food security for both developed and developing economies, and reducing our post war dependency on the car.

These are the challenges - and these are the choices we need to make - if we are to confidently embrace change. We value the legacy of generations past. But ensuring ours

is a legacy of ingenuity, of step-change innovation, that delivers a distinctive sense of place can only be achieved if we have clear, agreed goal. And its the best chance we have of navigating the uncertainty ahead without division.

In essence, this is a design challenge; an exercise in strategic thinking that asks us to move beyond incremental improvement, and to aim for no less than disruptive, positive change. Design is always hopeful, constructive, and inspiring. It sidesteps the constraints that are part of the problem. It initiates new models, new tools and new products that act as a pathway to change. In graduating from the disciplines of science, maths and finance, project management, information technology, computing and media, engineering, and critically in the fields of Built Environment, you are the ideal 'agents of change' that Donald Horne sought so long ago.

Chancellor, graduands. In preparing for today's Occasional Address I was fortunate to be hosted at Uni SA's Mawson Lakes campus some weeks ago. I saw research into tomorrow's materials that will expand the value of our natural resources and safeguard our natural environment. I saw intelligent visualisation that extends the 'visual' to the 'experiential'. I saw nationally leading technology and capability that will enable new methods tomorrow that do not exist today.

Most importantly I saw a focus on 'prototype' and 'simulation'; across scales. From macro to nano. If design is the process, then these are the tools that link 'knowledge' with 'action'; that link 'thinking' with 'doing'. The social innovation, technical expertise and creative thought needed to design our future deserves both a 'thinking', and a 'doing'. A strength embedded in the ethos of this University.

I'd like to close with a final invitation to all of you to assume the future is yours now. South Australia's progressive past needs to be refreshed into its future. Almost 50 years after Donald Horne imagined a society that could become more confident, more knowledge-based and more conceptually-driven, I congratulate you on graduating, and ask "who's with me?"