

GEORGE CLARKE

31.8.1972  
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J. Singer  
Prelim. "Scouting"  
Report to Brian Adams  
ABCTV Producer/Director  
re suitability of G.C.  
for a "Seeing My Way" program

George Clarke, 40, is attractive (in a rumpled way) and has a good voice. He is 'distinguished' enough to appeal to older viewers but he is also thoroughly in tune with 'younger' more radical ideas. He uses his hands a lot and constantly re-arranges the objects on his desk, but this is not too annoying. He needed absolutely no prompting to talk but he did tend to ramble on about his own experiences rather than specific ideas, displaying an egoism (not too rampant) that might well help an uninhibited performance. His reluctance to 'come to the point' would not be any great problem in a structured programme. He is well able to express his ideas in layman terms. He is very enthusiastic about doing the programme as up till now he has confined his 'haranguing' to the government level and sees this as an opportunity to bring important issues to the public.

From a very early age he wondered about 'how and why the landscape was organised'. He studied architecture at Sydney University but he found this unsatisfactory, although he was a very successful student. He was interested in more than just buildings - he wanted to investigate the 'patterns' of the streets - the design and the activities. He was made especially aware of this in his first job where he was general co-ordinator of a project erecting 50 timber-frame houses. He realised that they weren't good enough: the secret of what makes for a happy place to live was more than just houses. So he started studying town planning at night. But the 'dogmas' were based on English models and were not adequate for the Australian situation. He also realised that planning could not be based on set models - all sorts of variables were involved so he studied economics, aesthetics. So in 1956 he went overseas. First to Italy to study urban aesthetics and then to England where he was interested in social order and justice. While at Sydney University he was a socialist (and still is to some extent) but he was influenced by the Andersonians, part of the intellectual left, who rejected Utopian ideals and the idea of a totally planned environment. While he is not a physical determinist he does believe that raising the quality of the environment does play some part in raising the 'quality' of the people (ie their lives). It was while Clarke was at MIT that he realised the relationship of man and his environment is one of inter-reaction (a dialectical relationship). He wanted to make Australia a better place but he didn't believe in totally planned environments. The only possible planning policy is a community-involving one. All authoritarian planning fails eg. The Rocks, Moore Park etc. ad nauseum.

The turning point for planning came in the late sixties. In 1968 the Hunters Hill Council was the first to be thrown out of office on an environmental issue. This was significant because it showed that the middle class was being hit where it hurt - it was no longer a working class issue. This and other like events were the cumulation of a series of unplanned developments and they affected everybody which resulted in a general awareness of problems.

At the same time, another revolution going on. Better education for everybody in recent years has meant many young people are more questioning of all established values. Most of these questioning people are outside government agencies, so that they see social planning as being too important to be left to bureaucracy; and too wide too be left only to urban planners. That is, social planning should be a community learning process. This means that it is not necessary that there should be any material result of community involvement. It is here that Marshall McLuhan has

\* A slum is  
a state of  
mind.

influenced Clarke. He has translated 'The medium is the message' into 'the process is the product', meaning that as long as the community gets together to discuss and decide (they may decide to do nothing) on environmental issues, it is of positive value - the value is in the process of discussing and deciding as much doing.

The third factor in bring about a change of consciousness concerning environment is rural depopulation. Clarke says that the Country Party is the greatest impediment to change. He also talked about "selective decentralisation", which involves selected growth centres rather than trying to save every country town. He could have said more about this but as it stands it is not very clear.

Planning is concerned with the future and therefore with change whether in the physical environment or attitudes. But changes in the environment have only been a realistic possibility comparatively recently. This is because the mechanics of cities have only recently been understood. To understand the urban problem one must see it as a system. It was previously seen as an organism or a market place and both these ideas are fallacies with limited application. To see cities as systems brings the realisation that each action brings about various reactions in other parts of the systems, eg to build office buildings on a highway creates congestion on that highway. All factors must be taken into account.

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There has also been growing realisation, desire for an improved 'standard of living' is an outmoded concept - what is needed is the broader concept of an improved 'quality of life', which necessarily means environmental change. He says that the unions, eg Builders' Labourers, know this but the Federal Government has been very backward in concerning itself with the quality of life. However, there have been moves on the part of many local governments and some on the part of State Governments.

Clarke's central point seems to be that the participation of citizens and interest groups in environmental planning is essential, and he fights the common attitude that planning is the sole concern of bureaucratic or academic élites. He is quite prepared to prove his case by discussing individual projects.