

Creating the conditions for innovation

Art School 2.0

This paper builds on two presentations, one called *Art School 2.0*, given at Griffith University in 2007 and *Reciprocal Relations and the Art of the Possible: Art Schools in a new cultural economy*, at QUT in 2005. Today we are here to address the questions; what is the capacity of art and design schools to actively contribute to the growth of the nation's cultural capital?

Web 2.0 is the term given to the current iteration of the internet and its operations that promotes an idea, which emphasises the reciprocity between user and provider. Social networking popularised by wikis, blogs and commercial sites such as Facebook and Youtube, and others. It goes to the difference between a broadcast model and one based on reciprocal interaction, participants being able to be producer and consumer, such as might be characterised by a system of "hierarchical vs distributed knowledge"

How can contemporary art and design education help to produce a future-oriented and sustainable society? I detect that a change is underway. The change is happening from within and through almost unseen social networks that are fundamentally shifting the terms of engagement and by inference the orientations of the institutions, the circulation of artistic forms and ideas, and ways of both learning and knowing.

I might begin by saying that it is heartening to hear the discussion in business circles as describe by Narelle Kennedy of the Australian Business Foundation, who see a clear role for artists in assisting in this task of creating the conditions for innovation, and the development of new ideas in Australian society. The expectation here seems not to have the arts in a service relationship but rather as a participatory, methodological and speculative role.

Just as the discussion around Web 2.0, marks a significant shift in ways of interacting, accessing and sharing information and of being producers and consumers at the same time, over the last 20 years advanced arts practices and the ways artists work have also significantly changed. Just as the debates around whether books will survive the web - which they have - and whether socialisation will be effected by online communication - it has exploded as a vehicle of communication, and can operate with the full force of any social space; expressing, anger, humour, intimacy and so on. In some quarters concern has been expressed that the embodied qualities of art will be lost or diminished. Well, it seems not. And new forms are being created constantly.

A quality of this shift has been one of openness and sharing of information and creative products. Away from controls of the propriety systems and towards ownership of the communication through the open source movements a whole new ethos has emerged. I feel a strong parallel to what an art school for the 21st century should be, and how it could contribute to the renewed confidence in new ideas and innovation.

The point of this seemingly divergent introduction is to indicate that the models of communication are rapidly evolving, an issue central to the operations of art and design as in the broader community,

I am using this theme to discuss the nature and future shape of art and design education and what we need to be doing to make it mean something now. The major shift in the formation and production of contemporary art, design and cultural knowledge could be seen as the shifting power of its ownership and access.

What does that mean for art, design, and the production and consumption of cultural experience of all kinds. How much has the social networking ethos of Web 2.0 impacted on how students at art schools interact with information and cultural material, and each other. I am suggesting here that it is and will be radically different to the recent past and will require us to think laterally.

Now, I don't want to overstate the case and presume that the world as we know it will be different overnight, and that the world will immediately transform into a cyber version of its former self. The idea of Web 2.0 is only four years old itself, and there is much debate about what it means.

So, artist and designers may still work in studios, but this may also include what is called post-studio art, musicians will still make music together in a room but they will also produce work through digital modes and send these files to each other via email. Performance makers will create spaces in which things happen in real time and also create work that works between remote locations. What will change is the expectations of social engagement and ideas about access to information, ideas and entertainment, and each other.

What is Art School 2.0 or what is the art school in the 21st century? Is it a place that generates cultural, intellectual, and 'creative' capital? Or could it be also said that a good art school offers a form of agency, a means for linking 'talent' and opportunity through an intensive studio-based and immersive learning experience? This immersion can be in 'flesh space' or in the expanding subtleties and intimacy of the virtual spaces of the web.

Rather than 'art' being seen as an *industry*, in and of itself, it may be better conceived as forming an *economy*. By shifting the idea of an industry, as conceived in the 1980s, this may more adequately recognise the dynamic of a new knowledge based economy, which is much changed from late 19th and early 20th century industrial and manufacturing models.

It could be said that the notion of an *arts industry* was promoted in the 1980s to justify a bid for increased public arts funding to an unconvinced political class, where the tag of an 'industry' gave it the gloss of respectability and utility. A problem has emerged since, such that, the term "industry" invokes elements of late 19th century production of goods and artefacts, and the selling of those products for a profit. It was clearly a manufacturing model,

built on a craft tradition that gave art the appearance of a tangible exchange of goods that provided the comforting sense of 'value for money'.

In reality, now in the early part of the 21st century, it is hard for 'art' to really be seen as an *industry* without considerable distortion of the economic reality. It can however be talked about as an *economy*, such that we define an economy as a system of interacting elements, one in which value circulates and can be transacted and exchanged. So we have a clear shift in terms of the debate from the notion of an *arts industry* to that of a *cultural economy*. This is not merely a shift in language for the sake of contemporaneity, but rather recognises the framework of a new economy, much changed from that of the late 19th century industrial models.

As an extension of this, the revolution of information and communication technology and in particular the internet has had a profound impact on the consciousness and culture of the 21st century. How can this be seen? How does contemporary art operate in this space? We need to look and learn.

The question before us is how can art and design schools contribute to this important new conception of an *innovation system*, not only in the application of specific skills and art and design products but in expanding the ways that creativity is thought of as a pedagogic principle of producing creative thinkers?

The social networks created at art schools, exist both for the personal, professional and expert communities, and for the broader population. Art schools are under-utilized. Just as a good art school creates a milieu, it can also be seen as one big cultural think tank. The producers of art create a new conceptual marketplace, generating new knowledge and insights, building the capacity for innovation and social engagement. An art and design campus is a place to go and to mix it with other creative people, learn, produce and reflect, and as a launching pad for cultural experiments. This can be the wellspring of a creative economy.

While Richard Florida talks of the 3 T's: talent, technology and tolerance, I could talk about the 7 C's ; creativity : curiosity, commitment, confidence, criticality, communication, contestation, and compassion.

Writer on art and culture, Ernst Van Alphen in his recent book *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought* (Alphen, 2005) makes the argument for the now familiar proposition that art has the power to transform the ways in which cultural issues are conceived, that art has an active cultural function, a performative one, creating a realm where ideas and values, what he considers to be the building stones of culture, are actively created, constituted and, most importantly, mobilized.

Art has a power of agency, of making things happen, of transforming ideas into actions. As critical thinking, art does not, necessarily, equal positive understanding, that is, interpretation of the 'right answer', but rather, the experience of an art work activates doubt, stimulates a question, such as, what is happening here? Art, Van Alphen says "is 'autonomous' not in the sense that it is independent of context but in that it has an agency of its own"

Art itself can be seen as a form of thinking in the world. In the first instance the work of art invites the viewer to "think with it", often unlocking philosophical and/or social themes, and when this thinking happens the work releases its ideas or affect.

So to sum up, I have been using these seemingly heavy-handed parallels as an attempt to find a correlation between the open-ended, curiosity-driven experiments of art, the operations and ethos of the digital technological domain and the communities of practice paradigm that has been created, in the effort to discover what needs to be supported through institutions such as art schools and universities.

Paradoxically, in the increasingly *competitive* research and development environment of a global knowledge economy the quality of *co-operation*, crossing of disciplinary boundaries and the engagement with social relations has become essential. Similarly, the attributes of critical and creative thinking, problem-finding and solving, effective social and communication skill and so on are the desired attributes for the successful global citizen. These are, I attest, the familiar attributes of the artist.

If the community needs to find solutions to broad and complex problems and to find new ways of living in the world then the long view is needed. If it is assumed that innovation requires risk-taking and creating the conditions of innovation perhaps the fear of failure and aversion to risk should be treated directly through the playfully and testing methods of art and design educational cultures.

- The generation of students in the art schools, are in the main fluent in these changing conditions. It is important that we don't inhibit this energy by creating redundant structures around them. This means supporting them in their studies, by rigorous and responsible education, but also assisting them to survive their lives as students economically.

- We should be in the business of capacity building without limiting the range or expectations of what capacities we may need. Somehow we need to be ready for a future we can't even see yet. We need to imagine it.

The art and design sector will be making submissions to the Review and we look forward to contributing to the building of an innovation system. To borrow words of the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, we are the art schools and we are here to help.