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3Cs - COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND COMMERCE

*“O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see ourself as others see us”.....Robert Burns, “To a Louse”*

The 3Cs model has its historical origins in the Whitlam Government’s view that certain sections of the community were culturally disadvantaged and that the solution to this was “community arts” as distinct from “high art”.

With the benefit of hindsight we might now see that this well meaning attempt to spread the civilising benefits of culture beyond the middle classes in fact only consolidated the very hierarchies of cultural value which it sought to level.

By the end 1980’s the term “Community Arts” had been replaced with “Community Cultural Development” (CCD). Dropping the reference to “arts” altogether contributed to the polarization which had been occurring between the CCD sector, whose main agenda was socio/political reform, and mainstream arts institutions whose interests were vested in hierarchical or class based culture.

One of the means of implementing the community arts agenda was a program run through Community Arts Board of the Australia Council called *Art and Working Life*. This program identified workplaces as communities and sought to access them by means of the union movement. Thus the peak union bodies, Trades and Labor Councils, in most states were funded to employ arts officers to deliver arts projects and programs to the working class.

The Tasmanian Trades and Labour Council’s (TTLC) efforts to secure officer funding under the *Art and Working Life* program were not successful until 1993. I was the first officer to fill the position.

However, by 1993 *Art and Working Life*’s star was waning nationally, and there were other challenges too.

Firstly, politics: funding Trade Union Arts activity with its overt ideological agenda was not something which conservative governments felt warmly about. Secondly, positioning: there was a need for a more positive image of trade unions in general, and trade union arts in particular. Thirdly, the reconciliation of contemporary arts practice with its emphasis on product and excellence and community based work with its emphasis on process and engagement – one seen as elitist and pretentious, the other as worthy but daggy, in an atmosphere of mutual ambivalence. Thus the model which has gone on to become known as the 3Cs was from the outset a response to the imperatives of politics and positioning.

Rather than adopt the conventional approach to trade union arts – one of opposition, agitation and propaganda, banners, murals, didactic theatre in the workplace, the issues that we faced required a radically different approach. The TTLC program set about identifying good employers, or at least employers who practiced more or less humane industrial relations. We sought to develop with them projects which engaged their community, whether the micro community of the workplace or a broader definition of community. The concepts were linked to their own strategic objectives and engaged contemporary artists as distinct from exclusively “community” artists - one of the issues that we sought to address was the tendency for contemporary artists to stay away in droves from socially engaged practice, due in part to the restrictive practices of the CCD sector and the prescriptive expectations of the union movement.

The James Boag brewery, The Blundstone Boot company, The Amcor Pulp Mill in Burnie, mining communities, speech pathologists, diagnostic imaging technicians, social historians, museum curators, the Launceston General Hospital, The Royal Hobart hospital, Mental Health services, marketing people, school cleaners, environmental scientists, the fishing industry, designers, composers, opera companies, visual artists, writers, film makers, local governments.....the outputs were exhibitions, operas, books, social histories, a choir, marketing material, industrial relations, staff development, community engagement, education.....

From 1993-8 we did over 30 projects involving all of the above and more. The hall mark of the program was that it engaged communities, employed contemporary artists and the heritage and museum sector and *customised* its projects in consultation with local industries or businesses in direct response to their needs. A key point in relation to the corporate involvement was that this was not about sponsorship or philanthropy – it was about deploying the cultural sector’s expertise (creativity) directly to their corporate aims and objectives and linking that to community engagement. We had activated the relationship between community, culture and commerce and we had done so in a regional context, in the state with the smallest economy (smaller than Brisbane City Council), a declining population and in direct response to a challenging set of circumstances - *politics and positioning*.....

Of course, not everyone was happy about it. Despite the success of the program and the enthusiasm of artists, communities, industries and funding bodies, it was met with hostility from some within the CCD sector. There are many stalwarts of traditional CCD who will not countenance any deviation from the ideological dogma, who still believe that the corporate sector is the enemy and any truck with it is a sell out; scowling ideologues and po-faced pedants who think that irony is an industrial injury suffered by sweat shop workers in the garment industry. I once got into trouble for writing an article proposing that we set up a support group for victims of community cultural development. I called it Former Users of CCD (FUCCD)....

Throughout the early years of the program, I grappled with the criticism that what we were doing with the TTLC program was not Community Cultural Development. It then dawned that the correct answer to that was – that’s right, it isn’t – it is *something else*.....

This was in the days when we still used quaint terms like “the Information Superhighway”, before we had heard of “Triple Bottom Line” or “whole of government”. Now all of a sudden – at least it seems like all of a sudden – we are living in the creative economy, the creative city, the creative class and the creative industries.

The emergence of concepts such as the “triple bottom line” - or “quadruple”, god help us - identify social and environmental outcomes as being as important to good corporate citizenship as purely financial ones. The social, political, economic environment is more complex than it has ever been. The greatest demand from those who need to navigate this complexity is not for art or finished cultural product but creativity itself - and it is the creative sector to which the economic and social sectors are turning to supply it.

The cultural organisations that will survive and flourish in this new world are the ones who can navigate the complexity and who can lead others through it - who can think and act with confident imagination. The need that is common in both social service delivery and economic development is in finding new, efficient, creative ways of working. There is also an explicit need for the community and commercial sectors to relate better to each other – the cultural sector can be the interface: *community, culture, commerce*.

We need to make clear the distinction between finished cultural product, whether that’s arts or heritage based, and the intellectual activity, creativity that produces it - the raw and the cooked. There is a greater demand for our intellectual property than there is for our finished product – and wider applications. We can exploit this demand without compromise and without neglecting our core business.

Partnerships with local industries, governments and communities are evolving beyond the old models which marry pre existing cultural product with benefactors or sponsors. Such models are more concerned with top end of town outcomes, executive status and marketing, than the creative development of personnel, product or community.

Some arts organisations and community groups are taking this vision and running with it:

For example:

The **Straight Out of Brisbane Festival (SooB)** is a youth arts event, organic and chaotic but with real energy, a strong sense of community and real expertise in its field. Like many such events it runs on the smell of an oily rag. It has recently undertaken consultancy work with a major national property developer which is planning a new “community” of 60,000 souls in SE Queensland. The developer wanted the best possible advice on how to address young people in the fabric of its new town and wanted the leading edge of youth/digital culture. SooB provided that.

Similarly **Octapod**, a Newcastle collective, with a strong volunteer and community base among Newcastle’s young. It hosts the “*This is not Art Festival*” (TINA) – which has become one of the Hunter’s biggest events. In the coming months the Pod will roll out its new vision. It has developed its intellectual property into a set of products and services designed to position the organisation as a provider of expertise in event design and management, youth arts and digital culture.

On a larger scale the **Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA)** is in partnership with the **Casula Powerhouse, Liverpool (CPAC) and Penrith Regional Gallery** and the **University of Western Sydney (UWS)**. This initiative is exploring ways in which artists can help connect community development to economic development in W. Sydney. The partnership is working with Penrith Panthers, Ingham’s and SITA Environmental Solutions to find ways in which artists’ creativity can be brought to bear on their activities. There is no pre existing cultural product to “sponsor” – the cultural product is both the process of engagement and the outcomes that can be achieved for the community and the industry.

For example, **SITA Environmental Solutions** has a major waste recycling plant planned for Penrith. The leading edge technology which will be installed in this plant will achieve 70% compostible material from municipal waste. As a means of communicating this to Council and other potential clients SITA proposed a virtual fly through of the technology. Rather than simply contract a multi media company to build the model, SITA commissioned artists to build it as a training project with personnel from Panthers (their client) and Penrith City Council. This way of working provided jobs for artists (and a local animation graduate), staff development for Panthers and Council by means of exposure to both waste technology design and the creative industries and very significant value adding to the dollars that SITA would otherwise have spent elsewhere. On this basis SITA is now filtering all of its activities in W. Sydney to see whether artists can add value and better connect them to the community. Council is exploring creative means of delivering environmental education to the community.

Similarly, **Brisbane Marketing** was engaged in the **Tripod** project which saw a group of 12 unemployed young people employed to work with two photographers to produce marketing material to promote Fortitude Valley. Rather than simply commission a photographer to get the images, the concept was developed as a Community Jobs Plan (Department of Employment and Training). This enabled a mix of funding from local and state government and business to be added to the dollars that Brisbane Marketing was intending to spend. Thus, at no extra cost to anyone, outcomes were achieved across the community, cultural and commercial sectors – jobs, training and networks for the young people, an exhibition and calendar of images as well as the proposed marketing material, (12 sets of images instead of just one) jobs for artists in the delivery of the 23 week project and significant value adding to Brisbane Marketing’s original concept.

These examples confirm, I believe, that there is a change in thinking across all of the sectors – community, culture and commerce – in relation to creativity and that there is indeed potential for new ways of joining up the dots.

So where to from here

The **Blue Ocean Theory** is a new theory of business emerging from the US, the latest economic buzzword if you will. Its proponent is one W. Chan Kim from the international business school INSEAD. In a nutshell, Blue Oceans are those business environments where the competition has been rendered meaningless. Red oceans are those where direct competition prevails. An example of this is *Cirque du Soleil*, the Canadian Circus troupe who reinvented the circus in the face of declining audiences, rising costs, animal rights activism and alternative forms of entertainment. Any new entrant to this environment would

have been faced with the severest of challenges. Instead *Cirque du Soleil* reinvented Circus. It swam in a clear blue ocean in an uncontested marketplace instead of the ocean of direct combative competition, red with competitors' blood.

The Blue Ocean Theory reminded me of that defining moment in the mid 90's when I realised that the 3Cs model was not Community Cultural Development but *something else*. Not only did the realisation render the competition's attempts to undermine the program meaningless but it liberated my ideas and revealed a whole new market.

There is no denying that we live in an age of creeping, if not galloping, conservatism and meanness of spirit and I am not suggesting for a moment that the cultural sector should not be a critical intellectual and philosophical counterpoint to that – of course it should. The Scots are not a race noted for their sunny optimism, but even given my own cultural predisposition to melancholia, I do believe that the above examples of the creative industries connecting to communities and others too numerous to mention here, confirm that it is also an era of great opportunity and innovation. It has been suggested that we are now in transition from the information age to the conceptual age – we must exploit it.

But the corporate sector is not the enemy, nor is government – they are clients. The enemy is dull institutional thinking, atrophy of the imagination, risk aversion and spurious belief in tired old definitions of what arts and culture are and do.

Blue Oceans are all the concepts, industries and innovations which are not in existence yet. Organisations like the ones we mentioned above, which are exploring complexity with open minds, flair and imagination are the ones most likely to find the blue oceans. The blue oceans will be found in suburban shopping malls and regional and rural communities, by talking to economic rationalists and social planners at the same table as artists, by brokering mutually beneficial solutions, by developing projects that deliver new kinds of outcomes and business models which exploit this sector's untapped intellectual property, by imagining arts, culture and heritage differently.....and by engaging with politics and positioning.

While conferences provide opportunities for hands on experience and learning, they are also occasions for vision, speculation and imagination that do not often arise in the routine of daily work. But we often go back to work inspired only be faced with a backlog of tedium and no way of implementing the grand ideas we generated. I hope to address that later today in the workshop – to provide some practical guidance on how to reconnect community, culture and commerce in your own backyard.

