Moving the Mind

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> Few institutions will prosper under conditions of heightened competition solely on the basis of reputation. The realisation of new opportunities will depend on the institution's ability to be agile. Agility will depend in turn on an articulated set of flexible strategies regarding curricular emphasis, target audiences, technical approaches, and the role of research and scholarship in the institution.
> (Katz 1999:120)

The above quote from *Dancing with the Devil: Information Technology and the New Competition in Higher Education* poses a similar message to one I was given by Professor Des Crawley when I joined James Cook University (JCU) at the beginning of 2005.

The Australian National Coalition for Creative Arts (ANCCA) had been looking at models for courses that embraced technology in the current university setting and were attempting to provide research and methodology to accommodate change in arts practice in order meet student and industry demands. My area of Art History/Theory had already acknowledged the need to change focus with an emphasis on Visual Culture. Visual culture as a term crept into the vernacular in a seemingly natural way and pushed back much of the rhetoric associated with high art and popular culture (Duncum 2001:16). In the studio, contemporary arts practice had also been buffeted by a dramatic change, turning away from late modernist aesthetics towards a visceral melding of technology and theme based political agendas. These significant changes highlighted the need for a new model of art training to be introduced.

As a new academic at JCU, coming from a small art school in regional Victoria, the challenge of redesigning a tertiary creative arts program to meet the requirements of the University and to build upon the pre existing structure proved rather demanding. The multi-disciplinary approach seemed a logical step in breaking the strict discipline or 'silo mentality' of some sectors of the creative arts. From my own research over 18 years working in Higher Education, the most crucial feature of redesigning the curriculum seemed to be an emphasis on the outcomes for the potential student, as opposed to focusing upon staff and facilities, to draw regional students to see value in the degree leading them to enrol, participate and eventually graduate.

With these things in mind I took a lecturing position at JCU in 2005 where I had been told that the College of Music, Visual Arts and Theatre (COMVAT) was redeveloping their course structure. This was an understatement!

In this coastal region 1,500 km north of Brisbane, a population of 160,000 growing at 8.7% with a demographic reflecting a younger profile than the Australian and Queensland average, it was obvious that tertiary education provision was a key factor in the community. The College of Music, Visual Arts

and Theatre had been created at the Vincent campus in the early 1990's, transferring TAFE Art and Design courses and staff to the university sector. Many of the programs and staff remained part of the College until recent times, when the change process developed a new model.[1]

> In general, change in higher education is driven by a number of forces, including the demands of employers, government policy initiatives and attempts by 'teachers' in universities to meet the changing needs of students and to reflect the changing nature of their subject matter. But inertia - or resistance to change - is also heavily supported by a range of factors. (Hannan et al, 1999:287)

In 2007, the Bachelor of New Media Arts (BNMA) will be launched on the Douglas Campus of JCU with a substantial number of new staff and a totally new focus based on a significant strategic consultation process led by Professor Des Crawley.[2] This degree has at its foundation a strong pedagogical premise to enable students to determine their own learning path in alignment with new technology and the acknowledgment of current and future industry standards. The aim of the BNMA is to enable graduates to move easily into arts, academic and educational vocations (Harman 1997:301).

Part of our agenda is to permit students to take charge of their degree and make selections with the knowledge of the industry and its expectations. A student centred learning model will be adopted with a reduced focus on training and a greater emphasis on providing students with meaningful opportunities to develop holistically (Biggs 1999).

It is our aim to produce graduates with:
- Strong theoretical and conceptual insights into arts practice.
- Advanced oral/written and electronic communication skills.
- Specialist professional and applied knowledge of at least two areas of creative activity.
- Commitment to working within the collaborative creative communities emerging within the work force.
- Strong generic skills related to participation in the knowledge-information and communication industries that link to the creative industries.
- A wide variety of learning experiences intended to develop advanced levels of personal and professional autonomy.
- Levels of problem solving and independent critical and creative analysis consistent with graduate status.
- A global perspective informed by the traditions, concepts and precepts of art making.
- The foundations for pursuing specialist research activity within corporate, commercial or academic settings.

This list of Graduate Outcomes was based on the extensive research undertaken by Professor Crawley in a Cluster Review done in 2004 (Crawley 2006).

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[1] This is consistent with the statement by Cox & Krysa (2005:33) regarding the slowness of art schools to embrace new technology and change.
[2] 50% of the 2005 academics will take up VDPs.

The work done in 'scoping' Australian involvement in the arts was part of the 2004 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census program. The report suggests that over 612,000 participants were involved in some paid employment in one or more forms of the arts. These statistics highlighted the main employment sectors in the Visual Arts to be Design, Computer Art and Photography accounting for 80% of the sector.

> There were almost 1.1 million persons who had completed training in an arts or cultural field…Of all the persons who had completed training in an arts or cultural field, 73% were employed at the time of the survey, although the employment may not be in a field related to the training. (ABS 2004)

The ABS evidence, reinforced by internal JCU research in the form of Graduate Surveys demonstrated that a significant proportion of current studio media-based subjects were not serving student needs in the long term. However, despite the decline of the status of the Visual Arts, there is an argument that moving down an entirely new media path may not satisfy all parts of the industry (Green 2004:2). The use of technology may be at the centre of many of these industries, but it would appear that sound training is the key, not the technology alone (Cox & Krysa 2005:31). Technological skills may be replacing facets of drawing and printmaking but there still seems some benefit in exposing students to the rudiments of practice and how technologies (especially digital) have adopted modes and sequences based on earlier, analogue systems (Lewis 1999:144-145).

Departing from a technology argument we have also addressed the changing nature of contemporary practice. The contemporary art sector is defined by more than just work produced in the current time frame. It generally has a particular 'critical edge' and is evidenced in most major international exhibitions including biennales, triennials, *Documenta*, *Manifesta* and other major exhibitions (Green 2004:3). The new style of production often has new media characteristics, especially screen and installation-based work, and will usually present a combination of visual, audio and spatial interactivity. In the many curated contemporary exhibitions the inclusion of traditional mediums such as painting, printmaking and formal sculpture have diminished - their inclusion is often celebrated sometimes due to quality whilst on other occasions it is their rarity. This would indicate that traditional art practice is no longer the preferred model for curators and that arts curriculum needs to acknowledge this. The flip side, however, shows the success in blockbuster exhibitions of traditional art, connoisseurship and art collecting, as evidenced by the number of dealer galleries throughout Australia plus the increased number of trade journals and the success of the secondary art market dominated by auctioneers such as Sotheby's and Deutscher~Menzies. Added to this argument is the success of the Melbourne Art Fair and the Affordable Art Shows based in Melbourne and Sydney. [3]

As with any change process, a number of current staff have demonstrated concerns regarding the loss of the traditional media of Visual Arts, however the low numbers of participants gaining employment in traditional drawing, painting, printmaking and sculpture make it difficult to include these high cost studios. Clearly there is a market for traditional art but it is heavily subsidised by impoverished living artists (Throsby 2004).

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[3] Now renamed Art Sydney 06, and Art Melbourne 06.

There is much discourse on the nature of change in the tertiary sector with academics shying away from following an entirely digital pathway.[1] With this in mind there should always be an experienced overseer monitoring new course accreditation. However, the slow rate of change in visual arts curriculum and course structure may be impeded by the demographic of those in power.[4]

If we are to design a new course that meets the needs of our students we must also be cognisant of the consumers who will benefit from our graduates' skills. The arts audiences are also changing, many X and Y generations see the screen, (be it TV, film or computer) as the natural way to read the creative media and that if it does not conform to their expectations then they will not participate (Tapscott 1998).

In order to provide the maximum opportunities for students at JCU the staff in consultation with Professor Crawley designed a template that would allow students to define their own course structure within a simple design matrix. The Degree is predicated on the belief that there is a series of core skill sets and concepts that overlap within all Creative Arts disciplines. In a standard 24 subject Degree each graduate will take six Core Studies and two Professional Studies units giving the school maximum economies of scale to deliver essential skills in innovative programs. The student also has the opportunity to select eight studio based subjects that will give a Major status to their degree; these units may be derived from Digital Imaging, Creative Media, Digital Media Design, Digital Visual Arts, Digital Sound and Performance. Added to the eight possible Major subjects are four Minors studies taken from any of the level 1-4 Major studio programs, these units maybe augmented with any four units taken from subject options anywhere in the University. The matrix also has scope to allow students to embark on double degrees. (See Tables 1 & 2.)

The position of Theory in Visual Arts Degree qualifications has been evolving since the late 1970s with the winding back of Art History being delivered as an add-on to pre existing studio based Diplomas (Emery 2002:27). The nature of theoretical programs has been identified as crucial since studio based degrees became part of the University.

> The report also warns that because the prevailing ethos of higher education favours
> theoretical study, an appropriate balance is difficult to achieve. It is also claimed that the
> most rigorous study combines theory and practice. (Botsman 1985:12)

The need to make theory relevant to practitioners, as opposed to scholars, has been a central part of the design for the BNMA. Defining the parameters of the Core studies has been a challenge in that the Degree encompasses both visual and performance strands however we have investigated a number of key elements that have currency across the sector. These key issues will focus our students into contemporary art in a global sense - integrating aesthetics, technology, philosophy, community, culture and the economy. These units will not be bound by traditional delivery and assessment modes but will utilise a range of systems to manage the learning outcomes. Combinations of new media, visual and performance output, documentation of processes, digital photographic essays, online

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[4] Aged 0-20, N-Geners are embracing interactive media such as the Internet, CD-ROM and video games. The New Generation is exceptionally curious, self-reliant, contrarian, smart, focused, able to adapt, high in self-esteem, and has a global orientation. They are not only, demographically speaking, the greatest challenge to the cultural supremacy of the baby boomers, but technologically speaking, there has been a change in the way children gather, accept and retain information (Tapscott 1998).

discussion, group projects and field work, will engage the students in a more active form of learning that will be quantified through a natural series of integrated assessment tasks.

> The Core serves to introduce and develop key conceptual and theoretical understandings deemed essential for working within the new and next technologies and transcend all theoretical, technical and critical perspectives offered within the Majors. The Core will be team-taught and is interdisciplinary. All staff will be expected to 'own' and contribute to the core as a lecturer, tutor or mentor. (Crawley 2006)

The six Core subjects to be delivered include:

Media and Culture: introducing students to the key philosophical and theoretical underpinnings relevant to western cultural practices and in particular the creative arts. These investigations will draw on aspects of human perception and mediums of representation across the broad spectrum of the creative arts outputs over time.

The Creative Economy: an understanding of global, national and local economies in relation to creative artistic outputs. Students will gain insights into innovation, entrepreneurial art making and new visions relative to growth, demand and driving of new artistic practice. Creative arts careers will be explored in terms of real world contexts and relationships between the artist and consumer.

Contemporary Creative Cultures and Contexts: investigation into the emergence of popular cultures and their creative contexts. Arts discourses and critical theories will be examined as relevant to modernism and post-modernism. Key movements and outputs from the Asia-Pacific region will be explored with regards to future directions relevant to the field.

Creative Technologies: an investigation of the history and development of creative arts technologies across the fields of image, text, graphic, light and sound. Analogue and digital innovations will be explored in order to contextualise contemporary and emerging digital age practices.

The Reflective Creative Practitioner: an exploration of the artistic process as frameworks for research and/or professional practice. The role of the creative practitioner as self-reflective artist, researcher and communicator is explored both theoretically and in practice. Students will explore synergies across art forms, including models of performance and communication, and develop individual and collective understandings of the role and place of creative arts outputs.

Connecting the Creative Arts: an examination of various theories and models of collaboration both within and external to the creative arts and synergies in practice and concept as defined by relationships between art forms and new technologies will be explored. Foundation teamwork projects will be developed in conceptual settings.

Added to these theme based subjects will be two units of Professional Practice to be taken in the final year of study, these will build upon the skill base established in the Studio and Core subjects incorporating practicum and discipline-based experiences.

The proposed Core subjects have a new focus: one of placement of the Creative Arts into the context of the contemporary society, recognising that the arts are not posited in a vacuum. In a recent Arts Queensland focus group conducted in Townsville comprised of practitioners, gallery staff and academics, a distinct polarity was evident. Many visual arts trained graduates expressed the concern that their work was not selling, they were not gaining access into larger commercial galleries or group shows in capital cities and that generally they were being ignored. Most sought greater exposure of their work and suggested greater government support for marketing and advocacy of regional visual arts. They also were concerned about the loss of their *Alma Mater* and the changes that have been initiated. As a Theory academic, it was plainly apparent that their degree had not served them well and that the visual artists place in the commercial world required much more than quality work. I am reminded of the paper by Nikos Papastergiadis reflecting upon the function of the artist and the multi layered role theory has in contextualising their work (Papastergiadis 2004:161). Why must theory be seen as the burden of artists and why must it be assumed that it will always be 'about' someone's work? Papastergiadis continues to reveal the essential nature of both theory and practice in the ultimate positioning of the art in our culture.

Our core subjects will be the most crucial component of the BNMA, the arguments of digital verses new or old media will only make sense when a context is created in relation to the spatiality of the work, the site and the social setting. Ultimately, it is our ambition to produce graduates that will recognise the art world is part of the real world. Here they can see the fate of many other great products that are passed over every day, crops are ploughed under, components recycled and markets are massaged by advertising, spin doctoring and political lobbying.

The nature of the BNMA is based around the concept of relevance to the industry, a significant part of the research into the new program made a strong case for interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches. The major disciplines of Digital Sound, Digital Imaging, Digital Visual Arts, Digital Media Design, Performance and Creative Media are designed to introduce students to digital systems early in the program to allow greater levels of integration. With the development of each Major having the potential to communicate across disciplines we will enhance collaboration in the final year of the program. In the student's final year they will undertake a major team based project known as the Creative Exchange, this subject will draw groups into the planning, organization and performance/presentation of a public event, having the opportunity to explore team-based synergies working with a Director and design team from across the College (Crawley 2005).

The Creative Exchange program will establish a firm foundation for graduates to move easily in to the employment sector with 'work-ready skills' and portfolios.

The BNMA will be conducted in a purpose built new facility at the main campus using the latest technology and equipment. Despite some apprehension from the community there is a healthy interest from potential students wishing to undertake arts training and gain employment in the sector. Perhaps our greatest challenge will be finding the appropriately skilled staff to allow this ambitious program to flourish. The research and innovation that forms the basis for this new degree acknowledges many of the issues raised by the Australian National Coalition for the Creative Arts and articulated in Wissler et al, *Innovation in Australian Arts, Media, Design: Fresh Challenges for the Tertiary Sector* (2004) and it is hoped that the BNMA will become a model for future Creative Arts delivery.

Tables

The following table represents the diagrammatic outline of the Bachelor of New Media Arts to be delivered at James Cook University in 2007. Each subject has a 3 credit point weighting, contributing to a 72 credit point Degree undertaken over three years.

Strand	Subject Units	Contact hours	Credit points	Description
Core	6	3	6 x 3	The **core** provides the theoretical, conceptual functional foundations to the awards.
Major	8	3	8 x 3	The **major** undertaken by the student defines specialisation. The student selects their majo the 6 offered. The major and minor share initial four subject Progression is designed so that students do have to commit to their major until the beginn their third year.
Minor	4	3	4 x 3	The **minor** comprises a minimum of 4 subjec each with 3 contact hours per week and weig at 6 credit points. The student selects their m from the six offered by the school.
Prof Studies	2	3	2 x 3	Comprises the equivalent of two subjects ea contact hours weighted at 6 credit points.
Electives	4	3-4	4 x 3	A minimum of 4 subjects and must be selecte the student from offerings outside the school. student must attain no less than 12 credit poi way of electives.

Table 1. Diagrammatic view of the template (Crawley 2006)

Year 1	1	Core	Core	Major	Minor	12 hrs
Year 1	2	Core	Core	Major	Minor	12 hrs
Year 2	3	Core	Major	Minor	Elective*	12 hrs*
Year 2	4	Core	Major	Minor	Elective*	12 hrs*
Year 3	5	Major	Major	Prof Studies	Elective*	12 hrs*
Year 3	6	Major	Major	Prof Studies	Elective*	12 hrs*

Table 2. Diagrammatic view of the matrix.
*Contact hours for electives in other faculties might vary and so increase the total student 'load' accordingly. (Crawley 2006)

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