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Business and the arts: natural partners.

Ralph Kerle describes the relationship between business and the arts as a damaging one of mutual suspicion and recommends an ecological model as a solution.

Daniel H Pink, in his new book *A Whole New Mind*, suggests there is simply no longer any need to teach or learn survival skills. We live in a community of abundance where our daily needs in the main are met. This is especially true among Australia's art and academic elites.

So the main preoccupation emerging in this world of abundance is not the desire to acquire more capital and assets, but a search for meaning – a spiritual quest of some sort that this abundance allows us to pursue.

I am particularly interested in exploring the emerging sense of a 'natural ecology' in the workplace. When the workplace is perceived in this way, the possibility arises of engaging management and employees in an aesthetic discourse. It provides a more meaningful way of thinking about their individual contributions at work and to the general ecology in which they work: a way for management to think selflessly as opposed to selfishly.

Those with occupations such as academics, writers, artists or arts consultants are in the main privileged in that they understand to a great degree the processes of creative exploration and production in one form or another, and derive a living from it.

With the development of knowledge industries, the emphasis is on creativity and its application to develop knowledge for commercial purposes. The custodians of the processes of applied creativity are the artists in our community. For the future of our economy, both financial and social, the application of these processes needs to be taught and transferred to

the main drivers of our economy, the movers and shakers in finance, government, manufacturing and agribusiness who are mostly very conservative and wary of creativity and the arts.

Richard Florida's epiphany and the inspiration for his first book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, came when he adopted the methodology of looking at employment through the lens of the people rather than the organisations in which they worked. So the transfer of knowledge becomes a two-way street. Industry needs to work hard at understanding what drives people personally, what challenges people in a contemporary society and to engage in genuine aesthetic discourse to attempt to answer these questions.

There is always a tension between artist and entrepreneur. They have different agendas; yet each needs the other. The artist has the tools to create, the entrepreneurs the ability to turn a profit for themselves and the artist. And this relationship requires a great degree of trust and understanding to be successful – a meaningful aesthetic discourse.

It is rare in my experience for an artist to be a truly exceptional entrepreneur. There are of course some highly successful Australian exceptions to the rule – Ken Done, Pro Hart, Reg Mombassa.

On the other hand, the art entrepreneurs, whether you like it or not, have made Australian Aboriginal painting the wealth-creating commodity that it is and without their role we would not have such a vibrant and distinctive contemporary visual culture as we do now – recognised internationally.

The relationship between the painters and

entrepreneurs in this part of the art industry seems to have satisfied all parties. The exception has been a sideline debate in the media about IP that has little relevance to the indigenous people or their commercial supporters, but a lot to lawyers and art and academic elites. All the really active parties in this ecology have continued to get on with the game in one way or the other.

If we are to succeed in the creative industries of the future, to be really innovative in our communities, the arts community needs to change its attitude to industry in general, and the continual mythologising of the businessman as criminal is not to be trusted at any cost.

Perhaps Keith Webb, a Canadian ecologist in residence at the Banff Centre of the Arts, can provide us with some new insight when he talks about nature and capitalism as working very much in parallel; that is, as ecologically integrated.

"Fungi form a partnership with trees. Fungi break things down into carbon, phosphorus, nitrogen, water, minerals, which go back into the tree. Trees pay the fungi by contributing sugars to them because trees have access to light. In this economy, energy is the currency.

Different trees also exchange energies with each other; for example, the energy of birch trees flows in Douglas firs. That's not the way we think of our economy working or our ecology. We usually think of it in competitive terms because that's more obvious. But there is a more subtle, more pervasive and larger scale cooperative exchange of energy that is fundamental to the way a forest works. It's also fundamental to the way an economy works." **M**