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Strategic Directions for Research in Writing: A Wish List

To celebrate and commemorate the first decade of *TEXT*, this article looks forward and suggests directions for research projects focused on creative writing in higher education institutions. It was during this decade, and in the past twenty issues of *TEXT* (twenty-four if we include the special issues) that debates about the institutional location, orientation and praxis of writing were initiated, shaped and furthered. It is possible to trace a shift, over this period, away from pedagogical issues and towards research-oriented questions that explore the role of creative writing in the academy and the world, and demonstrate that as a discipline writing is capable of combining conventional academic rigour with creative thought.

Research in the conventional (academic) sense has become important to writing academics over this period. Changes in the structure of universities, and changes in government attitudes and policies, have meant that on the one hand we deal with increasing numbers of research postgraduate students, especially at PhD level, and on the other we face the sector-wide pressure to apply for and win research grants. For Australian researchers, the most attractive sources are those listed in the Australian Competitive Grants Register (last updated by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) in October 2004, though it is in the process of being updated now). However, few sources on this register suit researchers in our discipline, outside of the extremely competitive Australian Research Council (ARC) grants. Depending on the nature of one's project, it might be possible to approach some of the other sources: the Department of Defence (Army History Research Grants Scheme), say, or the Department of Veterans Affairs (Veteran and Community Grants). For most writing academics, though, sources outside the Competitive Grants are more likely to provide research funding, as there is a whole universe of bodies which support humanities- or social sciences-related research that forms the bulk of the sort of work most writing academics conduct.

Of course, considerable research is being carried out, and has always been carried out, by members of the creative writing body. The work of producing a novel, body of poems, creative nonfiction essay or script drives writers to find things out, and to explore issues related to practice, poetics or the tradition of their form. While not necessarily conducted in the systematic manner associated with 'academic research', this work has contributed enormously to the production, building and development of knowledge about human beings, human society and the world we inhabit. This paper acknowledges that work, and at the same time attempts to build on the discussions members of the AAWP and contributors to *TEXT* have been having, over the past decade, about the nature of research in writing

and the creative arts in general. What we suggest is that interested writing academics consider ways in which they (we all) might shape and conduct research in a way that makes sense to organizations like research offices and DEST as a strategic move to raise the profile of our discipline, and demonstrate its capacity to build knowledge. This should, in turn, allow us to develop an ever-growing, viable and, perhaps most important, nationally significant (and therefore nationally grant-body attractive) list of research projects.

There are enormous benefits from engaging in research, which take the form of what Pierre Bourdieu has called institutional, cultural, symbolic and intellectual capital: that is, the resources that 'define the chances of profit in a given field' (Bourdieu 1991: 230-31). A discipline that can boast a body of substantial research projects and research outcomes acquires institutional capital in the form of recognition as a research body; cultural capital in the form of expertise; symbolic capital in the form of, say, the prestige inherent in publications in high impact journals; and intellectual capital in the form of the knowledge that is now available to other members of that discipline. (And this list does not even begin to take economic capital - the financial resources to conduct research, and any economic rewards - into account.) Research when strategically organised can become a self-perpetuating system too, because the more research that is undertaken, the more likely it is too that researchers will be able to identify further areas that need attention. This is an important outcome both for building knowledge and for attracting further funding. As a discipline, we need substantial, completed projects (and the grants that fund them) for all these reasons. But our discipline has a foundational problem when it comes to considering major research initiatives. Although no longer a 'new' or 'emerging' discipline, writing is definitely 'young'. Despite the significance of writing as a professional, socio-political and economic field, and despite its growing importance to EFTSUs and RTS places in Australian universities, much of the research into the creative sphere focuses on other arts practices or on the mass media. Writing has largely been neglected in the work undertaken on social understandings and realities. In the 2004-2006 ARC rounds, for instance, only a few applications that are in any way connected to writing were successful: Chan and Brown for 'The Making of Creative Artists' in 2004; Gelder and Salzman on Australian literary production, and Chan on creative culture in 2005; Carter and Potter on poetics in public space, and Whitlock on autobiography in 2006. We have yet to receive any grants from the ARC to fund any major work - and thus to 'prove' the validity of our discipline in research terms. We need to begin somewhere and somehow to build this aspect of the creative writing discipline. We are suggesting that the place is here and the time is now.

Due to our experience and research expertise, many of our below comments refer to creative writing specifically. That said, we acknowledge the constantly broadening interest areas of the AAWP and *TEXT*. An example of this was the number of academics and teachers from the fields of professional writing, rhetoric, composition and academic writing studies who attended the 2005 AAWP conference and contributed their knowledge and expertise to this forum in Perth. There is, notably, a crossover in membership between the AAWP and other organisations such as the North American Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). The CCCC's membership comprises academics in the fields of creative, professional and academic writing as well as communication. Any widening of our local frame of reference, interests and discussions can only add to the collaborative scholarly, professional and creative

opportunities across the whole field of writing, and make our research efforts more viable. The below should be read with this broad disciplinary frame of writing in mind.

Research Priorities

Where to begin? The lists of research priorities produced by funding bodies are a good place to look for indications of what kinds of research are currently being funded. The ARC regularly publicises its list of 'Designated National Research Priorities and associated Priority Goals' mandated by the government. While these are (contentiously) directed towards the sciences and production areas, many of them can accommodate the sort of work carried out by writing academics. One in particular, Priority 3, goal 5, which aims at 'promoting an innovation culture and economy', deserves particular attention. This goal is further described as:

> *Maximising Australia's creative and technological capability by understanding the factors conducive to innovation and its acceptance.*
> Understanding the factors that lead to highly creative and innovative ideas and concepts, and the conditions that lead to their introduction, transfer and uptake is critical for any nation that aspires to lead the world in breakthrough science, frontier technologies, and in other forms of innovation. Promoting an innovation culture and economy requires research with a focus on developing and fostering human talent, societal and cultural values favourable to creativity and innovation, and structures and processes for encouraging and managing innovation. (Australian Research Council)

Phrases such as 'Understanding the factors that lead to highly creative and innovative ideas and concepts' or 'fostering human talent' readily fit much of the work, and certainly the ethos, of the writing community in higher education institutions. We already concentrate on how creative ideas can be generated and developed; we already understand the processes of thought that lead to innovation; we have a substantial toolbox of research attitudes, approaches and methods from which to draw - everything from Lacanian psychoanalysis and cognitive practice to quantitative social research to archival and textual analysis. When it comes to shaping a research identity in the current Australian economy, research that focuses on creativity and innovation is clearly where we fit, where we can contribute, and where we can demonstrate our capacity. Such projects would also allow us to develop and build disciplinary connections and networks with researchers working in cognate or, possibly, quite distinct areas: ethnography, philosophy, economics, neuroscience, education and human geography come quickly to mind, and there will be many others. Such connections, and the networks that proceed from them, would enormously expand the capacity of writing academics to apply for research funding, and to contribute their own strengths, knowledges and skills to wider projects.

Creativity and the Creative Industries

As National Research Priority 3 indicates, it is increasingly being recognised that creativity is not just about making beautiful or engaging works or expressing a personal and/or 'artistic' vision. Creativity is not only fundamental to human experience but is central to the development of science, business and governmental actions, as well as a tool for promoting a nation and its economic interests. This has been widely researched by academics and public intellectuals from a range of perspectives: psychoanalytic (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Daniel Dervin, Kevin Brophy), scientific (David Bohm, Margaret Boden), socio-economic (Richard Florida, Richard Caves, Charles Landry) and policy (Stuart Nagel).

As research by policy analysts/historians such as John Pick and Justin MacDonnell indicates, creativity has also been taken up by governments and their agencies, encouraged by the arguments of writers like Florida and Landry who have pointed out that the way to build a dynamic economy is to support creative practice, and that the artistic sphere is the seedbed for this. The Australian government, like those of New Zealand, the United States, Britain, Europe and much of Asia, is committed to promoting and developing national culture, including creative/artistic production, as a way of stimulating the economy and generating innovative and creative responses to national and international markets. *Creative Nation* (1994), for instance, which according to David Throsby 'at the time represented one of the most comprehensive and forward-looking statements of government policy towards culture that had been seen anywhere in the world' (Throsby 2002), was grounded on the notion that the creative industries are central to economic growth. As Jennifer Bott, CEO of the Australia Council, recently pointed out, 'increasingly we're seeing worldwide that economies - national, regional or even local - that encourage and emphasise creative talent are winning, and those without creative talent are slipping behind' (Bott 2004).

Writing academics, as a group, are particularly suited to researching in this area due to their professional and/or industry experience in the creative industries as writers, editors, publishers, project managers, arts and literary management professionals and arts/cultural workers of various kinds. Many also have research histories in this broader area, with significant work already undertaken or in process than can be built on and/or extended. Research project topics which could spin off from a consideration of creativity and the creative industries include: what is creativity?; how are art and creativity related?; is what is understood to be 'creative' static, or has this changed through time?; and, how is creativity enhanced, developed, and/or fostered?

Creative Writing Programs

Consideration of the fostering of creativity leads directly to research topics into how creativity is taught, and the relationship between creative output and the institutions associated with it - particularly, of course, one of our discipline's knowledge strongholds: the teaching of creative writing. While writing is a comparatively low-cost area of study, it still absorbs resources (economic, personal and creative) and, therefore, has a responsibility to produce practitioners with skills of value to the nation, its economy, and its sense of self. Much more needs to be known about education in, and training for, professional life in the literary/creative sector if best practice is to be achieved, and universities are to promote an innovation teaching, learning and research culture in this field. In these terms, there is potential

for systematic and in depth investigations into questions such as: what conditions are (most) conducive to developing or enhancing creativity and/or innovation? And, what is the relationship between creativity and innovation?

Although creative writing has been taught in some higher education institutions since the early 1970s, as Paul Dawson (1999, 2005) shows, it is only relatively recently that student numbers have grown and that courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels have extended across the university sector. We all know there has been an enormous increase over the past decade in the numbers of students studying creative writing in universities, as well as in the number of courses and range of levels at which it is taught. Thirty-five Australian universities now offer writing at varying levels with nineteen offering doctoral-level studies in creative writing; and the rise is similar in the UK, Southeast Asia and New Zealand. Add to this the growth of rhetoric, composition and professional/academic writing and, clearly, writing has become of significant importance in the higher education sector.

Basic, foundational data on this sector is, however, unavailable. It is even uncertain exactly how many students are (or have been) enrolled in creative writing courses because these statistics are incorporated into figures for general arts and/or communication degrees, and have not been counted separate from these cohorts. This is unlike the categorisation of visual art, music and performance students, who are recorded separately and whose numbers can easily be assessed. However, 22,797 equivalent full-time student units (EFTSU) were undertaken within the arts-related fields of study at the tertiary level in Australia in 2000, and between 1994 and 2000, enrolments in all arts related courses increased by some 39 per cent (Australia Council for the Arts 2003: 12). We need to establish, and analyse, these statistics.

The debate about the place of writing in universities, and mapping exercises related to the field, are being pursued in such scholarly and professional journals as *TEXT* (Australia), *New Writing* (UK), *College English*, *College Composition and Communication*, *AWP Chronicle* and *Issues in Writing* (all US). Overseas, along with other researchers, Bill Manhire has surveyed the New Zealand context, David Myers the US situation, while Graeme Harper in the journal *New Writing* traces and analyses developments in the UK. Conferences provide a venue for continued dissemination of research into creative writing - particularly those held annually by the Australian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (previously named the Association of Writing Programs) (US) and the Centre for Creative Writing Research (UK), and biennially by New Zealand's Tertiary Writing Network.

Despite all this activity, writing remains an under-researched discipline, nationally and internationally. It is often articulated that writing is a discipline that is still defining itself and its aims, and discovering its outcomes. In 2002, Jeri Kroll, then President of the Australian Association of Writing Programs, argued for an accreditation subcommittee of the AAWP to be formed:

> The disastrous state of affairs as far as accreditation of creative writing is concerned will only be exacerbated as technology encourages innovation and interdisciplinary work and collaboration increases… We cannot simply

> insist, however, that we are the experts and we know best. We must translate our understanding of the nature of research *about*, *in* and *for* the creative arts - of the connection between praxis and theory - so that non-experts can comprehend the significance of what we do. (Kroll 2002)

Despite this plea, and although there has been a general surveying of the discipline internationally (Myers 1996, Manhire 1997, Hayes 1998, Harper 2003, Bizarro 2004, Dawson 2005) and some work on the Australian Honours (Kroll 2000) and doctoral degrees in creative writing in particular (Krauth 2001, Brien 2005, North 2005), the next logical step of auditing our degrees across the country and internationally, with associated mapping processes and the setting of disciplinary standards of excellence, has not happened. We believe that if writing programs are to maintain standards nationally and continue to lead internationally, we need to design and introduce a benchmarking system that can work towards ensuring that creative writing programs contribute the best they can to the national 'pool' of creative capital. That makes it now the time to engage in comparative studies across the writing discipline and with other creative arts and humanities disciplines. Such studies could only further establish the validity of our place in the academy, and reveal what these wide range of courses and programs in writing can, and do, offer.

Conflict and Controversy Studies

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of creativity to economic and other national interests, not all creative practices, nor all training for creative practice, are regarded as of equal value. Many of us have direct experience of this in the debate about the contribution made (or not made) by Australian writing programs. At the same time, a plethora of criticism and complaint has been directed towards writing courses from outside the academy. Publishers, social commentators and professional writers in Australia (and to a lesser extent in Britain) have made negative assertions about the function, role and value of university training for creative writers. Generally this is connected to perceptions that universities do not train students to produce publishable work, or fit them for careers: that is, they satisfy neither the aesthetic nor the economic aspects of creative life.

The debates over the past 10 years in our universities (many of which have been initiated by and/or discussed in *TEXT*) as well as previous research have brought a high level of discontent to our attention. During 2003-04, one of the authors of this paper interviewed a number of publishers. When they realised she was the director of a creative writing program, they articulated their frustrations with such programs' failure to produce writers capable of working within the strictures of the profession, and the oversupply of people calling themselves 'writers' who, they felt, wildly overestimated their talent and ability. Far too many people are studying creative writing, publishers said, one even positing that some 50,000 students were at that moment (uselessly) enrolled in creative writing courses in Australian universities. Such complaints are echoed by the community of writers in Australia and, to a lesser extent, overseas. Peter Pierce (2003), Helen Garner (in Moran 2003), Frank Moorhouse (2004) and others have emerged in print to complain about the bastardisation of their art form by universities which are 'flooding the country' with inadequate or uncommitted writers. Many of these commentators insist

that the best training for writers is to 'get out in the real world'. Those who study in tertiary institutions are often considered to be stifling their talent, vision and voice, and/or to be taking an 'easy road' to writing. This is despite the fact that many internationally recognised writers such as British Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, novelists Tim Winton and Tracy Chevalier, and Booker-prize winners Ian McEwan and Kazuo Ishiguro are graduates of creative writing programs, and that even the most disappointed publishers have, in the past few years, published many graduates of writing programs. It is also despite the fact that in New Zealand such comments are rarely made, and in the US, as Susan Hayes (1998) points out, writing programs are well integrated into the literary landscape.

Though Frank Moorhouse has softened his position of late, and the debate seems to have gone off the boil, at least as far as media coverage is concerned, there is still a degree of negativity in attitudes towards university-based writing programs, including within the university sector itself. As Kelly Ritter argues, creative writers in the academy suffer from 'a collective anti-academic identity, one that carries with it frequent exclusion from...theoretical, pedagogical training' (Ritter 2001: 210). This is an area that researchers are beginning to investigate: Jeri Kroll's ongoing investigation of writing academics signals similar findings (2004). Sue North's doctoral thesis (2005) examined the status of creative writing in Australian universities, and found that while undergraduate students are generally welcomed (indeed, often seen as 'cash cows' for humanities departments), postgraduates and academics in creative writing programs almost universally complain that they feel marginalised within universities, that they had been told by colleagues that they are not 'real' academics, are not doing 'real' research, and (in a curious echo of the writing/publishing community's complaint) are taking 'the easy road'. Nor is all the criticism coming from outside the creative writing programs: a number of creative writing postgraduates and academics have themselves expressed doubts about the value of such courses in preparing them for either the writer's life and/or the academy.

Despite these projects, and a feeling that 'everybody knows' what is going on in the teaching of creative and other areas of writing, in fact what is 'known' is for the most part based on myths, misunderstandings, unsubstantiated data and partisanship. These ongoing debates about writing programs' value and writing's institutional location deserve more attention and suggest a direction for the research agenda to address in direct relation to these anxieties. It may be that the media reports and academic assertions about the inadequacy of writing programs are overstated, or simply part of the normal healthy give-and-take of any field. It may be that this is another instance of the 'culture wars' that have been evident across cultural discourse for some time, as articulated in recent publications by Richard Bolton (1992), Keith Windschuttle (1994), Jeffrey Williams (1995) and Drusilla Modjeska (2002a, 2002b). Certainly, all the players in this game have what Bourdieu and Wacquant have called a 'practical sense' (1992: 81) of the field, being active and professional members of their respective sectors. However, few seem to really reflect in any systematic or analytic matter on what is going on, or to be able to find ways to clearly evaluate the contexts or the outcomes of writing programs.

A decade ago, media theorist Tom O'Regan wrote, 'Conferring and creating meaning…is necessarily caught between individual enunciation and its social frame' (O'Regan 1994: 337). In the case of creative writing and its place in Australian universities, one point of stress seems to be

between the enunciations of university-based writers (staff and students), and the social frame of the industry and other agents, as outlined above. Another stress is between the autonomous/heteronomous debate: that is, the 'art for art's sake' perspective set against the approach to practice that is driven by economic or other (extra-artistic) concerns, which has parallels in contemporary understandings of creativity (economic value versus aesthetic or expressive value). Clearly, publishers, writers and universities need to manage and develop their economic resources; they also have a commitment to that undefined value, 'quality writing'. How this can be balanced and achieved, and the meaning of what is done, and for what purposes, is worthy of investigation. Even more broadly, scholars in the field can use writing as a jumping-off point for analysing current policy debates about tertiary education, economic growth and cultural development.

Writing Itself

There has been considerable commitment to researching the economic, social and cultural aspects of the field of creative production, including writing, and considerable market and statistical research into the arts, with analyses published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Australia Council for the Arts, the Australia Business Arts Foundation, DEST, the Department of Communication, IT and the Arts, the AVCC and other interested bodies. Among the research publications that address the economic, political and professional aspects of the creative and writing industries are works by particularly John Frow, Tony Bennett, John Hartley, Stuart Cunningham, Stuart Glover, Tom O'Regan and Dennis Strand, publications in *TEXT* and *Australian Humanities Review*, and occasional papers by the Australian Society of Authors. However, most of these publications, organisations and individual researchers focus on the whole field of creative practice, or specifically on the creative industries. Creative writing as a specific site of practice tends to be neglected in the broader fields of contemporary communication, cultural and sociological theory.

This means that research into the field of writing can be strategically positioned to contribute to a broader area that is becoming the target of significant research, and is grounded on well-known, validated theoretical and methodological foundations. It can build on the contributions made by theorists of culture, communication and conflict, especially the 'usual suspects' whose work, while rarely focused directly on the profession of creative writing and publishing, engages at a sophisticated level with philosophical dimensions of creative practice and the making of meanings. We can list here: Michel de Certeau (constructions of truth), Jean Baudrillard (value and power) and Carol Becker (art and power); Jacques Derrida (*différance* and 'law'), Deleuze and Guattari (rhizomatic research), Theodor Adorno (social efficacy of art), Roland Barthes (signification and representation) and Maurice Blanchot (authorial identity); sociologists of art such as Pierre Bourdieu, Vera Zolberg, Arnold Foster, Judith Blau and Janet Wolff; as well as many local scholars, including those mentioned in the paragraph above, who have elucidated cultural practice, cultural industries and cultural taste in the Australian context.

Writers Writing

There is a plethora of mainstream publication on the 'writing world', including Joan Didion's essay collections, Annie Dillard's *The Writing Life* (1989), Will Blythe's *Why I Write* (1999), Neil James's edited *Writers on Writing* (1999), Bill Manhire's *Mutes and Earthquakes* (1997), Jack Heffron's *The Best Writing on Writing* (1995), Stephen King's *On Writing* (2000), and Norman Mailer's *The Spooky Art* (2003). There have also been collections of interviews with writers such as Candida Baker's *Yacker* series (1986, 1987, 1989) and George Plimpton's *Women Writers at Work* (1999). This genre of writing has a respectable history: George Plimpton, H.L. Humes and Peter Matthiessen have published such work for half a decade, in *The Paris Review* (which they founded in 1953). *Paris Review* and the other books and journal articles in this field typically focus on the craft and what could be described as the 'mystery' of writing, from an autobiographical perspective. While these are fascinating documents, there is still very little systematic research attention paid to the contexts within which, and the conditions under which, writers come to write - their background, habitus, training regimes and experience, networks and formations of capital - or how they conduct their professional lives as members of the economic, professional and cultural sectors.

The status of writers in our culture, and the outputs they produce, would be an extremely interesting study, as would a comparison of this with practitioners in other creative arts and the professions more generally. The work/life balance, so topical at the moment, and how writers, in particular, deal with the various demands on their time (Webb 2004) is worthy of investigation. Significant work could be carried out to map the web of relationships between writers and professionals such as manuscripts assessors, agents and editors and assessing the effect of the latter on writers' practice, income and status. The support writers receive and the effect this has on their practice - whether from such organisational structures as writers' centres and festivals, from government in the form of grants and awards, from industry as prizes, or from the mass media in product promotion - is, as yet, a largely fallow field in terms of major research.

Technology

New media and other technological developments provide a raft of possible future research directions. Focusing research studies of writing, writers, editing, publishing, teaching writing and global/international collaborative practices across the writing industry through a technological lens has the potential to provide increased disciplinary access to a field which is high on priority lists and, therefore, significantly resourced. Research in this area is particularly important given the continual development of communication technologies that change how creative works are produced and disseminated as well as how writers interact and communicate with each other, various sectors of the publishing industry and their audiences. There is significant research potential in the current opposing trends in publishing: the democratisation afforded by the Internet, which makes it very easy to publish online, versus the increasing difficulty in achieving mainstream trade publication. It seems that literary culture is in the midst of a technologically driven sea change, and researchers in university writing programs are both affected by this change, and contributing to it. Those actively involved in a research culture in writing who are often also writers, editors and/or publishers themselves are in an ideal place to research this phenomenon and, through this assertion of leadership, take a key role in future developments.

Government Investment and National Identity

Reading and writing are valued practices. This is evidenced in Australia's formal program of compulsory literacy and demonstrated by research reports by such bodies as Saatchi and Saatchi (*Australians and the Arts*, 2000), those regularly produced for (and by) the Australia Council and using data from the national census. Such research continues to show that reading fiction is an enormously popular pursuit, and that even those who do not read value the fact that there is a body of Australian literature. A recent AC Nielsen market research project found that reading is the second most important arts/cultural activity for Australians and that 87% of people read for pleasure at least once a week (2001: 54). Books not only, therefore, continue to make the news and contribute to the GDP, but also provide many hours of entertainment, engagement and pleasure to the nation.

Australian governments at all levels have a considerable history of direct involvement with the literary sector, dating from the introduction of literacy programs and public libraries in the 19th century, through the establishment of the Commonwealth Literary Fund in 1908 to the various initiatives offered throughout the 20th century. This is partly because literature has been perceived as an important way of manifesting 'ourselves' and building a national identity, but also because it is an economically significant part of the art and culture sector. The Department of Communication, IT and the Arts reports that in 2003-2004 the cultural goods and services sector contributed $13.6 billion to GDP (Department of Communication 2005: 7). 'Culture' employs well over 800,000 people, with some 300,000 of those working full time (Bott 2004). Over 7,000 people list writing as their professional occupation (Throsby and Hollister 2003), but the number of people actually writing and being published far exceeds this.

The government has long supported creative writing: in 1998-99, the Commonwealth Government spent $17.3 million directly on literature and publishing (Throsby 2002), which also regulates and protects the publishing sector through legislation and policy covering copyright, classification, education, libraries and tariffs, *inter alia*. There are sound economic reasons for this: despite the low income-earning potential of individual writers (the Australia Council reported that the 2000-01 mean earned income of writers from writing was $26,400), and publishing and printing contributed nearly $14,500 million to the value of Australian production in the financial year 1999-2000. In 2000-01, some 104 million books were sold in Australia to a value of $1.2 billion (Ostell 2002) and 126 million books were produced by Australian book publishers and sold nationally and overseas (Australia Council for the Arts 2003: 23). The government's logic in its involvement in the writing field is, therefore, not just benevolent support for the arts and culture: it includes the management of a relatively significant part of the economy. Research into this field would, no doubt, add significantly to commonly useful knowledge. Moreover, by producing research information that could be fed back from the sector to policy makers, the discipline of writing could not only influence how government perceives us, but also even take a place in shaping that policy.

The government also takes an active role in the regulation of a sector that contributes to representations of what it means to be Australian, something past and current governments clearly understand to be worthy of interest.

Indeed, the Australia Council has a statutory obligation to 'foster the expression of a national identity by means of the arts' (Australia Council Act 1975: §5.a.v). The high public demand for books and other written material by and about Australia, the high level of value attached to Australian writing by the government and the public, and the economic investment made both by publishers and the university sector points to a pressing need to produce solid research into how this investment is being spent, and the effects it is having. The connection between Australian literature and national identity is well represented in academic writings and in government policies, but it is researchers in the field of writing who are extremely well placed to develop projects that tap into these discussions about national identity.

Conclusion

We acknowledge that not everyone in the discipline wants to conduct research and that many of those who do enjoy the research life acknowledge (often ruefully) that each such project cuts deeply into the time and energy they might otherwise put into creative work or family life. But with the increasing pressures on universities to produce knowledge, and their tendency to pass this pressure on to their staff, it is timely for academics in the discipline of writing to consider how, and in what ways, we might develop research outputs that count in disciplinary, academic and DEST terms. We might, and indeed often do, regret that DEST, the ARC and many university research offices do not acknowledge the extent to which creative work is, in itself, often a research experiment, or the extent to which creative products contribute to knowledge. While the struggle to gain this recognition has enormous merit and should continue, it is also increasingly clear that, despite all the work already completed in this area, we do not yet have the ability to change, or even significantly influence, the measures that are used to judge our performance.

Strategically, this paper is framed with the suggestion that as more writing academics become recognised in conventional terms as researchers, it will become increasingly difficult for some of our cousins in the humanities and related areas to categorise our work (including our creative work) as frivolous, lacking in intellectual rigor or historical perspective, irrelevant and/or trivial. We want, therefore, to throw out, for wider debate and hopefully uptake, the idea of writing academics across Australasia collaborating ('ganging up', in effect) to compete for research grants from a range of national and international agencies, to undertake significant and cumulative research projects, and to publish even more research papers, even more widely, than we already do. We believe that, in the process, our community will find more points of connection among ourselves and with other research individuals and bodies, and will elevate and, therefore, make more secure the position of writing in higher education. We will also build a body of systematic and substantiated knowledge on which we can all draw for our own, and our discipline's enrichment and advancement.

Any takers?

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