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Creativity: The fire in the fennel stalk

How can a change be brought about, one that would allow the creative writing to be identified as research in Australian universities? Writing's whole content and context revolves around mastering language, something that everyone uses every day, and this means it is linked to speaking - to the voice, the basis of our communication. From this an assumption arises that writing is something we can all do. As one writer said to me: 'there's a status thing about it, which belittles the creative effort. Anyone can write poetry. Uncle Jim did when there was a wedding last week, and it had everyone's name in it' (North 2004: 139). If 'we can all' do it, then it follows that someone who is doing what everyone else can do should not be bestowed with more 'capital' than the rest of us. Because of this attitude, creativity attached to creative writers in the academy lacks status and cannot easily win research funding.

Conversely, creativity in the broader field of social relations is enthusiastically embraced. Creativity is a buzzword, an activity that will gain the practitioner who uses creative techniques a great deal of capital - certainly cultural, maybe economic as well - because to be creative is to be innovative and entrepreneurial. Creativity is a byword in big business, an attribute to be cultivated, and one that will get you places. According to Richard Florida, the creative class has become the 'driving force of economic growth' and 'creativity has come to be the most highly prized commodity in our economy' (Florida 2002: xv, 5).

So if creativity has such a hold in the broader community, why is it that creative writers in universities struggle to have their work recognised as being on an equal footing with other disciplines, especially when it comes to research? This paper sets out to explore the social structure of contemporary notions of creativity, and to answer the question of why creative writers struggle for recognition in the field of research. As mentioned in a recent editorial of TEXT (Webb & Krauth 2005), writers in universities are the 'dominated of the dominant'. What does this mean, and what does it mean for creative writers?

Creativity as Capital

Creativity is big these days: big for business, big for innovation, and big for higher education. It has become such a buzzword that universities offering courses named 'creative' are inundated with applicants. It has also become a desired attribute to instil in university students over the course of their degrees. Creativity in this sense is no longer limited to practices that

involve the arts. It is used to describe processes in management, new innovations, discoveries and visions that contribute to the 'progress' of society or the social individual, anything out of the ordinary and, more and more often, just anything. Being creative is almost a person's right - with the possible exception of 'creative accounting'. As Florida notes, 'Creativity has come to be valued - and systems have evolved to encourage and harness it - because new technologies, new industries, new wealth and all other good economic things flow from it' (2002: 21).

Outside the artistic/cultural field, creativity has become part of the political agenda in a context where effort is expended to drive the economy further and faster. It has been tied in with development, new ideas, innovation, and human progress, and all these terms are becoming so entrenched that creativity is hardly imaginable without the associated attributes of 'drive' and 'determination'. This can be understood by seeing contemporary attitudes to creativity as part of what can be called the 'doxa', that is, the agglomeration of arbitrary meanings that have succeeded in becoming so naturalised that they seem commonsensical and, therefore, beyond discussion. Bourdieu explains it in this way: 'The social world doesn't work in terms of consciousness; it works in terms of practices, mechanisms, and so forth. By using doxa we accept many things without knowing them' (in Bourdieu and Eagleton 1994: 268). It is doxa that provides people with an image of society in which they can invest, and which seems objectively real. This means that doxa - the doxic attitude, the doxic perspective - procures legitimacy for a position or an argument by bringing together agency and worldview, subjective and objective positions. Doxa hides the politics, principles and practices that were evident - and necessary - when a particular knowledge first achieved legitimacy, and makes other ways of thinking virtually unthinkable.

The doxa of progress is an example of this. Progress, its importance, and its value to society are unquestioned, because progress is doxic, or part of 'the way things are'. This doxic notion of progress spills over to creativity because it sets up a teleological framework, which is analogic with a doctrine of manifest destiny. Under this perspective we (western societies, creative societies) are seen as being propelled, inevitably, into a better future; and creativity is an important tool in this movement of society towards its good end. An effect of this view is that there has been a shift in how creativity is valued, because it is tied now to technological advances rather than artistic expression, and hence to economic and political agendas rather than the aesthetic or expressive. A material-based, and increasingly globalised, economy is annexing terms that were traditionally seen as pertaining to activities that eschewed monetary gain. An example of this colonising of creativity can be seen in a billboard over a Melbourne freeway that states, 'Do you wish to imitate or innovate?' The implication is that innovation moves one ahead because it is tied to economics, and imitation leaves one behind because it is based on an outdated image of creativity. Under this logic, artistic expression becomes relegated to a simple aesthetic appeal, with all the limitations that conveys, and it seems that creative practitioners have no choice but to innovate if they want to be taken seriously in the current climate - and innovation equates with economic production.

The Value of Creativity

However, this is not the only way of seeing things, and nor has it always been the doxa of creativity. Not all that long ago, for instance, creativity was viewed through the prism - the doxa - of the Romantic era, in which artists were reverenced, and their creative practice and attitude given the form of a divinely inspired expression. Today creativity is increasingly viewed as part of practices capable of helping society to realise its potential, but only in a limited sense - only within the constraints of an economic framework. John Hope Mason, professor of history at Middlesex University, argues in his *The Value of Creativity* (2003) that creativity in this sense is a modern value, dating from the nineteenth century. He traces the trajectory that has led to the widespread belief in the possibility that everyone can be creative. The move, from apostatising the creativity of God and developing instead the capacity to believe in the self and the infallibility of the process of one's own creative powers, has led, according to Mason, to three false assumptions (Mason 2003: 234). The first is that more creativity is necessarily better for us, individually or collectively. The second relates to people's independence from one another and from society. Mason argues that if creativity is to be recognised as such by others, there needs to be a commonality from which it emerges. The widespread use of the term 'creativity' helps to drive a high sense of individualism. This in itself may seem a good thing - on the surface. But if everyone is busy being creative in their own individual ways, there is not the (cultural) market for creativity to function in its role as a form of social cohesion. Creativity is relational. It does not just come from nowhere; it is only creative in relation to something else, and thus needs to embody more than just a personal aesthetic:

> At the beginning of last century the undiscovered country was that which lay within; at the start of this century the vanishing continent is that of collective experience, or common identity, or shared ideals. What we are left with is an increasingly pronounced individualism delivering ever more diminishing returns. (Mason 2003: 234)

The search for individual creativity under the current doxa can lead to outcomes that are socially irrelevant, because in order for something to be creative it must have significance for others.

The third assumption Mason identifies relates to the fantasy of human beings' independence from the world. Creativity, he argues, just like 'progress', cannot continue without regard for the relationship between society and physical world on which we depend:

> Just as the belief in progress arose when awareness of actual (or possible) material improvement reached a critical mass, so our sense of the dangers which are inherent in the continuation of that improvement may now also be reaching a critical mass. To envisage a future which is no more than an extrapolation of the currently dominant trends is to see a prospect of gradual collective suicide. And it may be that that will be our fate. We will only avoid it by either some wholesale reversion to pre-modern attitudes (which is hard to imagine taking place) or by making the notions of limits and interdependence central to our perceptions and decisions. The first (pre-modern) solution would mean rejecting creativity as a value; the second change would mean that creativity would cease to have the

> exemplary status which it has come to possess over the last hundred and fifty years. (Mason 2003: 235)

According to Mason, creativity has become as important in our society as heroism, virtue and honour were in earlier times (2003: 5). The power attached to this image of creativity is like the power that was attached to fire in the Greek story of human creation, told through the tale of Prometheus - a story Mason also uses. According to this myth, Zeus refused to give fire to the mortals. Fire, while it has great capacity to create, has equal capacity to destroy. The gods forbad its use by the people because effective use of fire required considered knowledge of its properties, and users required sound knowledge of their own capabilities too. Fire's properties made it worthy of divine use alone. The gods would use fire wisely to produce wondrous things; giving fire to the mortals risked destroying much, including all that had originally been created by fire. Mason's placing of creativity in the 'progress' equation as that which may be taking us towards a 'gradual collective suicide' highlights a similar create/destroy dichotomy.

Paul Virilio's discussion of the development of art in the twentieth century is also pertinent to the social structure of creativity and the value it is given. He looks at the human form in art and draws an analogy between what he sees as humanity's move to a state of pure war, and the move in art from resemblance (emanating from a pious Christian influence) through representation, to annihilation of the human form. According to Virilio, we are now at the end of representation and representative art, and this is not a good thing. As art becomes *presentative*, rather than *representative*, it becomes based on the here-and-now, the 'live act'. The image holds the responsibility for meaning and significance and the creator becomes redundant in an increasing determination to display a 'realism' that is ever-diminishing while becoming more virtually available. Virilio writes:

> If God died in the nineteenth century, according to Nietzsche, what is the bet that the victim of the twentieth century will not turn out to be the creator, the author, this heresy of the historical materialism of the century of machines (Virilio 2003: 38-9).

Virilio describes 'extreme art' as an 'engineering of the living', like extreme sports where 'champions risk death striving for some pointless performance' (2003: 51). The human form destroyed in art is perhaps an expression of the artist who is being destroyed in the current colonisation of creativity. Art becomes separated from the artist, and used instead as a tool in the game of dominance in society. Art used for economic advance becomes more and more dependent on advancing technologies, and creativity becomes synonymous with technological skill rather than contemplation, inspiration and hard slog. The colonisation of creativity by the economic and political fields gives creativity that teleological aspect I spoke of earlier, which is dangerous in a world of finite resources and capacity.

In the Greek myth, Prometheus faced the danger of fire, and confined it in a fennel stalk to present it to human beings. This contained its danger, and allowed him to bring fire down to the earth from the realm of the gods. It is through the metaphor of the 'fire and the fennel-stalk' that the importance of creativity can be found (Mason 2003: 236). The analogy is a powerful one, and pertinent to the present-day issue of creativity. Creativity is something that must be contained: it needs limits and

boundaries, but not economic ones. Creativity's container - its fennel stalk - is the social/cultural realm. If it is set free in the economic field, the risk is that the drive and determination that are part of the value of creativity will consume the resources of the physical world and lead to Mason's 'gradual collective suicide'.

But setting it free in the social/cultural realm also needs some consideration. Currently, it seems, creativity is seen as an attribute of everyone; and in some respects this is appropriate. People are creative, and it is thrilling for creative writers to see so much attention and so much value attached to our practice. But like Prometheus' fire that can both create and destroy, this attention can also deplete the value of work carried out by creative practitioners. All people are (potentially) creative; but not all people are creative in a focused, trained, committed way that ties to the whole long tradition of creative expression, that deploys craft-specific techniques, and that is the product of concentrated and yes, systematic, research orientations that result in an object that has something to say. Of course Uncle Jim can write a poem for my cousin's wedding. But unless he has been trained, formally or informally, and has invested himself in the world of poetry, it is unlikely to be a piece of work that is genuinely creative in the sense that creativity is valued in the field of cultural production, the world of poetry. Nor is it likely to be the sort of work that would achieve economic success - so it fails on both dominant definitions of 'creativity'. So creativity need not be a necessary attribute for everyone - but it is necessary for anyone determined to produce significant work; and creativity-as-art can't be 'performed' as an everyday function like multiplication or writing a memo. I see creativity as a way of expressing an understanding of the everyday, and this can be part of its appeal to the academy.

Creativity in Universities

Universities, like other major social institutions, have increasingly taken up the descriptor 'creative' in areas not traditionally aligned with creative practice. Science, technology, and communication have all been involved. Scientists are called upon to be creative rather than detached, dispassionate, and objective. Computer technology has required increasing creativity because of its interface with the public through the world wide web and software programs. There is an expectation that knowledge formed in the academy will be innovative and creative as this contributes to 'production' and 'investment' (Kemp 1999).

Many disciplines generate genuine creativity - contributions to any economic imperatives notwithstanding - and creativity has always been accepted in the university. However, such creative practices are of a different order from those practised within the artistic field. Creativity *as such* receives the nod from universities principally when it is practised under the protection of another discipline and as an aspect of that discipline's general function. When practiced as an end in itself - *creative* writing, for instance - it is seen as being too emotive, insufficiently rational. It has been difficult for creative writing to gain entry to and acceptance within the university as a practice in its own right because creativity is disruptive, and refuses to follow standard practice. As Marcelle Freiman states (Freiman 2001), the scholarship of academics and postgraduate students in creative writing can be perceived as unstructured, perhaps even chaotic and irrational by those in other discipline areas.

A central problem with the universities' uptake of the doxa of creativity is that it follows the general uptake in society, particularly the changes in the meaning of the term from one of cultural production to one of potential capitalisation in the post-Cold War period. Viewing creativity as innovation that drives the economy disregards its role as the generator of ideas, thought, and new knowledge that drive the field of research (which may be, but is not necessarily, economic). Bill Readings' elucidation of this dichotomous influence on research practice shows the need for universities and researchers to accept economic imperatives on the one hand, while remaining separate from them on the other:

> Nothing in the nature of the institution will enshrine Thought or protect it from economic imperatives … But at the same time, thinking, if it is to remain open to the possibility of Thought, to take itself as a question, must not seek to be economic. (Readings 1996: 175)

The same can be said of creativity. If it is colonised by economic imperatives, it becomes a practice driven by external determinants rather than internal; and genuine creativity - new ways of thinking and seeing - will probably be subsumed by minor incremental adjustments designed to increase profits, rather than to offer radical change.

If one external determinant for creativity is the economic imperative, another is the way it is linked with the everyday. Rather than being a concern of the artistic or scientific areas of a university (in their own different ways), creativity has now become a necessary but 'generalisable' skill (Dean 2002: 2). Within the academy, one striking difference between the creativity it professes to support and the creativity that has been a part of the cultural field since the time of the Enlightenment is this notion that creativity *can* be a 'generalisable' skill.

Postgraduate and academic researchers are now required to demonstrate the general skills of inquiry, knowledge acquisition, and creativity. What these requirements do not take into account is the intrinsic quality of much creative work. In the past, art's separation from the everyday was, in part, due to the use of the term 'create' and its derivatives. Creativity was never a necessary attribute of everyone, and certainly not a generic skill.

The academy, and more generally, the society in which it functions, has divorced creativity from the aesthetic, taking it from the specific to the general. Creativity is no longer linked with the Romantic notion of the artist - appropriately; but rather than accept it as a part of dispositions and positions that *understand* the everyday, the current episteme emphasises that it *expects* creativity to *be a part* of the everyday. The word 'creative' is being inserted into government and university policies as a new way of saying, 'This will make us more financially efficient and effective'.

What this overlooks is the scholarship of many disciplines in the academy. Both theory and practice contribute to knowledge, and the concrete apparatus of the university needs to position them in balance. Creativity resides in and motivates both. Creative writing can contribute to knowledge without losing its aesthetic qualities and without wholly being subsumed under the 'creative industries' umbrella. It has the possibility of opening up areas of knowledge, but only if creativity and research are seen as equally valid, and different, ways of knowing that can be evaluated not just in economic terms. What is overlooked in much university policy is

creativity's ability to be a part of practices that help in gaining a greater understanding of our social existence.

This observation has become ever more pressing in light of Paddy McGuinness' recent editorial comment in *Quadrant* that states: 'Probably there would be little loss to society and to genuine intellectual enquiry if the funding of the non-sciences through the ARC (or through any similar body) were simply abolished' (McGuinness 2006: 4). In this he simply expresses the current doxa that values capital engendered from research output only when that capital is economic rather than cultural. More and more, public perceptions of research, and government policy and rhetoric on research in universities, align good and worthy research with that which can be commercialised. Innovation, communication and technology are the key concepts; good research is saleable. Creative writing in the university is affected by this economic paradigm, and its capacity to generate knowledge that is saleable, or that can otherwise be counted as 'research' under this paradigm, is restricted compared with other knowledges in the academy. (It is not alone in this; blue sky science, philosophy, the classics and others are all diminished in the eyes of policy makers by their apparent incapacity to produce commercialisable outputs.) I am interested to explore the constraints in light of creative writing's position as 'the little finger on the weaker hand of the research body' (Webb & Krauth 2005).

Autonomy/Heteronomy

Power is knowledge, but what holds power as knowledge in the academy does not remain static. Researchers, creative writers, teachers and administrators - all those who perform as agents in the university sector - do not operate in a vacuum; rather, they are constituted as agents through their interactions with others in what Bourdieu terms 'fields' (1993: 6). Fields, in Bourdieu's analysis, are in some ways similar to the sociological term 'social institutions' in that they generally encompass areas of relations that operate autonomously, such as law, medicine and education. Fields are the (metaphoric) site of practices and discourses that constitute particular meanings because of their location in the social system. Each field will have its own set of rules, codifications, behaviours, skills and talents that produce these practices and discourses. Each agent in the file takes a position in relation to others - their colleagues and competitors - and their struggle to maintain or change their position means the field is in a constant state of flux. Any change in position necessarily changes the structure of the field (Bourdieu 1993: 6). The academy is a field, and one of the agents in that field is creative writing. As it jockeys for position with other disciplines, and faces the limits placed on it by the system of relations of power in the academy, it will necessarily both be affected by, and affect, the field and the distribution of different forms of capital in that field (Bourdieu 1991: 57).

The capital that is valuable to each position in a field will differ according to how each position wishes to gain recognition. Capital might circulate in the research field in the form of peer recognition, for example, or public recognition, rather than simply the economic form. All those who participate in the struggle for positions in the field must believe in the value of their position and, therefore, in the value of the capital that they aspire to receive in these positions (Bourdieu 1991: 14). Creative writers who see themselves as also being researchers typically aspire to receive peer recognition for their contribution to knowledge, rather than public

recognition through commercial success. But their concerns and their practice are delimited by the structure of the field in which they operate, and by that field's position with respect to the overarching field of social relations. Dominant in that meta-field is what Bourdieu terms the field of power - that which is defined by its access to economic capital and political power, and is in the dominant position because of its economic and political wealth. Universities occupy a dominant position in relation to other fields because of their cultural and symbolic capital but are, in Bourdieu's terms, the 'dominated among the dominant' (1993: 164) because of their relative lack of economic capital. Traditionally, universities made the best of this, and operated with a degree of autonomy from other fields (even from the field of power) because of their capacity to generate cultural capital. They have, therefore, valued this capital above other forms. Now though, as the research field comes under increasing pressure from governments for research to be anchored to business and industry, a more complex structure of capital accretion is emerging.

This affects creative writers in the academy, because like any other individuals within the field of research, they aspire to some form of consecration: that is, recognition of the value of their research. From the government's perspective, it seems, such consecration only has value if it comes in the form of economic recognition; but in other areas of the field, cultural recognition is more highly valued. This equates with consecration by one's peers; and when this is sanctioned by the dominant field, it may bring with it associated wealth, the consecration comes in the form of economic rewards - higher salary, patent rights, royalties and so on.

These different forms of consecration constitute what Bourdieu describes as 'three competing principles of legitimacy' (Bourdieu 1988: 48; 1993: 46). These principles of legitimacy can best be demonstrated in a model of the cultural field (see Fig 1). This model shows the cultural field as bisected first vertically, with autonomous positions (the 'art for art's sake' positions) on the left and heteronomous positions (commercial production) on the right; and then bisected horizontally, with highly consecrated positions at the top and low consecration at the bottom.

High degree of consecration and Autonomy ('Intellectual' audience)	High degree of consecration and Heteronomy (Bourgeois audience)
Low degree of consecration and Autonomy (No audience)	Low degree of consecration and Heteronomy ('Mass audience')

Fig 1: A model of the principles of legitimacy in fields of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993: 49)

Bourdieu originally produced this model to explicate the work and function of the field of cultural production, but it is equally applicable to the field of university research. The position with the greatest autonomy, and greatest consecration, has traditionally been one where production is driven by interior demands of the field and its values and, therefore, is

designed to appeal to other (autonomous) producers rather than external bodies. Research in universities that fits this category is produced without thought of immediate utility or direct exchange value: the aim is produce 'knowledge for knowledge's sake' - 'blue sky' research - and the reward for researchers in this quadrant is cultural capital. Ideally, research attached to creative writing in the academy would belong in this quadrant.

The other main form of research production is tied to the heteronomous position of high consecration and is work that receives legitimation and rewards from the field of power, to some extent: applied research, effectively. Producers committed to this quadrant of the field work and compete for economic capital, but they also receive consecration from the 'dominant fractions of the dominant class' (Bourdieu 1993: 51): the government, for instance, or major industry, or other holders of position of power and privilege.

The last position of legitimacy is that of popular, heteronomous production. This position has low consecration because of its appeal to the masses, and because it is not perceived to have intellectual or creative freedom, but to operate almost entirely in accordance with the demands of market and/or socio-political forces. It is the polar opposite of the autonomous consecrated position.

The fourth position - autonomy with low consecration - is different from the other three sectors in the field, as it acquires no legitimation at all. This position does not attract attention from either the ordinary population or the dominant fraction; nor can individuals in this position be placed with others who engage in disinterested scholarship and have earned the regard of their peers. Therefore they do not earn the capital valued in the heteronomous positions - economic - nor, in their autonomous position are they well positioned to acquire cultural capital. In the field of research, autonomous positions with low consecration might find it difficult to attract any audience or support at all, and this may be where creative writers presently sit in terms of the field of research in many universities. Creative writers can be seen as producers outside the domain of research imperatives: autonomous because their research is committed to their own creative practice, and without consecration because it is not recognised as research by the university system. It does not obey the methodological and other traditional standards of research, and so is dominated by the relations of power that operate in the research field (the university) which, in turn, is dominated by the field of power that controls economic capital. This has flow-on effects: creative writers in the academy do not easily acquire the cultural capital associated with recognition of one's peers, because so many research peers do not see creative writing as valid research. Nor do academic writers easily acquire economic capital: when was the last time a novel, however thoroughly researched and however creative in its organisation of information and ideas, counted as a DEST-accredited publication?

Conclusion

Creativity and knowledge, if they are to be able to grow and be created in all areas of society, must not be narrowed to that which can be exchanged in the monetary market. If all knowledge, and therefore all aspects of our social constitution, are allowed to continue, change, diversify and adapt to a continually changing world, then knowledge within the university

framework must be accepted under the autonomous principle; that is, it must be recognised that not all knowledge can be exchanged for economic capital.

Creativity is an important component of cultural value and capital. Creativity is *more than* an outlet that attracts economic capital. It is *more than* a generalisable skill. By *more than* I mean it has the capacity to impact on social understandings and the everyday, and should not be ghettoised as commodity, entertainment or simply part of the everyday. Creativity is *more than*. Creativity, the 'fire in the fennel stalk', is part of society's expression, interaction, change and development that is always something more than economic value alone can allow for.

Accepting the importance of this opens up the possibility for creative writing in the field of research to make a valuable contribution to the broad social field. Creative writing, if it is able to function from a secure position in that field, can articulate other ways of operating that give rise to cultural understandings, and produce cultural capital that may be afforded, once again, as much worth as economic capital currently receives.

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