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Independent scholar

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The “living humanities”: Creative arts and academic humanities in tension

Abstract:

When the Australian Academy of the Humanities (AAH) was established in 1969, poet Judith Wright was elected as a founding fellow. Scholar and fellow poet A. D. Hope saw her inclusion as boding well for the Academy’s purpose to foster and promote the humanities. Six years later, Wright complained about a lack of opportunities for creative practitioners and claimed that she was being excluded from Academy life. While some fellows supported Wright, the majority disagreed that creative practitioners belonged in the fellowship. This incident is representative of a broader “unclear connection” between the “living humanities” – as H. C. Coombs described the creative arts – and what Simon During terms the “academic humanities”. Focusing on the AAH’s first three decades, this article traces different ideas held by leading humanities scholars towards the creative arts and shows how the AAH maintained boundaries and created exclusions. A major shift occurred with the John Dawkins reforms to higher education. Key figures at the AAH played leading roles in seeking solutions to alarmingly low levels of Australian Research Council (ARC) funding for “creative arts research”. Despite such efforts, the AAH continued to elect very few creative arts practitioners into its core fellowship throughout the 1990s and ARC data shows that funding inequities for creative arts research remain an intractable problem.

Biographical note:

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I have felt at times that we might have been more imaginative, but then I remind myself that the cultivation of the imagination has never been regarded as an academician’s virtue.
– Bernard Smith, 1979

When the Australian Academy of the Humanities (AAH) was established in 1969, poet Judith Wright was counted among its founding fellows. Scholar and fellow poet A. D. Hope saw her inclusion as boding well for the Academy’s purpose to “foster and promote the humanities ... and to influence practice, taste and public opinion” (Hope, 1970, p. 5). As a writer rather than an academic, Wright’s presence would assure the public that the Academy, supported by public money, was “presided over by the Muses themselves and not merely by the nursemaids and handmaids of culture” (p. 6). Nevertheless, Hope asked in the Academy’s inaugural annual lecture, where were the novelists, dramatists, artists and musicians? More muses were needed, he argued, to balance the overwhelming numbers of nursemaids and handmaids – otherwise known as professors. Only six years later, Wright complained about a lack of opportunities for the election of creative “practitioners” and claimed that she was being excluded from the life of the Academy (Wright, as cited in Coe, 1976). While some fellows spoke out in support of Wright – hoping to find common ground between artists and writers and academic critics – the majority disagreed that creative arts practitioners belonged among the AAH’s elected fellows (AAH Council, 1977).

This ambivalence about the role of the creative arts within what Simon During calls the “academic humanities” (2020a, p. 21) played out several times in the Academy’s history [1]. It is representative of a broader ambivalence about the place of the creative arts within the Australian higher education system. This can be traced, in part, to the John Dawkins higher education reforms of the late 1980s. However, as the incidents described above demonstrate, a tension between the two fields predates these reforms, as will be discussed in this article. The Dawkins reforms, also discussed further below, resulted in the merger of a diverse array of independent arts education institutions with larger universities, a consequence of broader aims to yoke higher education to national productivity and national debt, and to expand student enrolments (Croucher, 2018; Davis, 2018; Hunter, 1991). The so-called binary education system – with its vocationally focused institutes of technology, further education colleges, institutes, art schools and conservatoria on the one hand, and universities on the other – was transformed into a “Unified National System” (Dawkins, 1987). Prior to these mergers, without

research as a primary requirement, teachers in many forms of the arts were largely professional practitioners (often of high repute) who provided instruction in their field, frequently in non-degree-granting colleges (Davis, 2018; Stoljar 1996a; Strand, 1998).

While the history of creative writing as a discipline in Australian universities both does and does not follow this broader trajectory (Dawson, 2001; Krauth, 2000) [2], it too has been profoundly impacted – along with the other creative arts – by the Dawkins reforms. The reforms have had a lasting if unintended influence on the way creative arts education is delivered (Webb & Gibson, 2019) [3] and on expectations placed on creative arts academics. Jen Webb argues that:

The requirement to engage in conventional research as well as professional creative practice was a direct consequence of the Dawkins reforms, which placed on art educators the imperative to produce research that met the specifications of the annual Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC), without adjusting HERDC to accommodate the sorts of work produced. (Webb, 2018)

A lack of parity between the kinds of research conducted by creative arts academics and “conventional research” has had negative impacts for those academics, including fewer research funding opportunities and more professional responsibilities than “traditional” academics (Strand, 1998). (Most academics are responsible for three main areas of teaching, research, and administration, while creative arts academics have two additional responsibilities of professional practice and public engagement.) These issues have been recognised from the 1990s onwards. Especially troubling are low levels of Australian Research Council (ARC) funding for creative arts research, a seemingly intractable problem that has persisted for three decades (ARC, 1998, 2019; Strand, 1998; Turner & Brass, 2014, p. 54). There exists, too, an ongoing lack of clarity on the part of university research management and peer reviewers for Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) around submission of creative arts “outputs” to ERA (Watkins et al., 2018).

These inequities indicate the very real consequences of an “unclear connection” between the creative arts and the academic humanities in Australian higher education (Gillies, 1998, p. 263). This article examines that lack of clear connection as it played out at the AAH. Focusing on the first three decades of the organisation’s history, it traces shifting attitudes held by leading humanities scholars towards the creative arts and creative arts practitioners. Lesley Johnson (2021) argues that the AAH relied during this period on an “elite, club-like status to influence government” and to advocate for the humanities cause – “what the humanities are and how they should be supported” (pp. 20–21). This article shows how the organisation conceived of the creative arts as largely marginal to that cause, particularly during its foundation and throughout the 1970s and 1980s. A major shift occurred during the 1990s when key figures at the AAH played leading roles in seeking parity for creative arts academics in the broader humanities world – at both a national policy and university level. Despite such efforts, the AAH continued with its lack of a wholehearted or formalised inclusion of the creative arts in its core

fellowship. Through paying close attention to the mechanisms of and assumptions behind boundary setting and exclusion of the creative arts, the article contributes to efforts in the field of the history of the humanities to gain a clearer understanding of what the humanities have been and the functions they have served (Barnes, 2021; Bod et al., 2016; During, 2014, 2020a, 2020b; Harpham, 2011; Hunter, 2014; Johnson, 2020, 2021). It also contributes to gaining a clearer historical understanding of the interrelationship between the creative arts and the academic humanities, one that has received little attention to date.

During (2020b) cautions that we tend to speak of the humanities as if they were one thing, when in fact they are many:

There is no adequate ‘idea of the humanities.’ There is instead a humanities *world*: a loosely linked conglomeration of practices, interests, comportments, personae, moods, purposes, and values, and the various settings which these practices, interests, and so on inhabit. (2020b)

He suggests that one of the better ways to understand this porous humanities world, and to “figure out what the humanities are”, is to think about them historically, “to tell their story” (2020b). The same could be said about the creative arts: they too are many things, a loosely linked conglomeration of practices, interests and purposes inhabiting a variety of settings. Examining these two worlds as they intersected at the AAH is one way to tell their story and to think about their interplay historically.

For the purposes of this article, the two worlds of “the humanities” and “the creative arts” are not assumed to necessarily belong to entirely separate “domains” (Latour, 2013) with clearly defined boundaries. Just as Bruno Latour points to a science laboratory – which at first glance might seem a distinct realm (as a discipline and a set of professional practices), but on closer inspection is shot through with connections to business, law, politics and economics (pp. 29–30) – so too the humanities and creative arts are networked, both with one another and with other fields and institutions. However, although the academic humanities and the creative arts are interlinked activities, this article aims to keep in view the very real challenges the creative arts experience within Australian higher education precisely as a distinct field – one that is aligned with but not entirely congruent with the academic humanities.

Inception of the academy – creative arts as revitaliser or unwelcome guest?

The Academy grew directly from its predecessor organisation, the Australian Humanities Research Council (AHRC), a process of metamorphosis that involved shaking up the old organisation without discarding it altogether, to fashion a livelier one for the future (Davison, 2010, pp. 7–8, 12–13; Hancock, 1969; Johnson, 2021, pp. 21–23). Historian Max Crawford, the immediate outgoing president of the AHRC, played a key role in initiating and driving this transformation. He was concerned to inject a “strong infusion of new blood” (Hancock, 1969)

and to make the proposed academy more relevant to challenges facing the humanities during the 1960s.

These challenges included “the crisis of the bulge”, a steep rise in student numbers and a shift in student demographics (Crawford, 1964a, p. vi; Johnson, 2021, p. 22). Arts degrees were no longer undertaken by an elite few engaged in “the traditional values of a broad, liberal education” (Hancock, 1965, p. 2) and destined, often, for positions of leadership (Crawford, 1964a, p. 1). Instead, higher education was becoming more focused on vocation and technology, with many new students from families who in the past may not have pursued a university education. In this climate, Crawford urged humanities scholars to respond actively to change rather than lamenting an irretrievable past. What was required was a “constructive re-thinking of the role of the humanities in a modern Australian university” (p. v). His aim to refashion the AHRC into a more dynamic academy relevant and responsive to its times, one capable of undertaking useful enterprises “doing service to the public with honour to ourselves” (Crawford, 1969a, p. 5), aligned with this larger purpose.

When Crawford, inaugural Academy president Keith Hancock (also a historian) and others debated the precise shape the new academy might take, the creative arts divided opinion, even among their supporters. One of the clearest voices of support for their inclusion – in addition to Hope – was that of Herbert Cole (Nuggett) Coombs, an honorary fellow of the Academy. Not long after resigning as Governor of the Reserve Bank (1949–1968) and taking up his new position as Chancellor of ANU, Coombs wrote to Hancock. A long-standing supporter of the arts, Coombs suggested that the Academy should:

give a significant, if not a major, part of its attention to the *living humanities* [emphasis added] – to the poems, novels, paintings, ballets etc. which are currently being created and the people who are creating them. It would be good if a significant part of the infusion of new blood you refer to could be that of persons currently engaged in active creation. I have a feeling that it might have an explosive effect on the vitality of the organization. (Coombs, 1969)

Coombs had raised the same issue six years earlier with the AHRC. While “study of the creative works in the general field of the humanities” (1963) was quite rightly the AHRC’s work, Coombs wrote, “I have wondered whether it would not be a proper and socially valuable extension of this function if the Council were to take some initiative in promoting contemporary work in the same field” (1963). Not least in his considerations were financial difficulties faced by creative artists, an issue that remains unalleviated today (Australian Society of Authors, 2021; Zwar et al., 2015) [4]. His suggestions evoke a languishing organisation; through taking a far more active role in supporting the arts, it would reap benefits in return.

Hope’s provocative inaugural lecture argued in greater detail along the same lines. While the “high distinction” of the Academy’s scholars in fields like history, philosophy and language

would command respect, he argued that in the fields of literature and the fine arts the public was likely to pay “much more attention to authors and artists of high repute” than to critics and scholars who study them (1970, pp. 5–6). Despite this potential, there were 22 professors of literature in the fellowship but not a single novelist or dramatist, four art historians but not a single visual artist (pp. 4–5), and no musicians:

Speaking as a professor myself, I cannot help feeling that professors, however eminent, are middle-men... For this reason the literary influence and prestige of an academy will, it seems to me, be higher and more effective, if the public is aware that the best writers of a nation are associated with its best scholars and critics in one body with a common aim and purpose. (Hope, 1970, pp. 5–6)

Like Coombs, Hope argued for the potential of creative practitioners to enliven the organisation, to add to its prestige and authority, and to provide compelling voices to engage with a broader public. Despite this potential, the creative arts were not given a major or even a clearly articulated role at the Academy between 1969 to 2000.

When Coombs wrote advocating for a “living humanities”, Crawford and Hancock had already considered – and to a large extent laid aside – the concept of an organisation expansive enough to include the creative arts. They were not entirely opposed to the idea themselves but met resistance from other fellows. Additionally, in Crawford’s view, only certain components of the living humanities sat well with the proposed academy. In his “Proposal to change The Humanities Research Council into The Australian Academy of Letters” Crawford (1967) asked:

If we adopt the title ‘Academy of Letters’, should we extend its fellowship to include poets and novelists? If we go so far, should we extend both title and fellowship to include composers and artists? I am reluctant to suggest such an extension. (p. 4)

Critics and historians of the arts were already included in the AHRC’s membership, Crawford noted, as well as a “leading Australian poet” (p. 4) (in the shape of Hope). The proposed academy title incorporating “letters” – defined as “literature in general; hence acquaintance with it, learning, study, erudition” (p. 3) – would allow the new academy to elect poets and novelists “whose work was of a sophistication appropriate to a body devoted to learning” (p. 4). However, Crawford was at pains to point out, the Academy would not “wish, or be competent, either to select from the schools or [*sic*] art or to speak for painters and sculptors at large” (p. 4).

There is a clear preference here for written language (literature over visual or performing arts), although Crawford did not spell out how its required sophistication would be identified, of what it would be comprised, or how it would meet the Academy’s objectives as a learned body. Music, painting and sculpture (dance, theatre and other forms were not mentioned) were considered off limits. “Our interest is scholarship and it is proper for us to stick to our last”,

Crawford declared (1967, p. 4). Two years later, the academy was incorporated as “The Australian Academy of the Humanities for the Advancement of Scholarship in Language, Literature, History and Philosophy and the Fine Arts, a company incorporated by Royal Charter”. This mouthful of a title was later listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the longest name on the British Index of Company Names (AAH, 1995, pp. 84–85) and its five rather strenuously delineated fields became a cause for regret on Hancock and Crawford’s part, as will be discussed further below.

Although the overarching concept of letters had been dropped, the matter of a more expansive academy capable of including the creative arts – at least in some modest form – persisted as an unresolved issue that resurfaced intermittently over the next three decades.

Schism between creativity and criticism

As the AHRC transformed into the AAH, the entire corpus of the AHRC’s fellowship was granted immediate membership of the new Academy. Crawford, Hancock, Hope and others were concerned about this ageing fellowship. A key strategy for launching a new academy not entirely made up of the old was to decide upon 16 brand new Founding Fellows. In Graeme Davison’s words (2010), everyone “immediately began to advance the claims of local favourites” (p. 13). Hancock’s list included writers Judith Wright, Patrick White and James McAuley. “These are names I find extremely attractive, and which very much conform to my original proposal for an Academy of Letters”, Crawford (1969b, p. 2) wrote to Hancock. “There is a strong feeling, however, of which I take Trendall and Passmore to be the most articulate protagonists, that works of scholarship, in what one might call the technical sense of ‘scholarship’, should be the only criterion” (p. 2). According to Crawford, while Dale Trendall (a classics scholar) was not unsympathetic to broadening the categories, it was “simply his view that academic scholarship of the best sort must be the only criterion” (p. 2). In contrast to Hope and Coombs’s conviction that creative practitioners would lend prestige and authority to the Academy, Trendall (ca. 1969) was concerned that unless scholarship was the main criterion, Academy members would not “command the respect they should and the whole body will, in consequence, lose authority and face”.

John Passmore and Trendall’s strong views on this matter point to a long-standing division between the making of creative works and their study, preservation, judgement and criticism. Passmore (a philosopher) and co-author Alexander Mitchell (an English scholar) had written about this division in their contribution to *The Humanities in Australia* (1959), a survey of the state of the humanities conducted by the AHRC. In their introductory chapter, they noted the difficulty of defining the humanities. A humanist, they suggested, “makes a persistent attempt to come to a fuller understanding of the creative human spirit through a study of the masterpieces it has created” (p. 2). This undertaking leads, they proposed, to the question “are the humanities parasitic?” (p.7):

If they are defined as an attempt to come to terms with masterpieces, does not this imply that they are secondary growths, at best of negligible fruitfulness, at worst a drain on creative strength? Creative artists, creative scientists, creative philosophers sometimes think of humane inquiries in this way: the critic, the commentator, is a battener, a blood-sucker, a desiccated pedant. (Mitchell & Passmore, 1959, p. 7)

In the face of this schism between creativity and criticism, Mitchell and Passmore argued for the humanist’s role in preserving and retrieving creative work of the past and making it intelligible through “the exercise of scholarship” (p. 4). The latter entailed “removing those historical and linguistic obstacles which stand in the way” of understanding substantial creative works; and distinguishing between the “genuine masterpiece” and the “meretricious” or the “pretentious oddity” (pp. 4, 7). The creative dramatist may be able to bring characters alive, they suggested, but the humanist “may have a wider understanding of the dramatic arts than the creative dramatist ... can hope to possess” (p. 8). The authors imply that the creative artist is more narrowly focused on a particular “approach”, constrained within a world of *techné* (craft, art or practice), which (supposedly) precludes the “wider understanding” that is the special proclivity of the humanist.

The pair were invoking common understandings of what the academic humanities do: officially preserve and disseminate “civilizational history” and study, interpret, evaluate and critically examine works (texts, artefacts) made by human beings, often with the aim “that we may better understand ourselves” (Barnes, 2021, pp. 580–82; During, 2020a, p. 21; Harpham, 2011, pp. 5–6) [5]. Crawford, too, argued that the humanities had a role “in keeping up the level of intellectual vitality in the community, in defending and expanding, in short its civilised heritage” (1964b, p. ii). The humanities shared this role equally, he argued, with science and the social sciences. In support of his argument, he cited Jacques Barzun’s *The House of Intellect* (1959):

humanists should use their wits to show that they exist to make life livable [*sic*] on a rugged planet by satisfying desires implanted in the hearts of the majority of men, though cultivable in relatively few: the impulse to art and religion, the love of color and shape, song and story-telling, the curiosity about whence we came and why we are here. This established, it should be easy to show how the academic humanities serve the arts, philosophy and religion by bringing order into the heritage of civilization. (Barzun, 1959, as cited in Crawford, 1964b, p. iv)

Here, too – as with Passmore and Mitchell – the academic humanities are separate from the arts: the former serve and bring order to the latter.

These distinctions go some way towards understanding the reluctance of many Academy fellows to embrace creative practitioners as equal members under the auspices of an organisation dedicated to the academic humanities. Other considerations were practical – difficulty in judging the “scholarly quality of scholarly works of literature” (Crawford, 1969b).

In addition, the AAH modelled itself on the British Academy, adopting wording of the British Academy’s Charter (Crawford, 1969a, p. 42), and thereby aligning with a model that did not conceptualise creative practitioners as a core part of their fellowship. A more integrated treatment of the two fields can be found in the American Academy of Arts & Sciences (AAAS) where “humanities and arts” are joined together in one of five classes. Six “sections” make up this class; namely, Philosophy and Religious Studies, History, Literature and Language Studies, Literature, Visual Arts, and Performing Arts (AAAS, n.d.). As a result, leading writers, performing and visual artists sit alongside academic scholars as equal fellows. The founders of the AAH seem not to have considered this model.

Despite a lack of wholehearted or clearly articulated inclusion of the arts (as contemporary practice), poet Judith Wright was nominated as a foundation fellow of the Academy for “her internationally recognised distinction as a poet whose work has had a major influence upon the direction of Australian poetry and [for] her able and scholarly critical work” (AAH, 1969). She was the only independent founding fellow (that is, without a university position) and the only woman among the 16. Throughout the 1970s and well beyond she remained an exception in terms of integrating writers and artists with scholars and critics in “one body with a common aim and purpose” as Hope (1970, p. 6) had longed and argued for.

1970s – the mistake of limiting fields

In early 1969, on the brink of finalising the Academy’s Royal Charter through Cabinet and gaining the imprimatur of the Queen, Crawford and Hancock expressed concern about the limitations of their five main disciplinary fields prescribed in their lengthy, Guinness Book of Records-worthy title. “I see that we made a mistake in drafting the charter, in giving any detail at all of the fields. We would have done more wisely to have written ‘for the advancement of scholarship in humane studies’”, Crawford wrote to Hancock (1969a, p. 2). It was too late now, though, to amend the document and to “retreat from an unfortunate and too limiting definition of our fields of action” (p. 2). Both agreed that the only solution was to “interpret them [the fields] as liberally as we can to widen our inclusion of humane scholars” (p. 2). They also noted “disproportionate representation” (p. 3) of the fields, with historians outweighing others (a fact that persists in today’s Academy with the history Section far larger than any other [AAH, n.d.]). Crawford (1969a) was concerned, also, that too much emphasis had been placed:

on the interests of Universities, and [we] have to think more of the galleries, of the museums, and of private scholars. We have not failed entirely in this, but our non-university members must sometimes have wondered whether university people can think of anything but universities. (p. 5)

Crawford’s statements contradict During’s (2020b) notion of the humanities as a loosely linked conglomeration of diverse practices, mentioned earlier. Throughout the AAH’s history, prescribed disciplines or Sections have made up “the humanities”. In 1971, these were History,

Classical Studies, English Literature and Philology, European Literature and Philology, Asian Studies, Philosophy and Religion, and Fine Arts. In 1976, an eighth Section was added, namely Literature and Philology. The Prehistory and Archaeology Section followed in 1980 and Cultural and Communication Studies was added in 1997 after extensive debate. From 2001, some Sections were renamed and today the AAH lists its 11 Sections as: Archaeology, Arts, Asian Studies, Classical Studies, Cultural and Communication Studies, English, European Languages and Cultures, History, Linguistics, Philosophy and History of Ideas, and Religion.

Given the AAH’s tradition of prescribed humanities disciplines, Crawford and Hancock’s laments over and ambivalence towards their “too limiting definition of our fields of action” is striking. The Academy’s official entrenchment of their “mistake” of narrowness, along with the charter’s emphasis on “scholarship” as the key selection criterion, has in many ways bedevilled the Academy throughout its existence, especially when it has attempted – and failed – to include the creative arts in more conclusive ways.

During the 1970s and 1980s, two main attempts were made to address the problematic role of “distinguished ‘non-academics’ in the institution” (Coe, 1976). The first took place during Passmore’s presidency when he became concerned about an increasing number of fellows who had reached retiring age or had accepted permanent appointments overseas. In response, he proposed fixing the total fellowship at one hundred and revising categories of Fellows to include Senior Fellows and Overseas Fellows. It was this capping of numbers that prompted Wright’s concern that under these restrictions “few ‘practitioners’ would be elected as Fellows” (Wright, 1976, as cited in Coe, 1976).

Richard Coe, a linguist and founding fellow of the AAH, pursued this matter further. As he and others recalled, it was “very much the intention of the founders to try and find a *modus vivendi* between practising artists or writers and academic critics” (Coe, 1976). Coe warned that some of the younger and more dynamic members had felt hesitant to accept their invitation to join the Academy, described by some as “The Commonwealth Professorial Board” (1976).

Judith Wright also felt rather upset about the way it seemed to her that she was being ‘excluded’ from the life of the Academy by its exclusively ‘academic’ (bad sense) tone. I think that this is a very serious matter; and if the younger people are beginning to feel that to be invited to the Academy is not an honour but yet another chore, the whole thing is a bit self-defeating. (1976)

Coe acknowledged that the problems involved were “awkward”, and in some cases raised “untoward emotions”, but requested that the matter be put on the agenda for general debate. Four months later, Eugene Kamenka (philosopher and historian of ideas, and secretary of the Academy from 1976–1981) replied, having sought Council’s advice (Kamenka, 1976). He reminded Coe of the Royal Charter with its provision that future fellows shall be “persons of the highest distinction in scholarship in the Humanities” (1976) and of by-laws repeating this qualification. Council was aware of differing opinions within the Academy on this question,

explained Kamenka, and conscious of the fact that there were “considerable difficulties in the Academy setting itself up as a body competent to recognize creative as distinct from scholarly talents” (1976). If, however, Coe wished to pursue the matter, Council was willing to place the question on the agenda.

At the next Council meeting, Colin Horne, an English scholar, also reported on conversations with Wright about the exclusion of future “Fellows who were themselves very distinguished writers”, a question that extended to other practitioners (AAH Council, 1977). Horne suggested that Council should consider “the possibility of a special section of Fellows with achievements in the arts” (1977), over which a decision should be made one way or the other. He warned that Wright was considering resigning from the Academy over both this matter and the cost of the annual subscription.

Although Academy records note that a letter was prepared for Wright in response, it is not extant among its papers. Nor are there any records of direct communication from Wright – her concerns come to us via her interlocutors. In 1977 it was “agreed that while it is clear that some Fellows were concerned about Judith Wright’s query, the majority of Fellows were opposed to it. It had been discussed before and it was agreed that we should refer to the Charter” (AAH Council, 1977).

A discipline overview essay on “Australian Literary Studies” by Brian Matthews (1982), published in the Academy’s *Proceedings*, gives some insight into tensions between writers and humanities academics during this period:

In general, the now older generation of writers have felt embattled and neglected and have regarded university English departments as the enemies, by and large, of Australian writing... Younger writers ... see no place at all for the academic study and teaching of Australian literature in universities because ... the works are somehow lost or chewed up beyond recognition in the ‘maw of academe’. (p. 142)

Robert White (1998) argues that prior to the widespread development of creative writing programs within universities during the 1990s, a “rigorous segregation between the activities of scholarship and of imaginative writing” in English departments across Australia had held sway for a century (p. 103). (Whether these segregations have been broken down by the expansion of creative writing within higher education is a matter of ongoing debate.) According to Paul Dawson (2001), splits between the two fields can be traced to traditions within a British literary education, with which Australian English departments were strongly aligned, whereby the “production within the academy [that is, the university] of writing which purported to be literature was looked down upon as improper and presumptuous” (p. 2) (see also Krauth, 2000).

During the 1960s and 1970s the Academy had no widely agreed upon intention to bridge such long-standing divisions between the production of “crafted artefacts” and their analysis and criticism (White, 1998, p. 103) or, as Nigel Krauth (2000) puts it, between “reading and

criticising texts, as opposed to producing them” (p. 4) – in other words, between the “living humanities” and the academic humanities. This applied not only to local literature but to other creative fields.

In 1979, looking back with some ambivalence at a decade of the Academy’s achievements, art historian Bernard Smith (1979), then President of the Academy, made the statement at the head of this article. Ironically, while Smith noted that “imagination has never been regarded as an academician’s virtue” it would be Council’s entirely opposite view a decade later in 1989 that abolished a short-lived special committee dedicated to the question of so-called “creative persons”.

An ephemeral committee

In 1989, a committee “to consider ‘creative persons’ for election to the Academy” (AAH Council, 1991a, p. 80) was formed to establish principles and procedures for election. Candidates would fall under the Honorary Fellows category [6] and “should have achieved outstanding distinction in their chosen fields, and be recognised as having fostered their particular fields through personal activity, criticism, encouragement or historical understanding” (p. 80). Novelist David Malouf and painters Arthur Boyd and Sidney Nolan were elected under this rubric (AAH Council, 1991b, p. 85).

A mere two years later, the Committee for Creative Persons was abolished. Council concluded that “all Fellows must be deemed ‘creative’, because the line separating Fellows within the field of academic employment or working outside it is very blurred” (AAH Council, 1991c, p. 5). This logic is difficult to follow given that a vast majority of fellows either held or were retired from senior academic positions at universities across Australia and beyond. Indeed, these positions as a sign of eminence were integral to fellows being elected in the first place. Because fellows working outside the field of academic employment were very much the exception, it is difficult not to interpret this reasoning as a wilful and deliberate blocking of a discrete means by which to recognise outstanding creative practitioners. It was agreed that, instead, electoral Sections (representing a set number of disciplines or fields in the humanities) would put forward names in the category of “creative persons”; Council would decide whether the candidate should be considered under the category of “ordinary” or Honorary Fellowship and there would only be one “creative” candidate elected per year. Council also “considered that there were advantages in electing appropriate ‘creative’ persons as ordinary Fellows, as it may encourage them to attend meetings, to the benefit of all the Fellowship” (AAH Council, 1991c, p. 6). This last comment is telling. Only “ordinary Fellows” were eligible to become Section members and to hold voting rights. In effect, Honorary Fellows were ineligible to play an active role in the life of the Academy.

Council’s declaration was a muted gesture, then, towards the greater inclusivity of creative artists and recognition of the benefits they might provide that had been envisaged more fully

by Hope and Coombs two decades earlier. Despite what might seem a positive shift towards relaxing the Academy’s ongoing exclusion of creative artists, only three creative practitioners – who also held academic positions – were admitted as “ordinary” Fellows during the following decade. These were composer Dr Peter Sculthorpe, elected 1991 (AAH, 1993, p. 77); composer Professor Larry Sitsky, elected 1998 (AAH, 1999, p. 75); and poet, writer and academic Dr Vivian Smith, elected 1998 (p. 75).

1990s – creative arts research

The Dawkins educational reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which resulted in a series of amalgamations and mergers of smaller education institutions with larger universities, had a seismic effect on attempts to define research in the creative arts across Australian higher education.

Ironically, these changes which permanently transformed the role and procedures of creative arts education, were largely an unintended consequence of the reforms. The homogenising of institutes of higher education was intended as a mechanism to expand the system – not an effort to change the nature of creative arts education. However, this process has had a profound impact still felt in institutions of artistic learning today. As Glyn Davis puts it, with the loss of small specialist institutions and colleges, Australian higher education would henceforth “operate with a single set of [national] funding rates ... using the programs, titles, nomenclature, and operating procedures of the nation’s founding [educational] institutions” (2018). As these major shifts took place, the question of creative arts “research” quickly became a topic of urgent debate during the 1990s.

Peak bodies representing the interests of creative arts educators responded to anxiety and uncertainty about the future of creative arts disciplines in this new higher education landscape. They organised conferences, lobbied government and conducted studies, reviews and forums (ARC, Australia Council for the Arts & AAH, 1999, 2000; Strand, 1998; Webb, 2018). It is not surprising, then, given this climate, that these concerns were reflected in the Academy’s activities during the last decade of the 20th century. Because the Academy was (and still is) so closely associated with the universities, it could not fail to begin to recognise the major gaps in its relationship and dealings with the creative arts.

The Academy’s annual symposium of 1995 was dedicated to *Creative investigations: Redefining research in the arts and humanities*. In her foreword to papers from this symposium, Margaret Stoljar (1996a), fellow of the Academy and reader in German at Australian National University, made clear that the “many profound changes” (p. i) in universities were not simply a matter of restructure and nomenclature – as soon as the issue of research was raised, pressing questions followed. In the context of academic appointments, promotions procedures, or the establishment of degree, honours and graduate programs, “the new disciplines rightly demand

parity with the old”, she argued (p. i). “Equivalences must be arrived at if some sections of the academic community are not to be relegated to second-rank status” (p. i). In order to explore and debate the nature and definition of research under these circumstances, the symposium was devoted in part to facets of the performing arts – music, dance, and theatre and performance studies. Speakers were musician Roger Smalley, choreographer Shirley McKechnie and performance studies scholar Gay McAuley; the annual lecture was delivered by novelist David Malouf.

Participants in the symposium noted a difference between traditional historical research in the performance arts – such as history of music (musicology) – and the challenge to find new ways of defining research in these fields so that practitioners could take their place in the academic community and, crucially, “be assessed within the context of competitive funding” (Stoljar, 1996b, p. 21). The political and pragmatic stakes were quite clear.

An influential report of the period, *Research in the Creative Arts* (Strand, 1998), undertaken by the Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools and the National Council of Heads of Tertiary Music Schools, and funded by the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA), also noted the high stakes involved in defining that elusive term “research in the creative arts” (p. xv). A lack of consensus among key stakeholders as to its meaning was not merely a matter of semantics: “Defining both research and, with it, publication in the creative arts are important tasks ... as there are direct links between their definitions and the distribution of research funds” (p. xv). Scarce research dollars were linked then, as now, to traditionally defined research activities and outputs. The report found that the visual and performing arts (creative writing was not included) [7] received just 0.6% of total ARC funding in 1996 and 1997 (p. xviii).

These concerning low figures were referenced, too, in work undertaken by the Academy as it increasingly took on an advisory role to government during this period (Johnson, 2021). In the mid-1990s, the ARC commissioned a strategic review of the humanities to be conducted by the AAH as a basis for a strategy in research and training for the field over the coming decade. The review was convened by Academy fellow, Anthony Low, and informed by a large reference group made up mainly of further Academy fellows. Its final three-volume report, *Knowing Ourselves and Others* (ARC, 1998), made an extensive series of recommendations to federal and state governments, universities, the ARC and the AAH. It also surveyed 27 disciplines identified as falling under the broader heading of “the humanities”. Malcolm Gillies’s (1998) survey of “The Arts” identified a significant gap between the arts as a field of practice and the arts as the subject of traditional academic research. The “connection of The Arts with the Humanities is not clearly established” he observed in a telling statement (p. 263). This was so much the case, he was able to survey areas that fitted traditional research models, such as art history and musicology – areas involving “research *about* The Arts” – but set aside any attempt at surveying research “*in* the Arts”, which, he acknowledged, was produced by most creative arts academics and higher degree students (p. 265). It is revealing that, in a major

national review whose purpose was to identify future directions and advancement of “the humanities”, involving vital matters such as funding and resources allocation, the role and place of the creative arts in relationship to “the humanities” eluded the survey’s limits.

Bearing in mind differences between creative arts research and traditional humanities research, the *Knowing Ourselves and Others* report included a recommendation that creative work in the arts be recognised by DEETYA, the ARC and within individual universities either as research or the equivalent of research (ARC, 1998, Vol. 1, pp. 83–84). It also recommended that the creative arts be funded by research funding mechanisms on an equal footing with other disciplines, and that arts grants such as Australia Council for the Arts (ACA) grants, state government grants and others awarded on the basis of national competition be included in the list of approved “competitive national grants” (p. 84). These recommendations were informed and propelled by the same low funding figures cited in the Strand report: although the visual and performing arts comprised approximately 5% of all university staff and students, and were no less productive than other areas, they gained only 0.6% of all ARC grants (p. 83).

Gillies, a musicologist and linguist, and president of the Academy from 1998–2001, played a leading role in pursuing these matters further. With the AAH observing a “continued and chronic underperformance of research in the arts over the last decade” (Clark, 2000, p. 5) [8], he initiated a series of teleconferences and steering committee meetings, which began early in 1999 and culminated in a one-day *Forum on Research in the Creative Arts* held in September 2000. The forum brought together representatives from the ARC, the ACA, peak creative arts bodies and the AAH. It was hosted by the ARC. Participating creative arts bodies were in the fields of music, art and design, theatre, dance and multimedia [9]. Notably, although the Australasian Association of Writing Programs had been established in 1996, creative writing was not involved. The forum’s purpose was to provide recommendations and proposals to “form a basis on which to build enhanced coordination of national support for research and professional practice in the creative arts ... and [to] give guidance on the development of a national strategy to support the long-term growth of research in the creative arts” (p. 1). Of particular concern to organisers was the creation of a seamless funding model for creative arts research, which would require greater coordination and cohesion between the ARC and the ACA [10]. Gillies notes that the AAH and the ACA “came closer together at this time because they wanted to find a better way to bridge the yawning gap between traditional research (ARC and traditional universities) and overtly creative (making of art) activity” (personal communication, 21 June, 2022).

The forum was intended as an effort to agree upon tangible means to address and rectify funding and other inequities experienced by creative arts researchers (particularly the lack of a formal means of recognition for the kinds of research outputs they produce). However, funding data from the ARC shows how intractable these problems were to remain, at least at the national, policy level. Over the 2002–2013 period, humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS) fields represented approximately 26% of total ARC National Competitive Grants Programme

(NCGP) funding, with the humanities component receiving approximately 8% (Turner & Brass, 2014, p. 52). Within the HASS bloc, the Creative Arts and Writing Field of Research (FoR) (at the two-digit level) received 4% of funding – the lowest in the broader HASS area (p. 54), amounting to around 0.01% of total ARC funding. This figure is even lower than the 1990s figures that had caused such alarm among creative arts academics and others.

Similarly, according to the ARC’s most recent ERA report (2019), over the 2014–2016 period Creative Arts and Writing received the lowest amount of Australian Competitive Grants Research Income (ACGRI) across all two-digit FoRs – a figure so far below 1% it shows as 0% on the relevant ARC graph (ARC, 2019). These low funding figures persist even though the field contributed approximately 2% of research outputs to ERA 2018 (equivalent, for example, to the History and Archaeology FoR, which also contributed 2% of research outputs but received 2% of ACGRI income) (ARC, 2019). Furthermore, and importantly, ARC overview data does not reveal finer detail of the *kind of* research conducted within the Creative Arts and Writing FoR.

As noted above, research *about* the arts and research *in* the arts are two quite different enterprises (Gillies, 1998). In an influential essay, the UK creative arts academic Christopher Frayling (1993) identified three main categories of arts research that suits and grows out of “what artists do” (p. 5). Although he was referring to art and design, his arguments are just as relevant to, and have been applied to, other fields of practice including creative writing (Gibson, 2010; Webb, 2015). Frayling’s three categories are: research *into* art and design, research *through* art and design, and research *for* art and design. These last two – research *through* and *for* the arts – are distinctive to practice-based research and can be seen to sit at odds with traditional research methodologies, underlying principles and aims [11]. More recent scholarship discusses the many ways in which these apparently discrete categories have been challenged and entangled, especially through creative writing doctorates (see, for example, Aung Thin et al, 2020; Krauth, 2011). However, these distinctions remain pertinent to debates surrounding the funding of creative arts research.

ARC data does not reveal how many, if any at all, practice-based projects received funding over the 2002–2016 period. The Creative Arts and Writing FoR (formerly Division 19, now Division 36) represents both traditional arts research (research about/into the arts) and, at least in principle, distinctive creative arts research (through and for the arts). While fine-grained ARC data on research methodologies employed by Creative Arts and Writing projects funded under their schemes is not readily available, according to Webb (2018), it “remains very difficult to win research income for projects that rely on practice research”. Ross Woodrow (2018) argues that after almost a decade of eligibility for ARC grants and ERA measurement of creative outputs under the Non-Traditional Research Outputs (NTRO) category:

no real progress has been made in achieving ARC grants for researchers producing creative outputs. In fact ... it could be argued that the sector has gone backwards in relation to other disciplines. For example, over the past decade about 80% of ARC

grants awarded for projects that have an exhibition or [other] non-traditional research outcomes have been given to researchers in fields other than the creative arts. (Woodrow, 2018)

Such comments suggest that funding for practice research is negligible given the extremely low level of overall funding for the Creative Arts and Writing FoR.

In summary, the 1990s can be seen as a time when concerned fellows at the Academy played an active role in highlighting the plight of creative arts research in a profoundly altered tertiary sector. They strove, also, to find tangible resolutions to these issues and ways to conceptualise the creative arts as an equal partner in the larger academic humanities world. According to Gillies (personal communication, 21 June, 2022), while initiatives such as the *Forum on Research in the Creative Arts* and others may have had a marginal or “incremental” effect at the national policy level, at the institutional level it was more significant. “Individual universities started to take different kinds of research or research-equivalent outputs into consideration in their staff promotion procedures” (personal communication, 21 June, 2022). These outputs became known as NTROs and “even if more practically oriented arts academics had trouble gaining the large grants and industry grants at the ARC level, they gained more promotions” (personal communication, 21 June, 2022). Such efforts and initiatives continued into the next decade, with the formation of the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, for example, which aimed to represent and promote the three fields as a united sector (CHASS, 2008).

However, despite the proactive stance taken by Gillies and others, little changed at the Academy during the 1990s regarding the election of creative practitioners to the “ordinary” Fellowship. As mentioned earlier, only three creative artists were elected to this category during the 1990s (poet Vivian Smith and composers Peter Sculthorpe and Larry Sitsky). Others were elected to the Honorary Fellowship: Chief Justice and poet Dr John Jefferson Bray, elected 1991 (AAH, 1993, p. 77); poet and playwright Jack Davis, elected 1992 (AAH, 1994, p. 78); choreographer Professor Shirley McKechnie, elected 1998 (AAH, 1999, p. 75); poet Les Murray, elected 1999 (AAH, 2000, p. 104); journalist and author Sylvia Lawson, elected 2000 (AAH, 2001, p. 112); and composer Richard Meale, elected 2000 (p. 112). Novelist Peter Carey would be added to the Honorary Fellowship in 2001 (AAH, 2002, p. 124).

Currently, the AAH (2020) aims to shape a “more diverse membership” targeting “creative arts research and practice” among other areas. Follow up research into the period from 2000 to 2020, which is beyond the scope of this article, would assist in understanding the development of this aim, which has not been a traditional one for the AAH.

Conclusion

The creative arts and creative arts practitioners were considered by key figures (Hope and Coombs) in establishing the Academy for their potential to enliven the organisation, to make it more socially relevant, and to provide compelling and authoritative voices to engage with a broader public. Despite this rich potential, a deep ambivalence about the creative arts and their unclear connection with the broader field of “the humanities” has run through the Academy’s dealings with, and often outright marginalisation and exclusion of, the creative arts. Founding figures Crawford and Hancock were willing to consider a moderately liberal approach to the creative arts, allowing for their circumscribed involvement. However, other fellows were strongly opposed to this approach both during the foundational years and beyond.

During the 1970s and 1980s, despite the best efforts of some concerned members such as Wright, Coe and Horne, the Academy made active decisions to not include creative arts practitioners in wholehearted or formalised ways. At decisive moments, the Academy reiterated its commitment to the promotion and advancement of a “humanities” understood primarily as devoted to “outstanding scholarship”, enshrined in its Royal Charter. The creative arts were not seen to belong to this enterprise.

The 1990s, in the wake of the Dawkins reforms, marked a radical shift. Key figures in the Academy played an active role in attempts to gain parity for creative arts academics through formal recognition – at both a national policy and university level – of their distinctive research practices and outputs. This would ensure (in theory) equal opportunities for research funding, promotion, and so on. Despite such efforts by Gillies and others, which were most effective at the institutional level, the Academy continued to elect very few creative arts practitioners into its main fellowship. In terms of its membership, then, the AAH cannot be said to have become significantly more inclusive of the “living humanities”, to use Coombs’s distinctive words.

At broader scales, an “unclear connection” between the creative arts and “the humanities” (Gillies, Chapter 27, 1998) is also revealed in ARC funding data. A crisis in defining “creative arts research” as a vital means of gaining funding parity with other humanities disciplines was first recognised in the 1990s. More than two decades later, with the Creative Arts and Writing FoR continuing to receive the least amount of research funding in the larger humanities area (ARC, 2019; Turner & Brass, 2014), and creative arts researchers within this field receiving negligible amounts for projects with non-traditional research outcomes (Woodrow, 2018), this situation has not changed. Some argue that it has even worsened.

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Notes

[1] During (2020a) defines the “academic humanities” as the institution that “officially preserved and disseminated civilizational history” (p. 21) (or “the best that has been thought and said” in Matthew Arnold’s words). More broadly, the term also refers to the humanities as an academic discipline in the university. He identifies additional categories, including post-canonical humanities, extramural humanities, popular humanities and extramural figurative humanities.

[2] Dawson (2001) has argued that the Dawkins reforms “hastened the expansion of Creative Writing in universities” (p. 7) – in other words, the reforms did not simply introduce the field into the universities via mergers as it did with other creative arts disciplines. While fields such as music and the visual arts trace their history of education back to schools, colleges and conservatoria established during the 19th century, the CAEs and a small number of (non-sandstone) universities pioneered creative writing in Australia during the 1970s. The field expanded and became widespread within the university system during the 1990s alongside broader challenges to traditional English studies posed by the “new humanities” (Dawson, 2001; Krauth, 2000; Ruthven, 1992; White, 1998). The “new humanities” included such fields as communication and media studies, cultural studies, gender studies and postcolonial studies, among others.

[3] Webb and Gibson (2019) suggest that “[m]ost distinctive (and sometimes contentious) has been the Australian stipulation that, at HDR-level, an examinable exegetical text must resonate alongside the examinable created work ... By contrast, in both the UK and the USA, the focus of HDRs in creative arts is to a large extent the production of quality art and craft objects, rather than the explicit delivery of new knowledge”.

[4] The Australian Society of Authors’ recent Annual Member Survey undertaken at the end of 2021 revealed that 58% of respondents earned between \$0 and \$1999 from their creative practice in the last financial year, and 81% earned less than \$15000 (ASA, 2021).

[5] Finding himself in a cross-cultural context where no common language about the humanities could be assumed, Harpham (2011) drilled down to a single sentence in an attempt to establish a basic definition of the humanities: “The scholarly study of documents and artifacts produced by human beings in the past enables us to see the world from different points of view so that we may better understand ourselves” (pp. 5–6).

[6] The Academy’s fellowship is made up of different categories. The majority are “Fellows”, often referred to as “ordinary Fellows”. The remainder have gone by different names at different times, but one consistent alternative category is the Honorary Fellowship. Only “ordinary” Fellows are eligible to become a member of any Section of the Academy or to vote in Academy ballots, the latter are mainly concerned with the election of new fellows. Honorary Fellows are not entitled to play an active role in the electoral life of the Academy or to become members of the disciplinary Sections.

[7] Krauth (2000) notes that creative writing wasn’t included in the Strand report or invited to participate in the study or follow-up meetings “for one simple reason. Until late 1996, creative writing in tertiary institutions had no peak body” (p. 2).

[8] The final report from the *Forum on Research in the Creative Arts* notes that: “Artists often do not regard what they do, that is, their professional practice, as research. The concept of ‘research equivalence’ as a means to broaden the interpretation of research has been unproductive and poorly accepted” (Clark, 2000, p. 5).

[9] Namely, the National Council of Heads of Tertiary Music Schools (NACHTMUS), Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools (ACUADS), Council of Heads of Australian Theatre Studies Institutions (CHAUTSI) and the Tertiary Dance Council of Australia (TDCA).

[10] A key impediment to including Australia Council grants in the National Competitive Grants Index (NCGI) was the latter’s stipulation that funds must be for research only, while Australia Council guidelines stated that the Council did not fund academic research (ARC, ACA & AAH, 1999).

[11] See for example ERA definitions of research. See also Clark (2000): “The principal difference between professional practice in the creative arts and research in the creative arts lies in a discursive element, whereby tacit knowledge is revealed, analysed and critiqued. The Australian Research Council requires a discursive element while the Australia Council does not” (p. 6). Frayling’s (1993) three categories tease out these differences in greater detail. The first, research *into* the arts, is described as the most “straightforward” in that it follows established procedures, models and rules (p. 5). It aligns with Gillies’s (1998, p. 265) notion of research *about* the arts, typically involving historical research and/or research into theoretical perspectives on the arts, and encompassing fields such as art history and theory, musicology, cultural studies, literary studies, performance studies, and so on. The second category, research *through* the arts, is “less straightforward, but still identifiable and visible” (Frayling, 1993, p. 5), involving such things as materials research, development of new applications and methodologies and “action” research where a report communicates results of a studio or writing experiment (p. 5) (see also Gibson, 2010). According to Webb (2015), Frayling’s second category aligns with the terms practice-led or practice-based research (p. 13). His third category describes a process where reference materials might be gathered for the making of a work, but where the end product is an artefact and, crucially, the thinking is “embodied in the artefact” (Frayling, 1993, p. 5). The goal is not communicable knowledge in the sense of verbal (or discursive) communication, but in the sense of that art form’s mode of communication (visual, musical, filmic, literary, and so on) (p. 5).

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