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**The logic of practice? Art, the academy, and fish out of water**

Abstract:

The various institutional imperatives that have arisen in past decades have reshaped not only the academy but also the careers, responsibilities and practices of artist-academics. This transformational process has been characterized by both extensive and intensive competition. In a series of moves that might have been choreographed by Pierre Bourdieu, those involved have struggled with each other and with policies, procedures, shifting values and discourses to refine their understandings of the changing academic landscape, to acquire the capital necessary for success, and to achieve a better position within the field. In this paper I draw on Bourdieu's work and extend his analysis of the discipline of sociology to the creative arts disciplines in contemporary Australian universities. Bourdieu's distinction between practical knowledge and reflexive practice is central to my discussion about ways in which artist-academics might find a better fit for themselves, their practices and their values, within the academic domain.

Biographical note:

Jen Webb is Professor of Creative Practice at the University of Canberra, and Acting Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Design. Jen holds a PhD in cultural theory, focusing on the field of creative production, and a DCA in creative writing, focusing on time and the body. She has published widely in poetry, short fiction, and scholarly works: her most recent book is *Understanding Foucault: A critical introduction* (with T Schirato and G Danaher, Allen & Unwin, 2012). She is currently completing a book on theories of embodiment, and a textbook on research methods for creative writers. Jen is co-editor of the Sage book series 'Understanding Contemporary Culture', and of the journal *Axon: Creative explorations*. Her current research investigates creative representations of critical events, and the use of research in and through creative practice to generate new knowledge.

Keywords:

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## Introduction

It is a decade now since Pierre Bourdieu died of cancer, and was buried in the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris. In that decade his influence has not waned; indeed, Nicolas Truong and Nicolas Weill recently noted that Bourdieu is ‘the second most frequently quoted author in the world, after Michel Foucault’ (Truong & Weill 2012). He is probably best known as a sociologist, though his scholarly practice travelled across and between cognate disciplines during his working life. He began as a student of philosophy, and then worked as a teacher before he was conscripted and sent to Algeria. When his tour of duty came to an end, he took a post at the University of Algeria and taught himself ethnography. But his future was heralded in the title of his first book, *Sociologie de L’Algerie* (published in 1958); and by the mid-1960s, now back in France, he was appointed director of the Centre de Sociologie Européenne and, in 1981, Chair of Sociology at the Collège de France. Later in his career he became a public critic, using both scholarly and popular media to battle what he saw as forces of oppression in French society; the legacy and impact of such interventions are traced in the documentary *Sociology is a martial art* (Carles 2001).

I rehearse this biographical material because although Bourdieu could not be identified as a proponent of what we now call practice-led research, he has much in common with the community of artist-academics:<sup>1</sup> his somewhat erratic origins as an academic; his own perception that he was an outsider to the French academic community; and his focus on practical engagement. Like him, many artist-academics begin their careers with activities that do not necessarily lead to an academic career. Like him, many have combined a range of training, skills, interests and capability to become who they now are. And like him, many do not perform according to conventional academic expectations. Bourdieu may have spent most of his working life as a social scientist but, as Richard Jenkins notes, he did not fit the mould:

Insofar as he is either a sociologist *or* an anthropologist, Bourdieu remains, however, something of a philosopher ... [but] rather than attempting to pronounce on ‘the big questions’ – the ‘meaning of life’ – Bourdieu is more interested in how those questions become possible and the manner in which that meaning is practically accomplished. (2002: 16)

That is to say, he is not precisely a philosopher; he is not precisely a sociologist; he is not precisely an anthropologist; and yet his influence across these (and related) disciplines has been profound. His career and his work offer a model for another way of being an academic, and another way of undertaking academic practice: one that might be of value to artist-academics.

Bourdieu’s scholarly interest in the creative field was sustained throughout his career, and the innovative and flexible research methodology that he developed offers valuable frameworks for the projects in which many artist-academics find themselves engaged. His insights into how people organize themselves in social terms, how the structures of the social order function, and how individuals and groups are constituted can offer powerful ways of understanding the situation we are in, as artist-academics, and thus provide grounds for developing a way through what is, for many of us, a wicked problem: how to be both artist and academic; how to produce both art and

knowledge products. In this paper I first set out the context for art in the academy, and then draw on key elements from Bourdieu's work to propose ways of satisfying the multiple imperatives under which artist-academics must operate.

### **Some context**

The recent literature that has emerged about the work and the role of artist-academics has two fairly consistent threads. First, there is an interest in and a confidence with respect to the teaching of art forms; second, there is anxiety about and sometimes resentment toward the universities' expectation that they will produce objects that can be reported as research outputs. I will not touch on the teaching issue in this paper, but focus on research, which is where there seems to be a less-perfect fit between artist-academics and the academy. This poor fit is both systemic and structural. Universities want their artist-academics to be successful art practitioners because this provides the institution a degree of prestige, and attracts students who want to study under a nationally or internationally reputed artist. But they also want artist-academics to be successful researchers: this too provides prestige, this too attracts good students, and this too generates income and improves the university's standing in the academic league tables. The employers therefore want them to do both; in many cases, contracts of employment require that both be satisfied; but reports from the frontlines of the academy make it clear that artist-academics do not, in the main, believe they can do both.

The answer to this conundrum has been to assert that creative practice in fact constitutes research, thus neatly avoiding the double burden, or the bifurcation of practice. This approach has been building since the 1970s when the design and visual arts disciplines were beginning to focus on how, and under what circumstances, creative practice might constitute research practice (Rust, Mottram & Till 2007: 20). By the 1990s – a decade not coincidentally associated with the reforms in both Australia and the UK that brought the art schools into the academic domain – there was sustained development of thought and investigation into the topic.

Christopher Frayling's 1993/94 essay is one of the earlier publications that lays out the terms for practice-led research. It sets out his distinction between research *for* art practice (research conducted in order to produce a better work of art); research *through* art practice (practice as an element of the research design); and research *into* art practice (research that aims to shed light on creative process and practice). Now, by 2012, a small library of essays, articles, conference proceedings and books has emerged to explore, assert, theorise and clarify what is meant by practice-led research.

Despite this body of work, there is still a lack of precision about the methodology, design and methods appropriate to the field. Certainly artist-academics have reported a considerable volume of work to the academy, much of it taking the form of creative artefacts. Certainly they have produced a volume of work that asserts, if it does not always demonstrate, the knowledge contributions made by these works. But how a novel or a performance actually delivers knowledge has received little attention; and how Frayling's distinction between research in, for or through art is observed has likewise been under-explored.

One way to demonstrate that a practice constitutes research is to show that it operates in accordance with a methodological framework, and this has been addressed by a number of important writers – among them another early contributor, Carole Gray, who offers a widely-used definition:

By ‘practice-led’ I mean, firstly, research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners in the visual arts. (Gray 1996)

This definition sets out the intention of work conducted under this paradigm, and it usefully focuses on the point of origin for such research: the needs of ‘practice and practitioners’ (Frayling’s ‘research into art practice’); and the strategy used (Frayling’s ‘research through art practice’). However, when she moves to the ‘methodologies and methods familiar to us as practitioners’, I cannot identify any difference between those she designates specific to art practitioners, and those used by social researchers more generally. The methodology she names, constructivism, is widely used in the social sciences and humanities: there is nothing necessarily art-oriented about it. The research methods she lists too are precisely those used in the social sciences. Even the focus on creative artefacts does not, of itself, distinguish artist-academics from others: anthropologists, for instance, regularly use creative modes of investigation, incorporating documentary, life writing, photography and poetry as part of their research.

Following Frayling and Gray, a substantial body of work has emerged on practice-led research, though few writers go much beyond assertion and description in their accounts of how art functions as research. This vagueness has been observed by institutional gatekeepers; in the UK, the 2008 AHRC guidelines noted ‘that a precise definition of practice-led research is problematic and a focus of continuing debate’ (AHRC 2008: 28). By 2012 the AHRC seems to have made a decision, and now their guidelines restrict practice-led research to work that ‘should bring about enhancements in knowledge and understanding in the discipline, or in related disciplinary areas’ (AHRC 2012: 72). In Australia, the government has been both less and more engaged with practice-led research: excluding non-traditional outputs from the annual Higher Education Research Data Collection exercise, but allowing their inclusion (without the AHRC requirement that they enhance the discipline) in the Excellence for Research in Australia (ERA) exercise. These accommodations are the result of engaged activity from within the artist-academic community to gain recognition for our practice: there has been, to use Graeme Turner’s phrase, ‘an expansion in the definition of research’: a result that he judges ‘a significant achievement’ (Turner 2011).<sup>2</sup> It is indeed an achievement – in just a few years creative practice has gone from being classified as not-research to being acknowledged as research, at least for some purposes.

However, this is not the end of the story. It seems to me that creative outputs are included by grace and not by right, and that despite their inclusion in ERA (and the New Zealand Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF), and the British Research

Assessment Exercise (RAE)), their capacity to generate knowledge has not been confirmed. Turner makes this point, and warns that though art and artists have been allowed to enter the game of research evaluation, they are not really part of it. The danger inherent in their achievements to date, he says, is that though they are now allowed to play, they risk showing themselves to be poor players. ‘And that’s where you are now’, he concludes bluntly: ‘poor players’, fish out of water, academically inadequate.<sup>3</sup>

This is disheartening for those who saw ERA’s recognition of creative works as institutional legitimation that art can be research. It is an indication that creative products and practices are included only under a caveat, and a warning that there is a great deal more strategic and tactical work required in order to move from ‘playing badly’ to playing effectively. How to do this remains uncertain, but most writers on the topic offer a version of Carole Gray’s account: that what is necessary is to present artwork that was made in accordance with conventional research criteria: framed in terms of conventional research methodology, design and methods.

This context for art-as-research can be perceived as evidence that creative work does not meet academic standards; or as evidence that artist-academics have not effectively conveyed either the quality of their work, or the best modes for its assessment. However, the 2010 ERA results suggest this is not the case, as this table indicates.

Table 1:

Comparative figures for research activity in FoRs 19 and 20, art practice, and cultural practice

Field of Research	Contribution to national research outputs	Institutions rated at or above world standard for research quality	Average national rating	% of assessed outputs that were non-traditional
19 (Studies in Creative Arts and Writing)	about 5%	66%	2.9 (marginally below world standard)	94%
1904 (Performing Arts and Creative Writing)	—	70%	3.1 (marginally above world standard)	74%
20 (Language, Culture and Communication)	about 3%	67%	3 (at world standard)	2%
2002 (Cultural Studies)	—	60%	2.9 (marginally below world standard)	3%

(Australian Research Council 2011)

These are, necessarily, coarse figures: national averages only. However, what they suggest is that, in terms of evaluated quality, there is little difference between research outputs produced by those in art disciplines and those produced by the scholars who are perhaps closest to art in methodological and discursive terms: those in culture and communication. Though we need to approach these figures with caution, the raw averages seem to render moot the difference between non-traditional and traditional research. This suggests to me that the apparent misfit between artist-academics and the academy is not caused by a lack of research quality. Instead, I suggest, there are

structural reasons involved, and to explore this I look to Bourdieu's key sociological concepts: field, habitus, capital and practice.

### **The cultural field**

Field is a term used widely in the humanities and social sciences. Bourdieu offers what he calls 'a simple definition of the notion of field, a convenient one', which reads:

A field is a field of forces within which the agents occupy positions that statistically determine the positions they take with respect to the field, these position-takings being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field. (1995: 39)

This is perhaps not quite as simple as Bourdieu suggests, but we can break it down to its constitutive parts:

*Field of forces* – it is an abstraction, a site in which power operates within specific boundaries;

*Agents occupy positions* – it is dependent upon the investment and involvement of human agents, whether individuals or institutions;

*Position-takings* – there is nothing inevitable about the places these agents occupy; they select the position from which they play;

*Aimed at conserving / transforming the structure of relations of forces* – each agent competes to reshape the field in ways that suit their interests: to win the sorts of rewards they wish to acquire, and to make their position and perspective the dominant one.

Field refers, then, to a largely autonomous social system in which individuals and institutions with shared interests, concerns and characteristics both operate and compete. Each agent who participates in a field will agree, more or less, on the rules, rituals, conventions and categories that obtain in, and constitute, that field. But fields are about conflict as much as they are about agreement. Bourdieu writes, 'Every field is the site of a more or less openly declared struggle for the definition of the legitimate principles of division of the field' (1991: 242), and what is divided according to those established principles is capital, in the form of money, esteem, power or social standing.

Art and education are both fields in Bourdieu's terms because they are semi-autonomous social systems. Those who participate in these fields share the quality of being what Bourdieu calls 'the dominated of the dominant' because they 'possess all the properties of the dominant class *minus one*: money' (Bourdieu 1993: 165). The practices and products of those two fields are indeed dominant; each has an influence beyond what might be expected of fields that are not central to the power structures, because artists and intellectuals have considerable input into how cultures present, represent and perceive themselves. But both art and the academy are largely excluded from the economic field; the capital for which agents in both fields compete is not

money (though I am sure none of us would spurn it, were it offered), but symbolic and cultural capital – prestige, recognition, and the possession of skills and knowledges.

### **The habitus**

Why agents elect to participate in these fields, and to compete for what is effectively valueless capital – for what is ‘misrecognized as capital’ (Bourdieu 1990: 118) – can be explained by habitus, the second key theme in Bourdieu’s work. This is a term Bourdieu draws from earlier writers (Erwin Panofsky, Marcel Mauss), one that refers to the way in which subjects’ personal cultural histories dispose them to behave in particular ways, to hold particular values, and to possess tastes, preferences and tendencies that are peculiar to themselves (Bourdieu 1990: 53). Habitus is, Bourdieu writes, ‘history turned into nature, i.e. denied as such’ (1977: 78). That is to say, what seems to me to be a normal and necessary way of being is neither normal nor necessary, but simply the result of the learning I have done in my life so far; learning that has become incorporated within me, become part of my being.

To apply this to the fields of art and the academy: however different the individual members of the academic field might be, all agents in the field will possess a habitus with similar properties. They will, that is, share a belief in and commitment to the value of knowledge; despite what might be radically different approaches to the construction of knowledge, and competition for influence and rewards, they are ultimately all in the same game. Likewise artists will share a set of values, understandings, logics and discourses, and work within similar objective structures, despite the many forms in which art manifests. This commitment to the logic and values of any field corresponds to what Bourdieu calls ‘illusio’, which is ‘the fact of being caught up in and by the game, of believing the game is “worth the candle”, or, more simply, that playing is worth the effort’ (1998: 76). Any member of a field must, at some level, be subject to illusio, because artists, academics and people in their everyday lives invest a great deal of their time, their energy, their expertise and their very identity in participating in a field. Individual members must believe that it matters, if they are to continue to invest in it and seek to shape themselves to the field, and the field to themselves.

But fields are not fixed or concrete spaces. They are conceptual spaces that are actualized by individuals and organisations who share specific interests, aims and characteristics. Each individual brings with them their subtly or radically different histories, tastes and dispositions – their habitus – and how they operate within that field is going to have an effect on how the field itself is formed (Bourdieu 1995: 39). Similarly, habitus is not set in stone; as that individual participates in a field, their new experiences, the context in which they operate, the imperatives and the logics of that field, and their interaction with others in the same field, are all going to have an effect on their own habitus. They may change – deform, or reform – the field in which they operate, but they will themselves be changed by that experience.

The fields of art and of the academy are occupied, respectively, by individuals and organisations shaped by (respectively) an artistic or an academic habitus. The field of art values creative production and innovation; has a concern for aesthetic values rather

than economic return; and engages the ineffable rather than the sayable. Members of the field will generally be disposed, by the working of their habitus, to be imaginative, inventive, resistant to social norms, and given to looking awry at the broader social world.<sup>4</sup> The academic field values a commitment to knowledge; a concern for intellectual rigour; a commitment to experiment and analysis; and a rejection of 'commonsense' and mystique in favour of long training, constant testing of knowledge claims, and transparency of findings. Members of this field will generally be disposed, by the working of their habitus, to be rational, inventive, resistant to social norms, and given to looking awry at the broader social world.

Just as the values of the fields and the habitus of those associated with the fields differ, so too the logic of production differs from field to field: art is about producing aesthetic objects, and not being bound by (social) conventions; the academy is about producing knowledge, and operating according to (scholarly) conventions. The first relies on the imagination and the second on reason: though of course there is considerable reason in artistic production, and considerable imagination in academic work. Where they particularly connect is in the fact that in both art and the academy, there tends to be a search for innovation; and in both fields, the rewards are symbolic rather than economic. In the art field, lip service at least is paid to the notion that commercial success is artistic failure, and that the esteem of peers is reward enough, while in the academic field, the reward is acknowledgment that one has made a contribution to the store of knowledge.<sup>5</sup> The willingness of agents in each field to accept – indeed, to compete for – what is economically valueless can be understood by taking into account an important feature of the habitus: it always makes a virtue out of necessity. We incline ourselves to do what we must anyway do, and we reject those things than would anyway be denied (Bourdieu 1990: 54).

This is not necessarily a choice made consciously. When individuals operate within the field in which their habitus was formed, they are like 'fish in water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 127): not conscious of the water around them because they are perfectly at home in it, and not particularly inclined to conscious consideration of how and why they operate within it: or how and why they accept little or no economic reward for their effort. The comfort zone of the fish in water allows the individual to cope with their situation; but only while the comfort zone is stable. Introduce new elements, and individuals may find themselves no longer 'at home'. This is what is at risk when the fields of art and the academy are brought under a single domain. The fields operate according to different rules; they use different tools, discourses and methods; their rewards are different, as are their audiences; and they must satisfy different gatekeepers. An attempt to use the same actions, practices and ways of thinking to satisfy two different sets of logic will leave the individual like a fish out of water, struggling to survive.

### **Art and the academy**

Nonetheless, artist-academics often do attempt to conflate their two fields: to make art work count in and for the academy and, to a lesser extent, to transport academic products into the field of art. The differences and distances between the two fields are



such that this cannot readily be done; the two fields cannot exist in the same space; and yet they must co-exist. In Australia, the Dawkins reforms of 1988 saw the translation of colleges of advanced education and schools of art into university contexts; in the UK, many of the art schools met the same fate as a result of the post-1992 reform of higher education. This caused what seems to have been a problem for artists (who now found themselves) in the academy. Over the past 15 years or so I have heard traditional academics referring to artist-academics as intellectually vapid, as producing ‘light’ work, as having an ‘easy ride’ and as failing to contribute appropriately to the academic mission. During the same period, I have listened to artist-academics complain that they have to do double the work of other academics (making creative work *and* producing research), that their outputs are neither understood nor valued, and that the academic trajectory is irrelevant to the art field. I can understand this as a pattern of squabbling; but it is squabbling that has had very real effects on the collegiality in schools that comprise creative and conventional disciplines, and on the access artist-academics have to the typical markers of academic success.

It is, to some extent, a problem of the relationship between field and habitus: most artist-academics began in the field of art, and this means their habitus is likely to be more closely adjusted to that field than to the academic field. It is therefore not surprising that they are often misfits in the academic field. While there are sufficient shared characteristics to make it seem as though artists should fit the academy, the subtle differences mean they are not fully at home in both art and the academic fields. One must dominate; and this means there is always a loss, and always a cost. As Stephen Scrivener has written, anyone employed by a university must perform in the ways that it requires: ‘Put bluntly, the academic artworld has to be doing research, or something which is understood as research, if it is to participate fully and equally in the university’ (2006: 158-59). So artist-academics must produce research recognized as such according to academic conventions. And yet their doing this will come at a cost to themselves *and* to their institutions. It takes considerable time, intellectual and creative energy and (depending on the art form) financial investment to maintain a profile as a credible artist; those who are not credible artists will also lose credibility as academics employed within a creative discipline; but the investment required to maintain that artistic credibility eats into what they have available to invest in their academic identity.

It is thus a zero sum game: artist-academics are continually switching codes as they move between those two ‘home’ fields, and what they gain in one field can be lost in the other.<sup>6</sup> The options seem to be either that they are condemned to be ‘might have beens’ in the art world, pursuing a minor creative practice while producing enough reportable research to keep their deans happy; or else that they commit to art *qua* art and then, quite possibly, find themselves encouraged by their universities to seek alternative employment. In either event, they risk remaining frustrated near-outsiders to each of the fields that comprise their professional identity.

These stark antinomies only have effect if both field and habitus are as stable and durable as they appear to be. But fields are abstractions rather than concrete forms, and their shape and effect are products of the individuals and institutions that take up

positions within them. The field of art has changed in many ways in the past centuries; the academic field is changing before our eyes; and this is, Bourdieu points out, because fields 'are present in the form of persons' (1995: 31), and therefore subject to the games those persons play. So too the habitus is not set in stone, but is always constituted in moments of practice. It is, in a sense, entirely arbitrary: there is nothing natural or essential about the values a subject holds, the desires they pursue, or the practices in which they engage. We are the products of our histories, but we are not its prisoners.

What this suggests, to me, is a way out of the double bind of field and habitus. Although Bourdieu has been accused of developing a theory of reproduction rather than of transformation, of setting in amber the conditions of inequality that underlie all aspects of our social order,<sup>7</sup> it seems to me that rather than confirming that we are trapped in these situations, Bourdieu's analysis provides an opportunity to challenge and change the status quo. He calls on individuals to engage actively in their worlds, and both to question and to intervene: not only in how they operate within their field of reference, but also in the order, structure and objectivities that make up their social world: to engage in 'combat sport' as 'a means of defence against the various forms of symbolic violence that can be exerted against citizens' (Bourdieu 1995: 29).

### **Practice as a means of defence**

Practice is the mechanism involved here; it is practice that initiates moves associated with forming and reforming/deforming the habitus; that mobilises actions within fields. Practice is also the action in which artists are engaged in the making of their work. In social theory, practice is at the core of both individual and collective being: Max Weber, for example, uses 'practice' as a shorthand for social action; Karl Marx uses it to refer to praxis; and anthropologists generally use it to refer to anything people do. As Sherry Ortner writes, practice 'seeks to explain the relationship(s) that obtain between human action, on the one hand, and some global entity which we call "the system" on the other' (1984: 148). Practice theorists aim to identify the ways in which individuals and groups create their social reality, and to what extent that social reality creates them. Consequently:

A theory of practice is a theory of history. It is a theory of how social beings, with their diverse motives and their diverse intentions, make and transform the world in which they live. It is a theory ... of conversion, or translation, between internal dynamics and external forces. (Ortner 1992: 193)

Bourdieu works from this tradition of practice to interrogate what people do in relational situations – in relation to one another; to systemic and structural forces; to the demands and imperatives of the fields in which they operate; and to the generative dispositions of their own habitus. Practice is, for Bourdieu, always an effect of the connections between habitus, capital and field, and is thus the sum of people's activities as they are located within and associated with fields. It is also the manifestation of their knowledge of the world more generally – but in a tacit, and hence not fully self-aware, way:

The agent engaged in practice knows the world but with a knowledge which, as Merleau-Ponty showed, is not set up in the relation of externality of a knowing consciousness. He knows it, in a sense, too well, without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he is caught up in it, bound up with it; he inhabits it like a garment or a familiar habitat. He feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of the habitus. (Bourdieu 2000: 142-43)

It is critical that practice functions below the level of consciousness: one only needs a limited amount of awareness to perform adequately most of the things that need to be done in daily life. Michael Polanyi describes this with reference to the way in which research scientists rely on practice – tacit knowledge – to undertake their work (Polanyi & Prosch 1975: 31), and Donald Schön – without whom no publication on practice-led research would be complete – uses the same concept to discuss a practitioner’s professional capability. Practice in this sense is, for Schön, the sum of knowing-in-action, knowledge that is ‘tacit, spontaneously delivered without conscious deliberation; and it works, yielding intended outcomes so long as the situation falls within the boundaries of what we have learned to treat as normal’ (1987: 28).

Bourdieu defines tacit or practical knowledge in very similar terms. He characterizes practice, or ‘the practical sense’, as a ‘feel for the game. Having the feel for the game is having the game under the skin; it is to master in a practical way the future of the game, is to have a sense of the history of the game’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 81). It is important to observe that practice is not a matter of switching off the brain and running on neutral; it is a matter of our having become so habituated to the actions we perform that we seem to be on automatic pilot; operating like fish in water. But there is nothing automatic or naïve about this practical sense: it is the outcome of thorough training, and of a comprehensive investment in the field.

Practice can thus be understood as internalised, historicised knowledge. It is manifested in an individual’s particular skills, techniques and approaches to the game that allow them to make sense of what is happening and what might be made to happen: to negotiate the rules of the field; to navigate its spaces; to achieve desired ends. But it is, for Bourdieu, largely unreflexive knowledge, because it is embedded in the habitus; thus its history, and the history of the work involved in learning the game, are ‘forgotten as such’. One plays as one does because the habitus generates particular preferences and dispositions. This has its limits. Just as Schön notes that practice works well only when it remains within the established (‘normal’) categories – which provides little space for innovation – so too for Bourdieu ‘good’ players, those whose practical knowledge enables high levels of performance, cannot know what is foreclosed within the points of view authorized by the field itself. They do not have an informed relation to the game:

Once one has accepted the viewpoint that is constitutive of a field, one can no longer take an external viewpoint on it. The ‘nomos’, a ‘thesis’ which, because it is never put forward as such, cannot be contradicted, has no antithesis. As a legitimate principle of division which can be applied to all the fundamental aspects of

experience, defining the thinkable and the unthinkable, the prescribed and the proscribed, it must remain unthought. (Bourdieu 2000: 97)

The artist-practitioner is likely to have a well-honed practical sense – a genuine knowledge of the game, of its history and its future, and a genuine capacity to perform against its standards. But such an individual will not necessarily either need, or be in a position, to take an external viewpoint on the field of art, or to interrogate the field's 'nomos'. Being 'at home' within the field means the individual is less likely to think the hitherto 'unthought'. And conventional researchers too tend to operate in terms of practical knowledge: to be so invested in the scholastic point of view that they neither interrogate their own approach to the work, nor apply a reflexive perspective to the value of scholastic investigation more generally.

### **From practical to reflexive knowledge**

It is when we feel like 'fish in water' – fully at home in and familiar with the context – that it is possible to operate in terms of tacit knowledge. An academic who is deeply immersed in the language, practices, values, systems and structures of the university setting does not need to think about them, or consciously adjust the self to them. So too a creative practitioner who is fully invested in the world of creative practice, and understands the logic of arts grants, writers centre meetings, art policy and the creative community, need not think about them consciously or objectively. For each of these individuals, the environment, the discourse, the values, the practices and the 'games' played in the domain in which they are occupied, are fully aligned with each other. But introduce something new, something that is not fully aligned, and the 'unthought categories of thought' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 40) immediately intrude on the known, and force the individual to think beyond the frameworks of the familiar. Academics who find themselves required to teach creative writing students; creative writers who find themselves required to focus on curriculum development, generic skills and research imperatives: neither is properly equipped for the task; neither can operate according to practical or tacit knowledge; and so both must adopt a more reflexive position with respect to the circumstances in which they find themselves.

The term 'reflexive' comes from social theory, where it refers to a problem of knowledge construction: a failure to realize that data is interpreted rather than objective, that social reality is produced rather than pre-existing, and that we see what we expect to see, rather than what is there.<sup>8</sup> The word *reflexivity* comes from the Middle Latin *reflexivus*: 'capable of bending back'; it thus involves a 'return', a bending back of the self upon the self and the self's context. But it is not a simple matter of me reflecting on myself; reflexivity is neither navel gazing or personal development, but a collective attitude and series of actions invested in examining and testing the limits of knowledge. Where practice requires a 'feel for the game', reflexivity requires the ability to turn 'the instruments of knowledge that they produce against themselves' (Bourdieu 2000: 121). For social researchers, it indicates the need to apply the processes of knowledge construction to themselves and to their own discipline, not simply to the objects of their investigation. Artist-academics who take

up this same challenge will interrogate the very basis of their being and their knowing: and not theirs alone, but that which applies to the creative arts disciplines more generally.

If members of a field are propelled into a reflexive attitude because of a sense of disequilibrium and hence discomfort, the initial outcome is likely to be even more disequilibrium and discomfort. It is not easy to interrogate the things one has always taken for granted; it is not easy to generate or embrace major change. Reflexivity requires a willingness to drop all the truisms of the field, and consider them again, from a point of view that is outside the logic of that field in order to defamiliarise and thereby reconceptualise the field. And as newcomers to the field, as fish who are at least partially out of water and therefore motivated to engage change, artist-academics are in a very good position to apply a reflexive gaze on both art and the academy, and produce something new.

I do not wish to anticipate what that new thing might be; it will be the result of action by a body of reflexive practitioners – artist-academics individually and collectively reformulating their context. It will not (I hope) be a glum adjustment of the writer to the academy, but a deformation and reformation of both writing and the academy, one that leads to the construction of a methodology for this double-mode of practice. There are models for this kind of identity and practice: TS Eliot; Maurice Blanchot; Italo Calvino; George Steiner. All broke new ground in literary art, and produced highly significant works of scholarship: they are both fully literary in their art practice, and fully ‘academic’ in their scholarly practice. And what such double-mode practitioners do is research creative *practice*; they write about what they do, which is literary production, and so they remain in equilibrium, able to engage from one position, but across two fronts of operation.

## **Conclusion**

Artist-academics are not alone in the tension they often experience, or the sense of exclusion and disequilibrium. This is a familiar experience for academics involved in interdisciplinary work (see, e.g., Chan, Gonsalves & Metcalfe 2011), who likewise experience the sense of being not at home, not welcome and not understood. They might be able simply to withdraw to the comfort zone of their home discipline; artist-academics cannot do this as easily. But what they can do is to begin to craft and claim a part of the academy. Rather than struggling to maintain adequate outputs as artists and as academics; rather than elbowing a way into the research domain and being told they ‘play the game badly’; and rather than feeling that they are present in the academy only under a caveat, artist-academics may be able to move, reflexively, to change the terms of engagement and the relational principles that direct their activity: to find a new fit.

It must not mean that we become merely rational scholars, losing the sense of magic or imagination that inflects so much of creative practice. As Scrivener points out, there is a danger in setting up programs that treat art marking not ‘as an end in itself but as a means to research ends’ (2006: 166); this is a kind of ‘passing off’, and the outcome is likely to be that both the art and the research are compromised. But nor

can the future art-academy reject the logic of academic enquiry and intellectual rigour: simply making another artwork and passing it off as research results in a category error that has not served art disciplines well, to date.

What I suggest, instead, is that artist-academics apply a reflexive dimension to their creative and practical knowledge, in order to contribute knowledge that is recognized as such within the art disciplines: refining the methodology, design and methods found in the research literature so that they are better suited to creative thinking and seeing; reminding the academy more broadly about the extent to which imagination, chance and tacit knowledges actually drive research practice; being explicit about the difference between professional, aesthetic and research practice; and thus breaking the barriers of the apparent antinomies in which so many find themselves caught. A recrafting of both individual habitus and cultural field has the potential to result in something genuinely new: a new kind of academic who is simultaneously a new kind of artist, making a new kind of object in a reconceptualised field.<sup>9</sup>

## Endnotes

1. I use this term, artist-academic, as a catch-all to refer to those creative practitioners who are employed in universities as teachers and researchers within one of the art disciplines.
2. Turner speaks with the authority of his position as chair of the Research Evaluation Committee for Humanities and Creative Arts in the ERA (Excellence in Research for Australia) exercise.
3. An examination of the 2010 ERA results by institution shows that the institutions that did best – Adelaide, UNSW – focus on graduate and postgraduate programs in writing, rather than putting their energies into full undergraduate programs. Without a more finegrained set of reports, it is not possible to identify the correlation between teaching and research outputs, but it is instructive that, by and large, the institutions with sizeable undergraduate programs in creative writing did less well than the universities with a focus on postgraduate programs.
4. I take this from Slavoj Žižek, who himself takes it from Shakespeare's *Richard II*. The premise is that 'looking awry', or 'at an angle', allows one to 'see the thing in its clear and distinct form, in opposition to the "straightforward" view that sees only an indistinct confusion' (Žižek 1991: 11).
5. I hasten to add that, as Bourdieu's works and my own research into the field of art show, this is an entirely contingent and manufactured set of markers. If artists were truly free of social, political and economic influences, they would have no customers except each other, and academics manifestly compete for considerably more than recognition. Nonetheless, in each field this logic of disinterest continues to have resonance in how individuals and institutions operate.
6. I am conscious of the fact that artist-academics are not the only group in this position; other professionals in the academy are similarly caught between competing logics. Those in the health sciences, or education; those in management or public communication: all require up to date practice and technical expertise in order to be effective teachers and produce relevant research; so they must find the time to maintain a professional practice outside the boundaries of the academy.
7. As John Frow points out (1995: 31), Bourdieu's position on the field of art can be a little essentialising, and inclined to collapse various social groups and experiences into a single group or single experience. See also Jacques Rancière (2004) for his critique of Bourdieu – a critique that

appears here and there in the literature, characterizing Bourdieu as the theorist of reproduction rather than of change.

8. To quote three key texts on this topic: ‘facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations’ (Nietzsche, 1967: 481; s7.60); ‘human beings make meaningful the world which makes them’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 7); ‘Only those items which I *notice* shape my mind’ (James 2007: 402).

9. My thanks to Dr Vanessa Harbour and Professor Andrew Melrose, both of the University of Winchester, who offered useful suggestions on this paper.

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