

**University of Canberra**

**Jen Webb**

**Seeing, doing, knowing: Poetry and the pursuit of knowledge**

Abstract:

Auden's famous complaint that 'poetry makes nothing happen', and Blanchot's that art is useless to the world and to itself, are often cited as a truth about the practical uselessness of creative practice. Blanchot's is, of course, an insistence on the autonomy of art, while Auden's is a line from a poem – it is his elegy for WB Yeats, written to mourn not only a dead poet, but also the loss of peace (written, as it was, in the shadow of World War 2). Yet each writer has chosen writing, and 'artistic' writing, to complain that art/writing has no capacity to influence society or effect change. This is a bleak view of poetry and what it might be able to contribute to social needs: to knowledge, to understanding, and to the possibility of engendering change. Though it is perhaps a reasonable perspective, given the fact that poetry is about the aesthetic rather than about social action, I still wish to interrogate this attitude, to explore the possibility that poetry can in fact make some things happen: and, in particular, that it can generate knowledge and therefore new ways of seeing and of doing.

Biographical note:

Jen Webb is Professor of Creative Practice at the University of Canberra, and researches the relationship between art and society. Her current research includes two major projects – the first investigates the relationship between art and critical social moments; the second explores the relationship between creative practice and knowledge, focusing particularly on the role of poetry in generating thought and the possibility of 'knowing'. Her recent book-length publications include *Understanding Representation* (Sage 2008), the short story collection *Ways of Getting By* (2006: Ginniderra Press), and *Understanding Foucault: a critical introduction* (2012: Allen & Unwin; coauthored with Tony Schirato and Geoff Danaher); her recent exhibition of visual poetry focusing on war and society, 'What we forget', was presented at the Belconnen Arts Centre group show, *Creative Practice* (August 2011).

Keywords:

Poetry – Knowledge – Research – Ezra Pound

Science is the act of looking at a tree and seeing lumber. Poetry is the act of looking at a tree and seeing a tree (Pelias 2004: 9).

## **Introduction**

In the past decades, as Australian (and UK) art schools have been transformed into university programs, staff in those schools have been faced with the demand that they produce not only art, but also knowledge. The terms and conditions of employment have changed too, for many: in my university, for instance, as in many others, the requirement is that all teaching staff hold doctoral qualifications, and all must produce work that can be reported as research outputs. The usual response from artists in the academy is that their creative practice constitutes knowledge practice, but this has received, at best, uneven support from university management and government assessment regimes. However, it is increasingly becoming accepted that creative practice can indeed constitute a form of knowledge production.

In this paper I use the term ‘creative practice’ only for the work that is associated with art and writing, acknowledging as I do that all research work and much professional work has a profoundly creative element to it. However, creative work undertaken in order to determine how the physical universe works is not the same as creative work undertaken to produce an artistic artefact: the former is primarily about theoretical investigation, and the latter primarily about creative representation. So for the purposes of this discussion I need to segregate the latter from the former, and focus only on creative practice *qua* art.

## **A little background material**

Poetry is of course the site of my investigation, but my research is directed by concerns about creativity as a value, an attitude, a discourse and a set of practices, and how this might inform the approach of artist-academics. But I need to corral the term ‘creativity’, because it has largely escaped the domain of artistic production, and is now asserted to be the core of all good research practice, all good business practice, and all social innovations. Not only is creativity named as such in the Frascati definition of research (OECD 2002), but it is being mobilised across the knowledge industries, and the socio-economic sphere more generally. It seems, in contemporary official discourse, that its function is no longer specifically to produce works of art, but rather to produce applications that are seen to be of value. This has been a pattern of thinking throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Consider, for instance, the 1959 perspective offered by psychologist Rollo May, that creativity is ‘the process of bringing something new into birth’, and that offered in 2002 by innovation scholars Jeff DeGraff and Katherine Lawrence: that creativity is ‘a purposeful activity (or set of activities) that produces valuable products, services, processes, or ideas that are better or new’. Over these (nearly) fifty years, there seems little change in the notion that creativity is, as far as research is concerned, the gateway to innovation; and as far as business is concerned, the gateway to efficiencies.

Meantime, the genealogical connection between creativity and art has been attenuated, though not forgotten: many of the commentators on creativity and its instrumental values begin by discussing art. Sir Ken Robinson, for example, in his capacity as chair of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, encourages us to look to the arts for new paradigms for thinking, educating and making, explaining that:

Serious creative achievement relies on knowledge, control of materials and command of ideas. Creative education involves a balance between teaching knowledge and skills, and encouraging innovation. In these ways, creative development is directly related to cultural education (NACCCE 1999: 6).

And it is the potential of creativity – or creative activity – to generate thought, understandings and innovations, that makes it of value, in this line of thought. There is little space here for what Pierre Bourdieu referred to as ‘autonomous’ art: work that does not attend to economic or political imperatives, work that is done ‘for art’s sake’ (Bourdieu 1993: 39). Rather, art’s value under this logic is in what it can deliver in terms of education.

Robinson is not alone in viewing creativity as useful for its social or educational outcomes, rather than for generating art.<sup>1</sup> Plato is, I suspect, the first to discuss the practical value of creative practice in this way. In the *Phaedrus* he has Socrates argue that the ‘possession and madness from the Muses ... adorns ten thousand works of the ancients and so educates posterity’ (Plato, *Phaedrus* 244e–5a): in other words, ‘creative development is directly related to cultural education’. Similarly Aristotle, a generation after Plato, suggests that an audience’s pleasure in mimesis is intimately related to the opportunities it gives for learning (1984: *Poetics* 1448b–9b).<sup>2</sup> Two millennia later, Michel Foucault made his own contribution to the perspective that art’s value is in its instrumentalist – social, economic or political – outcomes, writing:

What strikes me is the fact that, in our society, art has become something related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialized or done by experts who are artists. But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life? (Foucault 1997: 261).

And just as the philosophers and educators are annexing creativity, so too are (some) scientists. Roland Jackson, Chief Executive of the British Science Association, complains:

It has always irked me that the arts community in the UK seems to have purloined the words ‘culture’ and ‘creativity’ as if they are synonymous with the ‘arts’. ... It is time to recapture culture and creativity from the exclusive grip of the artists, and to claim them squarely for the sciences too (Jackson 2011).

What we can see in this discourse is, first, a genuine interest in art *qua* art – in creativity as that which is marked by a transformative magic; and second, a degree of competition over it to determine who owns creativity, and in whose interests is it mobilized. The educators, philosophers and scientists show little appreciation of the connection between art and creativity that results in creative artefacts – in art that is

made for art's sake. Rather, they seem to appropriate the work of art, and the creative engine that drives art, for instrumentalist outcomes: better education, better economic approaches, more innovative research, a better life. While these are all valuable and necessary in any cultural context, when I think from within my identity as a creative practitioner, I grow concerned that my creative practice might be vitiated in the interests of producing outcomes other than creative objects. I grow concerned too that the concept of creativity may be vitiated by organisations who see it as a *deus ex machina*, available to revive tired cities or relieve overstretched state budgets; or who conceive of creativity as something done by fiat, rather than understanding the immense work involved in creativity, the investment of years of training and practice and dedication that are required to be a good creative practitioner.<sup>3</sup>

But the quarrel between artists and, well, everyone else about who has primary rights to creativity is quite a recent one. Art and creativity have in fact only been 'natural' bedfellows for a brief period in history: right up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the term 'art' bore no necessary relation to creative practice, but referred simply to a range of skills, techniques and areas of expertise that afforded benefit or pleasure: practices such as conversation, artisanal work, mathematics and warfare were all named as 'arts'. With the rise of Enlightenment thinking, and particularly with the emergence of the Romantic movement, the idea of creativity as something special became increasingly significant, and 'art' took on both a new identity and a new authority. No longer was it about utility; instead, it came to mean something capable of enacting a kind of social magic.

### **Art as magic**

The phenomenon of 'social magic' comes to us from the writings of Pierre Bourdieu by way of Marcel Mauss. Bourdieu opens his book on elite French schools with a quote from Mauss' 1906 essay 'Introduction à l'analyse de quelques phénomènes religieux':

For the judgments and arguments of magic to be valid, they must have a principle that eludes examination. ... These principles, without which the judgments and arguments are not believed possible, are what philosophy calls categories. Constantly present in language, without necessarily being explicit, they exist rather in the form of guiding practices of consciousness, which are themselves unconscious (Mauss, cited Bourdieu 1996: 7).

Bourdieu develops this notion of 'guiding practices' that are based on unexaminable arguments to make sense of how the social world operates. For him, social magic is a representative act or object has real, material effects 'by producing the collectively recognized, and thus realized, representation of existence' (1991: 42). Like Austin's concept of performative utterances that bring into existence what they state (a declaration of war, for instance, actually brings that war into material reality), an act of social magic performs, or effects, material reality providing that it is enacted by someone who has the right sort of authority. As Bourdieu notes, 'the formula 'I

authorize you to go' is *eo ipso* an authorization only if the person uttering is authorized to authorize, has the authority to authorize' (Bourdieu 1991: 223).

Art has no necessary authority to authorise; it is not in the position of government, law or the economy, those sites of genuine power; but it has been successful at presenting as authoritative. The principles on which its judgments and arguments are based 'elude examination', and yet are efficacious. This is a kind of magic based on what Hong Kong cultural worker Oscar Ho calls a 'happy misunderstanding'. As he puts it:

People still, even if they never go to a museum, will regard art as something profound. When someone makes furniture you look at it as furniture, but when you look at a work of art you think, *what is the meaning; there must be something profound it is trying to tell me*. It becomes this collective misunderstanding that is very powerful (Ho Hing-kay pers. comm. 2005).

The 'collective misunderstanding' of art's importance gives it the capacity to effect material reality – to transact social magic – by establishing what Bourdieu calls 'the principles of vision and division of the social world' (1996: 39): art is one of the means by which culture is objectified (Wacquant 1993: 132) because, as a substantial body of work on the sociology of art goes to show, it constitutes 'the repositories of social value and social meaning' (Wolff 1981: 14). Cesar Grana's reverential description of art is an excellent exemplar of this attitude: art is, he writes, 'capable of making visible certain ultimate meanings which are present in ordinary events but which remain hidden in them until they are, in fact, reborn in their full spirit within the work of art' (Grana 1989: 18).

This post-Enlightenment discourse of art as 'a separate and "sacred" realm' of culture (Wacquant 1993: 134), and of the artist as a privileged character, was dominant until very recent years. But now things are changing; art is struggling to retain its 'sacred' status and its special relationship to creativity. The two are being sundered, and creativity is being divorced from social magic and attached instead to best practice in any area of skilled activity. The result is the disenchantment of creativity, and its recruitment by professions and practices that are concerned with economic or scientific developments. Scientists, bankers, car manufacturers, accountants ... everyone, it seems, is now 'creative', and artists can no longer bank on a special status, but must operate, like everyone else, in the contemporary world of managerialism and instrumentality.

### **Changing discourses, changing times**

A consequence of the previous discourse of the 'sacredness' of art was that creative practice and thinking were considered somewhat ineffable. Hence, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz writes:

Art is notoriously hard to talk about. It seems, even when made of words in the literary arts, all the more so when made of pigment, sound, stone, or whatever in the non-literary ones, to exist in a world of its own, beyond the reach of discourse. It not

only is hard to talk about it; it seems unnecessary to do so. It speaks, as we say, for itself (Geertz 1983: 94).

This seems a little quaint, read nearly 30 years after Geertz published it; read in a context when the notion that anything can ‘speak for itself’ has been debunked and when, in the media, the cultural industries and the academy, we endlessly ‘speak about’ art. Moreover, it separates art from utility and from actual practical engagement; and while this does support the notion of autonomous art practice, it deprives art of its capacity to operate as a mode of research. Outside of discourse, unable to be spoken about, not needing to be spoken about: this places art in a different domain from science, which relies on testable arguments or explanations, and depends on constant discussion and debate. If art is indeed ineffable, it must remain outside of the knowledge economy; and this puts art-academics in a somewhat untenable situation. Unable to contribute the things that are valued in the contemporary world – economic advantage, scientific innovation, social advance – and at the same time determinedly eschewing practical outcomes, art is at risk of having little to offer.

But few would accept this – at least, few members of the public. Official surveys routinely demonstrate that people (in Australia, Britain and the USA) participate in artistic/cultural activities at a surprisingly high level – Australians spend more time reading than in either viewing or participating in sports, for example (ABS 2011) – and that, if asked, they assert a very positive attitude to the arts.<sup>4</sup> But while the answers from the public as to the value of art tend to focus on wellbeing and educative outcomes, artists themselves frequently take a different view. Famously WH Auden complains that ‘poetry makes nothing happen’; Maurice Blanchot insists that art is useless to the world and to itself (1982: 215); and Matthew Arnold writes, with reference to Shelley, that a poet is only ‘a beautiful ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in vain’ (Arnold 1977: 327).

It may be that these positions are more refusals to countenance instrumentalist logic in their field of practice than a genuine belief in art’s incapacity. And certainly, the fact that Auden, Blanchot and Arnold – creative writers, all three – have chosen writing, and lyrical writing at that, to complain that creative practice has no capacity to deliver value to society, or at least that the social utility of art is limited, seems a touch disingenuous.

A more positive view, and one that offers a way forward for creative practitioners who are also academics, is offered by John Dewey, who writes:

What is called the magic of the artist resides in his ability to transfer these values from one field of experience to another, to attach them to the objects of our common life and by imaginative insight make these objects poignant and momentous (Dewey 1934: 118).

For Dewey, it seems, art is transformative, because it provides bridges between ‘fields of experience’. It is, thus, a sort of public transport mechanism:

In modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called *metaphorai*. To go to work or come home, one takes a ‘metaphor’ – a bus or a train. Stories could also take

this noble name: every day, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories (Certeau 1984: 115-6).

But art, in its metaphoric capacity, is not magic in the conventional sense. Metaphors do not operate in a vacuum, but rather transfer knowledge and understandings along routes that already exist in our social and cognitive spheres, by means of what are often unexpected detours. Their ‘magic’ is in their ability to link spaces (concepts) that are not adjacent, that are not manifestly related and, in affording these links, to bring the new into social awareness.

This is something for which art is well equipped. If we accept the view that creative practice is about close observation, record keeping, experimental interventions – in short, a kind of magic – then in its function of generating fresh representations of the world and its people, it is necessarily also a mode of knowledge production. The very fact that poetry, for instance (when written by a poet who is thoroughly immersed in the techniques and operating at a high level of professionalism), requires deep and sustained observation and deep and sustained reflection means it is likely to allow first the poet, and then the close readers of the poem, to see a little differently, to think a little differently, and thus to generate new ways of knowing and of doing.

### **Making poems/making knowledge**

Given the long and often murky history of the discourse of art in general, and poetry in particular, it is not surprising that there is a degree of uncertainty about its capacity to contribute to the social, political, economic and educational domains. Many academics across the range of creative disciplines have told me that they feel that creative practice has no value to the university, and that artist-academics therefore need to do twice the work of colleagues in English, say, or Communication Studies. They find themselves producing creative work as a sort of guilty secret, I have been told, while demonstrating their value to the university through conventional research outputs. Though concentrated efforts on the part of many artist-academics and organisations have resulted in partial acceptance of the worth of creative outputs, typically they ‘count’ only if they are generated under the rubric of practice-led research, rather than as the result of autonomous creative practice. Poetry matters to the academy, that is, when it is produced in order to generate knowledge, and not when it is produced in order to make a poem.

But this is not the only way of looking at this particular conundrum. As the substantial body of writings on art and knowledge insists, poetry has the potential both to generate art, *and* to generate knowledge. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, for example, Sir Philip Sidney stated that poetry was ‘the first light-giver to ignorance, and first nurse, whose milk by little and little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges’ (Sidney 1922 [c.1583]: 96): a view of poetry that combines inspiration and knowledge. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Wordsworth characterised poetry as ‘the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science’ (1802: 423); and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ezra Pound asserted

that ‘The arts, literature, poesy are a science, just as chemistry is a science. Their subject is man, mankind and the individual’ (Pound 1913: 42).

Because Pound is so closely identified with his injunction to ‘Make it new!’, and because *making it new* is so closely identified with the contemporary discourse on creativity, I would like to take a little time to explore his perspective as he develops it in ‘The Serious Artist’. Interestingly, he begins at the same point that is adopted by many contemporary artist/academics in discussions of the value of creative practice: what is the social function of art? ‘We are asked’, he writes:

to define the relation of the arts to economics, we are asked what position the arts are to hold in the ideal republic. And it is obviously the opinion of many people less objectionable than the Sydney Webbs that the arts had better not exist at all ... It is as if one said to me: what is the use of open spaces in this city, what is the use of rose-trees and why do you wish to plant trees and lay out parks and gardens? (41).

To these questions he gives the obvious answer (‘obvious’ is his term): that art has value because people like it; and, more importantly, that art has value because it is one of the knowledge tools that allow us to ‘know what sort of an animal man is’ so that ‘we can contrive his maximum happiness’ (41).

He goes on, not to explain how poetry operates as a science, but to insist that it provides data on human beings, and how we differ from one another, and how therefore a society can build ethical ways of treating its subjects. How it does this remains obscure; indeed, as one of his contemporaries complained, ‘no elucidation or comment follows’ his insistence that poetry is a science; and hence ‘one has a suspicion, as though one had caught a glimpse of a bum with a gold watch-chain strung across his ragged vest’ (Carnevali 1920: 150).

Is Pound’s an empty argument? Or one that is over-dressed? Perhaps. But still it offers a series of metaphors about what art is and what it can deliver; and in its insistence that art can in fact present important data, and thus provide for wellbeing, it opens a door to serious consideration of how art might be a science. And, equally importantly, it lays out a foundation for ethics and accuracy in the making of our creative work. ‘Bad art is inaccurate art,’ he chides; ‘It is art that makes false reports’ (43). However slippery the argument that follows, there is something of immense value, in that he concludes this line of thought by writing:

By good art I mean art that bears true witness, I mean the art that is most precise. You can be wholly precise in representing a vagueness. You can be wholly a liar in pretending that the particular vagueness was precise in its outline (44).

And here, I suggest, is where we find the beginnings of an epistemology of creative practice *qua* research. Bearing witness – which demands fine skills in observation and recording, the capacity to recount in a way that makes sense. Being precise in representing – and in particular, in representing vagueness. Poet-academics do not operate across the terrain of the exact sciences. We may generate and test hypotheses, but this is done, typically, through aesthetic, intuitive and idiosyncratic modes of practice – an approach that cannot readily be replicated and hence confirmed or refined by others. Nor do we operate across the terrain of the social



sciences. We may observe, record and make representations, but the outputs from our work are not representative of the population as a whole, and hence cannot be generalised to a wider sample. Pound again addresses this:

The theorist typically proceeds as if his own case, his own limits and predilections were the typical case, or even as if it were the universal. He is constantly urging someone else to behave as he, the theorist, would like to behave. Now art never asks anyone to do anything, or to think anything, or to be anything. It exists as the trees exist, you can admire, you can sit in the shade, you can pick bananas, you can cut firewood, you can do as you jolly well please (46).

Here Pound seems to be foreshadowing Auden's (1948) complaint:

For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives  
In the valley of its making where executives  
Would never want to tamper, flows on south  
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,  
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,  
A way of happening, a mouth.

Here we see the 'makes nothing happen-ness' of creative practice: poetry merely 'survives'; art merely 'exists'. Each offers a passive vision of the creative form, and sets it against the busyness of the individuals associated with the event: the cutters of firewood, the pickers of bananas, the executives and the mourners. For Auden there is, at this point of the poem, only bleak nullity, and a grim holding on; for Pound there is the provision of material – data – that permits individuals to find a satisfying way through the morass of life. But Auden's work too moves in that direction as it comes to its end:

Follow, poet, follow right  
To the bottom of the night,  
With your unconstraining voice  
Still persuade us to rejoice

This observation emerges out of a simple argument; with the death of WB Yeats he is translated out of self as writer, and into words that now belong to his readers. This dissolution of individual self across a multiplicity of readers leads to the observation that poetry can illuminate the worst not, I think, *despite* its incapacity but *because* of it. Removed from instrumental action, removed from the poet, the works can make life possible; and this is ethical poetry. Though the observation is buried in an argument based on generalities – the abstraction of 'the free man' or 'the poor', the universality of 'every human face' or of 'human unsuccess' – still it comes back to the work of an individual poet, making of his or her individual experience a precise representation, one in which others can invest, one which allows an alternative 'take' on the world, one that 'In the prison of his days / [can] Teach the free man how to praise'.

## Conclusion

This is precisely Pound's point: that poetry, unlike the work of the generalizing theorist, is about a single and concrete individual, the poet, whose observations make an explicit statement about that person only; and in providing evidence that one person at least saw the world in a particular way, felt the world in a particular way, also provides evidence that there are many ways to see, to feel and hence to know. This is ethical, and socially engaged, because readers can appropriate that knowledge – not to test it, not to apply remedies to society, but to revisit both thought and being. And perhaps Auden is right, and poetry makes nothing happen directly, deliberately or legislatively, but because *it survives*, because it merely *exists*, because it *never asks anyone to do anything, or to think anything, or to be anything*, it presents something precise, and therefore able to be appropriated by others. Its validity is not found in the collection of data, in the systematic construction of a research program, or in modes of scientific experimentation, but in observation, reflection, and response.

Pound (and Auden) are in good company in positing poetry's capacity to offer small, local and contingent truths. Many other poet-commentators have claimed that art – and particularly poetry – is a knowledge generator; and confidently asserted that poetry does operate in the knowledge domain. Over centuries of writing, the relation between poetry and knowledge has been discussed, and among the assertions can be found some keen insights that suggest ways to understand the intellectual productivity of poetry. Think, for example, of John Keats' use of the concept of 'Negative Capability' to posit poetry as a mode of investigation: 'when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (Keats 1817). Keats here might almost have read Pierre Bourdieu's textbook on sociological research methods: 'To be able to see and describe the world as it is,' Bourdieu explains there, 'you have to be ready to be always dealing with things that are complicated, confused, impure, uncertain, all of which runs counter to the usual idea of intellectual rigour' (Bourdieu et al. 1991: 259). Of course, any research paradigm will involve processes marked by ambiguities and uncertainties rather than precision, or confidence. But for those of us engaged in socio-cultural work – building knowledge about what it means to be a person living with other people, and using creative practice as part of our methodology – it is vital to be able to linger, able to observe without excess reliance on pre-established constructs, to be willing to be wrong, to be capable of uncertainty. These are in many cases the qualities that will allow new insights to emerge, and they are also the qualities that generate poetry that is fresh and robust.

Poets would, of course, make claims for the utility and quality of their art – it is in their interests to do so. But philosophers too, those trained in argument and evidence, have likewise built a case for the capacity of poetry to generate knowledge. We can look to Martin Heidegger (1971), for example, and his identification of the key points of connection between writing poetry and conducting phenomenological investigation. More recently, philosopher Simon Critchley has produced a sustained argument that there is an analogy between poetry and philosophy in their shared attention to epistemology – 'the relation between thought and things or mind and

world' (2005: 4). Critchley, indeed, sees poetry as a form of philosophy; not least because creative practice generally:

permits us to see fiction as fiction, to see the fictiveness or contingency of the world. It reveals the idea of order which we imaginatively impose on reality. Plainly stated, the world is what you make of it. The fact of the world is a *factum*: a deed, an act, an artifice (Critchley 2005: 58).

Poetry, thoughtfully and technically created, provides us with a notion of reality, and allows us to see, more clearly, how in our lived experience the elements of reality are constructed, and how they fit together.

Of course poetry need not generate knowledge; it may well be simply a flickering images, or a moment of entertainment; it may be an aesthetic impulse, produced purely for art's sake. But even in such a case, I would assert, if written by scholars as part of their scholarly practice, the making of such a poem may have the capacity to deliver research findings. This is because it is creative act that is based on phenomenological engagement (a la Heidegger), built through a process of sociological reflexivity (a la Bourdieu), developed with patience (a la Keats) and rigorous honesty (a la Pound), interpreted through a hermeneutic rather than a statistical analysis (a la Critchley), and capable of crossing lines, in the nature of a metaphorai – transporting the writer and the reader from one location, one state of being, to another. And it does this when both writer and reader attend to the moment; David Malouf, in a recent *Quarterly Essay* on happiness, wrote:

poets, in what they stumble upon in the business of writing itself in the language they use and the way they deploy it, may open the way to institutional change by uncovering what, if only dimly at first, we see as a new possibility. One that, once the mind begins to work on it, becomes an actuality we cannot do without (Malouf 2011: 32-3).

And here, I suggest, is how poetry has the capacity to deliver knowledge outcomes; it permits us to see new possibilities, and in that seeing, to begin to build mechanisms that will allow us to transform an idea into an actuality.

## Endnotes

1. See, e.g., the papers in Richard J Deasy (ed) 2002 *Critical links: Learning in the Arts and student academic and social development*, Washington DC: Arts Education Partnership (also available online at [http://www.aep-arts.org/publications/info.htm?publication\\_id=10](http://www.aep-arts.org/publications/info.htm?publication_id=10)); Burger, K & Winner, E 2000 'Instruction in visual art: Can it help children learn to read?' *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 34: 3-4, 277-94.
2. Though it is important to acknowledge that Aristotle's concern seems far more with the production of aesthetic works of quality than with the educative function of art.
3. Malcolm Gladwell famously insists that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to become good at what you do. See his *Outliers: the story of success*, Penguin, 2009. So, *pace* Foucault, anyone *might* turn their life into a work of art, but very few *will*. After all, it can only be achieved by each individual working very diligently at their life-as-art, over a lifetime if necessary; and this is likely to distract them from other activities such as maintaining a professional identity, nurturing friends and family, educating others and so on: the sorts of activities that the work of art is now being directed to perform.

4. Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999 *Public Attitudes to the Arts*, cat 4157.0, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/ProductsbyTopic/CDAF161EB4BE285ACA2568A90013939D?OpenDocument>, accessed 9 July 2001; Arts Council of Northern Ireland 2007 *Arts and Culture in Northern Ireland*, <http://www.csu.nisra.gov.uk/default.asp4.htm>, accessed 12 December 2011;

Cherbo, Joni Maya and Margaret Jane Wyszomirski 2000 *The public life of the arts in America*, Piscataway NJ: Rutgers University Press

## Works cited

ABS [Australian Bureau of Statistics] 2011 *Arts and culture in Australia: A statistical overview*, cat 4172.0, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4172.0> (accessed 12 December 2011)

Aristotle 1984 [c335BCE] *Poetics* (trans G Whalley), Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's

Arnold, Matthew 1977[1888] 'Shelley', in RH Super (ed), *Complete prose works*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 305-27

Auden, WH 1948 'In memory of WB Yeats', in *The collected poetry of WH Auden*, New York: Random House, 48

Blanchot, Maurice 1982 *The space of literature* (trans Ann Smock), Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press

Bourdieu, Pierre 1991 *Language and symbolic power* (trans Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson), Cambridge: Polity

Bourdieu, P 1996 *The state nobility: Elite schools in the field of power* (trans Laretta C Clough), Stanford: Stanford University Press

Bourdieu, Pierre 1993 *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature*, Cambridge: Polity

Bourdieu, Pierre, with Jean-Claude Chamboredon and Jean-Claude Passeron 1991 *The craft of sociology: Epistemological preliminaries* (ed Beate Kraus, trans Richard Nice), New York: Walter de Gruyter

Carnevali, Emanuel 1920 'Irritation', in Eric Homburger (ed) *Ezra Pound*, London: Routledge, 1972, 148-55

Certeau, Michel de 1984 *The practice of everyday life* (trans Steven Rendall), Berkeley: University of California Press

Critchley, Simon 2005 *things merely are*, London & New York: Routledge

DeGraff, Jeff and Katherine A Lawrence (2002) *Creativity at work: Developing the right practices to make innovation happen*, New York: Jossey-Bass

Dewey, John 1934 *Art as experience*, New York: Perigee

Foucault, Michel 1997 *Ethics: Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984*, v.1 (ed Paul Rabinow), London: Penguin

Geertz, Clifford 1983 *Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretive anthropology*, New York: Basic Books

Grana, Cesar 1989 *Meaning and authenticity: Further essays on the sociology of art*, New Brunswick: Transaction

Heidegger, Martin 1971 *Poetry, language, thought* (trans A Hofstadter), New York: HarperCollins

Jackson, Ronald 2011 *Science and public attitudes*, Department for Business Innovation and Skills, <http://discuss.bis.gov.uk/pas11/2011/01/19/roland-jackson-science-and-culture> (accessed 12 December 2011)

Keats, John 1817 Letter to his brothers, Sunday [21 Dec. 1817], Hampstead, <http://www.mrbauld.com/negcap.html> (accessed 12 June 2008)

- Malouf, David 2011 'The happy life: The search for contentment in the modern world' *Quarterly Essay* 41
- May, Rollo 1959 'The nature of creativity', in Harold Anderson (ed), *Creativity and its cultivation: Addresses presented at the Interdisciplinary Symposia on Creativity*, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, New York: Harper & Row, 55-60
- National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) 1999 *All our futures: Creativity, culture and education*, report of the NACCCE for the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment, and Culture, Media and Sport
- OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development) 2002 *Frascati Manual: Proposed standard practice for surveys on research and experimental development* (6<sup>th</sup> ed), Paris: OECD Publications Service
- Pelias, Ronald J 2004 *A methodology of the heart: Evoking academic and daily life*, Walnut Creek CA: Altamira Press
- Plato 1914 [c370BCE] *Phaedrus* (trans HN Fowler), London: Heinemann
- Pound, Ezra 1913 'The serious artist', in TS Eliot (ed) *The literary essays of Ezra Pound*, New York: New Directions Publishing, 1954, 41-57
- Sidney, Sir Philip 1922 'An apology for poetry', in Edmund P Jones (ed) *English critical essays (sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries)*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Wacquant, Loic 1993 'From ideology to symbolic violence: Culture, class and consciousness in Marx and Bourdieu' *International journal of contemporary sociology* 30: 2, 125-42
- Wolff, Janet 1981 *The social production of art*, London: Macmillan
- Wordsworth, W 1802 'Preface to *Lyrical ballads with pastoral and other poems*', in ST Coleridge and W Wordsworth *Lyrical ballads 1798 and 1800* (ed. Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter), Plymouth: Broadview Press, 2008