Creativity and/as writing.

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Abstract

This paper arises from supervising PhD candidates in creative writing. It refers to the PhD Training Hub constructed by myself and my colleague at Swinburne University of Technology. It aims to encourage creative PhDs, particularly by the artefact and exegesis model. It focuses on the research question of how to encourage and understand the creativity that underpins all forms of writing. It utilises postmodernist theories about textuality to advance thinking about how creative discourse adds to knowledge in the academy. It encourages the practise of linear analytico-referential knowledge being overtaken by lateral postmodernist discourse.

The conceptual framework involves Gregory Ulmer’s ‘mystery’ and the pastiche of the dispersal of certainties in considering the practice of writing. Even as we see the fragility of language, we also see its robustness as a tool for experiments, for communication, for disruption as it works towards a new definition that is always under erasure. Experimentation means pushing against the limits, extending the boundaries, seeing beyond what is and was to what might be.

The paper encourages the questioning of metanarratives, showing how they both arise from and result in arid cultural conformity. It looks at some of the many elements to creative capacities being developed, nurtured and coming into their full potential. It opens up discourse about where a text comes from in the creative act of overcoming the blank page. In this postmodernist moment, we no longer interrogate those attributes of a text that were once dominant. We no longer have the expectations that history and cultural metanarratives laid so heavily upon us. Today, we have more open questions aimed at discovering how every text is a constructed terrain. This paper displays these areas of discussion that have strong implications for future research arising from applying critical theories to the relationship of practice and theory.
Introduction

*have a small plot of new land at all times* Gilles Deleuze.

Creativity is a significant element of human experience. It contributes to the health and the growth of the culture as well as that of the individual. In living our lives, each of us is called upon to be, both directly and indirectly, very creative. This is, paradoxically, an ‘everyday creativity’ that is neither celebrated nor recognised by the community because it is the common experience. Whilst there are indeed many aspects of ‘everyday creativity’, in the dominant Western culture the term of ‘creativity’ is most usually applied to individual endeavours of a high degree of originality in, for example, music, the visual arts, writing and dance. Creative thinking is seen in the sciences, mathematics and industry, but these are generally not the immediate thought connected in our culture to ‘creativity’ itself.

It is agreed that such creative activities are original, passionately driven, and intense in their nature. Creative people, in whatever field, stand above the common herd not only in the use of their talent but also in their ability to think and act beyond the known and accepted. They are innovative in that they are ready to seek out the new, to be original. Todd May says in his discussions of Gilles Deleuze that: ‘Thought is nothing more than a representation of the world: a re-presentation in our mind of what is presented to us once, already, out there.’ (May 2005:74) Then he warns us about such complacency: ‘If we are to loosen the chains that have bound our thought...then we must learn to think differently, to abandon representational thought for something else.’ (May 2005:80) That is to say, we must try not to KNOW.

Immersion as a child into an environment that is, for example, musical, literate, and/or encouraging of painting or dancing, enhances the creativity in these areas. Creative abilities obviously begin in early life. However, this is only its origination. It needs facilitation throughout life. Curiously, while the parental, social and educational emphasis on artistic creativity is strong in the earliest developmental years of the child, it tapers off as their schooling proceeds. By the undergraduate stage, it is barely present. As students, particularly males, advance they are advised into courses that lead fairly directly to well-paid professions. Indeed, most universities advise, and many require, that students undertake work placement as one of their subjects. Yet, ‘Studies of careers of cohorts of creative people show that the most common form in which the choice of an appropriate vocation is facilitated through the influence of an admired person is exposure to a master teacher, usually in adolescence.’Gedo.1996. 17)

Paradoxically, many who succeed in accepted professions go on to become collectors of art, appreciators and supporters of music and dance, readers and collectors of books, and fulfil their own creativity at, as it were, second-hand. It is as though their desire has been repressed until they are economically established and can place the arts within a commercial boundary.

It is in this cultural climate that the creative artist develops and is sustained by a sense of self as artist. In this way, creativity is seen as related more closely to
childhood than adulthood. The serious business of life, it seems, is a certain view of work that does not include creativity, especially the creative arts. In a poster at my University from ‘Industry-Based Learning’ group, we learn that you can: ‘Kick Start your Career with Real Learning’ because ‘Industry based Learning (IBL) offers you the chance to get ahead in your career by providing you with the chance to work with REAL employers in REAL jobs’. I’m sure it does. What I’m interested in is the statement that this is somehow ‘real learning’, and the absolute absence of a similar group and poster for what I will call ‘Creative Thinking and Practice Learning’. Most Universities, like ours, are seeing how their courses lead directly to employment opportunities as one of their key goals.

Employment is not a small part of the meaning of life: many, like Freud, would see it as integral. I have no argument with that: it’s more a question of why we see the creative arts as something that you do in your spare time that interests me here. Further, it’s also interesting to see why creativity is corralled within these arts areas and seldom encourages directly as a business goal. The most impactful cultural metanarrative of our neo-conservative times seems to be conformity in/within employment. Yet for most people, there are serious existential questions too.

Gilles Deleuze has a very creative way of looking at the ‘BIG QUESTION’ of ‘what is the meaning of life?’ He confronts the disabling ordinariness of the everyday paradigms and metanarratives of society that inevitably form us and gives us another and more creative way to think about constructing our lives.

‘This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential moments of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times.’ (in May, 2005:25)

Thus, Deleuze invites us to ask a very creative question about our lives: ‘how might one live?’ (May, 2005:1) This opposes the thought that the cultural determinants are unchallengeable, or that it is almost impossible to think outside them. Such creative thinking is difficult. Todd May says of Deleuze that: ‘The structure of society, the weight of history, the legacy of our language all conspire to keep the question from us, and to keep us from it. Our conformity is not solely a result of individual cowardice, it is built into the world we inhabit’ (2005:8) It is, then, both personally and culturally difficult for us to see the world anew. It is a very creative challenge that must be read dynamically and galvanise us creatively to ‘…have a small plot of new land at all times…’

Whilst creative energies may in psychological studies be seen to develop strongly in that period of turmoil known now as adolescence, the sorts of activities that might encourage it are progressively discouraged from kindergarten to Year 12 schooling. In my research for my PhD thesis (Arnold 1994) I read the mission statements of all primary and secondary schools in Victoria and interviewed hundreds of secondary school students. There was a great inconsistency between the stated goals and the actual school experience. All of the mission statements had something very like ‘we will develop each student to the fullness of their own capacity’ and ‘we will enable creativity in though and action’. Yet many of the students saw schooling as repressive
and even spoke of it as ‘jail’. It was also evident that ‘serious’ maths/science and
business type subjects took precedence over the arts when students were selecting
courses. It became more evident each higher the year of schooling that utilitarian and
‘safe’ money-making career oriented courses were valued in advising students about
subjects. Catering to future career options were then (and remain) the highest reason
for study. This kind of thinking has led me to a consideration of the importance of
creativity to the individual and the culture. In considering such a question, we might
first fruitfully look at how the culture protects itself. In his considerations of power,
Michel Foucault (1981) tells us that no-one ever gives up power voluntarily. Through
his work we see that ways of behaving are neither natural nor unchangeable: they are
historical and contingent. At the same time, he avers that power is what keeps the
society going: there is weak power that is like bullying, fascism, dictatorships; there is
strong power that is a positive way of keeping the society together in a cultural whole.
As Foucault sees cultural determinants as being historical, Jacques Derrida sees them
as being linguistic. These two are, of course, very close. The culture and the language
are embedded in one another and this is particularly so in a written and read culture.
‘For both Foucault and Derrida any approach to the question of being that goes by
means of an account of an unchanging, pure nature or essence is misguided, for
either historical or linguistic reasons. Misguided, and worse than misguided:har
Maiy 2005: 15) When language and culture are fluid and not set, new
possibilities arise that enable us to consider how we might live. This is a very creative
thought in itself: it also enables creativity within the person and the culture.

Clearly it is impossible for all people to be creative all of the time: such a galvanic
community would be out of control. It is true that, by definition, creativity acts to
disrupt boundaries, to disconnect from ‘given’ and to open up new possibilities.
Psychoanalyst and writer John Gedo, who has made a long-term study of this, says
that one significant attribute is that: ‘The creative person must be able to try.’
(1996:13). This ‘trying’ means that the creative person must be able to see beyond the
givens and to act accordingly. Of course, this is not the only attribute of the creative
person. Gedo also says of creativity that it: ‘…must be understood as the ability to
process concepts (or abstractions concretized in terms of perceptual metaphors) in an
extraordinarily flexible and sophisticated manner.’ (Gedo. 1996:11). He also
introduces (from Albert Rothenberg) the helpful metaphor of ‘Janusian thinking’
(31) by which he means the ability, like that ancient Roman god who had two faces
each facing opposite directions, to see more than one way of thinking and doing.

In the 21st century, we have a culture that seeks creativity even as it urges towards a
new conservatism. All cultures have been both nurtured and disturbed by creative
genius. Creativity is not of course confined to genius, although it’s clearly an essential
attribute of it. Being able to problematize is a heady creative act in the face of the
cultural pressures to conform. Yet the power of the culture is often falsely portrayed
as succeeding within that cultural given. Such determinants lead to stagnation rather
than fruition. The culture actually acts at its most powerful when it enables its
members to see beyond the metanarratives that lead to conformity. Perhaps this is
why, in the long run, we value ‘failures’ such as Vincent Van Gogh more than the
people who ran the art industry of the times and who made much more money than
he.
This is easy to comprehend when we evoke a genius as a creative force. A genius is by definition extraordinarily creative: genius is the enactment far beyond the ordinary, the known, or the expected. It is a profound act of ‘difference’ and is not available as a result of the more simple act of ‘trying’. Yet creativity is not confined to genius: it is always a fresh and passionate insight leading to the new in ways that do not merely sustain the culture, but enhance it. Rarely, creativity also changes the culture: perhaps this is the work of the genius and that’s why it is so rare to find one. In this paper, I am more concerned with looking at creative talent and how it comes about.

Despite the enormous acts of creativity in the medical, manufacturing and scientific creativity that form and inform our Western culture, creativity is described most clearly in the arts, particularly the visual arts. Psychologist, P. Greenacre, says of this that creative artists have a ‘love affair with the world.’ In psychological terms she sees this as arising from a developmental action in childhood that has a ‘lessened reliance on good relations with caretakers’. This paucity of personal relations is replaced with this ‘love affair with the world.’ (in Gedo 1996) which includes artistic intuition and access to a vivid and valued imagination.

I do not want to be forced to investigate the old canard that artists are ‘mad’, but there does seem to be a connection in the life of the creative artist between childhood development not being met and creativity developing. Gedo calls this ‘...the romanticisation of psychosis.’(138) after making this interesting and provocative observation about the art of the mad: ‘...once the shocking novelty of delusional views of the world has worn off, one tends to focus on the monotonous predictability of their content and style.’ (Gedo 1996:135) At the same time, there are connections; Freud is clear on the relationship between the patient’s narrative and fictional stories: ‘...the case histories I write should read like short stories...as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science.’ (in Williams 1995:19) Williams says of Freud as a narrator that his ‘role as writer of psychological histories which ‘read like short stories’ places him in the role of the narrator, under pressure to deliver a satisfying plot trajectory and a sense of closure as the tale reaches its conclusion.’ (Williams 1995:23)

Gedo discusses how the creative talent is atypical in development and hence in adult personality. Creativity clearly arises from a certain dissatisfaction with the known and given: the energy that drives productivity to develop new and surprising perspectives must arise from not being bound and shackled within the known. Such a view accords with the postmodernist questioning of the givens and norms in the late 20th century. The creative thinking that arose tsunami-like from this has never abated although it has met and still meets many seemingly intractable obstacles.

In working towards a definition, Simon Malpas gives us interesting ideas about what he calls ‘The New Critical Idiom’. He says of the postmodern that there is a conflict between the immensity of opportunity for the Western world in lifestyle and consumer choices and those aspects of postmodernism that cut deeper such as ‘...deregulation, dispersal, and disruption as the securities of tradition and community are continually crushed.’ Furthermore, he draws our attention to the artists’ responsibilities today in terms of seizing the energy of the paradox between these two aspects of Postmodernism: ‘Between these two contemporary extremes, a conflict exists which threatens the stability of both. The role of the postmodern thinker
or artist must be to explore and question this contemporary situation, to grasp the opportunities it might offer and respond to its challenges.’ (Malpas. 2005:3)

**I am creative, therefore I am. I am, therefore I can give birth.**

Success in creative endeavours feed the person’s self-esteem: ‘…the self-esteem born of great accomplishments irresistibly pulls persons with major talent into ceaseless exercise of their gifts’. (Gedo 1996:9) It is in their creative works that talented people show dynamic and galvanising capacities to themselves and others. This is because it restores something within themselves: it is transformative as a work and in the process from conception to delivery.

It is no coincidence that the metaphor of conception and birth is commonly applied to creative works by the talents themselves and by experts as well as the general community. There is an orgasmic and sensual pleasure in the secret enjoyment of conceiving a creative artefact. For many very talented people, this alone is enough and they never take any project any further forward: they flit from one great idea to another. I suppose that this is what is meant when we read that Hollywood actors (almost inevitably male) are ‘sex addicts’. Many creative people are ‘ideas addicts’ who ‘talk out’ their concept so that the moment takes over and nothing further occurs: satisfaction has been attained.

The imaginary is not only a world apart from everyday reality. It also gives birth to another dimension of being in the world but not of the world. In this sense, it is visionary. The creative imagination enables the practise of ideas that provide new and challenging visions of what is, what was, and what might be: it involves acts of invention and re-invention. The creative thinker utilises the imagination whilst at the same time disciplining it. That is to say, inner phantasising changes through the creative act to become exterior activities.

The Cartesian binary that has been produced between reason and imagination is one that has proved very sterile and, indeed, produced a quite false dichotomy. Whilst brain studies have shown that different lobes of the brain do different tasks, none has suggested that excising any lobe or lobes would be useful in a physiological sense: so why should such an excision of the imaginary from knowledge be seen as in any way reasonable? Clearly all lobes of the brain are interdependent in some way: this renewing of an imagined connection between reason and imagination is an enriching element of postmodernist and feminist views of knowledge that enable the creative to be involved in all areas of culture and society, not only in the ‘arts’ where it is unashamedly admired in practice, yet placed in chains by academic demands.

This bringing together of reason and imagination is essential to our understanding of the creative talent/mind. It also enables an understanding of the natural world that accepts that it is not reasonable in itself, but that we humans are a part of even as we try to enact a separation through, for example, cities, computers, manufacturing and land exploitation. This separation follows the Cartesian binary. Rene Descartes, famously the inventor of algebra and even more famously the inventor of the provocative Latin tag ‘cogito ergo sum’ (I think, therefore I am), initiated in Western culture the idea that we are not ruled externally by, for example, such cultural
imperatives as religious beliefs and practices. If we reject the proofs of existence that define us thus, Descartes asks, how do we know we exist at all? He answers this by taking humans outside the natural world into the realm of cognition:

‘I had persuaded myself that there was nothing at all in the world: no sky, no earth, no minds or bodies; was I not, therefore, also persuaded that I did not exist?’ He thinks deeply about his existence, concluding ‘...the proposition: I am, I exist, is necessarily true, every time I express it or conceive of it in my mind.’ (in Malpas 2005:59)

The Cartesian binary has dominated Western thinking and plays a significant role in the power and prestige of The Enlightenment. Such a binary is disrupted, questioned and broken into many differences through Postmodernist thinking that encourages the imagined and the metaphoric as well as the natural world and the intellectually understood. It is through the creative imaginary that we can give birth to metaphoric thinking. It is in the development of the metaphor that we can both draw together and also isolate the various elements of the known within a new terrain. Metaphor brings together aspects of one quite singular experience, happening or being with another quite different one that shares an aspect or aspects. So we can say ‘Isaac’s a cold fish’ knowing that Isaac is not a fish: he is cold in his feelings in the same way as a fish is cold to the touch. Most of us know so few fish intimately that we cannot say whether they are emotionally cold or not: but we do know that they do feel cold to the touch. Thus, the metaphoric utterance is a more direct and impactful way of saying ‘Isaac is emotionally cold.’

10% inspiration; 90% perspiration.

Motivation arises from competitiveness with self as well as with others. It involves moving from the conceptual to the accomplishment. People who prioritise the work of their talents are obviously highly productive. They are able to be absorbed in the work and to utilise great concentration and energy to bring it to a successful conclusion. Clearly this involves commitment and struggle. Much creative work occurs in personal isolation. (Phelan. 2006)

Struggle is inevitable when someone has superior capacities and talents and the drive to immerse themselves in their creative work with intense concentration. The creative person must be able to do differently: to swim against the tide so as to achieve something valuable and even idealistic. They must develop a preference for the new and also be able to deliver what they conceptualise. The long period of gestation that human beings experience, and the agonies of childbirth followed by the intense love affair with the child, provide a great metaphor for us to understand the process of creativity.

Hope and desire are central to creativity; they form as it were, the hub of the wheel. Yet the whole wheel is the work itself that arises form the creative talent: without this, the inspiration is invalidated and the hope merely peters out. There is a paradox in this creative exercise of hope: for creativity also engages cynicism and clear-sightedness in the face of the overwhelming power of the metanarratives of society and the constructed nature of the culture that is far from disinterested. ‘...hope is difficult to
describe...it is inextricably linked to despair. Despair is an attitude of capitulation and acceptance, whereas hope implies a relaxed kind on nonacceptance...Hope is a memory of the future.’ (Haynes 243)

To hope means to be willing to take risks even when the evidence around you opposes such actions: for the creative talent has grave responsibilities in taking the culture forward through fertile criticism.

The poet Jan Phillips says: ‘...when I come to the table as an artist, I come first with what rests on my surface –fears that I am not worthy or wise enough, doubts that I am capable enough, worries that others will judge my work as worthless or of no use. ’ She concludes that this is not the best approach because: ‘I may, in the presence of fear, create a beautiful poem, but in its absence, I might create a masterpiece.’ (1997:30)

Daring to do: beyond the creativity of everyday life.

In the 21st century, there has been an exponential growth in ‘extreme sports’ in which adherents put their physical well-being to the test as they use their skills to climb, leap, swim, parachute and/or explore wild places. The creative person puts another set of skills and another personality on the line in a different but no less ‘extreme’ way. This involves originality in setting the task, and an ability to tolerate loneliness not only in the conception but also in the carrying and delivery. To carry it through means great courage must be shown so that the self is satisfied rather than seeking the direct help and approval of others. There is a struggle with the creative work and the self, but there is also the struggle with powerful forces that seek to diminish the creative endeavour. Some of these are evident, others hidden. One very powerful hidden force working against the creative tender is sexual orientation and even gender itself. ‘Not only were women artists dismissed or excised from history, but the very theoretical categories used to define creativity were patterned on attributes perceived as uniquely male. Because to be an artist presumed possibilities of autonomy, originality, inventiveness and genius that were thought to be accessible to men alone, women were habitually excluded from the category ‘artist’. ’ (Haynes 94)

The popular saying that ‘real men don’t eat quiche’ is extended when we think about artistic and personal creativity. It is acceptable in business, management and manufacturing, for example, and even, dare I say it, in accountancy: it is not acceptable for men or women to pursue a muse that may not provide a financial return immediately or even ever. Jan Phillips looks at opening herself to her muse: ‘To come to our art like water, not ice, not fixed in a particular shape, but fluid and able to flow with the source.’ (1997:31) Of course, gender often acts against this, and this has been shown particularly in online textuality and discourse. Karen Coyle says, for example, that computer games are too often the domain of male creativity in making as in playing: ‘Computer games are notorious for their exhibition of macho.’ (Cherny,Weise 1995:47) and ‘The exclusion of women and femininity is as obvious as the inclusion of male imagery. And when women do appear, it is often as objects of desire.’ (50)

Yet gender is not the only barrier in the creative life of both the self and the culture itself. Any a-typical individual will have to work to integrate their abilities into their
culture in a way that enriches and renews both. ‘Creative work is a means of finding ourselves and of providing ways for others to find themselves as well.’ (Phillips 1997:16) The implication is that there is a need for a pathway through a morass waiting to be found means there has been a loss or that there is an awareness of something tangible or intangible that is missing. Where some aspects of being are at a dead-end, then some aspects of the cultural metanarrative are similarly non-productive.

The creative person provides a prophetic vision for the society in which they live: this takes that society forward. At the same time, the creative talent is subject to that culture’s past and present. Their work is evaluated in terms anterior to it yet also involved in its production. In speaking of the visual arts, but also aware of the other creative domains, Deborah Haynes avers: ‘Issues such as craftsmanship and competence, complexity and or simplicity, inventiveness and innovation, the sphere of influence, how the work engages the viewer, the nature of authorship, scale and ambition as reflected in the work: all of these help guide pragmatic judgements. None is absolute in itself.’ (Haynes 1997:22)

Opportunity knocks.

One important way to consider creativity is to see it as an attempt to use problems as dynamic interactions rather than something that needs to be solved. In a description of Gilles Deleuze’s rejection of dogmatism, Tod May says that: ‘Problems become an open field in which a variety of solutions may take place.’ (2005:84) This demonstrates the ability of creative thinking to identify problems and to overcome the ways in which they act, as it were, as no-go areas. The creative energy involved in moving beyond the directions and dimensions of cultural metanarratives is a significant indication of the power of creative thinking to make an opportunity from a negative influence.

There are many elements to creative capacities being developed, nurtured and coming into their full potential. As we have seen, some psychologists believe that these occur in the earliest years and involve a sense in the developing child that s/he has to look beyond the nurturing caretaker to fall into ‘a love affair with the world’ to sustain themselves. Of primary importance, I think, is that the child should have an ability that they themselves recognise as a gift. This can be nurtured by inspirational teachers and practitioners that enable the gift to develop into its fullness rather than to be lost in copying or conforming. Mentors can also aid the development of the creative talent. Opportunity does not always knock in these ways. Sometimes the creative talent has to fight against obstacles that would seem insuperable to others; sometimes it is only recognised after death.

Of course, luck does play a part: meeting the right people; being encouraged; having the materials; being financially supported; being in the right place at the right time. Moreover, it’s important that the cultural milieu and ambience itself is sympathetic to the muse. The ambience of the society in which we live may act to encourage or to discourage the development of optimal situations that encourage creativity. The book and film ‘Billy Elliot’ explores this theme when a working-class boy struggles against small-mindedness to learn and practise ballet.
Opportunities may present themselves, but circumstances must be right for them to be taken up. Previously in the Western world, class and financial imperatives meant that the labourers in field and factory had little or no energy for creative thinking. In the 21st century there is a great deal more education and social mobility in the Western culture: people do not feel discouraged because they are in the peasant or working class, must be satisfied with this, and must work to survive.

Commercial success drives the 21st century western world, and creative talent is a significant element of this just as this is a significant driving force for the development and sustenance of such creativity. ‘In the art world, many artists do indeed believe that their means of life are owned by galleries, that their desires are governed by others (including what the market will support) and that inhuman forces decide the artists’ fate. The consequences of this kind of alienation are profound, and, for the individual working artist, the effort to avoid it is arduous.’ (Haynes 1997:39)

Theodor Adorno (1999) questioned the ways in which what he termed ‘the culture industry’ acted to disable rather than to enable the adherents (victims?) of the ubiquitous popular culture that has come to dominate Western life. Popular culture brought forward evanescent desires for objects that offered minimal growth to those who desired them. This desire, after all, was constructed by an industry, particularly the advertising, cinematic, and televisual ones, rather than arising from some felt need. He notes that it works against creativity whilst (and because of) simulating it.

**Lopping tall poppies**

Creativity arises from both formative experiences and constitutional proclivities: it is often undervalued and even feared by the culture itself and hence by individuals within the culture. This is the strongest element of the culture industry. It is seen in the mindless blogs and reality T.V. shows that pretend to be creative yet work to suppress and even kill off the muse: ‘When the artist is primarily an entertainer, attitudes of complacency, satisfaction, and acceptance of the status quo tend to be inculcated in the audience or viewer. The ramifications of the artist as prophetic critic and visionary move out in quite another direction.’ (Haynes 1997:22-3)

Privilege operates in our society in ways that enable some and disable others. Indirectly, this may result in ‘mute inglorious Miltons’. Certainly being in the right place at the right time and networking with influential people remains as much a necessity for the creative person today as it did in Florence in the 16th century. Creative people seldom control the outlet for their works. The ‘culture industry’ is controlled by big business, and it is big business. (Adorno) In the emphasis placed upon this, tall poppies are often lopped because they are not directly lucrative. This is clearly able to be seen in the publishing industry. Some highly respected published authors have re-submitted best-sellers to their publishers only to have them rejected!

Creative talent is very often seen as attention-seeking in a negative rather than positive way. A large part of creativity is the personal pleasure one derives from the creative act. This, in itself, is not sufficient for the creative person who also seeks to have ‘notice’ probably because this does replace again the earlier learned habits of not having ‘good relations with the caregiver’ that were either missing or transcended in
childhood. Umberto Eco says, for example, that the writer always writes for publication.

The creative talent must finalise and publish their artefact/knowledge/inspiration or it will perish. Talented people accept that they perform at a higher level. Shakespeare says of Marc Antony: ‘He shows his back dolphin-like above the crowd.’ In leaping high above the sea of the ordinary, just as a dolphin leaps above the water, gifted people must somehow learn to withstand the rivalry, envy and even fear that their abilities bring forth in others. ‘Cutting tall poppies’ is rife in our hypercritical world in this way but also through exploitation. Many reviewers are more concerned to display their own talents than to act in an empathic way regarding the works under review. Art dealers, for example, make or break visual artists. They keep prices up for the artists that they have in their ‘stables’. They ensure that art is a part of the commercial world through their contacts with clients, institutions, museums and publishers. In this way, they ensure that art ‘…fulfils collective social fantasies…’ (Haynes 133) but not that it moves beyond them, nor that it moves them forward in any significant way. This has become increasingly apparent, for example, with the popularisation of Australian Indigenous art. Unscrupulous dealers exploit the unsophisticated painters and turn their deeply held beliefs into production-line commodities.

Making and recovering from mistakes.

‘…we live and act in a contingent world. This means that profound uncertainty about the results of our actions is unavoidable. Despair and nihilism could and often do result from both our individual and collective confrontations with contingency… But even in the face of contingency and uncertainty, creativity-both in life and in art- does not end.’ (Haynes 1997:28)

No one is perfect. Perhaps the best example of this is the carpet: we would not tolerate a mistake, yet Arabian carpet makers introduce mistakes as only Allah is perfect. Yet in our society we more and more emphasise the machine-like dimensions of certainty and value and compare human endeavours quite unrealistically with the manufactured and the computerised. We speak of ‘replaying’ emotional feelings, of ‘hard-wiring’ in the brain and of ‘programming’ behaviours. As though facing the blank page or canvas, the stage or screen, the still or cinematic camera, the science laboratory or the room is not enough to induce a kind of creative paralysis, creativity in action also has to overcome jealousy, bitterness, insecurity and conservatism. ‘The manner in which any individual responds to creative paralysis is most likely to follow paths already trodden in previous difficulties.’ (Gedo 1996:120.) As well as all of these pressures, the creative ‘talent’ is almost always self-critical as they wrestle in their engagement with the cultural milieu in some individually driven artistic process that will ‘…make a difference.’ (Haynes 1997:24)

It is all too easy for a creative person to be paralysed through both internal and external pressures. Many writers are enabled by computerisation: many people have written/performed and made their own blogs. There is also a residual sense that computers are disabling towards human creativity in some very significant way. Karen Coyle reminds us that: ‘We’re supposed to use computers, not worship them’. (Cherny et al 1995:43)
Pleasure

Inner necessity is a powerful drive to develop the creative force. ‘The imagination always provides pictures of the world, of human life, and of the significant cultural symbols that help to orient life in the world.’ (Haynes 1997:27) Through looking through, around and beyond the ordinary, creative talent reaches to the extraordinary. In doing so, it lifts all in the culture as it lifts the culture itself. At heart, all creativity is an act of communication that makes possible and known that which was unperceived and even unperceivable previously. A clear case of this in the political arena was the first wave of feminism where the Pankhursts and their adherents brought women from a social and political repression that was then seen as normal.

The pleasure of creativity is something that we Europeans have constructed from a very particular viewpoint, and then…as is our wont…universalised. The American architect Frank Lloyd Wright damns this attitude when he reminds us that: ‘We have ruined more, wasted more, trampled on more than any civilisation the world has ever seen-in a short time, too.’ (Lind 1994:10) We need to think anew. As Jean-Francois Lyotard says in his discussions about truth, reality and metanarratives: ‘…we Westerners must re-work our space-time and all our logic on the basis of non-centralism, non-finality, non truth.’ (Lyotard. 1989:120) For example, Indigenous Australian ceremony is the creative work of the tribe in ways that confront our Western work ethics and incur political wrath. In their open letter to the Prime Minister in 2006, Donald Gumurdal, Philip Mikinjmikginj, and Jacob Nayinggul, traditional owners of Kuniwinjku country in Arnhem Land gently but firmly castigate him for his lack of knowledge and presumptuous assumptions. They are responding to assertions that ‘…spending months on ceremony doesn’t work in today’s culture’. For them, such an assertion ‘…is wrong. Our ceremony is part of our work. That’s why we call it ‘business’. In our country, in Arnhem Land, ceremony has continued uninterrupted for a very long time. It is important to our culture, our art and our moral beliefs….It takes a lot of organisation…Everyone has to work for ceremony business. Young kids are initiated to learn the hard rules; we don’t want them to stop. Trouble comes when you lose the culture….If ceremony is changed, if it is stopped, the art will stop too.’

There is a profound sense of alienation in postmodern western society: the artist confronts this by working with it through/as the past, the present and-most significantly-with the on-going. Jan Phillips has a rather more poetic and personal view of what it is to ‘marry your muse’: She abjures us to ‘…listen in a different way, a deeper way, to the voice within’ and states that creative people: ‘...listen for the soul of the thing we are about to create and come to a sense of the whole of it-not necessarily to have an image of it in our minds, but to have a sense of its fullness, to know the root of it, so that when we start to build, we may begin there, at its real core…To allow creation to occur within us is to expose ourselves to an ever-changing flow of truth and beauty. It is to practise the discipline of openness, to learn to trust, to dare to risk the surprises that emerge as the work evolves.’ (Phillips 1997:16)
The act of creativity.

A bourgeois culture, such as that identified in the ‘culture industry’ by Adorno, acts to absorb creativity by commercialising it as a sought-after attribute that participates in, for example, the education, art, museum, printing, publication and even decoration industries. This takes the edge off the challenging aspects of creativity by conventionalising it. In doing so, it stops the struggle against categorisation and definition and causes copying. Hence the culture is ratified rather than taken forward. For Deborah Haynes, creativity does not act merely through ‘...its own immanent logic.’, rather it links: ‘...aesthetic values, the moral imagination, and intellectual analysis.’ (Haynes 1997:23)

What, then, is creativity in the commodified 21st century? In the late capitalist economy the objects of desire, the yearning for the new, are increasingly related to money and fame. For the creative talent, these are not the intrinsic driving force, although they are seldom disdained. The truth remains, however, that the musician makes music, the painter paints, and the writer writes because they WANT to and they HAVE to far more than because this brings them money and fame. Indeed, it is often the opposite. Australian Nobel Prize winner for Literature, Patrick White said that he earned less than one shilling (ten cents) an hour from his writing. The Australian worker poet Shaw Neilsen struggled to survive as a labourer and yet wrote despite the exhaustion of his work as a navvy that brought survival wages only. Both enacted from the opposite sides of the social scale roles that are still of great value to our literary culture because they enable readers to understand ourselves and our world in new and productive ways. Their writings bring new insights and perceptions that enrich us as readers bringing the text to life in the 21st century.

Seeing creativity as a transformative almost sacred act, Jan Phillips talks of the need for a special place to begin the ‘journey inward’ that starts the creative project. (1997:23) She brings herself, with her gifts and weaknesses to the creative act, and hopes ‘...that in the process of creating, some shift will occur that transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary.’ (1997:28)

Jean Baudrillard (2005) reminds us that the transaction between the cultural objects of desire and the consumer society is not a simply interactivity. He says that ‘THERE ARE NO LIMITS TO CONSUMPTION’ (223. His higher case), implying that the objects of desire may have no aesthetic, moral or ethical value. They may indeed have no intrinsic value at all. It is not so much the objects that are desired as the thrill of the transaction: rather like shopping therapy. Furthermore, ‘Consumption is irrepressible, in the last reckoning, because it is founded upon a lack.’ (2005:224) What this raises for me is the spectre of the creative as an object of desire that has no inherent cultural value otherwise.

Art and/as social change.

In the process of creating, the artist must be outside the everyday life and in some way(s) transcending social ‘norms’, influences and conditions. It is creative thought and action that enables us to see the underlying ideologies that construct what we come to accept and understand as ‘real’. It is the subtle inquisition of the real so as to see how it is constructed around us and constructs each one of us that engages the
creative talent. Stepping outside the ‘givens’ whilst being formed by them and residing within them is no easy task. This is particularly so in advanced Western culture where the ‘norm’ has lead to high standards of living. Mass consciousness is thus pervaded with a sense of self-satisfaction, and art itself along with all aspects of creativity becomes yet another commodity. (Haynes 62)

Imaginative future possibilities arise from memories of and reflections upon the past itself. The aesthetic experience moves from the past through the present to the future. The creative talent does not necessarily effect change, but it does perceive the possibilities of what might happen through change. In the contemporary consumerist society, this is difficult to do, as in Terry Eagleton’s observations: ‘…contemporary culture industry appears as a gross caricature of the classical public sphere, drawing upon authentic personal experience, rearticulating it in its own idioms, and returning that message to its consumers in ways which lock them more deeply into a privatised world’ (1984:122)

Originality in thinking and action is not morally and ethically neutral; it is not only complex in itself, but it allows for and encourages complexity. However, there are many questions that are raised if we deify originality. Look, for example, at the inhuman Nazi medical experiments that were very original but totally immoral. In thinking about creativity and/as originality confronting and influencing social givens and mores, we cannot ignore the ethical and the moral. Eagleton has another provocative quotation to share on this matter: ‘Capital cannot speak’, writes Brenkman, ‘but it can accumulate and concentrate itself in communications media, events and objects which are imbued with this power to turn the discourses of collective experience into a discourse that reconstitutes intersubjectivity as seriality,’ (1984:122)

At its best and because it is not didactic, creativity is continually evolving, evoking pleasurable responses and even acting to entertain as it raises the reader/audience from where it is to where it might be. As it encourages forward reaching, it has the potential to be transformative not only in its enactment, but also in its impact and reception. The ‘normal’ spaces of the society are moved from seeking reality and reinforcement into a particular imaginative space that reveals possibilities and foreruns the everyday. Arising from non-conformist and even anarchic thinking, creative conceptualisation and action is r/evolutionary, and may even seem (or be) prophetic. ‘…art can be a powerful and subversive tool for changing personal consciousness and social conscience.’ (Haynes 67)

For us as writers, narratives occur and circulate in the culture and are brought to life in the text through the writing and the writerly-reading involved. There exists through the written text the significant ‘…process of rereading, of analysis and resignification…’ (Williams 1995:137). This occurs not only at each reading but more significantly I think in the original writing/reading. It occurs as the writer ‘reads’ in and against the world itself. It further occurs as the writer develops and edits the work. It occurs at its most culturally significant when published so that readers can in Roland Barthes’s sense ‘readerly-write’ the work.
Creativity in the 21st century postmodern world

At its core, postmodernism arises from a desire to confront and roll back the dominant stories or metanarratives of the advanced Western culture. It is in itself a very creative way of thinking about the ways in which we can identify and work against cultural dominants. It has led both to challenges to the desire to taxonomise and to breakdowns of categories that have arisen after the growth of science and the influence of Enlightenment thinking. By questioning the underlying ideologies and identifying assumptions that underpin our cultural metanarratives, such thinking does not seek to establish realities or to reproduce what is already known. Intrinsically anti-institutional, it leads to the fruitful and challenging juxtaposition of the diverse and the unexpected. It does not rely on what we have come to know as ‘logic’, because it is eclectic and non-sequential.

The postmodern world is also a postcolonial world. This has the possibility of contributing hugely to a creative understanding from the margins of the culture and/or from positions which both embrace the culture and see its repressive and even destructive nature in the performance of its presumptions very clearly. Postmodernism encourages cultural pluralism in this way, although it might, by its very nature of embeddedness within the western culture, also be unable to see this aspect of its own restrictiveness. Creative thought and actions take us beyond the time in which we live and look forward to what might be: in critiquing, parodying and/or ironising the dominant ideologies and practices, the creative talent results in opening up future possibilities. Also, in paying critical attention to the present, creative thinkers can show how this will effect the future if it continues as is.

The relationship of creativity to the new technologies gives rise to a great number of questions that are outside the scope of this paper, yet noted by it as it is in these areas that new communications and creativities occur.

The electronic text: virtual reality and creativity.

Deborah Haynes says that ‘...new media are changing the nature of art itself.’ (1997:45) She indicates that this is attacking the visual sensitivities because of an overload of images and sounds: ‘...the overstimulation of our visual and aural environments may mean that people no longer see or listen very well.’ It is true that there is little silence in our lives and that there is visual stimulus surrounding us everywhere from advertising hoardings to electronic maps in cars to home surround systems and theatres.

Helene Cixous has a very particular view of what it is to be a creative writer who evokes through the silence of words on the page the lived experience. For her, the act of writing is one of the greatest acts of creation that makes her feel like attempting a portrait of God. ‘Of the God. Of what escapes us and makes us wonder. Of what we do not know but feel. Of what makes us live. I mean our own divinity, awkward, twisted, throbbing our own mystery-we who are lords of this earth and do not know it, we who are touches of vermilion and yellow cadmium in the haystack (Kandinsky’s words on seeing Monet) and do not see it, we who are the eyes of this world and so often do not even look at it, we sho could be the painters, the poets, the artists of life if
only we wanted to; we who could be the lovers of the universe, if we really wanted to use our hands with mansuetude, who so often use our booted feet to trample the world’s belly.’ (in Haynes. 1997:237-8)

Do we ‘...use our booted feet to trample the world’s belly...’ when we use technology for our creative endeavours? Engaging reader, writer and enactor in interactivity and 3 dimensionality, the electronic text produces a simulacra that is now familiar as ‘virtual reality’. Shannon McCrae says that: ‘Virtual existence has become so immediate that what constitutes reality has become a very complicated question.’ (in Cherny et al 1976:243)

The new technologies confront us with an art that may be quite transitory: ‘Art created using newer media, including performance, installation, video and electronic imaging...exist in non-object form...in transcripts, tapes and in cyberspace.’ (Haynes. 1997:45)

When we insulate ourselves from nature, from people, from reality in the virtual world of the electronic media, how might we answer Haynes’s plaintive question: ‘...is a life lived through the screen really a life at all?’ (1997:256)

Creative PhD

The artefact and exegesis PhD in Writing at Swinburne University of Technology

The PhD by artefact and exegesis comprises a creative work and an exegesis (a scholarly essay) that articulates, frames and contextualizes the artefact. The candidate should always follow their own path in developing both their artefact and their exegesis, but these introductory notes provide a guideline. The artefact and exegesis PhD in Writing is often referred to as the practice-led research (PLR) doctorate. PLR is now an established model across the creative arts, with studio-based, artefact-based and even action-based doctorates, often favoured over traditional research. The artefact and the exegesis must interact in some ways to show that the different authorial voices in the two elements draw them together, that they ‘talk to each other’ as Practice Led Research. It should be evident that the two elements were done in tandem over the course of the candidature.

The application proposal

The initial application proposal is a provisional plan. There are specific guidelines on the research website that indicate a proposal should:

- identify the project and some initial issues involved
- indicate some methodology and theoretical influences
- contain a robust scholarly initial bibliography indicating that the applicant has started to read in the area.

In order to present a proposal, it is useful to view the enquiry as praxis, i.e., as an ongoing movement between what is known and what will be revealed.
This staging part of the whole research project can be viewed as a provisional plan the PhD. The proposal typically answers the following questions:

- Where does the artefact fit in the market place?
- What is the topic to be investigated?
- What are the specific areas of interest and what ideas and positions have other practitioners taken in relation to these?
- How does the project relate to previous practice and theory in the field?
- What is the research question or hypothesis?
- What is the research objective, or what will be achieved at the end of the process?
- What is the thesis or main argument?
- How will this be developed in the exegesis?
- What voice should the exegesis adopt and why?

The Artefact

The Artefact offers Swinburne writing PhD students the opportunity to produce a substantial piece of work in the artefact (approximately an 80,000 word text or the equivalent in its genre or form) that is suitable for publication.

The artefact may be in one of the following broad genre categories or may include a number of them:

- creative writing (for example, a novel, a screenplay, a multimedia production, a book of poetry, a stage play)
- creative non-fiction (memoir, travel writing, reflective essays)
- research writing (for example, a scholarly book; a series of scholarly papers)
- curriculum writing (for example, a major curriculum plan, a textbook, a series of subject guides)
- business writing (for example, a company report; occupational health and safety; advertising manuals, strategies and guidelines)
- Visual text (for example, games; photographs; artworks; multimedia)

The artefact will drive the PhD journey as it is the major part of the project and it leads to the research through practice.

Data collection: the reflective journal

Candidates are required to keep a journal detailing their progress in conceptualising and creative the artefact. The writing journal that the candidate keeps is particularly useful as a self-reflective document upon practice in the first year of candidacy. In keeping this journal the candidate will see that certain issues arise regularly. These may encompass such things as ‘voice’; ‘ideal audience’; dialogue; ‘narrative non-fiction’; ‘genre’; ‘plot development’ or ‘characterisation’ (etc). These will enable the
candidate to identify sections of the exegesis: they will act as sub-heads and as entry points into the academic discussion about such matters. Such sections will not necessarily fit into some of the suggestions that follow.

A body of discussion and criticism thus builds upon such reflections made during the writing process in the writing journal, which writers often see as their ‘studio’. The journal may welcome personal, even intimate, comments. However, its main usefulness is in recording ideas pertinent to the making and analysis of the creative work, the survey of the theoretical field and the inquiry into the methodology. Students may find it helpful to keep a first and second order journal: one focusing on personal reflections, the other on academic issues such as scholarly discussions, refereed articles and scholarly books.

One of the crucial questions to be addressed in practice-led research is: ‘What did the writing journal reveal that could not have been revealed by any other form of enquiry?’ An analysis of the journal necessarily entails an analysis of the creative process and its significant moments. This is in fact the impetus of the exegesis. It is also a means of locating the work within the field of practice and theory.

The Exegesis

The exegesis accompanying the creative artefact should be approximately 20,000-30,000 words. It explores and clarifies the purpose and methodology of the creative artefact from experiential and theoretical viewpoints.

For most practitioners, this is the most difficult aspect of this PhD model.

The exegesis is best written when the artefact and the journal are well under way. The body of the exegesis typically addresses the following points:

- Context of practice: materials and methods, i.e., what was done to answer the question driving the artefact.
- Context of theory: conceptual frameworks, literature review and practice review, i.e., locates the research in the field of practice and theory.
- Outcomes: discusses what was revealed in the process of inquiry. Discussion of creative and research process as documented in the journal.
- Discussion and analysis of the artefact.
- Significance: articulates broader application of findings and reiterates the value of practice as production of knowledge.

There is no single pattern or model for an exegesis. Each exegetical journey is singular and will develop from the process of writing the artefact, from the writing journal that the candidate has kept particularly in the first year of candidacy.

The exegesis explores:

- the artefact itself
• the candidates’ genre readings that offer insights into published work that the artefact might sit beside in a bookshop. This enables candidates to discuss their work in relationship to other writers’ publications.
• readings of other writers’ observations: many writers have written or lectured upon their own experiences of the writing process and these observations take you into a discussion about how a genre operates from the creators’ perspectives.
• relevant updated refereed academic readings. Academic readings bring the practice into the arena of research and enable the candidate to both participate in and develop further the academic discussions about issues that have arisen through the process of production and through reflections upon that process.

Conclusion

Much postmodernist thinking is concerned with highlighting, considering and questioning how we construct our world through metanarratives and representations that, as constructions, can be fruitfully unpacked or, in Derrida’s word, ‘deconstructed’. We bring our ideas and our observations together in language to express and communicate. Donald Gumurdal, Philip Mkinjmikginj, and Jacob Nayinggul, traditional owners of Kuniwinjku country in Arnhem Land in their 2006 ‘open letter to the Prime Minister and the people of Australia’ confront us with our own inabilities to look at our culture as a construction by challenging us to understand how their very ancient culture has been and is constructed: ‘The Federal Government has said that it wants to change the way we live here on our land. No one has asked. We, the traditional owners of the Kunwinjku country of Arnhem Land, ask them to leave us alone.’ Is it possible for the dominant western culture to leave anyone or anything alone? Can the same be said for the creative mind? Is creativity always confronting what IS to see how it is and how it might/could be?

Culture exists as a network of meaning. It is enacted by its participants, and creatively held by being taken forward by certain people who can think and act galvanically so as to fruitfully critique the past and the present to lead to a dynamic future. Just as culture is ideological, so is creativity arising from fruitful criticism. Many postmodernist thinks say that there is no anterior position: that we are all caught up in the same networks of cultural meaning whether we accept them or critique and even attempt to reject them. In a sense, the creative thinker is always outside the culture that s/he resides in: a paradox that creates its own energy. Todd may reminds us that: ‘...a narrow view of what living consists in needlessly constrains our conception of future possibilities.’ (2005:23)

Is it possible that since 9/11 there has been such a backlash against the critical perspectives of theories that arose in the late 20th century (such as Postmodernism, Feminism, Postcolonialism and Queer Theory) that neoconservatism has succeeded in paralysing the fragmentation and dispersal of cultural imperatives that were offered? ‘We live in a culture of increasing right-wing conservatism. Various forms of backlash-neofascism, anti-Semitism, and fierce racism, along with anti-feminism and misogyny-are on the rise. All of these are rooted in a profound anti-intellectualism, a point of view that rejects self-reflection and critical analysis.’ (Haynes 247)
Has the ‘War on Terror’ so alienated our culture from the acceptance of creative critique that creativity itself is under threat? Or is a certain anti-creativity always inherent in late capitalist practices? Certainly, unless creative work resides within the commercialisation of the culture industry, it is difficult to find acceptance and make a livelihood from it. Singer Nelly Furtado thinks that ‘...the corporisation of culture has muted people’s willingness to accept alternative viewpoints.’ says entertainment reporter Daniel Ziffer in writing up his interview of her. The singer herself says that she: ‘...used to think that I could change the world show by show, but I don’t think that any more...I think that the spirit of what artists do can still inspire a young person to maybe live their lives a different way, or maybe change their attitude into a more positive one, but I don’t think revolution can be made through music any more...’ (Ziffer 2006:4) In what ways can we be experimental in a world where physical, cultural and commercial security is paramount? ‘How we think about our world and how we live in it are entwined...If things don’t have strict borders of identity and if relations among them are not reducible to natural laws, then we can no longer be sure of what a body is capable of...The only way to find out is to experiment.’ (May 2005:72) When I am thinking about creativity and/as writing, I am always thinking of the writer as an experimenter in whatever genre s/he chooses to write.

Experimentation means pushing against the limits, extending the boundaries, seeing beyond what is and was to what might be. Even as we see the fragility of language, we also see its robustness as a tool for experiments, for communication, for disruption towards a new definition that is always under erasure. For us as writers using language, Gilles Deleuze can always surprise and startle such as when he says that ‘It is language which fixes the limits...but it is language as well which transcends the limits and restores them to the infinite equivalence of an unlimited becoming.’ (May 2005:109)

In the early 21st century, it is timely to pay attention to creativity, to nurture and value it, to allow it and more than that, to rejoice in it even as it may/must assault our sense of logic and/or challenge our sense of knowing. Central to creativity is to acknowledge one’s ignorance in the sense that such ignorance is the brave capacity to admit to not-knowing and to allow insights to develop. ‘Every struggle is a function of all these undecidable propositions and constructs revolutionary connections in opposition to the conjunctions of the axiomatic.’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:473. Their emphases.)

Less academically, but I think more poignantly and pointedly, the playwright Stephen Sewell sees creativity as being the core of humanity. In his article discussing the ‘...end of history’, he claims that it is the creatives who can save the world from the last theatrical appearance of man on a stage of an earth made by us too debased for our children to live upon. ‘...it is the artists in any field who are capable of using the materials and techniques available to them to imaginatively recreate the world in which we live...for living is a hard thing, requiring considerably more than food and shelter, requiring meaning, and with meaning, hope’ (2006:12). He says that as artists are the source of this hope, their stories should be cherished, not buried in cultural metanarratives that are at heart hopeless. Above all, he reminds us that we must cherish the planet in a creative and loving way, for if our ecological damage persists, and an ‘...eternal night falls upon us, then everything we’ve thought, dreamt, painted,
sung, Imagined, hoped for, written about, drew or sculpted will be so much rubbish littering a fly blown planet.' (2006:13)

For each of us as creative writers, this is a stark reminder of the power of creativity and the need to be true to it whatever the immediate cost in a culture that has grown very careless of creativity.

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