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The creative practitioner in South African higher education: Practice and scholarship in conversation and flux

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This article examines the position of creative practitioners working in South African tertiary education, with specific focus on the scope and impact of the 2017 *Policy on the Evaluation of Creative Outputs and Innovations produced by South African Public Higher Education Institutions*. I argue that, although the policy is a welcome development, several fundamental issues related to creative work, definitions of knowledge, differences between 'pure practice', artistic research and academic research and the position of creative work in the knowledge economy are not adequately addressed in the policy. Furthermore there are several instances, I argue, where the policy exposes biases towards certain disciplines and sub-disciplines, and shows a significant lack of consistency in terms of the evaluation of outputs in different fields. I probe the question of whether creative and academic work should be considered as equally valuable within academe, and if so, what the implications of such a position could be for creative practitioners working in South African tertiary education.

Keywords: tertiary education, creative practitioners, evaluation of creative outputs, policy

Background

Higher education in South Africa has undergone many essential and positive developments since the beginning of democracy in 1994, and educational reform has featured in several of the country's development and transformation policies (Badsha and Cloete 2011; Cloete 2014; Mzanga 2019).[1] Transformation agendas have been driven by commitments to redress and restitution in the aftermath of apartheid, and significant changes in the South African higher education landscape have occurred in areas such as student diversity and inclusivity, expansion and development of curricula and infrastructure development for formerly disadvantaged institutions. According to Mouton et al (2013, 285):

> Change within tertiary education included adjusting the size and shape of institutions, the meaning of autonomy and accountability, the nature of higher education, the character of student demographic distribution, management and governance, roles of student politics, models of delivery, the notion of higher education in terms of the relationship between free trade and public good, programme changes and the nature of the academic workplace.

An important development during the early 2000s was the consolidation of all former tertiary education institutions, including technical colleges, colleges of education, 'technikons' and universities into a single system whereby all state-funded post-secondary education institutions came to be referred to as 'universities', able to award degrees as well as diplomas.[2] Currently, there are 26 public higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa, divided into three categories: traditional universities, which offer theoretically-oriented university degrees; universities of technology, which offer vocationally-oriented diplomas and degrees; and comprehensive universities, which offer a combination of both types of qualification (Bunting and Cloete 2010). A more detailed schema is provided by Bunting and Cloete (2010):

1 See, for example the White Paper on Higher Education: a programme for the transformation of higher education (Department of Education 1997); A Framework for Transformation (National Commission on Higher Education 1996); Department of Education National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education 2001); DHET Green paper for post-school education and training (DHET 2012).

2 'Technikon' is a term that has been in use since 1979, when former 'Colleges of Technical Education' were renamed under the 'Advanced Technical Education Amendment Act' (Winberg 2005). Technikons provided technical training to meet the needs of commerce and industry, and typically offered diplomas rather than degrees; only in 1993 with the 'Technikon Act' did it become possible for technikons to become degree-awarding institutions (Winberg 2005: 193). Former technikons have been renamed as 'Universities of Technology'.

> Universities: offer basic formative degrees such as BA & BSc, and professional undergraduate degrees such as BSc Eng and MBChB; at postgraduate level offer honours degrees, and range of masters and doctoral degrees. Universities of technology: offer mainly vocational or career-focused undergraduate diplomas, and BTech which serves as a capping qualification for diploma graduates. Offers limited number of masters and doctoral programmes. Comprehensive universities: offer programmes typical of university as well as programmes typical of university of technology.

These types of universities, although different in terms of their areas of specialisation, remain subject to the same principles and directives determined by government and administered through the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

Post-secondary qualifications in the creative and performing arts, which often include a significant vocational or practical component in the course structure and qualifications frameworks, are offered not only by universities of technology but also by traditional and comprehensive universities. Currently, 20 of the 26 public HEIs offer degrees and/or diplomas in this field.[3]Six of these institutions offer degrees and diplomas in the creative and performing arts, but only at undergraduate level.[4] The remaining 14 universities offer undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in creative and performing arts disciplines: Tshwane University of Technology and Cape Peninsula University of Technology; the University of the Witwatersrand, Stellenbosch University, University of Cape Town, University of Pretoria, Rhodes University, Northwest University, University of KwaZulu Natal, University of the Free State, Fort Hare University (all designated as theoretically-oriented institutions or simply 'universities' in the language used by Bunting and Cloete); and three comprehensive universities: Nelson Mandela University, University of South Africa and University of Johannesburg. This information reveals that practical components of creative and performing arts disciplines are taught not only at institutions that specialise in vocational training, but also alongside academic content at theoretically focused and comprehensive universities. Interestingly, the majority of institutions that offer degrees and particularly postgraduate degrees in this field are 'theoretically-oriented'

3 The six institutions that do not offer creative or performing arts specialisations are the University of Limpopo, Sefako Makgatho University, Walter Sisulu University, Sol Plaatje University, Mangosuthu University of Technology and the University of Mpumalanga.

4 These include the University of Zululand, University of Venda, Central University of Technology, Vaal University of Technology, Durban University of Technology and University of the Western Cape.

universities, and not universities of technology (nine universities offer degrees in the creative and performing arts, while only five universities of technology do so).

This article examines the field of creative and performing arts and its various disciplines in the context of tertiary education in South Africa, with specific focus on the 2017 *Policy on the Evaluation of Creative Outputs and Innovations produced by South African Public Higher Education Institutions*. I trace the origins and development of the policy, suggesting that part of the motivation for this policy can be traced to the complex role played by creative practitioners in academe. Creative practitioners working in South African universities have long held a complex position within tertiary education structures (see Lucia 2005; Schmahmann 2011; Tomaselli 2018).[5] As mentioned above, state-funded post-secondary education institutions in South Africa currently subscribe to a university model, often with a strong focus on research and tuition in mainly non-vocational subjects which culminate in academic degrees in various disciplines. Creative and Performing Arts departments in universities are exceptions, offering high levels of vocational training in specific arts practices together with academic content. Course offerings typically culminate in an undergraduate degree, balanced between practical and academic work; 14 of the 26 higher education institutions offer postgraduate degrees in the arts as well, and of these nine universities allow for practical components in their postgraduate degree offerings.

The South African government rewards universities through financial subsidy according to their traditional research output (articles published in accredited peer-reviewed journals, books, book chapters and peer-reviewed conference proceedings); as a result, all university employees are under pressure to sustain a measure of research productivity (Schmahmann 2011, 29). Financial rewards are also provided for the graduation of postgraduate students. Creative practitioners are often employed in universities primarily for their vocational expertise and are active mostly as practical teachers in their respective disciplines; as will be shown below, these individuals often do not produce much traditional research, and thus can find themselves under pressure to respond to research and academic output imperatives typical of the functioning of traditional university models. Since only nine universities offer doctoral degrees that allow for a practical component to be included in the degree outcome, graduation of postgraduate students can become another area where creative practitioners are often unable to contribute. Creative practitioners, unless they are also publishing research output and graduating students with postgraduate degrees (where they can act as practical but also academic supervisors), are often not able to contribute to the financial

5 Similar situations exist internationally. See, for example, Boehm 2016; Blom, Bennet and Wright 2011; Elkins 2009; Schippers 2014; Wilson 2017.

welfare of their departments to the same degree as academics who produce traditional research. For many creative practitioners, entry into full citizenship of the academy has been complicated by the ambivalent position of the arts within South African university structures (see Lucia 2005; Mbali 2010; Olivier 2009; Schmahmann 2011; Tomaselli 2018).

A response to these complexities that has emerged over the past two decades in Europe and the United Kingdom (UK) is a type of research that strives to integrate practical and theoretical components in research paradigms and teaching approaches. Referred to by various nomenclatures such as 'practice-based research', 'practice-led research' and 'artistic research',[6] this approach suggests that practical and theoretical knowledge could be viewed as integrated and mutually informative, and that creative work should form a central part of a research methodology in such projects (see for example Biggs 2011; Borgdorff 2012; Coessens et al 2009; Hannula et al 2005; Klein 2010; Rubidge 2005; Sullivan 2010). Over the last two decades (at least), artistic research has become established as a practice in many parts of Europe and the UK.[7] Several tertiary institutions now offer focused programmes in artistic research,[8] and a number of academic, peer-reviewed journals for artistic research have also emerged, including the *Journal for Artistic Research*; *Ruukku*; *Journal of Embodied Research*; *Sonic Studies*; and *VIS: Nordic Journal for Artistic Research*. International conferences focusing on artistic research outputs are also by now ubiquitous. Despite these international developments, artistic research remains as yet still relatively underdeveloped in South Africa. A detailed investigation into possible reasons for this lacuna falls outside the scope of the present article, but it is worth noting that institutional support for the development of artistic research has been fundamental to the proliferation of this type of research in Europe, the UK and Australia. Unless similar commitments are made by South African institutions – commitments supported by the DHET, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and other regulatory bodies – it is doubtful that artistic research will develop along similarly positive lines as is the case internationally. Artistic research enables viable possibilities for creative

6 This latter term is most commonly used in my own discipline, music.

7 Australia has also become an important contributor to artistic research, although arguably the reasons for the development of this type of research are not the same as those of Europe and the UK. For more information on the emergence of artistic research in Australia, see Schippers et al 2017.

8 Some examples include: University of Applied Arts Vienna in Vienna, Austria; the Orpheus Institute in Ghent, Belgium; University of the Arts in Helsinki, Finland; Oslo National Academy of the Arts in Oslo, Norway; Gothenburg University in Gothenburg, Sweden; Technische Universität Berlin; Leiden University in Leiden, The Netherlands. See also http://www.sharenetwork.eu/images/products/5/1-emerging-models-for-artistic-research-across-europe.pdf

practitioners to make significant contributions as researchers in the academy; I would argue that focused engagement with this research type could be to the benefit of artists and academics across the board.[9]

I want to posit that, if one does not engage an artistic research paradigm, there are two main ways of conceptualising creative work in academe. On the one hand one could argue that creative work should be supported and rewarded *as research*: this argument is endorsed by many creative practitioners employed in South African academia (and elsewhere), who cite the several similarities in terms of (for example) process and rigour that are features of both traditional forms of research and creative work. Another viewpoint is that the DHET should reward 'pure practice' outputs generated by university employees in arts fields: the argument is that the value of creative and artistic work should be recognised and rewarded on its own merit, *as art*, and not according to parameters related to research output. Put differently, this position assumes equivalence of creative work and research output, that these two types of output should be approached as equally valuable within the knowledge economy and rewarded accordingly, even though they are inherently different.[10]

These perspectives raise interesting philosophical questions (and different bureaucratic implications for university management). A critique of the first point of view – that art should be recognised as a form of research – is provided by Gerrit Olivier, former Head of the Wits School of Arts. Reflecting on the *Creative outputs workshop* hosted by the University of Stellenbosch from 17-19 August 2007, Olivier states the following (Olivier 2009):

> A fair degree of consensus was reached [during the 2007 meeting] that practitioners in the field of the visual, performing and literary arts should seek national recognition for peer-reviewed outputs as research. This would bring the present system of the Department

9 In Europe in particular the historic division between institutions of higher education that specialise in either academic or vocational training – universities, and conservatories and art schools – has over the past two decades been challenged, in part because of the Bologna accord of 1999, but likely also because of a general trend towards transformation in education philosophy. Many European education institutions (including Great Britain) such as art schools and conservatoires specialising in the visual and performing arts that formerly conferred diplomas rather than academic degrees have developed their programmes to now also offer academic content and postgraduate qualifications such as Masters and Doctoral degrees (Borgdorff 2012; Crispin 2015). A positive result of these developments has been the emergence of artistic research (also referred by a variety of other terms, such as practice-lead, practice-based, practice-as and creative research): under an artistic research

10 For various engagements with these different positions, see Coessens et al 2009; Croft 2015; Farber 2009; Olivier 2009; Riley and Hunter 2009; Schmahmann 2011).

> of Higher Education and Training (DHET), which restricts research to 'textual output', into accordance with policies and practices in countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia where the desirability of recognising a wide range of outputs is no longer debated.

He goes on however to critique the notion that art can or should be seen as a form of research (Olivier 2009):

> Two common sense assertions underpin my argument. Firstly, Jan Vermeer's *View on Delft* or Ludwig von Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* is not appreciated as research in the first instance, no matter how much research may have gone into the making of these works, or how much research could be *shown* to have gone into them. Art, even bad art, occupies a domain that is peculiar to itself … 'Creative output' can incorporate, flow from, be based on or lead to research, but in the final analysis it remains something *different from* research.

Olivier argues that artworks should not be 'packaged as' or made to conform to research outputs in other fields of enquiry. His assumption is that 'those interested in formal recognition for creative work are ideally seeking recognition for work that results from legitimate and widely accepted (and expected) professional and creative practices in their areas of specialisation' (Olivier 2009: 3); this (in his view) should ensure that artworks and other forms of creative output could be evaluated and rewarded on their merit *as works of art*, without having to be reconceptualised as forms of research output. Olivier's position seems to support the second strand of argumentation posited above: creative output and research can and should be accepted as equally valuable in the academy, without creative work needing to be conceptualised or presented as research output. Olivier also points out that the peer-review system on which the DHET subsidy policies heavily rely can be applied to creative outputs as well.

Since Olivier's writing in 2009, there have been major developments that have had an impact on these debates. Universities are increasingly introducing masters and doctoral programmes that make provision for 'creative research' (the nomenclature for these approaches varies considerably according to different institutions); some universities are actively engaging and supporting artistic research (again, identified by various terminology); and the DHET's outlook on subsidising of creative output is also substantially changing. In 2017, the *Policy on the Evaluation of Creative Outputs and Innovations produced by South African Public Higher Education Institutions* was officially accepted by the DHET, and its implementation is now immanent, with the first subsidy applications having gone

under review in November 2019. The policy itself will receive its first review in 2021. I will posit in this paper however that, although a very welcome development, the policy fails to address some of the fundamental complexities that influence the position of creative work in the academy. I turn now to a critique of the policy in terms of questions of quality; issues of peer-review and disciplinary divergences; and the roles of scholarly and creative output in the knowledge economy.

The 2017 policy on the evaluation of creative outputs and innovations

On 28 April 2017, the Minister of Higher Education and Training Blade Nzimande promulgated the *Policy on the Evaluation of Creative Outputs and Innovations produced by South African Public Higher Education Institutions*. The document states that the purpose of the policy is (DHET 2017: 4):

> ...to recognise and reward quality creative outputs and innovations produced by public higher education institutions. Recognised creative outputs are divided into the following subfields, namely: Fine Arts and Visual Arts, Music, Theatre, Performance and Dance, Design, Film and Television and Literary Arts.

Developed by the DHET in collaboration with the CHE, the policy acknowledges that not all legitimate and worthwhile academic practices are covered under the categories of masters and doctoral graduates or published textual research outputs – the only categories that until recently were considered for government subsidy. The rationale for the recognition and reward of creative outputs and innovations by university staff is foregrounded in several government documents that precede the 2017 policy; these include the *White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* of 1997; the *National Plan for Higher Education* of 2001; the 2011 *National Development Plan*; and the *White Paper for Post-school Education and Training* of 2013. The 2017 policy refers to several indications in these earlier policy documents of the need to broaden the scope of research and innovation, in order for South African knowledge institutions to become more inclusive and comprehensive and to ultimately enhance the country's global competitiveness. The 2017 policy for the peer-review and reward of creative outputs is ostensibly an answer to this imperative.

The policy has a fairly long history. The DHET has in the past been criticised for financially rewarding scholarly output in the form of articles in accredited journals, chapters in books, monographs and peer-reviewed conference proceedings while making no provision for the subsidising of creative work generated within the university sector. As mentioned above, university employees who are highly

productive in creative arts fields but less in traditionally accepted academic settings therefore have had no way to generate government subsidy for their departments, and their perceived lack of 'research productivity' has arguably been a factor that negatively influenced some career trajectories. In response to these criticisms, the DHET in 2010 established a working group to develop instruments and processes to enable the subsidising of creative work (Schmahmann 2011: 29).[11] The *Report of the Ministerial Committee for the Review of the Funding of Universities* published by the DHET in October 2013, states (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET] 2013: 39):

> Research outputs from the performing, creative and visual arts should be funded. The review of these outputs should be done by an internal panel at each university and, once approved, should be submitted to a DHET panel. The DHET should include a number of international representatives to benchmark outputs and to provide quality assurance.

Notably the language here specifies *research outputs* from these arts fields. Elsewhere in the same document it is however stated (DHET 2013: 302):

> There is widespread support for the recognition of outputs from the performing, creative and visual arts. Creative works that are subjected to public criticism, entered into the record for public scrutiny and use, and make a contribution to the advancement of the knowledge in the field, are equivalent to research. The difficult part of the comparison is to decide upon equivalence and consequently the research output units.

Here the position seemingly shifts to endorse the idea of equal value of creative work and research outputs, moving away from the notion that creative work and research are ontologically the same. This discrepancy in the 2013 document, I will show, also permeates the 2017 policy – there is alarmingly little clarity concerning divergence or similarity in terms of creative output and research.

Despite these developments, the 2015 DHET *Research Outputs Policy* again confirmed that only traditional textual research output would be considered for subsidy (DHET 2015a: 5):

> For the purposes of subsidy, the policy recognises research in journals, books and published conference proceedings which

11 I have been unable to procure a copy of this report, which was as far as I can ascertain not made public. One could perhaps assume that the report had been concluded by 2013 and incorporated into the 2013 *Report of the Ministerial Committee for the Review of the Funding of Universities* referred to above, but I have not been able to officially confirm this.

> meet the specified criteria outlined in this policy. The focus of subsidy is on scholarly publishing which refers to publications by scholars (academics and experts) for a niche market consisting mainly of academics and researchers (not normally students).

Interestingly, in the same year the DHET published a *Draft Policy on the Evaluation of Creative Outputs and Innovations Produced by Public Higher Education Institutions* (DHET 2015b). The 2015 draft policy has many similarities to the 2017 version, but also some significant deviations, some of which will be pointed to in this essay. The following section addresses key questions related to aspects of the policy.

Scholarliness, creative output and questions of quality

It is interesting to note that much of the 2017 creative outputs policy, especially in its description of purpose, scope and principles, makes reference to creative outputs inasmuch as they will potentially contribute to knowledge generation or are recognisable as scholarly endeavours. There are several examples. In the 'Background' section of the policy it is stated that the DHET developed the 2017 policy specifically to include '*scholarly* outputs from the creative and performing arts'. Number 12 in the policy document under 'Principles' states that 'This policy aims to support and encourage *scholarship*'; number 20 of the policy, under the heading 'Creative Outputs', states that peer reviewers must be found who are able to assess 'submissions by creative practitioners working in a *scholarly* framework'. Number 65 states: 'This policy allows for a three-year submission cycle, which means a researcher has up to three years from the time the work first appeared in the public domain to submit it for accreditation' – note the use of the term 'researcher', rather than 'creative practitioner'. Number 70 in the policy indicates that applications also have to include a framing statement that sets out, among other things, 'the conceptual and *scholarly* framework in which the output should be heard'.[12]

For music specifically, under the designation 'Music Composition' reference is made to the 'research-informed or scholarly, discursive intent' of the output; the term 'research-informed practice' is also used in the 'solo performance', group performance' and 'conducting/directing' categories. The term 'research-informed' is also used in reference to outputs in Film and Television; no mention of 'scholarliness' is made in other categories.

12 All italics used are my own.

The use of these terms in connection with notions of 'quality' as initially stated in the policy – its stated purpose being 'to reward quality creative outputs' – has interesting implications. Bearing in mind the several indications of scholarly pursuit in relation to creative outputs one could argue that the definition of 'quality', as recognised in this policy, is viewed in terms of the potential of creative outputs to constitute research and generate new knowledge. The emphasis on 'scholarliness' of creative output seems to suggest that the DHET does not wish to reward 'pure practice' outputs; rather, the approach seems to connect to practices employed in for example the UK. Linda Candy and Ernest Edmonds point out that (Candy and Edmonds 2011: 132):

> In general, the Arts and Humanities Research Council [of the United Kingdom] defines research in relation to process and does so in terms of what a description of research must contain. Three key elements are listed: questions or issues, context and methods (AHRC 2009: 66). They specifically state that creative outputs or practice can be included but are careful to delineate the cases that would count as research as against pure practice and require documentation of the research process and a textual analysis or explanation that demonstrates critical reflection.

The AHRC seems to clearly distinguish between pure practice and research that includes some forms of creative work. In this sense, it seems likely that examples of artistic research (where scholarly practice is integrated with creative work) are more likely to be rewarded than creative work with no accompanying textual evidence of research processes. The South African policy does not explicitly state whether it endorses types of research such as 'practice-lead' or 'practice-based' research - or any of the types of research that can be grouped together as 'artistic research' – yet there does seem to be evidence that the DHET will support creative output only inasmuch these outputs provide evidence of scholarly activity. The wording of much of the policy seems to indicate the notion of 'quality' in terms of creative outputs will be considered contingent on evidence of scholarly method accompanying the creative work.

It has been consistently claimed by some creative practitioners that quality creative output is always already indicative of a research process having taken place, and that textual framing or exposition of such processes are superfluous.[13] Whether this research is articulated in a discursive manner and therefore accessible outside the individual experience of the practitioner, and whether

13 This assertion is strongly stated by Coessens, Crispin and Douglas (2009); it is also addressed in several chapters of *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, particularly the chapters by Torsten Kalvermark, Henk Borgdorff, Morwenna Griffiths and Jenn Webb (Biggs and Karlsson 2011).

it can therefore be said to constitute shareable new insights and knowledge, remains disputed, but what does seem fundamental to the policy is that creative work will be required to be accompanied by some form of textual explication or exegesis in order to qualify for subsidy – pure practice will not be rewarded. The relationship between the policy's primary statement of purpose and its definitions of 'quality' is therefore rather opaque – individual applications for subsidy will likely bring this opacity into sharp focus.

Peer review, quality indicators and disciplinary divergences

The policy provides an initial framework for peer-review of creative outputs; this has been added to through workshops and additional documentation generated during 2019 and more comprehensive guidelines are now available (DHET 2019). According to subsection 63.5 in the document it will be the responsibility of individual institutions to verify that the applications for subsidy underwent 'a rigorous peer-review process' (DHET 2017: 23). The criteria for this process are founded on three main principles (DHET 2017: 5):

> *Originality*: whether the output contributes to fresh understanding and/or conceptual or stylistic, thematic or conceptual innovation in the discipline; and
>
> *Relevance*: whether the work demonstrates an intellectually and creatively informed response to the subject; and
>
> *Newness*: should be understood to indicate a given work that has never been accredited for subsidy before.

Clearly, the burdens of proof of originality, relevance and newness will be innately different according to each of the disciplines. An exhibition in the fine arts field, for example, is constituted of newly created objects or configurations of existing objects, arguably rendering the product original in and of itself (although not necessarily when judged in broader contexts of art criticism). In music, theatre or dance it is often the case that a pre-existing text is interpreted and performed or staged, which complicates judgements of originality to some extent. A dance performance of, for example, *Pierrot Lunaire*, with music by Arnold Schönberg and choreographed by Glen Tetley in 1962, conforms to the exact step specifications determined and notated by Tetley; a dancer reproduces steps already determined, although each performer provides an original rendition of the text by virtue of their individual performance style, physicality and personality. An understanding of originality clearly differs depending on which discipline is involved. Arguably a question of degree is important here: the degree of originality a performer brings to the contemporary rendition of a work (in the

case of performance) or the degree of originality of a new artefact (even though it may clearly be indebted to other arts traditions) is what must be considered in peer review processes.

The policy provides 'criteria for assessment' for each category. These criteria diverge significantly between disciplines, and at times seem at odds with other parts of the policy. I examine each of the six categories individually.

Fine and visual arts outputs

According to the criteria, single works in group exhibitions may not have been shown previously; in the case of exhibitions, the majority of the work has to be new and not previously submitted for accreditation. This is in line with the policy's stipulation regarding 'newness'. Other requirements are that the work must generate new knowledge or understanding; have contemporary relevance; be exhibited in the public domain; and must contribute to conceptual, stylistic or thematic innovation. Interestingly, it is stated twice that the work must be available in the public domain: under 25.4 the policy states 'work must be available in the public domain', and under 25.6 it is stated 'work must take place in the public domain such as reputable galleries or museums' (DHET 2017: 7). Whether galleries and museums should really be considered 'public domain' is debatable, though – such spaces typically charge an entrance fee, and are inaccessible to people who cannot afford this. This provision also does not allow for alternative exhibition spaces such as public or site-specific art; it is difficult to imagine how performance art pieces (such as those created by Steven Cohen, Athi-Pathra Ruga or Brett Bailey, for example), which do not necessarily qualify as 'theatre' but also are not usually exhibited in a traditional museum format, will be approached.

Music

The policy stipulates that all works must be accessible and re-accessible in the public domain. This stipulation could be interpreted as excluding any outputs that only occurred live and were not recorded (the 2019 *Policy Implementation Guidelines* (DHET 2019: 5) indicates the necessity of providing evidence of the creative output, 'in the form of MP3 or MP4'). Other criteria are that works must be substantive and exhibit 'exceptional creative originality, interpretive insights, technical proficiency and research-informed practice'; it is also indicated that submissions must 'extend the particular performing arts discipline in order to qualify for subsidy, distinguishable from routine, commercial music which should not qualify for subsidy' (DHET 2017: 10).

As mentioned before, only Music, and Film and Television refer to 'research-informed practice'. A further point worth noting is that the reference to 'routine' and 'commercial' outputs is only applied to Music, and Theatre Performance and Dance. The policy provides no explanation for the omission of this point in the criteria for the remaining output categories; it is apparently a criterion that is considered to be applicable only to the performing arts.

A close examination of the wording and conceptualisation of the musical categories or types included in the policy gives cause for concern. Point 26 of the policy, 'Definition of Musical Outputs', states that music applications are divided into four types: composition, solo performance, group performance and conducting and directing. Notably, there are no distinctions indicated for Fine Arts between categories such as sculpture, painting, photography or video art (for example).

The section continues with the following caveat:

> This categorisation is made with due cognisance that they encompass outputs in all musical languages, including traditional and indigenous music, Western classical music, popular music and Jazz.

The designation 'traditional and indigenous music' is likely meant to include African music, but excludes African art music. Furthermore, and this statement notwithstanding, the rest of this section seems much more closely aligned with Western art music than any other musical category. For example, the stipulations under the section 'Solo Performance' reads (DHET 2017: 9):

> This is the domain of the virtuoso who exhibits prodigious technical mastery, invention and charisma. Because the composer's musical score is but an incomplete guide to the musical work, for the truly outstanding performer this is also the domain of re-composition, originality of thought, exceptional creative insights, and research-informed performance practice, although the degree of re-composition and improvisations exhibited should be aligned with accepted performance practice in the genre performed. Solo performance may be accompanied or unaccompanied (as would be the case in concertos, lead roles in operas, non-keyboard sonatas, etc).

This description excludes any solo performer who does not play from an existing written or notated musical score; any solo performer who creates music outside already established, known or accepted genres; and what of the solo performer who plays music but does not perform in an opera, or does not

present a concerto or sonata? A performer who is not easily classifiable according to existing categories; or a performer who can be classified as a Jazz pianist but performs improvised music, without score or chart; a performer of the Uhadi, who may play unaccompanied music, but certainly not a sonata – these scenarios are all seemingly excluded from the parameters included in the policy, and are therefore likely not to be considered for subsidy. Under 'group performance', the policy refers to 'the ability to collaborate with co-performers towards a single interpretation of the musical work' – again, this description excludes performances where a pre-existing composed score is not used (for example in Jazz and much of African music). The genres included under this category include 'chamber music, ensembles, bands and orchestral music'; 'duos, trios, quartets and quintets'. This is the terminology of Western art music, also to some extent applicable to Jazz, but hardly suitable for indigenous, traditional or African music. The descriptors used in the policy expose significant biases towards Western art music.

Film and television

The criteria for Film and Television also include 'newness', in that submissions should not have been available to viewers publicly before being submitted for assessment. It must be 'substantial and exhibit exceptional creative originality, interpretive insights and research-informed practice' (DHET 2017: 12). There is an additional criterion in this category that does not occur in any other category: the policy states that '[…] evidence must be submitted of public standing, e.g. critical reviews, audience response, awards' (ibid.). There is also a condition here that a written defence of the work must be submitted – no other category includes this proviso. The duration of the output is also specified (at least 30 minutes), which is not the case in any other categories.

Similar to music, multiple categories are identified under this grouping: scriptwriting; directing; producing; acting; cinematography; editing; set design; and costume design can all be individually considered for subsidy (although point allocation may differ, see DHET 2019). The language associated with these categories does not contain a similarly discernible political undertone to that of the Music category, however.

Theatre performance and dance

The criteria for this category highlight three specific requisites: that the output makes an original contribution to the discipline; that there is evidence of complexity/significance (measured by quantitative and qualitative factors); and

rigour, or the extent to which the output reflects technical or aesthetic accomplishment, systematic method, intellectual precision and/or integrity. Other criteria are that the performance must be a scheduled, advertised public performance and 'not simply part of student training within the institution' (DHET 2017: 14). Like with music there is reference to a distinction between commercial performances (that should not qualify for subsidy) and outputs that extend the particular performing arts discipline, which do qualify for subsidy. A final condition, which is not applied to any other category, is that '[…] winning a recognised national or international award/prize/medal/competition will qualify such a performance for subsidy' (ibid.) (a similar stipulation, although not exactly the same, is included in the criteria for Film and Television, that evidence must be submitted of 'public standing'). Categories identified here are: directing; theatre-making/dramaturgy/choreography; writing; performance; and scenography/design/performance technology. As with Film and Television, these categories are not differentiated beyond technical specifications.

Design

Design submissions must be presented 'as a collection in the form of a book, magazine or catalogue and/or other evidence of discursive engagement' (DHET 2017: 15). This condition is unique to Design, and suggests that only design submissions that have already been reviewed and critiqued, and discursively commented on by outside assessors (publishers, magazine editors) will be considered. This is a significant deviation from all other categories, where institutions rather than experts in the field (often active outside academia) are relied on to complete the first phase of review. Recognition of innovation, contemporary relevance, contribution to fresh understandings and substantiveness of scope are other stipulations.

There are multiple subsidiary categories under this grouping, according to technical characteristics.

Literary arts

Again, criteria applied to this category are not applied to other groupings: a condition for subsidy for literary outputs is that the submission must already be published by a 'credible publisher' and may not have been self-published. Newness, technical proficiency and substantiveness are other stipulations. It is notable that, in this instance, it seems a prerequisite for subsidy that an output has already entered the public domain, and that it has assumed commercial value (no literary output is likely to be published if there is not a likelihood of

its commercial success). Output in the Literary Arts must therefore undergo multiple peer-review processes: first by a publisher, and then by the institution in question and finally the DHET. The indication for Music, and Theatre Performance and Dance, that outputs should not be 'commercial' in nature, seems somehow at odds with the requirement for Literary Arts that only published work can qualify for subsidy – surely, published literary work has already been considered either currently or potentially commercially successful.

Sub-categories here consist of: novels, novellas, poetry and short stories; oral performance and/or literature; creative non-fiction. No clear definition for 'oral literature' is supplied, but it is notable that the policy insists that submissions 'must be published by a credible publisher able to produce evidence that the work underwent a refereeing process' (DHET 2017: 17). This is again indicative that Literary Arts submissions are required to go through more levels of peer-review than other categories.

In summary: a comparison of the evaluation requirements or assessment criteria between the different subfields reveals several discrepancies. For an output in Film and Television, for example, the policy states that '…Evidence must be submitted of public standing, such as critical reviews, audience response, awards'. It is also explicitly stated that a 'brief written defence of the work must be submitted'. Theatre performance and Dance has a similar indication: 'winning a recognised national or international award/prize/medal/competition will qualify a performance for subsidy'. There is no such requirement for the evaluation of Music outputs, or for the Visual and Fine arts, Design or the Literary Arts. No explanation is proffered for why two of the subfields included in this policy require recognition outside the peer-review process in order to qualify for subsidy, and why Music, a performing art like Theatre performance and Dance, carries no similar requirement. It is worth considering whether these distinctions point to an ideological underpinning in the policy, which separates different subfields in the arts into 'high' and 'low' categories, or perhaps disciplines of higher and lower standing within the university – where the latter requires additional confirmation of value from outside academic contexts, but the former's value can (ostensibly) be determined within the academic milieu. That could be an explanation, albeit a very concerning one.

Several other potential issues may arise once the policy is put into practice. The stipulation that outputs must be accessible in the public domain is consistently stated, yet no clear definition of what the term 'public domain' entails is provided. Traditional concert halls, where operas, symphonies and concertos are commonly performed, are not public, not open; nor are the 'reputable galleries or museums' referred to in the assessment criteria for fine and visual arts. Literary artworks

may be in the public domain, but the public does not necessarily have access to these works unless they are able to buy copies of the output – and this again conflicts with the policy stipulation that outputs may not be of a 'commercial' nature. The policy insists on more than one occasion that 'commercial' outputs do not qualify for subsidy, raising the question of whether any artwork which is sold, any musical performance for which an artist is paid, any theatre piece performed in a commercial theatre, any piece of design which is patented and sold for profit or any published literary output will qualify for subsidy or whether it will be disqualified from evaluation.

These questions can only be rigorously engaged once the first round of subsidy applications have been assessed, but the many discrepancies, uncertainties and general opacity of the policy are causes for concern.

Conclusion

A reading of the 2017 Policy for the Evaluation of Creative Outputs clearly raises several significant questions that at the present time remain unanswered. The policy seems to favour creative outputs created in 'scholarly frameworks': there are several indications that quality of artistic work is assumed to be strongly connected to 'scholarship', 'scholarliness' and 'research'. The policy does not, however, specify how creative output in the different disciplines is required to show evidence of scholarship, and indeed the assessment criteria for these fields diverge considerably. It is interesting that the predecessor of the 2017 policy (the 2015 draft policy) refers under its point 9 to *creative research*, rather than creative outputs as is the case in the 2017 policy's number 10 (DHET 2015b). The term 'creative research' is not explained in the draft policy, nor is it clear why it was exchanged for 'creative outputs' in the 2017 version, but it does suggest a different approach to the connection between creative outputs and scholarly work from the draft to the final version of the policy.

The South African government's subsidising of peer-reviewed research outputs in accredited journals is generally viewed as an incentive for the production of research, which in turn should encourage universities to thus participate in and expand the global and local knowledge economy. The 2015 *Research Outputs Policy* states as its purpose: '…to encourage research productivity by rewarding quality research output at public higher education institutions'. It is not explicitly stated in the 2017 Creative Outputs policy whether the subsidy model for creative output is developed with similar incentives in mind, that creative output is explicitly seen as potentially adding to South Africa's knowledge economy. In fact, as I have attempted to point out, the policy's frequent reference to 'scholarliness', 'scholarship' and 'research informed practice' creates rather the

impression that it is not creative outputs per se that will be rewarded at all, but instead some form of research output which is related to, or generated from or through, creative work. In its overall intention, it seems, the 2017 policy is not attempting to incentivise the generation of creative output in universities at all, but rather trying to encourage some form of creative research, or at least creative practices that culminate in textual research or 'scholarly' output.

If this interpretation of the 2017 policy is correct, it leaves the creative practitioner in the university in a no less precarious position than has been the case in the past – there still seems to be no real commitment on the part of the government to support and incentivise creative output generated by university employees. One could ostensibly read the policy as a form of encouragement to creative practitioners in South African higher education to engage with internationally established forms of artistic research (referred to above). In such a scenario, the encouragement would be to continue creating creative output of a high standard, but to attempt to also expose the research processes that inform and engender such creative work, and to search for ways to discursively articulate such knowledge and make it shareable within a broader knowledge community. As pointed out above, the positive potential of artistic research in universities has been convincingly argued for by international and local scholars; it has by now become an accepted and encouraged research practice in most arts education institutions, and is entrenched in the majority of education policies in Europe, the UK and Australia. It is therefore unfortunate that the 2017 policy does not explicitly state support for artistic research in South African academe. It is, I suggest, a missed opportunity to encourage the development of artistic research in South Africa.

Creative practitioners, often appointed to universities primarily as practical teachers in their respective fields, are encouraged to maintain a strong career profile in their creative disciplines, as this often serves as a drawing card for prospective students. However, up to now these practitioners have been under significant pressure to supervise and graduate postgraduate students, and to generate accredited, peer-reviewed publications in order to be eligible for government subsidy, while their creative work goes unrewarded. The 2015 Research Outputs Policy and the 2017 Policy for the Evaluation of Creative Outputs were presumably developed in order to serve the same purpose: to provide guidelines that determine the financial rewarding of outputs – research and creative – by university-employed individuals in academic positions. Should this be taken to mean, then, that these similar purposes suggest an assumption on the part of the South African government of equivalence between creative output and research? That creative output and research are considered to serve the same purposes in our tertiary education institutions and more broadly within

the knowledge economy? Should we read the 2017 policy as a defence of pure practice, and therefore a commitment to reward pure practice in universities? The repeated references in the 2017 policy to 'scholarly frameworks' for creative outputs suggest, perhaps, otherwise: that what the policy actually encourages is forms of artistic, practice-based or practice-lead research.

There will be no funding outcomes to study and ponder until 2020; before the first round of applications is concluded and subsidies are awarded, there will be no way to determine how the criteria and guidelines in the 2017 policy were applied, nor will an assessment be possible of the effectiveness of this policy for or its impact on South African HEIs. In preparation for the first funding outcomes in 2020, the many questions raised by the 2017 policy are cause for concern. The creative practitioner in South African academe seems no closer to an equitable position or favourable circumstance. Creative work in academia remains in flux, while the conversation between practice and scholarship continues.

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