

***The Challenge of Creativity***  
*Occasional address : Dr Terry Cutler*  
*Queensland University of Technology Graduation,*  
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I feel deeply honoured, and humbled, to be admitted to the degree of Doctor of the University at today's ceremony.

When the Vice Chancellor contacted me about this award I was, uncharacteristically, quite speechless. Unfortunately for all of you today, that condition was temporary.

In a strangely moving way, this graduation ceremony is much more meaningful than my first. I feel ashamed to confess that that doctorate was a result of a youthful desire to delay gainful employment for as long as possible. Today I think I am finally beginning to get what graduation is all about.

The key word I kept hearing throughout this evening's ceremony was "admit" - we have been "admitted" to degrees. This ritual is not therefore about having made it, a passing out parade; it is about being issued with a licence to operate, an entry ticket, and a challenge to get on and do something in our lives with the talents which have been recognised tonight. You, I - we - have been admitted to our next challenge.

And no challenge can be greater nor more important than to be creative, to build creative and innovative industries, and to work together to shape creative communities.

But how might we rise to this challenge? Tonight, I simply want to canvas a few possible angles about this challenge.

The first angle is to remind ourselves why the liberal and creative arts matter. Second, let's remind ourselves what happens if we fail to rise to the challenge. Finally, in taking up this challenge, how do we understand the deal each of us needs to cut with the society we live in.

The liberal and creative arts matter. They matter because we know -- from lots of research -- that the creative arts make a real difference in the early education of children, improving learning skills and improving children's academic achievement in all areas. It also seems that exposure to the creative arts makes a particular difference for disadvantaged kids. Food for thought. Yet the arts have fallen away in primary and secondary school curricula. This is not good. We are also now starting to understand better how important the arts are in higher education and in life long learning. This University stands proud in celebrating the importance of creativity and the creative industries. But it does so in an higher education funding environment which has not, for the past few decades, been friendly to the liberal and creative arts. In under-funding education, in under-funding the creative arts, we are in danger, as a country, of shooting ourselves in the foot.

The arts are important on the basis of pure economics. Creative and copyright industries are the United States' biggest exports. By contrast, Australia's trade deficit in content industries and intellectual property is huge, and growing. We are in danger of falling behind in some of the key areas of wealth creation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Cultural capital and the cultural richness of our cities and regions is now important in the global competition for new investment and people attraction, to becoming a smart country. People actually want to live and work in creative communities. Recent

research has shown a strong correlation between the number of arty bohemians, multiculturalism, the acceptance of diversity and difference, and success in high technology enterprises. This combination is clearly a winning formula.

Creativity is at a premium in the knowledge economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; creativity is at the heart of innovation. Innovation in all professions and in all walks of life. The creativity of seeing things differently, and of making new connections. Exploring new frontiers of knowledge and enterprise. Creativity occurs at the interface of the known and the unknown, and in the interdisciplinary explorations between the arts and technology and in the art of design, whether architecture or elegant software. Creativity is therefore at the heart of the genesis of new enterprises and new industries - of nation building. The arts, as artistic director Peter Sellars has put it, provide us with "windows into realities under construction". I can think of no better description of the process of innovation.

Finally, the creative arts matter because they underpin our sense of national identity, our self expression as Australians, and our multicultural diversity.

The creative arts matter. But the great irony is this: as a community, we do not appear to truly value creativity and innovation. For example, since the Order of Australia was established in 1975, some 20,000 Australians have been honoured. The arts have a 2% market share of these honours. As a nation, we are three times more likely to value achievement in sport than creativity. In the citations for almost 20,000 national honours since 1975, only 14 awards mention innovation, there are only 9 mentions of excellence, and no citation at all highlights creativity.

We here today cannot afford to fail to rise to the challenge of leadership because the creative industries are all about the things that make us human and construct that fragile fabric we call civilisation. And civilisation is just a grand term for lives that are worth living and communities we would all want to live within. History teaches us that civilisations decay, if not constantly renewed and refreshed.

Amartya Sen, the Nobel Laureate who works in development economics, talks about poverty as unfreedom: the unfreedom of people to realise their potential. This reminds us that poverty has many faces, and there are many paths to poverty. One of the faces of unfreedom is poverty of spirit and imagination. We should never neglect the unfreedom of poverty of spirit. We should treasure the freedom to be creative.

The creative economy is a strange deal, and involves a special type of activity that goes beyond the accounting view of life. You cannot force someone to be creative.

It was one of Australia's great writers, Frank Moorhouse, who drew my attention to the notion of a gift economy as a framework for thinking about how we, as a community, value creativity. Each of us has a gift, we offer that gift, and the community in which we live either accepts and values and rewards that gift, or rejects it. It is an open, growing, generous and vibrant community that values these very special gifts of creativity.

As Yann Martel, the author of *The Life of Pi*, which won the Booker Prize for 2002, says in the preface to this book: "If we, citizens, do not support our artists, then we sacrifice our imagination on the altar of crude reality and we end up believing in nothing and having worthless dreams".

And the challenge for each of us graduating today is simple: have we got the guts to go out to create futures we might want to live in.