Authority 3.0: Toward a digital press for university-based musicians, and its role in validating ERA outputs

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Abstract

This paper examines dilemmas for Australian music academics in terms of quantifying their research equivalence in the recent Federal government ERA preparations. To do so, short written statements and limited digital assets were offered in a trial evaluation framework somewhat disconnected from the original musical contexts and their meanings, yet this assessment model will increasingly impact upon career progression, esteem, and research funding in future ERA rounds. Consequently, this paper reviews the salient features of recent web 1.0 and web 2.0 activity to argue the case for a scholarly digital resource peer-review system as 'authority 3.0'.

Keywords: Digital resources, music research, peer review.

Introduction

> While current computing practice abounds with innovations like online auctions, blogs, wikis, twitter, social networks and online social games, few if any genuinely new theories have taken root in the corresponding "top" academic journals . . Excess rigor supports the demands of appointment, grant and promotion committees, but is drying up the wells of academic inspiration . . the inevitable limits of what can only be called a feudal academic knowledge exchange system, with trends like exclusivity, slowness, narrowness, conservatism, self–involvement and inaccessibility. We predict an upcoming social upheaval in academic publishing as it shifts from a feudal to democratic form, from knowledge managed by the few to knowledge managed by the many . . The drive will be that only democratic knowledge exchange can scale up to support the breadth, speed and flexibility modern cross–disciplinary research needs. (Whitworth & Friedman, 2009, para. 1)

While these ideas encompass a wide-ranging agenda for academic research and peer-review, their thrust highlights some of the issues confronting university-based artists whose work falls in the 'non-traditional' research domain.

This paper considers musicians in the academy, and the barriers and opportunities arising from the recent Excellence for Research in Australia (ERA) trial collection of Humanities and Creative Arts (HCA) digital recordings, scores and written value claims. It questions the next steps for the ERA peer review processes in consideration of the confounding relationships between end-users (general public consumers of music), commercial approaches to online music endeavours, and a place for authentic peer-review of scholarly creative works.

A brief history of Artists in the University

Australian Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) were amalgamated with universities following the radical restructuring of tertiary education begun by the Hawke government under education minister John Dawkins in the late 1980s. This required more than just educational convergence, but also an evaluation of what might constitute 'research-equivalent' outputs by creative and performing artists, now as university academics. Subsequently, a significant policy initiative was the release of Creative Nation: Commonwealth Cultural Policy (Keating, 1994), marking the first occasion of an Australian federal government enunciating a clearly articulated cultural policy and "vision of a culture-led future in a globalised society" (Craik, Davis & Sunderland, 2000, p. 1). This was soon followed by the Strand Report (1998) and the introduction of Categories H and J, mechanisms to report on academic creative outputs in an attempt to parallel traditional research quality and esteem indicators. Perhaps a little early for its time, 'Cat.H/J' proved conceptually flawed and administratively unwieldy, and was subsequently abandoned.

A decade later the Howard government introduced the Research Quality Framework (RQF, 2006), modelled on the UK's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE, 2008) and which once again offered a suite of

indicators by which to measure and value creative arts outputs (now more widely available as digital proxies). This too never came to fruition and was quickly replaced by the Rudd government as the Excellence for Research in Australia Initiative (ERA, 2009). For the first time however, ERA does promise additional university research block funding on the basis of the quality and peer esteem of creative works. Now after some 20 years of speculation and false starts, a nation-wide ERA trail evaluation of the Humanities and Creative Arts (HCA) research cluster took place during July-September of 2009.

ERA and the music experience

In recent times therefore, university academics and administrators have repeatedly navigated the RQF and ERA processes to consider, test, re-examine and recommend appropriate discipline-specific indicators in order to better define notions of research income, publications, quality and impact using citations against relevant Australian and world benchmarks, where relevant and applicable.

For many university musicians however, this has been a blunt, force-fit approach with much guesswork involved in using the wrong instruments to evaluate digital proxies of the right activity – ie, traditional publishing conceptions and indicators used to measure artistic activity (often site-specific and/or real-time) via written commentary on digital representations restricted by the 2009 ERA trial requirements for a maximum 15MB file size (ERA, 2009). Nonetheless, the procedures have been useful in refining academic thinking around this, as per the following exercise at the author's institution.

Within the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre (QCRC) ERA data collection processes, the most common representation of practice-based music research outputs included:

*   music recordings;
*   video recordings;
*   music scores;
*   web-based creative and/or curated materials;
*   DVD-ROM interactive pieces.

These outputs presented a non-linear mix of commercial, independent or un-published works, where the latter may have often attempted to verify impact, esteem or significant public recognition – there appeared to be no direct correlation with scholarly conventions for academic publishing. Therefore a major component of the ERA undertaking has been in gathering so-called 'research statements' from each of the relevant academics which include best-as-can information re. research background /contribution /significance. While this has clearly been a useful reflective exercise both for staff and institution, it would be fair to say that most academic musicians do not personally monitor, gather and rank these kinds of metrics on a regular basis – unlike in the traditional publishing domain where citations indices are provided in an arguably rigorous but certainly systematised way. In sum, this method of self-review is neither suitable nor equitable.

ERA next steps will invite external peer review of secure digital archives of such material. While representing a welcome step toward due recognition of the work of artists in the academy (and one presumes, resulting research block funding flow-on) the on-the-ground processes may prove problematic in terms of notions of 'excellence', for example:

*   the separation of the reviewer from the abstraction of music making and/or its context;
*   the potential for various personal tastes to be applied to the ranking of any art-form; and,
*   the relative success of a digital proxy (variously limited by file size, platform, media or audience).

The External Environment

To the lay-person, when the question is asked 'how do musicians publish?', the answer is often 'by records' or perhaps 'music scores'. While the contemporary field of activity is certainly much broader than this, recording and score publishing is useful as a starting point to examine the current environment. Similarly to books, the music field is broken up into many niche markets and publishing houses: from jazz, to classical, world, and popular music etc., although it would be fair to say that commercial interests are generally very narrow. Other academic limitations also include:

*   finding and managing such interactions is time consuming and often unsuitable for the outputs of experimental or niche work so often common to the scholarly context;
*   equivalents of 'print and distribution' (P&D) arrangements require cash up-front but do not guarantee distribution or review mechanisms suitable for academic publishing;
*   difficulty in aggregating the metrics and/or esteem rankings on an institutional /sector basis as is

required for academic research evaluation.

Notwithstanding these restrictions, there remains the possibility that developmental or experimental works may be evolved over time and leveraged to wider distribution in much the same way that conference publications and journal articles may seed a significant book output. At least this could be the case if such a developmental mechanism existed, and if the relevant IP and copyright arrangements allowed.

The Problem with Music

In the 21st century, the Internet has impacted on the dissemination, consumption and ranking of digital works, but arguably none terraformed more significantly than the international music recording industry (ie, digital downloads, iPods, Apple iTunes, .pdf scores etc). Also in the recent past there have been a range of initiatives by Australian universities and peak bodies which have progressed the idea of sector-wide peer-review of arts endeavours (eg, ANAT, 1998; Ausdance, 2007; Inter-arts, 2009).

With music however, this has been somewhat problematic in that the online publication of works is subjected to a range of limitations. These include: sub-disciplinary or genre boundaries (eg, new music, vs. sonic art vs. popular music), competing university branding obsessions; Australian collection society licensing laws where the material may not be 100% original (for example, jazz improvisation on set pieces, original performances of classical repertoire); or where authorship is often complex given the varying contributions of composer, performer, recordist and/or executive producer (Draper, 2008).

Many Australian universities have developed varied approaches to measuring or profiling artistic works, but to date these are largely segregated along thematic or administrative lines, that is, digital works are utilised as:

- promotional materials (external relations and student recruitment departments);
- commercial products (enterprise units);
- research-equivalent outputs (administrative offices for research reporting);
- live online digital activity and data sets (e-research and computing clusters);
- faculty/school level independent endeavours (podcasting, webcasting, internet radio, etc.).

Clearly none of these viewpoints speak clearly to each other, highlighting a multitude of doxa-like assumptions about music-making, its quality, its value and its impact. More pertinently – there are no consistent peer-review criteria which as yet may be confidently applied to digital resources (Bates, Nelson, Roueché, Winters, & Wright, 2006).

Peer Review of Digital Resources

Digital resources cannot not tell the whole story about music, but in the ERA context, recordings, web-sites and scores are being put forward as research proxies for evaluation. While mechanisms for the evaluation of the print outputs of traditional scholarly research are well established, no equivalent exists for assessing the value of digital arts by-products and/or 'born digital' outputs. Therefore if digital resources are genuinely to contribute to the research profile of Australian higher education institutions and form part of the ERA processes, it is essential that an authentic framework for evaluating these resources be established. A consistently-applied system of peer review of the artistic quality, intellectual content, and/or technical architecture should serve to:

- establish resources types which are of most use/interest to practice-led music research;
- contribute to the development of common standards for accessibility and usability;
- reassure academics and their host institutions of the worth of time spent in the creation of music and its representative digital resources;
- inform proposals to ensure the sustainability, preservation or wider leverage of high-quality scholarly practices and material outputs (ibid).

With the next ERA sector-wide collection and evaluation imminent in 2010, this then prompts a re-examination of just how digital repositories, peer thinking and open publishing for music might be best conceptualised and leveraged. To do so, I will now turn to briefly examine a number of publishing scenarios, then draw upon these to discuss and argue some possible ways forward.

Authority Online

> Online scholarly publishing in Web 1.0 mimicked fundamental conceptions… Most content was closed to nonsubscribers; exceedingly high subscription costs for specialty journals were retained; libraries continued to be the primary market; and the "authoritative" version was untouched by comments from the uninitiated. Authority was measured in the same way it was in the scarcity world of paper: by number of citations to or quotations from a book or article, the quality of journals in which an article was published, the institutional affiliation of the author, etc. (Jensen, 2007, p. 3)

'Format shifting' was the first wave. For example, in e-learning platforms such as Blackboard, lecture notes and content have simply been moved from hard-copy face-to-face formats to online delivery of digital materials. While podcasting, video lectures and the like are welcome for asynchronous engagement and review, delivery represents a traditional approach to the one-way transmission of authorised knowledge to learners as receptors.

Similarly with scholarly e-journals. For example, First Monday (2009) is now a mature and widely read publication using the Open Journal Systems (OJS, 2002) platform to semi-automate peer review administration and publication processes. This allows for streamlined workflow and brings research articles to market much more rapidly than conventional print-press, yet, the framework is still that of old – authority blind reviews and edits, while readership consumes (and hopefully cites).

In music, the recording industry is moving progressively from shop-front sales of records and CDs to digital downloads stores such as Amazon and iTunes. More recently, music buyers have witnessed the resurrection of the LP format online, seen as some commentators as simply a way for the record industry to perpetuate old bundled approaches to maximising copyright and IP returns. CMX (Wikipedia, 2009a) is just such a file format proposed by the record label majors and intended to be a successor to MP3. CMX's premise is similar to that of Apple's iTunes LP (Mortensen, 2009), with data such as audio, lyrics, and album art being contained in a single file. Such approaches represent convenience or novelty, but nonetheless conventional transmission. In parallel, formerly blind consumption is increasingly awakened by 'long tail' pattern intelligence (eg, Google, iTunes Genius), web 2.0 rankings and social networking sites (eg, LastFM, BeBo, etc) (Draper, 2009).

Following this, it is perhaps unsurprising that many university programs have borrowed from these developments: firstly through web 1.0 content delivery, but more recently incorporating web 2.0 technologies for social networking, wikis, blogs and tagging to value-add. To unpack this further, the following presents a brief overview of online university music publication systems.

University Record Labels

Internationally, many universities have developed their own music dissemination platforms, often modelled on commercial online music stores. In most cases, it would appear a modest return is channelled back into the running of the enterprise, while the primary benefits would appear to be the promotion and viral marketing of the university and its programs. Indicative examples are as follows:

The UK – Royal Academy of Music Record Label

> Working in the recording industry is increasingly central to the careers of many performers. The Academy's excellent recording facilities are available for producing demo tapes, and the Business for Musicians module of the BMus programme includes training on making and promoting a CD. (RAM, 2009)

RAM's raison d'être for making CDs is threefold:

- to provide studio experience for students;
- to record music which reflects the disciplinary range and quality of RAMs' musical activities;
- to produce committed and discerning interpretations of interesting repertoire, "something which young, talented people often respond to spectacularly well" (ibid).

RAM recordings are regularly broadcast by BBC Radio 3, Classic FM and the BBC World Service, and selected discs are distributed world-wide. Most discs are available for sale in Academy Chimes campus stores, with all proceeds used to fund future recordings. Digital works are distributed through Naxos Music Library.

USA – Intercollegiate Record Label Association

> IRLA membership is comprised of representatives from student-run record labels and other student-run music-related organizations. The IRLA exists to facilitate the sharing of information between

student-run record labels and to establish a mechanism for music industry entities to communicate with all student-run record labels easily. (IRLA, 2009)

The IRLA links up record labels across a very large number of US universities. It promotes the name of the member organizations, logos, web stores and social networking sites, and provides opportunities for artists to promote their music via the ESPNU intra-university entertainment and sports television channel (Wikipedia, 2009b). The IRLA primarily services the networking of student-run, university music recording organisations.

The next two examples are from Australia. These both highlight variations in the student-led and commercial shop-front models by their inclusion of open publishing platforms, social networks and/or collaborative student-staff undertakings.

Queensland – Radio IMERSD

Radio IMERSD invites digital contributions and collaborative ideas from academic staff, practitioners, visitors, alumni and students in a range of areas including: public speeches, viva voce and workshop presentations; musical compositions, performances and sound recordings; commentary and review intended to stimulate critical discussion. (Radio IMERSD, 2006)

The open publishing component features podcasts which are disseminated under Creative Commons Australia licenses and via Apple iTunes and Griffith iTunes-U. All material comprises original works produced by staff, students and visitors as composers, arrangers, performers, or sound recordists/producers, as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Radio IMERSD Themes and Clusters

Theme	Content
Concerts	Staff, students, alumni and guests http://www29.griffith.edu.au/radioimersd/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=17&Itemid=27
Public Lectures	Academics, VIPs & research partners http://www29.griffith.edu.au/radioimersd/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=16&Itemid=28
Creative Sparks	Original student work http://www29.griffith.edu.au/radioimersd/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=15&Itemid=29

Radio IMERSD also provides a 24/7 streaming NetRadio station which cycles and broadcasts recording studio and live concert productions.

While external commercial recordings are not distributed, certain material can be made available only on the university intranet due to complex music collection society licensing laws, so limiting the distribution of those recorded performances which utilise compositions, scores or arrangements in-copyright with publishing houses (Draper, 2008).

In sum, this model provides an open source platform to freely disseminate and promote the work of the Conservatorium's diverse population. Google Analytics is employed to provide hard metrics about access numbers, downloads and international distribution. The value-adding is not only in terms of promotion, but also in terms of local exemplars, internal knowledge, popularity, and sharing ideas, opinions and cross-postings via other networks including discussion boards, blogs, and podcasting sites. A good deal of informal traffic returns to authors and creators, but to date this cannot be measured in terms of its impact.

Western Australia – Slow Release Music

Welcome to Slow Release. Here we will be releasing music from the various streams of the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. A student run enterprise, the label will be produced, managed and promoted by a student team from the Bachelor of Music course. (WAAPA, 2009).

A new initiative with little content as yet. However, the design thoughtfully profiles and promotes WAAPA music departments in how it has designed and presented its shop-front by album genre: Classical, Jazz, New Music and Contemporary.

Slow Release provides its own on-line store. Preview and purchase releases are available from the Slow Release label catalogue in both CD and digital format. All digital releases sold through the Slow Release Store are packaged as high quality non-protected MP3s and all albums and EPs come with printable

cover art. More notably than other examples perhaps, the Slow Release Music design includes cross promotion and maintenance of a range of external social networking websites as shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Slow Release Music Social Networks

Web 2	Site
Facebook	WAAPA Music Label
	http://www.facebook.com/pages/Waapa-Music-Label/80616819424?ref=mf
LastFM	waapamusiclabel
	http://www.last.fm/user/waapamusiclabel
MySpace	WAAPA Music Label
	http://www.myspace.com/waapamusiclabel
Twitter	waapamusic
	http://twitter.com/waapamusic
YouTube	WAAPA Music Videos
	http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=waapamusic

WAAPA's platform makes a useful effort to link web 1.0 and 2.0 authority models: it provides a front-end which borrows on a conventional web-store sales approach, but also links content to a range of well maintained and highly active social networks as a way to promote and to a degree, review content.

Synopsis

Across the wider breadth of university-based record labels that were examined, activity tends to remain focussed on student content, led by a decidedly commercial mimicry. While Radio IMERSD does provide for professional and/or academic content, what is missing is the capacity for review by expert professionals, academic authorities, or other leaders in the relevant fields as would be necessary as a basis for developing appropriate discipline-specific indicators against relevant Australian and world benchmarks, where relevant and applicable (see above, ERA discussion).

DISCUSSION: AUTHORITY 3.0

Throughout the related e-publishing literature (eg, Whitworth & Friedman, 2009; Jenson, 2007; Bates et al., 2006), an overarching question is repeatedly raised: what are the implications for the future of scholarly communications and scholarly authority? Jensen (2007) proposes this as 'Authority 3.0', that is: the digital availability of a work for indexing, referencing, quoting, linking, and tagging; the existence of metadata that identifies the work, categorizes it, contextualizes it, and summarises it; the capacity for others to enrich it with their own comments, tags, and contextualizing elements.

This last point was picked up in a significant report (Bates et al., 2006) by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) following many RAE rounds which proved unsatisfactory in relation to the peer review and evaluation of digital resources for the arts and humanities. The document summarises its key recommendations based on the input of many universities across Britain, with particular reference to the interface between blind-peer review, authors and audiences.

Firstly, it was apparent that an entirely new system of peer review and evaluation was not required, and indeed that

. . it would be damaging to replace wholesale the established methods of evaluating publicly-funded research . . Rather, the existing review structures should be developed to meet the specific challenges of the digital environment. Above all, peer review should retain its character as a measure of esteem (p. 18).

However, it was urged that this model then should be expanded in an open process, to be debated in public and made available to the community via conferences, wikis, discussion lists, and web 2.0 technologies. The report's final recommendations (pp. 31–32) convincingly argue that:

- Peer review of digital resources should be conducted with the evaluation report published on the respective project website. The process should be open, with all comments attributable.
- Resource creators should be offered a public right of reply.
- Post-completion review should be conducted in a spirit of openness, so that resource creators are encouraged to discuss freely any problems which they have encountered and any innovative solutions that they have adopted, for the benefit of the research community as whole.

- Scholarly press are encouraged to commission reviews of significant digital resources, and to publish them routinely alongside other reviews.
- Common and widely-publicised citation standards for digital resources should be established; resource creators encouraged to include citation instructions on their project websites and to maintain persistent URLs.

Michael Jensen (2007) takes this further in The New Metrics for Scholarly Authority (US, The Chronicle Review), that in a internet-connected world of pervasive and powerful computer processing, Authority 3.0 will likely include the following, as summarised in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Authority 3.0 Framework

Authority	Attributes
Scholarly Peer	Prestige of the publisher.
	Prestige of peer reviewers.
	Quality of the context: What else is on the site that holds the document, and what is its authority status?
Author	Quality of author's institutional affiliation(s).
	Significance of author's other work.
	Author's participation in other valued projects, as commenter, editor, etc.
	Reference network: The significance rating of all the texts the author has touched, viewed, read.
Social Network	Prestige of commentators and other participants.
	Valued links, in which the values of the linker and all his or her other links are also considered.
	Nature of the language in comments: Positive, negative, interconnected, expanded, clarified, reinterpreted.
	Percentage of phrases that are valued by a disciplinary community.
Digital Asset	Obvious attention: Discussions in blogspace, comments in posts, reclarification, and continued discussion.
	Percentage of a document quoted in other documents.
	Raw links to the document.
	Length of time a document has existed.
	Inclusion of a document in lists of 'best of', in syllabi, indexes, and other human-selected distillations.
	Types of tags assigned to it, the terms used, the authority of the taggers, the authority of the tagging system.

Implications and Conclusions

ERA aims to identify excellence across the full spectrum of Australian research activity and emerging research areas. Meanwhile, a recent CHASS report (Haseman & Jaaniste, 2008) reiterates the imperative to strengthen the evidence base for arts in Australia:

> Current measures and benchmarking of the contributions of the humanities and creative arts to national innovation are inadequate . . better measures are critical for future models for public support of national innovation. (p. 32)

In Australia there is currently no academic press able to offer a publishing and peer review platform for the digital assets of academic musicians (and used as part of ERA submissions). Given the preceding discussion, such a hybridised 3.0 vehicle must be established to support the following:

- The online dissemination of academic music publications, especially early-stage works, experimental or scholarly material unsuited to the commercial domain but highly relevant in areas of pure research and/or research-based learning, eg: Radio IMERSD (2006).
- The aggregation of music academic peer-reviewers, with editorial board and equivalent academic structures, eg: National Council of Tertiary Music Schools (NACTMUS) members.

- Both secure (peer review) and public access (end-user) web 2.0 frameworks for dissemination of materials, eg: Open Journal Systems (OJS) in concert with a suitable web 2.0 Content Management System (CMS).
- Initial Creative Commons licensing, to allow freedom for authors to leverage and further develop their creative works within a wider commercial or academic arena, as required.
- A sideline enterprise label to leverage and promote material via commercially accepted production standards, distribution (P&D) and shop-front arrangements for online music, eg: Slow Release Music (WAAPA, 2009).
- Recognition by peak bodies, press, industry and government, eg: Music Council of Australia (MCA), Australian Music Centre (AMC), Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA), Australian Research Council (ARC).
- Knowledge transfer and the enhancement of both peer review and academic capacity, vocabulary, and navigational understanding to utilise such a framework to best advantage.
- The realisation of authentic peer review of digital resources criteria as part of an National Competitive Grant (NCG) and/or theme within a Centre of Excellence in Music proposal.

Finally, it should be carefully considered how a pilot platform might be branded and operated to best serve and attract intellectual investment across the Australian academic music sector.

Authority 3.0 seeks to combine the most promising features of online evolution to date: from web 1.0, utilising established peer review and e-journal mechanisms to monitor the responsibilities associated with publically-funded research; and from web 2.0, to integrate end-user engagement, folksonomies and the viral dissemination of valued works. In such a landscape then, musicians may engage with peer review at multiple levels, while audiences can only benefit from greater access to the meanings behind the creation of music itself.

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