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A Doctorate by Definition: Exploring possibilities and opportunities in education

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The diagram and table below reflect my conceptualisation of the issues raised at the Conference as well as the issues that these suggested for me. Two broad questions frame this characterisation: (i) what defines the doctorate? and (ii) where to now? My comments here are brief and intended to stimulate further discussion of the issues in particular and their categorisation in general.

What defines the doctorate?
Influences on doctorate definitions are represented in Diagram 1 below. In papers presented at the Conference, three imperatives appeared to impact on the importance (for whom, how and why) of the doctorate. Predictably, these involved interactions between the economic, the bureaucratic and the academic. After Althusser (1969), I see these spheres as relatively autonomous, which nonetheless have impact on each other and are, 'in the last instance', heavily influenced by things economic. The structuralism of this account – mediated by 'relative autonomy' – is also tempered by a 'field analysis' (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 104-105), which 'involves three necessary and internally connected moments'. The first draws attention to relations between a particular field or *context* and broader 'fields of power', the second maps the 'field of *positions'*, and the third involves the 'field of *stances'*.

In brief, the (financial, human, etc) resources available to students, supervisors and institutions significantly influence what is regarded as a 'good' doctorate (eg. innovative, rigorous etc – academic influences) and the 'protection' of this standard (eg. stipulated duration, probation, etc – bureaucratic influences). These situational matters are necessarily connected to broader fields – connections similar to those Mills (1959) imagines between private troubles and public issues – such as the doctoral standards set by the academy as a whole and the politics of resourcing research higher degrees in Australia (or elsewhere for that matter). Institutions and individuals are differently positioned in these fields and adopt various stances (informed by their values, beliefs, etc) in relation to this positioning and their connections with other fields. Some, for example, work to maintain traditional definitions of the doctorate, particularly those who stand to benefit most from these, while others adopt a more liberal stance, influenced by the economies of doing so and/or an ideological shift in what constitutes a good doctorate and its importance.

Where to now?
A second (and overlapping) set of issues that framed Conference presentations are identified in Table 1 as responses to the question 'where to now?' These are expressed as strategies in negotiating doctorate definitions and futures; some more reminiscent of times past ('holding the line') and some cognisant of prevailing conditions ('playing it safe'), while

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others offer a qualitatively different strategy that explores (or generates) possibilities and opportunities within the parameters of the doctorate.

The first two strategies have similarities with Turner's (1971) two ideal-typical normative patterns of upward mobility in school systems: 'sponsorship' (selection by association) and 'contest' (fairness in competition)[1]. These organising logics are not simply evident at the point of entry ('input') into doctoral programs but also in doctoral 'throughput' and 'output'. Hence, traditional pathways through the doctorate amount to a rite of passage into academia, negotiated primarily through a hierarchical relationship with a particular individual. Similarly, the more contemporary market-driven conception of doctoral studies opens up questions about entry (which students, supervisors, programs?) but is also more specific and technical about the ongoing doctoral experience. In this conception of the doctorate, competition does not end upon entry and neither is the doctoral award the only or necessarily the most significant prize. Just as successful completion of secondary school has been decoupled from guaranteed entry into university so has the doctoral award been decoupled from guaranteed entry into academia or similar professional standing. The prizes are there to be struggled over, continuously, from beginning to end.

The tactics listed in the Table under each strategy are not exhaustive and neither should they be seen as the 'best' tactics available. They are simply illustrative of those canvassed at Conference. Similarly, the absence of tactics within some strategies reflects their absence in the context of conference discussions. Dale's (1989) useful distinction between strategies and tactics are employed in this characterisation of Conference discussions to distinguish between general plans of action and the opportunistic. What makes the third 'generative' strategy represented in the Table interesting by comparison is the way in which this distinction between strategy and tactic is understood and manipulated. Drawing on Giddens' (1994, p. 15) account of 'generative politics', the emphasis in the Table's third column is shifted from 'top-down' strategies to 'bottom-up' tactics that 'allow individuals and groups to make things happen, rather than have things happen to them'. de Certeau's (1984) makes a similar distinction between *uses* and *tactics* employed, in this case, by consumers of doctoral programs. Adopting a generative stance on the doctorate, then, implies that 'consumers who must occupy these places effectively become quasi-producers when they engage in tactics to subvert policy and/or put policy to use for intentions that its producers did not necessarily intend' (Gale & Densmore, 2003). In de Certeau terms, it is in this way that places are converted to spaces; spaces for students, supervisors and institutions to claim what doing a doctorate means.

Further, specific tactics are not the preserve of particular strategies, just as the same texts can be produced (written) and interpreted (read) differently by different discourses. Hence, the invention of Doctorates of Education (EdD) and of Creative Arts (DCA) to 'keep the PhD safe' is a tactic in keeping with a 'holding the line' strategy as much as it is one of 'playing it safe' with a sameness across institutions induced by market competition. On this point, Bourdieu's (1997) analogy of the game is instructive in explaining the highly structured processes involved in such arrangements, which is quite at odds from the rhetoric of choice and freedom often associated with market discourse. It is also instructive in explaining the relative value of the capital at work in the game. To employ a generative strategy, then, is to play the game in such a way as to change the value of the stakes in the game and thereby the nature of the game itself.

Conclusion
The challenges for this generative politics in negotiating the doctorate are at least two. First, to imagine what such a politics means for program inputs, including issues of student

entry. This will be important in the context of raised HECS fees and full fees for domestic students, driven by an increasingly greater reliance by institutions on financing their operations from the marketplace. The second challenge is to avoid the incorporation of generative tactics within the parameters of other strategies and/or to maintain the subversion of these through creative means. And perhaps there is a third: to reinvent the tactics utilised by other strategies; to reinvigorate them and put them to work towards more democratic ends. Drawing from this generative approach itself, there is an obligation to continue to explore possibilities and opportunities for and within the doctorate and to be innovative in such engagement.

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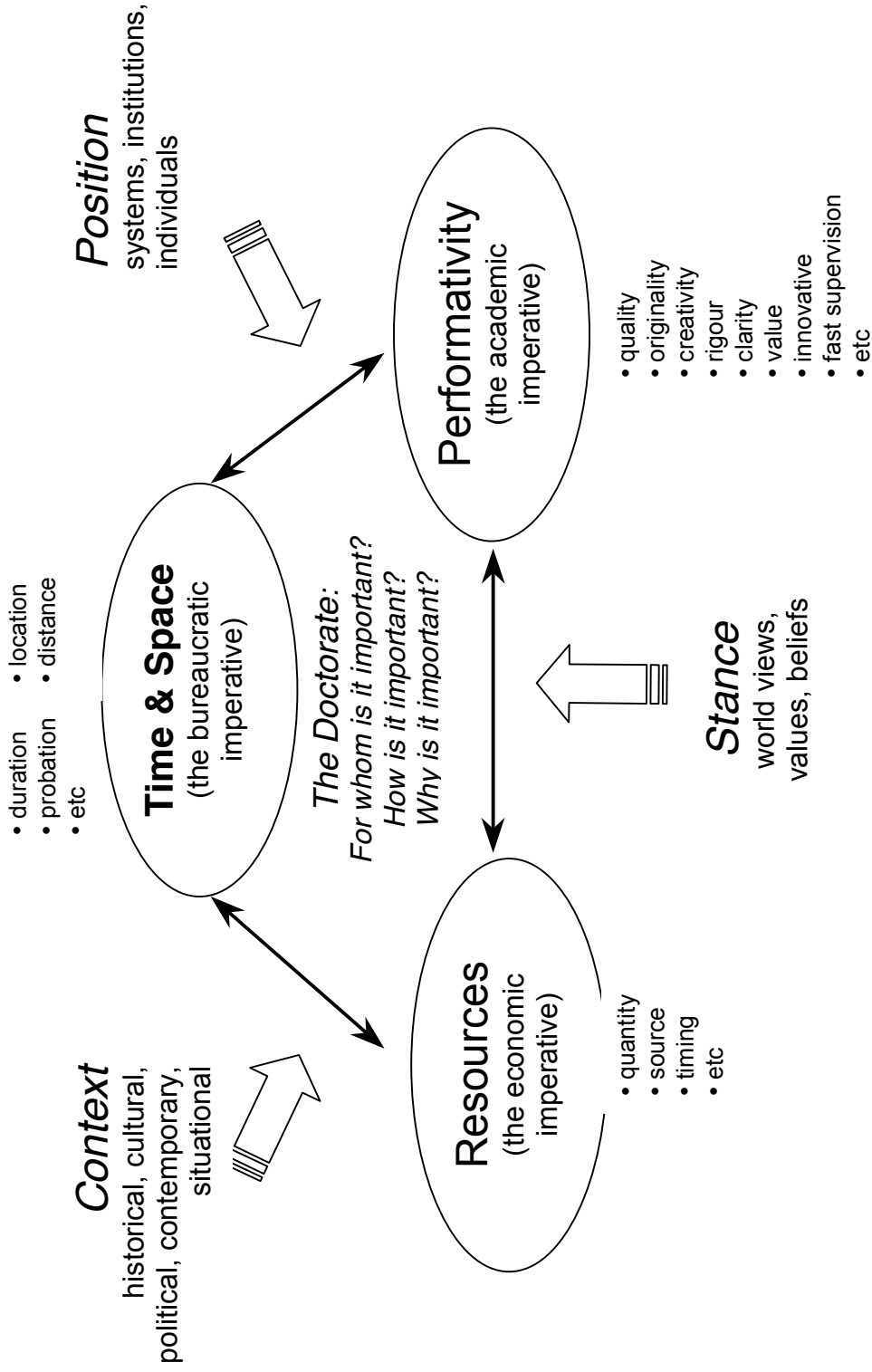
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Endnotes

[1] I have also found Turner's (1971) two ideal-typical strategies of upward mobility in schooling extremely useful in explaining systems of higher education entry in Australia (see Gale, 1999), for domestic students applying to enter government-funded undergraduate courses.

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Diagram 1: What defines the doctorate?

Context
historical, cultural, political, contemporary, situational

Position
systems, institutions, individuals

Time & Space
(the bureaucratic imperative)

- duration
- probation
- etc
- location
- distance

The Doctorate:
For whom is it important?
How is it important?
Why is it important?

Performativity
(the academic imperative)

- quality
- originality
- creativity
- rigour
- clarity
- value
- innovative
- fast supervision
- etc

Stance
world views, values, beliefs

Resources
(the economic imperative)

- quantity
- source
- timing
- etc

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Where to Now?

Strategies and tactics in negotiating doctoral parameters		Holding the line (research higher degree)	Playing it safe (research training degree)	Generative [Giddens] Exploring possibilities (uses) and opportunities (tactics) [de Certeau]
Program	**Input**	• sponsorship	• *Which students?* (domestic, full fees, O/S, NESB; via honours, from the profession; FT/PT) • *Which supervisors?* (research active? trained?) • *Which programs?* (keeping the PhD safe! – DCA, EdD, etc)	
	Throughput	• student & supervisor roles & responsibilities • 'come and see me when you need a discussion'	• research curriculum & pedagogy • self / institutional support • targeted funding • progress reports • graduate qualities	• group supervision / teams • networks (vs silos) – top-down and bottom-up • creating spaces for dialogue • digital theses
	Output	• rite of passage • book	• hurdle to overcome • DEST points (publications, grants, etc)	• an *obligation* to continue to research (post doc, early career researcher) • *innovation*