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'Gatekeepers' perform critical institutional functions regarding the recognition, interpretation, preservation, and the passing-on of knowledge and practices. Agenda-setting is the political manifestation. This paper begins with a rehearsal of the history of the concept of the artworld and traces recent political events in the Australian context that show the notion has contemporary relevance. The institutional theory of art is revisited and its compatibility with ontological theories of virtual relations that address ideology and the cultural formation of actuality is explored.

The interpretive function of gatekeepers has a place in the creation of both meaning and value. Value may be symbolic, economic and aesthetic.

Could the artworker as researcher, in a role formalised through higher degree fine arts research programs, have the potential to subsume the traditionally separate roles of the artist practitioner, art critic and even curator within the institution of art? Can such researchers be said to be performing the function of translation, in a sense similar to that which arises from actor-network theory?

This paper reviews relevant literature where the contribution of artists to culture is evaluated in terms of ontology. It is suggested that the, at one time, rising influence of the artworker/researcher concerned with establishing theoretical grounds for practice whilst also performing valuable interpretive function is currently being challenged by the often more pragmatic concerns of the cultureworker/researcher.

The interdisciplinary appropriation of theory between the creative industries and political economy is giving rise to a new breed of authority trained in cultural sociology and possessing the skill to shepherd opinion accounting for innovative value in the newly interpreted data about creative roles in marketplaces. It is argued that the result to date is a conflation of common understanding of the terms 'the arts', 'creativity' and 'innovation'.

The author identifies heterogeneous interpretive contexts vying within his own experimental new media art, teaching and research practice.