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Writing PhDs: Integrational Linguistics and a New Poetics for the PhD

The first thing that needs acknowledging is that anything can mean anything
Michael Toolan in *Total Speech*
It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place
Wallace Stevens in 'Of Modern Poetry'

The iconoclastic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) and the equally iconoclastic linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) both made much of the proposition that a language is best understood as a game, its rules a complete system as the rules are in any game. Their powerful analogy eventually breaks down on several counts, but most importantly it fails to explain adequately the point of language, which is communication. When two players enter Wittgenstein's and Saussure's game of language they are in at least one dimension not at all like two players in a game for they are cooperating, not competing. As for the fixedness of rules, we know from our daily interactions, that whatever aids communication in a particular situation can be incorporated into language at any moment. As Roy Harris, the British integrational linguist and translator of Saussure, observes at the end of his study *Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein: How to Play Games with Words*:

> There is no prior set of rules they [i.e. speakers of the same language] have to conform to, because they are co-operating, not competing. They are free to use verbal signs in any way which will further that co-operation and get the job done. (Harris 1988: 119-20)

The job being communication.

One way to begin considering language and the PhD thesis is to focus on questions of grammar and usage, including the poetics of a particular form language can take - prose. But again, this would be putting the cart of rules ahead of the horse of communication. Recently I participated in the task of introducing a group of secondary school children to the form of poetry called haiku. One way to approach this task is to give the students a correct set of grammatical and traditional rules for producing haiku. These might be something like: be brief, use 17 or less syllables, use aspects of nature, indicate a season, offer two images in two lines and then in the third a fragment or

phrase that implies significance or brings the two previous images together in a surprising manner, use present tense, avoid personification, similes and metaphors, avoid overt punctuation, avoid 'I'. There could be many forms of these rules, just as there are many formulations of grammar in linguistics. Linguists have proposed, for example, some 200 definitions of the 'sentence' (Harris 1998: 15). In any case, given these rules students could then produce versions or approximations of the haiku that will sometimes need to be corrected so their poems will qualify as haiku. It would be possible for such a student to write a haiku his teacher will tell him is successful, although the student might still not understand what has been achieved, beyond a technical exercise.

Another way of introducing students to this poetic form might be to show them many haiku, and ask what sense they make of these poems, how the poems affect them, what they mean to them, and why the poems might be structured in the ways they seem to be. When this second approach is used, two matters become apparent. First, the haiku must stand or fall on its effectiveness as a method of communication (in the case of the haiku communicating the paradoxical nature of human experiences in the present-ness of the present moment). Second, any 'grammatical' rules we can identify from the examples encountered will be recognised as, at best, tendencies rather than rules, for the haiku masters and mistresses are always prepared to bend and break whatever constraints prevent effective communication. Further, these tendencies might not even be that, for they can require of students resourcefulness, adaptation, inventiveness, subversion or personal interpretation in order for these students to develop meaningful instances of this kind of communication. For instance, what does a seasonal reference mean to an inner urban student, or to someone from a tropical or arctic climate? If you read enough haiku you will come to realise that even the rule of three lines admits significant exceptions. We are threatened with either an infinitely expanding set of rules or a set of rules that are contradictory - when the task is approached as a question of a supposed underlying grammar. In focusing here on the PhD-as-language I want to keep in mind that it is first and last an exercise in communication.

In addition to the above proposition that language is one open-ended aspect of the wider phenomenon of human communication, I want to note that language is not always a rational, safe, educated and cooperative behaviour. It can be a devious, manipulative, politicised, controversial, brutal and dangerous aspect of human social behaviour. On 18 September 2006 the front page leading article of the Melbourne *Age* newspaper featured a report that the Australian federal government had 'insulted' migrants and migrant groups by proposing in a discussion paper that all new migrants should take compulsory tests to assess their English skills and knowledge of Australian history and Australian values. Andrew Robb, parliamentary secretary to the Immigration Minister, suggested citizenship should not be given away 'like confetti', but people should be made to earn the privilege of citizenship (Topsfield 2006: 1). Here language, both its suppression and its promotion, has become a tool of political and moral change associated with the imposition of values and a certain body of knowledge. The context for this political move on language includes the so-called war on terror, fears that terrorism is promoted within Arabic-speaking Islamic communities, and attitudes to the recent global flights of refugees across national borders. This incident is also part of the history of the enforcement of language standards as markers of the modern phenomenon of nationhood, with dominant language speakers being privileged above immigrants and other groups. In the 1997 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) report on the separation of indigenous children from their families, Muriel Olsson, who was removed at the age of five, recalls, 'It was forbidden for us to talk in our own language. If we had been able we would have retained it … we weren't

allowed to talk about anything that belonged to our tribal life' (HEORC 1997: 201). Hers is one of many reports on attempts to control Aboriginal culture through silencing its languages as part of the forced removal policy.

Drusilla Modjeska published an essay in the *Australian* newspaper's Higher Education Supplement for 13 September 2006 that provides another example of the forces of inclusion and exclusion attached to language. Modjeska has been involved in two projects. The ARC-funded Thesis to Book project aims to transform research theses into high-quality nonfiction trade books. In another related project, Modjeska was involved in a series of seminars at Melbourne University and the Australian National University for scholars wanting to transform their research into accessible writing. This meant focusing PhD students, sometimes for the first time, Modjeska claimed, on matters of 'voice, projection of self, the power of narrative' (Modjeska 2006: 31). There are clearly many academics and students who consider communication important to their work, and a skill that can be acquired. There were 100 applicants for the 20 places in the master classes attached to these seminars. However, Modjeska mentions that creative writing students already understand these aspects of writing and can produce what she calls 'sophisticated writing' but, she claims, without substance, for they 'don't have a lot to write about' (Modjeska 2006: 31). Thus the debate over the legitimacy of creative writing as a field of study and research within the academy is more or less decided in a phrase. A dismaying proposition about language in an essay arguing for the intellectual credibility of writing is allowed to stand: namely, that the tools of fiction are best employed by those who have *factual* things to say.

Language is in every instance tied to its particular speaker, its particular participants, and its personal, institutional, political, social and historical contexts. Roland Barthes alluded to this when he remarked in his introduction to *Writing Degree Zero* (Barthes [1953] 1988), that 'to share the same language is a small matter' (Barthes 1988: 15).

With these two propositions in mind - that language is a sub-set of human behaviours aimed at communication, and that each act of language incorporates a particular context so thoroughly that language cannot be isolated from the instance of its occurrence - I want to position writing within the PhD. Two recent educational and intellectual forces have relatively recently fixed our attention on the fact that the PhD thesis is performed within language. First, the presence of creative writing (sometimes called professional writing) in undergraduate university courses has inevitably resulted in the demand for creative work to be included in the PhD. This means that writing - with its graphic presence, its particular features as a form of communication, its associations with literature and through speech with sounds, music and rhythm - becomes as important and as much a matter of investigation as the movement of ideas, logic, propositions and evidence in a thesis. The second force is the effect of critical theoretical movements that go under the banners of psychoanalysis, semiotics, structuralism, post-structuralism, Marxism, feminism, and deconstruction. Broadly, these and other critical schools of analysis have insisted every text is writing, and apart from any factual or logical claims it makes, a text is caught in the rhetorical strategies and undecidable uncertainties surrounding the meanings of words. Any text, including the PhD, can be critiqued as writing. Writing, in Barthes' image, has passed 'from an initial non-existence in which thought, by a happy miracle, seemed to stand out against the backcloth of words' through the stages of a progressive solidification (Barthes 1988: 5). It is no longer possible to ignore the thesis as text, or the thesis as performance of a certain kind of text. What natural law, for example, dictates that, whatever your topic, it can be covered thoroughly and naturally in 80,000 words or 100,000 words?

While both these forces are exerting a strong influence on the PhD in arts and humanities disciplines, sometimes leading to an over-emphasis on poetics and stylistics or to despair and confusion over the possibility of writing oneself out of the impasse of the undecidable, one remedy is to keep the wider purpose and context of language, even written language, in mind. This must be, as integrational linguistics insists, communication.

From the vantage point of the views on language proposed above, I want to put two proposals about the structure and writing of the PhD, one connected with the academic exegesis or dissertation and the other with the increasingly common creative component of the PhD (that part Drusilla Modjeska might regard as sophisticated writing with little justification for its existence). [note 1]

The Case of Scholarly Writing

First, I propose that the writing of an academic thesis or dissertation must be a creatively open-ended performance if the document is to communicate with its readers. One could argue that creativity is already implied in the requirement that a PhD be an *original* contribution to knowledge in its field, and I do see this as a crucial and practical starting-point for any PhD project. The originality of the PhD must arise, of course, from the research question. The question must be an informed one, but more importantly it must be real. By this, I mean it must matter. In one sense it is easy to ask questions that matter - *Why am I here? What can be done about human aggression? Why do we lie to each other so often?* - but once a scholar has become expert in a field or discipline it requires a degree of creativity to ask the particular important questions that might make a contribution to a particular discipline or even move that discipline forward. It is always a relief to have a PhD student arrive at the beginning of candidature with the right question being asked at the right time.

Apart from the above creative demand, there is a creative attention required in order for an academic thesis to succeed as a written communication. What are some of the implications of the fact that the PhD is written - that it is writing? And what exactly is writing? Is it language in the same sense that speech is language? If we think of writing as a biomechanical form of communication it becomes apparent that with writing there are particular features not characteristic of other forms of communication (Harris 1998: 119). For one, the writer can also be the reader long before a document is put into the hands of the actual intended reader. This is not possible when speech is the basis of communication. We cannot act as speaker and as listener before a communication is received. In addition the writer can repeat this cycle of being writer then reader repeatedly. This creates both an opportunity and an expectation. The opportunity is of the kind that happens in conversation when a listener responds with, 'What did you mean by that?', 'Surely that's an exaggeration!', 'But what about …' or 'Could you say that in another way?' The challenge and opportunity for the writer is to create a text out of this exchange between the self as writer and the self as reader, one which records the exchange in a kind of writing that is productive, intelligent, testing, pre-emptive and exploratory. The expectation on the part of the reader is that the document will address many of the possible responses, objections and reactions going through the reader's mind as the document is read. This aspect of written communication is important to the PhD because it is, presumably, engaging in debates, revisions and reviews of hypotheses, arguments and evidence; that is, in an ongoing intellectual and scholarly exchange. Many examiners do include in their assessment of a PhD consideration of its achievement as a written text, that is as writing, and good supervisors will ensure that this is acknowledged

from the beginning so that a process of writing, reading, reflecting, then writing again, re-reading and reflecting again is followed as a thesis is gradually developed. In this process the ideal supervisor acts as a rehearsal venue for the text. This supervisor acts as if he or she is the reader (examiner) and sends the text back to be re-shaped further, always with the eventual reader in mind. A thesis is not written once, but painstakingly argued into existence through these many rehearsals of communication afforded to the writer. Through this process the PhD student has an opportunity to become not just a careful scholar but also an accomplished writer - not merely in the sense Drusilla Modjeska meant when she wrote of modulating a voice and adopting narrative techniques, but in a way that pays respect to the kind of communication taking place between reader and writer. This I consider a creative development, for the thesis requires from its writer a creatively imagined communication if it is to succeed when it does arrive in the hands of its reader. Such writing will bring into itself a 'feel', a 'texture', a 'style' that will emerge from such creative attention.

What does it mean to say writing can be accomplished with attention to questions of feel, texture or style? Again, to answer this it is necessary to keep in mind what writing is and what its purpose is. As I have argued above, any form of language is always bent towards the demands of a particular occasion of communication. The more aware the communicator is of the many factors influencing communication, the more likely the language used will be effective for the particular task at hand. One of these factors is writing's mysterious relationship to speech. In fact, the written word detaches the spoken word from the speaker, and at this time in history invites the reader to take in words as silent events. This was not always the case, as we know. St Augustine was amazed, in the fourth century AD, to discover his teacher, Ambrose, could read silently (Fischer 2001: 237). Ambrose is the saint in whose mouth a hive of bees settled when he was an infant. Perhaps he had no choice but to read silently. It wasn't until the end of the fifteenth century that silent reading became the norm, and this development was in part made possible by the replacement of papyrus (aquatic reed of the sedge family) with more readily available and cheaper parchment (goat and sheep skin) bound into books (Fischer 2001: 237-38).

To press this question of what writing is a little further, we can say writing is not necessarily a visual or graphic version (a reduction) of language, as the marvellous invention of Braille text clearly shows. Braille is accessed by touch alone and yet it counts as writing. Writing might be understood then as a spatial configuration that indicates the order or sequence in which a message is to be received (Harris 1998: 119-124) while still allowing a reader to scan across a message in as many directions as they wish. The sequential reading signalled in writing (whether left-to-right, or down in columns, or right-to-left as the case may be) does, however, encourage a continuing integration of reading and speaking, partly through transforming speech into the paradoxical experience of silent speaking or inner speech. The late poet, Denise Levertov (1923-1997), spoke of an inner voice or inner song closely linked with the progression of written words on a page:

> … a poet, a verbal kind of person, is constantly talking to himself, inside of himself, constantly approximating and evaluating and trying to grasp his experience in words. And the 'sound,' inside his head, of that voice is not necessarily identical with his lateral speaking voice, nor is his inner vocabulary identical with that which he uses in conversation. At their best sound and words are song, not speech. The written poem is then a record of that inner song. (Levertov 1992: 92)

Levertov is attempting to acknowledge the particular kind of communication the written word is, while keeping in mind its continuing and strangely silent connection to speech. At its most ancient and primitive, this song could be related to the fundamental division between two vague groups of sounds upon which speech is based: the singing vowels that speak our passions and the rough consonants of our needs (Foucault 1994: 103, quoting Rousseau). If the PhD is to speak to its reader then, I hold, it must bend its ear to both its own voice and the possibilities of the inner voice of the reader.

One of the most daring, creative and common moves made in language, and especially in written communication, is the metaphor. A willingness to think one's way critically through the implications of new and old metaphors is at the forefront of any creative writing that is truly scholarly, philosophical, critical, poetic, fictional, or confessional. When metaphor is mentioned it might seem at first that we are referring to those perverse and outrageous flights of imagination and daring that result in, for instance, poems such Craig Raine's 'A Martian sends a postcard home' or Wallace Stevens' 'Of modern poetry' or Shakespeare's sonnets. But metaphors, creative metaphors, can be avenues to solving scientific problems and especially to communicating the solutions to these problems. Ernest Rutherford's statement in 1911 in an address to the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society that atoms 'must resemble miniature solar systems and not solid spheres' (Evans 1939: 91) was his inspired solution to the problem of atoms passing through other atoms without deviation but for a small number that did deviate, some dramatically. More lately the notion that an electron is like a butterfly in a cathedral (Toolan 1996: 61) or that its movements are shaped like a cloud about the nucleus (Hill 2000: 72) are advances on the image Rutherford proposed. Once we become aware of metaphors as associational sparks based upon analogy, intuition, imagination and complex but typically human leaps of thought, we find metaphors everywhere and in almost every sentence we utter. Metaphors are characteristic of our habits of thought. The American poet Billy Collins offers a wry take on the fondness of poets for the metaphor when he asks:

> And how will it ever end?
> unless the day finally arrives
> when we have compared everything in the world
> to everything else in the world,
> and there is nothing left to do
> but quietly close our notebooks
> And sit with our hands folded on our desks
> (Collins 2005: 83)

In poetry, it might seem that the metaphor has become an end in itself, a pyrotechnics. But what is the value of the deliberate, risky and creative form of the metaphor to the PhD? First, it requires that the writer encompass the whole picture or the whole sense of an argument or perspective important to a thesis in one brief image. It is a moment of both insight and summary. It forces the writer to ask the question, 'what is it I am getting at here? How could my point be captured all at once in its complexity and subtlety - and most strikingly?' In commenting on Rutherford's 1911 image of atomic structure, his biographer Ivor Evans noted Rutherford's 'gift for seizing upon the vital point' (Evans 1939: 91). The metaphor invites an examination of its implications, a testing of its usefulness and accuracy against whatever claim is being argued. Further than this, the metaphor is an appeal to the senses as much as to the intellect, and in this aspect the metaphor is a comprehensively human way of communicating. Some attempts at the creative use of metaphors work better than others, and this difference points us to the qualities of the successful metaphor. Keeping in mind that the purpose of the metaphor must be insight

and the communication of that insight, the metaphor that works best seems to be the one that 'goes on' (Toolan 1996: 93). By this is meant the quality that provides, provokes and suggests deeper and more various inferences the longer one spends with it. To make another point about the metaphor, it shows something of the texture of the mind of a writer. The metaphor is as well an impetus to fresh thinking because of its indeterminate, suggestive character. The metaphor is risky, for there is no immediate guarantee the reader will understand it in the same way the writer intended, and this both enlivens and creatively challenges writer and reader. In the context of the PhD it can break out of a bland, scholarly, all-bases-covered mode of writing to one that risks charges of either impropriety or inexactness.

The British contemporary linguist Michael Toolan makes the point that, as well as delivering mind-expanding possibilities, the metaphor enhances intimacy between writer and reader (Toolan 1996: 57). He notes it is hard to find constructive examples of creative metaphor use in specifically direct insults. Insults are marked by the use of dead or conventional metaphors. As soon as a creative element is introduced the speaker/writer is appealing to and respecting the imaginative and intellectual faculties of the listener. Michael Ondaatje's wonderful poem 'Sweet like a Crow' (Ondaatje 1980: 94-95) is an example of how an insult once treated with attentive creativity becomes both a shared joke and a love poem.

To make the importance and usefulness of the metaphor more vivid, I give you some examples from scholars tackling difficult questions, coincidentally about language. At the beginning of chapter four in part two of the *Course in General Linguistics* Saussure tackles the way language arises through the involvement of two elements: ideas and sounds. He offers the following set of images:

> Psychologically, setting aside its expression in words, our thought is simply a vague, shapeless mass … In itself, thought is like a swirling cloud, where no shape is intrinsically determinate. No ideas are established in advance, and nothing is distinct, before the introduction of linguistic structure.
> But do sounds, which lie outside this nebulous world of thought, in themselves constitute entities established in advance? No more than ideas do. The substance of sound is no more fixed or rigid than that of thought. It does not offer a ready-made mould, with shapes that thought must inevitably conform to. It is a malleable material which can be fashioned into separate parts in order to supply the signals which thought has need of. So we can envisage the linguistic phenomenon in its entirety - the language, that is - as a series of adjoining subdivisions simultaneously imprinted both on the plane of vague, amorphous thought, and on the equally featureless plane of sound …
> Thought, chaotic by nature, is made precise by this process of segmentation. But what happens is neither a transformation of thoughts into matter, nor a transformation of sounds into ideas. What takes place, is a somewhat mysterious process by which 'thought-sound' evolves divisions, and a language takes shape … One might think of its as being like air in contact with water: changes in atmospheric pressure break up the surface of the water into series of divisions, i.e. waves. The correlation between thought and sound, and the union of the two, is like that. (Saussure 1983: 110-11)

We move from the shapeless cloud of unformed thoughts to the malleable material of sound, to the two separate featureless planes of sound and thought, to the image of waves formed by the interaction of unseen air and visible water. The final image tries to encapsulate for us the meaning of the phrase 'thought-sound', while expressing dynamically and visually the idea of language as a single system of segmentations drawn from the interaction of two elements: unseen thoughts and audible sounds. There is much to feel, much to see, and much to think about in these images won from abstract principles. We can see at once that Saussure's concept of language is of a form not a substance, and of a form characterised by articulation. We can see that he is speaking of a system arising as a whole. The waves formed on water are a system, they are not separate units individually built into a whole. It is only through analysis that the constituent parts are isolated. Not long after this passage Saussure turns to the famous image of language as a sheet of paper with two inseparable but distinct sides that represent once again the two elements of sound and thought. It is a metaphor much used in later literary theory but I think it is less extendable than the image of sea and atmosphere.

The metaphor, like the fable, takes on the character of an observation that has forced a lesson or an insight on us. Each metaphor makes to fall upon us like that apple dropping from its tree above Newton as he stared at the moon on an autumn night in 1666 (Maury 1992: 18-19). The metaphor is language reaching beyond its insular self for knowledge; we might think of it as thought escaping the thinker.

A second example comes from Michel Foucault's (1926-1984) *The Order of Things* (1994 [1966]). In attempting to pursue the paradoxical significance of the verb *to be* as both a condition of language and one part of language he writes:

> Without a way of designating being, there would be no language at all; but without language, there would be no verb *to be*, which is only one part of language … Comparing language to a picture, one late eighteenth-century grammarian defines nouns as forms, adjectives as colours, and the verb as the canvas itself, upon which the colours are visible. An invisible canvas, entirely overlaid by the brightness and design of the words, but one that provides language with the site on which to display its painting. (Foucault 1994: 94-5)

Typically for Foucault, this image comes after a long abstract discussion and serves the function of summarising, underlining and saying-in-other-words what has already been reiterated several different ways. This draws our attention to another useful attribute of the metaphor - it acts as a mnemonic. Once this image of canvas as both the condition that makes a painting possible and one part of the painting itself (its visibility often erased in the making of the picture) has become vivid in our minds, Foucault's paradoxical thought is fixed for us.

I have argued here that language is always part of an instance of communication. Communication, and the open-ended creativity this requires, must take priority. I have suggested that communication has many varied, subtle and specific elements each time it happens. To settle on fixed rules or a fixed grammar unsettles the possibilities of communication. I have suggested that writing involves language, but is importantly different from speech. Writing presents particular opportunities and challenges. Among these are the slow, painstaking creative rehearsals and revisions that can go into a written passage that will be read in perhaps less than a minute. I have suggested that

the metaphor is an element of creativity in language that can enhance the communication of thought and perspective in a scholarly PhD. It is not just a move that poets make.

A counter-example is useful. It is not difficult to find writing that dies on the page, and it can be disheartening to try to unravel the reasons a certain piece of writing does not work as communication, even when its meaning is clear, because the tendency with this sort of critical commentary is to suggest rules-of-thumb for so-called good writing. Take the following brief article published in the *Australian* Higher Education Supplement in August 2006, written by the head of a university school of philosophy:

> It is a shame that some scientists see ethics committees as existing to hinder research, in particular medical research that could potentially provide health benefits to patients suffering from a wide variety of medical conditions. Many of those who serve on ethics committees, and this includes ethicists and lawyers, do not see themselves as seeking to hinder lifesaving research - indeed any kind of research - but as facilitating research by assisting researchers to see the ethical implications of what they ask research participants to consent to.
> Garry Jennings of the Baker Heart Research Institute quoted in the accompanying article, on the other hand, seems to regard ethics committees, lawyers and ethicists as adversaries who do not see the value of maximising the use of any human tissue that becomes available and who deliberately put obstacles in the path of potentially lifesaving medical research.
> This attitude is deeply worrying, not just because it sees ethics committees as being antagonists rather than collaborators but also because Jennings does not appear to appreciate the ethical complexities of conducting research with human participants. Indeed, this is precisely why there is a need for ethics committees which, through a broad membership that includes not only lawyers and ethicists but also lay people as well as medical scientists, are able to reflect in a dispassionate way on the ethics of the research with human participants that they are asked to approve.
> Not all scientific inquiry is life enhancing nor does it inevitably confer benefits on those who are asked to take part in it. Moreover, general debate about the common good and what medical research is good is not restricted to the scientist but involves al members of the human community.
> The scientist needs the ethics committee to provide critical reflective comment on what they propose to do with human participants and, among other things, their tissues and this is an inevitable outcome of the complex nature of research and of ethical questions to which such research gives rise. (Ozolins 2006: 30)

In response to this, I wish to make some brief points about this passage of writing that have more to do with common sense, psychology and a feel for communication than with grammar or rules for fine writing. Each of us over-uses certain expressions and words. In conversation it does not matter much, but in a text repetitions can become tedious quickly. Here, 'indeed' is used twice, as is 'potentially'. But even more strangely, in the first paragraph the words 'research' and 'researcher' are repeated seven times in one sentence. This, to me, is a case of writing that has not been heard with that inner, rhythmic ear. Three times we are told that ethics committees include ethicists and lawyers.

Again, it might work in a conversation to keep making this point, but I would argue that in a written text, once information is given, a repetition of it must carry an explicit justification (even if ironically delivered). I did not mention above that another particular characteristic of written communication is that it makes complex sentences possible, sometimes much longer than can be constructed or handled in speech. In the fourth paragraph of this text, which is itself one sentence, a number of subordinate clauses and qualifying phrases build the sentence as a series of statements enclosed within statements, each introduced by its conjunction '… which … that … but also … as well as …', eventually separating the main verb of the main descriptive clause so far from its subject that I found myself scanning and re-scanning the text in order to catch the thrust of the sense. The sentence ends with a redundant descriptive phrase that to my mind wastes a rhetorical opportunity to make the ending an emphatic moment. Then there is the doubtful and shifting status of 'and' in the equally long final sentence, interfering with its immediate reception by the reader. The article reads as a first draft. It is a series of sentences developing important points and carrying with them the sorts of qualifications and clarifications the mind throws in as one thought follows another. The next step, that of the writer receiving the message in a rehearsal of communication, has not happened. The writing has not become personal in the sense that there is a person writing this who foresees it as an exchange between actual people, a writer and a reader.

What, aesthetically and psychologically, is it we want from what we read? It is the same as what we want from all the other patterns in our lives - the buildings we inhabit, our workplaces, the streets and towns, circles of friends, networks of family, the many selves we come to realise inhabit our being. The architect Christopher Alexander began with this question when constructing his philosophy of building that he called 'a pattern language'. What we seek, he suggested, are 'moments and situations when we are most alive' (Alexander 1979: x). Conceiving of architecture and design as a community's shared language, he observed, 'A living language must be personal. A language is a living language only when each person in society, or in the town, has his own version of this language' (Alexander 1979: 337). It is thus both personal and shared. This communication can be spoiled, Alexander argued, by the desire for rules and the fear of chaos. 'Without method and more method, we are afraid the chaos which is in us will reveal itself … [But] the fact is, that this seeming chaos which is in us is a rich, rolling, swelling, dying, lilting, singing, laughing, shouting, crying, sleeping *order*. If we will only let this order guide our acts … ' (Alexander 1979: 15). It is these qualities of trust in a process and awareness of the shared nature of an act of communication, I feel, that has not emerged in this sample of writing.

Reinforcing one of the central points I have drawn from integrational linguistics, the words of Wallace Stevens in his reflection on the double role of the writer as both speaker and listener, make a suitable endpoint to this part of the discussion. The poem as a kind of performance, Stevens writes (and we might replace poem with thesis) has to:

> speak words that in the ear,
> In the delicatest ear of the mind, repeat,
> Exactly, that which it wants to hear, at the sound
> Of which an invisible audience listens,
> Not to the play, but to itself, expressed
> In an emotion as of two people, as of two
> Emotions becoming one.
> (Wallace Stevens 1988 [1942]: 298)

The Case of Creative Writing

Creative writing now vies for a position in the constellation of academic disciplines in Australian universities, and feels the pressure to claim the status of research. This is a peculiarly Australian phenomenon, for American universities have adopted the Master of Fine Arts or professional doctorates as the endpoints for training and education in creative writing. The current commitment of Australian universities to the single model of the teaching-and-research institution, along with the developing requirement that incoming academics hold a relevant PhD as a basic qualification, means that creative writing is now drawn into the existing systems of research and research support. If academics holding creative writing PhDs are to apply for ARC grants, as is required of them in work performance reviews, and if they are to advocate for the integrity of their discipline, they must claim creative writing can be research (Strand 1998: 31). This is an ongoing issue, important to note here but strangely enough not immediately affecting the ways all PhDs are being constructed and written. The PhD is perhaps being driven by market needs and demands, while ARC definitions of research are driven by government-influenced national research priorities in a climate of scarce funds. The one force dismantles boundaries while the other drives a conservative, fiscally responsible approach to decision making.

What kinds of PhDs are being written now, and how is the relationship between creative and scholarly work being negotiated? In 2003 Elaine Martin and Judith Booth edited the anthology *Courageous Research* that aimed to highlight unusual, exciting, creative and courageous forms of research being undertaken by PhD students, mainly from Victoria University in Melbourne. These included a novel by Doris Brett (later published as *Eating the Underworld*) in three voices dealing with a life-threatening illness, accompanied by an exegesis in the voice of a psychological study; another was a study of suicide from the viewpoint of one who had attempted suicide, offering a critique of suicidology, a personal narrative, and a spiritual inquiry. Deborah Wood included her own self-portraits in a study of women's self-portraits; another investigated how one might represent the sounds made by people while watching games of Australian Rules football; another took its methodology from the experience of watching the eight-hour holocaust documentary *Shoa* to develop a thesis set in male saunas, aiming to evoke the experience of space in these saunas. What characterises each of the contributions to this anthology is the commitment of each student to the project and its integrity. The issues matter to the students, the writing aims to communicate (and interrogate) not just ideas but passion and values, and each student sets as high a standard as possible for their work. At the conclusion of the book, Professor Valerie Walkerdine from the University of Western Sydney wrote of the importance of doing research in the social and human sciences that, at a gut level, one knows is important, and at the level of articulation is at first almost unexplainable. 'Our feeling, the briefest flash of intuition, tells us something important that we need to attend to' (Martin 2003: 131). In the creative arts more widely projects are being developed that break down disciplinary boundaries and academic proprieties. And in the field of literary theory this has begun to happen through, for example, the recent writings of Jane Tompkins and Frank Lentricchia.

If a creative PhD is to count as research is it only possible to accept *avant garde* creative work as suitable, or creative work that contains elements of self-critique or post-modern self-awareness? These sorts of questions lead us back to justifications and rationalisations of creative writing as an acceptable form of academic discipline or academic research. My experience is that these sorts of

questions do not preoccupy students or supervisors. In the above discussion of the academic part of a thesis I suggested that the successful PhD must give attention to questions of communication that will demand of the writer a degree of creativity. In turn, I suggest that what makes the creative part of a PhD a project different from, say, writing a novel or biography on one's own, is the requirement that whatever the project is, it must be developed around a question that arises from a deeply informed position as both creative writer and passionate scholar. The creative work must be one way of tackling a problem or question. The PhD students I am confident to work with are the ones who come at their work from this double set of directions - as both practitioner and scholar-critic, a relationship that might be both complementary and oppositional. This is different from the notion of writers needing to be readers, the idea that creative writers need to read as writers (Dawson 2005: 92-93), a dictum that has become one of the foundations of the pedagogy of creative writing. It is rather a willingness to work from a question or problem (a flash of intuition) at both creative and scholarly-critical tasks that in their different ways approach this question and in most instances will create a new and strange structure that works for each individual PhD thesis, bringing it together finally as a whole.

The creative PhD thesis, that emerging beast, however, is not always a happy creation. It is still a product and process being shaped by conflicting forces, confused ideas and ongoing debates. Whether it will be the qualities of arguments or the demands of a market that determine the future of the creative PhD, we must wait to see.

Notes

1. The growing presence and importance of creative elements in the PhD is attested in recent publications such as Krauth and Brady's *Creative Writing: Theory Beyond Practice* (2006), Martin and Booth's *Art-Based Research* (2007) and the emerging international journal for the practice and theory of creative writing, *New Writing*. return to text

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TEXT
Vol 11 No 1 April 2007
http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/

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