

This article was downloaded by: [Dr Paul Magee]

On: 24 September 2014, At: 12:35

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmnw20>

### What Distinguishes Scholarship from Art?

Paul Magee<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Faculty of Arts and Design, University of Canberra, Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia

Published online: 19 Sep 2014.

To cite this article: Paul Magee (2014): What Distinguishes Scholarship from Art?, *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, DOI: [10.1080/14790726.2014.956120](https://doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2014.956120)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2014.956120>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

# What Distinguishes Scholarship from Art?

**Paul Magee**

*Faculty of Arts and Design, University of Canberra, Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia*

*(Received 17 June 2014; accepted 3 August 2014)*

The paper concerns Michael Biggs and Daniel Büchler's 2010 claim that the creative arts doctorate is a contradictory amalgam of two discursive modes, one aimed at translating a research experience into a 'single, unified answer' to a problem, the other at eliciting a plurality of responses in diverse audiences through an evocative artefact. I set forth the lines of this critique, and then compare the analysis of scholarly method it is based upon with Jacques Lacan's fascinatingly similar account of what he calls 'the university discourse'. My discussion diverges from Biggs and Büchler's, however, when it comes to considering Lacan's own writing style, which seems far more geared to eliciting a plurality of responses than presenting a 'single, unified answer'. Lacan is, of course, a psychoanalyst. But many of the authors broadly associated with him in this stylistic regard (Derrida, Foucault, Serres, Deleuze, Barthes, among others) are academics. By Biggs and Büchler's analysis, they write as artists. This is curious, given that we cite them as our pre-eminent academic authorities. I reflect on how we might have to nuance Biggs and Büchler's distinction to accommodate this paradox, and further consider its implications for the style of humanities scholarship an exegesis might best assume, to satisfy critiques like theirs.

**Keywords:** university discourse, epistemology, scholarly style, Lacan, post-structuralist writing, art

## 1. What distinguishes scholarship from art?

Let me begin with the compelling distinction Michael Biggs and Daniela Büchler have recently made between the different audience relations enjoyed by creative artworks, on the one hand, and scholarly writings, on the other (2010); for it is not as if we experience both types of communication in the same way. Say rather that we approach them prepared and hoping for a specific type of experience in each case. The community engaged in the arts, they write:

values 'the event' which promotes the direct encounter with the artefact. The direct encounter in turn precipitates a plurality of experiences and, because these experiences are all different, a single unified answer does not emerge. (91)

The community engaged in the reading of scholarly books and articles, on the other hand, is generally looking for a clear and persuasive proposition in

response to an identified problem: 'the academic research model attempts to hone in on a single answer to a question' (91).

In writing that I find this distinction, from the authors' 2010 article 'Communities, Values, Conventions and Actions', compelling, I am referring in part to the way it casts light on a specific institutional impasse, one they refer to as 'the hasty academecisation of the creative practice community' (87). But actually, it seems to me that their distinction between cultural apparatuses geared around the production and reception of plural, and conversely singular, meanings can illuminate a broad range of epistemological issues, with relevance well beyond the current state of the creative arts as a university-based research discipline. I will turn to these in section two, which will bring some of Jacques Lacan's ideas to the table as well.

But first, I will outline the issue to which Biggs and Büchler are responding. They describe their field of intervention in the phrase I quoted above: 'the hasty academecisation of the creative practice community' (2010, 87). This is the process whereby tertiary-level arts education has, in a range of Western European and Anglophone countries since the 1980s, transformed from an 'atelier model' (88), involving instruction by arts teachers who were expected to produce art in addition to doing their teaching, and so to lead by example, to a new, university model, based around instruction by artist-academics, who are expected to produce not so much art but rather research in addition to their teaching, the latter having in some ways taken on a more university style as well.

This change can be attributed to a number of factors, including the incorporation of former arts colleges and polytechnics into universities under new, 'unified' models of national tertiary education provision, as in the British and Australian cases some 25 years ago (2010, 88; Strand 1998, 1–5), and in the E.U. more recently, with the onset of the 'Bologna model' (Kälvermark 2010, 6–8). The requirement that such artist-academics not only have or obtain doctorates but also continue to publish research post-doctorally is, I would add, inseparable from the rise of neoliberal models of public sector governance, also since the 1980s, which effectively insist that academics buy back their right to work with ongoing demonstration that they actually do research, as measured in the fetishised forms of: doctorates, refereed knowledge reports, external grants and successfully supervised students (Rose 1999; Marginson 1997). Prior to then, academics were unobliged to produce any specific research articles at all, on the grounds that they would themselves be the best judges of what forms their investigations should take (Harvie 2000, 106), a situation which would have obviated the very problem to which 'hasty academicisation' refers. For the fact is that arts teachers, suddenly brought to account as researchers in these very specific, often tightly-controlled, terms (in the Australian case, global accounting giant KPMG was contracted by the government to monitor error rates, one consequence of which was the eradication in 1997 of a category allowing unexegeted artworks to earn research funding (Strand 1998, 7)), had to cobble together something from their practice that would indeed be seen as scholarly-style research.

And so, to put the matter back in Biggs and Büchler's words, those former arts teachers 'remedially built a collage' from resources at distinct odds to each other, viz. the two modes of engaging an audience schematised above: the aesthetic one geared around 'direct encounter' with an 'artefact' and aimed at generating 'a plurality of experiences' in onlookers, and the scholarly one, aimed at furnishing its readers 'a single answer to a question' (2010, 91), an answer whose truth or falsity has nothing to do with the material qualities of the paper and ink, or computer screen and pixels, serving to convey it (and nothing to do with the sensory quality of the words either). Biggs and Büchler's further point is that this unhappy circumstance explains the wide-spread 'dissatisfaction' (87) these new creative arts research products have occasioned, a 'dissatisfaction' felt not simply among those outside the discipline, but also even within it.

Consider the form doctoral research in the creative arts has converged upon, over these same years. By 2004, Julie Fletcher and Allan Mann were writing that 'contestation and debates' over the possible form of such a doctorate appeared 'to have been resolved by university policy developments that have established the "creative work plus exegesis" model'<sup>1</sup> (Fletcher and Mann 2004; see Strand, for a sense of an earlier era's alternatives, which may become ours again in the future). As readers of this journal will of course know, the exegesis is an academic-style essay, composed by the candidate, and intended to put his or her artwork in enough context to convey its original contribution. The requirement that an artist furnish such a document is not without problems, as Fiona Candlin points out (2000). Her critique centres on the fact that the examiner of any such exegesis has to somehow assess it and the creative work as together amounting to an 'original contribution to knowledge'. It is, after all, that singular test that the package must pass or fail, not two separate tests designed to measure scholarship, on the one hand, and artistry, on the other. Yet Candlin finds no coherent explanation for how the two parts of the 'creative work plus exegesis' model might, as it is put, 'speak to each other', to the extent of constituting an original contribution. And she insists that this is a problem: 'How do you produce or examine a PhD when it is unclear what competence constitutes per se?' She adds, incisively:

This is not to say we have a blank canvas and therefore the lack of parameters can be interpreted as an exciting opportunity for experiment and innovation. In fact the canvas is overloaded with precedents that candidates and staff have to negotiate. (2000)

Her crucial point is that the available, indeed crowding, precedents for good scholarly practice, on the one hand, and good arts practice on the other, cannot be willed away, do not add up, and often as not militate against each other.

Biggs and Büchler's intervention clarifies how contradictory those respective expectations of the 'creative work plus exegesis' doctoral dissertation package in fact are. An academic reading of such a package will want it to amount to a 'single answer' to a question that community recognises as valid. The validity of any such answer, Biggs and Büchler further remark, will have to do with an

additional value that community holds: originality, as academically defined. For one must not produce academic knowledge that simply concerns what one personally 'does not already know'. The aim is to speak about 'something that nobody knows' (86). This entails that a researcher perform sufficient literature reviews to identify an actual gap in the community's knowledge, and that he or she engage in a sufficiently accepted, replicable method, so as to give generality to the evidence founding his or her proposition as to what is actually going on (see further Biggs and Büchler 2007). It also entails, I would add, that that same researcher hone his or her writing voice of all neurotic and otherwise conflicting currents, the better to stand as proxy for anyone not present during the research, and wanting to trust in that author's singular account of it, as based on observations that are not coloured.

The most cogent thing one can say about an aesthetic reading of that same dissertation package, on the other hand, is that it will want the package to generate a 'plurality of experiences' – not just among diverse readers, but within one and the same reader. In fact, there is not much more you can say about what that reading will expect, for this very reason. But here a comment is in order. Surely the reason the word 'academic' has for so long now been pejorative in relation to the creative arts (it goes at least as far back as Kant 2000, 188) is because it indicates situations where we find – instead of a presentational impetus to a proliferation of different thoughts and emotions – a species of monologue. An author deaf to polyphony, Mikhail Bakhtin writes:

may of course create an artistic work that compositionally and thematically will be similar to a novel, will be 'made' exactly as a novel is 'made', but will not thereby have created a novel. The style will give him away. We will recognise the naively self-confident or obtusely stubborn unity of a smooth, pure, single-voiced language. (1981, 327)

We call art 'academic' when it feels like its author's prime purpose was to have done things the 'right' way (his or her work is "'made" exactly as a novel is "made"'), to ensure the 'right' outcome. I would go further and argue that it is the absence of any such mastering, authorial voice that allows a 'plurality of experiences', on the part of the audience, to flood in. That granted, it follows that there is no chance for anything like a verifiable process for making art ever to arise: *I have made this work the right way and therefore you must recognise it as right*. We cannot afford that mastering I to infiltrate the surface of the work. So method's out the window too.

Whereas the problem with a 'hasty' research doctorate, 'remedially built' as a 'collage' of these two distinct modes of engaging a reader, is that an examiner needs to arrive at a summative reading of the whole. That is not possible in scholarly terms, from which perspective the package as a whole will appear an obfuscation, by dint of the artwork's polyvocality, of that one singular perspective you need to uphold if you are to table an evidence-based proposition about how things truly are. Nor is it possible in aesthetic terms, from which perspective the package is vitiated by its author's clearly evidenced desire to be seen to have done things the right way, through a valid method.

From within either perspective, and for directly contrary reasons in each case, the package as a whole will come across as *a failure at the level of editing*.

Nor is any third perspective in the offing, other than that vague sense that it is not really fair to be too hard-line about anything, in the scholarly component, nor as regards the artwork, given the overall incoherence of the task. That vague sense is, in other words, really to do with an occlusion of one's powers of judgement. (Some might think disempowering judges a good thing, perhaps on post-structuralist grounds. But the unfortunate fact is, as Candlin points out, that a candidate faces the same problem as the examiner. That candidate must spend three whole years facing it, while aiming the work somewhere, somewhere incoherent. How is that a fair thing to visit upon the next generation?)

That good doctoral work in Creative Writing<sup>2</sup> is nonetheless possible with the cards so stacked against it is a curious fact that I will turn to below.

But first, I would like to underline the challenge Biggs and B uchler's analysis offers to current practice in the field. I have just referred to the lack of a third perspective on the 'creative artwork plus exegesis' dissertation package, once we subtract that guiltily benevolent refusal (the 'vague sense' I referred to above) to give the candidate the benefit of one's uncompromising judgement. Could we not say that an outstandingly original creative arts doctorate will find how to create that third way, just as we accept that certain, extraordinarily original works of art demand and receive wholly new modes of reading from critics? Consider Duchamps' ready-mades, Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, Cage's '4 minutes, 33 seconds'. Who's to say an artwork can't out of nowhere suddenly do it? Biggs and B uchler are sanguine on the matter:

the world of professional creative practice has its codes which determine success and by which membership can be judged. We claim this even for contemporary creative practice, which appears to thrive on breaking rules and changing standards. However, in our view the professional practice of any activity is never a case of 'anything goes', despite occasional appearances to the contrary. (2010, 85)

What such an approach helps us to see, by bringing contexts of reception into the very definition of what art is, is that the 'anything goes' that pertains in our contemporary art forms is only really so in specific directions. It is certainly true that 'anything goes', or rather might be made to go, in regard to subject matter, and material form. As Jacques Ranc ere comments, the late 18<sup>th</sup> century brought about in Europe an 'aesthetic revolution' founded paradoxically upon 'the ruin of any art defined as a set of systematisable practices with clear rules.' (2003, 205) What came in that old art's place was the idea that 'everything is material for art' (206). Did not Duchamps make art from a bicycle wheel and a stool (*mutatis mutandis*, a creative work and an exegesis?), a bottle rack, the R. Mutt urinal, a grassy cup, that geography book left out in the sun, and then the rain, and later exhibited as a geography book? And the infinite responses any such piece can legitimately generate is well within the rule of 'anything goes' as well. Why shouldn't the encounter with that geography book installation lead

you to convert to fundamentalist Christianity? Who's to say that's a wrong reading of it? That it's any more wrong than a statement about the disembodiedness of modern meteorological knowledge? Anything does indeed go, in all these regards. But what will not be greeted with an 'anything goes' is an artwork that fails to generate the very plurality that phrase betokens. I reiterate my remark about the pejorative term 'academic', above. A work that seems to propose its own 'single, unified' reading will be criticised as 'dogmatic'. 'Academic'. 'Failed art'. In another context we would describe such a responsible voice, with justifiable approbation, as the right vehicle for conveying a thesis. Which is of course what legitimates it in the creative work plus exegesis model. And so one gets the depressing sense that a doctorate of creative arts is awarded for its candidate's ignorance of, or even worse their pretence of an ignorance of, art.

In short, I agree with Biggs and Büchler's characterisation of the status quo as one of 'compromise' (2010, 96), with deleterious consequences, including wide-spread 'dissatisfaction' (87). So why hold out hope? And how am I going now to posit a sort of third way, all the same?

## 2. An innate subversion

The following rests upon a gamble. I fully concur with Biggs and Büchler's description – I would call it that of a pragmatic stylistics (York 1986) – of how things function in the arts. But what if their characterisation of scholarship were wrong? Or rather, what if scholarship were a broader phenomenon than they allow, with normative tendencies precisely as they sketch them, but divergent ones as well? What, in fact, if certain wayward tendencies of scholarly production and reception were, especially in the humanities, closer to those that prevail over our arts? I am referring to an innate subversion, something our art fundamentally lacks.

This will involve looking at a passage in Jacques Lacan's 1969–70 seminar *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, which will both corroborate and suggest another possible strand to Biggs and Büchler's conclusion that 'the academic community's interest in producing single transferrable outcomes' necessarily runs counter to that 'plurality of experiences' we want from art. This is the seminar in which Lacan most explicitly theorises the operations of what he calls 'the university discourse' (41).

It is worth remarking, before turning to the passage I have in mind, that there is an immediate parallel within Lacan's very phrase 'the university discourse' to Biggs and Büchler's analysis, marked as the latter is by its keen attention to audience functions. For when Lacan uses the word 'discourse' he wants it to be understood always to imply a set of social links. Historically-given contexts of production and reception fashion any discourse, whether that of the university or even, in the supposedly intimate space of the clinic, that of the analyst. Perhaps the most striking of these pre-determined and pre-determining contexts, in relation to 'the university discourse', is that keenly-observing subject position Lacan will trace back to René Descartes's authoring of the cogito, and see as the very point of view of the scientific knowledge that has accumulated since:

The myth of the ideal I, of the I that masters, of the I whereby at least something is identical to itself, namely the speaker, is very precisely what the university discourse is unable to eliminate from the place in which its truth is found. From every academic statement by any philosophy whatsoever, even by a philosophy that strictly speaking could be pointed to as being the most opposed to philosophy, namely, if it were philosophy, Lacan's discourse – the *I-cracy* emerges, irreducibly. (63)

One can find a further, immediate corroboration of Biggs and Büchler's analysis here. For this theory of the university discourse's irrepressible '*I-cracy*' squarely relates to the scholarly mission of 'producing single transferrable outcomes'. That is to say, a bare requirement of the subject who will go as proxy for all other subjects, by recording his or her implicitly replicable observations on the consequences of following a valid method in relation to a given question, is that he, or she, must be the same as him or herself. One can see this in practice from the way all forms of slippage (slip of the pen, perhaps?) are erased from our knowledge reports, which as everyone knows require innumerable drafts over weeks, but nonetheless assume the fiction of a coherent speaker delivering a message without pause for sleep and bad or otherwise dreams. In a poem, which of course will require innumerable drafts over time too, you might well highlight that additional, luckily-found, slip-of-the-pen voice. It might even help you identify a genuine anxiety, to structure the work around. But it won't appear in one's scholarly article, the drafting of which is as much about forging authorial coherence between – i.e. forgetting about – disparately composed elements as anything else.

I will turn to the passage from *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* that I flagged above, a passage that corroborates Biggs and Büchler insistence on scholarship's normative tendency to 'producing single transferrable outcomes'. It specifically concerns how such transfer is facilitated in practice, by a community of readers. What, Lacan asks, is academic citation?

In the course of a text where you are making more or less good progress, if you happen to be in the right places of the class struggle, all of a sudden you will cite Marx, and you will add, 'Marx said.' If you are an analyst you will cite Freud and you will add, 'Freud said'. This is fundamental. (37)

This seems to tell us everything, and nothing. The comments immediately to follow are a little more pointed. They rely on a discussion earlier in the seminar, to do with enigma. Both of these things, Lacan will end up claiming, are forms of the 'half-said' (37). A citation, he will argue, only ever amounts to half a statement. It relies on a reader to complete it.

Allow me to backtrack for a moment. That preceding discussion of enigma began with Lacan offering as example of one the question 'How can we know without knowing?' (36). This led him to a reference to linguist Emile Benveniste's work (1971) on the distinction between the statement (*énoncé* – i.e. the propositional content of a given sequence of words) and the utterance

(*énonciation* – i.e. the meaning any such words derive from being articulated *in some particular context*; for instance, ‘we’re going to hang on for five more minutes’ means a very different thing at a bus stop, compared to over an abyss).

An enigma is most likely that, an utterance. I charge you with the task of making it into a statement. Sort that out as best you can – as Oedipus did – and you will bear the consequences. That is what is at issue in an enigma. (Lacan 2007, 36–37)

I now turn to our passage. An academic citation, Lacan says there, with reference back to his discussion of enigma, is ‘in its own way also a half-said.’ (37) It is a ‘half-said’ because when one either makes or reads a citation from ‘Marx or Freud [...] one does so as a function of the part the supposed reader takes in a discourse.’ (37) The part offered such a reader is the following:

I make a statement, and for the remainder, there is the solid support you will find in the author’s name for which I hand responsibility back to you. (37)

A citation, as I stated above, relies on the reader to complete it. At this point Lacan makes the strange comment that to cite a sentence from a work by Paul Ricoeur and to attribute it to Lacan is actually to give that sentence a very different ‘sense’ (37).

One way to read this theory of academic citation is that the mastery achieved by certain, canonical thinkers (for instance, those who made it into the list Thomson Reuters compiled of most cited authors in the humanities in 2007, which had: Foucault 1<sup>st</sup>, Bourdieu 2<sup>nd</sup>, Butler in 9<sup>th</sup> place, Freud 11<sup>th</sup>, Deleuze 12<sup>th</sup>, David Harvey at 18<sup>th</sup>, Benjamin 25<sup>th</sup> and Lacan at 33<sup>rd</sup> just pipping Marx by two at 35<sup>th</sup> (Education 2009)) requires a collaborative effort upon the part of readers, part of whose task is to participate in the fiction that some such stable figure as Deleuze actually exists and stands behind citational statements like ‘Deleuze argues *x*’ (*x* being either a paraphrase, or a, by-definition, selective quotation). Above I referred to Lacan’s claim that René Descartes is there at the very origins of ‘the University Discourse’, considered – by Lacan as much as by Biggs and Büchler – as a mechanism for ensuring ‘single transferrable outcomes’. He is there because he theorises and campaigns for the sort of subjectivity one needs for the machine to function: a self-same I. But it is also the case that Descartes has light to cast upon the subversive point I want to make here. I have in mind the passage near the very end of his 1637 *Discourse on the Method*, in which Descartes wonders about the value of his publishing anything, tells us how often it has occurred that he has explained his opinions to ‘people of good mind’, who seemed to understand them ‘most distinctly’, and yet ‘when they repeated those opinions, I have noticed that they almost always changed them in such a way that I could no longer acknowledge them as mine.’ Which reflection leads Descartes to ‘take this opportunity to ask future generations never to believe that the things people

tell them come from me, unless I myself have published them.’ (1968, 84). Such a stance would rule out all the secondary literature on Descartes. At the very least it would give us a pantheon (or Hell, as the case may be) of innumerable Descartes, one for each subsequent commentator. In short, we could read Lacan to be telling us that a part of the reader’s role, in relation to authoritative citation, is to collude in keeping ‘the myth of the ideal I, of the I that masters’ alive, by adding their readerly imaginations to the ‘reality effect’ (Attridge 2004, 7) that gives any such master his or her vivid, speaking voice. It is, after all, no small mystery how we manage to imagine anyone called Lacan is speaking to us through the wild congeries of his texts, to put the matter – ‘Lacan in *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* argues *x*’; but why not ‘Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* argues *y*’ to boot? – extremely.

There are numerous other ways to understand Lacan’s theory of academic citation. Rather than inspect them, allow me to hone in on the one I have raised so far, the little discussed (see Halperin’s *Saint Foucault* (1995), for a provocatively honest exception) matter of doctrinal citation: ‘Deleuze says’, ‘Lacan argues’, ‘Foucault demonstrates’. It is a phenomenon to which the humanities seem particularly given. Who has not felt that there is something a bit religious about it all? I take this path because it will eventually lead us to the divergent tendencies I referred to above. But not immediately. The analysis I will make of doctrinal citation should rather serve initially to corroborate the characterisation of scholarship as a machine for generating new knowledge, through the production of communally recognisable, singular answers, by an ‘ideal I’. It might even heighten our appreciation of those originating powers.

The reason is this: we certainly have all sorts of cultish behaviour in the humanities; but we do not actually have doctrinal citation. Our fall-back position, when challenged on anything in our citation that appears that way, is never to a dogma, and always to our translation of that thinker’s words into what would clearly be seen to be the case by an ‘I that masters’.

To appreciate how far from doctrinal this situation actually is, it is worth comparing how things stood in the Europe of Descartes’ era. Descartes was educated by Jesuits, whose school at La Fleche he attended from 1606 or 1607 to 1615 (Rodis Lewis 1992, 23). ‘Let no one adopt new opinions in the questions already treated by other authors’, Claudio Aquaviva, the 5<sup>th</sup> General of the Jesuits, wrote to the order’s teachers, some two decades before Descartes’ tuition began (qtd. in Ariew 1992, 67). One of Aquaviva’s immediate predecessors, François de Borgia, was more specific. I cite from a circular of his in the mid-1560s:

Let no one defend anything against the axioms received by the philosophers, such as: there are only four kinds of causes; there are only four elements; there are only three principles of natural things; fire is hot and dry; air is humid and hot.

Let no one defend against the most common opinions of the philosophers and the theologians, for example, that natural agents act at a distance without a medium.

Let no one defend any opinion contrary to common opinion without consulting the Superior or Prefect. (qtd. in Ariew 1992, 64–65)

For us, such doctrinal stances on prior authority are always repudiable through the provision of contradicting evidence, on the grounds that our knowledge is not sanctioned by tradition *per se*. It appears sanctioned at the level of tradition, to be sure. But the sanction ultimately lies in any such tradition's always-contestable accumulation of vigilant performances of something like the following stance (here Descartes' famous first rule of method, from the second chapter of the *Discourse on the Method*):

never to accept anything as true that I did not know to be evidently so: that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitancy and prejudice, and to include in my judgements nothing more than what presented itself so clearly and distinctly to my mind that I might have no occasion to place it in doubt. (1968, 41)

This has not always been the case. It is only over the early modern period – in which 'full responsibility for what one is advocating' became the 'cornerstone of intellectual morality' (Gaukroger 2006, 32), through that massive shift epitomised by works like the *Discourse on the Method*, Galileo's *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, and before either Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus* – that appeals to the evidence of one's personal observations, irrespective of all prior authority, come to be treated as anything other than puny. Why trust what an I can see, outside of and supposedly beyond all 'precipitancy and prejudice'? De Borgia's circular is explicit that you should not. Any observation to the contrary of 'there are only three principles of natural things' amounts, he is effectively saying, to a failure to achieve the perspective that knowledge requires: that of the 'the most common opinions of the philosophers', a form of objectivity, to be sure. For the Jesuit's knowledge, unless by way of divine revelation, is not confirmed subjectively, and in fact has nothing to do with what any method other than obedience might help you supposedly to see.

Our historically-received 'academic research model', in contrast, which 'attempts to hone in on a single answer to a question', does so by assuming the perspective of Descartes' at-the-time revolutionary and indeed repudiated, pared-back I. And this is very much my point, in claiming that there is no such thing as doctrinal citation in the humanities, all appearances to the contrary. We simply cannot afford to argue from authority alone, as Aquaviva and de Borgia's generations did, or rather still tried to. It has to be because that authority, a sort of Super-I, has seen with greater perspicacity than all the others what any other I in his or her shoes 'without precipitancy or prejudice' might. Witness the way any cudgel-clashing argument about the validity of 'Foucault's thinking' will translate it away from the wild texture of his writings and into the terms of what an unprejudiced I will, if trained on the same things as Foucault's, see truly to be the case. Thence Foucault's championed authority, always contestable as such, even among adherents. Aquaviva's 'Let us try... to

avoid having anyone suspect us of... teaching a new doctrine' (qtd. in Ariew 1992, 67) is simply not in our grammar of possible statements, (however much we might act that way as let us say dyed-in-the-wool Deleuzians, Lacanians, Marxists, whoeverians. We can only get there – at least in public – through a pathway implying allegiance to the perspective of an I that masters: theirs or our own, in the form of a claim on what every single I should 'without precipitancy or prejudice' see, the things they had the virtue first to see for us.

You can learn a lot about ancient Greek religion, Paul Cartledge interestingly remarks, by considering that its Gods are represented as twice as large as men on coins (1993, 46). In other words, their divinity was a species of heroism. That is the sort of authority those on the Thomson Reuters list have. We do not have doctrinal, so much as heroic citation, on behalf of an I we thus make appear twice as big as everyone else's. Which is why it is always possible quietly or otherwise to say *I don't care what 'Lacan' says, let's just look with our own eyes at the matter (the data, the text, the realities these premises imply etc.)*. One can always challenge. In Thomas Piketty's awesome case (2014) one can take on a whole discipline, the full pantheon.

A further comment, before I turn to the pivot of this writing, which is of course to do with the possibility of enigma in scholarly practice, a pertinent issue given that most of the authors named from the Thomson Reuters list above (Harvey and Piketty being the obvious, though not total, exceptions) in fact write enigmatically, voiding the mastering academic I in the process. Which puts them, by Biggs and Büchler's analysis, closer to artists. Actually, a fair deal of humanities scholarship has tendencies in that direction – and not just by dint of poor writing.<sup>3</sup>

My comment concerns what happens when you apply the curious thought-experiment found in Lacan's 1969–70 seminar and mentioned above (where Lacan swaps his own name in a citational reference for Ricoeur's) to authors about whom you know nothing at all. I have in mind authors who are nowhere near the Thomson Reuters list of top cited but serve as authority all the same, by dint of the fact that they anonymously participate in this same machine for 'producing single transferrable outcomes.' Following up their case will lead once more to corroboration, but also some slight undermining, of Biggs and Büchler's sharp distinction between the monologic aspiration and uptake of scholarship, and the plurality that wherever it comes from we find in art.

Let us imagine, then, that you are writing a paper and in the course of it want to refer to some established knowledge. You type in 'Studies have shown *x*', and then add a set of author-date references to: '(Eriksson 2009; Groennig 2001; Holmes and Fernandez 2008)'. Only out of perversity you decide to put the name 'Gruebner' in the place of 'Groennig'. What is curious is that on one level this change does not matter at all. It does not matter, in the sense that if you are citing the paper this baldly, as evidence of position *x*, it is on the grounds that any I – Groennig's sure, but why not Guebner's too? – would 'without precipitancy or prejudice' arrive at that same position *x*.

On another level, the true name is entirely relevant, for the following reason. An academic's research publications are, as Dennis Strand puts it, 'proxy' for

his or her 'overall research activity', and generally do not count as research outside that relation:

The publication is not the research but simply the outcome of the research process. The research occurs in the laboratory, the field, the studio, the library, at the computer terminal, in the workshop and may have extended over months, even years, before it is made public. (1998, 56)

That researching self, as I suggested above, has to be the same as the one who writes the paper, failing which the paper enters into the sackable category of scholarly fraud. In effect when writing a research paper you actually cite yourself, yourself as engaged in your own prior experience. For instance in this paper I keep citing the person who read all these books, Lacan's and so forth, that I write about from dodgy memory of reading last week, but really in depth a year or so before then, in some cases five years; I am only really glancing at these books now, to refresh said memory and find quotes to support its illusion of recall. I cite that past person as the same as myself and again, I rely on the reader to back me up on that, with their own means of reading coherence into the various references I make to that other.

One of the most revealing texts in the Cartesian corpus tackles this problem head-on, being in the unique historical position still to see the scholar's self-sameness *as a problem*. Descartes must, as we have seen, 'include in my judgements nothing more than what presented itself so clearly and distinctly to my mind that I might have no occasion to place it in doubt.' (1968, 41) His first attempt to construct a method around this requirement, the 1630 *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, expatiates on the problem that sometimes it is not possible to contain all the manifold materials that will validate a judgement in one 'continuous and uninterrupted movement of thought', such that the necessary relation of the component parts will be in one intuition 'clearly and distinctly' perceived. The vagaries of memory will intervene. But why trust in a memory that it really 'presented itself so clear and distinctly' to your mind? It might just be fulfilling a wish (or have been sent by an 'evil genius' (2006, 12)). The link to a certain proof is broken. Descartes' solution involves practising a retelling of the relations between those component parts, and getting faster and faster at it, 'until I have learnt to pass from the first to the last so quickly that I leave hardly any parts to the care of memory and seem to have a simultaneous intuition of the whole.' (1954, 158). Only thus can Descartes convince himself his I is integral enough to know anything.

Whereas we've simply learned to have faith in the I, our own and that of others. But not without experience of its difficulties.

Which is why composing academic writing is often as not like marshalling a personal army.

### 3. Lacan's theory of citation

For Lacan, Lacan himself sees, Lacan's discussion of enigma will reveal, Lacan swaps his own name, for Lacan too, Lacan will call it, Lacan's theory of citation, Lacan's claim, Lacan makes the strange comment, Lacan offering an

example, in which Lacan most explicitly theorises, Lacan uses the word, Lacan's discussion

#### 4. Saying the enigma

I leave aside the interesting question of what happens when one cites an authority precisely at the point where that authority utters an enigma, i.e. where one quotes the full enigma itself. I leave that aside, but note in passing that the effect is very different to proposing that one's reader pair a clear intention to a proposition whether in quote or paraphrase, and in fact much more like simply saying the enigma in one's (and now the reader's) own words, even as one attributes it.

Note too, that to swap Lacan's and Ricoeur's names in such a case is a far less significant undertaking. One might even substitute Descartes' name.

But before proceeding to conclusively confute this begging question it would be far fitter for you (if ye dare!) to hasitate to consult with and consequentially attempt at my disposals of the same dime-cash problem elsewhere, naturalistically, of course, from the blinkpoint of so eminent a spatialist. From it you will here notice, Schott, upon my for the first remarking you that the sophology of Bitchson while driven as under by a purely dime-dime urge is not without his cash-cash characktericksticks, borrowed for its nonce ends from the fiery goodmother Miss Fortune (who the lost time we had the pleasure we have had our little *recherche* brush with, what, Schott?) and as I further could have told you, as brisk as your D.B.C., behaviouristically *pailleté* with a coat of homoid icing which is in reality only a done by chance ridiculisation of the whoo-who and where's hairs theoricis of Winestain. To put it all the more plumbsily, the speechform is a mere sorrogate whilst the quality and tality (I shall explex what you ought to mean by this with its proper when and where and why and how in the subsequent sentence) are alternativomentally harrogate and arrogate, as the gates may be. (Joyce 2012, 119)

#### 5. Imagination

Anyone reading this journal article can imagine they are hearing the same voice, experiencing the same proof as anyone else.

#### 6. I-cracy

Michael Taussig calls it 'agribusiness writing' (2010, 32). I am referring to his recent, exasperated comments on the stylistic limitations of contemporary humanities scholarship, and in particular the way those limitations are imposed on the next generation in PhD programmes, to the point that in a field like literary studies, 'You can write about James Joyce, but not like James Joyce.' (29)

Actually writings like Taussig's *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (1986), with its evocations of Conrad, and its debt

to surrealism, or Benjamin's, or Joyce's, need to render account too, as any reflection on Lacan's discussion of enigma will reveal. It is a fiendishly difficult task to posit a world's complexity in such a way that the reader feels charged 'with the task of making it into a statement. Sort that out as best you can – as Oedipus did – and you will bear the consequences.' (Lacan 2007, 36–37). For why should that reader even bother? I will conclude by suggesting that we can find a name for whatever it is authors such as these enigmatically do, and that we can find that name within the creaking machinery of scientific methodology itself.

Nor should we ignore – as the 'agribusiness' in Taussig's term implies – that the achieved, I-bound perspective I have been otherwise tracing here leads to claims that at times, and certainly collectively, assume immense power in the world. Lacan himself sees this 'I-cracy', the scientific subject insisting on its own identity with itself and all others, as the very engine of modern science and technology, the engine that produced the engines all around us. You just have to read some of the classics of leftist political science to appreciate the critical power, at times quite awesome, of discourses propounded I-*cratically* (i.e. through the implicit premise that *I have followed a valid method and so have the right to say this, however subversive*). Think too of the I-bound and ultra-responsibilised discourse of our modern political leaders: for Lacan, I-*cracy* is the very form of mastery itself.

## 7. Models of enigmatic utterance

The reason good doctoral work in Creative Writing is nonetheless possible with the cards so stacked against it, as I put it above (i.e. two weeks ago, when drafting that section – 'not I, but the wind that blows through me' (Lawrence qtd. in Eggert 2009, 67)) is surely that in the best instances the exegetical component avails itself of the very currents Taussig taps into, that minor tendency towards enigmatic utterance that scholarship allows, no doubt because of the way it sparks off an investigative process in others, who are thus tasked to restore coherence to a putative, knowing I. In epistemological terms, you would have to say that this tendency to enigma amounts to a mode of research question (perhaps citing in the same breath Aristotle on the scientific impulse in fact driving 'the lover of myths' (1984, 1544)). For how else are we to explain the fact that citation in the humanities so massively clusters around authors whose putatively responsible, super-I intention is so manifestly difficult to reconstruct from the wild disparities of their utterance, and whose utterance is so often provocative and personally troubling. We have Lacan at 33<sup>rd</sup> most cited on the Thomson Reuters list. Benjamin, 25<sup>th</sup>. Derrida, 3<sup>rd</sup>. Foucault, number one. All of these writers are feasibly describable as 'poets'. To be fair some of that commentary is about artfully passing the enigma on. An exegesis that displays some of their mode can relatively easily accompany an artwork, because it too by and large voids the right-thinking I otherwise at scholarship's normative core. When produced in this mode, the exegesis can slide into being felt as yet another component part of an artist's portfolio; rather than yet another 'schizophrenic' (Owen 2006) instance of a would-be artwork

compromised by scholarly probity, a would-be scholarly contribution obfuscated by thoughts that have not been followed through.

That said, in creative writing, I would still want us to throw out the exegesis. For if a species of scholarly work can lead to a 'plurality of experiences' too, what actual need is there for what is at heart an accounting device within the creative writing doctorate? Why not converge energies upon the provision of one, singular work, on the grounds that it is possible to achieve the effects of poetic and novelistic art in works that are undeniable acts of scholarship as well? Which would be to take Lacan, Barthes, Derrida and even I will suggest Descartes (try to find a coherent I in the wildly polyphonic, self-styled 'fable' (1968, 29) which we know as the *Discourse on the Method*, and as one of the founding texts of modern science) for our models. Not as Super-I's to cite, unless enigmatically, but rather as models of enigmatic utterance, much as Auden and Moore serve poets as models of syllabic verse (and enigma, thus defined).

One might riposte that works such as Foucault's, or Lacan's, or Descartes', are not works of art at all, given the fact of their reception through the I-cractic protocols of scholarship. A comment of Susan Bordo's is interesting in this regard, in relation to that other famous, and scarcely less polyvocal text of Descartes', *The Meditations*. It has been, she writes, 'the primogenitor of wildly varying projects and temperaments' (1999, 6). But then Descartes, more 'than any other philosopher', Stephen Gaukroger reminds us, 'has been fashioned according to the philosophies of the time and interpreted accordingly.' (1995, 3). Such comments suggest that scholarship, when it comes to such works, acts markedly like we do in the face of art. We are drawn to them, and by them.

### Acknowledgements

This research was conducted during the course of two separate visiting fellowships, in the School of Literature, Language and Linguistics at the Australian National University, and in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of New South Wales, Canberra. I am grateful for the engaged comments, which colleagues in both institutions provided on earlier versions of this piece, and I would particularly like to thank Nicole Moore, Klaus Neumann, Russell Smith, Monique Rooney, Neil Ramsey and Gillian Russell.

### Note on contributor

Since 2004 Paul Magee has taught poetry composition and criticism at the University of Canberra, where he is Associate Professor. He is author of two books of poems, *Stone Postcard* (John Leonard Press, 2014), and *Cube Root of Book* (John Leonard Press 2006), and has also published a surrealist ethnography, *From Here to Tierra del Fuego* (University of Illinois Press, 2000). He is currently working on a book entitled *Poetry and Knowledge*.

## Correspondence

Any correspondence should be directed to Paul Magee, School of Creative Communication, University of Canberra, Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia ([paul.magee@canberra.edu.au](mailto:paul.magee@canberra.edu.au))

## Notes

1. 'Practice-led research' is of course another name for what I am discussing, as is 'practice-based research'. I think, however, the 'creative work plus exegesis model' is a more precise designation. That is because it is quite possible to perform practice-led research and simply submit a knowledge report about it. And one might similarly perform such research, but simply submit the artwork. This second option would have the same effect as Strand's (1998) proposal to the then-new accounting bodies, viz. the establishment of 'research equivalence' between creative works and scholarly research publications (xvi). Alternately one could submit the two parts to totally separate examiners. Any of these three possibilities would, my argument here implies, be an advance.
2. I confine my comments here – on the fact of good doctoral work, and on the possibility of extending those trends – to creative writing. That is partially because the focus of my disciplinary knowledge and practice is there. But it is also because I am sceptical about the idea of a general solution to the 'creative work plus exegesis' problem. I note that Biggs and Büchler's article very much has the plastic arts as its focus, and that these are forms where to write in styles similar to Lacan's or Foucault's, and to do so in the very medium of one's art (see further Section 7), is simply not an option. That may explain why their outlook is more grim.
3. Say rather that this is what licenses the writing often to be so convoluted, confusing and in a word poor; I mean when compared with the rather more exacting presentational standards in the sciences. This is a little remarked, but most revealing phenomenon.

## References

- Ariew, R. 1992. "Descartes and Scholasticism: The Intellectual Background to Descartes' Thought." In *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, edited by J. Cottingham, 58–90. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Aristotle. 1984. *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Edited by J. Barnes. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Attridge, D. 2004. *The Singularity of Literature*. London: Routledge.
- Bakhtin, M. M. 1981. "Discourse in the Novel." In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by M. Holquist, 259–423. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Benveniste, É. 1971. *Problems in General Linguistics*. Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press.
- Biggs, M., and D. Büchler. 2010. "Communities, Values, Conventions and Actions." In *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, edited by M. Biggs and H. Karlsson, 82–97. London: Routledge.
- Biggs, M. A. R., and D. Büchler. 2007. "Rigor and Practice-based Research." *Design Issues* 23 (3): 62–69. doi:10.2752/146069200789393599.
- Bordo, S. 1999. *Feminist Interpretations of René Descartes*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Candlin, F. 2000. "A Proper Anxiety? Practice-based PhDs and Academic Unease." Working Papers in Art and Design 1. [http://www.herts.ac.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/12284/WPIAAD\\_vol1\\_candlin.pdf](http://www.herts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/12284/WPIAAD_vol1_candlin.pdf).
- Cartledge, P. 1993. *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Descartes, R. 1968. *Discourse on Method; And the Meditations*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

- Descartes, R. 1954. *Philosophical Writings: A Selection*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and P. T. Geach, Edinburgh: Nelson.
- Descartes, R. 2006. *Meditations, Objections, and Replies*, edited by R. R. Ariew and D. A. Cress, Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Education, T. T. H. 2009. "The Most Cited Authors in the Humanities." *The Times Higher Education*, March 26, 2009. <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/405956>.
- Eggert, P. 2009. *Securing the Past: Conservation in Art, Architecture, and Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fletcher, J., and A. Mann. 2004. "Illuminating the Exegesis, an Introduction." *Text Journal of Writing and Writing Courses Special Issue 3 Illuminating the Exegesis*. <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue3/content.htm>.
- Gaukroger, S. 1995. *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press.
- Gaukroger, S. 2006. "The Persona of the Natural Philosopher." In *The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe: The Nature of a Contested Identity*, edited by C. Condren, S. Gaukroger, and I. Hunter, 17–33. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Halperin, D. M. 1995. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Harvie, D. 2000. "Alienation, Class and Enclosure in UK Universities." *Capital and Class* 24 (2): 103–132.
- Joyce, J. 2012. *The Restored Finnegans Wake*, edited by D. Rose and J. O'Hanlon, London: Penguin Classics.
- Kälvermark, T. 2010. "University Policies and Practice-based Research." In *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, edited by M. Biggs and H. Karlsson, 4–22. New York: Routledge.
- Kant, I. 2000. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, edited by P. Guyer. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lacan, J. 2007. *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, edited by J.A. Miller. New York: Norton.
- Marginson, S. 1997. *Markets in Education*. St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin.
- Owen, C. 2006. "Academic Research and Creative Writing: Redrawing the Map and Finding One's Allies (and Avoiding the Corbett Phenomena)." *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses* 10 (2). <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct06/owen.htm>.
- Piketty, T. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*. Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rancière, J. 2003. "Politics and Aesthetics: An Interview with Peter Hallward." *Angelaki: The Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 8: 191–211.
- Rodis-Lewis, G. 1992. "Descartes Life and the Development of his Philosophy." In *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, edited by J. Cottingham, 1–19. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rose, N. S. 1999. *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strand, D., and Australia. Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs. Evaluations and Investigations Program. 1998. *Research in the Creative Arts*. Canberra: Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- Taussig, M. T. 1986. *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Taussig, M. T. 2010. "The Corn-wolf: Writing Apotropaic Texts." *Critical Inquiry* 37 (1): 26–33. doi:10.1086/656467.
- York, R. A. 1986. *The Poem as Utterance*. London: Methuen.