What Does It Take? Auto/biography as Performative PhD Thesis

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 Abstract: Recently I completed a performative (creative) PhD in the School of Creative Communi-cation (now the Faculty of Design and Creative Practice) at the University of Canberra, Australia, where such doctorates were established only in 2002. Since I completed in 2006, I have been con-templating some process issues that emerged during my three and a half year's studies. While conferring with fellow students and colleagues at three universities in England, I found that the many of the problems they encountered were similar and so were not due uniquely to the innovative phase that I encountered, but were part of a wider scenario.

At my university, the requirements for a creative doctorate are a creative component (equivalent to about 60,000 words) and a theoretical component (exegesis) of about 30,000 words. The physical outcome of my thesis is two artist's books: one, Tissue, is autobiographical, while questioning the nature of autobiography, memory and identity. The other, Re-Picturing My Life, is the theoretical component, examining several paradigms including issues of methodology; the value of art as research; theories of memory, identity, autobiography, and human interactions with objects. I have placed some of my text/images in this paper to provide a taste of the work in my thesis. My paper reflects on performative work in the context of academic research, and the resilience, determination and sense of humour needed to complete a doctorate successfully in this valuable area of endeavour.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Yes, we had a farm in Africa, though not at the foot of the Ngong hills. And yes, as for Karen Blixen, the dry, burnt colours of Africa did enter my heart and my veins. It's not just the smell of the dust, the red and gold of the *Gloriosa* lilies, the geckos that hang stickily around the ceiling, the kak-kak-kak of the guinea fowl that call you back to Africa. It's not just the blessing of fluid gazelles flying through the thorn bushes. It's not just the heartstop of seeing a lion. It's not just coming across impressive piles of elephant dung surrounded by uprooted breakfast trees. It's not just the warthog clowns, babies following parents in-line, trotting high-legged into the bush with tails rigidly vertical, end-tassels blowing in the breeze as though on top of a guardsman's helmet at Buckingham Palace. It's not just the lightness of the air, the singing and the drumming in the dusk. It's the intense blue clarity of the sky and the weighty shifting clouds that call you back. It's the sunsets that smack you between the eyes and make even the strongest atheist believe in a celestial city. It's the feel of the place. Africa is sticky. There's no getting rid of Africa however hard you try, once you have been infected. [1]

An African worm had infected me. It constantly slithered and whispered in my brain. A movie about Kenya; a poster of a giraffe in a travel agent; the thrum of a drum; a meeting with a Kenyan friend—each time the worm whispered its old questions: What happened to our farm? Could I ever find it again? Did those seven years really happen? Are those memories merely a neurological twitch in my brain? Are those memories embroidered by Elspeth Huxley's *Flame Trees of Thika*, Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*? Did we really live in a tent for a year? What happened to our farm? What happened to Kenya's hopes and dreams after independence? What are the consequences of our having lived there for those who now live on that land?

Fig.1: Kenya diary [2]

For years I dreamt of returning to Kenya to find our farm. The farm that I left in 1956, before Kenya's independence from the British in 1963; where we lived in a tent for a year, where we had no electricity or running water, and where I tried to raise a striped baby honey badger that fitted in my hand, and to hatch an owl's egg by keeping it warm in my bra. [3]

My dream of returning to Kenya came true in 2003 when I sat in a small mud and wattle hut, drinking smoky tea from a white shiny mug. The fire that boiled the tea water was burning sticks that came from the eucalyptus trees that my brother and I reluctantly planted when we were children. The fruit trees we had also planted still provide fruit (oranges, mangoes, loquats). Dad's dam still provides water for cattle, for the descendants of our cows, and the brick lavatory we had built as the first permanent building on the farm still stands up behind the shed. It seemed that my memories were indeed my own—mostly, at any rate, as far as I could tell. [4]

It took my PhD journey to make my dream come true, to silence that slithery Kenya worm gnawing and nibbling at my psyche. It took my PhD journey to make me look up Calcutta newspapers from 1942 in the Australian National Library in Canberra, and travel to India to find my mother's previously unknown grave in Calcutta; and to England to the National Archives in Kew to find lost family history, including the actual divorce papers of my grandparents from 1909, and her family with deep, deep farming roots in Dorset (England). I didn't know that I would find so much family background: a whole heap of relatives, several stately homes, a few eminent and (fortunately, because they are so much more inter-esting) a few notorious ancestors, as well as a family tree that goes back some 800 years. This was extraordinary for me, a previously rootless being who has lived in four countries and can't feel totally at home or grounded in any of them.

Young gum tree – planted Canberra 2003   Old gum tree – planted Serikwa Farm 1953

Fig. 2: Old gum new gum] [5]

So, for me, the whole PhD journey was an enriching experience that answered positively one of my research questions: will writing my autobiography change the

way I see myself? I answered it in the affirmative in two main areas: first, finding a family context made me see myself differently, and second, the process of recalling memories, articulating and mediating them in creating an autobiography is in itself a change agent, as I write in my thesis. The PhD was both an impetus and a structure (with a deadline) for me to do this personal work, so the academic frame certainly had its uses, as well as some difficulties that I will mention later. [6]

When I started my PhD in 2003, I had no idea where it would take me. Of course I put in a project proposal and one that was written sufficiently well for the powers-that-be to accept it and give me a scholarship. As a migrant from England in 1966 (a so-called Ten-Pound-Pom), my emphasis at that time was on the effects of multiple migrations—Australia is a country of migrants. But, as we know, in emergent research nothing is set in concrete. I explored human interactions with the iconic family objects that can become sites of memory and stability in migration. In time, my autobiographical work turned into a commentary on journeys by ship and, in the end, a ship itself became the metaphor for my journey through the autobiographical process: the ship *Argo* that Jason sailed in when searching for the Golden Fleece. Argus, the ship builder travelled on the ship during their voyages and, as they progressed, he replaced and mended any rotten ropes or broken timbers. By the time they returned to Iolkos, the whole ship had been renewed, although it looked the same and went by the same name, as BARTHES comments in his own autobiographical work (BARTHES,1977, p.46).
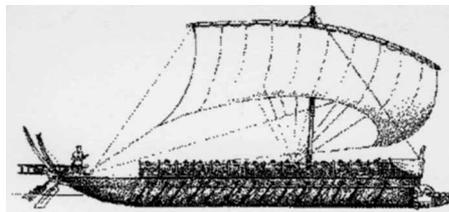

Fig. 3: Argo [7]

Of course, at the beginning, I had no idea just how I would put all my information together and make a creative thesis. While I had done a research Master's degree in science that was more clearly defined in its parameters, the openness around my doctorate in both form and content was both exciting and extremely challenging. In retrospect, the whole process was immeasurably enriching: it made me take the journeys to Africa, India and England that were important for aspects of my personal history and inner life; it made me consider the theoretical fields of autobiography, memory and identity in depth and attempt to make them explicit in a creative manner within my story; it made me explore the relevant methodologies that enlarged my thinking.
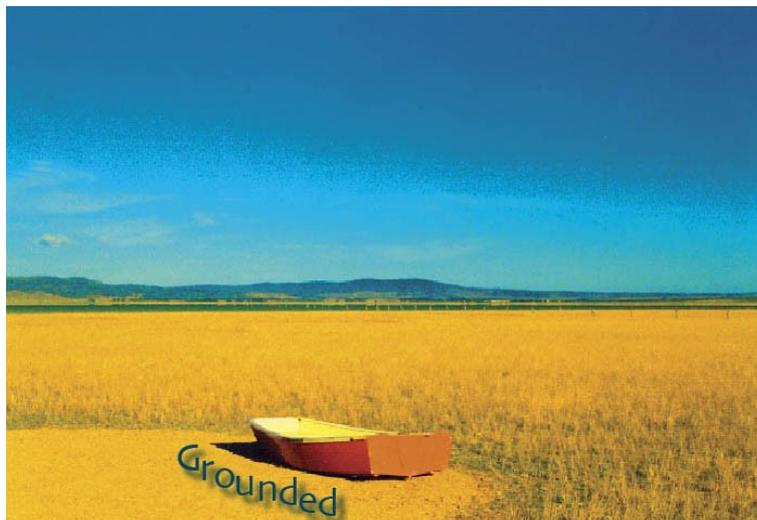
Fig. 4: Grounded [8]

In many ways, my identity was renewed and strengthened through the process. I would recommend the journey to anyone. But, as in all mythical heroes' journeys, there were challenges and tests along the way and it is these that I want to explore in this paper. From discussions with students at my own and other institutions, I think many of the issues I raise in this paper will have common threads. In conclusion, I wish to make some suggestions for smoothing unnecessary obstacles out of the way for the future. Not the challenges, these must remain: they are vital, and give the project life. In this paper I will address the main six areas that I felt affected my work: administrative issues (1), financial issues (2), ethical issues (3), supervisory issues (4), attitudes to art-as-research, and (5) multi-skilling in supervisors, student and examiners (6). [9]

2. Administrative Issues

Creative doctorates are relatively new in Australia, although creative Masters degrees are more common and have been around (I believe, though I cannot find recent statistics to back up this statement) for about 20 years. For example, ten years ago only 1.2% of arts-based PhDs were in creative subjects (excluding music and fine arts). In contrast, there were 5.8% of Masters degrees by research (STRAND, 1998, Appendix 9). Creative PhDs started at the University of Canberra in 2002, with the first two creative doctorates being awarded in 2005 and mine being the third in 2006. The first two were in creative writing, with mine being more intertextual. The administrative requirements for the creative thesis at my university are: a "creative" piece (novel, short stories, interactive poetry, video installation etc. equivalent to 60,000 words), and an exegesis or theoretical part to place the creative work in context with current theoretical arguments (about 30,000 words).

Fig. 5: Bleeding [10]

Examination is through the comments of two or more examiners (I had three) as well as overviews by the relevant university committees. There is no *viva voce* (a verbal defence of the thesis to an examining panel), but there are three mandatory seminars: two assessable seminars (at either of which there may be requests for modifications or even termination of the project) and a final seminar. My scholarship ended after three years, although I was allowed an extension of six months because I had had several time-consuming technical issues with which to contend. The government gives the university a large grant for each PhD completed, so the work had to be squeezed into the three years if possible, regardless of other paths I might have taken. [11]

The required final form of the thesis is normally a Word document in a standard binding in standard colours. This works well for some creative products, for example a novel or short stories. I was fortunate that my supervisor and examiners supported the hand-bound format of my books as being essential to the project outcomes—i.e., the format echoed and was an integral part of the content. [12]

The library required three copies of my books: one was the hand-bound version, the second an unbound copy, and the third was as a digital file. While I attempted to comply, clearly my books just didn't fit with the norm. While I provided PDFs of the text and images that made the internal material of my books, their mandatory placement on the Internet in the Australian Digital Thesis program omitted the very tactile nature that is an integral part of the work (e.g., material is printed on tissue paper, silk, calico, parchment, rice and elephant dung papers). Nevertheless, the digital files are out there in the ether and available for others in a lessened form. There is also a hand-made box that encloses the books—it is made to look like the dispatch box that features as one of my iconic family objects. Obviously, this is also omitted.

Fig. 6: Tibetan bowl [13]

My physical thesis has ended up in the rare book section of the library, since the staff think it could be stolen or damaged in the normal access part of the library. [14]

3. Financial Issues

At the beginning of the project, I really had no idea what form my thesis would take, but I had to fill out a form stating my requirements. They were minimal—just some desk space, library and Internet access, and printing facilities. I provided my own laptop. This was all I knew at the time. [15]

As time went on, I found I needed increased computer capacity, a colour printer and new applications. Requests should have been made at the start of the project, I was told. With an emergent methodology, how can this be done? In the end, I found and paid for all my materials and provided my own facilities. For the final year, I worked from home in my own office because what I provided for myself was superior to what the university was willing to provide. The costs to me included a computer with sufficient memory for some very large files, an external hard drive to save copies of my work, applications (the Adobe Creative Suite), a big screen, three inkjet colour printers, a scanner, all the different papers and threads I used to produce my books, including the elephant dung paper. And while there was a small travel budget for research and conferences, I provided the bulk of the necessary funds. [16]

This situation meant that I needed to work intermittently to get the necessary money. I was surprised to find that this was actually beneficial to the project, since it gave me other things to think about while some process was carrying on in my brain. Each time, I came back to my work refreshed, able to conceptualise differently and more effectively and the work progressed more speedily than I would have thought possible.

Fig. 7: Hard bark [17]

At the completion of the process I was given a small grant from my scholarship to assist with the costs of thesis production. Since I have now made nine sets of these books (one prototype, four for examination) and another four that included my corrections (two for the university, one for my supervisor and one for myself), this grant though certainly appreciated, was totally inadequate. What would be the position of a student who was unable to gain lucrative employment as I was? The scholarship proviso was that only limited hours could be worked and that essentially the PhD work should be undertaken full-time. I was fortunate to be able to command consultancy work at a rate that kept my hours down while maximising my financial return. [18]

4. Ethical issues

4.1 Ethics committee

When I decided to go to Africa to find the farm, my original idea was to interview the people who now live on the land, to ask them some historical and personal questions through my own knowledge of Swahili and with the help of an interpreter and my brother. How it has been for them in the intervening years? What did they think of the British in general, and our family in particular? How were they farming the land? My questionnaire went to be approved by the University Ethics Committee, but it was knocked back. I was told that I had to provide the subjects with written questionnaires at least three days before interviewing them. I was also told I would have to provide the subjects with a counsellor in case my questions brought up bad memories for them. Both these strategies were completely impractical: I was not sure that I would even be able find the farm at all, let alone be able to go there on two occasions; I was not sure what language would be spoken because I did not know which tribe now owned the land and I didn't know if I would be able to find one or more interpreters. I did not know the literacy levels of the people with whom I would be talking and, from

Australia, I could not find counsellors in the remote part of north-west Kenya that contained the land we used to own. I must add I felt insulted that it was assumed I would be a stereotypical insensitive British overlord in interviewing the present owners of the land, while my potential interviewees were attributed no resilience whatsoever. It was assumed to be a traumatic situation. I felt the Committee knew nothing about Kenya's history and was confusing it with South Africa and apartheid. I decided, therefore, to abandon the idea of formal interviews and merely take photos of buildings (if I could find them) and see whether I could have some mutually acceptable conversations. As it turned out, we were greeted with the utmost generosity, hospitality and good feeling by people who clearly had dignity and resilience in spades. We brought up some mutual memories and discussed the usefulness of the work that my family had earlier undertaken on that land, such as the dam and the fruit trees. I took no photos of the people and reported the outcome of our meetings in only the most general terms. This, I think, was a pity, because there were rich voices to be heard. [19]

The ethics issue seemed to highlight a misunderstanding that I was doing social work rather than recording some oral history within a creative, autobiographical, personal history. There were no generalisations to be made from what I had proposed, the conversations could have given depth to this part of my story by accenting the passing of time and political changes within my lifetime. In retrospect I would make a different case for such work so that the distinctions were clear. [20]

The place of ethics committee deliberations in autobiographical/creative projects has been addressed in full recently at the Australian Association of Writing Programs 2007 annual conference. EVANS notes that life writing within a creative arts field marries ethics procedures and creative endeavour. He suggests further that autobiography "valorises personal and subjective accounts so there is a strong likelihood of strong authorial claims to privilege, if not immunity from intervention" (EVANS, 2007, p.8). He outlines a new framework where "low risk" or "negligible risk research" proposals may still be vetted by supervisors or by delegates or sub-committees of appropriate institutional committees to ensure ethical and quality assurance issues are met. Particularly where publication is often highly regarded in order that the work will be out in the public arena, it is important to safeguard ethical issues for the student, the subject(s) and the institutions. [21]
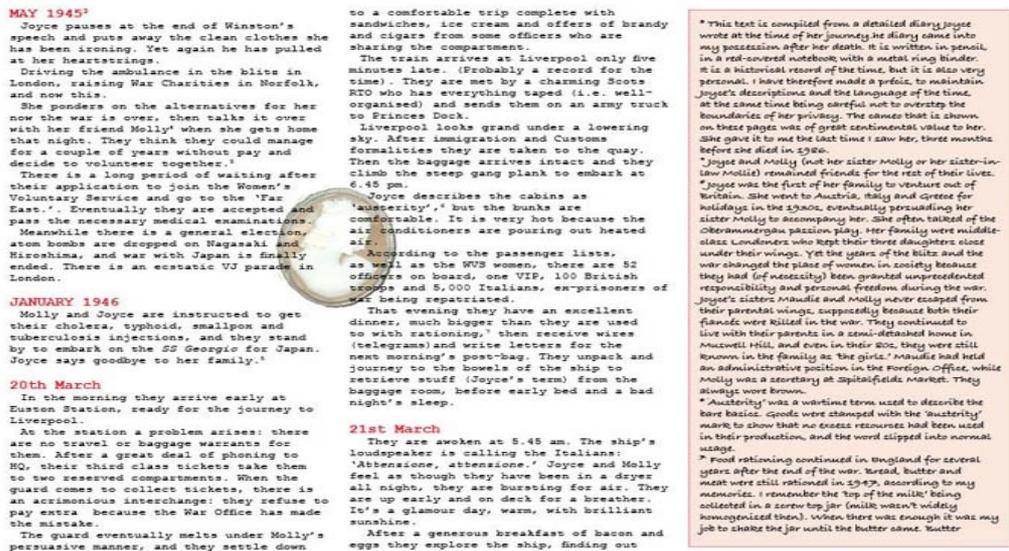
4.2 Plagiarism?

Fig. 8: Diary page [22]

As a writer I eschew plagiarism in principle. Yet, I found myself in a quandary with some of my archival material. For example, I acquired my step-mother's diary when she died some 20 years ago. This diary gave details of a voyage to the Middle East she undertook in 1946, on the SS. *Georgic*. It was then that she met and became engaged to my father within 10 days. So the diary held both important historical and family information and I wanted to use the material. Who could I ask for permission? Her family are all dead, as are my father's. No one will be hurt by the material, there are no personal or political time bombs held within her text. In the end I decided to use material from it, with personal sections heavily edited. Thus I made creative use of the historical facts written in the diary. [23]

CORMICK (2007) addresses the creative use of diary material in his recent paper concerning his use of the diaries of the cannibal convict Alexander Pearce. He considers the use of creative imagining in writing authentic histories and questions whether there are differing levels of "truth" in explaining the past. In my use of my stepmother's diary, I gave a small slice of life in 1946 while attempting to give a high level of truth to my memories of the person I knew, while also protecting her privacy and that of my father. [24]

5. Supervisory Issues

Selection of an appropriate, sympathetic, skilled supervisor is even more important in an arts-based project than in a traditional one. The student is doubly fortunate when they are blessed with a supervisor who has herself undertaken a creative doctorate as well as a "normal" doctorate, as had mine. In my university we have a primary supervisor and an advisory panel of about three other people to manage the PhD student. The supervisory panel were really involved only at the end of my process, where they provided comments that refined what I already

had produced. In fact one of them was uncertain that the thesis would get through because it was unlike anything she had ever seen. [25]

As a practicality, I would suggest that students establish a larger-than-necessary panel at the start, because during the three to four years of the project, the primary supervisor may move on. Having a substitute supervisor who has been involved with the evolution of the project from the beginning can save the heartache where a new person comes in as supervisor and requires fundamental changes halfway or more through the project. [26]

In retrospect, I realise that my relationship with my primary supervisor depended heavily on mutual respect and trust. My supervisor had to trust that I would come up with what was necessary, although I'm sure that she saw me as a loose cannon. And I had to trust that she would know what would be acceptable to my examiners and would be critical enough of my work for me to be sure of my getting through. [27]

Supervisory issues included, in the end, taking the risk of setting my own agenda. At the start, I would hand over sections of work for comment, but somehow the comments never quite fitted what I wanted, they seemed to go off in new directions. In the end, I realised that the only way to get the feedback I wanted was to complete a close-to-final draft of the whole work. This is a big risk to take when there is a rigid timeframe, but I think that this approach may be necessary for some creative theses, because a vital quality in assessment can be the tone and rounding of the work that must be seen in its entirety. This is another difference from the problem-solving thesis that can be split into separate chapters that can be assessed on their own.
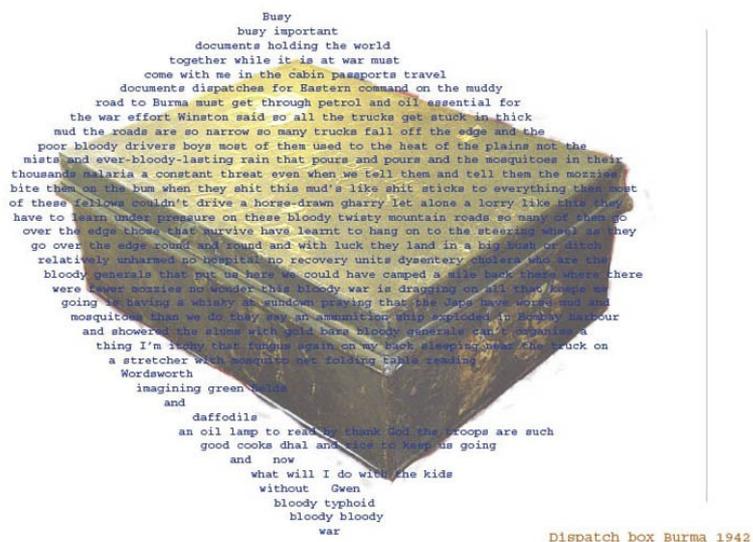

Fig. 9: Dispatch box [28]

5.1 How much is enough? Or too much?

I asked myself how I would know that my creative product was the equivalent of 60,000 words? I still don't know the answer. A colleague wrote digital poetry as her creative component. She also was puzzled about how many digital poems were equivalent to the 60,000 words. In the end, it had to be a feeling of completion that ended work on my project, rather than working out equivalence of words. [29]

In the exegesis, it was difficult/impossible to fit all the theory from diverse paradigms into 30,000 words without travelling far and wide and risking superficiality. For example, in my exegesis, I brought in issues of methodology (*bricolage*, narrative inquiry, narrative theory and action research). Placing my work in a contextual framework brought in theories of autobiography, memory, identity and the self, poetry and human/object relationships as outlined below in the multi-skilling section. SCRIVENER suggests that such a wide-ranging theoretical base is a characteristic of a creative-production project where there are generally multiple issues and goals to be addressed. He suggests that the start of the process will necessarily be broad in scope, but through rigorous and systematic investigation, the depth of such knowledge acquisition will widen and deepen (SCRIVENER, 2000, p.11). [30]

6. Art as Research—Joke or Danger?

Can art be research? Can art simply be practice? As WILSON writes, the interplay between art production, the creative process and the product are integral to the final outcome (WILSON, 2004). I have dealt with the arguments around this topic at length in a recent paper (BERRIDGE, 2007), and will not reiterate them here. Suffice it to say that I believe art can be research if the conceptualisation and thinking around the production of an artefact are sufficiently articulated. To be able to recognise art-as-research, it is necessary for student, supervisor and institution to develop appropriate literacies so that correct judgements and assessments can be made. It is also necessary to be able to embrace the "new" and not shrink away from it just because it doesn't fit old paradigms. [31]

Art-as-research can be a risky, in-between space where the "new" may emerge, yet, in the doctoral setting, this tender newness is subject to heavy-footed rules of academe that were probably never framed for this kind of work or at least not for projects where process may be all too apparent and where the rich space of uncertainty may abide. As I have written before (BERRIDGE, 2007, p.7), there is an unexpected resonance between art-as-research and sociology: LAW and URRY write of "the attribution of extraordinary subversive powers to the discipline of sociology ... [it] can be treated as a joke on the one hand or a danger on the other" (LAW & URRY, 2004, p.391). [32]

6.1 A soft option?

There is an apparent view of arts-based research as an easy journey within the wider university community. I suggest that a creative doctorate can be more difficult than a traditional doctorate because there are fewer limitations, boundaries and rules. In much scientific work, problem-solving projects are formed as a gap in a larger body of work. They are not self-generated to nearly the same extent as in a creative project. I set my own topic, methodology and limits as they emerged and came up with a complete piece of work, rather than finding a missing part of a jigsaw puzzle. In addition, there is the level of multi-skilling required that I mention later. [33]

In university-wide seminars I felt as though I had to justify my arts-based work because it was seen as easier than a "straight" PhD, especially amongst the university administration. For example, I was put into an inter-university competition that was framed for the "normal" thesis. At the time, there was no way I could portray the complexities and subtleties of my thesis, although I could do it better now. Clearly, while most people liked the look of my thesis, they were unable/unwilling to engage with my philosophical/theoretical underpinnings. At the end of one seminar, a university administrator asked me to outline in three sentences the major new findings from my work. I became tongue-tied: I had just spent twenty minutes describing my work, but clearly my language was not his. [34]

When non-university people have quizzed me about my thesis, or just had a brief look through the books without reading them in any depth, the two most common reactions have been: [35]

"Oh, it's like Creative Memories, isn't it?" (They refer to a widely used scrapbooking craft that is popular here in Australia at the moment. In this craft, stickers, cutters and stamps are used to enhance photograph albums and "bring them alive".) Or: *"It's about autobiography? Well you know, my mum's writing her autobiography, she* ..."—and then it's quite unnecessary for me to say another word. [36]

The implication of these conversations has been that just anyone could have done the creative doctorate. There has been no appreciation of the depth of thinking, skills and abstraction that characterise my work. [37]

6.2 Why an exegesis?

Why should the creative piece be justified by theory? One could argue that it should be able to stand alone and many of my fellow students felt it was an unnecessary imposition. But, for me, coming from a science background, it was an enriching experience and my exegesis turned into a creative piece of its own, enhanced by design and illustrations. While some people believe that analysis or reflective thought interfere with the experience of art making, GREENE believes that self-reflection and critical consideration can be liberating and educative, having the potential to open multiple worlds (GREENE, 2001). My experience of

making my autobiographical artist's book was immeasurably enriched and developed through the contemplation, writing and making of the exegesis, so I would encourage others to grasp the nettle and explore the riches to be found when setting one's own work in the context of others working in similar (or widely different) fields. [38]

6.3 Writing the personal

Autobiography is personal. This meant I chose to be circumspect about what I revealed in an autobiographical work that would be judged in an academic context. I made many decisions about what to omit that altered the final content of my work. Will these decisions change as I prepare my material for publication? Possibly. For example, I chose to omit any but the vaguest references to my husband and children because I find it too difficult to write about the living and our recent lives because of the potential for discord. In recent conversation with my sons and daughter, I have asked them each to write some material, so my final book will have within it an element of collective biography. [39]

Articulating family stories and memories into prose, poetry and images meant that I confronted my personal aesthetics and had to find a way of mediation between my personal preferences and the strictures that could be imposed by academe. This area is one where the supervisor can play an important role: I was fortunate to have a supervisor who provided a balance between enthusiasm about exploration, and the setting of relevant boundaries. Also there was the element of trust that I could come up with something appropriate. All the same, there were some philosophical and spiritual issues that I chose to leave veiled rather than explicit. [40]

6.4 Creative PhD to performative PhD

In writing this paper, I have been considering what it is that makes a piece of work performative rather than "just" creative. JONES addresses this difference in his performative biography *Thoroughly Post-Modern Mary* (JONES, 2004) and his 2006 paper concerning the use of arts-based (re)presentations in innovative, "performative" dissemination of life stories (JONES, 2006). A story (a life story, or indeed any narrative fiction or non-fiction) can be written "straight", in Plain English, and with no embellishment to the text. This is the kind of creative work that can win the Man Booker Prize or a Nobel Prize when written well enough. However, performative representations include extra, arts-based dimensions that extend the data from creativity to performativity. While the use of dramatisation of some kind—turning the raw material into a play or an opera is an obvious use of "performativity"—on the printed page, techniques such as font or image manipulation enhance aspects of the essence of the piece and change the way in which the raw story is communicated. In my work, I used fonts, papers, bindings, image/texts, poetry etc. to abstract and enhance my story, and to create a work that was not a "straight" autobiography, but one manipulated to "perform" my story on/from the page. I also deliberately considered inclusions and exclusions—in this way editing is another tool for the performative practitioner: considered

spaces may be constructed to either entice or exclude the reader. Performative representations hope to flesh out the sensory, emotional and kinaesthetic aspects of narrative (JONES, 2006, p.69) so that "text and audience come together and inform one another" (DENZIN, 2004, p.24). In this way, in the process of coming into being, my autobiography and accompanying exegesis moved from a creative PhD to a performative PhD. Tools from the arts were used to disseminate what is essentially social science material. [41]

As CARTER writes,

> "Creative research deals in matter that signifies. It is a discourse of material signs. To say this is not only to redefine the meaning of 'sign', but also to reconceptualise matter. Matter ceases to be solid. ... Matter that signifies is matter that capable of transforming itself" (CARTER, 2004, p.182). [42]

7. Multi-skilling in Students, Supervisors and Examiners

A fundamental need is for students, supervisors and examiners to have (or to develop) the required literacies in the field(s) of the project and, because the project is an emergent work, new literacies may be needed as it progresses. Such literacies are necessary so that assessments may be made concerning the quality of what is being produced in the creative piece, and its connection with the contextual theory. SCHIRATO and WEBB address in detail the need to assess, classify and categorise both the form and the content of a creative piece, as well as some criteria that may be used to decide whether an artefact is indeed an artwork:

> "whether it was made with a deliberate and conscious act on the part of an artist; whether it shows a deliberate and conscious engagement with a social or artistic issue; whether there is a concern with form and content; whether it demonstrates the desire to communicate something; or whether it incorporates the desire to create an impression, an effect, or some affect. When named as such, it leaves the world of food production, or nature, or industry, and enters the world of art" (SCHIRATO & WEBB, 2004, p.110). [43]

In performative work, multi-skilling is the name of the game. At the very least, the needed skills will include academic writing and one other (drama, poetry, creative non-fiction, video etc.). Often there will be other needs, such as adding music to videos or coming up with new combinations of traditional ways of working. It is necessary to develop background practical skills to bring abstract ideas into some kind of reality in the required fields of endeavour. [44]

I was pleased that I had three examiners. As it turned out, they all gave me a similar grading (minor editorial changes need before final approval), but my work as post-graduate student representative on the University Research Degrees Committee alerted me to the problems can arise if there are only two examiners. If there are widely differing opinions from the examiners and a less-than-able supervisor (performative work can be a potent area for disagreement), the

student may be left in no-man's-land right at the end of the project and all the years of hard work. If there are three examiners, it is more likely that two will agree on the grading, and this can guide the committee responsible for giving the final seal of approval for graduation. [45]

7.1 Creative piece

In producing/making the creative component, students may need to develop the practical skills needed to bring their ideas into fruition. For example, as my project progressed, I found I needed skills in:

- Poetry
- Creative prose
- Creative non-fiction
- Graphic design principles and practice
- Adobe Photoshop
- Adobe InDesign
- Traditional bookbinding, and ways of adapting it to my needs including learning to use a drill press
- The finer points of inkjet printing (e.g. the correct resolution for printing; which printer to use for which effect)
- How to print onto fabrics and exotic papers (including elephant dung paper for the title of the Kenya section)
- Scanning fabrics into the computer and manipulating their images with text. [46]

Each skill set required time, effort, practice and sometimes money for a course that would point me in the right direction. [47]

7.2 Theoretical piece

I came to my project mainly from a traditional, problem-solving background, so it was probably fortunate that I didn't realise the depth and breadth of knowledge that I would need to acquire. Like many students, I read widely in diverse texts at the start of the project, and allowed directions/ideas to crystallise from all the information, so that the relevant field began to narrow as I selected a path through the literature that resonated with my work. [48]

In the end, I found that I had covered aspects of methodologies such as narrative inquiry and *bricolage*; genres such as autobiography, poetry and creative non-fiction; theoretical and conceptual fields such as subjectivity, identity, memory, narrative theory, theories around human/object relations and a spattering of neuroscience. In some way, the breadths of these many contexts had to be incorporated into the exegesis without risking superficiality. How would this be possible? My solution was to approach the exegesis in a poetic, somewhat abstract manner and use illustrations to make some of my points. In theory, I chose a model where I wanted to answer the same research questions in two

ways, the Research-Question Model put forward by MILECH and SCHILO. The Research-Question Model addresses the relationship between the two components of the thesis by suggesting that "both the written and creative component of the thesis are conceptualised as independent answers to the same research questions" (MILECH & SCHILO, 2004, p.6). The advantages of this model lie in its resistance to the divide between artist/scholar and other similar binaries, its language is acceptable for university purposes because it fits to some degree "formal" research models, and it frees the student "to research a single question in two languages. ... [it] mediates the 'split' between theory and practice". [49]

I chose this third model, the Research-Question Model, for my exegesis partly because of the advantages previously outlined, but mainly because it logically fitted the way in which I worked. I gathered information and then looked at ways in which that information could be used visually or textually to tell my story, so both forms of expression pivoted on the same basis, the research questions. It fitted my action research procedure, the spiral framework of observing, reflecting, imagining, making, writing, observing, reflecting, imagining and so on. [50]

8. A Path through the Maze

Perhaps it is necessary to educate the wider university academic staff and administration about creative production doctorates, their processes, their gifts and their difficulties. Encouragement would be nice: an effort to validate and value the creative process and its outcomes. For example, the American Educational Research Association awarded the 2007 Arts Based Educational Research Outstanding Dissertation Award to Pauline SAMESHIMA of the University of British Columbia, Canada (SAMESHIMA, 2007). Something like this could be part of a wider training where supervisors are trained in the particular needs, openings and strictures that are part of supervising a creative doctorate. Not everyone will be as fortunate as I was. [51]

University rules for the format of the final products could be adapted to incorporate non-traditional bindings, covers etc., rather than each student having to argue the case for their presentation. Perhaps there could be some lines drawn in the sand to indicate the equivalence of word numbers to, say, video length, or hours spent preparing digital poetry. Perhaps administrators could be helped to understand that in emergent research it is not possible to know at the beginning just what the practical necessities will be further down the path. Surely contingencies could be built into the acceptance process? [52]

It could be helpful to have some clear guidelines about what is expected from the creative student, rather than each person having to adapt the guidelines of a traditional PhD. For example, SCRIVENER outlines the way in which a creative-product project can be reported (SCRIVENER, 2000, p.12). I would have appreciated an overview such as this, though the chances are I wouldn't have stuck to it. ARNOLD takes SCRIVENER's ideas further to set out detailed parameters for the assessment of a creative PhD (ARNOLD, 2005, pp.45-48).

While I am in principle against anything that would stifle originality, at the same time, I would have valued some kind of a path through the maze. Yet in uncertainty there is value, and perhaps I could argue that it is better in the long run to draw on one's own ingenuity and stretch imaginary boundaries. It would be nice to have the option. [53]

A welcome initiative at our university is the development of the [Australian Postgraduate Writer's Network](#) (APWN), an online community for writing higher degree students and their supervisors. This initiative has been supported by a grant from the Carrick Institute for Higher Education. The purpose of the APWN is to develop and improve the quality of both supervision and student learning and production on a national basis. The website is under development, and will contain a mix of static and dynamic material: databases of information, working papers, information on administrative matters such as writing proposals, online workshops, email chat lists, blogs, fora etc. The APWN project started early in 2007 with a national survey of students and supervisors to see what they required. The site has been built to first-stage capacity and was tested in late November 2007. Development is continuing. [54]

In retrospect, I can consider the personal attributes and qualities that kept me afloat during the three and a half years of my innovative doctorate and assisted me to complete successfully . First, I have a few years under my belt (there has to be some compensation for getting older!); second, a sense of humour came to my rescue on many occasions; third, resilience, and fourth, determination. I have a magnet on my fridge (a saying attributed to CHURCHILL, I believe)—"Never, never, never, never give up". Indeed, I never did contemplate giving up, even when, about halfway through my time, my panel scrunched up their noses at what I thought was brilliant material that I had presented to them. I had a bad few days, then I had to dig deeper. I see now that I have always been able to achieve to a reasonable standard without really stretching my abilities too far. On this pivotal occasion I had to draw on extra reserves to come up with something better, and for that I am now grateful. [55]

Somehow I managed to keep my head, keep going, laugh whenever I could, complain within my peer group of PhD students, enjoy it most of the time, and now look back on the process with a wry grin. Would you believe it, I would like to do the whole thing again. And do it properly this time. I miss it.

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    time silver lace silk      silk brass soapstone silk      silk lace silver time
       embroidery                    embossed                    embroidery
         locket                    broken buddha                    pearls
          Alice                        Basil                         Gwen
          dead                         dead                          dead
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Fig. 10: Precious [56]

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