

# Queer Path-Making: Expressing or Suppressing Creativity in Arts Doctoral Writing

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**Abstract:** An insistent and rapacious call for innovation exists at the heart of academic knowledge production. However, the desire to produce a novel product does not appear to extend to notions of creativity in doctoral writing contexts. In this chapter, I explore how doctoral writers in the Faculty of Arts at an Australian university engage with the notion of creativity, both in relation to what it is or might be and where it is found. Building on my earlier work written with Janne Morton and Julie Choi (2019), I trace the diverse and changing perceptions of creativity held by three multilingual doctoral writers throughout their candidature. I utilise the work of Sara Ahmed (2006, 2018, 2019) to reveal how arts doctoral writers may diverge from the well-worn path of “standard” doctoral writing to forge their own unique trail of textual creativity despite the potential dangers posed by this deviation. While the “innovative idea” may be celebrated in the academy, any overtly creative expression could provoke an adverse reaction from disciplinary readers. This adverse reaction commonly led to a critical moment for doctoral writers, as their creative efforts were either sanctioned or forbidden by these powerful gate-keepers. If writers do risk leaving the “safe” path, I demonstrate how this could involve overcoming significant personal, cultural, and institutional obstacles. Ultimately, I show how some arts doctoral writers queer their writing by imagining and then acting upon a desire to produce creative written work. They also queer their doctorate by raising their writers’ voices in a space typically enveloped in denial and silence.

**Re-imagining the doctorate (Scene):** Your thesis or dissertation should be 80,000 words long but no other boundaries exist—either about what you write or how you write it. Any style, any perspective, using any

voice you like. No specific words, structures, or approaches are forbidden; nothing is out of bounds. To do this work, your writing practices should be creative as well. So, instead of paraphrasing endless journal articles into turgid academic prose in a darkened room, you might sit in a sunny park jotting down your research findings using techniques borrowed from your favourite creative non-fiction author. If you feel the need for company, a range of writing groups are available to support you. In their cosy embrace, you share the creative notions you have on your topic among critical but kind peers and teachers.

This chapter re-imagines doctoral writing. It imagines doctoral writers exploiting their natural and learned creativity, opening up fully to its fruitful embrace. However, this vision, like the fantasy scene above, is far removed from the reality of the contemporary doctorate.

At the core of this re-imagining is the enigma of creativity and our imprecision understanding of what it actually is. One widespread definition by Robert Sternberg and Todd Lubart (1998) asserted that creativity “is the ability to produce work that is both novel (i.e., original, unexpected) and appropriate (i.e., useful, adaptive concerning task constraints)” (p. 3). While helpful, this perspective firmly ties creativity to the appearance of a creative product and the way in which this product is received and subsequently used. It also conflates creativity with other semi-synonymous terms such as originality and novelty, which may be, in fact, quite different creatures. Ultimately, I have become wary of such attempts to pin down creativity and now accept its ability to disregard neat definitions as part of its essentially rebellious nature. Challenging conventions and thriving on uncertainty, creativity finds its home on the contested peripheries of epistemological knowledge.

Nowhere is creativity’s peripheral status more pronounced than in doctoral contexts. Despite brave attempts to consider creativity’s role in doctoral studies (Bargar & Duncan, 1987; Lovitts, 2007), in doctoral education and pedagogy (Brodin, 2018; Brodin & Frick, 2011; Frick, 2012), in academic identity development (Frick & Brodin, 2020), and in doctoral writing itself (Badenhorst et al., 2015), it remains a frustratingly slippery term. From the literature, the concept of creativity and doctoral education are rarely combined, a situation Eva Brodin (2018) viewed as a “stifling silence” (p. 655). However, scholars such as Christine Pearson Casanave (2010) and Doreen Starke-Meyerring (2011) have highlighted how multilingual doctoral students writing in English as an additional language (EAL) might approach their work creatively, despite the risk and paradox it presents.

The current study explores how doctoral writers in the Faculty of Arts at an Australian university engaged with the notion of creativity regarding their

writing and writing practices, both in relation to what it is or might be and where it is found. Building on my previous work with Janne Morton and Julie Choi (2019), this study traces three multilingual doctoral writers during their candidature. Changing perceptions of creativity were elicited through discussion and analysis of their writing. Using the work of Sara Ahmed (2006, 2018, 2019), I investigate the decisions made by these writers to either remain on the well-trodden path of “standard” doctoral writing or else forge their own unique trail of creativity—often following a critical incident during their studies. If they did decide to leave the “safe” path—for even a relatively minor diversion—I show how this risk involved overcoming significant personal, disciplinary, and institutional obstacles. My hope is that this study will contribute to a re-imagining of the place of creativity in doctoral writing.

## Queering the Frame

I utilize queer theory in this chapter as a strategy of critique to investigate the notion of creativity in doctoral writing and to illuminate the complex, shifting role creativity holds for my participants. Like creativity, the parameters around “queer” are similarly contested and evolving. Also, similar with creativity, it could be argued that binding definitions are perhaps unnecessary. Indeed, queer theorists see this fluidity as part of its epistemological strength. For instance, Annamarie Jagose (1996) wrote that queer’s “definitional indeterminacy, its elasticity . . . part of queer’s semantic clout [and] political efficacy, depends on its resistance to definition” (p. 1), while David Halperin (1995) asserted that “by definition [queer is] whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (p. 62). Following Bryant Alexander (2017), I use queer to signify “a resistance to orthodoxy—expounding, elaborating and promoting alternative ways of being, knowing and narrating experience” (p. 278).

Applying queer to research, James Burford and Louisa Allen (2019) recognized its usefulness in three senses: queer as a term to unsettle categories associated with heterosexual identities; queer as referring to non-heterosexual, sexual, and gender practices; and queer as a broadly political term and tool for analysis. It is this last meaning that I address here. Deborah Britzman (1995) asserted that, used in this way, “the queer and the theory in queer theory signify actions, not actors” (p. 153). This emphasis on queer as a verb—that is, queering as an action—rather than as affirming a certain identity or practices informs this piece. In higher education research, Burford and Allen (2019) recognised a common feature across the three senses of queer is its ability “to offer more nuanced accounts of what is constructed as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ in university contexts, and which social groups are privileged by such constructions” (p. 131).

Boundary work is part and parcel of queer theory, exposing how normalized behavior in institutions can be identified, negotiated, and, if need be, challenged. In Ahmed's (2006) *Queer Phenomenology*, she posited that social boundaries are negotiated through following directional lines. These lines serve to orient us or join us to others in a line, thus preventing disorientation and cementing social relationships. Lines can also lead us to intentionally or unintentionally repeat what others have done:

The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative; they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition.  
(Ahmed, 2006, p. 16)

The time, energy and resources needed to follow these "lifelines" ensure they become a form of social investment and could ultimately lead to subjects reproducing the lines that they follow, although this is not always a conscious choice. Paths and path-making are another recurring motif for Ahmed. Put simply, "a path is made by the repetition of the event of the ground being 'trodden upon' . . . a path 'clears' the way" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 16). Paths can be straight and well-used or deviate and be ill-used. Unsurprisingly, Ahmed (2019) has equated heterosexuality with the straight path, "one that is kept clear not only by the frequency of use . . . but also by an elaborate support system" (p. 204). A queer use would be to deviate from this straight path. While not impossible, she has acknowledged that taking this queer route requires a strong effort: "Deviation is hard; deviation is made hard" (Ahmed, 2019, p. 42).

Ahmed's concepts mesh well with doctoral education. For many Ph.D. candidates, lines, paths, and boundaries are unclear during their doctoral journey, and the achievement of key milestones such as confirmation (signalling the end of probationary candidature at Australian universities) may only occur through trial and error. In this arduous journey, the siren call to emulate what others have done is strong, doubly so when coupled with the magnetic force of disciplinary traditions. Yet, resistance is possible. Genre studies scholar Christine Tardy (2016) outlined several common reasons why academic writers might wish to innovate, all highly relevant to doctoral writers. These include a desire to bring forth alternate knowledge and ways of knowing, to incorporate self-expression and assist reader engagement, and to critique and change dominant discourses (see also Molinari, Chapter 2, this collection). Running in parallel to these worthy intentions, however, is the pressure to follow tried and true conventions of what academic writing should look and sound like. The siren call to follow a persistent and well-trodden path beck-

ons, and any deviation from this route, possibly through introducing creative elements, is risky.

In making these decisions about how to proceed, the candidate faces a series of critical incidents—times when knowledge of what is required from them is sharply clarified—often after a troubling event. For David Nunan and Julie Choi (2010), a critical incident is “an event that stimulates the individual to restructure their understanding of the nexus between language, culture and identity” (p. 6), while Alastair Pennycook (2004) preferred the term “critical moment,” describing it as “a point of significance, an instant when things change” (p. 330). Bo Edvardsson’s (1992) definition links critical incidents to deviance from expectations: “For an incident to be described as critical, the requirement is that it can be described in detail and that it deviates significantly, either positively or negatively, from what is normal or expected” (p. 17). Echoing Pennycook (2004), Ahmed (2006) believes these key moments when we change course force a decision regarding a future direction. Facing this “fork in the road,” (2006, p. 19) a path is chosen. However, doubts soon creep in, and this uncertainty could slow progress. For Ahmed (2006), these moments are when “doubt gets in the way of hope” and we stop following a directional line “as abruptly as turning a switch” (p. 18-19). For doctoral students, however, going off-course brings decided benefits with such sideways moves or deviations possibly resulting in fruitful, chance encounters that “open up new worlds” and thus, create new knowledge” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 19). While acknowledging that “such moments can be a gift,” they could also be “a site of trauma, anxiety, or stress about the loss of an imagined future” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 19). In the doctorate, this “imagined future” necessarily involves the submission of a written thesis.

Through my investigations, I came to see creativity as a force for positive tension in doctoral writing contexts, although its exact shape remained uncertain. Initially, I believed that tracking the path of a possible creative “deviation” would be visible from the textual product; that is, I believed creativity could be discerned at the word, sentence, or paragraph level of the text itself. However, I quickly realized that identifying instances of possible deviation/s through the assessment of writing was not giving me a complete picture. Doctoral writing changes rapidly, with modifications mostly occurring away from public gaze—behind closed doors in supervisory meetings, in late night email exchanges, and in the “track changes” function of Microsoft Word or other feedback mechanisms. Often, after an unauthorized creative deviation has been spotted—usually by a supervisor—the writing draft is “tidied up,” with any evidence of this creativity removed. If left in, the creative element might be so minor or so dependent on knowledge of disciplinary conventions

that it becomes almost invisible for an “outside” reader to detect it. Therefore, in exploring creativity in doctoral writing contexts, I was forced to widen my gaze, focusing not only on written products of the doctorate but also on the writers’ perspectives on creativity and the processes and practices they undertook in their studies. I also needed to trace how these elements shifted during the three or four years’ intensive, lived experience of the doctorate.

## The Current Study: Creativity and Creative Practices in Doctoral Writing Contexts

This study set out to collect the perceptions of doctoral writers regarding creativity and creative practices in their written work. It was based on a series of discourse-based interviews and a collection of written artefacts from three multilingual doctoral writers. These candidates were international students based in the Faculty of Arts in a large, research-intensive Australian university between 2016 and 2019. I chose to research international, multilingual writers as, to some extent, they remain outside the institutional system—routinely being “parachuted” into their doctoral studies from diverse educational backgrounds. In addition, these students frequently struggle with the demands of the doctorate and may risk non-completion (Casanave & Li, 2008; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007).

I enlisted these three doctoral writers; Renato, Sofia, and Bianca (all pseudonyms) in the context of a doctoral writer’s group for arts students that I facilitated as part of my job as an academic writing teacher at the university in 2016. All three were undertaking the standard “big book” thesis/dissertation with no requirement for an exegesis or other “official” creative component (see Ravelli et al., Chapter 11, this collection, for accounts of theses in the visual and performing arts). I sought and gained ethics permission to follow up with participants from the writer’s group, involving semi-regular individual interviews over a four-year period and one focus group discussion held in 2017. While most of these encounters followed a pre-determined list of questions, I kept the final interview relatively unstructured. These meetings provided valuable opportunities for us to build rapport and for me to observe the participants’ longitudinal writing development. The collected data from our meetings—including interview transcriptions and self-selected extracts of the participants’ writing—were analyzed for key themes (cf. Leki, 2007). Theme selection was oriented toward major writing issues such as identity, voice, agency, and risk.

While the entire interview series explored intersections between creativity and doctoral writing contexts, the final interview in 2019 focused on critical

moments experienced by the three students over their whole doctoral journey. My desire to explore critical incidents was framed in general terms, such as “describe the best and worst things you’ve experienced during your studies.” Using a simple, hand-written timeline, I “fished” for key events that triggered a change in the practice or products of their writing (Choi & Slaughter, 2020) and used simple open-ended questions focusing on events and feelings (cf. Spencer-Oatey, 2013).

## The Narratives

A queer theory analysis of key critical incidents during the participants’ studies serves to illuminate the often-secrective role that creativity played over time for this trio of multilingual doctoral writers. Tracking how these writers experienced and utilized creativity in doctoral writing contexts throughout their four-year candidature resulted in an abundance of data. However, this chapter focuses on our final two interviews (2018 and 2019). This short section cannot fully reflect the rich discussions I had with each writer regarding creativity. Instead, excerpts from individual interviews highlight the complex role creativity played in selected critical moments, illustrating how creativity in doctoral writing was both imagined and constructed or otherwise rendered unavailable to these writers.

### Renato: The Strategic Outlier

An Italian criminologist and philosopher in his mid-20s, Renato left his city in southern Italy for higher education the United Kingdom. He arrived in Australia to continue graduate study two years before commencing his doctorate. He identified as a bi-lingual speaker (Italian and English), although he claimed to solely write in English. For Renato, using creativity in his research linked his work to the growing importance of subjectivity in his discipline, historical criminology. He used creativity to provide a logical framework for his ideas and help convey a precise and forceful message to readers. He also appreciated its role in knowledge creation, proclaiming, “The beauty of research, the joy of theory—that’s where the real beauty, the true potential of creativity lies.” Throughout his doctorate, Renato carefully considered how much creativity to include in his writing. He acknowledged the crucial role his discipline and readers had on shaping his work and demonstrated a keen awareness of what was rhetorically acceptable in written discourse in his field, observing, “Discourse is regulated by certain principles and the moment you don’t follow those principles, you find yourself outside that discourse. With-

out using the right criminological language, my colleagues will not realise the value of it." Deciphering disciplinary boundaries was clearly not problematic for Renato. However, he occasionally tested constraints, stating, "I try to find my own boundaries . . . I can be really creative, but I also know when I need to keep my creativity in check." Ahmed (2006) might frame this awareness of the parameters of acceptability as a response to the strength of disciplinary lines:

Disciplines also have lines in that they have a specific 'take' on the world; a way of ordering time and space through the very decisions about what counts as within the discipline. Such lines mark out the edges of disciplinary homes, which also mark those who are out of line. (p. 22)

Playing with creativity in the writing process was important to Renato, particularly at the drafting stage. He explained, "So many times, the creative element is really an excuse to entertain myself apart from anything else." This comment suggests that using creativity while drafting stimulated his interest and facilitated idea generation. This sentiment echoes the findings of Brittany Amell and Cecile Badenhorst (2018), who believe that "invoking a sense of playfulness towards one's [writing] practice may provide . . . tools to navigate through difficulty to meaningful understanding" (p. 28). In a written reflection in 2019, however, Renato recognized that the writer's consciousness needs to move from the more free-spirited processes of creation to more mundane, product-focused concerns, noting, "Creativity takes a backseat as candidature approaches submission deadline. Considerations made from the perspective of the artist—beauty, rhetoric, innovation—are suspended. Enters the artisan—attention to detail, accuracy, validity and usability."

This withdrawal from creativity and creative practices before submission presented a difficult adjustment for Renato, as he was instinctively drawn to the big picture idea rather than detail. Nevertheless, he displayed a keen awareness of his tenuous role as an apprentice academic, stating,

You are kind of playing with the rules; sometimes it [creativity] is unacceptable; that's why you have to conceal. But often the ones that do have [academic] success are the ones that breach the conventions in a particular field; they come up with new rules for the game . . . If that's not an act of creativity, I don't know what is.

This ability to introduce a degree of creativity into his work may have resulted from his understanding of what Pierre Bourdieu (1998) termed the "sportsman's feel" for the game, alluding to the game played among cultural agents that

provides a skilled player such as Renato with the knowledge to make strategic decisions regarding which discourses, genres, or practices are appropriate under certain circumstances. It also demonstrates not only his understanding of the potential rewards of being creative but also the need for concealment until a time when unbridled creativity can flourish. This ability to conceal but also strategically reveal creativity highlights Renato's flexibility as an academic writer and his manipulation of writing processes to further his writing goals.

Renato also felt creativity was present in his written expression, particularly in his use of dense sentence structure. Interestingly, he saw the construction of lengthy, complex sentences as critical to the emergence of textual creativity, commenting,

The moment when I am writing longer sentences, I feel like something is going on. Trying to create a stronger message without moving away from the initial idea; like the reinforcement. This is the moment that I feel I'm being really creative; that moment after the comma.

He wanted to keep what he termed this “Italianness” in his work but throughout our interviews hinted at ongoing tussles with a member of his supervisory team who preferred a much leaner written style (see Thurlow, 2021, for more detail on this tension).

From these brief observations regarding creativity in his doctoral practices and textual products, we can see glimpses of Renato as a playful maverick in his use of periodic creativity in his work. Nevertheless, his care to respect disciplinary expectations when he did utilize creativity marks him as a creative risk-taker. From our discussions, it appears that no major critical incidents marked him as “out of line” in his field. Rather, his confidence and skill as a writer meant that any queer deviation he undertook in his writing practices and final thesis/dissertation were most probably recognized and ultimately accepted by his academic readers.

### Sofia: The Vagaries of Voice

A scholar of Spanish literature, Sofia arrived in Australia to begin her doctorate in 2016 after completing a master's degree at a U.S. university. In her late 20s, she was fluent in both Spanish (her first language), Catalan, and English. For Sofia, creativity in her research meant being open to new ideas and linking apparently unrelated topics together. Creativity in her doctoral writing entailed combining novel ideas and expressing them in a personal, understandable way.

A recurring theme in our interviews concerned establishing and maintaining writer's voice. Sofia believed that finding an appropriate personal voice in writing required confidence and only then might creativity start to emerge. For example, her 2018 comment, "It's something I'm working on," is emblematic of her own varying levels of self-assurance during our meetings. Picturing an interested reader helped Sofia to access a more confident voice and produce "less boring" material.

Despite this, using reader engagement devices such as the subjective "I" was clearly challenging for Sofia. In 2019, when discussing her primary supervisor's perspective on this topic, her voice quietened and the tone became almost confessional:

He doesn't like the "I." He's been very consistent. Any time I put them in he would change it or delete. If he had seen this [refers to an "I" in her text], he would have changed it to something else . . . It's not resolved.

As ever, the use of "I" in academic writing is contentious. Even in the contemporary humanities, where Sofia researched, proclaiming a strong personal identity in academic writing is rare. Alphonso Lingis (2007) saw its use as an "awakening," indicating a fundamental separation with others' company and discourses. Sofia's sensitivity to the topic reveals a vexatious relationship with what Roz Ivanič (1998) might have termed her "discoursal self," the voice that effectively regulates how the self is constructed through writing, and its unresolved status provoked a critical moment. Ahmed (2006) has pondered why such consternation exists over personal digression, sensibly asking, "Why is it that the personal so often enters writing as if we are being led astray from a proper course?" (p. 22).

Despite these reservations, maintaining a degree of subjectivity in her writing was confirmed for Sofia during the process of writing a journal article. In this endeavour, she was encouraged by the journal editors to include more engagement techniques, including personal pronouns. However, an anxious critical moment regarding writer's voice ensued once more:

I wasn't putting myself enough in the text; they [the editors] couldn't see me. They could see a lot of quotes but they couldn't see me; I wasn't showing what I thought . . . But it was not my first choice and I would not say that I learned like this; the use of the I is not very me.

I saw Sofia as still struggling to represent herself in her work in a way that could give her complete satisfaction. I asked her which textual voice would

appear if she had a free choice, and she responded, “I feel my style would be something in the middle . . . Free to use it, the ‘I,’ but not being forced to use it because someone says I cannot hear the voice of the author here.”

Even after completing writing, Sofia found it difficult to release her work, making repeated references to her perfectionism throughout our interviews. During drafting, she told herself, “Stop trying to do everything perfect from the first time . . . [stop] thinking in some kind of perfect structure; from paragraph to paragraph; everything linked.” As a result of this self-talk, she stated she was “unlearning” key core features of academic writing, such as topic sentences and paragraph structure, and this process represents yet another critical moment in her doctoral studies. Even coming to the decision that the standard writing process might be unsuitable for her context took considerable time and effort. She would clearly love to feel more pride in her work but admitted that “small things” like a missing comma could set off a great deal of anxiety. For Ahmed (2006), this could indicate a feeling of identity-based disorientation: “We can also lose our direction in the sense that we lose our aim or purpose: disorientation is . . . when we lose our sense of who it is that we are” (p. 20). Sofia needed to beware that such moments of disorientation would not further erode her sense of confidence in her work and overwhelm her candidature. During times of crisis, Ahmed (2006) warned, “when we tread on paths that are less trodden, which we are not sure are paths at all . . . we might need even more support” (p. 170).

Sofia’s words remind us that overt subjectivity in writing brings attention—and attention brings risk to the writer. Specifically, complexities around use of personal pronouns can prompt a critical moment for doctoral writers as they negotiate the boundaries of subjectivity in their work. Sofia, however, clearly intended to avoid this risk, but a significant danger remained as to whether she would be able to assume the role of a visible and confident authority in her written doctoral work. Despite tussles over subjectivity, I believe she was on the path to queering her writing. This is shown through a desire to better communicate her ideas through a process of questioning—and occasionally rejecting—some staples of academic writing, such as the use of topic sentences and other aspects of “standard” academic paragraph structure, in her work.

### Bianca: Making it to the End

From a large, northern Italian city, Bianca’s first language was Italian. Arriving in Australia three years before commencing her doctorate, she maintained work as an Italian language teacher throughout her studies. In her early thirties, she was fluent in several European languages and researched

bilingualism. For Bianca, creativity in her research meant being able to combine different writing styles and diverse approaches to research without being bound to the practices of her discipline of applied linguistics. The ability to use a range of voices in her work encapsulated the concept of creativity in doctoral writing for her.

At first, Bianca was the most enthusiastic of my three participants in a desire to create engaging writing for her readers. In 2016, she stated, “You are not saying something that others have said [so] you have to present it differently.” However, in 2019 she had moved away from thoughts of “seducing the reader,” with an uncomfortable mixture of impatience and ennui now permeating the writing up process for her. She explained, “My goal is to pass the Ph.D. in a way . . . with the less pain possible.”

Bianca’s writer’s voice also diminished over time. In 2018, the “creative” extract of current writing she presented was, for me, virtually writer-less, apart from the presence of the “organising I” (Giltrow, 2002) and vastly different from a highly subjective and animated piece she shared two years earlier (see Thurlow, 2021, for detail on this earlier work). When I observed that her absence from her 2018 piece seemed a shame, this triggered an immediate, charged response:

I’m not concerned about whether it’s a shame . . . If I want to be creative about this topic, it can’t be in my Ph.D., so like my Ph.D. is what I have to write and I’m told to write it in a certain way and I’m going to do it. If I want to be creative about this topic, it’s going to be outside this 80,000 words.

Throughout our final two interviews, Bianca underlined the lack of creativity in her work and speculated on the causes of this. Her supervisors were obvious targets. She noted, “I feel like my hands are a bit tied . . . I mean they [her supervisors] are not pushing me to be creative; maybe the opposite. It’s more to do with non-creativity.” However, she later attributed the “killing” of her personal creativity as a system-wide issue, declaring, “It’s not their fault. They just reflect the system; they are just an ambassador for it.” In her mind, the real culprit was the thesis assessment process itself. Specifically, she believed that the system of passing theses to an anonymous “expert” readers for final assessment inhibits creativity:

I still think they [her supervisors] just do it to play it safe . . . So they say “OK, if you write in a neutral way, it’s going to be acceptable for the ones that are traditional and also the ones that are open-minded.” But it’s not vice-versa . . . if you

are too lively in the way you write and you get a traditional examiner, you are going to be disadvantaged.

During this critical moment, recognition dawned for Bianca that the system would not change to accommodate her. This realisation that her writing must change led Bianca to introduce a degree of self-censorship into her work. Consistent with Michel Foucault's (1977) identification of self-discipline as controlling activity in institutions such as schools, hospitals, and prisons, Bianca's participation in doctoral "school" was subject to these controlling influences. From her observations, it appears that the veiled instrument of the thesis examination was the primary form of disciplinary power acting on her. As Foucault warned, "The exam's normalising gaze makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish" (p. 84). Indeed, for Bianca to pass the final writing hurdle, the responsibility for ensuring her work met disciplinary expectations ultimately rested with her. Therefore, a willingness to self-censor through self-surveillance may lie at the core of this power. This realisation clearly unsettled Bianca and impacted the degree of creativity she felt she could include in her work.

As a multilingual writer, Bianca was well aware how languages can express similar ideas differently. From this personal experience, she had gained a somewhat cynical perspective on how written English expression may constrain the writers' ideas, stating,

I have this prejudice that English speakers don't like things which are convoluted; ideas that convoluted anyway . . . Something that is convoluted in Italian is . . . acceptable in Italian . . . while in English it would be disregarded and discarded.

Related to this idea, she believed "proper" use of syntax in written English may stymy creative written approaches, commenting,

If you teach someone to work at the sentence or paragraph level, you are still embedding their creativity into some rules . . . If they are going to follow these rules systematically, [a creative approach] sounds like a contradiction to me.

Therefore, the rigid rules of academic writing—especially at the clause and sentence level—would act to prevent the emergence of creativity in its freest and most unfettered form. This idea recalls Renato—also from an Italian language background—who felt at his most creative "the moment after the comma" in lengthy sentences but who acknowledged that long sentences may

have been viewed as poor academic style by his readers. Hence, for both Bianca and Renato, it appears that the precision so highly valued in academic English writing may have been a significant force against creativity in their own doctoral work.

As her thesis journey neared completion, creativity was an object in retreat for Bianca. She realized that including a form of creativity in her work would necessitate deviation from the sanctioned path of doctoral work and that this queer detour might risk delays or non-completion. During this process, she echoed Renato's recognition of disciplinary and other boundaries but, unlike him, seemed unable to strategically deviate from the well-trodden path by including elements of creativity in her thesis. Her eventual acquiescence to respect the occluded constraints surrounding creativity and re-produce a conventional form of doctoral writing occurred after several critical moments and a great deal of, mostly internalized, resistance.

## Re-imagining the Doctorate: Less Trodden Paths Toward Creativity

Renato experienced a critical moment as he lodged the final version of his thesis for examination:

One interesting thing about the thesis submission process is that one of the [assessment criteria asks] whether the thesis contains a creative element or not . . . like a piece of poetry. Obviously, my thesis just doesn't . . . They [the examiners] basically get you to admit that what you've been doing is not creative.

Renato's astute reflection reminds us of the frequent yet often hidden intersections between doctoral writing and creativity. Although unquestionably connected to originality, a commonly included criterion for assessment of doctoral theses worldwide, creativity remains the poor cousin of the "Big O" and, therefore, largely absent from discussions of doctoral writing.

The doctoral thesis is not a document usually associated with rebellion and deviation. Yet a desire for difference does beat strongly in the hearts of these apprentice knowledge creators—able, creative people who want to share their novel ideas with the widest possible audience. This desire provides fertile ground for their work to germinate into something both useful and creative in writing. However, before this propagation can occur, "creative" doctoral writing needs to be authorized by the discipline and institution from which it springs. The writers themselves must also recognise the usefulness of creative

approaches and have the courage to stray from the known path of doctoral writing to creatively queer their work.

This study's findings show doctoral writers clearly do grapple with creativity at critical moments of their candidature. Tracing these moments as experienced by Renato, Sofia, and Bianca throughout their candidature, we see their attraction to creativity for the inspirational and enlivening edge it can bring to their writing and for its ability to bring forth an engaging yet authoritative writer's voice. But what influence does creativity ultimately have on the written products of these three multilingual writers? Utilising queer theory and Ahmed's work on orientation/disorientation (2006) and path-making (2018, 2019), we see Renato, Sofia, and Bianca traversing a disorienting and somewhat intimidating landscape, joining growing numbers of international students on a similar journey. My findings suggest that Sofia and Bianca, although initially attracted to the notion of creativity and creative practices, were unlikely to leave the known path of how a thesis in their disciplines should look and sound. They seemed unwilling to risk a negative reaction from readers and, particularly at the end of their doctoral journey, lacking the confidence, time, and energy to take risks with creativity. As a result, they likely disciplined themselves to remain on their "safe" paths. In contrast, Renato had subtly re-made his path. I could see him queering his doctoral writing by challenging expectations about what might be creatively possible in it and playfully including what he termed "crumbs" of creativity into his work.

But why should we be satisfied with crumbs when a more substantial feast awaits? Before we dine, however, we must acknowledge the greater tension at work here between the forces of creativity and conventionality, which are knotted so tightly together in any thesis. Clearly, unravelling (or even loosening) these knots is difficult to do. However, through tracking the experiences of three doctoral students, I have found that resistance to the accepted path of doctoral writing into more creative terrain, although difficult, is possible. Indeed, for those with the stamina to persevere, creative deviation could bring multiple and lasting benefits. Ahmed (2006) has considered that such deviation can "help generate alternative lines which cross the ground in unexpected ways" (p. 20). Following these oblique lines could lead to new angles, novel perspectives, or innovative solutions to old problems. Ahmed (2018) believed that such radical changes in direction or perspective could ultimately jolt institutional systems such as traditional universities into transformative change, asserting, "a system [or] machine needs blockages to make it operate differently" (2018).

Despite the potential and obvious rewards of such deviant re-imaginings, this study finds that creativity in arts doctoral writing contexts is more about

the potential of where it could be rather than where it currently is. Notwithstanding its current peripheral state, even a brief discussion about creativity could usefully raise awareness of this notion among those located at the heart of the doctorate: supervisors, their students, and other university educators who care about and support doctoral writing. Consciousness of creativity's presence and potential and of the forms it might take in doctoral writing contexts could provide powerful learning opportunities, especially if followed by hands-on, writing-focused workshops. In a re-imagined doctorate, this approach could ultimately persuade doctoral writers to more wholeheartedly accept creativity's transformative effects on their work.

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