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**COMMUNICATION AND WRITING:
FOOTPRINTS ON A TERRITORY**

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COMMUNICATION AND WRITING: FOOTPRINTS ON A TERRITORY*

Claire Woods **

I am interested in the genre of the Inaugural Professorial Lecture. It is, after all, the reason I am standing in front of you tonight. Those of you who have attended the others in this series will perhaps be able to compare the various offerings and contemplate their rhetorical attributes. What purpose do they serve? Who is the audience? How does the speaker present him or herself? How is the lecture organised? What focus should the lecture have? These are the questions my colleagues and I have asked ourselves as we have prepared our Inaugural Professorial Lectures.

A few years ago, I attended one rather grand Inaugural Professorial Lecture at one of the UK Universities which was attended by many staff and students, by the council members, and by family and friends. The new professor, robed in academic gown, presented a talk in which he made a case for his discipline — it happened to be dance and performing arts — showing how it fitted into the university's curriculum and what it might offer in the future. At the same time he gave the audience a sense of his own background and of the scholars, experiences and resources upon which he had drawn and continued to draw.

As I have listened to the other inaugural lectures in this series I have analysed them in an attempt to uncover any shared concept of what the Inaugural Professorial Lecture might be. There is certainly a sense in which almost all have taken us on some sort of journey that reveals a little of their academic past, an auto-history or ethnography, a sort of retrospective intellectual anthropological exploration. (Indeed anthropologist Edward T Hall titled his autobiography *An anthropology of everyday life* (1992).) Sometimes in the earlier inaugural lectures this has been handled quite chronologically; sometimes details have leaked out as the lecturer concentrated on a particular research project or topic; sometimes we were offered a personal reflection on a lifetime of academic scholarship.

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On the other hand, some lectures have avoided the personal and have been simply an exposition of a current major research topic. Some of our colleagues thus kept themselves at a distance, not dwelling on the 'footprints on the mind'. The phrase is ethnographic historian Greg Dening's, a phrase for capturing the intellectual influences which have in some way contributed to the stance one takes in one's academic field of endeavour or indeed in one's personal journey in life.

In an essay in the collection titled *Readings/writings*, Dening employs the notion of the beach as the metaphor for the space in one's intellectual development where one joins in the conversations of others about things that begin to seem important: 'Where minds meet', he says, 'is a beach of sorts. It is a place in-between, a limen, a middle ground, where to share that space one has to give a little, where everything is new by being somehow shared, where everything is in translation, where we see ourselves reflected in someone's otherness.' (Dening 1998, 86)

He also makes the point (drawing on Michel de Certeau) about one of the territories I wish to explore here, that 'reading itself is a performance, a dance even, on the beaches of the mind', for it is in reading, Dening suggests, that we encounter other writers and readers. Thus this beach of the mind is a conversation space between writer and reader (1998, 87).

If there is any one thing which has driven my academic life then it is just this: the nature of the conversation between reader and writer and the very nature of the readings/writings, and thus the texts, which engage us and the ways in which we are thus engaged. This is of course a particular concern with matters rhetorical and with matters of literacy or literacies, of reading and writing practices in a wide range of contexts, social and cultural, in community and workplace.

You will see immediately that I have made the decision to invest this talk with some of the rhetorical trappings of ethos — the detail which allows the speaker to evoke a sense of the personal as part of the lecture.

So what of the purpose of the lecture? Do I aim to persuade you about the place of communication and writing, my professed field, in the academy? Well, yes, in part I do. But I am not making a claim for a discrete disciplinary territory for that begs far too many questions about the nature of disciplines; about the notion of interdisciplinarity; about the possible demise of disciplines; and about the emergence of new areas of academic concern.

While not denying these issues, what I want to explore is the territory of communication and writing within the university context at the end of the millennium.

(This is a context that Canadian scholar, the late Bill Readings, has painted with the title of his book, *The university in ruins*.) Where does what I do, and the academic and pedagogical concerns which I share with my teaching colleagues, fit specifically into the University of South Australia and more generally into the academy? How have we made this territory in practice? What do we intend that our students should experience in their undergraduate education? What are the footprints for this territory called communication and writing?

So now I have a topic, a purpose and an audience. I have made a rhetorical decision to allow the Aristotelian principle of ethos (the personal) to impinge on the logos (the argument) in the lecture. But how indeed should I develop that argument? What form should this lecture take?

First I am limited by the fact that this is a public address, a particular kind of performance, and in fact a ritual performance: the Inaugural Professorial Lecture (though less ritualised in Australia than in other parts of the world). The Inaugural Professorial Lecture as a form of academic discourse is a kind of epideictic rhetoric: a rhetoric of display. However, as American scholar Michael Carter has pointed out, academic discourse is more than a display because it also serves to create understanding and knowledge. Within the academe such events as this also function as ways of generating a sense of community.

Carter asserts the intrinsic value of scholarship (his field is English literature) and of the discourse which constructs such scholarly endeavour. He refers to the Sophists, the roving teachers of the fourth and fifth centuries BC Athens who in speeches at 'small, private meetings with other intellectuals ... defined who and what they were about' (Carter 1992, 307). The Sophists were concerned at such times to play with knowledge and 'the play of knowledge ... formed the substance of their speeches'. They were often prepared to challenge orthodoxies and to question established ways of thinking, as well as established values and beliefs. (Plato of course condemned the Sophists' rhetoric as false rhetoric because it was seen as playful and not a serious enterprise seeking Truth with a capital T (Carter 1992, 308)).

Carter argues against what he sees as the demands both from outside and from some within the academy that scholarship (in this case literary scholarship) should have only an extrinsic function and a moral and instrumental purpose, ie the maintaining of the national culture or literary heritage, or being 'useful'.

The important thing here is to recognise the nature of the conversation prompted by the speeches and the possibilities opened up by the scholarly speech offered to friends and colleagues. But more significant for me is to think of what happens not only as we

engage in a conversation here in a formal context but what we also do as we establish spaces for conversation with our students.

This has been the second thing that has driven my working life: deliberately tying my scholarship to teaching. Let me quote Carter again. Commenting that 'teaching should ... be a reflection of our scholarship', he says:

As scholars and heirs to the Sophists, our job is to ask questions, to make knowledge problematic; the questions we ask are far more important than the answers we offer, which are ever tentative. As teachers and likewise heirs to the Sophists, our job is to teach others to ask questions, to make accepted norms and practices problematic, to read and write their worlds with a healthy skepticism. (1992, 311)

In the essay from which this quote is taken, Carter asserts the value of scholarship and teaching as the rhetoric of display. He makes a case for its intrinsic value in face of the increasing instrumentalism of a university context that is geared to the economic bottom line, to corporate norms and so on. This is a theme to which I will return later.

For now, I need to construct a performance of a sort, to write and deliver a form of the rhetoric of display. There is a particular 'theatricality' in the writing required (Denning's word again, 1998: 148). I am aware that in previous Inaugural Professorial Lectures the speakers have employed the electronic capabilities of PowerPoint slides, colour slides (neatly sequenced to guide the talk) and overhead transparencies to accompany traditional lecture notes. As I prepared this chat (and you will immediately note that I have repositioned this piece of discourse by describing it as a 'chat') I found myself wishing I could construct the entire performance as a hypertextual form.

As a writer, I wanted the capacity to create new boxes of topics and ideas and links and thoughts and recollections and ... I found myself feeling constrained by the very linearity of the traditional lecture. Even in the text that has preceded this sentence I would love to highlight links with key words: footprints, rhetoric, literacies, ethos, logos, performance, auto-history, ethnography and so on.

As a writer, I wanted the freedom to roam with my thoughts and invite you (in the position of listener/reader) to roam as well. In a way I wanted to create a 'conversation space' with you as reader/audience. Now of course this could be done if I stopped mid-talk and immediately asked you to enter the conversation. But that would not serve the purpose very well at all since I have a case to make or at least a territory to explore and I need to be able to do that so that you have something to which to pin

your reactions and responses. And no matter how I structured such a public conversation, only one or two people at a time could enter it.

You must therefore bear with me as I talk, but also bear with me as I ‘essai’, in Montaigne’s terms, to attempt to explore, the territory of communication and writing. The reference to Montaigne is particularly relevant to the rhetorical exercise here. Since I cannot create a hypertextual environment in which each one of you individually might be involved, I choose to fall back on the rather wandering and reflective style of the prose essay we associate with Montaigne, a style described by the editor of a selection of his work as ‘leisurely and meandering, conforming only to the contours of memory and fancy, seldom submitting to the disciplines of rhetoric’ (Smith 1996, iii). So here I make an ‘attempt’ to explore the footprints of the territory of communication and writing.

Well, one still has to take the first steps into the territory. How do I develop this excursion for you and with you? What theatrical devices might I use? Had I been creating this as a multi-media performance, I might have strung together a collage of visuals while credits rolled across the screen. Had I created this as a hypertext, not only would key words have been keys to other screens and connections, but I might have used key visuals as icons which, when clicked, would take you the reader/listener somewhere inside the ‘footprints’.

But no, I have not created a multimedia presentation. I shall revert to the theatrical tradition, if not the tradition of the storyteller, and ask you to imagine the worlds being offered to you in words.

I might put in front of you:

- Rembrandt’s vast painting of a merchant and his family and colleagues, ‘The night watch’, in which he broke with tradition and represented the group more informally, and perhaps more accurately, than the previous group portraits of the Dutch merchant class;
- a painting by Howard Arkley of Australian suburbia, of a house captured in bright neon colours in sort of pixilated dots and strokes;
- a painting by Clarice Beckett showing the end of a suburban road on a grey morning: a woman’s personal and intense view of the streets near her home in suburban Melbourne;

- historian Greg Dening's splendid book *Mr Bligh's bad language: an ethnographic exploration of an historical event*;
- Edmund Blunden's personal account of World War I: *Undertones of war*;
- Ray Parkin's *Into the smother* and Elizabeth Simons' *While history passed*, the accounts of two prisoners of war in World War II;
- Samuel Pepys' diaries: the minutiae of the Naval Secretary's life in Restoration England;
- Robert Tressell's novel *The ragged trousered philanthropists*: a novel of working class life in early twentieth century England.
- Greek poet and political activist George Seferis's *A poet's journal*;
- Arundhati Roy's novel *The god of small things*;
- and finally a book by Ralph Cintron, *Angels' Town*, a rhetorical and social anthropological/ethnographic study of Latino gangs in inner-city America.

I might also add here a colour map of Australia indicating the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language territories before 1788: a representation of the language communities of the indigenous people of Australia.

And so I could continue. You may not know all of these objects, artefacts, paintings, and books. You may from your point of view consider this a strange and even unbalanced collection. As, of course, it is. I chose more or less randomly in order to make a point which leads to the main game here. This is not a list of academic footprints: these you will hear as I continue. Let me explain this list then.

For me what is of particular interest is the capacity to be an 'ethnographer of one's own situation'. That is, as a participant to be able to observe, describe, analyse, reflect on and bring to bear a measure of critical awareness on any situation in which you find yourself. And that is what, in part, these items represent. They are representations in words and paint. They are rhetorical, iconic or graphic constructions. These authors or painters were or are ethnographers of their situations, whether as painter (Rembrandt, Arkley, Beckett), historian (Dening), anthropologist (Cintron), politician and poet (Seferis), novelist (Tressell, Roy), bureaucrat (Pepys), soldier (Blunden, Parkin), or nurse (Simons).

Arkley for example has been described as a ‘geographer, ethnographer, cartographer of urban heartland’ (McAuliffe 1999). A reviewer of Seferis, the poet politician in Greece during and after World War II, wrote: ‘His hard won *ars poetica* graphically recaptures the landscape, seascape, soulscape of the modern Hellenic world’ (Victor Howes, *The Christian Science Monitor*, back cover).

For the most part these are people writing ‘their territory’, ‘reading’ their lives, and representing them in paint and print. They have a way of seeing their world and their situation. They then offer their version in words or paint to a reader and audience; they are, as Denning says, ‘ethnographers of our living experience’ (1998, 210). They render their situation as if they were researchers.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz writes that ethnographic research ‘is above all a rendering of the actual, a vitality phrased’ (1988: 143). And researcher Alan Peshkin talks about the way in which ‘some of the best novelists render human affairs’ and thus provide models for social scientists (1997, xiii).

The very process of representing in words or images the observed and lived is a process of knowledge making. Thus, the cartographer of Aboriginal language groups who made the map to which I have just referred can only create what, despite his scholarship, is at best a mere representation of a rich language heritage. The very act of map making for an encyclopaedia has the force of knowledge made and added to the conversation about Aboriginal Australia. Yet, as Greg Denning notes:

Such a map is a frozen moment that never was, not even in the time it took to draw it, let alone for 42 000 years. Language doesn’t have boundaries like that. Neither in space or time. Words leap spaces. Words hold their future, their present and their past within them. Words swallow time and space like black holes. (Denning 1999, 11)

The rhetorical activity of representing the world in words, with all the complexities, the intricacies and the puzzles of that process, has engaged my attention for most of my life. Certainly, it underpinned my life as an English teacher, as an English curriculum and methods lecturer, as a scholar and researcher, as an editor and professional writer, as a government department bureaucrat and administrator, as a curriculum leader and as a university teacher, and also as a writer and reader.

Let me talk about one of the ‘footprints on my mind’ here because it illuminates how the issue of representation (the so-called rhetorical or linguistic turn, as it is called in the world of qualitative research and particularly in anthropology) has continued to be central to what I do.

In the late 1970s and early 80s I found myself, as a high school teacher and teachers' college lecturer, taking long service leave and taking a Masters degree in Education at Harvard and a PhD at the University of Pennsylvania. Gradually I found myself coming closer to the territory of greatest interest to me: literacy practices in school, community and workplace contexts and the teaching of writing.

I sifted and sorted my way through studies in literary theory, myth and literature, linguistics, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, the ethnography of communication, folklore, reading theory, writing development, anthropology, cross-cultural studies in literacy and so on.

At Harvard, I revelled in studying symbolic development with Howard Gardner, oral and folk literatures with Albert Lord, language development with Catherine Snow, reading theory with Jean Chall. Then I lived folklore with Dan Ben Amos, sociolinguistics with Gillian Sankoff, and the ethnography of communication with Dell Hymes at the University of Pennsylvania.

All this built on my undergraduate and honours work in Adelaide. And when I look back on that work I can see (understandably) the threads in my majors in English and history for much of what followed in my academic life. Even my honours thesis was a close reading of President Woodrow Wilson as a writer. I read every published word of his available to me, his confidential journals, his political and historical essays, texts on constitutional reform, letters and other miscellaneous personal and public documents, and trawled them for insights into the development of his concept of social reformist leadership. 'How had he represented himself and his ideas in his writing?' was the question I tried to explore.

However, a footprint of significance was imprinted during my time in Philadelphia. I had gone there to undertake doctoral studies in writing and the teaching of writing. More importantly, I had the opportunity to study with Dell Hymes, linguist and anthropologist, whose work in forging the field of sociolinguistics I had known of from postgraduate studies with George Turner in Adelaide. Indeed, working as his research assistant on a series of research projects within the Center for Urban Ethnography, while I carried out my own research on literacy practices in urban classrooms, and as I taught graduate classes in cross cultural literacies, offered one of the most challenging intellectual adventures of my life.

Working and writing as an ethnographer raised for me the questions that today continue to compel my attention. It was here that I was inducted into the possibilities offered by the perspective of ethnography as a way of seeing the world, a disciplined and systematic approach to exploring lived experience.

As Hymes said, ethnography is ‘continuous with everyday life’. ‘Our ability to learn ethnographically is an extension of what every human being must do, that is learn the meanings, norms, patterns of a way of life’ (1980, 98; 1995, 13). Most particularly, I became immersed in the ethnography of communication in education settings and specifically with exploring literacy practices.

In introducing a collection of Hymes’ most influential essays, Alan Luke writes:

The tasks outlined by Hymes ... are a worthy guide for educational research in language and literacy. He argues that we need to focus on, *inter alia*, the social and discursive relationships between and within speech communities, the linguistic and social differences between speech and writing, the institutional acquisition and use of ‘linguistic resources’, and most importantly, the relationship between language and systems of subordination and domination. (Luke 1995, vii).

Luke describes succinctly what has proved a worthy guide, a footprint, for my work in education since those days in Philadelphia. For there I explored literacy practices from an ethnographic perspective, drawing on a wide range of theoretical territories to write about what was going on in the three inner-city classrooms in which I worked for two years.

There, as a researcher, I confronted the issues of writing in qualitative research. These issues have in the past 15 to 20 years been much discussed by anthropologists, urban ethnographers, ethnographers in education and social scientists in general. I encountered the work of Clifford Geertz. I am not alone in acknowledging his footprint on my mind. For me the essay ‘Deep play: notes on the Balinese cockfight’ was particularly germane to my growth as a scholarly writer (Geertz 1973). I read Geertz and I resolved to write my doctoral dissertation in a very different way: as a set of essays, each one integrating narrative and analysis, which would enable me to gradually unfold the layers of the territory I was exploring. I also resolved to reflect very specifically on my own role as a researcher and my palpable influence on the contexts in which I conducted my research.

The Geertz essay was an important catalyst for my reflection on the nature of representation as rhetorical. I acknowledge now the particular version of reality painted by this western anthropologist, a point regularly brought home to me as I discuss the essay with Asian graduate students in Singapore. Nevertheless, it is Geertz’s work and also his later work on the writing in qualitative research (along with the work of Clifford, Marcus, Van Maanen and others) which was fruitful as I explored what it means to write research, to construct a version of reality, and to make

knowledge. The writing of research is a rhetorical activity; the making of knowledge is a discursive and rhetorical activity. The work of Latour and Woolgar, Bazerman and others, which considers the discursive construction of knowledge by writers, scholars and communities of researchers, has illuminated this.

It is this territory I want to invite students to explore, wearing a critical sensibility coached by the theoretical perspectives of cultural studies, feminist theory, Marxist perspectives, new social rhetorical theory and so on. I hope that they will achieve an educated alertness to words, a capacity to investigate and understand language in the terms articulated by Hymes.

I also want them to acquire a way of seeing through language and to understand the very nature of representation. As post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha says, 'there is no knowledge — political or otherwise — outside representation'. Bhabha calls for the acknowledgement of 'the force of writing, its metaphoricity and its rhetorical discourse, as a productive matrix which defines the "social" and makes it available as an objective of and for action' (cited in Hardin 1999, 212).

This brings me slap up against issues of disciplines, and of the construction of disciplinary knowledges, disciplinary territories and the possibilities of a dynamic interdisciplinarity in the new humanities, and the way we shape communication and writing in today's academy.

Let me set the context a little. I do not need to rehearse here the state of the university sector. We need only read Vice Chancellor Professor Denise Bradley's statement in an issue of *UniNews* (August 1999) where she explicates the DETYA University Funding Tables, pointing out that government spending in education (despite public statements to the contrary) has declined while student numbers have increased. The implications for everyone involved in tertiary education are obvious to all of us as we teach larger classes, teach off-shore, strive to increase our research output and research quantum points, strive to lift course evaluation questionnaire scores to satisfy DETYA requirements and compete for students and research funds.

Read any issue of the *Australian Universities' Review* and one can see the anxieties which the competitive market place engenders. Simon Marginson, for example, examines DETYA statistics and discusses the nature and extent of diversity in the Australian higher education sector following the end of the binary system and the move to market regulation. Reviewing current available data, he notes that there seems to be a convergence in fields of study and most likely in educational programs and research practices (1999, 18). He notes that many of the new universities have attempted to develop niches but that these are inevitably restricted by 'the need to

minimise the band of risk'. 'New competitors', he writes, 'find it hard to change the rules of the game' (1999, 16). He concludes that the sector is 'more or less institutionally diverse', but he notes:

[B]oth the state and market forces have encouraged systemic convergence, and have encouraged organisational and academic isomorphism. Canberra has administered a 'one size fits all' approach and has supported standardised governance and common definitions of academic work. (1999, 22)

Marginson's concluding remarks are particularly germane to my theme today. He comments that, while market forces ought to lead to greater variety, the reality is 'that expectations of a flowering of creativity in course content, pedagogical innovation and fundamental research inquiry have been disappointed'. He suggests:

These forms of creativity depend on long lead times and thus on the security of funding that enables a willingness to take risks. In a managerial environment in which untied public funding is falling as a proportion of total incomes, and isomorphism is uppermost in strategies, the capacity for such innovations has become more restricted. (1999, 22)

This is the environment in which we work and within which the current undergraduate programs within the School of Communication and Information Studies were developed and have evolved.

In 1993, the staff of the then two-year-old University of South Australia (staff from different campuses and programs of the former College of Advanced Education and the South Australian Institute of Technology) worked to develop a new undergraduate arts and humanities territory. The description of our work was to redevelop the existing BA programs, the BA Communication Studies and the BA Liberal Studies, and to create 'niche market' degrees. In addition, consistent with our preceding institutional orientation but also in competition with the two other universities, the new undergraduate BA was to be designed to allow an 'applied' or 'professional' focus.

Of course, we set out to redevelop the degrees in the context of changes and challenges within the humanities, particularly in the traditional arts areas. The antecedent awards in communication studies and liberal arts had already carved new territories in what had previously been traditional domains in arts and particularly English or literature studies. The BA Communication Studies, with its orientation to cultural studies and media, was to be retained. Now, in a revised generic BA structure, and alongside the

other 'professional majors', we had an opportunity to create a program which was to be titled the BA (Professional Writing and Communication).

I can remember clearly the meeting at which the title was discussed. I had wanted it to be 'Writing and Communication' and had already argued the case of an undergraduate program in writing: there was not one in South Australia, and there were few in other universities and these were mostly in creative writing.

I did not succeed in convincing the committee about the name of the new degree. Instead, the advantages of marketing an award with an applied focus won the day, thus the word 'professional' was seen as a necessary adjunct to the title. We were definitely operating in the context of the competitive higher education sector in which the marketplace took precedence over scholarly issues at least at the level of degree titles. Of course we had then to determine what this beast 'professional writing and communication' might be. What should a degree in communication and writing look like?

Now, before I come to this, I want to capture briefly some of the tenor of the disciplinary context in the humanities, and particularly in the closely related areas of English, literary studies, communication studies and cultural studies, in which the new degree programs evolved. For it was in a context of significant changes and debates in these areas within the humanities, particularly in the late 70s through the 1980s and into the 90s, that the program in writing and communication evolved.

Two books published in 1996, one Australian and one North American, set the scene for me to discuss the place and role of the humanities in the higher education sector. Ian Reid, Deputy Vice Chancellor at Curtin University, in *Higher education or education for hire?* explores the impact of changed funding and resourcing in higher education on the role of universities and on academic values. In particular he explores the rhetoric and discourse which has become so much part of the new world of the market-driven and management-oriented university context. Thus 'values versus prices, leaders versus managers, collegiality versus corporatism, education versus training' (Reid 1996, iv). He sets his territory thus:

Within universities there is much discord and uncertainty about the directions that are being taken. Large questions abound, and fundamentally they are all questions about values:

- Where are our universities going and why?
- What exactly is their distinctive role, if they still have one?

- Being now so deregulated and entrepreneurial, is there anything much they should not do as long as it turns a useful dollar?
- What remnants of their traditional role remain important, and how can those be safeguarded in the present climate?
- What can the general public reasonably expect universities to deliver?
- What should their future look like? (Reid 1996, 2)

Whether, three or four years on, the discord and uncertainty still hold is a moot point. What we do know is that universities strive to present themselves publicly via statements of strategic intent which attempt to capture their vision of themselves and set the context for their future. Such statements are presumably the products of a process of internal consultation in which questions such as those posed by Reid are debated. The questions have not gone away. And they are questions that a teaching team, such as the one in which I work, also ask of their teaching and their courses.

Like the author of the second book I shall mention, Reid also asks what becomes of the idea of a liberal education. He looks at disciplinary and interdisciplinary areas (specifically in education, management and the humanities) and in particular the field of English/literary studies as an example of the changes being made in the humanities.

The second book, *The university in ruins* by Bill Readings, presents a North American perspective on much of this. Readings sets his argument within the context of the globalisation of educational provision and the transformation of the university into a 'transnational bureaucratic corporation' with a consequent change in role:

The current crisis of the University in the West proceeds from a fundamental shift in its social role and internal systems, one which means that the centrality of the traditional humanistic disciplines to the life of the University is no longer assured. (1996, 3)

Readings asserts:

The University ... no longer participates in the historical project that was the legacy of the Enlightenment: the historical project of culture. Such a claim also raises some significant questions of its own: Is this a new age dawning for the University as a project, or does it mark the twilight of the University's critical and social function? And if it is the twilight, then what does that mean? (1996, 5)

Reid and Readings are, of course, not alone in examining the changing role and nature of the humanities. However both are pertinent to this discussion because both discuss at length the changes to the traditional areas of English or literary studies in relation to other disciplinary and theoretical influences and the emergence of the interdisciplinary project of the new humanities. I do not intend here to rerun the debates about English, literary studies, cultural studies and communication studies. Readings deals with this at length; his is a cautionary approach to interdisciplinarity and to cultural studies (1996, 39). He acknowledges that

the apparent horizon in arts and letters for the North American University can be roughly sketched as the development of an increasingly interdisciplinary general humanities department amid a cluster of vocational schools, which will themselves include devolved areas of expertise traditionally centered in the humanities, such as media and communications. (1996, 176).

To dwell in the ruins of the university, including the opening up of disciplinary spaces, Readings suggests, means that what is needed is 'not a generalised interdisciplinary space, but a certain rhythm of disciplinary attachment and detachment' (1996, 176).

His answer is to construct short-term collaborative projects for teaching and research that are 'designed to keep open the question of what it means to group knowledges in certain ways, and what it has meant that they have been so grouped in the past'. The point is that disciplinarity should be seen as being permanently open for questioning and any new grouping would need to be able to reflect on 'the terms of their production and reproduction' (1996, 178). The territory of communication and writing has certainly allowed and indeed demanded this of the teaching team with which I work.

The emergence of writing as a territory in Australia is relatively new and, as I noted earlier, the substantial work in the area has been in creative writing. It was only in 1997 that the first National Conference of Australian Writing Programs was held and the Association for Australian Writing Programs was established, along with a refereed on-line journal *Text* which was to be the locus of shared discussion and debate about issues particular to this territory. For the most part, writing programs in Australia struggle to assert themselves and find a path alongside traditional literary studies or English. Thus we find in the most recent edition of *Text* Paul Dawson posing the question: 'Writing programmes in Australian universities: creative art or literary research?'. He quotes the editors of *Text*:

The reading of literature (ie text reception, the traditional business of English Departments) has full status; but the making of literature (ie text production, the business of new Creative Arts and Writing Departments) has yet to establish its niche in spite of swelling student numbers and increased research activity. (Krauth and Brady 1997, in Dawson 1999)

In a key note address to the last AAWP National Conference, Andrew Taylor also dwelt on the place of creative writing in the university, where it is seen to be at odds with the prevailing instrumental and vocational ethos. Interestingly, he suggests that professional writing has a more assured place:

Professional Writing can often be legitimated within universities as vocational, job-oriented and seen as posing little threat. But Creative Writing — like the other Creative Arts generally — is a relative newcomer to the university context and will not be so easily assimilated to this growing sense of anti-complexity which I have called The Machine. By its very diversity and plurality, by the way it draws its vitality from the conflicting and the irresolvable, creative writing is a profound challenge to it. Furthermore, it refuses to fit into the job-oriented ethos of so much current university thinking about education — the Machine-mad track to a job mentality. (Taylor 1999)

Perhaps he is right about professional writing. But what does he mean by the term? He doesn't say. He assumes the name says it all and that it fits into the current vocational ethos. It is not that simple. And because it is not that simple, it is not possible to assume that its position in the university is less problematic than that of creative writing. It still raises issues about the nature of university study and about the nature of the disciplines. What exactly is meant by the term as it applies to the BA (Professional Writing and Communication)? Where does it fit?

The *Australian Journal of Communication* devoted an issue in 1998 to discussing the term 'professional communication'. Ticehurst and Ross-Smith note that the term is not well defined, though they write that it has been used to describe 'communication activities such as professional writing, business communication, public relations, and organisational communication' (1998, 2). Other writers in the *Australian Journal of Communication* include aspects of public relations, human resource development, media management etc. Durham, Withnall and Harris describe their research focus on professional communication as including interests in 'public relations, professional writing, journalism, business and technical communication, communication technology, and environmental communication' (1998, 13).

Zorn, in the same issue, considers 'professional communication as a category of cultural knowledge and practice' (1998, 31). He thus draws it into the domain of communication studies, arguing that professional communication describes the more vocationally oriented programs in 'professional and technical writing, management communication, media management and public relations' (1998, 38). He makes a crucial distinction between areas that exist solely for vocational purposes and those which, from a theoretical base in critical and postmodern theory and a concern with language, discourse and metaphors, focus on theorising professional practice.

He sees communication studies, including the range of professional communication courses infused with such critical thinking and theory, emerging as a new liberal arts field. Its power, he suggests, is in its capacity to critique the language discourse, and metaphors of professional practice and the market. Thus, he makes a claim for professional communication education with a backbone of theory and critique in which teachers and students theorise professional practice and text production in professional contexts. He cites work in the BA (Professional Writing and Communication) as an example. And while I agree with his claim and his approach, I note that the version of professional writing to which he has referred does not encompass all the territory we traverse in the BA.

The disciplinary footprints for our degree come less from the vocationally oriented world of public relations, or management communication and similar areas, and more from English studies, literary studies, language studies (including linguistics and sociolinguistics), the ethnography of communication, communication studies (including media and cultural studies) and rhetoric. We have pushed the boundaries of the disciplines from which we have come as scholars and teachers to create a grouping of knowledges to make this degree.

You will remember earlier I quoted Paul Dawson, who made a distinction between text production (the making of literature, thus creative writing) and text reception (the reading of literature, thus English or literary studies). The distinction is interesting but narrow and, in relation to the BA (Professional Writing and Communication), too simplistic.

For us, text production means not only the making of literature but also the making of texts (print, multimedia, electronic) for professional, community, business, political, scholarly, personal or recreational purposes. Text reception means not just the reading of literature but, more widely, the reading of texts of all kinds in social and cultural contexts.

The BA degree focuses on both the making and the reception of texts. For us, this is a concern with rhetorical practice: not with rhetoric narrowly conceived as the art of persuasion but more widely conceived as concerned with communication, with the use of language and of discourse in context. (See, for example, Winterowd 1968; Andrews 1992.) It allows us to adopt both a critical and a creative perspective on discourse in use, on the production and reception of texts, on writing and reading practices, and on literacy practices in context.

Ours is an interdisciplinary project that perhaps can be described in part as, in Ian Reid's words, 'an enlarged conception of rhetoric'. Noting the evolving nature of English and its historic capacity for cultivating interdisciplinary affiliations, Reid makes a claim for English as being primarily concerned with rhetorical practice. He cites the work of Richard Andrews, Jonathon Culler, John Frow, Terry Eagleton and Ian Hunter, who have all variously claimed the usefulness of a revised notion of rhetoric.

Thus Reid notes that Culler promotes 'the study of rhetoric, in the ample sense that investigates the production of meaning in various types of discourse'. Frow suggests 'a generalised rhetoric' and a concern with 'cultural activity and discursive formation' (Reid 1996, 105). Similarly, Eagleton, in dismissing literature as a 'distinct, bounded object of knowledge' and thus redrawing the boundaries of 'literary theory', set his focus on the study of discursive practices and their effects. Thus he writes:

Rhetoric, which was the received form of critical analysis all the way from ancient society to the eighteenth century, examined the way discourses are constructed in order to achieve certain effects. It was not worried about whether its objects of enquiry were speaking or writing, poetry or philosophy, fiction or historiography: its horizon was nothing less than the field of discursive practices in society as a whole and its particular interest lay in grasping such practices as forms of power and performance. (1983, 205)

Eagleton also emphasises both the creative and critical capacities of rhetoric: 'It was ... a "creative" as well as a "critical" activity: the word "rhetoric" covers both the practice of effective discourse and the sciences of it' (1983, 207). This is particularly relevant to our project in the BA (Professional Writing and Communication).

We find a comfortable meeting ground at several points with Eagleton, Frow, Reid and Andrews in relation to the work of the BA. While we do not claim we are doing

English, even with the optimistic view of its potential asserted by Reid,¹ we do acknowledge the claims for an education which allows students to explore ‘how “selves” are constructed through sociolinguistic practices’ (Reid 1996, 111).

With Andrews we would claim for rhetoric, with its interest in production and reception of texts, a capacity for

providing a meta-disciplinary unity for the arts of discourse and indeed a necessary unity at a time when the arts and humanities are from time to time having to defend their patch. (1992, 18)

Such a claim is relevant to how we conceive of the work in the BA (Professional Writing and Communication) as work which is not just professional communication, nor English/literary studies, nor cultural studies, nor just creative writing or professional and technical writing. Rather, the territory of communication and writing as we work it within the BA is a site for rhetorical study and textual practice defined by the multi-disciplinary theoretical perspectives we bring to teaching, learning and research as integrated activities and processes.

The disciplinary space we seek is both a hybrid and interdisciplinary and also open to change and challenge. Yet at the same time we intend that it should be clearly theorised in the terms that I have begun to outline here. We have had to know the nature of the beast that has emerged as a consequence of the development of the new BA.

Despite Marginson’s suggestion that creativity in course development has retreated in face of the marketplace orientation of the higher education sector, I see the development of the BA (Professional Writing and Communication) as a creative achievement and one which meets the challenge of revitalising the work of the humanities (or at least of our patch in the humanities).

1 Reid writes:

Certainly English is and always has been a hybrid; but that, precisely, remains its potential strength and value. Its very impurity ensures that ethical and aesthetic and linguistic competencies are preserved in a strategic alliance. The cohesive principle can be found in an enlarged conception of rhetoric — not something extricated from the study of literature and culture, but an inclusive rhetorical education in which there is an important place for the study of how ‘selves’ are constructed through sociolinguistic practices. (1996, 111)

I should note here briefly, since there is not time for a much longer exposition, how we might consider our territory in relation to the composition or writing field in North America. The impact of the composition field on the literary studies or English department in the US is the topic of continuing debate. Not only has the composition field begun to claim a disciplinary status separate from the English departments in which it has traditionally been housed, it has often been at the forefront of the interdisciplinary thrust, frequently infused with cultural studies, and postmodern and critical theory, that has often created a rift with literary studies/English departments (see, for example, Fish 1995). Thus composition has in many places provided the impetus for reconfiguring English/literary studies.

Of course the rhetorical tradition in the US is well known. As Berlin points out in a recent book, Eagleton's call is nothing new to the US system, which has a long history of the 'production and interpretation of rhetorical texts' (Berlin 1996, xiv). In his book, *Rhetorics, poetics, and cultures*, Berlin describes the resurgence (after decades of marginalisation in departments concerned with literary interpretation) of rhetoric and composition programs and the growth of undergraduate writing courses (or subjects). He sees rhetoric — a revised version which he titles social epistemic rhetoric — as a means for sorting out 'the crisis' he asserts in English studies. The most fruitful alignment for Berlin is between rhetoricians and scholars in literary and cultural studies who have been particularly influenced by structuralist and poststructuralist theories. Indeed those that have been most concerned with the issues of discourse, language, ideology, power and performance.

Berlin defines his project this way:

Social-epistemic rhetoric is the study and critique of signifying practices in their relation to subject formation within the framework of economic, social and political conditions. (1996, 77)

He also claims that it is 'a recent development unique to the United States, growing out of the singular experiences of democracy in this country' (1996, 77). Thus social epistemic rhetoric has a particular political and ideological edge. For Berlin it is a way of bridging together the divide between rhetoric (as practical public discourse) and the poetic (the object of literary study) by focusing on signifying practices:

The English classroom should ... provide methods for revealing the semiotic codes enacted in the production and interpretation of texts, codes that cut across the aesthetic, the economic and the political, and the philosophical and scientific, enabling students to engage critically in the variety of reading and writing practices required of them. (1996, 88)

Followers of Berlin, such as McComiskey, also assert that the writing class is ‘the most promising academic site in which to empower those who live within the cultural problematics that postmodern cultural studies seeks to understand and critique’ (McComiskey 1998, 145).

The theoretical line linked to the critical pedagogies of Freire, Giroux, and McClaren is strongly made in Berlin’s work. I will not dwell on this here, other than to note that it seems to me that the impetus provided by cultural studies (allied to a socially and politically motivated rhetorical study) has provided Berlin and other US scholars with a means of reconfiguring English/literary studies, such that both production and consumption of all texts become the focus of study. There is food for thought here, since Berlin seems to come close to the territory we are interested in, yet he does not go far enough and his project is very much bound up in the re-working of English from the perspective of a revised rhetoric in the US tradition.

Our territory, I believe, is very differently couched because its antecedents in English/literary studies and long-established communication/cultural studies courses in the Australian context have allowed an interdisciplinarity relatively free of the internal academic politicking (and indeed the public scrutiny) which seems to underpin the Berlin project.

So, to give you an indication of what this means in practice, I want now to describe briefly some examples of the work we do. I will not outline the course or the subjects. Instead I am going to refer to some of the projects undertaken by students and staff by way of illustration of how we have created a curriculum and a pedagogy by drawing on the perspectives offered by a range of disciplines and theoretical territories.

The theoretical and pedagogical work of the award can roughly be grouped under five headings: an ethnographic perspective; a rhetorical perspective; literacies in context; discourse and the construction of knowledge; and language studies. Our students undertake studies in creative and critical reading and writing, professional writing, technical writing, document development in print and electronic media, editing and publishing, literacy research, discourse across disciplines, linguistics and socio-linguistics and so on. Much of the course involves them in carrying out their work in community and workplace contexts. At each point we ask them to concentrate on the meta, the macro and the micro aspects of their work. That is, they need to consider the micro elements within the document or text, the macro issues of context which have an impact on the text, and the meta issues which involve theorising the production and consumption/reception of texts and the discursive relationships embedded in textual activity.

To illustrate this let me mention research by some of our students and staff:

- an honours study of the literacy practices of elderly Greek women who must communicate in both English and Greek in their daily lives;
- an honours study of the language in particular communities created via on-line chat rooms;
- a contract research project conducted by Paul Skrebels and me, and one of our former students, to produce a guide to writing a particular form of report used in dispute resolution, with accompanying training sessions for field officers working with apprentices and employers;
- an honours project which involved the writing and making of a text about culinary heritage. The student, Simon Behenna, describes it this way: ‘My thesis is concerned with the creation of a particular style of text that “re-makes” the current genre of cookbooks. The re-making of the genre ... is concerned with exploring different cultural and rhetorical relationships around the experiences and practices of collecting, preparing and eating food’. This thesis involved interviews, document research, writing of the text, and design of the publication, as well as a substantial theoretical appraisal of the process of design and publication.

In all these what we see is rhetorical practice and textual practices under scrutiny. It is not sufficient that students carry out a project but that they critique and understand the rhetorical and discursive exigencies of any project. The critical and the creative go hand in hand, or, if you like, the critical and the crafting or design go hand in hand. For us this is a matter of what we might describe as *teckne* — as the art of making. Textual practice, whether as textual production or reception, is about making.

Cintron in the book *Angels’ Town: Chero ways, gang life and rhetorics of the everyday* (1997), to which I referred at the beginning of this talk, explains Aristotle’s notion of *teckne*: ‘For Aristotle *teckne*, “art” and “craft”, was associated with ‘a reasoned habit of mind in making something’. He continues:

For Aristotle, *teckne* was associated with ability, capacity, and skill. Most significantly, art ‘as a reasoned capacity to make something’ was concerned with that something’s ‘coming-into-being’; hence, art was ‘not the product of artistic skill but the skill itself’. (Cintron 1997, xi)

This to me seems an important notion to consider in a university world that is driven by vocational ends. We should consider an education that allows for the critical and the creative, and for the theorising of practice.

Another way to look at this has been suggested by Michael Galvin. Citing Gunther Kress, Galvin points out that in communication studies the focus has been on ‘critique as an influential if not dominant way of researching and teaching’. Kress, notes Galvin, suggests that the dichotomy between critique and design is not productive and that the changing circumstances of textual production demands a different emphasis:

In the new theory of representation, in the present technological context of electronic, multimodal, multimedia textual production, the task of text-makers is that of complex orchestration. Further, individuals are now seen as the remakers, transformers, of sets of representational resources — rather than users of stable systems, in a situation where multiple representation modes are brought into textual compositions. All these circumstances call for a new goal in textual (and perhaps other) practice: not of critique but of design. (Kress 1997, in Galvin 1999)

The position Cintron adopts in relation to *teckne* seems to have something to offer in relation to this. Cintron asserts the ‘everyday-ness’ of art and creative activity; rather than assuming a split between ‘art’ and ‘skills’ whereby ‘art’ is fetishised and seen as ‘art as high art, or art as fiction’. He wishes to reassert the integral relationship between art and skills in the process of making: ‘I am using the notion of *teckne* here to level that fetishization and to see the art in mundane skills, and more significantly, in day-to-day life’ (1997, xii).

His conclusion on this matter accords with a position I hold as appropriate for the pedagogy, theory and practice of the BA (Professional Writing and Communication). It certainly fits with our concerns to have students understand from their first class what it means to be a writer, reader, researcher, ethnographer, participant and observer, that is, to be one who is particularly concerned with rhetorical practice. Cintron asserts:

Why not, instead, level the concept of high art and recover another sort of art, one that is not dressed in prestige but that names, nevertheless, an intrinsic aesthetic or crafting that underlies the practices of everyday life, including the making of research. Call it *teckne*, ‘a reasoned habit of mind in making something’. (1997, xii)

We ask student writers to engage in the *teckne* of writing. We ask them to engage in design and in critique. We ask them to read and write a short story and poem, read a public document, design and write a public document, undertake research on an aspect of literacy in the community or conduct a communication project in the workplace. If they are to render or represent the world on paper or on-line they must also critically consider the reader or audience and the social and cultural context for the discourse.

Asking them as writers to think of themselves as ethnographers demands that they wear the critical sensibilities and accountabilities of the researcher. As the researcher as writer, they must consider the limits of the textual account, and take responsibility for the way the account represents or renders ideas, events, issues and so on. All of this demands the exercise of both critical and creative capacities. The same applies when they read other texts. As linguist David Crystal notes, ‘a critical creative response when reading an encyclopaedia is as essential as when reading a novel or poem. They both employ selectivity, half-truths, rhetoric, imaginative exposition and creative emphasis.’ (1999)

In the BA (Professional Writing and Communication) we attempt to challenge the distinction between the practical and the poetic text and between what some think of as ‘creative writing’ and others might consider ‘professional writing/communication’. We want students to consider that the work they do as writers and readers (as producers and receivers/consumers of texts) has to do with individual subjectivities and with discursive accountabilities and possibilities.

Notwithstanding the name of the award (a niche marketing ploy), we think of the territory broadly as to do with communication and writing and this is the field in which our students are engaged. I find George and Trimbur (in a recent article designed to reassert the communication component in the US composition field) capture this well:

‘Communication’ exerts a useful pressure to acknowledge that writing cannot be reduced simply to a mental activity of composing (even if you put composing in a social context). The term is a persistent reminder that to write is to operate a technology that makes visual signs — that encodes messages by inscribing marks on a page or a screen. ‘Communication’ pulls us toward the world, the actual, the material. It makes writing, like other types of composition (musical, graphic, handicraft, engineering, design), into an act of labor that quite literally fashions the world. (1999, 697)

This act of labor is an act of design in Kress’s terms. For our students we want their work in writing and in reading — in textual practice — clearly to be more than a

vocationally driven activity. It also involves ongoing critical awareness of what it means to render or represent. And this applies whether the text is for the workplace or for the stage or the community association or the reading group or the home. As novelist A S Byatt says (rejecting the distinction between creative writing and any other kind of writing):

I have never ever allowed anyone to use the word ‘creative’ about anything I do. ... I have never talked about ‘creative writing’. I use the metaphor ... work. Work is understanding, work is representing, work is making an object which allows you to consider — as in a microscope — the world from a different angle. (1998)

In communication and writing, as practised in the BA (Professional Writing and Communication), this is what we hope our students experience.

This has indeed been a meander through many territories. I hope you have a sense of the field in which I and the professional writing and teaching team work. Early in this talk I referred to Greg Denning’s suggestion that reading is ‘a performance, a dance even, on the beaches of the mind’, the places where minds meet. For me writing and reading are both performances. My career has been built on the sense of such a meeting ground and on engaging students in the practice/performance of reading and writing and thus to give them the opportunity to acknowledge ‘footprints’ which might be embedded in their minds and lives.

It is appropriate that, while I have talked about the many footprints on my mind from my reading and research experience, I also acknowledge the footprints made by all my colleagues in the team and within the school on the way I think of my work in the university. Their capacity for reflection on our practice, their capacity for a healthy skepticism and hard-nosed critique, for optimism, enthusiasm and extraordinary hard work (labour as art, and teaching and research as art), as well as generous friendship, is something I continue to value and applaud.

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