Molinari, Julia. "What Makes Writing Academic: Learning from Writings 'in the Wild'." *What Makes Writing Academic: Rethinking Theory for Practice*. London,: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. 73–99. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350243958.ch-3>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 12:08 UTC.

Copyright © Julia Molinari 2022. Released under a CC BY-NC-ND licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

What Makes Writing Academic: Learning from Writings ‘in the Wild’

Introduction

what is academic writing? What is an academic community? Wide-ranging change will occur only if the academy redefines writing for itself, changes the terms of the argument, (and) sees instruction in writing as one of its central concerns.

(Rose, 1985, p. 359)

At this pivotal point in the story about what makes writing academic, I showcase the diversity of academic texts by drawing attention to writings that roam naturally, ‘in the wild’, so to speak. Like Rose, I call for a re-definition of academic writing, one that is more inclusive and diverse, less standardized and prescriptive, less wedded to the ideologies associated with alphabetic literacies and more open to diverse ways of communicating knowledge. With reference to multimodal and multilingual doctoral theses and other modes that do not rely on the linearity of the alphabet and of prose to be ‘academic’, I highlight the role that writer agency can play in shaping written knowledge. In this and the remaining chapters, I will argue that what makes writing academic are the emergent varied, current and future practices of the academy, including its values.

Chapter 3 posits that what makes writing academic, namely its ‘academicness’, cannot be reduced to any particular feature. Secondly, it explains the naturally occurring diversity of academic writings with reference to Adler-Kassner and Wardle (2015)’s threshold concepts in writing studies. And, thirdly, it shows that ‘argument’, commonly assumed to be *the* defining characteristic of academic writing, is one of the features that can make it academic, but it is not the only one.

Academicness

I use the term ‘academicness’ to refer to a holistic property of a text, i.e. the totality of what makes it academic rather than, for example, legal or poetic. A property is a quality that can be predicated of *whole* objects, like colour, shape, sound, or taste. It is a quality that does not pick out any single or uniquely identifying *part* of the whole object (Sellars, 1963). In this sense, academicness is like ‘meaning’: it emerges from a context and cannot be reduced to a ‘single element that stands alone’ because it is ‘relational’ and ‘holistic’ in structure (Malpas, 2002, p. 407).

Since it emerges, ‘academicness’ is not dependent on the presence or absence of specific features relating to language, genre moves or argument. If what made writing academic could be reduced to these specific features, then hoax academic papers such as those by Alan Sokal (Cuthbert, 2018; Franca & Lloyd, 2000; Sokal, 1996, 2008) and Ike Antkare (Labbé, 2010; Labbé & Labbé, 2012; Van Noorden, 2014) would count as academic in virtue of the fact that they display the features that standard academic writing programmes readily teach as ‘academic’ (such as the passive voice): despite displaying conventional academic *forms*, hoaxes promulgate ‘nonsense’ (Alvesson et al., 2017) and, in so doing, they fail to adhere to the standards of excellence (MacIntyre, 1985) inherent to socio-academic practices (SAPs). These SAPs include epistemic virtues such as a commitment to the truth (Connell, 2013), to academic integrity (Zgaga, 2009), to social justice (Case, 2013) and to innovation and research (Warnock, 1989). Such commitments require an ethical orientation towards honesty, an orientation that must be intentional and originate from an agent, in this case the writer. Neither an automated generator of academic jargon (C. Labbé, personal communication March 25, 2014; Labbé & Labbé, 2012) nor the deliberate human intention to mislead and distort disciplinary knowledge (Sokal, 2008) is commensurate with these standards of socio-academic excellence. It is in this sense that academic hoaxes do not count as academic because academicness cannot be reduced to its forms and because there are no inherent standards of excellence from which academicness can emerge. Clearly, however, those who published these articles, the editor-readers of *Social Text* and *Springer* (for Sokal and Antkare, respectively) believed them to be genuinely academic, probably because they based their judgements of academicness on the form of the texts (i.e. they looked and sounded academic). Sokal (2008) has documented these reasons. They include the editors’ appreciation of post-modern academic jargon and relativist conclusions which suggested to them that the text was *bona fide*.

Similarly, Van Noorden (2014) has indicated that the fake papers published by *Springer* had 'characteristic vocabulary', meaning the kind of recognizable academic jargon that a fake text generator, in this case SCIfgen, had been programmed to produce.

If the text itself, i.e. its form, has the power to generate this level of confidence in the reader, then this might suggest that the academicness of a text resides in the text itself and/or in the reader's perception of it. Accordingly, hoaxes might indeed count as academic in virtue of the reader's *perception* of their academicness. However, this is an uncomfortable position to hold because readers can be wrong, in the sense of being misled. Alternatively, rather than relying on the reader's perception, the academicness of a text might reside in the author's intent (Fish, 2017). The writings of twentieth-century analytic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's are a case in point. Wittgenstein famously wrote his philosophy of logic and language using aphorisms, namely short, sequenced statements that express a definition or truth in a literary style that is terse and that can seem brusque (Wittgenstein & Russell, 1922). Do his aphorisms count as 'academic' writing? Would an undergraduate or postgraduate or doctoral student be allowed to write like this? Why? This remains contentious, yet the debate surrounding whether they count as academic hasn't prevented them from remaining established and cited, in the disciplinary (academic) discourses of analytic philosophy (Sigmund, 2017, p. 128):

Wittgenstein confided to Russell [one of his PhD supervisors (the other was G. E. Moore)] that no one would ever understand the book, although it was, as he put it, 'crystal clear.' Elsewhere, however, he noted: 'I am aware that all these sentences are unclear.' As he seemed to realize at least to some extent, his style struck an odd balance between moments of dazzling lucidity and moments of total opacity, reflecting the tension between his yearning for clear expression and his awareness that some things simply cannot be expressed ... Wittgenstein's style was at once cryptic and crystalline.

How could a text that was both 'clear' and 'unclear' become such a classic of analytical philosophy? One possible reason is that Wittgenstein was well known and sufficiently well regarded in his intellectual circles, namely Cambridge University, for his ideas to be trusted and his writing respected. This suggests that it is the ideas, the extent to which a person is known and accepted in their academic community and the academic standards of excellence of an academic community, that determine what makes a text academic, not the form of the text itself. Compare this to the treatment of philosopher Jacques Derrida,

deemed to be a ‘charlatan’ and unworthy of an honorary degree in Philosophy by philosophers trained in the analytic tradition of Cambridge University, like Wittgenstein and Russell: Derrida, unlike Wittgenstein, apparently, did not meet the ‘accepted standards of clarity and rigour’ of ‘normal and universal’ writing (Peters, 2009). Yet, Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logicus Philosophicus* (which was also his PhD thesis) was rejected by several publishers because of its cryptic style, indicating that a judgement about the text was concurrently being made on the basis of the text itself and/or the reader’s perception of it. Eventually, the *Tractatus* was accepted for publication thanks to Bertrand Russell’s introduction and endorsement, which further signals that ‘knowing who the author is and endorsing their intentions’ may have more bearing on what is considered ‘academic’ than the form of the text itself.

This complex relationship between authorial intent, reader perception and text meaning lies at the heart of what makes writing academic. It matters because it has implications for who gets published and what grade an essay receives. Debates about this relationship have an established literary history that highlights the messy complexity of how and whether it is the text that represents knowledge or the author. This complexity can be described in terms of the tension between textual authority and authorship (linked to a foundational conceptualization of the author as the ultimate source of knowledge), on the one hand and interpretations and reader meaning-making (referred to as hermeneutics, whereby it is the reader who brings meaning to the text through interpretation), on the other. That the author’s intended meaning is irrelevant to the interpretation of a text is referred to in literary theory as the ‘intentional fallacy’. Proponents of this fallacy are Barthes (1967); Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946) and Foucault (1969). Strictly speaking, on their account, it would not matter that Sokal and Antkare are hoaxes because if the academicness (or meaning) resides in the text, not the author, then nothing more than the text is needed to judge its academicness. Conversely, proponents of the thesis that authorial intent *does* matter include Knapp and Michaels (1982) and Fish (2017). Knapp and Michaels collapse ‘the author’s intended meaning’ with ‘the text meaning’ arguing that we cannot ‘derive one term from the other, since to have one is already to have both’ (1982, p. 724). For them, only authorial intent establishes text meaning in the sense that the intent *is* the text (i.e. the text is an expression of the author’s intent). Stanley Fish also points to the culture of plagiarism as further evidence that authorial intent and originality *are* measures of academicness: if intent didn’t matter, he argues, then why would the ‘West’ be so concerned with plagiarism and originality (Jones, 2014; Moynihan, 2015; Pennycook, 1996)?

The Sokal and Antkare texts complicate matters further. Despite both being hoaxes, they differ in at least one crucial way: one was written by a human and the other by a computer. If we appeal to author intent, following Knapp and Michaels (1982) and Fish (2017), then the Antkare texts are clearly not academic because they cannot enact any SAP (further outlined later in this chapter) since they were generated by a computer and, typically, computers do not have intent. But, following Barthes and other proponents of the 'intentionalist fallacy', Sokal's article could count as 'academic' because it displays 'predictable and recognisable patterns' that readers would normally expect in an academic text: it is researched in the traditional sense of 'referring to relevant literature'; it made sense to its intended audience; and, worryingly, it remains (as I write this) in circulation and available in *Social Text* via an established academic publisher, JSTOR (Sokal, 1996). The fact the text is published in an academic journal further confers institutional legitimacy to the text, giving it academic credibility. Moreover, at the time, the article generated genuine academic debate around what counts as knowledge (see, for example, Dawkins [1998]). What makes us reluctant to call it 'academic', however, is not its content but the *intention* with which it was produced and perhaps more importantly, the dishonesty of this intention: Sokal intended to parody and discredit critical theory and did not believe his own arguments.

In the Sokal case, intent becomes a contributing factor in whether a text is deemed to be academic, whereby his *dishonest* intent detracts from the academic credibility of his text. But this, too, is an uncomfortable conclusion to reach because it suggests that intent matters: if the intent were *honest*, would this change our perception of whether the text is academic? For example, despite being 'unclear', was Wittgenstein 'sufficiently honest' to warrant being published? Moreover, how do we establish authorial intent, when the author may not be available to confirm what their intent was? A further problem with appealing to the author's intention to determine whether a text is *bona fide* academic or not is that, to the joy of many students and academics, this would confer to the writer ultimate jurisdiction as to whether their writing counts as academic or not because only the writer can know what they intended.

Both the hoax and Sokal's subsequent justification for it raise further unsettling prospects for determining what makes a text academic: on the one hand, the hoax was read as an 'academic' text; on the other, none of it was 'true'. If we accept, as I do, that a necessary value of higher education is a commitment to 'truth' or to 'realness' (understood broadly from a critical realist perspective as the recognition that external ontologies exist [Bengtsen & Barnett, 2017]), then the hoax was not

academic. But if we accept this, then we also have to accept that the commercial tests relied upon by universities to predict the writing abilities of students, such as the IELTS and Pearson Tests of Academic English, are not academic either. This is because they are written to display language and mimic academic essay forms, not to advance truthful, or real, accounts of the world.

To sum up, what I am claiming so far is that when we invoke the formal markers of academicness as standards by which to judge whether a text is academic or not, hoaxes would count as academic but the unconventional texts I refer to next would not. This is because unconventional texts – academic writings that don't conform to the imaginary of what an academic text should look like – display the 'wrong' sort of language and moves and certainly not the kind of academic language that EAP writing programmes and textbooks are likely to engage with because they do not meet putative standards of academicness. Yet, such texts circulate in 'the wild' and are imbricated in the structures of academic knowledge communication. They include, alongside many others, the graphic doctoral dissertation of Nick Sousanis (2015), the musical PhD exegesis of A. D. Carson (2017), the playful and feminist PhD thesis of Harron (2016), the aphorisms of Ludwig Wittgenstein and earlier still, the scientific dialogues of Galileo Galilei's *Two Chief World Systems*.¹

Crucially, the need for these academic texts to break with convention was not driven by the arbitrary whim, or intention, of their authors. These academic writers broke the rules on epistemic grounds: their textual forms afford knowledge representation that conventional forms, arguably, do not. Theoretical physicist Daniel Shanahan (2015), for example, holds the form of the scientific article to account by calling for it to become a 'living document' that allows more space to report methods rather than results. Since what matters most in scientific research is the appropriateness of the methods used and the extent to which these can be replicated to yield sound findings, methods need to become more prominent in scientific writing. Instead, findings rather than methods tend to be given more prominence in abstracts and in the way journals 'market' key findings. By not giving due prominence to methods and by granting more visibility to the findings of scientific research, the 'form' of the academic paper amounts to a scientific 'fraud'. This fraud is further compounded when superlative language is

¹ Clearly, Galilei's dialogues were written before modern academic conventions existed. My point here, however, is that Galilei chose the dialogue genre to propose his heliocentric thesis as opposed to the more conventional prose and less controversial thesis of his other work on classical physics (cf. Chapter 2).

used to inflate the significance of the findings (Vinkers et al., 2015). By allowing more published space for methods, scientists would curb the *unscientific* drive that publishers have towards prioritizing controversial or trending results which are more likely to capture the attention of a superficial audience than satisfy the needs of the scientific community. Shanahan, therefore, advocates that we re-configure the scientific article so that we can move beyond the now-obsolete print model and truly embrace the freedom that online publication gives us, moving towards living documents that can be updated, amended, extended and indeed directly linked to other articles and data.

Shanahan's living physics document, Sousanis's visual interdisciplinary argument, Carson's aural anti-racist activism and Harron's black feminist mathematics can all be classified as examples of what Bazerman (1988) means by 'shaping' knowledge or of what literacy scholar Lunsford means when she claims that writing is 'epistemic', namely that it doesn't 'simply record thought or knowledge but ... has the capacity to actually produce thought and knowledge' (2015).² In drawing attention to these academic writers-authors, I am highlighting that the academicness of a text can be explained in terms of an *interaction* between the structural elements available in the textual environment (such as form, grammar, genre and reader expectations) and the disciplinary knowledge, values and intentions of the writer who has agency in shaping the text. What makes these four authors 'academic' thus becomes an interaction between, on the one hand, the writer's disciplinary values and their intention to 'shape knowledge' by giving more space to methods, visuals, rap and voice, respectively, thus upholding the epistemic integrity of the scientific, interdisciplinary, socially just and feminist endeavour and, on the other, what the textual environment affords in terms of structures that enable this to happen, such as the possibilities afforded by the online medium in the case of Shanahan's living document or the fact that there are other ways of writing non-fiction that still fulfil the academic standards of excellence required for the award of a PhD in mathematics.

What makes the text academic is thus irreducible to either the writer's intentions or to the structural form of the text.

² N. B.: As argued in Chapter 2 with reference to Ong and others, this is not tantamount to claiming that the thought and knowledge produced by writing is *better* than thought and knowledge produced by other media. My claim here is simply that since writing has the power to shape and produce thought and knowledge (as do many other modes of communication), the forms that writing takes matter to the kind of knowledge that is created. For example, Carson's anti-racist thesis would have been different – less persuasive? Less impactful? – had he written in conventional academic prose instead of performance poetry, rap and rhythm.

Socio-academic Practices (SAPs)

Despite breaking the rules, these ‘wild’ texts are academic. What makes them so are their SAPs. SAPs are the specific practices of the academy, what MacIntyre (1985) might have described as their inherent ‘standards of excellence’, standards that cannot be reduced to any finite set of external skills. This is because they are what philosopher of mind, complexity and emergence Fodor (1974, 1997) might have described as ‘multiply-realizable’, meaning that they are complex phenomena that have been caused by a range of interacting variables. The standards of excellence which are inherent to academic practices include acknowledging the work of others, establishing warrants (Toulmin, 1958), arguing, providing evidence, generating and crossing threshold concepts (Meyer et al., 2010) and creating new knowledge. Crucially, what makes these practices academic are their underlying epistemic virtues, such as scientific, social and human values and knowledge (Fricker, 2007; Harding, 1995; Wylie, 2003); qualified commitments to subjectivity, objectivity and trained judgement (Daston & Galison, 2007), to the truth or truthfulness (Connell, 2013), to academic integrity (Zgaga, 2009), to social justice (Case, 2013; McArthur, 2020), to innovation and research (Warnock, 1989) and to creativity (Besley & Peters, 2013; Robinson, 2001). SAPs can include problem-solving and problem-generating research; understanding, imagination and interpretation; care, wisdom and thinking; activism (Spivak, 1987); ideologies and identities; creativity and reflection; inclusion and diversity, *phronesis* (deliberation) and *eudamonia* (human flourishing); risk-taking and public engagement; and intellectual love (Rowland, 2008). References to these practices and epistemic virtues resonate throughout the literatures on higher education and the nature of academic study, yet they are rarely mentioned as conditions for what makes writing academic (Barnett, 2012; Bengtsen & Barnett, 2018; Besley & Peters, 2013; Biesta et al., 2019; de Sousa Santos, 2017; Nixon, 2012; Sperlinger et al., 2018; Thesen & Cooper, 2013; Warnock, 1989b).

When writers (and, by extension, their texts) are committed to SAPs and epistemic virtues (EVs) rather than to a display of form, they are more likely to mobilize a wider range of semiotic resources. This is because when academicness is conceived as a non-reductive property of texts, as I showcase below, there is no *a priori* semiotic resource to enact it. What this means is that an image, sound or movement (Roque, 2015) can confer academicness to a text.

SAPs emerge from an interaction between the writer (their agency, knowledge, intentions, values and abilities) and knowledge of the *textual environments* they operate in. This textual environment includes the readers and the institutional,

social and linguistic structures which determine conventions and which writers need to be knowledgeable about so that they can make informed decisions about shaping their academic texts. In claiming that writers have agency in shaping their texts, I am not downplaying the role of the reader or of institutional expectations in establishing the academicness of texts. I recognize with Tardy (2016, p. 76), for example, that:

In the traditional academic classroom, clearly defined roles of the teacher (as expert and assessor) and the student (as novice and learner) shape how student texts are both written and read and they limit the likelihood that a student will depart from genre expectations.

However, innovation, even at a relatively novice level, does occur, as the doctoral writings referred to earlier exemplify. It occurs through interaction, dialogue and negotiation with the 'experts', who belong to and have some agency in shaping the structures of the institutions that establish academic conventions. This innovation needs to be given a space in which it can be nurtured because it is what allows novel SAPs to emerge. For example, Harron (2016), in her mathematics PhD, uses language to disrupt her readers' expectations and to enact a socio-academic practice of inclusion: this is signalled by the claim in her Preface that 'Respected research math is dominated by men of a certain attitude'. Harron is using her academic writing to foreground her identity as a female mathematician in a male-dominated discipline and to advance her ideology of social inclusion (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015). This is further compounded by writing her thesis for three different audiences, or readers: the lay person, the initiated person and the expert. Harron is knowingly and knowledgeably both anticipating and orienting her readers' expectations by disrupting the traditional genre of the PhD thesis that assumes one type of reader (the expert). She does this because she wants to write a thesis that is 'as mathematically complete as I could honestly make it' and for a community of mathematicians that includes those who 'do not feel that they are encouraged to be themselves'. By interacting with her textual environment and by choosing the forms and genres that allow her to express her identity and ideology, she is enacting a socio-academic practice of inclusion and social justice. Had she chosen to write a conventional mathematics thesis, she is unlikely to have shaped knowledge of mathematics in this way.

Threshold Concepts (TCs)

Having argued that academicness refers to holistic and relational SAPs that cannot be reduced to any single element in the text or to a writer's intent, the

following section examines threshold concepts in writing studies (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015) to further argue that what makes writing academic emerges from an interaction between the ways in which writers, i.e. agents, conceptualize their written texts and their textual environments, understood as the structures that both constrain and enable writer choice.

Threshold concepts designate a powerful heuristic for describing knowledge and how we come to understand it. Threshold concepts can be understood as ‘portals’ that open ‘a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something’ (Meyer & Land, 2006, p. 4). This new way of thinking has a ‘transformative function’ because ‘once students have understood a key disciplinary concept, they are taken into a new intellectual and emotional space’. For example, Reimann and Jackson (2006, p. 166) discuss the threshold concept of ‘opportunity cost’ in economics. This is explained as ‘the sacrifice made, when resources are scarce, to seek opportunities between competing uses of finite resources’. An ‘opportunity cost’ is therefore not actually a cost. It is a ratio that measures ‘the best alternative’ in the range of resources available. Understanding this, for an economics student, is part of a ‘liminal’ state in their learning whereby they may feel confused, stuck and challenged (Kiley & Wisker, 2009, p. 432) as they try to ‘integrate’ their previous understandings with the new ‘troublesome’ understandings that seem ‘conceptually difficult, counter-intuitive or even “alien”’ (Meyer & Land, 2006, p. 39).

Similarly, understanding that what makes writing academic cannot be reduced to a set of prescribed conventions requires entering a liminal state where the familiar comfort of previous knowledge (e.g. prescriptive paragraph patterns or impersonal grammar) becomes troublesome. Although threshold concepts are referred to as ‘troublesome’ because they disrupt previously held understandings, this does not presuppose that there is a ‘correct way’ to understand a concept: the point is that *any* shift in conceptual understandings is likely to be troublesome. This point is implied by Cousin (2006) when she reminds us that threshold concepts are ‘bounded’, meaning that concepts border with other concepts that index new conceptual areas. Their boundedness requires us to resist ‘essentialist readings’ by remaining open to questioning the concepts themselves. This is because of the ‘provisional explanatory capacity’ of disciplinary concepts rather than because of any ‘congealed property’ that might be defining them. For example, understanding that in economics an ‘opportunity cost’ is not actually a ‘cost’ but a ‘ratio’ does not mean that understanding it as a ‘ratio’ is correct: this, too, may be a ‘provisional explanation’. It is the conceptual shift in crossing the threshold that matters because this shift will be required

again for new and evolving disciplinary understandings. In what follows, I am proposing that a similar conceptual shift is needed to understand that what makes writing academic are its practices and not its forms. The shift consists in the troublesome recognition that when writing is reduced to a relatively finite and closed set of skills, it may fail to 'encapsulate' new SAPs, but that when it opens up to new skills it can shape knowledge in new and creative ways.

In *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts in Writing Studies*, Adler-Kassner and Wardle (2015) articulate thirty-seven threshold concepts of academic writing. These threshold concepts foreground the diversity, the affordances, the social practices and the mobility of both writing and writers in ways that a standard EAP writing class, for example, typically, does not. An example of a threshold concept in writing includes what Lunsford (2015) calls 'performativity',³ meaning that written texts can make things happen 'beyond their own terms of reference' (Back, 2016), such as a policy change. Another example is the power of texts to build *identities* (Villanueva, 2015), such as feminist writings (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1995) and ecologies of knowledge (de Sousa Santos, 2009), which allow non-dominant epistemologies and ontologies to become visible. Policy changes and new epistemologies and ontologies are examples of SAPs that emerge from the performativity of a text and from the identities it foregrounds. They are irreducible to prescribed language forms. When a writer is knowledgeable about the range of options that the textual environment affords, they can then make informed choices about the shape, form, genre, language, modality of their written text. Below, I list and illustrate what two of these threshold concepts look like when applied to academic writing.

Threshold Concept 1.5 refers to the fact 'writing mediates activity': 'The concept that writing mediates activity [e.g. a STOP sign or a performative] is troublesome because it goes against the usual concepts of writing as "just" transcribing ... thought or speech' (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015, p. 27). What makes writing *academic* with regard to this threshold concept is its capacity to make things *happen*. An example of such a text might be O'Dwyer et al. (2018), who invite us to resist the pressures of academia by *performing* a manifesto. By choosing to write a manifesto, the authors are perceiving their writing as a 'Mediating Activity'. The academicness of their text (published in a journal of reflective practice) emerges from the authors' intention to perform a manifesto and their knowledge of the textual possibilities available to them,

³ This is not the same meaning of 'performativity' found in Macfarlane (2021b).

in this case a poem that represents the self-care they wish to perform (taken from pages 245–7):

An invitation: to our reader

The poem that follows is both a representation of our self-care and reflective practice and an invitation to others to engage in dialogue with us. We invite you to read, to reflect and to resist.

Self care: a manifesto

Eat apple pancakes smothered in Nutella.

Practice yoga

Watch The English Patient

Turn off email notifications

Walk

Drink wine

Have a massage

Eat fish and chips

Swim.

Threshold concept 3.0 refers to the fact that writing enacts and creates Identities and Ideologies: ‘When we seek to “apprentice” students into academic writing, what ideological imperatives are being asserted in the ways we choose to conceive of academic writers and writing?’ (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015, p. 50). Here, what can make writing *academic* is the recognition that writers are different and as such, not only do they bring different kinds of knowledge to their texts, they also shape their texts differently. Examples of such writing include Harron (2016), Carson (2017) and Kunju (2017), the latter having chosen to write his thesis in isiXhosa, one of South Africa’s eleven languages. In doing this, not only does he obtain his doctorate, but he also asserts his humanity through an ideological imperative that consisted in reclaiming as academic an indigenous language and in resisting the dominant geopolitics of academic English (Lillis & Curry, 2010a). By choosing to write in isiXhosa, the academicness of Kunju’s text emerges from the interaction between his intention to challenge a dominant ideology and the textual possibilities available to him (namely writing in isiXhosa instead of English).

When read cumulatively, these and many other threshold concepts afford creative possibilities for re-thinking academicness. These possibilities include de-centring language to embrace multimodality and dethroning English as the *lingua franca* of academia.

Argument, Logic and Why Language Isn't Enough

I have so far indicated that academicness, a holistic non-reductive property that makes a text academic, resides neither in the text nor in the intention of the writer for their text to count as academic. Instead, academicness can be said to emerge from a space that facilitates the interplay of writer agencies and their textual environments. These environments include reader expectations and the range of threshold concepts that define writing. I articulate this position more explicitly in Chapter 4, but before then, reference must be made to the role that argument plays in determining the academicness of a text. This is because argument is often associated with what makes a text academic.

My contention will be that argument can make a text academic but that it is only one of several non-defining features. It, too, emerges from the interaction of a writer's purpose (their agency) and their perception of what the textual environment (the structure) affords. I begin this section by assuming a shared and generic understanding of argument as the means through which we persuade others (Fish, 2017), but as the section draws to a close, I will offer more specific definitions with the intention of showing that an argument does not need to be linguistic. This is intended to further foreground and disrupt the historical contingency, introduced in Chapter 2, of the 'Western' logo-centric legacy that conflates logical thinking with alphabetic literacy and, ultimately, language.

Although there are times when academic communication doesn't need to be about argumentation (Allen, 2015; Bammer & Joeres, 2015), generally, we think of argument as being a marker of academicness (as discussed throughout Andrews, 2010; Archer, 2016; Björkvall, 2016; Fish, 2017; Gourlay, 2016; Wingate, 2012). In this section, therefore, I assume argument to be one of the properties that emerge from the interaction between the writer and their textual environment, but I also take it to be just one of the many non-essential SAPs that arise from this interaction. I further demonstrate that there is no univocal understanding of argument and because of this, academic arguments can take many forms. I focus on the ways in which 'argument' has been conflated with language to show that this conflation has led to marginalizing multimodal affordances of argument. I conclude by claiming that an over-reliance on language limits our ability to argue and that a multimodal approach to argument affords greater academicness.

How Language Came to Define Argument

As shown in Chapter 2, academic writing instruction has inherited a legacy which considers language, and language alone, to be the primary enabler of complex, higher-order thinking that ‘raises consciousness’. This ‘higher order thinking’ is further associated with ‘argumentation’, understood simply, but by no means simplistically, as the ‘art of persuasion’ (Fish, 2017, p. 6): what Fish refers to as the ‘art of persuasion’ is shorthand for the Aristotelian legacy of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* which underscores much current literature on what argumentation consists of (Ramage et al., 2009). Because of its persuasive powers, argument has come to define academic communication (Andrews, 2010; Wingate, 2012). However, we are now faced with yet another conflation, that between alphabetic language and argumentation.

This conflation is a problem because we know from the histories of literacy and of philosophy that language is both limited and fallible in capturing and, therefore, doing justice to the ontologies we seek to represent and cognitively engage with. Philosopher Miranda Fricker (2007) has not only re-iterated the limits of language in representing the world, she has also shown that epistemic injustices emerge from these limits. She describes several social situations in which knowers who do not have the linguistic resources to interpret and then describe a social event can become victims of a ‘hermeneutical injustice’. This is when somebody (a knower) becomes disempowered and then disadvantaged by social realities that have not developed the linguistic repertoires to describe an event. Some of her examples relate to instances of sexual harassment whereby women must develop the language needed to describe situations that may not be adequately captured by previously established words, such as sexual ‘coercion’, ‘intimidation’ or ‘exploitation’: in the contexts that Fricker describes, ‘harassment’ helps women describe behaviours that were not adequately captured by the other terms. She shows that language can create conceptual spaces to frame thoughts and experiences in new ways, but, in doing so, she equally indexes how readily language fails to describe what is happening.⁴ It is this failure that I wish to foreground.

For our present purposes, the limits of language signal the possibility that human cognition might develop through a range of representations whereby

⁴ Interestingly, the word ‘harassment’ does not exist in Italian. It is generally translated as *molestia* (as in ‘being molested’). However, since the 2019 #MeToo scandal, whereby several women took to social media to call out male harassment, the English word has increasingly been used in Italian media, often untranslated.

(academic) reality is not dependent on being represented by a single mode, namely language. When argument is allowed to draw on the *most fitting* modes rather than the *most conventional*, the richness and fullness of SAPs are more likely to emerge. As artist and psychologist Rudolf Arnheim reminds us (1974, p. 2):

The scientist builds conceptual models he [*sic*] wants to understand about a given phenomenon. But he [*sic*] knows that there is no such thing as the full representation of an individual instance.

That language is the most fitting modality to be the transparent carrier of our thoughts has had many critics. Literacy and EAP scholar Karen Bennett, for example, has described this conceptualization of language as a 'transparency trope', claiming that rather than a conduit for reality, language is constitutive of it. This view challenges the widely deferred to Orwellian metaphor whereby language is seen as a 'window pane' that is detached from, but through which we represent, the outside world: this view of language as a window onto reality assumes that language is 'clear' and 'transparent'. A more robust challenge has come from socio-semiotic integrationist linguists, such as Harris (2011), who claims that the 'window pane' view of language falls into the 'fallacy of telementation'. The fallacy assumes that words are adequate carriers of our thoughts and that our listeners and hearers are able to intend our words as we intended them to be understood, as though the meaning of these words were transparent and complete, needing no further integration with the context in which they were uttered or with the receiver's own understanding of those words. In this sense, traditional linguistics (in the tradition of De Saussure and Chomsky) is *segregationist* and has failed to recognize that 'languages must be conceived as systems that are entirely *dependent* on their use in communication' (Harris, 2011). Meaning emerges from the *integration* of the word and the social context it is uttered in by the speaker or writer. It does not emerge from its segregation, as the 'window pane' metaphor suggests. This explains why writers need knowledge of their readers by interacting with their textual environments and integrating meanings accordingly to allow academicness to emerge, but it also explains why readers need knowledge of their writers: how else can we explain why Wittgenstein and Derrida were understood by some but not by others?

In his later writings, Wittgenstein himself adeptly captures the problem of signification when he wonders what it means to 'point to something', in the sense of trying to give an ostensive definition. He asks (1953, #33):

[W]hat does ‘pointing to the shape’, ‘pointing to the colour’ consist in? Point to a piece of paper. – And now point to its shape – now to its colour – now to its number (that sounds queer) – How did you do it? You will say that you ‘meant’ a different thing each time you pointed. And if I ask you how that is done, you will say you concentrated your attention on the colour, the shape, etc.

Instead, Wittgenstein proposes that we think of meanings in terms of ‘language in use’. This frames language as a social practice and not as the mental representation of what it refers to (Wittgenstein & Russell, 1922). Thinking of language in this way, as integrated with its uses, has important implications for how we think about academic writings. Integrating meanings and fixing referents to ensure we all understand what we mean is a troubled process, as painstakingly demonstrated by philosopher Saul Kripke (1972). What is meant by ‘academic’ is not fixed because, in Kripkean terms, ‘academic’ is not the ‘rigid designator’ of a fixed external referent in the same way as the word ‘bachelor’ is in designating an ‘unmarried man’ (or even a university degree). Since the meaning of ‘academic’ cannot be fixed, what makes writing academic remains open to how we integrate its meaning with its uses. From a linguistic perspective, Harris (2011) claims that the ‘semiological value’ of using any linguistic structure ‘depends on the circumstances and activities in which they fulfil an integrational function’ rather than on external referents. Harris gives the example of how the seemingly unequivocal word ‘tree’ can refer both to a plant and to a landmark that signals ‘the need to turn left’: to understand ‘tree’ as ‘landmark’, we need to integrate a wide range of signs, circumstances and activities.

On an integrationist reading, then, the visual literacies of Sousanis (2015), the aural thesis of Carson (2017), the messy social scientific methods of Law (2003) and the call by English (2015) to conceive of academic writing as a creative venture can be said to have an ‘academic semiological value’ because they depend on the academic ‘circumstances and activities’, namely the *practices*, and their inherent standards of excellence, that generated them.

Yet, despite the ways in which writers translanguage and integrate signs and meanings to advance their polysemiotic arguments, the burden of a ‘full representation’ of our thoughts and meanings has historically been on (a mono) language (Blair, 2008, p. 44):

Arguments are traditionally associated with speech, either written or oral, for a couple of linked reasons. First, because the reasons they use are propositions. Second, because propositions are standardly expressed by propositions in language.

Like language, what is meant by 'argument' is contested and varies according to its purpose (Fish, 2017), its disciplinary norms⁵ (Andrews, 2010; Toulmin, 1958) and its cultural forms (Galtung, 1981; Kaplan, 1980 [1966]). Once we start to investigate the structural diversity of propositional arguments and how this might affect representations of reality, deeper questions arise about how form and content relate to each other. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum has a long-standing interest in this area and has focused on how form and content influence each other in the field of philosophy (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 3):

How should one write, what words should one select, what forms and structures and organisation, if one is pursuing understanding? ... Style itself makes its claims, expresses its own sense of what matters. Literary form is not separable from philosophical content, but is, itself, a part of content – an integral part, then, of the search for and the statement of truth.

An example of how 'style itself makes its claims, expresses its own sense of what matters' is the Manifesto of Care (O'Dwyer et al., 2018) article referred to earlier, which invites us to reflect on and resist the pressures of academic life by affording us the opportunity to read an academic text written as poetry.

I now highlight how the meaning of argument has changed over time and how it becomes conflated with language. This opens up the possibility for argument in academic writing to go beyond language, making it inclusive of a range of 'ecologies of knowledges' (de Sousa Santos, 2017), 'textual ecologies' (Canagarajah, 2018), 'intellectual styles' (Galtung, 1981) and 'creativity' (Besley & Peters, 2013).

The Limits of Language

Stephen Toulmin (1958)'s *The Uses of Argument* was a turning point in the way argumentation can be understood. This is because Toulmin repudiated the logical positivist reduction of argument to a series of symbols that divorced argument from natural, or ordinary, language. Instead, he proposed that we re-think what we mean by logic. His response consisted in recognizing that argumentation shares some of the features of psychology, understood as the study of 'healthy laws of thought' and of sociology, namely the study of 'habits and practices developed in the course of social evolution and passed on by parents and teachers from one generation to another' (1958, p. 3). He argued that language is

⁵ For example, a deductive mathematical argument is different to an inductive historical argument.

only one of the modalities that allow us to be 'logical' in both the psychological and the sociological sense but he also posited that framing argument in terms of psychology and sociology imbued the thinking process with a subjective and relative quality, such as a reliance on induction that 'proper' deductive logic did not (Toulmin, 1958, p. 5):

[I]t cannot be custom alone that gives validity and authority to a form of argument, or the logician would have to wait upon the results of the anthropologist's researches.

His discomfort with subjectivity and relativity was not, however, resolved by turning to the kind of logic that posits formal relations between propositions and that reduces the validity of an argument to its deductive form. This is because logic is concerned with statements about logic itself and not with the thinking process *per se*. The mistake of equating logic with correct and rational thinking is known as 'qualified psychologism'⁶ and assumes that logic, rather than psychology, is the study of thought. Toulmin invokes logical positivist Rudolf Carnap to refute the way in which logic has arrogated the thinking to itself (Toulmin, pp. 86–7):

The characterisation of logic in terms of correct or rational or justified beliefs is as right but not more enlightening than to say that mineralogy tells us how to think correctly about minerals. The reference to thinking may just as well be dropped in both cases. Then we say simply: mineralogy makes statements about minerals and logic makes statements about logical relations. The activity in any field of knowledge involves, of course, thinking. But this does not mean that thinking belongs to the subject matter of all fields. It belongs to the subject matter of psychology but not to that of logic any more than to that of mineralogy.

By the same token, it can be argued that when it comes to the practice of academic writing – *pace* Ong (1982, 1986), Emig (1977), Kaplan (1980 [1966]) and other literacy scholars who have in various ways subscribed to the view that writing raises consciousness in ways that are qualitatively superior to other forms of communication – the reference to 'good thinking' may as well be dropped. This is because it amounts to an instance of 'qualified psychologism', whereby writing has arrogated to itself the process of correct thinking, a process that more properly belongs to the enquiries of the field of psychology. Since the activity of any field requires 'good thinking', it is not clear why it should belong to the practice of writing any more than it does to that of drawing.

⁶ For an overview and explanation of qualified psychologism, see <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/psychologism/> [accessed 14 December 2018].

Rather, Toulmin proposes that we shift our conflation of logic with correct and rational thinking to thinking of logic as a way of making sound claims that give prominence to warrants instead of prominence to form and truth (Toulmin, 1958, p. 7):

Logic is concerned with the soundness of the claims we make – with the solidity of the grounds we produce to support them, the firmness of the backing we provide for them – or, to change the metaphor, with the sort of case we present in defence of our claims. The legal analogy implied in this last way of putting the point can for once be a real help. So let us forget about psychology, sociology, technology and mathematics, ignore the echoes of structural engineering and collage in the words 'grounds' and 'backing' and take as our model the discipline of jurisprudence. Logic (we may say) is generalised jurisprudence.

In re-framing logic as jurisprudence, where what persuades is a convincing and reasonable case, not the truth, Toulmin discards much of the language associated with logic, such as 'premise' or 'proposition' and replaces it with legal terminology, such as 'data', 'warrants' and 'qualifiers': data are the situations we wish to make a claim about; warrants are legitimate 'steps' that act as 'bridges' which 'authorise' further 'steps' culminating in further 'claims'; and 'qualifiers' provide conditions under which a claim can be considered *reasonable* (as opposed to 'true'). By introducing this terminology, he shows that what constitutes an argument is not its reliance on logic and language (propositions) but its reliance on the legitimacy of the warrant. As will be revealed, the 'legitimacy of a warrant' can also be established in several non-linguistic ways.

Toulmin further cautions against the mis-use of the term 'logic'. He does this by reminding us that non-mathematical and non-logical arguments are substantial. This makes their truth and validity contingent on external conditions, not on the internal, logico-deductive conditions of formal logic. Since the majority of meaningful academic arguments, ones that extend our knowledge – in the sciences, social sciences and humanities – are substantial and inductive, they require warrants and qualifiers as well as linguistic modalities for expressing attitudes of probability, possibility and necessity, rather than formal logic (Toulmin, p. 154):

The only arguments we can fairly judge by 'deductive' standards are those held out as and intended to be analytic, necessary and formally valid. All arguments which are confessedly substantial will be 'non-deductive' and by implication not formally valid. But for the analytic syllogism validity can be identified with formal validity and this is just what the logician wants to be possible universally.

It follows at once that for substantial arguments, whose cogency cannot be displayed in a purely formal way, even validity is something entirely out of reach and unobtainable.

Reaching similar conclusions in response to those who objected to her use of poetry to represent sociological data, Laurel Richardson has cautioned against the mis-use of 'rational' to describe the academic endeavour (Richardson, 1997, p. 41):

[T]he fact that social science research does not meet the logic of enquiry model of research does not mean that the research is irrational. The problem is not with social science, but with the inappropriate narrowing of the meaning of 'rational'.

Drawing on philosopher Richard Rorty (who is unfortunately also associated with problematic relativist ontologies), Richardson rightly calls for the meaning of rational to include a set of 'moral virtues' such as tolerance, respect, a willingness to listen and persuasion. This is quite different to reducing rationality to a set of logical linguistic propositions.

Language Is Field-Dependent Rather than Clear, Precise or Transparent

A further key move in Toulmin's critique of classical logic and its arrogation of argument is that substantive arguments require more than a reliance on the univocal meaning of language. He develops this thesis by drawing attention to the *field-dependency* of arguments (1958, p. 15):

How far, for instance, can one compare the standards of argument relevant in a court of law with those relevant when judging a paper in the Proceedings of the Royal Society, or those relevant to a mathematical proof or a prediction about the composition of a tennis team?

A specific example of 'standards of argument' might be that what counts as evidence for a warrant or qualifier in each discipline will differ. In a court of law, a *blood-stained garment*, rather than a linguistic proposition about how the victim had blood on their clothes, may provide a warrant for claiming that the victim had been injured; in a scientific paper, *references* to previous studies can serve to qualify a new theory; in mathematics, an *axiom* such as $A = \pi r^2$ to calculate the surface area of a generic circle can provide the warrant for establishing the surface area of a specific circle; in tennis, the use of past *performance statistics* can establish which players are the most competent for the formation of a new

team. The point being that by narrowing and reducing the meaning of argument to propositional logic, we fail to capture the wider-ranging uses of argument that occur in other fields of human enquiry, uses which may or may not include language itself. This is why the frequent designation and juxtaposition, in EAP and other general academic writing courses, of academic writing as 'logical' and 'linear' is misleading: both terms are highly field-dependent and it is not clear what they designate when they are used to describe the arguments in generic student essays.

Toulmin's focus on warrants and qualifiers now creates a space within which to think of arguments as non-linguistic, since neither warrants nor qualifiers need be expressed in language.

The Case for Non-linguistic Argumentation

Richard Andrews (2010), whose scholarship on academic literacies has been influential in studies on higher education and EAP, draws significantly on the seminal work of Toulmin. The claim that 'arguments may be of different kinds' (Toulmin, 1958, pp. 158–9) is of specific relevance to this section. Arguments can and do include, but need not be reduced to, the logical characterizations favoured by EAP (Chapter 1) and the Enlightenment research genres (Chapter 2) but they can further be conceptualized in terms of composition, as dialogic, as (inter)disciplinary and as multimodal. Specifically, by drawing attention to the interdisciplinary nature of argumentation, Andrews is highlighting that the form and the aim of an argument are not paradigmatic, meaning that there isn't a standard to which all arguments conform. In the absence of a paradigm, arguments are not universally transferable across disciplines: a mathematical argument is substantially different to a historical argument, for example. Because arguments are not paradigmatic, Andrews leaves open the possibility for arguments to be non-linguistic and multimodal, showing that these 'can operate inductively, not just as evidence for a verbally conceived set of propositions but as a set of propositions in [their] own right' (Andrews, 2010, p. 52). The existence of a range of academic arguments signals that what makes writing academic goes far beyond the narrow requirement to be 'logical' and 'linear' and includes requirements that are usually ascribed to creative writing, such as the need to be 'refreshing', 'modest' and 'curious' (Andrews, 2010, pp. 99–101); to be open to interpretation (Marin et al., 2018); and to develop authorial identities (Ivanič, 1998; Kamler & Thomson, 2006).

To achieve such wide-ranging qualities, propositional arguments themselves frequently rely on non-propositional forms, such as implicit or unstated premises. Enthymemes are an example of this. These are the ‘missing parts’ of an argument, such as a premise or conclusion (Hurley, 2000), that require readers’ knowledge or interpretation to ‘fill in the gaps’. They rely, that is, on the reader’s ‘cooperation’ (Turner, 2018). According to Andrews, visual argumentation creates opportunities for this kind of inference, which matters in education: it is what Dewey calls a ‘forecast’, a ‘leap from the unknown’, a ‘creative incursion’ (cited in d’Agnese, 2017, p. 451). Similarly, Tarnay (2002) argues that moving images can argue without being reduced to propositional content. This can be illustrated with reference to *Fuocoammare* (2016), Gianfranco Rosi’s 2016 documentary about the plight of refugees arriving on the small island of Lampedusa in Sicily. In one scene, we are shown that ordinary life continues on the island despite the tragic loss of life: two young boys play together throughout the documentary while rescue boats, helicopters and other medical services concurrently deal with migrant emergencies. It is a mostly silent documentary, yet, as viewers, we become aware that Lampedusa’s children are being affected by what they see and hear around them. Despite this never being stated linguistically (i.e. propositionally), the inference that their lives are being affected is clear and the viewer cannot help but make that inference because their knowledge of life, or maybe even shared experiences, allows them to fill in the gaps. This documentary film, narrated visually, meets the conditions for what Toulmin (1958) calls substantive arguments and as such, can be said to meet the criteria for being ‘academic’ in the sense of enacting the socio-academic practice of advancing an evidence-based claim (or thesis): it provides data (D) of migrants arriving on a small island and claims (C) that this affects the local children. The steps the director takes in moving from D to C are realized by the editing and juxtaposition of images and overlay of sounds to provide warrants (W), or bridges, between the data and the claim, a form of arguing that relies on recursive composition rather than linearity (Palmeri, 2012). A full analysis of this documentary might further show that backing and qualifications are also present in the film when considered as a whole. The reason we can make inductive inferences, rather than formal deductions, from the data to the claims is because images and motion are being arranged according to what Tarnay (2002, p. 4) calls intentional ‘compositional’ features (in the sense of *intended* by the director) that cannot be reduced to propositions that merely guide the eye in a linear and sequential way or

that are left open to unqualified interpretation. Such features include 'depth', 'motion', 'distance' and, following Groarke (2015), 'non-verbal sounds', which are 'perceived' by the viewer through the senses rather than directly processed as propositions (Tarnay, p. 5):

[T]he operation of our sense organs (or whatever it is that computes and processes sense data) can be described as an inferential activity under the level of phenomenal consciousness (The strongest version that our eyes 'argue' can be found in Bonfantini, 1987). The retrieval of arguments should not be confined to higher – semantic and pragmatic – level of processing, but it should be grounded on certain 'automatic' processes.

Some may object that a documentary such as *Fuocoammare* does not count as an academic argument on the following grounds. Firstly, as discussed above, argument is traditionally understood as a propositional, not visual, endeavour. In the case of *Fuocoammare*, the scope for interpretation is, arguably, far wider than it might be in a traditional academic format. A film or an image allows the viewer to see much more in a single frame or panel than does a sentence containing a proposition or a paragraph containing several sentences. Secondly, whilst acknowledging that language is 'unstable', some writing scholars such as Gourlay (2016, p. 88), for example, remain of the view that 'written text is still more suited than visual images' to the complex requirements of argumentation and critique, especially within the context of a literature review (Gourlay, 2016, p. 87):

The dense, precise and closely-argued nature of much academic argumentation in reference to other academic texts seems to demand a system which delivers nuance and can be readily and unambiguously shared with a readership beyond the immediate context of text production – the complexity of language still appears better suited to the task than images alone.

A third objection is that films and images tell stories which rely on narrative rather than argument. This third contention relies on the common acceptance that argument and narrative are mutually exclusive methods for communicating knowledge. The implication of this contention seems to be that by doing the former one is not doing the latter and vice-versa. The contention indexes that since narrative is not traditionally valued as a method of inquiry, the documentary genre which relies on narrative to advance a thesis is less likely to be accepted by academic writing programmes, such as those taught in EAP. The assumption that narrative is not deemed to academic is made explicit by

Ingraham (2005, p. 49) in discussing whether the BBC documentary entitled *Walking with Beasts* can be considered 'academic':

[A]n obvious way in which documentary often differs from conventional scholarly discourse is in the use of narrative. Documentary programmes are much more likely to use narrative as a strategy to maintain and direct an audience's attention than are scholarly articles or books. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with using narrative within the context of scholarly discourse. Many historical and biographical studies almost inevitably involve narrative.

The extent to which the documentary being analysed by Ingraham can be considered as a 'carrier of academic argument' has been deliberated by Gourlay (2012, p. 95) who concludes that it cannot be classified as academic. This is because academic argument should be explicit, something that narrative is not seen to be and unambiguous, something only words can be (Gourlay, 2012, p. 97).

It is, however, possible to challenge the above three objections to the thesis that a documentary and its non-verbal forms of argumentation can be academic. Firstly, we need to remind ourselves that even traditional argument and its investment in language is fallible and requires constant refining clarifications. If linguistic argument were as precise and as clear as Gourlay and others claim, then why is so much academic time spent on revisiting and surmising over the ambiguous meanings expressed through the language of academic writers? As Fish (2017, p. 19) notes:

[I]f we could confine ourselves to a language that did not admit [uncertainties], there would be no need for argument; for argument is required when there are competing accounts of what is the case. If everyone agreed on how a set of facts should be characterised, there would be no competing accounts and there would be nothing to argue about. And such agreement would be assured if there were prior agreement about the correct vocabulary for stating things.

Secondly, Toulmin has shown that traditional propositional logic fails to capture the substantive nature of human argumentation which includes understanding argument as an 'invitation to inference' and not merely as a logical deduction to establish the truth of a premise (Pinto, 2001 cited in Groarke (2015, p. 135)). Since inferences and interpretation are very much part of the academic endeavour, it seems unwise to defer so extensively to the power of propositional arguments to convey unambiguous meaning. Similarly, Tseronis (22 May 2013) shows that argumentation is a social and discursive activity in which images, in addition to playing a role in conveying premises and conclusions, communicate

something about the argumentative process that goes beyond mere representation to include the ways in which images contribute to the context in which they are being used. The scene where the two Sicilian boys in *Fuocoammare* are pretending to shoot down targets in an imaginary war is therefore not to be viewed for its representational value, namely two boys shooting, but as contributing to the overall narrative argument, namely that migration is affecting life on the island. Crucially, Tseronis also reminds us that meaning and truth are distinct concepts and that 'the meaning of a proposition cannot be reduced to its truth-evaluable propositional content'. In other words, meaning, rather than truth, can equally be the aim of an argument. To quote Fish again (2017, p. 8):

Argument is protean – ever changing, mutable, kaleidoscopic, voracious – and almost anything can be its vehicle, swinging a big stick, putting on a badge, intoning a holy phrase, making the sign of a cross, wearing a uniform, speaking in a stentorian tone.

Thirdly, and contrary to Ingraham's and Gourlay's claims, narrative methods are used in academic research (see, for example, Chanock [2014]; Richardson [1990a]), including the use of ethnographic methods in anthropology, sociology, education and science. As evidenced in Chapter 2, Isaac Newton himself deploys the narrative of 'stumbling across a fact' to persuade the reader of an epistemic virtue, that of the 'objectivity' of his findings. Despite the ubiquity of narrative in academic communication, academic writing programmes such as EAP, with their underlying positivistic ideologies, rarely foreground multimodal narrative as a valid form of argumentation.

And finally, since academia is, or ought to be, moving on from the discredited logical-positivist endeavour of seeking to establish a strict correspondence between word and object, what counts as an academic argument also needs to move on (Paré, 2017). One way of moving on is to recognize that privileging monomodal practices narrows what can and cannot be said (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Laurillard et al., 2000 [2]), making it more likely that by mobilizing a wider range of semiotic resources to communicate meaning, academic arguments will become more persuasive. This likelihood stems from the fact that our meaning-making capacities and ability to think in abstract conceptual ways extend beyond language (Arnheim, 1969, p. 228):

[L]anguage is widely assumed to be a much better vehicle of thought than other shapes or sounds Nobody denies that language helps thinking. What needs to be questioned is whether it performs this service substantially by means of properties inherent in the verbal medium itself or whether it functions indirectly,

namely by pointing to the referents of words and propositions, that is to facts given in an entirely different medium. Also, we need to know whether language is indispensable to thought. The answer ... is 'no'.

Arnheim's point is that if the sole function of language is to describe, or point to, a reality that is beyond it – such as a thought or an object – then art and other modalities can do this, too. But since words, images, sounds and other media are ontologically distinct from what they are describing, none can be said to provide a 'full representation' of that reality. From the perspective of what makes writing academic, this entails that words are not inherently superior to any other forms of representing reality because something is always lost and gained through semiotic choices.

Conclusions

This chapter has argued that what makes writing academic cannot be reduced to formal features of language and grammar because doing so would allow hoaxes and IELTS essays to count as academic. These are not academic because they transgress values of academic integrity (such as a commitment to the truth), which are emergent SAPs. Rather, what makes writing academic are the ways in which writers knowledgeably interact with their textual environments to allow these SAPs to emerge. These environments include the threshold concepts that trouble and re-configure what we think makes writing academic. In considering the role that argument also plays, I claimed that whilst arguments can make writing academic, there is no requirement for them to be propositional (i.e. linguistic) or logical because most academic arguments are substantive and inductive rather than logical in any formal sense. Because of this, they are possibly better described as reasonable. Given this non-reductive nature (non-reductive to logic), argument, too, can be considered as a socio-academic practice that emerges from the interaction of the writer's warrants and claims with the range of socio-semiotic resources available to them in their textual environment.