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Unpacking Critical Theories to Enhance Creative Practice: A PhD in Screenwriting Case Study

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Abstract

Drawing from my own experiences of the practice-based research degree, this article outlines some of the key principles I consider to be necessary for negotiating a PhD in the specific area of screenwriting, for both the candidate and the supervisor. Referencing my own and others' ideas of the practice-based PhD, the article places the screenwriter at the centre of its investigation, celebrating their role in the interplay between the creative and the critical; between practice and theory; between doing and thinking. It argues that just like the protagonist of a screenplay, the screenwriting PhD should take its candidate on a journey: one that improves not only craft skills, but also an understanding of what it means to write for the screen.

Undertaking a PhD is daunting for any candidate. With expectations like being able to demonstrate 'a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice' (Bournemouth University, 2009: 71), resulting in work 'of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication' (ibid.) and that is 'an independent and original contribution to knowledge' (ibid.: 12), the PhD journey is far from easy. Whether the candidature is full-time for a solid three to four years, or part-time for up to six or seven years, there will be times when candidates question and probably doubt what they are doing. If this was not testing enough, we could suggest that there are further challenges and complexities for candidates undertaking practice-based PhDs; those in Creative Writing, for example, which according to Krauth, 'worry university administrations, attract scorn from some older writers and academics, and bring in more

candidates that we can handle' (2007: 10).

As Brien and Williamson argue, 'many [concerns] are magnified when dealing with newer academic discipline areas such as the creative arts [... where] emergent research practice seeks to legitimise alternative forms of knowledge production that do not always sit comfortably alongside accepted norms of research' (2009: 1-3). This very fact, of 'newer academic discipline areas', is indeed the cause of such complexities for the practice-based PhD: if the territory is relatively new, how can we be sure of what is acceptable? If there is a shorter history of completions in such discipline areas, where do we turn to for models of best practice? These are fundamental questions for any candidate undertaking a practice-based PhD, and for their supervisors alike; and, although they are actively being explored in current scholarship, they still have a fair way to go in being answered.

In the area of Creative Writing, recent PhD graduate Sarah Dobbs writes: 'What actually constitutes research? It is the practice of writing, yes, but does this mean any writing, or does this mean *informed* writing, whereby the author has employed traditional research methods, data gathering for example?' (2011: 67). A basic question perhaps, but an important one that addresses specific concerns about how a PhD candidate working with practice can be measured alongside one working with traditional methods of research. As outlined, there are many complexities and many unanswered questions relating to the practice-based PhD, whether it be in Creative Writing, Media Practice, Visual Arts, and so on. In this way, questions like the one posed by Dobbs are, I would argue, fundamental in developing models of best practice that can be drawn upon by current and future candidates and supervisors.

It is the intention of this article, therefore, to explore how a practice-based PhD might be considered and constructed, and, by association, supervised. The discipline area of Creative Writing will be used to facilitate this exploration, not only because of the literature available and the international developments that have taken place, but because it also allows me to draw from my own experiences of undertaking a PhD in this area. However, because my own PhD was in the sub-discipline area of Screenwriting, it is my hope that the discussions will also speak to those in the areas of Media and Screen Practice.

As Williamson, Brien and Webb articulate, many supervisors believe that 'as long as you have been supervised at some point, you are considered capable of supervising'; furthermore, that 'in the beginning [as a new supervisor], most supervisors rely on a mixture of trial and error, and applying techniques that were applied to them – whether or not those techniques were successful' (2008: 2). Therefore, as a relatively new supervisor myself, I feel that it is extremely useful to draw on my own practice-based PhD experiences in that it will allow me to reflect on what worked and where I got stuck; and, perhaps more

crucially, will enable me to understand how I was successful in integrating theory with practice in order to warrant a satisfactory completion, attaining the required standard of a more 'traditional' PhD.

The Creative Writing Research Landscape

Graeme Harper is seen by many as a leading figure in the development of Creative Writing research, having written and edited numerous books and articles on the topic, many of which specifically in relation to the PhD. He was also my PhD supervisor, which I feel is important to mention because of the effect this had on how I developed and executed my work, specifically the complex integration of theory and practice. In one of his articles, Harper articulates clearly his views on the fabric of Creative Writing research. Considering that new practice-based PhD candidates do not necessarily understand exactly how and where their research will take them, and how theory and practice will be pieced together in the final 'package', I believe that Harper's views are a very useful starting point:

Some of this [Creative Writing research] is concerned with the pragmatics of putting words on a page, the actual physical act of creative writing. But a great deal more is concerned with linking the individual (i.e. the understanding and approach of the individual writer) with the holistic (i.e. understanding of genre, form, convention, the market, the audience). There are similarities here between the post-event analysis of literature, film, theatre and other art forms, but the difference is plain enough: the critical understanding employed is used to assist the creative writer in the construction of a work at hand, and/or of their future work. (2007: 19)

Quite simply, a practice-based PhD should be about practice; the PhD in Creative Writing should be about creative writing, where students research and understand factors that are relevant to the act of writing. In contrast to an English Literature PhD, for example, a practice-based PhD does not speculate on the intentions of the writer, nor does it look back at a creative artefact from an outsider's perspective. Rather, it is the intentions of the writer, and looks *into* the artefact from a creator's perspective. As O'Mahony reflects, 'the unique quality of the PhD in Creative Writing is that it gives writers the opportunity not only to write, but also to find ways of elucidating the process of writing by referring not only to their own work but to the work of other writers who have gone before them' (2007: 46).

Harper continues that 'it is entirely possible to celebrate Creative Writing as a human activity without valuing it solely, or even primarily, for the material outcomes it produces'

(2009: 64). This once again gives a candidate ammunition to consider their creative artefact in a personal and responsive way, for example questioning why they want to write it in the first place: business, pleasure, otherwise. Harper's assertions also encourage us to understand that Creative Writing might function as a research methodology to uncover a deeper critical understanding of writers and their writing. In this way, understanding that Creative Writing is an activity that does not necessarily have a material (commercial) outcome allows candidates and supervisors to consider that creative practice can in fact be a research methodology, not merely an end product to complement any traditional research that may have been conducted.

This idea is shared by Dobbs, who writes: 'It sounds almost strange to say that the purpose of a PhD is *not* to get published. Publication can and does happen, but these novels/collections/works should still make "an original contribution to knowledge"' (2011: 69). The creative artefact of a practice-based PhD does not necessarily have to be a material artefact; in fact, perhaps the creative element should *not* be a material artefact, and rather a creative artefact that embodies a set of research questions and presents the results in a non-traditional way. Krauth offers a useful example here from Newcastle University in the UK, whose online literature promoting its Creative Writing PhD states: 'instead of the thesis being derived from the creative component, a poem or story or chapter or scene may arise directly from research and may indeed drive the academic writing on, so that an intertwined structure is created, observing the same proportions, but exploring the established relationship between text and criticism in a new and dynamic manner' (2007: 12). This is a somewhat inspirational statement of how such a PhD will be developed and executed, though according to O'Mahoney is a rarity. She cites the struggle she had in finding an appropriate institution to undertake her PhD, noting that many of them saw creative and critical components as entirely different entities, sometimes supervised by staff from entirely different departments. In this way, she suggests that candidates 'may feel they have to develop dual personalities in order to satisfy the conflicting demands of creativity and criticism' (2007: 40). Things may have moved on since then, with the number of completions increasing, supervisory capacity building, and universities adapting to developments in the discipline, but it is important to note that these practices still can exist, and where they do, they have the potential to compromise the candidate and their work.

If this is the case, the practice-based PhD candidate should try and better understand how theory and practice can combine, leading to a project that is both more manageable and more imaginative. As Krauth recalls, the more fulfilling PhDs for him as a supervisor and examiner are 'audacious, revolutionary and convincing because they [take] on not just their specific projects, but also the project of freedom to create exceptionally in the

academic context' (Krauth, 2007: 18). Thus, rather than writing theoretical and creative components individually, one blind to the other, candidates should embrace the idea that the 'oscillatory and interrogative exploration between creative and critical [may be] what brings about the required original contribution to knowledge' (Dobbs, 2011: 68-69). This approach is, I would argue, particularly useful for the supervisor who has little experience of working with practice-based candidates, and who may indeed be struggling to understand the philosophical difficulties a candidate is experiencing.

As a result of such discussions on the practice-based PhD, in 2008 the Higher Education Committee of the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE), the UK's Subject Association for Creative Writing, developed a benchmark statement for research in Creative Writing. Supported by leading Creative Writing academics from a range of UK universities, the statement 'offers a reference point for those who assess research proposals and research outputs in Creative Writing, and it provides a guide for those developing research degrees in Creative Writing' (2008: 11). Many UK universities have used it in the development of research projects and research degree programmes, and with the accompanying benchmark statement on Creative Writing pedagogy, it is under review for official endorsement by the Quality Assurance Agency. Needless to say, the statement holds weight and is an excellent resource for candidates and supervisors of the PhD in Creative Writing.

One of the first articulations of the statement is:

Practice-led research in Creative Writing uses creative practice to explore, articulate and investigate. The range of explorations and articulations is as broad as the range of possible subjects, emotions and ideals prevalent in the world. However, the simple definition is: that the creative writer will undertake this research through the act of creating; that they will invest knowledge and understanding into this practice, and that they will develop their knowledge and understanding through their practice. The results of this practice-led research will demonstrate this knowledge and understanding (ibid.).

As highlighted by Dobbs' thoughts above, the creative component of such a PhD should embody the research question and in some way present the results. A candidate should therefore be encouraged to understand that they can actively produce a creative work drawn from a specific research agenda, and that their response to all of this should speak to other practitioners. They are not analysing creative work from the perspective of a literary analyst. Furthermore:

...that the creative writer will undertake this research through the act of creating; that they will invest knowledge and understanding into this practice, and that they will develop their knowledge and understanding through their practice ... Practice-led research is not research without critical understanding. Rather, it is research in which the act of practice is central and in which critical or theoretical understanding is contained within, and/or stimulated by, that practice ... Knowledge in Creative Writing may be thought of as incorporating a practical skill and critical or theoretical knowledge that underpins and supports that Creative Writing practice. (ibid.)

Once more, this reminds us that practice-based PhDs should unquestionably combine practice and theory as one; that doing and thinking, creating and understanding, should fuse and be directed to explore one another. The resulting 'new knowledge' can thus be seen to grow from creative-critical experimentations, insightful reflections and subsequent practice-based applications that take place. In other words, theory and practice collide, and as the candidate considers what each means for the other, they are bestowed with knowledge that can then produce new creative work.

Defining Research Questions

Here I would like to draw more openly from my own experiences of being a practice-based candidate, completing a PhD in Creative Writing from Bangor University in the UK in July 2009. As already highlighted, my PhD focused specifically on the subject of Screenwriting, and in order to drill down more productively into the specifics of development and execution, I would like to draw from particular examples that appeared in the final text. As well as illuminating some of the ideas being explored, the purpose of this is to provide raw material that may be useful for other candidates and supervisors.

As Harper tells us:

As creative writers [...] we spend most of our lives in the event of Creative Writing: that is, in the doing. We spend most of our lives working as individuals, or because of individual motivations, feelings, ideals, dispositions. So the question of what finished artefacts we produce and the value of these in an aggregated cultural situation is, already, only a small part of our daily lives, if it is a part at all. (2009: 65)

Therefore, when we write, we have a purpose, and that purpose is something of intrinsic value to us. It could be a feeling; it could be an impulse; it could be a challenge.

The PhD began for me with an interest in the idea that film protagonists undergo an emotional transformation (the character arc) as a result of undertaking a physical journey (the plot). This was drawn not only from teaching screenwriting, but also from experiences of receiving feedback on my own screenplays from industry personnel. What I struggled with, I reflected, was telling stories that had a heart; screenplays that explored themes, not just used clever plotting. The notion of two narrative threads working for one whole is outlined in many screenwriting books, but as I became aware, nobody had presented a clear model for how the two develop: symbiotically, one changing as a result of the each other, and so on. Not only that, from some initial research I found that the terminology used in such books was different, nobody ever referencing another's work as one would expect in scholarly works. Using this as my basis, I felt there was enough of a gap in the knowledge being presented on the subject that if researched thoroughly, could be presented to add to the canon of screenwriting literature. Importantly, I also felt this was something that would help me with my own practice, allowing me to apply the results of research back into the act of screenwriting. It was here that the PhD began to take shape and feel like it had the potential to offer something that worked both practically and philosophically.

We can draw upon Harper's notion of 'capability' and 'knowledgeability' (2007: 20) in Creative Writing research to understand what was happening here. In essence, this is the idea that research into a subject enables a better practice of that subject (capability), at the same time developing a greater awareness of what we know about the subject (knowledgeability). This produces a 'responsive critical understanding' (Harper, 2007: 21): a process of moving beyond mere reflection and instead towards application. Or, rather than reflecting on the practice of the subject, understanding it and then just leaving it there, knowledge gleaned is then applied back in practice. This, one would hope, results in a better, more enhanced ability of practice. Understanding thus becomes responsive because of how it is used, not just acknowledged:

...if reflection was all we encountered in Creative Writing, we would never see another piece of Creative Writing produced – creative writers would be too busy 'reflecting' on their first works! Most importantly, the creative writer's response is meant to improve that writer's ability to develop their own Creative Writing. That is its purpose: it is not reflective, but responsive: its purpose is to initiate action. (ibid.)

Once I had understood this sufficiently, I felt the need to make it apparent in the final text. This was because as well as being important to state my intentions with the PhD, I felt

it necessary to signpost clearly my approach to the PhD. After all, there was no guarantee that the eventual external examiner would have experience of working with practice-based PhDs. To give a sense of how this signposting, here is a direct quotation from the Introduction to my thesis:

As will be explored, what lies at the centre of this research is a deeper understanding of the relationship between ‘what a character wants’ and ‘what a character needs’. This will be argued to form the basis of a dual narrative journey for the mainstream feature film protagonist: the physical journey and the emotional journey. Understanding these two journeys will help to map the movement of a protagonist across a screenplay narrative, both physically and emotionally. The results of this, addressing both my own and an audience’s desire to understand how ‘want’ and ‘need’ function in a complete narrative, will appear in a two-fold way: more traditionally, as a piece of critical research presented in a scholarly way; and, more innovatively, as a piece of creative work, a screenplay, which both responds to and feeds into the critical discussions presented. Creative and critical artefacts thus work together in symbiosis, just like ‘want’ and ‘need’ in a screenplay, offering a complete PhD narrative experience.

It was important to signpost the PhD’s intention to work as a ‘package’, and that the approach taken in producing it would facilitate this. This is something I now always make clear to my own PhD students, especially at application stage: that the two artefacts may be physically separate, but should be philosophically connected. To go back to the notion of responsive critical understanding, knowledge gleaned through research should enhance one’s creative practice, not stand alone as a piece of critical theory. Needless to say, this very much guided me.

Sarah Salway articulates the notion of responsive critical understanding when writing about the transition between an MA and a PhD in Creative Writing. She states:

The two strands – theoretical and creative – feed into each other continuously. I often put down textbooks to jot down notes for the novel [...] So I am confident that analysing my creative process has stimulated rather than inhibited my writing. (2003: 36)

For her, then, the relationship between creative and critical work functions on a practical as well as a philosophical level: as she thinks, she writes; and presumably, as she

writes, she thinks. To refer back to Dobbs, she too highlights how throughout the PhD journey she was able to come to a better understanding of her practice by undertaking theoretical research. She notes:

The question ‘What is your work about?’ at PhD level comes with a whole field of other questions, such as ‘Where are you in this text?’ and ‘What was the reasoning behind constructing the narrative in this way?’ I was asking and answering these questions during the writing and rewriting of the PhD novel and by the third year I had a stronger sense of knowing their answers and their evolution. And it was only when writing and rewriting the critical part of the thesis that I felt better able to articulate the conclusions I was coming to. (2011: 68)

Harper spells this out quite simply: ‘This practice, investigation, formal or informal theorizing or modelling, and re-practice and re-investigation, is how knowledge is created, and it is how critical understanding evolves’ (2007: 19). Creative and critical endeavours thus work in symbiosis, and for those working towards or supervising a practice-based PhD, I suggest that this is something that should be constantly reminded. To quote from my own thesis again:

The role of the screenwriter is thus at the centre of this investigation: a negotiation between creative and critical, practice and theory, doing and thinking. Although creative and critical artefacts are separated in presentation, they combine to produce a singular understanding of the research question: what is the relationship between the physical and the emotional journey undertaken by a mainstream feature film protagonist, and how can this be mapped out onto narrative structure? Like a screenplay itself, the overall PhD research suggests a synthesis of two narrative threads: the transformational journey of the screenplay protagonist, and that of the screenwriter himself, my journey. As Nelmes argues, ‘[t]he ideas explored and the characters created [in a screenplay] have, to some extent, to be an extension of the writer and the writer can often make the most of this when pursuing a story’ (2007: 111). In *Offside* [the screenplay component of the PhD], the ‘extension of the writer’ is the critically inquiring mind, seeking to explore and express in a creative medium the question of a protagonist undertaking physical and emotional journeys within one contained narrative.

Clearly Stating Intentions

As already highlighted, practice-based PhDs in the arts are still relatively new territory, which can cause issues of parity and legitimacy for the candidate, the supervisor and even the external examiner, when compared to more traditional PhDs. With this in mind, I believe it is important for candidates and supervisors to fully understand why they are undertaking this type of PhD (approach, methodology, and so on), and why they wish to present it the way they intend (artefact, performance, exhibition, and so on). This will ensure that the candidate can speak with authority about their project, and will be fully equipped to deal with any prejudices that may emerge. From personal experience, this is something I had to contend with. I was aware that using more ‘acceptable’ forms of research material would position me on safer ground, yet because my whole PhD was about the practice of screenwriting and its subsequent connection to industry expectations, I was keen to use materials such as trade magazines and how-to books that were appropriate for the subject in question. Therefore, having purposely used more traditional film and television theories about character and audience emotion in the Introduction to my final thesis, providing the reader with a more familiar approach, it was important to then give a clear rationale for using practice- and industry-based sources for some of the thesis. Although any PhD will require the candidate to regularly signpost their reasons for doing what they do, in an under-examined area like Screenwriting, it could not be emphasised enough. As I wrote:

These theoretical insights provide a strong starting point for the creative and critical scope of this PhD. However, it is not enough to merely understand the academics of how narrative threads of film work. Instead, they must be practiced; drafted in numerous forms and experimented with. Films must be watched and screenplays read in order to ‘feel’ the narrative in action, sensing what works and what does not. The views, methods and ‘realities’ of screenwriters and industry professionals must also be read, in order to immerse the screenwriter in a culture of writing where the creative endeavours of film are explored.

I then followed this up by offering a deeper discussion that as well as setting the context for my practice-based work reinforced the overall approach that I had decided to take. Once again, I would like to suggest that even if such arguments are not presented in the final thesis, they are explored and understood in an early stage of the development of the PhD so that its eventual execution will feel relevant, authentic and innovative.

The eclectic range of texts used in the critical commentary is deliberate. Not only are there few screenwriting texts specifically relevant to the research, screenwriting itself draws inspiration from a variety of sources. The newest form in the lineage of creative writing, when compared to prose, poetry, stage and radio scriptwriting, screenwriting is still a young academic discipline. Few screenwriting texts exist in the 'academic canon' because they are either somewhat recent, or adopt a simple 'how to' approach. Therefore, some of the works drawn upon are from mythology and more general dramatic writing, as well as articles from screenwriting publications aimed specifically at industry professionals. However, because 'the literary critic does not draw upon the vast sites of knowledge that the creative writer draws upon' (Harper, 2006b: 162), this range of sources is entirely appropriate for a discipline that is both process-based (the act of screenwriting) and product-based (the screenplay itself). (ibid.)

As Harper suggests, creative writing should seek to create its own 'site of knowledge' (2006a: 3) which has its concerns in process and practice, not 'post event' speculation. This critical commentary, therefore, is enriched by a wide range of sources, appropriate for such a creative-critical investigation. This is not a Film Studies PhD which offers a historical exploration of screenwriting, nor is it an English PhD which deconstructs the work of a specific screenwriter; it is a Creative Writing PhD which seeks to advance knowledge about a structural model of screenwriting, and apply it to practice. '[C]reative writing research deals with human agency, human intention, behaviour, reasons and meanings' (2006b: 162), therefore research which intends to help the screenwriter with his intentions, and to enhance his writing processes, is absolute. Subsequently, the research undertaken will seek to advance a body of 'creative theory' (Melrose, 2007: 110) which will help screenwriting, 'a form which is complex, has a language of its own yet is driven by the demands of the medium of film' (Nelmes, 2007: 113), in pursuit of its own site of knowledge.

Analysing the screenplay and the process of its writing, Nelmes shares the view that 'creative theory' needs to be developed in an appropriate way. She writes that 'the screenplay is a form worthy of study rather than being viewed as merely the precursor to the completed feature length film' (ibid.: 107). Similarly, Spicer's (2007) work on 'Restoring the Screenwriter to British Film History' argues that the role of the screenwriter should be acknowledged in the filmmaking process, not one that is absolved once a director has been taken on board and the screenplay put into production. Therefore, although the screenplay is the blueprint to the film production process, 'the first cog in a very large wheel' (Nelmes, 2007: 107), it should not be denigrated; critically, it should be celebrated. Screenwriter

Rupert Walters' view about the screenplay as 'artefact' goes some way in justifying Nelmes' desire to create further, more distinct knowledge about the screenplay and its formulation:

Everyone talks about the script being a blueprint – and it is, in the sense that it gets turned into something else – but it also has to be a piece of writing which stands up on its own, because the producer who's deciding whether to pay for it and the actor who's deciding whether to be in it want to be transported by the experience of reading it (cited by Owen, 2003: 9).

The screenplay is thus a text in itself: an artefact with its own agenda, be that commercial or artistic, with its own form and function. Nelmes rightly argues that 'screenwriting is an almost invisible process and whilst the script may be the blueprint for the film, it is rarely admired in itself' (2007: 108). Therefore, this critical commentary addresses the 'lack' of attention paid to the screenplay and its creation. As already suggested, the process of writing a screenplay can be closely linked to the critical knowledge required to write a screenplay, connecting screenwriting and screenplay, writer and artefact. The 'rarely admired' screenplay will thus be brought into the limelight in the research that follows, considering both its creation and its form. The purpose of the research, in relation to the screenplay, is 'to assist the writer in the construction of further new creative work [...] as well as assisting the writer in comparing and contrasting their work with that of other writers, post the act of writing' (Harper, 2006b: 162). This appears 'in process' (ibid.), before, during and after writing the screenplay, and can thus be understood as 'responsive critical understanding': applied knowledge 'that can be outlined either separately to the creative work of a writer, or incorporated into the modes and methods of creative practice' (ibid.: 165). Therefore, both purpose and product of creative writing research are found embodied in what follows, combining to add originality to screenwriting as a developing site of knowledge: 'to find the subject approached as if it is not a site of knowledge in its own right creates a situation in which the chances of achieving a 'justified true belief' are considerably diminished' (Harper, 2006a: 3). "Justified true belief" in this sense can only come from recognition of screenwriting as practice; or, as Joseph Campbell posits, the need to work with a text in whatever form is appropriate to the way in which it is intended:

Wherever the poetry of myth is interpreted as biography, history, or science, it is killed. The living images become only remote facts of a distant time or sky [...] the life goes out of it, temples become museums, and the link between the two perspectives is dissolved (1993: 249).

Conclusion

I have attempted in this article to outline some of the key complexities underpinning the practice-based PhD, namely its development and execution in relation to modes of research. By looking specifically at the PhD in Creative Writing, and with reference to my own PhD experience, I have attempted to outline some of the key principles that might aid both candidature and supervision. The discussion is by no means exhaustive, but does touch upon key areas to be considered by candidates and supervisors: the legitimacy of Creative Writing as a method of research; oscillations between creative practice and critical investigation; modelling a thesis that reflects its intentions; and claiming validity for the type of research undertaken. Although a number of principles have been outlined, it should be noted that they are always under scrutiny and 'in flux', adaptable from one PhD to another. Nevertheless, I hope that they are useful for both candidates and supervisors involved in practice-based PhDs of any kind.

As a final point, it is worth noting the variables that can affect how a PhD is both undertaken and completed. Williamson, Brien and Webb outline these variables as institutional, personal and industrial (2008: 6–9). The first two of these can be applied to any PhD student and project: the University's structure, its research strategy, the candidate's anxiety over their thesis, the specific fabric of their work, and so on. It is the third, however, that is of special interest for the practice-based PhD. According to Williamson, Brien and Webb, PhDs in Creative Writing are subject to changing and highly subjective industrial contexts, whether for the publishing industry (novel writing), the production sector (screenwriting) or even the world of performance (playwriting, poetry). In this way, it is argued that supervisors move beyond a purely academic role into one more commensurate with those in the said industries: editor, agent, script producer, and so on (ibid.: 9). Not only can this create further complexities for the candidate, who might struggle with how they should conceive their project (commercially, academically, both?), it can also complicate expectations around the role of the supervisor. For example, should they only comment on how the candidate's screenplay explores the research question, or should they apply a professional script editor's eye to elements such as scene structure, dialogue and visual grammar? This opens up a whole discussion that is not possible to explore further here, though it seems fitting to end on a quotation by Jeri Kroll from Australia. Writing about how practice-based supervisors might get their candidates past the finishing line, she writes:

They function as manager, coach and trainer all in one [... and] can transform at will into whatever she needs to be: academic, artist, mentor, disciplinarian,

cheerleader. And of course, as a creative scholar who embodies all of these bodies from diverse traditions, she obviously understands cross-disciplinarity, (2009: 1–3)

Although tongue-in-cheek, this observation might not be altogether far from the truth. For the practice-based PhD supervisor, there is unquestionably a need to know about and be comfortable operating within a variety of scenarios with their candidates: philosophically, methodologically, creatively, pragmatically, commercially and pastorally.

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