

## **Putting the Doctorate into Practice, and the Practice into Doctorates: Creating a New Space for Quality Scholarship Through Creativity**

By Tara Brabazon and Zeynep Dagli<sup>1</sup>

There is much debate in an environment of Quality Assurance, vocationalism and research impact about the diverse modes of doctoral education. Traditional models, methods and protocols have been challenged, transformed and shaped by professional and practice-based candidatures. Yet the key problem and issue is often unspoken: can the international academic community create a culture of equivalence between the diverse doctoral forms? How are the very specific regulations for PhD by prior publication aligned in standard and quality with professional doctorates that often involve coursework? Similarly, how are newer modes of credentialing aligned with the ideologies of artistic quality that often infuse practice-based doctorates? How do the diverse doctoral forms effect the enrolment and examination of the “traditional” thesis?

When discussing the specific challenges of practice-based research in the portfolio of doctorates, a *Times Higher Education* article conveyed concerns with existing academic protocols.

Practice-based PhDs, where doctorates are awarded for “non-textual” submissions such as a work of art, are becoming more common. Yet researchers in the creative fields still lack a “properly developed language” to describe what they are doing.<sup>2</sup>

To create, discuss and apply this language, a conference was held at Northumbria University bearing the title “All Maps Welcome: doctoral research beyond reading and writing.” The goal was to investigate “non-textual” forms of communication in scholarly processes. Unaddressed in such a title was whether doctoral education should welcome ‘all maps’ and indeed if there are consequences when decentring ‘reading and writing.’

Our paper acknowledges these difficult questions, enabling a language to explore the pathways, benefits and difficulties emerging through practice-based doctorates. The writers of this paper were a research team of supervisor and student. A film-based doctorate was submitted by Zeynep Dagli

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Dagli and Professor Brabazon wish to dedicate this article to the memory of Zeynep’s father who lived to see her pass her doctoral degree, but not long enough to witness her graduation.

<sup>2</sup> Z. Corbyn, “Creative researchers urged to find words to sum up their own art words,” *Times Higher Education*, March 27- April 2, 2008, p. 8

with the title *The eyes of death: the visual movement from witness to spectator*. Four films were examined alongside a seventy thousand words exegesis of print-based doctoral research. Considered attention was placed on the relationship between the visioning of film and print, through the development of a new theory of grief. Problems emerged through the supervisory process and management of the candidature. When Tara Brabazon took over supervision, the doctorate had passed through many years of enrolment, many supervisory hands and many (often negative) judgements about quality and scholarship.” The supervisory file was bursting with personal statements from research managers questioning the calibre of the “art” being produced. A complex series of debates ensued about the “correct” matrix of examiners. Ultimately, Zeynep Dagli submitted the completed thesis to a different university than the one in which the research had been commenced, to ensure an independent examination. The doctoral thesis then passed through international examination protocols with great success and the films have been exhibited in a range of film festivals. She is now Dr Zeynep Dagli.

From this experience, our article probes the process of practice-led research from a supervisory team that had to manage diverse and often unsubstantiated statements about art, quality and – most significantly – research. A gratifying conclusion to this doctorate was reached, but it involved the candidate moving institutions to overcome the conflictual interpretations of cultural value and research expertise. The first section of this article learns from this experience to reflect on the process to assist other supervisors and doctoral students. We investigate the distinctions between the production of media artefacts inside and outside a university, inside and outside a doctoral programme. The second part works within these contextual considerations, offering perspectives from the position of a supervisor and student who have had to negotiate the tussle between art and research. We conclude with one resolution to the ‘problem’ of practice.

### **But is it art?**

There are (at least) four distinct doctoral programmes in our universities: the “traditional” PhD comprised of 80,000 to 100,000 words of text, a practice-led qualification, the PhD by prior publication and an array of professional doctorates.<sup>3</sup> The Doctor of Creative Arts (DCA) wavers unstably between professional and practice-led models. The fundamental question is how to

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<sup>3</sup> S. Hoddell, D. Street, H. Wildblood, “Doctorates – converging or diverging patterns of provision,” *Quality Assurance in Education*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2002, pp. 61-70

construct regulations and protocols that acknowledge this diversity but also build a culture of equivalence in examination procedures and outcomes. In other words, (how) do we ensure that a PhD in one form is equal in scholarly merit to another? The answer is – in reality – that such a goal is almost impossible to achieve. Regulations may be precise. Supervisors may be trained with professionalism. Still, there are specificities in these doctoral modes that are not only methodological and theoretical, but also raise concerns about scholarly rigour.

These problems of translation and application have increased during the last twenty years. When humanities doctoral candidates entered an archive filled with documents to construct a print-based thesis assessed by examiners who were also assessed through the same process, the criteria and expectations were clear. Divergent results still emerged in reports, but the debates and dissonance were triggered by questions in approach, rigour, repeatability, bias, theoretical perspective, method or the absence of a key monograph.

With the range of popular cultural and diverse media sources increasing in their presence and use in the last two decades, a gap emerged between the type of evidence cited and the document presented for examination. For example, Tara Brabazon's honours dissertation on the Goon Show and research Masters investigating the Beatles<sup>4</sup> included a sonic appendix featuring "aural footnotes" at the end of the written script. These were submitted almost two decades ago: the auditory material was presented on an analogue cassette encapsulated in a polystyrene appendix at the conclusion of the dissertation.

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<sup>4</sup> T. Brabazon, *Framed Pretty Little Eloi: Beatle photographs and the construction of image*, University of Western Australia thesis, 1992,  
<http://catalogue.library.uwa.edu.au/search~S1?/XTara+Brabazon&SORT=D/XTara+Brabazon&SORT=D&SUBKEY=Tara%20Brabazon/1%2C10%2C10%2CB/frameset&FF=XTara+Brabazon&SORT=D&8%2C8%2C>



Despite the popular cultural topics selected, these theses deployed traditional source materials and methods and were supervised and examined through conventional academic protocols. The historians who assessed these submissions treated the tapes as a quirky extra, adding a sonic element to research projects about radio and popular music. Yet the written dissertations remained the core documents evaluated.

The early 1990s was a transitional period for the traditional disciplines, building on many debates about media choice in the presentation of oral history research. The translation of interviews into print bled meaning and emotion from the testimony. Although the goal of oral history was to render

the invisible visible and return the voices of disempowerment to a print-saturated discipline, the sonic texture was often lost – and certainly edited – for the page. Such debates predated new concerns, as popular cultural studies candidates started to enter doctoral programmes, often attended by postmodern and poststructuralist theorizing. How were these scholars to prove to examiners – in form as much as content - that they understood the complexities of popular music beyond lyrics, dance culture beyond the secular hagiography of a great DJ and film beyond the auteur? Collapsing diverse media into print on a page was not always appropriate. As the internet and read-write web proliferated alongside theories of multimodality, this problem with presentation intensified.

As these debates about cultural value infiltrated popular cultural studies, practice-led research started to generate controversy. There were many reasons for the disquiet, but those of us who have been in doctoral examination boards know the quiet truth that few admit: split decisions between examiners were and are very common in this mode of PhD. In other words, practice-led theses dominate the number of examination panels when there is complete disagreement with the quality of the research. There is a theory for this stark division in results. The wider the gap between media submitted for a doctorate, the greater the likelihood of a variation or split result from examiners. Safe theses reference printed sources from established archives and constitute an original contribution to knowledge based on footnoted evidence. More risky are the candidatures that mobilize popular cultural sources. Most challenging are those doctorates composed of two or more separate objects or artefacts, as it is necessary to coordinate them into a streamlined analysis and argument. For example, Zeynep Dagli deployed a much more integrated format and dialogue between films and text.



There are other reasons for differential results between doctoral modes. Practice-led PhDs are flooded with assumptions about art, cultural value and quality. It is like postmodernism never happened. Too often, supervisors, examiners and managers of postgraduate programmes confuse

and conflate art and technical skill. These judgments are of a distinct order from evaluating the calibre of research. To be clear: competency in a medium – words, sound and/or vision – must be a condition of entry into any candidature. The capacity to abide by scholarly protocols is a similarly crucial imperative. Technical expertise with hardware, software, vocabulary and grammar are necessary. But it is important not to confuse technical competency in a media or form and a value-laden determination of art. These assumptions sideline a more robust discussion of academic standards.

Instead of commencing this honest discussion about the examination protocols of mixed platform doctorates, it is fascinating when reviewing the literature “celebrating” practice-led research. There is a focus on “newness,” “innovation,” “excitement” and “creativity.”

The turn to creative practice is one of the most exciting and revolutionary developments to occur in the university within the last two decades and is currently accelerating in influence. It is bringing with it dynamic new ways of thinking about research and new methodologies.<sup>5</sup>

I have argued that “new” knowledge in creative arts research can be seen to emerge in the involvement with materials, methods, tools and ideas of practice.<sup>6</sup>

PhDs, practice-led or otherwise, may be described as art outside a university. That is not a designation or label for an examiner or a manager of candidatures to use. In procedural terms, candidates submit two or more components that – when combined - create an original contribution to knowledge. The media object is tethered to the exegesis and has no independent role beyond developing evidence. Estelle Barrett offers an informative if disturbing description of “creative arts enquiry”: “We propose that artistic practice be viewed as the production of knowledge or philosophy in action.”<sup>7</sup> There is a slippage between method and epistemology in such a maxim, along with a confusion of evidence and interpretation, object production and knowledge production. Even if her statement is taken as true, then an odd relationship emerges between the resultant exegesis and the artistic practice that has “produced knowledge.” Barrett extends her argument however, affirming difference, separation and distinction from “traditional” research.

<sup>5</sup> H. Smith and R. Dean, “Introduction: practice-led research, research-led practice – towards the iterative cyclic web,” from H. Smith and R. Dean (eds.), *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 1

<sup>6</sup> B. Bolt, “The magic is in handling,” from E. Barrett and B. Bolt (eds.), *Practice as research: Approaches to creative arts enquiry*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 31

<sup>7</sup> E. Barrett, “Introduction,” from E. Barrett and B. Bolt (eds.), *Practice as research: Approaches to creative arts enquiry*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 1

Rather than attempting to contort aims, objectives and outcomes to satisfy criteria set for more established models of research, I believe there is a need to generate appropriate discourses to convince assessors and policy-makers that within the context of studio-based research, innovation is derived from methods that cannot always be pre-determined, and “outcomes” of artistic research are *necessarily* unpredictable.<sup>8</sup>

There are many comments to make as a result of such a statement. Firstly, all research outcomes are unpredictable. If the results are predetermined then the research question is not only redundant but also superfluous and flawed. Secondly, there is a problem with the affirmation of “innovation from methods.”

Research – particularly doctoral theses – that focus on methods is a more basic form of scholarship than theses that are theoretically rich. Spending analytical time on ‘the how’ operates at a lower level than projects probing ‘the why.’ When comparing research projects that are practice-based, the candidates spend much of the exegesis unravelling process, “how” they created the artefact. Method substitutes for analysis. While some fine and innovative scholarship can emerge through method-based projects, more incremental knowledge is generated. The other question for “assessors and policy-makers” – particularly in an environment of a Research Evaluation Framework where impact is a variable to assess the value of scholarship - is if innovation in method creates sufficient impact. The other problem with an argument such as Barrett’s is that by desiring to enlarge the criteria by which scholarship is assessed, she is questioning the value of academic standards. While such a discussion may be innovative and beneficial, there is a cost. Practice-based research becomes ghettoized, disconnected from a wider research environment, focusing on ‘the how’ and not ‘the why.’ At that point, different standards and regulations are applied to diverse doctorates. A hierarchy must result. Intriguingly, in academic advertisements for appointments in North America, there is a new phrase being used to find a scholar holding not only a doctorate, but an “earned doctorate.”<sup>9</sup> While this phrase is – seemingly – used to remove honorary doctorates from consideration, in effect it is creating a difference between supposedly equivalent degrees, opening a discussion of process, standards and training. A much more hushed and implicit knowledge circulates amongst supervisors when selecting examiners for their postgraduates, being wary of an academic who has attained a PhD by prior publication. The rationale for this caution is that because

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3

<sup>9</sup> University of Chicago, “Survey of earned doctorates,” NORC, <http://www.norc.org/projects/survey+of+earned+doctorates.htm>

these scholars have not conducted the large-scale research project to ‘earn’ a doctorate, they will not understand the protocols, difficulties and shape of a conventional PhD.

When applying such arguments to an institution’s entire doctoral programme, the consequences become clearer, if more worrying. Stephen Goddard, who completed an exegesis and creative work for a doctorate, outlined the systemic processes of practice-led research.

What characterises creative arts research practice in universities that offer doctoral degrees is the requirement not only to understand a substantial practical project, but also a reflective exegesis that contextualises the methodologies and significant contributions of the research. The specific components of the exegesis are defined by each institution and re-negotiated by each candidate according to different emphases. Fortunately, and by design, the function of each candidate’s exegesis can be redefined in relation to the practice it seeks to elucidate.<sup>10</sup>

The problems in such a process are obvious. Goddard suggests that doctoral examinations should be an individualized process, customized for the specific candidature. Obviously, this is incorrect. There must be regulations, processes and protocols to ensure not only professionalism and parity *within* an institution but the maintenance of standards *between* institutions. While there is a national disparity, along with intra-national distinctions, the aim and aspiration of international doctoral research is that a doctorate submitted at MIT should be equivalent to a PhD examined in Auckland or Sunderland Universities. The problem when conflating practice-based methods with often-unspecified statements about art and quality means that institutional protocols are seemingly individualized. Therefore, it is harder to validate and verify the standards of a programme. Goddard makes the statement that “it is possible (within enlightened institutions) for creative arts researchers to re-interpret and make sense of the specified requirements of the exegesis.”<sup>11</sup> There is nothing enlightening, democratic or empowering about individualizing scholarly standards. The consequences of such a statement on examination and examinations are deeply worrying. If a doctoral researcher “re-interprets” requirements (regulations?) for an exegesis, then what precisely are examiners’ examining? Again, the focus is placed on ‘the how’: how the postgraduate “re-interprets” the form of a doctorate, instead of developing a doctoral-level dialogue between form and content to generate an original contribution to knowledge. Without clear criteria and internationally validated regulations, examiners are offering much more personal, opinionated and unanchored judgements about doctorates. Actually, doctoral candidates are protected from irrational,

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<sup>10</sup> S. Goddard, “A correspondence between practices,” from E. Barrett and B. Bolt (eds.), *Practice as research: Approaches to creative arts enquiry*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 113

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 113-114

opinionated or biased examiners if the guidelines, criteria and regulations are clear. Then the student understands expectations and how they operate and apply on an individual project.

It is too easy to individualize a doctoral process. Instead, PhDs are like all degrees and must be structured by and embedded in both institutional and international standards. One way to ensure that assumptions about cultural value do not mask a discussion of academic value is to transform the vocabulary of practice-led research from “art” to “artefact.” Through such a shift, students will have transparency in the evaluative criteria of their examination process. The artefact is not assessed in isolation. Similarly, the exegesis is not evaluated independently. The relationship between the two elements configures the research project. Too often, practice-led candidates prepare for their oral examination thinking that they can talk about their art for two hours.

It is too late in the midst of a viva voce to realize there is a breach in expectations or assumptions between a candidate and examiners. The aim is to handle this problem during orientation days for new candidates. If a student would like to make a film, then institutional candidature managers need to intervene early. A film is not a PhD. If the student would like to make a film, then walk away from the campus. Make a film. Do not assume that a film is inevitably and intrinsically research. It may be, but the scholar must make the case. Making a film is not the same as constructing a doctorate. A film may be great and important, but it will not necessarily be relevant to a PhD programme. This premise is as true for words as for vision. Because a student can write does not mean they can write a doctorate. The problem emerges when discussions of art and creativity overwrite recognitions of research. For example, Smith and Dean realized, with great honesty,

creative practitioners have sometimes argued that theorisations or documentation of the creative process risks subduing the creative fire or reducing the range of responses to their work. However, such arguments reinforce the mystification of the creative artist and romantic ideas about the spontaneity of the creative process. Creative practitioners traditionally had an ideological investment in such mystification because it shored up the idea of the creative genius.<sup>12</sup>

Creativity is not the same as research and is not intrinsically of value within a doctoral programme. Further, as Web 2.0 platforms permeate all research disciplines and areas, the skill and talent of the individual artist is being discredited. Smith and Dean realized that by building a relationship

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<sup>12</sup> H. Smith and R. Dean, “Introduction,” from H. Smith and R. Dean (eds.) *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.25

between practice-led research and research-led practice,<sup>13</sup> it is easier to create both credibility and equivalence between disparate doctoral formations. While Graeme Sullivan may refer to this type of statement as “rationalist planning,”<sup>14</sup> the impact of enabling individualized statements about art and value to determine whether or not a doctorate should be awarded must discredit the value of a degree and infringe on some individual postgraduates.

If doctoral candidates use mixed media in their research, then they must ensure that they manage the movement between these platforms technically, theoretically and methodologically. They must ensure that all elements of the submitted doctorate are coordinated into a tight, precise and convincing intellectual bundle that constitutes research. Claims for artistic quality are not a technique for marginalizing academic protocols. Indeed, in a 2.0 environment that is better described as the read-write web, “traditional” doctorates increasingly include video, sonic files and wiki media as part of the evidential base of the research. In other words, traditional doctorates are using sonic and visual media as part of their PhD. Such a movement means that the ‘specialness’ of practice-based research is declining. A consequence of convergent digitized media is that more theses will present a diversity of outputs. Such a change means that the distinctiveness of these theses – supposedly requiring new regulations and criteria – is reducing.

When the language of practice-led research transforms from “art” to “artefact” and the exegeses explores the why of scholarship rather than the how, then there is greater parity between doctoral modes, facilitating rigour through examination. The OECD’s Frascati Manual from 2002 offers careful and significant advice for “experimental development” in research. They support, “creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge ... and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications.”<sup>15</sup> The choice of language in this statement is instructive. The aim is to create artefacts (a ‘stock of knowledge’) that constitute new information. Chicken stock is not a meal. When added to soup, it provides flavour. Art is not a doctorate. It can create a new way to think about evidence. It can be the basis of research. It is not *the* research.

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 26

<sup>14</sup> G. Sullivan, “Making space,” from H. Smith and R. Dean (eds.) *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.43

<sup>15</sup> OECD (2002), Frascati Manual: Proposed Standard Practice for Surveys on Research and Experimental Development, OECD: Paris.  
[http://www.oecd.org/document/6/0,2340,en\\_2649\\_34451\\_33828550\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/6/0,2340,en_2649_34451_33828550_1_1_1_1,00.html)

Carole Gray, a great supporter of practice-led research, described this type of scholarship as “initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners.”<sup>16</sup> If research is defined as that which we do not know but are motivated to discover, then Gray’s definition is inadequate. She has forgotten that PhD students are part of a higher education institution. All modes of doctorate must slot into the regulations of a university and demonstrate parity with other equivalent qualifications. They are not about “the needs of practice and practitioners.” Consider postgraduates in business schools investigating the contemporary banking system. While their research may be of interest to the financial sector, should it be shaped by the “needs of bankers and banking,” or criteria valued by the international academy? The relevance of “gown” to “town” (or “academy” to “city”) may emerge. It may not. This is a separate conversation about relevance and impact. It must be distinct from a discussion about scholarly protocols and international standards.

Those involved in candidature management are required to log the difference between holding technical skills with a camera, software or hardware and mouthing (theoretically and politically unsustainable) claims about the value of art. Neither popular culture nor high culture is research. Cultural forms may offer evidence, models, modes or metaphors. However, the mechanism for connecting an object with a scholarly environment should be stated, not assumed. The best doctorates take on these challenges and provide correctives to problems aligning practice and research. The use by doctoral candidates of wiki-enabled media, Flip cameras, Zoom microphones and other mobile devices are capturing data in new ways and summoning innovative dialogues between text, sound and vision. Oral history programmes, as an example, can be enhanced, blended, augmented and transformed by this theoretical and technological hybridity. They may test the parameters of auditory literacies through movements between sounds, words and ideas. The resultant theses do not separate the object from the exegesis or justify their work through claims of artistic quality. Probably this mode of justification is derived from self-consciousness or a self-protective mechanism that has historically demeaned the arts in relation to the sciences.<sup>17</sup> However, such justifications not only waste time, but are also mis-placed. The goal is research, not art. The

<sup>16</sup> C. Gray, *Inquiry through practice: developing appropriate research strategies*, 1996, <http://www2.rgu.ac.uk/criad/cgpapers/ngnm/ngnm.html>, p. 3

<sup>17</sup> E. Barrett and B. Bolt, *Practice as research: context, method, knowledge*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007)

goal is not to justify art as research, but to evaluate practice-led inquiry as a repeatable, rigorous and transparent method.

What may happen – when the 2.0 platforms become more stable and a full cycle of undergraduate and postgraduate students have been trained in their reflexive use – is that students may not choose between a traditional dissertation or an artefact and exegesis. There may be – and Tara Brabazon is seeing this amongst her current doctoral candidates - a continuum of research opportunities where students create objects with their mobile phones and self-standing recorders and cameras to read old theory through new media. Their use of 2.0 platforms confirms that definitions of technical expertise are changing. It has never been easier to use a camera or editing software. Students are not creating the next Fellini or Kraftwerk masterpiece. That is not their aim. The point of research is not the creation of art, but the building of evidence. Nimkulrat has confirmed, she moves between the roles of “practitioner” and “researcher.”<sup>18</sup> The best investigations of practice-led research do not frame it as special, distinct or different, but embedded in a wider field of academic scholarship.<sup>19</sup>

A distinction is also made between practice-led research and practice-based research. The difference is not seismic, but the former tends to deploy the artefact as a demonstration of the research, whereas the phrase practice-based describes an artefact more deeply embedded into the cycles of scholarship. Smith and Dean have been particularly focused on questioning the trajectory and field of practice-led research, arguing for the need for an “interactive cyclic web.”<sup>20</sup> The evocative application of this phrase can be seen between the two parts of Stephen Scrivener’s argument.

The visual arts community places great significance on the art object and the art making process. Consequently, many visual artists wish to see a form of research in which art and art making are central: that is to say, the art making process is understood as a form of research and the art object as a form of knowledge. If one takes this position and accepts the common understanding of research then one must be able to explain how visual art contributes to knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> N. Nimkulrat, “The role of documentation in practice-led research,” *Journal of Research Practice*, Vol. 3, No. 1, December 2009, [http://artsresearch.brighton.ac.uk/links/practice-led/Nimkulrat\\_2007.pdf](http://artsresearch.brighton.ac.uk/links/practice-led/Nimkulrat_2007.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> M. Biggs and D. Buchler, “Eight criteria for practice-based research in the creative and cultural industries,” *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2008, pp. 5-18

<sup>20</sup> H. Smith and R. Dean (eds.), *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009)

<sup>21</sup> S. Scrivener, “The art object does not embody a form of knowledge,” *Working Papers in Art and Design*, Vol. 2, 2002, <http://www.herts.ac.uk/artdes/research/papers/wpades/vol2/scrivenerfull.html>

Scrivener has captured the steps in logic in configuring practice-led research. As an object-driven process, the focus is on the process and the “art.” This means that process overlays method and “art” becomes an outcome. Such a confluence of terms is not actually accurate or inevitable. The crucial final sentence from Scrivener captures the key problem. There are so many, perhaps too many, assumptions about art “as” research and art “as” scholarship. More theoretical and empirical work is required so that the relationship between these words is tracked and mapped rather than assumed. Simon Biggs realized that such a course of action “may render ... art practice utilitarian.”<sup>22</sup>

The great strength of these robust and productive conversations about practice-led research, particularly when elitist notions of art are displaced from the discussion, is that they ask that all of us as researchers, supervisors and students to arch beyond our practices, behaviours and protocols and consider the context and systems of our research. Sharon Bell captured the consequences of a too easy and glib splicing of art and research, creativity and scholarship.

As an academic, I have been in the habit of commencing my CV with a statement that emphasises the marriage of creative and academic interests – specifically film-making, research in the fields of anthropology and ethnographic film, and tertiary teaching and administration. If recited quickly this sounds credible, perhaps evoking an effortless combination of scholarly and creative interests with academic leadership. In reality this has often been a “marriage of inconvenience” as I have struggled to accommodate creative interests in tandem with the development of a “credible” research profile and increasingly demanding roles as a senior academic leader.<sup>23</sup>

The question is, should the category of Doctor of Philosophy be widened further to incorporate a range of creative practices? Another option already exists to accommodate these differences: the Doctor of Creative Arts (DCA). This qualification enables the specificity of the degree to be logged, verified and examined through the regulations. There are fewer assumptions or misaligned cross-disciplinary justifications by differentiating between the mode of degree. Greater precision in terms of the descriptive potential of doctoral titles emerges and clear criteria for assessment can be assembled. The success of the Doctor of Education exemplifies this premise.<sup>24</sup> The key is to ensure that instead of cramming an even greater array of practices, approaches, methods and structures into

<sup>22</sup> S. Biggs, “New Media: the “first word” in art?” from H. Smith and R. Dean (eds.), *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 81

<sup>23</sup> S. Bell, “The academic mode of production,” from H. Smith and R. Dean (eds.), *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.252

<sup>24</sup> Terry Evans wrote an outstanding review of the supervisory parameters of professional doctorates, particularly the Ed. D. Please refer to “Issues in ‘supervising’ professional doctorates: an Australian view,” from G. Wisker and N. Sutcliffe (eds.), *Good Practice in Postgraduate Supervision*, (Birmingham: SEDA, 1999)

a Doctor of Philosophy, the differences can be noted by a change in nomenclature. Generalizations – that can often spill into pretension – are then avoided. For example, Colin Renfrew extemporized that,

Today, I would claim, the visual arts have transformed themselves into what might be described as a vast, uncoordinated yet somehow enormously effective research programme that looks critically at what we are and how we know what we are – at the foundations of knowledge and perception, and at the structures that modern societies have chosen to construct upon those foundations.<sup>25</sup>

Phrases like “looks critically” are marked as an error in first year papers. Similarly, “modern societies” is so general that it is analytically useless. Significantly, such a statement was made in 2003, before the arrival of the digitally convergent, mobile visual platforms such as the Flip. Because of the hyperbole, there is little mechanism for change, critique or extension in such a statement. Ian Biggs investigated “the pedagogic potential of a particular model of creative practice-led research in the context of the ‘politics’ of doctoral study and submission.”<sup>26</sup> Biggs has realized that there needs to be more discussion about the form and content of the document/object/text and how it is submitted. Therefore, it is important to configure the role, function and positioning of practice-led research so that an honest, reflexive and coherent case be made. From this maxim, the second section of our paper inverts this argument. Instead of a ‘top down’ study of doctorates from the perspective of regulations and candidature management, we probe the consequences of the ambiguity and assumptions to both staff and students.

## **New beginnings: new applications**

Every study, particularly doctorate study, starts an experience of research, discovery, exploration and invention. The goal is to lead to the transformation, adjustment and arrangement of thought through the discipline of academic enquiry. Instead of being arbitrary and extraneous, it operates with rational and logical insight and into a methodological elucidation

Many discussions of doctoral candidatures do not ask the fundamental question: what prompts the practitioner↔researcher to undertake three years of doctoral study? There are many answers to this question: to be able to create a dialogue between theory and practice, to raise questions that cannot be raised within practice, to probe the applications within the theory and/or to follow the process of

<sup>25</sup> C. Renfrew, *Figuring it out*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), p. 7

<sup>26</sup> I. Biggs, *Art as research: creative practice and academic authority*, (Saarbrücken: Verlag Dr. Müller, 2009)

thought in order to identify the intellectual pathway in/to the creation of visual propositions. These projects at their best combine visual and theoretical implications in order to reach to an understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, word and expression, language and silence. In the doctoral literature, there are numerous studies and approaches<sup>27</sup> to the practice-based doctoral studies in terms of the challenges of writing, the role of the practitioner and conceptualising the practice within the research. It is often stated that what distinguishes practice-based doctoral study from conventional PhD programmes is “the high value placed on generating practice-based knowledge to address ‘real-world’ problems, whereas traditional PhD programmes intend to give rise to ‘professional researchers.’”<sup>28</sup> As discussed in the first half of this paper, such a statement of differences were initially unsustainable and now are increasingly so. For example, Media Policy Studies is an example of research that solves “real-world” problems. Similarly, the statement “professional researcher” is used as a pejorative.

In practice-based doctoral study, the research challenges the practitioner to create and then to raise awareness of the critical and analytical process, enabling the development of a dynamic, reflexive and interpretative discourse. This process also generates professional practitioners, adopting a dual role of practitioner and theorist, as described by Graeme Sullivan.<sup>29</sup> It is useful and convenient to highlight Sullivan’s approach with regard to the multiple possibilities in negotiating the relationship between theory and practice. Sullivan suggests four ways of reading and understanding practice within a theoretical framework, conceptualising visual elements as part of the research. Visual knowledge can be understood as “transformative, constructivist, conceptual and contextual.”<sup>30</sup> He states.

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<sup>27</sup> See G. Winter, M. Griffiths and K. Green, “The Academic Qualities of Practice. What are the criteria for a Practice-based PhD?” *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2000, pp. 25-37; C.D. Nelson, “Crafting Researcher Subjectivity in ways that Enact Theory,” *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 2005, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 315-320, D. Strand, *Research in the creative Arts*, (Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia, 1998), J.A. Walker and S. Chaplin, *Visual Culture: An Introduction*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), N. Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1999), J.C. Gowan, G.D. Demos and E.P. Torrance, *Creativity: Its Educational Implications*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1967), C. Manathunga, C. Smith and D. Bath, “Developing and Evaluating Authentic Integration between research and coursework in professional Doctorate Programs,” *Teaching In Higher Education*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2004, pp. 235-246, C. San Miguel and C. Nelson, “Key Writing Challenges of Practice-based Doctorates,” *Journal of English For Academic Purposes*, Vol. 6, 2007, pp. 71-86.

<sup>28</sup> C. San Miguel and C. Nelson, Key Writing Challenges of Practice-based Doctorates, *Journal of English For Academic Purposes*, 6, 2007, pp. 71-86.

<sup>29</sup> G. Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research, Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, (London: Sage, 2005), p. 190

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 100

Visual arts knowledge is *transformative*. This means that knowledge creation in visual arts is recursive and constantly undergoes change as new experiences “talk back” through process and progress of making art. Second, visual arts knowledge is *constructivist*. This means that knowledge is produced as a consequence of integrating theory and practice and this praxis results in descriptive awareness, explanatory insight, and powerful understanding. Third, visual arts knowledge is *conceptual*. This means that knowledge is grounded in the practice of making that uses knowledge that is available through personal cognitive systems and culturally accessible domains. Fourth, visual arts knowledge is *contextual*. This means that knowledge that is produced by artists enters into communities of users whose interests apply new understandings from different personal, educational, social and cultural perspectives. These features of visual arts knowledge are by no means definitive, and each aspect owes a legacy to paradigms of theory and practice that, under certain circumstances, may be used as explanatory systems, interpretative frameworks, or imaginative forms.<sup>31</sup>

Within the practice-based PhD, the practitioner aims to probe all these features - transformative, constructivist, contextual and conceptual - by integrating the subjective and objective into a new object for academic scrutiny. The knowledge accumulated within the mechanism of transforming, constructing, contextualising and conceptualising configures the structures for research and discovery. This underlines the qualitative novelty of the study in comparison to the conventional doctoral programmes.

With intellectual experience, researchers↔practitioners arrive at speculations, elaborations and evaluations. Word and language are concerned with knowledge, research and discovery that will pursue a solution through analysis. Practice keeps the questions open, invites experience and interaction. Practice is the starting point, enabling theoretical and intellectual reflection within an academic framework, adopting a dual role, that of a practitioner and a theorist. Language choice is of concern in order to communicate abstractions into a rational and logical argument, and construct a study that weaves the critical and analytical examination with a dynamic, reflexive, creative and interpretative discourse.

In practice-based PhDs, the structure of the research must be carefully determined. As argued in the first part of this paper, media and platform selection is crucial, as is the justification of the movement between diverse forms. When the candidate steps away from the conventional structures s/he is threatened with a range of labels about scholarship, academic or artistic quality. Such descriptors are difficult to manage while trying to offer an original contribution to knowledge. In the experience of the two writers of this article, the practice-based candidature can become a battle, a fight and a

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

struggle that can lose its purpose and meaning on the way. The key is to ensure that there is a continual tether to not only the institutional regulations, but international best practice. At its best, a PhD should be an explorative, experimental and experiential journey in order to create something original. However what is required are not only experienced examiners, but candidature managers that continually verify and align institutional protocols with wider processes.

## Submitting our thesis

The key is to discuss the diverse forms and modes of doctorates with clarity, placing attention on the shape of enrolment, nomenclature title and examination systems. For example, at Murdoch University in Western Australia, there is a clear differentiation between ‘professional doctorate’ and ‘traditional doctorate’.

The major differences between professional doctorates and the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) are that the former include substantial coursework (a PhD includes no coursework), and that the thesis must make a distinctive contribution to the profession (a PhD thesis must make a distinctive contribution to the knowledge of the subject with which it deals).<sup>32</sup>

Such a statement makes it much easier for students and supervisors to organize the candidature and understand how the thesis will be examined.

Such clarity is needed for all modes of doctorate, with attention to originality, method, outcomes and audience. If this article has a goal, then it is to affirm the value of the Doctor of Philosophy programme, as the highest available qualification in our university system. Certainly higher doctorates are granted as a result of research produced subsequent to the doctorate. Higher doctorates include a Doctor of Letters, Technology or Music. The University of Manchester for example confirm that,

Higher doctorates are awarded by the University in recognition of published work and/or other material of high distinction resulting from research, which makes a substantial, sustained and original contribution and addition to investigation, knowledge and/or scholarship, and has established the candidate’s authoritative standing in his or her subject.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> “Courses,” <http://handbook.murdoch.edu.au/study/postgraduate.html#courses>

<sup>33</sup> Ordinances and Regulations: Higher Doctorates June 2007, University of Manchester, <http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/medialibrary/researchoffice/graduateeducation/reg-hd.pdf>

The University of Western Australia specifies that, “Higher doctorates are awarded essentially for work of which the whole or a substantial part has been published or accepted for publication, the form of publication acceptable to be determined in each case by the board or faculty concerned. (Approved exception is the Doctor of Music.)”<sup>34</sup> Both definitions of the higher doctorates include the provision for non-print based materials. Both of these ‘old’ universities acknowledge that “other material” of high distinction may be included, particularly with regard to music. With these provisions available for the higher doctorate, why is this diversity of titling and format not encouraged and increased at the base doctoral level, proliferating the doctoral awards and rendering them more accurate and descriptive?

The Doctor of Philosophy enrolls scholars who have been successful at undergraduate study and are granted an opportunity for future scholarly development. The key distinction between a research masters-level qualification and a doctorate is the “original contribution to knowledge.” The lesser qualification can demonstrate a strong synthesis of ideas and a good understanding of a discipline. The Doctorate offers something new in method, source material, approach, argument or interpretation in a specialist subject. Bob Hodge has referred to these as “disciplinary doctorates” in “hierarchically organized knowledges.”<sup>35</sup> In the late 1980s in the United Kingdom – and shaped by the Research Councils – the PhD began to include phrases and imperatives for “research training.” This imperative has rendered British doctorates heavier on methods and lighter on originality. It is not uncommon for British doctorates to deploy half of their wordage in discussions of method and a literature review. These chapters are lost from a scholarly monograph and are difficult to publish in any form. Such a structural emphasis on more basic knowledge of processes, along with the shrinking spaces for academic monographs to gain a publisher and audience, means that most theses are read by examiners, lodged in libraries and/or archived digitally, and are rarely cited or read. While a few refereed articles may emerge, the outcomes of this scholarly effort are decreasing in their visibility. Particularly in the humanities and social sciences, which are underfunded and disconnected from industry, doctorates are an underutilized source.

<sup>34</sup> “General provisions for higher doctorates,” University of Western Australia, Student Handbook, 2008, <http://rules.handbooks.uwa.edu.au/rules/GeneralRules/Part4/Division1>

<sup>35</sup> B. Hodge, “Monstrous knowledge: doing PhDs in the “New Humanities,”” in A. Lee and B. Green (eds.), *Postgraduate studies/Postgraduate Pedagogy*, (Sydney: Centre for Language and Literacy and the University Graduate School, 1998), p. 114

In this underused, yet historically and academically important space of the “traditional” qualification, both practice-based and professional doctorates have propelled into popularity. New opportunities are available for diverse modalities of writing and presentation of original scholarly ideas. The diversity of media creates spaces for new forms, discourses and innovation. The problem emerging through such diversity is how to ensure equivalence. In the United Kingdom, the QAA in 2001 inferred that the learning outcomes for these diverse modes of doctorates should be the same.<sup>36</sup> Such a task is frankly impossible. More criteria and scaffolding are required to manage the differences (and similarity) between a practice-based Doctor of Philosophy and a Doctor of Creative Arts. Bill Green and Adrian Kiernander asked a series of question about how a Doctor of Creative Arts transforms the status, process and agenda of postgraduate scholarship.

What counts as and constitutes research? What counts as and constitutes a doctorate? What is the relationship between “research” and the “doctorate,” as a specific academic-educational credential? What relationship is there, or perhaps should there be, between “research” and doctoral education? And finally: what are the specific circumstances and challenges for the Creative Arts in this context?<sup>37</sup>

These questions offer an opportunity to consider the spaces between a conventional PhD in the Creative Arts, a Doctor of Creative Arts and the possibilities of professional doctorates in the Creative Industries. Through their study, Green and Kiernander confirm that creative arts “might well go either way.”<sup>38</sup> Like all liminal formations, a space for professional doctorates in creative arts – rather than practice-based work - raises a serious epistemological issue: what profession is actually being discussed, labelled and described in and through this qualification? The “outcomes” or “results” do not often have any immediate practical application in the way required by professional doctoral theses. Unlike nursing, education, medicine, engineering, commerce or management, there are no professional bodies that accredit, examine or assess the competency or excellence of ‘the professional’ creative artist. In response to this absence, Gillies limited his definition of Creative Arts to the visual and performing arts, including design, music, drama and dance.<sup>39</sup> Film and

<sup>36</sup> Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, The National Qualifications Framework, The National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, 2001, [www.leeds.ac.uk/ncihe](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/ncihe)

<sup>37</sup> B. Green and A. Kiernander, “Doctoral education, professional practice and the creative arts: research and scholarship in a new key?” in B. Green, T. Maxwell and P. Shanahan (eds.) *Doctoral education and professional practice: the next generation?* (Armidale: Kardoorair Press, 2001), p. 111

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 112

<sup>39</sup> M. Gillies, “The Arts,” in *Knowing Ourselves and Others: the humanities in Australia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Vol. 2: *Disciplinary Surveys*, (Canberra: The Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1998), p. 262-263

digitally convergent screen and sound platforms have a more complex positioning in a postgraduate environment.

The professional doctorate has been part of a movement to align industry and the academy. As the Council for Graduate Education confirmed, the professional doctorate, “is the personal development of the candidate (either in preparation for professional activity or to advance further personal skills and professional knowledge) and advancement of the subject or profession.”<sup>40</sup> While most of these doctorates are not in the commercial sector – with the Doctorate in Business Administration being rarely awarded – they are undertaken for career progression and to develop a more rounded view of a profession, becoming a “reflective practitioner.” The status and function of a practice-based doctorate, particularly in film, can also be useful for “career progression” or reflection on process. The difficulty is that media-oriented and sourced doctorates rarely fit concisely into the needs of the knowledge economy.

In 1993, the British government was concerned about the future of the Doctor of Philosophy.

The Government welcomes the growth of postgraduate courses. It is concerned, however, that the traditional PhD is not well-matched to the needs of careers outside research in academia or an industrial research laboratory.<sup>41</sup>

This White Paper demanded an increased commodification of ideas. With the infiltration of research training into the discourse of doctorates, there is a substantive distinction between the resultant doctorates in the United Kingdom when compared to the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand where the focus is more strongly on the original contribution to knowledge rather than the more basic restatements of methods and literature reviews that prevails in UK.

The first Doctor of Philosophy was awarded by an English university in 1920. A D. Phil at Oxford,<sup>42</sup> it was followed by a PhD awarded from Cambridge the following year.<sup>43</sup> Harvard awarded a Doctor of Education in 1921. A much wider gap awaited the first PhD awarded in Australia, which was in

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<sup>40</sup> United Kingdom Council for Graduate Education, *Practice-based doctorates in the creative and performing arts and design*, (Warwick: UKCGE, 1997)

<sup>41</sup> Office of Science and Technology, *Realising our potential – strategy for science, engineering and technology*, (London: HMSO, 1993), p. 3

<sup>42</sup> K. Noble, *Changing Doctoral Degrees: an international perspective*, (Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, 1994)

<sup>43</sup> R. Simpson, *How the PhD came to Britain: a century of struggle for postgraduate education*, (Guildford: Society for Research into Higher Education, 1983)

1948 from the University of Melbourne. The University of Sydney followed three years later.<sup>44</sup> Of most significance for this article, Australia's first professional doctorate was the Doctor of Creative Arts from the University of Wollongong in 1984. It predated the qualifications in law (1989)<sup>45</sup> and education (1990). In other words, while Australia delayed the introduction of a Doctor of Philosophy, the nation's universities pioneered innovative and diversified higher degrees. Bourner, Bowden and Laing noted a distinction in the English university sector which survives to this day: pre-1992 universities "protected" the doctorate by proliferating other more descriptive and different titles, while post-1992 universities denied the diversification of doctorates.

Whereas the "old" universities have been concerned to protect the "gold standard" of the PhD by allowing the development of alternative titles for professional doctorates, the "new" universities have been more concerned to avoid proliferation of new doctoral titles so that variants have been squeezed into the PhD. This may reflect the greater self-confidence of "old" universities as long-established awarding bodies.<sup>46</sup>

What they have recognized is that older universities have been more satisfied to use diverse doctoral designations, while "new" universities overloaded too many genres of original scholarship into that title.

Such under confidence in new universities must end. This article, written by a supervisor and former doctoral student, asks that doctoral titles be diversified. The time has come to stop pushing inappropriate methods, approaches and presentation into a singular qualification: the Doctor of Philosophy. By encouraging and supporting a diversity of doctoral titles, with clear descriptions, criteria and instructions for examiners, staff and students can make informed selections about their enrolment. Examiner dissonance will decline. Such a system is better for postgraduates, more effective for staff and most importantly, offers a way to secure the future of the academy in all its diversity, rigour and breadth.

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<sup>44</sup> L. Johnson, A. Lee and B. Green, "The PhD and the autonomous self: gender rationality and postgraduate pedagogy," *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2000, pp. 135-147

<sup>45</sup> P. Shanahan, "Professional doctorates other than the Doctor in education in Australian universities: some comparative data," in T. Maxwell and P. Shanahan (eds.), *Which way for professional doctorates: context and cases*, Proceedings of the "Which way for professional doctorates?" Conference, Coffs Harbour, October 16-18, 1996, pp. 13-28

<sup>46</sup> Bourner, Bowden and Laing, "Professional doctorates in England," *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2001, p. 77