Experiences of the Creative Doctorate: Minstrels and White Lines

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Abstract

Relationships between the expectations of the PhD, creativity and identity are a rich terrain for research, explored here. Doctoral student identity and the expectations of the PhD have been the focus of much previous work, while work on candidates pursuing research in literature and art has focused on tensions in their work, and the conceptual threshold crossings they make during the PhD journey. The research discussed here explores tensions and rich relationships between creativity, identity and success for candidates self-defined as 'creative' engaged in doctorates ranging between art or literary practice, and creative work in professional contexts.

Keywords: doctoral learning, doctoral research, creative, creativity, art practice, literary practice, identity

Introduction

Research was conducted with doctoral students who are producing or have produced creative doctorates, whether in art or literary practice or professional contexts. We explore evidence of candidates' experiences, dilemmas and breakthroughs related to identity, creative expression, and conformity when engaged in research which deploys a wide range of creative processes and practices. They are seen to make learning leaps, face challenges, and take risks while ensuring they do not undermine their chances of success with the doctorate, in often quite conventional university contexts. We ask questions about creativity in doctoral learning,

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supervisory 'nudging', and the tensions between creative work, university requirements and examination.

The focus on creativity and PhDs grows from our earlier large-scale project, 'Doctoral Learning Journeys' (HEA funded, UK, 2007-10, report 2011; and the parallel international project which accompanied it), focusing on doctoral students, supervisors and examiners. We published on conceptual threshold crossings in literature and art (Wisker & Robinson, 2009) and continue with and deepen that focus in our current research. This includes responses and perceptions of both candidates and supervisors engaged with PhDs which involve a creative focus; approaches, processes and/or products in a range of research projects from Higher Education management behaviour to production of fictions; and art practice. This piece focuses on the candidates, while in a companion piece (forthcoming), we consider supervisors' sense of effective practices of 'nudging' doctoral students engaged in such creative PhDs, and their own negotiations with the tensions inherent in their roles as gatekeepers and partners on this creative journey. Our work contributes new knowledge to discussions of doctoral identity, the PhD journey, and the experiences of doctoral candidates, specifically those self-defined as creative engaged in doctorates ranging between art or literary practice, and creative work in professional contexts.

Literature

Academic identities and the relationship between creative approaches, creativity, the expectations of the PhD, and conceptual threshold crossings are each key, interlocked areas of interest in our exploration of undertaking and supervising the creative PhD.

Among those of other academics, researcher academic identities have been the focus of recent research (Henkel, 2005; Enders, 2005; Collinson, 2006; Clegg, 2008) identifying role development and change and the potential for both confusion and enabling in transitioning between professional identities (Beck & Young, 2005) and research identities. Work by McAlpine and Akerlind (2010) includes issues of the changing demands of academic roles, and the career aims, prospects and realities for those pursuing doctorates and postdoctoral futures. McAlpine's long term study in the UK and Canada focuses on science and social science PhDs, their identity and progress (McAlpine, 2012).

Tensions, challenges and opportunities for researchers working with creative issues, areas and practices are not singled out in any of this work on academic identities. However,

creative researchers could be a special case, and some could feel a disruption and tension in their identity between being a creative practitioner, focusing on creative processes and practices, and the perhaps more regulated identity of the PhD candidate. In many cases, the creative, personally engaged response and the PhD process and shape are 'contested territory' (Robinson, 2011: 154). Indeed, so personal is some of the research that leads to a creative product through creative processes that the creative identity might well be fundamentally questioned through the PhD process. A historic literary example with an art product at its centre (*The Picture of Dorian Grey*, Oscar Wilde) serves as a reminder of the conflicts and problems inherent in the ways in which identity and creative practice are intertwined, emphasising the disequilibrium, anxiety and risk. Dorian's debauchery is hidden from view, embedded in the actual portrait of himself, a literary comment on how artwork expresses or hides the self: 'The artist discovers himself on the painted canvas. The reason I cannot show this painting is that I am afraid I have discovered the secret of my own soul' (Wilde, 1890).

Wilde was not talking about PhDs, of course, and although one of our respondents was actually working on a self-portrait, it certainly was not one intended to act as a proxy to hide a dissolute life. Discussions of critical, theorised expression of creative art practice have a long history (Wolfe, 1975). More broadly conceived, creativity in doctoral study has been the focus of work by Frick (2011) and Frick and Brodin (2012) and others, where their focus is on the critical and creative as it affects a range of doctoral students, rather than on doctoral work in creative practice or identifying as creative, as such. Frick considers problem solving, the differences between the creative process and the creative product and does so in relation to the work of Sternberg and Lubart (1999) who 'argue that creativity extends beyond the generation of novel ideas – it also includes an evaluative component in terms of problem solving as a part of the creative process'. She and they consider Pope's (2005) notion of creativity as co-becoming and Csikszentmihalyi's work (1999) in terms of co-development of creative processes.

Our work focuses in particular on self-identified creative researchers across a range of disciplines but particularly in art and literary practice. It also focuses on those who are creative in their professions and relate this creativity to challenging established forms of thinking, such as in focusing on mavericks in educational management practice, and research where process and product might be creative in themselves. Theory and creative practice can be in tension, as can expressing creative practices through the conventional processes and forms of the PhD. This might cause supervisors to suggest caution and restrict the kind of

experimentation which enables creative expression to find forms going beyond the confines of convention. Others have noted, for example, concerning the practice-based thesis and the role of theory that, 'anxiety about the need to incorporate theory into the project sometimes disrupted students' practice fundamentally, so that the student lost confidence in the practice and became theory directed. Supervisors would then attempt to reorient the students' work' (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2000: 350). Ways are identified in which imbalances can occur when the different ends of the continuum between the creative and the passable PhD product are seen as in tension so: 'Imbalances arose when students were either reluctant to engage with the written analytic, which resulted in overcompensation in practice, or in contrast, when, in their anxiety they focused upon the theory to the detriment of the quality of practice' (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2000: 350).

Work by Geof Hill (2002) initially focused on similar issues and, latterly, through the use of cabaret as an expression of the PhD and supervision processes, has advocated a mix of creative practice and conventional PhD format.

Earlier research on the processes of conducting and supervising creative-based doctorates focused on literature and art (Wisker & Robinson, 2009). It identified critical, conceptual and creative work in a range of disciplines. Using theories of conceptual threshold crossings at stages in the research journey (Kiley & Wisker, 2008, Wisker & Robinson, 2009), built from research on threshold concepts in the disciplines (Land, Cousin, Meyer & Davies, 2005), the work explored, theorised and discussed evidence of ways in which students made 'learning leaps' at significant stages in their research and writing. These stages include developing their research question, engaging with the literature, and seeing where their new work makes a contribution to knowledge and understanding, and identifying and defending the methodology and methods which help them ask their research question, address it, analyse their data and interpret findings. We also discussed as conceptual threshold crossings the stages where candidates had major insights into the dynamic intersections between and expression of the conceptual, critical and creative in their work, to enable them to articulate their new contributions to knowledge and understanding.

Creative PhDs might well have breakthroughs in their thinking and articulation when they actually engage with the more conventional demands of the PhD and can challenge established formats. For example, with a recent PhD, a 'Comic Book' (Sousanis, 2014), led to some positive recognition of the ways in which it pushes the boundaries of format and what is possible through different, non-standard forms of expression. For candidates in, for

example, fine art, sculpture and photography, the exegesis is often required in a standard format alongside the creative work, so there is little risk involved unless they wish to also produce an exegesis which has a non -standard format, such as a text which is expressed in a reflective voice, then in a critical voice, or one which interweaves indigenous thought and expression patterns with western critical and theorised argument (one of the authors has assessed several such theses.) However, potential dangers and tensions remain for many candidates and supervisors seeking non-standard format for creative expression in disciplines less familiar with more creative expression, since a non-standard format might not be acceptable to examiners and might not be seen in itself as able to engage with the critical and theorised, as well as the creative, elements. Geof Hill's own education thesis was part standard format yet part cabaret, for example Hill (2002). In empowering students to produce non-standard formats whatever the discipline, we have conservatism, real or imagined, to contend with. Risk is important in the PhD (Kiley & Mullins, 2002) but leaving the candidate vulnerable and exposed if they are taking the risk is not very ethical. In our research we discovered researchers and work which offered a variety of creative approaches, engagement with creativity and creative processes and practices in a wide range of contexts and formats of expression. Supervisors and students show that they have managed or are managing to enable a creative enough format to express the creative work, which itself is as wide-ranging as art practice, writing novels or poetry, relationship to the land and land rights, and management behaviour.

Research explored here was conducted with doctoral students who had identified as having a creative approach, focus, process or product and have produced creative doctorates considered in that broad sense. It was also conducted with supervisors who have supervised such creative doctorates in the range we have defined, for example, in art practice or in professional contexts. Focus on supervisors forms another article (forthcoming) considering their working practices and 'nudging' students to produce work which is both creative and in a form and of a standard required to achieve a doctorate. Doctoral students are engaged in research which deploys creative processes, practices and behaviours and sometimes also formats.

Both the supervisors and the students are focused on the cognitive and conceptual, as well as the personal and institutional dimensions of the work so candidates are encouraged and nudged to face challenges, take risks, and to cross conceptual thresholds in their work, to make 'learning leaps' (Wisker & Robinson, 2009; Kiley & Wisker, 2010), yet in doing so not

to undermine but rather to strengthen their chances of success with the doctorate in often conventional university contexts. We seek evidence about creativity in doctoral learning, conceptual threshold crossings, and the tensions between creative work and university requirements and examination.

Methodology and Methods

To explore candidates' experiences, issues and practices with work self-defined as creative, we:

1)   re-scrutinised data from two earlier linked projects: 'doctoral learning journeys' (1a) and the international 'parallel' project (1b), each using the same methodology and methods (2007-2010);

2)   conducted new face-to-face and email interviews with six doctoral students identifying as 'creative' and six supervisors who have supervised/are supervising creative doctoral work, from the UK and internationally (2013-14). We asked:

- How do candidates experience their creative work and approaches at PhD level, as these relate to their attitude, work and the production of a PhD which is likely to pass?

- Do they experience any tensions between the focus on production of a creative work as part or whole of a PhD and if so, what are their perceptions, experiences and strategies?

- How do we supervise this mix of critical contextualising, theorising, explanation of the relationships of the creative to the whole, and then the creative work, e.g. novel/poems/stories/artwork/themselves?

- How do we encourage and enable hybrid research and hybrid writing of critical/creative work and the PhD?

(The last two bullets are addressed in the second piece on supervising creative work.)

Both sets of data from the historical (1a and b) and new (2) projects were read through carefully, focusing on the research questions (above). This particularly helped us to identify new knowledge from the historical (1a and b) data that had not been gathered initially with a focus on creative PhD processes and products. The questions were asked directly of the respondents in the new (2) research. We thematically analysed the data from both projects,

paying heed both to themes we were directly exploring in the research questioning, and to themes which emerged unexpectedly. We searched the historical data for keywords and expressions which had similar meanings. Words included 'identity', 'self', 'embodiment', 'creative/creativity', 'tensions', 'risks', 'breakthroughs' (in thinking i.e., conceptual threshold crossings, and in finding an appropriate form of expression).

Data and Findings

A number of themes emerged from the interpretation of the data in line with the keywords and expressions with similar meanings (above). Our research reveals ways in which doctoral students engage with, and supervisors supervise, a variety of creative doctorates, from those based in art practice to those exploring the creative processes in everyday professional practice, for example, higher education manager mavericks (see $2C^2$, below). It explores and evidences the experience of researchers who deliberately deploy conventional doctoral formats (in art practice, for example, this would be likely to involve a creative product as well as an exegesis, a thesis) and those who push the boundaries of such formats and are creative in their presentation. Relationships between the researcher's sense of identity as a creative person as well as a creative researcher emerged, so that, for some, the PhD enabled this creative expression, and for others it felt like either a straitjacket or an alien process.

Respondents discuss the interrelationships between their sense of identity and the PhD process and product, and ways in which they manage to align the two successfully, both for their own peace of mind and for the examination processes. This identified evidence of moments of conceptual threshold crossing (Kiley & Wisker, 2008; Wisker & Robinson, 2009) when doctoral students express their awareness of making transitions through the troublesome and often conflicted spaces of creative, theorised, conceptual and articulated work. Here they comment on undertaking creative-based research, problematising accepted constructions of knowledge, and engaging creatively with theory, practice, the personal and professional in their work to make something new. We also discovered a link between supervisors who were able to bridge any gap between the creative innovations of their students' work and the acceptable modes of presentation and articulation of a PhD. Further work will explore the emerging theme of the creative-minded supervisor, and issues of the

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[2] 1 and 2 refer to the two different studies, while respondents are indicated by random alphabetical letters, e.g., N or C.

roles of gatekeeper and enabler in the supervisory process, building on emergence of these new themes.

Themes

- Creativity and identity

- Tensions and developing links between creative processes, products and the PhD

- Crossing conceptual thresholds

Creativity and identity

'What I know I do underpins a strong part of my identity as a creative thinker and doer' (2C). Several doctoral students made a direct link between their sense of identity as a creative person and as an academic and how the engagement with PhDs tested, sometimes troubled, and ideally enabled productive links between the two. The engagement with identity was strong in the comments of many respondents, and it might be interesting to discover whether this is the case with students undertaking doctorates in disciplines which are more rooted in objective or externally validated practice such as the sciences and business. Two noted a link between identity, theorising, investigating and creating:

> *The whole thing for me (and this might just be for me) is that these structural parts of the learning leading to thesis and knowledge are intrinsically rooted inside my own identity and that inside my question. It is why I had to begin to discover a kind of bricolage that might direct a methodological approach* (2C).

This respondent's sense of identity is closely bound up with their work, as is that of the next respondent. This could seem solipsistic except that the expression and articulation in the PhD format moves the candidate beyond any simple scrutiny of themselves.

And: *'I found that being occupied in creating art, and the possibility to investigate the creation in a cognitive manner, enables me to bridge the two worlds of my self'* (1N).

Here the respondent talks of the two worlds as those of cognition and theorising, and of creating, in their case, painting. Some respondents focused on the personal, the self, and creative responses, seeing creativity as a form of research, so, *'One of the difficult questions I had to grapple with during the research process was that in addition to researching my own*

*work, I was also investigating myself. When I investigate myself and my self-portrait, there is a twofold investigation' (*1, b, B).

It could be that undertaking a doctorate causes tensions between the creative identity and the perhaps less established identity of an academic researcher. In the latter, candidates have to conform to new parameters of exploration, approach and articulation, and so might not only find that stressful and troublesome in its strangeness, but also even at odds with the creative identity, the freedoms and insights recognised and rewarded in that version of identity.

One summed up the tension lucidly and also identified themselves as in transition between the creative problematiser and the expected forms and conformities of the PhD process. Asked how they saw themselves at that point they said:

> *Something between a wandering minstrel I suppose and the person who paints the white lines down the middle of the road because sometimes it's very easy, it's slightly more analytical, you read something it makes sense, you read something else, the two pieces fit together so therefore you have a very clearly defined path. Other times, the wandering minstrel you start singing one song and by the time you finish you're on a completely different theme and a different song altogether and you're wavering from either side of the road and it's not a clearly defined path because of the very nebulous nature of narrative and how people perceive things as well. It's wholly unscientific which I love but at the same time it has purpose and I can see where these different things are going.* (2C)

This reflects an identity which is stretched in different directions, the need to engage with creative thinking and practice, and the sense of negotiating particular rules and expectations.

Tensions and developing links between creative processes, products and the PhD itself

'The critical work made me very disciplined in my research for the creative work' (2L).

Those writing critically about the relationship of research and accepted form and the artistic process can offer enlightening thought to creatively inflected PhDs more generally. We are reminded and ask: 'If the making of art is not simply the formation of an object, but also the formulation of complex ideas, then what effect does academic enquiry have on art practice?'

(Macleod & Holdridge, 2006: back cover). Debates about the relationships of art practice to theory and academic discourse is well established.

As both researchers and supervisors note: 'anxiety about the need to incorporate theory into the project sometimes disrupted students' practice fundamentally, so that the student lost confidence in the practice and became theory directed. Supervisors would then attempt to reorient the students' work' (Hockey & Collinson, 2000: 350).

Candidates and supervisors in our research noted tensions between the expected format of the PhD and creative expression, and/or practice, though some reported negotiations which both enable that expression, such as by producing a creative work with a critical, theorised 'wrap' or outer analytical element which theorises the creative work and situated it historically and critically (a format used at the universities of Aberdeen, Birmingham and Chichester, for example, and sometimes referred to as exegesis). Some identified this potentially restricting process as offering a helpful scaffold, encouraging a new hybrid form of writing and expression engaging the creative, critical and conceptual together.

Respondents in our earlier study personally recognised the difficulties of moving backwards and forwards between the creativity of producing, in their cases art, and the expectations of the formats and rules of the PhD process. One commented:

> *Another insight was regarding the confluence of the conscious and the subconscious. Art and creativity are regarded as an intuitive, spontaneous and sensual process which originates mostly from the subconscious. The aspect of methodical and well-structured work of the researcher belongs to the conscious, cognitive world. The meeting of these two worlds assists the process of personal mental development. Knowledge and understanding contribute to mental equilibrium, and the process makes it possible to reach knowledge and understanding.* (2C)

Others recognised the need for both constraint and expression, as mirrored in the literature: 'Certainly part of PhD training must be concerned with the skills of clear and concise expression' (Gray & Malins, 2012: 95).

> *'...all of a sudden I realised it was an obstacle and I began to deal with it'.* (1,a, N)

PhDs that involve creative and critical work caused students to split their efforts, focusing on the theorising, critical reading, data analysis and writing, and then focusing on the creative work, while others deliberately integrated the two forms of work from the start. Some spent a conscious effort bringing them together from a position in the PhD, at which

points the demands of a PhD structure and format and the demands of developing an argument, articulating connections between research aims, process, methods and products and findings, was variously seen as a tension of different thinking and writing processes, or a new fusion or hybrid product. One student notes the effects of splitting their work, which comprises a theorised PhD concerning land ownership and identity, and paintings which express the same issues. Here their mentioning of the 'book' means the thesis.

> *I started off creatively, I mean it was that book was something that I worked on, ... it's difficult to say when I've started working on a book because it's, those ideas might be formed 20 years, beginning to form 20 years ago ... and that would be the creative really, largely, the creative work, the critical work, when I actually started doing the critical work, I well I s'pose that I found it very difficult to work on both at the same time, so I would work on the, I worked on the critical work at the university for a few months and then I would spend maybe double that time on the creative work and I couldn't complete the critical piece before completing the creative piece because that was the relationship between, because of the nature of the relationship, between the creative and the critical.* (2L)

The two developed alternately and together for this candidate, each supporting the other:

> *...the critical was a reflection on the creative...I found they're very different parts of me really and I think the critical work did tend to make my creative writing a bit sort of dry and formal, but that's a style you know and so that was the style that I was working on for the critical work...but it did also enhance the creative work because it did make me analyse it.* (2L)

This candidate is aware of the way in which the PhD expected a kind of expression, more formal, more critical, which actually enabled and partnered the creative work.

Crossing conceptual thresholds

Conceptual threshold crossings in PhD research and writing can take place at several stages in the work, including identifying a research question, situating the work in the literature, identifying the appropriate methodology and methods, identifying themes, and the engagement of data with theory in data analysis. A conceptual threshold crossing stage for

creative PhDs emerged strongly in the students' appreciation of the importance of finding the right form in which to express their creative work and thinking, and their theorised critical argument where that was not expressed in the creative work itself. This is shown below in responses. Tensions and blockages were often reported before the appropriate expression was developed. Blockages often precede breakthroughs. On the taxing and enabling expectations of form – in this instance the literature review (which varies between disciplines but situates the new work in theory, historical and critical work to which it now contributes in both social sciences and, to a lesser i.e., shorter extent, in literature and the arts) – students see this variously as enabling their voice to be situated within an ongoing dialogue with the past and experience, offering a form of validity to it where it might otherwise seem rather intuitive, or a newly strange form of thinking and expression, or both of these at different points in their work. One commented that when younger he would not have been able to engage in the same way, and that engagement with the literature must vary enormously between students and in relation to age and background.

But meeting new theorising and literature can be a blockage: *'I felt there was a blockage. There were things I couldn't answer. I couldn't move forward'.* (1, a, S) And: *'I realised that I have to deal with identity theory and it didn't fit the conceptual framework'.* (1, a, S)

An interesting finding was that uniting or linking the creative and the PhD format could in itself enable a crossing of a conceptual threshold, a learning leap. So, for example, an exhibition, a poem sequence, or a dance express argument, an interpretation of which can then be theorised and critically situated in the literature and explained and argued in the other language of the exegesis, the thesis. This is a recognition that engaging across critical and creative work and response could be troublesome but could also produce an integration of the two, resulting in transformational understanding of the work and its production, and creating something which offered conceptual, critical, as well as creative knowledge.

> *...the reflection the kind of a critical reflection is, something that I think many creative writers go through but they're actually not aware of it as well, but not to the extent where actually you know you sit down and write a critical piece, but I think that that relationship is quite natural, but it has to be drawn or had it to be drawn out.* (2J)

For some the relationship between the unconscious, from which their creative thoughts and expression came, and the conscious theorising and shaping which the PhD demanded, caused a learning leap or conceptual threshold crossing. They were able to articulate more clearly what their work contributed, in a form that enabled theory to integrate with the creative practice. As Robinson (2001: 154) reminds us:

> Creative processes draw from all areas of human consciousness. They are not strictly logical nor are they wholly emotional. The reason why creativity often proceeds by intuitive leaps is precisely that it draws from areas of mind and consciousness that are not wholly regulated by rational thought. In the creative state, we can access these different areas of our minds. This is why ideas often come to mind without our thinking about them.

The participants talked of learning a new language, of first feeling out of their depth, which could be seen as troublesome knowledge (Land, Cousin, Meyer & Davies, 2005), then engaging with research methodology, process and writing, analysing data, and in so doing making a leap into understanding and producing something new.

> *At first there is a lesser understanding based on practice – theoretical and practical as creative practitioner and as educator and researcher. ... then suddenly the traditions of curriculum learning as practised in the fields of research are put on us. They are loaded with terminology, and a need to find rigour through building upon others' discoveries within fields. It is necessary to have a research design but the science and apparent demand as read on paper can be daunting and confusing. Here begins the process of learning new languages, practising them as best you can, feeling out of depth, and wondering where to go.* (2C)

This is followed by an analogy of discomfort then new skills and understanding: *'You are trying to ride the bicycle without knowing or realising that it needs to move and take you forward on it…. So there is tension and compromise'* (2C).

However, another excerpt from this interview acknowledges the iterative maturing process, moving through stages of new understanding:

> *Maturity and an understanding that iterative processes take time has enabled study at this level. The lit review has come to represent for me the framework to enable abstract and conceptual/intellectual pursuit, where beginnings and endings are often difficult to find, order and shape. Although I have struggled with the structures and*

> *proposed formats (feeling that at times they are not the most creative) I have learned to respect that reviewing literature via a set process can actually enable a more creative investigation to follow on, and most importantly build a cohesion which enables certain freedoms of structure. The extent to which this can be explored and the freedoms by which this may be done will depend hugely on a number of factors – the subject the methodology and methods of analysis, and how these will enable valid research to emerge.* (2C)

> *With some existential thinking, a belief in the nature of dialogue, postmodern eclectic matching of theorists and schools of thought, and a need for curiosity are vital in my definition of the purpose of literature review.* (2C)

> Working at many levels and the need to communicate via a potential

> *...number of languages (visual, analytical/written, metaphorical) have enabled a greater understanding of the purposes of the review too. What has been essential to realise is how they are all necessary to make the discoveries and move the research journey forward. I DO have a greater understanding now.* (2C)

Others have commented on the importance of perspectives, awareness of theorised practice, which enables them to put their own work in context and perspective, as critics note:

> …the more perspectives one can bring to their analysis and critique, the better grasp of the phenomena one will have and the better one will be at developing alternative readings and oppositional practices (Kellner, 1999: xii).

And the importance of linking the methodological with the creative:

> …the fact that scholars and practitioners agree on many points, such as the centrality of artefacts, e.g., paintings, videos, installations, etc., the existence of contested territory means that the doing of practice-based research is accompanied by a significant component of methodological development: frameworks and methods are created and tested through the doing of practice based research (Scrivener, 2004: 1).

But it is 'messy', as is grasping and using threshold concepts: '…mastery of a threshold concept often involves messy journeys back, forth and across conceptual terrain' (Cousin, 2006: 4). Disequilibrium and liminality accompanied by practices which ensure rigour through critique lead to new knowledge and a new confidence in its production.

Another candidate undertaking a PhD which uses both a 'wrap' of the analytical and theorised, with a novel or other creative work at its centre, has been enabled by this process of dual research to make conceptual threshold crossing in their thinking and to understand the way the forms of thinking, creating and writing support each other to explain the link between their creative work and the theories, offering a theorised explanation of the creative in their actual work:

> *This section will deal with the literary context of my creative research. I intend to use recent theorisation of female mobility and agency in Modernist literature to examine representations of women in twentieth and twenty-first century dystopian fiction.... In my twenty-first century examples, the female characters tend to embody a continual sense of exile. They are homeless because 'home', both as place and as metaphor, no longer exists.* (2J)

Sullivan highlights needs and difficulties: '…if an aesthetically grounded and theoretically robust approach is to emerge, then the methods of enquiry should be located within the domain of visual arts practice' (Sullivan, 2010: 95).

All students have to consider methodology and methods, and many find that challenging. The distinction we make in our work is of specific instances of creative arts practice which require methodology, methods and potentially new forms which can express both the creative work and the theorising and argument, and work which is not in the arts but which takes an openly acknowledged creative perspective (such as the management education-oriented example), and also seeks methodology, method and form which can express this but test and push those boundaries. The management education candidate expressed their felt tensions and struggles thus:

> *How things are said has become as important as what is said. There has been a greater adherence to strict editing and clarity of communicating concepts. However insecurity at the new lessens slowly so this candidate still struggle[s] to believe I can achieve this, and am defensive at each main stage of the process, hoping that the work will be just good enough.* (2C)

There are still struggles, but the structure and the formal processes of writing are supporting rather than hampering many of the students.

Conclusions

Doctoral students engage with a variety of creative doctorates, from those based in art practice to those exploring the creative processes in everyday professional practice, for example, higher education manager mavericks. Considering the learning journey of such students, the challenges and the ways forward which they have shared with us in our research, should be of use for both supervisors and doctoral students. Our research explores the experience of researchers who deliberately deploy conventional doctoral formats and those who push the boundaries of such formats and are creative and innovative in their presentation. In this work we note evidence of the moments of conceptual threshold crossing when doctoral students undertaking creative-based research problematise accepted constructions of knowledge, engage creatively with theory, practice, the personal and professional in their work to make something new. We have identified student and supervisor tensions between the creative processes and conventional formats, and awareness of the problems, challenges and achievements of putting the creative and the appropriate format together, and we discovered a variety of successful hybrid practices which should be useful for supervisors of those working with doctoral students who engage with a variety of creative doctorates. Supervisors and candidates show awareness of bringing together the creative impulse and expression, enabled by the strictures and structures of the PhD, the form, making something genuinely new. As one creative PhD commented:

> *In some way it was very difficult to move from the creating process (being busy making art work) to the writing. But finally I crossed the border.* (1 b, D)

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