The Visual Arts Practice PhD in Ireland: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Susan Halvey

BA Fine Art, H. Dip Art & Design Education, MA History of Art

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Supervisors:

Professor Helen Phelan PhD
Professor Marie Parker-Jenkins PhD

Submitted to the University of Limerick, June 2018
Dedicated to the memory of beautiful baby Donnacha.

Source of my purest joy and my profoundest sorrow.
Abstract

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Susan Halvey

The Visual Arts Practice PhD (VAP PhD) has emerged during the last few decades in part due to the assimilation of autonomous art schools into the fabric of the bigger Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Baker, 2009; Candlin, 2001; Kälvemark, 2010; Biggs & Büchler, 2007). Several commentators have indicated that the VAP PhD, is pervaded by a high degree of uncertainty, where anxieties go beyond the personal doubts of students and are shared by examiners and supervisors (Macleod & Chapman, 2014; Solleveld, 2012a; Webb & Brien, 2015; Candlin, 2000a). Internationally a modest number of empirical studies have attempted to shed light on experiences of the VAP PhD (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2000; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2003; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2005; Holbrook, et al., 2008; Webb & Brien, 2015). Most of the literature on the subject takes the form of abstract, speculative debate. Taking a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, et al., 2013) investigated 13 participants' experiences of VAP PhDs in Ireland. The inquiry revealed ideological dilemmas and ontological paradoxes which characterised the VAP PhD experience. As a consequence of the research, a model of the VAP PhD research journey is proposed. The study found that the VAP PhD experience was typically marked by five distinct phases: intrepid embarking; wandering and epiphany; resistance, *aporia* and evading capture; rationalisation and assimilation; accomplishing and arriving. This model serves to illuminate understanding of the VAP PhD experience and increases potential for effective intervention in the process, directed toward amelioration of problems, and the anticipation of pitfalls. In addition, it was found that the application of the Aristotelian rhetorical concepts of *aporia* and *aposiopesis* have emerged as useful concepts for understanding several characteristics of the VAP PhD.
Declaration

The Visual Arts Practice PhD in Ireland: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

I hereby certify that the material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

___________________________________
Susan Halvey
Date:
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I am of course indebted to the research participants for their candour and their seriousness of purpose. They gave generously of their time and themselves and for that I am extremely grateful. I hope that I have done justice to their experiences.

My colleagues and friends at Limerick School of Art and Design, Limerick Institute of Technology also deserve my thanks for supporting my research endeavour.

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## Abbreviations

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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADIT</td>
<td>Art and Design Index to Thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHRB</td>
<td>Arts &amp; Humanities Research Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHRC</td>
<td>Arts &amp; Humanities Research Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Artistic Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARIAD</td>
<td>Allison Research Index of Art and Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>AV</td>
<td>Audio Visual</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCA</td>
<td>Burren College of Art</td>
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<td>BERA</td>
<td>British Educational Research Association</td>
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<td>CAA</td>
<td>College Art Association</td>
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<td>CARP</td>
<td>Creative Arts Research &amp; Practice</td>
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<td>CCS</td>
<td>Critical &amp; Contextual Studies</td>
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<td>Cork Institute of Technology</td>
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<td>CNAA</td>
<td>Council for National Academic Awards</td>
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<td>Dip AD</td>
<td>Diploma in Art and Design</td>
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<td>Dublin Institute of Technology</td>
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<td>EARN</td>
<td>European Artistic Research Network</td>
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<td>ECTS</td>
<td>European Credit Transfer System</td>
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<td>EFQ</td>
<td>European Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>ELIA</td>
<td>European League of Institutes of the Arts</td>
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<td>ERA</td>
<td>Excellence for Research in Australia</td>
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<td>ESRC</td>
<td>Economic and Social Research Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>FORD</td>
<td>OECD Fields of Research and Development</td>
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<td>GradCAM</td>
<td>Graduate School of Creative Arts and Media</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>HEA</td>
<td>Higher Education Authority</td>
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<td>HEFCE</td>
<td>Higher Education Funding Council of England</td>
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<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institute</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>HERD</td>
<td>Higher Education Research Development</td>
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<td>HERDC</td>
<td>Higher Education Research Data Collection</td>
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<td>HETAC</td>
<td>Higher Education Training Awards Council</td>
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<td>IADT</td>
<td>Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dún Laoghaire</td>
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<td>IELA</td>
<td>Irish Exhibition of Living Art</td>
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<tr>
<td>IoT</td>
<td>Institute of Technology</td>
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<td>IPA</td>
<td>Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis</td>
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<td>IRC</td>
<td>Irish Research Council</td>
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<td>IRCHSS</td>
<td>Irish Research Council of Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
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<td>IRCSET</td>
<td>Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology</td>
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<td>IWAMD</td>
<td>Irish World Academy of Music and Dance</td>
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<td>JAR</td>
<td>Journal of Artistic Research</td>
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<td>KPI</td>
<td>Key Performance Indicators</td>
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<td>LSAD</td>
<td>Limerick School of Art and Design</td>
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<td>LIT</td>
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<td>MFA</td>
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<td>MIT</td>
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<td>NACAE</td>
<td>National Advisory Council on Arts Education</td>
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<td>NCAD</td>
<td>National College of Art and Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>NESTI</td>
<td>National Experts on Science and Technology Indicators</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSHE</td>
<td>National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030</td>
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<td>NUIG</td>
<td>National University of Ireland Galway</td>
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<tr>
<td>QAA</td>
<td>Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education</td>
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<td>QQI</td>
<td>Quality and Qualifications Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PaR</td>
<td>Performance as Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>PARIP</td>
<td>Practice as Research in Performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>PME</td>
<td>Professional Master’s in Education</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRTLI</td>
<td>Program for Research in Third Level Institutions</td>
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<td>RA</td>
<td>The Royal Academy</td>
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<td>RAE</td>
<td>Research Assessment Exercise</td>
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<td>RC</td>
<td>Research Catalogue</td>
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<td>R&amp;D</td>
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<td>Royal Dublin Society</td>
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<td>Recurrent Grant Funding Model</td>
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<td>Royal Hibernian Academy</td>
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<td>RIA</td>
<td>Royal Irish Academy</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQF</td>
<td>Research Quality Framework</td>
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<td>Regional Technical College</td>
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<td>RTI</td>
<td>Research Training Initiative</td>
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<td>SAR</td>
<td>Society of Artistic Research</td>
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<td>SHARE</td>
<td>Step-Change for Higher Arts Research Education</td>
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<td>VAP PhD</td>
<td>Visual Arts Practice PhD</td>
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<td>University of Ulster</td>
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Chapter 1 Situating the Research

1.1. Introduction

The Visual Arts Practice PhD (VAP PhD) has emerged during the last three decades, in part due to the incremental assimilation of autonomous art schools into larger Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Baker, 2009; Candlin, 2001; Kälvemark, 2010; Biggs & Büchler, 2007). Its evolution has precipitated vigorous debate with several commentators claiming that the VAP PhD experience, is characterised by uncertainty, where anxieties go beyond the personal doubts of students and are shared by examiners and supervisors (Macleod & Chapman, 2014; Solleveld, 2012a; Webb & Brien, 2015; Candlin, 2000a). Internationally a modest number of empirical studies have attempted to explore experiences of the VAP PhD (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2000; Hockey & Allen-Collinston, 2003; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2005; Holbrook, et al., 2008; Webb & Brien, 2015). Most of the literature on the subject has taken the form of abstract, speculative debate, with protagonists striving to eke out a theoretical foundation upon which to build a new research tradition.

Taking a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, et al., 2013) investigated 13 participants' experiences of VAP PhDs in Ireland. The inquiry sought to reveal ideological dilemmas and ontological paradoxes which might characterise the VAP PhD experience. The research was directed toward accessing participants’ understandings of aspects of artistic research which are hidden from view, but which inform the research at every level.
This introductory chapter begins by providing a rationale for the research. Research questions are identified and aims are outlined. Also included here is a discussion of the researcher’s ontological stance and an account of the research design. The chapter concludes with an exposition on the approach to the literature review, the use of terminology and the organisation of the text.

1.2. Rational for the Study: Statement of the Problem

In a 1993 seminal paper Research in Art and Design, Sir Christopher Frayling, the then rector of the Royal College of Art, teased out possible conceptions of artistic research. The essay served to open a discursive space for deliberation on the ontological and epistemological issues which ensue from the emerging field of artistic research. Over a decade after the publishing of his touchstone paper, Frayling acknowledged that, the area of ‘art as research’ is surrounded by confusions (MacLeod & Holdridge ed. 2006). With the passage of time one might expect for uncertainty to have dissipated, for issues to have become more resolved and for conceptualisations of the phenomenon of artistic research to have coalesced into something more concrete. Yet in 2012, Solleveld (2012a, p. 78) goes so far as to suggest that after over two decades ‘there is no satisfactory answer as to what artistic research is.’ Candy and Edmonds (2018, p. 63) observe that though practice-based research in the creative arts has existed within academic contexts for 35 years, the approach ‘has yet to reach a settled status in terms of its definition and discourse.’

At a recent conference, Piper (2015) maintains that although the idea of academic research in a traditional context has a clearly defined meaning, artistic research ‘does not have a well-defined referent’ [Un-paginated]. Taking her definition of academic research from the Oxford English Dictionary, Piper defines research as an
investigation which is directed at the discovery of a fact by careful study of a subject or a course of critical enquiry, using a specialised methodology. When trying to determine what the term ‘artistic research’ means however, she observes, ‘an alarming humpty-dumpty tendency to make the word mean whatever one wants it to mean’ [Un-paginated]. Clearly if Piper, Solleveld, Candy and Edmonds are correct in their assessment of artistic research then there are considerable implications for those undertaking and those administering Arts Practice PhDs.

In 2000, after over a decade of Arts Practice PhDs in the UK, Candlin (2000a, p. 1) maintained that anxieties regarding Arts Practice PhDs went beyond personal doubts of students, being ‘shared by supervisors, examiners and senior academics.’ Since its inception the Arts Practice PhD has been bedevilled with doubts not least of all, are those to do with issues around academic standard (Burgin, 2009). It appears, despite the elapsing of time, doubts have not been assuaged. By 2014 Macleod and Chapman (2014, p. 140) are characterising PhDs in Fine Art as existing in a ‘limbic space,’ stating that those embarking on a Fine Art PhD, are entering a domain where ‘the subject of enquiry cannot be mapped out in advance.’ Elements which are taken for granted in the context of traditional academic research become ‘troublesome’ once transposed to an artistic research context.

Endeavouring to interrogate the Arts Practice PhD ‘at root level,’ Elkins (2014, p. 228), delineates a raft of reasons for mistrusting the degree and while Mottram (2014a) presents a systematic rebuttal, which addresses each of Elkin’s fourteen reasons for distrust, the literature would suggest that at ground level, anxieties, uncertainties and unresolved issues continue to be a feature of the Visual Arts
Practice PhD. Writing from an Australian context where over 400 PhDs in the Creative Arts have now been completed, Webb and Brien (2015, p. 2) echo Candlin’s assertions, speaking of ‘anxieties and uncertainties held by many doctoral supervisors, candidates and examiners’ in relation to not only the examination but also the ramification of presenting artistic outputs as part of a research degree. In a recent edition of Leonardo, which is dedicated to the issue of the PhD in Art and Design, Freedman and Ox (2017, pp. 516-517) posit the following indictment of the Visual Arts PhD, asking:

Why are so many programs struggling and why have so many gone astray, graduating PhD students who are incapable of doing research and unable to supervise research degrees? Why do universities and accrediting agencies permit problematic programs to continue? (Friedman & Ox, 2017, pp. 516-517).

The speculative debate which circulates around the PhD for artists, would seem to suggest that the VAP PhD continues to be rife with problems.

Throughout the discourse on artistic research there has been insistence that the artistic academic community take ownership of its own context which should not be distorted by conventions imposed by other research domains. Jones (2006a) for example, calls for the community to have confidence in itself. Urging that artistic research culture should not cede to the hegemonic influence of the social sciences, he asserts that, ‘different contexts require different solutions to common problems’ (Jones, 2009, p. 82). A rejection then, of the conventions which govern other research traditions.

Suggesting that artistic research could be conceived of as being situated somewhere between the conventions of the artistic world and those of the world of research,
Biggs and Büchler (2010a, p. 99) call for the practitioner/researcher community to take on the task of delineating its practice/academic values, calling for a critical appraisal of inherited values and conventions. This is work they say which has not been done. They acknowledge a prescient need for an unveiling and auditing of essential or fundamental principles. Once these values are made visible, ‘meaningful actions can be identified, and the significant activities conventionalised.’ It is towards this end that this study is directed.

Internationally, a modest number of empirical studies have attempted to shed light on the experiences of supervisors, students and examiners engaged in Arts Practice PhDs (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2000; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2003; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2005; Holbrook, et al., 2008; Nelson & Andrews, 2003; Paltridge, et al., 2012b; Webb & Brien, 2015; Bloom, et al., 2011; Zeew, 2017). It would be fair to assert that the lion’s share of the literature on artists’ research has taken the form of abstract debate. This is particularly true of the UK context. As Elkins (2005) quite rightly asserts the field does not suffer from a dearth of theoretical perspectives being brought to bear. One could assert that this body of discourse around artistic research, theoretically sophisticated as it may be, is often far removed from the lived experiences of those involved in the phenomenon, and while important, it does little in a practical sense to ameliorate issues faced by candidates, examiners and supervisors.

Commenting on the Arts Practice PhD, Kälvemark (2010, p. 22) argues that it is incumbent upon those responsible for research training and quality assessment to maintain momentum in the development of standards and methods in ‘order to
increase the respect for this field from other actors in the community of scholars and researchers.’ It is my contention that for this aim to be effectively realized, more attention must be paid to the phenomenon itself, as it is experienced and understood by those engaged in the process. Greater clarity about how stakeholders navigate and conceptualise the Visual Arts Practice PhD is needed. This study is primarily directed toward improving the health of the Visual Arts Practice PhD, looking to inform policy and practice and seeking to enhance the experiences of those involved.

Loveless (2012, p. 93), suggests that interrogation of the fine art doctoral work which traverses ‘theory/practice lines’ offers the opportunity for a critical reappraisal of the production and assessment of academic knowledge. Talking about changing practices in doctoral education, Boud and Lee (2009, p. 20) speak of a space which is increasingly complex where competing agendas are at play. Park (2005, p. 187) calls for a ‘for a wholesale revision of assumptions and expectations about what the PhD is.’ The VAP PhD may provide a site for the excavation of norms and assumptions related to the PhD and could operate as a locus for the critical evaluation of the culture of higher educational research. At a time when the sector has come under pressure from technocratic, neo-liberalising forces, an investigation of the Arts Practice PhD may furnish opportunities for a critical interrogation which extends beyond the specificity of the Arts Practice PhD.

This study investigates the Visual Arts or Fine Art Practice PhD as it manifests itself in the Irish context, thus it is concerned specifically with what Elkin’s (2013, p. 11) identifies as the UK model. Characteristic features of this model, he maintains, are the involvement of high levels of administrative and bureaucratic oversight which include ‘elaborate structures for specification, assessment and quantifiable
Though VAP PhDs have been in existence in the UK for the last thirty years, Irish equivalents have only come on-stream during the last eight to ten years. In 2009, Dr Áine Phillips was the first person to graduate with an Arts Practice PhD from an Irish institution. The first generation of VAP PhDs were administered by artist academics for whom the MFA was normally the terminal qualification held. These intrepid individuals worked alongside academics from cognate disciplines who were normally qualified at doctoral level. In Ireland, the field is now entering a new phase whereby a small number of pioneering VAP PhD graduates are coming to maturity as supervisors and examiners. Recent years have seen a burgeoning PhD culture emerging in Ireland. This situation is in part symptomatic of the massification of doctoral level education internationally and has been accelerated by national level policy initiatives. In 2011 The National Strategy of Higher Education to 2030 opened the door to the possibility of IoTs attaining Technological University status contingent upon, among other criteria, the fulfilling of a quotient of staff qualified to PhD level. IoTs, as a result, began to encourage and support incumbent staff in the undertaking of doctoral level study. Within a context of austerity measures and a struggling economy, art and design staff located in both University and more usually in the IoT sector began to enrol in increasing numbers on to PhD courses. An investigation into the Irish context is timely, allowing a space for reflection on recent accomplishments and a chance to consider future courses of action for the betterment of the evolving culture. Whilst academics, who are or have been situated within the Irish context, have contributed significantly to the literature on arts
practice research (Bell, 2006; Elkins, 2014; 2005; Hanrahan, 2006; Jones, 2005a; Wilson & Ruiten, 2013; Wilson, 2014a), and have acted as key players in driving policy through high level involvement in the European League of Institutes in the Arts (ELIA) and Step-Change for Higher Arts Research Education (SHARE), to date empirical research which looks to investigate the experiences of stakeholders in Ireland has been, at best, scant. Speaking more generally, art and design third level education in Ireland is an under-researched area, notwithstanding Turpin’s (1995) tombic history of the National College of Art and Design. When research has been undertaken into art and design education in Ireland it has tended to focus on primary and secondary rather than tertiary education.

1.3. Research Aims

This study aimed to investigate participants' experiences of newly emerging PhDs in Visual Arts Practice in an Irish context, focusing on participants' contextual conceptions of the phenomenon. By revealing participants’ values, attitudes, beliefs and priorities in relation to the VAP PhD, I wanted to determine if, as the literature suggests, uncertainty and anxiety are dominant features of the experience for those in Ireland. It is important to point out that I did not attempt to investigate doctoral work in the area of design. The focus was purely on the visual or fine arts as it manifested itself within schools of art and design. I sought to build a deep, rich, fine-grained picture of the phenomenon based on multi-perspectival accounts of a small number of students, graduates, supervisors and examiners. If, as Piper (2015) suggests, the term artistic research has no well-defined referent, what then are the implications for those engaged in the process of the Arts Practice PhD? What are the conceptions of
artistic research and academic standard which prevail and what effect do these have on the processes of evaluation which are brought to bear on artistic research outputs?

The study sought to illuminate the phenomenon in the round, looking at how participants made sense of issues such as the role and purpose of the text, theory, artistic work and assessment. As has already been mentioned, Biggs and Büchler (2010a, p. 99) call for the practitioner/researcher community to take on the task of mapping its artistic/academic values, calling for a critical appraisal of inherited conventions. This research sought to access, make visible, map and critically appraise the fundamental values of this cohort of participants with a view to identifying significant activities.

Describing the relationship between art and academia as both uneasy and challenging Borgdorff (2010, p. 44) states that the issue of delineating the demarcation between the artistic and the academic has been one of the most prescient debates in artistic research over the past two decades. The research sought to access participants’ experiences along this line of demarcation with a view to informing decisions pertaining to curriculum, policy and pedagogy.

The research questions, which were used to begin the inquiry, could be summed up as follows:

- Is uncertainty a prevalent feature of the experience of the VAP PhD?
- How do the participants experience the VAP PhD?
- How do graduates and students conceptualise their own identity in relation to the VAP PhD?
- What artistic and academic values are at play?
The research questions then, upon which the study was predicated, signalled a qualitative approach and more particularly suggested a phenomenological inquiry.

1.4. Researcher’s Ontological Stance and Methodological Approach

It is important to establish from the outset that what was undertaken here was not arts practice research. The inquiry was not conducted through artistic means and the research output does not take the form of a work of art. However, the research is significantly coloured by the fact that the researcher is a graduate from an art and design school and has taught for nearly twenty years in an art school in the areas of art and design practice, critical and contextual studies and initial teacher education.

A/r/t/ography is a recently coined term which describes the activities of artist/researcher/teachers or pedagogues who view themselves as belonging to a community of practice which espouses a commitment to inquiry through practice and self-study, as well as being committed to ethics and activism (Springgay, et al., 2008). Stressing the notion of belonging, such communities of practice, ideally provide a supportive environment for self-reflexivity, from which artist/researcher/teachers can generate opportunities for leadership in the arts and art education. Springgay et al. (2005, cited in Springgay et al., 2008, p. xxix) describe a/r/tographic inquiry as ‘an embodied encounter constituted through visual and textual understandings and experiences rather than mere visual and textual representations.’ The artist/researcher/teacher is, as it were, cast into a phenomenological disposition, being-in-the-world, looking to abstract meaning out of the ebb and flow of lived experiences through engagement in arts practice. I then, by dint of my own a/r/tographic identity, came to this research with an intellectual
commitment to a phenomenological ontology and it is out of these going concerns that the research question was formulated.

This study is pervaded by and founded on the notion of belonging. Knowledge is seen to emerge from intimacy with, rather than distance from, the research context. The perspective presented here is to a degree, *emic* in that I have spent thirty years either studying or teaching in art schools. Despite the sense of belonging which pervades the research, the notion of critical distance was also important. The choice to undertake this study outside of the confines of an art school was significant and indicative of a degree of ambivalence which was felt toward the very idea of artistic research. I did not after all, although I could have done, elect to undertake a Visual Arts Practice PhD. By locating the study within a structured PhD in Education, I wished to acquaint myself with the conventions and methodologies for knowledge acquisition which prevail in traditions outside of art and design, while also experiencing first hand a traditional PhD process. The process of doing a PhD whilst investigating the PhD contributed significantly to double hermeneutical process demanded by the chosen research methodology. The experience of undertaking a PhD in the company of a cohort of students from a myriad of disciplines provided opportunities for dialogical learning which enriched my own conceptualisations around the notion of the PhD. Particularly important was the insight gained from the opportunity to conduct a professional placement in The Irish World Academy of Music and Dance (IWAMD). This experience afforded me the opportunity to engage with students and academics undertaking doctoral level study in the areas of music, dance and song, areas which while being very different, have much in common with art and design.
1.5. Research Design

This study is founded on the hermeneutic phenomenological approach adopted by Smith et al. (2013) in what they term, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Rejecting ‘transcendental’ knowledge claims which seek to extract ‘essences’ from their historical contexts and eschewing the notion that preconceptions can be ‘bracketed off,’ I am dubious about the possibility of achieving the Husserl ‘inspired’ epoché suggested in the work of descriptive phenomenologist such as Giorgi (1997).

Preconceptions, prejudices and biases are viewed as the very conditions out of which understanding emerges. Lawn and Keane (2011, p. 115) sum up Gadamer’s thought on prejudice stating a ‘condition of making reflective and evaluative judgements about the world is the possession of prejudices; without prejudices there can be no judgments.’ Underlying this research then is an acceptance that one cannot extricate oneself from the process of data generation. Similarly, interpretation is seen as constituting, ‘an inevitable and basic structure of our ‘being-in-the-world’ (Finlay, 2012, p. 22). Speaking of phenomenology, Wertz (2005, p. 175) states that it is, ‘a low-hovering, in-dwelling, meditative, philosophy that glories in the concreteness of person-world relations and accords lived experience, with all its indeterminacy and ambiguity, primacy over the known.’ This characterisation accurately captures the disposition of this study.

Smith et al. (2013, p. 57) maintain that one-to-one, semi-structured interviews are well-matched to the IPA approach, as they allow participants to offer deep and detailed personal accounts, giving the participants the space to ‘think, speak and be heard.’ The thirteen individuals who participated in this study were purposively selected on the basis that they possess deep and rich experience and knowledge of
the phenomenon under investigation. The study looked to access participants who could furnish ‘substantial contributions to filling out the structure and character of the experience under investigation’ (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 139). Selected from eight institutions, thirteen participants, comprising of senior academics, supervisors, examiners, graduates and current students, were interviewed.

1.6. Approach to the Literature Review: perspective, coverage, organisation

Newbury (2010, p. 381) says of artistic research, that it is ‘promiscuous,’ and this promiscuity typifies the manner in which the writings on artistic research insinuate themselves into the literature. A traditional critical literature review was deemed most in keeping with the ontological underpinnings of the research. Given that the study is phenomenological, yet does not seek to achieve a Husserlian *epoché*, the researcher’s pre-existing experiences and prejudices are seen as, not only infiltrating the review but as driving the literature search. For Gadamer (1998, p. 119) prejudice (*Vorurteil*) is the very condition of ‘our openness to the world’ forming the basis of the potential for understanding, in fact, he says that prejudices ‘constitute our being’. Prejudices lie at the foundation of our ability to experience and it is from this philosophical disposition that I write. It follows then that the literature review, from a phenomenological standpoint, cannot be replicable. It emerges from a flow of circumstances, as they exist at a particular time, filtered through the prism of a singular consciousness. This is not to say that the search is relativistic and lacking in coverage or rigour. Although the literature is not intended to be replicable it is nonetheless exhaustive.
The review was directed toward conceptualising the field and providing insight into the diverse and plural dynamics of the phenomenon under investigation. Moreover, the review aimed to give a holistic interpretation of historical and conceptual contexts while also looking to explore terminology. While the texts drawn upon pertain predominantly to the Anglophone tradition and the UK model of Arts Practice PhD, contributions from other jurisdictions and from cognate discipline areas are included where deemed appropriate. For example, work has been cited which deals with design, performance, dance, music, film and creative writing. In addition to sourcing literature to do specifically with artistic research or the arts practice PhD, this body of writing sat within a broader literature context of writings on higher educational organizations, aesthetics, doctoral study and practice-based or practice-led PhDs. Publications on practice-led doctoral study, though dealing with areas as diverse as nursing and architecture, nonetheless had something significant to contribute to the discussion. It is interesting to note that an affinity was perceived to exist between the writings of nurse theorists and those of artist/academics. The early part of the dissertation prioritises writing pertaining to visual arts doctoral studies while the discussion section brings in to play literature pertaining the studies on doctoral research in general.

A fluid, iterative and multidirectional approach to the search was seen to be the most effective strategy in trying to capture a discourse which is heterogeneous, dispersed across manifold literatures, rapidly evolving and mosaic like. Given the emerging nature of the discourse on artistic research there is a high degree of instability and inconsistency in the language being used to deliberate on the field. For this reason, considerable flexibility was needed in identifying search terms which would extend
into and give coverage of the literature base. For example, discussions could manifest themselves under the description artistic, creative, visual arts, studio art, fine art, arts practice, practice-led, practice-based research. In many cases there is a lack of consistency in what is understood by specific terms, with vocabularies being applied differently in various jurisdictions and by different commentators.

As well as employing a compliant attitude to the use of search terms, explorations using a flexible lexicon of terminology were complemented with iterative searches conducted using what Webster and Watson (2002) refer to as forward and backward searches based on pertinent articles; searching the reference lists of articles, as well as using the ‘cited by’ and ‘related articles’ functions in Google Scholar and university search engines. Sir Christopher Frayling’s paper Research in Art and Design of 1993 (Frayling, 1993), is widely regarded as a seminal text on the issue of art and design research. The paper has been described as a ‘touchtone’ for those contemplating the nature of artistic research (Belcher, 2012, p. 1; Rust, et al., 2007, p. 12). During the last twenty or more years this essay has been repeatedly invoked in discussions on artistic research, garnishing citations numbering in the hundreds. Frayling’s essay proved a useful starting point from which to assay the discourse as it has evolved over the past two and a half decades.

1.7. Terminology

It has already been stated that there exists a high degree of instability and inconsistency in the language being used to deliberate on the field, with little consensus as to what this area of research should be called. In fact, much of the literature on the subject concerns itself with identifying and fine-tuning terminology
which would prove adequate to accommodating the research activities of artists. Much of chapter four is dedicated to exploring these debates around terminology. For the purposes of this dissertation the term Visual Arts Practice PhD (VAP PhD) is used to describe a PhD which involves the production of artistic works in combination with a written document. Sometimes this term is shortened to Arts Practice PhD or Visual Arts PhD. This study does not concern itself with the area of design and so design disciplines are not implied in the use of the term Visual Arts Practice. Neither does it deal with what is normally referred to as ‘arts-based’ research which Sullivan (2013, p. 20) characterises as being ‘generally interested in improving our understanding of schooling and how art can reveal important insights about learning and teaching.’

The terminology used to describe the written document which constitutes part of the final submission of VAP PhDs, is also variable and the subject of much debate, being referred to as the thesis; dissertation; discursive text; analytic; supplementary text; supporting document or exegesis. Paltridge et al. (2011, p. 248) maintain that the term exegeses which is used frequently in the Australian context, is generally disliked on the bases that it creates a distance between the text and the artwork which emasculates the creative work. The term ‘written component’ is preferred as it implies that the text is just one element of the submission. I use these terms interchangeably, with full cognisance of the debates which surround each term.

Artistic works produced as a part of a Visual Arts Practice PhD may include not only artefacts but also performances, installations, film, multimedia and texts. It is important to note that the term PaR, which stands for performance as research, is routinely used to describe research activities in the areas of theatre, music, dance,
song, film and multimedia. The term ‘artistic research’ (AR) is used to refer to research within and outside of academic institutions. In Australia, the term ‘creative research’ is used to describe AR and PaR. In the British context, there is a tendency to eschew the use of the term ‘creative’ in favour of ‘artistic,’ although this term is disliked by designers. Anyone who is vaguely acquainted with the field will be aware of the fact that a plethora of prepositional terms are used to describe the relationship between practice, research and art. These are explored more fully in chapter four. Within this document the terms Arts Practice Research, Visual Arts Practice Research, Creative Research and Artistic Research are used to refer to broadly similar activities.

Upon review of the interview data gathered as part of this study, one will be able to observe the idiosyncratic use of certain terms by the artist academic community. For example, the term, ‘the practice,’ is used to refer to artistic work and the activities which give rise to artistic work. ‘The work’ is also used to mean artistic work and the term ‘thesis’ is generally used to refer to the supporting text. I, as a member of this community, tend also to use these terms in these ways.

1.8. Organization of Dissertation

The dissertation is organised into three main sections: Section one, consists of a traditional critical literature review comprising of four chapters. The first of these contextualising chapters, gives a broad overview of the field, highlighting some of the policy frameworks within which the debate is situated. The second chapter of the literature review provides an overview of the histories which shape the context. The third chapter looks at issues around the ontology, epistemology and methodology of
artistic research and the concluding chapter focuses predominantly on empirical studies.

Section two of the dissertation deals with methodology and comprises of two chapters, the first of which lays out the philosophical underpinning of the study. The second provides a detailed exposition on the methods and procedures employed. It also explains the approach to data analysis, discusses issues around trustworthiness and quality and elucidates the role of reflexivity in the study.

The third section, presents the findings of the study. It consists of a preamble to findings which sets the scene and provides a point of entry to the research for the reader through the provision of idiographic portraits; a reflective passage and a discussion of conceptual frameworks. The section comprises of three further findings chapters which are richly embellished with verbatim extracts from the interviews. Interspersed in the findings section there are two more reflective passages.

The findings are followed by a discussion, which reconnects the key findings with relevant literature and provides a critique of the study. The dissertation concludes with an articulation of the contribution to knowledge; the implications of the research and indicates suggestions for future research. Figure 1.1 gives an overview of the organisation of the text.
Figure 1-1 Outline of the organisation of the text
1.9. Summary

This introductory section has provided a rationale for the research; the research questions were identified, and the aims of the research were outlined. The section discussed the researcher’s ontological stance and the research design, concluding with an explanation of the approach to the literature review, use of terminology and the organisation of the text. The next four chapters contain the literature review. The first of these provides a discussion of the Visual Arts Practice PhD in terms of international and national level advocacy organisations. The chapter also investigates the policy imperatives which are acting on Irish art and design institutions and the VAP PhD and gives an overview of the current context of the Irish higher education landscape.
The Literature Review
Chapter 2 Overview of Contexts: The Lay of the Land

2.1. Introduction

Elkins (2013, p. 10) estimates that approximately 280 institutions world-wide are now offering ‘arts-based’ PhDs, and he identifies six distinct cultures, including Nordic, Continental, UK, Japanese, Chinese with ‘No model’ being a feature of the Northern American culture. Adding to Elkins’ list, Teikmanis (2013, p. 163) identifies the ‘art research academy’ as a further model. This, it is maintained, consists of a diversity of artistic and designerly research practices which are taking place under ‘different legal frameworks’ making use of a variety of research methods. This chapter provides an overview of the contexts effecting the provision of artistic research at higher education. It begins with a discussion of international and European contexts looking at advocacy organisations. It then goes on to consider relevant national level policy frameworks and organisations.

2.2. Emergence of the Visual Arts Practice PhD

The relatively recent development of research cultures in art and design schools has much to do with where these institutions have been positioned within the higher education landscape (Candlin, 2001; Collinson, 2005; Rust, et al., 2007; Thompson, 2005). The majority of British and Irish third level art and design education, historically, has taken place outside the university sector. There have been exceptions in this regard, but these have been on a small scale in the UK, thus not on a level which would have impacted significantly on the overall academic culture of art and design third cycle education. Third cycle here refers to doctoral level education, second cycle refers to master’s and first cycle refers to bachelor’s (Rust, et al., 2007). In this sense the culture of art and design education, for much of its
history, evolved along its own distinctive trajectory, was governed by its own pedagogic conventions, and was framed within its own curricular architectures.

By the 1990s, UK art and design schools, due to tectonic shifts in the higher education landscape, largely became assimilated within the polytechnics, which in turn were ultimately conferred with university status. It was at this time when, as Maharaj (2004b, p. 58) put it, artistic researched loomed ‘into view as an unscripted zone.’ Although the practice of artistic or creative research was first seen to develop within the areas of art, design and architecture, there is now an expanding literature which speaks of evolving research cultures in almost every area of creative endeavour including; Music (Dogantan-Dack, 2015); Dance (Gehm, et al., 2015); Performance (Allegue, et al., 2009; Freeman, 2010); Theatre (Belliveau & Lea, 2016); Film (Hjort, 2013); Creative Writing (Kroll & Harper, 2012) and Circus Performance (Damkjaer, 2016).

The emergence of the artistic or arts practice PhD as a global phenomenon is also evidenced in a growing international literature. The publication in 2010 of The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts (Biggs & Karlsson, 2010a) testifies to the insinuation of artistic research into the broader literature on research, with contributions from the UK, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Australia, Germany and Switzerland. Rethinking the Contemporary Art School: The Artist, the PhD and the Academy (Buckley & Conomos, 2009), an edited collection emanating from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, includes perspectives from Australia, Canada, Norway, Denmark and the United States. Faber and Mäkelä (2011) and Baxter (2013) give accounts of the situation as it emerges in South Africa, while a
publication entitled *Kunst und Künstlerische Forschung* (Caduff, et al., 2010), traces moments of confluence and divergence across the domain of art practice and artistic research and includes commentaries from the UK, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Australia, Germany and Switzerland. Australia, which has a comparatively lengthy tradition of the Arts Practice PhD, has produced a more substantial body of literature (Baker, 2009; Barrett & Bolt, 2010; Paltridge, et al., 2011; Wilson, 2011; Candy, 2006; Crouch & Cowan, 2007) with Australian academics taking the lead in terms of producing the largest body of empirical research into the phenomenon (Ravelli, et al., 2014; Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2010; Hamilton & Carson, 2013; Dally, et al., 2004; Webb & Brien, 2015).

It is important to acknowledge the distinctive characteristics of the Nordic model upon which Nimkulrat (2009), Kälvemark (2010), Malterud (2012), Artlander (2013) and Fentz & Mcguirk (2015) reflect. The Nordic award normally takes the form of a professional doctorate thus the system is deemed to be focused on professional and artistic values in terms of assessment. A recent report from the *National Council for Artistic Research, Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions* (2016, p. 12), although not negating the idea that arts based research would produce a contribution to knowledge, foregrounds the notion that the quality of fourth level arts practice doctoral research should be determined on, ‘Whether choices, processes and consequences are articulated and assessed, and whether the process and reflection produce an interesting and relevant artistic result.’ In this sense Nordic practices differ from the UK model of which Ireland, Australia, South Africa, Uganda, Canada, Malaysia and Singapore are deemed to belong (Elkins, 2013). Whereas the Nordic approach is to strive for high quality artistic outcomes, the UK model is
thought to emphasise the notion of art as research which culminates in a contribution to knowledge.

The United States has until recently been resistant to the idea of Arts Practice PhDs. This set of circumstances seems about to change. Riley (2013) and Schwarzenbach and Hackett (2016) explore the evolving situation in the US. Given the nascent state of development of doctoral education in the arts, Elkins (2013, p. 14) claims, that the US is amenable to ‘foundational critique.’ It must be observed however that as early as 1929, a PhD in Fine Art was awarded in the US, in Ohio State University. These early PhDs came under pressure and were eliminated in favour of the Master’s in Fine Art (MFA) as the terminal qualification in fine art or studio art in the US (Schwarzenbach & Hackett, 2016). In 2014 the College Art Association (CAA) in the US, an association who describe themselves as ‘the preeminent international leadership organization in the visual arts’ issued a statement confirming the MFA as the terminal degree in studio art, however included in the statement is the following sentence:

The Association recognizes the existence of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Doctor of Fine Arts (DFA), Doctor of Visual Arts (DVA), Doctor of Studio Art (DA), and other doctoral degrees that incorporate art and/or design practice (College Art Association, 2015, pp. [Un-paginated]).

The US appears to be set to join the debate with publications on the issue by Jones (2006b, p. 124), Barone and Eisner (2012), Daichendt (2012), jagodzinski [sic] and Wallin (2013) and Schwarzenbach and Hackett (2016). Toward the completion of this study an issue of Leonardo (2017), was dedicated to the debate on the visual arts practice PhD in the US.
2.3. European Advocacy Organisations and the Frascati Manual

In Europe, several advocacy organisations and networks have evolved with the purpose of supporting artistic research both within and outside of academic institutions. Notable amongst these are SHARE, an acronym for Step-Change for Higher Arts research and Education; EUFRAD, the European League Forum for Research Degrees in Art and Design; EARN, the European Artistic Research Network and SAR, the Society for Artistic Research. Emanating from the University of Bristol, PARIP, Practice as Research in Performance was a five-year project which ran from November 2000 to August 2005. PARIP’s mission was to develop national frameworks for the encouragement of excellence in the area of performance media academic research.

Claiming to be the only international society devoted to the promotion and dissemination of artistic research, SAR produces JAR the Journal of Artistic Research. Furthermore, SAR is responsible for the Research Catalogue (RC) which is a searchable repository of artistic research which is created within and outside of academic institutions. SAR has been active in advocating for the inclusion of artistic research as a distinct category within the Frascati Manual.

A publication of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Frascati Manual aspires to operate as the de facto international standard for collecting and reporting on research and experimental development of scientific, technological and innovation activities. Describing research and experimental development (R&D) as comprising of:
Creative and systematic work undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge - including knowledge, culture and society - and to devise new application of available knowledge (OECD, 2015, p. 58).

The Frascati Manual classifies research into three categories; basic, applied and experimental. The research domain is divided into six high-level groupings or ‘Fields of Research and Development’ (FORD). They are as follows:

1. Natural sciences
2. Engineering and technology
3. Medical and health sciences
4. Agricultural and veterinary sciences
5. Social sciences
6. Humanities and the arts (OECD, 2015, p. 59).

Artistic research is captured in the two-digit designation 6.4 under category six, humanities and the arts. History of arts, performing arts and music also fall within this two-point designation. SAR and ELIA have lobbied to have artistic research promoted and classified under a single digit designation, arguing that its status is unsatisfactory. The current designation does not, SAR claims, represent the development of artistic research. SAR’s efforts in this regard have been unsuccessful (Hughes, 2013). In the most recent iteration of the Frascati Manual, artistic research remains at the double-digit designation 6.4 (OECD, 2015, p. 59).

The Frascati Manual is not silent in terms of its definition of artistic and performance research and development. It is worthwhile considering the OECD’s position from the outset as a way of laying the foundation for this current discussion. In point 2.64 of the document a distinction is made between research for the arts, research on the arts and artistic expression. Research for the arts is understood as the development of goods and services ‘to meet the expressive needs of artists and performers.’ As
such it might include for example the development of new musical instruments. Research on the art includes areas like art history, media studies and musicology. The Frascati document states that artistic performance is concerned with artistic expression rather than research, and therefore is ‘normally excluded’ from R&D. Such activity fails to meet the criteria of novelty and reproducibility. Reproducibility here implies the transference of any new knowledge which might potentially be produced as a result of the artistic performance context. Art colleges and art departments, in the absence of additional supporting information cannot, according to the Frascati Manual, be thought to be performing R&D, although students may be granted doctoral degrees based on artistic performance. For the purposes of Frascati such activities ‘are not relevant to R&D measurement’ (p. 65). The idea that one might conduct research in and through artistic performance holds no sway with the OECD.

2.4. A Brief Overview of the Irish Context

In the second edition of *Artists with PhDs: On the New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art*, Elkins (2014) takes on the ambitious task of compiling a list of institutions worldwide which provide PhD programs in Visual Arts Practice. This list, as Elkins observes is incomplete. In his account of the Irish context he neglects to include Limerick School of Art and Design (LSAD) which is one the three oldest purveyors of art and design education in the state, dating back to the schools of ornamental design of the 1850s; while he includes Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) which does not have an art school but offers courses in art and design as part of the humanities department.
Though the arts practice PhD has a short history in the Republic of Ireland, with the first graduates only emerging within the last five to ten years, it is important to note that this is not the case north of the border. Maharaj (2004a, p. 167) observes that it was from the University of Ulster (UU) that the first arts practice PhDs in the UK emerged and that these courses were ‘invented and created with great love, care and affection by a leading practitioner, Susan Hillers, as professor of visual art practice.’

In Northern Ireland, substantial government funding has been ascribed to the development of a research culture and to doctoral programs against the background of what Jewesbury (2009, p. 2) refers to as ‘a supposedly post-conflict political context.’ Students from the Republic of Ireland have naturally taken advantage of the favourable funding opportunities over the border, attaining their terminal degrees in Northern Ireland.

In Ireland, not unlike the UK, an operation of incremental assimilation of art schools into larger higher education institutions took effect throughout the latter half of the 20th century, with small independent art schools becoming absorbed into Regional Technical Colleges (RTCs), these RTCs eventually became Institutes of Technology (IoTs). With the exception of the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) and a few small independent schools, art and design schools have predominantly become located within the IoT sector. Limerick School of Art & Design, The Crawford in Cork and Galway School of Art and Design for example all fall within the IoT sector. The Burren College of Art (BCA) is unique in that it does not share the lineage of other Irish art schools, being a small-scale independent operation, which has only been in existence since 1993. Although the Burren College of Art presents itself as being essentially autonomous, claiming that it operates ‘free of bureaucratic
silos,’ it is affiliated for the purposes of PhD award validation with National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) (Burren College of Art, 2014) as is the Huston School of Film and Digital Media which also offers doctoral level awards. The National College of Art & Design has in recent years come under the auspices of University College Dublin (UCD).

Several of IoTs in the Dublin region deliver art and design education. Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown (ITB) and Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT) were at the time of writing muted to be headed for merger into a large technological university. DIT and IADT both deliver doctoral level studies in art. In May 2012 the Higher Education Authority (HEA), commissioned a report into the provision of creative arts programs in Dublin. For those looking for more detailed information on institutions both public and private who preside over the delivery of higher education in the arts I direct them toward this resource (Higher Education Authority, 2013b).

2.5. The Influence of Britain

The British educational system has been the most abiding influence to affect Irish third level art and design education, throughout the last one hundred and fifty years. By Britain, I mean more particularly England. Baker (2009) notes that the evolution of the Australian art school, is similarly tied to the British system up until the 1970s when the influence of the US began to be more prominent. Art and Design schools in Ireland share the rich and varied histories of those in the UK. Some started out life as independent drawing schools which date back in some cases to the 18th century; others evolved out of the Victorian schools of ornamental design and others
still have only recently arrived on the scene as art and design departments embedded within the framework of bigger institutions. Even after control of art schools shifted from London to Ireland during the first half of the twentieth century, cultural and policy changes in Irish higher education in art and design, have tended to emulate changes taking place in Britain. Meagher (2002, p. 91) observes that in relation to education the position of the Irish church and state was one of consolidation, building upon ‘that which had been bequeathed to them’ by the British. While Meagher was speaking of primary and secondary level art and design education, the principle holds true for art and design schools.

In the later part of the twentieth century the influence of British art education particularly found its way into Irish art schools via the English members of staff who were favoured for tenure. With the exception of NCAD, which offered postgraduate courses from the 1980s, for most Irish art and design students, the terminal award was the Diploma in Art and Design with BA level courses only coming on stream in the early nineties. Quite simply British artists and designers were often qualified to a higher level than those emerging from Irish educational institutions and thus were more employable. Those graduating from British colleges were rewarded with posts in Irish art schools. Irish staff, who held post-graduate qualifications, would frequently, have achieved their terminal awards in establishments such as The Slade, Chelsea, The Royal College of Art, Central Saint Martins, University of Ulster and in my own case Goldsmiths College.

Changes to the culture of art and design higher education which have taken effect in the UK, have impacted in tandem, albeit slightly delayed, on the Irish system.
During the 20th century one of the most significant initiatives to impact on art and design education in Britain, and by proxy in Ireland, was the publication in 1960 by the National Advisory Council on Art Education of *The First Report the NACAE* (1960). Otherwise known as the Coldstream Report, this policy aimed at improving the status of art schools, while also calling for validation and oversight of courses by a centralised controlling body (Williamson, 2013). ‘Coldstream’ was instrumental in reshaping art and design education. Aspinall (2014) characterises the ‘Coldstream Report’ as:

> A graspable moment of displacement in the British art world. It represents a shift between an educational system based on disciplined studies of techniques and crafts to one based on conceptual thinking and design. Its legacy is marked by trauma and confusion that deepened as the decade matured, spilling over into creative outbursts of political revolt (Aspinall, 2014, [Un-paginated]).

Candlin (2001) argues that the practice-based PhD is a natural outcome of critically and politically aware practices; whilst also being the outcome of a series of politically motivated, conservative educational reforms such as the Coldstream Report and the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). She argues that the recommendations published by the NACAE (National Advisory Council on Art Education, 1960), proved to be hugely significant in providing an impetus for change to art at third level altering the nature of what it was possible to produce and teach within art schools and changing the relationship between practice and art theory and history of art. ‘Coldstream’ was the first step in a process whereby the activities of art schools could, slowly be brought into line with activities in other higher education institutions. Writing of the Australian system which has undergone a broadly similar process, Conomos (2009, p. 107) insists that the merging of art and design schools with universities has levied huge ‘socio-cultural, pedagogic, and perceptual pressure’
which have served to ‘neutralize’ artist/academics’ societal role as dissident intellectuals. Conomos makes an interesting point and this idea of the artist/academic as dissident intellectual is one which emerges later in this research.

2.6. The National Strategy of Higher Education to 2030

In 2011, within a climate of austerity measures, budgetary cost-cutting and public commentary, which saw a financial crisis translated into a public service crisis, the government published the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (DES, 2011). The Hunt Report, as it came to be known, proposed a reconfiguration of the Irish Higher Education Landscape on the basis that the current system is unsustainable. Even a cursory glance at the report is enough to reveal a shift in the language towards the language of neoliberalism, bringing to higher education, the principle that the market enables the highest expression of freedom. Embedded in the language of efficiency measures, competing global markets, delivering of value for money, economies of scale, critical mass and internationalisation, the document bears all the hallmarks of having been authored by an economist. One of the directives of the report is that programmes should align themselves ‘with the needs of stakeholders, particularly employers of graduates’ (DES, 2011, p. 100).

Chapter 8 of the Hunt Report (DES, 2011, p. 97) lays out a plan for the reconfiguration of the Higher Education landscape calling for a ‘coherent system of strong higher education institutions’ with ‘complementary and diverse missions for different institutions’ predicated on ‘regional collaborations between clusters of geographically proximate institutions.’ Hinfelaar (2012) refers to the plan as:

a highly ambitious programme of sector evolution supported, on the one hand, by mergers which should address a mixed agenda of rationalisation and efficiency gains
Both the Hunt Report and the OECD Review of Higher Education in Ireland (2006) laud the diversity which exists within the Irish system whilst simultaneously advocating rationalisation directed toward the eradication of ‘overlap and pooling of strength.’ Such efficiencies are to be ‘promoted and accelerated by incorporating appropriate incentives into the funding model for institutions’ (DES, 2011, p. 97).

Much as one may baulk at the language of these reports, it is true to say that the Irish sector has evolved in such a way as to produce overlap between the missions of IoTs and the universities. Hazelkorn (2005, p. 145) refers to such mission drift as the ‘convergence’ of institutional extremes, with IoTs becoming increasingly research active and universities emphasising employability and professional skills.

On the back of the Hunt recommendations, innumerable regional clustering strategies have been iterated and re-iterated, varying in terms of suggested configuration with each new rendition. Some IoTs have bandied together proclaiming themselves to be on a pathway to re-designation as Technological Universities, whilst a small number have decided to remain IoTs. In the mid-west for example, initially, the idea of a Munster Technological University was muted. This would consist of an alliance between Limerick Institutes of Technology (LIT), Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) and Tralee Institute of Technology (TI). LIT, under the presidency of Dr Hinfelaar, abandoned the strategy electing to remain a stand-alone Institute of Technology with a distinctive mission and a strong university alliance. By 2017 the idea of a mega-merger of six IoTs to include, Letterkenny IT, Athlone IT, Sligo IT, Dundalk IT, Galway & Mayo IT and LIT, resurfaced again. Toward the end of 2017, LIT under new presidency, had expressed its resistance to this configuration and had
determined to ‘go it alone’ behaving as though it were on a path to technological university status.

The Hunt Report (DES, 2011, p. 105) acknowledges the IoTs’ strong performance in the provision of NFQ level 6 and 7 awards, and their track record in providing access for non-traditional students and students from depressed social-economic backgrounds. The report, goes on to outline the distinguishing features of the technological university, as concentrating on provision at levels 6 to 8 with some involvement at level 9 and level 10, which it deems to be ‘appropriate to its mission.’ The majority of provision at higher levels, however, should occur within the existing universities. The Hunt Report suggests that IoTs should focus on the provision of NFQ level 6 and 7 apprenticeship courses while developing ‘pathways’ for advancement to higher awards at university level. IoTs however have seen significant drop off in applications to level 6 and 7 courses, with the majority of applicants seeking degree level qualifications (CAO 2017). Seeing that levels 6 and 7 constitute a diminished market share IoTs are reluctant to restrict themselves to the prevision of apprenticeships and trades.

2.7. Qualification Validation

Until recently validation for National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ) level 9 and 10 awards in the IoT sector came from Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), previously the Higher Education Training Council (HETAC). It is important to point out that QQI levels 8, 9 and 10 equate to European Framework for Qualifications (EFQ) levels 6, 7 and 8 representing BA (honours), master’s and PhD respectively. Over the course of the last five to ten years some IoTs had been successful in
attaining delegated authority to validate postgraduate research awards. The acquisition of delegated authority to award postgraduate degrees in areas of knowledge which had historically been excluded from academic recognition, represented a significant move forward for an array of discipline areas which had normally been excluded on the basis that they were not academic. Recent policy changes have resulted in the revoking of delegated authority for the awarding of all degrees at NFQ level 10 and some at level 9 (for example Professional Master’s in Education, or PMEs), with IoTs, regardless of the qualification levels of their staff, having to enter into agreements with co-operating universities for the purposes of validation of research awards (DES, 2011). Art schools, which predominantly fall under the auspices of the IoTs, have had to enter into collaborations with neighbouring universities to ensure the validation of NFQ level 10 awards.

The Crawford School of Art, Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) is an interesting case in that it does not have authority to offer degrees in visual art or design at level 10. Prospective art PhD students, who are enrolled on postgraduate art and design courses in the Crawford, may however follow a pathway to PhD study at CIT by locating their research within fields such as science and engineering where authority has been granted. As such, CIT encourages a system of inter-disciplinarity whereby mutually beneficial research synergies can occur within dedicated research hubs such as The Nimbus Centre for Embedded Systems Research.

2.8. GradCAM and other Irish Advocacy Entities

Established in 2008 and initially funded through the Program for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI), the Graduate School of Creative Arts and Media (GradCAM) was instigated as an all-island collaboration which intended to gain
critical mass by pulling together the graduate activities of the National College of Art and Design (NCAD), Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), the University of Ulster (UU) and the Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dún Laoghaire (IADT). The mission of GradCAM is to function as a centre for creative research development. GradCAM has contributed positively to the promotion of artistic research in Ireland and has acted as an advisory group in the drafting of guidelines for postgraduate arts practice research for the Higher Education Training and Awards Council (HETAC), as well as being a key partner in Step-Change for Higher Arts Research Education (SHARE). From 2010 to 2013 the SHARE network has been funded through the ERASMUS Lifelong Learning Programme and jointly coordinated by GradCAM, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and the European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA). SHARE is an international networking consortium whose goal is to enhance 3rd cycle art and design research. Mick Wilson, originally the director of GradCAM has subsequently gone on to play a key role in SHARE and has contributed to the literature on Artistic Research (Wilson, 2009; Wilson & Ruiten, 2013; Wilson, 2014a).

In 2008 the Higher Education and Training Awards Council in Ireland (HETAC), established the Working Group on Practice-based Research in the Arts. The group entered into discussion with stakeholders, including representatives from GradCAM, through focus groups, consultation and online questionnaires, and looked to develop guidelines under seven broad headings:

- Understanding and contextualising practice-based research in the arts;
- Qualifications and programme structures;
- The challenges of supervision;
- The research environment;
The presentation of the research and assessment;
Towards a code of good practice;
The economic dividend; current performance and future potential


The first iteration of the guidelines was presented as a part of an international conference entitled *Arts Research: The State of Play*, which took place in Dublin in 2008. After several iterations, the final refined document was published in 2010. Having considered extant discipline dependent and independent definitions the working group proffer the following description of artistic research:

Practice-based research in the arts is research which is centrally predicated on realising actual practice within the arts, but which, nevertheless, is consistent with the existence of a discipline-independent and generalised conception of research which comprehends practice-based research in the arts (Higher Education and Training Awards Council, 2010, p. 9).

The working group presents us with a definition of artistic research which foregrounds artistic practice while at the same time answering to the demands of discipline independent definitions. Interesting in the context of the broader debate which will unfold in the ensuing chapters, the group is vociferous in stating that, ‘arts practice in and of itself- art qua art- is not necessarily a research activity’ (p.8).

In recent years GradCAM has come under pressure due to a combination of factors including withdrawal of funding and the decreased engagement of the participating institutions, as is evidenced in a 2013 Program Validation Report for a proposed structured PhD. The report highlighted the logistical problems around validating awards for students who were more properly registered within other institutions. Without explicitly saying so, the panel also hinted at fissures which were beginning to appear in the collaboration. Recommending that the UU and IADT logos be removed from the proposed program documentation as, neither of these institutions
would ‘be involved in awarding doctoral degrees in which GradCAM are involved.’

The report went on to describe GradCAM ‘as a creature of DIT and NCAD’ (Hyland, 2013, pp. 5-6). In the end, the panel refused to validate the proposed program recommending that GradCAM should change the proposal to look for validation for the delivery of an element of the award. As this study was reaching completion, anecdotal evidence suggested that NCAD had also distanced itself from involvement with GradCAM. An Irish doctoral candidate enrolled in an institution outside of Ireland, speaking to me of the organisation, referred to it as ‘GradSCAM.’ Some of the difficulties experienced by the GradCAM ‘experiment,’ as it was heralded, could be said to be born out of trying to marry institutions which fall under the governance of stakeholders situated in diverse sectors.

Anecdotally one of the criticisms levied against GradCAM over recent years has been that its focus has been ‘Dublin-centric.’ Outside of Dublin, operating under the name Bresal, the Burren College of Art has collaborated with The Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick (UL) and the Huston School of Film and Digital Media, National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG). These three institutions have co-operated in the promotion of creative practice research, delivering symposia on performative and artistic research in the west and southwest of Ireland. At a 2015 workshop entitled ‘Mind the Gap’ which took place in the National College of Art and Design, a proposal was tabled for the establishment of a new national association for the promotion of creative and artistic research which was to be called CARP, Creative Arts Research and Practice. The association was to include stakeholders from visual arts; digital arts and multimedia; lens and film-based art; design and architecture; sonic arts; music; dance; theatre,
drama; performance and creative writing. At the time of writing the proposed constitution was at embryonic draft stage but included aspirations to do with acquiring research funding; encouraging the publication/exhibition of creative research; establishing a register of qualified supervisor and examiners; fostering opportunities for interdisciplinary creative research and the establishment of a repository of exemplars of good practice in completed PhD work. Other areas of need identified at the CARP meeting included the originating of a peer review system for practice-based research, the establishing of a set of national protocols and the instituting of national standards for the evaluation of arts practice outputs. It should be noted that many of the aims and objectives outlined by CARP overlap with those of GradCAM.

Very close to the submission of this study, a further advocacy forum came into existence. With a focus on artistic research in the performing arts, Imbas, is comprised of an ad hoc group of University-based academics and performers which includes partners from the IWAMD, Mary Immaculate College (MIC), University College Cork (UCC) and NUIG.

2.9. The Irish Research Council & Higher Education Authority

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is the statutory funding authority for Irish higher education institutions and has responsibility for advising the Minister for Education and Skills on planning, policy and development in the sector. The HEA’s vision for the future development of the sector is set out in The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (DES, 2011). Operating under the aegis of the HEA, the Irish Research Council (IRC) was established in 2012 under the Government’s Public Sector Reform Plan, through the merging of the Irish Research Council for
Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) and Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology (IRCSET). The IRC aims to foster a ‘healthy research ecosystem’ through support for individual early stage researchers in a diverse range of areas including the Arts. The language used to set out the IRC’s mandate while retaining the language of efficiency measures and accountability, also speaks of well-being, nurturing, support. Moreover, it talks of providing ‘opportunities for excellent researchers with excellent ideas, regardless of the discipline or research topic’ (Higher Education Authority, 2014, p. 6).

It is important, at this juncture, to acknowledge that Irish HEIs have not been subject to the kinds of research assessment exercises which have prevailed in the UK or Australia. For example, funding for HEIs in Ireland has not been allocated on the basis of research productivity. Instead a core grant is distributed, based on a standard per capita amount, worked out by dividing total available funding by total weighted student numbers. Point three of the HEA’s, Recurrent Grant Funding Model (RGFM) of 2014, however signals a phasing in of performance related funding, stating that it is, ‘proposed that up to 10% of the annual core recurrent grant will be linked to performance by HEIs in delivering on national objectives set for the sector.’ The model aims to ‘provide meaningful accountability to various stakeholders.’ In addition, there is a strong indication that HEIs will be encouraged to look beyond state funding to access alternative revenue streams. The model looks to ‘provide positive incentives to institutions to diversify and increase their income from no-state sources, consistent with their mission’ (Higher Education Authority, 2014a).
Accountability is to be measured against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Objective 4 of The Higher Education System Performance Framework 2014-2016 lays out the Government’s agenda with regard to Higher Education Research Development (HERD). The objective speaks of striving for increased commercialization of research activity through spinouts and licencing agreements; increasing enrolments of PhD students onto structured PhD programmes and an increasing alignment of research activity with ‘priority areas.’ Particular attention is given to the monitoring of the funding of public investment in Science, Technology and Innovation (Higher Education Authority, 2014b). The first report of the National Research Prioritisation Exercise explicitly prioritizes science, technology and innovation (Higher Education Authority, 2014c). Although a system such as the RAE is unlikely to be established within the Irish system, pressures regarding accountability to external stakeholders grows. Within this environment it remains to be seen how the Irish system will accommodate, and indeed foster the unconventional research activities proffered by fledgling artist researchers.

On foot of recommendations by the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, the HEA and the QQI in consultation with the Irish Universities Association and Institutes of Technology Ireland, developed the National Framework for Doctoral Education (2015). The framework sets out a set of nine core principles which are to underpin doctoral education in Ireland. Stressing robust quality assurance mechanisms and successful completion, enshrined in the principles is an acknowledgement of the uniqueness of each PhD and recognition of the possibility that theses may be submitted in ‘a variety of formats.’ The principles are reproduced in their entirety in Appendix K.
2.10. Summary

Staking out the lay of the land, this chapter provided an overview of the International and national level contexts relevant to the delivery of tertiary art and design education. It also discussed policy imperatives which are acting on Irish art and design institutions and the VAP PhD. The chapter also identified advocacy groups which are working toward the development of research cultures in artistic research. While providing an overview of contexts, in order to properly appreciate the nuances of the phenomenon under investigation, it is necessary to look at the VAP PhD diachronically. The next chapter situates the VAP PhD within its historical context in the UK and Ireland and engages with the debates which emerged as doctoral level study in art and design began to take a tentative foothold within the landscape of higher education.
Chapter 3 Academies, Ateliers, Armageddon and Artistic Research

3.1. Introduction

Solleveld (2012a, p. 80) acknowledges ‘a glaring gap in the post-war historiography of higher arts education’ and while this chapter does not attempt to fill that lacuna, a tracing of the contours of some key features of the historical background is important to contextualise the study. This chapter examines the historical context for the institutionalisation of art in the UK; tracing a line from the Academy of the eighteenth century, through to the Coldstream Report of the 1960s arriving at a discussion of contemporary higher education institutions. There is justification for examining the UK context. Ireland and the UK have a shared history with developments in Ireland following along a similar trajectory to those in the UK, even after the establishment of the Republic.

The impact of the First Report the National Advisory Council on Arts Education NACAE (1960), otherwise known as the Coldstream Report, is evaluated as a turning point which precipitated the enculturation of art education into the norms and values of the university. The recommendations enshrined in the Coldstream Report had a profound effect on tertiary art and design education in the UK. This was a policy, which transgressed geographical and administrative boundaries influencing developments in Irish third level art and design education. The chapter concludes with a discussion of art and design education within the contemporary context, examining the impact of national and supranational forces which are effecting change across all strata of the educational landscape.
3.2. The Institutionalisation of Art

Describing the relationship between art and academia as both uneasy and challenging, Borgdorff (2010, p. 44) states that ‘the issue of demarcation between the artistic and the academic’ has been one of the most prescient debates in artistic research over the past two decades. There is some justification then for looking to the history of the institutionalisation of art as a means of establishing context for this investigation. A distinction must be drawn between the use of the term academy to refer in a specific sense to a society of learned persons and the more generalised term of a place of higher learning. The chapter begins by reflecting on the academy in the specific sense and moves to consider visual arts in relation to the academy as a more general place of higher learning.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century academies functioned as loci of professionalization and were engaged in the teaching, exhibiting and promotion of Art. In 1761 Mengs (2000, p. 641) had defined the Academy as:

> An assembly of men the most expert in science or in art, their object being to investigate truth, and to find the fixed rules always conducting to progress and perfection (Mengs, 2000, p. 641).

Although not established until 1768, substantially later than its European counterparts, the Royal Academy (RA) in Britain quickly became the foremost establishment intermediating between cultural markets and visual culture. Fyfe (2000, pp. 118-120) notes that academicians had quickly become a ‘privileged corps of celebrated living painters.’ Countless portraits testify to the elevated status of these artists. Donned in academic robes and displaying the accolades of academic success; the protagonists are usually set against backdrops of classical friezes and
busts, highlighting their supposed connection to the eternal laws of beauty which were to be found embodied in the marbles of Herculaneum and Pompeii. In Ireland, although similar institutions such as the Royal Dublin Society (RDS) and the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) had been established in 1732 and 1785 respectively, London proved a more interesting and lucrative destination for artists attempting to forge a professional career. Drawing on the theories of Bourdieu and stating that the power of the Royal Academy ran deep, Fyfe describes the context as ‘a field of interdependencies, conflicts and institutional associations’ which formed ‘a space of relations and positions in which artists, critics and other cultural agents determine legitimate art.’ It would be incorrect to characterize the academy as stagnant and impervious to change. Trodd and Denis (2000, pp. 2-3) detailing a broad range of activities, suggest ‘a richness and fluidity of ideas and practices’ which were typical of academies. They cite ‘assimilation and absorption’ as key characteristics. Academicians invested their efforts in the upholding of connoisseurial values focusing on notions of skill, taste and professionalism through a process of incremental adjustment and mutual consensus.

Connoisseurship as Herbert Reed described it, is associated with judgement rather than taste, involving ‘a combination of sensibility and knowledge’ (Holst, 1967, p. 4). Trodd and Denis maintain that nineteenth century academies provided a forum for negotiation and debate, ‘gradually adjusting their meanings through continual consensus-building and the constant reaffirmation of institutional authority’ (p. 6). Drawing on the writings of Gibbon, Craske (1997) makes the point that standardization of professional practice led to the establishment of common criteria.
of achievement arrived at through a process of emulation; arising out of a context of competition between European nations.

While the academy was an early step in the institutionalization of art, it was precisely when academic orthodoxy was at its most authoritarian that dynamic, counter-cultural, avant-garde forces critiqued the academy on the basis that its values epitomized the penchants of the bourgeoisie. In Britain opposition came in the form of the moralising and painstakingly detailed work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood; a group who referred to Sir Joshua Reynolds, President of the Royal Academy as ‘Sloshua,’ but whom themselves where referred to by Dickens (1998, p. 438) as ‘a convocation of eternal boobies.’ In France, resistance found expression in the guise of the irreverent Courbet and the squadrons of bearded artists who fashioned themselves as social realist, peasant painters. Thoré (1998, p. 457) in his critique of the Salon of 1861 decried the mythological paintings which populated the exhibition as false, feeble, prudish and melodramatic while in October 1863 the de Goncourt Brothers (1998, p. 417) delighting in the spectacle of Japanese obscenities, famously declaring, ‘Looking at them, I think of Greek Art, boredom in perfection, art which will never free itself of the crime of being academic!’

By extending the exhibiting of their work into unconventional spaces, Harrison et al., (1998, p. 312) argue that radical French artists were initiating a process whereby alternative patterns of practice would begin to emerge ‘in cohort with a nascent capitalist market.’ The artists who exhibited in the many Salon des Refusés, which took place from 1863 on, may have espoused the motto ‘no more juries’ but as Biggs
and Karlsson (2010b, p. 406) point out, even those eschewing the authority of institutions could not escape adjudication:

Much as art might react against, and even define itself, as that which cannot be categorized judged or otherwise standardized, nonetheless the conventionalization of actions by institutions and even communities of practice themselves, follow hard on the tail of anyone maintaining the view of art as revolutionary, unclassifiable and beyond qualitative judgements (Biggs & Karlsson, 2010b, p. 406).

Anti-academic sentiment in Ireland expressed itself most forcibly, much later, after the Irish War of Independence and through the efforts of Anglo-Irish artists, mostly women, who had trained in France and in England and who formed themselves into the Dublin Society of Painters. Barber (2013, p. 60) notes that the establishment of the Society was ‘a typical avant-garde gambit in its rejection of the RHA, and a desire to provide an alternative exhibiting venue for young artists.’ Later avant-garde influences came in the form of the *Irish Exhibition of Living Art* (IELA) of 1943 and the activities of the White Stag Group.

### 3.3. The Expansion of Art & Design Education

While the spaces for the exhibiting of art began to extend beyond the purview of the salon, nineteenth century Britain saw a significant growth in the number and type of sites dedicated to the provision of art and design education. Instigated under the direction of Henry Cole in the wake of the Great Exhibition of 1851, the schools of ornamental design were established with the mission to address a perceived decline in the artistic quality of manufactured goods which became ‘painfully evident during the Great Crystal Palace Exposition of 1851’ (Efland, 1990, p. 50). As such, schools of ornamental design were, from their inception, founded on utilitarian principles and were intended to be aligned with the needs of industry, whilst also promoting good
taste. Meagher (2002) writing of the UK and Irish schools, points out that the focus in these institutions was primarily on drawing which sat in terms of academic accomplishment next to the three ‘Rs.’ Drawing or rendering, was a skill which was essential to the artisan and instilled an ethos of orderliness desirable in the factory worker.

While a preoccupation with drawing directed towards to needs of industry and the improvement of public taste were the founding principles which underscored the schools of ornamental design at their inception, the pedagogic and curricular foci of these institutions transformed over time, fed by a plethora of conceptual standpoints which have emanated from evolving sociocultural, technological and economic circumstances.

Throughout the twentieth century waves of theoretical positions on art in education filtered into British and Irish art school education contributing to the complex ecosystems or academic cultures of these institutions (Buckley & Conomos, 2009). The utilitarianism of the Victorian period was followed by instrumentalism; expressionism; the influence of child art; organicism; modernism; discipline-based art education and cultural studies (Meagher, 2002). None of these standpoints was obliterated by successive movements. Art and design school cultures instead, through a process of accretion carried and held within them, pedagogical and curricular traces of all the conceptual landscapes through which they had passed. From the guilds to the academies and ateliers of Europe, the impact of the arts and crafts movement is felt alongside that of the Bauhaus and the discipline-based and behaviourist movements of the United States. Innumerable local and global
influences have found entry into art school education via the eclectic experiences of those who have participated in these institutions. The art school educational culture then, could be described as highly malleable and context sensitive, whereby influences acting on staff and students, quickly find expression in pedagogical and curricular activity.

By the 1960s, Beck and Cornford (2012, p. 61) maintain, the art school in the UK had become synonymous with values and practices that were ‘outward-looking, international, experimental’ these values they claim functioned as a counterpoint to British social and cultural identity. Characterising the art school as a space where members from diverse social classes could come together, they point out that for the working-class student, the art college operated as a ‘portal through which the most advanced cultural debates and practices of the time could be encountered.’ The art school was, they say, a space where tradecraft and high art collided and was experienced by a socially diverse student body. As such the British art school was ‘an engine of unforeseen cultural outcomes.’ Fallon (1994, p. 183) observes that in the late 1960s in Ireland, student unrest in the National College of Art and Design had ‘led to the ending of conservative minded, academic clique which had dominated it.’ Students rallied against the establishment in a series of work-ins, walk outs and a famous episode of vandalism which Turpin (1995, p. 488) refers to as ‘the smashing of the plaster casts.’ It is precisely, at this time, within a typology of student rebellion, that predominantly right wing educational reforms began to be enacted in the UK and it is partially as a consequence of changes, effected on the back of these essentially conservative policies that the PhD in Visual Arts Practice finds its geneses (Candlin, 2001).

In a section entitled *Armageddon*, McDonald (2005, p. 207) identifies the establishment of the National Advisory Council on Arts Education (NACAE) in 1958 in the UK, as a first step in the ‘slaughter of art and design education.’ The NACAE whose mission it was to raise the standard of art education and to foster greater co-operation with industry, initiated the colonisation of art schools and academies, firstly by polytechnics and subsequently by universities. MacDonald maintains that:

> with supreme contempt, the Council had swept away the remainder of the systematic national system of art education, the progressive methods initiated by the teachers of the Arts and Crafts movement, and the network scheme of approved Regional Colleges (McDonald, 2005, p. 207).

Otherwise known as the Coldstream Report (1960), this initiative was instrumental in reshaping art and design education in the UK and by proxy in Ireland. One of the upshots of the recommendations made in the report was the establishment of a Diploma in Art and Design (Dip AD).

Pevsner, who served on the Coldstream committee, was dedicated to the notion that theory should underpin artistic practice, and it was he who insisted that history of art and design and ‘complementary studies’ should be necessary elements on diploma courses (Borg, 2009). Implicit in this recommendation was the notion that studio-based courses required a written thesis usually art historical, which would confer upon the practice-based degrees, academic rigour and credibility. History of Art and Complementary Studies was to constitute no less than 15% of the curriculum (National Advisory Council on Art Education, 1960). Insistence on the inclusion of these subjects could be seen as evidence of a tendency to view art practice as non-
academic and something that has more to do with intuition, inspiration and talent rather than any intellectual engagement. Candlin (2001, p. 304) argues that the consigning of history of art and complimentary studies to a discrete and independently assessed area of the curriculum contributed to an already growing schism between practice and theory. However, she goes on to acknowledge that the eclectic nature of what was called at the time ‘complementary studies’ allowed for freedom within the system, stating that the ‘lack of structured and rigorous education in art history gave room to more marginal groups and critical stances.’

Taking a less jaundiced view of the development of the field than McDonald, Allison (1991) says that the creation of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design in 1965 was the first step in the elevating of academic standards in art and design. The second stage, he claims, came in 1975 when the granting of degree level and higher awards came into effect under the auspices of the newly created Council for National Academic Awards system of regulation (CNAA). The UK art and design school was travelling along a trajectory, which would see it assimilate with the polytechnics, these in turn by 1992 were ultimately conferred with university status. Art and design, Allison maintains, had undoubtedly benefited from assimilation into multidisciplinary institutions stating that ‘art and design has derived a great deal of benefit from contact with the wider constituency of research activity’ (Allison, 1991, p. 157). Brian Allison is credited as being the first fine artist to have been awarded a traditional PhD in the UK in 1970 (Langrish, 2000 cited in Bogh, 2009). He was also responsible for establishing the Allison Research Index of Art and Design (ARIAD); the first serious attempt to provide a database for the recording of art and
design research activity. This database was the predecessor of the Art and Design Index to Theses (ADIT).

While in the UK, art and design schools moved into universities, Ireland saw some art and design schools assimilated with Regional Technical Colleges (RTCs) an early incarnation of the Institutes of Technology (IoTs). Irish art and design schools in the main were not to be assimilated into the university sector, however for reasons already outlined, changes wrought by enculturation of UK art and design schools into the university sector had effect in Ireland. Changes included; the instigation of requirements for history of art and complementary studies which constituted at least 15% of the art and design course; the establishment of the Dip AD and later the BA in Fine Art and the BA in Design and albeit at a much later stage, the evolution of master’s and doctoral level awards in art and design.

Stating that the practice-based PhD has a ‘Dual Inheritance,’ and specifically referencing feminist art, conceptual art, social art history and post-structuralist theory, Candlin (2001) argues that the practice-based PhD is a natural outcome of critically and politically aware practices; whilst also being the outcome of a series of politically motivated, conservative educational reforms such as the Coldstream Report and the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). She argues that the recommendations published by the NACAE (1960), proved to be hugely significant in providing an impetus for change to art at third level, altering the nature of what it was possible to produce and teach within art schools. In addition, recommendations changed the relationship between practice and art theory and history of art. Critically aware practices, she maintains, functioned as a challenge to the modernist orthodoxy and practice-based PhDs growing out of this tradition would function as a challenge
to conservative orthodoxy. Conversely practice-based PhDs, could be seen as a growing out of conservative policies which repositioned art schools within the polytechnic and university sectors. As such, the artistic PhD can be ‘considered as part and parcel of the departmental need to self-account both financially and academically’ (p. 308). Interestingly Candlin notes, that while administrative concerns might shape the kind of work that it is possible to produce within an academic research context, administration itself is not particularly concerned with the quality or nature of work produced, directing its attention to issues such as quantity of students and outputs.

At the end of a lengthy career in the service of art and design education, Prof Thompson in a speech given at his retirement from Goldsmith’s College, decried changes wrought, as a result of the colonising of educational discourse by neo-liberalising forces. Describing William Coldstream as a ‘libertarian socialist with a pronounced anarchistic bent,’ whose aim was the enrichment of art education, Thompson (2005, p. 219) refers to the implementation of the Coldstream recommendations as a betrayal at every turn. He argues that by yielding to the process of systematisation enforced by university administrators, fine art had turned its back on its own history and principles becoming subject to an ‘array of indiscriminate, marginally corrupt and largely unaccountable bodies like the QAA and the Research Assessment Exercise.’ Fine Art he claims had ‘sacrificed its birth-right for a mess of University potage.’ The gradual programatising and academicising of fine art education occurred he claims, as a direct result of the implementation of a market-led model of higher education, which was dreamed up by the second Thatcherite government. Critical of the tendency to talk about
educational standards in general terms, he says, that as an artist he was more used to thinking about quality as ‘an apopthegmatic absolute’ rather than the measuring of inputs and outputs. Disagreeing with the notion that fine art, he conceived of as an academic subject like other subjects, Thompson claims that fine art learning happens through personally directed material and conceptual experimentation. He offers the following description of fine art:

fine art is not a subject of study. It does not define itself by negotiating boundaries with other subjects. Nor is it a discipline. It has no ‘root’ or normative rules of procedure. Rather, it is a loose assemblage of first-order materially based activities taking place in a speculative existential territory that has no boundaries and is designed, as Guattari so aptly describes it, to ‘extract complex forms from chaotic material’ (Thompson, 2005, p. 218).

Arguing that assimilation into the university and polytechnic sectors has involved the relinquishing of pedagogical traditions founded on the relationship between the teacher and the taught, Thompson implies that the Coldstream initiative was a death nail in the coffin of fine art education.

Particularly disparaging of what he describes as the ‘bogus and highly misleading nature of what is referred to as ‘research-led teaching ethos’ and the ‘spurious recasting of fine art as research’ (p. 223), Thompson iterates forcibly the point that artists do not go into studios in order to make research but in order to produce art. He is adamant that art works cannot be describable as measurable research outcomes ‘with or without attendant explanatory text or illustrated catalogue.’ To claim so, he says, ‘is to belittle the practice of art themselves and reduce them to mere scholarship,’ the creations of the artist being far more significant than the outputs generated by those writing about art (pp. 222-223).
Jewesbury (2009, p. 1) similarly maintains that the research agenda in fine art institutions has been ‘thoroughly counterproductive,’ and that the status of the artist teacher has been utterly undermined and devalued within higher education institutions. Such is the drive for academics to secure their own tenure through attracting research funding, that the artist teacher has been forced to justify and redefine their artistic activity as research, lest they be ‘locked out of career advancement’ and maintained in tenuous posts with little hope of progression.

3.5. Technical Rationality

Thompson’s concern regarding the colonization of educational discourse with the language of the market is shared by other educationalists (Ball, 1995; Apple, 1997; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Giroux, 2002; 2010; Gopal, 2013). The thrust of this argument is by now familiar. Giroux (2010, p. 184) argues that educational principles founded on critical thinking, moral judgement and social responsibility are being obliterated in the face of ‘market driven competitiveness’ and ‘militaristic goal setting.’ Olssen and Peters (2005) state that under the forces of neoliberalism, education is conceived of as an input-output system prized for its ability to drive economic production:

The traditional professional culture of open intellectual enquiry and debate has been replaced with a[sic] institutional stress on performativity, as evidenced by the emergence of an emphasis on measured outputs: on strategic planning, performance indicators, quality assurance measures and academic audits (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p. 313).

Contemporary education could be said to be dominated by an audit culture preoccupied with metrics of accountability and pervaded at every level by technical rationalism which has become deeply internalized within the system (Apple, 1997; 60
Looney, 2001; Nowotny, et al., 2003). Discourse around education has undoubtedly become permeated by procedural theories which have their genesis in the Tyler rationale, as expounded in *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (Tyler, 1949). Kliebard (1970) in his critique of 1970, was already highlighting the reductionist nature of this model cautioning against the wholesale uncritical acceptance of the Tyler rationale, he states that:

> the simplistic notion that evaluation is a process of matching objectives with outcomes leaves much to be desired. It ignores what may be the more significant latent outcomes in favour of the manifest and anticipated ones, and it minimizes the vital relationship between means and ends (Kliebard, 1970, p. 270).

Speaking of the colonization of education by the Tyler paradigm, Apple (1997, p. 342) argues that what has ensued has been, the expunging of cultural and political conflict as foci of curriculum debate. The prevalence of technical rationality in educational discourse has in Apple’s opinion, exacerbated a situation whereby, neoconservative ideologies have infiltrated and held sway over curriculum policymaking and educational discourse, shifting the emphasis of the debate away from issues of social democracy and equality towards concerns about the inculcation of quantifiably measurable skills and competencies directed toward the private sector. Economically and culturally powerful groups, Apple points out, have been able to direct educational discourse into their own domain by laying emphasis on standardization and productivity. A core feature of this system is the imperative of accountability.

Writing from an Irish context and echoing somewhat Thompson’s position on the nature of an education in art and design, Granville (2012, p. 40) contends that the turn towards technical rationalism with its emphasis on clearly articulated outcomes
and outputs presents a significant challenge to a subject like art & design which is characterized by an ‘inherent orientation towards divergent thinking’ and ‘intuitive processes of working.’ Granville highlights the educative significance of failing as a means of resolving issues in art design. Arguably, the values which are said to be eroded by the technical rationalisation of education; critical thinking, moral judgement and social responsibility are those which have come to be held up as core attributes or goals of contemporary art practice. This is particularly true in the case of art which claims to be socially engaged. Sustained and vociferous criticism from practitioners and curriculum scholars alike has done little to stem the colonisation of anglo-phone and European curricular processes, policy and thought with behaviourist and procedural theories predicated on the Tyler rationale.

Whereas in the past pedagogic practices in art and design had been founded on the master/apprentice relationship, the atelier model or a myriad of other idiosyncratic practices, there is now an almost pandemic insistence that educational practices be framed in terms of ‘learning outcomes.’ Drawing on Dabord’s theory of the spectacle, Brancalone & O’Brien (2011, p. 504), identify the learning outcome as the key ‘didactic instrument’ which facilitates the commodification and quantitative evaluation of education as it yields to the forces of neoliberalism. Learning outcomes, they claim ‘present a site of exchange value between learner and ‘provider,’ characterised in economic value terms as customer-learner, producer-teacher.’ Policies, which emphasise learning outcomes often, re-designate the academic as facilitator, trainer or purveyor of skills. All of these terms represent an eroding of the academic’s professional status, reducing education to the simple task of transfer of skills and competencies.
On a bureaucratic level, learning outcomes are integral to the modus operandi of the European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF) (2008) and are perceived as a key transparency instrument through which the principles, practices and ‘products’ of higher education can come under the scrutiny of quality assurance agencies and funding bodies. Calls for the harmonization of learning outcomes pervade the various communiqués emanating from the Bologna Process. Trow (2010, p. 598) describes Bologna as a ‘top down politically driven process’ with little input from the European academic community. In addition to homogenous modular architectures and the pan European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ECTS), learning outcomes are a key instrument through which the Bologna project intends to aid mobility and encourage internationalization across the European higher education landscape.

On the surface, the Bologna Project would seem to have been compliantly adopted by Irish Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), with Ireland attaining high scores in all areas of implementation as evidenced by the European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report (2012). Stressing the homogenising nature of the Bologna instruments, Bogh (2009, p. 65) states that the Bologna Declaration, with its emphasis on quality assurance has exerted pressure on higher education to ‘converge towards central and shared standards’ forcing academics to arrive at ‘an ideal model’ which is driving heterogeneity out of art education.

Notwithstanding what could be seen as homogenizing and reductive forces exerted by the ‘Bolognaisation’ of higher education; the process has been instrumental in facilitating the academisation of artistic practice at post-graduate level through its championing of the three-cycle system of bachelor’s, master’s and doctorate or PhD
(Kjørup, 2010; Kälvemark, 2010; Borgdorff, 2012). Borgdorff (2012, p. 117) states that rather than viewing Bologna as a threat, arts educators should view the initiative as an opportunity which will facilitate entry of artistic research into the topology of higher education. Despite being faced with EU dictates, Maharaj (2004a, p. 167) argues that for art educators, there is always the option to ‘ignore those bureaucrats and invent something that is specific to the conditions and the histories in which we are working.’ Academics and students in the arts, seeking parity of esteem with colleagues in other disciplines, have welcomed the opportunity to attain third cycle academic credentials in their own disciplines, regardless of being faced with the daunting task of preserving their own traditions which are often at odds with externally determined structures.

3.6. Hard Managerialism, Rankings and the Reputations Race

In his analysis of the British system, Trow (2010, p. 273) points to a growing tendency towards what he refers to as ‘hard managerialism’ in higher education whereby governance is increasingly removed from the hands of the academic community and is displaced into the domain of externally driven administrative structures. This form of managerialism which has become the dominant feature of governance in the HE sector is, according to Trow, driven by an impulse to locate a ‘bottom line that performs the function of a profit and loss sheet for commercial business’ and is characterised by a withdrawal of trust in academic communities’ capacity as professionals to critically evaluate and improve policies, processes and procedures. Responsibility now comes to lie in the hands of external quality assurance bodies whose remit it is to make academics accountable. Claiming that accountability has been ‘deeply internalised’ within systems, Nowotny et al. (2003, 64
argue that it would be wrong to claim that accountability is being foisted on HEs ‘by hostile external forces, even if mutual trust, once rooted on the collision of political, administrative and academic elites, has been eroded.’ While it may be difficult to pinpoint precisely from where pressure to conform is emanating, it is nonetheless the case that HEIs are coming under increasing pressure to meet externally determined criteria of achievement.

While HEIs restructure to meet the demands of the Bologna process and quality assurance agencies, there is at the same time growing pressure to perform well in the ‘reputations race.’ HEIs are amending priorities and structures in an effort to attain the dubious accolade of excellence in global ranking systems and research assessment exercises. Hazelkorn (2009, p. 12) indicates that there is compelling evidence that rankings are exerting an influence on curriculum and priorities and are having ‘a profound impact on academic decision-making and behaviour, with implications for the structure of systems and the organization of institutions.’ Elsewhere Hazelkorn (2011, p. 21) drawing on the theories of Gramsci and Foucault in relation to hegemony and surveillance, observes that, ‘rankings create hierarchies by establishing a ‘single norm for excellence’, which are turned into mechanisms or tools of differentiation.’ This differentiation is achieved by measurement and quantification systems which give the appearance of statistical rigour. As Foucault (1991, p. 195) puts it ‘Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere.’ Rankings exert power opaquely whilst simultaneously giving the illusion of transparency.

Drawing on Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital, Hazelkorn (2011, p. 24) states that ‘rankings elevate and fetishize particular conceptions of status, creating a social
norm against which all institutions are measured that quietly insinuates itself into public discourse.’ Ball (1995, p. 259) frames it thus, through ‘a combination of financial restructuring and Faustian deal-making, the academy is tamed’ as research funding becomes increasingly harnessed to the policy agendas of government. While particular conceptions of status are fetishized in the rankings race, certain types of research knowledge count for more than, and in turn are prioritized over others, being more amenable to capture by quantitative control, bibliometric and citation measuring systems (Looney, 2014).

Within this environment of supranational audits, quality assurance and verification systems the ‘Doctorate’ or ‘PhD’ is coming under growing public scrutiny as the gold standard academic credential. Tennant (2009) states that ‘critical appraisals’ of the PhD are being conducted within a context which is typified by:

concerted efforts by governments, accreditation agencies, and peak bodies to regulate and control universities, largely through more rigorous accreditation provisions, audit mechanisms, and requirements relating to standards and quality assurance processes (Tennant, 2009, p. 225).

Boud & Lee (2009, p. 1) claim that the PhD is ‘becoming subject to the influence of policy-makers and others wanting to shape directions for development’ while McWilliams (2009, p. 189) notes that PhD student themselves ‘count literally as performance indicators, as quantifiable units of enrolments and timely completions.’

3.7. New Orthodoxy in Higher Education and the Art School

In her evaluation of Irish Art Schools, Hazelkorn (2005, pp. 138-143), states that art schools are beginning to awaken to the fact that the HE system is not ‘benign’ but is driven by competition and market forces. Irish schools of art and design, may in the
past have been protected by ‘history, mission or governance’ (Hazelkorn, 2011, p. 29), enjoying the autonomy to conduct their business according to their own idiosyncratic educational cultures, drawing on subject specific curricular epistemologies and pedagogies, however, Irish art schools have at last come to the realisation that they too need to respond to issues affecting the HE sector. Issues such as internationalization, globalization, demographic changes in student population and the ‘stricter regulatory environment.’ She states:

The realization that arts/culture products and services can be economically significant has fundamentally changed the way in which both art schools and industry interact with each other; across the globe, cultural districts are an increasingly important part of city and regional economic development strategies, providing shared/collaborative space for, SMEs, incubator units or start up facilities, and cultural organizations (Hazelkorn, 2005, p. 140).

For a time, idiosyncratic art school curricular architecture may have been accommodated within mainstream systems, however growing pressure from externally driven supranational organizations implies acquiescence to and enculturation into the norms and regulations which govern all HEIs.

Irish art & design schools under the governance of the IoTs, have made many concessions when it has come to their curricular and pedagogic traditions, acquiescing to modularisation and output led philosophies of teaching, learning and assessment. The art school and the IoT may seem to be unlikely bedfellows, however it could be argued, that under the governance of the IoTs, albeit with concessions, art schools has been reasonably well accommodated, and the autonomy of the art school has been upheld. For examples modules have, thus far, been allowed to be long and fat. Within academic regulations and procedures, special regulations have been put in place to accommodate art and design, and the
professional practice of artist and designer academics has been allowed to count as research for the purposes of staff promotion. Autonomy and traditions have up to recently been protected through the efforts of art and design staff, many of whom had trained in Britain and had lived through the Coldstream era. Of late however the process of enculturation into the norms and values of mainstream academia has been hastened on the back of government policies incentivizing early retirement which have resulted in a rapid leeching of knowledge, tradition, expertise and arguably resistance out of the system as tenured positions are replaced (when indeed they are replaced) with part-time, casual staff. As an aside, I would argue that, the wholesale and uncritical introduction of digital applications for the administering of education has hastened a reductive standardisation in education, effecting changes which are predicated on efficiency and accountability and not on best educational practice or theory.

Art and design education, is coming under mounting pressure to orient itself in the direction of the corporate sector and has become the focus of many mapping exercises. The *Dublin Creative Arts Review Report* (2013a, p. 43) states that arts education institutions are required to evolve ‘clear pathways…to identifiable outcomes’ asserting that, ‘Industry needs to have a voice at the table, while also respecting academic freedom.’ The same report, in a section entitled, ‘Small is not always beautiful…’ refers to smaller art academies, schools and institutions as ‘boutique,’ a word used to describe small, elite shops (p. 48). The Creative Arts Report calls for ‘critical mass’ through the formation of ‘clusters’ across, disciplines, institutions and/or geographical boundaries.
By appropriating art and design research activity into HE clusters, it is hoped that discipline boundaries will become permeable, allowing for the transference of knowledge. Clustering exercises may well provide artist/academics with opportunities to create interesting research synergies with other disciplines however as Steigler (2008, p. 14) points out, the cluster model is ‘hyperconsumerist,’ requiring that creatives to be ‘penned together inside golden ghettos designed to encourage their mutual stimulation.’ The intellectual property generated within these clusters would enter into a process of becoming directly economic, supported by structures for the ‘speedy commercialization’ of outputs (DES, 2011, p. 22). Within the current climate, art practice research must account for itself not only in terms of its intrinsic cultural value or its contribution to knowledge in the field but in terms of its ability to drive innovation and to produce measurable and marketable outputs.

3.8. Falling between Two Stools

Biggs and Büchler (2010, p. 84) argue that the expedient academisation of creative practice has led to a rupture between actions and values. The arts community have had to acquiesce to the norms and values of the academic community which have not evolved naturally out of the field and are not part of the internal coherence of the communities constituting behaviours, ‘meaningful actions’ or ‘significant activities.’ Many of the conventions of the academic community have been adopted in an effort to produce research of ‘the academic kind,’ yet although the actions performed might conform in terms of academic conventions and regulations, this is not to say that significant research activity is an outcome of these actions. Similarly, the outcomes of artistic research can lack significance in the professional world of exhibitions and the broader artistic community. Biggs and Büchler observe that:
as a result of academization, there is dissatisfaction from the academic community that what practitioners do is not research; and from the practice community that their values are not represented or reflected in academic research (Biggs & Büchler, 2010, p. 89).

Sade (2012) also observes that artistic research is positioned between professional practice and academic research, concluding that this situation presents the artistic researcher with the significant challenge of having to negotiate ‘intractable differences’ [Un-paginated]. The Fine Art PhD graduate could be seen to be particularly vulnerable in this regard. Jewesbury (2009, p. 3), perhaps not unreasonably asserts that many graduates of Fine Art PhD programs ‘are equipped neither to be academics or artists.’ Having succumbed to the regime of the research agenda, they often have little experience of the commercial art world and never develop the skills or the infrastructure to work independently of the academic institution. These graduates, according to Jewesbury, having become overly institutionalised, are ‘simply incapable of making careers as artists.’ Art and Design researchers exist in a hinterland, on the edge of two communities, negotiating a schema of norms and values from one realm, while simultaneously risking failure to live up to the expectations of the other.

For better or worse artists are increasingly re-defining themselves as artist/researchers. It has already been noted that art school educational culture could be described as highly malleable and context sensitive, whereby influences acting on staff and students, quickly find expression in pedagogical and curricular activity. Artistic research has of late begun to establish itself as a contemporary pattern of practice outside of the context of the academy (Sullivan, 2005), and has extended itself into the world of international biennales and art fairs. In 2015, at the time of
writing, the Venice Biennale featured the first ‘Research Pavilion.’ Organised by the University of the Arts Helsinki, in collaboration with EARN (European Artistic Research Network), Valand Academy of the Arts (Gothenburg University), MaHKU Fine Art (HKU University of the Arts Utrecht), Universita Iuav di Venezia, JAR (Journal for Artistic Research), GradCAM (Dublin), and Frame Visual Art Finland. A ‘Research Exhibition’ was accompanied by talks and discussions aimed at exploring the relationship between contemporary art and artistic research. The organisers state that by ‘Deploying the theme of ‘Experimentality,’ the dynamic between artistic research and contemporary art will be articulated’ (GradCAM, 2015).

This moving out beyond the conceptual and physical limits of academic institutions and the assimilation and absorption of contextual factors to produce new patterns of practice is in keeping with Springgay et al.’s (2008, p. xxv) conception of a/r/t/graphic communities of practice. Defined as communities where artists, educators, and researchers ‘locate themselves in the space of the in-between to create self-sustaining interrelating identities that inform, enhance, evoke and/or provoke one another,’ a/r/tographic communities extend beyond the borders of the institutions which they inhabit.

3.9. Summary

In the past academicians invested their efforts in the upholding of connoisseurial values and the preservation of the canon through a process of incremental adjustment, absorption, assimilation and consensus. Whereas the British and Irish art schools of the 1960s have been characterised as vehicles for the transgression of social, class and cultural boundaries; contemporary education could be said to be
dominated by an audit culture preoccupied with metrics of accountability and
pervaded at every level by technical rationalism which recasts the student as
consumer or user, and the educator as service provider and purveyor of skills and
competencies directed toward the needs of the private sector. The prevailing
mechanisms for assessment and evaluation, those sanctioned by Bologna, are
mechanisms founded on a philosophy which is essentially reductionist and at odds
with the curricular and pedagogical epistemologies which underpin art education and
practice.

Despite the elevation of art and designs academic status, Thompson’s assertion that
fine art has been spuriously recast as research is not, I find, so easily dispensed with.
The situating of artistic practice within a research context may very well create what
Schön (1987) referred to as epistemic tensions. As Holert (2009, p. 5) observes,
when art schools are displaced into the institutional framework of the university with
the aim of creating sites of research ‘the demands and expectations of the scientific
community and institutional sponsorship vis-à-vis the research outcomes of art
schools change accordingly.’ Or as Carter (2004, p. 10) puts it, art comes to be
conceived as a reified datum detached from its social relation. Carter speaks of the
stultifying effect of trying to satisfy ‘preordained and externally driven research
agenda.’ Wilson (2009) issues a similar caution against the inherent conservatism
which pervades the university system stating that:

In expanding the reach of the PhD system into contemporary art practice, we must
not be blind to the attempt to arrogate a degree of control of an extramural system of
value to the university. On the other hand, we must be alert to the inherent
conservatism of educational practices and the tendency of educational institutions to
direct, contain and even dissipate the creative impulses of its student cohorts
(Wilson, 2009, p. 65).
Art has long vied for parity of esteem with other academic subjects. Artistic research is the offspring of this desire. On the face of it artists would stand to gain status by coming under the auspices of university conventions. Yet this could be a pyric victory. Inclusion may come at the expense of the rich history of teaching traditions. Arts practice research which is not of the ilk which delivers marketable outputs, may not be tolerated within the system and artistic research must be made to count. It must tally with standards of academic achievement externally across institutions and in other subject areas. It must register on external metrics. Its outcomes must be systematically recorded and be retrievable so that artistic researchers can build on what has gone before. And herein lays the dilemma, the challenge for the emerging field will be how to account for itself in terms which will satisfy external agencies, while still retaining it essentially transgressive disposition and radical contingency. Baldachinno (2012, pp. xvii-xx) argues that whereas blind and complicit acceptance of ‘the received wisdom of the politics of academic legitimacy’ will result in an incremental ‘distortion and standardization of art into ‘scholarship’ that bears no resemblance to arts’ plural reality,’ a rejection of the concept of artistic research would lead to nothing.

While this chapter looked at the evolution of the VAP PhD situating it within broader discourses within higher education, the next chapter discusses the ontological, epistemological and methodological debates which have emerged in response to the establishment of doctoral level study in the Visual Arts.
Chapter 4 The Ontology, Epistemology & Methodologies of Artistic Research

4.1. Introduction

This chapter examines ontological, epistemological and methodological debates on artistic research as they have evolved during the last twenty years. Upon consideration of the broad sway of the literature, one can determine a loose trajectory in the development of the debate. Early discussions focused on ontological questions about what artistic research might be. Moving on from ontological concerns or what might be referred to as first principles, the literature turns to reflect on issues to do with methodology (Barrett & Bolt, 2010; Hannula, et al., 2014; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Pink, 2009; Leavy, 2013). While debates relating to ontological and methodological concerns have continued to be a feature, more recently discussions have tended to focus on ideas related to epistemology and questions about the kind of knowledge artistic research claims to produce. The imperative to argue for the right to existence of a ‘new art paradigm’ in research (Biggs & Karlsson, 2010b) has been superseded with a focus on issues to do with the evaluation of standards and the establishing of networks and infrastructures for the exposition, dissemination, and promotion of artistic research (Wilson & Ruiten, 2013).

It would be tempting to present the literature in this chapter under the three headings of ontology, epistemology and methodology and while the chapter loosely follows this trajectory, these three stands of the debate are not always easily disentangled from each other. For this reason, the discussion oscillates across these issues. While the early part of the chapter deals with the foundational issues of terminology and
ontology, going on to look at epistemology and methodology, the latter half considers issues to do with validity; the effect of ethical procedural requirements for the artistic researcher, before finally returning to epistemological issues, concluding with a discussion of debates around contribution to knowledge.

4.2. The Enlightenment ‘Artist-as-Analyst’

George Stubbs, the English equestrian artist and anatomist, had what Mybrone (2002, p. 10) refers to as a ‘common-law relationship with the Academy.’ Myborne notes that after an extended period of avoidance, Stubbs finally applied for membership of the Royal Academy (RA) in 1781. The artist’s ambivalence to this institution is evidenced in the fact that he never actually received his diploma, failing to present the requisite examples of his work for adjudication.

Twenty-five years previously, Stubbs had embarked on an astonishing project. After acquiring a remote studio, he immersed himself in a sustained period of enquiry through drawing which lasted eighteen months. During this time, he could be seen hauling the carcasses of dead horses up the stairs to his studio. In the privacy of his workspace, he constructed hoists and pulleys which would allow him to animate and articulate his subject matter; and with the aid of his partner Mary Spencer, he began the gory business of dissecting the bodies, peeling back one layer at a time. In what was a highly dangerous pursuit, he drew his subjects again and again, delving deeply into the intricacies of the anatomy of the horse. In addition to devising elaborate strategies of suspension, Stubbs developed innovative means for the preservation of the corpses.
Upon completion of hundreds of investigations through drawing, the artist/anatomist turned his attention toward the dissemination of his work, whereupon he endeavoured without success to engage the services of an engraver. In the end Stubbs was himself compelled to undertake the task of engraving, spending seven long years translating the drawings into a body of etchings which finally appeared in 1765 in his highly original publication The Anatomy of the Horse (Illustration 4-1).

In the advertisements for the folio, the artist outlines what he saw as the main contribution of the work:

> The Work being the Result of many Years of actual Dissections, in which utmost accuracy has been observed, the Author hopes, that the more expert Anatomists will find it a useful Book as a Guide in comparative Anatomy; and all Gentlemen who keep Horses, will by it, be enabled not only to judge of the Structure of the Horse more scientifically, but also to point out the Seat of Diseases, or Blemishes, in that noble Animal, so as frequently to facilitate their Removal, by giving proper Instructions to the more illiterate Practitioners of the Veterinarian art into whose Hands they may accidentally fall (Mybrone, 2002, p. 21).

While Stubbs undoubtedly had ambitions to elevate his professional standing, adding to his artistic arsenal, the case represents a fascinating example of an artist wrestling free from the commercial world of polite and lucrative portrait painting; dedicating himself to a sustained, focused and visceral research process which was directed toward the advancement of knowledge in the fields of art and equine science.
A great deal of the contemporary discourse around artistic research uses the rhetoric of a newly emerging field (Collinson, 2005; Mäkelä, 2007; Mottram & Rust, 2008; Paltridge, et al., 2012a). While these authors speak of the emergence of artistic research within the context of contemporary higher educational institutions and the recent massification of doctoral education in the arts (Wilson & Ruiten, 2013), it is interesting to consider the activities undertaken by artists such as Stubbs. Frayling (1993, p. 1) who acknowledges Stubbs in his, much cited, essay on the nature of research in art and design, begins by observing that the word research at times describes activities which seem ‘a long way’ from the activities of artists, craftspeople or designers. While Frayling undoubtedly has a point, the example of Stubbs highlights the extent to which artistic activity can fit neatly with traditional definitions of research. Stubbs had conducted a systematic investigation that led to new and ‘substantially improved insights’ which were of direct relevance to the needs of the public, scholars and commerce; and were disseminated to the broader community through publication (Higher Education Funding Council of England, 2012). That Stubbs’ endeavour is accommodated within the definition is attributable to the fact that his project had arisen out of the context of the enlightenment. Like many of his peers, the artist was striving for the eradication of ignorance and the betterment of mankind through the attainment of truth and the unveiling of the eternal laws of nature.

When constructing a narrative in support of artistic research it is perhaps too easy to single out examples from history where the goals and methods of science and art have coalesced. Sullivan (2005, pp. 4-5) indicates that the ‘pattern of practice’ which emerged during the period of the Enlightenment saw the scientist and the artist
sharing common aspirations when the notion of the ‘artist-as-analyst’ or ‘artist-as-technologist’ abounded. Sullivan identifies several successive patterns of practice and conceptualisations of the artist which evolved, he claims, in tandem with the institutionalisation of artistic practice. The notion of the ‘artist-as-teacher,’ for example, held sway for much of the 20th century alongside the concept of the artist as creative progenitor. Throughout all this time debate has circulated around the issue of the purpose and function of visual arts in educational institutions. A feature of this relationship, Sullivan maintains, has been an abiding schism between radicals outside of institutions who sought to challenge what they saw as the sterile conservatism of those within whose mission it was to uphold standards and preserve the canon.

4.3. Ontological and Terminological Issues: Frayling’s Seminal Essay

Sir Christopher Frayling’s paper *Research in Art and Design* of 1993 (Frayling, 1993), has been described as a ‘touchstone’ for those contemplating the nature of artistic research (Belcher, 2012, p. 1; Rust, et al., 2007, p. 12). Over the course of the last twenty-five years, this essay has been repeatedly invoked in discussions on artistic research, garnishing citations in the hundreds. Durling et al. (2002, p. 8) refer to the paper as ‘more often cited than read’ while Macleod and Holdridge (2004) note that in the absence of an established tradition, students and supervisors have been dependent on seminal articles such as Frayling’s for guidance as to the exact nature of artistic research. Rust et al. (2007, pp. 11-12) observe that although the paper has been much cited by arts practice researchers, the theoretical implication of are not generally worked through.
Undoubtedly the most influential aspect of the paper is the adroit re-articulation of Herbert Reed’s concept of ‘teaching through art’ and ‘teaching to art’ (Reed, 1943). Transposing this model to artistic research, Frayling (1993, p. 5) postulates three categories or possible modalities of art and design research; research into art and design; research through art and design and research for art and design. These categories, he claims, ‘resemble’ Read’s thoughts on art education.

As one might expect with a model which has achieved such prominence within the literature, it has attracted a small measure of controversy. Rust et al. (2007) maintain that although Frayling is normally credited with the three-part conception of artistic research, the model was also advanced by Archer (1995). Citing Norman et al. (2000) they claim that there is some evidence to suggest that Archer had discussed the model with colleagues as early as the 1980s. Belcher (2012, p. 2) suggests that Frayling, had ‘bolted together’ two philosophical frameworks, one pedagogic from Read and the other scientific from Archer. Whether or not Archer spoke of the idea hardly seems relevant as it is Frayling who was first to explore and tease out the ramifications of this conceptualisation of artistic research in a published text.

Of the three categories proposed by Frayling, research into art and design is the least contentious, consisting of art historical, theoretical or aesthetic research. This category has a reasonably established tradition upon which it draws. Research through art and design is less common and trickier in terms of associated established conventions and methodologies. Through the use of the design process, or experimentation with materials and media, this type of research might attempt to solve a predetermined problem which exists outside of the work.
By far the most contested category is research for art and design. Research where, he says:

> the end product is an artefact - where the thinking is, so to speak, embodied in the artefact, where the goal is not primarily communicable knowledge in the sense of verbal communication, but in the sense of visual or iconic or imagistic communication (Frayling, 1993 p.5).

In this third category, the implication is that knowledge is embodied in the artefact itself. Frayling is not dismissive of the potential for art and design to become a site out of which research could emerge, stating that there may well be opportunities for research which would emerge out of the ‘cognitive tradition in fine art’ but this he says, ‘involves standing outside of the artefact while remaining within it’ (1993, p. 5). Therefore, as Durling et al. (2002, p. 9) note, Frayling clearly is not in support of the ‘the extreme statement of the case’ that is the position which holds that PhDs should be awarded on the basis of artefacts alone.

Durling et al. (2002) claim to have located a significant failing in Frayling’s tripartite conceptualisation of artistic research, which they say is founded on a surface adaptation of Read’s theory, with no distinction being made between pedagogy and research. They go on to argue that while education can proceed through practice or research, ‘one does not undertake research simply by practicing the art or craft to which the research field is linked.’ While acknowledging the value of the contribution they claim that much confusion is caused amongst those who ‘have come to believe that practice is research’ (p. 10). Taking a similar position, Nimkulrat (2009, p. 58) maintains that one of the dominant difficulties with practice-based doctorates in art and design ‘is the unconvincing argument that practice as
such is a form of research inquiry without need for further validation and explanation.’ This, she asserts, ought to be addressed in order to establish practice-based doctorates in art and design in a larger academic context.

Stating that although Frayling’s taxonomy on *prima facie* appears to accommodate all eventualities, Newbury (1996c) goes on to evaluate the model against two PhD studies which he has supervised, concluding that the examples proffered fit unevenly into the model. Regardless, of the ‘subtleties’ of the argument, Frayling, he asserts is in danger of ‘reinforcing’ a theory practice divide, in art and design. Expressing optimism with regard to the potential for artistic research, Newbury claims that rather than trying to fit artistic research into extant categories, this type of research has the potential to ‘dissolve’ institutional categories facilitating interaction between different traditions.

Newbury’s critique is based on personal anecdote and a limited range of examples, the scarcity of exemplars being indicative of the fledgling nature of the phenomenon at the time when he was writing. Mottram, and others (Mottram & Fisher, 2006; Mottram & Rust, 2008; Mottram, 2009), with the benefit of a growing tradition upon which to draw, attempt a more systematic evaluation of the ‘utility’ of Frayling’s model by using the categories of research, *into, through* and *for* practice, to code the abstracts of Fine Art PhD theses available through the Art and Design Index to Thesis (ADIT). Established through the efforts of six universities in the UK, the ADIT was funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and arose out of a concern that there was no way of determining what was being done in the area. Acknowledging the limitations of the study, Mottram (2009, p. 248) observes a ‘gap in the abstracts’ of any evidence of ‘research for practice’ concluding that while
Frayling’s model may have initially provided a means of opening up debate, ‘the energy now might usefully be applied to thinking about what we could address through future work.’ Having attempted to systematically apply the model Mottram et al. advise that the debate move beyond deliberation on the utility of Frayling’s categories. Mottram’s endeavour could, indeed be deemed to be misguided for Frayling did not intend for modalities to be understood as distinct categories, rather these modalities could be overlapping (Frayling, 2017).

It is interesting to note that in Mottram’s reporting of her research she uses the terms research into, through and for ‘practice’ rather than Frayling’s ‘art and design’ (Mottram, 2009; 2014b; Mottram & Fisher, 2006; Mottram & Rust, 2008). Biggs (2002, p. 112) in his critique of Frayling similarly substitutes ‘[a practice]’ for art and design. This goes somewhat against the thrust of Frayling’s argument for he contends that ‘Research is a practice, writing is a practice, doing science is a practice, doing design is a practice, making art is a practice,’ to single art and design out into the category of practice, he says, is ‘conceptually strange’ (Frayling, 1993, p. 4). The use of the nomenclature ‘practice’ to describe artistic undertakings has been a source of much debate and will be dealt with in more depth later in the chapter.

Employing a constructionalist approach and referencing Wittgenstein, Biggs (2002, p. 113), maintains that language constructs rather than describes existing realities. He states that should one take this approach the implication is that, Frayling is not describing a tripartite model which exists argumentum re, but rather categories are called into existence through the invoking of instrumental language. The same could be said of the many other manifestations which have emerged since Frayling’s
For Biggs, it is important that the community locate language which will describe the category of research for art and design. This label he contests would ‘describe how the discipline is advanced and how knowledge arises through practice’ this he claims would be inescapably tied to the ‘embodiment of thinking in objects.’ Yet the category of research for art and design does not function well. The problem, Biggs maintains, does not reside with research in the field itself but in the inability of the linguistic term to evoke the characteristics of this mode of research. This is an interesting observation. Biggs makes a rather weak case for the use of ‘work-of’ research, and it must be said that this term has not been taken up in the community.

Despite resistance to Frayling’s framework, theorists continue to take their lead from the linguistic construction of subject, preposition, object to articulate new categories for art and research and artistic research (Borgdorff, 2010; Dombois, 2010). In many quarters the slogan art as research has gained currency. McNiff (2013, p. 110) uses art as research to refer to a spectrum of arts-based approaches which include but are not confined to; art therapy; art education; history; business; organizational studies; philosophy; social relations and art. Jonas (2007) transposing the model into a design context extrapolates further categories of research about design and research by design, while Dalsgaard (2010) also writing from a design perspective posits a version which combines two prepositions coming up with research in and through design.

In his monograph on artistic research and academia, Borgdorff (2012, p. 37) takes inspiration from Frayling’s model and gives it a ‘twist.’ Devising his own tripartite schema for understanding the nature of artistic research, Borgdorff makes a
distinction between research on the arts, research for the arts and research in the arts.

In doing so he claims to shift the emphasis away from extant categories preferring to frame his analysis in terms of perspectives. Research on the arts is research which has art practice as its object from a theoretical distance and reflects an ‘interpretive perspective.’ Research for arts reflects an ‘instrumental perspective’ to be understood as applied research. This perspective he says relates somewhat to Frayling’s research for art. Borgdorff maintains that this type of research makes art its objective; instruments and insights which arise ‘may find their way into concrete practices in some way or other.’ The final perspective, research in the arts, reflects the ‘performative perspective.’ Here artistic practice is viewed as integral to both the ‘research process and the research results.’ Borgdorff states that:

> there are no art practices that are not saturated with experiences, histories, and beliefs; and conversely there is no theoretical access to, or interpretation of, art practice that does not partially shape that practice into what it is (Borgdorff, 2012, pp. 38-39).

In this mode Borgdorff asserts, there is no schism between theory and practice.

In *AR-artistic research* a publication which arose out of out a yearlong collaboration between invited artists and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Dombois (2010, pp. 78-83) elucidates further possibilities. By reversing subject and object order into reciprocals; and substituting yet more prepositional combinations, further possibilities are produced; research on art; art on research; research for art; art for research; research though art; art through research. Through this rearticulating of terms, Dombois reveals a system of possible ‘reciprocal transfers between art and science.’ (Bauer & Trummer, 2010).
The area where art/artistic research and science/scientific research meet is complex and fascinating. In *Experimental Systems Future Knowledge in Artistic Research* (Schwab, 2013b) a publication arising out of the Orpheus Institute in Ghent, fourteen theorists, artists and musicians deliberate on and engage with the theories of Hans-Jörg Rheinberger on experimental systems, in order to evaluate the theory’s potential utility within an artistic context. Rheinberger in conversation with Schwab, drawing on the ideas of Polanyi, acknowledges the ‘uncircumventability of tacit knowledge.’ He maintains that there is that which may not be made explicit, but unlike Polanyi rather than conceiving of the tacit as residual, Rheinberger encourages an appreciation of ‘prospective potential’ (Schwab, 2013a, p. 200).

While *Experimental Systems Future Knowledge in Artistic Research*, is concerned with how artists may glean impetus from scientific experimentation, *AR-artistic research* represents at times an almost reciprocal position. It is interesting, for example to note that in the foreword to *AR-artistic research*, Bauer and Trummer (2010, p. 10) assert that artistic research has the potential to have relevance to scientific research ‘through its processes of mediating knowledge and, above all, through its particular efficacy in questions of representation.’ In this conceptualisation artistic research is useful for its ability to generate new ways of portraying, conveying or representing knowledge. Yet the notion that art embodies and generates rather than merely conveys or represents knowledge is a fundamental premise upon which artistic research’s legitimacy is founded.

The category research for art, Dombois maintains, is founded on the assumption that art itself embodies knowledge. This notion has been hotly debated within the literature (Scrivener, 2000; Biggs, 2002a; Niedderer & Reilly, 2011; Mäkelä, 2007;
Niedderer & Roworth-Stokes, 2007; Borgdorff, 2010; Smith & Dean, 2009; Elkins, 2005; Barrett & Bolt, 2010). The question of how artistic research can be seen to contribute to knowledge is central to the debate and will be dealt with in more depth in section 4.11.

4.4. Practice, Practice, Practice

The terms Practice-based and Practice-led, commonly appear in the literature and have become the focus of much contestation (Mäkela & Nimkulrat, 2011; Mäkelä, 2007; Kick, 2014; Garfield, 2007; Millward, 2013; Atlander, 2013; Dowmunt & Thomas, 2005; Biggs & Büchler, 2007; Candlin, 2000b; Smith & Dean, 2009). It has already been noted that Frayling rejects the nomenclature ‘practice’ as conceptually strange when used to distinguish the work of the artist from other activities yet the term continues to be used to refer to artistic research. In Practice Based Research: A Guide (2006, p. 2) Candy identifies two types of practice related research. Practice-based research she maintains is an original inquiry directed toward the acquisition of new knowledge ‘partly by means of practice and the outcomes of practice.’ Practice-based would roughly equate to Frayling’s, research for art and practice-led to research through art. More recently Candy and Edmonds (2018, p. 64) makes the following distinction between practice-based and practice-led research:

- If a creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge, the research is practice-based.
- If the research leads primarily to new understanding about practice, it is practice-led.

(Candy & Edmonds, 2018, p. 64)
It has not been my experience that such a neat distinction exists, rather I have found that these terms are often used interchangeably and idiosyncratically with artists holding to both modes simultaneously.

Smith and Dean (2009, p. 7) note that there is a growing tendency to interpret ‘practice as research,’ to imply both artwork and its contiguous documentation and theorization. These authors claim that for an artwork itself to be considered a form of research it must ‘contain knowledge which is new and that can be transferred to other contexts, with little further explanation, elaboration or codification, even if this transferral involves a degree of transformation.’ Hannula et al. (2014, p. 28) also observe that within the artistic academic community there is a tendency for artistic researchers to equate practice with research, as they put it, ‘I paint thus I research.’ They, however, maintain that there is a need to ‘narrate the process’ through words and concepts which they deem to be essential to the academic process. A process which demands argumentation through writing. ‘Explaining and explicating by writing,’ they point out, ‘is the first distinctive characteristic of artistic research compared to art-making.’

Jones (2005a) who until recently was the ‘Dean of Possibilities’ in the Burren College of Art, eschews the terms practice-based or practice-led research, favouring instead the ‘PhD in Studio Art’ as a way of describing doctoral level artistic research. He observes that traditionally there has been a distinction made between research and practice. Research was perceived as the locus for the generation of knowledge, while practice implied the application of knowledge. The term ‘practice’ however in an artistic context, he argues, gives rise to confusion while simultaneously enriching the issue. In the field of fine art, practice ‘is widely seen to be normally innovative and
seldom routine.’ This is a concept of practice which, he says, is upheld by Schön, whom Jones claims, ‘deliberately inter-relates and conflates ideas of practice and research in dealing with ‘knowledge in action’’ (Jones, 2005b, p. 23). Schön (1995, p. 33) arguing for the expansion of the epistemological frameworks informing the research university, suggests that there may be epistemologies of practice which would accommodate and legitimize the tacit knowing-in-action which is to be located in practitioner scholarship. Scholarship, he argues, demonstrates artistic and intuitive competencies in ‘situations of uncertainty, complexity, uniqueness, and conflict.’ These ways of knowing he maintains are ‘susceptible to a kind of rigor that falls outside the boundaries of technical rationality’ (p.23).

Describing artistic research as a complex mix of ‘pragmatism, theories of experiential learning, social constructivism, phenomenology and aesthetics’ which borrows from action, participatory and emancipatory action research, Sade (2012, [Unpaginated]) suggests that artistic research is shaped by the work of Schön. Artistic research, he maintains, frequently employs Schön’s reflective strategies. However, while the concept of the reflective practitioner and the strategies delineated by Schön may be useful in understanding artistic research it is probably true to say that this reflective disposition arises out of the context of art making itself rather than arising out of the application of Schön’s strategies per se. Sade, using the ideas of Bourdieu, and echoing Borgdorff, observes that in the case of artistic research, practice becomes both the method and the object of inquiry. Practice in this sense, becomes both the framing of and the focus of research. This operation involves the inescapable transformation of both research and practice. Sade states that:
decisions regarding what is practice, what is the role of the observer or researcher in relationship to the object of study, and how is practice represented and interpreted, become impossibly intertwined (Sade, 2012 [Un-paginated]).

There is a danger however that when creative practice becomes a ‘research instrument,’ when artistic work is recast in this way, the emphasis may tend to shift away from the work itself toward contemplation and deliberation on the activity of artistic production in terms of ‘process.’

4.5. Discipline Dependent and Independent Definitions

Situating artistic research within a generalised notion of research, Borgdorff (2007) proposes a definition, whereby artistic research is that which is founded on a clearly articulated research problem, employing explicitly identified research methods, the results of which are documented and disseminated; working from the assumption that research should make an original contribution to knowledge and be based on systematic processes recognisable outside its own field of reference. This definition of artistic research is very much in keeping with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) definition of research as an endeavour comprising of:

Creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humankind, culture and society, and the use of this stock to devise new applications of available knowledge (OECD, 2015).

Borgdorff’s and the OECD characterisation could be described as ‘discipline-independent’ in orientation.

By contrast Barrett (2014) proffers a more discipline dependent definition stating that:
In artistic research, the artist as human actor is both subject and object of the research process and, in this paradigm, the movement of illumination always flows first through interaction (and intra-action) with matter and materials of making, then subsequently from the particular to the general through the audience’s interaction with the art object or outcome of the research process (Barrett, 2014, p. 54).

Barrett’s depiction points up features which are intrinsic to the artistic process. Artistic research here is conceived of, not as culminating in a hermetically sealed contribution to knowledge but as a flow of illumination which is made manifest through a web of interactions and intra-actions between artist (oscillating between subject and object), materials and audience. While this explanation certainly captures the contours of artistic practice, the concept of flows of illumination might prove too mercurial a prospect to satisfy externally determined criteria, lying too distantly from generalised definitions of research.

Stressing that the imperative is to come to a comprehensive conception of the value of arts and ‘its potential contribution to the academy,’ and referencing new paradigm approaches which were developed in the social sciences in the 1980s, Biggs and Karlsson (2010b, pp. 408-409) postulate a ‘new paradigm’ approach for visual arts whereby particular actions or activities become significant. Underscoring their work is the assumption that creative and performing arts have the capability of developing a new paradigm, by virtue of the fact that ‘they have had to partake in a rigorous analysis of what it means to do research in a contested context which works against accepted norms’ (p.423). Citing the example of the shift from positivist quantitative methods toward an inclusion of qualitative approaches, they insist that meaningful solutions to problems must emerge from within the fields of study themselves and must not result from an aping of pre-existing models. Solutions, they say, should be internally rather than externally determined.
Hannula et al. (2014, p. 15) present a model of artistic research which does not appear to be predicated on externally sourced conventions but seems to spring from within artistic practices and conventions. While not negating the idea that the ‘identity of artistic research should be open and contested’ and stating that one does not need to begin by agonizing over the ‘unclear nature of the field,’ the authors present a ‘Basic Formula of Artistic Research,’ claiming that, ‘If you don’t stand for something you will fall for anything’ (see Table 4.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artistic Process: Acts Inside the Practice</th>
<th>Arguing for a Point of View (context, tradition, and their interpretation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Committed with an eye on the conditions of the practice</td>
<td>▪ Social and theoretical imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Documenting the acts</td>
<td>▪ Hermeneutics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Moving between insider and outsider positions</td>
<td>▪ Conceptual, linguistic and argumentative innovations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Preparing works of art</td>
<td>▪ Verbalization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-1 'Basic Formula of Artistic Research' From Artistic Research Methodology: Narrative, Power and the Public p. 15 by Hannula et al., 2014

‘The Basic Formula’ offers a holistic picture of artistic research as involving a combination of acts done from both an *emic* and *etic* disposition, some executed within the practice, and others enacted through conceptual work executed beside or outside of the practice.

A further option suggested by Biggs and Karlsson is the possibility for a hybrid approach whereby criteria are derived from both the research and artistic domains. Biggs and Karlsson in a schematic diagram propose three positions; where art and research are maintained in two different spheres; where there is a greater degree of homogenisation of the two spheres and where there is total homogenisation giving rise to a new hybrid of art and research. Refer to Figure 4-1. As part of the process
of hybridization there would need to be an audit of criteria from both spheres to
determine which would be applicable or relevant and which were not, thus there
would be a need to be explicit about those to be included and excluded. This idea of
a hybridized approach is in keeping with Hannula et al. (2014, p. 52), when they
suggest that, ‘artistic research combines some good features of research and some
good features of art.’ One could of course argue that artistic research could also
potentially combine some bad features of research and some bad features of art.

Figure 4-1 Range of hybrid models that result from the merger of arts practice with academic research,
showing three different degrees of overlap (Biggs & Karlsson, 2010a, p. 409).
4.6. Debate shifts to Epistemological and Methodological Issues

Elkins (2005, p. 36) acknowledges that various theoretical models such as Schön’s ‘action research’ or Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, might be deployed in a justification for the notion that fine art research produces new knowledge but says that because the concept of knowledge is distorted to fit purposes, all that really is achieved here is a kind of special pleading. Elkins believes that for ‘new knowledge’ to function as a validation for art PhDs, it would be essential to have consensus throughout the university sector about the nature of such knowledge and this he states would be impossible.

Turning his attention to the terminology used to describe the ‘New PhDs’ Elkins (2005) like Jones drops the term practice in favour of studio art but whereas Jones speaks of a PhD in Studio Art, Elkins calls for a Studio Art Doctorate. In fact, he advocates for the use of the term ‘studio art instruction’ instead of ‘practice-based research’ which he critiques on the basis that the term practice-based research assumes an opposite ‘theory-based research.’ Similarly, he rejects the term ‘creative-practice research’ claiming that the concept of the ‘creative’ is itself a contested term within discourses about fine art. The term ‘creative’ is generally preferred in the Australian literature, and in an Irish context has recently been used to describe a nascent network called Creative Arts Research and Practice (CARP). Elkins claims that the term ‘studio art instruction’ is a neutral one which omits written exegesis while positioning art, the endeavour of studio-practice, as central.

One must question however the assertion that the term ‘studio art instruction’ is neutral. The word ‘instruction’ would seem to point to authoritative direction rather than to self-directed conceptual and material experimentation. One also might be
inclined to question the insistence on the term ‘studio’ which might not sit well with contemporary relational or socially engaged patterns of practice which sees art move from studio-based to situated practices (Doherty, et al., 2004). This type of work as Bishop puts it, ‘looks to social situations to produce dematerialized, antimarket, politically engaged projects that carry on the modernist call to blur art and life’ (Bishop, 2006,[Unpaginated]).

Elkins proposes the label of ‘studio art instruction’ in his afterword for Thinking Through Art: Reflections on Art as Research (Macleod & Holdridge, 2006) an edited collection of essays dealing with various aspects of the debates surrounding research as art. Upon reviewing the manuscript, he produced a 5,000-word critique, which he duly submitted to the editors. He was met with a response which claimed that his piece was too critical of the other contributors to the book. Suggesting that the field of practice PhDs needed criticism, Elkins agreed to amend his original piece, expunging some of the criticism, with the caveat that the introduction would explain the story behind his contribution and would invite interested readers to write to him to attain the full and original article. I draw here on that original ‘uncensored’ article which also appears in a special edition of Printed Project (Elkins, 2005). Printed Project is a publication of the Sculptors’ Society of Ireland. At the time of publication of Thinking Through Art: Reflections on Art as Research Elkins, who is now based back in his native United States, was employed in University College Cork (UCC). It is worthwhile considering this critique as he brings many contentious issues to the surface.
While endeavouring to locate a place for art production within the university system, Elkins does not adhere to a rethinking of research and new knowledge, which he sees as a product of economic motivations which are tied up with the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). In addition, art as research or progenitor of new knowledge is located he says, far too distantly from studio practice. The meaning of research in this sense is inextricably linked to the notion of ‘a quantified volume of production in refereed journals, academic presses, and conferences’ (p.36). Elkins acknowledges that for those operating within the UK and Australian systems, the Arts and Humanities Research Board AHRB and RAE are impossible to escape. Echoing Maharaj’s suggestion that bureaucratic missives could be ignored (2004a, p. 167), Elkins suggests that departments wishing to set up programs should produce the required documentation containing references to new knowledge and research, and should proceed without paying any attention to these documents. Ireland, he says, should do the same.

Elkins levied some particularly cutting criticisms against the contributors to Thinking Through Art whom he says draw on eclectic, eccentric and scattered sources whilst also being guilty of poor and inadequate citation. He specifically cites the writings of Renwick, Hanrahan (an Irish scholar who completed an arts practice PhD in Northern Ireland) and Mooney stating that although the essays are ‘independent-minded’ they might be hard pressed to find a hearing amongst the specialists in the discourses which they utilise. These three essays, he equates with the artist’s statement ‘the very genre which writes its own exclusion from ‘serious’ academic discourse’ (p. 40). Elkins suggests that where fine artists draw on theoretical fields,
the level at which they engage with these discourses should be equivalent to the level at which one writing in the original field would operate.

He may have a point here. His comments however unpalatable to the authors of *Thinking Through Art*, cut to the quick of the issue of intellectual standard. A great proportion of the literature, which strives to make a case for or explore the parameters of artistic research, tends to draw on the writings of radical French thinkers such as Delueze, Derrida and Lacan, to provide a kind of theoretical alibi for artistic research activities (Coessens, et al., 2009; Springgay, et al., 2008; Quinn, 2010; Vincs, 2010; jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013). jagodzinki and Wallin (jagodzinski, it should be noted, eschews the use of a capital letter in his name) for example construct a Deleuzian inspired critique of the work of Barone and Eisner (2012). Coessens, et al. (2009) also draw heavily on Deleuze and Guattari in their manifesto. For Elkins, university resistance to studio art doctoral studies is not down to a dearth of theory but to a lack of ‘testable, discrete, hierarchically arranged skills and facts.’

Iain Biggs (2006, p. 5), (who should not be confused with Michael Biggs one of the editors of *The Rutledge Companion to Research in the Arts*), claims that Elkins’ article is a retaliation against the editors of *Thinking Through Art* for their ‘rigorous editing of his contribution.’ Biggs accuses Elkins of attempting to discredit the book before it was even published, stating that there is ample evidence in Elkins’ article to support the view that he gave the material in the book, only the most superficial of readings. Elsewhere Biggs accuses Elkins, an art historian, of idealising ‘the integrity of academic writing as a rhetorical strategy to reinforce the authoritative
aspects of his own discipline’ (Biggs, 2009, p. 63). As one of the contributors to *Thinking Through Art*, Biggs does no claim to be impartial. His main issue is with Elkins’ denial that there exists resistance, within the university sector, to new forms of knowledge rooted in ‘poetics,’ as opposed to scientific empiricism. Stating that Elkins reduces ‘an important epistemological issue to a pragmatic issue in the teaching of art,’ he maintains that:

> the doctorate based on art as research is a battleground on which issues of academic authority- ultimately the ability to arbitrate what forms of knowledge are seen as substantive in any area and what not- are currently being tested and contested (Biggs 2006 p. 7).

Biggs devoted his own PhD work to interrogating the political landscape of, what he refers to as, ‘art-led research in a doctoral context.’ The fruits of this PhD work found expression in a 2009 publication entitled *Art as research: creative practice and academic authority, A project-based examination of the politics of art-led research in a doctoral context*. Adopting what Elkins calls a pseudo- Nietzschean approach, Biggs conceptualises the field as being pervaded by Apollonian and pantheistic tendencies. Commenting on Frayling’s seminal text, Biggs, states that the approach taken in this discussion is indicative of the fact that its author was writing from the elevated position of a senior manager. Biggs critiques this work stating that it emerged from an agenda which looked to normalise and legitimate models of research without making a case for art as research. As such Frayling, he says, conforms to a dominant monotheistic, Apollonian or scientific ‘understanding of research and its methodologies’ (Biggs, 2009, p. 53).

With the intention of assessing ‘the intrinsic value of a hybrid research model for creative arts practice,’ Biggs (2009, p. 125) presents the findings of questionnaires
which he administered to ‘a broad range of academics/tutors and practitioners.’

Biggs presents the results of the questionnaires as ‘a sum of these perspectives.’

Commenting on the potential of the artwork to act as contribution to knowledge, to be judged against criteria, the ‘sum of perspectives’ accessed by Biggs, indicates that while the creative work was considered to be operating within clearly understood conventions within the tradition, contributing to ‘personal knowledge and understanding,’ the creative work ‘may not make any generically accessible contribution unless verbally contextualised within a broader field of operation’ (p. 128). It must be mentioned, that the means with which Biggs administers and accounts for his own research undertaking, would probably not square with accepted conventions for conducting and presenting empirical research in other research contexts.

In many ways Biggs’ monograph is an example of the kind of writing which Elkins admonishes in his critique of Thinking Through Art. The structure is erratic, the citations are inconsistent, and the work is theory laden. However despite the eccentric and somewhat laborious application of his Nietzsche inspired framework, Biggs puts forward a convincing argument with regard to the artist/pedagogue’s requirement for a pathway to doctoral level status, stating that using artists’ professional profile, as a criteria for employment or promotion is no longer viable in a context where artists’ reputations often are built not on the intellectual integrity of their practice but on self-promotion and celebrity culture. In this context, value he claims is, ‘uncertainly located outside academia and inseparable from a notoriously fickle cultural industry’ (Biggs, 2009, p. 61).
Biggs makes the point that important and radical possibilities exist within the site at which traditional forms of research intersect with art as research. Claiming, that from the post-war period, there occurred a colonisation of art practice by the humanities research community, he says that art education is now in a post-colonial phase, where the orthodoxy’s privileging of certain kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing are being interrogated. While Elkins is disparaging of the range and diversity of sources drawn upon, Biggs voices strongly the need for art practice to engage ‘freely’ with the myriad of discourse available to it lest the discipline become ‘tired, derivative and increasingly dogmatic’ (p.2).

4.7. Bricolage, Textual Suavities, Academic Posturing and the Discourse around Artistic Methodology

Certainly, the literature dealing with artistic research frequently draws on a broad and disparate range of critical theorists and continental philosophers. The artists who draw on or ‘deploy’ these discourses in support of their artistic work are not always knowledgeable enough to deal with the epistemological nuances of these philosophies on terms which would be acceptable to academics in the field of philosophy. While one could postulate that the tendency to invoke such sources stems from a concern about intellectual legitimacy and an urge to establish credibility and status through association with radical continental philosophies, one could similarly assert as Candlin (2001) has, that fine artists’ eclectic and idiosyncratic use of concepts and application of theory have their origins in the pick and mix of ‘complementary studies.’

There are those who conceptualise the artistic researcher as a kind of *bricoleur* (Wägelin, 2007; Marshall, 2008; Rolling Jr, 2010). It is not difficult to detect the
activity of the *bricoleur* in the eccentric and disparate textual sources and methodological strategies upon which the artistic academics often draw. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005, p. 316) state that *bricolage* ‘is understood as the process of employing these methodological strategies as they are needed in the unfolding context of the research situation.’ Art practice could be said to be typified by a high coefficient of uncertainty and disagreement (Matarasso, 2010). It may be that the artist is proficient at navigating what Jameson (1998, p. 93) refers to a ‘random indices of change.’ As such, the artist as researcher could be conceived of as a *bricoleur* who selects from random indices of theoretical and methodological instruments at their disposal, to extend the reach of research beyond existing categories.

In his elegantly written essay *Know-how and No-How: stopgap notes on ‘method’ in visual art as knowledge production*, Maharaj (2009, p. 1) puts forward the notion that knowledge production as visual art, comprises ‘sundry epistemic engines and contraptions that we may broadly refer to as ‘Thinking Through the Visual.’’ He cautions against getting bogged down with what, he says, is the daunting notion that nothing has validity unless it has the ‘systematic rigour of the ‘sciences.’’ Maharaj, drawing on the writings of Bachelard, asserts that science itself is very often based on a confluence of diverse activities which arrive with their own idiosyncratic tool kit of methods. Bachelard’s account, he maintains:

> resonates with the state of play in art practice and research that also amounts to a proliferation of self-shaping probes, stand-alone inquiries, motley see-think-know modes. Their sheer heterogeneous spill tends to stump and stonewall generalizable principles- at any rate: they resist being wholly taken under the wing of systematic methodological explanation (Maharaj, 2009, p. 1).
For Maharaj ‘thinking through the visual’ oscillates between Kantian principles of the universal and ‘Know-how’ which advances along clearly stipulated lines and the ‘rather unpredictable surge and ebb of potentialities and propensities- the flux of ‘no-how’” (pp. 2-3). Maharaj states that the institutionalisation of art research and practice accompanied by a heightened academisation ‘not in the sense of analytical rigour but of regulation is behind the insistence on knowledge production.’ Yet Maharaj unlike Elkins, does not see the artist’s lack of systematic engagement with theory as a deficit. Visual art, he says, interacts vigorously with ‘established discursive-academic circuits and think-how components… glossing over and translating them, aping them with bouts of piss-take, subjecting them to detournement…seething para-discursive charge and capability’ (pp. 3-4).

Within the context of artistic research, methodologies are as idiosyncratic as the practices of the artists undertaking research. Schenker (2010, p. 161) in a series of affirmations and propositions states that:

> It is right that basically we artists do not have at our disposal a number of standardized methods that are accepted by everyone and generally practiced and which are comparable in function and status with methods in the system of science (Schenker, 2010, p. 161).

Gray and Malins (2004) also affirm that ‘a pluralistic approach and the use of a multi-method technique, tailored to the individual project’ is a distinctive characteristic of artistic methodology. Yet they call upon artist researchers to exhibit a willingness to be open to other fields, acknowledging that there exists a variety of extant methodological approaches which could prove to be productive to the artist.
4.8. Arts Inspired Research in a Methodologically Contested Present

Speaking of creative arts and design research as methodologically promiscuous, Newbury (2010, p. 381) observes that while a great deal of time and energy has been spent by creative art and design academics, on pondering over the definition of research in their fields, ‘others less worried about definitions have been busy just getting on with it.’ While what might be referred to as ‘art as research’ has emerged within the context of the art college or academia, whether or not that be under the auspices of the university or some other type of higher education institution; in a parallel process of evolution, ‘promiscuous’ artist-based approaches to research have evolved outside of the specific context of artistic practice or studio-based work, situated within the social sciences.

Art-based research is defined by McNiff (2008, p. 29) as:

> The systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies (McNiff, 2008, p. 29)

Positioned within new research contexts the arts are valued as having something significant to bring to the table. This is evidenced in the recent publication by Sage of a *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research* (Knowles & Cole, 2008). This text draws together thinkers from across the arts including; music; choreography; poetry; painting; installation, video and community arts, in a process of evaluating the potential of arts to inform and elucidate research in anthropology; psychology; women’s studies; education; social work; nursing; disability studies, business studies; sport and physical education; and health policy research (Knowles & Cole,
2008). The text is an endorsement of the capacity of arts-based methodologies to illuminate and add richness to social sciences inquiries across a plethora of domains.

It is no coincidence that the emergence of artist based inquiry has overlapped with, what Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 1116) refer to as, ‘the methodologically contested present,’ a present which is characterised by a profound break with classical norms.

The point at which academic artistic research begins to be included in the discourse on qualitative research coincides with a phase in the 1980s which Denzin and Lincoln (1998) characterise as a time of ‘blurred genres.’ A time when the researcher could draw on a smorgasbord of theories and their associated methods which might include; ethnographic action research; grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 2009); thick description; observation; documentary methods and a range of other research strategies. It is during this phase that the researcher began to operate as a bricoleur, one who ‘uses the aesthetic and material tools of his art or craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand’ (Beck, 1998, p. 2 cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 8). The 1980s saw a ‘profound rupture’ and crisis in representation when ‘classical norms’ came under growing criticism from feminists and cultural theorists, initiating a return to interrogating notions of validity, reliability and objectivity, which Denzin and Lincoln (2000) claim had been more resolved in earlier periods.

A sustained engagement with the ideas of postmodernism and post-structuralism precipitated a further crisis when preoccupations about the possibility of representing the ‘other’ in language abound. Narrative which is viewed as a contrivance is deconstructed. The author is de-centred and traditional modes of representation are replaced with those more traditionally associated with fiction. The explicit is
abandoned in favour of the tacit and a metaphysics of ‘presence’ is replaced with a Derridean *hauntologie* (Derrida, 2006). The postmodern troubling of accepted norms resulted in the emergence of radical research methodologies which have included fictional ethnographies, ethnographic poetry, autoethnography and multimedia texts. The interventions of critical theorists and the emergence of postmodern epistemologies, have resulted in not one but many ruptures in the continuum of dominant paradigms, opening up portals through which artistic modalities of research have gained access.

Finley (2005) argues that:

> Arts based inquiry has emerged in post-colonial postmodern contexts, woven from complex threads of social, political and philosophical shifts in perspectives across multiple discourse communities (Finley, 2005, p. 682).

Dominant research paradigms have been critiqued on the basis that they perpetuate phallocentric, Eurocentric and hetero-normative hegemonies. Reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Lather (2006, p. 44) describes this phase as post qualitative or post-post where the monolithic homogenizing apparatuses of traditional paradigms give way to a proliferation of ‘a thousand tiny paradigms.’

Characterizing artistic research as emerging, as a consequence of a Kuhnian paradigm shift, Coessens et al. (2009, p. 180) state that artistic research has the potential to ‘focus the infinite variability within acts of representation and interpretation.’ For contemporary research in general to deal competently with issues to do with human society, they claim, there needs to be an acceptance of:

> those aspects of knowledge production that deal with human subjectivity and relationships, not as phenomena to be deduced and re-harnessed within human control, but open-endedly, as part of a process of creative construction and
interpretation that is relative, specific to context and value-driven (Coessens, et al., 2009, p. 180).

Speaking of a deterritorialisation of the research space, artistic research is understood as, yet another ‘turn’ to add to the succession of turns; linguistic, structural, postmodern, narrative, queer; ecological, ethnographic, auto-ethnographic and material which have characterised the last few decades.

Conceptualisation of the research terrain has moved beyond reductive accounts predicated on either/or relationships between a quantitative or qualitative paradigm. The research landscape has become in Dyssen’s (2010, p. 223) words, ‘increasingly multifaceted and heterogeneous,’ with traditional disciplines being continuously ‘undermined by crossover problems and networking structures… stable, coherent areas of knowledge production are rare.’ Concepts of validity, objectivity and methodological certainty are under suspicion, where, as Lather puts it (2012, [Unpaginated]) ‘there is no methodological instrumentality to be unproblematically learned.’

4.9. Validity and Artistic Research

Arts-based research could be understood as either existing outside of traditional research paradigms, conceptualised as a new art paradigm, or conversely it could be conceived of as eking out a territory within a post-paradigmatic research landscape. While debates regarding the legitimacy of artistic research’s place within the academy have pervaded the literature, less attention had been paid to issues of validity and what might constitute a valid or credible artistic research outcome.
Traditionally debates around the formalisation of qualitative methods have centred on, how concepts of validity and reliability, core concepts which underpin positivist perspectives, could be translated to have relevance in an interpretivist or relativistic context. Seale (2000) in his review of interpretivist ‘criteriology’ suggests that those wishing to enter the field are met with a baffling ‘proliferation’ of concepts:


He goes on to suggest that Lincoln and Guba’s translation of terms is useful; replacing credibility for internal validity, transferability for external validity, dependability for reliability and confirmability for objectivity (Lincoln & Guba 1985 cited by Seale 2000 p. 45). Seale also notes that the activity of reflexive auditing and triangulation (Campbell & Stanley, 1963) can go some way toward ensuring the credibility of the research. One must question how such concepts would function when applied to an artistic research context.

Frisk and Östersjö (2013, pp. 41-49) suggest that for artistic researchers, there is much to be gained from engaging with discourses around validity as they play out in other fields, advising that the result may be an amplifying of both artistic practice and research in general. What is more, artistic research may in the course of this more productive engagement ‘break free from the individualistic perspective that has sometimes been criticized as the solipsistic consequence of practice-based research,’ thus widening the possibilities for knowledge production. Asserting that, in the
initial stages of development, there may have been justification for an individualistic approach lest the emerging field should be colonised or constrained. Frisk and Östersjö state that the time for thinking of the field as being in a nascent state of development where ‘methods and formats are in constant flux’ is over. There now is an imperative to ‘discuss a set of defining frames and methods for researchers to use or depart from’ (p.49).

Writing of arts-based research, Haywood Rolling Jr. (2010, p. 109) citing Lather (1993, p. 675) speaks of ‘ephemeral constructs of validity,’ or a ‘validity of transgression’ which undermines formulaic foundational concepts of validity, replacing them with non-deterministic, iterative validity. The argument though attractive is not particularly convincing, as it is expounded upon in this publication, and the features of ephemeral, transgressive or iterative validity are only vaguely alluded to with little exposition on what might actually be involved.

4.10. Transgression, Ethnomethodology and Ethical Procedures

It would be fair to say that transgression is a well-established pattern of contemporary artistic practice for many artists, and this pattern of practice also on occasion pervades artistic research. It is interesting to consider similarities between certain kinds of conceptual and performative artistic practices, for example the ‘intervention’ or ‘happening,’ and the ethnomethodological ‘breaching’ experiments of Harold Garfinkel and his students in the 1960s. Ethnomethodological social experiments were designed to effect subtle adjustments to ordinary social interactions. A typical example of Garfinkel’s experiments would involve a student entering a lift and standing facing the wrong way, another involved having students playing a game of ‘tic-tac-toe’ whereby they repeatedly erased the first move they
made before making the next (Garfinkel, 1991, original 1967). The intention was to breach social norms with a view to exposing the processes which govern the rendering of social interactions as ‘normal’ (Heritage, 1984).

The act of breaching social norms has long been a feature of artistic practice. Looking to the early twentieth century one could cite for example the activities of the Dadaists, the Futurists or the Situationist. It could be claimed that the intention, in both the case of the early ethnomethodologists and conceptual artists of the 60s and 70s, was to produce knowledge in very similar ways. In the art world however, ‘breaching’ can go far beyond subtle intervention becoming subversive and disturbing. A memorable example which occurred almost contemporaneously with the experiments of the early ethnomethodologist can be seen in the work of the performance artist Vito Acconci.

In the late 1960s, in a series of performances entitled Following, Acconci stalked gallery visitors, an activity not unlike some of the experiments performed by Garfinkel’s students. In 1972 Acconci, famously and controversially, concealed himself beneath the floor of the Sonnabend Gallery where he performed the work Seedbed. This piece involved Acconci masturbating for two weeks and speaking his fantasies, which were based on the movements of the audience overhead, into a loud speaker system which played into the gallery.

Whereas Garkinkel and his students aimed to subtly disrupt norms in order to reveal the taken for granted assumptions and structures which underpin and govern interactions in the social world, in many cases artists look to exceed the mere illumination of a particular set of circumstances, looking to interrogate, subvert and
violate. In the early 70s, Marina Abramovic, in her performance piece *Rhythm 0* relinquished her agency. Putting her body at the disposal of the audience and laying a series of implements in their hands. Implements included a gun, a whip, a feather, a scissors and a scalpel. Santiago Sierra, in 2000, paid heroin addicted sex workers a line of heroin in exchange for allowing to have a line tattooed on their backs. In another piece, 20 immigrants were paid $20 to hide inside the hold of a cargo ship for a week. Transgressive cultural practices, Cashell (2009, p. 3) maintains, allow us to ‘experience excess, and identify with possibilities of life liberated from all social constraints and moral judgement, at an imaginative distance.’ The question of how the Arts Practice PhD could accommodate such practices, which have been an enduring and prevalent feature of a great deal of contemporary art, in the face of adherence to academic ethical approval procedures, has received little attention in the literature on artistic research in academic contexts.

On foot of a pilot study looking at experiences of university ethics protocols in which 18 artist researchers and research supervisors were surveyed, Bolt and Vincs (2015) observe a persistent mistrust and resistance by artistic researchers to university ethical procedure processes. They state that respondents demonstrated:

> resistance to ethical regulation of artistic research, in which bureaucratic instrumentalism and compliance or censorship are considered to potentially emasculate the vitality of an art work and the ability of art to serve as truthsayer or agent provocateur (Bolt & Vincs, 2015, p. 1304).

The researchers found that, where conventional methodologies were being employed very little difficulty was experienced, however where artistic research was involved respondents expressed ‘a great deal of dissatisfaction’ with the ethical process which was ‘fundamentally in conflict with’ the nature of practice-led research (Bolt &
Vincs, 2015, p. 1307). One can appreciate the problem, and one must wonder how the work of Sierra, for example, would fair if put before a university ethics committee for approval, for it is in its dubious ethical stance that this kind of work finds its potency.

Illustration 4-4 Santiago Sierra (1998). Línea de 30 cm tatuada sobre una persona remunerada, Calle Regina # 51, Mexico D.F., Mayo 1998 / Person paid to have a 30cm line tattooed on them, Regina Street # 51, Mexico City, May 1998, 2016 Black and white print 211 x 150 cm 83 x 59 in. Sourced: http://www.lissongallery.com/artists/santiago-sierra [Accessed 30/9/2017]
4.11. Arts as a Contribution to Knowledge

Traditionally claims regarding the validity of research, rest on ideas about the extent to which statements regarding contribution to knowledge can be judged to be well-founded on fact or established on sound principles. A fundamental demand of traditional academic research is that it should make and original contribution to knowledge. Stating that the arts have traditionally been thought of as pertaining to the decorative and the ornamental, Eisner (2008, p. 3) notes that the notion that art could be understood as a form of knowledge has not had a strong history in contemporary philosophical thinking. Asking the question ‘Do we gain knowledge from art?’ John (2013, p. 385), maintains that it is not possible to come to art with surety that it has been formed with the goal of providing knowledge. Art, she says has a plethora of aims which may include in addition to the provision of knowledge things like:

Expression, imaginative play, originality, emotional power, formal experimentation, beauty, pleasure, stylistic integrity and moral and political impact, all of which have unclear relations to the pursuit of knowledge (John, 2013, p. 385).

One might add to John’s list things like the grotesque or the absurd. Given this diversity of aims John maintains art, it would seem, is unlikely to function as ‘a reliable content-bearing resource that is available for use by conscious agents and that meets a success condition appropriate to that content’ (p. 384). While knowledge may be happened upon incidentally, art possesses too many divergent and ambiguous characteristics and aims to be reliable. Yet even if one rejects the idea that art functions as a reliable source of knowledge, Johns states that it is obvious that art is important to theoretical and practical interests in knowledge.
Critiquing the formal perception of the concept of knowledge as it is realised under the regime of cognitive capitalism, Rogoff (2015, [Unpaginated]) states that, ‘knowledge is supposed to be applicable, transferable, profitable, accessible and it should not in any way be critical.’ One of the inadequacies, however of focusing discussion on the bureaucratic strictures which come to be imposed on knowledge within higher education institutions is, she says, that we neglect to focus on knowledge itself. Rogoff, wishes to shift the line of argumentation from a focus on formats, structures, protocols and strictures and comes to deliberate on issues of substance. While concepts of knowledge founded on enlightenment principles have been ‘teleological, linear, cumulative, consequent and verifiable,’ what she refers to as ‘creative practices of knowledge,’ through processes of deterritorialisation, undisciplining and asignification, create ‘ruptures and affects within the map of knowledge.’

Invoking Foucault’s insurrection of subjugated knowledges, Rogoff, contemporises the concept, talking of creative practices which unfit bodies of knowledge from their accepted frames, ‘leaving their place in the chain of argumentation and drawing to themselves unexpected companions,’ to create a queering of knowledge and paradigmatic challenges. She states that at Goldsmiths, where she teaches, there has been staunch and adamant rejection of the imposition of formalised structures or protocols on artistic research with students being given ‘permission’ or indeed with students being asked to give themselves ‘permission’ to unchain themselves from normative mainstreaming research practices to develop their own methodologies, protocols and structures, pertinent to the particularities of their own research undertakings.
4.12. Summary

Regardless of the utility or the efficacy of Frayling’s tripartite model, his seminal paper, which teased out possible conceptions or perspectives on artistic research, despite demonstrating the qualities of an early manifestation of the discussion, served to open up a discursive space for deliberation on the ontological and epistemological issues which ensue from the emerging field. Over a decade after the publishing of his paper Research in Art and Design of 1993, Frayling in his foreword for Thinking Through Art: Reflections on Art as Research (MacLeod & Holdridge ed. 2006), acknowledges that, the area of ‘art as research’ is surrounded by confusions which need to be sorted out, not only for pragmatic reasons to do with funding linked to research activity; promotion tied to credentials and an increasing number of research students, but also because of a more profound need to understand art as research. Yet it is debatable whether, even ten years on again, these issues have reached any resolution.

It could be argued that the artistic research community has paid too little attention to the clearly defined and deeply embedded methodologies for knowledge acquisition, which reside in other research domains. The danger here is that Arts Practice PhD students, by not engaging with or by not becoming conversant with the protocols and conventions of other research domains may emerge from their study being largely research illiterate in terms of more generic research skills. On the other hand, engagement with the structure, strictures and protocols of established research paradigms could effect a corruption, demanding an acquiescence to hegemonic forces and a disavowal of the legitimacy, autonomy and vitality of artistic research.
Rogoff’s articulation of the possibilities of ‘creative practices of knowledge’ is seductive and potentially liberating, but not all Arts Practice PhD candidates or indeed their supervisors, have the benefit of being at Goldsmiths, where they are given ‘permission’ to unchain themselves from bureaucratic missives and are allowed to continue on their own lines of deterritorialised flight. What of those who resides within more provincial contexts? The next chapter moves from considering more abstract elements of the debate and turns to focus on practical issues. It looks at early practical responses to the new PhD and takes into account the experiences of students, supervisors and examiners.
Chapter 5 Practicalities, Empirical Studies

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter the emphasis shifts away from the speculative discourses around artistic research, to look more specifically at practical responses and empirical research which has been done in the area. The chapter begins by examining early responses to research training for Arts Practice PhDs in the UK and goes on to evaluate empirical studies. The chapter concludes by looking at the mechanisms for the recording, publication and dissemination of artistic research. While mostly focusing on studies pertaining specifically to doctoral studies in the visual arts, literature pertaining to doctoral education in general is also considered where relevant.

5.2. Early Work: Charting a Trajectory through the Terrain

As early as 1995 the Research Training Initiative (RTI) in the UK, undertook an in-depth study, to develop a practical response to what Newbury (1996a, p. 8) identified as ‘an area of need.’ The study pointed to a lack of established research tradition; a dearth of expertise in supervisory experience and a lack of developed research perspectives on art and design post-graduate research. The outcome of the project was the publication of a series of six comprehensive guides for postgraduate students. Drawing on generic information to do with PhD level study couched within the framework of art and design research, the aims of the guides were to:

- provide an indication of the nature of postgraduate research in art and design, and the shape of a research degree;
- provide a guide to generic research skills;
- provide a source of information and reference;
• provide a stimulus for debate around the nature and purpose of research in art and design, and the importance of research education and training (Newbury, 1996a, p. 5).

Issues tackled included; doing a postgraduate research degree; designing and managing a research project; presenting research findings and research resources; and information searching in art and design. Complete with extensive bibliographies, theses guides were available online, until quite recently and were a useful resource for both students and supervisors in an area with little or no research tradition. Commenting on the RTI project Newbury (1996b, p. 8), the head researcher, asserted that the intention was to ‘stimulate methodological debate, rather than prescribe a methodology.’ He suggests that the path to clarity is not achievable through abstract debate about the nature of art and design research. Instead, he advocates a case study approach whereby actual examples of research in art and design would be analysed in terms of the ‘broad value of their contribution to society and culture as well as the store of academic knowledge.’

Colleagues of Newbury, Gray and Malins (2004, p. 1), in their book Visualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design building on the work done for the RTI, also aimed to provide much needed guidance to post-graduate students. The text operates as a navigation aid for students attempting to traverse a little-known terrain. In this publication, the act of undertaking artistic research is conceived of as a journey which involves a series of actions; planning the journey; mapping the terrain; orienting and situating one’s research; crossing the terrain; interpreting the map and recounting the journey. The language used conveys a sense of an intrepid exploration into an unchartered territory. Gray and Malins’ book like the RTI publications, is an imminently practical response, drawing on important
concepts from the social sciences such as Schön’s (1991) notion of the reflective practitioner and pedagogic perspectives such as Green and Shaw’s taxonomy of assessment domains (Green & Shaw, 1996; 1996). Gray and Malins, position artistic research as a new paradigm and pose the question ‘What might characterize an ‘artistic’ or ‘designerly’ paradigm of enquiry?’ (p. 19). By locating artistic research in a space alongside Guba and Lincoln’s four main paradigms positivism; post-positivism; critical theory et al. and constructivism, the authors endeavour to open a discursive space for the exploration of the ontological, epistemological and methodological nature of artistic research.

Macleod and Holdridge (2005, p. 143) however critique the work of Newbury, Gray and Malins and also Painter (1996) on the basis that this body of literature is preoccupied with the tasks of providing justification for the validity of the Arts Practice PhD, and is devoted to elucidating ‘the protocols, procedures and more broadly acceptable methodologies for research in higher level.’ While this may be the case, these early publications go beyond justification and go some way toward orienting the debate in the direction of students and supervisors.

Like Newbury, Mottram (2008) also advocates a case study approach which looks to analyse actual examples of PhD work undertaken, as a means, to advance knowledge of the field and to galvanise the evolving research tradition. In a study funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) and involving over 20 art institutions, Mottram and others (Mottram & Fisher, 2006; Mottram, 2008; Mottram & Rust, 2008) analyse PhD submissions identifying eight exemplars. The examples are not intended to foster a culture of rigid frameworks and standardisation but are intended to reveal the high level of complexity and conceptualisation, which they claim, is a
typical feature of the domain. While Mottram (2008) and Newbury maintain there is a need to establish a knowledge base upon which analysis of what has been done thus far can be used to inform future development, Biggs and Karlsson (2010b, p. 408) caution against ‘redefining research based on case studies.’ This approach they see to be problematic not only due to a dearth of cases, from which one might draw conclusions, but also because early examples ought to be viewed with scepticism. Early cases they conclude ‘suffer from the disadvantage that they were judged as successful during a time in which robust definitions of research were not available.’ The fact that these early examples were awarded PhD degrees does not imply that these very same studies represent exemplary instances of research.

5.3. Practicalities & Determining the Health of the Field

At this point it is useful to turn our attention again to the research conducted by Mottram and Fisher (2006) and their investigation of art and design PhD abstracts. This study, notwithstanding the criticisms levied by Biggs and Karlsson, provided an early barometer for assessing the kinds of activities undertaken by fine art doctoral students in the fledgling domain. Mottram (2014b, p. 59) reports a diversity of approaches and a broad range in terms of quality of the material surveyed. She particularly notes variability in the quality of language used stating that, ‘some abstracts slip more towards the language of catalogue essay rather than adopting academic precision.’ Clearly evaluation of abstracts can only provide a limited glimpse of the work which has been undertaken by PhD candidates and while it may be possible to determine the quality of writing through analysis of the abstracts, the artistic outcomes of this genre of research are much more difficult to access. The fact that such variability in the quality of the abstracts is observed, could lead one to
conclude that there are discrepancies in terms of the perceptions of adequate intellectual standard amongst the research community itself. This notion is upheld by Burgin (2014, p. 94) who observes broad inconsistencies in understandings of intellectual standard for arts practice PhDs. He states that:

> there are widely differing conceptions of the quality of intellectual argument and written expression that is acceptable at PhD level- not only between different departments, but between different faculty within the same department (Burgin, 2014, p. 94).

Central to the debate regarding academic standard is the role played by the written exegesis or accompanying PhD text. Macleod et al. (2004, p. 157) point to an endemic privileging of the written outcomes over the practice, stating that a lack of agreement about what is required has resulted in ‘confusion throughout the culture’ with a dearth of ‘standard reference points or suitable guidelines.’ The only consensus which has emerged, they claim, is the notion that ‘the conventional academic written thesis appears to be inappropriate for doctorates in Fine Art.’

5.4. Thesis, Exegesis or Written Analytic

At undergraduate level, art and design students are required to produce less written work than for example those in the Humanities or Social Science. It is notable also that in the UK and Ireland it has been possible to complete a Master’s in Fine Art (MFA), which has little or no written requirement. This set of circumstances, though now changing, undoubtedly results in a situation whereby students have had less opportunity to develop competencies or indeed proficiencies in academic writing. Borg (2009, p. 45) in his PhD research into writing and the arts practice PhD, argues that it was at Nikolaus Pevsner’s insistence that contextualising texts be included in art and school design school’s curricula, and that the incorporation of these
contextualising texts transformed the ‘distinctiveness’ and ‘ethos’ of post-secondary art and design education. Pevsner, a German art historian is responsible for producing a forty-six-volume guide to the buildings of Britain. Describing the writing of an arts practice PhD as ‘a fraught process’ (p. 4), Borg observed that candidates experience difficulties ‘beyond those of a normal thesis,’ and that problems stem from the fact that the context of doctoral studies in this area had little or no tradition (p. 295). Many identify the relationship between writing, theory and practice as a key area requiring attention (Macleod & Holdridge, 2004; Burgin, 2009; Davey, 2009; Macleod & Holdridge, 2010; Paltridge, et al., 2011; Ravelli, et al., 2013; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2005). Macleod et al. (2004, p. 157) claim that for many artist/researchers, there is still resistance to the requirement for a written text. These artists/researchers, they say ‘argue that their language is visual, and that to make work and submit a written thesis is equivalent to a double doctorate.’ Derrida is often invoked in support of the assertion that the artwork itself is a text and can stand in for a discursive text. Burgin (2014, pp. 92-94) goes some way toward countering this position when he recounts conversations between Derrida and Steiglar, where Derrida talks of having rejected two students’ submission which was presented in audio-visual format, on the basis that ‘what I expected from a discourse from a theoretical elaboration, had suffered from this passage to the image.’ Derrida does not however rule out the possibility in principle. Burgin observes ‘almost universal confusion in respect of the written component of the degree’ while, as has been stated earlier, Hannula et al. (2014, p. 28) observe that in the artistic research community there is still a propensity to ‘think that doing art is the same as doing research.’ However, they go on to say that
explication of the artwork and the processes and contexts which inform this work is the primary distinctive characteristic of artistic research.

For a time in the UK it was possible to gain a PhD in some institutions without the requirement to produce a written output. Frayling, upon hearing of Wimbledon’s regulations whereby a PhD could be done without a requirement for written exegesis with a specified word count, responded by saying, ‘I don’t agree with Wimbledon’s regulations. I applaud you for pulling it off, but I don’t actually agree with you’ (Durling, et al., 2002, p. 9). Elkins (2014, p. 14) notes that the University of Plymouth experimented with the idea of having no written requirement on the basis that students were being called upon to produce two separate bodies of work.

Tracing the trajectory of the development of the PhD in a UK context, Jones (2005b, pp. 29-30) identifies three generations of ‘practice-based’ PhDs in Visual Arts. He observes that the granting of dispensations in terms of required word length for written component was a feature of early VAP PhDs. In the 1990s, he pinpoints a second generation which did not stipulate word length requirement. He cites the example of Wimbledon School of Art. What was conceived of at Wimbledon he says was ‘a sliding scale of portfolio and text, whilst retaining a requirement for the written element.’ Jones claims that a third generation of PhDs emerged in 2000 from Glasgow School of Art. Jones does not identify characteristic features of this ‘third generation of PhDs.’ That the genesis of this ‘third generation’ can be pin-pointed to one location is questionable.

In Ireland, there is significant diversity in the word length for the written output of artistic PhDs. The Burren College of Art, which until recently has been presided over by Timothy Emlyn Jones, who previously worked in Wimbledon, requires a
reflective analysis and a critical review each to have a minimum of 10,000 and a maximum of 20,000 words, a 200-word statement of contribution to knowledge is also to be submitted. In the IoTs and NCAD the minimum requirement is generally in the region of 20,000 with a maximum of 40,000 words, however through the course of the research I have encountered graduates who have produced far in excess of this maximum. While the length of the written requirement represents one set of concerns, a more qualitative issue needs to be addressed by the community. Namely there are unanswered questions around the purpose and content of the written analytic and its function in relation to the creative or artistic work. What exactly should this text do?

Australia has led the way in terms of empirical research. In a large study of practice-led research across visual arts, animation, fashion, drama, music, dance, communications, film and television, Hamilton and Jaaniste (2009; 2010) conducted content analysis on 60 practice-led exegeses which were produced between the years 2002 and 2009. The study revealed a pattern of content which prevailed across most of the sample. Exegeses tended to be comprised of three sections. The first main section, normally comprise of situating concepts which may involve theoretical perspectives important to the work in addition to historical and contextual material; there was frequently a second main section comprising of practical concepts which drew on precedents of practice and a third main section which focused on the researcher’s creative practice. While noting variants in the model it was found that the principle prevailed in 85% of the dissertations examined with 50% of the sample following the pattern exactly (Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2010, p. 35). This model, they
say, in the absence of any institutional directives on content, has evolved endogenously, being arrived at by supervisors independently.

The researchers are careful to point out that what they are proffering is not a prescription for what the arts practice PhD exegeses should contain but merely a description of what they have found them to be. These authors do however go on to advocate a ‘connective model’ whereby the subject position moves from being critically distant and outward focused in the contextualising sections to a reflective inward disposition in the section which deliberates on the student’s creative practice. Such an approach, they claim, would allow the researcher to ‘retain a voiced relationship with practice, and to do justice to the internal poetics and contingencies of the creative process outcomes’ (Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2010, p. 41).

Hannula et al. (2005, pp. 114-117) suggest a suite of tasks that ought to be undertaken in the written component of artistic research. These have been usefully summarised by Cazeaux (2008) and subsequently reproduced by Hannula et al. in later work: The task of ‘verbalization’ they say is to:

- Clarify ‘what is being researched, why it is being researched, why it is of interest and what is the aim behind it.’
- Specify ‘with whom the research converses, what traditions it can be considered to be linked with, and what relations it has to these different traditions.’
- Justify ‘one’s own focus and viewpoint in relation to what has been said and claimed previously.’
- Adhere to ‘known literary styles and methods of presentation’ primarily in order to avoid ‘narcissism and end[ing] up in an uninteresting vacuum.’
- Form (at best) a fresh and substantial conclusion.
- Cultivate the nascent field of artistic research by reflecting upon how the research extends the subject and suggesting how any future project by an artist researcher might be informed by his or her work (Cazeaux 2008, cited by Hannula, et al., 2014, p. 29).
While this list may provide a helpful checklist, which embodies some of the principles which also underpin traditional PhD dissertations, it falls short of operating as a model of what might need to be produced for the purposes of PhD.

Asserting that there has been little work done into structure and nature of practice-based doctoral texts, Paltridge and others (2011; 2012; 2012b; Ravelli, et al., 2013; Ravelli, et al., 2014) in a series of studies looked to evaluate the breadth and nature of textual PhD submissions in the visual and performing arts, through a nation-wide study, again in Australia. The researchers observed widespread institutional vagueness in terms of expectations of both the written and the creative work. These findings raise questions as to how doctoral students are to come to terms with ‘unarticulated expectations’ (Paltridge, et al., 2011, p. 247). Yet the lack of clarity or direction signalled in guidelines was perceived by supervisors as being necessary for providing a flexible context in which creative work could be fostered.

Notwithstanding this consensus, the researchers concluded that it was obvious ‘that for students and supervisors alike, there is a manifest tension between experiences of confusion, flexibility and creative growth’ (p. 253).

While questions about length and content of the written text are one set of concerns, one must also consider issues surrounding candidates’ preparedness for doctoral study in terms of writing skills and pre-requisite generic research skills. In a traditional academic context, one expects that the process of acquiring research competencies begins at master’s level, however this may not be the case within an art and design context. Newbury (2010, p. 377) quite rightly observes that whereas in other areas of endeavour the master’s degree functions as a preparation for
undertaking research, this is not the case in the creative arts. The master’s in visual arts/design was and still is conceived of as the terminal degree which validates that the candidate has attained a ‘level of competence suitable for independent professional practice.’ The emphasis then is on bringing a level of professional sophistication to one’s artistic practice and not on producing a research output. This situation may be changing with the engendering of research agendas into art schools, but for many who embark on practice-based PhDs in the visual arts, their formative educational experiences in art and design have been directed toward the development of artistic practice and not toward the acquisition of a competency to conduct research.

5.5. The Experiences of Supervisors

One of the findings of Rust, et. al.’s (2007) review into practice-led research in art design and architecture in the UK, was that while departments provided good support for the research training of PhD students ‘including support for practice-led methods,’ departments had limited capacity to supervise PhD students. Little information is given as to what is understood to be satisfactory research training in this specific field. A consistent observation of this investigation was that supervisors with little or no expertise in practice-led research were imported from cognate areas to ‘beef up an inexperienced team’ (Rust, et al., 2007, pp. 54-55). Friedman (2014), speaking of the Australian context, notes that until very recently only a small number of supervisors had themselves acquired PhDs and of those, many had been supervised by supervisors who themselves did not hold this qualification. This situation, it is safe to assume, is replicated in both the British and certainly the Irish contexts. The practice of drafting in people with PhDs from cognate areas such as
the Humanities, to form supervisory teams is a common strategy adopted in Ireland to overcome the dearth of doctoral level qualifications amongst studio staff.

Although not in abundance, there have been some attempts to enquire into the experiences of supervisors and students engaged in the VAP PhD process. A study conducted by Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2000, p. 348) helped to reveal some of the challenges facing supervisors of art and design doctoral students. The researchers undertook qualitative interviews with 50 supervisors who were involved in the supervision of art and design doctoral level studies in a range of UK institutions. Acknowledging cross-disciplinary challenges revealed by general research on supervision, this enquiry endeavoured to locate the kinds of challenges, which are particular to the supervision of art and design practice doctoral level research.

The research brought to light several issues, which were seen to impact at various stages of the PhD journey. From the very beginning of the PhD process supervisors experienced problems around fitting students’ research proposals into pre-existing structures established by research committees as part of validation processes. The researchers reported that supervisors often had to engage in advocacy missions outside of their disciplines in order to ‘inform, persuade and convince colleagues’ of the academic credibility of research proposals. Supervisors reported significant difficulties in translating proposals, which had been agreed upon by student and supervisor, into proposals which would be satisfactory to research committees. It was noted that supervisors tended to deal with difficult committee decisions with a pragmatic strategy of tailoring proposals to fit committee expectations through the
adopter of extant research models. This strategy was often employed, where institutions and supervisors lacked experience of doctoral level work. It was also found that where supervisors did not advocate for the tailoring of studies to existing research structures, more ‘innovative’ work tended to ensue. Another significant challenge which supervisors reported, was the difficulty in having external examiner appointments validated by committees. These issues centred on, committees’ concerns regarding the lack of experience and academic authority of proposed examiners.

On the micro level, in relation to their dealings with students, a central concern for supervisors was the responsibility they felt to manage and keep a balance between the ‘creative’ and ‘analytic’ elements of the research undertakings. Supervisors noted that students frequently experienced difficulty when it came to the written element of their research. This difficulty, it was believed, emanated from a lack of experience on the part of the students with the ‘written analytic’ (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2000, p. 350). One of the significant observations, reported by supervisors, was the anxiety suffered by students ‘about the need to incorporate theory into the project’ and this was found to sometimes disrupt ‘students’ practice fundamentally.’ Supervisors felt that in some cases students hid in their practice retreating from ‘unfamiliar and threatening intellectual demands.’ Overcoming the students’ anxiety regarding what they perceived as a disconnect between the practice and the written element of the research, required considerable support and intervention on the part of the supervisors. A theme, which Hockey and Allen-Collinson consistently saw emerging from their study, was that while students were
not averse to writing, they had trouble in reconciling their own writing styles with the academic language required for doctoral level study.

Though the demands of coming to terms with theory and/or writing were identified as factors which challenged students, one of the interesting findings reported by Hockey and Allen-Collinson was the observation by supervisors of students’ reluctance to document their artistic processes whereby they ‘detailed how they arrived at their particular creative outcomes’ (p. 352). It is notable that supervisors in the study appear to accept or subscribe to the requirement for students to engage in systematic documentation of the creative process. Such a requirement seems to be based on an approach which is suggested by Scrivener (2000, p. 13) when he writes of a process of systematic episodes of reflection which are ‘supported by records of working.’ It is worth taking some time to consider the assumptions underpinning this activity.

In an attempt to adhere to the norms and conventions of what might constitute legitimate research activity, the artist comes to consider their work in terms of justification of choices made, attempting to articulate decisions which hitherto might have remained tacit. Such decisions may in fact reside beyond the realm of language, having arisen out of spontaneous and unconscious generative processes. Jewesbury (2009, p. 2) notes that the problem residing in an evaluative approach is that only the ‘efficacy of a research process’ can be ascertained. What cannot be deduced is whether this process has given rise to good, bad or mediocre art. What has emerged from such a situation he claims is a body of ‘Dull, process-led art’ which is promoted in ‘an internally-circulated round of theoretical publications.’
At undergraduate level, students of fine art are required to engage in periods of reflection and asked within the framework of the ‘studio crit’ to consider in retrospect what led to this or that decision. In addition, they are invariably required to produce sketchbooks or notebooks which function as spaces for gathering, juxtaposing and working through ideas embodied in text and image. The sketchbook functions as a space for experimentation, idea generation and thinking as well as a tool for documenting. Fine art students at undergraduate level are not usually required to record systematically, and mindfully to deliberate on the minutia of the creative process itself as it unfolds. Such recording is not essential to the modus operandi of the artist, as it is for the scientist or student of science. While detailed documentation of procedure is of course essential in a scientific research setting where results are required to be replicable to be valid, one has to question to point of such an activity in an artistic context.

Durré (2014, pp. 190-191) maintains that ‘the artist has no inherent ethical obligation to method or procedure.’ Critiquing Scrivener’s suggested system on the basis that it privileges reflection over ‘absorption, speculation, affect, observation, open-ended engagement with social space- and above all mental freedom,’ she asks, ‘Where are delight, discovery, curiosity in this nested narcissism, these sequential solipsisms?’ Durré goes on to argue that for the artist, process, insight and material are related to each other in an intimately, irrational and complex ‘flux’ which is difficult to unravel. While artists may undertake rigorous and painstaking documentation of the creative process as a part of the creative process, such an undertaking is not essential to the production of art. Scrutiny of the creative process could at times be seen to be anathema to the way in which work is produced, functioning to impede rather than
advance progress. Durré questions the need to expose creativity’s ‘delicate process’ imploring that its mystery be honoured (p. 193). Looked at in this way one can understand students’ reluctance to cede to this requirement for scrupulously recorded accounts of process.

On foot of a study which looked at audio visual PhDs in the UK, Lebow (2008, p. 202) found that individuals involved in the supervision of Audio Visual PhDs tend to be reticent about speaking of guidelines and regulations. Lebow maintains that this reticence has much to do with a desire to protect what she identifies as a fragile flexibility in the defining of this ‘nebulous area of research.’ Flexibility appears to be a characteristic which is often used when speaking of the supervision of arts practice PhDs. Stating that the multifarious contexts, media and outputs of artistic research pose challenges to conventional approaches to supervision, Hamilton and Carson (2015, p. 3) say that supervisors in the creative arts must be ‘flexible, innovative, and able to solve new and unanticipated challenges.’ It has been suggested by Harrison and Grant (2015, p. 556) that artistic and performative PhD supervision demands ‘considerable fluidity in supervisory practices.’ An investigation of the emergent models of pedagogy which resides within these disciplines may, they claim, yield new, non-hierarchical approaches to research pedagogy, where there is a horizontalising of the ‘master-apprentice’ relationship between supervisor and student. In a study which drew on data gathered from an online survey of 73 students and 72 supervisors, administered across 11 countries, Harrison and Grant’s research highlights perceived benefits of the distribution of supervision amongst a team, stating that some students were found to value a diversity of perspectives.
5.6. The Experiences of Students

In a cognate study to their research into the experiences of supervisors, Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2005) looked to the experiences of doctoral level students, interviewing 50 PhD students in art and design from 25 UK institutions. Stating that empirical studies on students’ experiences of undertaking PhD level study in art and design were ‘sparse to say the least,’ the researchers sought to access the students’ experiences covering a broad range of topics. The study found that students consistently identified themselves as creatives as opposed to academics. The researchers noted that, with the exception, of two students who had graduated from Master’s in History of Art, all other students were considered to be relatively unskilled when it came to academic writing. This deficit of skill was attributable to the lack of opportunity to gain experience of writing in previous levels of art and design education.

Notably, Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2003) found that the students they interviewed ‘constituted a ‘naïve’ population in relation to the rigours of completing research.’ The level of naivety it was felt went beyond the level typical of more conventional PhD students. The study postulated that students experienced ‘shock’ at finding themselves in a foreign situation with ‘an unfamiliar intellectual terrain’ stretching out before them (p. 84). While students feared that they would fail to meet up to academic requirements they similarly feared failure in their professional contexts. Time, which normally would have been given over to the production of creative work, was now being diverted into research activity. Furthermore, students found the regulatory frameworks which governed the PhD process to be particularly constraining, feeling that their creative work was being corralled and overseen by
regulatory committees which were populated predominantly by non-art and design staff. Corroborating the supervisor study, it was discovered that students found the requirement for consistent documentation and analysis of the creative process to be a significant drawback to the progress of their work. Students felt it to be ‘disturbing’ to have to break away from the creative process to engage in analytical reflection through writing. In particular, students expressed feeling disturbed by the level of detailed disclosure required.

Asserting that academic research embodies a set of values which involve a ‘commitment to methodological transparency and communicability,’ Newbury (2010, pp. 371-372) makes the point that creative arts and design researchers often have difficulty with academic conventions which require the researcher to ‘account for the research journey.’ The artistic researcher must however he says, ‘make a commitment to articulating the knowledge they have in forms with which others can engage.’ Speaking about the ‘creative arts and design PhD,’ Newbury differentiates the PhD from subsequent research in that it embodies an extra set of values which require a deeper and more pronounced ‘reflexivity’ and ‘methodological self-consciousness.’ Newbury goes on to emphasise the pedagogical role of the PhD as an education in how to conduct research. The PhD is, he says:

A training in research through which the students develops a reflexive competence in the procedures for handling and generating ideas and evidence appropriate to the specific field of study and demonstrates the capacity for making an original contribution to their field of study (Newbury, 2010, pp. 371-372).

Interestingly he places the emphasis on the ‘capacity’ to produce an original contribution to knowledge and not on the original contribution itself. Newbury goes
on to elucidate a possible approach to dealing with the research training needs of the creative arts and design PhD candidate, whereby research training is delivered on various levels throughout the programme ranging from individual supervision, to department level methodology courses and institutional level generic skills training. What is important here is that the student acquires a methodological sensibility which would involve a critical appraisal of the distinctive evolving methods which are particular to the arts and an appreciation and understanding of methods hailing from other traditions.

Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2003, p. 87) noted that students adopted one of three stances in relation to the research undertaking. For some the pursuing of a research degree was of little importance. These students viewed the process as a means to fund three years of creative practice. This cohort ‘harboured no serious intent to pursue their declared research project; their concern was to enhance practice’ and so had decided not to allow the research process to interfere with this aspiration. The researchers signal flaws in quality assurance mechanisms governing student admissions as a reason for the enrolling students of this ilk. A second category of student had succeeded in synthesising the dual identities of researcher and artist, but this was achieved at the expense of the creative work which students regarded as being either stunted or taken in undesirable unintended directions. Students in this category exhibited a high degree of ambivalence towards research seeing it as a necessary encumbrance to be endured for the sake of possible career advancement in academia. A third category of student did not display ambivalence but engaged with the research process. These students struggled to adapt but ‘began to connect in an emotional way with being both a researcher and a creative person.’ This cohort
began to view writing as a creative endeavour in itself, finding the PhD process to be a powerful impetus for development in the creative work (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2003, p. 89).

In a second paper arising out of the same research Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2005, pp. 84-86) focus more particularly on students’ experiences of ‘the analytic’ and ‘the creative mode’ finding that students reported elevated levels of anxiety with regard to what they referred to as ‘writing.’ Where students demonstrated confidence and sophistication when discussing the creative element of their work, they equated the written endeavour with struggle. It is noteworthy that students were eager to convey that the most significant creative decisions made during the course of their study proceeded ‘intuitively rather than programmatically, linearly, or mechanically.’ Perhaps the most interesting finding revealed in this study was that students tended to engage in patterns of activity whereby they either fully engaged in writing or fully engaged in making with only a small number of participants reporting that they were able to combine these two ‘divergent experiential states.’

5.7. Experiences of Examination and the Artistic PhD

Commenting on emerging research in the area of PhD examination in general, Holbrook et al. (2004a) observe that the later part of the 20th century and the early part of the 21st century have seen a steady accretion of research findings in this area. In a large-scale study of doctoral examination in the UK, Tinkler and Jackson (2000, p. 179) found that while there were differences in peripheral examination criteria governing traditional PhD examination, in the main there was a ‘large degree of institutional consistency in relation to ‘key’ criteria for assessing PhD.’ By contrast,
Dally, et al. (2004), researching the Creative Arts PhD examination in Australia, identify a large degree of diversity in terms of processes and outcomes across the institutions investigated. This research drew on interviews with 15 fine art research higher degree examiners and the evaluation of 30 examiner reports from 16 Australian institutions. The study looked to investigate standards and models of evaluation and, also sought to access examiners’ perceptions of their role. Given the nascent nature of examination traditions in this area, the researchers felt that inquiry into this specific context offered a unique opportunity to investigate the evolution of assessment practices and the establishment of standards (Holbrook, et al., 2004a; Holbrook, et al., 2008; Holbrook, et al., 2004b).

Dally et al. (2004, p. 156) note that fine art PhD examination calls for examiner teams who are both flexible and cautious. While examiners were prepared to accommodate diversity in terms of assessment processes they also expressed concern that these processes should not deviate from those of other discipline. In contrasting their findings to other work by Holbrook et al. (2004) carried out with PhD examiners across all disciplines, Dally et al. found that whereas in disciplines with a long research tradition, examiners were less likely to concern themselves with adherence to guidelines, fine art examiners were very much concerned with adhering to ‘ground rules’ (p.145). The researchers found that while there was general acknowledgement of the fact that fine art research was substantially different to traditional modes of research, participants expressed concern that the processes undertaken to conduct examination of fine art PhDs ‘should adhere to the same practices governing examination of conventional written theses.’ For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that, the word ‘thesis’ in an Australian context is generally
conceived to refer to both the exhibition and the written component of the research. The word ‘exegesis’ is normally used to refer to the written element. Speaking of judging work, examiners preferred to conduct this work in solitude and independently of other examiners, whilst also being open to the idea of collaborating with other examiners. It was observed that examiners generally tended to agree on standards when it came to the exhibition and the study suggests that the ‘critiquing’ of art work by panels of examiners operates as a means of peer review.

Looking at how participants conceptualised their role, Dally et al. observe that examiners in fine art doctoral studies, rather than conceiving themselves as experts and gatekeepers, sought a more mentoring role; seeing themselves as ‘co-investigators’ with the evaluation process itself being conceived of as a formative experience (p.157). It appears from this research that examiners tended to adopt a hermeneutical stance, engaging with the work and communicating information regarding its impact as they experience it.

When looking at examiner reports Dally et al. observe that fine art reports differ significantly from those of other disciplines. For example, fine art examiners devote a lot of time to the exposition of a neutral commentary on the meaning or impact of the work, without making value judgements. The researchers maintain that for the examiners, the exposition of their interpretation or understanding of the work could perhaps function as a means to demonstrate the validity and value of the PhD contribution. Although examiners devoted less than half of their commentary in reports to the exegesis, it was found that when recommendations for amendments
were made they were invariably directed toward this element with the exhibition being viewed as less amenable to change due to its status as a finished entity.

Conducted in Australia, Brien et al., (2014, pp. 104-105) undertook a study which sought to access the perspectives of examiners, supervisors and students with regard to the examination of doctoral level studies in the creative arts. The research found that although the community was convinced of the necessity of a written component in doctoral research, there was a considerable variability in expectations across the sector, with regard to perceptions of content, purpose and quality with even the name being given to this element being the focus of substantial debate. The study which consisted of a two-year long investigation using focus groups, round table discussions, questionnaires and the reviewing of 70 examiners reports as well as university policy documents, found that some policies and examiners expected to find scholarly outcomes revealed in the creative work whereas others expected professional qualities to be revealed in the creative work and scholarship to be present only in the written supporting document. Analysis of the 70 examiners reports found that examiners commented primarily on the exegesis. If amendments were required, it was to this element of the research with only a small percentage requiring changes to the creative work. This was true even in cases where the creative work was deemed to be ‘barely adequate.’ Of the examples reviewed the creative work was judged to be inadequate in only 6 per cent of the reports, whereas the critical written component was deemed to be below standard in 26 per cent of the samples. The conclusion drawn by Brien et al. is that either doctoral writing is afforded more weight than other elements of the doctoral ‘package’ or that examiners
feel more confident to offer clearly articulated judgements on written work than on creative output.

Interestingly when it came to the kinds of criteria that examiners brought to bear when evaluating work, Dally et al. found that the concept of originality did not play a significant role. Examiners looked to establish that development had taken place, that the work was situated or contextualised in terms of the literature and contemporary art practice and they looked for innovation or ‘newness’ but not originality. Dally et al. found that examiners located the legitimacy of the PhD ‘within the diligence of the research process and the ‘authoritative’ representation of this in the studio practice’ (p. 157). This point is interesting to consider in light of the generally accepted view that a PhD should make an original contribution to knowledge in the field. An area where contribution to knowledge proved particularly problematic was in the cases where there was no clear delineation between the candidates professional practice and their supposed doctoral contribution. This circumstance tended to be more pronounced when the candidate had come into the process already having an established and successful professional practice.

It is worthwhile, taking into account research from the area of performance as research (PaR). Looking specifically into the areas of theatre, film, music and dance PARIP (Practice as Research in Performance) was a five-year project emanating from the University of Bristol and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB). Working under the auspices of PARIP, Nelson and Andrews (2003) garnished feedback from 33 HEIs producing a series of recommendations for the administering of PhDs in the area of PaR. The visual arts were not included in the
research. The feedback gathered, which included the experiences of students, makes for interesting reading with students reporting that they felt they were left ‘to make it up’ as they went along. In addition, respondents reported that they felt that when it came to the examination process there was often a privileging of the text with less attention being paid to practice elements.

The researchers also observed that some institutions appeared to not ‘accept PaR as research-worthy’ requiring the practice to be accompanied by a full 80,000-word thesis. They note that in one case a student appeared to be penalised for submitting a practice element being required to submit an extra 20,000 words. One of the noteworthy recommendations made by the report was the suggestion that HEIs consider recruiting external examiners much earlier in the process than would be normal in other disciplines. This recommendation makes sense in terms of the trajectory of arts practice PhDs whereby the process may be punctuated at distinct stages with work being presented for exhibition. It was noted that remuneration for extra external examiner visits, which would occur throughout the PhD process, be considered in the costing of PaR PhD programs.

5.8. Recording and Dissemination of Research Outputs

It is advisable, finally, to consider some work which has looked at the formats taken by arts practice research outputs. Mottram and Fisher’s (2006) study reviewed art and design outputs as they were reported to and selected by the UK Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) from 1992 to 2001. Reflecting on this research in 2014, Mottram (2014b, p. 54) observes that although art and design staff comprised 20% of academic staff in the sector, 40% of research submissions to the RAE in 2001, came from art and design. The recorded submissions comprised of ‘a high proportion of
exhibition type outputs.’ Observing a discrepancy between the percentages of artistic outputs submitted and those accepted, she concludes that a preference for conventional text-based outputs resides within the RAE system. With regard to exhibition outputs, a number of issues are raised, for example how impact rating is quantified in terms of the status of exhibitions. In addition to determining the relative status of one exhibition venue over another, the question arises as to who will function as steward to the discipline. Mottram, states that fine art academics might be ‘dependent upon gallery directors or curators or commissioning bodies for disseminating and assessing the quality of new thinking’ (p. 55). Clearly the question of how artistic research outcomes are recorded, disseminated and adjudicated on, remain substantive issues to be addressed by the research community.

I have previously referred to a large-scale review of research in art, design and architecture which was commissioned by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in the UK. In 2007 Rust et al. (2007, p. 63) tried to get the measure of the emerging field, charting in broad terms the research being done in the specified fields, as well as ‘assessing the overall health of the subject areas in terms of the capacity and capability for delivering research.’ Signalling a lack of scholarly publishing infrastructure in the area the review agreed that the issues of outcome or contribution to knowledge was ‘difficult to resolve’ and required ‘fresh thinking’ stating that practice-led research in art and design represented ‘a challenge to AHRC definition of research or at least the way the definition is generally interpreted.’
The challenge artistic research represents to traditional definitions of research is not unique to the UK. If one looks to Australia, one can observe the high degree of uncertainty which has surrounded the acceptance of unconventional non-textual research outputs during the evolution of the field. For a time during the nineties, creative outputs which were not accompanied by text were recognised by the Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC). This situation changed to a system of only acknowledging traditional text-based outputs for a decade, until finally artistic non-text outputs were again recognised by the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative. So, for a period of a decade there was a hiatus in the recognition of artistic outputs. Sade (2012) maintains that such controversies have been detrimental to the development of the field.

While the Australian system has demonstrated a high degree of vacillation between acceptance and non-acceptance of presentation outputs, by comparison Biggs and Büchler (2014, p. 89) commend the variety of presentation formats allowed by the RAE, nineteen in all. These mechanisms for presentation are not preserved for the exposition of artistic research alone but are open to all sectors. Biggs and Büchler however, note that exhibition type outputs are the predominant submission format used by those submitting to the UoA63 category which is the category for submissions in art and design. Nevertheless, the UK RAE is they claim, driven by a ‘bottom-up’ approach. As such the artistic research community are shaping what comes to be accepted as publishing in the arts under the various headings. Because the exhibition is of such dominance within the UoA63 category it is this community who come to define what exhibition type publishing might mean across all other university sectors who may wish to disseminate research in this way. In addition,
notions of what certain output types involve, are being augmented by the artistic research community. For example, the book as research output extends beyond the traditional format to include the idea of book as artefact or artist’s book, and new forms of journals, which are dedicated to the ‘meaningful’ exposition of artistic research, are beginning to emerge. These are qualitatively and structurally different to existing models.

Despite a small number of exceptions for example the *Journal of Artistic Research* (JAR) and *Art and Research*, one could reasonably make the claim that the field lacks sufficient infrastructure for the publication and dissemination of artistic research. In the absence of an established infrastructure particular to the field, the artistic research community has tended to look for validation of artistic research outcomes outside of its own academic community, either in the broader academic field or in the art world.

**5.9. Summary**

Candlin (2000a, p. 1) maintains that although every PhD student experiences anxiety, in the case of practice-based PhDs ‘anxieties reach beyond personal doubt and are often shared by supervisors, examiners and senior academic management.’ Although written nearly two decades ago Candlin’s comment would still seem to have some resonance. In Australia over 400 PhDs have now been completed in the area of Creative Arts, thus researchers have been able to move beyond speculative debate, engaging in work of a more empirical nature. Despite the passing of time uncertainty still appears to be a feature of doctoral education in the Arts. Webb and Brien (2015, p. 2) continue to speak of ‘anxieties and uncertainties held by many doctoral
supervisors, candidates and examiners’ in relation to not only the examination but also the ramification of presenting artistic outputs as part of a research degree. Their study into attitudes to examination and the creative arts PhD reveal that while participants welcome clearer guidelines pertaining to the examination process, there is unanimous rejection of the idea of a ‘restrictive code to guide doctoral examination’ [Un-paginated]. Sade (2012) supports this idea stating that practice-based research requires ‘a disposition that remains open to change, new possibilities,’ one where uncertainty is not trimmed away [Un-paginated]. Ambivalence appears to be a dominant feature of the Arts Practice PhD experience with stakeholders attempting to balance the need for certainty and structure with the requirement for unfettered liberty, openness and freedom to innovate and experiment. Yet as Paltridge et al. (2011, p. 247) point out while vagueness may create conditions for flexibility, questions need to be raised as to how candidates ‘are to meet unarticulated expectations.’

The preceding chapters have provided a substantial contextualisation of the VAP PhD looking at the phenomenon in terms of its evolution and its current location within the HE landscape. This section also examined epistemological, ontological and methodological debates which circulate around the VAP PhD and the broader field of artistic research. Finally, the contextualising chapters evaluated the findings of empirical studies completed in the field. The next section discusses methodological considerations underpinning this study and presents information on the methods, processes and procedures which were adhered to in the conducting of this research.
Chapter 6 Methodology

6.1. Introduction

This section is comprised of two chapters, the first of these presents a methodological discussion, the second presents information on the methods, processes and procedures which were adhered to when conducting this research. In this chapter, the theoretical assumptions of the researcher are unfolded, in order to identify the ontological and epistemological dispositions out of which the research has arisen. An exposition of the key ideas informing phenomenology as a philosophical tradition serves to elucidate the researcher’s intentions with regard to the adopting of this approach. In particular, I felt it important to account for the abandonment of the Husserl ‘inspired’ epoché suggested in the work of descriptive phenomenologist such as Giorgi (1997). It is my contention that the notion of epoché as it is often employed by descriptive phenomenologists, represents a fundamental misapprehension of the concept as it is espoused in the writings of Husserl.

Smith et al. (2013, p. 6) assert that those undertaking Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis ‘need to know something of the history of phenomenology and hermeneutics, to be able to place IPA in an intellectual history.’ It is important then, to show some depth of understanding in relation to the philosophical foundations upon which the study is premised and for this reason I have devoted some time to expounding on key themes. A rehearsal of foundational ideas underlying phenomenology is undertaken not only to expose the philosophical foundations upon which the study is built, but also to show the justification for electing a hermeneutic rather than descriptive approach.
6.2. Settling on an Approach

Bryman (1984) in his discussion of the merits and characteristics of quantitative and qualitative methodologies points to an increasing tendency for methodological issues to be explicated on the basis of the epistemological predispositions of the researcher. Countering Trow’s (1957, p. 33) assertion that ‘the problem under investigation properly dictates the investigation,’ Bryman makes the point that it is not so much the research problem which drives the choice of technique ‘but a prior intellectual commitment to a philosophical position’ on the part of the researcher. He goes on to point out that it is rare for researchers to ‘traverse the epistemological hiatus which opens up between the research traditions’ (p. 80).

The research question which directs this study focuses on conceptions of the Visual Arts Practice PhD in Ireland. Taking a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the research aims to investigate participants’ understandings of their lived experiences. The research question reflects the philosophical disposition of the researcher and situates the research within the qualitative tradition.

6.2.1. Qualitative Enquiry

Denzin and Lincoln (2013, p. 6) offer the following generic definition of qualitative research:

*Qualitative research* is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field-notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 6).
Implicit in this definition is the situatedness of the researcher in relation to the research and the relativistic nature of qualitative research. This relativistic characteristic of the tradition was markedly revealed in the famous debate which arose regarding the work of Margaret Mead (1929) and Derek Freeman (1983) and the contrasting interpretations which arose out of their respective Samoan research. Saukka (2010, p. 17) makes the point that this case demonstrates how Mead’s ‘impressionistic style’ rendered a completely different reality to that of Freeman’s rationalistic objectivism. The contrast between Mead and Freeman, highlights the context sensitive nature of the research process. Not only is the data shaped by the analysis in each case, but also by the unique attributes of both researchers. Mead gained access to a different reality to that of Freeman and this reality was mediated through her unique outlook, that of a middleclass girl in her twenties.

Whereas Creswell (1998) identifies five distinct approaches to qualitative investigation; case study; narrative research, grounded theory; phenomenology and ethnography; taking a diachronic approach, Denzin and Lincoln (1998; 2000; 2013) maintain that the tradition has demonstrated certain characteristics during different phases in its development. Each moment has revealed a different attitude toward the notion of objectivity. In their numerous iterations of a timeline for the evolution of the qualitative research tradition, Denzin and Lincoln attend not only to a synchronic range of static categories or approaches, but also to the historicity of the qualitative paradigm as a tradition which has evolved and has been shaped by context. Though phases may have evolved, at particular points in time, this is not to say that one moment was superseded by the next. Each phase continues to exert its influence as phases ‘overlap and simultaneously operate in the present’ (2013, p. 5).
6.2.2. The Researcher as A/r/tographer

Upon consideration of the range of research approaches at the disposal of the researcher, a *phenomenological* approach was deemed most appropriate for this study. A number of guiding considerations informed this choice. Firstly, this philosophical attitude is sympathetic to the disposition of the artist/researcher. The artist/researcher does not generally, look to extract *nomothetic* assertions from numerical data, striving for rhetorical neutrality. Nor does the artist/researcher believe that they can remain detached, free to produce findings that can be time and context free (Nagel, 1986). The artist/researcher is embedded in the context, culturally, relationally, bodily, temporally and spatially.

There has been a tendency for artistic researchers to draw on postmodern discourse. Springgay et al. (2008) for example bring into play the writings of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). While the fluid, non-hierarchical, non-reductive theoretical constructs and language play proffered by postmodern thinkers is attractive to artist researchers, I have elected not to succumb to this seduction. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005, p. 321) make the point that:

> Oppositional and insurgent researchers as maieutic agents must not confuse their research efforts with the textual suavities of an avant-garde academic posturing in which they are awarded sinecure of representation for the oppressed without having to return to those working-class communities where their studies took place (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 321).

For the phenomenologist, the fundamental origin of meaning and value is the lived experience of human beings. Armstrong (1994, p. 562) points out that according to phenomenology, the work of the philosopher involves disclosing ‘the structures of
experience, in particular consciousness, the imagination, relation with others, and the situatedness of the human subject in society and history.’ He goes on to say that:

Phenomenological theories of literature regard works of art as mediators between the consciousnesses of the author and the reader or as attempts to disclose aspects of the human being in their worlds (Armstrong, 1994, p. 562).

Springgay et al. (2005 cited in Springgay et al., 2008, p. xxix) describe a/r/tographic inquiry as ‘an embodied encounter constituted through visual and textual understandings and experiences rather than mere visual and textual representations.’ The artist/researcher/teacher is, as it were, already cast into a phenomenological disposition, being-in-the-world, looking to abstract meaning out of the ebb and flow of lived experiences through engagement in arts practice. By dint of my a/r/tographic identity, I came to this research with an intellectual commitment to a phenomenological ontology and it is out of these going concerns that the research question was formulated.

The study aims to investigate participants' experiences and conceptual understandings of PhDs in Visual Arts Practice in an Irish context. As such I sought to build a picture of the phenomena based on multi-perspectival accounts of a small number of students, graduates, supervisors and examiners. One of the aims of the research was to understand how participants make sense of the arts practice PhD. As such the research question lends itself to qualitative investigation and more particularly the question signals a phenomenological approach.

6.2.3. Other Approaches Considered for Study

Several approaches were considered in advance of settling on a phenomenological approach. A brief account of these is given here by way of illuminating decisions
made and paths taken and not taken. When first formulating the research question, I was inclined to view the participants and context as a distinct culture and this seemed to suggest an ethnographic approach. The ethnographical researcher tries to navigate a path between the *etic* and *emic*, by ingratiating themselves into the research context and by attempting to probe and describe cultural milieu, through either ‘covert’ or ‘overt’ participation in the daily lives of the actors, over an extended period of time (Hamersley & Atkinson, 1995). Through direct and sustained participant observation, along with a mix of other methods, the researcher would ideally, gain insight from insiders by listening to their stories, trying to become somewhat of an insider themselves (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Showing sensitivity to the complex, non-static, research context, the researcher would be mindful of the perspectives of the participants and would consider their own influence on the research process and outputs (Snape & Spencer, 2003). Despite the strengths of an ethnographic approach, it was decided that the private, self-directed and unpredictable trajectory of the PhD process including supervision and examination was not amenable to this kind of investigation. Yet the embeddedness of the researcher in the research context does mean that the study retains some echoes of an ethnographic approach. It could be said to be ethnographic around the edges.

The notion that theories would emerge from the research context forms the basis of Grounded Theory Method (GTM) as advocated by the early work of Glaser & Strauss (1967). The researcher, much akin to the descriptive phenomenologist, tries to evade presuppositions which might frame understanding in advance of the research process. Rather than performing a Husserlian ‘bracketing,’ the exponent of Grounded Theory Method in its purest rendition, would try to come to the research
context without hypotheses, and therefore would not conduct a literature review prior to entering the field. Through exhaustive and meticulous data collection to the point of saturation; coding and cross-referencing, the researcher would seek to generate and discover theories and categories worthy of analysis. Data collection and analysis would happen concurrently using a constant comparative method (Becker, 1993) and would continue until the point of information saturation.

Grounded Theory itself has evolved over time, with Glaser and Strauss parting company. Strauss and Corbin (1998) advocate an elaborating oscillation between induction, deduction and validation with data being continually shaped by the researcher but also continually being validated to minimise distortion. Charmaz (2000) modified GTM to allow for co-construction of data into theory by the researcher and participant. Seale (2000, p. 91) makes the point that GTM had broad appeal because it offered a means by which the ‘Theory capitalists and big-time, government-funded, quantitative survey research’ could be overthrown by ‘a sociological proletariat of qualitative research workers.’ Seale goes on to say that GTM carries the hallmarks of the ‘era of scientism’ but cautions those who would be quick to dismiss the method as being old-fashioned and derived from a ‘naively realist epistemology’ (P.104). The method he reckons, in terms of its rigour, self-awareness and openness, has a lot to offer.

While I feel, I have gained insight through considering the benefits of a grounded theory approach, it clearly was not going to work for one who grew up within the research context. The possibility of coming to the research without a distorted lens seemed impossible. However, the idea that theory would not be imposed from the outset but would emerge through engagement with the research context has been
important particularly in the light of a discourse which has been the subject of repeated and sometimes preposterous attempts at theorisation.

Ethnomethodology is like phenomenology in that it concerns itself with everyday life. The ethnomethodologist rejects grand theories focusing on the practices of participants, looking to determine how actors construct these very practices. The researcher looks to focuses on the methods of members and the accomplishment of a sense of order within systems. Attention is given to the micro process of the everyday. Indexicality and reflexivity combine to arrive at ‘accounting’ (Garfinkel, 1984). While it certainly would be fruitful to gain insight into the micro-processes by which for example examiners arrive at value judgements regarding Arts Practice PhDs, the unpredictable, infrequent and erratic convening of PhD evaluation processes would present insurmountable difficulties for one attempting an ethnomethodological approach within the timeframe of a structured PhD study such as this. Attention then shifts from observation of processes to the accessing of fine grained accounts of perceptions and contextual understandings. A phenomenological approach suggests itself.

6.3. Phenomenology - A Brief Exposition of Origins and Philosophical Principles

In his impassioned writings on the Romantic Roots in Modern Art, Wiedmann (1979, p. 34) recounts how the painter Franz Marc despairs of science’s ‘cosmic fall.’ For Marc science was, to use Wiedmann’s words:

Dangerously close to becoming a common whore whose calculated embrace soiled all it touched. Nothing in the end was secure from the greedy grasp of a scientific mind, from a profane, inquisitive intelligence which ruthlessly destroyed the sacred
life of things. The cold touch of science, in short, merely succeeded in emptying the world of its divine magic (Wiedmann, 1979, p. 34).

Wiedmann observes that Marc, while exhibiting a moment of great insight, is simultaneously simply reviving the Romantic controversy between science and art whereby the artists’ ‘magical incantatory’ vision which perceived the world as whole and living’ is deemed irreconcilable with the ‘scientist’s analytical perception, under whose dissecting gaze things seemed to shrivel and die.’ While what is recounted here may be perceived to be an extreme view, one must understand Marc’s despair as emanating from the early 1900s when positivistic science was marching with spectacular success into the twentieth century, offering up the promise of answers to all the puzzles of the universe wherein man finds himself. It was a common contention at this time that all the enigmas of human existence could be resolved through science’s analytic tools. Scores of artists, poets and philosophers united in denunciation of what they perceived to be ‘the vainglorious progressiveness of positivism’ (p. 33). Marc’s anxiety could be said to have arisen out of a technological nihilism which became a characteristic feature of the modern age and it is out of this technological nihilism that phenomenology is born, finding expression in the writings of Husserl, Heidegger, Bergson, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and others.

6.3.1. Husserl, Epoché and The Phenomenological Reduction

In his two-volume text *Logical Studies* (1900-1901) and in a later work *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1913), Husserl presents his conception of phenomenology. Later in life he goes on to clarify his position in several lectures and in a 1929 entry for *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Following in the Cartesian tradition, Husserl engages in a thorough critique of cognition and a
critical evaluation of the conditions under which knowledge is possible. Husserl’s phenomenological thought is perhaps best approached in terms of how the starting points for his conception of knowing differs from those of Kant. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1782), Kant navigates a path between the empiricism of Hume (1748) and dogmatic rationalism of Leibniz (1710). Questioning the nature of knowledge and knowing and interrogating the idea that reality can be accessed ‘in-itself’, *a priori*, Kant deliberates on the limitations of reason and attempts to evolve taxonomy of the criteria for knowing. While not attempting to get into the epistemological nuances of Kant, it is helpful in considering Husserl, to be aware of Kant’s distinction between the object as it is ‘given’ in experience, *phenomena* and the object ‘in-itself’, *noumena*. For Kant knowledge is inextricably caught up in experience. Objects must conform to what the knowing subject contributes to experience through their cognitive faculties:

space and time contain a manifold of pure *a priori* intuition, but are nevertheless the condition of the mind’s receptivity, under which alone it can obtain representations of objects, and which, consequently, must always affect the concept of these objects (Kant original 1782, 1998, p.84).

Politis (Kant, 1998, p. xlviii) in his introduction to Meikeljohn’s translation of *Critique of Pure Reason* puts it thus, ‘For Kant, the inclination to use reason alone, divorced from experience, in order to know things, must be illegitimate and a source of illusory knowledge.’

Husserl maintains that although objects may have a reality outside of human consciousness, one nevertheless has indubitable knowledge of these objects of the extra-mental world. Subject/object dichotomies give way to an understanding of
objects as they are ‘given’ in conscious awareness. Objects, be they abstract, or concrete may exist ‘noumenally,’ but this issue can be put to one side, objects as they present themselves in consciousness are amenable to consciousness as phenomena.

Consciousness for Husserl is always directed toward some object, under some aspect. This directedness is termed ‘intentionality.’ He maintains that for understanding to take place there must exist in the mind of the knowing subject, ‘intentional content.’ This intentional content is made up of intending consciousness noesis and the thing intended, the ‘intentional correlate’ or noema (Husserl, 1998, p. 4). As he puts it in his entry for the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1929):

In unreflective holding of some object or other in consciousness, we are turned or directed towards it: our ‘intentio’ goes out toward it. The phenomenological reversal of our gaze shows that this ‘being directed’[Gerichtetsein] is really an immanent and essential feature of the respective experiences involved; they are ‘intentional’ experiences (Husserl, 1998, p. 4).

Husserl suggests that the verifiability of the existence of objects, the ‘things-in-themselves’ as a feature of an extra-mental world is of little consequence. Cognition by virtue of the fact that it is human cognition is, he says, ‘unfit to reach the very nature of things, to reach the things in themselves’ (Husserl, 1999, p. 219). Yet as one directs one’s intentional gaze toward objects, one has access to knowledge of objects as they are constituted in cognition. What is required he says is a phenomenological reduction, one must suspend one’s natural disposition, which is wont to perceive the world as something out there external to the knowing subject, in a process which he refers to as epoché. In the act of suppressing or ‘bracketing’ suppositions or hypotheses which pertain to objects as they may exist ‘noumenally’ and turning to reflect on one’s own intentional content, one may ‘break through to
his own consciousness as pure phenomenon or as the totality of his purely mental processes’ (Husserl, 1998, p. 17):

If then we disregard any metaphysical purpose of the critique of cognition and confine ourselves purely to the task of clarifying the essence of cognition and of being an object of cognition, then this will be phenomenology of cognition and of being an object of cognition and will be the first and principle part of phenomenology as a whole (Husserl, 1999, p. 221).

The phenomenological reduction involves a turning about of the ‘experiencing gaze on our own psychic life’ (Husserl, 1998, p. 15). It is through this at once reflective and reflexive process that the general essential character of objects comes to ‘appear’ under some aspect or in aspects (*Abschattungen*).


Heidegger dedicated his masterpiece *Being and Time* (1927) to his teacher Husserl, yet the phenomenological approach which Heidegger elaborates, arises out of a systematic dismantling of the Cartesian and Neo-Cartesian traditions. In the early sections of *Being and Time*, Heidegger locates the etymological origins of the word phenomenology. Phenomenon from the Greek root φαινόντες (phainontes), is derived from the verb φαίνομαι (phainomai) meaning that which reveals itself or that which shows itself. The second constitutive etymological element in the word phenomenology, originates from the Greek meaning of λόγος (logos), that is discourse, or that which ‘opens to sight’ or ‘lets something be seen’ (Magill, 1963, p. 887):

The word merely informs us of the *how* with which *what* is to be treated in this science gets exhibited and handled. To have a science ‘of’ phenomena means to grasp its objects *in such a way* that everything about them which is up for discussion
must be treated by exhibiting it directly and demonstrating it directly (Heidegger, 2000, p. 59).

Phenomenology according to Heidegger (2000, p. 50) is properly understood as the logos of the phenomenon and is the disciplined attempt to disclose or to open to sight that which shows itself, letting that which shows itself, be seen as it is, as he puts it, we go ‘to the things themselves!’ Yet for Heidegger, Husserl’s phenomenological approach depends on the conceptual constraints of inherited philosophical terms such as ‘subject’ and ‘object’, ‘act’ and ‘content’ and on a concept of Being which was founded on a subject/predicate dogma which proceeded from Plato down to the logic of Hegel. And so, Heidegger strives to develop a language which will operate outside of the pre-existing linguistic constructions of philosophical discourse which had persisted from the time of Plato.

Central to Heidegger’s deliberations is the concept of Being and the exploration of a particular manifestation of being termed Dasein, a word which Heidegger coins. Etymologically the German da sein translates as ‘being-there’ or ‘there-being.’ It is difficult to encapsulate Heidegger’s conception of Dasein into a neat definition or set of attributes, in fact to do so would be to work against Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein. Within Being and Time Heidegger spirally unfolds the concept of Dasein throughout the course of the text. Dasein is something which is beyond a hermetically sealed definition in the classical sense. What we can say is that for Heidegger the essence of Dasein is its existence. Furthermore, Dasein is a being for whom Being is an issue. It is a re curans, for Dasein is that which ‘concerns’ itself with or ‘cares’ about the question of Being:
Everything we talk about, everything we have in view, everything towards which we comport ourselves in any way, is being; what we are is being, and so is how we are. Being lies in the fact that something is, and in its Being as it is; in Reality; in presence-at-hand; in subsistence; in validity; in Dasein; in the ‘there is’ (Heidegger, 2000, p. 26).

*Dasein* is ‘being-in-the-world.’ Unlike the *re cogitans* of Descartes, *Daisen* is not self-contained; a thinking being sitting in isolated contemplation of external objects which are ‘out there.’ The world is not in Heidegger’s conception, external to man, nor is it ‘an extended substance or an objective spatial container into which man is placed’ (Magill, 1963, p. 887), rather the world is ‘present-at-hand’. Man, himself unfolds, or ‘emerges in a world of going concerns and initially discovers himself in his engagement in practical and personal projects.’ The world is not constituted then of static subjects in contemplation of objects rather man finds himself ‘thrown’ (*geworfen*) into a world, already brought into being and in its ‘throwness’ (*geworfenheit*), *Dasein* is attuned to the world in certain ways. As Bruns puts it, (1994, p. 373) ‘Heidegger characterizes us in terms of our historicality and belongingness, our situatedness, our finitude or temporality.’ Man is revealed to himself as already brought into being whilst also experiencing himself as the possibility of being projecting into the future. Implicit in this conjecture is the claim that *Dasein* is not temporally static, but is constituted of its primordial existence and potential for being:

To *Dasein*’s state of Being belongs *throwness*; indeed it is constitutive for *Dasein*’s disclosedness. In throwness is revealed that in each case dasein, as my Dasien, is already in a definite world and alongside a definite range of definite entities within-the-world (Heidegger, 2000, p. 264).
‘Being-in-the-world’ or *in-der-welt-sein*, as part of its totality of involvements implies ‘being-on-to-others.’ *Dasein* splits into different modes of ‘Being-in-the-world’ existing authentically or in-authentically. In inauthentic mode *Dasein* slips into the everyday *Dasein* of the ‘they-self.’ It is only when *Dasein* comes to acknowledge in conscious awareness the *Dasein* of others in the world that *Dasein* moves to the authentic mode of Being. It is in this authentic mode that *Dasein*’s potentiality for being is disclosed.

Dilthey’s (1900) notion of understanding or *verstehen* as ‘lived experience’ expresses itself in Heidegger’s conception of Being. The seeds of Heidegger’s conception of the temporality of being can also be detected in an earlier work of 1860 by Dilthey, *Schleiermacher’s Hermeneutic System in Relation to Earlier Protestant Hermeneutics*. Here Dilthey questions the efficacy of philosophical deliberations which endeavoured to reach understanding through the analysis of static concepts detached from history (Makkreel, 1998). For Heidegger *Dasein* has a primordial existence. We can never identify the moment when we realize our own coming into Being, we are always already ‘thrown’ into the hermeneutic circle. Heidegger’s phenomenology is then an ontological phenomenology. ‘Being-in-the world’ implies intimate familiarity.

Every inquiry is a seeking [Suchen]. Every seeking gets guided before-hand by what is sought. Inquiry is a cognizant seeking for an entity both with regard to the fact that it is and with regard to the Being as it is. The cognizant seeking can take the form of ‘investigating’ [‘Untersuchen’], in which one lays bare that which the question is about and ascertains its character. Any inquiry, as an inquiry about something, has that which is asked about [sein Gefragtes] (Heidegger, 2000, p. 24).

Understood in this fashion, the world, for man is a region of human concern which is never disclosed independently of this concern.
6.3.3. Merleau-Ponty, Embodied Knowing

Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, provided an impetus for a phenomenological approach which found expression in French existentialist thought. Sartre’s *magnum opus*, *Being and Nothingness* (1943), clearly takes its lead from *Being and Time*. In *Being and Nothingness* however, Sartre presents us with an overworking of Heideggerian phenomenology, whereby Sartre returns to a Neo-Cartesian position. It is in the writings of Merleau-Ponty, that we find a more consistent extension of the thought advanced by Heidegger, despite Merleau-Ponty’s effort to align himself with Husserl eschewing his philosophical connectedness to Heidegger. Merleau-Ponty reluctance to overtly align his thinking with Heidegger, most likely stems from an attempt to distance himself from the member of the Nationalist Socialist Party. Merleau-Ponty, is particularly cherished by artists and dancers for his prizing of perception and embodied knowing. His important contribution to phenomenology was his situating of consciousness in the body, rejecting a body mind dichotomy. In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1999, p. 207) Merleau-Ponty writes:

> In so far as we believe in the world’s past, in the physical world, in ‘stimuli’, in the organism as our books depict it, it is first of all because we have present at this moment to us a perceptual field, a surface of content with the world, a permanent rootedness in it, and because the world ceaselessly assails and beleaguer subjectivity as waves wash round a wreck of the shore (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, p. 207).

Through the elevating of the status of perception and of corporal knowing, Merleau-Ponty appeals strongly to the sensibility of artists. His sympathetic understanding of the perceptual activity of the artist is born out in his investigation of Cezanne in the essay *Cezanne’s Doubt* (1945). The artist, Merleau-Ponty contends, ‘is the one who
arrests the spectacle in which most men take part without really seeing it and makes it visible to the most ‘human’ among them’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1993, p. 66).

Whereas Heidegger had pointed to the temporality of Dasein, for Merleau-Ponty it is one’s corporeal or bodily existence, which anchors one in the world. The corporeal being is engaged in the unending task of negotiating the impenetrability and obscurity of experience:

Between my consciousness and my body as I experience it, between this phenomenal body of mine and that of another as I see it from outside, there exists an internal relation which causes the other to appear as the completion of the system. The other can be evident for me because I am not transparent for myself, and because my subjectivity draws its body in its wake (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, p. 352).

Armstrong (1994, p. 563) points out that, ‘Merleau-Ponty’s awareness of the necessary situatedness of existence makes him emphasize the inescapability of social and political entanglements in the constitutions of subjects.’ In his later thinking Merleau-Ponty falls under the influence of the structural linguists and comes to deliberate on the nature of language. This turning toward the contemplation of language is indicative of a linguistic turn taking place across continental philosophy.

6.3.4. The Hermeneutics of Gadamer & Ricoeur- Linguistic Circles, Speil & the ‘Fusion of Horizons’

Gadamer, a student of Heidegger, extended Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology toward the consideration of language (Sprachlichkeit). As Schmidt (1999, p. 435) puts it, Gadamer is ever ‘alert to the riddle of language always calling attention to the limits of what can be said.’ Gadamer (1998, pp. 111-120) directs his attention to the conceptual language and therefore the conceptual limits of art and poetic language, while at the same time acknowledging that while there may be limits there ‘is no captivity within a language.’ Drawing on the language of
Heidegger and reiterating the primordial nature of understanding, Gadamer points out that ‘Language is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world.’ For Gadamer prejudice (Vorurteil) is the very condition of ‘our openness to the world’ forming the basis of the potential for understanding, in fact he says that prejudices ‘constitute our being.’

Prejudices lie at the foundation of our ability to experience:

In his first apperception, a sensuously equipped being finds himself in a surging sea of stimuli, and finally one day he begins, as we say, to know something. Clearly we do not mean that he was previously blind. Rather, when we say ‘to know’ [erkenner] we mean to ‘recognise’ [wiedererkenner], that is, to pick something out [herauserkenner] if the stream of images flowing past as being identical (Gadamer, 1998, p. 119).

It is important to note that Gadamer does not view prejudices as impediments to understanding. Rather than trying to avoid misunderstandings and strangeness, it is in this very strangeness that insight is to be found:

This formulation certainly does not mean that we are enclosed within a wall of prejudices and only let through the narrow portals those things that can produce a pass saying, ‘Nothing new will be said here.’ Instead we welcome just that guest who promises something new to our curiosity (Gadamer, 1998, p. 115).

Man is not severed from man but exists as a ‘linguistic circle’ which merges with other ‘linguistic circles’ in a process of play or Speil, seeking words through which one reaches from one’s own horizon, fusing with the horizons of others or perspectives on the world. Gadamer (cited by Keane, 2011, p. 51) observes, ‘The concept of the ‘horizon’ suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have.’
Ricoeur (1998, pp. 150-151), who translated the work of Husserl into French when he was detained in a prisoner of war camp, rejects Husserl’s ‘phenomenological reduction’ positing that understanding is ‘always inseparable from being that has been thrown into the world.’ Ricoeur acknowledges the post-Heideggerian ontology and Gadamerian hermeneutic influences in his thought. He states that self-understanding cannot take place outside of the mediation of signs, symbols and texts. Ricoeur identifies language as ‘the primary condition of all human experience.’ Speech leads us across the ‘open space of signs.’ Meaning is not ‘given’ but takes a detour into language arriving indirectly. Self-understanding is forced he says, ‘To take the roundabout path of the whole treasury of symbols transmitted by the cultures within which we have come, at one and the same time into both existence and speech’ (Ricoeur, 1998, p. 152).

Privileging the text over speech, Ricoeur says that it is the text which renders ontological understanding explicit. When referring to explicitness in language Ricoeur is not implying that the rendering of meaning into language involves a ‘reduction’ for it is not only in specificity of meaning but also in the ambiguity of language and the polysemy of words that richness of meaning is to be found. In Becoming-text, discourse can attain a ‘threelfold semantic autonomy’ in relation to speaker, receiver and the context of its production. As Kearney (1999, p. 446) puts it:

The text breaks the circuit of internal reflection and exposes us to intersubjective horizons of language and history. Meaning involves someone saying something to someone about something. This requires us to pay attention to the particular contexts and presuppositions of each speaker and each reader (Kearney, 1999, p. 446).
For Ricoeur (1998, p. 154) the ‘Being-in-the-world’ is a *Being-demanding-to-be-said* (*un être-à-dire*). Discourse becomes a ‘dialectic of event and meaning’ (Valdés, 1994, p. 624). The speaker engaged in ‘speech acts’ communicates not the experience itself but meaning. Valdés, sums up the point thus, ‘The lived experience remains private, but its sense, its meaning becomes public through discourse.’
Illustration 6-1 Franz Marc (1913). ‘Fate of Animals’ Oil on Canvas, 1950 × 2680 mm (6 ft. 4 ¾ in × 8 ft. 9 ½ in) Kunstmuseum, Basel. Sourced: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fate_of_the_Animals [30/9/2017]
6.4. Exposition on Phenomenology as a Research Methodology

Phenomenological approaches to research have become increasingly popular across social science disciplines particularly in the health sciences. Bryman (1984, p. 79) maintains that the advancement of methods which had hitherto been perceived to be ‘impressionistic or unscientific’ was precipitated by ‘disillusionment with the spread of quantification in research’ and was facilitated more generally by the influence of phenomenological writing which he says, ‘provided a ready-made justification for their research.’

Van Manen (2014) provides a comprehensive mapping of the professional terrains which have taken up phenomenological attitudes to research in his *Phenomenology of Practice*. Interrogation of the literature accompanying so called Descriptive or Transcendental Phenomenological research methodologies quickly reveals the distance between phenomenological approaches as they are applied in research domains and philosophical expressions of phenomenological thought. On examination of transcendental approaches which purport to employ a Husserlian *epoché*, (Colaizzi, 1978; Moustakas, 1994; Giorgi, 2009), one can detect a fundamental misreading of Husserl. Moustakas (1994, p. 33), for example, states the *epoché* involves a ‘bracketing’ or setting aside of ‘everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings’ so that phenomena might be considered from the ‘vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego.’ This clearly is not what is implied in the philosophical writings of Husserl, as we have seen for Husserl the *epoché* implies a turning of owns gaze away from the consideration of objects as they might exist ‘noumenally’ and turning to reflect on one’s own intentional content to consider objects as they are constituted phenomenally in consciousness. Despite this
fundamental misapprehension, the Husserlian inspired concept of *epoché* or bracketing has come to be both adopted and adapted to serve the needs of researchers.

6.4.1. A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

This research draws on the hermeneutic phenomenological approach adopted by Smith et al. (2013) in what they term Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Rejecting ‘transcendental’ knowledge claims which seek to extract ‘essences’ from their historical contexts and eschewing the notion that preconceptions can be ‘bracketed off,’ I am dubious about the possibility of achieving the Husserl ‘inspired’ *epoché* suggested in the work of descriptive phenomenologist such as Giorgi (1997). Inspiration is taken instead from Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur. Preconceptions, prejudices and biases are viewed as the very conditions out of which understanding emerges. Lawn and Keane (2011, p. 115) sum up Gadamer’s thought on prejudice stating, ‘A condition of making reflective and evaluative judgements about the world is the possession of prejudices; without prejudices, there can be no judgments.’ Experience and language are viewed as co-emergent and co-constitutive (Freison, et al., 2012). There is acceptance that one cannot extricate oneself from the process of data generation. Interpretation is seen as constituting ‘an inevitable and basic structure of our ‘being-in-the-world’ (Finlay, 2012, p. 22).

6.4.2. Idiography

Contrary to a nomothetic approach which seeks to determine generalised laws derived from the study of large scale groups, idiography looks to probe the private and personal perspectives of unique individuals. Idiography is one of the central
tenets of IPA, whereby primacy is given to the particular as a means of illuminating the phenomenon under investigation. In this sense, the single case can become valuable if it is ‘intrinsically interesting’ (Smith, et al., 2013, p. 30); and for the ways in which individual cases diverge or converge with the findings of nomothetic studies. By cautiously moving from a nuanced analysis of one case onto the next the sensitive researcher produces ‘fine-grained accounts of patterns of meaning for participants reflecting upon a shared experience’ (p. 38). Smith et al. assert that detailed idiographic analysis can make a significant contribution by allowing connections to be made with extant literature.

6.4.3. Advantages of the Approach

Brocki and Wearden (2006, p. 89), in their critique of IPA, observe that the approach has predominantly been used in Health Sciences and less so in other fields. The reason for this they say is probably due to ‘an accident of birth.’ Citing flexibility as one of the advantages of IPA and stressing the need for creativity, Smith et al. (2013, p. 205) state that the IPA approach is useful for qualitative researchers who need to respond to the unexpected. By foregrounding the process of interpretation, the IPA approach can serve to amplify and illuminate the nuanced meanings, emanating from an intimate engagement with rich data and ‘the worlds of others.’ The researcher using this approach is in a position to access the complexity of participants’ understandings whilst also being in a position to reflect on their own understandings in a double hermeneutic. Rather than looking to extract essences, the hermeneutical disposition requires the researcher to engage with the process in a critical, reflective and creative manner, as such the approach is apposite to the disposition of the artist. Smith and Osborn (2008, p. 56) note that one of the advantages of IPA is that, rather
than thinking in terms of generalizability, the researcher can make connections ‘with their own personal and professional experience, and the claims in the extant literature,’ while remaining close to deep, rich and complex conceptions of the participants. The strength of the approach they say is ‘judged by the light it sheds within its broader context’ as IPA offers the researcher the opportunity to make connections between the going concerns of participants who have a deep and engaged involvement with the phenomenon under investigation as it unfolds in context.

6.4.4. Weaknesses of the Approach

Giorgi (2011) strongly criticises Smith et al. on the basis that IPA involves a superficial application of hermeneutic phenomenology. He claims that IPA does not measure up to important scientific criteria. Giorgi is particularly disparaging of the reluctance by advocates of the IPA method to identify formalised methods of analysis; the absence of which negates against the possibility that IPA research can be replicable. This quality of replicability is for Giorgi one of the cornerstones of fulfilling the important scientific criteria of reliability and validity. For Giorgi, it is crucial that standards of rigor in qualitative research are equivalent to standards associated with scientific status.

While proponents of IPA situate the subjectivity of the researcher within the research process, for Giorgi (1994), objectivity is an achievement of subjectivity. One of the key mechanisms by which scientific criteria can be met, he believes, is through the articulation of the Husserlian epoché or the phenomenological psychological bracketing. For Giorgi the epoché ensures or at least goes some way toward achieving objectivity. In the absence of the epoché and an explicitly delineated
method, one is left with nothing but an approach which is unscientific and loose or a situation in which, he claims, ‘Anything goes’ (Giorgi, 2011, p. 212). For Giorgi, the \textit{epoché} is a fundamental condition for the phenomenological approach, for Smith et al. however the \textit{epoché} is only ever partially achievable. It is my contention that Giorgi essentially misreads Husserl in his interpretation of what is meant by \textit{epoché}. Notwithstanding this assertion one could still take Giorgi’s conception of ‘bracketing’ on board, however it is my view that setting aside researcher subjectivity and suspension of bias is unachievable. Rather it is held that knowing is deepened by increasing the relationship between the researched and the researcher (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984) and it is prejudice itself, when critically reflected upon, which becomes the very condition out of which a new understanding may be reached.

Finlay (2009, p. 8) is in support of the taking on an open phenomenological stance which resists the impetus to import ‘external frameworks and sets aside judgements about the realness of the phenomenon.’ She talks of a continuum along which descriptive and interpretative stances may exist ‘where specific work may be more or less descriptive’ (p.11). In forthrightly and self-consciously foregrounding researcher prejudice and bias, putting this bias into play, the researcher is acknowledging that phenomenon always come into consciousness under some aspect. In the case of IPA, meaning is constituted in the meeting of horizons. This study does not aim to make generalizable claims arising out of first person accounts. As has been previously noted Wertz (2005, p. 175) describes phenomenology as ‘a low-hovering, in-dwelling, meditative, philosophy that glories in the concreteness of person-world relations and accords lived experience, with all its indeterminacy and
ambiguity, primacy over the known.’ Many proponents of phenomenological research methodologies stress the need for an aesthetic sensibility which has less to do with systematised methods than art, the poetic and the prosaic (Todres, 2000; Manen, 2007). It is interesting to view IPA in this way, as the adopting an open phenomenological stance which is sensitive to the aesthetic qualities of experiences. Brocki and Wearden (2006) in their evaluation of fifty-two IPA studies, indicate a lack of attention given to interpretative elements. This observation needs to be kept in mind during analysis of the interviews. I suggest that a researcher who has come through an art and design education might be well equipped to deal with the demand for an aesthetic sensibility and might be well placed to respond creatively to the conditions of uncertainty which are implied by IPA.

6.5. Summary
This chapter has presented a discussion of the philosophical considerations which have shaped this study. It has also provided a discussion of the basic tenets underpinning the IPA method. Finally, it discusses the advantages and weaknesses of the approach. The next chapter focuses on the application of IPA in this study, looking at the methods, processes and procedures.
Chapter 7 Methods, Processes & Procedures

7.1. Introduction

While the previous discussion focused on the philosophical underpinnings guiding the research, this chapter focuses on more practical issues. It begins by detailing the approach to data collection and management; it goes on to discuss choices made regarding participant selection, recruitment and ethical considerations. Lastly the section provides an account of the approach to data analysis, reflexivity, concluding with a discussion of issues to do with trustworthiness and quality.

7.2. Data Collection

The hermeneutic phenomenological approach is concerned with disclosing and interpreting qualitative experiences and requires ‘rich data.’ The process requires a double hermeneutic operation. Focusing on the particular rather than the universal, the researcher first engages in a deep and detailed analysis of participants’ accounts. The IPA researcher holds to the belief that there is no possibility of accessing an un-interpreted account which is ‘bracketed off’ from the concerns and preconceptions of the researcher, thus a second hermeneutic operation is undertaken. This second operation requires the researcher to turn their gaze reflexively to reflect on their own pre-conditioned knowledge, meaning-making and interpretations. Methods were selected on the basis that they were congruent with the IPA approach.

7.2.1. The IPA Interview

The IPA interview is viewed as an interaction and a forum for the ‘fusion of horizons’ whereby the interviewer attempts to enter, in so far as possible, ‘the psychological and social world of the respondent’ (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 59).
Smith et al. (2013, p. 57) maintain that one-to-one, semi-structured interviews are well-matched to the IPA approach as they allow participants to offer deep and detailed personal accounts, giving the participants the space to ‘think, speak and be heard.’ In the early stages of research design, the possibility of conducting small focus groups was considered but upon reflection it was decided that one-to-one interviews would be more valuable in that the interviewee could be given the space to reflect and expound on their own experiences in a discrete and nuanced manner. Smith and Osborn (2008, p. 59) maintain that the advantages of the semi-structured interview are that it ‘facilitates rapport/empathy, allows a greater flexibility of coverage and allows the interview to go into novel areas, and it tends to produce rich data.’ The drawbacks of this method of data gathering, might include; diminishing the power of the interviewer over the situation; semi-structured interviews are time consuming and they are difficult to analyse.

7.2.2. Interview Schedule

Smith & Osborn advise that an interview schedule be devised in advance of the interview as it allows the researcher to anticipate difficulties and how they will be addressed. Two different schedules were prepared one directed at the experiences of students and graduates, the other directed at supervisors and examiners (Appendices C & D). Bevan (2014) provides advice on how to approach descriptive phenomenological interviews. This approach was adapted to reflect a more interpretative approach and was used to create a structure for the interview schedule based on a tripartite framework which involved:

- contextualising questions (eliciting the life world in natural attitude);
- questions aimed at apprehending the phenomenon (modes of appearing in natural attitude);
The schedule was designed to be used flexibly, to guide and not control the interview. Essentially participants were invited to speak to the areas which were most important to them.

7.2.3. Pilot Interview

Pilot interviews were conducted with interviewees from both the student/graduate and the supervisor/examiner strands of the research. These interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed before they were used to inform the process. Upon completion of the pilot interviews some minor changes were made to the schedules. Contextualising questions which invited very open responses from examiner/supervisor participants regarding their own academic histories were on reflection altered to elicit more closed responses. While open contextualising questions helped to furnish valuable information pertaining to the participants’ life worlds also putting the interviewees at ease, it was felt that these questions tended to dominate the early part of the interview leaving less time to consider the phenomenon under investigation. During the pilot it was observed that participants spoke freely, taking on a reflective disposition and drawing on their experiences in quite detailed ways to support statements of opinion. Opinions were not given in an abstract way but were generally filtered through reflection, for this reason the interview schedule was deemed to be generally fit for purpose.

7.2.4. The Interview

The interview schedule was sent to the participant in advance of the interview. This was felt to be an effective strategy in providing the participant time to reflect on the
phenomenon prior to the interview. It was thought that the schedule was sufficiently accommodating to allow the participant to focus on the issues which were of most relevance to them. The interview schedule itself was used in a flexible non-directive way to guide the conversation. During the first pilot only four questions were asked yet the participant spoke to all the areas identified in the schedule. While I had intended to take notes during the interview, no notes were in fact taken. I felt at the time that if I were to take notes it would detract attention away from the unfolding narrative and would prove distracting to the participant.

7.2.5. Recording and Transcription of the Interviews

Interviews were recorded using digital recording equipment. As I have mentioned I elected not to take handwritten notes during the interviews. Instead I attempted to attend very closely to the accounts of the participants during the course of the interview providing minimal prompts. Probes were used on occasion to gain deeper insight. In all cases the transcription process was begun within a day of the interview taking place. Software was not used in the transcription of interviews as it was felt that given the objective, that the researcher remain close to the data, the act of slowly and manually transcribing was integral to a close, deep and more engaged interaction with the accounts given by participants. Full transcripts were forwarded to the participants in a timely fashion whereupon participants had the opportunity to qualify accounts made during the interview session. A few small amendments were made to two transcripts on the direction of the participants involved.
7.3. Data Management

Care was taken to ensure that the collection, processing, storing and eventual destruction of data gathered proceeded in a responsible manner and in accordance with the University of Limerick’s policies and procedures for the protection of data; in line with the Data Protection Acts (Data Protection Act 1988 and Data Protection Amendment Act 2003). Recordings were immediately transferred to a password protected PC only, accessible by the primary investigator. All transcripts created were stored on a password protected PC. Notes and hard copies of transcripts were stored in a locked personal filing cabinet in the primary investigator’s place of work. In line with the University of Limerick’s policy regarding data protection all information will be stored for between 7 and 10 years. Information will be effectively destroyed at the end of this period. Hard-copies will be shredded, digital material will be deleted and fully cleaned from hard-drives.

7.4. Participants: Selecting Knowledgeable People

Polkinghorne (2005, p. 139) cautions that use of the term *sampling* in qualitative research can imply that the participants are intended to be ‘representative of a population,’ he suggests that the word *selection* is more appropriate. Participants for this study were selected because they possess deep and rich experience and knowledge of the phenomena under investigation. They were not chosen on the basis that they were intended to fulfil ‘the representative requirements of statistical inference.’ The study looked to access participants who could furnish ‘substantial contributions to filling out the structure and character of the experience under investigation.’ Smith et al. (2013, p. 49) maintain that purposive sampling is theoretically compatible with the IPA approach. They advise that participants are
selected because ‘they ‘represent’ a perspective, rather than a population.’ The researcher recognises that purposive or judgment sampling is prone to researcher bias but makes no claims of generalizability. Barbour (2001, p. 1116) indicates, purposive sampling which looks to include outliers ‘allows for such deviant cases to illuminate, by juxtaposition, those processes and relations that routinely come into play.’ In some ways the categorisation of ‘outlier’ is not applicable to an IPA study as each account is valued for its unique contribution to filling out the structure and character of the phenomenon under investigation.

7.4.1. Selection Strategies

Patton (1990, pp. 182-185) provides useful guidelines for purposive sampling which identify sixteen sampling strategies or enquiry approaches. He makes the point that the selection must be ‘judged in context’ and should be ‘judged on the basis of the purpose and rationale of each study.’ For the purposes of this research the researcher has drawn on Patton’s strategies, but does not view these approaches as being discrete or mutually exclusive. Several strategies are simultaneously brought to bear on the selection process. For example, the sample population in this study could be viewed as homogenous and expert in that they are members of a community of practice which is involved or has been deeply involved with Visual Arts PhDs. At the same time the researcher looked to access a selection which included the experiences of candidates, graduates, supervisors and examiners. Participants were drawn from eight academic institutions and in this sense the selection, while not being statistically representative, sought to represent the perspectives of participants from a variety of Irish educational contexts. Patton (1990, p. 172) states that in using maximum variation purposeful sampling strategies, one must begin by

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identifying a framework of diverse criteria which guides the choice of participants.

For this reason, the researcher endeavoured to access participants whose experiences converged on the phenomena at different junctures and from multiple perspectives. Refer to Figure 7-1 for information pertaining to sampling strategies.

7.4.2. Sample Size

Creswell (1998, p 64) suggests interview sample sizes ranging from 15-25 for phenomenological studies. Morse (1994, p. 225) suggests a minimum of 6. The sample size may be reduced if saturation is reached (Glaser & Strauss, 2009). In a study of five hundred qualitative PhDs, to determine the number of interviews conducted, Mason (2010) determined that the number of interviews conducted in 57 phenomenological studies ranged between 7 and 89, with a mean of 25, mode of 20 and standard deviation of 19.9. For the purpose of this study, and in keeping with the tenets of the IPA approach, the researcher elected a sample size of 10 -15 participants. Commenting on sample size, Patton (1990) states that:

The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the observational analytical capabilities of the researcher that with the sample size (Patton, 1990, p. 185).

He goes on to identify two main findings which a small diverse sample can yield:

(1) high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniqueness and (Z) [sic] important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity (Patton, 1990, p. 172).
Figure 7-1 Frame-work of criteria for maximum variation

Candidates:
Early part of the process (in years 1 or 2); Nearing completion; Successful professional practice prior to PhD study; Early, mid and late career artists; Working in Academia and not working in academia.

Graduates: Recent graduate; Experience of early rendition of PhD; Successful professional practice; Coming straight through from MFA; Unsuccessful candidate

Supervisors & Examiners: Have completed a traditional PhD; Have completed a Visual Arts Practie PhD; New to PhD supervision; substantial experience of supervising traditional PhDs with experience of Visual Arts Practice PhDs; Humanities employed in Art School, Humanities not employed in Art School

7.4.3. Recruitment

Participants were contacted via an emailed invitation. A total of twenty-one invitations were sent to which I received eighteen expressions of interest in participating in the study. Of these eighteen, thirteen came to fruition in an interview within the timeframe of the study.

7.4.4. The Participants

Although the interviews were conducted on an individual basis; that is one long, one to one, interview per participant, it became apparent that inter-relatedness was a strong feature of this research community. In one case, I interviewed multiple generations; that is a first-generation supervisor and their student, who then went on to be a second generation, supervisor and their student. In one case I interviewed a supervisor, their student and the external examiner. In another instance, I interviewed a student and their entire supervisory team which consisted of three supervisors. In a number of cases I interviewed participants who were not connected to anybody else in the study. In some instances, the level of inter-connectedness in the research community did not become apparent until during the interview when it was revealed that this or that individual had been involved in this or that process.

Of the participants, seven had been or are currently enrolled on Arts Practice PhDs, six in Ireland and two in the UK. One of these Arts Practice PhD graduates had experience of supervising an Arts Practice PhD and had chaired an Arts Practice PhD vivâ voce. Of these seven, all were employed in higher education institutions in Ireland on either full-time or part-time basis. The selection included participants who were early, mid and late career. Of the thirteen participants, seven had experience of supervising Arts Practice PhDs. Of this seven, three were new to the
process of supervision at doctoral level. One had extensive experience of supervising and examining traditional PhDs but was relatively new to the supervision of Arts Practice PhDs. Two of the participants had substantial experience of supervising and examining Arts Practice PhDs, while a third could be described as having a modest level of experience supervising Arts Practice PhDs. Four of the participants were senior academics. Two of the participants were retired. Represented in the sample were a number of supervisors who did not hold PhDs but were distinguished by their careers as artists and academics. Of the thirteen participants, six held PhDs, three from the Humanities disciplines and three in Arts Practice. One of the participants held a doctorate by publication. The study included one participant who pursued the PhD process right through to final submission, exhibition and *vivâ voce* whereupon the work was deemed worthy of the award of MPhil. Figure 7-2, demonstrates how participants’ experiences converge on the phenomenon.
7.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethics is a complicated area and it is difficult for the researcher, even with the best will in the world, to predict when ethical dilemmas will arise, indeed the researcher’s limitations in terms of their own moral and intellectual outlook will dictate their ability to predict potential areas of difficulty. In some cases, limitations in their own moral outlook could quite possibly cause problems. Just as research traditions have been re-evaluated in response to the emergence of postmodernist ideologies, so too has the field of Ethics. Seedhouse (2008) taking a utilitarian approach, offers an ‘ethical grid,’ which identifies four layers of ethical decisions, 1. *external* e.g. codes of practice, laws; 2. *consequential* e.g. consequences for groups, society; 3. *deontological*, what is one’s duty to do; and 4. *individual*, respect for individual
freedom and autonomy. Cohen et al. (2011, p. 51) drawing on a range of work outline what they see to constitute initial considerations for the researcher.

- Informed consent;
- Gaining access to and acceptance in the research setting;
- The nature of ethics in social research generally;
- Sources of tension in the ethical debate, including non-maleficence, beneficence and human dignity, absolutist and relativist ethics;
- Problems and dilemmas confronting the researcher, including matters of privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, betrayal and deception;
- Ethical problems endemic in particular research methods;
- Ethics and evaluative research;
- Regulatory ethical frameworks, guidelines and codes of practice for research;
- Personal codes of practice;
- Sponsored research;
- Responsibilities to the research communities (Cohen, et al., 2011, p. 51).

Some methods by their very nature are unpredictable. Orb et al. (2000, p. 94) make the point that it is particularly difficult to predict when ethical issues may arise from interviews which can be sites for the opening of old wounds and the ‘sharing of secrets.’

Cleary, the researcher must tread a thin line between ethical responsibilities to the participant and the need to produce work which is critical and contributing in a worthwhile way to the body of knowledge in the field. It is incumbent on the researcher to develop a code of ethics which will, in so far as is possible, attempt to predict the ethical dilemmas which are likely to arise from the range of methods used in the research, whilst also taking into consideration the specific features of the research context. However, given the unpredictable nature of the way in which ethical issues can arise and the way in which these are necessarily defined by context, the researcher must draw on other resources beyond that code. The
researcher needs to be self-reflexive and capable of identifying their own values and biases.

Although the participants in this study would not be classified as vulnerable and the research undertaken is not sensitive, the researcher recognized potential minimum risks to the participants, for example misrepresentation; deductive disclosure; damage to professional reputation; possible retribution. The researcher viewed the ethical process as dynamic and requiring constant monitoring throughout the duration of the research.

7.5.1. Informed and Voluntary Consent

The research was conducted using the principle of voluntary informed and rolling consent. All participants received information leaflets prior to the interviews. The information leaflet contained information about the process in which the participants were to be engaged including; why their participation is necessary; how information was to be used and to whom information would be reported (Appendix A). Voluntary, informed written consent was obtained before the interview commenced. For all interviews, the participants were asked to re-read the information leaflet before the interview commenced. The participants were made explicitly aware of the fact that ‘verbatim extracts would appear in published reports’ (Smith, et al., 2013, p. 53).

7.5.2. Right to Withdraw

Participants were informed of the right to withdraw consent at any time, in which case all material gathered up to the time of withdrawal would not be utilized in the study. In the case of participant withdrawal, the researcher would examine their own actions to determine if they contributed to the participant’s decision to withdraw.
The researcher would, in the case of participant withdrawal, not use coercion to persuade the participant to re-engage with the study.

7.5.3. Privacy, Anonymity & Confidentiality

The researcher recognizes the participants’ right to privacy and treated participants’ identities confidentially. The researcher made every effort to be clear and transparent about potential threats to and limits of confidentiality and had an open conversation with participants about their understanding of confidentiality. Wiles et al. (2006, p. 1), in a study commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), involving 31 individual interviews, six focus groups and 33 email responses from experts, explored how researchers handled issues to do with anonymity and confidentiality. They state that the concept of anonymity and confidentiality are generally conflated. Researchers, they observe may make claims about keeping confidentiality even though ‘they cannot promise that this will be the case.’ They claim that the efficacy of anonymisation measures depends on the research context.

Smith et al. (2013, p. 53) make the point that in qualitative research ‘anonymity is all that qualitative researchers can offer.’ Stating that confidentiality implies that no one will see the data and that this is not possible when verbatim extracts are presented in the research, Cohen et al. (2011, p. 65) provide a different interpretation of confidentiality stating that confidentiality means that:

> Although the researcher knows who has provided the information or are able to identify participants from the information given, they will in no way make the connection known publicly; the boundaries surrounding the shared secret will be protected (Cohen, et al., 2011, p. 65).
Bearing in mind the premise that data in qualitative research cannot be kept confidential, the researcher has endeavoured to keep the participants’ identities confidential.

Anonymisation is the key strategy for ensuring confidentiality. The researcher employed the following strategies to militate against deductive disclosure (Tolich, 2004); deletion of all identifiers (personal and contextual where needed); use of crude report categories; error inculcation and use of a pseudonym. In all cases pseudonyms were used. In the case of the student and candidate cohort gender neutral pseudonyms and personal pronouns have been used. Issues of confidentiality were attended to in relation to data collection, date cleaning and dissemination of the research (BERA, 2011). The researcher was mindful of the threat of distortion to data in the case of error inculcation. When employing this strategy, the researcher endeavoured not to erode the integrity of the argument or data. Participants were made aware of the possibility of follow-up discussions regarding confidentiality (Kaiser, 2009).

As has already been noted the participants in the study would not be classified as vulnerable and the research undertaken is not sensitive. Nonetheless it was important to protect the identities of some of the participants, particularly current PhD candidates and recent graduates, lest there be negative repercussions ensuing from their participation in the study. A few participants openly expressed concern regarding keeping their identities confidential. As a measure to ensure confidentiality, I elected to anonymize all data collected removing names of individuals and institutions. Given the fact that artistic research outputs are often presented in the public domain and that individuals are easily identifiable in the
community by the work they make, the researcher needed to be careful to not include details of specific artistic work or artistic research undertaken by the participants. It is customary with IPA studies to give a detailed idiographic portrait of each participant. I needed to be careful here to provide enough information so that the reader could appreciate how context informed the experiences of participants while at the same time not providing too much information which would compromise anonymity.

Two of the senior academics who participated in the study expressed little concern regarding the anonymization of their contribution. One of these individuals explicitly expressed the desire to have their ideas openly attributed. In this case the researcher needed to negotiate with the participant, explaining that given the small size of the artistic research community in Ireland, revelation of one identity might result in the revelation of the identities of more vulnerable participants. The participant in question accepted this point.

The high level of inter-relatedness in the artistic academic community, even on a national level posed some threats to confidentiality. In the case where there was inter-relatedness between the participants, I did not reveal to participants that I was interviewing other participants involved in the process. I did not feel that this was a deception. I did not deliberately go out to interview clusters of people involved in the same PhD process, although this clustering of perspectives certainly helped the study. Inter-relatedness is an inescapable characteristic of this community of practice. In one case, I discretely interviewed a PhD candidate and three of their supervisors. The supervisors were not selected because they had experience of this
student but because they had extensive experience of the phenomenon under investigation, in a multitude of contexts as students, supervisors, examiners and chairs. These four individuals, over the course of time, spontaneously revealed to each other that they had participated in my study. Once this became known to me I felt it was important to return to the student involved to ensure that they were happy for me to proceed. They did not perceive that there was an issue, acknowledging the beneficence of being involved in the process.

7.5.4. Financial Information

No participant received any payment or remuneration for his or her participation in the research. Interviews took place in locations which were convenient to the participants. Participants were offered refreshments, the cost of which was borne by the researcher. All participants were also given a small gift as a token of appreciation for their generosity in giving their time and thought to the study.

7.5.5. Beneficence

Visual Arts Practice PhD study in Ireland is at a formative stage. This study aimed to access subtle and complex information regarding participants experiences of undertaking and delivering the Visual Arts Practice PhDs. The researcher wished to identify the challenges facing supervisors, students and examiners in relation to the evaluation of diverse and unconventional research outputs. The study sought to make recommendations for the improvement of the delivery of these programs and aims at the betterment of the student experience. Through participation in the study, participants had the opportunity to critically reflect on their professional practice. Several participants, particularly those who are currently actively engaged in PhD study acknowledged that they felt they had benefitted from the experience of
participating in the study. Aggregate data generated by the study is to be made available to participants following the completion of the research. Research findings, implications and recommendation will be shared via presentations in educational settings and relevant publications.

7.6. Data Analysis

The following section presents a detailed account of the approach to data analysis and provides an audit trail. The interpretative role of the researcher is also explored. Issues to do with quality and trustworthiness are discussed and the section concludes by looking at the limitations of the IPA approach. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach requires ‘rich data.’ In-depth one-to-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow participants to offer deep and detailed personal accounts. Data was analysed using an iterative and inductive cycle drawing on the strategies outlined by Smith et al. (2013, pp. 79-107) a process which they describe as ‘collaborative, personal, intuitive, difficult, creative, intense and conceptually demanding’ (p.80). Smith et al. advocate for considerable room for manoeuvrability within their espoused range of strategies, insisting that IPA requires a creative and innovative approach. The focus moved from the descriptive and the particular, to the interpretative and to the shared, and focused on how the participants made sense of the experience of being involved in the Visual Arts Practice PhD.

7.6.1. Step One: Reading and re-reading, close line by line analysis of experiential claims, concerns and understandings of each participant

Data analysis began with manual verbatim transcription of the audio-recorded interviews. Although transcribing interviews is a time-consuming task, I felt that given the chosen methodological approach it was important, not to try to circumvent
this stage in the research by using transcription services or software. I found the activity of transcribing the interviews valuable in helping me to engage in a very deep and meaningful way with participants’ accounts. Each interview was transcribed within a day or two of conducting that interview. Park and Zeanah (2005, p. 246) acknowledge that the researcher-transcriber is afforded the opportunity to ‘listen carefully and think deeply about the recorded voices and the interview context, using sensory and other memory’ while Strauss and Corbin (1990) see the process as a way for the researcher to develop theoretical sensitivity. The transcription process was the first stage of immersion in the interview data and was important in fostering sensitivity in the research.

7.6.2. Step Two: Initial noting

This stage was the most time consuming, painstaking, demanding and intense part of the process. Smith et al. (2013) describe this phase as a ‘free textual analysis.’ The researcher engages in meticulous line by line analysis. Three interpretative lenses were brought to bear on the verbatim interview data.

- **Descriptive** comments focused on describing the context of what the participant has said, the subject of the talk within the transcript (normal text)
- **Linguistic** comments focused upon exploring the specific use of language by the participant (italic-red font)
- **Conceptual** comments focused on engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level (underlined)

(Smith, et al., 2013, p. 84)

Descriptive comments attend to interview content, noting issues of significance to the participant. Linguistic comments attend to metaphors, use of idioms, tone, emphasis and fluency while conceptual comments involve more interpretative work. Conceptual comments may be interrogative, reflective and discursive, moving...
beyond simple description. This is where the researcher is making meaning out of the participants’ meaning making.

7.6.3. Step Three: Developing emergent themes

Following the initial exploratory commenting, the researcher engages in a process of sifting through the exploratory comments to draw out potentially significant material, moving toward the development of emergent themes. During this phase Smith et al. (2013, p. 92) say, the focus is on finding themes which ‘reflect not only the participant’s original words and thoughts but also the analyst’s interpretation.’ I have included extracts from three of the transcripts (Figs. 5, 6, & 7.) which demonstrate the process and give a flavour of the interpretative work which was done.
Developing Emergent Themes

Participant One: Nicholas

Exploratory Comments

Here the performative element is described as giving abstract form and a degree of affective stimulation to the research. *Here there is use of hyperbole when the contribution to knowledge is described as 'colossally scientific research'.* The sense here again is of an attempt to validate the research through the invoking of scientific language. Validity in this account is strongly linked to a notion that the contribution is scientific and not just scientific but colossally so. Again, stresses the hybrid nature of the research which presented a real challenge to the supervisor in terms of meeting the requirements of a normative evaluation process.

Original Transcript

it did indicate strongly that that the performative live indeed performative rhythmic gesture nature of the end piece (.) abstractly but nevertheless appropriately gave form and a degree of affective interest in stimulation to the colossally scientific research that and indeed critical studies art history and indeed the allied art and design academic research components that she had engaged with so it formulated itself in a myriad of ways seemingly quite hybrid but connected in a very vital and valid way and of course as these things developed over the latter stages presented

Emergent Themes

Perfomative gives abstract form and affective stimulation to the research.

Use of hyperbole to justify contribution. – Invested in the research.

Science confers validity

Hybrid nature of the research presenting issues for supervisor.

Table 7-1 Example of exploratory comments and emerging themes for Nicholas, supervisor and examiner.

Developing Emergent Themes

Participant 3: Graduate - Gabriel

Exploratory Comments

There was a sense that the physical work didn’t seem to matter as much.

*Entirely different set of requirements and agendas underpinning the PhD. Prior experiences in education did not prepare the student for the undertaking and there is a sense of unease with process. It did not sit well with me.*

*I sometimes felt I was in conflict, with me as an artist and this as an academic process.*

*The process felt schizophrenic at times.*

*I was looking over my shoulder while I was making my work.*

Original Transcript

there was obviously requests for alterations to the written text. It was all about the written texts was where I was coming unstuck.

P3: Ok

P3: But sometimes there was a feeling that the physical work somehow didn’t seem to matter as much in relation to this idea of acquiring a PhD [10:11] in comparison to the MA program I would have been on, or the BA program um and I suppose that was something that I would have been aware of the whole way through the process and it wouldn’t have sat well with me, I sometimes felt I was in conflict, with me as an artist making work and this as an academic process.

PI: yeah.

Emergent Themes

Text as problematic. Coming unstuck.

The physical work didn’t matter.

MFA experience not equipping the PhD student with the necessary pre-requisite skills to be able to undertake the PhD.

Sense of unease

Conflict of the artist and the academic.

A schizophrenic process. Looking over my shoulder when I was making. The inhibiting role of reflection.
I wonder about this idea of reflecting in practice does it work the same for art as for other processes. There is a sense here that the artistic process is hampered by this looking over one’s own shoulder. Usually reflection happens in group crit. Pulling away from the process to reflect not constantly monitoring as you make.

Problems with supervision. The supervisors may be generally in the area or discipline but once one goes past the surface the supervisor can have specialism which emanate from a completely different area of the discipline—there may be conflicts in terms of the ideologies underpinning the approach taken in the practice. Supervisors not having a PhD. No prior experience as a supervisor. One can appreciate the deficit in this regard of being supervised by somebody who has no research training and no experience of supervising at this level. Use of the word inevitable all the time indicates a sense that the whole thing was doomed from the outset. The idea that these issues could have been anticipated. I would have been green about. The student again refers to themselves as naïve or green in the face of a process which was alien to their previous knowledge of higher education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exploratory Comments</th>
<th>Original Transcript</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PI: How do you identify then do you identify since you have done this do you identify</td>
<td>P3: And that was always a difficult thing for me you know I suppose it’s that thing where the process itself felt schizophrenic at times, I was looking over my shoulder while I was making my work and I …</td>
<td>Reflecting on practice while doing perceived of as an unnatural process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI: It’s a good way to put it</td>
<td>P3: Yeah and I found that difficult and yeah again there would have been certain difficulties with regard to supervision. I found out very early on that my main supervisor and even the second supervisor on it, well the main supervisor would have been very much a traditional printmaker and he didn’t have any interest in um conceptual models or approaches to um I suppose print as an area [11:25]</td>
<td>Inadequate supervision. Lack of guidance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI: Did he have a master’s or? PhD or what were?</td>
<td>P3: As far as I knew he had a master’s he didn’t have a PhD he wouldn’t have been through the process so he didn’t have experience as a supervisor of bringing a student through a PhD process. Um and that became a problem further down the line as it inevitably would. But obviously these would have been things that I would have been very green about when I started. And the second supervisor would have been a supervisor coming from the area of electronic media um but he didn’t have an MA he would have studying for an MA whilst he was..</td>
<td>Suitability of supervisor-attributes of the supervisor. Specialisms or area of expertise overlooked in the selection of supervisors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI: Really</td>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisors not sufficiently experienced or qualified. Feeling green or naïve.</td>
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Table 7-2 Example of exploratory comments and emerging themes for Gabriel, graduate.

Developing Emergent Themes Participant Eight: Graduate, Supervisor - Adrian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Original Transcript</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
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<td>PI: Did he have a master’s or? PhD or what were?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI: Really</td>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisors not sufficiently experienced or qualified. Feeling green or naïve.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Identifies as an artist writer. Not as a researcher.

An artist and academic and a writer- but not a researcher.

I don’t really see myself as a researcher- researching all the time.

Research comes to me- I’m like a magnet for the right things- Identification as a creative individual not framing the discussion in terms of a researcher but more instinctive-things coming at the right time-serendipity. The right things find their way to the artist. Disavowal of the identity of researcher.

I don’t unpick it until it’s like a carcass with all the bits taken apart you know down to its bare bones and then pick the bones apart the way I did so I make my work now in just the free joyful, creative way that I always did am then I let it be – the contrast in metaphors of a carcass being picked over versus a free and joyful approach to work.Very interesting statement about the way that work is approached- there is a great sense of the work being freed up released from scrutiny- I recall the work of Stubbs discussed in the lit. review. Picking over the bones of the horses.

Other people write about the work – I don’t need to write about my own work anymore other people write about it. Writes about other people’s work modes of operating have been augmented- has taken on the role of critic.

 yourself as a researcher, or an artist researcher or an artist or? You what do you use? P8: Well I call myself, like I call my, like when I write and publish you know my little by-line is an artist and a writer. PI: Right ok P8: Sometimes I say an artist, an academic and a writer sometimes I say that too, like if I’m writing with a visual artist newsheet I’m [name of participant] is an artist and a writer, if I’m in at a conference and publishing for a more academic context it would be an artist academic and a writer so I just that, I don’t really see myself as researcher I’m not a researcher researching all the time. Research comes to me I just you know I’m like a magnet for the right things that’s the way I feel so the right research suddenly lands in my lap I don’t know it happens but the things I need happen or the information I need just materializes and then I’m grand [humorous] maybe I put myself in the way of it too but I’m not I don’t set out to be a researcher as such. PI: And since you have completed so you use the work in the same way that you did in the PhD? Or have you shifted into another P8: Hmmm, that’s an interesting question. That’s a very interesting question. I don’t use it the same way as I did in the PhD, I don’t unpick it until it’s like a carcass with all the bits taken apart you know down to its bare bones and then pick the bones apart the way I did so I make my work now in just the free joyful, creative way that I always did um then I let it be [laughter]. PI: Yeah P8: But I don’t need to write about my own work anymore other people write about it now [unclear word- stuck] so I write about other people’s work that’s what I do now.

Identity- artists writer- Not a researcher.

Identity artist academic - not researcher.

Dispensing with the identity of research after graduation- doing research but not being a researcher.

Creative - instinctive things come to me.

What happens to the practice - unpick it until it’s like a carcass with all the bits taken out. Down
It is interesting that this artist has stopped writing about her own work - while continuing to write - it is not the writing which is the issue it is the business of writing about one’s own work. I think this is where the problem is.

Knowledge absorbed into me - I don’t really need to dredge it up again - Knowledge as something residing in the being - interesting use of the term dredge.

It definitely made my art better.

PI: Ok that’s good. It’s a good transfer of skills
P8: Yeah so all my own writing now is reviews so I am one of the house or in-house reviewers for [name of publication] and then I get my reviews published in [name of prestigious journal] and some publications in the UK as well and they’re all reviews of other artists’ work.
PI: That’s interesting, It’s interesting
P8: I know I’ve stopped writing about my own work.
PI: Well I think it’s a very hard thing to direct your attention towards your own work.
P8: That was my book as well, yeah but it was good it taught me a lot about my own work and my own practice but now all that all that in, now all that knowledge has just become absorbed into me and I don’t really need to dredge it up again I just do it now you know it’s become second nature the confidence in my own work and my own practice, like it definitely made my art better as well.

to the bare bones and then pick the bones apart - Taking leave of the art world.

Making work in a free and joyful way after PhD.

Reluctance to write about own work - not a method which is of value to person after graduation - happy to write about the work of others.

Artist’s professional identity augmented - taking on the role of critic. Teaching ornithology to the birds.

Not interested in writing about one’s own work - The work no longer provides the context for academic output in writing.

Absorbing knowledge into the fabric of one’s being. No need to attend to it in a knowing way. – Not knowing - tacit knowledge.

Table 7-3 Example of exploratory themes for Adrian, graduate and supervisor
7.6.4. Step Four: Searching for connections across emergent themes

Stage three generated hundreds of potential emergent themes. Each of the thirteen interviews were brought to stage three before embarking on the fourth stage of coding. Taking one interview at a time I set about grouping themes, working case by case to come up with a loose organisation of ordinate and superordinate themes for each interview, please refer to Appendices F and G for examples of this initial grouping of emerging themes. From these listed initial themes, I engaged in a more analytic ordering whereby I made connections between themes. At this stage themes were clustered under headings. I refer to these headings as grouped themes. Examples of these grouped or clustered themes can be found in appendices F and G. Appendix H charts the prevalence of these themes across all transcripts. At this stage, the language used to describe these grouped themes were idiosyncratic to the individual interview being analysed. I was still at this stage working on a case by case basis.

7.6.5. Step Five: Moving to the next case

Each interview was slowly and carefully brought through stages one to four. I was careful to take each interview on its own terms allowing themes to emerge from the analysis rather than imposing ideas or terminology which I had used in previous cases. If similar themes emerged spontaneously, well and good.

7.6.6. Step Six: Looking for patterns across cases

At this stage, I constructed a table which mapped the occurrence of themes across all the transcripts. Appendix H captures this stage of the analysis. Once I had mapped themes across all transcripts, I then preceded to cut up this table and to manually group themes under new category headings. Appendix I captures this phase of the
analysis. This stage involved a number of iterations and the themes were consolidated, re-configured and relabelled. Appendix J demonstrates this stage in the process and shows how the categories are starting to become more abstract.

7.7. Reflexivity

Finlay (2002, p. 531) notes that by ‘outing’ the researcher, ‘through the use of reflexivity’ subjectivity which may be viewed as a problem can be transformed in to an opportunity. In addition, the act of reflecting reflexively is directed toward producing ‘thoughtful, conscious self-awareness’ in relation to the research. Brocki and Wearden (2006, p. 101) observe that:

> Whilst inclusion of verbatim extracts in the analysis certainly helps the reader trace the analytic process, perhaps including more acknowledgement of analysts’ preconceptions and beliefs and reflexivity might increase transparency and even enhance the accounts rhetorical power (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 101).

While engaging in reflexive activities can significantly contribute to the trustworthiness of the research, Finlay (2014, p. 541) observes that preoccupation with one’s own experiences can skew research and can privilege the researcher’s position ‘blocking out the participant’s voice.’ A balance needs to be struck lest the whole endeavour descend in to ‘eschewing navel-gazing.’ In order to contribute to the integrity of the work, this study includes a small number of reflexive statements and commentaries which lay out for the reader the researcher’s previous experience and beliefs, pre-understandings, frameworks and biases. I provide reflexive accounts, not in an effort to push aside beliefs and attitudes in the service of a phenomenological reduction, rather they are foregrounded so that the reader may understand how the researcher’s disposition and experiences colour and shape the
research. Reflexive commentaries are intended to add to the transparency of the study and are rendered in a different font so that they may be distinguished from the main text.

7.8. Quality, Issues of Trustworthiness

Eschewing prescriptive and simplistic checklist approaches to assessing validity and quality in qualitative research Smith et al. (2013, p. 179) suggest that the work of Elliot et al. (1999) and Yardley (2000; 2008) offer stances which are more ‘sophisticated and pluralistic.’ Drawing on Yardley’s (2000) work they emphasis four first principles which include; sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. Sensitivity to context should pervade the process from inception, to completion and can be manifested in several of ways. For example, sensitivity is implicit in the very selection of an IPA approach which seeks to immerse the researcher in the experiences of the participants. This study was born out of my own embeddedness in the research context. I was sensitive to the vernacular vocabularies used by those in art schools. The fact that I am well acquainted with the art school cultures meant that it was easy to strike up a productive rapport with the participants. An expansive contextualising literature review was undertaken to demonstrate sensitivity to the context, tracing out the complexity, controversies and debates surrounding the phenomenon. As I have already noted, interviews were manually transcribed in an effort to foster sensitivity and closeness to the accounts of participants. Smith et al. (2013) note that a good IPA study will be built on a foundation of plentiful verbatim extracts which serve to uphold the argument being made. In this study claims are consistently interlaced with verbatim extracts which served to substantiate the discussion and to honour the
voices of the participants. *Commitment and rigour* according to Smith et al. (2013, p. 181) imply ‘thoroughness’ and ‘care.’ These are evidenced in elements such as the appropriateness of the sample, the completeness of the analysis and in maintaining a significant idiographic engagement. Themes should be supported with quotations from several participants and the researcher must attend to divergent accounts. I have been careful to acknowledge divergence where it has occurred.

Yardley’s third category is *transparency and coherence.* Careful description of all of the phases of the research should be provided to serve as an audit trail for the reader. The reader should be able to clearly see how the researcher has arrived at their findings. Coherence is found in the ways in which the underlying epistemological assumptions filter through and inform every level of the study. Finally, Yardley asserts that a study should have *impact and importance,* the research in the end must convey to the reader something ‘interesting, important and useful’ (Smith, et al., 2013, p. 183).

During the course of the study I maintained contact with five participants, engaging in periodic conversations about the evolution of the study. I used these conversations as opportunities to validity check emerging themes. Toward the end of the study as micro theoretical models began to emerge, I returned to a number of participants to test these for plausibility. Participants consulted at this stage felt that the emerging models resonated closely with their understanding of the phenomenon.

**7.9. Summary**

Chapters six and seven have provided a detailed and comprehensive account of methodological concerns. Sufficient detail has been provided to allow the reader to
make judgements in relation to the efficacy, trustworthiness and credibility of the research. In the ensuing section the findings are presented.
Findings
Chapter 8 Preamble to Findings: Setting the Scene

8.1. Introduction

The findings section is comprised of four chapters. This chapter operates as a preamble, providing the reader with orienting information which will assist entry into the research. The following three chapters present the findings. The first of these looks predominantly at student and graduate experiences in relation to preconceptions, motivations and experiences of the VAP PhD in general. The next chapter looks at experiences of writing and theory. The concluding findings chapter deals with experiences of assessment.

As we have seen one of the essential measures of trustworthiness for an IPA study is transparency and coherence. The reader should be able to clearly see how the researcher has arrived at their findings. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to offer an entrée into the research. It begins by providing idiographic portraits of the participants. In addition, the chapter furnishes the first of three reflective passages on experiences which informed my own understanding as I journeyed through the PhD process. Not an attempt to ‘bracket off’ my preconceptions, the reflexive interludes are intended to help the reader to see where my own values shade over into the research. A brief exposition on the evolving conceptual framework is then given to further expose the researcher’s disposition. The chapter concludes by providing a statement on the organisation of the findings chapters and gives an overview of an intermediary rendition of super-ordinate and ordinate themes.
8.2. Idiographic Vignettes of Participants

IPA requires a discursive and substantial results section, which is rich with references to transcripts and which allows the reader ‘entrée’ into the hermeneutic process (Smith, et al., 2013, p. 109). To facilitate the process, and in the interest of maintaining the idiographic focus of the research, I begin the findings section by giving a portrait of each of the participants. These vignettes endeavour to convey to the reader an impression of the different orientations of the participants. Taken together the vignettes help to build an over-arching picture of the phenomenon. To preserve the anonymity of my participants, pseudonyms have been used and identifying contextual information has been removed.

_Idiographic Vignette: Nicholas_

Nicholas is a supervisor and examiner. Not from a visual arts background, Nicholas completed his PhD in the humanities, also holding higher-level qualifications in the sciences. He has spent a substantial part of his professional life working in an art school. He is committed to the education of art and design students. At the time of interviewing the participant had recently completed the successful supervision of a Visual Arts Practice PhD. Nicholas demonstrates a high degree of empathy with art school values and culture and demonstrates an aesthetic sensibility. This is borne out in the use if rich, prosaic language and sensitive appreciation of the context. As a supervisor, Nicholas had a close and nurturing, almost paternalistic relationship with their candidate, showing care and a great deal of admiration for their ward. They saw their role as one who must advocate for the student and reassure the examiner. When Nicholas imagines an examiner, he envisages one who is caring, fair, flexible and in sync with the artistic work.

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Demonstrating exasperation with the inefficacy of onerously complex bureaucratic processes, Nicholas conceptualises the Visual Arts PhD as a hybrid, complex and challenging model which is punctuated with regular pitfalls. Frustrations were expressed through raised voice and banging fits on the table, this was striking when contrasted with the gentle demeanour of the participant. Nicholas experiences frustrations with problematic timings in the bureaucratic process, lack of professional etiquette, particularly in dealings with local managers and rushed and badly handled endpoints. The VAP PhD exhibition is identified as being ill-defined in terms of purpose and a source of great stress for supervisor and student. Though problematic, the exhibition is essential as a didactic tool of dissemination. Nicholas expresses concern about potentially flimsy written components and the danger of presenting descriptive reflection of practice. Talking of the centrality of the text as purveyor of research arguments, judgements made in its absence are seen to be tricky. While the participant appears to be sensitively alert to the aesthetic qualities of research which they see as being borne out on an affective level, they stress that the research must be empirically testable. The PhD must, they believe go beyond repeating aesthetically compelling practice and must rise above higher-level studio work.

An interesting feature of Nicholas’ rhetoric is the repeated use of scientific terminology when talking about validity, and hyperbole when discussing the contribution to knowledge.

*Idiographic Vignette: Daniel*

Holding a PhD in the Humanities, Daniel has worked for some time in an art school, in the area of Critical and Contextual Studies. This participant had recently been involved in their first examination of a Visual Arts Practice PhD working in
conjunction with a second more experienced external examiner. At the time of the interview they were supervising a Visual Arts Practice PhD. Daniel expressed frustrations with middle-management, feeling straight-jacketed by the limited and conservative conceptions of bureaucrats. Overall, they conceived of the process as problematic. They also felt that as a humanities supervisor they were consigned to the supervision of the text. They conceptualised the text as a mapping of a critical journey and an exploration of the student’s development and felt that sometimes the text helped to elevate below standard artistic work. Uncertainty and insecurity was a strong feature of this account of the Visual Arts Practice PhD. The participant expressed candid doubts about their ability to assess the artistic elements of the research, talking about the difficulty for a non-practitioner of arriving at decisions. They also expressed ideas around not knowing in relation to standards. They felt reluctant when making pronouncements on art. In the absence of any training, they valued the mentoring role taken on by the more experienced examiner. Conceptualising the assessment process as collaborative and heuristic, they brought their experience as a critic to bear on the process.

*Idiographic Vignette: Gabriel*

A graduate, this participant had what could be described as a traumatic experience of the Visual Arts Practice PhD. They submitted for examination, staged an exhibition and underwent a *vivā voce*. They were required to re-submit the text and undergo a second *vivā voce*. They were awarded an MPhil. They enrolled on the PhD in the UK during the early days when the field was beginning to emerge. Their master’s experience while viewed as educationally edifying, had no written component. Gabriel describes themselves as feeling isolated, lost, vulnerable and naïve. They
felt let down by a process which lacked clarity and had no sense of direction. Idioms of distress pervaded the narrative with the participant talking about feeling as though they were, coming unstuck, a guinea pig, a rabbit caught in the headlights, set up and hi-jacked by a system which was trying to protect itself. They felt like a nuisance and a burden on the system. The participant conceptualised the process itself as problematic, schizophrenic and potentially damaging. They expressed doubts about standards, feeling that weak artistic work could be helped through when accompanied by a strong text. The participant left the process feeling extremely disillusioned about their own ability as a critical writer. Their belief in themselves as an artist and their artistic work however remained steadfast and although the participant’s confidence was significantly undermined by the process, they were able to glean benefits from the experience in terms of advancing their artistic work and in terms of advising their own students. While they had difficulty recovering from the shock of the experience, feeling shame when meeting people afterwards, they felt secure in their artistic identity. The experience reminded them of how much of an artist they were.

_Idiographic Vignette: Sam_

Currently a VAP PhD candidate, Sam is a lecturer in an art school and has a mature professional practice. The abiding conceptualisation which comes through in this account is that the PhD is viewed as a way of framing and interpreting an extant body of practice. The value of the PhD is in its ability to provide ways to think, talk and write about the artistic work. There is a strong sense that the artistic work goes on unchanged, regardless of what happens in the PhD. The impression one got was that for this participant the art practice is untouched by the PhD process. One feature
of this account is that terminology which is used in discourses around research more generally, is used in an idiosyncratic way, by this candidate to describe entirely different operations. Sam conceives of themselves as a courageous radical, one who is resistant to conventions. The narrative moves between searching for certainty and rejection of structure. While Sam is extremely self-confident when it comes to artistic accomplishments the account is pervaded with candid disclosures relating to a lack of surety around their academic identity. Oscillating between feelings of self-confidence and inauthenticity, they talk about feeling at times like a fraud or a fake academic. These feelings are specifically related to the participant’s experience of writing for the PhD. It is significant that Sam produced minimal writing as part of their MFA.

_Idiographic Vignette: Alex_

A recent graduate, Alex is an early career artist who is employed on a casual part-time basis in academia. Alex came to the PhD having just done a master’s in the UK which had a more significant theory element than is customary on MFA courses (particularly early MFA courses which required little or no writing). This prior experience with writing and theory showed through in the participant’s account and they described themselves as being comfortable with this element of the PhD. They talk of becoming more philosophical. Uncertainty around the process was a feature of this account particularly when it came to the endpoint, and they experienced frustration with what they perceived to be a lack of clarity. Alex was also uncertain about the perceived status and value of the qualification. They showed resistance to what they felt were conventions coming from other fields. This participant had a change of supervisor during the process. Identifying a divide between theory
oriented and practice-oriented supervision, they describe themselves as at one point feeling like a child in a divorce. Showing tolerance for uncertainty and valuing failure as an integral part of the artistic process, the participant often conceptualises the PhD as consisting of two separate bodies of work, where not enough emphasis is placed on the artistic work. They, like other participants, talk of finding a stronger voice and in the wake of the PhD have been able to extend their professional identity and bring artistic work to new audiences in academia.

*Idiographic Vignette: Morgan*

Morgan who completed their VAP PhD a few years ago, works in academia and maintains a professional practice. Despite having completed some time ago they are reticent about undertaking the supervision of VAP PhDs stating that they would need to see a change in the culture of the PhD before they would commit to supervising a candidate through the process. Their attitude could be described as pragmatic and somewhat ambivalent, and while positive outcomes are perceived to have issued from the experience, Morgan describes the PhD as a dry model which flattens out the artistic work. They maintain that there is a consensus that the artistic work made on PhD courses is boring. Characterising the VAP PhD as a messy process which lacks structure, they recount the experience as one of path-finding and navigating, experiencing an epiphany when they come to realise that the PhD is not like the MFA. Like others in the study, Morgan talks of rejecting imposed structures, of risk-taking and attempting to innovate with the model. They appear to be comfortable with the unknown and while clarity in the text is desired, clarity in the artistic work, is seen as damaging to the practice. Morgan renounces the identity of researcher
post-graduation, describing themselves as an artist, liberated from having to have a reason for everything.

**Idiographic Vignette: Ben**

A Professor, Ben holds a PhD in the humanities from an American University. In the late stages of their career, this participant has spent the most substantial part of their professional life working in university contexts. They have extensive experience of supervising and examining traditional PhDs having supervised sixteen, two of which involved some element of practice. In the past one of their students who was enrolled in a traditional PhD ‘pulled out their practice in an apologetic way’ and began to incorporate it into their inquiry. This was Ben’s first encounter with arts practice research. Artistic work is valued for what it can bring to research. Currently supervising a VAP PhD student who is registered in an art school, Ben, like many of the participants, sometimes conceptualises the academic identity as being different from the artistic identity, yet at the same time talks of creative intellectuals. They express confidence about making pronouncements on the quality of artistic research. Ben views art schools as conservative and insular institutions which are too small, and which would benefit from integration with larger entities where students could ‘swim more freely.’ While art schools themselves are seen as conservative, artists and their research have the potential of playing the agitator in the audience, subverting the status quo.

**Idiographic Vignette: Adrian**

A lecturer in Fine Art, Adrian is one of the earliest people in Ireland to graduate with a VAP PhD. Adrian is currently supervising a VAP PhD and has served as a chair in
the examination of another. For Adrian, the PhD experience although arduous was an invigorating and positive one. They talk of shaky beginnings, living with uncertainty, and sweating it out. Subscribing to the idea that art is knowledge, they believe the artistic work made on PhD courses should be the best that artists make. For this participant, the PhD changed everything conferring upon them authority and an embodied, pleasurable confidence. While Adrian has extended their practice in terms of publication they do not identify as a researcher and have no interest now in writing about their own practice. They describe completion of the PhD as a liberation of the artistic practice where there is no more need ‘to unpick the carcass down to the bare bones’.

*Idiographic Vignette: Chris*

Chris is a Professor who holds a doctorate by publication and who enjoyed an illustrious professional career before taking up a role in academia. They have published on the matter of VAP PhDs and have experience of supervising and examining in the area in both the UK and in Ireland. Chris conceptualises the VAP PhD as having value due to its ability to disrupt a system which is extremely risk averse. The audience for Chris, is seen as being crucial in the process of the VAP PhD, which must have a public moment. As external validators, the audience can inure the work against criticism from egotistic external examiners. The participant thinks it is a tenuous assertion to say that art is knowledge. When examining they yearned for an unencumbered encounter with the artistic work, the text was used to validate their initial understandings and to contextualise the exhibition. In terms of examination, Chris says they would be reluctant to make recommendation in relation to the artistic work and they note that attention usually tends to fall on the text as it is
tangible and can be “got hold of.” The participant values risk, uncertainty, reflexive openness and serendipity as qualities of the model which breathe life into academia.

Idiographic Vignette: Frances

A VAP PhD candidate, Frances has a successful professional practice as well as working in academia. They are very well regarded by the artistic community. This participant describes themselves as having a foot in both camps in relation to their interests in practice and theory and are comfortable and more than competent in terms of writing. Their master’s degree consisted of both theoretical and practical elements. Frances, who is in the early years of their PhD, conceives of it as being a minefield full of hidden dangers. They yearn for feedback on the aesthetic side of their work but feel that such feedback is not always available to them. They are negotiating a new set of values, often encountering conflict where artistic and academic values clash. While valuing their contribution, Frances sometimes feels as though the non-art supervisors just do not ‘get it.’ These supervisors try to push students in directions which are not seen to be appropriate by the artists who feel artistic work is being made to conform to conventions which belong to other research domains. Frances actively tries to keep the work complex, resisting simple solutions, yet they are mindful that too much complexity results in superficiality. At the time of interviewing the participant was troubled by the ethical process. They wanted the process to be meaningful but were wary that the process could emasculate their practice. Frances had no problem writing but felt that it would need to be put away so that they would be able to create artistic work. They spoke of the irreducibility of art, an unspeakable kind of knowing and of that which cannot be measured and cannot be articulated.

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Idiographic Vignette: Thomas

Thomas is a Professor with a background in the Visual Arts. Having worked in both the UK and in Ireland, the participant has published on the VAP PhD and has extensive experience of supervising and examining the model both in the UK and in Ireland. This participant did not reveal whether they themselves had a PhD.

Favouring the Nordic model, Thomas is critical of the way in which the Irish system adopted the UK model with little critical debate. They feel that artistic work needs little mediation through text, being knowledge bearing in, its own right. They talk of weak artistic work limping along after a text. The participant rejects the imposition on artistic research, of conventions which come from the humanities or social sciences, feeling that art has more in common with the hard science. They conceptualise the Visual Arts Practice PhD examination as a process where judgements are made in an apophthegmatic pronouncement by experts, believing that artists at the top of their field are qualified to assess artistic research.

Idiographic Vignette: Phil

Phil is a mid-career artist who works in academia in the Republic of Ireland, however they are enrolled on a VAP PhD in the North of Ireland. For this participant concerns around their ability to produce the doctoral text seem paramount. They profess to limited prior experience with academic writing having written little as part of their MFA. Uncertainty is a strong feature of their account with the participant conceptualising the process as one of finding their own way through or trying to fit into a structure. Phil however feels comfortable with uncertainty, seeing it as part of the process. They talk about the challenge of writing and making artistic work contemporaneously, feeling that being in one’s head blocks artistic work. For Phil, it
is all about the practice and the exposition of this work, the written text is something
which they wish to remain hidden somewhere. At the same time, they feel that the
PhD is all about the text and it is via the text that the work will be judged. Most
interestingly the participant conceptualises the PhD as a threat to the artistic work
which needs to be protected.

*Ideographic Vignette: Mark*

Mark is a Professor from a Visual Arts background. The participant was involved in
the crafting of European level policy for the administering of higher degrees in the
Arts. They were involved in the supervision of a few early VAP PhDs. They do not
have a PhD or doctoral level qualification. For Mark the BA, MFA and VAP PhD
are situated along a scale of accomplishment in the arts which moves from more
derivative artistic work towards creative outputs which are more sophisticated and
original. The PhD course is seen as a safe place to produce non-commercially viable
artistic work. Artistic research is radical, challenging a system which fears and
mistrusts troublemaking artists. Having recently left academia, Marks feels
liberated. Artistic life blooms in the aftermath of academia.

A synopsis description of participants’ dispositions and experiences is given below to
facilitate ease of cross reference (Table 8.1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Brief Portrait</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas</td>
<td>Lecturer in an Art School with over 30 years’ experience with responsibility for post-graduate research. Qualified to PhD level in the Humanities with two master’s level qualifications, one in the sciences and one in the humanities. Has supervised one Arts Practice PhD and a number of Master’s in Fine Art students. Has examined one Arts Practice PhD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Lecturer in Art School, with experience of lecturing in University. Qualified to PhD level in the Humanities. Currently supervising Arts Practice PhD and has experience of examining Arts Practice PhD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>Lecturer in an Art School and practicing visual artist, with nearly 25 years’ experience. Completed an early Arts practice PhD but was conferred with the award of M.Phil. also possesses an MFA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Lecturer in an Art School and practicing visual artist, with nearly 30 years’ experience. Currently undertaking Visual Arts Practice PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Recent graduate from Visual Arts Practice PhD, conferred with the award of PhD. Master’s in Fine Art Media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>Lecturer in Art School. Graduated with Visual Arts PhD within the last ten years. Practicing visual artist. Completed MFA. No experience of supervision or examination of PhDs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Professor. Traditional PhD in the Humanities. Extensive experience of supervising and examining traditional PhD. Some experience of supervising Artistic PhDs. Currently supervising a Visual Arts Practice PhD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>Graduated with Visual Arts PhD over ten years ago, also a practicing visual artist. Currently supervising a Visual Arts PhD. Has chaired a vivâ voce on a Visual Arts PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>Professor in the Visual Arts. Extensive experience of administering, examining and supervising Visual Arts Practice PhD and Doctorates in the Visual Arts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances</td>
<td>Lecturer in an art school and practicing visual artist. Currently undertaking a Visual Arts Practice PhD. Holds a master’s which combined practice and theory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Professor. Doctorate by Publication. Extensive professional experience in the industry. Has supervised and examined numerous Visual Arts PhDs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil</td>
<td>Lecturer in an Art School and practicing visual artist. Currently engaged in a Visual Arts Practice PhD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Professor of Visual Arts. Professional Artist with experience of supervising a small number of Visual Arts PhDs and of crafting European level guidelines for administering of doctoral education in the Arts</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 8-1 Quick reference description of participants
8.3. Conceptual Framework

This brief section outlines the understanding and the use of conceptual frameworks throughout the study. Taking my lead from Miles and Huberman’s (1984, p. 33) much cited definition of a conceptual framework as ‘the current version of the researcher’s map of the territory being investigated,’ the conceptual framework in this study is seen as evolving through several iterations as the research unfolds, and functions as a tool for reflecting on the phenomenon under investigation. The conceptual framework is used as a heuristic device for thinking, linking concepts and working through and explaining the issues under investigation. The framework draws on concepts from the literature, my own experiences and observations and the act of reflecting on reading, experience and developing research assumptions (Lesham & Trafford, 2007, p. 101). Weaver-Hart (1988, p. 11) refers to a conceptual framework as ‘tools for researchers to use and not totems to worship.’ This is the attitude taken here. Given the unfolding, inductive nature of the research the framework is designed to be a flexible apparatus for capturing thinking as the research findings emerge and so various conceptual frameworks appear from time to time in the study. These emanate very much from my art and design background and have much to do with a tendency to think things out through visual mapping.
Figure 8-1: Evolving conceptual framework 1: Teasing out the characteristics of the VAP PhD in relation to traditional modes.
Figure 8-2 Developing conceptual framework detail focusing on thoughts in relation to VAP PhD
8.4. Organisation of the Findings

The study sought to reveal implicit theories, values and conceptualisations which are hidden from view, but which influence artistic research at every level. Van Manen (1997) speaks of the ‘distinctly existential, emotive, enactive, embodied, situated, and nontheoretical’ orientation of phenomenological understanding stating that:

> a powerful phenomenological text thrives on a certain irrevocable tension between what is unique and what is shared, between particular and transcendent meaning, and between the reflective and the prereflective shared of lifeworld (Manen, 1997, p. 345).

As has already been noted IPA favours small samples. Smith et al. argue that larger numbers are not indicative of superlative work indicating the typical number for doctoral study is between four and ten (2013). Thirteen participants were interviewed for this study, seven of whom had experience of undertaking the Visual Arts Practice PhD, three of these are current candidates and one of these is a very recent graduate. Significantly more attention is paid in the analysis to the experiences of these seven individuals. The accounts given by the student/graduate cohort were of a more experiential nature and provided a richer insight, speaking more directly to the aims of the study.

The experiences of four individuals who are currently engaged in supervision, one of whom was a recent examiner also provided rich experiential accounts which would allow one to ‘dwell in the minutiae of the data’ (Finlay, 2014, p. 122). These stories came into play in the chapter which looked at attitudes to the examination of the VAP PhD. The accounts given by three participants who were at a more senior level were not as experientially rich as those of the others. These participants seemed removed from the experience and reflected on the phenomenon from a critically
detached disposition, data gathered here tended to have more to do with opinion than experience but nevertheless was important in providing insight into attitudes and dispositions in relation to the phenomenon. The analysis then focuses predominantly on those participants who spoke about ‘what it feels like’ rather than ‘what they think of’ the Visual Arts PhD.

**Figure 8-3** Focus of the analysis - emphasis is on the inner circle moving outward.

Chapter 9 looks predominantly, but not exclusively, at student and graduate experiences, looking at preconceptions, motivations and experiences of VAP PhD. Chapter 10 focuses on experiences and understanding of writing and theory and includes the perspectives of graduate, supervisors and examiners. The concluding

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findings chapter, chapter 11, deals with experiences of assessment. Although it is customary to present findings and discussions separately, given the interpretative orientation of the research, interpretation and discussion cannot be fully expunged from the analysis and findings. For this reason, there are elements of discussion and sense-making dispersed throughout the presentation of findings.

Smith et al. (2013, p. 110) state that there is no clear line of demarcation between analysis and writing up, ‘as one begins to write some themes loom large and others begin to fade.’ This was certainly the case in this study whereby initial categories receded in the writing giving way to others. Figure 8-4 shows the initial superordinate and ordinate themes which had emerged, as I began to write the findings chapters. These became more refined in the writing with some looming large and others falling into relief.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual Arts Practice PhD</th>
<th>It's all about the 'Practice'</th>
<th>Motivations, naivety</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Ways of being - the shape of the research</td>
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<td>Imperative to protect the Practice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Aporia as a necessary condition for creating art</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Longing for art pedagogues</td>
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<tr>
<td>'It's all about the text'</td>
<td>'I'm not a natural writer'</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conceptualisations around the purpose and substance of the PhD text</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Text as a threat to <em>aporia</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>A schizophrenic process-a process with a schism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identity and resistance- 'I'm not an academic'</td>
<td>Artistic identity- augmenting identity</td>
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<td>Artist as anarchist-<em>détournement</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Disavowal of researcher identity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Finding voice- becoming a writer</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Finding new audiences- finding acceptance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment, Uncertainty and Doubt</td>
<td>'It's all about the text'</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The <em>vivâ voce</em> - failing to speak up</td>
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<td>The exhibition as a problem</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Assessment criteria - moving between the artistic to academic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Doubt and uncertainty</td>
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Figure 8-4 Overview of superordinate and ordinate themes- these begin to loom large or recede in the writing
Reflexive Commentary- Prejudices and biases of the researcher

From the outset, it is important to acknowledge that I have a rather ambivalent attitude toward artistic research, as I have seen it manifested in the last few years. This is not to say that I cannot appreciate brilliant work when I see it, and I have seen some examples of work which have resonated deeply with me. Originally from a working-class background, I have had to work extremely hard to find my way through my education, over-coming significant obstacles. For this reason, I highly value education, and issues around status and standards are extremely important to me. In recent years, in my personal life, I have had cause to engage with cutting edge genetic research. Sometimes I find it hard to square this life saving research with some of the artistic research I see. I feel that a lot of artistic research is so turned in on itself that it contributes very little to anything beyond itself. I do at times feel that this work lacks vitality and that it can be pretentious and elitist. I have a naturally cynical disposition and could rightly be accused of being conservative in my attitudes to artistic research. I am not easily seduced by the language, posturings and claims made by many of the protagonists in the artworld. For this reason, I can sometimes be dismissive. On the other hand, I love art, it has been my life. I see myself as being an advocate for my subject and an advocate for the students for whom I have a deep respect and admiration. If I am overly critical it is because I want it to be better for them. I also must acknowledge that through engagement with the participants, my appreciation of the value of artistic research has been enhanced.
Chapter 9 Findings: “It’s all about the practice”

9.1. Motivations and intentions

Stating that a responsible approach to the administering of higher education degrees would involve a harmonious relationship between students’ motivations for undertaking the degree and the experience, type of degree and likely outcomes, Guerin et al. (2015, p. 92) maintain that clarity regarding the reason why individuals elect to undertake research degrees would, ‘help manage those expectations, potentially avoiding disappointment and poor use of resources.’ Brailsford (2010) similarly notes that difficulties encountered by doctoral students may be overcome with greater understanding of the candidate’s aspirations and motivations.

Analysis of the interviews given by Visual Arts Practice PhD graduates and candidates showed that the predominating motivation expressed by this cohort for undertaking the VAP PhD, was the enrichment and advancement of artistic practice. Participants saw the PhD as a way to focus their artistic work. They sought a deepened critical and theoretical understanding of their oeuvre arrived at through critical feedback. This motivating factor was articulated more frequently and more vociferously than any other. As Sam put it, “I had been thinking of doing a PhD as a way of …. kind of pulling the threads of my practice together.” Frances makes a similar point:

…in a way it’s just about focusing trying to focus, re-focus my practice because I was kind of doing that anyway, but I sort of went off the scale or something I lost the sense of why I was doing it or something [14:23] so that was pretty scary already actually, so this is more about trying actually to put it back together, you know in a
more, in a way that I can feel confident about or something [Frances].

Participants observed that they had lost direction in their practice or were looking for a way to move it in a new direction. The PhD was thought of as a process which would facilitate the development of artistic practice, and was seen of as, a means to foster in the candidates, renewed confidence in their artistic work. As Frances puts it:

at a certain point between my MA and now I think that ah I sort of lost a bit of direction and maybe confidence in my practice, um I mean apart from the practical, you know the practical side of having a PhD of course that’s a factor, but for me I think I want, I really want the feedback around the, around the aesthetic practice, that’s really what I am looking for um I actually haven’t been getting as much of it as I like [Frances].

Frances’ observation that they are looking for aesthetic feedback on the work which they are not getting is significant and the thread of this discussion will be picked up again.

While acknowledging the advancement of artistic practice as a motivating factor, Phil speaks of the challenges of maintaining an artistic career within a limited Irish artworld. Phil goes on to speak of “bringing knowledge.” The use of the phrase to ‘bring knowledge’ seemed strange in the context of the interview however and did not indicate to me an endogenous motivation. It seemed as though the idea of “bringing knowledge” was being laid on to an existing agenda. In Phil’s case, the PhD is conceived of as a way to validate the artist
and the artwork within a constrained national art scene which provides limited opportunities for validation.

I felt like I couldn’t take my practice any further which could be part of a midlife crisis, but I really felt like I needed to bring knowledge... I think in in Ireland as a mid-career artist it’s very hard where do you go with it, you know because in a sense too, you know you feel you’ve failed as an artist because you’re not part of the elite group that has made it, you’re not in a commercial gallery you’re not in that you know you’re not doing the exhibition circuit but Ireland is quiet small like how many places can you take it to or like internationally, so and I think I suppose you get the point you know your teaching affects your work as well just from a time point of view and maybe you become a bit cynical within looking at your practice a bit like where is it and you know have I cut the mustard with it really [Phil].

The PhD could reassure the artist that they were capable of making artistic work which was of a sufficiently high standard. Furthermore, the participant went into the experience expecting it to rejuvenate artistic practice. Mark, a Professor of Fine Art, also talks of the difficulty of maintaining a career in the Irish context, observing “there’s only three museums worth the term so that’s three sales, how are you going to fund your work.” He goes on:

if nobody is interested in what you are doing if it’s abstract research, if it’s the commercial thing of monetizing of it is years down the road that’s when you go to university. So, in its, it is a safe space for people to develop new forms of work which have no financial, no engagement with the market [Mark].

The PhD process in this case is conceptualised as a safe environment where the artist could develop non-commercially viable work. It is noticeable that Mark refers to research, however research appears to be understood as practice. It is referred to as “abstract research.” One could easily substitute the word ‘painting’ or ‘art’ for research in this statement.
Gabriel, who was in the early part of their career when they undertook PhD study, thought of the PhD as was a way to continue with artistic work within an institution which could provide space, resources and critical feedback.

I suppose from me it was also an opportunity to continue practice um within an institution, inevitably I was dealing with that post, um, graduation experience um, in terms of what do I do next in order to maintain a practice [Gabriel].

This participant was in receipt of funding to undertake study and their outlook is somewhat reminiscent of Hockey and Allen-Collinson’s (2003) findings whereby some students viewed the PhD as a means of continuing practice.

Not all participants looked for advancement in the practice per se, however the disposition could still be described as oriented toward practice. Sam, who has a well-established professional practice, did not wish for a huge transformation in their artistic work but instead saw the PhD as a way to “frame” their work.

I would have been a more mature candidate with an established practice you know that did, that certainly did make things easier because I wasn’t trying to reinvent my practice I was trying to reframe my practice so that track record was there, and I deliberately chose three supervisors who I thought had a good understanding of some of the elements of where I was coming from. And that could, would help me or assist me frame it [Sam].

In this instance, the PhD is spoken of as though it is in the service of an extant artistic practice which had already arrived. There is no mention of research and even though Sam does not want to reinvent the work, they wish to “reframe” it. Sam talked of constantly coming back to the artistic work, “so it was always back to the work, the work is the key.” The PhD is something which is put
around the artistic work. In Sam’s account, the PhD is not talked about as a process directed toward creating knowledge but as a critical tool for helping to conceptualise and ‘theorize’ extant artistic practice.

While Phil spoke of career aspirations in terms of validating professional practice, Alex spoke in a way that demonstrated their eagerness to establish a career in the academic world. This is not surprising as Alex is a recent graduate, an early career artist and unlike the other participants is not in steady employment in an academic institution.

the recession had kind of hit as well so there wasn’t a lot of teaching work from MA, so I thought I would keep on studying and see how far I could push the whole research base [Alex].

While Alex demonstrated aspirations toward building a career in academia and talked in terms of research, they still emphasised the primacy of practice in their orientation.

What was striking was that participants did not foreground aspirations in terms of conducting research. It was clear that participants’ aspirations around the VAP PhD were to do with the enhancement of practice and their professional profiles. Yet it was not unanimously felt that the PhD was regarded by the artistic academic community as being able to fulfil these aspirations. In my explanatory noting I observed again and again that participants were not talking about research. While not precluding the idea that participants were interested in becoming researchers, it is clear from analyses of the interviews that the most salient motivating factor for doing the VAP PhD, as expressed in the accounts given, was an aspiration around the enhancement of artistic practice.
Participants wished to deepen critical and theoretical understanding of their work and to further their artistic careers. Research was for practice.

9.2. “I was green, I went into it completely blind”

Several of the participants talked about feelings of naivety in terms of what a Visual Arts Practice PhD would entail. They engaged in the process thinking that the PhD experience would be different, and in this way the experience did not match their expectations. For example, Gabriel observes:

> So, there was a lot of naivety in terms of my understanding of a PhD. What it could do for me…my motivation of doing it for me it was about maintaining my practice, it was about researching more, but I was quite naïve. I didn’t really have a full understanding of what I was getting into [Gabriel].

When Gabriel talks of “researching more,” what is implied is the kind of research that an artist does in order to develop ideas and processes in the artistic practice. Feelings of naivety did not abate for Gabriel as they navigated their way through the experience, and they recount moments quite late on in the process when they were “totally green.” Phil observes “I think I went into it completely ignorant, hadn’t a clue really what it was, but you know I think it is. I went into it completely blind.” Morgan also talks about being naïve and entering a process which was not what they thought it would be:

> so the staff were encouraging, and I thought I was naïve about it, I felt like it was going to be an extended version of what I was doing and that I, you know that was such an exciting process for me and really had built up a great kind of social network on the MA and was experimenting with new processes and new ways of making um that didn’t involve [name of participant’s discipline] so ah... I signed up and can’t remember even what I proposed [Morgan].
Morgan experienced an epiphany, two years into the process when they came to realize that the PhD was completely different to the MFA:

a PhD was a completely different kind of animal um so that dawned on me suddenly and then I realised what I got myself into um and it, yeah it was very kind of like, I found it very challenging, ‘cause it was kind of lonely and it was actually completely different to an MA. It was a much more isolated kind of situation and yeah you have to really design your own strategies for how you are going to do it. [Morgan].

Not all the candidates expressed feelings of naivety. Adrian, for example, did not characterise themselves as being naïve saying that they were “prepared for what it was going to take intellectually and creatively.” I find it interesting that Adrian went into the process which such confidence, as they undertook the PhD in the very early days when there was no culture of doctoral level study in Ireland.

The study revealed that feelings of naivety were common amongst the graduates and candidates. Naivety was not so much associated with a lack of comprehension around the rigour of the process but was to do with not knowing what the VAP PhD would be. Participants enrolled feeling that the course of study would be like the MFA. The interviews revealed a problematic lack of continuity between the MFA experience and the Visual Arts Practice PhD.

9.3. “It was a completely different animal”

The MFA was unanimously conceived of as an extremely positive experience being described as “joyful,” “exciting,” “fun,” “intensive,” “dynamic” and “invigorating.” While people such as Sam, Phil and Gabriel completed MFAs which had little or no requirement for writing, Morgan and Adrian were both
required to produce supplementary MFA texts which were comparatively more substantial. Both Frances and Alex undertook study which provided them with a mix of theory and practice and therefore had undertaken a substantial written requirement. Morgan talks of the excitement of engaging with theory in relations to their artistic work as being a reason for going back to do a master’s.

In my own practice I felt that I wasn’t ah... I had lost out maybe on a kind of an academic side or theorising elements of the work, so I returned to do an MA, so I was just really, I found it really dynamic and exciting and interesting and really kind of had, suddenly kind of gained an appetite for discourse around practice [Morgan].

While characterised as a positive and edifying educational experience, it was clear that the MFA appeared to offer the candidates little in terms of a foundation which would give them any indication of what was entailed in Visual Arts Practice research. It was not just that there was little writing or research training but that there was a complete lack of continuity in terms of the substance and orientation of the two qualifications. Phil describes the PhD as “completely different from a master’s.” Morgan makes the same observation “it was completely different to an MA.” The Master’s in Fine Art offered students an experience which was seen to be a continuation and intensification of their under-graduate experience. Participants went into the PhD expecting an experience which would resemble their previous educational experiences but were met with a phenomenon which was “a completely different animal” [Phil].

It was interesting to look at this issue of expectation in relation to the conceptualisations of the supervisors. Mark, an artist supervisor who did not have a doctoral level qualification, but who was engaged in crafting policy for
higher level degrees in Visual Art at a European level, conceptualised the
difference between the levels of award for BA in Fine Art, MFA and Visual Arts
Practice PhD as a process of deepening knowledge and a gradual moving toward
artistic work which was highly accomplished and original. The PhD was seen by
Mark as a sophisticated version of the MFA, however in contrast to the MFA
which might produce artistic work which could be somewhat derivative, the
artistic work produced on the PhD would be unique and with an orientation
toward society. Mark maintained that, “in MA it comes about that they need to
prove they are capable of conducting a body of research.” Although Mark used
the word research, within the context of the conversation, I took research to
mean the artistic work.

in a way with BA they do it once, but in MA they have to understand
what they are doing, and they have to be able to debate it and ah it’s
connected to what they do, the connection, the theory and the
practice are connected. That’s my understanding of MA. But there,
still the requirement of originality, it’s more that there is still the
acceptance that the, it’s not a hundred per cent unique, they are
within a field and they are travelling in similar. Really the MA has
replaced the honours degree [Mark].

The successful candidate is one who can debate and connect theory and practice
and produce unique artistic work.

at the end of an MA the student has got to prove that they are well
versed and capable, you know that they can do another one, you
know that they understand what they have done, you know it’s not a
one off. They can argue it and debate it and so on. Now with a PhD
the originality comes in, it has to be unique and it also introduces a
social context which is absent from everything else it has to be of
value to us as a society [Mark].
I am not sure about the assertion that value to society only comes in as a consideration at doctoral level and that it is absent in undergraduate and master’s level work. Mark, saw the PhD as a superlative version of the MFA, where the sophistication and the originality of the artistic work was the ultimate goal. Research meant being engaged in the making of artistic work, coupled with the contextualisation of this work in relation to relevant contemporary debates. Mark’s understanding of the VAP PhD was in keeping with the expectations of the VAP PhD candidates and graduates. It is notable that during the interview Mark became a little frustrated with the conversation, at one point asking, “Why is all this, which I would say this very normal stuff that I’m telling you why is it radical?” There was a sense that these questions hardly needed to be asked as there was a consensus of understanding around the issue. But this was not the case.

Supervisors coming from the humanities expressed a different conceptualisation of the VAP PhD, one which was more research oriented, where research is understood as the implementation of a prescribed methodology directed toward discovering new knowledge. Ben, a professor in the humanities, who has spent most, but not all, of his career teaching in University contexts, talks in terms of “creating a space in the research” for the creative input. Ben recounts an experience whereby a student enrolled on a traditional model “apologetically” pulls out their professional practice. For Ben the artistic work breathes life into the research. The creative practice in this case has the potential to elevate average work, allowing the student to reach beyond their limitations in academic writing. Ben speaks of his experience of this happening:

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their writing was not mediocre, but it could have been, it wasn’t up to the standard of other PhDs, it probably would have reached the bar at some point but the, by bringing their professionalism and art into it and creating a space for it, it moved the thesis on quite significantly and in fact shaded over into their I’d say relatively average work in textual history [Ben].

Participants’ experiences of writing for the VAP PhD is a theme which looms large in the study and will be dealt with more thoroughly in its own section.

Embedded in art school culture, Nicholas also came from a humanities background. Nicholas is unusual in that although not a visual artist he has predominantly taught practical elements of art and design in an art school for much of his career. Nicholas, like Ben, appreciates the aesthetic approach for the affective value it can bring to research, but for Nicholas research must “rise above” studio practice. He observes:

I can appreciate the value of an aesthetic approach but…engage it accordingly but I think in a much broader sense if an individual was to be approaching a practice-led PhD and that individual had exhibited enormous strengths creatively which relied heavily or almost entirely on the aesthetic embedded in that work it would have to be remarkably secure and constant to rise it above their normal studio practice [Nicholas].

For Nicholas, the VAP PhD must culminate in an empirically testable contribution to knowledge.

I felt that to gauge progress you know to identify authenticity to sift and to weigh you know the quality of something that that the research should be capable of a degree of testing in that quite formal sense [Nicholas].

For these two supervisors, there was tendency to see the artistic practice as being in the service of the research, with aesthetic elements contributing to the overall impact and richness of the contribution.
9.4. Ineffability, artistic practice and contribution to knowledge

One area where there was a lot of divergence amongst respondents was around the question of art and contribution to knowledge. Adrian, in an unremarkable statement, discusses the idea that the VAP PhD must be a clearly communicated contribution to knowledge:

> it has to be a contribution to new knowledge otherwise it’s not a PhD so you have to be able to, so the student has to be able to say what they are contributing and clearly, oh and clarity real clarity um I mean they don’t have to have confidence yet you know because it’s only new but to be able to say it in a clear way with clear language that’s easily accessible and easily communicable but that’s but that is able to but that’s in respect of the field [Adrian].

This characterisation is unremarkable because it would be in keeping with any description of a PhD. However, when one comes to look at ideas about the role of artistic practice in relation to contribution to knowledge, a number of diverse and sometimes contradictory positions began to emerge.

Alex, who has brought their contribution to non-artistic academic audiences via conference presentation, acknowledges that there has been positive reaction to what they term as “sensory research.”

> You know you have to push for your resolution to say my contribution to new knowledge is through my practice. It’s through this… which I think can be... I was at a conference last week in [name of European Institution] and I think that other scholars can find it very refreshing and exciting. You know that you have taken this from an actual first person find of experience [Alex].

Alex articulates their contribution as a contribution to knowledge through practice.

> well I was contributing through artistic practice um hoping to contribute towards um the more sensory forms of research that artistic practice can take, so
embodied experience and through sound and this idea of the haptic through cinema and photography and I suppose having tried and tested several experimental processes, my area was to contribute to this non-verbal experience that you would have through this practice [Alex].

While some of the participants saw the idea that art contributes to knowledge, as being relatively unproblematic, others had a lot of difficulty with this notion. Daniel a supervisor and examiner from a humanities discipline, found the notion challenging, stating, “that’s one of the things I’m still grappling with in my mind, whether art can contribute knowledge as such you know” [Daniel].

I think as well to talk about art as contributing something new in a field of knowledge is in itself kind of a kind of a problematic notion because like art doesn’t necessarily generate the same kind of response, it is not a very clear-cut kind set of outcomes is it? [Daniel].

Whereas Daniel questions art as contributor to knowledge, for Adrian it was a given. Art itself was knowledge.

Art is knowledge, visual art is a way of thinking through images so the better that is the better the knowledge is and language, written language is just a way of thinking through this, these little signs that we make these tiny, you know this language we have developed so visual language is just another way of communicating knowledge [Adrian].

Despite stressing the importance of clarity in communicating contributions, Adrian also talked about the ineffability of judging the contribution art makes “it’s ineffable I mean there is a certain ineffability about judging art” [Adrian].

At the same time however, Adrian says that art is a language and elsewhere says that art is knowledge. There is a lot going on in these pronouncements. Art is knowledge, art communicates knowledge, art is thinking, art is a language, there is something ineffable about it and the judging of the contribution is ineffable.
Reflecting on the end of their own PhD experience, Adrian observes that knowledge which was “dredged up” became embodied in them, sinking back into a kind of tacit knowledge which silently now, much long after, continues to inform the artistic practice.

Knowledge is seen as residing in the artist and their work, and its value is in ability to inform the artistic practice.

When talking about art as a contribution to knowledge Chris states, “Well um well that is the party line, it is a contribution to knowledge, um I think that … art thinks in a different way.” Chris talks of knowledge being thought about differently, art “has an epistemology but a different epistemology.” Chris, like Daniel, is dubious about the ways in which art contributes to knowledge asserting, “there is meaning to be had around art” but the meaning is not fixed, to say that art is knowledge is, Chris says, “a tenuous assertion.” He goes on to explain:

going right back to semiology you know there is a sign and there is a signifier and a signified and the, I won’t say problem, the difference with abstract painting or a single note is that it does not have a fixed signified it’s floating, it’s polysemic, ambiguous um … I mean obviously a lot of things can be said about how we make meaning but um there is meaning to be had around words and around representational images for example, I think therefore it’s a kind of um it’s a kind of tenuous assertion just to say art is knowledge [Chris].
Chris signals the ambiguous, polysemic nature of art. The statement “well that’s the party line, it is a contribution to knowledge,” suggests that knowledge contribution is not the authentic goal of the VAP PhD.

It is clear from Frances’ account that the status of art as knowledge bearing is given considerable thought. Drawing on the work Barbara Carper (1978), a nurse theorist, Frances identifies empirical, moral, personal and aesthetic ways of knowing. Frances speaks of aesthetic knowledge as an “unspeakable” kind of knowing:

aesthetic knowledge, it’s a kind of, it’s a way of knowing that is not, it’s not necessarily conceptualised knowing you know it’s um I don’t want to over simplify it because she talked about it in quite complex terms and for me I think again this comes back to this question of the relation between the text and the work and how does the work not just be an illustration of the text right, so I am thinking of aesthetics in terms of this unspeakable, this kind of unspeakability, and kind of an unspeakable form of knowing [Frances].

Interestingly both Frances and Adrian talk about the “unspeakability” of aesthetic knowledge. Frances observes “it speaks to the unspeakable, it speaks to what cannot be somehow cognitively captured.” The knowledge which is to be had through art evades spoken language and therefore cannot be reduced to simple explications. Frances explains:

in that sense that is a body of knowledge which, you know George Bataille is very good on this he talks about non-knowledge and um yeah I’m trying to hold on to those ideas without it being about sort of again not some sort of romantic regression to some sort of primitive not knowing but it’s about all that stuff that cannot be reduced [Frances].

Many of the participants spoke of trying to find a voice or a stronger voice. Alex, when responding to recommendations made by examiners in relation to
their PhD text, talked about finding a stronger voice which would help to drive the contribution home. They observe, “it was almost like it was a little tentative when I first submitted it and I had to kind of solidify it and come in with a stronger voice...Find that voice, that voice which contributes more as a um less as a suggestion and more as a statement” [Alex]. Things which were suggested and intimated in the artistic work needed to be galvanised into a fully articulated statement in the text.

9.5. Ways for the art to be in the PhD

During the course of the research I looked, not only at PhD work which was undertaken by the participants in the study but also at examples which were examined and supervised by participants. A number of loose models of execution were in evidence. It is worthwhile teasing out some of the nuances of these approaches.

In the case of Sam, at the very beginning of their PhD journey, before they had even started in fact, they came up with a concept which was articulated as the contribution to knowledge. This ‘concept’ could be said to have been residing within the artistic work for some time. While Sam strove to refine this idea in the PhD writing, I got the impression that the artistic work continued, in its own way, un-impinged by the PhD experience. When Sam spoke of their PhD work, the conversation centred around their struggles with writing and finding suitable theoretical perspectives to support the ‘concept’ which ostensibly was already in existence before the PhD began. In my noting, I observed ‘Constantly there is this sense that the practice is the practice and that it essentially is unchanged by
the process it is just there, and the PhD is happening around it or beside it’

[Researcher’s notes]. Sam’s response to a question at a progress review reinforces this point:

I mean it’s just a continuum of what’s going on and they are going yeah but you know are you going to bring this to some kind of public moment and I was going ‘well why would I?’ It’s there all the time [emphasis] [Sam].

The artistic work seemed to me to have been compartmentalised. It was happening before the PhD, it formed a backdrop to the PhD and it would continue, as before, in the wake of the PhD. It felt as though a concept was syphoned off, plucked out of the artistic practice and the PhD was essentially the activity of contextualising this idea. Sam’s contribution is something along the lines of, ‘I do this in my work, here it is theorised and contextualised, now it can function as a model of practice for others’ [Researcher’s notes].
In some ways reminiscent of Sam in approach, Adrian deals with and develops on an issue which was already a feature of their practice. The approach taken by Adrian could be described as autoethnographic, although they acknowledge that they were not aware of this terminology or perhaps this research approach, when they produced the work some time ago. Whereas in the case of Sam the artistic work feels as though it is sealed off from the PhD, with Adrian the work is brought wholly into the PhD. Ultimately Adrian’s contribution is directed toward an understanding of the potential of their own artistic genre to deal with a specific issue to do with the self. I felt that in Adrian’s case they saw their artistic work as the research. It was as though Adrian had relinquished their artistic work to intense scrutiny, while at the same time using it to generate a focused body of practice around an idea.
Even though Adrian frames their study in terms of a question to be answered the following statement encapsulates the extent to which Adrian’s approach is directed toward the enhancement of practice:

> the value has been absolutely enormous for me um, it is almost like where do I start, it transformed my practice because of the depth of research I engaged with um and also I learned skills which I really didn’t have before I suppose skills of synthesis, analysis and being able to take a body of research and transform it, creatively because my project was very much creative and practice-based so I was thinking of everything in terms of my art practice so even the theoretical I took and really looked, and really used that to benefit my own creative practice as an artist um it just it enriched me it gave my practice depth [Adrian].

I was struck by the fact that when talking about the outcome of the research, Adrian did not foreground how their art contributed to knowledge or research, instead they spoke in terms of the way in which researching had contributed to their artistic practice.
Unlike Sam, Morgan observed that they did not create artistic work in the same way that they would have done had they not been enrolled on a PhD. This artist was trying to find things out through the artistic work. They say, “I did try and use forms of practice to find things out that I didn’t know” [Morgan]. For Morgan, the artistic work was altered to function methodologically and was used as an instrument of inquiry:

I wasn’t kind of just on a PhD making work that I would have normally made already, I was making things that I never would have made so the PhD did, did change the way I made, like if I had a situation that came up I would think well I’ll try and build a project around that [Morgan].

For Morgan, the work was used as a means to stage a series of experiments directed toward the exploration of an issue to do with visual art and its audiences. The contribution was to knowledge about art’s place in the social milieu.

I was very, very busy in the first two or three years ‘cause I was doing that, that’s the way I was naïvely approaching it that way that I was finding, trying to find how my art work or different artistic projects could yield material that would help the project move forward [Morgan].

Engaged in the activities of path-finding and risk-taking, Morgan tried continuously to innovate within the system, particularly trying to come up with strategies which would inure the work while also conferring credibility on the process. In the absence of conventions around reliability and validity, or more aptly, trustworthiness and credibility, Morgan constantly searched for ways to test their work through engagement with artistic peers. There is a reticence in evidence in Morgan’s account and a sense of ambivalence and reticence is
threaded through the narratives in general. Morgan observes that some forms of artistic work fit more easily in to the VAP PhD process:

I do think that in some cases the PhD is appropriate like some artists have very kind of discrete practices that are responding maybe historically to something or in a very particular way they have found a gap in their subject that is appropriate and they are themselves very scholarly and you know um don’t find a problem turning over text, turning around text writing is part of what they do and so in that case I think it is really you know it is, it can work out really well for them and can be just a kind of a richer focus on what they are doing already [Morgan].

The declaration that “in some cases the PhD is appropriate,” indicates that the participant feels that not all forms of artistic practice sit easily within the process. The statement that the PhD can be “a richer focus for what they are doing already,” is further evidence of a disposition which sees the value of the PhD as being linked to the idea of the enrichment of artistic practice.

Frances adopted an approach whereby a series of complex relational aesthetic actions were undertaken and critically reflected upon. The actions generated data and insights around a specified social and cultural context and would inform future actions. Frances did not envisage the PhD culminating in an exhibition, the actions themselves, as they punctuated the process, in addition to a theoretical exposition in text, were to form the artistic research outputs. While there are similarities here to an action research model, it would be an over-simplification to characterise Frances’ research as such. Yet the fact this approach is reminiscent of an action research model makes Frances’ modus operandi easier to accommodate in terms of existing approaches to research. Being easily accommodated into existing models is a double-edged sword
however because Frances feels they are required to fend off threats to the work from outside traditions which would deplete it of its artistic potency.

Frances’ artistic work provokes and facilitates interactions with co-producers within a politicised social context, so although their approach may call to mind existing methodological approaches, the political, aesthetic and relational potency of the artistic actions situates it beyond more conventional approaches.

Whereas it seemed that Sam had compartmentalised artistic practice, syphoning off an idea for the purposes of the PhD, Frances and Morgan allowed the practice to impact on research processes, looking to innovate, testing the ways in which artistic research methodologies could augment existing approaches. In the absence of accepted conventions to ensure the trustworthiness of their responses
both Frances and Morgan deployed a range of discrete strategies in an effort to ensure credibility. As Frances puts it:

it’s complicated ‘cause it’s also my research and I have to take ownership and responsibility of it um so partly I’m following established methodologies from other disciplines and partly I feel like I’m trying to invent actually and I’m trying to invent and sort of theorize the invention so that it’s solid and water-tight but that is a little bit confusing about all of that, and there’s so much variation from place to place on what’s expected or how um you know the standards around the expectation of.. like is the practice just a methodology already and we don’t have to do anything else to it. You know? [Frances].

Frances is trying to stake out a territory for artistic methodologies which would be rigorous and valid while acknowledging feelings of confusion around expectations and standards.

Nicholas’ student produced a PhD which could be described as using a mixed methods approach. A traditional literature review was conducted; a variety of experiments involving participants were carried out; data was gathered using conventional methods; and artistic work consisting of films, photography and performances were produced throughout the process. Some of these visual artefacts were ultimately presented for examination in the form of an exhibition and performance supported with the PhD text.
A conspicuous feature of Nicholas’ account was the use of hyperbole when he talked about the candidate’s contribution to knowledge. He spoke of “a huge contribution” and “colossally scientific research.” I felt that Nicholas was really trying to make a compelling case for the student. Although artistic work was produced throughout the PhD journey, as far as I could determine, the knowledge claims espoused in the text were claims beyond the field of art and extended into the area of the health sciences. I found this one rather problematic. My reservations were around the fact that the PhD was making claims to knowledge in an area of the health sciences, yet the examination board was constituted of academics from the art world and the humanities. I found it hard to know how these people, who were superlatively qualified in their own fields, were qualified to assess some of the knowledge claims made by the artist.
In contrast to Frances, and to a lesser extent Morgan, whose work moved toward a homogenising of artistic and research values, Phil demonstrated an approach which prized artistic values above all else. Unlike Sam, Phil’s work was not a continuation of existing practice, in that it was framed around a specific investigation of a site, for the purpose of completing the PhD. You could characterise Phil’s PhD as an investigation of a place, and the historical and social contexts associated with this place, through artistic practice. It is difficult to distinguish in Phil’s account a differentiation between artistic subject matter and the object of a research endeavour. The ensuing statement by Phil is extremely revealing of a disposition which is oriented, not towards research, as one might expect but toward the development of artistic work:

Well for me it’s interesting just about doing a PhD, like in practice, to me it’ll always be about the practice, you know like you know and the methods I deploy in that as an artist, I just feel like to me that’s the key thing, the theory part of it is there just to assist that journey for me, like you know I just would like my thesis to be hidden somewhere when it’s finished it’s about the artwork for me [Phil].

The assertion that they wished for the “thesis,” and by this they implied the written component of the submission, to be “hidden,” is surprising and illuminating. Whereas Phil spoke enthusiastically about the prospect of publicly exhibiting the artistic outcomes of the PhD, this statement about concealing the textual work speaks volumes about Phil’s reticence and lack of confidence working in text.
Phil’s comments are also indicative of a tendency which I noticed whereby some participants saw the writing and the practice as representing two separate parts of the process, with the notion of ‘thesis’ being associated with text and not practice. Phil’s primary goal was toward producing an ‘end of PhD exhibition’. The requirement to “bring knowledge” was understood as harbouring a potential threat to the artistic work. The idea that artistic practice could be damaged or destroyed by the VAP PhD was a strong theme which emerged from the study, as was the idea that artistic practice needed to be protected from the research process.

9.6. The PhD can kill the art: protecting the practice from the process

Idioms and metaphors to do with death, conflict and killing were common when participants spoke of the effect of the PhD process on the artistic work. Phil is explicit in stating fears regarding a perceived threat, speaking about how the “analysis,” or “this new knowledge that you are bringing” is a danger because it may “kill” the practice:
I thought yeah you do and I feel like I’ve been at this for twenty years I do have to protect my practice. You know that you know this analysis or this new knowledge that your bringing, that it doesn’t you know, you’ve sustained a practice, it’s not about like sort of you know your record of exhibitions but your practice itself as an artist you know how you, you know that this doesn’t kill it you know like to me the practice leads here it has to always lead and that’s the danger you know it’s really a danger [Phil].

For Phil, there is a strong imperative to protect the artistic work from the PhD.

Morgan also talks of the potential for artistic work to be killed by the process:

I mean I’ve heard that it can really hinder the work that it becomes too theoretical and that it kills it and it’s dry compared to just artists’ practice [Morgan].

Daniel also alludes to the fact that the aesthetic element can become side-lined through the process:

you do constant, you do consistently come up against the problem of well where’s the kind of aesthetic component here like, do you know what I mean? because if it’s just going to contribute, you know if it’s going to be geared towards a kind of a knowledge formation process you know then sometimes the actual aesthetic merits of the work can get a little bit side-lined and lost. The students can become over-preoccupied with trying to prove a particular point [Daniel].

Frances’ account of their experience of the PhD was replete with metaphors to do with war and conflict. They described the process as a “minefield” full of hidden dangers. They describe their research activity as being composed of a series of “field actions” and they characterise the meeting of different disciplinary traditions as a conflict. When talking about the effect of the process on the artistic work, Frances demonstrates fear and misgivings:

there is something neutralising about it, and I can’t help feeling that there is something… it turns it into, it’s like a black hole it’s sucking it towards a service economy model and I just have I have a misgiving about it. I have a
misgiving about what it is going to do to, I don’t know, the question of what it is that makes it art in the first place [Frances].

One of the areas which Frances particularly identifies as being problematic is around the issue of ethical clearance:

people keep saying why are you making such a fuss about it but when I read the ethics forms I just I know you could just fill it out but I feel that there is something being done to the practice by making it fit into, and I chose to do the PhD but you know the sheet you have and I’m thinking how do I word that so that I give it to someone from you know, I’m hoping to work with someone from the [name of association] and you know I’m kind of concerned about the, I know it’s a formalising of that has to be done but I fell it’s a little bit flattening in some way, and I have to find my way around that but I can’t find anyone to talk to who really understands what I’m trying, what I’m saying, you know they are kind of like what’s the problem, but I do really think there is something there and I can’t seem to get to the bottom of it [Frances].

A common theme was that of having to rationalise or simplify the artistic practice so that it would “fit into a structure.” The notion that the PhD process could constrain, emasculate, neutralise, flatten and ultimately kill artistic work was a prevalent theme throughout the research.

Adrian demonstrated a much more positive attitude than other respondents, when they spoke of the effect that the PhD had on the artistic work, saying that PhD work “should be the best work that we make,” the process is generally conceived of as one which has enriched the artistic work, augmented professional standing and conferred on Adrian a deeply embodied confidence in themselves as an artist and an academic. That said, Adrian made a few revealing statements at the end of the interview which hinted that the process, however beneficial it may be, was nonetheless constraining. The metaphor of death arises again:
Researcher: And since you have completed do you use the work in the same way that you did in the PhD? Or have you shifted into another?
Adrian: Hmm, that’s an interesting question. That’s a very interesting question. I don’t use it the same way as I did in the PhD, I don’t unpick it until it’s like a carcass with all the bits taken apart you know down to its bare bones and then pick the bones apart the way I did so I, I make my work now in just the free joyful, creative way that I always did um then I let it be [laughter] [Adrian].

I was immediately put in mind of George Stubbs, who I had written about in the literature review. I imagined the toil of picking over the carcasses of horses for years until being finally liberated. Artistic work which was constrained in the service of the PhD, once released, took flight becoming again joyous and free.

9.7. The art is overlooked, longing for art pedagogies
One of the issues signalled by Frances and many of the artist participants, was that they felt that they were getting little in terms of feedback when it came to the aesthetic elements of the research. This is one of the ways in which the VAP PhD experience differed from that of the master’s. Both Frances and Alex note that supervisors from other disciplinary research traditions were coming to the work with their own research agendas, failing to appreciate qualities and dispositions which artists took to be a given. Although value was to be had from the feedback given, supervisors who came from other traditions did not always give feedback which the participants felt was appropriate to their artistic endeavours:

that wasn’t really what it was about you know the census and all this kind of stuff that it’s making it more into a sociology project and I kept fighting with everyone about that it seemed, it was like this is art practice [Alex].

Artistic practice they felt was being regarded as a methodology and was not being challenged or evaluated on its own terms. There was a constant yearning
for quality critical feedback and critique of the artistic accomplishments of the PhD, but this was not always received by many of the candidates. When feedback was provided in the case of Adrian and Sam, for example, the candidate expressed satisfaction with the process but when it was absent, it resulted in a great deal of distress. Whereas Adrian characterises their encounters with supervisors as taking the form of lively engaged discussions around the artistic work, Gabriel recounts experiences of unease and dissatisfaction:

But sometimes there was a feeling that the physical work somehow didn’t seem to matter as much in relation to this idea of acquiring a PhD in comparison to the MA program I would have been on, or the BA program and I suppose that was something that I would have been aware of the whole way through the process and it wouldn’t have sat well with me [Gabriel].

Gabriel speaks of getting little feedback, and recounts that during one meeting their supervisor fell asleep:

I remember having a tutorial with him in the office and he had his, it was a small office and his chair was kind of perched up against the door and he was kind of leaning back and he ended up falling asleep in the middle of my tutorial [humorous][Gabriel].

Gabriel speaks of a PhD experiences which was typified by lack of engagement. They felt isolated, and these feelings were compounded by the fact that they saw others in their cohort who were experiencing edifying and rich engagement. Gabriel talks of having drawn a “short straw” in terms of their supervisory team, “that was one of those moments of feeling very frustrated and feeling like I was going around in circles.” Their narrative is replete with idioms of distress from
start to finish. Gabriel’s experience will be recounted in more depth, in the ensuing chapters.

Adrian’s experience contrasted markedly with that of Gabriel. They had a large supervisory team which was composed of artists and theoretical people. Adrian also benefitted from meetings with visiting artists:

So, it was a nice team and really collaborative, you know, we had great meetings and discussions together as a group and then there was at periods at times I’d have external people coming in sometimes from inside [name of institution] and sometimes from outside giving you know, if they were visiting say um visiting artist to the college while I was there I got a chance then to talk about my project with them as well [Adrian].

For Adrian interactions with the supervisory team were viewed as positive and fulfilling experiences in that there was an abundance of rich critical discourse around the artistic work, with plenty of external feedback from practicing artists. Morgan also speaks positively of having benefitted from having a supervisor who had a PhD and was an artist:

When I was doing it, it was really unusual, but I had found [name of supervisor] who had done a PhD just weirdly ten years before in [name of location] when they were starting up. Yeah so, she had just had one and I had had a couple of tutorials with her before and I thought that she was good and she was brilliant like she was really you know and also she kept me on the track of seeing the value of art practice [Morgan].

While the participants greatly appreciated the guidance, they received from supervisors with traditional PhDs, particularly around endpoints and in relation to the production of the PhD text, above all else they valued supervisors who could appreciate and critique the artistic work not for what it contributed as a
research methodology but for what it contributed in its own terms. They especially valued artists supervisors who had VAP PhDs.

What should be noted is that Sam, Adrian, Frances, Morgan and Alex took active roles in assembling around themselves supervisory teams which consisted of people with both conventional and practice-led PhDs. They were involved in seeking out people who they felt would be able to give them the kind of feedback they felt they needed. If they could not formally assemble supervisory teams who would offer this support, they looked for informal encounters. Whereas some might find the prospect of working with such complex supervisory teams daunting and untenable, Sam and the other participants welcomed diversity of approach in their supervisory relationships. The VAP PhD candidates sought out multi-perspectival feedback and could happily tolerate and benefit from contradictory viewpoints. What they yearned for most of all were the rich experiences of lively studio discussions around the work which were typical of their art school cultures. Where they felt most dissatisfied with the PhD process was when these rich pedagogical experiences were replaced with meetings in offices and ten-minute PowerPoint presentations.

9.8. Resistance, aporia and dwelling in uncertainty
Analysis of the interviews exposed an interesting tension between conceptualisations of constraint and of liberty. While sublimation of the artistic work to the PhD process was one set of ideas which circulated in the accounts, participants simultaneously felt that the PhD process lacked structure. Feelings of doubt, confusion and uncertainty were common. On one hand there was a
desire for more structure to guide the student through the PhD experience, on the other there was a rejection of the imposition of reductive structures which would constrain the artistic work. Most of the participants expressed feeling constrained by the PhD at times. The artists wished to dwell in complexity, they wanted to honour the ineffability of artistic knowledge and protect it from a rationalising process.

Sam repeatedly referred to the idea that there was no “template” while at the same time speaking of resisting the imposition of convention:

so, I suppose when I started with the work I had no, I had no template and so I looked at other people and I thought well that’s the way you must do it [Sam].

Reiterating feelings of naivety, Gabriel talks of their struggles with trying to find a structure in the process, they also signal the political dynamics lurking within the process which they felt adversely affected their journey through the PhD:

It’s important to kind of impose certain a certain timeline, you know what happens within those timelines. I didn’t have any of that and again I was very green and naïve in terms of my understanding and expectations, you know and what I could and couldn’t ask for. And it also felt that my requests were slightly politicised by individuals telling me that you know that [name of professor and name of supervisor] are best friends and you’re never, you know that’s always going to… so there was also a bit of a feeling of that going on, you know what I mean? [Gabriel].

The role of the supervisor for Gabriel and others was to provide the candidate with a structure which could help them to navigate the journey. The following statement by Sam sums up this attitude:

Sam: because I will tangentalize and I will go down a rabbit hole, your job is to pull me out of that rabbit hole and that’s what I expect you to do. Researcher: Right
Sam: So I was very clear ‘cause I knew myself and fair play to them they did that in key moments, you know that first essay with [name of second supervisor] that was pulling me out of a rabbit hole of a very, very deep rabbit hole [humorous] you know [Sam].

The artist needed to be able to go into unchartered territory with the knowledge that the supervisor would help them to find their way back. It is clear from Gabriel’s account that a perceived lack of structure coupled with a disengaged supervisor are seen as contributing factors which led to their unsuccessful outcome.

Morgan also describes a process which did not have a structure:

it was completely different to an MA, that you know it was different there wasn’t a design for it in the same way that there was for an MA, there was no structure that was going to bring you through [Morgan].

it’s different to another thing, like with other added qualifications there’s a structure there, there’s a course there, though it’s not as huge a task the deadlines are kind of set for you, you don’t have that job of work to design those and agree those and stick by them [Morgan].

One of the ways in which Morgan coped with what they characterised as a “messy process” was to simplify the practice toward the end of the PhD:

I tried different experimental things throughout the course of the four years and it became very clear that that was going to give me more problems if I tried to do that and um so I didn’t I kept it simple at the end [Morgan].

Stripping the work of complexity so as to facilitate the expediency of the process could, however, lead to artistic work which was emasculated. Stating that contemporary art tends to “drift into all these different areas,” Daniel observes
that in the act of supervision he tries to reign in a candidate who has a tendency to extend the work into too many areas:

one of his maybe problems is trying to reign in his interests you know and to realize that you can’t contribute to multiple fields at the same time that you have to situate your practice or at least the part of your practice that the PhD is...is going to be illustrating you know, I mean in his case because he’s got a lot of different projects that he is interested in and because he’s got collaborative work as well you know a lot of the kind of process of getting him into tune with regard to focusing on the PhD was making him realize that you can’t be kind of pushing out in all these different directions at once [Daniel].

Implicit in this statement is the idea that artistic work needs to be rationalised in order to fit the PhD model. It was generally acknowledged that this rationalisation process could be detrimental to the artistic work.

While acknowledging that it is a blanket assumption, both Alex and Morgan observe that there is a general perception amongst the artistic community that PhD art is not very exciting. As Morgan puts it “Yeah it definitely affects artists, I mean it makes, that’s what they said at the time, you know there’s a general consensus that work that’s made on PhD is really boring” [Morgan]. They both however are careful not to condemn all PhD art and acknowledge “good work” which they have seen.

The struggle to maintain complexity in the artistic work in the face of a rationalising framework was a concern expressed by many of the artists, Frances for example has the following point to make:

I’m interested in, and always interested in is complexity I’m always interested in complexity right and that’s always a problem you know how do you represent complexity [Frances].
While artists negotiated trying to accommodate artistic practice within a structure which was perceived to be ill-defined, they similarly felt that the process was reductionist and rationalising.

As I analysed the data it seemed to me that the artists demonstrated a high tolerance for uncertainty not only that, but they strove to reject certainty when it came to the artistic work. Phil, for example, typifies disposition of being able to cope with uncertainty:

> you think you know I've been doing it wrong but that’s fine you know it’s like everything you find your feet and it’s like you know and I suppose being an artist you know that sometimes the accidents take you somewhere in your process so you know I don’t think there’s one big template for it, you know you find your own way and what works for you [Phil].

Adrian also speaks of “shaky beginnings,” being in a “divergent state” and “sweating it out.” Certainty in the process was perceived to be a stifling influence which could drain the artistic work of its potency. It seemed to me that the artists tried to protect their artistic work by adopting an aporetic stance. Certainty was resisted, and uncertainty simulated. Frances speaks, for example, of “keeping it complex.” While clarity was a desirable attribute in the PhD text, clarity in terms of the artistic work was problematic. As Morgan points out, “with a piece of practice if it is very clear then it’s problematic because it means that the work is, could be very obvious.”

The following statement by Frances encapsulates for me the kinds of tensions which exist for the artist who brings their artistic work in to a PhD framework.

> the aesthetic side of the work for me this is the way I’m working with it, is that it interrupts the coherences, it speaks to the unspeakable, it speaks to what
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cannot somehow be somehow cognitively expressed or captured and in some way it tempers the illusory coherence of the textual side of things [Frances].

Frances’ subtly captures what I think is a core tension residing within the Visual Arts Practice PhD. That is the complicated act of retaining ineffable complexity in the face of an imperative to produce a legible and coherent body of text.

9.9. Artists as anarchist, challenging orthodoxy & frustrations with bureaucracy

The assumption that the artist is an anarchist who would challenge and extend the boundaries of a conservative orthodoxy, was one which prevailed throughout the accounts given by the research cohort. Several of the artists acknowledged that they pushed against conventions within the PhD process. We will see later that Morgan, for example, tried to innovate within the model, challenging ways of presenting by performing a section of the thesis which would normally be written. Their attempt was not appreciated by examiners and they had to revisit this element and present in a more conventional format. Sam, when asked about whether they had faced bureaucratic obstacles responded by affirming that going against convention was how they liked to operate:

Researcher: What about the bureaucratic side of things have you encountered obstacles or challenges in terms of the organization?
Sam: Nothing that I can’t get round I love a challenge it excites me, if someone says you can’t do something that way I’m going ‘ok I’m doing it the other way’ and they go ‘shouldn’t have done it that way’ and I’m going I know [Sam].

For Sam, rallying against bureaucratic constraint is viewed as “an opportunity to be creative.” Generally, the participants expressed discontent with having to present their on-going research in what they felt was the constraining format of a
ten-minute PowerPoint presentation. Sam looked on this situation as an opportunity to challenge the system:

…so like for example we got this um you know this mid-year review and they have given me this template, these ten slides which I um completely deconstructing at the moment… and figuring out a way of presenting it. I’m thinking of doing a silent presentation this time [humorous] [Sam].

Thomas recalled encountering a Visual Arts PhD thesis which consisted of artistic work and several published texts which were gathered together in a book which had a bolt driven through it, thus preventing the texts from being read:

They didn’t submit any written work to be examined what she did do was assemble all the papers she had published and there were a lot of them she had published a lot she had presented at conferences, bound those, drilled a hole through the middle and but a bolt through it [Thomas].

The idea that the VAP PhD candidate would revolt against convention was an assumption held by student, supervisors and examiners. When discussing the VAP PhD model, senior academics often spoke of its value being located in its ability to challenge existing orthodoxies in post-graduate education and in academia. Chris’ affirmation is typical of this position:

Frankly it opens and challenges the format of a traditional doctorate a bit. I remember we had a sort of a research day where a couple of guest academics listened to our students present and um one of them said, what is this practice based stuff about I can’t really get a grip on it, it doesn’t fit any known format and I suppose I thought quietly you know actually that’s not a bad thing that it is fresh and new and challenging and finding you know new formula, you know new formulations to take shape rather than being the very constrained and defined nature of a traditional thesis, I think.[Chris].

The idea of the artist as anarchist or agitator within the orthodoxy of the system prevailed throughout the accounts of the participants. Ben recalls that when in
the UK “a quite a famous art college was incorporated against its will kicking and screaming into the polytechnic” [Ben].

so [name of artist lecturer] and his gang were around all the time subverting putting stuff in the corridor you might fall over, they didn’t want to be in the Polytechnic but actually they were gradually by osmosis, it happened you know they became part of the, it was like paying a person to be the agitator in the audience [humorous][Ben].

Having spent most of his academic career working within universities, Ben felt that art schools were extremely conservative insular institutions which could benefit from being brought into bigger more varied educational frameworks:

I think it has to be part of a bigger pot once the art school is on its own like it is, it’s incestuous messing around with you know trivial school rules, you’re talking about with um very little contemplation about what is the PhD and so forth, in the bigger mix you can see people swimming around freely like writing poetry studying Alexander Pope at the same time you know and people playing Jazz piano at lunch time in the cafeteria as well as being serious musicians you know, it’s just too small the art college is, most of our institutions are too small [Ben].

Several of the supervisors and examiners felt extremely frustrated with bureaucratic systems which they felt did not trust artistic research and were imposing conventions from other research traditions. Mark speaks forcefully of feeling mistrusted:

over my recommendation they over-ruled me and the appeal board over-ruled them, that was the only appeal against me during my period of ten years, that was successful in fact, you know, but I remember that and you know after all those years they still didn’t () trust me. You know [Mark].

Daniel echoes the idea that academic institutions are governed by a conservative middle management who demonstrate a high degree of mistrust when it comes to artist academics:
Personally, I think they are less trustworthy of people who are knowledgeable on this because they don’t understand it themselves. See what happens is you get a system that remains very conservative you know the only people that are really brought into the reigns of management or leadership in the area are people that were quite conservative you know and I think that really if you just take the end of year presentations that they have I mean like PowerPoint presentations like about practice like where they are asked to list publications like you know what I mean? [Daniel].

Finally, there was a general assumption that the artist would be a kind of agitator within the system. They would rebel against the constraints of a bureaucratic and reductionist system.

9.10. Synthesis of findings

The predominating motivation expressed by the cohort for undertaking the VAP PhD, was the enrichment and advancement of artistic practice. More than any other factor participants saw the PhD as a way to focus and develop their artistic work. They sought a deepened critical and theoretical understanding arrived at through critical feedback. In addition, they expressed aspirations around advancement and validation within the artistic community. The abiding disposition in the case of the artists in the study could be characterised as an orientation toward practice. Participants did not typically foreground aspirations in terms of conducting research and when research was invoked often it was spoken of in terms of its value to generate and feed practice.

The study revealed that feelings of naivety were common amongst the graduates and candidates. Naivety was not so much associated with a lack of comprehension around the rigour of the process but was to do with not knowing what the VAP PhD was and feeling that they were existing within systems
without structure. The experience did not match up to expectations. Participants enrolled feeling that the course of study would be like the MFA but found themselves in an unfamiliar intellectual territory. There was a problematic lack of continuity between the MFA experience and the Visual Arts Practice PhD. This problem was exacerbated because there was also disparity amongst the supervisors in terms of the purpose and orientation of the PhD, with some conceiving of it as a sophisticated version of the master’s and others subscribing to versions which were more closely aligned to models from other research traditions.

While characterised as a positive and edifying educational experience, it was clear that the MFA appeared to offer the candidates little in terms of a foundation which would give them any indication of what was entailed in a Visual Arts Practice PhD. It was not just that there was little writing or research training delivered on the MFAs (it must be borne in mind that two of the candidates undertook master’s with a considerable amount of theoretical work) but that there was a complete lack of continuity in terms of the substance and orientation of the two qualifications. While the master’s was unanimously conceived of as an extremely positive experience, being described as “joyful,” “exciting,” “fun,” “intensive,” “dynamic” and “invigorating,” the VAP PhD, by contrast, was spoken of in terms of constraint, threat, danger, conflict and the death of the artistic work.

The status of art’s role in contributing to knowledge was contested. While some of the participants saw the idea that art contributes to knowledge, as being relatively unproblematic, others had a lot of difficulty with this notion. For the
non-artist supervisors, there was tendency to see the artistic practice as being in the service of the research, with aesthetic elements contributing to the overall affective richness of the contribution. There was a feeling amongst many of the artists that the knowledge which is to be had through art cannot be reduced to simple explications. It is at once ineffable and polysemic.

There was a constant yearning for quality critical feedback on the artistic accomplishments of the PhD. When feedback on artistic work was provided the candidates expressed satisfaction with the process but when it was absent, a great deal of distress and frustration was experienced. A point of tension for candidates was when supervisors from other disciplinary research traditions came to the work with their own research agendas, failing to appreciate qualities and dispositions which artists took to be a given. It upset artists to have their work evaluated on the basis that it was merely a methodology and they wished for the work to be challenged and evaluated on its own terms. It seemed that the candidates longed for the kinds of experiences they had in the earlier phases of their art school education. They missed the incidental critique delivered by the visiting artist and studio-based discussions, these were often replaced with office-based meetings and formulaic ten-minute PowerPoint presentations to be fitted into received templates.

The analysis exposed an interesting tension between conceptualisations of constraint and of liberty. The notion that the PhD process could constrain, emasculate, neutralise, flatten and ultimately kill artistic work was a prevalent theme throughout the research. While sublimation of the artistic work to the
PhD process was one set of ideas which circulated in the accounts, participants simultaneously felt that the PhD process lacked structure and was a “messy process.” Feelings of doubt, confusion and uncertainty were prevalent. On the one hand there was a desire for more structure to guide the student through the PhD experience, on the other there was a rejection of the imposition of reductive structures which would constrain the artistic work. Artists sometimes felt that they had to rationalise or simplify the artistic practice so that it would ‘fit into a structure,’ and so that they could get the PhD done, yet clarity in terms of the artistic work was problematic.

The artists wished to dwell in complexity, they wanted to honour the ineffability of artistic knowledge and protect it from a rationalising process. Certainty was perceived to be a stifling influence which drained the artistic work of its lifeforce. The artistic practice needed to be protected. It seemed that the artists tried to do this by adopting an aporetic disposition whereby certainty was resisted, and uncertainty simulated. This aporetic stance appeared to be the very condition out of which artistic work would grow. Artists felt at home with uncertainty, they needed it in order to produce. Art school pedagogies were in my experience, focused on challenging certainty, pushing the student in new directions, encouraging risk-taking. The fact that this cohort felt at home with uncertainty, I think, is a legacy of their art school training. Tolerance for uncertainty however could be a double-edged sword. On the one hand artists could deal with the unknown, take risks, invent strategies, innovate within the system, and demonstrate high levels of self-reliance, on the other they may be inclined to endure in pedagogical contexts which were unnecessarily chaotic. A
tolerance for uncertainty could lead to a situation whereby candidates would accept PhD processes which were poorly conceived and badly delivered.

Finally, there was a general assumption that the artist would be a kind of agitator within the system. They would rebel against the constraints of a bureaucratic and reductionist system. Senior academics, who had reached the pinnacle of their profession, felt that those undertaking the VAP PhD could challenge orthodoxies and extend the boundaries of the traditional PhD. It seemed to me that this was a big responsibility to place on the VAP PhD candidates who came into a process which they did not always fully understand.
Figure 9-6 Overview Chapter 9: “It’s all about the practice”
9.11. Summary
The art students in the study demonstrate an impressive ability to tolerate and navigate an uncertain terrain. In fact, an aporetic disposition seems to be a condition of their ability to produce interesting artistic work, work which, as Frances puts it could challenge the illusory coherence of the text. Certainty in the artistic practice was held at bay. How do candidates reconcile what they view as a necessarily complex, polysemic and ineffable, artistic practice with a clearly articulated statement of knowledge contribution? Already we can begin to see echoes of the next important theme begin to emerge from the narrative. It is a theme which loomed large in the research. The next chapter moves to reveal participants’ experiences and attitudes towards writing and the PhD text.
Reflective Commentary: After attending a symposium on artistic research at the Burren College of Art and the SAR International Conference on Artistic Research: Writing 2015

The Burren – A Symposium on Arts Practice PhDs

Presenting at a symposium in Ireland, is a fine art student who completed her PhD in the UK, she identifies issues with supervision stating that her supervisor was ‘hands off’ and talks of her own ‘naïve entry’ into the process, where she ‘fumbled around in the dark…it was really, really lonely it was really hard.’ This student was required to significantly rework the written component of her research before the degree was conferred. Another student spoke of “playing at being a scientist” and ending up “feeling more lab rat than scientist.” The whole area of the arts practice PhD is laden with unresolved issues about supervision, assessment, the role of the written requirement in relation to the studio outputs and issues about research training. Arts practice PhD students seem to experience a large quotient of uncertainty as to the nature of the research activity with which they are engaged. This seems to go beyond the uncertainty experienced by the PhD student who is finding their way through an established research tradition. I observe that my fellow students on the Structured PhD in Education by contrast appear to be more secure in themselves in terms of knowing which research tradition they belong to, what methodologies are most likely to be employed and what shape the research output is going to take. There is no such safety net for the artist.

The Hague – SAR International Conference 2015

During a break out session an American academic is talking about artists’ writing, she says she feels excited about re-imaging a bear which is a mixture of a brown bear and a polar bear. I have enough of re-imagining. I wait for the session to finish and slip away to the Mauritshuis Museum to look at the paintings.
Chapter 10 Findings: “It’s all about the text,” finding voice & creating productive dialogues

10.1. Writing and the PhD text

Perhaps the themes which figured most strongly in the study were those of the challenges posed by writing and the difficulty of producing the VAP PhD ‘supplementary’ text. I use the term ‘text’ here not in a postmodern or Derridean sense which is often implied in discourses around art, that is that everything is text or nothing existing outside of the text. I use the term ‘text’ to mean quite literally the written document which accompanies the artistic practice. All the graduate/student participants spontaneously began to recount experiences of dealing with this element of the research. When asked about research they spoke of experiences with writing and the text; when asked about research training they began to speak of the challenges posed by writing and when asked about improving the PhD experience they spoke about the text. The following two extracts from my reflective noting capture the extent to which this theme forcefully emerged.

Immediately the conversation has turned to the issue of writing - this has been the main concern of a sizeable proportion of the participants. I have not noticed this preoccupation with ‘writing’ when speaking with other students from other disciplines- they are concerned with theory, methodology, data collection, data analysis, ethical procedures [Researcher’s commentary in respect of Morgan’s interview].

Immediately the issue of the difficulty of writing comes up- almost before anything else - conflating of writing with research. Grappling with the idea of the ‘theory’ [Researcher’s comments in respect of Phil’s interview].

While themes to do with identity and writing were strongly present in the accounts, there was a generalised vagueness when it came to identification of possible
constituent elements of the PhD text. This vague conceptualisation was a feature of accounts given by students, supervisors and examiners. Morgan captures this sentiment:

Well again it was very vague like you know, you’re on it and it was like well how much um I writing here and it was kind of crudely broken up, broken into two components so your, you had your body of practice and then you had a body of text and you know at the beginning it was kind of like well you know it can be as long as it needs to be to articulate what it needs to articulate, it was as vague as that, but then as I got closer to 4th year it was kind of like it’s got to have forty thousand words. [Morgan].

The most common ideas associated with the text were that it should ‘contextualise’ practice; it should contain an exposition of theoretic positions held by scholars, which were felt to be of relevance to understanding the practice or the subject matter being dealt with in the practice; the text should include a great deal of reflection on the practice and it should clearly articulate a contribution to knowledge. Participants, often drifted toward discussion about the word count. I found it remarkable that participants spoke very infrequently about research per se, with only two of the artist participants identifying themselves as researchers. In a lot of cases the notion of research itself was conflated with writing and the production of text, and the identity of academic was conflated with that of writer. While two of the artist participants felt extremely confident in their ability to manage the textual and theoretical elements of the VAP PhD, the rest demonstrated insecurities which saw them suffer varying degrees of stress.

10.2. “I’m not a natural writer, I’m not an academic”

While Frances and Alex were confident about writing, all the other student/graduate respondents expressed, to a greater or lesser degree feelings of doubt about their
ability as writers. Adrian and Morgan, who had both completed comparatively lengthy supplementary texts as part of their MFAs, described the PhD in terms of experiences of over-coming challenges and of “triumphing over writing” [Morgan]. Several participants communicated feelings of incompetence when dealing with the written requirement of the PhD. Phil, Sam and Gabriel had done very little if any writing as part of their master’s degrees and for these participants, writing was at times challenging. As Gabriel speaking of their MFA experience observes:

you know it was very much a practice-based MA with no written component. Um bar the production of statements um but there wasn’t a written component in a sense um…[Gabriel].

The accounts of these three participants are pervaded with insecurities, uncertainty and vulnerability. While for Sam and Phil the research is still on-going, for Gabriel, sadly, the text became the rock upon which their PhD perished.

For many of the artist participants the experience of writing was one which felt alien to them and which seemed to undermine their confidence in themselves as academics. Phil, who at the time of the interview was at the end of their first year, demonstrates the extent to which insecurities about ability to write can be a preoccupation for a mid-career artist academic who came to the VAP PhD armed with an MFA which had involved the production of nothing more than a few artist’s statements:

I’ve been so sort of you know, worried about the writing and my sort of bad skills of the writing, ‘cause it’s that thing of coming in you know you write artists’ statements but writing essays is very different and you know presenting your argument [Phil].

In relations to Phil’s interview I observed in my notes:
Conceptualisation of themselves as different. Not an academic. Concerned with how you write essays - almost remedial - one would normally expect a PhD level candidate to have more or less mastered these skills before embarking on this level of study. Difficulty in writing exacerbated when you don’t know what the writing is supposed to be for [Researcher’s notes].

Difficulty with writing may have had much to do with lack of opportunity to develop skills, appropriate to the level, at previous stages of their education. Another exacerbating factor, I felt, was a vagueness about the substance and purpose of the text in the research. Phil repeatedly made the observation that the PhD had no structure. They had been provided with a “template” for the text, but this did not help to assuage their fears:

my supervisor sort of went through the template. Like it’s funny I did an introduction essay there for him which I sort of abandoned when I got the wobble email because I felt I’m writing the thesis through the introduction and I don’t know where I am with that yeah so it was really funny I emailed him at eight in the morning and he got back to me at eight fifteen, and said, come here I’ve had a quick scan at it and it’s not as bad as you think it’s actually quite good and don’t be upsetting yourself about it, we’ll talk about it when we meet don’t be worrying is nice you know because I thought oh maybe I might have to throw in the towel here with it [Phil].

Phil’s insecurities are obvious but also what can be seen is the lack of a sense of direction for the writing. In this case immediate intervention and support on the part of an engaged and empathetic supervisor helped Phil to negotiate around a significant moment of crisis which might have led to the candidate leaving the process. When Phil falters, the supervisor directs them back to ‘the practice.’ The artistic work is the ballast which steadies Phil:

he just thinks you know think more about the practice and what, and what you are trying to do with the practice. So, I think he’s been supportive in that because he knows I’m sort of in my head you know I’m creating blocks within it [Phil].
It is notable that in Phil’s recounting of exchanges between supervisor and candidate the emphasis is either on writing or on “the practice” with very little discussion around the kinds of topics usually associated with conducting research. There was no mention of a literature review or methodological issues, or issues to do with ethical process for example. This was a point I remarked upon repeatedly in my noting in relation to most interviews ‘not talking about research’ or at least not talking about research in the same way as those in other fields.

The following extract reveals a lot about Phil and their supervisor’s attitude to the writing:

my supervisor, the last meeting we had he just said to me you know he could see that there’s no joy in the writing and he said like be more you know, be a bit more intuitive, innovative with it, and so I think you know even in my head I went through a wobble with it so I feel like now you know like I am not a theory academic so why am I trying to be one, so I think I have to work out how the writing can actually be a form of practice, so it make it a bit more interesting and you know [Phil].

The description of writing for the PhD as a “joyless” activity contrasted starkly with accounts of art making as “joyful.” Participants often spoke of trying to overcome issues with writing by trying to make the writing like a form of practice. This effort usually involved trying to innovate. I got a strong impression when talking to Phil that they were on unsure footing when it came to the writing of the PhD text, not just because of their self-professed “bad skills” but mostly because there was a lack of clarity around the text itself and its role in the process.

Sam, like Phil, struggles with writing during the preliminary stages of the PhD. Whereas Sam demonstrates an unquestionable degree of security in relation to their
artistic identity, the experience of receiving feedback on their first chapter exposes vulnerabilities and insecurities in relations to their ability to write:

It was very painful, you know… I remember getting the hardcopy back from him and it was like being back in secondary school again, you know with red biro through so much of it going you know what do you mean by this, explain, and you know why are you using this, and you know why are you using this kind of language, is this the way you normally speak? [Sam].

Despite having worked in academia for over thirty years, Sam is undermined by the experience of receiving feedback on the written work and is moved to question their identity as an academic. In fact, they feel as though they are back in secondary school being admonished for badly executed work. Sam tells a story of the excruciating experience of delivering their first conference paper where through inexperience they tried to cover too much material and ran out of time:

it was awful [emphasis] it was like watching a car crash in slow motion and I was so annoyed with myself afterwards an [name of 3rd supervisor] came up an’ she said, ‘you learnt a hard lesson there didn’t you?’ she was the time-keeper and she stopped me and she said ‘no more time that’s it, you’re out of time’ and I was like fuck this is so unprofessional [Sam].

The PhD is sending Sam and Phil into new academic arenas, where they are taking on the unfamiliar yet conventional academic practices of writing and presenting.

Entering these new arenas, they can sometimes feel exposed and far from competent.

A recurring refrain was the idea that writing did not come naturally, for example Sam says:

I mean I wouldn’t describe myself as a natural writer, I don’t have um …… You know a very strong, what I might call writer’s or academic voice or background, you know [Sam].

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Both Sam and Phil stumbled over their words when they spoke about their perceived levels of competency when it came to the writing and there was an obvious halting in the fluency of their language when they spoke of these things. It felt as though they were quite literally trying to find a voice.

I’m ..I mean if anything I am a practical voice, rather than you know practical I would say intelligent voice rather than an academic voice. And so that was the difficult thing in the early days of the PhD was you know they keep asking you…you know you need to find your voice in your writing [Sam].

Sam observes that one of the supervisors had “morphed” into their writing coach, taking on the responsibility of helping them to find a more authentic voice in the writing, one which was less riven with “art speak.”

Yeah well I call it, what was it ah ah academic psychobabble you know in terms of art speak um, but [name of supervisor] was very good because he cut to the chase and he said you know in your voice, you know what’s the way you normally talk? He said I would have rather listen to you having an intelligent conversation about the work that you do rather than some sort of academic faux intelligent conversation [Sam].

While for some, the artistic work was a way to test ideas or theoretical material, one of the conceptualisations around theory which prevailed throughout the study was the idea that theories needed to be found which would be used to “articulate” ideas about the artistic work. Not precluding that the development of theory might ensue from artistic research, within the context of the VAP PhD, the engagements with theory often took the form of appropriating the extant theories of others to give voice to the artistic work. Phil was particularly concerned with trying to locate theories, which they could “link” to their practice:

cause I’m really sort of finding the writing really difficult. And you know sort of the theory and he is saying forget about the theory, forget about the theory just think
about your practice and even the last time I met him he said Phil use your knowledge in the arts you know a lot about what’s going on in Irish, so he said use your knowledge, which I think is really good, he I think feels that even with my writing it needs to become a lot more reflective. And the theory will come in but I think it’s that thing you sort of been trying to dive into trying to get the theory or writers to link it and I think he just thinks you know think more about the practice and what, and what you are trying to do with the practice. So, I think he’s been supportive in that because he knows I’m sort of in my head you know I’m creating blocks within it [Phil].

While Sam has developed a theory around the artistic practice they also feel compelled to search out theory which will populate the writing. It is as though the candidate needs to find an external explicit theoretical expression of the ideas which live implicitly in their artistic work:

It’s the framework, you know like when you are reading theory, when you are reading Ranciere and you go ‘oh yeah so that’s why I’m doing that or oh there you go.’ Or you’re reading Dewey or you’re reading de Certeau you know or you’re reading theories on the everyday, it’s like you know God yeah that’s what I mean, I’ve never call it th.. I mean why didn’t I ever call it that but I would never call it that you know [Sam].

In my exploratory notes I observe:

Understanding the text as a means to demonstrate ability with theoretical language. It feels like the student is trying to prove their academic ability through engagement with theoretical language and lots of it [Researcher’s notes].

Ultimately Sam speaks of getting “suckered into,” spending too much time with theory. It is the supervisor, one who holds a VAP PhD, who directs the attention back to the practice:

so they have been very good at bringing everything back to the practice, framing the practice in a very particular way um not spending too long on theoretical aspects of it which I was getting suckered into [Sam].
It was evident that both Phil and Sam were in receipt of tremendous support and a significant amount of input from their supervisory teams in terms of over-coming their issues with writing, and in helping the students to surmount their insecurities. Notably supervisors directed the candidates back to the security of their artistic work in times of doubt and uncertainty. I met Sam a year after our initial interview and they seemed confident in themselves, having published and presented at conferences, they had extended their professional activity and were getting ready to submit. Despite successfully taking on new academic practices, Sam did not identify themselves as a researcher, an academic or even a lecturer. “I never describe myself as lecturer, I always describe myself as an artist” [Sam].

10.3. A structure with a schism
A dichotomy frequently emerged in the discourse whereby participants drifted into speaking of ‘the practice’ and ‘the research’ as though they were two different entities. When they spoke of research, very often ‘text’ was what was implied. Research was writing, and the text was the research. Reflecting on Alex’s interview for example I wrote, ‘the participant is at times conceiving of research as something other than practice, it happens alongside practice, research is writing’ [Researcher’s notes]. One of the two participants to describe themselves as a researcher (when asked Alex identified as an “artist slash researcher”), Alex unquestionably viewed their practice as research. More specifically they described it as “a sensory form of research.” Having studied documentary film-making their mode of working sat well within academic conventions, possessing features reminiscent of traditional research practices such as ethnography. During the interview, however, Alex often slipped into talking about “the practice” and “the research,” where the research was intended
to mean dealing with text. When I asked about research outputs, I was told there were a number of publications, the visual work was not mentioned. When I asked Alex about where they felt their strengths were in terms of dealing with artistic work or dealing with text, their answer reveals this tendency to view practice as separate to “the research.”

Alex: Um [0:02 pause] I see practice more than theory but I’m quite, I am really committed to research as well. I am really committed to research I like writing and you know.

Researcher: When you are talking about it you say, you kind of make a distinction, you say I’m committed to research, research and practice are separated when you’re talking about it, do you see the practice as research?

Alex: Yes I do, yes it’s just that I suppose I am meaning the contextualising the writing, and reading [Alex].

When they spoke of having brought the PhD to an endpoint Alex described the feeling of having “given birth to two children.”

The only other participant to explicitly identify themselves as a researcher was Frances. Unlike many of the participants, Frances does not conflate the idea of research with writing. In Frances’ case traditional research activities, such as interviewing or searching archives, are strategies which are used in the production of artistic work:

“I’ve, I think you see I’ve always had a research, I’ve always been interested well I’ve long been interested in research not always obviously but I would long see research as integral to the way that I practice you know I do a lot of research and I love to research so I suppose um I think of myself as an artist researcher probably. Um but like the beauty of the PhD for me is the indulging in the research actually [Frances].

It is interesting that both Alex and Frances identify as researchers and both express feeling confident working with theory and writing. All other participants
acknowledged that they found academic writing challenging. Both Alex and Frances came to the experience having completed appreciably more writing in their undergraduate and master’s degrees. The fact that they selected degrees with a significant theory component might indicate that they were already predisposed to being able to work with, what participants often referred to as, the more “academic” side of the PhD. However, despite feeling competent in dealing with theory and secure in their ability to produce text to the required standard, both Alex and Frances spoke about the challenges of producing the PhD text in conjunction with practice:

it is that slight panic thing, it’s like you’ve got to produce a body of work, or you know or you know you’ve got to have the outcome kind of thing. I think if I was just doing, maybe if I was just doing the written work I would actually be a bit more free about the whole thing, cause I’d know what form it was going to take, it’s going to take the form of a big long text [Frances].

The problem was to create a productive dialogue between the text and the artistic work.

In the last eighteen months of their PhD, Alex turned completely away from making artwork, devoting their time exclusively to writing. They felt the text kept “growing and growing,” until it was 60,000 words. As Alex notes:

Alex: You know when I started off I thought, practice as research.
Researcher: Yeah?
Alex: But it was, it was very, I thought it was pushed quite hard, the writing took up all my time for the last eighteen months or so [Alex].

For Alex the writing grows in prominence within the PhD to the point where they feel they have completed a double PhD. They described a crisis point where they felt that the conflicting agendas of the various people on the supervisory team meant that the PhD was being pulled into “two camps.”
Alex: she just felt that the writing wasn’t at a PhD level at one point. And my other supervisors were distressed because they wanted more practice emphasised on it, and she was pushing for something else which would have meant that I would have not had time to really go for the practice and I would have got side-lined into a very academic PhD. It was literally like divorced parents you know [laughs]
Researcher: [Laughs] Gosh
Alex: It’s great to talk about this. [Laughter] [Alex].

Alex was able to overcome this moment of crisis by acquiring a new supervisor who was capable of holding the two sides of the research in balance.

The schism between the creative work and the accompanying textual work, sometimes manifested itself in the division of supervisory labour. Thomas observes that such an approach can lead to inappropriate criteria being brought to bear on the VAP PhD.

a student will have two supervisors one for the studio and from the humanities department and they kind of connect but that doesn’t really leave any room for the evolution of praxis as it’s found in art that practical activity is heavily theorised and is knowledge bearing and can be knowledge bearing in innovative ways, if you can’t examine that you are not examining the subject, if you are going to mark it according to some other criteria [Thomas].

Daniel, a lecturer in the humanities, speaks of his frustration at being left to deal with the supervision of the production of the textual elements of the submission.

if somebody is just a practitioner like there tends to be this idea that the text isn’t really something that they have got a lot of expertise in, it’s better off giving it to the guy whose done it or the girl whose done it most, do you know what I mean, an I found that really frustrating like, that’s one of the reasons why I kind of I mean I’d like to see ah… more like, it’s one of the problems really in the sense that, if I get involved in a project as a CCS person there is a kind of assumption that thesis writing is part of my… my bread and butter like do you know what I mean? [Daniel]

While Daniel expressed frustration at being consigned to the supervision of the text,

Mark demonstrated a ‘hands off’ approach to this element of the research. The
abiding impression was that Mark saw the labour of supervision being divided along these lines, whereby the artist supervises the art and somebody else deals with the text.

Participants experienced significant difficulty managing, what they perceived to be two distinct parts of the research, namely the writing and the art making. The idea that the VAP PhD consisted of two parts was also in evidence in the way in which the supervisory workload was distributed.

10.4. The writing stops the making, creating a dialogue

Artists frequently expressed the idea that writing hampered their ability to make artistic work. Phil becomes so concerned about writing that it was stopping them from making. Commenting on Phil’s experience I wrote ‘The writing seems to be of greater concern - artwork is slipping into the background - the participant seems to be grappling with balancing priorities’ [Researcher’s notes]. The problem however was more than just a simple matter of devoting too much time to one activity to the detriment of the other. The issue was more deeply seated and had to do with reconciling conflicting modes of working. Phil states that they were struggling to find a “dialogue” between the text and the artistic work.

I found you know I’ve been thinking a lot about the writing and that has become problematic because I haven’t been making so that’s been a problem and so I’m starting now to make so there’s, there will be a dialogue, it’s that thing you know to create that dialogue and we discussed this dialogue, but you know how can there be a dialogue if there is no artwork [Phil].

Sensitive to the issue Phil’s supervisor, who is not an artist, advises that Phil stop writing altogether for the period of a year so that they can make artistic work uninhibited by the imperative to analyse their creative output in text.
what he wanted me to, to try and get the writing, he would like a year with no writing. Which is good it’s, I think he’s, it’s quite interesting the background he’s coming from, but I think you know he’s really sort of you know like um supporting the process as well and he understands how for an artist, how for an artist how the writing, how it can actually interrupt the practice maybe or where your analysing it maybe too much or you know [Phil].

The idea that the activity of writing disrupted the activity of creating artistic work was a common observation made by not only by those who were inexperienced or insecure when it came to their writing. Frances observed that they were confidently producing text but that the artistic work was not happening and that this was a problem:

when it comes to theory side I have no problem, I have theory coming out my ears. Um in fact if anything in fact probably I am too theoretical, it interferes with my practice I think, do you know, so in a way the task for me is to, and I keep saying this to them as well, the task for me is to have a bit of theory which is then tested through practice which in turn reshapes the theory [Frances].

Frances like Phil is grappling with trying to foster a productive dialogue between the artistic work and the theoretical writing but acknowledges the challenge of producing text which does justice to the implicit, complex aesthetic meaning which is driven forth by artistic work. The text potentially denudes the artwork, turning it into mere illustration of a theoretical argument.

[name of supervisor] said to me, at one stage I write an abstract and he said I think the way you’ve written that it sounds as though the practice is just illustrating the theory. You know and I think that’s always the danger, so to make that relationship productive in both directions I think is certainly challenging for me and I think maybe in general I think that is a challenge within a practice-based PhD [Frances].

Morgan identifies this issue as being “the crux of the problem.” Morgan expresses the notion that the artistic work must be kept somewhat obscure and beyond
legibility, and that whereas the accompanying text can be open to critique, the artistic work allows for a plethora of interpretations.

One of the issues around a piece of work, you don’t want it to be obvious, so that’s kind of I think really where the problem is that the thesis has to be legible and um correctable, and told to go back because it’s not right and you go ok well I get it it’s not right, whereas a piece of practice you can argue it and say well I feel it’s right because it’s doing this this and this. Um so it’s not as cut and dry [Morgan].

The experience of having difficulty reconciling the activities of writing and creating artwork was not confined to those who had little experience of writing for academic purposes but affected even those who were confident in their abilities. The roots of the dilemma lay more deeply than just poor time management or an issue of candidates needing to develop skills. There was a schism to be negotiated. Sometimes this schism was made manifest in the way that supervisory labour was divided between ‘theory’ people and ‘practice’ people. In some cases, the later had a ‘hands off’ attitude to the written work leaving this labour up to colleague who were seen to be proficient in theory. Participants needed to foster ‘productive dialogues’ between practice and theoretical writing. They proactively sought out supervisors who could help them to foster these dialogues.

10.5. Coming unstuck

Gabriel gave a most upsetting account of their experience of the Visual Arts Practice PhD which they undertook in the UK. Unlike many of the other candidates Gabriel did not feel they received adequate supervisory support. They felt isolated throughout the process and had an abiding feeling that they had ‘drawn the short
straw’ in terms of a supervisory team. Although assigned to an advisor who was a professor, none of the team had completed a PhD. More significantly for Gabriel the people involved did not have ‘any interest’ in the way in which Gabriel worked. Despite a very disappointing outcome, there are moments of triumph and resilience to be found in Gabriel’s account. Although the PhD was not awarded and Gabriel’s confidence in their ability to write was shattered, they emerged from the experience sure in their identity as an artist and confident that the process had benefitted their artistic practice.

While Gabriel expressed confidence in relation to how they orally accounted for their artistic work in *vivâ voce* examination, noting that the examiners said that the defence was “formidable,” they exhibit a lack of confidence when it come to the text. As I noted previously, throughout the process they felt that the physical work was of lesser significance in acquiring the PhD and this did not “sit well” with them. Gabriel openly admits that they went into their *vivâ voce* examination with a text that they knew to be unfinished. When they speak, there is a sense of inevitability about the outcome:

> You know the document was not a finished document I would have acknowledged that but I needed to get it to some sort of form and, and to... because I was, I had totally used up all extensions you know um… so I knew it was never going to work out as an ideal situation [Gabriel].

In a sense, Gabriel experienced a perfect storm. A candidate who felt very “green” and “naïve” with limited experience of writing for academic purposes, going into a process which they felt had no structure, assigned to supervisors who had not
completed PhDs and whose practice or professional interests were not aligned with those of the candidate.

When Gabriel speaks about the challenge of the text, it is not only spoken of in terms of a lack of skill in terms of writing, the difficulty is also in reconciling the two activities of writing and making. The difficulty was in switching between textual language to visual language.

…again I have different moments of going back into text in a very concerted way in terms of reading and then pulling away from it and getting on with making work and so and so forth. Um but definitely my confidence was shattered in my ability to write[Gabriel].

When I asked Gabriel if there was guidance in terms of the text, the answer was a straightforward “No” and they observe, “It was all about the written texts was where I was coming unstuck.” They speak of an uneasy “schizophrenic process” whereby the artistic and the academic are in conflict.

it wouldn’t have sat well with me, I sometimes felt I was in conflict, with me as an artist making work and this as an academic process…And that was always a difficult thing for me you know I suppose it’s that thing where the process itself felt schizophrenic at times, I was looking over my shoulder while I was making my work [Gabriel].

This statement “looking over my shoulder when I was making” resonated with me.

In my notes I wrote.

There is a sense here that the artistic process is hampered by this looking over one’s own shoulder. Usually reflection happens in group crit. Pulling away from the process to reflect not constantly monitoring as you make [Researcher’s comments].
For Gabriel writing felt like a second language. When I asked if they felt confident about writing before they came to the PhD, they professed that for them, making art was their primary mode of communication.

Researcher: And had you been confident with it prior to this?
Gabriel: Um…. [7.00 pause] ah my first language I’ve always felt has been me engaged with visual activity [Gabriel].

Gabriel never managed to reconcile the activity of writing with the activity of creating artistic work, at the same time they spoke of how theoretical perspectives informed their artistic work. The experience left Gabriel feeling humiliated having to return to colleagues and students. Their confidence in their ability to produce text was destroyed. Yet Gabriel felt steadfastly secure in their ability as an artist, the experience in fact help to galvanise their sense of themselves as an artist and Gabriel acknowledges good outcomes in relation to the artistic work.

Gabriel: Some of the work I created the drawings actually became a much bigger series of works after that, so the work didn’t disappear. If anything it it...it reminded me of how much of an artist I am and how the model of… I described it as a model when there was kind of no structure surrounding it [humorous]
Researcher: Yeah [laugh]
Gabriel: But um my disillusionment was more to do with my ability in writing.
Researcher: Right.
Gabriel: Where I had lost my confidence because inevitably it did impact on my confidence
Researcher: Of course
Gabriel: Not in relation to my...the physical making of my work or relationship with my practice in that respect it was in relation to my confidence with regard to my own writing. And to be honest I’ve never really recovered from that [Gabriel].

10.6. Assimilation and triumph, finding a voice in the writing

Two participants who managed to negotiate their ways through the difficulties of the process and who ultimately triumphed over writing were Adrian and Morgan.
Speaking of a schism between writing and practice, Morgan points out that they came to the PhD feeling that the task of writing a large text was alien to them.

it’s too polarised, it has been too polarised. I think that that will change over the years. So that, I came from that you know where producing a body of text was still a huge, task a job of work and alien to me because I hadn’t done it before. [Morgan].

The activity of writing felt unnatural and alien and was not integrated into their normal ways of being as artists. Morgan spoke of being forced to go against “every single instinct.” In an effort to assimilate the practice of writing and, also disguise their insecurities, they tried to experiment and innovate with the text. In fact, they presented an element of their document as a performance, but this was not accepted by examiners and they were asked to represent this element in a more conventional format. Morgan signals a lack of guidance in terms of how to initiate the written work:

they didn’t even set tasks I just felt I think I should be writing something maybe I should go off and write something [humorous] I mean really bad and I was trying to be experimental, I was trying to do this and I was trying to do that and really some of the time I was doing that I think I was really trying to disguise the fact that I was not very skilled and insecure about academic writing. You know I think I was trying to disguise that fact a bit for the first year or two [Morgan].

Like many of the participants Morgan spoke of navigating their own way through what they describe as “a messy process” and “a dry model.” In the end, it is the process of going against every “single instinct” which makes the experience a fruitful one:

Until it dawned on me that actually the academic framework was really helpful because it simplified, well I suppose that’s why you can’t really hide anything so you’ve got to know your stuff a little, it requires that you do that, well you know everything about it, it’s such a dry model that everything about it, and it so goes against the grain, that after a few years after you process it, it is very helpful because
you have done something that has required that you go against everything single instinct that you have, that’s what I actually did um and so that has been really helpful and I can write things [Morgan].

One of the ways in which Morgan navigates their way through the process is to enlist the help of as many people as they can, as a means to ensure the quality of the work.

I was trying to get as many people as I could to read it, just as a document which is a hard thing to get people to read ‘cause it’s such a big thing and you it’s boring so I managed to blackmail a few people into reading it and you’d get different perspectives on the material because everyone comes at it from their angle... so I was trying to capture as much of that as I could so that when it came to the final exam that maybe I had filled as many gaps as I could [Morgan].

Though the experience is described as “very uncomfortable,” Morgan describes themselves as having triumphed over the writing by the end. When Morgan reflects on the value of the PhD they frame their response in terms of the value of being able to produce text which is “such a valuable commodity within the art world system.”

Repeatedly when artist participants reflected on their aspirations for the VAP PhD they talked about what it might bring to the artistic work and how it might benefit professional practice. Yet when they spoke of the value of the PhD in retrospect they spoke of its value in helping them to become good academic writers.

At the beginning of the PhD, Adrian says they were “not a natural writer.” Looking back on their PhD work, Adrian expresses doubt as to the quality of the final written submission, believing that it was not of publishable standard. It must be noted that Adrian did ‘publish’ the artwork which was produced as part of the PhD in audio-visual format:

I wouldn’t have had the skills, so I learned my skills through writing the PhD paper, study but I wouldn’t ever consider publishing that study, I don’t think it would be
good enough whereas some people would produce a body of writing that would be nearly publishable um my one publishable um my one wasn’t but my next one was then the next thing I did after that was [Adrian].

Rather than refer to their PhD text as a dissertation or a thesis, they prefer the term “study.” Adrian described the text as a “standard” PhD text containing writing about the practice and interviews with artists. The participant talks about learning to write on the PhD and of “figuring it out for myself.”

It seemed to me that all the candidates, were trying to figure it out for themselves and not just in relation to writing but also in relation to other elements of the research process. For example, Adrian noted that they did not go through an ethical approval process, they just figured it out for themselves, Morgan made the same observation in relation to ethics procedures. It was noted that for those who undertook earlier PhDs little or no attention was given to ethical procedural processes. However, for the participants who were engaged in the PhD process more recently, students were required to attain ethical clearance and training in research ethics was more likely to be provided.

Adrian spoke passionately about the confidence that the PhD had given them in themselves and in their work. I asked if they would describe themselves as a researcher:

Adrian: Well I call myself, like I call my, like when I write and publish you know my little by-line is an artist and a writer.
Researcher: Right ok
Adrian: Sometimes I say an artist, an academic and a writer sometimes I say that too, like if I’m writing with a visual artist news-sheet I’m [name of participant] is an artist and a writer, if I’m in at a conference and publishing for a more academic context it would be an artist academic and a writer so I just that, I don’t really see myself as researcher I’m not a researcher researching all the time [Adrian].
Never questioning their status as an academic, Adrian spoke of the authority which the PhD conferred upon them. This they said was especially significant for a woman:

I suppose as well in a hierarchical sense above me in academia is very strong now and my, and I can hold my own position in a very good way, but with my students that I deal with across all those academic contexts I feel that um, having a PhD gives me a great standing with students in that they automatically know that I am a person who is an expert in my field because of having gone through a PhD, so I don’t have to prove it. I don’t ever have to walk into a room anymore and prove myself through what I say or how I look or what I do or, I just I am [emphasis] I am a doctor, I’ve earned my stripes, I think that’s really great especially for women [Adrian].

By the end of the process Adrian had augmented their professional identity, describing themselves as an artist, an academic and a writer. They continued to produce artistic work and they continued to write, however they did not wish to write about their own work, only writing about the work of others. Significantly, in the wake of the PhD Adrian does not see themselves as a researcher.

Morgan and Adrian, through hard work and by dint of their intelligence, have bridged a considerable skills gap in order to be able write at the required level for doctoral and post-doctoral work. Not only that, they have taken an activity which previously was alien to them and incorporated it into their professional activity. They emerged from the experience feeling confidence in their abilities having triumphed over the writing.

10.7. Synthesis of findings

It was no surprise to me that the production of the PhD text posed challenges for the artists. Many of the participants came to the experience feeling that writing was not
natural to them, they struggled with making the experience of producing written work align with that of producing artistic work. Some felt that writing was not their first language. Others could be described as bi-lingual, these participants felt they had the ability to produce in both domains. Feeling confident working with text, however did not militate against struggling with this requirement of the PhD. They struggled with trying to speak two languages at once.

While participants spoke of the activity of writing as an academic endeavour, they did not usually frame their artistic work as such. Very often the participants spoke of trying to find a voice and of making the two components, text and art, speak to each other. These pronouncements resonated with my own experiences of not being able to talk about my creative work when I was immersed in the activity of making it. I did not have conscious access to what I was doing at the time of execution. I often found it difficult to give voice to work, to put language on it. It seemed to me that the problems related to writing, were not necessarily about skills but had more to do with translation. What was problematic, was the act of translating the complex language of art into a verbal language which by contrast had a restricted vocabulary and grammar. Participants spoke of creative work which was polysemic, complex and ineffable, it evaded transcription into a text which needed to be a clearly articulated and unambiguous statement of a contribution to knowledge. The artists sometimes tried to bridge a perceived schism between writing and artmaking by trying to make their writing feel more like their art-making. Triumphing over the writing for some meant stripping back the artistic work to make it fit, ceding to a dry model.
One of the most valuable outcomes of the experience for the participants was when they arrived at a stage where they would feel confident in their writing, triumphing over it, and incorporating it into their arsenal of professional activities. Being able to conquer this element of the work gave the participants authority and confidence in themselves as academics. When participants articulated their feelings about the value of the experience of doing the PhD, they spoke of augmented professional identities whereupon they took on the extended practices of writing, publishing and presenting at conferences.

One element which shone through was the fact that participants showed amazing resilience in being able to forge out a pathway through a process which they felt had little or no discernible structure. Frequently they spoke of navigating, path-finding, risk-taking, resisting and innovating. One thing which became clear to me was that there was a vagueness around the supplementary text. Whereas uncertainty and not knowing were tolerated and even courted in relation to artistic work, the participants needed more clarity in terms of the functions to be performed by the text. Generally, it was felt that the text should document and contextualise practice; reflect on practice; present theories, (often those of French philosophers), which would ‘link’ to practice and that it should present a clearly articulated contribution to knowledge.

Some participants spoke of ‘theorising’ the practice but often what they were doing was locating complex continental philosophies and using these to interpret, explain or give voice to elements of their work.

It seemed that the concept of research was being used in very idiosyncratic ways. Research could be the gathering together of material which would feed the practice.
Research could be exploring a subject matter through different forms of visual representation. Research could be the act of critically reflecting on the artistic work and research could be testing ideas through artistic experimentation. What was most striking though was that most of the participants did not identify themselves as researchers. For some, once the PhD was completed, they renounced this appellation. They reverted to making artistic work in a much freer way, unencumbered by the constraints of an academic system. I found it hard to know if they had gone on to produce artistic research or to make artistic work, my suspicion was that it was the later. They did however bring their artistic work to ‘new audiences’ by presenting at conferences and they did continue to write and publish. For the two who did see themselves as researchers, the artistic work was nonetheless of paramount concern and there were struggles to stake out a territory for a form of research which would not be colonised by other research traditions.

Those who came through the process successfully did so by virtue of a high degree of resilience, inventiveness and ingenuity. They took ownership of the experience actively seeking out supervisory teams which would be sympathetic to their endeavour. These were supervisors who cared. When supervisors were felt to be unsympathetic to the subtleties of artistic research they were, when possible, dispensed with. Despite resilience and a capacity to work in very self-directed ways the participants needed a great deal of supervisory support. The student who felt as though they were not nested within an effective supervisory collaborative team perceived themselves as being launched into a dangerous terrain without a map, whereby they were left to flounder.
Finally, it was my impression that there was too much happenstance and risk built into the system. It was my view that so many conflicting values were at play within the context of the VAP PhD, that the possibility of people ‘coming unstuck’ was unacceptably high. At this stage in the study I was beginning to feel, given the values and aspirations of this population, that for some a professional doctorate in the arts would have been a more suitable model than that of PhD.
Figure 10-1 Overview of findings chapter 10, experiences with the text

Illustration 10-1 Alakbarov (2013). 'It is not chaos'. Mixed media. https://i.pinimg.com/originals/99/1d/12/991d12dec2ccada5c9dbac9b1cadedf5af1.jpg [Accessed 16/9/2016]
10.8. Summary

Up until now I have concentrated mainly on the experiences of artists candidates and graduates, tracing the populations values, attitudes and aspirations in relation to their identities, their artistic work and the PhD text. In the next chapter, the voices of the supervisors and examiners become more central to the discussion as I move to look at their attitudes to standards and the examination of the Visual Arts PhD.
Reflective Commentary: On time spent at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance

Entering the Space

As I enter the Academy building, I am aware that I hold very romantic notions about music and dance. I have never had music or dance lessons. I sit in the foyer, and I reflect on Schopenhauer’s idea of music as the supreme art-form which has the ability to hold in abeyance corporeal desiring and suffering. I am aware that my outlook is idealistic, but I cannot help but view the musicians and dancers with admiration, as well as a feeling of envy at not having been able to do what they do. As I wait for the symposium to begin I notice that my emotions are very close to the surface, for some time now I have been avoiding music. I am grieving the death of my son at four weeks old. Music exacerbates the grief. It has been a few years since his death, but I am nervous that the music might force the grief out into public.

There is a girl sitting near me. She is a singer and a PhD student who is researching chant. We get to talking about arts practice and the role of the supporting text. Almost immediately we are engaged in a discussion of one of the key issues to do with epistemology and arts practice research. She observes that “we must acknowledge that there is knowledge embodied in the work which must remain there and cannot be made explicit.” The student is to present. We enter the Tower and I take a seat at the back. The symposium begins.

Singing about Singing – ‘As I add hymns upon the hymns I hear’

The student introduces her research. She is looking at Georgian, Byzantine and Slavic chant as the embodiment of theology with a focus on Holy Week and Easter hymnography. She describes her engagement with the research context as “immersion” and identifies two strands to her research, the dissertation and the participative. The written and the performative strands she says weave in and out of the research overlapping with each other. She identifies the underlying structure of her project which comprises of sections on methodology which is interdisciplinary and practice-based. She has sections which look at philosophical and theological issues as well as historical context and there is an ethnographic section where she
does fieldwork. As part of this fieldwork she performs chant with the research participants. Her work also consists of an autoethnographic discussion. There is a high degree of reflexivity tied up with arts practice research. As Merleau-Ponty (1999, p. 235) puts it ‘My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my ‘comprehension’.’

Throughout the course of the student presentations I have attended in the visual arts, I hear students talk of the work being “encumbered by theory.” One talks of the “theory becoming a kind of seduction.” Someone observes that creative practice is “fragile-you could analyse it too much and destroy it.” The problem of articulating ideas encapsulated in the work is also frequently referred to across all the communities of practice, “I’m finding it difficult, how do I express these experiences through language.” I have noticed that some students use the word “theory” interchangeably with “writing.” One student claims that he is doing practice-led research but describes a process which seems to be theory led practice. Others believe that theory can reside in and arise out of the creative work whilst simultaneously being articulated in the accompanying text.

This music student seemed to me extremely competent at managing the demands of the two strands of her research, being able to move over and back between the performative and discursive. Other students of the Academy crafted their projects differently, but all seemed capable of positioning their activity in relation to broader research activity. The students at the Academy demonstrated a degree of certainty about what they were doing and how they were going to go about doing it which I did not often see in the presentations of visual arts students. This competence which I observed is, I imagine, due to the structured nature of the delivery of the PhD at the Academy which appears to be actively engaged in addressing the salient dilemmas which are a feature of the arts practice research landscape. The structured delivery and attention to research training, seems to alleviate some of the problems encountered by students undertaking this kind of research. The course specifically addresses what is often referred to as a fraught relationship between writing and practice through the administering of taught modules which introduce to the student
modes of investigation through writing which are more sympathetic to the needs of the practitioner. These include autoethnography, personal narrative, narrative enquiry and writing as creative process. There seems to be a strong tendency across the projects, I witnessed, to adopt an ethnographic approach in conjunction with other methodologies.

There can be no doubt that the kind of knowledge produced by this music student furnishes deeper insights than perhaps those which might be found through a traditional ethnographic or musicological approach. The student states that her research is “captured through the magnifying glass of poetry.” “Hey... look here it is in action!” she says and begins to sing. For this student chant is not only a mode of artistic expression, neither is it just the focus of her research or the conduit of knowledge bringing her into a deeper understanding of her subject. Each time she performs she is performing an act of worship to her God. Then I hear her voice and experience a moment of joy. Music pulls back the ‘veil of Māyā.’
Chapter 11 Findings: “I know it when I see it”

The two previous findings chapters looked predominantly at the experiences and attitudes of candidates and graduates in relation to the artistic work and the writing of the PhD text. This chapter considers experiences and conceptualisations around the assessment of the PhD, bringing together the voices of the students and graduates with those of the supervisors and examiners. It has been observed in previous chapters that there was a disparity amongst the supervisors in terms of the purpose and orientation of the PhD. Some conceived of the PhD as a sophisticated version of the MFA, directed toward the production of superlative artwork. Others subscribed to models which were more closely aligned to those found in other research traditions focused on the production of a contribution to knowledge.

Stating that the standards of the humanities and the social sciences have been imposed on the context of the VAP PhD, Thomas asserts that an upshot of this scenario has been “PhDs that were really rather raggedy because they were trying to mimic something they are not.” This statement captures a sense of the conflict of opinion which circulates within the community. It was clear from analysis of the student interviews that development of the artistic work was their foremost priority when entering the PhD. Where then did the priorities of the examiners and the supervisors lie and what exactly did they value when it came to the assessment of the PhD? Did participants’ understanding of this crucial element of the process align? How did the participants conceptualise the criteria by which they felt the VAP PhD should be or was judged? I tried to get hold of what the cohort valued or felt was being valued in the examination of the VAP PhD.
The vivá voce: “It’s all about the text” and failing to account

Recounting a conversation with their supervisor, Phil speaks of coming to the shocking realisation that the PhD would be principally evaluated on the basis of the text. Having come to the PhD with an aspiration around the enhancement of artistic work, they were now under the impression that the quality of the artistic work was irrelevant to the PhD.

Phil: [My supervisor] has said to me and you do find this a bit of a blow in some ways, he says Phil you know the art work it doesn’t matter how wonderful it is, it doesn’t matter how good it is it’ll all be, it’ll be marked on the thesis. And that’s it and you know generally that’s where it is isn’t it?
Researcher: Yeah, I don’t know this is what I’m trying to find out.
Phil: Yeah it is, it doesn’t matter how wonderful the artwork is it will be the thesis, and I think that’s quite hard when you are an artist [Phil].

Clearly Phil, and indeed their supervisor, are under the impression that the physical work is of little relevance in terms of the assessment of the VAP PhD and whereas Phil professes that for them “it is all about the practice” they feel that for the examiners “it is all about the thesis.” When Phil says thesis, they do not mean an argument made through the various components of the PhD, they are using the word thesis, as it is used in the vernacular of art and design schools, to mean the supplementary text:

I think it’s just that the, the thing of the academic, it is the thesis is what will be marked, so it’s almost like you can, but at the same time how can the artwork, you know for me the artwork is almost trying to make the thesis a bit more reflective so there is a dialogue so that they’re together, I hope that they are informing, you know the thesis is about informing the actual practice [Phil].

Here again we see echoes of themes from the previous chapters, the purpose of the text in this affirmation is not to present research, its role is to inform practice.
The notion that the examination was predicated on the text to the detriment of the artistic elements of the submission, could be found not only within the accounts of the students but also the examiner/supervisors. Thomas identifies the uncritical adoption of a social sciences hybrid model within the UK and Irish contexts as resulting in a framework which has the potential to be very damaging. Yet again we have the idea that that the PhD framework can be injurious to the artistic work:

the imposition of social science’s sort of hybrid of science, can be really quite damaging but that’s the way the way most institutions have gone the PhD is assessed by a written thesis with a body of work somehow limping along um you know slightly behind [Thomas].

In the wake of their examination Alex is left with a feeling of disappointment that the process did not focus sufficiently on the artistic work produced for the PhD, stating it “was disappointing how little really that they talked about the practice, the artwork in the end.” Morgan who was also left feeling disappointed and “let down” at the end of the PhD, spoke of a vivâ voce which focused predominantly on the text. During their examination Morgan was asked to talk about the theoretical rationale underpinning the “project” but says, “we didn’t get into any nitty gritty about some of the projects that had really, were really what the PhD was based on you know we didn’t really get into the nitty gritty about that at all.” Morgan talks of the vivâ voce as a tennis match where points are won and lost, and where the discussion focuses primarily on the text with very little attention being given to the artistic practice:

it was like a game of tennis so sometimes I won the point and then sometimes I didn’t … and you’re trying to think at the end how many points did I win and how many points did they win. And [name of external examiner] was actually focusing very much, the text was really the legible document… they were kind of going to different pages and saying what do you say here, what do you say there, so at no point did they say in that project you do this you do that, you know at no time really was the practice really referred to [Morgan].
Participants had identified a schism which existed at the heart of the PhD, and this schism extended right into the heart of the examination. Within the framework of the assessment process many felt that the examiners tended to focus almost exclusively on the text. The text was the tool which was used to access the contribution. These experiences left students feeling as though the physical work did not matter.

It has already been noted that Gabriel sensed that the physical work was of little consequence within the framework of their VAP PhD. Following the *vivâ voce* examination, Gabriel felt that they had defended their artistic work formidably. This, they say, was acknowledged by the examiners. They were sent away to make corrections to the text which they acknowledged was “incomplete.” A troubling aspect of Gabriel’s account is the fact that they presented for re-examination not knowing that they would need to go through a second *vivâ voce*. Whereas the initial examination consisted of an exhibition of artistic work, for the re-examination, the candidate was given a few minutes to place some work in the examination room, the process focused on the text, and was conducted with an entirely new examination panel who did not have complete access to the artistic work. Gabriel seemed confused about procedures, at one point saying they thought they were going for a meeting and not a re-examination. The entire story is permeated with accounts of feeling confused, duped and in a state of shock:

I think I certainly I was, I felt in a real kind of like it kind of felt almost like a set up or something … that I was anyway but anyway.. which is a bad feeling to have and I was outside sitting down and [name of professor ] came out and he sat down to talk to me as did the woman from the graduate office and next thing they are having this conversation like I’m not in the room referring to me a guinea pig which was also kind of adding to the surreal nature of this um and I was becoming increasingly anxious um in terms of that meeting, that situation and then I was called back in and then I was very clearly told that I was being ah um given the MPhil qualification. Not the PhD qualification [Gabriel].
Gabriel felt that the artistic work did not matter, within the context of the re-examination it mattered even less. They felt as though they were the subject on an experiment which was not fully worked out and, ultimately, they felt as though they were a burden on a system which was risk averse and which was trying to protect itself against litigation. Gabriel describes themselves as being “disorientated,” of not being in a good place, of having mixed feelings of upset and anger, and of feeling like a “guinea pig” and “a rabbit in the headlights.”

Recounting their experience of attending a student’s *vivâ voce* in the capacity of supervisor, one of the participants invokes very similar idioms of distress [I am removing the pseudonym here to preserve anonymity]:

from the onset of the viva it was clear everybody on the panel including myself on the side that this research student was turning into the proverbial rabbit in the headlights, in the headlamps, the first question which she would have been quite capable of answering under normal circumstances proceeded to elude her, the second question also didn’t seem to connect with her answer, the third question met with a blank stare, there was a little bit of a pick-up in the middle but then there was a falling away, but knowing this person over five years, I knew from the timbre of voice how deeply nervous she was, I’d also over the three previous nights in a dark immersive installation space.

One can intuit from this description, the sensitivity the participant has to the disposition of the student. In what would be quite an unconventional move, once the candidate had left the room the participant, intervened to assuage the examiners’ doubts and to account for the student who had not adequately accounted for themselves. The participant attributes their student’s less than satisfactory performance at the *vivâ voce*, to the exhaustion of trying to stage an exhibition in tandem with the examination. This was no doubt a factor, but it seemed to me that there was more than exhaustion at play. I imagined spending three nights in a dark, immersive installation space where one was deeply engaged in orchestrating an
aesthetic experience and I could see how to shift from this scenario to that of the vivâ voce would require a considerable alteration in disposition. The student upon entering the vivâ voce examination literally could not find their voice:

at essence it was an opportunity for her to demonstrate that she has absolutely implicit ownership over every iota of work under consideration. That she could take joyous pride in the fact that she has accomplished these things …here were two individuals who were committed to, to finding all of these details and giving her a voice literally but intellectually to account for its value or where there were any, in the great tradition of the viva, where there are any unresolved or ambiguous elements to confidently and competently reassure them, but this person was not able to do that.

There was a marked contrast between this account of the examination and that of Adrian. Adrian thoroughly enjoyed the experience of the vivâ voce, they found it exciting, pleasurable and loved answering questions about the work. There are significant differences between the way in which Adrian and the previous example cited, presented for examination. Whereas the first student was working toward an exhibition to coincide with the vivâ voce, for Adrian the artistic work was completed and documented well in advance of the examination. The time lag allowed Adrian time for reflection and a space during which they could come to “own” the artistic work:

you need periods of digestion because you’ve gone through a huge amount of production of work and then you need to digest it because it doesn’t belong to you for a while, it’s like it’s just come out of your head but it needs to, I think to really belong to you it takes a bit of time so that gap when they are reading between you finishing the writing and they and the viva is a good gap you know for digestion and um then the viva itself was really a great day I really, really enjoyed it [Adrian].

I thought this was an extremely revealing observation. The idea that artistic work would “just come out of your head” and might need time to belong to the artists made sense to me. This is what I had experienced in relation to my own artistic
work, one needed temporal distance from the artistic work to be able to properly appreciate, know and own what had been done. I could see how not having had that time for reflection could result in one failing to account for oneself at the *viva* examination. Students were under inordinate pressure when they elected to stage a public exhibition to coincide with the *vivâ voce*. Nicholas in his account identified the exhibition as problematic and a real moment of crisis, he was not alone in this contention.

11.2. The exhibition as a moment of crisis

Speaking of the crucial need for the public exposition of artistic research, Thomas is emphatic about bringing the artistic work completed as part of the PhD to a public:

> art is made to be seen and it would be crazy to have an examination exhibition that’s not open to the public and that’s not just doctoral level it’s the same for master’s and to an extent bachelor’s level you know these examination exhibitions are on for terribly short periods of times which I think is a shame [Thomas].

The exposition of the artistic research outputs, however, was by no means a straightforward matter for the participants. Some saw the PhD as culminating in a terminal professional ‘show’ directed toward satisfying the conventions of the art world. This professional show could be preceded by smaller events, which would build toward the final exhibition. Phil explained that they adhered to the notion that the professional exhibition was one of the primary goals of the PhD, this is revealed in the following comments:

> I think I’ll do an exhibition to the public oh I think so. And I feel as well, like I’ve seen some people that have done some PhDs and, I’ve seen their exhibitions and they’re very tainted by the PhD [Phil].
We can see here again, the idea that the PhD is perceived as potentially having a damaging influence on the artistic work. For Phil, many PhD exhibitions fall short because the PhD can ‘taint’ the work. The use of the word “taint,” is itself revealing, implying spoiling and a corruption. In their account Phil gave a lot of attention to conceptualising how their “show” would be received by “the audience.”

so how what audience that will bring I don’t know… I’m still thinking of it just as the art and it will be the art audience, and that’s a very niche, we all know that’s a niche market, in itself, but it is what it is you know [Phil].

Notably Phil saw themselves exhibiting to an art audience or art market and not a research community.

One of the participants (I have omitted the participants pseudonym here to protect their identity) staged the work in a space which was open to the public, but the exhibition was not envisaged as a polished professional ‘show.’ The emphasis was on the exposition and dissemination of the research activity which had taken place throughout the process. In this case, the exhibition was understood by the student to be the final examination exhibition. They intended to submit the text at a later point. “I thought the [name of first exhibition location] was going to be the final one and then I could hand in the thesis and the supervisor said that that would be ok.” The student ran into trouble when their external examiner prioritised a professional ‘finish’ and wanted to see all outputs contemporaneously. Speaking favourably of their examiner in terms of their sensitivity to the work, the student noted, “he was the one who pushed for everything to be professionalised exhibition-wise and for the thesis to be finished at the same time he wasn’t willing to compromise at all.” The student was required to stage a second exhibition of their work in another location.
There seemed to be a lack of clarity for the student as to the timeline for submitting the different elements of the submission.

Participant: so, it was incredibly stressful that moment where they said this wasn’t acceptable that they had to see the two things at the same time.
Researcher: Was it stipulated that you needed an exhibition? Did you have to have an exhibition?
Participant: Well it was a bit confusing to be honest, yeah revisiting it, because sometimes they said it would be fine just to show the work in a kind of a, just one of the project rooms, in [name of educational institution] or something. It didn’t have to be an exhibition.
Researcher: Right ok
Participant: But then my extern came in and he wanted the whole thing like walking into a professional exhibition and he wouldn’t accept anything less than that. Yeah it was like coming up with two huge things at the same time.
Researcher: Yes
Participant: And them being ready at the same time. It’s like having two babies at the same time [Pseudonym has been removed to ensure confidentiality].

Not only was there a lack of clarity regarding when the different elements of the submission would be delivered but there was disparity of opinion regarding the orientation of the exhibition. Responding to this account I wrote:

Stress caused by uncertainty as to expectations. Opinions change throughout the process with student getting mixed messages, differing conceptualisations in terms of what is acceptable and what the PhD is for. Is it to demonstrate professionalism as an artist or to produce knowledge? Use of the idea of giving birth to two babies demonstrates that the various elements of the work are conceived of as two distinct entities [Researcher’s notes].

The pressure of arriving at an end point, where a number of outputs needed to be simultaneously delivered was highly stressful for both supervisors and candidates.

Speaking of the examination of a student, Nicholas observes:

her viva experience was entirely the legacy of the unfurling stressful time pressures that were building in the final three-week period, consequent of, consequence of standard bureaucratic procedures perhaps not being as adhered to as professionally as they should have been. So that ((tapping table)) is my fully reflective view of that recent experience now [Nicholas].
Notwithstanding the travails of dealing with badly managed bureaucratic procedures, whereas traditional PhD students could enjoy a relatively fallow period between the submission of their text and the vivâ voce examination, VAP PhD students who elected to present their work to the examination panel as a terminal exhibition or live event, were under increased levels of stress which could significantly impact on their ability to account for themselves.

Of course, not all participants saw their work culminating in a terminal exhibition, with some wishing to exhibit the artistic elements of the research intermittently throughout the PhD process. Sam, for example, did not see the exposition of artefacts as appropriate to their endeavour, and, as we have seen, Frances’ work took the form of on-going relational actions in consort with a community of “co-producers.” While participants like Phil were keenly focused on bringing the work to a terminal public moment in a gallery, for others the artistic work was exhibited at a mid-point or was embedded in the process, providing the condition for interaction between the artist and audience or “co-producers.” These co-producers were rarely referred to as research participants. Relational interactions or performances occurred throughout the course of the PhD and were captured in documentation which was presented at the end alongside the text. In these cases, the examiners did not always directly experience the artistic work, only having access to documentation. Morgan, who had documented their artistic work and made it available online, felt sure that the examiner had not seen the artistic work prior to the vivâ voce:

So I didn’t have an exhibition at the end, lots of people have exhibitions. And my point was that I was showing throughout the whole process and that this was a live on-line thing that could be that they could look at and it was examinable so um my external examiner said that she couldn’t access my website because she didn’t have access to the internet when she was reading my text [Morgan].
While Morgan suspected that their examiner may not have engaged with the artistic work at all, Daniel, reflecting on his experience of examining a PhD which did not culminate in a terminal exhibition, felt that he had lost out on the experience by only being able to access the artistic work via a digital file on a USB stick.

so you’re looking at it on a computer which is you know is a little bit …and you that’s for me is not the most, not the easiest way to kind of engage with something that’s as intricately composed as his work because there was a whole layering of images using like digital technologies and very subtle kind of um.. ah piecing together of various different quite, quite intricate images so it would have been nice to see it on bigger projection you know, seen it maybe as he’d have liked it to be seen in a gallery [Daniel].

While the responsibility to produce a terminal exhibition would put significant pressure on a candidate, the alternative was to present work in a way which, depending on the format, might prevent the examiner from experiencing the work as an immersive aesthetic encounter.

11.3. Assessment, ambivalence, certainty and doubt. Daniel’s experience.

As I have already noted, many of the senior academics who participated in this study, tended to focus on their opinions more than their experiences of the VAP PhD. Daniel, a humanities lecturer who is mid-point in his professional career, provides a more experiential story. His account offers an illuminating insight into the perspective of one who comes to the process of examining a VAP PhD, as a novice examiner who is not an artist-academic. Daniel, however, brings considerable knowledge in terms of their experiences as a writer and lecturer in Critical & Contextual Studies (CCS). As a lecturer who has worked in an art school for over a decade, Daniel is well acquainted with and indeed takes part in the cultures of the art and design school.

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Reflecting on his experience of examining his first VAP PhD, Daniel speaks of an assessment process which was allowed to evolve freely, he says, “we didn’t kind of formalise, I mean we just said we’d actually, we’d allow the examination to unfold organically”. As Daniel’s account emerges, what is revealed is a disposition which oscillates between certainty and doubt. At times during the interview Daniel expresses absolute surety about the standard of the work examined and at other times, he seems to be unconvinced about the quality of the constituent parts. The following statement exemplifies Daniel’s ambivalence around not only the standard of the work itself but also around what exactly about the submission was being judged:

it was difficult at times to know really…to know the nature… to know exactly the nature of what he was doing, in the sense that you could look at it from an aesthetic point of view but, technically it could have been quite derivative or it could have been, it mightn’t necessarily have been that ground-breaking like [Daniel].

Whereas others, Ben and Nicholas for example, had spoken about the artistic work breathing life into research, Daniel spoke of a text breathing life into artistic work.

Daniel: Because, you know I do think his exegesis or theoretical document as such was exceptionally good like, and it gave a really, really interesting adjunct to the actual work itself. But that was one of the debates we had, would the work itself standalone without the text?
Researcher: Yeah
Daniel: and ah..I quite liked the work but I thought it was a little bit kind of maybe…. boring, for want of a better word that the text really gave it life as such you know. But that was one of the debates we had like if um…you know when I say it’s boring does that mean it is derivative or that it doesn’t contribute anything new, you know what I mean? [Daniel].

Clearly, in this statement, Daniel is grappling with where the original contribution might be found within the submission. In the process of trying to locate the contribution, one can see that Daniel is engaged in the activity of imagining the artistic work in the absence of the text:
And that as one of the things we actually discussed quite a bit like you know is, if you have to give somebody a document before they go into an exhibition you know how good is the exhibition you know or how how ground breaking is it like a contribution? [humorous] [Daniel].

This activity of imagining one component in the absence of the other in order to judge its value on its own merits, is something that many of the participants tried to do as part of the examination process. They tried to imagine the text without the work, and the work without the text, before going on to evaluate the whole:

If he didn’t have the practical work he mightn’t have been able to make the claims that he was making in the actual text that the practical work really kind of demonstrated what he was doing so they were kind of a demonstration, but you mightn’t have seen that demonstration if you hadn’t read the text, you know what I mean. So, you know it was like [humorous] maybe that sounds a little bit contradictory maybe but…but they needed each other that’s what I felt [Daniel].

The examiner moves between the various outputs searching for affirmation that the whole adds up to a PhD. Daniel, acknowledges that he sometimes struggles with the artistic work. He states that in previous cases he has seen PhD artistic work which, if it had been presented in the absence of a text, he would have had no difficulty as identifying as PhD standard. In this case he has doubts that the artistic work would not stand alone.

At the same time, although the text is deemed to be of an exemplary standard, he maintains that the claims being made in the text might not stand up in the absence of the artistic work:

Daniel: I probably saw it as two halves maybe that were necessary for the whole like…but ..yeah…but whether. I don’t know for example if the work itself was just presented in a kind of a gallery setting and I had to go in and evaluate that I would have found that very difficult like.
Researcher: Yeah right ok, that's interesting isn't it?
Daniel: Yeah it is yeah definitely yeah, I mean I would have found it very pressurised to say that’s a PhD standard you know [Daniel].
I thought the statement “I would have found it very pressurised to say that’s a PhD standard” was significant. Elsewhere in the interview Daniel expands on this idea when he says that he might feel like a “party pooper” saying that artistic work is not of the appropriate standard. In my notes I wrote, ‘There is a sense that the examiner feels under pressure to state that something is a PhD even in the presence of doubts. These doubts sometimes go beyond doubts about quality and centre more on issues of substance’ [Researcher’s notes]. More accurately, what I mean to say here is that it seems that although the examiner can have doubts around the aesthetic quality of the artistic work, a strongly written text can convince the examiner that overall the submission is of PhD standard. Gabriel suggested that in her case the opposite was the case and that strong work was failed because it was accompanied with a weak text.

Generally, amongst the group there was a reluctance around pointing out flaws or identifying areas for improvement in the artistic work. Whereas Daniel would have little or no compunction about making recommendations to the text. He would be reticent about suggesting changes to the artistic work:

But it’s not always that easy to ..I mean you could have doubts about something but you know the text could be excellent and the presentation could be poor you know…what happens in that sense like there’s certain things that I’m not wholly sure of you know, if I think a film piece for example needs more editing like it needs to be much better thought out and there needs to be actors used for example um you know those kinds of alterations and changes like are a bit more difficult to make or to suggest you know [Daniel].

Examiners in the study felt uncomfortable with making recommendations to the artistic work. In my notes, I observed, ‘there is a sense that if they made suggestions about the artistic work they would be overstepping a line.’ Morgan comments on the
fact that, due to its complexity, it is not as easy to pinpoint areas of weakness in artistic work as it is with the text. Morgan observes that, “you can do anything in contemporary art like you can make work about the fluff in your pocket and it still can be ok and cool.”

Whereas clarity is looked for in the text, when a piece of work is too clear, it is deemed to be too obvious:

> And I suppose that’s really the crux of the problem really is the legibility of the thesis is clear and distinct and as an examiner you really can say well this is very clear where the problems are in this but with a piece of practice if it is very clear then it’s problematic because it means that the work is, could be very obvious [Morgan].

The abiding sense was that making recommendations for changes to the artistic work was “a hard thing to do.” In a follow up conversation with Daniel a year after the initial interview, he made a similar point that ‘nobody wants to say the work is bad.’ Chris highlights the difficulty:

> you know you’ve got your wheels spinning in the sand it’s difficult to contend with that it’s not an academic format you can say we’ll show it to an independent new reader, you know how do you deal with that, so therefore the encounter with the public through either test groups responding to it or being in a film festival or being shown to several sets of people or something that helps protect the practice I think [Chris].

In previous chapters we have seen that students wish to “protect the practice,” here we have an example of an examiner/supervisor who talks of protecting the practice as it passes through “the eye of the needle” that is the PhD examination process.

The language Daniel used is replete with words and statements to do with uncertainty and doubt. In the following passage Daniel talks about a lack of clarity about what is being judged in a VAP PhD. This lack of clarity is not just a feature of the Irish
context but is also evident in the assessment instruments which he has used when examining MFAs in an Australian context:

in a small country like Ireland where if I’m asked to go to (name of institution) you know and I did find this as well even when I was doing this external work in Australia like that um their evaluation sheets and their assessment sheets were very ambiguous in relation to whether they were referring solely to the text like or whether they were referring to text and project you know and that just illustrated some of the kind of problems that are more apparent in the bigger, you know when it comes to MA and PhD as well you know so yeah that’s, that’s… I just think that’s maybe where um… I mean you can’t get away from the fact that a lot of art is taste driven as well you know what I mean? [Daniel].

This pronouncement, “a lot of art is taste driven,” is revealing of the fact that Daniel is not an artist academic. At undergraduate and MFA level, artist academics routinely make judgements about the standard of artistic work which are not ostensibly predicated on personal taste. Judgements are arrived at by panels of artist/teachers who debate the merits of artistic work, evaluating the evidence of thinking behind the work. They arrive at a judgement through discussion and consensus. It is entirely possible that one could judge a work to be of a high standard and at the same time not like it. As a lecturer in the humanities and a critic, Daniel did not have experience of evaluating artistic work in this way. Daniel’s comments here are in stark contrast to those of Thomas, an artist examiner, for whom taste is completely irrelevant to the judgement he brings to bear when assessing artistic work:

knowing it when I see it is not the same as saying I like it. You know and that’s important to know, at any level of art education I mean for me it doesn’t matter whether I personally like a student’s work or not that is totally beside the point, it’s can I understand it, can I engage with it, can I recognise where are those in relation to you know the field and that’s enough [Thomas].
Daniel demonstrates that he is insecure about his own ability to make determinations about the quality of the aesthetic and particularly the technical elements of artistic submissions:

Daniel: so really, it was really, I mean it is, I’d say this very much like, it is something I did think about, if somebody doesn’t necessarily come from having been a practitioner themselves you know if they di..if they hadn’t have had that kind of you experience to draw on you know…

Researcher: Em

Daniel: How they might formulate their ideas and opinions about certain things, you know. Yeah I mean there isn’t a course there that you can do…how to, well not that I know of anyway, I wasn’t asked to sit in on a series of sessions maybe where you know my expertise in terms of practice is probably based on my you know academic background as a critic maybe [Daniel].

Daniel intimates here a lack of training. What is also clear is that Daniel had doubts. He found navigating the relationship between artistic work and the “theoretical text” challenging, he says, “That’s one of the things that I find a little bit problematic you know because you have a text, you got work and you’ve got the relationship between the two you know?” [Daniel]. He, at times, was not sure if he were judging the work on an aesthetic basis. Furthermore, there were occasions when he was unconvinced that the work was aesthetically interesting or technically accomplished, not feeling confident in his ability to judge the artistic work against these criteria.

In the end Daniel overcomes his doubts with the guidance of a more experienced examiner who mentors him through the process, and this is one of the interesting features of his experience. Because of the complexity of the PhD, two external examiners were appointed with differing areas of expertise. This meant that Daniel had the opportunity to engage in a collaborative examination process with a second external examiner. It is important to point out that neither of these had a qualification in visual arts practice.
Daniel: He had actually examined thirty PhDs. So he was able to really help me with any kind of doubts, we spent quite a bit of time together before the actual viva, so we spent a lot of time talking about the differences between a conventional PhD and practice based PhD, so you know I that he also made me see the work a little bit differently as well because he was um… you know quite adept at working with um…you know the relationship, you know evaluating the relationship between a text and an actual practical piece of work and then thinking about that within the context of say the visual arts in general, like not just academic projects you know [Daniel].

This collaborative way of working, with an examiner who had extensive experience and who was conversant in issues to do with the visual arts, was felt to be enormously beneficial. The more experienced examiner in this case was adept at negotiating the terrain between the various elements presented for examination. A collaborative assessment allowed examiners to engage in a hermeneutical process which helped them to navigate the complexity of the VAP PhD. Through shared assessment the examiners helped each other to interpret and find the merits in the work and to locate its contribution. Daniel, a novice examiner of VAP PhDs, turns to the more experienced second examiner for reassurance about his interpretation and assessment of the work. His doubts are, at least partially, assuaged.

11.4. Doubts, uncertainty and contribution to a field of knowledge

Not surprisingly the idea of a contribution to knowledge figures strongly in respondents’ discussions around the issues of evaluation and judgement. As we have already seen in a previous chapter, Nicholas prizes an empirical approach. In the following extract from Nicholas’ interview, he considers the possibility of an approach which is predicated on the idea of aesthetic contribution:

If an established individual were to attempt to define a PhD, a research PhD practice, practice-led stroke practice-led… set of aims which constituted a body of work that required an aesthetic value and an appropriate response from the audience… it would be the sort of empirical approach that clearly I found to be preferable but the general audience values and reception, you know in terms of critical appraisal… could I suppose, you know, with the right stature the right level of prominence for
that exhibition dissemination could perhaps constitute something that people felt was of worth of value, but, but it would be somewhat contentious and imponderable, I would have thought, for the average person to rely merely on an art and design response [Nicholas].

For Nicholas, although it is not totally implausible that the PhD could be judged solely in terms of its aesthetic impact, the PhD must go beyond making an aesthetic contribution, ideally making a contribution to knowledge which is backed up with empirical findings. We see in Nicholas’ account a manoeuvring between artistic and academic values, with Nicholas coming down on the side of an empirically testable contribution. The artistic work, for Nicholas, may function as a means of dissemination or may lend an affective quality to the research, but the artistic work itself is not the ultimate goal of the research.

Although the notion of contribution might seem like a very straightforward expectation for a PhD, I have already observed that some found this idea challenging and at times problematic. Thomas expresses the idea that the PhD should be judged on the basis that it makes a contribution to “new knowledge,” within the determination of “experts in the field.” He states that:

> The judgement is that there is either the generation of new knowledge or a new contribution to understanding within the judgement of experts in the field so the judgement of experts in the field is where it counts you know and to involve other people who mightn’t bring that kind of expertise could be contradictory [Thomas].

Although it is crucial that the work be presented to a public, it is ‘experts’ who sit in judgement. Thomas speaks of ‘new’ knowledge, but overall, I was struck by the fact that the idea of originality was barely alluded to in the accounts garnered. It was as though it were assumed, without question, that the work produced was making an original contribution, by virtue of the fact that it originated from the individualistic
response of the artist. None of the artists appeared to question the originality of their contribution, it was for them a given.

11.5. Criteria and experts in the field

Thomas was insistent that it is within the determination of “experts in the field” to decide if the contribution to new knowledge or “new contribution to understanding within the field” was worthy of the award. That an expert in the field would sit in judgement of the VAP PhD would seem like a straightforward assertion, however, the identification of a ‘field’ was felt by some to be contentious. I have already referenced reservations I had in relation to the examination of a VAP PhD, which made claims about a contribution to an area within the health sciences, but which was presided over by artist and contextual studies academics. This is not to say that the contribution was not valid, and the individual has gone on to publish in the health science literature, my question is around the suitability of those appointed to evaluate the contribution.

The experts who took part in this study did not always feel that they were expert in the areas that they were supervising or examining. Daniel articulates this position, stating that the “idea of a field of knowledge isn’t that clear cut.”

So, I think with art, and as you know yourself like Susan the problem, contemporary art is so many different overlapping disciplines that you know you can have one ah.. you know somebody could be working with photography and you know um drawing for example, could be making installation pieces that are spatial as well as temporal you know so to kind of, you know to be confident of having the expertise to cover all those bases is, is not always, you know is something that is dependent on each particular project you know [Daniel].

The promiscuous nature of visual art makes the defining of a field of knowledge extremely challenging. Daniel signals that it might be difficult for examiners and supervisors to feel confident in the face of the complex idiosyncratic responses
generated by artists once within the framework of the VAP PhD. In fact, when speaking of his own involvement in an examination, Daniel says something which indicates that he did not feel like an expert in the area which he was examining. He says, “It probably would have been better if somebody who maybe was an expert in that area was brought in.”

Stating that supervisors and examiners might not necessarily understand the artworks that they are assessing, Ben stresses “seriousness of purpose” and a strong skills base as qualities to be looked for in a VAP PhD:

in a way the aesthetic judgement with performance based or arts based PhDs, seriousness of purpose is a large part of the criteria because a lot of artworks aren’t going to be understood by potential supervisors but we can all see if someone is serious and it might be seriously wrong or wrong-headed…Yeah so I think that’s one of the areas I did want to get into anyway, is that one of the main criteria is seriousness of purpose and I follow that up by strong skill based, strong expertise in skill involved in the art area, such as skilful dancing, it doesn’t mean it’s aesthetically pleasing or even aesthetically confident but there is a strong skill base to the work going in, you know music, painting [Ben].

As well as singling out “seriousness of purpose,” Ben also spoke of the idea that the PhD should have “amplification.” He says the criteria is that it “amplifies into other areas, it’s got some breadth as well as depth you know, that’s the third criteria the seriousness of purpose, the skill base and the amplitude.” I would venture to say that few would argue with the idea that a VAP PhD should demonstrate seriousness of purpose but the idea that it can be evaluated on the basis of skill is not unproblematic. Daniel highlights problems around assessing artistic work based on skill:

Daniel: I think there’s a kind of a difficulty in saying that that’s a bad piece of art like because there is a whole culture of making bad art in contemporary art do you know
Researcher: Right (Humorous)
Daniel: Where practitioners choose to make low-fi kind of work that do you know what I mean so having the confidence to kind of say that’s just not good enough like you know can, can, if for example a text is really excellent you know do you know what I mean [laughing] so you know that’s where I, that’s where I would be, that’s where I find it quite, kind of quite difficult you know [Daniel].

Daniel’s statement exposes the complexity of the situation and highlights the fact that for some examiners making pronouncements on the quality of the artistic work can be difficult. Examiners can have doubts about quality but might not feel confident to voice these doubts. In these cases, a well-executed text can as Daniel puts it “paper over the cracks.”

Thomas identified the “research question” as the crucial distinguishing feature of a PhD, this he asserts is the way in which the PhD is different from a master’s. Criteria for examination, must he claims, ensue from the research question, yet he goes on to observe that not everyone subscribes to the idea of a research question:

the research question is crucial because that’s where the criteria should be embedded in that, and so not everybody goes with the research question, but you know to, and this is a complex issue um, but not to have a research question but to have an identification of the field of inquiry um is too loose [Thomas].

For Thomas, it is from the specificity of the research question that the examination criteria need to be derived. He maintains, “it can’t just hang loose, it’s got to be rigorous and the work has got to be self-evidently rigorous.” The research question is the distinguishing feature which differentiates the PhD from the MA or MFA. Interestingly while some of the student/graduate participants in this study spoke of having a research question many did not articulate their research in this way. Adrian spoke of having a question at the beginning which they stuck to throughout. It is notable, however, that those who had finished referenced a research question,
whereas those who were in-train, spoke in terms of navigating a path through an unchartered terrain.

When asked about the assessment which they brought to bear on the process, Chris spoke of an examination which he had experienced which was “precarious for all the wrong reasons.” He contests that though numerical judgements are unbalanced, the system places more trust in judgements which can be expressed in numerical form. The expression of judgements in a numerical form could protect the examiner when the decision was appealed and guard the student against the vagaries of an unsympathetic or egotistical examiner:

I do think it is strange that such a large scale endeavour like doing a doctorate actually ah depends on well it isn’t just one person’s judgement and you can appeal but it is a very narrow moment and I suppose it goes back to you know the 1930s in some Cambridge College, oh come on up and have a glass of sherry and talk about Keats and you get your Doctorate eventually you know? [Chris].

Chris characterises the PhD examination as a potentially precarious and somewhat archaic scenario whereby the judgement of one individual can hold sway within the context of a very narrow vista.

Questioning the rationale behind applying a criterion-based approach, Thomas suggests an idiographic attitude to the assessment whereby each VAP PhD is dealt with on its own terms. He says, “I’m not sure it is really appropriate because a taught course, because basically a PhD is a course, but it is a course for one person” [Thomas]. During the interview Thomas recounts an experience he had with Finnish examiners:

and it was interesting the way they engaged with the work because they came into the exhibition and I said I’ll leave you to it and they said we’ll just chill out and we’ll talk to you in an minute and they had a really good look and they were like
pondering around the exhibition having an eye, and one of them just said to the other do you think she is a Doctor and the other one said yeah look around you I think so and he said so do I [Thomas].

Thomas observes, “And that was the work, that was the whole engagement with the work. After that the following day came the viva so it was hers to lose not hers to win.” In my notes, I observed “Evaluation is made quickly and in response to the work. An apopthegmatic pronouncement, declaring it to be of standard.” Others hinted at the fact that they made judgements in a similar way, Daniel for example says, “for me it is very when something is good enough like... you know?”

Implicit in the accounts of the supervisors and examiners were ideas around trust in terms of who is chosen to take on the task of examination. Rather than speaking of finding an examiner who was “an expert in the field,” most of the participants spoke of the necessity of finding an examiner who could be trusted to respond to the VAP PhD in an appropriate manner. Supervisors felt a big onus of responsibility in this regard and demonstrated that they took great care in locating people who they felt would have empathy with artistic research. Referring to the demanding nature of the VAP PhD model, Ben identified that the locating of a suitable external examiner was especially challenging:

it was a challenge, to be honest the challenge, that is, the best way to talk about the challenge is to begin at the end and that is what kind of external examiner could take on that kind of work. [Ben].

The following statement by Ben highlights that he felt it was crucial to find an examiner who would be “kind” and who could respond to the work appropriately. “Finding this man smoothed that path considerably for this woman, he knew the kind of questions to ask her about how she, more than I would know about.” Ben
acknowledges in this statement that he did not feel entirely knowledgeable in terms of how to respond to the work presented.

In the following statement Mark moves from considering the imperative to phrase judgements in terms of numbers, to thinking about having faith in the examiner. He frames this discussion in terms of applications to professional organisations for art’s funding:

you know the arts council are arguing that we have to get to numbers if we, if we are giving money to that one and not to that one we need to prove it with numbers they need to go through the same process and come out with different numbers it justifies the money so we, you can get to numbers but you need enough boxes for all the humanity that I’m describing, or you need not to ignore stuff you know so um it used to be like just one box and you could trust somebody like [name of examiner] to mark that box through all his resources [Mark].

In his delineation of the desirable attributes of an examiner Nicholas repeatedly stresses that examiners should be extremely flexible, capable of responding in a sympathetic and holistic way to hybrid research outputs. They should be, one who would be of exceptional calibre and who would “buy into the overall holistic worth” of the VAP PhD. As Chris puts it, “if you get the wrong extern, you’re in trouble.” Where Nicholas talks of finding an “impeccable individual,” Mark poignantly speaks of coming to the assessment of art with all your resources and all your humanity:

you know when you are dealing with art every part of your humanity is involved in measurement, every part you know your history, your memory, your past, your prejudices, your senses like it’s all working [Mark].

When it came to the VAP PhD the notion of “a field of knowledge” was either broadly or ill defined. Supervisors took on the onus of locating examiners who they felt could respond appropriately to the complex amalgams, which were often presented by VAP PhD candidates. Examiners were sought who would be able to
respond flexibly to complexity and who could “buy into” the overall holistic worth. Examiners needed to be able to respond with every part of their humanity.

11.6. Synthesis of findings

In the minds of the students, the examination focused predominantly on the text. Students began the VAP PhD wishing to enhance their practice. By the time they reached the vivâ voce they believed the PhD was all about the written document which accompanied the artistic work. Students experienced disappointment when they felt their artistic work was overlooked and generally felt that the artistic work was not engaged with to a sufficient level. For the student who had to undergo re-examination the artistic work not only fell into relief, it virtually disappeared out of sight with only traces of it in evidence for the re-examination.

The responsibility to produce a terminal exhibition, which coincided with a vivâ voce examination, put inordinate pressure on students and their supervisors. Examinations often culminated in badly managed endpoints where expectations were unclear. Whereas traditional students could enjoy a relatively fallow period between the submission of the dissertation and the vivâ voce, whereby they could acquaint themselves with the most recent publications in their field, the visual arts students who chose to stage a terminal show were trying to juggle qualitatively diverse, highly pressurised and complex activities. In some cases, sufficient time had not elapsed between the production of the artistic work and the examination for the students to have gained ownership of the artistic work. It was felt that time was needed for the work to becomes one’s own. Under the pressure of delivering an end of degree exhibition, some students failed to find their voice at the vivâ voce, performing below par.
Whereas students felt the examination was all about the text, this was not the case in the minds of the examiners. Although the text was used to navigate the complexity of the artwork, examiners moved between the various elements of the research. When assessing examiners put a significant amount of labour into trying to locate the contribution. This could be a contribution to an aesthetic field or a contribution to knowledge outside the field. Contribution could also be conceived of as an augmenting of appreciation of, or a unique way of seeing, a given set of circumstances. Students found navigating the relationship between the text and the artistic work problematic, so did examiners. There was a tendency to conceptualise the text and artistic work as representing two halves of the research. They went about evaluation by taking each component as a discrete element before going on to consider the whole as a research gestalt. There was a significant divergence of conceptualisation when it came to the kinds of values which were being brought to bear in the examination of the PhD. Whereas some examiners and supervisors valued a response which produced empirically verifiable findings and a contribution to knowledge, others emphasised a professional exposition of artistic work. Some brought all these expectations to the PhD. These differences in orientation could impact greatly on the students, who at times experienced stress and confusion around what should be delivered and when.

One of the areas which was contentious was the idea of a field of knowledge and what constituted an expert in the field. Some examiners demonstrated insecurities about their expertise when confronted with the complex assemblage of outputs delivered by the VAP PhD. While most believed it was easy to locate weaknesses in a text, several observed that making recommendations to artistic work was ‘a hard thing to do.’ Some of the examiners, particularly those who did not have an art and
design education, felt less than confident about making judgements in relation to the artistic work. Examiners could be quite dubious about the standard of artist work but did not feel confident vocalising these misgivings. Judgements in relation to the artistic work, were often arrived at, not through the application of a list of criteria but through the act of aesthetic appraisal and interpretation or an apothegmatic moment “I know it when I see it.” The act of assessing by engaging in a collaborative interpretation was perceived to be of great benefit, was in keeping with art school pedagogies and could help to assuage doubts.

Finally, supervisors went to great lengths to source examiners, who they felt would be capable of responding to the VAP PhD appropriately. Rather than emphasising expertise in the specific area being investigated, supervisors took immense care in identifying people who they could trust to be sympathetic to the work presented; to be aesthetically sensitive; conversant in ‘theory’; who would be flexible and open; who would ‘buy into’ the holistic worth of the VAP PhD and who would come to the act of assessment with all their humanity. Moreover, it appeared that the desirable examiner would, like the student, be one who could tolerate uncertainty. They too were one who could feel happy adopting an aporetic stance. They were one who when examining did not need for everything to be fixed and secure, resolved and in a recognisable format. They weighed and sifted, considering the constituent parts which could never really be fully reconciled to each other. The ideal examiner was one who could accept the ‘nonce’ and be open to difference.
Figure 11-1 Overview of findings chapter 11, the examination “I know it when I see it”
11.7. Summary

Before I move on to the discussion section, I would like to highlight one final feature of the findings. It became clear as the research unfolded that uncertainty and doubt were characteristics of the experience for examiners, supervisors and candidates. Notwithstanding this fact and the candid criticism which was levied on the process by all, in the end when the participants reflected on the VAP PhD, they found it to be a rewarding and educationally edifying experience. Supervisors and examiners valued the work for its radical contingency and its challenge to inertia and constraint in the system. Graduates and students, even those who had troubling experiences, valued the VAP PhD for the ways in which it augmented their thinking and gave them new ways of being as artist academics. Participants even those who had unfavourable experiences were able to glean positive outcomes form the VAP PhD in relation to their artistic work. Strife within the process was perceived of as ‘good strife,’ if it benefited the development of the artist. The next section draws out and discusses the findings of the research. It also presents a modest micro theory which helps to shed light on the trajectory of the VAP PhD experience.
Discussion
Chapter 12 Discussion

12.1. Introduction
Looking to access participants’ experiences along the line of demarcation between academic and artistic values, the core aim of the research was to disclose any ideological dilemmas and ontological paradoxes which might characterised the experience of the Visual Arts Practice PhD for a selection of knowledgeable people in Ireland. The literature seemed to suggest that the VAP PhD was problematic. The study, therefore looked to expose potentially problematic features of a phenomenon which may hitherto have been insufficiently understood. It was felt that deeper insight into how participants are encountering the VAP PhD would contribute to decisions relating to curriculum, pedagogy and policy. It is therefore, in its depth and attention to nuance, and in remaining close to the accounts of its participants, that this study finds its unique contribution.

12.2. The Student Experience: Stages of the VAP PhD journey
Brew (2001, p. 275) in a phenomenological study which investigated how research is experienced by established senior researchers across a range of discipline areas, identified four categories by which research was conceptualised: domino, trading, layer and journey conceptions. It was clear from this study that the abiding conceptualisation of research, held by the participants, was that of Brew’s final category. The VAP PhD was conceived of as a journey. The language of navigation, which was so ubiquitous in the accounts, supported this idea. It is hardly surprising that journeying would form the basis of conceptualisations of artistic research, after all, historically the artisan was conceived of as a ‘journeyman’ embarking on his ‘mystery’ under the guidance of a master. Brew states that in this
mode researchers are less concerned with content and topic. The researcher themselves is the central focus:

Encounters with the data are viewed holistically as transforming theoretical and experiential understandings of the issue which are the focus of interest. The researcher grows and is transformed by this (Brew, 2001, p. 223).

What is stressed in this mode is the growth and transformation of the researcher. In the case of the VAP PhD candidates and graduates in this study, however, it was the growth and transformation of the artistic work as well as the growth and transformation of the artist which was sought. Gray and Malins (2004) also conceived of artistic research as a journey, organising their text along the following stages: planning the journey; mapping the terrain; locating your position; crossing the terrain; interpreting the map and recounting the journey. I would like to propose a different trajectory for the VAP PhD journey based on the findings of this study, whereby the journey is typified by five stages: intrepid embarking; wandering and epiphany; resistance and evading capture; rationalisation and assimilation; accomplishing and arriving. Figure 12-1, gives an overview of the stages of the VAP PhD journey, highlighting the key experiences which tend to typify each stage.
12.2.1. Intrepid Embarkation

Several studies across disciplines have looked at the issue of what motivates candidates to undertake doctoral level study (Leonard, et al., 2005; Churchill & Sanders, 2007; Gill & Hoppe, 2009; Brailsford, 2010). Brailsford (2010, p. 15) who interviewed 11 History PhD students spoke of ‘improving career prospects, personal development and intrinsic interest in their discipline.’ While Churchill and Sanders (2007) who looked at a range of discipline areas, identify five categories which include: career development, improving job satisfaction, personal agenda, research in politics and drifting in. Leonard et al. (2005, p. 139) evocatively speak of candidates who wish to ‘prove myself at the highest level,’ while Gill and Hoppe (2009, p.31), who looked at the professional business doctorate, list five profiles including: ‘traditional,’ aspiring toward entry into academia; ‘advanced entry’ and ‘continuing
development,’ both directed toward continuing professional development; ‘transition,’ looking to change career and ‘personal advancement,’ looking for self enhancement.

In an appraisal of professional and traditional PhDs, Neumann (2005, p. 179) conducted 134 semi-structured interviews with participants across a range of disciplines including the Creative Arts, concluding that both professional doctorate students and PhD students were, ‘primarily motivated by the prospect of undertaking research and having a specific problem they wished to investigate.’ A noticeable and unanticipated finding of Neumann’s study was that, ‘with the exception of the creative arts, no student elected to undertake a professional doctorate for career advancement.’ Interestingly, she goes on to note that, ‘Arguably the first professional doctorate in Australia was the Doctor of Creative Arts (DCA) at the University of Wollongong (Evans, et al., 2005’ (Neumann, 2005, p. 180).

While the current study revealed that there were motivating factors which tallied with previous studies, these included ‘drifting in,’ career advancement and continuing professional development, the overarching motivations reported by participants, were those of the enhancement and validation of artistic work and the development of the artist, both professionally and intrinsically. The idea that candidates wished to ‘prove themselves at the highest level,’ held true for participants’ artistic identities, however in the case of their conceptualisation of themselves as academics, they sometimes wished to establish and validate an identity about which they could at times feel very insecure.
The VAP PhD candidate generally embarked on the journey with an orientation towards practice. Whereas Mottram (2009, p. 248) observes a ‘gap in the abstracts’ of any evidence of Frayling’s ‘research for practice,’ that is research where:

the end product is an artefact - where the thinking is, so to speak, embodied in the artefact, where the goal is not primarily communicable knowledge in the sense of verbal communication, but in the sense of visual or iconic or imagistic communication (Frayling, 1993 p.5).

The participants in this study appeared to embark on the VAP PhD journey, seeing research as being ‘in the service of’ practice. Research was viewed as that activity which one engages upon to produce and augment practice both practically and theoretically. Their expectations of the PhD were normally founded on their experiences of the MFA which conformed to a completely distinct set of values and orientations to those normally associated with a research degree at doctoral level. In this sense, there was a striking lack of continuity between the two experiences which often led to participants feeling lost. Rather than confidently ‘mapping the terrain,’ as Gray and Malins (2004) suggest, the cohort engaged in a process of wandering and pathfinding. They searched around in the process trying to eke out a path and looking for familiar pedagogic encounters which would resemble those of their prior educational experiences. But the landscape of the VAP PhD was an unfamiliar one.

The candidates reflecting on this phase of the journey, for the most part, characterised themselves as being naïve. These experiences of naivety were also reported by Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2003) who observed that the Visual Arts Practice PhD students they interviewed, ‘constituted a ‘naïve’ population in relation to the rigours of completing research,’ with levels of naivety going beyond the level typical of more conventional PhD students. Whereas Hockey and Allen-Collinson talk of naivety being associated with expectations around the rigours of the process,
this study does not suggest that students were naïve in this regard. Rather they were naïve about what the VAP PhD would be. Institutions, I would argue, have a responsibility to address this issue.

12.2.2. Wandering and Epiphany

Sometime into the journey, candidates came to the realisation that the VAP PhD was not what they expected it to be. This realisation would come sooner or later and was characterised as an epiphany. The PhD was taking these artists in an entirely different direction to where they had thought they were going. Nichter (2010, p. 402) suggests that being attentive to idioms of distress, can help one to access, ‘interpersonal, social, political, economic and spiritual sources of distress, to appreciate tacit communication.’ One of the striking features of the research was participants’ use of idioms of distress when describing their engagement with the Visual Arts Practice PhD process. Idioms associated with being a vulnerable animal in a state of shock, the subject of an unthought out experiment and of being lost in an unchartered landscape, conveyed forcefully what it felt like to be on the VAP PhD journey. Idioms to do with war, conflict and the death of art also pervaded the accounts. Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2003, p. 84) reported that students experienced ‘shock’ at finding themselves in a foreign situation with ‘an unfamiliar intellectual terrain’ stretching out before them. It is nearly fifteen years since Hockey and Allen-Collinson’s work, yet naivety and shock still appear to typify the VAP PhD experience.

12.2.3. Resistance and Aporia, trying to evade capture

Having experienced an epiphany, generally the candidates began to perceive the PhD process as a rationalising threat which could damage their artistic work. The PhD
was frequently spoken of as instituting a constraining set of circumstances which ought to be resisted and challenged. We have already seen in a study by Bolt and Vincs (2015, p. 1304) reference to a version of this idea, that compliance to bureaucratic instrumentalism can be viewed by artists as potentially emasculating to ‘the vitality of an art work and the ability of art to serve as truthsayer or agent provocateur.’ The concept of the artists as a rebel within the system, as a kind of Brechtian agitator in the audience, was one which was held by nearly all the participants; students, supervisors and examiners alike. In fact, for the senior academics in the study, those who were most securely established in their careers, it was in its potential for radical opposition to inert academic regimes and a dry model that the value of the artistic PhD lay.

The candidates, for their part, holding to the idea that resistance to orthodoxy is part of the modus operandi of the contemporary artist, frequently sought to push against the conventions of the PhD. These acts of resistance could be characterised as ‘breaching exercises’ or acts of détournement enacted by students in the face of a received system which did not always happily accommodate or honour their artistic offerings. And while such acts of rebellion could serve to disrupt and ultimately augment formulations of research, one might argue that a conceptualisation of the artistic PhD candidate, as one who pushes against convention, could expose the naïve VAP PhD candidate to significant risk. The outcomes of these acts of détournement were unevenly received. I would suggest that there is an ethical obligation on those administering the VAP PhD, to interrogate underlying assumptions, alerting the candidate to the potential perils of bucking against the system.

Solleveld (2012a, p. 78) maintains that debates related to artistic research have circulated round three main themes; bureaucratic; philosophical and the largely
neglected area of the artistic. This study revealed something of the issues pertaining to the space occupied by the art within the research framework. The speculative discourse around the VAP PhD, had at times suggested that the PhD process could have a detrimental effect on artistic work. For example, Jewesbury (2009, p. 2) had signalled that the process was leading to ‘dull, process-led art’ which was promoted in ‘an internally-circulated round of theoretical publications.’ In this study, candidates, perceiving the PhD as a potentially corrupting influence on their artistic practice, felt that the ‘work’ needed to be protected. Sometimes this was done by compartmentalising the artistic work to keep it away from the PhD.

Participants had signalled two features of art; polysemy and ineffability. Many thinkers have written about the irreducibility of art. O’Sullivan (2006, p. 6) touches on this idea when he speaks of art which ‘operates on a variety of signifying but also asignifying registers.’ In his later writing Heidegger (1933-34) considers the artwork, not from the point of view of aesthetic theory but rather as ontological, stressing its strangeness:

The work belongs to the earth, which constitutes something like the absolute horizon of the world, the limit that determines the world’s historicality and finitude. …The work opens a clearing in the density of the forest; it lightens a place within the darkness of what withholds itself. But it belongs to density and darkness; the work opens the world but proves uncontainable within it (Bruns, 1994, p. 374).

Adorno (1997, p. 233) in his aesthetic, similarly points to the way in which artworks ‘synthesize ununifiable, nonidentical elements,’ that:

grind away at each other; they truly seek the identity of the identical and nonidentical processually because even their unity is only an element and not the magical formula of the whole (Adorno, 1997, p. 233).

And Schopenhauer (1998, p. 16) speaking of aesthetic experience implores one:
to not let abstract thought, the concepts of reason, take possession of our consciousness, but instead of all this devote the whole power of our mind to perception, sink ourselves completely therein (Schopenhauer, 1998, p. 16).

Schopenhauer may seem a remote and romantic figure to invoke at this juncture but the participants in this study often spoke of art in similar terms, signalling qualities of art which placed it beyond explication. Current research in the nascent field of neuro-aesthetics suggests that ‘multiple and distributed brain regions are involved in aesthetic reactions to artwork’ (Ticini, 2017, p. 5). It follows that a reciprocal complexity would be a feature of art creation. Often participants needed time to elapse between making the artistic work and owning it. Two participants formally interrupted their PhD journeys to allow time for reflection where they could get on with the making without having to think about the writing. The irreducibility of art and the possibility of capturing its complexity in a supporting text seemed like an intractable difficulty.

One of the core features of artistic work which artists tried to protect was what I have identified as aporia. Founded on the assumption that uncertainty is ever truthful, the beautiful Greek word aporia denotes an impasse or inclination toward doubt. A rhetorical device which operates out of either a simulated or real uncertainty, aporia, is the act of holding certitude at bay so that truth may emerge. An aporetic stance, it seemed, was the very condition out of which artistic work could emerge.

Furthermore, it occurred to me that the positing of doubts in relation to ongoing work was a key didactic device used by studio-based pedagogues, in the ‘studio crit.’ These aporia fostering encounters were the very pedagogical experiences which the student participants actively sought out. They went so far as to actively construct complex supervisory teams to ensure a diversity of approach. If they could not
experience these encounters formally within the curricular structure of the PhD, they sought them out informally.

The PhD with its demands for certainty, legibility and a succinct declaration of contribution to knowledge, could threaten *aporia*, a vital element of artistic practice. Oriented toward argumentation rather than evocation, the PhD required a response which was more aphoristic than aporetic. If *aporia* was one rhetorical device at play, *aposiopesis* was another. Art stopped short of full utterance. It did not explicate all its ideas but allowed space for its audience to finish its sentences. Speaking of art as bricolage and machinic, O’Sullivan (2006, p. 7) speaks of ‘art practice that calls its audience into being, and in so doing produces a different kind of (political) subjectivity.’ The PhD text which was produced in conjunction with the artistic work, was frequently viewed as having the potential to drive complexity out of the work, with its need to pin everything down.

12.2.4. Rationalization and Assimilation

Macleod et al. (2004, p. 157) claim that for many artist/researchers, there is still resistance to the requirement for a written text. For the artists in this study, it was not that artists did not want to engage with writing, in fact a desire to triumph over writing and the delight in doing so, were recurrent themes. Rather it was that the activities of writing and art making, were difficult to execute contemporaneously. During the journey candidates oscillated between phases of making art and writing. Orr (2007, p. 150) in a study which looked at assessment of third level art and design noted that respondents’ transcripts revealed:

> the difficulty they experienced when they were asked to render their practices in words. This difficulty was evidenced in the use of tortuous syntax, awkward grammar, hesitation, contradictions and sentence fragments (Orr, 2007, p. 150).
This study suggests that the difficulty of rendering practice into words continues into doctoral study. While often extremely eloquent and sophisticated in their speech, I observed, from time to time, the same dysphasic tendencies in the case of some of the participants. Production of the PhD text could prove problematic, not particularly because there was a skills deficit, which has been suggested by previous researchers (Borg, 2009). For even those who felt they were accomplished writers, identified a schismatic relationship between the artistic work and the textual work. For some a skills deficit was undoubtedly an issue, but there seemed to be a more profound reason underlying participants’ sometimes fraught experience with the text. It was as though the individual had to shift between two different mind-sets. The process could feel schizophrenic. Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2005, p. 19) had noted similar findings whereby ‘few interviewees were able to combine making and analysis within the same period, particularly given the divergent experiential states required.’

The VAP PhD was experienced as being constraining while simultaneously it was felt that there was no structure. The imposition of a framework on the art-making activities was seen to be detrimental and undesirable. These findings tallied with Hockey and Allen-Collinson’s. In their research, they had noted that:

From the students’ perspective, the flow of their making, the creative momentum, was initially impeded, even threatened by engagement with the analytical dimensions of their research. This problem was compounded by deep fears that documentation of their creative work would ultimately inhibit that very creativity, and that their powers of aesthetic expression would be greatly reduced by new found ‘objectivity’. At a fundamental level lurked the fear that the analytic mode of being might actually destroy the creative mode (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2005, p. 20).
In this study, while most participants viewed the PhD as representing the imposition of a structure, they often bemoaned a lack of structure in the process of the PhD. Despite the passing of time, it appears that students’ experiences of navigating the relationship between creating artwork and creating the analytic text, has changed very little. Artistic work, polysemic and ineffable lay beyond the parameters of a PhD text, yet it needed to be captured. Maharaj (2004b, p. 51) claims that differences are only tolerated ‘as long as they pass through the grid’s epistemic filter. What it cannot stomach, drops out of sight.’ Ultimately for the sake of expediting the PhD, students needed to cede to the requirements of the system, this inevitably involved an act of rationalisation.

Macleod and Chapman (2014, p. 140) citing Maharaj (2009, p. 2) state that ‘each PhD is made ‘for the nonce’ that is, they are invented for the contingencies of the research; they are one-off inventions.’ This certainly appeared to be the case. The VAP PhD in each instance was something which had ‘to be invented each time with each research endeavour’ (Maharaj, 2009, p. 2). Each participant through a process of pathfinding, experimentation, acquiescence and resistance to the academic structure, arrived at an individualistic response. They created a ‘nonce.’ They found a way for their art to exist within the VAP PhD. As Macleod and Chapman (2014, p. 140) observe, regardless of how rigorously executed, the VAP PhD ‘may well not be understood as skill or knowledge because they fall outside existing scholarly systems and methods of thought and ongoing art practice.’ Candidates in this study were not particularly concerned with what Maharaja called ‘the frenzy over method,’ and did not generally engage in any systematic way, with acquiring the kinds of methodological training which one might receive on more traditional PhD routes.

When students were introduced to methodological approaches from other research
domains they could view them as alien and potentially corrupting, thus they were often resisted. Artists in the study were extremely resistant to the notion of re-casting their work as a methodological approach. This study suggests that VAP PhD graduates, could emerge from the PhD with low levels of research literacy in relation to other methodological traditions. If one takes the PhD qualification to be a training directed toward producing a graduate who is capable of supervising research, then the haphazard, idiosyncratic nature of VAP PhD engagement with issues to do with methodology could leave graduates with a less than adequately developed methodological sensibility.

12.2.5. Accomplishing and Arriving

In their analysis of the changing identities of art and design PhD students, Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2005) investigated students’ incorporation of a research identity into their existing creator identity. Their discussion centred mainly around students’ experiences of balancing the activities of art-making, with those of producing the analytic text. In relation to the development of identity within the doctoral process, my study found that participants experienced a similar set of concerns to those reported by Hockey and Allison-Collinson. What is striking however is the fact that participants often conflated the idea of ‘research’ with ‘writing.’ This is a point to which Hockey and Allison-Collinson do not attend.

While participants in the current study often began their journey, describing themselves as, not being natural writers or not being academic, by the end of the process they were happy to refer to themselves as artist/writers or artist/academics. In this sense, they had triumphed over the writing, assimilating it into their modi operandi. Overwhelmingly this triumphing was viewed as one of the most important accomplishments of the PhD. Artist participants had been able to significantly
augment their professional identities by developing abilities as writers. Having established for themselves augmented academic identities, most had been successful in bringing their writing to new academic fora. A notable and significant finding of this study, however, was that artists did not generally identify themselves as researchers. Some held to the idea that artistic work was a contribution to knowledge, or a field, or that there was meaning to be had around art, but I came away from the experience feeling that research was not the primary goal for most of those taking on the VAP PhD.

Friedman and Ox (2017, p. 518) asserting that artists frequently create knowledge state that, ‘we should not confuse research with knowledge creation. They are not the same and not all knowledge creation is research.’ An advocate for the VAP PhD, Wilson (2013, p. 205), perceptively asks the question:

but what if artists and musicians really don’t want to become researchers? What if they just wish to be artists and musicians, just doing their own thing and getting on with stuff? Well then, it seems probable that doing a doctorate and studying to become a researcher is not the thing for them. (Wilson, 2013, p. 205)

This statement seemed extremely pertinent in light of the findings presented here. Even when participants had succeeded in successfully completing the VAP PhD they normally did not identify with being a researcher and the work they produced after the PhD was not often cast within the framework of artistic research. Upon completion of the PhD, they spoke of constraints being removed, of the liberation of their artistic work and of making work in a much freer way. Yet the artists’ desire to achieve a doctoral level qualification, to triumph over the skill of writing, to prove themselves at the highest levels both academically and artistically, through processes which could assist in the development of their artistic work, these aspirations must be
honoured. Commenting on the emerging situation in the US, Maksymowicz and Tobia (2017) argue this very point, insisting that what is important here is the accolade of ‘doctor’ and not that it be a PhD, or a PhD which is practice-led.

12.3. The Examiner Experience: Uncertainty & Assessment of the VAP PhD

Webb and Brien (2015) spoke of ‘anxieties and uncertainties held by many doctoral supervisors, candidates and examiners,’ in relation to the examination of the VAP PhD. Their study revealed that while participants welcome clearer guidelines pertaining to the examination process, there was unanimous rejection of the idea of a ‘restrictive code to guide doctoral examination’ (p.9). Sade (2012) supports this idea, stating that practice-based research requires ‘a disposition that remains open to change, new possibilities,’ one where uncertainty is not trimmed away [Un-paginated]. Resistance to constraint appears to be a dominant feature of the Arts Practice PhD experience with stakeholders attempting to balance the need for certainty and structure with the requirement for unfettered liberty, openness and freedom to innovate and experiment. This study found uncertainty and doubt to be integral features of the VAP PhD assessment process.
12.3.1. Assessing with all your humanity

The idea that a PhD would be examined by an expert in the field, one might have assumed, would be a fundamental condition of the doctoral assessment process, but as we have seen notions of what constituted an expert, or a field of knowledge could be less than straightforward. Mullins and Kelly (2002, p. 374), in a study which asked PhD examiners across a variety of disciplines why they thought they were asked to examine, found that the majority of respondents believed they were invited to examine because ‘they were experts in their field and so they had a good sense of the standards for the discipline.’ These respondents also felt they were asked because they would be sympathetic to the students. This study suggests that for the
examiners of the VAP PhD the notion of ‘an expert in the field’ is not that clear-cut. The examiners who hailed from non-art practice academic traditions, for example, all observed at one point or another that they were not experts. In terms of supervision, the artist supervisors who did not hold PhDs, often took a ‘hands off’ approach to dealing with the writing, leaving this part of the workload to the ‘theory people.’

Dally et al. (2004, p. 147), in their study of the examinations of the fine art PhD, found that the focus was not on being an expert, stating that for examiners:

Their main concerns are that they are flexible and responsive enough to deal with the unexpected fairly and efficiently and identify the qualities of the artwork and exegesis in a manner that is legitimate in the merged contexts of art and academe (Dally, et al., 2004, p. 147).

Delineating a list of characteristics which their participants identified as being crucial for the fine art PhD examiner, Dally et al., cite a serious commitment to art and the standards that define ‘good’ art and high academic quality; empathy for practice; fairness and reasonableness; flexibility; decisiveness and openness. These personal characteristics of openness and flexibility were those prized by the examiners and supervisors who took part in this investigation.

In this inquiry, it was found that, supervisors went to great lengths to source examiners, who they felt would be capable of responding to the VAP PhD appropriately. Rather than emphasising expertise in the specific subject areas being investigated, supervisors took immense care in identifying people who they could trust to be sympathetic to the work presented; to be aesthetically sensitive; conversant in ‘theory’; flexible; open and who would ‘buy into’ the holistic worth of the VAP PhD. It was not the knowledge base of the examiner which was prioritised but their capacity for aesthetic appreciation. Supervisors looked for examiners who
would come to the act of assessment with openness, flexibility and with all their humanity.

12.3.2. Assessing across the schism

Several of the examiners were candid about their insecurities when it came to the evaluation the complex assemblage of outputs delivered by the VAP PhD. Rather than viewing these candid revelations as signs of weakness, I would suggest that, examiners willingness to accept lacuna in their understanding demonstrates confidence and competency. In fact, being at a loss might be a necessary part of the process of assessing this kind of work.

While most of the examiners were of the opinion that it was easy to locate weaknesses in a text, several observed that making recommendations in respect of the artistic work, was a hard thing to do. Dally et al. (2004) in their analysis of creative PhD examiner reports, noted that recommendations were rarely made in respect of artistic work. Similarly, Brien et al. (2014, pp. 104-105) in their analysis of 70 creative PhD examiners’ reports had also found that if amendments were required, it was to this element of the research with only a small percentage requiring changes to the creative work. This was found to be the case even where the creative work was deemed to be ‘barely adequate.’ The conclusion drawn by Brien et al. was that either doctoral writing is afforded more weight than other elements of the doctoral ‘package’ or that examiners feel more confident to offer clearly articulated judgements on written work than on creative output. Certainly, the student participants in this study felt that the written analytic was afforded more weight, this was particularly borne out in their accounts of the vivâ voce experience. (It must be
noted that Brien et al. are writing from an Australian context where *vivē voce* do not normally take place as part of the PhD examination).

When it came to assessment of the VAP PhD, many of the students felt that the process focused overwhelmingly on the text, this was not the case in the minds of the examiners. Although the text was used as a means to navigate the complexity of the artwork, examiners moved between the various elements of the research. Students found navigating the relationship between the text and the artistic work problematic, so did examiners. There was a tendency to conceptualise the text and artistic work as representing two halves of the research. Examiners went about evaluation by taking each component as a discrete element before going on to consider the whole as a research gestalt.

Burgin (2014, p. 94) observes ‘almost universal confusion in respect of the written component of the degree.’ I found that although there was consensus on a general level, there was normally a lack of detail regarding ideas about the function and content of the constituent elements of the PhD text. Mostly the text was understood as a space that would need to ‘contextualise’ the practice, expounding on relevant philosophical perspectives; it should document the research or artistic process (these two ideas could be conflated) and it needed to present a legible and clear account of the contribution.

12.3.3. Locating the contribution, disparity of orientations

When assessing, examiners put a significant amount of labour into trying to locate the contribution. This could be a contribution to an aesthetic field or a contribution to knowledge outside the field. Contribution could also be conceived of as an augmenting of appreciation, or illumination of a given set of circumstances. There
was significant divergence of conceptualisation when it came to the kinds of values which were being brought to bear in the examination of the PhD. Whereas some examiners and supervisors valued a response which produced empirically verifiable findings and a contribution to knowledge, others emphasised a professional exposition of artistic work and a contribution to the artistic field. Some brought all these expectations to the PhD. These differences in orientation could impact greatly on the students, who at times experienced stress and confusion around what should be delivered and when. Paltridge et al. (2011, p. 247) point out that while vagueness may create conditions for flexibility, questions need to be raised as to how candidates ‘are to meet unarticulated expectations.’ Lack of clarity with regard to expectations and disparity between the differing positions held by stakeholders had impacted detrimentally on the participants who took part in this study.

12.3.4. Assessment and art school pedagogical practices

Judgements in relation to the artistic work, were often arrived at, not through the application of a list of criteria but through the act of aesthetic appraisal and interpretation. Drawing on the ideas of Eisner (1972), I had asked the examiners if they felt the notion of the connoisseur was applicable to the assessment of the VAP PhD. This idea was normally rejected on the basis that it summoned up bourgeois ideas to do with fine wine and cheese. Examiners when speaking of their evaluation of artistic work tended to sum up their response in the following apothegmatic statement, ‘I know it when I see it.’ Orr (2007), in her doctoral thesis which looked at assessment in higher education fine art, made the same observation, stating:

Arguably, in higher education today, lecturers can be castigated for saying that they 'can recognise a first when they see it'. And yet, based on my analysis, this is, to an extent, lecturers' lived experience of making assessment judgements (Orr, 2007, p. 150).
Dally et al. (2004) found that having arrived at their determination, creative arts PhD examiners appreciated opportunities to validate their evaluation through engagement with another examiner. In this study, collaborative assessment was considered to be of great benefit. Examiners interpreted and explored the artistic elements together, working in tandem to locate the contribution through acts of interpretation. This group approach to marking is in keeping with art school pedagogic traditions. Orr (2012) observes that whereas the activity of second reading in conventional assessment is conceived of as a validity measure, in art and design group assessment ‘in part, defines pedagogy’ [Un-paginated]. For a number of participants in this study, it was through this collaborative, interpretative group assessment that doubts could be assuaged. Furthermore, the novice with limited experience of assessing art in this way, could be mentored through the process by more experienced pedagogues.

12.3.5. Assessment and Aporia

One of the impressive attributes which I observed in the artists interviewed was their ability to live with and often thrive on uncertainty. The cohort demonstrated a high degree of resilience and an ability for self-directed learning. They did not need certainty and could go with the flow. Very often in fact, they would hold certainty at bay. Most of the artists were proficient at navigating their own path through the VAP PhD journey, notwithstanding the fact that most of the supervisors were very ‘hands-on’ providing a high degree of support to the candidates. In terms of their stance in relation to their artistic work, Aporia was a valuable quality which allowed meaning to emerge for the artist. Yet the examiner too had to learn to live with a lack of certitude. A very interesting feature which emerged from closely attending to the accounts of the examiners was that there was a tension between certainty, ‘I
know it when I see it’ and uncertainty ‘I found it hard to know.’ This finding resonated with those of Dally et al. (2004, p. 146) when they noted that interviewees valued in examiners ‘a preparedness to be wholly surprised and sometimes at a loss.’ It appeared that the VAP PhD examiner would, like the student, be one who could tolerate uncertainty. They too were one who could feel happy adopting an aporetic stance.

The ability to accept doubts as part of the process seemed to me to be a defining feature of this kind of work. The examiner was one who did not need for everything to be fixed and secure and resolved and in a recognisable format. They weighed and sifted, considering the constituent parts which could never really be fully reconciled to each other. The VAP PhD examiner was one who could accept the ‘nonce’ and be open to difference. There was however a potential downside, close attending to examiners’ accounts revealed that they could on occasion be quite dubious about the standard of the artistic work they encountered, yet they would not feel confident vocalising these misgivings.

12.4. Reductionism and complexity

The literature had strongly suggested that uncertainty was a feature of the experience for students, supervisors and examiners alike. This was found to be the case. Uncertainty however was not necessarily an impediment, conversely it might be a condition for artistic production. Artist academics seemed to be drawn to philosophical positions which could accommodate and promote complexity, heterogeneity and indeterminacy. There was a tendency for the community to characterise artistic research as, rhizomatic, as assemblage and as a minor literature effecting a deterritorialisation of the research space (Coessens, et al., 2009;
Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013; Rogoff, 2015; Lerm Hayes, 2016). The artist researcher was one who tried to maintain noise in the system and resisted linear, additive reductionism.

A proponent of object-oriented ontology, Harman (2012) speaking of speculative realism and the arts declares that:

> The various districts of human knowledge have relative disciplinary autonomy due to their differing objects and the varying sorts of expertise required to practice them competently. The transgression of these boundaries should not be constant and rampant and decreed as a global principle, but can only be justified by its effectiveness in individual cases (Harman, 2012, p. 183).

The fact that graduates did not generally fore-ground the identity of researcher seemed significant. Similarly, the idea that examiner expertise was predicated on their capacity for aesthetic appreciation and not especially on their knowledge of the subjects being tackled in the various PhDs, said something of the values and priorities of those involved. Ultimately was the VAP PhD really directed toward the production of extrinsic knowledge?

12.5. Critique of Study

All research has limitations. Before moving on to the conclusion of this study, this section offers an evaluation of the research, locating points of weakness and strength.

12.5.1. Limitation of the Researcher

IPA as a methodological approach hails from the field of psychology. Whereas in law one must demonstrate a legal mind, in the field of psychology one might be expected to have a ‘psychological eye.’ Not being trained in psychology, I cannot claim to have developed a ‘psychological eye,’ thus I could not bring such a range of theoretical lenses to bear on the investigation. I have, however, brought an aesthetic
sensibility which served to increase my sensitivity to the mores, lexicons and ontological dispositions of my participants.

Brocki and Wearden (2006, p. 89) observed that it was due to ‘an accident of birth’ that IPA has predominantly been used in Health Sciences and less so in other fields. Citing flexibility as one of the advantages of IPA, they stress the need for creativity, when implementing the approach. Pringle et al. (2011, p. 22) state that the ‘non-prescriptive, adaptable nature’ of the approach can feel ‘alien to researchers of a more positivist persuasion.’ Nonetheless, Wagstaff et al. (2014, p. 11) observe that IPA has cross-disciplinary applicability. As an artist, I hope that I have brought some creativity and adaptability to the study which will compensate for deficits in other areas. What is presented here is an adaptation and application of IPA to the field of art education. As such my approach has been innovative in that it has extended the application of IPA beyond its usual context. This study can be added to modest yet growing range of studies, which have applied IPA as a research approach outside of its context of origin. There is some merit in this.

12.5.2. Data Collection

One limitation which arose was related to the kind of interview data gleaned from the senior academics. Some of these participants had recently retired from the field and I think they had somewhat psychologically departed. As I have noted while these interviews provided me with the opinions of the academics, in some cases, I failed to access sustained experiential material needed for phenomenological analysis. These interviews nonetheless contributed to my understanding of the issues and provided insight into dispositions. There was sufficient richness in the experiential accounts of three of the examiners and supervisors, who were at the time of the research,
immersed in administering PhDs. IPA lauds the merits of the single-case analysis, looking to ‘privilege the individual’ (Pringle, et al., 2011, p. 21). Ultimately, I did not view this limitation as having a significant impact on the overall health of the study.

Analyses of IPA interviews is time-consuming and emotionally intensive. It has already been noted that IPA, well executed, produces large volumes of rich material. This was the case with this study. There were themes which emerged from the six-step analysis of the interview transcripts, which were not focused on, in great depth, in the discussion. For example, themes relating to the relationship between the candidate and the supervisor could have yielded a further study. I chose not to go down these routes at this juncture, lest I be taken away from the focus of this investigation but there is certainly potential for future work.

12.5.3. Transferability

In terms of transferability, IPA looks to extract micro or idiographic theories inductively from the particular experiences of individuals. Thus, it does not attempt to make nomothetic generalisable claims. The value of the research is in its ability to attend to nuance and to reach into the depths of an experience to locate issues of pertinence for those living through a phenomenon. Smith et al. (2013, p. 38) in their discussion on the impact of IPA research, point out that each study is not the end of the story, it is with time they say that larger corpuses of cases ‘may lead to the ability to consider the essential features of a particular phenomenon.’ Over time what can be achieved is a steady accretion of information which will serve to fill out the structure of a phenomenon. Detailed idiographic analysis they say:
can make a significant contribution. Through connecting the findings to extant psychological literature, the IPA writer is helping the reader to see how the case can shed light on the existing nomothetic research (Smith, et al., 2013, p. 38).

The findings in this study are not generalisable. They do, however support and augment the findings of earlier studies and can be added to the body of existing knowledge. Reid et al. (2005, p. 23) state that IPA is especially ‘suited to researching ‘unexplored territory’ where a theoretical pretext may be lacking.’ IPA has provided a means of honouring and respecting the perspectives of the individuals who took part in this research whilst also creating an interpretative space for the researcher.

12.6. Summary
This chapter has presented a discussion of the findings. As a consequence of the research, a model of the VAP PhD research journey is proposed. The study found that the VAP PhD experience was typically marked by five distinct phases: intrepid embarking; wandering and epiphany; resistance, aporia and evading capture; rationalisation and assimilation; accomplishing and arriving. This model serves to illuminate understanding of the VAP PhD experience and increases potential for effective intervention in the process, directed toward amelioration of problems, and the anticipation of pitfalls. In addition, it was found that the application of the Aristotelian rhetorical concepts of aporia and aposiopsis have emerged as useful concepts for understanding several characteristics of the VAP PhD. The concluding chapter identifies the contribution to knowledge, areas for future research and it deliberates on the implications of the research.
Conclusion
Chapter 13 Conclusion: Contribution & Implications

13.1. Introduction

This final chapter begins by presenting the contribution to knowledge, goes on to quickly identify areas for future research and concludes with a discussion of implications which ensue from the study. I have used the National Framework for Doctoral Education Principles issued by the Irish Research Council (Irish Research Council, 2015) as a framework for considering implications.

13.2. Contribution to Knowledge

Brew (2001, p. 227) states that, ‘Being clear about one’s own way of viewing research provides a basis for making sense of others’ conception.’ In paying close heed to the accounts of those intimately involved with the phenomenon of the Visual Arts Practice PhD, I have been able to access participants’ experiences in respect of academic and artistic values. The core aim of the research was to uncover ideological dilemmas and ontological paradoxes which it was thought might characterise the experience of the VAP PhD. IPA has facilitated an in-depth exploration of the experiences and conceptualisations of the participants. The study, unique in the fact that it is the first to look at experiences of the VAP PhD within an Irish context, has produced findings which resonate with, generally support and augment those of the modest number of studies conducted internationally.

I would argue that IPA as a research approach, has yielded a deeply illuminating and more fine-grained picture of the VAP PhD experience than has hitherto been demonstrated in the extant literature. IPA has provided for a richer focus than might be achieved with other research methods. The adoption of IPA within the context of
art and design education is, in and of itself, innovative. In applying IPA to art and
design educational research, I have extended the use of this methodological approach
beyond its original context and added to the stock of knowledge related to the
application of IPA as a methodological approach.

As an inductive method IPA looks to draw out micro theories at ground level. In this
case what has emerged is a conceptualisation of a research journey marked by five
distinct phases: intrepid embarking; wandering and epiphany; resistance, aporia and
evading capture; rationalisation and assimilation; accomplishing and arriving. This
model serves to illuminate one’s understanding of the VAP PhD experience and
increases potential for effective intervention in the process, directed toward
amelioration of problems. The model which has emerged has the potential to allow
for the demystification of elements of the process and can alert VAP PhD candidates,
supervisors and examiners to likely pitfalls.

The application of the Aristotelian rhetorical concepts of aporia and aposiopesis
have proved useful in conceptualising the ways in which art might make its
contribution to knowledge. Furthermore, they may shed light on the hidden
mechanisms which are features of artistic process form inception, to production and
to reception. In addition, they may help one to understand the artists’ disposition and
their struggle with representing their practice in text. Application of these concepts
also has the potential, I suggest, to illuminates certain features of art school
pedagogies in relation to teaching, learning and assessment. Finally, the concept of
aporia has been helpful in understanding the kinds of disposition which the examiner
and indeed the supervisor, might need to adopt, to be able to cope with the VAP PhD.

13.3. Areas for Future Research

The work presented here is only the beginning of the story. With the passing of time, as the field evolves, and as greater numbers arrive at completion, there will be further opportunities for research into doctoral level study in the visual arts. It remains to be seen whether the micro theory of the research journey developed here, works for non-Irish jurisdictions, which might be at a different stage of development in terms of the evolution of their artistic research cultures. It also remains to be seen, whether the model can be transposed to other creative discipline areas. Insights gleaned in this research, into the complex array of dispositions adopted by the examiners of VAP PhDs, adds to the work done in the UK and Australia. But there is more work to be done to understand the nuances of the delicate processes used by visual arts examiners.

This study has suggested that there is a problematic lack of continuity between the master’s and the doctoral cycles in art education. I would argue that there is a need to look more closely at the pedagogical practices of the MFA. What about this experience made it so positive in the estimation of the participants in this study? How can the master’s be improved so that it makes for a more seamless transition to doctoral level studies? The research suggested a schismatic relationship between the written analytical elements and the artistic practice elements of the PhD. This feature, it seemed, is not particular to PhD level study but appears to be a feature of art educational experiences at undergraduate cycle (Orr, 2007). More research needs
to be done to understand the dynamics of the relationship between artistic production and production of accompanying analytical writing.

Artist academics, while they have always reflected on the pedagogical practices which typify art school education, have not traditionally rendered this knowledge into empirical studies which could be disseminated to the wider community. I argue that there is much to be learned from attending to the pedagogical and aesthetic forms of knowledge which reside within art school cultures. Calling for critical evaluation of existing structures, Abbs (2003, p. 153) points out that given the depleted state of education and culture there is a need to resist the dominant tendencies of our time. He appeals for the ‘excavation of critical concepts and subversive metaphors’ lest we risk being buried ‘under the glittering debris of consumer products and the leaden piles of bureaucratic missives.’ Critical stances are imperative in the face of the new orthodoxy of neo-liberalism which is sweeping through contemporary educational discourse. Artist researchers, once made properly research literate, may be uniquely positioned to lead the charge in the critical evaluation of market-led orthodoxy in educational policy-making.

13.4. Implications

By engaging with the model developed in this research, I have been able to identify aspects of the VAP PhD where it may be possible to critically intervene to effect positive change. I will begin, however, by identifying an over-arching point in relations to doctoral study provision in Ireland.
13.4.1. There is a need for a Doctorate in Visual Arts Practice in Ireland

Point one of the National Framework for Doctoral Education Principles (Irish Research Council, 2015) provides the following first principle of doctoral research:

> The core doctoral education is deep engagement with a question, problems or hypothesis at the frontier of knowledge, and advancement of this frontier under the guidance of expert and committed supervision. To be awarded a doctoral degree, the candidate must have made an original contribution to knowledge (Irish Research Council, 2015, p. 3).

Irish art and design institutions have generally followed the lead of the UK by developing visual arts doctoral qualifications which are founded on the notion of the PhD, essentially a research degree. Given the motivations and orientations expressed by the students and graduates who took part in this study, there is evidence to suggest that a model which is directed toward the enhancement and development of the artistic practice might be more appropriate for some candidates. I am suggesting a Doctorate in Visual Arts Practice which is more in line with the Nordic model. Such a degree would need to incorporate taught modules directed towards developing the artists’ capacity to produce accomplished academic writing. The development of these skills and competencies were a highly valued and desired outcome of the PhD process for the candidates in this study.

The introduction of a Doctorate in Visual Arts Practice, might seem like an obvious conclusion at which to arrive, yet for the most part the artistic academic community in the UK and Ireland have been insistent on a PhD and not a doctorate. Introduction of a doctorate, I argue, would have the effect of ameliorating several issues which currently cause confusion for candidates, and would better match the motivations and aspirations of many artists who elect to undertake the current VAP PhD. The teasing
out of values into professional artistic-centric and research-centric would have the effect of transforming thinking about the role of art within the PhD.

One objection which might be raised against such a suggestion, is that a hierarchy would develop between the doctorate and the PhD, with the doctorate being perceived of as a lesser degree. Ideally the doctorate should not be a ‘watered-down’ version of the PhD but would be as rigorous in its own right. I speculate that artists would have a preference for the doctorate, on the basis that it might sit more comfortably with their prior experience and their professional and academic aspirations. The artists in this study were primarily concerned with being artists, academics and writers. A doctorate could accommodate all these aspirations.

A problem would, of course, ensue when those who had completed doctorates were called upon to supervise and examine PhDs. Toward the end of the study I spoke to Nicholas who had just been involved in reviewing guidelines for the recruitment of examiners for VAP PhDs. He told me that due to a scarcity of suitably qualified people, there was a suggestion that guidelines be amended to include professional artists who did not hold doctoral level qualifications. This is a worrying development and indicates that there is a lack of consensus about the purpose of the degree.

In suggesting the development of the Doctorate in Visual Arts, I do not preclude the existence of a PhD in Visual Arts Practice for I believe there is a place for this kind of PhD. In an attempt to accommodate plurality of approach, National and European level guidelines have been very noncommittal and loose in terms of definitions of
artistic research. Take for example the following definition provided by the Working Group on Practice-based Research in the Arts:

Practice-based research in the arts is research which is centrally predicated on realising actual practice within the arts, but which, nevertheless, is consistent with the existence of a discipline-independent and generalised conception of research which comprehends practice-based research in the arts (Higher Education and Training Awards Council, 2010, p. 9).

Such a definition might on the surface accommodate a variety of positions in relation to artistic research, but it can lead to confusion and does nothing to improve the experiences of those involved on the ground. It is clear from this study that a complex mix of values and expectations are brought to the VAP PhD. For those undertaking, supervising and examining the VAP PhD, differences in orientation must be made explicit from the outset. If, in addition to offering VAP PhDs, institutions were also to offer a Doctorate in Visual Arts Practice, institutions would necessarily need to take a stance on which academic and artistic values were at play in respect of each award.

I suggest that in the case of the doctorate, research would be in the service of the artist work, in the PhD art would be in service to the research. In the first case research would breathe life into art, in the latter art would breathe life into research. In the case of the doctorate, the orientation would be toward developing a sophisticated professional practice and high-level skills in the production of artistic academic writing. The candidate would be required to produce critical essays in conjunction with high-level expositions of their work. The model should be structured in such a way, as to allow time for the artist to consider the reception of the work by its audience. In the case of the doctorate, art and design pedagogies
would be prioritised with candidates having the opportunity to engage in ‘studio
crits’ with academics and practicing artists.

13.4.2. The VAP PhD: Admissions, Orientation & Informed Recruits

Point seven of the National Framework for Doctoral Education Principles issued by
the Irish Research Council states that:

The admission of doctoral students takes into account preparedness of the applicant,
the availability of qualified, competent and accessible supervision and the resources
necessary to conduct the research (Irish Research Council, 2015).

The participants’ tendency to characterise their experiences in terms of ‘shock’ and
naivety, would strongly indicate that more needs to be done in terms of making the
content, structure and purpose of VAP PhD courses more explicit, prior to and during
the recruitment of candidates. This research indicates that there is a prescient need
for those administering VAP PhDs, to expose for all involved, the nuanced
disparities in orientation which are typical of the field, so that there might be greater
clarity, all round, in terms of expectations. It was found that candidates could drift
into, or be encouraged into PhD courses, without understanding what would be
involved. The issue was not around appreciating the rigours of the process but was
to do with a tendency for participants to enter into the process with expectations and
conceptualisations, which were predicated on a completely different set of academic
principles to those usually associated with academic research at doctoral level.
Sometimes supervisors, examiners and candidates existing within the same PhD
experience could have dramatically diverse conceptualisations where one took a PhD
to be a more sophisticated version of the MFA and others were looking for
empirically verifiable contributions to knowledge. Potential candidates, and indeed
those involved in supervising and examining the PhD, need to be more carefully alerted to the nature and purpose of the research PhD. Furthermore, candidates should be made aware of the likely effects on their artistic practice, both positive and negative.

Should professional values be syphoned away from the PhD and located within the framework of the Doctorate in Visual Arts Practice, the PhD could be re-oriented as a research degree directed toward the production of a contribution to knowledge. One could imagine a scenario whereby the VAP PhD candidate selecting this mode in preference to the doctorate, would be forewarned that artistic work, in this case, is being used to generate research. They would need to accept that they are not researching in an effort to generate practice, although the generation of practice would be an outcome. It may seem unpalatable and a somewhat conservative assertion, but candidates, supervisors and examiners would need to accept from the outset that the ultimate goal of the PhD, is not ostensibly the exposition of artistic work. Nearly all the student participants in this research had acknowledged the rationalising influence of the PhD. The artist would, now be afforded this information at recruitment or induction and would need to accept from the outset that their artistic practice was being relinquished to a research agenda and that this might imply a distortion and rationalisation in the service of the research. Rather than stumbling upon this realisation two years into a PhD process, I argue that if students were prepared for this eventuality, they could gain more ownership over the process and be able to make informed decisions about which elements of their practice were most usefully turned to the research endeavour.
13.4.3. Research Training: Relinquishing art to research, accepting alien research methodologies

Point three of the National Framework for Doctoral Education Principles advocates that:

> Doctoral education increases significantly students’ depth and breadth of knowledge of their discipline and develops their expertise in research methodology which is applicable to both a specific project and a wider context. It provides a high-quality research experience, training (including a formalised integrated programme of personal and professional development) and output consistent with international norms of best practice (Irish Research Council, 2015, p. 3).

Based on the accounts of participants, I have been left with the impression that approaches to research training for the VAP PhD have been rather haphazard, while some had undertaken research training in software for qualitative data analysis, others received nothing more than generic courses in citation and academic writing. The result has been that graduates can emerge from the VAP PhD process with under-developed methodological sensibilities. In addition, the study has demonstrated that candidates can often be resistant to methodological training from, for example the social sciences, viewing these approaches as the imposition of potentially corrupting and constraining conventions from alien paradigms. When artists used the terminology associated with research, they used it idiosyncratically to mean different things. I think that adoption of oppositional stances coupled with hit and miss structured components of PhD courses, can leave artists impoverished in terms of their research literacies. Significantly, I did not see this type of resistance during my engagement with the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance. It was my impression that unlike many of the artist candidates, music students were focused on redirecting their attentions to research and were open to all manner of
methodological approaches which had been made available to them, through carefully designed taught modules on research methodologies.

If artistic research is developed for the ‘nonce’ there is a danger that the artist emerges from their PhD experience without the skills to contribute authoritatively to discourse on research, beyond the scope of the specificity of their own work. Traditionally art educators have not made the development of leadership roles a priority. The VAP PhD might well provide a pathway for artist/academics to drive change and engage more meaningfully at all levels of education. But only if there is respect for the qualifications awarded. The VAP PhD ought to be perceived to be operating on an equivalent level to PhDs in other areas. This cannot happen if the VAP PhD graduate cannot converse authoritatively in the generic language used to talk about research. It is my contention that if values and priorities are disaggregated, with distinctions being made between the doctorate and the PhD, then the candidate will be in a better position to decide where their own priorities lie. This may lead to a situation where PhD candidates are less resistant to engaging with research methods which hail from other fields.

13.4.4. Facilitating structures for production of the text

The production of the PhD text proved troublesome for those involved in this study, even those who demonstrated confidence and competency in the production of analytical texts. The PhD process was conceived of as schismatic. The schism extended into the division of supervisory labour. I suggest that academics taking on the responsibility of supervising a PhD would need to commit to supervision of the entire opus as a research gestalt and should dispense with the notion that the text is supervised by ‘theory’ people and the art is supervised by ‘practice’ people.
However, supervisory teams would need to be constituted of academics hailing from both practice and ‘theory’ backgrounds.

Candidates found it extremely difficult to write while simultaneously remaining immersed in the activity or art making. Rather than requiring the candidate to try to perform these two activities contemporaneously, it would be better to structure the research journey into discrete phases dedicated to writing, art-making and exposition.

Point five of the National Framework for Doctoral Education Principles states that:

Recognising that each doctorate is unique, doctoral education is also flexible so as to support students within individual disciplines or within interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary groups (Irish Research Council, 2015, p. 3).

This point is especially relevant to the VAP PhD. I am not suggesting that constraints be put on the artist researchers, such that they could not produce innovative responses within the research context. Each supervisory team would need to work with the student to develop a bespoke timeframe, consisting of phases where activities are compartmentalised. In this way there is acknowledgment of the difficulty faced by artists when switching between visual and textual modes of thinking. Having to disaggregate the activities of writing and art-making into discrete phases would give all involved a clearer picture of the unfolding study and might help militate against the phenomenon of the double-doctorate. Students in this case way could oscillate between an aporetic stance when making, and an analytic stance when writing.

A further issue faced by candidates was that there was a lack of detail in terms of the constituent elements and the purpose of the VAP PhD text. I would argue that the
notion that the purpose of the text is to ‘contextualise the practice’ is too vague. This surely is the purpose of a literature review. A PhD text should go beyond contextualisation. A product of European League of Institutes of the Arts, ‘The ‘Florence Principles’ on the Doctorate in the Arts (ELIA, 2017), states that the text is for documenting the process. As part of their process and their professional practice, artists routinely document their work and the evolution of their work. I would argue that ‘documenting the process’ does not go far enough to engage with the methodological issues.

13.4.5. Examination & Assessment

Point eight of the National for Doctoral Education Principles (Irish Research Council, 2015, p. 3) states that doctoral education should be supported by established structures with ‘Clearly defined examination processes, involving external examiners, assessment criteria and declared outcomes.’ It was the experience of many of those involved in this study that endpoints could be badly handled. Bureaucratic processes were in place, but these were often modelled on the traditional PhD format, focused on getting texts to examiners and orchestrating vívá voce examinations. There was a lack of detail in terms of the exposition and examination of visual work. If students chose to exhibit periodically during the course of the PhD, then this work might not be viewed by the external examiner. Some students were focused on putting on a ‘show’ for the arrival of the external examiner. This show, was not only staged for the purpose of examination, but was often intended to be opened to the public. Inordinate pressure was put on students who were required to stage an exhibition and perform a vívá voce within the same
timeframe. Executed in this way the students did not have an opportunity to critically reflect on the reception of the artistic work by the audience.

VAP PhDs are complex entities. For some the artistic work is realised, exhibited or performed continuously throughout the process, for others it culminates in an end of degree exhibition. I have observed that whereas generally there are institutional timelines in place for submission of texts, little attention is paid to planning the points of contact between the visual research outputs and the examiners. I would argue that one visit by the external examiner is insufficient for the examination of the VAP PhD. Regardless of financial costs, I would recommend that external examiners should be required to make a minimum of two visits when undertaking the examination of a VAP PhD. If the external examiner were to visit twice during the process, this would allow the examiners access to ongoing practice and would afford students more options in terms of the presentation of the work. During the interim visit examiners could clarify parameters for the examination of the VAP PhD under consideration, teasing out issues to do with the extent to which professional values and research values are at play.

External examiners would need to be recruited at much earlier stages in the process than is traditional for PhDs in other fields. When recruiting external examiners, supervisory teams need to think carefully about where the student is directing their contribution. In some cases, examiner expertise may be predicated on the fact that the examiner holds a PhD in Visual Arts Practice or that they are an academic from another field who has experience with Visual Arts Practice examination. However, these prerequisites may not be sufficient in all cases, particularly when artist
academics are making knowledge claims which extend into subject areas where the 
examiners may not be experts. The notion that a professional artist who does not 
hold a PhD, is well positioned to assess a PhD, to me is extremely problematic.

13.4.6. Visual Arts Pedagogies
A significant theme which emerged from the research was the diminution of the role 
of art pedagogies within the delivery of the PhD. Most of the students sought 
pedagogical encounters which were typical of their art school education. But these 
were not always easy to find. Studio ‘crits’ were often replaced with ten-minute 
PowerPoint presentations and meetings in offices with supervisors.

The examination processes experienced by participants tended to be characterised as 
fitting uncomfortably within frameworks designed for traditional models. Yet some 
of the vestiges of art education tradition remained in the form of group assessment 
practices. These were generally felt to be extremely valuable. I would urge that 
those administering VAP PhDs and those involved in the delivery of art and design 
education, need to be attentive to the incremental eroding of art school cultures, 
ensuring that the rich repository of knowledge pertaining to art pedagogies is not 
allowed to fall out of the system under the weight of top-down technocratic missives.

13.5. Epilogue
Mottram (2009b, p.24) likens artistic research to a gawky teenager ‘prone in places 
to making some daft claims.’ While this may be so, there are at the same time 
startling moments of sophistication which typify an unevenly evolving culture. As I 
conclude this study, I am mindful of the fact that I have at stages drifted into a 
somewhat reductive account of the VAP PhD, invoking the old dichotomies; theory 
versus practice; text versus image; artist versus academic. However artistic research
is, when at its best, a delicate intermingling of *theoria* (θεωρία) as a kind of intellectual seeing; *poiesis* (ποίησις) the act of bringing into existence and *praxis* (πρᾶξις) and embodied enactment of theory. Sometimes the process gives rise to a human flourishing or *eupraxia* (Εὐπραξία), herself born from obedience and safety; at other times what emerges can be a kind of dyspraxia or split-brain syndrome. The VAP PhD candidate enters the breech without an artillery of accepted methodological approaches or identifiable canons of rigour upon which they can draw. It is, in short, an extremely risky business. Ultimately, I wish to conclude by acknowledging the bravery and the intellectual sophistication of the participants’ work, for they are grappling with highly complex and philosophically rich research entities. The paths they have taken are far more intrepid than the one I have chosen. They are the risk-takers. I have played it safe. I conclude then with Adrian’s passionate validation of the VAP PhD.

…the value has been absolutely enormous for me, it is almost like where do I start, it transformed my practice because of the depth of research I engaged with and also I learned skills which I really didn’t have before, I suppose skills of synthesis, analysis and being able to take a body of research and transform it, creatively because my project was very much creative and practice-based so I was thinking of everything in terms of my art practice so even the theoretical I took and really looked, and really used that to benefit my own creative practice as an artist it just it enriched me it gave my practice depth, it gave me confidence huge confidence, it’s, in my own work and in my own ideas and just because of going through that rigorous and because I’ve learned so much through it and it’s given me authority in my own field, a real, a nature.. a real, not a kind of, an authority that I feel is really, I really own it it’s really embodied in me now, and that’s a real pleasure that’s so pleasurable because I sort of I know where I stand, and I know my own mind with my own, in art practice, in my own practice specifically but in the broad field of art practice I feel like I have a place [Adrian].
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Appendices

Appendix A Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

As part of my PhD research at the University of Limerick, I am carrying out a study into Visual Arts Practice PhDs in Ireland particularly focusing on current practices of evaluation. The aims of the research are to evaluate current PhD provision in order to determine practices in relation to evaluation and modes of delivery; and to investigate the experiences of stakeholders including students, graduates, supervisors and examiners in relation to the evaluation process looking particularly at how performance-based criteria are applied and how research outputs are judged.

Your experience in this area would be of great value to this research. If you agree to participate, you will be invited to partake in an interview at a place and time of your convenience. The interview will take approximately 60mins. The interview will be largely unstructured and will take the form of a ‘conversation with a purpose.’ You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time as to the nature of the study or the methods being used. The interview will be documented through audio-visual recording. No material from your interview will be used without your consent. The transcripts of the interview will be sent to you for review and feedback. You have a right to not answer any questions or to withdraw at any stage.

Privacy will be ensured through confidentiality. The interview will be taped and recorded however your name will not appear on the recording. Though direct quotes from you may be used in the thesis, your name and other identifying information will be kept confidential.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact the student conducting the research Susan Halvey or her supervisor the principal investigator Dr Helen Phelan.

Thank you for taking to time to read this. I would be grateful if you would consider participating in the study.
Yours sincerely,

Susan Halvey (Principal Investigator)
Lecturer in Critical & Contextual Studies
Limerick School of Art & Design
Limerick Institute of Technology
Clare Street Campus
086 8989266
Susan.Halvey@ul.ie

Dr Helen Phelan (Research Supervisor)
Program Director PhDs in Arts Practice
The Irish World Academy of Music & Dance
University of Limerick
Helen.phelan@ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (20015_06_01_AHSS). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact:

Chairperson Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
AHSS Faculty Office
University of Limerick
Tel: +353 61 202286
Email: FAHSSEthics@ul.ie
Appendix B Participant Consent Form

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSENT FORM

I, the undersigned, declare that I am willing to take part in research for the project entitled ‘The Visual Arts Practice PhD in Ireland: An investigation into experiences and conceptions of academic standard and evaluation’.

- I declare that I have been fully briefed on the nature of this study and my role in it and have been given the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate.
- The nature of my participation has been explained to me and I have full knowledge of how the information collected will be used.
- I am also aware that my participation in this study will be recorded (video/audio) and I agree to this. However, should I feel uncomfortable at any time I can request that the recording equipment be switched off. I am entitled to copies of all recordings made and am fully informed as to what will happen to these recordings once the study is completed.
- I fully understand that there is no obligation on me to participate in this study.
- I fully understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without having to explain or give a reason.
- I am also entitled to full confidentiality in terms of my participation and personal details.

____________________________________         __________________________
Signature of participant                                               Date
This research study has received Ethics approval from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (20015_06_01_AHSS).
Appendix C Interview Schedule Graduates and Candidates

**Interview Protocol - Graduates or Current Students**

Project: The Visual Arts Practice PhD in Ireland: An investigation into experiences and conceptions of academic standard and evaluation

Time of Interview:

Date:  
Place:  
Interviewer:  
Interviewee:  
Position of Interviewee:  
Description of Project:  

**Introductory Script**

Researcher: ‘Firstly I would like to thank you for being so generous with your time and agreeing to meet with me to discuss your experiences in relation to the arts practice PhD. I would just like to confirm that you are happy that you have received and read the information sheet and consent sheet and are happy to go ahead with the interview with the understanding that you can withdraw at any point.  

**Contextualization Questions:**

Researcher: ‘I wonder if we could begin by getting a sense of the kind of practice you have, the kinds of things which motivated your decision to undertake this kind of study

1. Can you tell me about how you came to undertake a practice-based PhD?
2. What motivated you to undertake this work? What did you wish to achieve through engagement in this process?
3. Were you actively making work before you decided to study at this level. Could you describe where you were in terms of your professional life/practice?
4. Could you tell me about some of the logistical elements of your PhD, for example what is the word count for the textual element, does/did the course involve a research training/how are the research outputs presented for examination?
5. Describe to me your PhD work. What are you investigating/What did you investigate?
6. What motivated you to undertake this particular investigation?
**Apprehending the Phenomenon (Modes of Appearing in Natural Attitude)**

**Preconceptions**

Researcher: ‘*I would like now to get a sense of where you were prior to undertaking PhD study. Perhaps you could talk to me about some of the ideas you had regarding the nature of Arts practice PhDs before you entered into the process’*

1. Could you talk about the expectations you had prior to undertaking the process, for example before you commenced the course what were your views on the intellectual standard which would be required of you?
2. What other ideas about the process did you have before you started?
3. How has your understanding of the process changed since the beginning?

**Theory/Practice/Text**

Researcher: ‘*Would you mind if we talked now a little about the relationship between theory, practice and text’*

1. Describe to me how you view the relationship between the text and the practice.
2. Undertaking this study did you feel equipped to deal with the textual element of the study?
3. Have you encountered challenges in relation to the written exegeses, could you tell me about theses?
4. Could you talk a little about theory and practice? What theoretical material is prominent in your investigation? Could you describe how you happened upon this particular approach?
5. How has an encounter with theory impacted on the practice? Was theory a consideration in your work prior to the PhD process?

**Evaluation**

Researcher: ‘*I would like to ask you now about your experiences of how the research is evaluated both in relation to supervisions and in relation to the terminal evaluation’*

1. Could you describe your experiences of the evaluation process for example could you tell me about your understanding of how the research outputs of the PhD would be/were evaluated?
2. The ‘studio crit’ is one of the main pedagogical tools implemented at undergraduate and master’s Fine Art level, could you talk a little about your experiences of the PhD level ‘studio crits’ or supervisions. Was there a difference in approach at PhD level?
3. Have you reviewed the QQI descriptors for level 10 Arts Practice PhDs or similar descriptors pertaining to your course of study? What are your thoughts on and experiences of these types of performance-based descriptors. Do you feel they adequately capture artistic research outputs?
4. Have you had negative experiences related to the evaluation of your work perhaps in either a supervision of examination context? Could you talk a little about these?
5. For you, when you are thinking about your work being evaluated, where do you feel the focus of the evaluation process lies.
6. What are your views of the vivâ voce.

Value

1. What in your view is the value of a practice-based PhD? What in your view have been the main benefits of undertaking an Arts Practice PhD?
2. Do you think there have been negative implications of having gone through this experience?
3. Where do you see the research outputs having impact?
4. Could you talk about your ideas regarding the status of artistic research?
5. How has your attitude to your artistic work changed by having been framed within an academic structure?

Clarifying the Phenomenon (Meaning Through Imaginative Variation)

1. Would you have considered doing a conventional PhD, how would that have been different?
2. Could you envisage completing this PhD without the written exegesis?
3. If you were to undertake the process again what would you like to be different about it?
4. How would you envisage that some of the issues you raised could be addressed going forward?
5. Are there any points which we raised earlier in the interview which you would like to revisit?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add which you feel would add to our discussion?
7. Have you got any other questions for me regarding the project I am undertaking?

Closing Script - Oral debriefing

Researcher: 'I would like to thank you again for taking the trouble and time to meet with me and discuss these issues. Your contribution is most gratefully appreciated and will contribute significantly to my work. The next step for me is to transfer all material to a secure location which only I will have access to. In the coming weeks I will send you a written account of the main ideas which emerged in our discussion. This is so that you can validate the accuracy of my account. It is important to me that I accurately reflect your ideas and experiences so if you feel I have misinterpreted your opinions please help me to clarify these points. Similarly, on reflection you may wish to add to or change your account of certain issues to more accurately represent your experiences. I would like to reiterate that if at any time you wish to withdraw from this study you may do so no questions asked. If you decide to do this I will immediately destroy all evidence of our meeting and will not use
any of the information gathered in the process. Finally, if you are unhappy with any element of the way I have engaged with you, you may make an independent formal complaint. I have included contact information to this effect on the information sheet. I wish to thank you again for being so generous with your time and for sharing your insights with me.

Again, I would like to re-iterate that if you have any concerns, complaints or questions please feel free to contact Dr Helen Phelan whose contact details appear on the information sheet which you received at the start of the interview. If you have concerns about this project and wish to contact an independent person who is not involved in the study you may contact the Chairman of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee the Faculty Office, University of Limerick - the contact details also appear on the documentation provided.’
Appendix D Interview Schedule: Supervisors and Examiners

Interview Protocol - Supervisors and Examiners

Project: The Visual Arts Practice PhD in Ireland: An investigation into experiences and conceptions of academic standard and evaluation

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee;

Position of Interviewee:

Description of Project:

Introductory Script

Primary Investigator: ‘Firstly I would like to thank you for being so generous with your time and agreeing to meet with me to discuss your experiences in relation to the arts practice PhD. I would just like to confirm that you are happy that you have received and read the information sheet and consent sheet and are happy to go ahead with the interview with the understanding that you can withdraw at any point.

Contextualization Questions:

Researcher: ‘I would like to start off by getting a feel for your own background and to get a sense of the kind of experience you have of dealing with PhD supervision and examination.’

1. In your own professional career have you been predominantly engaged with education in the liberal arts or the humanities?
2. Could you tell me a little about your own PhD work what kind of a PhD was it?
3. Have you supervised or examined many PhDs?
4. Were these practice-based or conventional PhDs?

Apprehending the Phenomenon (Modes of Appearing in Natural Attitude)

Researcher: ‘Dealing more specifically now with the nature of Arts Practice PhDs…

Evaluation

1. What are your thoughts on issues to do with intellectual standard in relation to Arts Practice PhDs?'
2. Could you describe the kinds of judgements you make when you are evaluating PhD work?
3. Could you describe for me the process you go through when evaluating practice-based research, for example, describe for me how you approach the evaluation of the different elements of the research, the text, the work itself, the viva.
4. Could you talk to me about aesthetic judgement and the role it plays in the process of evaluation?
5. What other forms of judgment are brought to bear on the work in order to ensure that it is of an adequate standard?
6. Could you describe for me how performance-based criteria are used in the evaluation process?
7. Thinking back on the work you have been involved with can you recall incidences where the process of evaluation did not run smoothly and there were challenges. Could you tell me about these?
8. Could you identify and describe for me any models of good practice which you encountered during the course of your career?

Theory/Practice/Text

1. Could you tell me about your ideas regarding the role of the text in Arts Practice PhDs?
2. Could you describe to me your thoughts about the intellectual standard of Arts Practice textual outputs?
3. In your experience what are the unique challenges which face Arts Practice PhD candidates?
4. What is your experience of the way in which theory is used in Arts Practice PhD work.

Value

1. What are your thoughts on the value of Arts Practice PhDs as opposed to conventional models?
2. Where do you see the research outputs having impact?
3. Could you talk about your ideas regarding the status of artistic research?

Clarifying the Phenomenon (Meaning Through Imaginative Variation)

1. Have you got ideas about any of the issues you raised might be addressed differently going forward?
2. In your opinion how might the intellectual standard of Arts Practice PhDs be ensured or improved?
3. Are there any points which we raised earlier in the interview which you would like to revisit?
4. Is there anything else you would like to add which you feel would add to our discussion?
5. Have you got any other questions for me regarding the project I am undertaking?

**Closing Script**

Researcher: 'I would like to thank you again for taking the trouble and time to meet with me and discuss these issues. Your contribution is most gratefully appreciated and will contribute significantly to my work. The next step for me is to transfer all material to a secure location which only I will have access to. In the coming weeks I will send you a written account of the main ideas which emerged in our discussion. This is so that you can validate the accuracy of my account. It is important to me that I accurately reflect your ideas and experiences so if you feel I have misinterpreted your opinions please help me to clarify these points. Similarly, on reflection you may wish to add to or change your account of certain issues to more accurately represent your experiences. I would like to reiterate that if at any time you wish to withdraw from this study you may do so, no questions asked. If you decide to do this I will immediately destroy all evidence of our meeting and will not use any of the information gathered in the process. Finally, if you are unhappy with any element of the way I have engaged with you, you may make an independent formal complaint. I have included contact information to this effect on the information sheet. I wish to thank you again for being so generous with your time and for sharing your insights with me.

Again, I would like to re-iterate that if you have any concerns, complaints or questions please feel free to contact Dr Helen Phelan whose contact details appear on the information sheet which you received at the start of the interview. If you have concerns about this project and wish to contact an independent person who is not involved in the study you may contact the Chairman of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee the Faculty Office, University of Limerick- the contact details also appear on the documentation provided.'
Appendix E Email Confirming Granting of Ethical Approval

From: Orla.McDonnell
Sent: Thursday, June 18, 2015 9:28 AM
To: Susan.Halvey
Cc: FAHSSEthics; Helen.Phelan
Subject: 2015_06_01_AHSS The Visual Arts Practice PhD in Ireland: An investigation into experiences and conceptions of academic standard and evaluation

Susan, this email is to confirm that your PhD (Education, EHS) ethics application (reference: 2015_06_01_AHSS) has been approved. Please note that for the purposes of the FAHSS REC, you rather than your supervisor are the principal investigator.

Best of luck with the study

Dr. Orla McDonnell

Chair, Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Email: orla.mcdonnell@ul.ie

FAHSSEthics@ul.ie
Appendix F Grouped Emerging Themes: Frances - Student

P10-Frances Candidate – Initial consolidation of themes

Features of the Art PhD/ Conceptualisations around research
Framing
Beauty of the PhD - indulging in research.
PhD as an aesthetic experience.
Conventional model more liberating - freedom and constraint.
Research as integral to practice - small r (Frayling)
The benefit of being part of a larger research centre.
Multidisciplinary cohort is perceived to be beneficial.
Perceived need for teams with a variety of experience due to complex nature of artistic research.
Shifting perception - doing research or doing a project.

Art and Design Pedagogies
Inadequacy of ten-minute presentation - conventional means of administering PhD
How to represent complexity.
Progress reviews as partial representations.
Looking for feedback around the aesthetic process.
Pre-conception about the process providing critique
Looking for art and design pedagogies. (Needs to be researched more thoroughly.)
 Desire for fluidity in the process to draft in experts as the process needs them - art pedagogies -
drawing on incidental visiting artists.
Yearning for art and design pedagogies - looking for a ‘crit’
There needs to be more talk about the work.
Assumption that the art will take care of itself, but candidates yearn for feedback on the work.
A missing element students, meeting and sharing their work. – Expectations not being met.
Drawing them in as they are needed.
Not getting the input, they were expecting.

Values of the Community
Artist academics/teachers interested in issues around content
Not getting aesthetic feedback
Expectations around type of engagement not met.
Conflict of values research and artistic.
Taking ownership of the research- ownership of the work - my work
Variation around expectations.
Trying to capture complexity- the activity of the artist.
Authorship and agency

Idiom of Distress & Expressions of Frustrations
Trying to do too much.
Not getting aesthetic feedback
The PhD process as a mine-field full of hidden dangers-
Confusion around the process and expectations.
Field actions and strategy- language of warfare
Attempting the impossible.
The ragged edge of disaster.
Something quite frightening in the language-
The process as prone to disaster of danger.
Not able to find anyone who understands. Feeling at a loss and isolated.
No-where to bring the concerns.

Identity
Conceptualisation of those inside and out the discipline.
Resistance to alien frameworks.
Artist identity recast as researcher- struggling with.
Being a good writer does not help one to be a good artist- conceptualisation of two identities.
Coming to terms with a new set of values.
Letting go of the aesthetic values- an eye to the audience.
Relinquishing artistic values for research values.
Tension between values.
Identity- artist researcher.
Teaching artists with PhDs- labelling of the professional identity.
Shifting values.

**Role of Theory**
Using contextual material/theory to justify practice.
Theory as a means of justification- academic alibi.
Theory perceived as an interference (later practice is described as an interruption)
Action research model- theory tested through practice to inform theory and then practice.
Practice as a means of testing theory.
Practice as illustrating theory- danger of.
Theory and practice productive in both directions.
Travel in both directions.
Curiosity about theory and ideas
Drawing on theory and philosophy to explain concepts.

**Looking for Complexity- Keeping it complex-Living with Uncertainty**
Holding everything at once- keeping it complex.
Interference and interruption.
Cognitive mapping of the complexity.
The problem of representing complexity.
In search of complexity- keeping it complex.
Trying to find balance too much complexity ends up being superficial.
Tolerance of uncertainty and the unknown.
Feeling that the process is not sufficiently worked out.
Drawing on a range of complex particularities.
The relationship between the text and the work.
Inability to map the complexity of any notion.
Resistance to coming up with simple solutions trying to keep complexity in the system.

**Motivations for Doing PhD**
Motivation for undertaking Practice PhD- to reorient practice. To improve practice.
Infrequency of meetings.
Not getting aesthetic feedback.

**Prior Post Graduate Experience & Research Training**
Model of MFA (Theory and practice)
A lot of experience with writing at post-graduate level.
MFA provided a good grounding in academic skills.
Research training minimal not perceived to be of much value.
Research training was piecemeal. - Research training surface.
Group uneven in terms of ability with academic skills.

**Methodology**
Little discussion around methodology.
Course not engaged in a deep way with issues of methodology.
Aesthetic side of the work not engaged with.
Engaging with social sciences.
Following establish methodologies- and inventing as they go.
Theorizing the inventions- making the work water-tight- safe- protecting.
Being challenged on conceptualisation of methodology.
Ethical Procedures
Difficulty with procedures - ethics - difficulty fitting practice into framework.
Crisis around ethics process.
Being conscientious about ethics results in perception that the student is making a fuss.
Procedures are obstacles to be circumvented.

Understanding of the Practice
The practice as methodology - we don’t have to do anything more with it.
Using artistic process to immerse oneself in the research.
Multi-perspectival approach generated through the practice.
Bricolage - open-ended process.
Looking to re-focus practice - a sense of losing focus - practice moving in the wrong direction.
Putting practice back together.
Trying to protect the practice during the process.
Artistic research is sensitive.
What makes it art in the first place?

Protecting the Practice
Putting practice back together.
Trying to protect the practice during the process.
Artistic research is sensitive.
Work is fragile - easily affected by processes like ethics procedures.
Making the work fit the process.
Flattening out of the work.
Emasculating the work through the process.
Neutralises the work.
Artistic work at the mercy of the economy model
Art under threat from the system.
There is a problem.

Conceptions of Duality in the Process
Stop the writing and putting it away to do the practice.
The activities of writing and making do not happen contemporaneously – one must stop for
Tensions critically sound and aesthetically interesting versus knowledge producing.

Writing
Using writing to think one’s way through complexity.
Thinking happening in writing.
Difficulty in balancing the two modes of working.
Yearning for an exchange to happen between the work and the writing.
Writing for curatorial purposes.
Stop the writing and putting it away to do the practice.
The activities of writing and making do not happen contemporaneously – one must stop for the other
to happen.
Being a good writer does not help one to be a good artist - conceptualisation of two identities.
The need for the text to be coherent and seamless.

Path-finding
An array of processes used to sensitise the artist to the context. (Grounded theory literature review)
Looking to feel confident - the PhD as a way of finding confidence in the practice.
Motivations intrinsic - wanting to create a space for the excavation of critical reflection on own
practice with a view to making it better.
Articulating and systematising methodology.
Taking ownership of and responsibility for the research, more particularly the methodology.

Language of the Land - Exploration
Drilling down
Using language to navigate the journey.

**The Context of Higher Education**
Knowledge economy putting pressure. Commodification. Activity of extract commodifiable outputs out of practice.

**Aesthetic Practice as a Form of Resistance**
Aesthetic practices as a form of resistance. Resistance as a criteria of success in the work. If it doesn’t function as a form of resistance it fails. Aesthetic interrupts coherence it speaks to the unspeakable. The artistic work tempers the illusory coherence of the work. Artistic work disrupts coherence.

**Quality and Standards, Evaluation**
Institutions don’t want to fail candidates. Perceives a drop in standards- watering down of standards. Each side of the work can be poor but together it passes. Evaluations of work holistically allows it to pass. Everyone ends up with a PhD massification of PhD study.

**The Audience**
Eye to the external art audience
Confusion about the role of the exhibition and audience. Ideas around the exhibition- no expectation of a big exhibition around the end. Process is punctuated by expositionary events. Confusion around how the work would be understood. Endpoint exhibition not part of the conversation.

**Examination Process**
How can this be given a form- using the field to generate aesthetic rather than epistemic results. Making work as part of the PhD that is not seen by examiners. Examiner sees documentation of work but does not experience work. Lack of clarity around when the examiners access the work. Quality of documentation. The extern might be present throughout. Lack of certainty around the process. Conflict of values and practices. Not thinking about the logistics of examination Anxiety about being able to remember information at the viva. Adeptness at judgment individual attribute.

**Supervision**
Only wanted one particular supervisor but got another form social sciences. Supervisors with PhD supervision experience one practice one social sciences. Perceives the non-artistic supervisor is responding in a limited way to the visual work. Feelings of disappointment with how the process is unfolding. He doesn’t really get it. Supervisors external to the field not getting the aesthetic concerns- seeing it through their own lens. Doubts about suitability of supervision team. Doubts about adeptness of supervisors’ judgement. Feeling that supervisor didn’t quite understand artistic priorities and processes. Supervisors not socialised to the art context. Giving commentary which isn’t quite right in relations to practice. Supervisions focus on text.- Feel more like CCS tutorials than studio crits. People present and get feedback- the importance of feedback for the artist researcher. Run by a theoretical trio- perception of division of labour between theory and practice.
Knowledge
Aesthetics/art and knowledge.
What is the relationship.
Drawing on nurse theorists-finding allies is strange places.
Conceptualisations around the nature of knowledge.
Different kinds of knowledges.
Aesthetic knowledge happens before conception.

Irreducibility of Artwork
Irreducible artistic work.
Aesthetics an unspeakability. An unspeakable kind of knowing.
All the stuff that can’t be measured can’t be articulated.
Appendix G Grouped Emerging Themes: Daniel - Supervisor & Examiner

P2supervisor & Examiner Daniel- Initial Consolidation of themes

Assessment and Evaluation
Student engaged in a varied practice across discipline requiring a varied team of supervisors and examiners.
Distributed responsibility for examination-arts inspired pedagogies.
Positive aspects of joint examination, more experienced externs mentoring less experienced
Organic unfolding of the assessment
Collaborative examination which involved a process of questioning.
Lack of experience of examining conventional PhDs (This is the second supervisor who had a humanities background but because of their embeddedness in schools of art IOTs had no experience of supervising or examining conventional PhDs).
Experienced supervisors mentoring those with less experience- feature of the more provincial setting.
Strategies for over-coming lack of experience- no knowing.
Doubts as a feature of the process- collaboration as a means of over-coming doubts.
Examination process which involves examiners engaged together in the act of interpretation of the work. Process entails a large amount of discussion.
The line between art world and academic world.
Discussion as a means of discovering the innovation in the work.
Deficit in experience for those not coming from practitioner background.
Difficulty of non-practitioners to arrive at decisions.
Indicates a lack of training. Not the kind of thing that you can do a course in.
Examiner as critic.
Limitation in terms of being able to assess the technical elements of the work.
The difficulty of knowing.
Evaluating work from an aesthetic point of view but the work could be technically derivative.
Expression of doubt
Forthright about inability to evaluate certain elements of the work.
Examiners engaged in questioning the necessity of text.
There seems to be a step in the evaluation process when examiners try to imagine the work in the absence of the text in order to make some judgements.
Evaluation process moves across three elements, the text, the work and the relationship between the two.
Instances when the PhDness was obvious in the absence of the text
Overlapping disciplines adding to the problem of assessing work.
Lack of confidence in the breadth of their expertise.
Recommendations- understanding of what constitute recommendations for the written element are clearly understood- no such understanding exists for the work- yet at under-graduate there is a clearer understanding that display, and presentation of the work is part of the process.
Feeling of being a ‘party pooper’ if there is a claim that the work is poor. Emperor’s New Clothes.
A difficult process.
Looking for clarity by separating the two elements, finds evaluation instruments which look at the research holistically as ambiguous and difficult to negotiate.
A lot of art is taste driven.
Either you like it, or you don’t.
Feelings of reluctance to make pronouncements on the quality of the work.
The difficulty of arguing with pronouncements of value made about art.
Employment of examiners who are only incidentally expert in the area
How can someone be assessed on the basis of a ten-minute presentation.
The viva resembled the traditional viva, a rigorous examination of the text.
Difficulty of viewing the work when presented on usb.
Text
Exegeses as exploration of student’s development.
Purpose of text to demonstrate innovation in the work.
Surety when assessing text.
Text as an adjunct to the work.
The text gives the work life.
Text needed in order to make the thinking clear.
Content of text - demonstration of understanding of the context which informs the work.
Doubts now expressed about the claims made in the text - If he didn’t have the practical work he could make the claims he did - earlier there was doubt expressed regarding whether or not the work could stand up to scrutiny. (Flip flopping)
Reciprocal relationship between the text and the work, but each taken on its own raises doubts in the mind of the examiner.
They need each other.
Text as a support - validation of the status of PhD - examiners look to the text as a way of ensuring the PhDness of the submission.
Using the text to navigate through the work - Viva
The text as tracking the chronological development of the work.
Two elements imbalance of quality. What can be done when the text is excellent, and the standard of the work is dubious.
The function of the text as a documenting of a critical journey.
Using the text as a map.
The text helps to elevate bad work.
Questioning the ability of the work to stand without the text (A measure of the success of the work)
Writing used as a tool for thinking but not writing that will end up in the PhD text.
Small written requirement for MFA.
Uncomfortable with a model which would not involve a text.
Situating the project historically with the use of a literature review.
The unique attributes of practice people with PhDs who are not uncomfortable with text.

Practice
Situating a strain of practice in a field of knowledge.
Working with a hypothesis.
The complexity of the practice makes it difficult to locate specific fields of knowledge.
Reraming existing practice as a PhD.
Stripping back of the diversity of practice in order to refine it so that it would fit the PhD process.
Practice as promiscuous.
The process of reflexivity/reflection as part of the process.
Finding a set of problems in the practice.
Using practice to test out ideas within a community.
Testing out ideas in a collaborative context.
Practice being heavily grounded in theory
PhD work is artistically boring.
Boring work could imply derivative work which does not contribute anything
Lack of clarity with artistic outcomes.
Types of work which lend themselves to the process.
Working through ideas through making.
Side-lining of aesthetic work when the process becomes about a knowledge formation process.
Is art a form of knowledge?
Positioning the work.
Proving a point with the work.
Artist scholar as cartographer.

Contribution to Knowledge
Questions about art as a contribution to knowledge.
The idea of art as contribution of knowledge to a field as problematic.
Student not interested in publishing work.
Two halves that were necessary for the whole.
Doubt about the work if presented without a text in a gallery.
Pressure to say it’s a PhD.
Doubts do not always figure there are times when the participant is sure.
Contribution to knowledge as the starting point but acknowledgement of the impact of this approach on aesthetic component.
Proving a point with the work.
The development of a hypothesis

**Doubts and Uncertainty**
Doubt about the work if presented without a text in a gallery.
Doubts do not always figure there are times when the participant is sure.
Questions about art as a contribution to knowledge.
Profession of lack of expertise- doubt.
on one supervisor.
Doubts about the practical elements.
What happens if text is excellent and work is poor. Lack of clarity here.
Difficulties with suggesting changes to the practical work
Happy not to be the full supervisor- doubts about ability to supervise the practical elements of a PhD.
Doubts about standards of work encountered in the past.
These people might not have expertise.
Suspicion of artist academics and the research they produce.
Strategies for over-coming lack of experience- no knowing.
Doubts as a feature of the process- collaboration as a means of over-coming doubts.
Deficit in experience for those not coming from practitioner background.
Difficulty of non-practitioners to arrive at decisions.
Indicates a lack of training. Not the kind of thing that you can do a course in.
Feelings of reluctance to make pronouncements on the quality of the work.
The difficulty of arguing with pronouncements of value made about art.
Doubts as a feature of the process- collaboration as a means of over-coming doubts.
Doubts now expressed about the claims made in the text- If he didn’t have the practical work he could make the claims he did- earlier there was doubt expressed regarding whether or not the work could stand up to scrutiny. (Flip flopping)
Reciprocal relationship between the text and the work, but each taken on its own raises doubts in the mind of the examiner.
They need each other.

**Unique Features of the Artistic PhD**
Viewing the PhD as consisting on components. (Language).
Disaggregation of research process into two halves.
A big jump

**Dispositions and Roles of the Supervisor**
Empathetic to practice though from a conventional PhD.
Relinquishing of responsibility for supervision of the text by practitioner supervisors.
Humanities supervisor consigned to supervising the text and not the work.
Division of supervisory labour.
Problem with trying to reign in interests.
Art as promiscuous insinuating itself into a myriad of fields- difficulties in identifying a field where the supervisor or examiner would be an expert.
Stripping back has been good for the student.
Role of the supervisor as one who strips back preconceptions.
Contributions made by the supervision team.
Need to make student aware of the criteria for academic writing.
Student engaged in a varied practice across discipline requiring a varied team of supervisors and examiners.
Process, Challenge and Frustrations in the Process
Conservatism in the system due to lack of understanding.
Reigns of management held by conservatives- lack of representation in leadership by more radical artistic academics.
Rigid structures for presentation of progress, non-imaginative media for presenting work.
Frustration with management for their lack of understanding.
Imperative to allow students to present work according to their own criteria.
Practices which would not be considered best practice in terms of presenting the work.
No exhibition- unfulfilled.
Presenting documentation of smaller exhibitions.
Unsatisfactory experience of viewing the work due to format.
Poetic use of language when talking about the work.
Pressure due to financial concerns to get somebody local.
These people might not have expertise.
Logistics of exhibiting.
Straight-jacketed by the limited conceptions of others specifically bureaucrats in regard to research.
Lack of understanding on the part of bureaucrats.
Process as problematic.
Logistics of having externs visit financial constraints.

Exhibition/ Dissemination
Prior to PhD the main way of being examined is exhibition.
Contested methods of dissemination.
Prescribed formats.
Experiences of the exhibition model is problematic.
The exhibition and the solo exhibition (understanding the higher award exhibition as a solo show)

The Student
More discussion needed about who would suit a particular student.
Calls for a forum where the students trajectory through the process could be mapped out.
Need for student to not be overly dependent

Language of science.
Language of science used when talking about the research

Striking feature of this interview is the fact that the student is never referred to as a researcher.
## Appendix H Distribution of Initial Emergent Codes throughout Transcripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Broad Descriptive Emergent Codes- overview across all participants</th>
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<td><strong>The Role of the Art in the Research</strong></td>
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<td>Using the Language of Science to talk about validity Language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **it? What is it for?**

- **Exhibitio ns and the Audience**

- **Desirable Attributes of the Student**

- **Role of the Exhibition in the Process**

- **Documentatio n (process of)**

- **Failures as part of the artistic process/ Coping with uncertainty and failure/ Clarity**

- **Language of Navigation**

- **The Viva**

- **The Viva**

- **Openness and diversity**

- **Methodolog y**

- **Text and Practice**

- **Art Practice**

- **Liberty outside the constraints of Academia**

- **Using the Language of Science to talk about artistic research**

- **The Practice**

- **The Role of Theory**

- **The Exhibition as a crisis point**

- **Fitting into the Structure**

- **Artist as anarchist**

- **Time for Reflection**

- **Research and the Language of research**

- **Ethical Procedures**

- **Knowledge**

- **Protecting the Work from the PhD**

- **Examine rs**

- **No reference to student as a researcher.**

- **Supervision and Support**

- **Dealing with Uncertainty and adversity- Aporia**

- **Concerns about status and value of qualification**

- **Innovating with the Model/ Looking to innovate and break rules.**

- **PhD as Preparation for Academic Teaching**

- **Looking for Clarity**

- **The role of the audience in the process**

- **Understanding of the role of Practice**

- **Assessment**

- **Conceptualisation of the PhD**

- **Using the Language of Science to talk about validity Language**

- **The Viva**

- **The Audience/Exhibition**

- **Finding new outlets for practice in academia**

- **Value and quality**

- **Knowledge Production**

- **Theory and Practice**

- **Protecting the Practice**

- **Place of the Audience**

- **Research training**
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<td>The Aftermath/ Recommendations</td>
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<td>Particularities of the Irish context</td>
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Appendix I Grouping of Initial Themes into Over-arching Categories

Over-arching category: standards, assessment, examination

Over-arching category: epistemology, knowledge, theory and practice
Over-arching category: Art & Design higher education and institutional context

Over-arching category: The Arts Practice PhD- preconceptions, contextual understanding, post hoc evaluation
Over-arching categories: perceived roles, responsibilities and attributes of the people involved- supervisor, candidate and examiner

Over-arching category: identity, values of the community
Over-arching category: uncertainty, complexity and *Aporia*
## Appendix J Early Rendition of Super-ordinate and Ordinate Themes

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Visual Arts Practice PhD</th>
<th>Preconceptions &amp; Expectations</th>
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<td>Ways of Being - the shape of the research</td>
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<td>Protecting the Practice</td>
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<td>Aporia as a necessary condition for creating art</td>
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<td>Fine Art Pedagogoes</td>
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<td>A process with a schism - Text as a threat</td>
<td>Prior Knowledge &amp; Experience</td>
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<td>Documentaiton and reflection</td>
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<td>Identity and Resistance- I'm not an academic</td>
<td>Artistic Identity- augmenting identity</td>
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<td>Artist as anarchist</td>
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<td>Finding voice</td>
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<td>Finding new audiences</td>
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<td>Assessment, Uncertainty and Doubt</td>
<td>It's all about the text</td>
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<td>The exhibition as a problem</td>
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<td>Criteria moving between the artistic to academic</td>
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<td>Doubt and uncertainty</td>
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Appendix K National Framework for Doctoral Education Principles


1. The core doctoral education is deep engagement with a question, problems or hypothesis at the frontier of knowledge, and advancement of this frontier under the guidance of expert and committed supervision. To be awarded a doctoral degree, the candidate must have made an original contribution to knowledge.

2. Successful completion and examination of the research thesis, comprising work of publishable quality, is the basis for the award of doctoral degree. The thesis can be presented in a variety of formats.

3. Doctoral education increases significantly students’ depth and breadth of knowledge of their discipline and develops their expertise in research methodology which is applicable to both a specific project and a wider context. It provides a high-quality research experience, training (including a formalised integrated programme of personal and professional development) and output consistent with international norms of best practice.

4. Doctoral education is conducted in a learning community where sufficient critical mass of internationally recognised research activity exists to allow students to gain access to a training programme of appropriate breadth and to interact with peers engaged in their field, nationally and internationally.

5. Recognising that each doctorate is unique, doctoral education is also flexible so as to support students within individual disciplines or within interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary groups.

6. Doctoral education is conducted in a research environment with a high degree of academic quality and infrastructure and where it is consistent with the institutional strategies. Academic quality includes quality supervision and training for supervisors.

7. The admission of doctoral students takes into account preparedness of the applicant, the availability of qualified, competent and accessible supervision and the resources necessary to conduct the research.

8. Doctoral education is supported by established structures with:
   - Supervision by a principle supervisor(s), normally with a supporting panel approved by the institutions;
   - Formal monitoring of progress to completion against published criteria, supported by institutional arrangements;
   - Clearly defined examination processes, involving external examiners, assessment criteria and declared outcomes.

9. A robust quality assurance system underpins all doctoral provision.