

**Jeri Kroll**

## **Creative Practice and/as/is/or Research: An Overview**

### Abstract:

Creative Writing Research is in some ways as problematic as a genetically-engineered animal. Everyone exclaims in wonder at the birth and celebrates the advance, but then finds it hard to categorise, control and nurture. Questions about how we know and how we communicate what we know are central to debates about understanding documentation in the creative arts. Terms such as creative writing research, practice-led research, practice-based research and practice research are often used interchangeably. Visual and performing artists face similar challenges developing a vocabulary (“practice as research in performance” and “performative research”) as do innovative educators (“action research”). Terms and definitions alter depending on the academic, cultural and institutional context. After looking at the recent history of creative arts research as a methodology, beginning with the Strand Report in 1998, this paper discusses the terms currently exploited in an effort to find a consistent nomenclature for creative writing as a discipline. It posits a form of practice-led research focused on three goals that relate to conventional formulations of research without misrepresenting how writers perform.

### Biographical note:

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### Keywords:

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## Introduction

When creative writing's popularity in higher education increased in the 1990s, proponents and opponents initially discussed it as a craft discipline and a cash cow. More recently the debate has matured, with the focus on research outcomes. In the United States, Tim Mayers' study of 'craft criticism' (Mayers 2005: xiv) offers one pathway, providing an outlet for teachers who feel as if "the American system" is a "creative writing gulag, a closed and self-referential world where creative writing teachers and students write and publish for each other" (Koval 2005, quoting *Harper's Magazine* article). Craft criticism situates practice historically as well as sociologically and pedagogically, connecting its practitioners with a tradition beyond the classroom. It is a fruitful path, but one that only moves into a creative writing research culture by way of English Studies, as it focuses on the "scholarly analysis of creative production" (Mayers 2005:12) while looking to explore links with Composition as well. Like traditional research that is 'about' the arts rather than 'of' them, it primarily explores, synthesises or argues with "existing claims to knowledge," rather than being a research framework that "iterates, instantiates and generates knowledge" (Richards 2006: 4).

Creative writing's many faces in Australia has been affected by the range of courses offered and the types of degrees in which it finds its home at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This expansion has occurred in a context in which creativity in general is the flavour of the decade.

About 75 percent of Australian universities have an expressed commitment to creative learning, according to a 2007 analysis of higher education teaching and learning plans and graduate attributes. (Erica McWilliam, the *Australian*, 31 Oct 2007)

Within this global push for creativity to enhance economic and social development, the concept of creative research should be able to flourish. Yet it is still fighting for recognition, especially among conventional scholars and bureaucrats.

Australian writer-academics who want to contribute knowledge to the field beyond the pedagogical have been pushing research boundaries in the past fifteen years, crossing disciplinary barriers, exploiting theory from congenial camps such as feminist and postcolonial studies, philosophy and linguistics as well as in fields that investigate the nature of creativity, such as neuroscience and cognitive psychology. In this way they have positioned their art historically and culturally, but given the Australian government's past research assessment formulae, only this type of conventional writing has counted as research. Creative work has – except for two short periods, the last occurring in 2001 (see old DETYA guidelines) – been excluded.<sup>1</sup>

Within this embattled environment, the concept of some form of practice-based or practice-led research seemed the answer. It is worth noting that the Strand Report (1998), assessing the state of research in the arts, did not consider the case of creative writing. At the time, the discipline had only recently established a peak body (the AAWP founded 1996) to analyse common problems and to formulate a national agenda. In addition, since our discipline has been primarily print-based, most

proponents of visual and performing arts believed that it did not have problems fitting into a standard research paradigm. This belief holds true up to a point if the researcher purely studies a text as text; that is, if he or she writes ‘about’ the work or about works that set it in context rather than creates something that is integrated within it, for example, or lets the practice itself steer the research. In addition, the ‘text as text’ explanation does not deal with questions such as the artwork’s format and length, does not cover multidisciplinary or hybrid cases and does not address how much exegetical commentary suffices to ‘make up’ a doctorate.

Since its inception the Australian Association of Writing Programs has advocated conceptual flexibility in understanding research in the discipline, especially through its international journal, *TEXT*. Jen Webb and Jordan Williams, the editors of the refereed proceedings from the November 2007 12<sup>th</sup> annual conference, titled their editorial “Writing (is, and is not) research,” stating that

... in most cases ... research practice is intimately connected with the writers’ creative practice. Again and again, contributors to these proceedings show the intertwining of writing and thought, the material practice of making a work and the abstract practice of research, analysis, critique and synthesis. (Webb and Williams 2007 [http://www.creative.canberra.edu.au/aawp/conference\\_proceedings.html](http://www.creative.canberra.edu.au/aawp/conference_proceedings.html))

Papers exemplify the research being conducted in creative writing in Australia, exploring the types of knowledge that emerge: “Refinement of understandings of the identity of the writer. Contribution to the issue of ethics in practice and thought. Exemplification of the work of writing in the social world” (Webb and Williams). Papers also address the nature of truth in fiction and nonfiction and the possibilities thrown up by new technologies. These have augmented the more traditional approaches suggested by literary criticism and aesthetics, yet the essays remain more ‘about’ the work than ‘of it,’ or inhering in it.

Despite this abundance of conceptual energy, thus, artist-academics still do not agree about what research grounded in the work and the writer’s process means. Note the phrasing of the first question at the AAWP plenary research panel (Nov 2007): “What is ‘creative and practice-led research’ in writing?” Definitions morph depending on who asks the question, how they phrase it and in what context. The terms practice-led research, practice-based research, practice-as-research and practice research are used differently by stakeholders such as critics, teachers, writers and administrators. One of the newer terms to be floated in Australia for the creative arts is “performative research” (Haseman 2006: 98). Nevertheless, there seems to be general agreement that

practice ... can be viewed as a mode of investigation, and a mode informed by individual and cultural circumstance. Also, as an act of acquisition and exchange, it is informed by critical understanding of a specific kind related to creative achievement, but not always to notions of ‘the market’” (Harper and Kroll 2008: 6).

We can see how this mix of approaches has given rise to the periodic revision of higher degree guidelines, including or deleting terms such as ‘publishable’ or ‘high quality’ depending on a university’s culture and rephrasing the relationship between exegesis and creative product.

### **Creative Arts Research: Defining the Genus and Species**

We must begin our discussion of creative arts research by returning to the definition at the top of the pyramid, since the Australian Government bases its audit on the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) research concept:

Research and experimental development comprises creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including the knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications. (Strand 1998: 32)

For *some* artists, that definition can be shaped to fit *some* if not all of their projects; ‘the some if not all’ can be a sticking point, however. To be accepted as research, the exploration must “lead to publicly verifiable outcomes which are open to peer appraisal” (Strand 1998: 32). That proviso also can cause difficulty, depending on the art form.

Let us consider now some of the species of creative arts research in order to understand how our discipline has been responding to the challenge of that über-definition. Here it is worth returning to Malcolm Gilles’ outline of three approaches (see Kroll, “Creative Writing as Research and the Dilemma of Accreditation,” 2002, for a full discussion”) because many of the variations on creative research since play with his initial categorisations. In the first instance he analyses “research . . . exclusively about the art form” (Strand 1998: 40). This is the safest approach because it most clearly approximates a standard paradigm in ‘objective inquiry,’ utilising familiar strategies that are “normally critical, analytical or historical in nature” (Strand: 40). This is the type of “conservative” (Strand: 40) scholarship that can be published in refereed journals or academic books. In the case of creative writing, it might range from researchers studying literary ancestors or uncovering unpublished or neglected manuscripts to evaluating the economic and cultural influences on the contemporary publishing environment.

The second model, which Gilles has dubbed a “pragmatic” (Strand: 40) type of “research *in* the art form” (40), has become increasingly popular because it seeks to foreground the creative work and/or process within the context of the overall research project. One of its strategies (not all) is self-reflection, and at least one of the objects of study is the researcher’s own creative product that is the outcome of the research process. If this is the case, it must be an “indispensable” (40) component of the whole and, therefore, qualify as research, too. We can see how this early formulation has mutated into many universities’ statements about the relationship between the exegesis and creative work, which ask for some kind of integration or connection to be clearly identified. A critical accompaniment to the creative work, then, is necessary. Most students and supervisors find that the creative work must be affected by this intellectual process taking place either before, during, or after creative effort.

The third option that Gilles discusses as far as I know is not acceptable for writing Ph Ds in Australia, although some universities in the UK appear to allow submission of creative work alone. This “liberal” (Strand: 40) variation acknowledges the value of

creativity and finds that process and product alone are sufficient under the “work *in* the art form” rubric. At the time Gilles was writing artists were already debating whether they needed to differentiate research from professional practice. Agreeing that something is equivalent in value does not have to mean agreeing that they are the same activity. The research equivalence concept does not sit easily with the belief that research occurs within an intellectual and artistic community and that its results should be disseminated to advance a field as a whole.

Research and practice are not the same. Posing questions such as “what if?” (Strand: 51), “how” or “why” are critical. Methodology and outcomes will pivot on the questions artists use to structure a project. Assessors will ask if those questions are significant and if the answers are well articulated, producing results (critical and creative) that attain a high standard. What creative arts Ph Ds require is not that all students follow the same pathway, but that whatever pathway they have chosen can be understood by others competent to judge.

### **Working Models Working in the Arts and Education**

Since the Strand Report, artists, critics and administrators in the creative arts have been manipulating these research concepts. In the UK a project entitled PARIP – Practice as Research in Performance – was established at the University of Bristol in 2000 and ran through 2005 (funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board). Its website ([www.bris.ac.uk/parip.faq.htm](http://www.bris.ac.uk/parip.faq.htm)) acknowledges the shifting nature of the territory under discussion:

Practice as research (PAR) and practice-based research (PBR) – and ‘research through practice’, ‘research by practice’, ‘performance as research’ – are contested terms that resist close definition. Practice as research and practice-based research are frequently used interchangeably to suggest a relationship of research between theory and practice.

Broadly speaking, practice as research is an attempt to see and understand performance media practices and processes as arenas in which knowledges might be opened. The institutional acceptance of practice as research in the higher education sector acknowledges fundamental epistemological issues that can only be addressed in and through theatre, dance, film, TV and video practices.

Questions about how we know and how we communicate what we know are central to debates about understanding advances in the arts and, in particular, documenting research results. Elizabeth Grierson differentiates the arts (excluding literature) as functionally, imaginatively and intellectually distinct, yet the knowledge they produce is consistently “delegitimated as ‘knowledge’ (2005: 3): “Essentially the arts work through practice – theirs is a practice-based or materially-based knowledge formation, which engages audiences in a way that is interactive and potentially community building” (2005: 2).

James Cook University has been a leader, along with Wollongong, in tackling this problem of research legitimacy on a specific front – that of creative arts higher degrees – rather than fighting a battle on the amorphous field of research. It was one

of the first to alter its university's definition of the doctorate to reflect this inclusiveness: "Research' means the process leading to the production of original scholarly *or creative work* to be presented for the purpose of obtaining the degree (section 1.6, Doctor of Philosophy – degree Requirements, JCM)" (Davis 2002: 18). One of the drives behind legitimising the creative arts doctorate was to allow staff to earn higher degrees and, as such, James Cook immediately had to confront the practice versus research conflict. Studio practice, in particular, supported by notebooks, journals, etc. would never be sufficient, although they could provide raw "data . . . then used by the researcher to exemplify, interrogate, or amplify practice" (Davis: 20).

Davis explains that proponents of the Ph D program knew, therefore, that they had to clarify conceptions of research; find "an appropriate role for theory in modelling the processes of research;" and mentor artists in communicating "inchoate practice to an audience" (Davis:18). Some of the markers of research projects were identifying "methodological frameworks" (Davis:18), research questions, public dissemination of the project and "a feedback loop" (18) that incorporated self-reflection and analysis. Davis' insistence on skills that creative arts researchers must learn reflects what creative writing students acquire, too: "The capacity to survey, synthesize and evaluate the literature . . ." (Davis:19). This process necessarily becomes "an essential prelude to a clear identification of the niche which the research is designed to fill" (Davis 19)." I should add that candidates also need to argue that the niche they fill is significant.

The development of the concept of "action research" in education offers instructive parallels, too, as does the struggle for its acceptance as a legitimate methodology. What is action research and who should define it? As David Tripp maintains, when championing the cause of teachers trying to "research" their profession, the people who do the defining in our society are the powerful – with a little help from their friends, the social scientists" (Tripp 2003: 2). In its broadest sense,

action research is inquiry or research in the context of focused efforts to improve the quality of an organization and its performance. It typically is designed and conducted by practitioners who analyze the data to improve their own practice. . . .

Action research . . . gives educators new opportunities to reflect on and assess their teaching; to explore and test new ideas, methods, and materials; to assess how effective the new approaches were; to share feedback with fellow team members (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/drugfree/sa3act.htm>).

In Australia, Bob Dick analyses this approach by asserting that it has "two main outcomes – action and research. It therefore requires two sets of procedures" (Dick 1999: 1). As we have already discussed, research implies questions and a methodology developed to investigate those questions. Practice or action for artists can comprise the fundamental technical, artistic and intellectual skills needed to work in the art form and also those developed to pursue the particular research project. The

two procedures necessarily interpenetrate and support one another and, as Dick has found (and creative writing students report, too), frequently “the action and the research can enhance one another” (Dick: 3). The “third component which manages the content” (Dick: 3) approximates what happens when arts researchers employ a theory or theories from their own or other disciplines in order to “make sense of the data” (Dick: 3). An appropriate framework is one of the ways in which writers communicate their findings to audiences.

Another central point in Dick’s analysis has particular relevance for arts practitioners: his assertion that “action research is also explicitly cyclic in application. Carr and Kemmis (1986) for example conceive each action research cycle as comprising planning, action, observation and reflection” (Dick: 2). Ideally, the canny researcher learns to focus so that “the copious amounts of data that some qualitative methods require” (Dick: 4) will not be needed to achieve satisfactory answers or interpretations to conclude a research cycle (4). Scope and focus are of course familiar difficulties confronting creative writing researchers; they understand the intertwined, circular research paradigm. Dick applies the term “dialectic” (Dick: 6) to this non-standard research process. Over the years, supervising students and engaging in creative projects myself, I have noted that the interplay of imagination and logic, of left brain and right brain, of the processes of creation, revision and argumentation can move a work forward in a series of overlapping loops.

Dick’s analysis of this cycle, concluding that initial “answers can be used to refine both questions and methodology” (Dick: 2-3), reflects, thus, on what happens when writers in a university context focus at varying times on creative product and exegesis or, indeed, when any artist begins with a research question. Tripp’s contribution to the debate takes a slightly different tack but is relevant, too: “Action Research is an action inquiry sequence that tends towards more radically innovative action based on and monitored by recognised research procedures; action research usually begins with a formal reconnaissance, and there are specific data production and analysis phases, which produce a more general and less wholly actor-centred [read artist-centred] view of action in [the] field of practice” (Tripp 2003: 12). Translating this process to creative writing, we see a cycle of asking questions, generating methodology, collecting data, creating, revising, reflecting and modifying practice, which then moves to another level to clarify significance through systematic (or theoretical) evaluation. For Tripp, parts of this process can occur during ordinary practice cycles, but some, such as choosing a framework, being objective and reporting results, do not necessarily occur as they do in research cycles.

After comparing new and old research cultures, Yolande Wadsworth posits what she calls “participatory action research” (1998). Her discussion reflects on non-standard creative writing projects which are not linear as conventional research is, “commencing with a hypothesis and proceeding to a conclusion which may then be published in a journal” (Wadsworth 1998: 5). In fact, the interplay of forces ensures that “change does not happen ‘at the end’ – it happens throughout” (Wadsworth 1998:8). Her analysis of “new paradigm science” (5) offers useful comparisons because it stipulates that “new ideas are not accepted until tested in action”(5).

Writers who produce creative work alongside of or incorporated into the exegesis do just that – test hypotheses.

Although the ultimate purposes of action research (“to improve the quality of an organization ... explore and test new ideas ... to assess how effective the new approaches were,” etc., North Central Regional Educational Laboratory website) differ from those art forms that define themselves by singular practice, its methods and difficulties do bear on the arts research-practice continuum in general, on pedagogical issues and on collaborative or multidisciplinary arts projects in particular.

I want to conclude this discussion of action research by considering its status as “a fringe methodology” (Dick 1999: 4). Some critics dismiss it as a practice “purely concerned with professional development” (Tripp 2003: 1). Others misuse it in the same way as artists who claim all practice involves research because it involves thought or reflection (Tripp 2003: 2). As in the arts, a proliferation of terms has occurred. Tripp cites confusion between “action research, action learning and reflective practice” (Tripp: 3). Some critics complain about action research’s “lack of rigour” (Tripp: 4) and its inadequately explained research outcomes. If research is meant to contribute to a stock of knowledge, then how one reports findings is paramount. Creative arts proponents have been fighting for acceptance of appropriate research strategies since the 1980s, so they need to explain the claims they make for the creative work as a site of knowledge or the innovative practices they have developed. The nature of that “explanation” is, of course, where conflict often arises.

More recently, Professor Brad Haseman, Director of Research in the Creative Industries at Queensland University of Technology, has developed a performative paradigm that circumvents a text-based only component to the idea of creative arts research. This concept of performative research has the potential to clarify those engaged in interdisciplinary, multi-arts projects and builds on models of qualitative research. Without dispensing with notions of credibility, accountability and knowledge transfer (Haseman 2006, AAWP 11<sup>th</sup> annual conference keynote), Haseman argues that practice or performative research distinguishes itself from a now traditional qualitative approach in the outcomes produced. How does an artist-researcher express results (Haseman 2006: 99; also see Green 2006)?

Research is embodied in practice and can be expressed, too, in forms appropriate to that practice, he argues, in particular “present[ing] as symbolic forms other than words of discursive text” (Haseman 2006: 102). Does this translate into minimal documentation then? Does any documentation at all need to exist designed to “transfer” or “translate” artistic knowledge for an audience or examiner? If the knowledge generated by a creative work is expressed purely or primarily in a similar artistic mode, how is communication of knowledge ensured? At one Australian university, for example, a doctoral student framed their exegesis as a long poem with footnotes to accompany the primary work – a long poem.

Alison Richards clarifies the problem when she says that “enquiry conducted solely within a praxical modality may well be accessible and ‘real’ only to those who have gained ‘insider/insighter’ status through induction into the specific matrix of percepts and concepts that has grown up around it as cultural practice” (Richards 2006: 7). One

presumes peer reviewers or higher degree examiners form part of this “insider/insighter” community, those who “need to experience” (Haseman 2006: 101) research results – view the exhibition or performance– in order to evaluate. If they cannot experience it first hand, is a video or DVD of the work sufficient, given that the context of a performance can contribute much to the overall aesthetic experience? (Also see Berridge 2008 about her Ph D comprising two artists’ books.) More than a decade ago Richards confronted the complexity of performing arts research directly by issuing this warning: “The researcher must be aware that the translations of research are also transformations of the lived experiences they and others exchange in the course of performance making and presentation” (1995: 1).

The requirement for elite or specialised knowledge explains why some scholars without artistic backgrounds do not feel competent to examine creative arts theses. They feel unsure of the artistic content and, while experts perhaps in the scholarly area, they will be familiar only with the scope of a traditional doctorate. Limited numbers of writers or artists with Ph Ds or academic training exist; they provide a crucial link between camps, functioning as a “bridge over troubled waters” (Duncker 2007 Keynote), to adapt Patricia’s Duncker’s description of herself as both novelist and academic.

Does Haseman’s concept of performative research and symbolic forms of knowledge transfer solve the problem of claiming that a creative work in itself embodies research as in earlier versions of the debate, or is it simply theorising it in a more sophisticated way? As artists and academics we still face that thorny question of verification, authentication, validation. Who testifies to the work’s quality as well as to its research outcomes? Those questions still remain to be untangled, particularly in creative writing’s experimental, hybrid or multidisciplinary projects.

### **Creative work, research and practice: To hyphen or not to hyphen**

The hyphen is an embattled symbol these days. Sometimes it yokes what appear to be opposing entities; sometimes it suggests amicable cooperation. Two sides of the same coin, Yin and Yang, applied or pure art. In debates about creative writing and research, it has become a punctuation whore, working for whoever desires it at the time. As I’ve said previously, who asks questions about what our discipline does and why can dictate what terms we pull out of our box of creative tricks and whether we drop in a hyphen to tart them up.

To draw together the discussion, let us explore where the AAWP seems to be in its thinking about research and practice. Professor Jen Webb and a research assistant have posted some “Brief notes on Practice-led Research” under the auspices of the AAWP and the Carrick-funded Australian Postgraduate Writers Network (<http://www.writingnetwork.edu.au/content/brief-notes-practice-led-research-O> 1-3). Note that the site chooses to use the term “practice-led,” hyphen securely in place. The idea of “leading” a project gives researchers a sense of purpose; the hyphen emphasises practice’s leadership role. It also dovetails with the thinking of other art forms. Australian Paul Carter, who has documented complex collaborative projects, maintains that “creative knowledge cannot be abstracted from the loom that produced

it” (Carter 2004:1). This position foregrounds what artists do first and foremost: create. The actual ‘practice’ of the particular art form either initiates or becomes part of the investigation, feeding back into reflections on the process as well as on the results, generating new questions.

The website discusses “research *for* practice, research *into* practice and research *through* practice (writingnetwork). Research for practice might consist of preliminary work in order to ground a project and “draws on conventional methodologies” (writingnetwork). The second subdivision focuses on skills and techniques called upon to practice the art itself as well as upon the discipline’s approach to its methodology. The third can mix creative and critical skills and theories in order to produce that “stock of knowledge” that researchers are meant to increase.

I would like to offer another way of conceptualising practice-led research by focusing on how it achieves three goals that relate to conventional formulations of research without misrepresenting how writers perform.

**1. The research proceeds by and for the practice (goal).**

By experimenting and, thus, developing new or advancing accepted techniques and methods, the writer uses a “stock of knowledge to devise new applications” (OECD definition). “Thus practice here means an approach to a subject based on knowledge acquired through the act of creating” (Harper and Kroll 2008: 4). This goal advances the practice of the art form.

**2. The research proceeds through practice in order to produce a creative product (goal).**

By researching and practising, the writer produces innovative work of a high order that advances the art form (the genre, the content, etc).

**3. The research proceeds before/during/after practice, aided by ideas generated by practice, in order to produce new knowledge (goal).**

The writer researches and practises in order “to increase the stock of knowledge, including the knowledge of man [sic], culture and society” (OECD definition). This knowledge can be embodied in the creative work and the exegesis individually, in the combination of the creative and critical as a whole, or in an integration of the two.

Number 3 can encompass a range of methodologies. Some research questions might be generated through the practice loop, but others might be generated by conventional scholarship or primary source reading. The central goal remains the production of a creative and critically aware entity that can be evaluated. The development of a theoretical framework suitable for this individual project fulfils the aim of any research, if, as Eagleton asserts, “theory means a reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding assumptions” (2003:2).

A final word on some of the other terms in evidence in the debate. *Practice-based research* embodies the concept of a base, but it lacks that sense of direction that the term “led” contributes. If creative research needs to

originate with an idea and questions, then researchers must devise a schema to direct the argument/work. *Practice as research* is less precise and can be confused with the position still held by some that all practice is research, or can be research without some form of verification. Paul Dawson asserts that “the accepted terminology is now ‘research through practice’, where the creative work is the ‘outcome’ of practice-led research” (Dawson 2008: 8). I still find articles where alternate terms are used, and the writingnetwork website actually uses “research through practice” as a subdivision. It is to our discipline’s advantage to settle on terms that allow us to make a consistent case for creative research.

Accordingly, I suggest that practice-led research focused on the three goals enumerated above is a workable formulation. It necessitates the posing of research questions and an appropriate context for posing questions (see Haseman 2006: 105). It stipulates that new knowledge must be embodied in a creative-critical package (product, exegesis or critical documentation, practice) that can be evaluated by those who are suitably qualified (inside and outside the academy) and, ultimately, disseminated to the culture.

## Conclusion

The camps that flourish under one or another linguistic banner push towards creating a flexible paradigm for the creative arts as a whole. Beneath the aegis of this contested vocabulary creative work takes place that can accomplish some or all of the outcomes Gardner proposes for “creative contributions”:

They include (a) solving a well-defined problem, (b) devising an encompassing theory, (c) creating a “frozen work,” (d) performing a ritualized work, and (e) rendering a “high-stakes” performance.” (Gardner in Sternberg 2003: 104)

It is important to recognise that within the same project writers might be functioning in multiple ways: practising as artists; researching their creative process; researching their art form itself; and engaging in practice-led research (in order to discover new knowledge). Do they always know which they are doing when? Is it necessary to delineate each role or function and, if so, why?

The way in which we understand research in creative writing in academia is not simply conditioned by individuals’ preferences for one role or methodology rather than another, but by four factors that inhere in the contexts in which they function.

**1. the nature of the discipline itself** – This factor concerns the study of writing as a practice, of the processes of creation, of the nature of texts, of literary artefacts, of writing in a cultural context, of publishing, etc.

In fact, “a triumverate of practice, research and pedagogy defines Creative Writing as a subject in universities around the world” (Harper and Kroll 1998: 1). That subject includes the kinds of primary research that might be done by any novelist or poet and opens out into studies of creativity that might encompass psychology and neuroscience.

## **2. writers' relationships with the practice and theory of other art forms –**

Much of the theory about non-textual art forms (such as dance, music, painting, for example) focuses on their “materiality” and symbolic vocabulary. This offers writers innovative perspectives on how they “perform.”

## **3. local institutional culture and requirements –**

This factor encompasses school, faculty and university-wide cultures that determine workloads, teaching methods, research supervision and funding.

## **4. government definitions of research –**

These definitions affect quality assessment and funding, in particular in Australia, New Zealand and the UK. In Australia, certainly, as Alison Richards comments, the imperative to please those with financial power has led the creative arts in some instances to “‘bootstrap’ elements of enquiry embedded in current activity into a recognisable relation with established research paradigms” (Richards 2006: 3), sacrificing the individuality of particular artistic terrains and consequently the opportunity of developing strategies appropriate for each.

The four factors enumerated above have contributed to the development of the concept of a practice-research nexus that aims to validate the creative arts and the ‘results’ or knowledge it produces within the university. In particular, research higher degree knowledge must be embodied in the creative thesis package. The principle has held, therefore, that something else has to accompany the creative work; unless, of course, the writer incorporates that “something else” into the creative body itself, interpenetrating it. Whatever is produced, however, has to include “more” than simply a work that might have been produced outside the academy. The “more” must somehow make a case for it, thereby connecting it with an audience beyond the readerly one; or beyond the audience that experiences a transient performance or viewing. Whatever argues for the project’s significance has to be permanent enough so that other practitioners and scholars can benefit. Ideally, the artistic work will reach out to a broader audience, too, whose only concern is with aesthetic experience.

In the most exciting developments in Australia innovative forms are being designed; in some cases hybrids crossing media boundaries. This is a far cry from the well-mannered scholarly essay that still has its place and where the battle to have creative writing accepted as a focus of higher degrees began. Students as well as academics have looked to the sciences and social sciences for new paradigms. As Leila Green explains, “from examples as diverse as Physics (the observer effect: Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle) and Management (the Hawthorne Effect [Mayo, 1933; Landsberger, 1955]), it has been argued that the act of observation impacts upon the entity observed” (Green 2006: 178). This explains an aspect of the higher degree experience that I have already described. As soon as one writes in an academic context, and reflects upon the writing itself as well as on the research one is necessarily doing to enhance that writing, the creative work must be affected.

To summarise, the concepts of creative research and, in particular, the practice-research nexus, have developed impressively in the past ten years in Australia as well as in the UK and, to a lesser degree, in the US, pointing to a rich future for creative

writing studies. In the twenty-first century, writers in higher education know that they create in a multidisciplinary culture where they can accept the challenge of new theories and new technologies. As an academic discipline we are responsible for how we achieve these outcomes. We need to address not only our peers and students but colleagues in other areas and institutional and governmental authorities. In order to design more effective higher degree programs, to supervise successfully and to pursue our own (properly-funded) research, we can only benefit from a consistent nomenclature describing what we do.

## Endnotes

1. A new Research Quality Framework (RQF) scheduled for introduction in Australian higher education in 2008 is now in abeyance after the election of the Rudd Labour Government in late 2007. No one is yet sure what will happen and, in particular, how the creative arts will be assessed.

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