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Becoming-Supervisor Becoming-Supervised

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Abstract

PhD supervisors and PhD students from UAL were invited to take part in an experimental research study entitled *Becoming-Supervisor Becoming-Supervised*. This study was co-authored by two PhD supervisors at UAL, and an alumni UAL PhD student. The purpose of this research study was to gather their thoughts about interactions with PhD supervision. A questionnaire was sent out and below is the anonymous, randomised, unedited and verbatim assemblage of the answers given by 15 respondents. We hope it gives a snapshot of some of the reasons for being involved in doctoral research and supervision in an art and design context.

Keywords

becoming; supervisor; supervisee; supervising; supervised; PhD

Becoming-Introductions?

Let us approach the introductions to this research from the point of view of the multiple, of multiplicities. We are three (or even 18) 'unauthors' of this online survey/questionnaire produced text; and 'since each of us was several' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p.3), we, as multiplicities, have considered: what can the *process* of the PhD *do*?

This process we speak of is present in the very title of this research study, *Becoming-Supervisor Becoming-Supervised*; indicating the research approaches to PhD supervision and PhD studies initially through the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's ontological concept of becoming 'as the affirmation of the positivity of difference, meant as a multiple and constant process of transformation. Both teleological order and fixed identities are relinquished in favour of a flux of multiple becoming' (Braidotti, 1993, p.44).

The *form* of the study itself introduces yet another becoming; a becoming-text. Our experimental way of writing a text as a 'single assemblage' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.34), about what it is to be a becoming-supervisor and to be becoming-supervised also reflects Deleuze's idea of becoming. Concurrently, a becoming-text enacts textography as an assemblage of texts to question 'how academic texts are socially constructed' (Swales, 1998, p.110) through relationships between text and context.

When curating the texts mined from the survey - curation here is understood as both action archive and network of practice - we set out to assemble all the answers to the questions posed as unaltered and unadulterated. We have therefore kept any typos, as we thought too many 'sics' would spoil the flow and begin to erase the text's authenticity. This may make this text harder to read and therefore, responding to the constructive feedback from the peer-reviewers we have tried to make it easier to comprehend and keep the poetic way we wanted to be constructed; poetics of the assemblage. This

is considered as another becoming and keeps the construction of this text fluid and dynamic, so we thank the reviewers for their productive input as additional 'unauthors'. We hope these changes both challenge and help its reading as a site of becoming 'to examine text-community associations' (ibid. p.112).

The 15 survey respondents were anonymised so they could say what they wanted, and this is easy to do with the familiarity of using Microsoft Forms. Figure 1 shows the opening page of the survey which states,

You are being invited to participate in an experimental research study titled Becoming-Supervisor Becoming-Supervised. This study is being carried out by researchers from the University of the Arts London. The purpose of this research study is to gather your thoughts about interactions with PhD Supervision and for them, with your permission, to be used in an article for Spark: UAL's Creative Teaching and Learning Journal. It will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time by contacting us at: [redacted]. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to. We believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, as with any online related activity, the risk of a breach is always possible. To the best of our ability your participation in this study will remain confidential, and only anonymised data will be published, unless you wish otherwise. Questions should be answered generally and not name other students or supervisors. We will minimise any risks by securing all data on UAL's internal institutional One Drive that will be password protected. Once the article has accepted for publication all data will be destroyed. Please answer the question below to indicate you agree to participate in this questionnaire.

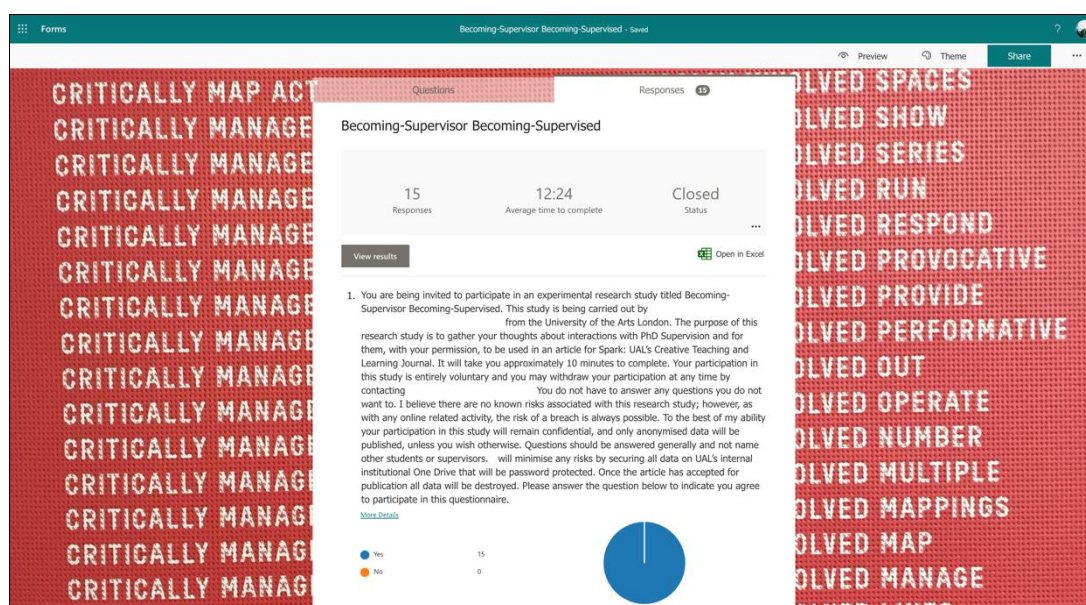


Figure 1: Opening page of the survey questionnaire constructed on Microsoft Forms. Image: Ingham (2021).

Q. How did you become a PhD supervisor? (12 answers)

By invitation. Invitation by a colleague who is DoS. Straight after finishing my PhD I took on two PhD students – I'd been an academic for a long time and publishing before finishing the PhD so this felt like a natural progression – One of the teams has my supervisor as director of studies, and the other is supervising someone I met a few years ago and coached through the application process – A natural progression from other teaching – I was a subject expert, so I was hired, I was asked, quite simply – I suppose I expected it as a part of being an academic.

I was asked to supervise a student who I knew as a friend of a friend & who was researching in an area in which I was working – I was asked by a colleague at Wimbledon School of Art if I wanted to join them on a supervisory team as one of my expertise was in the subject of the student who had just been accepted – When I started at UAL this was my first permanent job after years of fixed term contracts. This meant I was able to supervise PhDs. Previously I had only examined PhDs.

Q. How did you become a PhD student? (13 answers)

Accidentally – my MA coursework in one unit was exceptional and so I was offered to make it into a PhD – I had written some papers and a colleague suggested I apply.

I knew I wanted to do a PhD and had the topic ready almost straight after my masters – I wish I had started it then, but I sat on it for a few years, thinking the time had to be right – Then I realised the time would never be right and I should just go ahead and start it part time along with working as an academic. – My then line manager was crucial in helping me take the plunge, and mentoring me through the process, and then supervising my PhD – After a lot of research in my own subject matter, I looked to see who was available that I could form a working relationship with – I did a PhD by Publication, because it would help me in my career - and make me more credible as a supervisor – I had an urge; an urge that emerged out of my MA studies and an urge that consumed the majority of my thoughts at a particular point in time – An urge to crack an abstract yet problematic image of thought. This urge led to continuous acts of becoming-PhD student – I searched for and discovered an individual whose work aligned with my proposal, and I applied to do a PhD at that institution with the hope that this individual would agree to become my supervisor – I was absolutely immersed in philosophy & wanted to keep it going – The educational environment was also a massively intensive one, with so much amazing work going on, it was a great place to be researching – It followed on from my Master's studies – I was able to get British Academy funding too, which was crucial as I wouldn't have been able to afford it otherwise – Through becoming engaged with research during my MA in Academic Practice – I was in a pub in Shoreditch, after an opening at the White Cube, in 2000, and a friend of mine said they had just got into Goldsmiths to do a Visual Arts PhD, and having started one a few years previously which I was unable to complete I thought I needed to try again. – The deadline was 2 weeks away, but I put a proposal together as was accepted 3 weeks after the jolt in the pub – I looked around at design-centric universities with a track record in supervising PhDs – I chose one supervisor from design and one from sociology – I was offered another PhD opportunity in a related field but decided to go the option that made it easier for me to do a 'good enough' PhD, not an amazing one, as I was being pragmatic about my need for a secure job in academia.

Q. Why did you become a PhD supervisor? (12 answers)

A PhD is more collaborative than we are led to believe – I want to support students through the process as it was not easy for me – I really enjoy both the process of research and also mentoring and teaching, so PhD supervision is a great fit – It is a satisfying form of teaching – I like seeing 'big ideas' develop, and forming an intellectual relationship with the student and other supervisors – There is another reason, not so romantic: as a PhD supervisor, you get 'bought out' of BA teaching – This, as we know, has become more and more pressurised over time (last week's nationwide strikes weren't for no reason) – So PhD teaching was a way out: if I had stayed at BA level, I would be off with stress (like a lot of my colleagues) – Not that PhD teaching is 'easy'.. I was asked, quite simply – I suppose I expected it as a part of being an academic – To help to contribute to helping students gain a better understanding of their research – Don't make assumptions – Keep asking questions – I'm an advocate for collective knowledge production – I became a supervisor to be part of an academic community in which reading and writing about my field (design) happens in lots of different ways – By supervising I get to shape the next generation and continue to learn myself, through their studies. – For me, it's a dialogue in which both of us are engaged in learning but I have slightly more experience in the disciplining associated with, and required to participate in, academic research.

Q. Why did you become a PhD student? (13 answers)

I wanted to develop my project – To expand my knowledge and make a greater contribution – I wanted to move more into research and I had a burning question I wanted to explore that was PhD-sized – After teaching for many years, I needed to extend my own knowledge – It was necessary for career reasons – Choosing to become a PhD student was an entirely indulgent choice – I wanted to really understand my practice and find a different route to expression of ideas; a route that circumvents dominant forms of thought and expression, and a route that would lead to a cracking of a particular image of thought – I didn't know this when I applied; all I knew was that I had discovered that the image was false – To give me some deadlines and a focus, no matter how blurry, to walk towards – Through chance, I suppose – Chance and necessity – Because I want to make something more of it all – To rethink my art practice and to find something more exciting and challenging to do other than the FE job I had been in for 7 years – Doing a PhD was an essential step for becoming a serious academic researcher who aims to contribute to the building of knowledge in an academic community – I did it later in life when years of being a clever practitioner and lecturer were no longer adequate for my goals to contribute to knowledge – My PhD was 'good enough' rather than good as a necessary step to secure me an academic job where research was an important part of the role.

Q. What advice would you give a becoming PhD supervisor? (13 answers)

Wait - this is a long journey for you and the student – I'm just at the start of this, so I'm here to take advice rather than give it at this stage – It's amazing and difficult – You have to 'perform competence' and do a lot of 'student whispering' – The job will take you double to three times the amount of time the university thinks it does – There is no money in it, and you will have to fight for the smallest things e.g. a few AL hours to hire a Confirmation examiner – The admin is horrendous, but not as bad as BA teaching – CRDSC can be obstructive, so expect that. In the end, you won't regret it. – To make sure your student checks in with you (and themselves) on a (semi-) regular basis – Your student's work is not about you – Be interested – Be accessible – Be a person in the world – Think carefully about the pedagogy of the supervisions – Work at being a team – Always have a meeting prior to the supervision with your fellow supervisors, so you are all speaking as one – If you haven't got a PhD, seriously consider doing one – Be part of a professional academic community (e.g. through writing and publishing) – Read. Read. Sometimes write.

Q. What advice would you give a becoming PhD student? (14 answers)

This is not a life project – Do what inspires you – Treat it like a job and like a project. PhD can feel massive, but it's a 3-year project you are passionate about and you have the space to do it as a job. amazing! – Also: build networks while you are doing the PhD, don't be scared to present at conferences and share your work – Peer reviewers and conference audiences make great sounding boards and ad-hoc tutorials and you'll already be part of the research community and have a research record in your field when you finish – Treat the PhD not as your masterpiece, but as the start of your research in this area – You can make mistakes as a PhD student, take that as an opportunity to experiment – Don't work full time and try to complete a PhD it's very hard to get the balance right – Your idea has to 'float your boat' - don't do a thesis about something you are not into – It is a 'journey' and you get out of it what you put into it – Do not expect a job at the end. But the tutors impress me – 1: Be prepared for thinking differently, and for living and breathing your research for the next few years – At one point, it becomes – This becoming is omnipresent – Accept it and breathe it – 2: Refuse borders, walls, barriers, and shields – Become-connected – Talk to others – Share and discuss ideas – Don't be afraid of being wrong – Resist paranoia – 3: Accept and rejoice in that the PhD is not a fixed journey – The destination may be set; how you get there isn't – It is a becoming – Sometimes that is uncomfortable, frightening, overwhelming and paralysing – However, most of the time the PhD journey is an adventure that feels liberating, exciting, thrilling and absorbing – 4: As your research progresses, let your discoveries become connective nodes that you can return to when the PhD feels muddled, confused or tangled – The nodes may - and probably will - shift position, but

recognising these as discoveries is what holds them together in an ever expanding web of research – 5: Be prepared to engage in a becoming; in multiple becomings that will lead to fundamental shifts to your very being – To allow yourself time to 'become' - accept that there will be drifts – And slips - and that this is all part of the process... – You will never quite be able to pin 'it' down - get used to the idea that you won't always (/ever?) be in control – Research is not always about mastery, but about letting go – (Sometimes) – Perhaps that means you'll have to let go of 'yourself' as much as anything else – You will change with your work - and it with you – Get used to it – Be comfortable in the slips – Your research is not about you – Allow yourself the time - to listen, to question, to think, to not have to understand but to know that there is value in it all – Read, write and be merry – Write and make as much work as you can, quickly – Then slowly edit – Don't censor your thought process – Keep asking questions – Don't bother unless you want to be an academic – It's intense, stressful and requires major investment of your time and other resources – You can explore ideas in depth through other means without doing a PhD – But if you are going to do a PhD, read and write, often.

Q. What question(s) would you ask instead of the above? How would you answer it (them)? (13 answers)

What resources you have to support your journey? – I'm not sure, maybe I would have asked the ones about being a student before the ones about being a supervisor? – Best part of being a PhD student – Answer: having the luxury of three very professional teachers looking at my work and helping me through the journey – Something about practice and how to assess that - and whether PhDs should be looking to capitalise on this post-degree – Not instead of the above, but in addition to, or in parallel to the above: What does becomings- PhD student/supervisor/doctorate do? – My answer would probably link to the answer to the question about the advice I would give a becoming PhD student; that it triggers a sequence continuous becomings that are designed to extend beyond the PhD and into post-PhD life, research, practice, writing, thinking, making, engagements – How do you see the role of supervisor / supervised? – What techniques might you employ to develop / extend / explore / make the most out of this dynamic (of super-supervisor-supervised)? – What are you afraid of? – I don't know – Of myself mostly – Of not understanding – Of being shut out – Of not doing – Of not becoming – How did you plan your PhD? It became more planned as the research developed – I would add one question: What does knowledge production mean to you? – (I leave answering the question to the creator of this project!) – I don't understand this question.

Becoming-Endings?

'.. you can't be one wolf, you're always eight or nine, six or seven'

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 32).

We approached this research as a pack operating within a 'single assemblage'; the supervisor and the supervisee and the university and other supervisors and other PhD candidates and the survey and the peer reviewers, and, and, and...

We may now want to consider: what can such an assemblage of these 'unauthors' do?

The experimental text as assemblage - to borrow from Deleuze and Guattari once more - can be seen as a form of 'minor literature' that 'stutters and stammers' the language of the major (O'Sullivan, 2009, p.247). Its presentation changes the 'constellation of the pack' (Canetti, 1963, *quoted in*: Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.37) and disrupts the expected flow of words, letters, spaces and punctuation; it 'breaks with the operation of "order-words"' (O'Sullivan, 2009, p.247), to offer a space in which other entities, metamorphoses, understandings, groups may come into being. One could also see this text as a diagrammatic practice, what Félix Guattari called an 'autopoietic machine', liberating identities from capture, from being 'locked into simple structural relations' (Guattari 1995, p.44). Here, in this actual and virtual space, multiplicities of voices intersect, converse, babble and echo one another,

regardless of position. In turn, the text's inherent textography has afforded an opportunity to 'investigate how young scholars become socialised and acculturated into a discourse community' (Swales, 1998, p.111) through a 'contextually embedded discursive practices' (ibid. p.112).

Becoming-supervisor and becoming-supervised are both fluid conditions expressed by the 'unauthors' of this research as states brought about through 'natural progression', the fulfilment of 'expectations', career aspirations, and - at times accidental - topographies of 'chance and necessity'. Simultaneously, and seeping out of the text, are voices of desire; desires for dialogue, for involvement in research and for the pure enjoyment of becoming; 'a leap'.

Many thanks to the 15 anonymous participants who took the survey. Their informative, honest and insightful responses give a snapshot of what it is to become a PhD supervisor and some aspects of becoming-supervised.

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Biographies

Dr Mark Ingham is a Reader in Critical and Nomadic Pedagogies at the University of the Arts London. He is a National Teaching Fellow (2021), a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, and a UAL Senior Teaching Scholar in the Design School at London College of Communication. He is a Co-chair of UAL's Professoriate and co-founder of UAL's Experimental Pedagogies Research Group (EPRG). His pedagogical and creative research over the last 30 years has been entangled encounters with images of thought and memory, rhizomatic & meta-cognitive learning theories, fuzzy narratives, and virtual and physical liminal teaching spaces. Mark's research critiques relationships between autobiographical memory and photography, Deleuzian and Guattarian ideas of 'becoming rhizomatic', assembling agency, nomadic thinking, and active blended learning, with ideas of belonging and critical pedagogies.

Dr Rachel Marsden is Research Training Manager for the Research Network for doctoral students (RNUAL), and Senior Lecturer in Academic Practice, at UAL. Research interests comprise practice-based research and inclusive pedagogies through methodologies and ethics of care. This work is informed by her practice in arts and creative health, social prescribing and disability justice. Rachel is currently an investigator on the international research-driven curatorial project '[Stomach Ache: Art and the Gastrointestinal System](#)', a member of UAL's [Health, Arts and Design \(HEARD\) research hub](#),

and Regional Champion for the [Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance \(CHWA\)](#). Rachel's experience as a curator, consultant, researcher, educator and arts writer spans over 16 years across contemporary arts, culture and curation; Higher Education and academia, and the VCSE sectors, from living and working in the UK, USA, China and Australia. She is also a member of the [International Association of Arts Critics \(AICA\)](#).

Dr Sara Andersdotter is a Swedish-born, UK based artist, academic and researcher, who has taught at a number of Higher Education institutions since 2004. She is currently a PhD supervisor and Senior Lecturer in Visual Communication at the University for the Creative Arts. Having studied fine art at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, Sara completed a practice-based PhD in Fine Art at the University of the Arts London in 2015, which proposed radical, critical, creative reconsiderations of memory and manners in which the mnemonic may be expressed in art practice. Her art practice is primarily photography, moving image and installation based, and she has exhibited since 1999. Sara has delivered research papers at a range of national and international conferences, and is currently co-editing a book with four other academics on contemporary writings on photography and autobiographical memory, due to be published in 2023.