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“See you on the other side”: Researcher identity, threshold concepts and making a ritual of confirmation

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Abstract

With the requirement of making a contribution to new knowledge in the field, in doing a PhD the researcher creates a curriculum – a new world built with the knowledges, values and matter(s) required to sustain it. At its heart, the person doing the PhD is also changing, especially in relation to what matters to them and the world they are making. But when the ritual of the ‘PhD confirmation’ is instrumentalized, the format of confirmation doesn’t relate to the research and scholarship of doing a PhD as ‘doctorateness’ (Trafford and Leshem, 2009), as threshold concept (Meyer and Land, 2003), or as liminal process (Keefer, 2015). If the PhD and its supervisory processes are to remain relevant to the changing 21st century world of learning for/with life, we need to re-situate the centrality of the pedagogical and ontological practices at stake in original knowledge production.

Keywords

PhD; supervision; threshold concepts; pedagogy; researcher identity

What happens when doctoral candidates experience disorienting dilemmas through shifts in their frames of reference, such as when learning results in altered ways of thinking or perceiving reality (Kiley, 2009; Land, Meyer & Smith, 2008)? These liminal moments of transition exhibit a former way of being or knowing toward a future state.

(Keefer, 2015, p.18)

In her paper ‘How are doctoral students supervised: Concepts of doctoral research supervision’ Anne Lee suggests that as supervisors, our own experience of being supervised as a doctoral student is a key influence on how we supervise (Lee, 2008). I wanted to find out more about this concept and practice of confirmation which I never experienced. The department in which I studied for my own PhD delivered different kinds of confirmations during my research: wise confirmations from my teacherly supervisor; peer confirmations from the heated debate with the fellow graduates I met every Wednesday for two hours in the post-grad common room, where each of us had to present a paper once a term; and the unnameable but tangible and emotionally valuable, collegiate confirmations from the other lecturers in the department, who fostered an ethos of discussion that signalled that your ideas really mattered. ‘Collegiality’ was then the scholarly, knowledge-production equivalent of ‘belonging’.

One of the things I realise now is that I understood doing a PhD as the activity of research rather than the practice of learning. By ‘learning’, I mean that I didn’t pay attention to the change the research activity and subject matter was making, in relation to how I understood myself as a researcher and a

person. Thinking back on my time as a PhD student, I developed elaborate, creative and complex hermeneutics (methodologies of interpretation) to swerve any understanding of self into elaborate, oblique strategies of thinking and making.

Threshold concepts

For this reason, the question of learning and researcher change became the theme of my intervention when doing my PgCert in Higher Education at UAL in 2016, reflecting on my practice and teaching with postgraduates in a paper titled 'Uncertainty, Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge in Learning and Innovation'. At the time I taught, then led, the Uncertainty Project unit, a live project in the second term for researchers on Central Saint Martins' MA Innovation Management course – a unit that wore the t-shirt 'Troublesome Knowledge'.

My teaching and research since then have involved noticing the processes and practices by which postgraduate researchers (often the other lecturers I now teach on the PgCert/MA Academic Practice programme) and myself move through our learning. Noticing in the context of troublesome knowledge has sometimes been about recognising practices and behaviours which indicate what in art school and art practice we call 'stuckness'. Like its psychoanalytic cousin 'neurosis', ongoing, structural 'stuckness' is mis-directed creativity. The energy – psychological and creative – that is put into being stuck, into not being able to do something, into staying the same, is immense and demanding beyond any resources or insight that we may attribute to the emergence from being stuck.

The theorization of troublesome knowledge was developed from a study into undergraduate teaching in the UK in the early 2000s. Conducted by Erik Meyer and Ray Land (2003), it was a professional development project, in exploring the teaching of economics they identified how learning particular concepts in a discipline can create significant disciplinary and ontological disturbance. They call these disciplinary blockages (and openings) 'threshold concepts'. They also characterise the experience of this knowledge with a concept that is psychological, cognitive and existential: 'troublesome knowledge'. 'Troublesome' as a word does a lot of work in being richly evocative and in implying both a response to a specific form of disciplinary knowledge, and a specific cognitive experience of knowledge. The grasping of such concepts requires a re-evaluation by the learner of their current way of seeing their discipline and even seeing themselves. Julie Rattray highlights the affective dimension of such concepts:

Threshold transformations foster ontological shifts that are associated with both cognitive and affective changes in the individual. They cause the individual to view and experience the world differently in terms, not just of the intellectual understanding of an idea but also in the way they feel about, or experience, the world. (Rattray, 2016, p.67)

To use a language different to educational development, it is not just the learner's identity that is loosened, but the epistemological and ontological ground from which their identity – as student, as individual – is formed and situated.

It was only much later looking back from the perspective of teaching in the atmosphere of the art and design school that I was able to recognise my own relation to the PhD as a threshold concept. Art college is a space of learning where uncertainty, ambiguity and creating unknown futures is what our students do every day and, unlike traditional education, prepares them to understand and shape a workplace that is also rapidly changing. Professor Susan Orr, who was Dean of Learning, Teaching and Enhancement and Professor of Creative Practice Pedagogy at UAL when I was doing my own PgCert in Teaching and Learning, wrote in her book with Alison Shreeve on art and design pedagogy that, "we need to build 'learning bridges' that can overcome stuck-ness and support students'

transitions to new threshold concepts (Savin-Baden 2008:76). To build up students' tolerance of ambiguity, we offer students multiple 'little leaps into the not-known' (Atkinson 2012:11)" (Orr and Shreeve, 2018, p.63). As a PhD researcher I made plenty of leaps into the not-known.

My research was motivated by work that aimed at unsettling borders, boundaries and lines – work that decentred rules, conventions and authority, not least the authority of the author. Algerian-born French philosopher Jacques Derrida's (Keenan and Kadi-Hanifi, 2021) book *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (1987) for example contains a section written as a series of postcards to his lover. I loved the idea that you could make philosophy in a different way, but my researcher self still hid behind the proper name and authority of 'Derrida'. This was due to my restricted imaginary of what might count as research and what might count as being a researcher. I recognise now, from an art and design school perspective, something very obvious – deconstruction is a philosophy of surfacing interdisciplinary knowledge-making, in fact it's the history of how belief systems depend on, are structured, and haunted by the knowledges, disciplines and values they try to exclude; how western ethnocentric epistemologies are structured by, and depend on what is othered by the system. In this way deconstruction is a study of the politics and subjectivities inherent in the systematic drawing of lines and boundaries (Shildrick, 2020). But at the time I didn't truly embrace the ontological and epistemological consequences of that, either for me or my research.

A year into my studies I spent some time in New York and came back needing to think with a different idiom and jumped into the work of another French thinker, Jean Baudrillard. An anti- or post-theory French thinker (probably neo-Warholian), Baudrillard argued that in order to get any sense of the forces, drivers and realities of post-industrial globalization we need to unmoor ourselves from traditional modes we mistakenly think are solid reference points, the binary conceptualisations such as subject-object, or nature-culture. We might now call Baudrillard's aphoristic work post-representational theory (what any anticipatory thinking has to become if it is to have any relation to a 'future' not built with the norms of the present). In describing his own practice of making ideas Baudrillard says "one had to jump, to pass over the other side of the line and lose a sense of reference in order for one's thought to be more a projection, an anticipation" (Smith and Clarke, 2015, p.29).

As a PhD researcher I created my own ritual, I anchored myself in a version of Baudrillard and refused to jump. I hid behind a received idea of what a researcher or an academic might be and couldn't anticipate a future researcher self. In research terms I was looking for what I thought was a superior epistemology, borrowing from other epistemologies. Which would have been ok if I had reflected on this research strategy as a performative act, as an ontological doing.

Anticipating a researcher identity, creating an image and sense of self is critical not least because in doing a PhD we create our own curriculum (Pretorius and Macaulay, 2021; Sun, 2022). A PhD researcher is required to make an original contribution to knowledge and such a practice involves creating an anticipatory world of mutually constituted self-and-research-space. Our field of research is developed in how we assemble the ecology of thinkers and practices which will populate it. Unless we anticipate the researcher and world to whom this curriculum is talking, at best, the curriculum and the research which emerges from will simply make no sense – the research will just float off as disembodied, un-narrated thoughts. The endgame of this dis-engaged approach to post-graduate research is that we are training ourselves. Or disciplining ourselves in Foucault's sense (Ball, 2019; Foucault, 1995; Leask, 2012) to reproduce a higher education system which encourages lecturers and professors to avoid the practice of pedagogy. This traditional idea of research, and the researcher, doesn't recognise the ontological stake in teaching practice. Educational thinker bell hooks (1994) remembers the shock of discovering that being a university lecturer didn't necessarily

involve anything more than book learning, "I learned that far from being self-actualized, the university was seen more as a haven for those who are smart in book knowledge but who might be otherwise unfit for social interaction" (hooks, 1994, p.16). We might want to consider surfacing this research self, this academic identity as part of our methodology, as a necessary surfacing of our axiology, our value systems.

Methodology and researcher identity

The anticipation of our researcher self, how it is figured, sketched, bodied, is fundamental to methodology. For those of us not schooled in the schematic, staged performance of social science research, and whose knowledge production involves practice, the strategies of methodology can feel too pre-determined. But from the interdisciplinary perspective of the art and design school graduate, the task of methodology is a way of surfacing the practices and disciplines, and the epistemologies and ontologies of the emergent researcher self.

In *Problem Spaces: How and Why Methodology Matters* (2020), Celia Lury, Director of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies at University of Warwick, highlights Donna Haraway's argument that maps and figures in research are more than simply signs or representations of something else – they create worlds with real material effects. The figure we think/visualise of the research is critical to taking responsibility for the world we are making with our research. It is even more important for the researcher in art and design school because we cannot rely on inherited, disciplinary ideas of what a researcher or an 'academic' is. Rachel Fensham and Alexander Heller-Nicholas (who teach on Theatre, and Film respectively) argue in 'Making and Assembling' (2018) that in the 21st century, learning, education and research need to be characterised by movement between disciplines. Which is why art and design school is a working prototype for the future of education. But this interdisciplinarity has consequences for the researcher identity. Those working in an interdisciplinary space can't rely on the citation of scholars from one specific field to define the borders of their research. When our art and design research requires the exploration of anthropology, sociology, materials science, semiotics, chemistry, botany, urbanism, and computer science amongst others, how can we rely on previous 'figures' or images of research practices to envision direction for us? Fensham and Heller-Nicholas map this shift in 21st century knowledge production (though it's actually existed for a very long time in art and design schools):

So, rather than making a space of knowledge for ourselves from a centralized location of discursive action, or in terms of unidirectional lines and stable shapes that serve as basic elements of a rather geometric way of modelling an argument, the interdisciplinary turn leads, we would suggest, towards a more dynamic, spatialized understanding of what a field of knowledge is and, by extension, who the specialists in the field might be.

(Fensham and Heller-Nicholas, 2018, p.31)

This in-betweenness, this not-quite-belonging, is critical to learning and developing one's practice in art school – it brushes against the grain of institutional strategies around 'belonging'. Professor of Higher Education Maggi Savin-Baden argues that students engaged in problem-based learning are particularly prone to a sense of disjunction because it creates an encounter with liminality. The idea of liminality comes from the discipline of anthropology, from Arnold van Gennep in his 1909 work *Rites of Passage*. It describes rituals used to mark the transition to various life stages (birth, marriage, death for example) and was re-discovered and popularised by Victor Turner in the 1960s.

The sensory, the liminal and doctorateness

The ritual of confirmation in the PhD process is one moment when the idea of the PhD, of doctorateness, comes into focus as a threshold concept. In the context of the PhD, a threshold

concept is a core disciplinary concept that not only changes how we understand our discipline, or field of research. It changes how we see ourselves as learners and researchers, and can change the way we relate to our research. In this way it is said to be transformational.

Threshold transformations foster ontological shifts that are associated with both cognitive and affective changes in the individual. They cause the individual to view and experience the world differently in terms not just of the intellectual understanding of an idea, but also in the way they feel about, or experience, the world (Rattray, 2016, p.67). The threshold concept is experienced affectively as troublesome knowledge in that our current researcher identity can't manage or integrate this new idea and the new way of seeing and experiencing the world which it entails. It is experienced as an encounter with what is 'other', because it disrupts not only knowledge boundaries but also our sense of the boundary between self and world. In terms of research, our world shifts alongside our researcher identity.

It's why the model of 'self-reflection' as a device in research makes no sense for research that is interdisciplinary and whose ontology is that of a complex, changing research space. As a response to this seemingly value-free epistemology of self-reflection, Donna Haraway and Karen Barad offer the optical metaphor of diffraction. In 'Syntactics: The Grammar of Feminism and Technoscience' Haraway writes, "Reflexivity has been much recommended as a critical practice, but my suspicion is that reflexivity, like reflection, only displaces the same elsewhere, setting up the worries about copy and original and the search for the authentic and really real." (Haraway, 1997, p.16). On this reading, the belief in the homogenous self-transparent self needs scholarly and critical evaluation. One off-the-shelf practice readily available for PhD researchers doing interdisciplinary research is that of ethnography. We need to become ethnographers of the new research field and research identity which we are creating. We need to find ways of noticing not just ourselves but the research, practices and others (human and non-human) that unmake and remake the composition of self and the boundary of self. The differences in these practices are not just semantic, they speak of a much wider teaching and learning problem in art school. While the language and practice of self-reflection comes from western philosophy (Descartes to Hermeneutics in modernity) and the social sciences, in art and design school we have an embodied version of this – noticing (Smith, 2022, p.103).

In many ways art and design school learning is much closer to medical school pedagogies for example than it is to the Humanities scholarship which much of our research citations comes from. In her book *A Sensory Education*, Anna Harris, Associate Professor of the Social Studies of Medicine at Maastricht University writes, "Sensory lessons demand the cultivation of a particular 'art of noticing'. All learning is sensory. Lessons in life and at school are bodily, sensory engagements with others and things and places whereby transformations, ideally, occur. It is these everyday and expert sensory lessons that I refer to when I talk of sensory education" (Harris, 2020, p.2). Transformation happens partly due to the embodied, sensory component of learning. Harris distinguishes this art of noticing from the related concept of 'attention' highlighted in the environmental psychology of J. J. Gibson and the anthropology of Tim Ingold (also popular reference points in art school) because she sees it as "too cognitive and individual" (Harris, 2020, p.2). In the case of J. J. Gibson, it needs to be ecological but not anthropocentric.

Researcher practices in art and design, such as the art of noticing, are practices and pedagogies of making researcher identity. When he was course leader of the MA Innovation Management course at CSM, my former colleague Dr Jamie Brassett would tell students, "*you* are your own innovation management project". It's about learning as ontological, about having to create the concepts that make sense for you and others, the new entity you are bringing into the world. It's why we, as Innovation Management scholars, both became a little obsessed with pedagogy. Bringing anything

new into the world involves practices of pedagogy. The PhD researcher needs to teach themselves and their supervisory team about the new body (self and object of study) of knowledge they are creating. This itself is a threshold concept, which as supervision teams we need to recognise. Professor of Arts Integrated Studies, Pauline Sameshina and Professor of Art Education, Rita Irwin make this explicit connection between liminality and art education:

Liminality is derived from the Latin word for threshold and is perceived to represent borders or the borderlands. These in-between spaces are always attached to other areas yet they are neither inside nor outside. Liminal spaces are dynamic spaces of possibility where individuals and cultures come in contact with one another creating interstitial conditions for new communities of learning (see Conroy, 2004). The arts offer practices that are inherently liminal because they highlight taken-for-granted experiences or conversely, make strange experiences seem familiar. They open up possibilities for different insights and thus expand notions of scholarly inquiry. (Sameshima and Irwin, 2008, p.7).

Let's consider the PhD process as a series of rituals, routines and initiations. The official normative forms and formats of knowledge-making such as registration sit alongside the affective liminality that comes from learning new things about our discipline and practice. The PhD confirmation is one of these formative moments, a ritual of transformation that takes us from one state to another, from one future to a future self already here, but we haven't seen yet. What practices and spells might we need to get to assemble ourselves on... the other side?

In 'Experiencing doctoral liminality as a conceptual threshold and how supervisors can use it', Jeffrey M. Keefer, based in the Division of Programs in Business at New York University, highlights three areas he identified through an interview-based study where issues emerge in the supervision process which can be understood as liminal. The researcher feels isolated because they feel no one else understands the particular difficulties involved in their research journey. Then there is a lack of confidence which Keefer identifies as imposter syndrome. Finally, a sense that there isn't quite the right fit between researcher and the programme or the supervisor, perhaps around "real or perceived paradigmatic or methodological differences" (Keefer, 2015, p.22).

These are all common features of 'doctorateness', and while the desire to change the supervisory team for example may help the candidate (another initiatory term), it may also hide more fundamental changes that need to be recognised as academic identity emerges. The novice researcher registers they are different to the person who began the programme of study, some threshold has been crossed:

As a rite of passage toward creating new knowledge, this identity shift often follows a period of uncertainty, confusion, or doubt. This in-between, transition period within a rite of passage as known as a period of liminality (Turner, 2011; van Gennep, 1960) [...] What happens when doctoral candidates experience disorienting dilemmas through shifts in their frames of reference, such as when learning results in altered ways of thinking or perceiving reality (Kiley, 2009; Land, Meyer, & Smith, 2008)? These liminal moments of transition exhibit a former way of being or knowing toward a future state. (Keefer, 2015, p.18)

Liminality in this way is anticipatory knowledge, a sensing, an experiencing of the future in the present. This "way of being or knowing towards a future state" is the experience of temporality, an experience of the event by which self and world is produced in the creation of new knowledge. For this reason, we might also want to think about the threshold concept of liminality for the supervisory

team too. In a supervision context, liminality is shared across what Liz Done (2014) calls the supervisory assemblage.

Supervision as assemblage

Using the term assemblage from the work of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Done argues that the supervisory team when it is working creatively needs to be understood as a relational and shifting entity. Professor of Political Science at Johns Hopkins University, Jane Bennett gives a rich contextual account of assemblage in her work *Vibrant Matter* (2010), a book highly-regarded for how it conceives ecological agency. Bennett situates the concept of assemblage as a relevant concept to describe the interconnected, interdependent and conflictual world of globalization that emerged at the end of the 20th century. What is useful about the concept of assemblage is that it is a term that allows for emergence of new things in a world of complexity. It is an alternative to 'reductionism' (the sum of the parts are greater than the whole) or holism such as Systems Thinking (the whole is greater than the sum of the parts). There is no central control in an assemblage which can continuously manage the effects or direction of the group. The effects generated by the group are "emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen (a newly inflected materialism, a blackout, a hurricane, a war on terror) is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone. Each member and proto-member of the assemblage has a certain vital force, but there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping as such: an agency of the assemblage" (Bennett, 2010, p.24). This is why assemblage is important for Bennett as a political philosopher, as it allows us to think of agency not as something that belongs wholly to a self-contained individual, but rather a more complex idea of distributive agency. It's why Liz Done describes her mode of doctoral production – of producing a researcher self – as an element in a supervisory assemblage:

It is the site of my becoming a doctoral student and individuation as an academic subject in a process that is unique, yet unpredictable and changeable. I emphasise the singularity of the doctoral experience because one cannot know in advance quite what may emerge from a supervisory assemblage where, as I have already suggested, all parties must negotiate processes of stratification (e.g. pressures to conform to institutional imperatives and to sedimented assumptions as to what a doctorate is) and processes of destratification (lines of creative production that defy such imperatives and assumptions). (Done, 2014, p.8)

As part of a supervision team, I wonder if what we might call an event such as the 'supervisory assemblage' can only emerge, or be recognised as emerging, from the troublesome knowledge of what it is to practice supervision? As much as the PhD itself is a threshold concept, the concept of supervision (beyond its suggestion of a panoptic pedagogy) might be considered a threshold concept for supervisors. Supervisory pedagogy is the act of co-constituting a mutable entity of collective learning that is singular each time.

Assemblage as described by Bennett is a useful term to describe the complex effects and affects of the dynamic of the PhD research process. But I am drawn to a word in the subtitle to her book: *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Let's consider the PhD process as part of an ecology of things, an ecology of practice where the pedagogies required to make sense of new subjectivities, knowledges and practices emerge in the porous edges of PhD research. This liminal process is defined by the ontology of the learner moving from a previous way of inhabiting the world into different bodies – individual, disciplinary and institutional – they are creating with their research. We thus should think of liminality as less of a tunnel as it is represented in the literature, and more of an ecology composed of the different matters (in the physical *and* ethical sense) creating the PhD research. To think this idea of ecology with the model of assemblage, the PhD researcher will need to notice the different speeds at which different entities work and the speeds at which they experience

the research process – the supervision team may be slower in registering or recognising transformative moments for the PhD researcher. This lack of understanding may be due to the institutional frameworks they inhabit. Dennis Atkinson understands this kind of learning for the researcher as taking place on the “edge of time – between that which exists and that which-is-yet-to-arrive.” (Atkinson, 2017, p.25), the idea of knowing towards a future state. Edges are critical to interdisciplinary PhD research as it is not just a matter of mapping the many different disciplines the researcher is working with, but looking at what happens on the edges, the thresholds of those disciplinary boundaries. These edges are also ontological. For this reason, the PhD is a mode of creating agency through an ecology of learning, the discipline of assembling the different parts of life – personal, practice, pedagogy, academic and professional. It is a life practice. In the epilogue to their edited collection, *Ecologies for Learning and Practice: Emerging Ideas, Sightings, and Possibilities* (2019), Ronald Barnett and Norman Jackson argue that:

The idea of learning ecologies, after all, offers a stage on which both optimists and pessimists can play their legitimate parts. The optimists will doubtless focus their attention on the forms of agency that the idea affords and will seek to paint a picture of individuals and groups forging their own paths and futures, in fulfilling learning and development ventures, full of human flourishing. Learning on the edge in liminal spaces – or ecotones, as Ann Pendleton-Jullian puts it – will be seen itself to sponsor creativity and innovation and many forms and sources of value creation. The optimists will connect the idea of learning ecologies with the needs of a future world that is in need of more ecologically sustained thinking and behaviours from its human inhabitants. (Barnett and Jackson, 2019, p.228)

How do we, the supervision team and the PhD researcher, recognise threshold knowledge in supervision processes? For a start, we are going to need some rituals that foreground thresholds, and such rituals, according to Isabelle Stengers (2005), will need to involve magic.

Rituals and ecologies of practice

In the early stages of her paper ‘Introduction to an Ecology of Practices’ (2005), philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers probes the fear we have when what she calls the ‘habitat’ of our disciplines is challenged, the challenge fundamentally being a challenge to the authority of the discipline as a way of explaining the world that is innately superior to another. Though her argument is situated in the context of the discipline of physics, it is keenly recognisable in the research of art and design school. What she terms in the following quotation as ‘approaching a practice’, I think of as the pedagogy of the unknown, a critical component to PhD supervision: “Approaching a practice then means approaching it as it diverges, that is, feeling its borders, experimenting with the questions which practitioners may accept as relevant, even if they are not their own questions, rather than posing insulting questions that would lead them to mobilise and transform the border into a defence against their outside” (Stengers, 2005, p.184). This pedagogy of the unknown means our research, if is an original contribution to knowledge, will need to encounter those edges and thresholds where the practice becomes something other. It is what she calls an ecology of practice, “a tool for thinking through what is happening” (Stengers, 2005, p.185). There is a lot of work being done by the phrase ‘what is happening’ but I would argue, from an art and design school perspective, that it is a practice of noticing the practices, knowledges and matters that are creating the ecology or assemblage. What’s more, Stengers argues, this idea of the ‘tool’ is not an instrumental one, the tool changes depending on the body who is taking it, “Borrowing Alfred North Whitehead’s word, I would speak of a decision, more precisely a decision without a decision-maker which is making the maker.” (Stengers, 2005, p.185). The tool for thinking what is happening is thinking ‘me’ in the happening of the practice. In this way the tool for thinking is not simply the exercise of habit, but is attuned to the unique situation that is happening.

There are two things that are critical for Stengers, and critical for us in thinking about PhD supervision: 1) as much as the work we do in art and design is inevitably interdisciplinary, attachments matter, they "are what cause people, including all of us, to feel and think, to be able or to become able." (Stengers, 2005, p.195). We have attachments to concerns, disciplines, territories of thinking and practice. The problem (it's an ethical problem) is when our attachment becomes the tool by which we judge other practices. 2) Equally she argues we need rituals, such as 'magic', techniques which enable us to gather with others, around the effects, the consequences of following our practice to its threshold, the liminal space where how we understood our practice begins to break down. Stengers argues that the ritual is the means by which we remake our relationship to what we thought was at stake in our knowledge production. When we renew our relationship to our new ecology of learning, one part of this ecology is the new research problem whose new pedagogy is teaching us how to relate to it – with which practices, which knowledges, which experts?

Stengers introduces this issue of magic in the context of the neo-pagan eco-feminism of Starhawk, a witch and one of the participants in the 1999 World Trade Organisation protests in Seattle. In the following quote, Stengers' description of the ritual required to create belonging and becoming, is the pedagogy of supervision:

What the ritual achieves could perhaps be compared to what physicists describe as putting 'out of equilibrium', out of the position which allow us to speak in terms of psychology, or habits, or stakes. Not that they forget about personal stakes but because the gathering makes present – and this is what is named magic – something which transforms their relation to the stakes they have put up [...] The problem for each practice is how to foster its own force, make present what causes practitioners to think and feel and act. But it is a problem which may also produce an experimental togetherness among practices, a dynamics of pragmatic learning of what works and how. This is the kind of active, fostering 'milieu' that practices need in order to be able to answer challenges and experiment changes, that is, to unfold their own force. (Stengers, 2005, p. 195)

For this reason, I imagine a PhD confirmation ritual requiring the researcher to create the ritual, make explicit the ecology of learning, by which we, the team, need to understand the transformation of the research problem. What I find so interesting about supervision is the way in which the infrastructure of support is invisible. While it is the researcher who is central, there is something fascinating about the invisibility of the assemblage – there is a different kind of magic, a sleight of hand at work.

It is only by creating their own ritual that the candidate begins to own what it means to develop their academic identity, and to change that meaning and experience for others. The 'practice review' in the UAL research handbook is a review of me, of my making my ecology of practice. Knowledge production, and assessment of knowledge production requires more than assessment of subject expertise. It's a pedagogy that is recognised by the likes of Etienne Wenger (2001), known for his work with Jean Lave on communities of practice:

Knowledgeability is therefore a form of identity anchored in practice. In a social learning space, participants engage their identity in the inquiry. They use their very beings – their personal history, relationships, and aspirations – as vehicles for learning. They pursue learning as a change in their ability to participate in the world, as a transformation of their identity. To bring a rigor of inquiry in any social learning space, this dual focus on practice and identity has to manifest in two ways: in the accountability of learning to the experience of participants (the lived experience that learning needs to enable) and in the expressibility of experience (how the

actual experience of participants can become engaged in the learning process). (Wenger, 2011, p.195)

Representing change, something new, is difficult, partly because when we are only just coming to terms with what is new, our sensing hasn't caught up with the new – cognitively, perceptually, and semiotically. We formalise moments, manufacture moments of representation, whereby change can be registered in events such as the PhD confirmation. The value in representing original thinking in research, in a mode that is manageable by the institution, is a PhD-level skill. But an ecology of practice also means creating the ethos through which this new knowledge and this new knowledge maker is recognised and supported. Developing a new landscape of research also requires expressing its ethos, the values which sustain this ecology. Which is what my pedagogy understands by the requirement in the UAL Research Degree Handbook: "If the student intends to submit a body of creative, practical work for the final examination, the contextual review will include a practice review." (UAL, 2022).

PhD researchers are also their own creative body of work, with an ethos and values that enable them to work with and create an ecology for a future self and world within which that self exists. This is especially true in Art and Design universities where PhD researchers are problem-based interdisciplinary practitioners creating something unforeseen. They create the person they need to become in order to make sense of their innovation and to support a just ecology of living. The PhD confirmation is a practice, in the sense of rehearsal, for creating an opening to a world, for showing why a topic or problem matters for the researcher and the world; and how it matters, the forms and practices by which it materialises in the world. Think of the PhD confirmation as an ecology, not just of practices, but of pedagogies. As what art school educator Dennis Atkinson calls a learning event when there is an ethics of encounter, a 'learning event' where we need to work with the learner's, "exposure of the learning event towards potentials for becoming – the coming to matter of a new way of thinking, seeing, acting, feeling. In this scenario, pedagogic work can be conceived as a becoming-with and a making-with, what Donna Haraway (2016) terms sympoiesis." (Atkinson, 2017, p. 94). A PhD confirmation is already a ritual, just not a very interesting or useful one for recognising the necessary research moment of teaching oneself what is mattering. Let's make the PhD confirmation a ritual that matters. Let's reimagine it as the magic of the ecology of practices.

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