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“From the ‘local’ to the ‘global’: the shift towards new knowledge in creative writing research.

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Introduction

In this paper I describe how aspects of the ‘Creative Writing Laboratory’ model, devised by Jeri Kroll, have informed my working processes in producing new work, in this case, poetry, on a creative writing PhD, and have formed part of its methodology. I explore particularly her notions of moving from the ‘local’, in research practices, to the ‘global’, that is shifting from research that merely enhances a specific project to that which produces transferable knowledge. (Kroll, 2013, p.102). This, of course, is central to the REF where research is defined as, “a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared”. However, I hope it will be useful for other researchers in this discipline to help them conceptualise their new work, not only at the site/s of its origin but for within wider creative/academic communities. This resonates too with Lave and Wenger’s (1991) conception of learning as “legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice, “that is, the idea of moving from” the periphery to the centre” and, as a result, to be able to take part in the discourses and activities such communities require.

The ‘Creative Writing Laboratory’ model

I am in the fourth year of a part-time PhD in which I explore ekphrasis (writing which responds to other art forms) in developing my own new poetry. Along with this come investigations of perception, and, as part of the originality of this research, in what ways

technologies of perception, in this case, holography, are useful conceptually. Kroll is keen to emphasise some basic questions in relation to the Creative Writing Laboratory model for writers: what do we research, why are we doing this, what form of practice do we choose, what methods do we employ, what theories underpin our choice and how do we communicate results to others? (2013, p.110)

In Kroll's terms, 'local' research is that which 'grounds' a project and relates to specific information, the what and the why. For me, this involves, for instance, extensive reading of poets who write in the ekphrastic mode; reviewing the literature about that genre to devise with my own working definition/s of the term; reflecting on my own past work and its ekphrastic content with a view to contextualising the research; discussions; reading about processes of holography, developing theoretical frameworks; fieldwork, visits to specific sites (e.g galleries, museums); note-taking; journaling; drafting/redrafting poems; getting feedback from supervisors and others; editing; revising. These are a few examples of many more.

In shifting from the 'local' to the 'global' in my research practices, I have, as Kroll notes, begun to 'perform' more as a researcher by developing my own new conceptual models as part of my methodology, and take my work to new audiences, such as academic conferences, poetry festivals, writing 'workshops'. I have been invited to join a prestigious multi-disciplinary research group in my institution to look at potential future collaborations in 3D Technologies, with joint papers and conference presentations a likely consequence. My 'knowledge' of key concepts of holography, such that it is, has been 'transformed' via new insights and is embodied in the new poetry I am producing. Critical reflection on such informs a 'poetics' which accompanies it. I argue that, in following research pathways suggested by my identity as both practitioner and academic, I am interrogating both product

(poems) and the process/es (e.g. decisions about language, form; how poems came to be written), and that I am reinvigorating ekphrastic poetry as a literary mode in what I bring from holography.

It is important to recognise, as Kroll points out, that global research which intends to transfer knowledge is doing more than generating new creative work. It is consciously involving that work's context within a culture and literary history and also its mode of production. (p.113)

The poetry I produce exists within, not only an ekphrastic tradition, but, because conscious experimentation with spatial form is part of my working method, within the historical context of developments in visual poetry. As a feminist researcher, the role of gender in determining ekphrastic precedents comes to the fore, on the 'male gaze', for instance, subject for more detailed discussion beyond the scope of this paper.

As a model, Kroll's Creative Writing Laboratory accords rigour and credibility to research in the discipline by appropriating and adapting practices and conventions that have high currency for the academy and I have only referred to a small sample of her writings on it here. The point is that both 'local' and 'global' research can be exploited according to the nature of projects and the level of study. In my case, at this stage of my PhD, I am conscious about the shifts I have made from one to the other and the insights gained as a result of this understanding.

The scholarship of creative writing in the UK relies on fresh and innovative theory and practice from other countries, such as Australia and the United States. Bringing ideas from art and holography and reworking these into a conscious 'poetics' may be unconventional – although is growing less so -in a creative writing PhD here, where creative work

accompanied by a separate critical exegesis of that work is still the 'norm'. However, I have found it to be both challenging and thrilling.

John Law and John Urry refer to "the performative", that is, any method of displaying information in subjective ways, such as art, drama, creative writing, saying that such methods do more than just provide a different perspective on a single reality but that their results, "become the enactment of different realities"(pp 390-40). I strongly believe that my new work, my poetry, *is* my research, and, therefore, in the context of other arts-based research, "embodied enquiry". (Bochner and Ellis, 2003). In reflecting on a recent model like Kroll's and showing how aspects of it allow me to conceptualise my research in both 'local' and 'global' terms, I hope I am able to suggest ways for other creative writing researchers to move their work onto another plane.

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