Valuing in Songwriting

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Abstract

Valuing is a sub task of the creative process (Zembylas and Niederauer 2018) where the agent of creativity evaluates the possibilities afforded to them by the domain and field (Csikszentmihalyi 2014). To make such evaluations the agent must apply their domain knowledge and an internalised system of the field (Csikszentmihalyi 2014; McIntyre *et al.* 2016a). This paper explores how the songwriter, as agent, constructs a criterion of appropriateness based on such knowledge through which to assess their creative possibilities. Through autoethnographic studies, triangulated with ethnographic sources (primary and secondary), this paper offers a structuralist perspective of how songwriters develop and apply these criteria of appropriateness. These criteria conceived by the songwriter through an imagined audience which operates as a 'competent yet fallible audience' (Trivedi 2015). Songwriters demonstrate their awareness of these imagined audiences through the application of reference tracks and research of the current audiences. The valuing process is progressive, moving from the imagined audience of the songwriting agent to be refined by developmental interactions with songwriting, production and record label teams (Hennion 1989; Thompson 2019). In understanding the criterion of effectiveness, we can further develop our understanding of how other creative practices develop and apply their own creative knowledge. We may also transfer such a criterion to the audience, as a criterion of effectiveness, in which the chosen ideas are evaluated.

KEYWORDS: autoethnography, creativity, effectiveness, practice research, valuing

How It All Started

This research started seven years ago in 2015 when I was preparing to undertake my PhD at Newcastle University. At the time I was teaching at Newcastle College where I had designed a Foundation Degree in the Arts in Songwriting which had been running since 2013. The programme was statistically as

successful as other courses, and I would argue that most students were producing their most creative works. However, I felt that the pedagogy still had a lot more potential than we were currently practicing. I originally

proposed to use my PhD to study how we (could) teach songwriting in Higher Education but around this time Professor Andy West shared with me his PhD thesis (2012) that was, pretty much, on the same topic. West's research observed and investigated his students' interactions, perceptions, and reflections on their learning experiences of his teaching methodology. West's findings were most insightful when his students were actively engaging with their learning through critical reflections and metacognitive processes such as

> Using metacognition the students were also able, in general non-specific terms to identify existing compositional elements that might not be contributing to the communicative gesture they had intended. Making a critical comparison between this method and the ones they had previously tried, Paul and Julia used reflection to link process to outcome, effectively evidencing a degree of understanding of the value of each method within the context of their own individual practices (2012: 270)

West gave a great deal of thought and reflection into his own learning and how this had influenced his approach to teaching, which became the context of his students' learning experience. This prompted me to question and challenge my assumptions and biases on how songwriting is learned. My teaching had so far been mostly successful, but on reflection it was very much guided by biases based on how I learned to write songs through my formal songwriting education, experience of working with other songwriters, the songwriters I listened to and emulated, and the books and articles that I had read on songwriting. As such it seemed reasonable to suggest that while my approach to teaching songwriting might appeal to those students with similar tastes or stylistic approaches to myself, it would be potentially alienating and demotivating to students who think and/or feel differently; not conducive to an inclusive curriculum. My teaching was not so biased as to result in a cohort of students who all sounded and thought like me, they actually demonstrated an inspiring range of creative outputs, but I am sure that my biases did impact my teaching and their learning, and so I felt that more emphasis could be placed on their learning and less on my teaching.

Thinking through my situation a key question that repeated itself was 'how do we learn to write songs?' Following constructivist modes of thinking on learning, how we learn to write is unique to each writer and, as suggested earlier, to each song. At first, this position presents an issue that it is not realistic to answer how we learn to write songs, but I could potentially answer how did I learn to write this song. This question alone will not satisfy an empirical study and will not, in and of itself, produce results that could further a songwriting pedagogy. In fact, such a solipsistic approach could be more damaging to the teaching practice, creating a corrective-pedagogy in which the teacher's practice is the standard. My

research would seem trapped between empiricism and intellectualism, but phenomenology offered me a third option.

How I Observed my Practice

> Empiricism cannot see that we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it, and intellectualism fails to see that we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or equally again we should not be searching. (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 28)

I knew the phenomenon was there—learning to write songs—and that it existed in my mind, the minds of others and in between as a social construct. Phenomenology values the experiences that we have with phenomena as the only means available to us to perceive phenomena. A phenomenological ontology gives a value to my experiences as a songwriter but what is then required are rigorous collection and processing methods. I decided to approach and subsequently present my research as an autoethnography as this allowed me to follow a similar process as Joe Bennett's (2014) study into collaborative songwriting. Some differences between Bennett's autoethnography and my own start with Bennett's focus on collaborative songwriting while I mostly focused on my solo songwriting practice. Bennett's research was also focused on the creative practice and but he used Csikszentmihalyi's Systems Model of Creativity (2014) as the criteria to select songs for his study (in other words, a song must have been accepted into the Domain for Bennett to consider the song appropriate to his study) while I used Csikszentmihalyi's model as a means of understanding the songwriter's intentions, agency and context. This was an important distinction as this allowed me to include the songwriting process of unsuccessful or unfinished songs driven by my belief that a significant amount of learning occurs in failures (Peelo and Wareham 2002), more so than successes. Lastly, Bennett collected his primary data from the discussions with collaborators, 'save as' files (Collins 2007) and post session interviews whereas my primary data was from reflective practice journals (cf. Finlay 2008; Johns 2009; Arnold 2012) which were processed with a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Charmaz 2005).The journaling process was conducted across 76 projects over 23 months and was an evolving process, experimenting with different media (video, audio or written modes) and models of reflection (Gibbs 1988; Schön 1995; Finlay 2008; Brookfield 2017).[1] I then theorised my results into structuralist models such as the Model of Authorship in Songwriting (Figure 2 below), emphasising the agents and structure at play, which I integrated into Csikszentmihalyi's Systems Model of Creativity and a basic flow chart of communication. I then triangulated my theories with interviews, primary and secondary sources.

What I Knew

As stated above, my focus was on the creative practice of songwriting which required an acknowledgement and shift from the previous mode of study. For the most part, research into songwriting has been through the song and this study

would reside within musicology, therefore song was the object of study from which inferences were made regarding its creation. It has been commented that access to the creative practitioners was seldom available (cf. Sloboda 1985; Bennett 2014; Csikszentmihalyi 2014) which limited the insights available to the researcher. Beyond the academic literature there is a world of literature on songwriting written by and for songwriters, what Long and Barber (2017) refer to as 'how to' books. This literature would often draw from the sole experience of the author (cf. Webb 1998; Rooksby 2006), some would be akin to the ethnographic interviews (Zollo 2003) and some from the songwriting educators (Pattison 1991a; 1991b; Stolpe 2007). The 'how to' books cover a range of aspects from the micro-decision processes (such as selecting notes, chords, words and similar (a good example of this can be found in chapter four of Webb (1998: 80)) and theories on the approaches to these micro-decisions (I find Pattison to have some of the most insightful and useful contributions in this area). In terms of the overarching aim of improving my teaching practice, the 'how to' books are a great resource for students and offer a decent and growing range of perspectives on how to write songs and therefore can contribute breadth to a songwriting pedagogy.

This musicological approach developed a robust body of knowledge through critical analysis of songs and their component parts and contexts. The data for this body of knowledge is based mostly on commercially successful songs, which can be considered to have been accepted into the Domain according to Csikszentmihalyi's Systems Model of Creativity. The 'how to' books are based on the specific experience and knowledge of those songwriters which is validated by their success. These two bodies of knowledge, the first rigorous (academia) and the second valid (professional experience), are both drawing from a limited pool of data. The notion that these songs are good and have value because they are commercially successful does not account for the multitude of factors that go into a commercial release. Middleton (1990) has previously highlighted how this could invalidate some of the findings of such research. In response, Bennett (2014) has suggested that the influence of marketing can only extend so far, for example while a good song may not necessarily become a hit song, a bad song is extremely unlikely to be a hit song. While both positions have merit, my position is that in the context of research we can find valuable insights within the songwriting process of both successful and unsuccessful songs, just as a negative result is still a result in most areas of research. Further still, when researching a practice the outcomes (successful or unsuccessful) are not known and so the practice and research should continue regardless of this unknown. In developing a body of knowledge of songwriting, the literature based on those ethnographic interviews and education-focused works (cf. Pattison (1991a; 1991b)) have presented a number of very plausible and applicable notions of songwriting, and represent common practices in professional songwriting and songwriting in education. The intention of my research was to develop and demonstrate how songwriters, with and without successful releases, can learn from their songwriting through reflective practice and, I hope, they will share their results with the growing field of songwriting studies to further demystify the practice.

What I Observed

In my research, I worked on 76 songwriting projects, 26 of these projects were completed and the processes were tracked with 131 audio files, 242 video files and 55 reflective journal extracts. I processed these primary sources using a Grounded Theory Approach (Charmaz 2005) specifically using a Constant Comparative Inquiry and along with reflective practice (reflecting on the practice and the research), I was able to refine my research question and the intentions of my outcomes. For example, my initial video recordings were of me in the studio moving between playing an instrument, writing lyrics or programming drumbeats through my Digital Audio Workstation (DAW). When I analysed these videos I struggled to draw any data that I felt could contribute to my songwriting or teaching practices as it felt too distant from the creative act. Simultaneously, I was working more in the DAW to compose and produce, so I made screen recordings of the DAW while I was working in the hopes that being closer to the creative act would reveal something more substantial. When I analysed these videos most of the information I gathered was concerned with micro-decisions (selecting and editing notes, sounds and parameters) and a lot time listening back and thinking. I have no doubt that these observations would yield valuable insights such as the time spent selecting, editing, attenuating or listening but these were all observable phenomena which created a false sense of separation between me as the songwriter and me as the researcher. These reflections brought me back to the frustrations of Sloboda (1985) and Csikszentmihalyi (2014) in not knowing the mind of the composer. As previously mentioned, I knew the decisions (micro or otherwise) were not arbitrary but were informed by unconscious (Sloboda 1985), intuitive (McIntyre 2016) or the flow (Csikszentmihalyi 2014) processes that were not palpable or externally observable. And so I developed my reflective practice (Boud et al. 1985; Loughran 2000; Eraut 2004; Finlay 2008; Fook 2010; Kerrigan 2013; Brookfield 2017) to help me bring my unconscious thoughts to the surface and to critically process them.

My thoughts developed from the well-established theory of experiential learning by David Kolb (1984); Concrete Experience, Observation Reflection, Abstract Conceptualisation, and Active Experimentation, and how these steps align with the steps in the various theories of reflective practice. After the concrete experience I would introspectively reflect (Finlay and Gough 2003; Finlay 2008) thinking on 'what happened' and 'how do I feel' about what happened' (Gibbs 1988). I then critically reflect (Finlay 2008), analysing and evaluating the experience asking 'why do I think this happened' and 'what was good/bad about the experience' (Gibbs 1988), and what might be the perspectives of others (Brookfield 2017).[2] Completing this cycle I make reflexive actions (Finlay 2008) with conclusions and plans to test or experiment with my reflections (Gibbs 1988). I consider this whole process in terms of in-action and on-action (Schön 1995) which I achieved by writing my reflections immediately after a songwriting

session (reflecting-in) and then reflecting on those reflections after a few days and when reviewing those reflections (Figure 1).
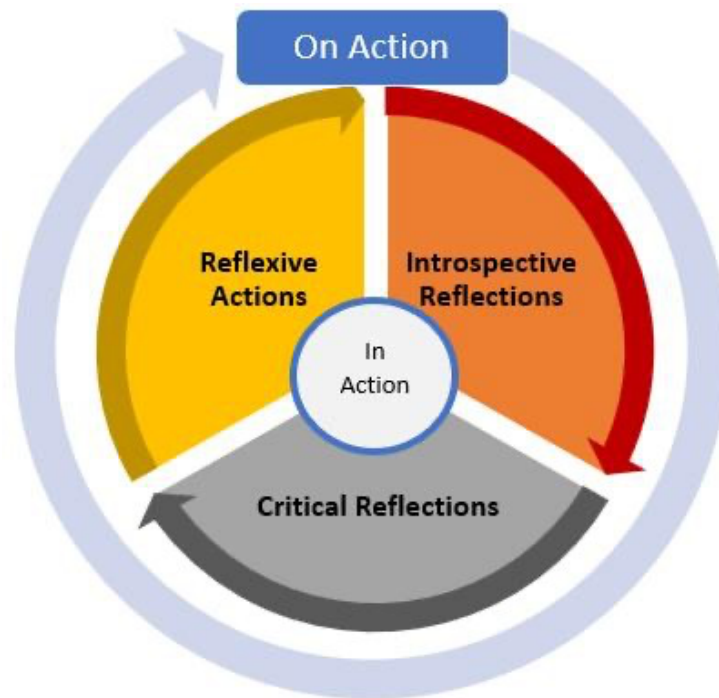

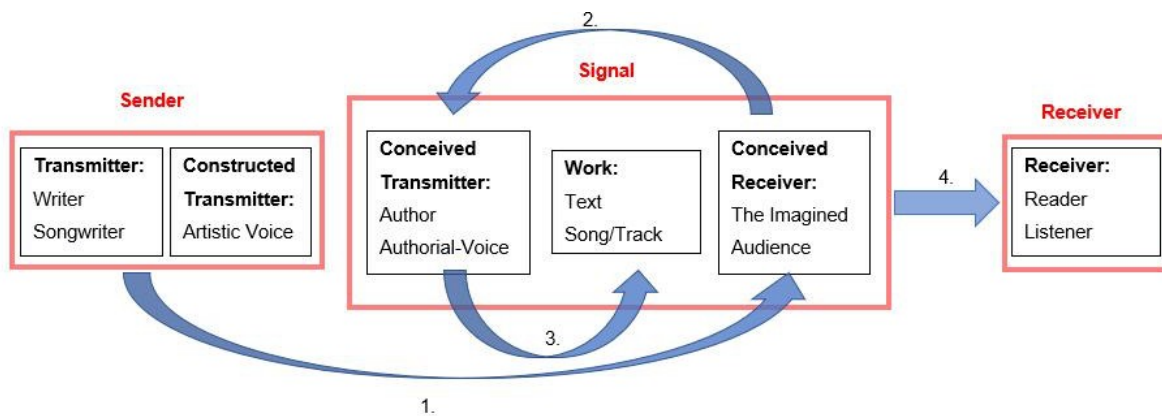FIGURE 1 Three Stages of Reflection, In and On Action

FIGURE 2 The Model of Authorship in Songwriting

From my analysis of the DAW screen recordings, I thematised my observations into 101 unique themes from which I removed themes that were related to those micro- decisions covered in the 'how to' books (selecting, editing, attenuating and listening) in the hope that the remaining observations would contribute further depth to my songwriting pedagogy. The remaining themes that were generalisable and ubiquitous to all songwriting practices were Authorship, Style and Voice, the Imagined Audience and Valuing in Songwriting, which encapsulates all the previous themes drawn from the analysis. These themes were then theorised into The Model of Authorship in Songwriting (Figure 2) (integrated into a communications model of Sender, Signal and Receiver), which includes within it

the stages of Valuing in Songwriting.

A key feature of this model is the subtle inversion of Roland Barthes Death of the Author (1977). Barthes' Death of the Author was at the Birth of the Reader and as such the theory was primarily concerned with the perceptions of the reader and the opportunities afforded to them in opening the text. He believed that the author (what he called the God Author) and his [sic] intentions for the art should not close the interpretation for the reader. In terms of a communications model, Barthes' theory works backwards from the receiver to the signal/text. Similarly, Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946) suggest that the intentions of the author should not concern the critic at all, as the categories of success of the art should be included within the art itself. While these philosophies of art have sired many of the great movements in modern art, I would contest that not all students of songwriting are intending on making such high art. In fact, in my experience, most are hoping to achieve a broadly mainstream category of success.[3] My intentions being to further my songwriting pedagogy through an autoethnographic study of my own practice I needed to focus my ideas on songwriting and therefore, in terms of the phenomenological experience, the songwriter as the observer and agent of the experience. What was perceived by the reader for Bathes is now what is conceived by the songwriter in my model. In the context of a pedagogy, this model places the student as the transmitter who is conceiving and supporting a reflective investigation into their agency and the structure(s) that they operate within.

The following steps, as numbered in Figure 1, describe how each conceptual block of my model acts as a filter for the songwriter, which will become the key concept of this paper. The following description relates to the model but not the generalised practice, which is more complex, nuanced and rhizomatic than the model can represent. The Transmitter in the left-hand red box (Sender) is the Songwriter and the Artistic Voice is the performing voice.[4] The Songwriter is the person(s) who writes the song, but the Artistic Voice could be; the voice of an intended performing artist such as Diane Warren writing for Toni Braxton (what I term a Pseudo Collaboration); using an unreliable narrator or character personae such as Vincent Furnier writing as Alice Cooper (what I term a Hypothetical Collaboration); or the actual voice of the songwriter themselves (actual in terms of experience and perspective). In step 1. the songwriter conceives of their Imagined Audience which is a hypothetical yet fallible audience (Trivedi 2015). The Imagined Audience may also be referred to as an ideal audience or intended market in music industry parlance. Conceiving this Imagined Audience is not an arbitrary act, just as the putting together of words, notes and chords in making a song is not arbitrary. Both are acts of creation which are based on the individual's prior knowledge; one of the Domain and the other of the Field.

In step 2. the songwriter is conceiving the Authorial Voice of the song they are writing. The Authorial Voice is the voice specific to the song in question and should be focused by the Imagined Audience to convey a sense of

'trustworthiness' and 'sincerity' (Frith 1996: 197) to that Imagined Audience. Songwriters interviewed raised this as a question of believability. The Artistic and Authorial Voices should, in theory, be aligned as the Artistic Voice will be present across the body of work while the Authorial will be the specific examples of work.

In step 3. the songwriter applies the words and music for the song, which then completes the centre red box giving them a song with an Authorial Voice and an Imagined Audience. This work is now ready to present to an audience (step 4.) although not necessarily the actual audience in terms of being released. The song is in fact presented to smaller trusted circles of stakeholders and/or influencers to gather feedback, on which the song is refined (Hennion 1989; Becker 2008). The refining process is not simply changing the words and/or music. The songwriter reiterates the whole process, adjusting the Voices based on a reconceived Imagined Audience to better filter those creative decisions and signpost the intended audience so as to be received as trustworthy and sincere. This reiterative process operates the same as the experiential learning cycle (Kolb 1984) and reflective learning cycle (Gibbs 1988) but in this model the learner is specifically focused on developing how their artistic work communicates with their intended audience.

What I Now Believe

The body of knowledge gathered and constructed through musicological study is of the structuring materials, immaterials and contexts of songs and music.[5] These components of songwriting all need to be addressed in songwriting and move between conscious and unconscious processing depending on the awareness and competency of the songwriter. This movement between conscious and unconscious learning is well presented in the Four Stages of Competence (Curtiss and Warren 1973) where the learner progresses from incompetent to competent as they become conscious of their (in)competency (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3 The Four Stages of Competence (Curtiss and Warren, 1973)

These structuring materials, immaterials and contexts can be broadly thought of as knowledge of the Domain and of the Field (Csikszentmihalyi 2014), the text and the context (Tagg 1982) or culture and society (Bourdieu 1993) but in the reality of practice the two are inseparable, each drawing from and referring to the other (as presented in Table 1). Our art is structured by societal concepts and behaviours such as gender, class and purpose, and society is learned and expressed through art such as stories, fashion and music. Csikszentmihalyi (2014)

describes how creative practitioners immerse themselves within the Domain and the Field so as to acquire and internalise these bodies of knowledge. Bennett (2014) breaks these down further to describe the constraints, conventions and rules of the Domain, and the agenda, policies and values of the Field. Within the body of Domain knowledge a songwriter would consider the materials as the words, melodies, harmonies, instrumentation, sound effects and other notable and sonic parameters (Tagg 1982), and immaterials as the constraints, conventions and rules such as a 3-minute pop song (constraint), verse-chorus song form (convention), or no drums in blue grass music (rule). The Field prescribes the conditions for the context in which the song or music operates such as wanting to dance (agenda), no swearing before 9pm on the radio (policy) or selecting songs with lyrics around female empowerment (values).

TABLE 1 Table of Song and Audience Concepts

Boden (2003) describes creativity as the exploration, combination, or transformation of creative spaces. In terms of songwriting these creative spaces are (in the first instance) the structuring materials, immaterials and contexts. The composing of a new melody, a unique lyrical theme or creation of a new sound or instrument are typical areas of exploration, combination and transformation in a songwriting practice. The songwriter might explore the possibilities of melody over a standard chord progression, combine instruments in novel arrangements to create new sounds, or transform sounds with manipulative technology such as a vocoder. A similar process can be done with the immaterials such as a 6-minute progressive rock song, starting a song with the chorus, or including a synthesizer in a blue grass band. This range of creative opportunities represents the songwriter's agency with and within the structures. Less often thought of or discussed by songwriters or in discussions of songwriting practice, is the exploration, combination or transformation of contexts, but these can include creative approaches to how and where the songs are performed or played which may challenge the agenda, policies or values of the social context.

The songwriter's agency is not boundless but is limited by the structures, as without such limitation creativity would have no space in which to be creative. Within Western popular music, songs are often limited to a diatonic scale (Bennett 2014) with only the slightest chromatic incidentals available. The available lyrical themes are predominately relationship based themes as it is a

broadly generic agendum of society. Radio stations very rarely play extended or long form songs, preferring the 3-minute conventional song length. A live drum and bass performance in coffee shops between 8-10 am will most likely not be well received. Creativity which is novel and surprising but not of value to the end user would not meet Boden's (2003) definition of creativity and would certainly struggle to achieve acceptance into Csikszentmihalyi's Domain. As such, the songwriter must understand how their knowledge of the Domain and the Field relate to one another, and this must be incorporated within the practice and product of their creativity.

Theoretically, any creative idea should be possible but within the terms of Boden's definition, as a criterion of success, the creative product must be new, surprising, and valuable within a certain context of society. This criterion can be contextualised ensuring that the product is appropriate for its intended context, for instance is this melody new in terms of the combination and series of the notes with a surprising aspect such as an unexpected chromatic note. What is new and surprising is contextual to the person, groups of persons and the Field at large, the former being the *aficionados* and the latter the general public (cf. Becker), but this is not a linear progression as different ideas will be valued differently by different groups and at different times and in different contexts. I propose that these be considered in four aspects; time, space, receiver and text (Figure 4). Time and space are the environment in which the song (text) interacts with the listener (receiver). While this is a post-facto situation for the songwriter it is an essential consideration during songwriting. A key skill of the songwriter is in knowing the schema of knowledge shared by the intended audience (receiver) and recognising the limitation of what creativity can be offered to them; what Collins (2007: 243) refers to as frustrating the expectations of audience. The criterion of appropriateness also applies to the context of the song in the way the songwriter signposts the intended audience and environment. How well these various structuring components align with Domain knowledge, challenge expectations and signpost to the intended context—audience and environment—will determine how effective the song is on the audience. The cliché of the acoustic singer-songwriter performing a love song in a late-night coffee shop would be an appropriate context and therefore more likely to be effective although to be creative would require something new, surprising and valuable of the song or performance, such as a unique lyrical framing device or combining the performance with an unexpected instrument. When the songwriter is writing the song or arranging the performance they work to a criterion of appropriateness, such as, is this appropriate for the context that is intended for the song, and for the audience it is a criterion of effectiveness.
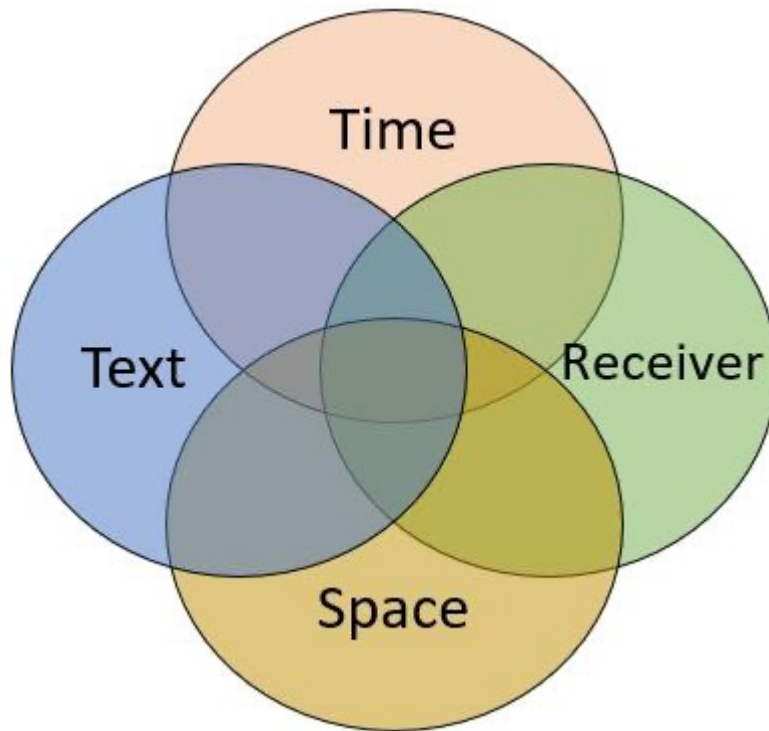
FIGURE 4 The Four Factors in Evaluating a Song

Re-contextualising What I Believe

Being a Constant Comparative Inquiry (Charmaz 2005), I was throughout the research evaluating the theories against my practice, testing the typicality and generalisability of theories within my practice. Once I was confident that my theories represented my practice, I contacted a range of songwriters from early career through to established professionals to triangulate my theories against their experiences. With some refinements and a degree of acceptance in the variations of terminology (for example, the Imagined Audience could also be called the intended market) my theories of the Model of Authorship in Songwriting, and how this contained a system of valuing, where the songwriter uses a criterion of appropriateness and the listener use a criterion of effectiveness to evaluate the song, were validated.

   In the table below (Table 2), I have presented an example of the types of questions the songwriter and the audience might ask to evaluate the song, although in the actual practice the questions could be a lot more specific to the context. The songwriter's agency is mostly within making the song appropriate for an audience (text/appropriateness) and so the questions are concerned with who, what and how. While the songwriter cannot control when and where the song will be heard, they can signpost within the song the ideal environment for the song (I will discuss this further below). The listener (receiver) asks questions about how effective (new, surprising and valuable) the song is to them. If they are kind, they might also evaluate the environment in which they are hearing the song.

TABLE 2 Criteria of Appropriateness and Effectiveness as Questions

		Appropriateness	Effectiveness	
Text	New	Who would find this song new?	Is this sufficiently different from songs I have heard before?	Receiver
Text	Surprising	What songs do my audience currently listen to?	Is this song within my zone of acceptance?	Receiver
Text	Valuable	How does the song perform a function for my audience?	Does this song perform a function for me?	Receiver
Environment	Time	When would be an appropriate time to hear this song?	Am I in the right time and place to appreciate this song?	Environment
Environment	Space	Where would be an appropriate place to hear this song?	Am I in the right time and place to appreciate this song?	Environment

My theories do not represent a formulaic or linear practice, although the model does present the theory as a process from songwriter to listener but only to contextualise the theory in accordance with the standard theories of communication based on transmitter, message, and receiver (cf. reception models). In my own practice, I was mostly focused on developing my Artistic Voice as this was a new project started with the intention of forcing me to learn a new mode of songwriting.[6] The more established songwriters that I interviewed were more focused on how they conceived their Imagined Audiences for their own and other projects. Established songwriters, having already developed a strong sense of their own voice as unique qualities and values, now offer these qualities and values to include in others' projects. The most common means of explicitly conceiving these Imagined Audiences was through reference tracks which would focus the songwriter or songwriting team into a specific sub-Domain and through these tracks the Field that accepted that track into the Domain. One songwriter described how, when employed to write with an established artist, she would read through YouTube comments of the artist's current material as a way of accessing the audience of that artist. In the terminology of my research, from these comments she is able to construct the criteria of appropriateness for that specific audience by knowing their agenda and values; in other words why that audience listened to that artist. This information informs the songwriter on what it is that the audience expects to hear from that artist, and how she might be more creative by frustrating or surprising these expectations.

The Model of Authorship in Songwriting can be entered into at any point, but each box requires attention for the creative work to be completed. How it is completed is unique to each work but it has proven that the work requires a

voice, an audience and signposting to be a generalisable aspect of the songwriting practice. The criterion is a more specific notion of those broad requirements but more malleable to allow the questions to be contextual, such as would a particular radio DJ play this song, or how will this song fit in the current live set? It is in this manner that the songwriter(s) create the space in which the work exists as problem-creating, not simply problem-solving (Collins 2007), and how the valuing process moves from the songwriter to the listener.

Looking Back on the Process

It is acknowledged that creative practice is unpalpable and that it resides within a much greater system (Csikszentmihalyi 2014) beyond the mental exercise. This presents fundamental challenges to the study as the individual case only offers a limited degree of observable phenomena it therefore cannot be used to infer robust conclusions on the practice at large. While the practice at large has been scrutinised by disciplines such as musicology, the focus has been on the products of the practice and therefore can only draw weaker inferences of the practices behind these works. Art is subversive, constantly seeking to challenge its own constraints, conventions, and rules by exploring, combining and transforming its creative spaces. If we accept this as the first principle in any investigation of creative practice, then we must acknowledge that our results will not be typical in broader contexts and will struggle to be replicable in ways that might satisfy other disciplines. For this reason, my theories focused more towards the broadly generalisable that I could validate through triangulation with ethnographic sources (primary and secondary interviews) and established literature on songwriting and creative practice.

The goal of establishing an accepted theory of songwriting practice would be ambitious and to that end I would welcome amendments and challenges to my theories, especially as practices evolve over time. Just as I have argued for research(ers) to take a step back from the product—songs—to acknowledge the wider process of the practice—songwriting—I would also suggest that the process is of more potential value to the reader than the theoretical outcomes I have presented. The theories are generalized to a degree that allows researchers and practitioners to use them to understand and develop their practice. However, I believe that there is even greater value if researchers, practitioners, or research-practitioners undertake their own studies of their practice. Such an approach can develop a stronger sense of practice in practitioners, as well as a more in-depth understanding for researchers. Moreover, conducting more in-depth studies of practice can benefit the larger community of researchers in creative practice.

The risk of solipsism in the findings of this research are curtailed by the processes of conceiving an Imagined Audience and the reiterative exposure to audiences including the songwriting team, trusted circles of influencers and stakeholders, and the final actual audience which emerges after the Imagined Audience. In this way, the songwriter must acknowledge as part of their practice

the existence of others and their values. To address the risk of solipsism, which arises from the fact that the research method is primarily based on reflective practice and presented as an autoethnography, the researcher must acknowledge that the research could be susceptible to 'introspective navel gazing' (Finlay 2008). However, this would only be a consequence of incomplete reflective practice. To be considered complete and effective all three stages of reflective practice should be attended to: introspective reflection, critical reflection, and reflexivity. Introspection is important, especially for the practitioner-researcher, as the opportunity for the individual to explore in-depth is the unique advantage of reflective practice, as well as autoethnography, and requires the individual be allowed to freely reflect on their experience and views. Critical reflection should then compare the introspective findings with those of the wider field and published literature, critically analyse and evaluate the findings for generalisability, typicality, validity, and replicability. Reflexivity then requires that the researcher/practitioner generates outcomes or actions that develop the practice (even if the action is to keep doing what you are already doing). These outcomes and actions should then be subject to the next iteration of reflective practice in a never-ending cycle of development and learning.

Looking Forward to Opportunities

In keeping with this process of a reflective practice, I shall now conclude this paper with some suggestions on how the outcomes of this paper – the theories and the methodology could be applied or developed.

   In the first instance, the theories that I have presented which make up the valuing process of songwriting, can be applied as lenses through which a practitioner can explore and evaluate their practice. Should the practitioner apply a process of reflective practice then they shall be able to explore their practice in even more depth with the possibility of adapting these theories further or constructing new theories of practice. The ability to evaluate and adapt their practice is an essential skill to maintain a lifelong career in creative practice.

   Returning to how this research started, my intention was to better understand the songwriting practice so as to develop my teaching practice. The research and outcomes have not been put into the context of teaching so much as learning, but it is no huge leap to draw links between what the learners do and what the teacher does. The practitioner's application described above works equally inside and outside of an educational setting. Within the educational setting I suggest that all creative practice students would greatly benefit from developing a reflective practice alongside their creative practice. The honing of analytical and evaluative skills and inclusion of meta-cognitive skills will support their studies in other modules or units of the syllabus as well as beyond the educational context. This learning process unveils much of the mysticism of creativity further empowering learning to be autonomous and lifelong.

   In terms of curriculum design, I propose that this research has further highlighted the emphasis of creative products over creative processes in previous studies, which

has understandably become the foundation on which curricula have been designed. In this way, students are assessed on their creative products, songs, from which the assessor infers their abilities as practitioners. In this process I have demonstrated just a few of the many skills that make up the songwriting practice, such as analysis and evaluation, but I have not mentioned or emphasised other skills such as those within the affective, psychomotor or interpersonal domains (Bloom and Krathwohl 1956; Bloom et al. 2001; Atkinson 2016). To fully support students into a career as a creative practitioner a more rounded curriculum should be considered, and I suggest that this should start with designing assessment that focuses on the processes of the creative practice.

Endnotes

1. The full discussion and demonstration of application can be found in my PhD thesis. Whiting, C. (2022) Theorising and Observing the Learning in Songwriting through Autoethnography. Newcastle University.
2. In Stephen Brookfield's four lenses there is the self, colleagues, students and literature. I considered my reflections as self, songwriting colleagues, audience and literature.
3. In an educational context, the work will always have an audience which should be addressed, even if this is only the assessor. For this reason, I do not discuss songs written for self-pleasure or therapeutic reasons.
4. Voice in this context refers to the disembodied voice that we perceive through use of language, parlance, gestures and utterances, not the physical voice of the singer. It is in the Voice that the Style of the songwriter is exercised.
5. Immaterials are the less tangible components of a creative practice such as discourses, notation systems, algorithms and software (Zembylas, 2018).
6. I changed the mode of writing and intended audience so as to force myself into a situation of learning in which I could observe the process without disguising the practice with naturalised (Bloom, 1956) or unconscious competence (Benner, 1984) abilities being presented as intuition (McIntyre, 2016).

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