The story of Leonardo’s Spoons is about the engagement of the individual with the prevailing conventions. The new artist learns the mechanics, the experienced artist has achieved an instinctive sense of the desired harmony. Da Vinci is above the basics; he uses his understanding of them to transcend them, to create the sublime. The individual can transcend the mechanical conventions when he or she no longer needs to refer to them consciously, though now they form his or her dispositions, and therefore the very basis for the judgements of that individual. My interpretation here is based on creativity theory, which relies on an understanding of the interaction of field, domain and individual to explain the generation of new and novel work.

A poetics – an explanation of how an artwork is constructed – is an attempt to make sense of the doxa. It is a view about what has gone before, and so may give an implicit impression about what should inform future work – it could look like an orthodoxy. It will include observations about norms, modes and paradigms of practice. Part of the argument for studying screenwriting is about re-focusing attention away from the screenwork alone, towards an understanding of what informs the construction of that screenwork. The practice of screenwriting includes not just identifying paradigms of practice, modes and norms within the output of a particular industry, but also considering what it means for the individual’s dispositions and habitus, in the form of a ‘personal poetics’. How does an individual respond, working within a specific cultural environment, to the doxa? Part of that response is through their work, but how far does that
reflect a coherent personal paradigm of practice? How does their response fit with the observable modes and norms that form the prevailing doxa? This chapter is about the writer's struggle to make sense of the doxa as it applies to creating new work – where the field meets the personal and the subjective – and how much we can say the writer forms a personal sense of a poetics.

The individual and the doxa

‘Transcendence’ of the mechanical conventions is recognizable in present-day screenwriting as a notion of excellence, of ‘writing outside the rules’. A small study of seven professional screen-readers in 2004 explained how this works.\(^2\) For example, Reader E felt that ‘breaking the rules’ is important to the field, to avoid mediocrity, a sentiment shared by all but one of the seven interviewees. Whatever method is used to construct the screenplay, to be good it must somehow transcend those methods. Writers A and B, and Director D say that the achievement may involve avoiding classic structure, and moving away from the conventional, but even so the more general framework of craft skills is ‘not set aside’ (Director D). While admirable writing is ‘more than’ the rules (Writer A), the rules must be known ‘in order to break them successfully’ (Reader E), and students need to master the three-act structure before they can ‘throw away the spoons’ (Writer B). But it is not clear from these interviews how this transcendence is to be achieved, other than finding a way that engages the reader subjectively. Professional screen-readers in the UK describe seeking an original voice that can be observed within normative uses of the form and which is appropriate to the structure of the field (Macdonald 2003, 32).

The point here is that the doxa forms and informs the actions of creation. Creativity research has considered the products of creativity (Sawyer 2006, 7), and there is often debate about major works of genius (what Sawyer notes as creativity with a large C), but screenwriting (as a group-based activity within which individuals make sometimes major creative contributions) is more complex, not least because of the problems of identifying the product itself. Sawyer's interest in performance creativity, which he describes as ‘one of the more important examples of human innovation’ (2006, 7), can be linked also with screen idea development. Performance is similarly ephemeral and fleeting, and any documentary evidence of it is similarly propositional. There might be a ‘fixed’ final text in the screenwork, of course, but as Sawyer points out, explaining performance creativity brings in the important new elements of improvisation, collaboration and communication. For the individual within a Screen Idea Work Group, collaboration and communication is what makes it work, and the element of improvisation in this example from jazz performance neatly describes the individual’s own agency in the process of contributing to a shared goal.