

Conceiving art practice as a theoretical act within a framework of inquiry sets in place the prospect of doing research in artmaking. When used as a site for research, art practice brings into play the seamless relationship between the 'researcher' (artist) and the 'researched' (art practice) and this builds on all the discursive arguments that disrupt untenable dichotomies such as the fictive subjective-objective divide. (Sullivan 2006, p. 31)

A series of research acts [...] is organized around three elements that characterize studio processes as a cultural practice, namely structure, agency and action. Studio practice involves going forth to thought in a purposeful way that embodies meaning and this is registered in many contexts. (Sullivan 2006, p. 29)

Forming Acts in Art Practice: Although the mind is the medium that most clearly shapes art practice, for many art researchers art materials are still the most tangible means that give form to imaginative thought. Therefore, when under taking studio research where there is a focus on structural qualities among other interests, the artist really does think in a medium. In this process the artwork becomes the primary site and source of knowledge [...] where questions, problems, and insights emerge as part of the practice. Research acts such as visual problem finding and problem solving are characteristic of this kind of inquiry process whereby forms, materials, properties, and qualities become the means by which concerns are explored and expressed. [...] A characteristic of these research acts is that understanding emerges within the process of media experimentation, and this performative knowledge can be likened to more traditional grounded strategies such as observation and empirical confirmation. (Sullivan 2006, p. 31)

PoI involves a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry and where, in respect of the arts, a practice (creative writing, dance, musical score/performance, theatre/performance, visual exhibition, film or other cultural practice) is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry. (Neilson 2013, p. 9)

A general feature of practice-based research projects is that personal interest and experience, rather than objective 'disinterestedness' motivates the research process. Recognition of this permits us to understand more clearly, the contexts, methods and value of knowledge derived from artists' research, and to validate the subjective, emergent and interdisciplinary research methods of studio enquiry, that I have argued (Barrett 2006), constitute the innovative dimension of practice as research. (Barrett 2007, p. 119)

Creative arts research is often motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns; it operates not only on the basis of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on that of tacit and experiential knowledge. Creative and experiential knowledge operates within in the domain of the aesthetic and knowledge produced through aesthetic experience is always contextual and situated. (Barrett 2007, p. 115)

The problem with eighteenth century conceptions of aesthetics is that they tend to efface materiality by casting aesthetic experience in terms of disembodied contemplation. Shusterman observes further, that the 'subsequent separation of art from reality and everyday experience, not only binds it as practically worthless, but also isolates it from practical life and social-political action' (Shusterman 1992: 52). The challenge for practitioner-researchers therefore, is to restore the link between practical or lived experience and the aesthetic, and to demonstrate how, in artistic practice, this realizes a mode of generating knowledge that has application beyond immediate points of production and consumption of the artistic product. (Barrett 2007, p. 116)

As the subjective is seen as always operational, and as knowledge can only ever be situated within a context, the arguments against practice are significantly altered. The knowledge that is intrinsic to a research object cannot be generalised without erasing the postpositivist discourse. (Banerama 2004, p. 66)

Dewey tells us that knowledge, gained by the artist through everyday living and activity, is instantiated into the artwork through creative practice. Though more intensified, the process of artistic activity can be likened to what is described by Dewey as the flow of experience that runs its course to closure or fulfilment through processes of adjustment to our environment and objects in the world. In artistic experience, as in everyday experience, 'action, feeling and meaning are one' (Dewey 1980: 35). Experience involves interaction as a response to discord or lack of adjustment. In the flow of experience occurring in the everyday, or in artistic practice, a problem can be said to emerge when there is a lack or absence of adjustment to surroundings. Initially, such experiences are aesthetic, since they involve sensory responses which are then qualified with emotion, a process by which positive or negative value is attributed to experience. From this, conscious intent or thought emerges. The process of attributing meaning and value in artistic practice (and the contemplation of art) is therefore necessarily experiential. (Barrett 2007, p. 116)

In his critique of science, Latour points out that, as new technologies of reproduction of inscriptions increase, the volume and rate of circulation of inscriptions also increase; this in turn, speeds up the spread errors or inaccuracies that are carried by them. Through this process of displacement and circulation, knowledge becomes less and less tied to real conditions. The circulation of inscriptions results in the displacement of experience in favour of representation and discourse. It can thus be argued, that artistic research which draws predominantly on lived experience and more direct engagement with materials and objects, provides a crucial alternative mode of knowledge production compared with the scientific method described by Latour. (Barrett 2007, p. 117)

Problematising practice as research thus presents the challenge of thinking about the messiness of the myriad of activities and strategies that make up a creative practice methodology in a way that embraces the why as well as analyses the how. (Barrett 2005, p. 186)

A pattern of reflexivity emerged that became the process through which the research study emerged. The reflexive cycle involved making, reflecting and acting on the reflections – and often a messy combination of these. This reflexive pattern so prevalent in my art practice served my research as it contended with multiple processes and layers such as data collection, analysis and interpretation that interacted simultaneously as an ongoing exchange. The reflexive cycle seemed to be a central component of my research in my own practice, but in the artists that I was studying as well. Reflexivity also seemed to be the cycle of action and reaction that enabled my art practice as research method to work in concert with other research methods. (Baxter 2006, p. 14)

Documentation / Documentation

Some research outcomes are processual, emergent that is in the processes of generation, selection, shaping and editing material in practice. These processes and insights may be documented in notebooks, sketchbooks, photographs, on video and even in related artworks and practices. (Neilson 2006, p. 112)

Interpretive research acts build on the rich conceptual traditions associated with image making whose purpose is to open up dialogue between the artist and viewer, and among an interpretive community whose interests may cut across disciplines. The linguistic turn of postmodernism has done much to disrupt the easy equation that presumes an artwork and its 'reading' by viewers is a simple matter of encoding and decoding visual forms. Interpretive acts open up the space among the artist, artwork, and the setting as different interests and perspectives are embraced. New understandings result as they are filtered through the interpretive live community of art writers and theorists. (Sullivan 2006, p. 32)

For an arts researcher inspired by a call to critical action, any inquiry is undertaken for personal and public ends. A questioning attitude that is socially and culturally directed readily maps onto methods of inquiry and research acts that are responsive and exploratory. Yet the most crucial element within this inquiry process is the need to be able to create forms from which critical options can be more clearly assessed and addressed. This will require moving in and beyond the comfort of prescribed discipline knowledge, as issues and concerns demand approaches where new perspectives are opened up. Consequently it is the creation of new opportunities to see beyond what is known that has the potential to lead to the creation of new knowledge. (Sullivan 2006, p. 32)

The impact of practice as research is still to be been fully understood and realised. It can be argued that the generative capacity of creative arts research is derived from the alternative approaches it employs those subjective, emergent and interdisciplinary approaches that continue to be viewed less favourably by research funders, assessors and others still to be convinced of the innovative and critical potential of artistic research. That studio production as research is predicated on an alternative logic of practice often resulting in the generation of new ways of modelling meaning, knowledge and social relations is still a relatively foreign idea (within the wider university research community. (Barrett 2007a, p. 3)

Caractéristiques / Characteristics

implies that practice, in and of itself can be considered research. (Banerama 2004, p. 65)

the proposed inquiry necessarily entailed practical knowledge which might primarily be demonstrated in practice – that is, knowledge which is a matter of doing rather than abstractly conceived and thus able to be articulated by way of a traditional thesis in words alone. (Neilson 2013, p. 9)

Practice as Research

the assessment of practice as research [...] should not privilege the written exposition by assessing the communication and avoiding the practice itself. This is often the triumph of context over text, and by text in this instance, I mean the practice and the finished work itself. (Banerama 2004, p. 67)

In this doctoral work there is clearly a requirement for the presence of the traditional literary mode of communication, often a commentary or critical analysis. (Banerama 2004, p. 67)

Exégèse / Exegesis

all possible distributions of research across art and writing are perfectly acceptable; the point to be made here is only that some of those are less artistically owned than others and that academic frameworks may distort practice if they do not allow for a self-determined negotiation of writing. Moreover, it should also be said that the writing of academic texts may, in fact, be one element of an artistic practice. Artwork and text are non-correlated but can both be used for the exposition of practice as research. (Schwab Borgford 2014, p. 18)

Réflexivité / Reflexivity

Through such re-doubling, artistic practice is able to install a reflexive distance within itself that allows it to be simultaneously the subject and the object of an inquiry. In this way, practice can deliver in one proposition both a thought and its appraisal. (Schwab Borgford 2014, p. 15)

Innovative practice-as-research approaches in the domain of phenomenology aim to construct 'encounters', sometimes actively involving 'experiences' in a practical engagement, or at least denying a fixed and comfortably separated disposition. Some projects, perhaps following Deleuze and Guattari, have aimed to construct a 'haptic' space to research practice as a clear distinction between seeing and feeling is based upon a false opposition between two senses as experienced. (Neilson 2006, p. 110)

Épistémologie / Epistemology

phenomenology, like post-structuralism, has emerged as a influential conceptual framework contemporaneously with the rise of 'practice as research'. The sub-branch of 'existential phenomenology' derived from Heidegger's 'Sein und Zeit', 1927, particularly as taken up by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, emphasises, amongst other things, the practice of becoming (as distinct from being), and the embodiment of thought rather than the Cartesian discrete mind.5 In some ways paralleling post-structuralism, Merleau-Ponty blurs category boundaries and emphasises slippage and 'in-between-ness'. But his particular emphasis is upon incarnate perception as an 'inter-twining' ('the chiasm', 1969) in which experience is perceived through the body and its immersion in the world. For Merleau-Ponty, perception is always incarnate, context-specific and apprehended by a subject, and thus any knowledge or understanding is achieved through an 'encounter' in a subject/object inter-relationship. (Neilson 2006, p. 110)

Enjeux / Challenges

One of the foremost issues with creative practice as research can be the notion of 'subjectivity'. The 'truth', validity, and work of the project may be brought into question when a work has no basis in preestablished and prelegitimised theory. (Ryan 2005, p. 7)

The aesthetics of performance practice as research are highly sensitive as they automatically spark off major issues regarding, for example, standards and virtuosity, rigorous protocols and creative unpredictability, inadequate resources and the nature of appropriate infrastructures. The underlying dynamic producing these issues aligns with the 'questions or hunches' conundrum outlined above. Because 'hunches' – or, more conventionally, 'intuitions' – problematise the well-worn modernist oppositions between mind and body, spirituality and materiality, creativity and rationality, arts and sciences, and so on, and can issue in aesthetic forms that confound those distinctions – whether through the raw economics of 'production finds' or even in how to prove a 'hunch' is a truth forever. Hence contemporary performance practice as research generally may patently fail to conform to the schemas of modernism through its principal defining feature: a radical diversity of approaches producing an incongruous field. (Kershaw 2009, p. 115)

The creation of embodied knowledges has been most frequently invoked by practitioners as an 'object' of their projects. This 'knowing how' is often placed in opposition to the conscious cognition of 'knowing that'. The epistemological historiography of this position can be traced from Cartesian dualism through to many later thinkers, including Heidegger's nineteenth century work on aesthetics (Reber 1995: 15). Heidegger's existential philosophy of *dasein* – or the knowledgeable being in the world; Merleau-Ponty's Gestalt-informed phenomenology; Polanyi's post-critical philosophy (1958/1974); Lashley's work on cerebral organisation and behaviours (1956); Chomsky's studies of language acquisition and use (1972); Searle's constructions of social reality (1995); and of course Schöen's management/marketing work on the well-esteemed practitioner (Pisicini Kershaw 2004, p.88)

the post-structuralism fosters a sceptical and radical mode of thought which resonates with experimentation in arts practices insofar as play is a method of inquiry, aiming not to establish findings by way of data to support a demonstrable and finite answer to a research question, but to play elements in a bridge which afford insights through delicate and careful juxtaposition. (Neilson 2006, p. 109)

À propos... / About...

Cartographie des thèmes reliés au mot-clé «Practice as research» à partir d'un corpus de plus de 200 articles / Mapping of themes related to the keyword "Practice as research" from a body of more than 200 articles

Cartographie (en couleurs) de la recherche-critique, Louis-Gaude Paquin et Cynthia Noury
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The drawbacks, such as questions of subjectivity and validity, of research based purely in creative practice can be overcome by the traditional component of the hybrid method. Using the conventional and established research strategy of textual content analysis can give a solid base for the creative to spring from. (Ryan 2005, p. 8)

insights, understandings, knowings relevant to a wide range of disciplines specifically. (Kershaw 2009, p.5)

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Because art is inherently reflective and reflexive, practice-as-research activity may be identified with art activity in key and necessary aspects. But, more typically perhaps, practice-as-research is marked as distinct from art per se by differences of degree rather than kind in such matters as intention and context. The reflexive and reflexive intent of practice-as-research is directed within and at the academy rather than within and at the artwork itself, even though the boundary between domains may be increasingly blurred. (Neilson 2006, p. 112)

Réflexivité / Reflexivity

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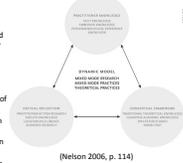
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Donald Schön's work on reflective practice and his notion of 'knowing-in-practice' extends our understanding of the process of experiential discovery that is central to practice as research. It involves reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, processes through which the researcher is able to Surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice, and make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness which he may allow himself to experience (Schön 1983: 61).

The notion of 'knowing-in-practice' can also be understood in terms of Michael Polanyi's account of 'personal knowledge'. It could be argued that both of these terms are interchangeable with the notion of experiential knowledge. Polanyi argues that positive and objective philosophies that underpin modern science obscure the fact that knowledge belongs to human agents who engage personally in their knowledge. (Barrett 2007, p. 117)



(Neilson 2006, p. 114)

Polanyi's account of tacit knowledge adds to our understanding of experiential knowledge. Though not explicit, tacit knowledge is always implicated in human activity and learning (Polanyi 1966). It refers to embodied knowledge or 'skill' developed and applied through practice and experience and apprehended intuitively; this process is readily understood by artistic researchers who recognize that the opposition between explicit and tacit knowledge is a false one (Boit 2004). (Barrett 2007, p. 118)

Practitioner knowledge is both a necessary and sufficient condition for arts practices but it is only a necessary condition for practice-as-research since research sufficiency may be in sustained and structured relation to make the 'tacit knowledge' explicit. (Neilson 2006, p. 112)

Connaissance / Knowledge

Jumping through time, the schism between the early seventeenth century by Plato was endorsed, though on very different terms, in the body and mind inaugurated by Descartes' retreat in the 'cogito' ('I think therefore, I am') into the mind as the sole locus of embodied knowledge. Some practice-as-research (PaR) projects that advance the idea of 'tacit knowledge' pose a challenge, as we shall see, to the privileging of mind over body in the Western intellectual tradition in respect of the locus of knowledge. Furthermore, the project of bodily disembodiment of knowledge from one community to another – for example the passing on of a movement vocabulary in the workshop from one dance or physical theatre community to another – challenges the dominance, if not virtual exclusivity, of writing (or other codified symbolic language) which has long since established itself as the appropriate means of storage and distribution of knowledge. (Neilson 2006, p. 106)

Post enlightenment separation of the arts from science along with scholastic and even now knowledge. Such projects run a course between and between rational argument and embodied knowledge and in so doing explore a limited space favoured by a number of practice-as-research projects. The inhabiting of liminal space in itself poses a conceptual challenge to the 'clear' categorical boundaries of Aristotelian logic. The case for such projects (theory imbued within practice) is not only that it effectively makes arguments but that the arguments are letter made in the Praxis [...] rather than in writing. (Neilson 2006, p. 108)

The research in its totality yields new understandings through the interplay of perspectives drawn from evidence produced in each element proposed, where one data-set might be insufficient to make the insight manifest. In sum, praxis (theory imbued within workshop) may thus better be understood as both the product and related documentation, as indicated. (Neilson 2006, p. 115)

Méthodologie / Methodology

Nobody works in a vacuum, all creative work operates within – or reacts against – established discourses. Similarly, it is essential that the re-doubling of practice in order to artistically move from artistic ideas to epistemic claims. (Schwab Borgford 2014, p. 14)

The methodologies are broad. In the context of dance, they might comprise: the generation of dance and/or movement studies to investigate, for example, the validity or range of a particular dance analytic concept; experimentation in the practice of, say, teaching dance to test the validity of theoretical insights about that practice; practical studio experimentation to evaluate the relevance of certain somatic theories to dance performance; creative artistic activity as research methodology; and research product, in its own right. (Robbidge 2005, p. 4)

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