THE ART OF RESEARCH II

Process, Results and Contribution

Graphic design: Cleo Bade
Language revision: Damon Tringham
Photos: authors, unless otherwised mentioned
Cover photo: Pia Staff, detail of Cyborg, 2006, Rag Doll
series, recycled bed linen, sewing and embroidering

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Process, Results and Contribution

Edited by
MAARIT MÄKELÄ
TIM O'RILEY

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Figure: Maarit Mäkelä, 2007, Silence, silkscreen and painting to finnish earthenware, 30 x 38 cm.
Photo: Rauno Träskelin.

The Art of Research conference series provides a forum for sharing and discussing research in the fields of art and design. The spheres of knowledge, material thinking and experience that are fostered through creative work have long and extensive histories (for example, see Sennett 2008). Perhaps regardless of, or in spite of, such histories, the term 'research' has only been used to describe the intersections between these spheres in a formal, academic sense during the last 25 years. In this respect, research was probably a necessity of language, which – given funding and research assessment criteria, together with the integration of the art school or academy into the university – led to a re-thinking of studio practices.

As the gradual proliferation of publications related to practice-led or artistic research (for example, Hannula & al. 2005; Macleod & Holdridge 2005; Mäkelä & Routarinne 2006; Svenungsson 2007; Elkins 2009; Biggs & Karlson 2011; Koskinen & al. 2011; Dombois & al. 2012; Van Schaik & al. 2012) indicates, this is becoming embedded in how designers and artists think about how they work within and in response to the institution or academy. In addition, at a more fundamental level, they are acknowledging how enmeshed or entangled are the thinking and material practices that they use on a daily basis. Through the second volume of *The Art of Research*, we suggest that research can be both a creative as well as a rationalizing process, at whose heart curiosity undeniably lies.

Christopher Frayling, one of the early contributors to ideas concerning research in the sphere of art and design, discusses a distinction that he refers to as research with a lowercase 'r' and uppercase 'R'. By *research* he refers to the kind of research that designers and artists informally use to extend their thinking and practice. By *Research*, on the other hand, he refers, for example, to a format of research undertaken formally in the context of PhD study or according to a defined methodology (Frayling 1993).

Based on Frayling's account, it seems apt to argue for an intermingling of research and creative practices. Apt, because we consider research

– with a lowercase 'r' rather than an uppercase 'R' – to be part of the everyday process of discovery, invention, reflection and realization that is integral to artists' and designers' practices. In addition, we suppose that to inquire into something with an appropriate and understood method is not necessarily to know what will be found. In many ways, not knowing what the outcome of a research process will be is an inevitable part of that research. We believe that when uncertainty is a fact of life, to be sure of one's process of going about things, i.e. to find one's own methodology, is undeniably helpful, perhaps even vital. However, it should be stressed that this methodology should be aligned and responsive to the purpose of the practice itself. Otherwise, there may be good reason to reconsider carefully why one does something one is not best placed or trained to do, or versed in practising.

What is considered research – or *Research*, for that matter – could be aligned to an individual's preferences and purposes, and the context in which one sees her work operating. By utilizing Frayling's idea about research, it is obvious that work can simultaneously contribute to his two definitions, i.e. the realms of *research* and *Research*. Obviously, it is a challenge to codify or lay bare what are often hidden and unarticulated processes or motivations. Nevertheless, we believe that, particularly in the case of *Research*, this 'laying bare' by the works' authors – the artist-researchers themselves – might also provide a resource for others to access and apply to their own thinking.[1]

It might be beneficial to emphasize that in this context we understand the work as an integrated amalgam of various activities where thought

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[1] Laying bare, codifying, communicating or reflecting on one's motivations and the things that one produces are not necessarily problematic actions, The quality that the American writer Edgar Allan Poe referred to as intuition can perhaps never be fully understood or completely mapped: "... it is but the conviction arising from those inductions or deductions of which the processes are so shadowy as to escape our consciousness, elude our reason, or defy our capacity of expression." (Poe 2002, 21.)

and action operate in unison and in dialogue (see also O'Riley 2006). We assume that it is useful to regard the tasks of 'work' in this sense, as occupying an integrated whole where the activities of thinking, making and reflecting provide the underlying strata. In a way, we thus consider work as establishing or positing "*relational objects of thinking*" (ibid.).

Creative practice[2] is often an amalgamation of things discovered by chance. Often, these chance occurrences become discoveries through an intentional perception, one that betrays at times an unspoken or tacit intention or, on other occasions, an overt and definable method and goal. Those serendipitous moments, where intention and accident collide, are perhaps the places where creative practices in terms of both art and science draw their strengths and particularities (Walpole 1833, 59–64).[3] Nevertheless, both of these spheres habitually regard, reflect and utilize these collisions in their own particular ways.

Where, depending on its purposes, *Research* can contribute towards proffering knowledge that is secure and stable, i.e. knowledge that can

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2 It is evident that the term creative practice could be fairly applied to activities from many disciplines, including the sciences (see, for example, Polanyi 2009, 69-83). Nevertheless, it seems to be most frequently used to describe design or art practices. In addition we acknowledge that other disciplines are inherently and fundamentally creative in terms of how ideas, theories and practices develop. Finally, we believe that curiosity, creative enquiry and critical reflection underpin much that is considered research in various fields.

3 The word 'serendipity' was coined in 1754 by Horace Walpole, the British antiquarian, art historian and politician. Its origins lie in the title of an oriental tale known as The Peregrinaggio of the Three Princes of Serendip (1557), a story about three young princes in Serendip, an old Persian name for what is now Sri Lanka. According to the story, the King of Serendip sent his three sons away from his kingdom to gain in worldly knowledge. This occurred in a series of adventures, as the Princes were "always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things which they were not in quest of" (Walpole 1833, 61).

be trusted, *research* can enable incompleteness. Provisionality is central to what creative practice can offer other disciplines and it can perhaps make a virtue of this incompleteness (O'Riley 2011). If art or design offers things or processes that are fundamentally incomplete, and in addition, is able to acknowledge this in its formulations, a recipient's involvement is a necessary requirement for the work to exist or function. Moreover this acknowledgement reflects the entanglement of thought, material, reflection and spectatorial engagement, which is at the root of the process. Research targets the unknown with a specific way of taking aim and following this through, without necessarily knowing where the path may lead.

The main attempt of this second volume of *The Art of Research* is to reveal some features of particular serendipities undertaken in the context of practice-led research. The subtitle of the anthology, *processes, result and contributions,* is simultaneously the subtitle of *The Art of Research* conference that took place at the University of Art and Design Helsinki during November 24–25, 2009. This anthology consists of presentations that took place during the conference, two of these being the invited keynote presentations, and five being papers which have gone through a double-blind peer review process.

The keynote presentations by Pirkko Anttila and Janis Jefferies discuss the conference topics from an overarching perspective and lay some of the ground for the publication. In her article, Pirkko Anttila discusses the sphere where knowledge is produced from a subjective perspective, while Janis Jefferies is concerned with the concrete place, i.e. the laboratory, which enables the entanglement of different modes of practice. In addition, the anthology presents five cases of doctoral candidates – the cases of Pia Staff, Joanna Sperryn-Jones, Leora Farber Sarah Casey and Marsha Bradfield – where a particular journey related to the author's own practice-led research is discussed in more detail. These papers were presented in the conference, but have been further developed for this publication. In addition, the authors have proceeded

with their studies, some of these being already submitted and evaluated. Next, we will give a brief account of each of the articles – or rather take a specific look at the sphere that each of the articles creates around them.

Mangling practices

Janis Jefferies' contribution considers the notions of collaboration and material agency as intrinsic elements of what is referred to as practice-led research, citing the usefulness of Andrew Pickering's concept of the 'mangle of practice' for considering research in this context (Pickering 1995). Before looking at Pickering's approach to scientific practice and material agency, Jefferies provides an overview of the history of practice-led research. According to Jefferies, this special approach for research originates from the distinctions between studio practice and complementary studies in the 1970s and develops into subsequent academic structures that integrated art and design practices with theoretical and contextual frameworks.

She asserts an apparent tension between what was regarded as academic and scholarly research and the artist-theorist who "*raided across ideas, disciplines and practices to invigorate visual arts practices from within*", and regards the practice-led research degree as a contemporary manifestation of this drive. Jefferies goes on to delve into and unpick some of the relationships between research and practice, and provides a robust analysis and positing of practice-led research as a "*profound model of learning*". Collaborations in the studio and lab are seen as central to research practice, and, as an example, she reflects on two projects that can be seen as instances of this. Through the given examples, immersion in a collaborative, cross-disciplinary way of working provides a view of knowledge or contribution, where disciplinary boundaries – in a group rather than individual sense – become areas of creativity and negotiation. Running a 'lab' is well known in the sciences. Establishing

a space where artists or designers collaborate is perhaps less familiar but foregrounds the notion of an 'emergent practice'.

It is apt that Jefferies goes on to review and analyse Pickering's 'mangle' as this provides a metaphor, if not a model, for the kind of practice she describes. Pickering (2011) seems to propose a dynamic performative practice in contrast to the static representations of, for example, physical theories of matter and the world, describing a dialectic or interplay of resistance and accommodation that he calls the 'mangle'.[4] The mangle in a sense acknowledges the entanglement of action and idea. For this reason, it seems highly appropriate as a means to think about practice-led research, art or artistic research, research practice, or thinking through art.

The main idea of Jefferies's article is that thinking occurs not only in, and is not only realised through, language. Thought can be formulated in other ways. Moreover, there is no hierarchy to human beings and the world they inhabit, as in Pickering's view, humans are on the same level as things. It can be concluded that awareness of an entanglement between the human and the material is central to Pickering's thinking, and the grammars of practice that Jefferies describes, which 'tune' the agency and interaction between material and human practice, suggest new ways of considering, engaging in and reflecting on research in this context.

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4   Pickering states in a seminar to students at the European University at St. Petersburg: "I invite you to [have] a lively engagement with a lively world... I try to encourage people to start from somewhere else, rather than from language." (Pickering 2011, video time code c. 28:00:00).

Unseen representations

Pia Staff's subject is her own artistic process and the ways that this slow process takes shape and proceeds. The starting point for her artwork is everyday life, in particular the experience of femininity and duties related to this gender. In her article, Staff takes a closer look at her own artistic production and reveals how the theme of a doll appeared, developed and acquired new modalities during the process. Staff starts her article by describing a moment, when she drew a strange figure in her working diary. This drawing can be considered to be an unconsciously hooked, 'root' figure – a starting point for a long artistic journey.

Painter Tarja Pitkänen-Walter (2006, 151) refers to this same moment when considering painting as a process, where something that is "*too fragile to make it into [an] image*" seeks to find expression. To be able to achieve this moment, the artist has to develop the ability to give up planning and give shape to something that is more heterogeneous than an already-existing notion (ibid. 121). The experiences of hesitation and groping are elemental parts of this process, where, as the creator of a new image, the artist has to take a kind of sidestep and give space to a new picture that seems to be creating itself (ibid. 135). During this process, the artist is guided to the source of the unconscious by unexpected, casual surprises and sensuousness. That which she discovers, she expresses with figures, forms, colours, structures and textures (ibid. 101).

According to Pitkänen-Walter (2006, 26), the birth of the artwork calls for the author to make a visit to the tacit dimension of the mind. When the work is taking shape, the author defines its visual meaning. However, the interpretation with words takes place usually after the work has been finished. Due to the different modes of expression, words can never reach the same representation as an image. An image is more archaic and, in this way, prior to a language expressed through words (ibid. 30). In a way, the essence of the image is more undefined – or

indefinable – as, on the one hand, it can suggest multiple meanings, and on the other hand, it leaves these open (ibid. 32).

Daniel Stern, in his study of baby development (Stern 1997), remarks that some non-verbal experiences are unable to be expressed with words. In addition, verbalization has a tendency to break rich, complicated, unified experiments into pieces (cited in Pitkänen-Walter 2006, 122). In the context of practice-led research, the relationship between written text and related works has a crucial meaning. One of the commonly-shared conceptions is that in these studies the process of making provides a unique sphere for explorations and experimentations, and in addition to the related insights and created artefacts, a primary ground for knowing and understanding.[5] Based on Stern's research, it is possible to conclude that the utilization of non-verbal experiences and representations enables us to take into consideration issues and thoughts which might otherwise be out of our reach.

The Power Of Autoethnography

In her article, Joanna Sperryn-Jones reveals how her own experiences of 'breaking' made her experiment with the same theme in her artistic production. In an accident while jumping on a mountain/cross-country bike, she broke her bones several times. During the subsequent lengthy recovery period, she made a trip to Japan and became interested in the 'crutched' trees she saw there. This unexpected interest led her to develop

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[5] This conception is supported by theoretical and methodological texts related to the emergence of Practice-Led Research (e.g. Biggs 2002, Scrivener 2002, Mäkelä 2007), as well as numerous doctoral dissertations. For example, the written part of Teemu Mäki's dissertation consists of essays that were written after he created the related artworks. As he explains: "I first made art and after that, separately, stuffed my research-oriented self-reflection onto the covers of the book" (Mäki 2005, 11).

an artistic process in which the themes of making and breaking were profoundly explored by means of fragile ceramic twigs.

Sperryn-Jones utilises an autoethnographic approach for connecting her autobiographical experiences to a thematically related discourse, using her own voice in a dialogue with relevant theoretical texts. Especially over the past two decades, in the field of qualitative research, the personal experience of the researcher has been focused upon as an integral part of the research. This has encouraged the utilization of a self-reflexive approach, by which practitioners use their own experience as part of their research; this approach has been used especially by such researchers who agree upon the contextual nature of research, and acknowledge its situatedness and relatedness in time (see, for example, Ellis and Bochner 2000).

In her book *Autoethnography as Method*, Heewon Chang (2008) indicates the threefold notion of autoethnography. Firstly, the 'auto' locates 'I' as the focus of the investigation. Secondly, the 'ethno' places the rich and complex context of culture and society as a site to be interrogated. This is also the site in which research and the researcher, i.e. 'I', is embedded, as well as a site about which the researcher is attempting to find 'new knowledge'. Finally, what Chang refers to as the 'graphic', speaks to the 'post' moment of writing. This concerns the cultural context and the 'I' as part of this context, in which and through which the process of ordering information and making an argument that might lead to 'new knowledge' or 'epistemological gain' is presented (Chang 2008; see also Munro 2010, 73.)

By following Chang's account, it is possible to acknowledge that the starting point for Sperryn-Jones' investigation is her own experiences. By using an autoethnographic approach Sperryn-Jones is able to reveal a thread between her own autobiographical experiments and her artworks, as her own life situation pushed her to employ the themes of fragility and breaking when practising her work as a sculptor. What she does in her article is to contextualise her own observations and experiences

and set these in a wider social and cultural context. She does this by establishing a dialogue between her own written reflections and other thematically suitable, textual sources. Finally, written reflection takes place after the practical exploration in the studio has ended and the final artworks have been realized.[6]

Anu Koivunen (2004, 288), one of the authors in the first Finnish publication that discusses the methods and methodology of feminist research, states that speaking about methods and methodology is actually always narration after the fact.[7] The question is about how narration – where the researcher presents herself as the subject of her research – defines the time and space of the research, names the object of the drama and the other actors, determines the turns of the plot and the course of the drama, and sets the scene for the ending. In turn, reflection on the methodology means that the researcher contextualizes and frames herself by using narration.

It can be concluded that by utilising an autoethographic approach Sperryn-Jones is able to uncover some particulars about her creative jour-

6   This is also the approach that Mäkelä has utilised in her own practice-led doctoral dissertation (Mäkelä 2003), in which she discusses her own creative process and its outcomes in the context of feminist research. Mäkelä has called her approach the retroactive look (ibid. 26–28). The starting point of the notion is an artist-researcher who reviews her artistic work process and the created artefacts from a retrospective viewpoint, creating a dialogue between her observations and interpretations on the one hand and (research) literature on the other (Mäkelä 2006, 77). The written part of the research functions, thus, as a space in which the contextualisation of actions and a closer examination of the meanings related to the process of making take place (Mäkelä 2010, 64–65).

7   The term 'method' is derived from the Greek word methodos, which means 'the way to reach something'. The possibility of following the same road in the same direction that has been taken before is inherently methodological and therefore characteristic of a scientific approach (Gadamer 2005, 17).

ney, which in her case – as in the case of Staff – signifies the importance of serendipity and uncertainty. In relation to her case, Sperryn-Jones also shares with the readers some pages of her working diaries, thus enabling a visual tracking of this particular creative process.

Knowledge and subjectivity

The idea of situatedness, or emphasis on personal experience, is also a basis of feminist epistemology and is evinced in the second wave feminism slogan 'the personal is political' (Humm 199, 204).[8] For example, Evelyn Fox Keller (1985, 127–198), who is particularly interested in the relationship between gender and science, reclaims subjective experience. She speaks about 'dynamic objectivity' and refers to knowledge production, which – when aiming at more effective objectivity – is based on subjective experience.

In addition, the American science historian Donna Haraway (1991, 188) alludes to the same conception when speaking about feminist objectivity. By this term, she refers to socially situated knowledge, which is produced from a specific speaker's position. According to her view, the point is not to see the knowing subject as an external observer, but as a subject who is conscious of her situatedness, history and discursive nature. Hence, the knowing subject becomes participatory, mobile and embodied. It could be concluded that the concept of situatedness is

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8 The idea of private experiences becoming public issues was discussed as early as in C. Wright Mills' seminal book The Sociological Imagination (1959). In the field of feminist research, this idea was later refined to the form, 'the personal is political'.

one of the central tenets of feminist epistemology, as well as one of the basic requirements for feminist knowledge production.

This epistemology has challenged and deeply influenced the comprehension of knowledge production in the field of contemporary research in general. In the context of practice-led research, it might be appropriate to draw parallels between certain forms of feminist knowledge production and knowledge gained through artists' and designers' own art and design-related practices (Mäkelä & Latva-Somppi 2011, 2).

In her article, Pirkko Anttila discusses special features of knowledge production that are typical in the field of art and design, and in a more specific way, the role of researcher in the context of practice-led or artistic research. The starting point of her discourse is a new figure in the research context: the protagonist with the dual roles of artist-researcher.[9] The historical factor for this novel figure is the transformation of art academies into universities. This has created new kinds of connections between art and research, resulting in the emergence of an 'academic artworld' (Elo 2007, 12; Scrivener 2006, 160).

The photographer-researcher Mika Elo (2009, 19) talks about a new type of Janus-faced researcher, that is, someone who is able to assume positions in both spheres. He contends that there is a still a firmly established division in the structures of individual thinking and those of institutions. A seldom-challenged assumption is that whereas a good researcher focuses on the verbal, an experienced artist focuses on the non-verbal articulation of ideas. In her article, Anttila attempts to fit

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9   The dual role of artist-researcher has already been considered in several discussions of artistic or practice-led research. (See, for example, Hannula & al. 2005, 61; Mäkelä & Routarinne 2006, 13; Borgdorff 2006, 20–21.)

this complex figure into the field of academic research by negotiating the premise behind practice-led or artistic research, and where logically space can be found for this new 'character' in the academic world.

At this stage, we want to emphasize that by following the terminology used in the first volume of *The Art of Research*, we consciously use the term *practice-led research* to refer to the on-going discussion that also takes place under the terms *practice-based* and *artistic research*.[10] Even if it might already be possible to differentiate some of the features typical to each of these special trends, we consider that their backbone remains the same.

Entangling practices

The interplay of the positions of artist and researcher is also the epistemological basis of Leora Farber's article. Farber utilizes her own experiences as a Jewish woman living in postcolonial South Africa. This situated knowledge is the starting point for her project, in which different art and theory-related practices form a unique case, and where personal and social spheres are entangled tightly together.

According to the art philosopher Kathrin Busch (2009, 1–2), an entanglement with theory is one of the most intriguing aspects about

10 The difficulty in distinguishing between the terms has been evident in recent discussions; thus, they have been used more or less interchangeably (see, for example, Elo 2009, 19; Borgdorff 2009, 23). In addition, although various terms reflect the different modes of combination of artistic practice and research, their meanings and usages vary among countries, subject areas, and even scholars working within institutional contexts. It can be roughly summed up that practice-led research is the term currently used in most universities in the UK and in design disciplines, whereas artistic research is used more extensively in other European countries and in the field of fine arts (Nimkulrat 2011, 60; Mäkelä & al. 2011, 3.)

contemporary art. Art practices are today saturated with theoretical knowledge as artists attempt to integrate the notion of research with their creative processes in diverse ways. Busch points out that the initial attempt to anchor a theory-derived and practice-based concept of art within an academic curriculum was a response to a changed notion of art, as well as a significant trend in contemporary art-making that focuses on the production of knowledge rather than of artworks.

Busch also notes that a typical feature for contemporary art practice is that it utilizes philosophical and sociological theories in its processes, and integrates scientific research methods:

> The resulting art productions are thus often characterized by an inter-disciplinary procedural method, in which artworks are created within broader, theoretically informed framework. (Busch 2009, 2.)

In this way, the evolving art world seems to have become a field of possibilities, of exchange of ideas and comparison of outcomes, in which different modes of perception, thinking and making have a chance to be recognized for their unique potential. This evolution has also changed the concept of art traditionally taught in art academies, by emphasizing more the development of processes and capabilities. (Ibid. see also Mäkelä & al. 2011, 3.)

In particular, Farber considers the complex process in which different modes of art, design and research-originated methods and practices are coupled and entangled in multiple ways. By using her own practice-led research project as an example, she shows explicitly how this complex process might proceed – as a combination of making, thinking, reading and writing. Simultaneously, the article reveals how the fields of theory and making, in this case in particular the fields of contemporary art and practice-led research, are entangled at a fundamental level through multiple common features.

Practices from elsewhere

The entanglement of diverse practices from different disciplines is also a starting point for Sarah Casey. She begins her article by discussing her periods of fieldwork, during which she became acquainted with working methods typical in the disciplines of medicine, costume conservation and archaeology. During this fieldwork, she particularly observed the adapted, practical methods when handling materials. In her article, she reveals the kind of consequences and results that might occur when the painter returns to her studio after such visits.

In Casey's case, these experiences were transported back to the studio via her notes, sketches and photographs. In this way, the studio itself became a kind of 'lab', where acquired ideas and materials were then tested and further refined in the form of drawings. During this process, visual and conceptual elements that were common to all her fieldwork cases began to emerge. In this instance, the themes were, for example, (in)visibility, control, light, damage and distancing. Finally, she utilized these themes she had discovered in her own research practice – drawing – as a means of making connections between seemingly disparate materials and practices.

What happened in the studio entails a fundamental discussion about the special features of practice-led research. Henk Borgdorff, who has discussed the epistemology of artistic research, points out that such research is not 'hypothesis-led' but rather 'discovery-led', in which the artist or designer undertakes a search on the basis of intuition and trial-and-error (Borgdorff 2009, 7). This is also a journey that might uncover or cause one to stumble upon unexpected outcomes, or it could lead to surprising insights.

In the case of Casey, the journey suggested that, for different practitioners in their explorations (regardless of whether they inhabit the sphere of art or design or science), the 'context of discovery' provides a shared platform. According to Casey, identifying and exploring areas

of shared practice across disciplines extends the potential for interdisciplinary knowledge transfer. Furthermore, her case shows that in a contemporary context, this knowledge is transferred not only between different disciplines inside in the realms of science, but can also include the spheres of art and design.

Recapturing the present

GAMMA: Meaning my intuition tells me there's been a relapse. The High Commission's silence bespeaks concern. It may be The Culture has [pause and then whispers] withered.

Bradfield's scripted dialogue features reflections on research by three characters based on the *Future Reflections Research Group*, which some readers of this anthology may remember already from *The Art of Research* conference in 2007. Participants in that event may recall the group's presentation-performance during which they sought responses from the audience by launching paper aeroplanes and subsequently – when comments had been written on the paper – asking for these to be flown back to the group. In Bradfield's article, the dialogue continues in this spirit and looks at how questions of research in the present context have or might have developed in terms of research's usefulness for and general acceptance as part of creative practice.[11] As the idea of practice-led research has now been developed for nearly three decades,

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11 Particularly in the UK, questions of the future of creative research practice are accentuated by the current funding environment, in which cuts proceed in tandem with an increase in the numbers of those involved in research.

especially in the UK, Finland and Australia,[12] it is time to consider some of the associated issues of "(re)ception, (re)sponse and (re)form" as Bradfield sets out to do.

Located in the near future, on-board a space station orbiting the Earth, Bradfield's dialogue gives an alternative dimension from which to consider developments in practice-led research, artistic research or – as she terms it with a degree of straightforwardness – art research. These apparently fictive reflections also feature a discursive practice that Bradfield refers to as 're-ing', a method developed by the group to support the (re)interpretation of its collaborative practice.[13] Through this process – 'a vehicle of return' – Bradfield imagines the three protagonists revisiting the early years of the group's collaborative research where they speculate on aspects of research practice, and on its context, formulations and theoretical underpinnings.

Final remarks and acknowledgements

Finally, we would like express our gratitude to those people without whom the publication would not have been possible. First, we wish to thank Nithikul Nimkulrat and Mika Elo, with whom Maarit Mäkelä established the framework for *The Art of Research 2009* conference. We also want to acknowledge Professor Stephen Scrivener of the University of the Arts London in the UK for developing the links between the

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12 The reformation of doctoral degrees in all the above-mentioned countries, i.e. Australia, the UK, and Finland, in the early 1980s allowed university faculties and departments offering art degrees to conduct their own research practices (Candy 2006, 4; Gray 1998, 83; Mäkelä & Routarinne, 2006 17; Scrivener 2006, 158). Thus, the emergence of practice-led research within art and design can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s. During these years, different institutions adopted different strategies towards the implementation of doctoral degrees that are based on different art and design related professional practices.

institutions that helped facilitate the publication. We are grateful to Damon Tringham for his valuable linguistic input: he not only checked the language of the articles but also suggested formulations that catch more precisely the authors' intentions. Without the Aalto ARTS Books, and in particular Pia Alapeteri, this process would not have resulted in a tangible book. We are also grateful for the input of graphic designer Cleo Bade, especially how she tuned the visuals and texts to tell a shared 'story'. We are also extremely happy that the artist-researcher Outi Turpeinen agreed to have the photographs she took during *The Art of Research 2009* published as part of this book.

Helsinki and London, November 2012
Maarit Mäkelä and Tim O'Riley

13 In Bradfield's article, words beginning with the prefix re- that appear in this 're-ing' include: (re) interpretation; (re)sponse; (re)gard; (re)sponsibility; (re)ferred; art (Re)search; (re)cognized; (re)turning; (re)quired; (re)searcher; (re) port; (re)production / (re)presentation; (re)flect; (re)flection; (re) flection / (re)flexion; (re)flective / (re)flexive; (re)hearsing; (re) trospect; (re)ception; (re)late; (re) gister; (re)ferenced; (re)ading; (re) gistered; (re)collection; (re)minder; (re)mainder; (re)form; (re)call; (re) spectability; (re)lapsed; (re)levant; (re)turn; (re)mained; (re)vealed; (re)member; (re)lied; (re)create; (re)sisted; (re)tro; (re)ceived. Words that also begin with re-, but do not incorporate parentheses separating re- from the rest of the word, include: recollection; reception; response; research; recent; reflection; retelling; residency; revisit; resume; repeated; recliner; reasonable; resume; reckon; receive; remain; referenced; relapse; reluctantly; recognition; revision; recycling; reinterpretation; return; really; response; real; relying; restriction; restrict; referring; reality; revealed; reveal; reconfigured; resultantly; register; resonant; reason; received; reportage; -referential; residing; reaction; recuperate; reminiscent; read.

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Serendipity and intentionality
An introduction to the Art of Research II

Janis Jefferies

Mangling Practices

Figure: Building of the exhibition related to the Art of
Research conference 2009. photo: Outi Turpeinen

Abstract

Digital environments, studio/labs and cultural collaborations offer new and different forms of research and scholarship within the arts and humanities. As pointed out by Graeme Sullivan (2005, 23), "*a range of models of practice evolved as history moved from the café, from the classroom to the studio, and into the virtual world.*"

Andrew Pickering in his 1995 book *The Mangle of Practice, Time, Agency and Science* describes how he observed practice in experimental science laboratories. Whereas I might suggest that reflective practice is fore-grounded in the arts and humanities alongside the question of experience in arts production, Pickering describes a process which he calls 'temporally emergent practice' in science research. He specifies that temporally emergent practice occurs at the technological inter-face in response to what he calls 'material agency'. Pickering calls his theory about the nature of technological engagement in the laboratory the 'mangle of practice' and develops a concept of 'material agency' in which the interaction between a person and their material operates as two halves of the mangle.

There may be a technological interface in Pickering's account but the metaphor of the mangle, which encompasses temporally emergent practice, could be appropriate for tuning and re-tuning one's own goals within digital environments, studio/labs and cultural collaborations. This essay reflects on the different forms of research and scholarship within the arts and humanities that might usefully consider the value of Pickering's metaphor, particularly as the rise of the artist researcher extends to interdisciplinary research clusters across the arts and sciences.

Introduction

In many countries, including the UK, independent art schools provided discipline-specific courses that mostly drew on the atelier traditions of

the academy or on Bauhaus-inspired formalism. The debate that ensued about whether an artist was 'made' or could be 'taught' owes a great deal to arguments about what constitutes skill, whether it is part of an art education, training or a networking opportunity to enter the professional (and at that time) singular version of the art world, its institutions and processes of commodification. To my knowledge, the word 'research' was never used within a studio context but referred to only that within what which was described as complimentary studies developing out of art history with a broader cultural remit. The now defunct National Academic Awards Council (CNAA) ratified my own degree in Fine Art at Maidstone College of Art in 1974. The following year, it was possible to have the degree award of BA (Hons) degree if one's creative work was clearly presented in relation to the argument of a written thesis. This had to be set in the relevant theoretical, historical or critical context. The restructuring of art and design education along university models was instigated by the first of several Coldstream reports.[1] A new era of intellectually ambitious, critical self-reflectivity and cultural renewal was trumpeted in. On reflection, and after many years working in higher education, I would argue that an unresolved tension emerged between what was constituted as academic and scholarly research and the artist theorist who raided across ideas, disciplines and practices to invigorate visual arts practices from within. It continues to this day as to what constitutes a practice-based PhD in visual arts and design.

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[1] In the 1960s, William Coldstream and his committee made a report which changed the landscape of art education in the UK forever. Did he foresee that the acceleration of technology and what was happening in art history and theory militated that art schools would never become respectable unless they were able to have awarding degree powers. During the 1970s, critical and contextual studies were established on the newly formed Honours programmes that were to provide a research base for the new universities. For a full account of this debate, see Thompson (2005).

As in the 1980s, there is a case to be made for the image of the artist-theorist as practitioner and researcher when taken as the focal point of how artists receive their professional induction rather than that of the arts educator. The practitioner theorist came to the fore during the 1980s. I was certainly included in that category, employed both as a visiting artist and theorist across studio and critical theory. It was also an era in which the scripto-visual/text and image production dominated debates within the studio and the academy.[2] For example, Victor Burgin in particular was courted by the academy, exploiting connections between practice and academia at the same time as occupying an uneasy position within artistic production.[3] Practice-based and practice-led research, particularly in the visual arts, has to now satisfy both the demands of the University as well as the non-academic structures of art production. It is possible that the institutional reception of his work helped to establish a template for artistic practice and the dominance of the text in the University (Connolly 2005).

Increasingly, visual arts as practice-based and practice-led research has been positioned as one that has to be grounded in practices from art itself, particularly if the enquiry is studio-based. This is a concept foregrounded in much of the available literature, from Graeme Sullivan's seminal study *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*

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2 One strand of feminist art theory, sometimes referred to as 'scripto-visual' practice, is close to the semiotically-informed critical practice outlined in Elizabeth Chaplin (1994).

3 Victor Burgin's practice is inseparable from his theoretical writings, which are steeped in the ideas of many 20th century poetical, psychoanalytical and linguistic theorists. During the 1970 and 1980s, his work was based on the juxtaposition of text and image called the "scripto-visual." The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity (Burgin 1986) was extremely influential in developing cultural criticisms.

(Sullivan 2005) to Hazel Smith and Roger Dean's *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Smith and Dean 2009). Perhaps the most provocative of all is James Elkins' *Artists with PhDs: On the New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art* in which he argues that no one knows how to supervise these degrees (Elkins 2009, xii). Such publications have engendered a fervent debate around practice-based research in the UK, Northern Europe and Australia from the 1990s and through to the present day. Art and art-based research, it is argued, verges on uncertainties: it is "from this sense of knowing and unknowing, and how we deal with it, that visual arts practice can be described as a form of research" (Sullivan 2005, 1, 15).

The scholarly value of art-based practices has been recognised in the academic accreditation of practice-based PhDs in the UK for almost 20 years, yet with proviso that the argument presented in the art-work is accompanied by a written component, the exact nature and purpose of which continues to be contentious and widely debated. If, however, art in practice and presentation becomes recognised as a valid form of academic research then there is no reason why an obligatory text should be required in the future. Fiona Candlin argues that change happens over time. She refers to the development of feminist practices, which:

> "… were once considered inaccessible to judgement, but have now become thoroughly institutionalised, [and] so too will the practice-based PhD. Instead of being an anxiety inducing but potentially groundbreaking path that confuses modes of judgement and established authority, it will become a beaten path with its own canons, authorities and precedents." (Candlin 2000, 5)

Sullivan continues the discussion by proposing that, rather than adopting the research paradigms and conventions from other disciplines, artists need to insist on "*their own, yet different complementary paths*" (Sullivan 2005, 34) and that judging matters of equivalence between

practice and text "*according to rules that can only be changed by those who make them*" (ibid. 89) becomes a lop-sided affair. According to Sullivan, there is "*an inherent folly in assuming practices from different fields can be validly compared if criteria are drawn from the disciplines of authority*" (ibid.). In this account, the text accompanying the artwork needs to be guided by the art practices that have given rise to it rather than comply with other disciplines' conventions of academic writing. The task then is to not to explain the artwork, nor reduce its meanings, but rather to open up a multitude of potential links to be made beyond the stated and verbalised intentions of the artist. On the other hand, Mieke Bal (2008, 205–208) advocates a move away from artist intentionality towards investigative tools of analogy, motivation, serendipity and secrecy. Bal goes on to suggest that the demand for research is to follow pre-established protocols, which come from a very different time when research aimed at disclosure and discovery of already existing material. The emphasis by various funding agencies on the generation of new knowledge that promotes creativity, innovation and collaboration across the arts and humanities has shifted the dynamic from individual scholarship to cross-disciplinary endeavour, as any visit to funding websites will show.

Conditions of practice-led research

Carole Gray, in her *Research through practice: positioning the practitioner as researcher*, sets out two enabling definitions for practice-led research:

> "… firstly research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of the practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners" (Gray 1996, 3).

In this context, practice can be understood primarily as the knowledge, tacit or otherwise, of how something is done within the context of a professional and cultural framework and within dynamic systems of complexity and emergence. From Gray's point of view, the point is that for practice-led researchers, problem formation does not happen in any neat or predictable way but emerges over time according to the needs of the practice and the practitioner's evolving sense of what their project might be. This is not simply to say that research questions mutate and change but rather that, for many practice-led researchers, the final problems are not fully decided until the practice is completed. If not fully decided, there is also immense confusion around terms: artist, artist as researcher, practitioner, practice-led and, practice-based, as can be gleaned from the available literature I have already cited.

To take one example, the Creativity and Cognition Studios (ccs), situated in the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia, has identified how 'practice-based' and 'practice-led' research are terms that have become frequently interchangeable. Within ccs definitions, Practice-based Research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice. Creative outcomes can include artefacts such as images, music, designs, models, digital media, performances and exhibitions. On the other hand, Practice-led Research is about practice and results in new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice. The results of practice-led research may be fully described in text, and it is this relationship to writing that provides contentious and continuous debate (Candy 2006).[4]

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4 For recent insights into this discussion see Candy and Edmunds (eds.) Interacting: Art, Research and the Creative Practitioner eds Candy and Edmunds, Libri Publishing (2011).

Collaborative conversations in studios and labs

An elaboration of the subjective nature of the artistic research processes can also be found in the principles of problem- or action-based learning. Various approaches to problem-based learning share a number of common features, which are of relevance to creative arts research as articulated already by Sullivan (2005). Firstly, the acquisition of knowledge (the alleged domain of the sciences) and culture (the alleged domain of the arts and humanities), involves learner-centred, activity-driven problems that might be anticipated in the 'real world' As such, the learner is actively engaged in finding a solution, and this occurs increasingly in teams and collaborative situations, which will be discussed in more detail in the following. The basic idea is that the experiential approach starts from one's own lived experience. How we learn takes place through action and intentionality as well as explicit reflection on the actions we have taken; it thereby becomes impossible to separate knowledge from learnt situations. Hence, our experiences become tuned, adapted and modified according to the specificity of how and with whom we engage in the learnt situations.

A general feature of practice-based research projects is that personal interest and experience rather than objective 'disinterestedness' motivate the research process. I think this is true whether we are working in the arts, the arts and humanities or science. In terms of the acquisition of knowledge, practice-led research provides a profound model of learning that reveals the production of new knowledge not anticipated in advance.

As I know from my experience, artists' studios can be significant places for the creation and the critique of new knowledge, and never more so than now with the flow between digital environments, studio/labs and cultural collaborations. Each dimension offers new and different forms of research, particularly since the emergence of the artist/researcher who exists both as an independent artist and a research academic.

My engagements with two research projects with Hexagram (Institute of Media, Arts and Technologies, Montreal, Concordia University, Canada) have involved these issues, the first being *Narrative: Textiles Transmission and Translations* (2004–2009) and the second *Wearable Absence* (2006–2010). Both of these projects were driven by these criteria. *Textile Transmissions and Translations* is a research project that takes advantage of the ability of fabric to impart meaning through material and electronic languages, by combining a creative approach to the textile arts with technical innovations in circuitry and wireless transmissions: exploring ubiquitous computing, mobility and interactivity through the introduction of electronic devices into fabric structures; creating animated displays on the surface of cloth, in order to extend its dynamic, narrative abilities; and developing a transitional space in which meanings are altered and textiles are invigorated into new patterns of discovery. The research focus of *Wearable Absence* centres on offering a unique vision of future textile technologies situated in a personal, social and cultural context. It combined innovations with interactive textiles and the idea of archiving an individual's life to provide a new way to activate personal memory.[5]

The collaborative team worked across two universities, Concordia and Goldsmiths, and involved engineers, computer scientists, visual artists, textile designers, writers and five PhD students across a range of related disciplines. What is interesting for me now as I reflect back on the process, is how I became immersed in what can be described as

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5 The project Wearable Absence, comprises Professor Barbara Layne, Dr. Mohammed Soleymani, Hesam Khoshneviss, Dianne Morin, Maryam Golshayan and Meghan Price at Concordia University in Montreal, and Professors Janis Jefferies and Robert Zimmer, as well as Miguel Andres-Claveras, In-young Cho and Helen Watson from the Digital Studios at Goldsmiths College in London. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/10236143.stm (Accessed 16 June 2010) and http://subtela.hexagram.ca (Accessed 16 July 2010).

a problem-orientated, cross-disciplinary and cross-Atlantic research cluster in a way that was not familiar either to my work as an independent artist or as an individual scholar in a visual arts department. However, and since my working life is currently situated in a computing department rather than an arts-based one, I am aware that whilst one model of the artist-researcher implies the enrichment of skills through engaging with practices from other disciplines, the science lab offers something comparable – if differently organised according to people and skill set. Individual practitioners retrain and move from one discipline to another as is quite common across music and computing, art and engineering, physics and genetics.

More frequently, the model produces cross-disciplinarity within groups rather than individuals, by bringing differently specialised researchers together around any given problem. For example, in *Wearable Absence* the problem to be solved was how to capture emotions categorised by the physiological data monitored by sensors embedded in the hand-crafted garments.[6] Whereas at one time the science model

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6   Further investigation by psychological researchers might provide a different model, but the system has been developed to test the architecture of the system in relation to memory retrieval. There is no rigorous algorithm to recognize human emotional states.

7   In another example drawn from Goldsmiths, Geraint Wiggins' Intelligent Sound and Music Systems (ISMS) lab forms part of the Centre for Cognition, Computation and Culture, involving staff from several departments around the University of London. It receives funding across the UK research councils. They also facilitate several PhD students who are involved in understanding creativity in machines and people, artificial intelligence and cognition and cognitive aspects of music composition and performance. Some of the students might once have been described as hackers, interestingly supporting Mario Biagioli's idea that: "The figure of the hacker snatches some of the aura traditionally associated with that of the artist" (Biagioli 2009, 825).

did not appear to be applicable to the arts and humanities – training of graduate students was seen as separate from research – some scientists' teaching takes the form of running labs where graduate students are trained while conducting their own research. Whilst this may seem 'normal' in my colleagues' labs, it is a distinctive feature of Studio sub-Tela as it is an artist-based lab with science funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.[7] There was a core research team in Studio subTela and Goldsmiths Digital Studios, and several assistants came and went to tackle specific issues in a temporary cross-disciplinary set up. Where the two models connect, in both the lab and the studios, is that the graduate students have had more time to engage in collaborations and have mobilised more resources for their own projects.

In this project, the key word is collaboration, which is not necessarily discipline specific. In each collaboration there may be a different and temporary cross-disciplinary set up. As practiced in the sciences, cross-disciplinarity is a problem-specific collaboration. It takes place within a limited time frame, and when a window of opportunity opens up in places that may have nothing to do with standard discipline-specific academic departments.[8]

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[8] This is also partly true of two of the research centres established at Goldsmiths with scientists and cultural studies. Goldsmiths Digital Studios (GDS) was established in 2005 and is dedicated to multi-disciplinary research and practice across arts, technologies and cultural studies. GDS engage in a number of research projects and have recently started post-graduate teaching with new PhD and MFA programmes. Our projects aim to have outputs of interest in both arts and science. The Centre for Creative and Social Technologies (CAST) was established in 2010. It investigates computational approaches to arts and media practice, with a specific focus on the impact of technology on Social Science and Cultural Studies, bringing several disciplines and departments together to stimulate research and to provide integrated postgraduate teaching.

Emergent practices

The emergence of new, social and creative media practices has added to a disciplinary 'mash up', drawing participants from, amongst others, computer science, engineering, visual arts, science studies, literature, philosophy, film and media studies. New internet-based forms of collaborative activity are involving ethnographers and science-studies practitioners, whilst the digital humanities cross a number of practice-based activities. The speed of development in these areas ensures intersections along specific lines of work. A new space for emergent intersections provides points of contact where shared problems can be temporarily investigated in either physical or virtual space. Significantly, the 'new' may be encountered in terms of emergent objects and practices brought about through temporary liaisons across the arts and humanities.

The topic of emergent practices is discussed profoundly in the work of Andrew Pickering. In *The Mangle of Practice, Time, Agency and Science* (1995), he writes about temporally emergent forms in experimental science laboratories. He makes a strong case for a re-conceptualization of research practice as a 'mangle,' an open-ended, evolutionary and performative interplay of human and non-human agency. While Pickering's ideas originated in science and technology studies, the concept of a 'mangle' captures what he describes as an entanglement between the human and the material.

Though the (re)turn to studies of materiality and its interference with research processes is a major achievement of science studies, it is in Pickering's work simply a point of departure. The question posed is how materiality should be considered within explanations of research that cannot be reduced to 'pure' scientists' accounts of their work. In Pickering's view, neither material nor human agency should be privileged within scientific accounts, but rather each reveals different influences which are temporally emergent from ongoing practice as worked through in a lab. A big difference (but only if you believe in the art/science wars

of the past)[9] between Pickering and those of us that might argue for reflective practice in the arts and humanities, is that the former does not refer to reflective practice as such.

Pickering is identified with the discipline of the sociology of scientific knowledge (ssk). In his work, he seeks a real-time understanding of scientific practice as we might seek a real-time understanding of arts practices. The question could be posed as: What happens when we are actually engaged in a task in the moment of its happening, when this occurrence is co-connected to what might take place within an artist's studio? He calls the place where work happens the 'performative idiom', and within this place agency is the driving force for accomplishment. Based on scientists' observations, Pickering (1995, 3–4) asserts that there are two senses of practice: the first being the work of cultural extension and transformation in time, and the second specific and repeatable sequences of activities on which scientists rely in their daily work.

The activities to which Pickering refers can, according to Ashley Holmes (2006), be considered as grammars of practice. These grammars, Holmes argues, are rule-based forms of setting up experimentation, and I contest that they can also be observed in arts practices, performance being one that immediately comes to mind. Nonetheless, such grammars of practice can also be challenged through ideas of the device – the term which has multiple meanings, including an object, a method and a bomb. To describe an event, an archive or a biography as a device is thus to make explicit how the object and method of social research are linked to each other – and with what potentially explosive effects. For example, in the work of Bill Gaver and his then team of research-

9   Here, I am referring to C.P. Snow's 1959 Reid Lecture, The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution where Snow identified the gulf between the two cultures of modern society – literary intellectuals and natural scientists – as a major hindrance to solving the world's problems. (Snow 1964.)

ers based at the Royal College of Art in London, probes were part of a strategy of pursuing experimental design in a responsive way. In their paper, *Cultural probes and the value of uncertainty*, probes "*embodied an approach to design that recognizes and embraces the notion that knowledge has its limits*" (Gaver & al. 2004, 53).

For an anthropologist in the 'ethnographic' process, grammars of practice are presented through a set of field notes. In practical terms, a journal, diary, field notes and a blog are means by which one records a 'feel' for the work and provide data for analysis and a flexible tool which helps in the grasping and filling out of vital issues which might otherwise become lost. It enables a dialogue in the present and with the self, which lasts over time. The journal records the details of the process of problem formulation, derivation of a research methodology or enquiry strategy and orderly reflection on the practice(s) selected to be at the centre of one's practice based research. It should be noted that the journal is not conceived as a descriptive, chronological diary of events. Rather, it is a literary device through which the problematic nature of educational enquiry is rendered intelligible. This returns me to Carole Gray's (1996) bold assertions that the use of journals and sketch books can be repurposed to serve as a research method for documentation and recording insights. Repurposing in this case may include regularly reviewing and re-reading the journal to identify key stages in the creative journey as it evolves over time.

For artists as researchers and as media practitioners, there is a rigour of procedural engagement with software tools and/or algorithms. Commenting on the two-way agency that is involved in this kind of practice in science, Pickering (1995, 16) asserts that it is routinised, disciplined and machinelike, and it works both ways. One can start from the idea that the world is filled with agency. "*The world… is continually doing things that bear upon us… as forces upon material beings*" (ibid. 6). In addition, scientists (and also artists) spend time dealing with this force of agency, which, he claims, may come from within or outside of the

human realm. For Pickering, agency is the ability to do things, and intentionality is the ability to set agency in motion, on both the micro and macro levels. It constitutes the desire to do (ibid. 17–20).

I believe that human goal-setting has no counterpart in the technological world. Our desires are temporally emergent as we work alongside and co-operate with things of unlike kinds, whether through other disciplines (across the arts and sciences) or the machines through which we create our social networks and virtual collaborations. Pickering (1995, 22) argues that the difference between people and machines is not in the things we do or the quality of those things, but in the ability to change or ignore plans within the situatedness of our endeavours and research projects.[10]

Tuning and the mangle of practice

Simply because there is a difference between agency and intentionality does not mean that each exists independently of the other. In his reading of Pickering, Benjamin J. Kleinman (2002) proposes that they do not exist at all without one another. More importantly, they constantly impact, change, and interfere with each other in real time, and on both the macro and micro levels. In his analysis, intentionality has an impact on agency; it sets agency, both human and technological, in motion. There is a shifting of agency from people to machines and back to people. If a person runs a program on a computer (i.e. human agency), the person then waits for the computer (or indeed the jacquard loom)[11] to finish (technological agency), and then uses the results to do something

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10 Pickering uses as an example a human who will never be able to do what an electron microscope does.

11 The idea behind the Jacquard-loom was a system of punch cards and hooks.

The ability to change the pattern of the loom's weave by simply changing cards was an important conceptual precursor to the development of computer programming.

else (human agency again). Pickering (1995, 21) calls this, "the dance of agency". However, when the work of that which had agency is ended or otherwise produces a result of interest or use, it becomes the next step of intentionality and the subsequent agency. This "tuning" allows goals to be met when things do not go as planned; it is the force behind the action in situated action (ibid. 20). Like other practice theorists, Pickering defines the concept of practice as a cultural and historical activity, which is "*the work of cultural extension and transformation in time*" (ibid. 5). For Pickering, the entanglement between the human and the material, therefore, is practised culturally and historically. Pickering's 'tuning' metaphor is also helpful in that it invokes the sense of shared adjustment. A technology and a culture, with all its components, must similarly work toward a mutual 'tuning', which Pickering suggests has to proceed through repeated and routinised practice that occurs over time giving rise to experiences that can be modified and changed.

Until something is done and happens, we cannot predict with certainty that it will happen: it is unpredictable and this is the temporal nature of the mangle. Neither success nor failure is guaranteed beforehand, and obstacles do not exist until we face them head on, as we had to do within the *Wearable Absence* project. A team member died half way through and had to be replaced, the sound engineering went wrong and the garments had to be reconfigured with different sensors. Because of the nature of time, obstacles are emergent. In any specific example, the emergent obstacle (such as the crashing of the computer or the jacquard loom) stops the flow of the task at hand. Resistance and accommodation are the embodiment of practice in real time, not in theory (Pickering 1995, 22). Pickering draws this experience from the historical analyses of scientists' notebooks to conclude that "the practitioner's accounts pose no problem for analysis of practice – they should themselves be seen as products of the dialectics of resistance and accommodation, at once retrospective glosses on emergent resistances and prospective elements of strategies of accommodation" (ibid. 53).

Resistance can occur in both human and technological realms of agency, and accommodation, therefore, must be inclusive of either or both. The accommodation can involve cultural issues, social structure, adding or removing hardware or software, or even altering the goals set (Pickering 1995, 22). If scientists do not simply fix their goals once and for all, neither do artists. The process of 'tuning' is as powerful for science as it is for practice-based work in the arts and humanities. Plans and goals are transformed and liable to revision once the artist or scientist reflects and takes in the feedback from the project at hand. This is even more the case with interdisciplinary work, as in my experience of *Wearable Absence*.

Metaphors or analogies to travelling across borders of disciplines often occur in discussions of interdisciplinarity. To return to Mieke Bal for a moment, in writing about writing about concepts she maintains "*they travel between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities*" (Bal 2002, 24). However, we have to remind ourselves that interdisciplinarity is not a place, nor a fixed position, like a geographical destination, nor a studio or lab. But like thinking and making itself, it takes place in and over time and in different contexts. Consequently, Bal's idea of interdisciplinarity is that it is not a place to be reached, but rather provides a commitment to a process of continually testing the value of parts, experimenting with different ways they might be combined to make wholes, and using the resulting wholes to refigure the parts in temporarily emergent ways.

In conclusion, the lines of research offered and explored within an interdisciplinary frame indicate the abundance – perhaps the overabundance – of opportunities not only for engaging the arts and humanities, but also for articulating collaborations with scientists confronting the same issues. More importantly, all of these opportunities show that they are precisely that – opportunities – not disciplines or fields (Biagioli 2009, 830). While it is impossible to predict the impact of these topics, there is

a strong case to be made for a strategic alliance between the humanities and science studies in order that we may 'tune' our emergent practices in ways we may not be able to predict or precisely determine in advance.

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Pia Staff

Drawing and Sewing as Research Tools

Figure: Pia Staff, The Red Legged Madonna, 2003, detail, sewing and embroidering on bed linnen.

Abstract

In this article, the aim is to examine one artistic working process over a period of ten years and how this is integrated within a research process. The making of a doll has been a repetitive act and, as such, a tangible way to redefine the area of interest: female embodied subjectivity. I am questioning the socio-cultural environment and everyday practices, habits and beliefs that build and shape the woman's gendered being in the world. My own cultural background has been absorbed into my artistic process and style. This has resulted in a series of imitative actions that have become a continuous artistic method. I describe this multi-sensory artistic process and discuss how the thinking evolves by mixing different kinds of knowledge and activity. The main question concerns the kind of understanding that is generated through the artistic work as a part of a research process?

Introduction

> *Movement*
> *between reality and art –*
> *sculpture and object,*
> *touching reality, the ordinary,*
> *arraigning the order,*
> *to an image of everyday life.*
> Working diary, 2007

At the centre of my practice-led research is a multisensory artistic process, building on the tradition of material-based art and 'thinking with hands'. The quote from the working diary above reveals the artist-researcher's

position in a situation where different fields of knowledge coil and form the structure of the research project. As a researcher as well as an artist, I am interested in how the socio-cultural environment and the practices, habits and beliefs attached to it, build and shape being and living as a woman in mundane everyday life.

Michael Biggs, one of the pioneers in the field of practice-led research, has stated that the essential factor in this particular research method is the experience that the artistic process generates (2006, 180–204). In the following, I will examine how this kind of experience is created, by mixing different kinds of knowledge, skills and activity. The artistic process and finished works are placed in dialogue with each other, along with reflections on gender studies. The interaction between various skills and discourses opens up the scenery to the continuous construction of the female subject.

In this article, I will examine one artistic working process. The making of a doll has been an act I have repeatedly returned to over a period of ten years. It has been a way to tangibly redefine the research area: female embodied subjectivity. By making dolls, I have examined the gendered and ever-changing embodied subjective experience of life.

My aim is to examine how the artistic process, or as I see it 'thinking with hands', takes place as a dialogue between personal life experience and the artist's personal style, skills and different techniques. I am interested in the kind of understanding that is generated through the artistic process, in visual and materialistic form, and its role as a part of the process of knowledge production.

Different ways of making, for example drawing, sewing and embroidering, have in turn and side-by-side inched the artistic process and the whole process of enquiry forward. Social reality, everyday life, making and theoretical discussion have intertwined into a narrative of woman's embodied experience and possibilities.

The drawn and sewn otherness

I am inspired by the American gender theoretician Judith Butler and particularly her book, *Gender Trouble* (Butler 2006). She examines the construction of female gender mainly in the light of French theory. In her thinking, bodily experience and existence through action is essential. Butler views the body as a kind of surface on which various discourses meet and intertwine with each other, forming the subject (ibid. 54–63).

I do not personally strive to discuss different discourses separately as such. Instead, I feel that the social, biological and cultural together form conditions, limitations and opportunities for the subject to exist in the world. For Butler, the subject is constructed through repetitive activity. It is precisely through repeated actions that I find a connection to the thinking of Butler. I am interested in the subject's conditional opportunities, and how a gendered subject is connected with the cultural and social field through action, time and space. The gender-habitual way of being that is a part of my cultural background has penetrated my artistic process and style. In this particular tradition, the naturalized environment and place for a woman is the sphere of home and the many forms of care-taking duties that take place in this environment. As the French feminist philosopher, Luce Irigarey writes:

> Man has been the subject of discourse, the subject of moral and political discourse. In Western countries, God is always masculine and paternal and God is every subject's and all discourse's guardian. The skills considered to be of lesser value are left for women: the skill of cooking, knitting and embroidering and exceptionally, poetry, painting and music. As important as these skills are, they are not after all in an authoritative position. At least not openly.[1] (Irigarey 1996, 23.)

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[1] Translation from Finnish to English by Nelly Staff.

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Women's position in the socio-cultural sphere is essential in the works of feminist artists. The repositioning of the embodied being – a woman in the art scene and the subjective perspective on this experience – is essential. The focus lies in how one understands gendered ways of being. Using different oppositional, carnivalistic or even haunting stylistic ways has been a way to take control over the presentation of the female body and gender. Going along the lines of this tradition, the process of making functions as a sort of concrete conversation where the questions at hand are tried out and the attendant thinking is recorded in the material.

Tacit knowledge

The geriatrist Raymond Tallis states (2003, 21–41) that the human hand above all has formed the human world, as we know it. The hand grasps the world, manipulating and shaping the way of life and perception. During my research process the intuitive, or tacit, knowing has become essential. Tacit knowledge is experiential and subjective, and it takes form through action, becoming visible and detectable through visual expression. It can be seen as a way to grasp the world in order to understand it. It is always influenced by the position of the subject, earlier experiences and skills as well as cultural and social background. One's socio-historical past is invariably present in the scenario of knowing and learning. The question is above all about the in-between-ness of things and the ability to connect different components.

The Hungarian philosopher Michael Polanyi speaks of different ways of knowing and acknowledging. In his thinking, tacit knowledge is based on activity. According to Polanyi, it is knowledge that exceeds verbal expression and this is embodied. "What" and "how" are ever-present in tacit knowledge, which is vaster than verbally explicated knowledge:

we always know more than we can say.[2] Embodied experience in space and time becomes knowledge. (Polanyi 1983, 3–25.)

As an artist, I use the surrounding world as my material in order to understand it. During the multisensory, tacit process, sensuous discoveries, knowledge gained through experience, physical capability and skill connect and help develop a process of understanding. It is a part both of the process of making and of the artefacts themselves; knowledge that has been achieved through experience condenses into visual and material interpretations. Making is a temporal, spacious and material event. It advances through different transitions and variations, growing, not linearly but rhizome-like.

In the following, I will move on to the early stages of this story and look at my doll project as a temporal continuum. Tacit and visual thinking starts from what I call the moment of the original image. I describe the different stages of the process and how, through different experiments and transitions, it evolves into an act that requires repetition.

The original image

The lumpy but clearly feminine creature is standing on its toes, ready for movement but restrained by its incomplete body, it remains still. The weight is shifted to the balls of the feet as if the creature were trying its weight or reaching towards something. The greyish white body in itself is strange and unfamiliar, but the legs obviously portray the legs of a woman (Figure 1).

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2 Polanyi enlightens the matter with an example of riding a bicycle. This ability cannot be learned by verbal descriptions for verbal describing in this case is insufficient. We need knowledge accessed through physical practice. The ability to ride a bike is the price of many components. It is based on diverse experiences, where embodied knowledge and action is vital. (Polanyi 1958, 49–50.)
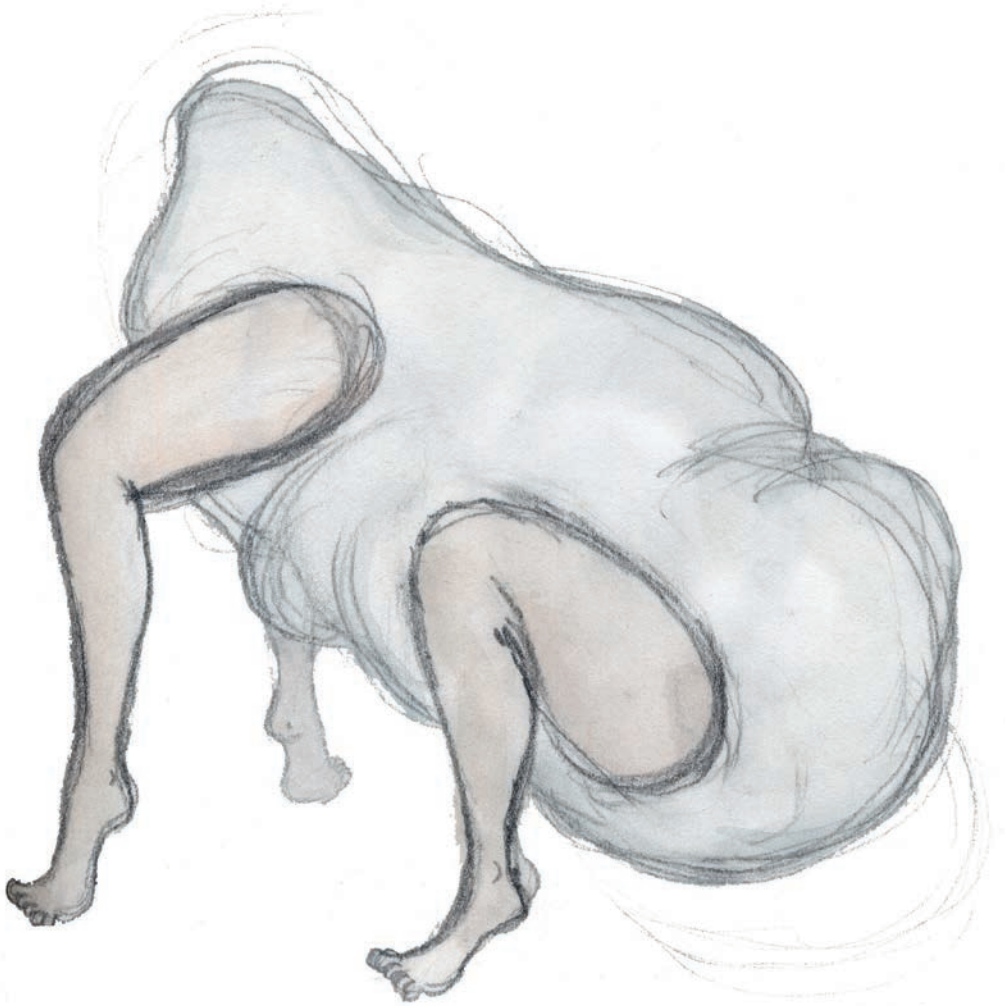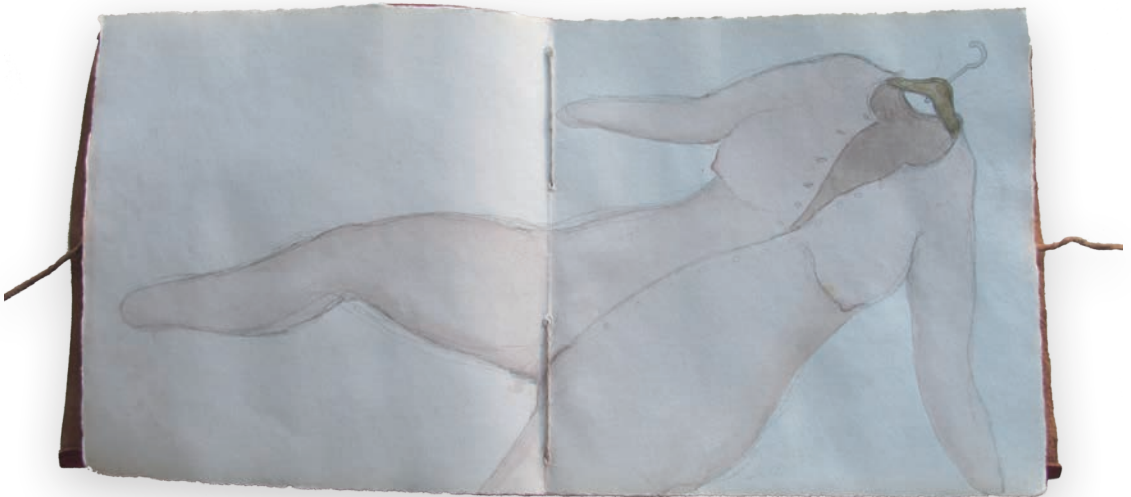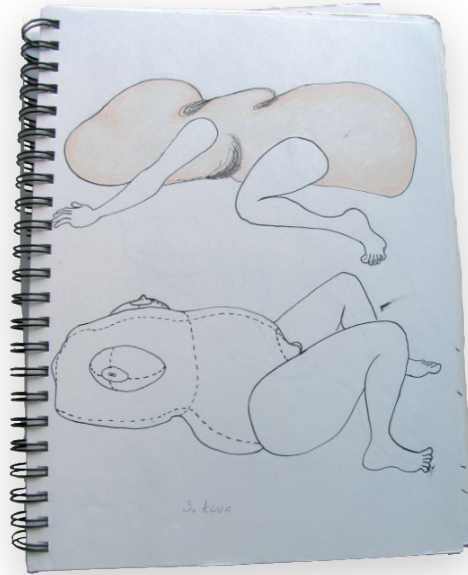
Figure 1. Pia Staff, Working diary, 2001.

Figure 2. Pia Staff,
Working diaries,
spring 2002 and
autumn 2004.

The image in the working diary is an inner visual experience. I consider the image to be first-hand evidence of experiential knowledge that is not verbal but visual. The notation of the image, the drawing, is a quick procedure where the central goal is to replicate the picture as it appeared. This odd visual discovery is fragile and volatile in its nature but it is a beginning. The visual sensation is verbally unreachable. The hazy form of the drawing brings up the question of the body and its character.

The continuous sketching process, done repetitively throughout the years (Figure 2), begins from the moment of the inner visual experience; the original image is multi-sensory and based on the experiential. In the first image (Figure 1) the sense of weight is embodied in the image and as the process continues, the feel of the character changes; instead of being trapped on the ground, it sways and hangs lightly (Figure 2). The information it contains is activity originated by character. The inner visual sensations are connected to the action of the artistic work. The lived and experienced create visual-haptic conclusions that feed the artist's interaction with the material. The fumbling sketches line out the otherness of the female body, the subject being in the continuous stream of time, the body in constant change. The experiential origin of the sketches mirrors the relationship between social life and the inner sensation of being: this void that is distancing and closing up in a constant flux.

These private and partial visual thoughts are the prerequisite for the working process. The moment of the original image is at the same time strange and familiar; it comes from outside and yet is born within the self. It is the moment when the external and inner being in the world merge, when the experiences and relationships of lived life enter consciousness. As an event it is universal, an essential part of the human and above all, the everyday life of an artist. As such, it is always deeply personal and unique.

The proceeding of time and experience, layered in the body, gives the process a multi-directional form. The original image seems to be

a temporal accumulation of condensed experientiality that translates into visual expression. The artefacts seem to be withholding time in plural that presents as overlapping temporal layers in the bodies I am aiming to build. They reach towards a temporal being that seems to be in a continuous plural.

Visual and material recycling

> *White,*
> *Sacred colour,*
> *So innocent and pure,*
> *So luscious,*
> *So full of emptiness*
> *That everything becomes visible on it,*
> *It reveals everything,*
> *Accounting the truth.*
> Working diary, 2002

The note in question was once written down as I was bombarded by information streaming from the television. The first was a documentary about wedding traditions. In some southern cultures it had been customary to hang the bed sheet of the wedded couple on the outer wall of the house, the morning after the wedding night. A sheet stained by the bride's virgin blood was evidence for the community of the family's honour, which was here tied to the young woman's body and sexuality. If the bride was not a virgin, it was customary to pour chicken blood on the sheet. The white sheet was a part of the family's personal and intimate life, on which the bride marked evidence of her suitability and which was then represented to an audience to see: a mark made by blood on pure white. Another visual impulse was a news film of the victims of the war in the former Yugoslavia. Corpses wrapped in

light-coloured fabric-like material were lowered into graves. The dead bodies appeared heavy in the hands of the carriers. The shape of the body was just recognisable through the covers.

These two very different visual experiences collided with my own personal, embodied experience of time and life and kept bothering me, pushing my artistic process into movement. The first experiments to build the form and test different porcelain clays, failed. The artefacts shaped towards some sort of interpretation of the body, but the bone china clay that worked impeccably in a technical sense, did not reach the narrative feel I was looking for.

A basket of old, white sheets – found by chance – resolved this question of material. The old sheets connected my visual experiences with both my artistic process and my own memories. Wistful pictures of my grandmother's linen cupboard filled with piles of white sheets came to my mind, and these homely textiles were a part of my own history, reflecting my gendered cultural heritage. The material pushed my artistic process into the sphere of handicraft.

The film theoretician, Vera Dika (2003, 20–25), highlights the possibility of nostalgia as a stylistic method, with which communal experiences can be critically reconstructed by hand from a new position. The repositioning of culturally-loaded visual material mixes the boundary between past and present, thus revealing tensions and power structures in them. The replacing is tied to the maker's own experience and personal history. It seems as though this sort of recycling takes somehow culturally charged things and places these things in a personal narrative. This seems to be an act of removal in two parts: first, a movement from the common sphere to a personal narrative. Then, as a part of a personal narrative, back to the common sphere, as a part of artistic expression: a film, an artefact or design object.

The sheets that appeared to be suffused with lived life have been used as described above. As parts of the dolls' material makeup, they are relocated from a common, public sphere to the private and back

to the public: bed linen is the kind of material that contains a sort of multicultural familiarity that crosses over class, race and cultural borders. These common, ordinary objects have been a part of the intimate, personal being in the world. The weight of the body, pressing of skin, sorrow, joy, sleep and wakefulness, the times between life and death, are all absorbed in this material. To build the rag dolls' skin with this kind of culturally-loaded material was for me a perfect solution to an artistic dilemma.

The material seems to work as a mirror, tied in both time and place. The information within the bed linen draws a picture of gendered being in the world. In other words, these objects illuminate the experience of being. The experiential is charged in them with invisible and unspoken gendered values, habits and places, action that is formed in time. The re-usage of culturally significant objects opens onto a socio-cultural scenery, which allows the examination of customs attached to the female gender and the structuring of the subject.[3]

The stitched body

In my early years, my grandmother represented safety and wellbeing. The sheets, pillowcases and towels in my grandmother's linen cupboard were always in neat piles, washed, pressed, and white. They had crocheted lace decorations and her initials embroidered in red. This cupboard seemed to belong to the sphere of secure family life filled with gendered chores and caretaking duties. It was as if the clean sheets in

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[3] The usable objects, things that are a self evident part of everyday life can be informative filters in the sense that they absorb cultural values and practices (Henare 2007, 5–7).

their neat piles were a guarantee of our wellbeing and respectability, perhaps even our happiness.

I used to kill time searching through the cupboards and drawers in my grandmother's house, finding fascinating things that allowed me to travel in time and space, imagining and dreaming. In the bottom drawer of the linen cupboard, I searched through old tin boxes with embroidering threads, laces and unfinished crochets that fascinated me. These objects evidenced a gendered life and skills. Linen and handicraft belonged clearly to an intimate, female part of home and to gendered, caretaking work. It was as if these objects could contain the origin of female power.

The inherited values of my socio-cultural roots emphasize cleanliness. A woman's duty was to see that the respectability of the family home was maintained by keeping the home clean and tidy. This distinguished the home from the immorality that somehow seemed equated with dirt. A proper home – and a proper woman – were always clean.

The style and materiality of caretaking work – cleaning, making food, handicrafts and caring for the family's basic needs – function as a bridge between subjective experience and socio-cultural reality. The repetitive nature of the artistic process in the doll project – the drawing, stitching and embroidering – imitates the traditional woman's work, the caretaking duties that outline gendered reality. These imitative actions place the project in the sphere of home. By using recycled material, linen and cloth has provided a passage to the ordinary and intimate experience of everyday life.

Hilkka Helsti (2006, 190) has explored the history of women's everyday life in a Finnish context. According to Helsti, the nature of handicrafts has been a defining agency of everyday life and as such it plays a remarkable role in the construction of the female. It functioned both as an individual and a communal activity by which social connections and rank were built and retained. In a way, it was seen as a natural part of a woman's chores and caretaking work. The value of handicraft and

recycled material in my work and artistic process could be seen within a more common history and gendered tradition. Through it, cultural values and appreciations sneak in as a part of my visual and material expression.

Dressing up the doll as a nude

The process of making the rag dolls has been an act of recognition, distinction and imitation of the gendered otherness of the female. In this particular case, the artefacts, that is the dolls, are linked to dolls that are a part of girls' play and preparation for adulthood. The dolls of my own childhood were tightly socially situated, constructed by visual and material attributes, designed to look like a baby, a girl or an adult woman in a normative, idealized way. The purpose of these objects was to enable the girls to prepare for adulthood, to imitate the doings and ideals of the female way of being in a certain social and historical situation.

Luce Irigarey has stated that the heterosexual order places the woman as a seducer who has no opportunity to be simply her 'self', who just exists for others. According to Irigarey (1996, 166–167) this obligation tears the female away from the possibility of being herself, thus she starts to resemble a mechanical doll.

As Irigarey refers to the social expectation of seduction, I would like to add to these expectations the caretaking duties that are socially connected to the female gender. This tedious part of everyday life certainly narrows the subject's opportunity to exist just for her self. The nature of caretaking, cleaning, cooking and washing, is also in a way mechanical, redirected from the needs of others. The female activity becomes in this sense a series of gendered mechanical reassigned performances directed by social and cultural practices.

Figure 3. Pia Staff, The Red Legged Madonna, 2003.

The doll object is imitating the gender specific human body, and furthermore it is meant for preparing for the gendered being; thus, it is connected to the deep structures of the distinctively female in the

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Figure 5. Pia Staff,
Calendar Girl, 2006.

heterosexual normative order. As such, it can be utilized as a tool and as a source of knowledge and understanding. The doll's body has become a visual and tacit investigation of gendered otherness.

As everyday life is filled with gender-habitual repetitive acts, so, too, has the making of these dolls been a process of repetitive acts: cutting the fabric to pieces, stitching the pieces together and embroidering the surface. The making is similar to traditional handicraft, resembling the making of bed linen.

The slow pace of the work, has given the time to feel and think of the embodied experience of being in the world. To feel the surface of the recycled fabric, the surface of the doll's skin and to explore the social scenery where the body is situated. Despite the tedious work and imitation of the gendered caretaking duties and skills, the task fails. The fabric, that is normally used to cover the body, is now exposing it. The doll is clad into nudity. The traditional way of handicraft, women

Figure 4. Pia Staff,
Ihotar, 2002.

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producing nicely decorated and pretty comfort-objects for others, turns into exposure of the embodied otherness, sexuality and vulnerability.

The intuitively chosen object and the process of making these objects have allowed me to explore the core of my interest: the female body. The object prompts simultaneously multiple discourses. The project as such has provided a space for reflection and juxtaposition. It has opened a door to the relevant cultural, historical and socially gendered circumstances. In addition to the previously described relation with everyday life, the doll objects are also a counter reaction to the male gaze and to the tradition of visual art where the female body has been seen and depicted by male artist. The fact that these things are not sculpture but functional objects provides a visual and tangible argument that emphasizes the female tradition and history. The functional objects are in a way less than sculptures. These objects carry a lesser burden, being just objects made for imagination, projection and play – in this case, play with the gendered circumstances of female life.

The work process can be seen as a sort of play in which the doll bodies are dressed in a culturally layered nudity; the material pushes the objects towards a domestic role or reading. Female gender is examined through an explorative play. The process is bipolar, moving between the reality of everyday life and the endless possibilities of play.

The choice of material is significant as it connects the historical with present circumstances. Furthermore, the materiality transfers the attention from the conscious and more-or-less performative to the private, intimate and vulnerable.

A somewhat old-fashioned style directs the visual narratives towards an embodied memory; recycled fabrics transform into cultural wrappers that take the form of the female body. The inner sensation of being percolates through this used, stitched and embroidered surface. The material that has been comforting someone's life becomes a narrative where beauty and horror mix in an interpretation of the female body.

Figure 6. Pia Staff, Wellamo, 2007.

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Interpreted transformations

After finishing the rag doll series, the work felt finished, and I put a lid on the box of dolls, both literally and mentally. The doll character seemed to be emptied of information, and I continued with other projects. Then, on a cold winter evening, on my way home, a woman in front of me caught my attention. Her brown hair was sleek with gray pushing from the roots and her fur coat black and curly – the fur of an unborn lamb. The strange sight of her straight hair and her curly coat had me mesmerized; it was a mix of bland, neat and animalistic. I could not take my eyes off her. Later at home, somewhere between awake and sleep, the image of the woman returned. The fur sprang to life, the curly hairs beginning to move, becoming this living entity with the passive, still head of the women above her moving coat.

There was something disturbing about the image, and I started to sketch (Figure 7). Using just pencils seemed to be the right technique to illustrate this hairy motif. The pencil was just like the woman – ordinary and mundane – and yet the result, the drawing was quite strong and vivid.

After this incident, I started to collect women in a visual sense, on the street, in trains and buses, wherever they caught my eye. I sketched ageing women who drew my attention with different kinds of disturbing features that somehow seemed to lift them out of the everyday. I was drawn to a certain kind of bestiality, big hair, strange ways of moving, odd clothes, things that were somehow wrong or exaggerated, wrong in a sense that their features stuck out beyond the ordinary.

The drawing process then continued from these sketches as I started to make interpretations from the rapidly produced visual notations. I did not strive to draw something I had actually seen but instead to let the different visual experiences morph into non-realistic visual narratives. During the process, the images started to acquire doll-like features: big, passive eyes, small hands and unmoving, stiff postures. This return to the

Figure 7. Pia Staff, Sketch, 2009.

doll project felt like stepping from the naked intimacy of the rag dolls to a public, social space where the subject is more consciously performed.

As the project continued, Therese Lichtenstein's (2001, 5–6) book of the German-American artist Hans Bellmer's life and works caught my eye in the library. Lichtenstein describes how Bellmer shocked the public in the 1930s with his disturbing, erotic photographs of adolescent doll figures. He commented on his work by saying that it was disturbing because the world itself was not just disturbing but a scandal. His way of constructing the unsettling images, and his ability to confront the spectator with unsettling and confused feelings was clever. Faced with these threatening, erotic and inappropriate images, I also felt a certain kind of familiarity; this work related somehow to the startling feeling of that winter evening when the lady in the fur coat had sat in front of me.

Though the starting point of my drawing process was a startling visual experience, a specific woman, the work then escalated into depicting women more generally in the public sphere. As the drawing process proceeded, it soon became clear that the images included something additional to that which I had actually seen. The public and personal, the human and animalistic was mixed and exaggerated in the drawings. The working process, my 'play' with the material, had developed and transformed the visual interpretation of women into a series of images with animalistic and mechanical un-human features.

The images felt inappropriate. It was as if I had been digging the ground out from under my own feet by playing around with these odd characters that somehow seemed to emphasize stylistic failure, distancing the ageing subject from a normative ideal. It also felt like a success. The images embodied enough of the subtly disturbing and ridiculous that somehow exceeded the appropriate and normative.

The visual styles indicated on the one hand the feminine, and on the other hand the characteristics of a doll; the mixture of baby-like and mature female. The neat pencil drawings build a contrast to the undertone of horror and ridicule attached to these images. The images were

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Figure 8. **Pia Staff,** Doll play, 2010.

not images anymore, but instead they had become dolls that I played with. These dolls had the features of adults and children, woman and doll. But there was something wrong: instead of portraying the female ideal as a doll, the images are disturbing: the imitation of pretty female style fails once again.[4]

This drawing exercise became a provocative inquiry into the situation of the ageing female body in the public sphere; how it is comprised, seen and (re)presented. Sociologists Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth (1991, 374) discuss the ageing body in current Western culture. Cultural attitudes seem to have constrained what we consider to be a normative body image. The young and youthful is desirable, and evidence of ageing can even be considered socially stigmatizing. As the human lifespan continues to extend, 'body maintenance' has become a lifelong project that has a socially profitable effect.

A normative standard, where age is hidden, begins to falter with my doll drawings and objects. Style is exaggerated; the paper doll characters become unable to attain a desirable, youthful appearances. Their doll-like faces are aged, their eyes stare, as their lack is exposed (Figure 9). Elspeth Probyn (2000, 13–28) has suggested that shame can be a sufficient way to explore what lays behind normative categories, in this case the category of ageing women.

These drawn characters seem to have a kind of shameful quality to them and, as such, serve to highlight the gap between everyday reality and a normative ideal.

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4 The Finnish art educator Pirjo Seddiki (2010, 132) questions the connections between ugliness, beautiful and the pretty. She states that the ugly and the imperfect causes a friction that in turn opens up a view into something deeper behind the pretty, feminine, performed subjectivity.

The nature of the dolls feels partial, as the images are neither really just dolls nor women but some kind of hybrids in between. These partial women have manufactured, unmoving, rigid and non-functional parts with a mechanical and passive feel. The history, the habitual knowledge[5] of the ageing subject is visually put on display and mixed with the distancing from the normative youthful, the gendered otherness and the doll-like mechanical.

The dolls as functional objects of inquiry remind me of the paper dolls that we used to play with as children. There were paper dolls that depicted pop-stars or beauty queens in magazines that we – my friends and I – used to glue on thick paper and then cut out. Some of the dolls we made ourselves, visualizing ideal adult women, young and beautiful, the kind we wanted to become when we grew up. In a way, my recent drawing exercise is similar to those early playful forays. It conflates aged features with child-like, doll features to a somewhat ridiculous and vulnerable extent. It functions as a means to experiment with how ageing affects the subject and how this ageing subject is considered in the social environment.

A return to the simple medium, pencil drawing, resembles in many ways my earlier sewing and embroidering work. As with the sewing, the act of drawing during the process is slow and meditative. It feels important that pencil drawing does not require special technical skill but is a really basic and accessible thing that anyone can do, for anyone to explore life.

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5 Michel Bourdieu's (1990, 52–65) concept of habitus signifies experience that has become embodied history and turned into social skill and knowledge. It is hidden in the body as the body itself has forgotten about it. As the exaggerated doll images made me feel uncomfortable, it seemed that these interpretations related to Bordieu's habitus.
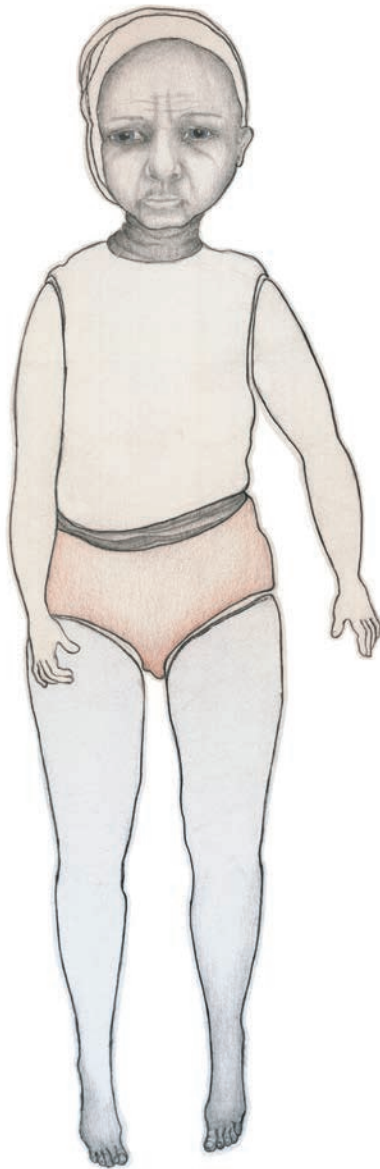
Figure 9.
Pia Staff,
Bald Doll, 2010.

Tangible thinking

The ceramic artist Maarit Mäkelä has done pioneering work in the area of practice-led research in Finland. Mäkelä has developed a central tool for this research: the retrospective gaze. This allows the maker to revisit and re-explore the art or design work, produced as a part of a research process (Mäkelä 2003, 26–27; Mäkelä 2011, 39). This tool allows a truly multidisciplinary approach, as it binds together tacit, experiential and practical knowledge and making with a theoretical discussion of various fields.

In this doll project that I have described, the process of making, "thinking with hands", the artistic skill and the choice of material and technique build a multilayered experiential inquiry. The artistic work process at hand does not remain in the studio and the produced artefacts do not merely exist as an exchange between the artist and the art audience. Instead, the working process and the artefacts spread outside their traditional boundaries, reaching and collaborating with different areas of knowledge and ways of knowing and understanding.

The work has proceeded with jerky movements forward and repetitive movements back. Observation and understanding seem to erupt from the relational space between different phenomena, actions and discourses. The experiential knowledge concerning hidden socio-cultural habits and values has become comprehensible through making; the dolls are building a continuous narrative that is the core of my research process. Visual information differs from verbal information; it cannot be explicitly translated or broken down to the verbal. Thus, the visual material has a double role in this project; it functions, as a part of the research data, but it is also a part of the result of the inquiry in tandem with the verbal discussion.

The artistic method of repetitive imitation that has emerged from this project has opened up an outlook onto gender-divided historical

circumstances.[6] The working process itself has been an imitation of the chores that are culturally attached as natural for the female gender and its duties. The dolls are intended to be dolls, both images of women and usable play objects. The materiality of the dolls directs attention towards the various ways of being a woman. During the work that has been repetitive play in a way, the imitation of actions, skills and the gendered, embodied experience of being in the world are visualized through the dolls.

The experience of my own life and the life around me has been transmitted through my hands to the work. The play that moves around on the edge of pretty and ugly, chaste and vulgar has made it possible to grasp tangibly subtle changes in one's subjective circumstances during the lifespan after reproductive age.

Essential in the process is the maker's entering into the art-play instinctively and naively, foregoing all assumptions about the result. Thinking proceeds through the interaction with the material and technique: drawing, sewing and embroidering. Attitudes towards the process need to remain open and volatile; anything and everything is possible. It is essential to experiment and play around with different options. Each artistic work accumulates knowledge and experience; each work is connected to the previous work.

Intended to address the process of the construction of female subjectivity and otherness as an embodied material entity, the repetitive imitation has provided tangible means with which to make visual narrations of female gender and being in the world. Experiential knowledge, spatial experience, sensations, power positions, habits and meetings

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6　Kerttu Isaksson has studied the history of Finnish handicraft and found that it is one of few areas that make women's — otherwise quite invisible — history visible. According to Isaksson, handicraft works as firsthand evidence of women's everyday life, work, skill, creativity and gendered being in the world (Isaksson 1990, 9–15).

interact and coil together with the maker's personal style. The works are interwoven with gendered being, cultural values and the theoretical discussion of gender studies. The interaction with the material builds up a sort of experiential map between everyday life and the theoretical field at hand. The visual data that is produced during the research process can be regarded as condensed moments of questioning, which open up for further discussion.

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Drawing and Sewing as Research Tools

Joanna Sperryn-Jones

Reflecting Visual Approaches in the Verbal

Figure: Joanna Sperryn-Jones, Breaking, 2007. Documentation
of a performance breaking bone china cast twigs.

Abstract

Rather than using writing to analyse artwork, I have attempted to make it reflect the approach of my artwork – including developing ideas on their own terms. Firstly, I set out my reasoning for the approach to writing I have taken and then in the main body of the paper give an example of both this and my visual approach. Developing writing that reflects the approach of visual practice has enabled it to operate as part of my art practice. To conclude, I will consider the implications of this and whether these two creative practices – art and writing – could meet the requirements of a PhD.

Approaching writing within a fine art practice

Before starting my PhD, I spent considerable time reading to challenge and further develop my ideas on certain issues, but I felt that my understanding was developed furthest through my practice of making sculpture. I was unable to articulate verbally exactly how I did this and so could not substantiate that furthering this 'understanding' was actually happening. Consequently, finding ways to explore and foreground this has been an ongoing concern during the progress of my research.

On starting my PhD, I initially proposed that writing would be used to analyse ideas explored in the artwork and compared this to others' exploration through written disciplines. I soon experienced problems, however, realising both the futility of using writing as a means to translate visual thinking and in addition the negative affect of this type of writing on my visual practice. The artist researcher Fiona Candlin (2000, 100) notes that writing is not a transparent medium; it is a practice itself with its own form. I found that new artwork now only seemed to illustrate the ideas I explored within writing; the certainty with which the writing

formed my thinking somehow inhibited me, preventing me seeing the elements of surprise that previously drove my practice forwards.

I had two issues to solve here: to establish a constructive relationship between the writing and visual practices, and to find a means to indicate the nature of the thinking occurring when I am making. I agree with Tim Jones (2009, 34), an artist and academic, who suggests that at this early stage in practice-based research we need to understand works of art or design as art or design and not as evidence of something else. Whilst exploring other artists' writing, I found that the sculptor, Tania Kovats' catalogue *Lost* (2000), could give a clear insight into the thinking involved in the visual work by reflecting on the source material for artwork without the need to try to interpret the work itself. Rather than focusing on the thinking within my artwork, this led me to consider the entirety of my thinking from the first elements that inspire my artwork. Before starting my PhD, I had written a diary to help me reflect on and develop my artwork; I now realised this diary was driven by breaks in understanding. Rather than trying to use writing to convey my visual thinking, I was instead allowing the writing to develop my thinking on its own terms. This was more constructive in developing understanding both in the writing and visual work, and even though this was not the thinking actually occurring during making, I felt it better represented my thinking as an artist.

My writing tries to understand affecting experiences both with the world and in making art. By affecting experiences, I mean anything that has an impact on my existing knowledge or has the potential to restructure my ideas or thought processes. My art practice functions by searching for those moments of surprise, as described by Donald Schön in *The reflective practitioner* (1983) that encourage practitioners to reflect and develop understanding. These moments of surprise do not only originate from studio processes but can be triggered by numerous sources: others' artwork, fiction, theory and personal experiences in

life. It is important to note that in writing I am not reflecting on the content of visual work but simulating its approach. I am hoping an edited version of my sketchpads (Figures 4–12) will be sufficient to show development of visual understanding.

Two elements of my approach to writing have been utilising autobiography and writing from a subjective perspective. Christopher Frayling (1993), formerly Rector of the Royal College of Art, proposes that research through art is as much about autobiography and personal development as communicable knowledge. I do not wholly agree with Frayling since my artwork is not 'about' autobiography – this is not the intended end product. Instead, I utilise autobiography and a subjective approach to develop a broader understanding of the world. With the approach of my visual practice reflected in writing, it becomes evident that there are academic precedents for this already established, such as autoethnography. Autoethnography foregrounds the researcher's subjectivity, exploring the relationship between the personal and its wider social context and acknowledging the varied experiences that affect the construction of understanding. In *Doing narrative research*, Holloway and Jefferson note that the "*humanist and the poststructuralist traditions of narrative research are brought together by their shared tendency to treat narratives as modes of resistance to existing structures of power*" (Andrews & al. 2008, 4). Subjective writing has been used as a means of resistance by feminists such as Helene Cixous (1986) to challenge patriarchal structures, revealing them to be constructs rather than objective truths.[1] In *On not being able to paint*, Marion Milner proposes

1 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, for example, used her subjectivity in her partly autobiographical and fictional work The Yellow Wallpaper (2000) to reveal that her disturbed emotional state was a result of her oppression through confinement rather than the dominant masculine view that perceived this as her natural state and required the protection of confinement.

that to understand the nature of objectivity there is a need to see for oneself rather than seeing what one is told to (Milner 1971, 147). For her, art involves looking beyond these accepted ways of seeing (ibid. 17).

In the following section, I explore experiences and perceptions of breaking in different contexts from breaking bones to breaking sculpture.[2]

Approaching writing again

In September 2005, I broke my wrist very badly, and followed shortly after this healing by breaking a bone in my hand and some ribs in February 2006. I returned to work on in April 2006 and almost immediately broke my collarbone, breaking it again in both June and August. The third break would not heal and took until the following Easter 2007 to recover. During all of this time, I was not able to continue with the sculpture I had been making because I was physically unable to move and manipulate it. When I returned to making sculpture, I could only relate to previous work in my studio by breaking it. Following this, my artwork shifted towards a focus on breaking and although this was not a radical shift from previous work, I realised my experiences of breaking bones had played a large part. I was concerned, in relation to the PhD, as to whether this change was a temporary break or indicated a new line of inquiry. Finding that this shift from making to breaking had occurred for others after injury, I began to research experiences of breaking in the body, sculpture and relationships between the two. I was interested in why being injured creates such an imposing break on your work, be this artistic or academic.

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2 The following text is based on my recently finished dissertation (Sperryn-Jones, 2012).

After the third time I broke my collarbone and finding that it wasn't healing, I decided I couldn't keep my life on hold waiting for it. I took the opportunity to visit a friend in Japan with the intention of collecting some visual research material and inspiration for when I could return to making sculpture. In Japan, I unexpectedly became interested in the 'crutched' trees (Figure 4). Initially, I tried to ignore the trees because they did not seem to fit with the concerns of my research proposal. I strongly suspected that the experience of having broken my collarbone three times in the last four months and continually wearing a sling was influencing my identification with the crutched trees. Previous research material in my sketchpad had focused on different types of breaking, but I felt it was possible that this selection had more to do with my current state than my previous interests. I could associate with the simultaneous support and restriction of the crutches and the seeming frailty of the trees.

The trees surprised me in Japan because I have never thought of trees as weak whilst they are still standing: a dead tree at the end of our garden continued to look perfectly alright even after half of it dropped off one day. The trees in Japan looked frail even though in many cases the tree itself, if imagined without the crutches, looked quite robust. This paralleled by what Ann Oakley, a sociologist, writes about her experiences of breaking her arm. She notes that the sling becomes an emblem of her disability, it is, "*the first thing people notice about me*" (Oakley 2007, 14). She realises that even though she has only broken her arm she is treated as if she is completely disabled. Rather than distinguishing her broken arm from an issue concerning mobility, her plane ticket notes '*wheelchair assistance*' is needed; once she is in a wheelchair, the carers talk over her head about her as if she is no longer able to take part in normal society. Even one crutch on a tree made me perceive the whole tree as fragile; I recognised that my sling also made me appear fragile.

Walking through Waterloo station with a broken collarbone was a complete nightmare the first few times. I thought that people would

be careful of me because of the sling indicating my injury, but in fact the reverse was true and I was knocked into virtually every day. On one occasion, I was cornered as everyone rushed to catch a train. I stopped completely, but a man walked straight into me, re-breaking a bone that had been healing. He turned around and apologised, briefly treating me like a person rather than an obstacle to be negotiated. It was as if he had not been seeing me as a person. After this, I sat down to keep out of the way, and I saw an obviously lost old lady crossing from the platform trying to find the station exit. Someone knocked into her and then, before she got herself together from this knock, took another from someone else. As I watched, I realised that the more hesitant or weaker someone looks, the more likely they are to be knocked into. If I was going to survive in Waterloo I needed to look tough. In the days after this I made concerted efforts to look as unhesitant and aggressive as I could, which was quite hard to do when I didn't feel this way. Strangely, even with a sling on, looking aggressive was enough to alter others' behaviour and no one knocked into me again. The act was also performative in that I felt less fragile and powerless.

Where I work, the deaf school shares the same floor as the sculpture department, and I have noticed that I have never communicated more with the deaf than when I have been in plaster or a sling. Oakley (2007, 68) also notes this effect and recounts Robert Murphy's experience of paralysis where he becomes aware of the stigmata of a spoiled identity. Black security guards on campus now greet him for the first time as someone visibly worse off than them. I also noticed a difference when in public between the arm in plaster, which everyone understands as temporarily broken, and my collarbone where people did not recognise what was wrong and were far more reluctant to help me. People could identify with me better, and I was far more likely to be offered help with tying shoelaces or taking lids off things, if they could see me as being similar to them with a temporary break than possibly more permanently disabled.

Writing about his experiences of breaking his leg Oliver Sacks observes how in hospital he is avoided by the healthy whilst out in the garden:

> ...nothing gave me such a sense of the social caste of patients, their being out-cast, outcasts, set apart by society: the pity, the abhorrence, our white gowns inspired – the sense of the complete gulf between us and them. (Sacks 1990, 163.)

In addition, he realises that during his recovery he is not able to identify with the fit and healthy, only other patients. He states that it is not just that the sick are not able to deal with the real world but also that the world cannot face the sick because they inspire fear and horror (Sacks, 165). In the film *The Beach* (2000), the man severely injured in a shark attack destroys the sense of paradise for the others. They put him in a tent in the jungle so that they do not have to deal with the presence of the sick. Also, Sacks notes that:

> ...to be in full strength one moment and virtually helpless the next, in the pink and pride of life one moment and a cripple the next, with all one's powers and faculties one moment and without them the next – such change, such suddenness, is difficult to comprehend, and the mind casts about for explanations. (Sacks 1990, 21.)

For over a month, my wrist had difficulty in healing, the uncertainty of whether my wrist would heal forced me to have to deal with the state of being injured because I was no longer able to look to a near future of being whole and healed. Sacks talks of a period of limbo lasting twelve days after the discovery of his scotoma causes him concerns over whether his leg would heal. I could identify similar feelings and fears whilst I did not know whether my wrist was healing. Sacks suggests that the limbo is a journey of the soul to despair and back, about learning to

Figure 1. Me doing the double jump at Rogate downhill 2009.

be a patient, to be patient and passive and having to "*relinquish all his 'powers and pretensions', all my adult, masculine enterprise and activity*" (Sacks 1990, 113). It seems to be about altering his identity. I felt my journey was not just about the present experience of being broken but about the future and possible acceptance of permanent injury. Using my hands, as a sculptor, identifies who I am; not knowing if my wrist would heal called into question this identity.

The change to identity also affects subjectivity. When I am injured and look at photographs of me airborne on my bike I feel it was stupid to take such risks. Sacks notes after his injury, that he "*would see all life,*

all being, as the most precious gifts, infinitely vulnerable and precarious, to be infinitely prized and cherished" (Sacks 1990, 187). What I find interesting is how this view can vanish again. After breaking my collarbone three times through mountain biking, I decided that I would not start jumping again. On my first time back out, however, we stopped at a little learning drop and I agreed to lead a friend into it. It is admittedly only two feet but is enough to instil the sensation of freefall. I don't feel bad about this but good; I feel in tune with my body and focused within the present. Round the corner is a gap jump, shortly followed by a kicker that sends me soaring into the air and I feel electric (Figure 1). I'm pulled out of this mood abruptly as one of the men crashes, breaking his collarbone. It reminds me that I'm supposed to be behaving. I had so much sense before I went out and yet a few runs over the jumps changed my entire state of mind. Even knowing I have weak bones has gone straight out the window as I feel electric, powerful and graceful.

My muscles wasted quite considerably whilst I was in plaster so that when it was removed my hand and arm neither looked nor functioned normally. I initially found it quite difficult to accept that this wasted, scaly, immobile object formed any part of me but at the same time its seeming fragility and sickliness inspired me to feel protective over it. For me, the very idea of some part of me being broken had been difficult to accept and this, in part, caused me to become alienated from the offending article (my damaged hand). Sacks describes his broken leg as a '*phantom*' and '*a corpse's leg*' (Sacks 1990, 88) and that "*…it was, in effect, mortified: it was neutrally, functionally and existentially dead*" (Ibid. 83). Ann Oakley notes that "*It's a shocking to experience part of one's body as lifeless flesh when one 'knows' it isn't*" (Oakley 2007, 32).

The broken limb, then, is perceived as alien although ambiguously still attached to the body. Julia Kristeva suggests that the abjection is caused by what makes our individual subjectivity ambiguous. Blood, urine and excrement can cause this since by crossing between interior and exterior they problematise the physical boundary of the body. "*A*

decaying body, lifeless… the corpse represents fundamental pollution. A body without soul, a non-body, disquieting matter" (Kristeva 1982, 109). It is not merely the alien limb that becomes ambiguous but that this ambiguity reveals a break in the coherence of the self and that in turn challenges the systems and orders that created this conception of self.

> It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. (Kristeva 1982, 4.)

Nick Mansfield surmises that "*what abjection unleashes, then, is the internal ambiguity and uncertainty that logical systems try to deny or disguise*" (Mansfield 2000, 85). I found that my alienation from my broken limbs made me question the boundaries of my body and how I thought about myself in relation to my body. Whilst Sacks was injured, he felt as if there was no organisation or centre to himself, whereas once he could walk again he felt there was once again. When he walked again, he felt reorganised into a '*seamless, perfect, whole*' (Sacks 1990, 149).

After my collarbone, wrist and hand had healed, I returned to my studio again for the first time in a year. I had previously been part-way through making a large sculpture created by riveting hundreds of coke cans together. When I looked at this sculpture again for the first time since being injured I could not identify with it at all. I was in a completely different place to the one when I had started making it. Of all the pieces in my studio constructed prior to breaking my bones there was only one with which I could identify. This was a sculpture that I had become annoyed with and then deliberately broken. The perfect wholeness of the other pieces was frustrating. I felt revulsion at their perfection because it seemed unreal, posed and fake. I no longer viewed this aesthetics of wholeness that I had strived for as natural but rather as a construct that now felt alien. I wanted to break and twist them and

destroy their sense of wholeness. The art historian, Thomas McEvilley, proposes that the use of broken glass or of breaking glass in artwork is essentially anti-art and an attempt to challenge the authority of the Kantian theory of aesthetics (McEvilley 1998, 37). Of greatest interest in this article to me is the recurring theme of a contrast between a drive towards an ideal, whole form contrasted against a will to crush this ideal form into fragments. The shift of subject position from health to injury had altered my position in relation to these contrasting drives.

It does seem that much of the literature and artwork that forms the context for my current work on breaking has a recurring element where the artist or author's personal experiences have both inspired and informed their work. Ann Oakley and the writer, Henri Michaux, broke their arms (Michaux 1994), Sacks broke his leg, the artist Barbara Bloom fell out of window and suffered many breaks and Virgina Woolf writes about illness using her own experiences of instability of the mind. In *Fracture* (2007) Oakley's experience of breaking her arm is the central focus of the book, whereas her previous works were focused on feminist issues. Oakley writes that "*my intact right arm couldn't have composed the tale its reconstituted version has*", thus highlighting the influence this personal experience had on her work (2007, 147). After falling from a third-storey window and breaking many bones Barbara Bloom made a set of works entitled *Broken*, which clearly departed from previous themes in her work. Shortly following this, she returned to the previous themes.

My identity altered when I broke my bones and discovered I have a very low bone density. I have explored how being injured compared to being healthy altered my perception of life. My relationship to, and interpretation of, the spaces I researched altered because my new identity as injured, fragile and vulnerable now highlighted aspects of the spaces in relation to this as opposed to my previous research topic. The alteration of my identity altered how I perceived the spaces around me because it highlighted different aspects. A person brings all their

prior understanding and knowledge to an interpretation of experiences. Experiences are mediated and, therefore, understood differently by different people. Identity can affect subjectivity, which in turn can affect the construction of knowledge and understanding.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman explored feminist issues through both fiction and theory. She is possibly best known for her fictional, and partly autobiographical, work *The Yellow Wallpaper* (2000), which provides an excellent example of how subjective writing can contribute to developing knowledge or understanding. This is very much in conflict

Figure 2. Joanna Sperryn-Jones, Breaking, 2007. Documentation of a performance breaking bone china cast twigs.

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Figure 3. Joanna
Sperryn-Jones,
Fragility 2007. Bone
china cast twig
installation.

with concepts of research that have grown up with purely objective approaches.

Two of my recent sculptural installations have raised issues concerning gender. Both installations create fragile spaces from bone china cast twigs and involve the participation of the viewer to activate the work. The first installation, *Breaking* (2007) (Figure 2) invites people to walk across a floor covered deep in china twigs. The other work *Fragility* (2007) (Figure 3) creates fragile, precarious walls from the china twigs and involves manoeuvring through these tight passageways without

breaking them. Underlying these installations is that one requires an active, assertive, destructive approach to the space and the other instils a passive, restrictive response. Both installations were initially intended to explore experiences and perceptions surrounding fragility and breaking, but from the initial conception there was a definite split between women's and men's reaction to their expected participation in the work. Men almost universally relished the idea of destroying my china twigs whereas women were far more reserved and often horrified by the idea. *Fragility* inspired the reverse attitudes. In actuality there was little difference in the levels of participation.

After several months working with bone china in my studio, I began to feel annoyed by the way it restricted my movement. I had to be continually gentle, slow and supportive in handling the unfired china and constantly watch every step I made in case I upset any pieces. One wrong move and I could obliterate several days work. I felt I was forced into a passive role which created pent-up aggression. There were points where the restriction on my movement aggravated me so much that I wanted to smash everything. This feeling of pent-up aggression was very similar to my experience of injury. Every move, even getting out of bed in the morning, had to be thought about to prevent further damage. With a broken collarbone, I had to roll out of bed because sitting straight up exerted too much strain on the new soft bone. Sacks suggests there are two afflictions to being a patient; being physically restricted by the injury and being morally prostrate as you have to take on a passive role to the doctors:

> When I felt physically helpless, immobile, confined, I felt morally helpless, paralysed, contracted, confined – and not just contracted but contorted as well, into roles and postures of abjection. (Sacks 1990, 158.)

My first bone china installation, *Fragility*, was inspired by these feelings of restricted movement and being confined by the fragility of my body. In *Breaking*, the experience – china twigs being smashed to smither-eens beneath my feet – feels very empowering. They seem to hold to a certain point and then completely shatter in a particularly violent way. The smaller twigs gently ping and break in one place in a much more predictable, controlled way with a higher, more melodic pitch than the big ones. My weight feels overly powerful when walking on the smaller ones; there is the horrible feeling of crushing something delicate. It feels like a very violent action, and even though this is my own work being destroyed I find something addictive in the process and satisfying in the way my body weight powerfully crushes the china. The documentary *Louise Bourgeois: No Trespassing* (1994) includes scenes of Bourgeois smashing one of her own sculptures. She pushes a marble carving onto the floor where it breaks and says that at first it gives her pleasure but then results in depression. She only breaks things when she gets angry and breaking releases the anger. At one point, she throws ceramic pots onto the floor and then stamps on top of them claiming *"doing that gives me pleasure"*. She sees breaking as a way of overcoming the oppression she felt by not being able to stand up to her father. I think there is a feeling of power and dominance in the violent experience of breaking china.

Approaching visual practice

The following are selected pages from my sketchpad. In their own way, they discuss the same themes as presented in previous sections, though in visual form. In this context, I regard them as visual chapters or notations.
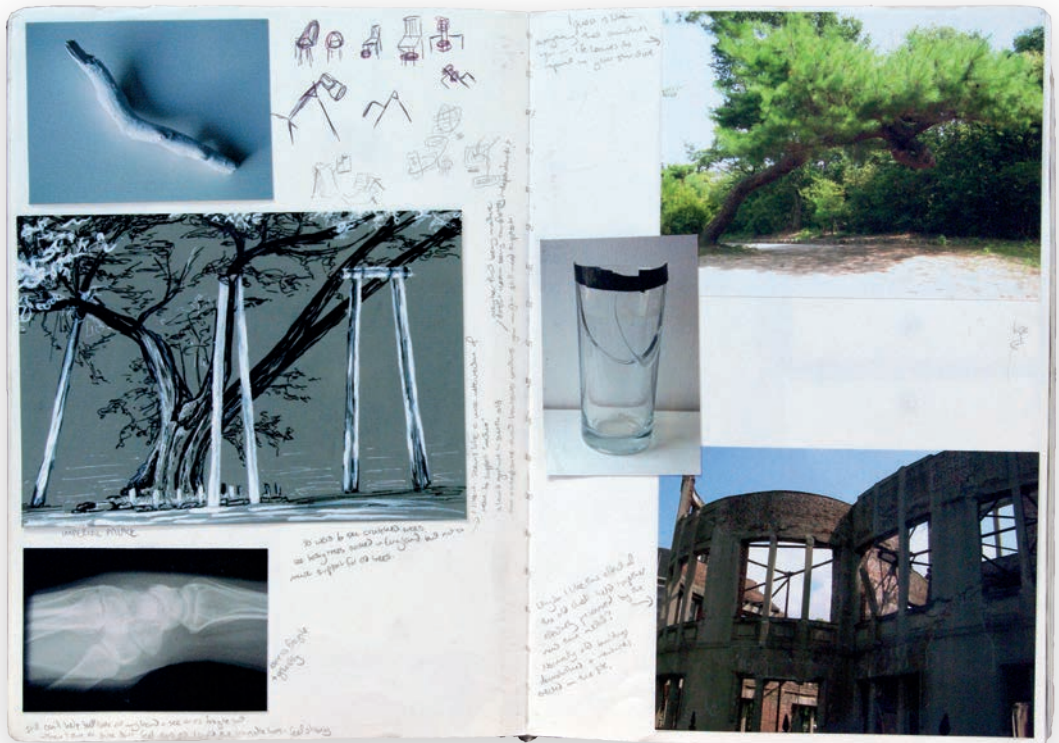
Figure 4. Joanna Sperryn-Jones, Sketchpad 2007: unfired china twig, Japanese crutched trees, my wrist X-ray, Hiroshima.

Figure 5. Joanna Sperryn-Jones, Sketchpad 2007: wrist
X-rays, china twig, fallen tree, bone structure,
crutched tree and nailed china twig sculpture.
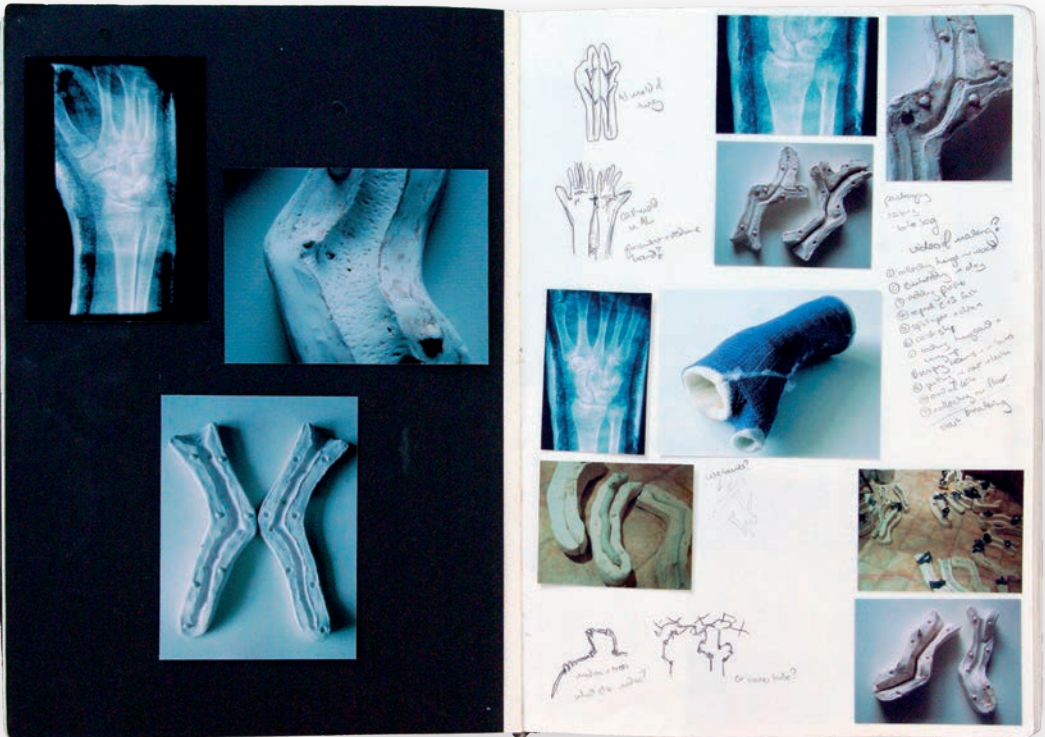
Figure 6. Joanna Sperryn-Jones, Sketchpad 2007: X-ray of
my wrist in plaster, plaster mould, casting process.

Figure 7. Joanna Sperryn-Jones, Sketchpad 2007: crutched
trees, wire and thread-bound china twigs.
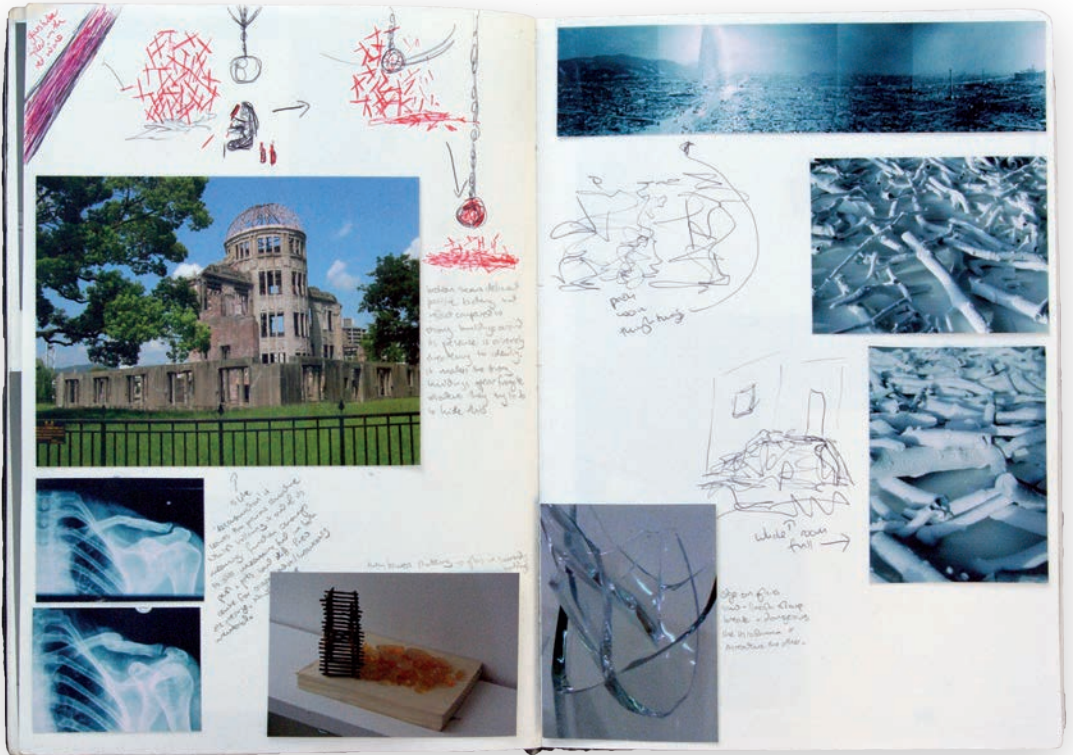
Figure 8. Joanna Sperryn-Jones, Sketchpad 2007:
Hiroshima — present memorial and past destruction, X-ray
of the first and third time I broke my collarbone,
matchstick and glass wax sculpture, a broken glass,
thinking about possibility of laying twigs over floor.

Figure 9. Joanna Sperryn-Jones, Sketchpad 2007:
Hiroshima drawing in ink and bleach and photo from
museum, bone china twigs fired and standing for the
first time.

Figure 10. Joanna Sperryn-Jones, Sketchpad 2007: photo from Hiroshima museum, cables on Japanese street, china twigs on floor and creating walls.
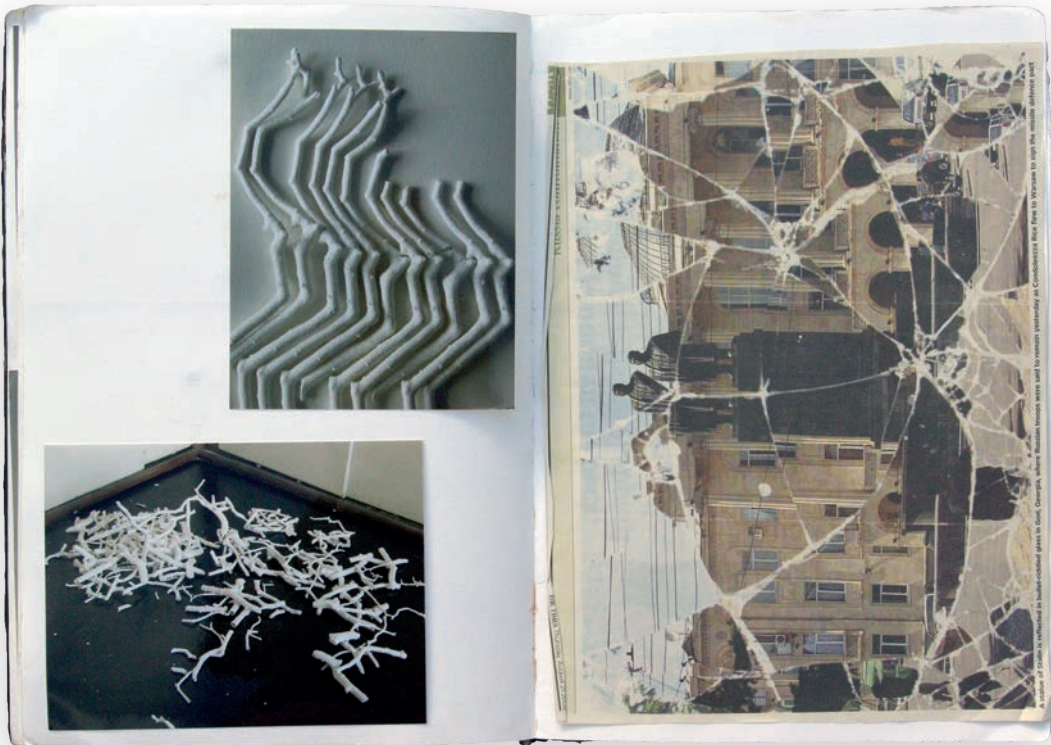
Figure 11. Joanna Sperryn-Jones, Sketchpad 2007: china twig sculpture created from broken casts, broken china twig wall installation, newspaper clipping of statue of Stalin reflected in broken glass in Russia.
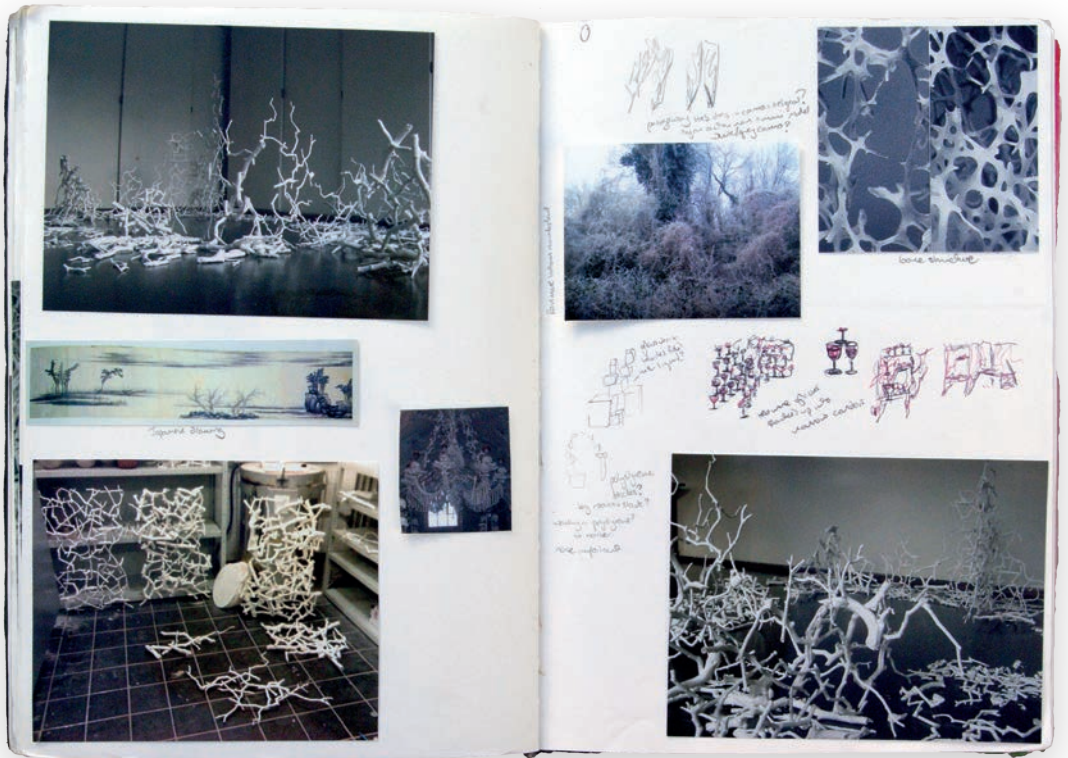
Figure 12. Joanna Sperryn-Jones, Sketchpad 2007: first installation of 'Fragility', Japanese ink drawing, twig walls as they come out of kiln, chandelier from Kutna Hora Bone Church in Prague, frosted trees, bone structure of osteoporosis.

Tuning Visual with the Verbal

In categorising the possibilities for PhDs in art, James Elkins proposes a model where the artwork and dissertation become interchangeable and entitles this '*The Dissertation Is the Artwork, and Vice Versa*', and suggests "*the artwork is scholarly and the scholarship is creative*" (Elkins 2009, 159). He suggests that not only could the artwork be understood as the result of research but the written dissertation could be read as fiction:

> Why not write a personal, or partial, or partly fictional account…
> What logic assures the reader, or the candidate, that such approaches
> would not be better? (Elkins 2009, 162.)

This leads me to question whether this form of writing could meet the requirements of a PhD and, by implication, the visual work. Art does not have to be visual as, for example, it could be a discussion, a gathering, a text, a reading, or a sound piece. Perhaps a useful question to ask is: what characterises art and how does it differ from research?

More than merely providing a reflection on the approach of my visual work, I have come to see my writing practice as a part of my art practice, similar in approach to the visual work but contributing slightly different content. However, my writing has experienced difficulties in making explicit the role of certain forms of theory. I am certain that the theory I have read does affect decisions I make in the artwork, but when writing my PhD thesis I struggled to layer this into the writing.

I have recently confronted this problem by utilising the process I use in my sketchpad for bringing diverse research material together and adapting it for writing. In my sketchpad, I collect drawings, photos, material experiments and sketch ideas for new work. I stick these in with masking tape so I can rearrange them on a daily basis. I bring things together for numerous reasons; it could be disparate things that have a similarity or alternatively elements that feel uncomfortable together.

Reflecting this in writing, I cut previous versions of my thesis and rearranged the sections on the wall of my studio. I wrote my notes on theoretical texts on post-it notes, sticking these on the wall wherever they seemed most relevant (Figure 13).

Once I viewed rearranging the writing as akin to my sketchpad process, I ceased to worry about finding a definitive structure and instead perceived the process as playful and under continual review. The continual restructuring is not arbitrary but is done with a sense of play, where different juxtapositions of content create new tensions to explore. The result is that by physically breaking all the text, including the theory, into small sections, no particular framework particularly dominates. In fact, at certain points several different theoretical frameworks are brought together and then may be repeated at later points. I believe that this way of using theory better reflects its interaction with my visual work. Not only is the text physically broken, but this method also leads to a philosophical sense of breaking.

Figure 13.
The writing for my thesis cut up and being rearranged on the wall of my studio December 2010.

My research – both visual and verbal – centres on specific lived experiences rather than abstract theory. In a way, I mine other disciplines to further understand my own artwork; I do not judge theory by its 'truth' value but simply by its usefulness in understanding my experiences in life and of making. My subjective approach to writing and making highlights the varying experiences and perceptions from different subject positions and the complex interactions as these shift from health to injury. It evidences the multiple subject positions associated with lived and decentred experience, such as being a woman, an artist, being broken or becoming a breaker. To conclude, I strongly believe that visual and verbal creative practices combined have much to offer in understanding our lived experience.

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Pirkko Anttila

Determination of Researcher Positioning in Artistic and Practice-based Research

Figure: Building of the exhibition related to the Art of Research conference 2009. Photo: Outi Turpeinen.

Abstract

This paper discusses the determination of a researcher's positioning with regard to the aims of their research and the questions posed in it. The research of art and design and its concomitant creative expression are here considered part of the system of an extended concept of knowledge. This comprehensive view combines artistic and practice-based or practice-led research and their typical thought and process models within the academic research tradition.

Challenges to artistic research

Artistic research is all too often seen as an activity completely at odds with actual academic research, which is, on the one hand, characterised by a belief in the self-explanatory power of art and, on the other hand, disbelief in the possibility of the transformation and translation of this explanatory power into the language of research. The result is that artistic research finds it extremely difficult to believe itself the equal of academic research. There have been evident attempts, from various perspectives, to find theoretical and methodological bases that could support artistic research (e.g. Hannula & al. 2005; Elkins 2009). Simultaneously though, there has been an equally strong desire to clearly distinguish artistic research in its own right (e.g. Anttila 2004; Sullivan 2005; Barrett & Bolt 2007). Faced with such uncertainty, it is tempting to seek solace in philosophical foundations, which were not originally intended to be applied to art as an activity. For example, the kind of design that remains founded on the principles of functionalism is also in danger of relying on the principles of the rationalist philosophy of science of the period. Nevertheless, research on artistic work is at a very exciting and challenging stage of development regarding research activities and methodology for many reasons. Not least, because we do not yet precisely know the impulses that underlie the creative process.

Traditionally, research in the field of art has taken as its object the outcomes of the creative process, i.e. works of art, which have subsequently been studied as objects as such, or through their creator. The main focus of interest has always been on perceptions linked to artefacts and their expression, and whether such questions are to be related to the recipient or the creator of the work of art in question. Art communities themselves place a great importance on works of art but also on their creators and the processes involved in such creations.

However, such artistic research perspectives have not gained a great foothold in the sphere of traditional research. A look at research into artistic processes reveals four interrelated factors: the first being the person performing the artistic act; the second, the creative act with all its components, including the tools used for the act (materials, tools, techniques) as well as the processes of planning and implementing the act; the third, the outcome of the act, i.e. the product or artefact, which can be of very many kinds (for example, a utility article, work of art, programme or service or, in the case of architecture, a whole building); and the fourth, the recipient and the user of the work. (See Anttila 2001; 2005, 105–109.)

Artefacts and objects represent many levels of both reality and imaginative reality, such as material, functional, visual, aesthetic and symbolic. However, it is possible to attain objective, measurable and testable knowledge about these, although they are also open to interpretation based on subjective impressions and meanings found in them. The measurable and testable characteristics of artefacts and objects usually can be reasonably well described by using traditional academic research terms.

The objective and measurable data contained in these artefacts and objects can be presented using verbal and statistical methods. This can be done by using terms that refer, for example, to financial factors or those affecting ecology, terms that describe the structure and composition of the artefact, as well as terms that refer to the function of the object.

Moreover, the interpretative characteristics of the object can be described using the methods of qualitative, interpretative description accepted by traditional academic research. In this stage, it is possible to use terms that refer to the psychological effects evoked by the object, its features and signification processes, as well as terms referring to the social and cultural phenomena that pertain to the object.

In addition, it is possible to describe the person experiencing an object, its user or its recipient with both objective and interpretative methods and by using verbal expressions utilised in traditional academic research. This can be done by using terms that refer, for example, to the recipient's inner psychology or the social effects experienced by the recipients.

Finally, the creator of an artefact, the implementer of an artistic work can herself be studied with traditional scientific methods and, regarding her psychological and personal characteristics, with means related to interpretation and signification. If such approaches are used, the interest is directed at the performer of a creative work who is seen as an implementer of processes, and an active person with intentions and a set of value-based objectives. Those individual properties can thus be expressed by using terms belonging to the field of psychology, stylistic terms belonging to the field of art history and interpretative terms belonging to the field of semiotics.

However, the process of the creative act, i.e. the act of creative expression and its practical work, has thus far remained distant from academic research. Consequently, this has been referred to through means other than those typical of verbal communication. These include the expressive means typical of the arts, as well as descriptions of the processes involved in the making of art and design artefacts, the reflections that both occur during such actions and that these engender, and finally, to the time management of the process.

What is knowledge acquired through artistic research?

Research aims to produce knowledge. According to the classical view of science, knowledge acquisition is a dynamic process, which is used to provide grounds for and justify individual beliefs as "truths". Knowledge is defined as a belief, the reliability of which is checked through the methods used for its acquisition. Traditional science presumes that knowledge can be verbally transmitted, that is, it can be expressed and justified in sentences expressed verbally, or as signs or symbols. Verbalisation is considered such an essential way of presenting knowledge that if a thing cannot be expressed in terms of verbal or symbolic concepts, it cannot be considered to be a well-founded truth. The goal of finding objective, analytical, value-free knowledge is overwhelmingly emphasised in traditional academic research. However, research outcomes that have been attained through artistic means – or sometimes even interpretative means – have not been considered valid.

However, the concept of knowledge is changing. The traditional technical-scientific concept of science was cast out from its final bastions in the last decades of the 20th century and simultaneously the aspirations for a completely value-free science and a belief in universal truth were abandoned. This is clearly evident, for example, in the interest expressed towards tacit knowledge (e.g. Polanyi 1966), as well as the interest in reflection-in-action (e.g. Schön 1983). Advocates of distributed cognition consider knowledge context-specific, as it is "situated" in the interplay between people, processes and artefacts. In the 21st century, it appears that the paradigm of value-based critical theory, in its most current variants, is increasing in prominence, especially in research on the social and cultural discourse of art, in which the critical realism approach is evident, for example, in research into various systems. The most recent addition to the range of approaches

available seems to be the realistic paradigm, which, through the logic of practical reasoning and value objectives, evaluates and accepts at the level of probability the profitability of various processes and other issues requiring decision-making.

Focusing research activities on the creative process has been seen as greatly problematic because the creative process is, by nature, free, shuns all commitments and is based on subjective experience. Likewise, combining scientific and artistic research in parallel and simultaneous examination has been considered difficult. It has been necessary to respect boundaries. Even the esteemed British scholar Stephen Scrivener has said that the only true and proper goal of artistic research is artistic activity and that artistic research should not be focused on the acquisition of knowledge but on original creation (Scrivener 2002). There has even been a willingness to keep research into the creators of artistic expression and their processes and products separate from each other. The reasoning behind this is that an artist should first become an object for the researcher in order to meet the requirements of science. Up until now, science has not been very willing to accept a situation where a scientist studies herself, in other words it does not wish to do research in which the object of study would simultaneously be its subject.

In order to avoid the kind of dead end described above, I will introduce the term "extended concept of knowledge" – the notion that an expression of knowledge does not have to be merely verbal. It can be presented in ways other than verbal declarative sentences. The extended concept of knowledge also enables the expression of other objective and subjective forms of experience. Moreover, it provides opportunities that would help to develop research methodologies for creative and performance cultures. By forgoing the concept of knowledge, according to which knowledge should be connected with truth and certainty, and by accepting, in its place, the subjectivity of knowledge and granting more significance to the expression of sensations and mental images, we allow artists more freedom to develop a way of expressing knowledge

that is not in contradiction with theories arrived at through scientific rationality. Experiencing art and understanding the significance of imagination and sensations provides artistic research with an excellent opportunity to develop new methods of knowledge acquisition. Ultimately such methods might even be useful for the development of science in general.

Instead of presenting ideas on the methodological solutions best suited to art and design as such and pondering their respective superiority, it is my aim to show how we can successfully, without artificial barriers, include the process of artistic work within the sphere of academic research. To put it another way: I aim to show how the visual-haptic-kinaesthetic conceptualisation of the creative process can be linked to verbal conceptualisation. By adopting a comprehensive approach it is possible to combine artistic and practice-based or practice-led research and their typical process models with traditional, academic research traditions.

Nevertheless, there has been a great deal of academic research conducted in the field of artistic research and research focusing on, for example, the nature, form, expressive power, use and usability of artefacts, which has brought artistic research very close to the established academic research tradition. For example, in the field of design research a great deal of attention has been paid to usability issues, and many traditional and academically popular testing and measuring methods have proven useful in its research, as have methods of analysis based on survey and interview data used in the fields of psychology and sociology or, from cultural studies, the interpretative methodologies used in semiotics. In the 21st century, art's content-related meanings and intellectual dimensions have experienced a growing interest that has run parallel to the previously dominant research into aesthetic expression, which has meant that the methodological dimension has been relatively easy to determine from the highly developed qualitative and interpretative methodologies used.

Determination of researcher positioning

If the starting place of a work of research in the overall field of scientific research is artistic and practice-based, it is easy to clash with the traditional views of science. Science is surrounded by words such as reason, rationality, method, theory and objectivity. Art, on the other hand, is described by such words as creativity, experience and experiential, intuition, emotion and subjectivity. However, artistic and more traditional academic research share some fundamental concepts. They both acknowledge the existence of a subjective approach, i.e. the experience of the creator herself (e.g. Ellis & Bochner 2000), and an objective approach, one that is founded on agreed, universally accepted data. They are also both concerned with deduction, that is, with meaning generated through inference from the general to the specific, and with induction, or the determining of universal principles from specific instances. Artistic and more traditional academic research are also variously concerned with sense perception, practical activity, experience, analysis, reasoning and theory, as either a background to activities or as a target for them.

Let us construct a fourfold table (Figure 1) of these concepts, the vertical dimension of which is formed by theory's relationship with practical activities, in which, at one end, there is the theory (theory-based/theory-led/theory-oriented), which provides the goal or the point of departure for the research activity, while at the other end, the goal or aim is practical activity and creation of artefacts or works of art (practice-based/practice-led/practice-oriented).

Because artistic research concerns the analysis of perceptions and experience, the horizontal axis of the table has been formed with the aim of analysis taking place in research in order to verify and make visible the nature of perceptions and experience. At one end, this is done by means of demonstrating the greatest amount of objectivity possible

(objective analysis), while at the opposite end this is done as clearly as possible though the internal means of the individual (subjective analysis).

Differences in research activities placed within this fourfold table are best explained according to the aim of knowledge acquisition; whether knowledge is sought through the measurable perceptions of a person or his/her internal experiences or whether knowledge acquisition is directed at practical experiences or ascertaining theoretical, generalisable knowledge. The way in which this orientation takes place is dependent upon the questions asked. Hence, asking the right questions, in the right terms and in the right proportion to the practice in one's own field is a challenge to artistic research, and research in general. A good research outcome is dependent on the way the research question is set and how its presentation of itself provides methodological guidelines for its solution (see Reilly 2002).
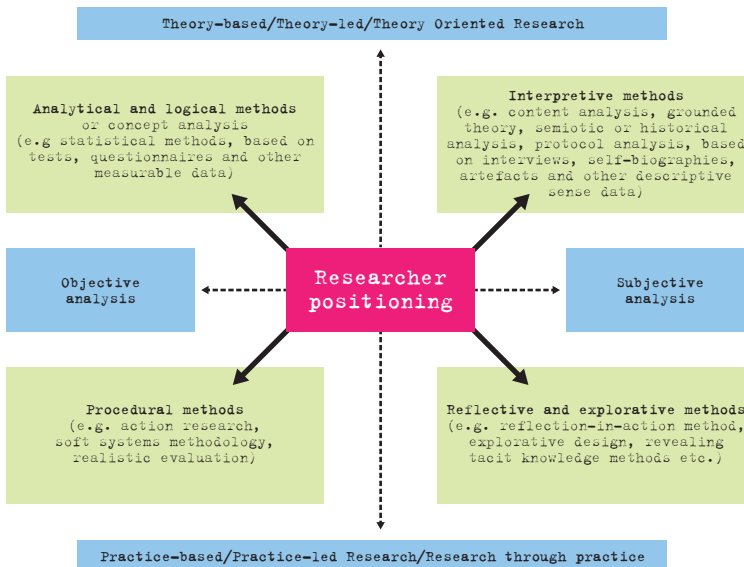
Figure 1. Determination of research orientation.

Various directions for knowledge acquisition

A natural scientific-technical approach seeks knowledge that can be tested and verified as sense-data (*knowledge tested against sense-data*). The epistemological principles in this field are built on the presumption that knowledge can be verified with the help of tested and measured sense perceptions and that these can be expressed in terms of various mathematical and verbal concepts. The epistemology of this paradigm is based on the principles of objectivity and reason. An alternative is to compile interpretative knowledge collected by interpreting usually verbal but sometimes also non-verbal expressions based on the sensations and experiences of research subjects (*knowledge interpreted from sense-data*).

Procedural research studies information gained through sensations and experience with the help of internal and external reflection directed at an object in the various stages of the process of its creation; critical analysis is made of its effect and significance in guiding action (*knowledge through sense-data*). The epistemological principles of procedural research are to be found in the direction of the principles of critical realism (Anttila 2007, 61–71).

The fourth segment of the table seeks knowledge that has been gained through internal reflection and experience. Experiential research can thus be said to produce *knowledge experienced as sense-data* leading to understanding. This is because the sense-data can be perceived in objects through our various physical senses, i.e. hearing, vision, touch, taste and smell. Since one aim of creating art is to forge an understanding of something, this channel of knowledge acquisition functions on the basis of sensory and intellectual insights. The sensory content is experienced, for example, as an image of reality relayed by the senses of sight, touch and hearing, which create a whole experience in one's mind. It, as it were, transmits or relays information onto external objects

from the material senses to create an understanding that is considered immaterial.

The epistemological principles of artistic expression and its activities are formed through the internal experience of the artist or creator with the help of information through which the works are imbued with a variety of means of expression. This is then transformed into knowledge by the internal sense-data of the person experiencing the art. Thus, the epistemology of research on artistic work is based on the principles of subjectively experienced and received sets of emotions and values.

From the perspective of researchers, the fourfold table of research orientation can guide them in seeking their position in the field. Researchers must carefully consider their own research interest: Are they studying something in which the answer can be found within themselves, their actions, or their internal reflections? In which context are they working? Are they aiming at universal, general knowledge that is applicable to all people, or something that involves personal interpretation? Are they aiming at the description of a unique event or a construction, which can be generalised to numerous objects and issues? After settling on their own position, it will be easier for them to begin seeking answers to concomitant questions and use applicable methods to do so.

Risks in artistic and practice-based research

What then is the quality of knowledge gained through practice-based and artistic research like, and with what element of practical work can it be made visible? Is a research outcome related to the interpretation of an object, which can be expressed verbally, or is it something that can be measured or tested? Maybe it is an artistic work, a creative process or perhaps it is a reflection based on this creative process?

In determining the researcher's own position, attention must be paid to the risks of a research approach based on practice and internal

reflection. Among the most prominent is the danger of solipsism (see Pakes 2004), which is a question raised by the school of thought based on the idea of 'me, myself and I'. Nothing other than the opinion of the researcher herself matters. There are several forms of solipsism, including epistemological solipsism, according to which a researcher cannot with certainty know about anything except her inner state of mind; ontological solipsism, according to which nothing else exists as such except the phenomenon currently being studied; and methodological solipsism, in which some familiar method is chosen as the research methodology regardless of its suitability to the research question at hand.

All three of these risks are very real to a person engaged in creative work or artistic research. This is due to the fact that artists' personalities often have to entail a kind of certainty according to their need to justify and defend their views. However, it is possible to avoid the risk of solipsism by carefully studying the research problem, by finding one's own position on the research map and by deriving from it the most suitable methodological solution.

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Leora Farber

Integrating Theory and Practice in the Dis-Location/Re-Location Project

Figure: Leora Farber, A Room of Her Own, 2006.
Performance still.

Abstract

In this article, I consider *Dis-Location/Re-Location* (2005–) as an example of a multi-modal practice-led visual arts project. In addition to a large-scale art exhibition consisting of photographic, sculptural, installation, performance, video and sound art that travelled to South African national galleries from 2007 to 2008, the project comprises numerous forms of textual research outputs. This article presents a space in which to 'work through' selected aspects of what I propose as an 'integrated' relationship between theory and practice in the project. I explore how the creative work occupies a central position in, provides the basis of, and acts as a catalyst for a range of textual outputs. I also analyse how thinking, theorising, writing and making work systemically in the project.

Introduction

In this article I reflect, retrospectively and in process, on how *Dis-Location/Re-Location* (2005–) might be considered as an example of a multi-modal, practice-led visual arts project. The project was initiated in 2005 and is on-going in the form of a practice-led doctoral degree in visual arts. At the core of the project lies a large-scale art exhibition consisting of photographic, sculptural, installation, performance, video and sound art that travelled to seven South African national galleries from 2007–2008.[1]

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1 The galleries were: the Albany History Museum, Grahamstown (28 June to 27 July 2007); the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum, Port Elizabeth (7 August to 9 September 2007); the US Art Gallery, Stellenbosch (16 October to 17 November 2007); the South African National Jewish Museum, Cape Town (30 October to 15 November 2007); the Oliewenhuis Art Museum (4 December 2007 to 27 January 2008) Bloemfontein; the Johannesburg Art Gallery (10 February to 13 April 2008) and the Durban Art Gallery (15 May to 27 July 2008). The exhibition was preceded by a live performance held at the Premises Gallery, Johannesburg, on 10 August 2006.

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There is an underpinning aspect of the project which I focus on in this article that distinguishes the project as Practice-Led Research (PLR). This is the complex, somewhat vexed, relationship between practice and theory. In this project, articulation and dissemination of the research findings take place both through the product of making and established academic means; for me, these are dialogical and interrelated. Therefore, there is no distinction between 'the project' and 'the research' – the project is the form in which the creative and theoretical research takes place. I use this article as a space in which to 'work through' selected aspects of this 'integrated' relationship between theory and practice as it is manifest in the project. I explore how the creative work occupies a central position in, provides the basis of, and can act as a catalyst for a range of textual outputs. I also analyse how theorising, writing and making work systemically in the project. I follow the model proposed by the University of Art and Design Helsinki, wherein PLR is based on the premise that, "*[t]he product of making – the artefact created during art and design practices – is conceived to have a central position in the academic research process…*" (Mäkelä & Routarinne 2006, 12). In keeping with this premise, I consciously adopt the term 'Practice-Led Research', as this emphasises practice as an active component of the research process. The exhibition and the processes of making the artwork thus lie at the centre of the research.

The project was 'directed' by me. This entailed assuming multiple roles, including the artist, project manager, and writer on the work in certain instances. However, as is characteristic of many PLR projects, much of the creative work was collaborative or at least involved working with others. Collaborations took various forms, ranging from paid expertise (professional photographers, digital retouchers, special effects artists, sound artists, engineers, professional Fine Art printers) to work with the Johannesburg-based artists and fashion designers *Strangelove*. *Strangelove* designed and manufactured the contemporary Victorian-inspired garments that the protagonist of the photographic images wears.

Graphic Design and Visual Arts students played important roles in this collaborative process. Eight students worked on the project over two years, some being responsible for major aspects of the work. After my initial conceptualisation of each work, collaborators were briefed as to how I wanted the concept to be realised. This was however, an organic process, in which changes to the initial concept occurred through process, discussion and professional input.

Before grappling with the complexities between theory and practice in section three, I first outline some of the thematic underpinnings of the project in section two below. These include the concepts of displacement and belonging, placelessness and rootedness; homeliness and foreignness that the immigrant experience of uprooting and regrounding sets up. Ways in which these themes play out in the artwork, through processes of grafting and hybridity are outlined in section four. In the final section of this paper, I detail selected methodological approaches that underpin both the creative and textual work.

Thematic underpinnings of the project

The research – and in using this term, I include both the creative work as well as the textual components – explores constructions of the South African immigrant, first- and second-generation Jewish identities, with reference to three female personae. Colonial immigrant Jewish identity is explored through the factual and fictionalised persona of Bertha Marks (1862–1934), wife of entrepreneur, Sammy Marks. An immigrant from Sheffield to South Africa in 1886, Bertha Marks lived an insular life in which hierarchical Victorian conventions of class, language, race and gender differences were upheld. Inherent in this colonial attitude is the privileging of whiteness as a product of race and social class. Immigrant identities of those Jews who came to South Africa from Lithuania and Latvia in the 1930s, are embodied in the persona of my

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mother, Freda Farber (1932–). Positioning myself as the third persona, second-generation (Jewish) immigrants' postcolonial experiences of cultural transformation and renegotiation of identity in terms of hybridity in post-apartheid South Africa are explored.

The research traverses geographic and temporal terrain, through Victorian England and late nineteenth- and mid-twentieth century Eastern Europe, to colonial southern Africa and contemporary South Africa. The study poses a central research question that asks whether a parallel between these three personae's respective identities, each of which is characterised by a particular form of displacement, might be likened to currently evolving formations of postcolonial, post-apartheid South African cultural identities. These South African identities are explored with particular reference to South Africa's white, English speaking Jewish communities, and my own position within the latter.

In order to investigate this research question, my lived experience of displacement is visually and theoretically paralleled to the persona and historical circumstances of Bertha Marks. Bertha Marks's experience was quintessentially colonial in her attempts to retain Anglicised customs, morals, behaviours and values in an alien environment. However, I, as a South African-born, white, second-generation Jewish female, explore ambivalences of 'dislocation' and 'belonging' within post-apartheid South Africa. Critically, both experiences are underpinned by alienation: in Bertha Marks's case, it might be argued that the loneliness and isolation that she experienced as an immigrant, living 12 kilometres from the developing town of Pretoria, was exacerbated by her attempts to retain the colonial avoidance of others of different race, ethnicity, class, language and religion. My sense of ambivalence is characterised by a sense of psychological dislocation, coupled with a need to re-locate myself within this new environment in ways that permit personal integrity. This entails a re-evaluation of personal and collective naturalised, Westernised and Eurocentric values, morals, ideologies and beliefs, embedded in South Africa's colonial past and within

my consciousness. Whilst re-evaluation is a personal process, it is also public, as reformative changes in South African society post-1994 have brought the society to a further level of postcoloniality. Consequently, cultural, racial, and political identities are being re-reframed internally on new and contested political and psychological terms.

Theory and practice

As suggested in the above overview of the thematics of the creative and textual components, the theoretical and creative work in this project is closely, albeit not neatly, intertwined. Perhaps 'entangled' is an appropriate word to use in this context, as it suggests a difficulty in separation. South African cultural theorist Sarah Nuttall (2009) poetically explains the term entanglement as being,

> a condition of being twisted together … ; involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness. It works with difference and sameness, but also within their limits, their predicaments, their moments of complication. (Nutall 2009, 1)

Although I consider the practical aspect of making and the product which arises from it to be a form of research, for me, the art-making process and its product are integrally bound to a range of research processes that are usually considered within academe to be traditional research practices. During the process of making, certain theoretical positions strongly informed the content of the work. Ways in which these theoretical concerns are explored visually are used to develop themes and content in writing on the work, thus effecting a cyclic relationship of *praxis*; that is, practice-following-theory-following practice. Yet, to

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stress, this process is far from neat. For, as South African artist and writer Kathryn Smith pertinently notes, although academia demands that an artist contextualises their work in the specific terms of its broader contexts and forms,

> the contingency-riddled space of practice does not lend itself easily to formulating research questions in the same, formulaic manner that conventional research supports. The limitations of language in the initial stages of a project's development is certain and requires sensitivity; [it is useful] to embrace the not-quite-knowing as productively troublesome rather than prejudicial. (Smith cited in Farber and Mäkelä 2010, 8)

While I can identify with Smith's evocation of the state of 'not-quite-knowing', I also find that an active, critical engagement with theory can help to clarify my visual thinking in the formative stages of a project. At the initial stages of making the work, variables are often not known. They are manipulated and subjective elements, from which interpretive observations can be made. These variables include a range of factors such as memory, emotion, empathetic projection and embodied lived experience. Thus, the process of making is not solely based on theoretical premises. However, of course, these factors can be analysed and theorised in textual outputs at later stages of production. At the crux of this integration of theory and practice is the recognition that while the creative and theoretical research is closely interrelated in terms of topic, thematic choices and content, each form of research has its discrete approaches, methodologies, aims, objectives and outcomes.

For me, this is where a slightly artificial divide emerges, albeit that it is a necessary and inevitable one. For instance, although the *Dis-Location* project's theoretical framework is located within the field of visual art, both the theoretical and creative work draw extensively from work done in humanities disciplines. These disciplines include

cultural studies and literary studies, particularly postcolonial, feminist, post-feminist, class-, race- and gender studies, as well as the emerging field of whiteness studies. These theories are applied within writing in a visual art context in the textual outputs of the project and within the conventions of representation. Critically, however, within representation, they are not used as a means to merely 'illustrate a theory', as critics of theory-informed work often suggest, but rather as a means to fuel my visual thinking and enrich my understanding of the subject matter. South African artist Penny Siopis's words (cited in Farber and Mäkelä 2010, 7) that an artist can "shape and produce" theory, as opposed to just using what exists there, are pertinent here. Although theory informs practice and *vice versa*, for me, the process is reciprocal; neither should be made in order to 'legitimate' or 'justify' the other.

From the outset, it was necessary to conceive of and structure the exhibition into a larger project that would deliver a range of textual outputs. This process meant moving beyond considering the work in isolation. Rather, the work had to be conceptualised within a broader theoretical paradigm, focusing on what kinds of textual outputs could be delivered. The work acted as a base from which these textual outputs emerge and into which they might feed. It also necessitated formulating the creative work in such a way that it became 'a project' as opposed to 'an exhibition'. As noted in the introduction, this led to conception of myself not as artist, for this was only one role I fulfilled in the project in addition to being fundraiser, project manager and logistics coordinator, but rather as 'director'. Such a multi-faceted role is complex, necessitating a constant wearing of different 'hats' and encouraging the need to be proficient in many areas. This is opposed to the conventional or historical conception of the artist whose primary, and often only, task is to 'make art'.

Constructivist theories of identity are used to frame written discussions on, and my understanding of, the construction of emerging South African identities. The project can be positioned within the research

paradigms of postcoloniality, coloniality and feminism. Given that it is beyond the scope of this article to tease out the complex range of theoretical threads which underpin the creative work in relation to these paradigms, I focus on two of these threads, namely hybridity and grafting, in my discussion to follow, and specifically on how the latter is realised through the gendered activity of needlework.

Hybridity and grafting

In the theoretical outputs and the creative work, hybridity is considered a product of grafting.[2] I operationalise the term 'hybridity', with specific reference to Russian philosopher, literary critic, and semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin's literary model of 'organic hybridisation'[3] and cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial model that allows for the emergence of a 'Third Space'. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha foregrounds his

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2   My thinking is influenced by Colin Richards's (1997, 234) use of the term 'graft' that as he argues, involves both contact and exchange – interactions that commonly intersect across difference. When one element is grafted onto another, the boundary crossed can be, and often is, traumatically transgressive – a deep incision that wounds and can leave permanent scars, even though it may also lead to productive and successful fusion.

3   In Colonial desire. Hybridity in theory, culture and race (1995), the postcolonial theorist Robert Young describes how Bakhtin's (1981) linguistic model of hybridity differentiates between 'organic' (unconscious) and 'intentional' hybridisation. Unconscious hybridity gives rise to amalgamation rather than contestation which is an imperceptible process whereby two or more cultures merge to produce a new mode, language, world view or object. In contrast, intentional hybridity sets different points of view against each other in a conflictual structure that retains an elemental organic energy and open-endedness (Young 1995, 21–22).

understanding of hybridity in social, cultural and political terms, out of which his conception of the 'Third Space of Enunciation' emerges. This concept directly informs my theoretical and art-making positions. I apply to the emergent, fecund space that I argue to be emerging as part of the formation of heterogeneous, hybridised, postcolonial South African cultural identities. Within the context of my argument, the 'Third Space of Enunciation' offers a generative way of understanding the dichotomies of coloniser *versus* colonised or oppressor *versus* oppressed, with forms of culture at the collision of the two – "hybrid cultural forms borne out of a productive, creative syncretism" (Ang 1999, 558).

Hybridity, like the term 'grafting', has a biological etymology. It was originally used to describe the outcomes of crossing two plants or animals of different species, and thus has relevance to the creative work in which organic species of plants and human skin is shown to be conjoined through processes of stitching. In terms of horticulture, a graft's purpose is to cultivate new orders through the actions of cutting, severing, transplanting and attaching different species from and to each other. Commonly used in postcolonial discourse to describe a range of social and cultural borrowings, exchanges and intersections across ethnic boundaries and the emergence of new cultural forms that might ensue from such mixes, hybridity refers to both biological and cultural 'merging'. (Fig. 1).

In the exhibition, the three women's narratives are visually and phonetically grafted throughout the work, in ways that are simultaneously fictionalised, autobiographical and historically factual. Using my body

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4 I often refer to this amalgam of Bertha Marks and I as 'the protagonist'. In certain of the artworks, Bertha's experience is obviously addressed; in others, mine is more openly dealt with.

Figure 1.
Leora Farber,
Aloerosa, 2006-2007: Transplant
Archival pigment print
135.8 x 102 cm.
Photo: Michael Meyersfeld.

as a metonym for myself and Bertha Marks,[4] I perform our identities as postcolonial and colonial white Jewish women in three core narratives, which are presented as a series of staged photographs. The protagonist is represented as engaged in needlework activities, typically considered 'women's work' in the Victorian era and a signifier of 'femininity' through docility and labour (Parker 1984, 4–5). Representation of this activity is given a subversive twist in that she appears to be working on her skin as opposed to fabric. This subverted needlework activity becomes a metaphor for a white woman with English affiliations, trying to negotiate a sense of being 'African' within a (post)colonial environment.

This conception of women's work, and the claustrophobic passivity associated with domestic labour in Victorian England, is subverted by redefinition of the act of sewing as a form of agency. Needlework becomes a means through which Bertha Marks unsuccessfully struggles to reaffirm, and 'I' ambivalently manage to renegotiate, a sense of identity as a white woman living in (post)colonial Africa. Albeit reluctantly in Bertha Marks's case, these intimate acts of cutting and conjoining of plants and objects that act as signifiers of 'South African' and 'English' identities are shown to lead to new subjectivities and hybrid identities. By deliberately inserting the 'other' into my body, I actively invite and embrace the stranger or other within. Although the 'taking' of the graft, represented by the aloe's growth, is imaged as physical in the work, metaphorically this insertion of the other and its 'taking root' is also a psychological process.

The main bedroom in the Sammy Marks Museum, Pretoria – the former home of Bertha and Sammy Marks – forms the context for the key video work, and the subsequent photographic prints and stage set installation, *A Room of Her Own* (2006–2007) (Figs. 2, 3, 4a, 4b). This private space becomes both a place of alienation and liberation; a charged

Figure 2. Leora Farber, A Room of Her Own, 2006
Performance still. Photo: Michael Meyersfeld.

Figure 3. Leora Farber, A Room of Her Own, 2006.
Performance still; stage-set.
Photo: Michael Meyersfeld.
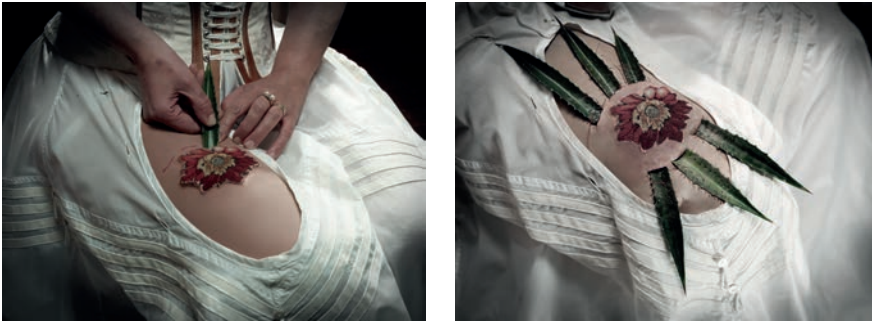
Figure 4a and 4b. Leora Farber, A Room of Her Own, 2006.
Performance still.
Photo: Michael Meyersfeld.

space wherein the protagonist performs a series of physically and psychologically transformative acts on her body.[5] Her various insertions into the body are shown to 'take' and transform into new hybrid plants, beaded flowers or scarification markings. The bedroom becomes a metaphoric 'transitional space' wherein unpredictable outcomes may

5   Virginia Woolf's essay, A room of
    one's own (1929), formed a signifi-
    cant prompt for the creative work,
    in that it provides a literary par-
    allel to the colonial and postcolo-
    nial protagonist's quest to use the
    'room of her own' as a transitional,
    private space which offers a form of
    psychological, intellectual, emo-
    tional, and cultural liberation. The
    title of the series of artworks on
    the exhibition, namely, A Room of Her
    Own, derives from Woolf's (1928, 4)
    conception that "a woman must have
    money and a room of her own if she
    is to write fiction." Further liter-
    ary sources that are analogous to the
    narratives of liberation and trans-
    formation which the protagonist of
    Dis-Location/Re-Location experiences
    can be found in E.M. Forster's nov-
    el A room with a view (2000-1908),
    Kate Chopin's novella The awakening
    (1899) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's
    short story The yellow wallpaper
    (1997-1899).

emerge from the grafting of diverse materials and cultures, giving rise to new identity formations. In *A Room of Her Own,* Victorian constructs of femininity such as the domestic imperative with needlework as one of its exemplars, and the historically gendered psychosomatic 'disorder' of hysteria are imaged as means by which Bertha Marks and I deal with transformative physical and psychological changes in response to our respective alien and alienating environments.

In this context, hysteria represents a way in which, historically, women feigned disease in an attempt to bring unspoken traumas into words or to draw attention to their social, intellectual, creative and emotional constraints under patriarchy. In the artwork, tentative correlations between hysteria and self-mutilation by 'cutting' as forms of agency are suggested.[6] Feminist writers such as Rose Ellis (2002) contend that cutting, like the contemporary eating disorder anorexia nervosa, is a response to certain expectations embedded in patriarchal ideologies, rather than a symptom of individual psychopathology. Viewed from this perspective, cutting, like hysteria, might be seen as a way in which women choose to (re)negotiate patriarchal regulation over the boundaries of femininity. The representation of hysteria (Fig. 5), as well as the protagonist's cutting might therefore be considered to be historical and contemporary forms of agency, as attempts to gain liberation from the restrictions imposed on women by patriarchal society, and as a means to transcend cultural boundaries.

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6 Cutting the skin to the point of releasing blood is a contemporary practice common amongst Westernised teenage girls. As psychologists have noted, the compulsion to cut one's body to the point of breaking the skin and releasing blood is a way of inflicting pain on oneself. The relief provided by the endorphins released into the body 'anaesthetises' the person's emotional pain. Cutting can therefore be seen as a way of 'speaking' when one is unable, verbally, to express overwhelming emotions or unfulfilled emotional needs (Ellis 2002, 12).

Figure 5. Leora Farber,
A Room of Her Own: Redemption, 2006–2007.
Archival pigment print
102 x 135.8 cm

Selected methodological approaches

Textual analysis, which incorporates the critical analysis of both text and image, forms a key research methodology in the project. Colonial and historical studies are referenced both textually and visually in articulating the historical context and positioning of Bertha Marks as a Victorian wife, mother and woman living in *fin de siècle* southern Africa. In her examination of the Victorian 'cult of domesticity' as a critical, concealed dimension of male as well as female identities, Anne McClintock (1995) points out that the architecture of imperialism was gendered in that it was white men who made and enforced laws and policies in their own interests. Barred from formal power, these colonial women, of whom Bertha Marks is an example, served discreetly, upholding the boundaries of empire and bearing its children. Thus, women like Bertha Marks were not, to use McClintock's (ibid. 6) phrasing "… *the hapless onlookers of empire, but were ambiguously complicit both as colonizers and colonized, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting.*"

Selected art historical conventions and genres are referenced in both written texts and in representation. In certain of the photographic works, I drew on particular art historical sources such as the Dutch seventeenth-century portraiture tradition and pre-Raphaelite painting, in particular, John Millais' *Ophelia* (1851–1852) (Fig. 6). The latter served as a prompt for those images that reference hysteria. Nineteenth-century oil painting conventions, in which "*[t]he silent embroiderer … become[s] implicated in a stereotype of femininity in which the self-containment of the woman sewing is represented as seductiveness*" (Parker 1984, [sp] text accompanying plate 5) were also important references. In certain prints, I attempted to set up an analogy between the protagonist's self-contained pose and her representation as eroticised object, in a deliberate play on these art historical conventions. In this way, feminist discussions on the eroticised male gaze, voyeurisms, and woman as objectified spectacle for consumption through the male gaze, are brought into play.

Figure 6.
John Everett Millais, Ophelia, 1852
Tate Britain, London.

Figure 7a. Leora Farber, 2005–2006.
A Room of Her Own (Set I) 3 wall panels each:
230 x 100 x 53 cm
1 ceiling panel: 160 x 100 x 2 cm
Archival pigment print on canvas
3 floor panels each: 230 x 100 x 35 cm
Archival pigment print on vinyl
Wax, aluminium, mild steel, wood, mirror, glass, fabric,
embroidery thread, plastic, Dimensions variable.
Photo: Angela Buckland.

Figure 7b. Leora
Farber, 2005–2006.
A Room of Her Own
(Set I) detail of
chair.
Photo: Angela
Buckland.

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In addition to textual analysis, the conventional primary research methodologies of interviews and the use of archives also informed the content of both the creative work and the textual outputs. In order to gain further insight into Sammy and Bertha Marks's subjectivities as Jews in *fin de siècle* South Africa, I interviewed Dr Richard Mendelsohn, Professor of South African Jewish History at the University of Cape Town (UCT). An interview was also conducted with UCT sociologist, Melissa Steyn, who has conducted ground-breaking work in the emergent field of South African whiteness studies. Valuable information was sourced from my mother and other surviving first-generation family members who could recollect living in Latvia, and narrate memories of their processes of adaptation to living in South Africa as immigrant Jews in the late 1930s. These interviews are translated into the creative work, in the form of the soundtrack for *A Room of Her Own* (2006–2007). In the second section of the soundtrack, my mother narrates her anecdotal memories of leaving Latvia, aged three, and adapting to living in apartheid South Africa.

Use of archives played an important part of the research process in making the artwork. Firstly, in researching her history, I found that in contrast to her husband whose entrepreneurial successes are well documented, Bertha Marks remains a historically marginalised figure. Given the paucity of information on her, I found Bertha Marks's letters to her husband a rich resource. Written either during her many trips aboard or whilst he was away, the letters are now housed in the Samuel Marks Papers Archive, at the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Research, UCT. These translate into the artwork directly. For instance, the first section of the *A Room of Her Own* comprises a voice-over narration of selected quotes from these letters, quotes that indicate Bertha Marks's frustration as a Victorian wife and woman, her loneliness, and concern for the Jewish upbringing of her children, as well as her ingrained colonial prejudices, attitudes and values. On looking more closely at her letters, it became

evident that these were written almost as letters to herself, rather like diary entries expressing her reflective thoughts.

Secondly, many of the shoots were staged in Bertha and Sammy Marks's former home that currently functions as a museum. The home is thus an active archive in itself, containing much of the original furniture that Bertha Marks had shipped to South Africa from England. Furthermore, in the creative work, this space – already an archive – was re-archived in the form of the stage-set (Fig. 7a and 7b). The latter constituted a life-sized photographic simulation of a section of the main bedroom. The notion of 'recreating the archive' was taken a step further by exhibiting the stage set in the archival settings of national South African museums.

The creative work involved the visual realisation of concept or idea that was articulated through a series of formal decisions, including a choice of medium, scale, display as well as overall iconography. A wide range of media were employed in the creative work, based on choices that best suited the realisation of the underlying concept. For instance, still photography was chosen as a primary medium, in that it allows for the construction of 'staged' narrative scenes, within specific contexts. Bertha Marks's colonial and my postcolonial identities are shown to be constructs of role-play, masquerade and performance, embodying processes of 'putting on' and 'taking off' in relation to our respective historical, gendered and cultural contexts. In contrast, performance and video were deployed for their time-based nature and ability to enable the depiction of continuous motion.

Materials were deployed for their metaphoric qualities. For example, wax was used in the stage-set (Fig. 2) specifically for its flesh-like qualities, its instability, and its conduciveness to melt under heat. In the videoed performance from which *A Room of Her Own* was edited, wax roses that formed part of the wallpaper of the stage-set slowly shift and melt, due to the heat being transmitted from the back of their supportive surfaces.

They literally crash to the floor around the protagonist while she sits demurely, engaged in the activity of stitching young aloe leaves into a rosette-formation on her thigh.

Conclusions

In the *Dis-Location/Re-Location* project, various textual forms of research (such as journal articles, conference papers, a thesis and a catalogue essay) collectively, together with the product of making, combine to constitute Practice-Led Research. During the time of making the artwork, certain of these textual forms of research worked systemically, 'feeding into' and supporting each other, as well as feeding back directly into the product of making. Articulation and dissemination of the research findings therefore takes place in a dialogical and interrelated manner, wherein the process of making and its product are integrated with established research methodologies. This approach brings my roles as artist and researcher together, to the point where they are entangled in and enmeshed with one another.

The current phase of the project comprises the writing of a thesis towards attaining a Practice-Led Ph.D in visual arts. The thesis comprises a textual exegesis of the artwork, and follows the structure of traditional research by encompassing a central research question, a defined methodology, a particular context, and a substantive list of references. In the thesis, one is required to contextualise the artwork within a theoretical framework, provide rigorous critical analysis of the work, articulate the processes involved in making the artwork, and detail choices of medium, showing how these affect content.

Given that these critical research processes have characterised the *Dis-Location* project from its inception, and that the theoretical framework and critical analysis of the artwork has already been articulated in various textual outputs of the project, the process of writing the thesis is one of critical reflection and consolidation. In other words, the

theoretical underpinnings of the artwork were not arrived at retrospectively through a process of reflecting on the completed exhibition and setting out certain observations or conclusions in textual forms, but rather, through a dynamic process of integrating conventional forms of research with the process of making.

The process of writing the thesis has led to an interesting observation. I had previously considered the way in which theory is used in relation to the creative work as being discursive; as a dialectical engagement with and between theoretical discourses. However, in writing the thesis, it seems that theory works best as a framing device within which to contextualise the artwork. The writing is primarily interpretive and analytical as opposed to discursive; theory functions as a lens through which the artwork may be read. Therefore, the artwork serves as *a point of entry* for discussion of theoretical issues raised in the literature, or, put differently, theoretical discussion emanates *from* the artwork and not *vice versa*. The theoretical frames are drawn upon and mobilised only insofar as they pertain to, illuminate, and expand upon concepts that are visually articulated in the artwork.

In the *Dis-Location* project, the close relationship between theory and practice is thus realised through the ways in which the processes and products of making inform and provide the basis, or catalyst for, textual forms of research, and *vice versa*. However, this reciprocity is far from neat: in writing the thesis, new theoretical positions retrospectively become applicable and further possible readings of the artwork arise, over and beyond those that were initially conceptualised at the start of the project, and during the making of the artwork. These new readings do not necessarily alter the underpinning thematics of the research (although it is possible that they may), but, in my experience, add layers of depth, complexity and meaning to ways in which the artwork might be understood. While it would not be possible to incorporate entirely new perspectives into the already-made artwork, if these perspectives open up significantly new avenues of thinking, they can serve as fertile

ground for conceptualising a second iteration of the exhibition, thereby putting a cyclical process of *praxis* into motion.

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Sarah Casey

Laying Practice on the Line: Drawing as Subject, Tool and Research Outcome in an Interdisciplinary Context

Figure: Sarah Casey, Patina: Light, 2009, grease on paper, detail.

Abstract

This article originated as an accompaniment to a visual exhibition of studio outcomes to examine the methodology of my studio-based doctoral project to analyse where, how and to what end this research is reliant on practice. In my example, drawing practice is informed by collaborations in the sciences and has performed multiple functions: a subject, tool and means of disseminating outcomes. This article considers studio research activities through these three functions to identify potential for meaningful interdisciplinary exchange.

Introduction

Broadly speaking, aspects of creative processes and creative methodologies can lack understanding, without which interdisciplinary knowledge transfer is limited. The reasons for this are several and complex. These range from the artists' own reticence to share working methods (Sullivan 2005, 84; Barrett 2007, 2) and differences in the character of these working methods in comparison with those in other academic contexts (Barrett 2007, 3). It is generally reinforced by cultural values assuming that an artist's work is by nature made in secret. Moreover, when positioned within the administrative structure of a higher education context, studio research treads a precarious line between, on the one hand, the privileging of text and theory[1] and on the other, collapsing theory and

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1 The assumption crops up in many discussions that the text supports the practice or is the 'real' research. Fiona Candlin assesses these problems in the context of the practice-based PhD (Candlin 2000, unpaginated).

2 Stephen Goddard examines an argument that all research is a practice in one form or another (Goddard, 2007, 116).

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practice so that in effect, practice simply functions like a readable text.[2] The latter is problematic since practice is multifaceted, encompassing multiple activities and modes of engagement which enable modes of thought and outcomes that are non-linear, multi-layered and subjective. It is already generally acknowledged that practice-based methodologies cannot simply or easily be transferred from, or mapped onto, existing theoretical or scientific models (e.g. Sullivan 2005, 88; Brown 2000, 2). Nor are they easily communicated through established academic channels or necessarily understood in terms of linguistic models. For instance, Estelle Barrett writes about the problems in the incompatibility and (even opposition of) creative methodologies with established theoretical frameworks (Barrett, 2007, 3). Taking a slightly different approach, examining artists' creative decision-making process, Rebecca Fortnum addresses this issue through examining how these processes are distinct from those in theory or language (Fortnum 2006, 7 & 11).

However, to maintain practical and theoretical methodologies as completely discrete or mutually exclusive is also problematic. To cite Sullivan, "*arguments that claim artistic ways of knowing to be a distinctive modality of human engagement that is set in opposition to other forms of knowledge construction run the risk of denying the complexity of what it is to know, to see, to understand*" (Sullivan, 2005, 86).

If these subjective, multifaceted characteristics are what makes practice a valued mode of research (see Barrett, 2007, 2–3), a more comprehensive understanding seems imperative. This is especially relevant in what is arguably an increasingly interdisciplinary research community. In this article, I draw parallels between the methods of studio research and those in other academic disciplines in order to explore where a common framework or language may reside. Such an approach seems imperative if studio research is to make meaningful contributions in an interdisciplinary context rather than limiting its impact to the field of fine art.

This would seem, perhaps, easier said than done: studio making is typically a hidden and private affair between artist and materials, and perhaps nowhere is this given more credence than in the act of drawing. As a researcher whose practice is predominantly drawing-oriented, such accounts are problematic in the context of debates surrounding the legitimacy of art practice as research. These issues are particularly pressing given the recent concerns over the introspection in drawing research. I refer here to Steve Garner's claims that drawing research[3] has become introspective and defensive, justifying itself as an autonomous and significant area to research (Garner 2008, 20). Garner refers to the recent trend of exploring the nature of what drawing is, defining drawing as a medium and discipline as an end in itself. This is an approach that is both introspective and ultimately limited in its scope.

In this article, I adopt Maquard Smith's stance: 'to use research to understand research' by making research practices 'visible' (Smith 2007, xi). I do this though discussion of my PhD research project, which seeks to examine relationships between investigative procedures in the sciences of conservation, archaeology and medicine and the experimental tools and ideas of Art. This research hinges on the following premise: if drawing, historically intimate with knowledge in the sciences, is now said to mimic everyday acts of touching (Godfrey 2007, 71) and blur distinctions between art and the everyday (Petherbridge 2006, np), might these scientific practices translate into new means of drawing that present ways of understanding the fugitive and visually elusive, which these scientific practices explore?

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3   I use the term 'Drawing Research' here broadly to refer to research into forms, uses and applications of drawing. This is an area which has attracted particular academic and creative interest over the past decade and encompasses research carried out through both theoretical and practical means.

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The research is conducted through interdisciplinary field visits where information is gathered then brought back to the studio for, in academic research terms, 'testing' and 'analysis'. This article attempts to examine what practice actually does 'on the ground' from an artist's point of view. Discussion is framed around the broadly transferable research functions of subject, tool and object. I explore how drawing research can function in an interdisciplinary context in a way that maintains its subjectivity, openness and creativity. Therefore, while specific content may remain esoteric outside the immediate field, I suggest that the use of this *model* could enable greater cross-disciplinary sympathy with the work that studio practice does and the ways it does it in a research context.

Context of the project: drawing as subject

To understand the project, some words are perhaps needed regarding its context and position within the field of drawing research.

In recent years, serious interest in drawing has grown "exponentially" (Taylor 2008, 10), with what it means to draw coming under considerable scrutiny as this activity becomes increasingly established as an autonomous discipline and area of research in its own right.[4] There are now research centres and groups for drawing, spaces dedicated to the exhibition of contemporary drawing, postgraduate courses, research students, journals, blogs and glossy publications giving drawing a visibility and presence to an extent never previously enjoyed. While this offers enormous scope for development, a danger emerges, namely

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4 As opposed to a subsidiary or formative step in the production of paintings or sculpture.

that 'an immature discipline tends towards defence. It is inward looking and protective rather than outward looking and willing to take risks' (Garner 2008, 20). It seems texts can often deliberate over definitions of this discipline, which, at extremes, condense to a binary logic of what is and what isn't drawing.

My research evolved out of a joint interest in and dissatisfaction with delicacy as a value, in particular its relation to drawing, specifically when enmeshed in rhetoric expounding the uniqueness of this medium. Historically, delicacy in drawing has typically been coded positive, traditionally an indication of accuracy or truth,[5] of dexterity and a heightened sensitivity to the minutiae[6] or more recently, a subversive ambiguity or immateriality.[7] "Delicate" can also describe the material fragility of the supports commonly used in traditional drawing – such as paper – which has rendered them subject to special conservational measures, conditioning viewing protocol and general access. For instance, drawings cannot be exposed to light for long periods, nor can they be easily handled, material conditions that are often cited by the curators of drawing exhibitions (e.g. Craig-Martin 1995, 7). Such examples have been used to historicise or justify drawing's uniqueness or specificity.

It seems imperative to take a critical stance towards these discourses: the approach here is through the lenses of research practices that lie outside drawing or even fine art. To clarify, this is not a case of illustrating

[5] In 'Elements of Drawing' (1857) John Ruskin wants his students to adopt "a delicate method of work, such as may ensure his seeing truly" (Ruskin 1971, 14).

[6] This is typified in John Berger's description of Watteau's drawing (Berger 2005). He praises both deftness of touch and the capturing of detail noting "an enormous power of observation and feeling"(ibid. 39).

[7] Deanna Petherbridge (2006) argues drawing is able to be ambiguous, its uniqueness also resisting commercial forces. Brian Dillon values in drawing a "lightness" which is a form of "gaucherie" (Dillon 2009, 8).

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these practices, nor about looking at how they use processes, which may be considered drawing; indeed in the context of an expanded field of drawing, this may be mistaken for an attempt to mark these various interdisciplinary practices *as* drawing. Rather, my aim is to examine the activities of professions which share similar values to a particular type of studio practice, i.e. a type of drawing concerned with damage, contact, delicacy, sensitivity and traces. Instead of simply asking that increasingly hackneyed question "What is drawing", I am interested in finding answers to three more specific questions: What does drawing do? How does it do it? What might drawing share?

It tests an alternative, hopefully complementary, strategy to the other 'outward-looking' approaches emerging in this discipline which examine either the use of drawing in non-art disciplines (such as medicine and design) alongside that in fine art,[8] or the situation of fine art drawing practices in non-art contexts. A good example of the latter is found in the Artists in Archaeology project.[9] This project has enabled teams of artists to work alongside archaeologists, observing their practices to generate artworks or ways of making. Likewise, archaeologists benefit from the alternative ways of thinking brought by the artists to their work and the public presence of exhibited artworks. In many ways, this project resembles my own, though rather than seeking 'inspiration' in the different external fields, a significant divergence is my concern with commonalities, and crucially, that my project works across several fields, creating a "web" of relations as a means of interrogating particular disciplinary issues as related to my practice.

In this sense, questions about what drawing does when it leaves the studio and how new drawing tools and interdisciplinary models might be developed, are questions *about* drawing, positioning it as subject. Yet

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8   See publications such as Davies &
    Duff, 2005; Duff & Sawdon, 2009.

9   Artists in Archaeology,
    Online: www.artistsinarchaeology.org
    (accessed: 04/12/2008).

since the most effective, and perhaps only, way to ask questions about the process of drawing is through actually making and doing drawings, drawing is no only a subject of research but also a *tool*. This distinction can sometimes become blurred due to what emerges as a reciprocal relationship between drawing as both a subject of enquiry and a tool with which the research is carried out. The confusion between these two 'functions' may be partly responsible for impeding non-specialist understanding studio methods. If we are to value the research in an interdisciplinary context, as I have argued above, it is crucial to have a grasp of these distinctions.

Drawing as tool: what does drawing do?

Undertaking the case studies

The initial stages of research were carried out through a series of case studies, designed as an opportunity to gain access to areas outside fine art in order to collect information relevant to the research agenda. The studies formed a series of field visits and correspondences undertaken over a period of three months in the early stages of the project across the fields of medicine, costume conservation (Fig. 1a) and archaeology (Fig. 1b). These areas were selected on the grounds of pre-existing research[10] indicating similarities in drawing to medicine's microscopic

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10 This can be seen both through my own existing work in costumes archives (unpublished) and other more established projects such as Artists in Archaeology. This is a project where artists have worked alongside archae- ologists. Notable, too, are numerous Wellcome Trust funded initiatives and publications (such as Arends & Slater 2003; Arends & Thackara, 2004) pro- moting collaboration between artists and scientists.

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Figure 1a.
Author working in
archives.

Figure 1b.
Observing
archaeology on site
visit.

viewing, archaeology's stratigraphy and a conservator's chemical processes, specifically in their engagement with fugitive or delicate material.

Visits typically involved discussions and observing practice, during which visual and textual notes were made, compiled in a series of notebooks and supplemented by photographic and filmic material. I should perhaps point out at this stage that drawing is frequently considered a form of touching or contact, and it is within such a framework that my practice operates. Consequently, I focused on how things were handled, and the issues surrounding visibility and damage. My plan for the work was kept as open as possible with the purpose to really look and find out what went on. I would work through the available equipment or use the limitations of the environment to determine the way that small drawings and sketches were made. For example, in the case of costumes archives, the drawings were dictated by the need to wear gloves and work in pencil. In other words it was a situated understanding, one grounded in the context. Over a period of what is now three years, I have worked with curators of the royal dress collection at Kensington Palace to study items of underwear in the collections. I observed how these were handled, stored, conserved and brought out to be examined making notebook drawings of my observations.

Back in the studio: Drawing comparisons

These experiences were then transported back to the studio via the notes, sketches and photographs. A process of brainstorming, list making and material experimentation ensued: a physical or material cross referencing (Fig. 2b). The studio itself became a kind of lab or sorting ground for sifting through and testing the material (Fig. 2a). Drawings were made by combining elements of the practices I had observed. This included a type of reconstruction of activities observed on the visits. For instance, working through microscopes, using processes of enlargement and precise recording techniques, working on a section rather than a whole, or using light to reveal and make visible the form.

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Figure 2a.
Testing in the
studio.

Figure 2b.
Example of visual
cross-referencing.

During this process, the "drawing" became a means of making connections between seemingly disparate materials. Through testing the aesthetics of these processes, visual and conceptual elements began to emerge that were common to all case studies: for instance, (in)visibility, control, light, damage, or distancing (the wearing of gloves being a prime example of the latter). The question became: how might these elements be developed into a coherent body of work that would comment on the information gained? To illustrate this concept more tangibly, I will next focus on the development of one particular series of work entitled *Patina*.

Making the patina drawings

In archaeology there is a method of 'preservation by record'. This is recognition that the process of excavation is ultimately one of irrevocable destruction but that this is essential to further knowledge. In the archaeological context, the artefact itself becomes replaced by processes of human intervention such as records, diagrams and illustrations. The documentation of the process of uncovering becomes the means by which artefacts or objects are then known and preserved. This series of works developed around the idea of damage mediated by human intervention in the struggle to control fugitive elements.

I had firstly attempted to work *with* the systems of preservation, for instance, using gloves and hard pencil – the only drawing media allowed in the archives. Here, I took the systems to the extremes – using a pencil so fine the marks were barely visible – to map out and scrutinize the surface of the archival garments, establishing a process of measuring or tracking. However, this obedience soon gave way to curiosity. If drawing is a medium of marking, what if these precautions and preventative measures of conservation were inverted to be actively deployed as a mark making system? In other words, if factors such as light, acid, damp, greasy fingers and heat are all hazardous to archival garments because they *cause marking*, how might these be used to 'draw'?

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Figure 3a and 3b.
Making patina using
a syringe.

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Crispin Sartwell discusses different cultural understandings of beauty. His interpretation of Japanese concept of beauty – *wabi sabi* – highlights an idea of beauty in imperfection and aging, a patina (Sartwell, 2004, 126). In this stage of the process, my own ideas began to condense around the concept of '*patina*', an aging that can seem – perhaps perversely – to add a sense of value. Remaining with my interest in handling, the series responded to the damage caused by grease in touching. The image is painstakingly mapped out with a syringe to issue carefully moderated deposits of grease (Fig. 3a and 3b).

The obedience of the rule-bounded system of working discussed above becomes somewhat farcical given the detrimental purpose to which these rules are now put. The process itself becomes a struggle between chance and control, evidenced in the image by the occasional blot or run, an aesthetic "error" which builds up to create a sense of density or form. Light is also significant: this is an image revealed through light, displayed by light and literally made by light, as the sensitive paper will eventually discolour as a result of the harmful rays.

Through tracing the development of a series of drawings, the 'work' that drawing undertakes becomes more readily understandable. As Avis Newman has said of her drawing, '*The construction of the image – the process of sifting, tracing, manipulating, modifying, placing, displacing – is as important as the image itself*' (1994, np). This is how drawing researches, how it can perform as a tool to enable shared approaches and practices to become evident. So, as a tool, the process described here is perhaps an example of what Petherbridge (2006) has called drawing blurring '*distinctions between art and everyday usage*' (ibid. 9). It is also, to revert to linguistic terms, performing a kind of embodied deconstruction, a means of picking apart and understanding relationships between the material collected, rebuilding this and reforming it to reflect on emergent themes, in a way that is not entirely dissimilar to the mental revolutions involved when writing a report or summary of research. However, given the layered and rhizomic way that this 'deconstruction'

Figure 4a and 4b. Sarah Casey, Patina: Light, 2009, grease on paper, 1800 x 2560 mm., installation view (a) and detail (b).

happens, linguistic models leave us with a simplistic, unilateral and impoverished account of the richness of this creative process.

As a research tool, the method described might resemble an approach to research described by Bruno Latour as 'object oriented' (Latour 2005, 14): the drawing seeks out and is formed through setting up dialogues between shared concerns with delicacy. While Latour's concern is primarily political, this drawing methodology can be understood as a visual manifestation of his concept of a 'hidden geography', a hitherto invisible space created by mapping overlapping concerns (ibid. 2005, 15). The research process enables such overlaps to be found and to be seen. Drawing inherently leaves its traces, physical signs of a developing thought, visible in sketchbooks and test material if not in the marks of the drawing itself.

Outcomes: of drawing, for drawing and drawn outcomes

Such examples indicate drawing's potential as a tool outside the immediate arena of fine art, and this in itself has implications for drawing as a subject of research: it presents new knowledge about what drawing can do, and how it does it. In this stage of the project, it is possible to identify significant implications.

While the project remains focused on implications for art, it would seem to raise awareness of the visual and methodological dimensions of other practices, presenting an example of an approach to transfer between art and science disciplines. For instance, images and information generated through the project are being included in the databases of the institutions with which I collaborated, suggesting mutual gain. Perhaps most obviously, by making visual work that reflect the processes or values of these professions, outcomes can act as a communicative tool to bring these to public attention and thereby reach wider audiences.

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In entering dialogical relations with other material practices, this interdisciplinary approach falls in stark opposition to drawing as a secretive, private, studio-based dialogue between artist and page, offering an alternative vision of what drawing does: here, drawing is an analytical approach that stems from but extends beyond the studio. Moreover, it challenges the suggestion of drawing being unique in its characteristics, looking instead '*to suggest the borders where the drawing world abuts the world of other disciplines, and to suggest where we might or should explore*' (Garner 2008, 13). Yet, it is important to note that while it is outward-looking, seeking to make connections and establish relationships, these remain firmly grounded within the histories and issues internal to itself.

These outcomes tell us about drawing as a (theoretical) subject; such knowledge was produced through the means of drawing, making it a tool (in conjunction with others in my 'research toolkit', such as critical theory). But to stop here deals with only half the story, seeing drawing only as verb[11] focusing on the process. If we consider only the process, the danger is that the actual drawn work, 'drawing as noun' (Hoptman 2002, 3), becomes positioned as a by-product of research, not a research outcome in its own right. This would seem a highly impoverished notion of drawing indeed given the rich multilayered communicative potential that I referred to at the start of this article. I will conclude my case by discussing what might be learnt from the drawn outcome itself.

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[11] I refer here to Richard Serra's famous pronouncement that "Drawing is verb" (Serra, 1977 cited in Borden 1994, 51).

Conclusions

Hung suspended, unframed in space (Fig.4), the material vulnerability of the drawing becomes omnipresent, a spatial metaphor for the limbo in which the archival artefacts exist. In many ways, this image presents the tension of display and decay, as much a part of traditional drawing as for the archival artefacts. In doing so, a parallel dialogue is established between fields of practice, one that might then comment on the tensions involved in preservation and hint at discourses of power or control. On a basic visual level, viewers are intrigued by the image's revelation through light. Many described an embodied response to the work: it dominates the room with a palpable lightness. The care and hesitancy with which so many viewers approached the work underline delicacy as a socially contingent value. It is not merely fragile: there is some desire for caution on the part of the beholder which leads it to be called 'delicate'. While drawings often create viewing conditions that demand scrutiny, the nature of this work challenges this convention, not so much in the scale of the work, but in its exposure (in space, unframed) and apparent vulnerability: how close can or should one get? It is from such phenomenological experiences that more complex questions begin to emerge. What is a viewer's relationship to the work? What is its status as a drawing? Is it a drawing or has it become something else? How can drawings occupy space? What is the relationship between two sides of a drawing? Does it matter what materials are used to draw?

Therefore, the emergence of such questions from the exhibited work points to the conclusion that these drawings do what outcomes of research should fundamentally do: pose new questions to be researched and answered. In this way, drawing participates in a full cycle of research, but in multiple ways: generating questions about drawing as *subject* that arise from practice; providing tools to undertake the research; making outcomes that communicate ideas and lead to future questions. Crucially, as I have argued throughout this article, identifying and exploring

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areas of shared practice across disciplines can extend the potential for
interdisciplinary knowledge transfer. The scope of this cycle need not
be limited to art.

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Marsha Bradfield

Future (re)vision: A few reflections on recollection, reception and response in practice-based art research or: Hindsight isn't always 20/20

NASA image AS8-16-2593, 22 December 1968

Abstract

This experimental paper explores questions of recollection, reception and response in practice-based art research. Staged as a fictional dialogue set on a spacecraft in 2020, it uses time travel to speculate about the future of this emerging field of research. By contemplating the present as the past[1], this dialogue provides an alternative perspective from which to glimpse recent developments in art research. The paper offers lively and intense consideration of the art research conference as a convention actively shaping the theory, practice and culture of this approach. Recollections of Future Reflections Research Group's[2] experience at The Art of Research Seminar 2007 anchor this discussion. These retellings also model the discursive practice of "re-ing," a collaborative research method developed by the group to support the auto-(re)interpretation of its practice. The art research of tomorrow imagined through this "re-ing" asks the question: "If not the future pictured here, what fates and fortunes await art research and why?"

1 This text is indebted to Manuela Zechner's art activist project "Future Archive" and Neil Cummings' artwork "Museum Futures," both of which explore the present through imagining it as past.

2 A note about authorship and ownership: "Future (Re)vision" was written by one member of Future Reflections Research Group. However, many of the ideas discussed herein were elaborated through the group's collaborative practice.

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or: Hindsight isn't always 20/20

This fictional dialogue takes place on SpaceShip7. This vessel is part of the Virgin Galactic fleet and is dedicated to research in/about/through space as the final frontier. SpaceShip7 hosts the Aerospace Art Research Residency and *Future Reflections Research Group*, a team of three researchers committed to exploring the theory and practice of art research, was awarded a three-month stay on the vessel in 2020. Nine months later, the group is still orbiting Earth. It has not heard from the body supporting its mission (the High Commission for Excellence in Aerospace Art Research) for many moons and is running low on patience and supplies. While waiting, the group revisits the early years of its collaborative research and speculates about what the Commission's silence might be saying.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

(David Bowie's "Space Oddity"[3] is
heard offstage. ALPHA, an aging female
wearing a tattered gray lab coat sits
behind a monitor with her back to the
audience. She types and stops, staring
at the screen expectantly. She resumes
typing a few moments later. This
pattern is repeated three times. ALPHA
breathes deeply and with exasperation.
She gives up typing and rubs her
face before starting again. BETA, a
similar-looking female, also wearing
a shabby gray lab coat, assumes the
fetal position in a charcoal-colored
Eames recliner. Lying on her side,
she faces the audience. Enter GAMMA,
a third aging female, also wearing a
disheveled gray lab coat. Like the
others, her hair is scraped back into
a bun. All three women sport mirrored
badges pinned to their left breast
pocket. The music fades.)

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3 From David Bowie's "Space Oddity"
   1999.

4 The first four utterances of ACT 1,
   SCENE 1 quote the opening lines of
   Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot
   (N.D.).

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                          ALPHA
      (giving up again)4
Nothing to be done.

                          BETA
      (getting up and advancing with short, mincing steps)
I'm beginning to come round to that opinion.

                          ALPHA
For months I've denied it, saying to myself, "be
reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything."

                          BETA
And you?
      (gesturing towards GAMMA)
You're quiet.

                          GAMMA
Quite (slash) quiet...It's just there's so much to say.
      (sighs, audibly)

                          ALPHA
Well?

                          GAMMA
Well...our performative papers. Or rather, our
recollections of these...events. The yarns we tell
ourselves to knit together the hisss-stories (slash)
herstories or their (slash) there stories... The multi-
headed narratives that tell themselves tales — heads and
tales, heads or tails...or tails...ortails...orails...
oreilles
      (to ALPHA)
Did you hear that?

                              BETA
Shhhh! It's alright.

                              ALPHA
Sure. Whatever you say.
       (laughs incredulously)
But you can't deny we're stuck in this tin can and
everything's gone Major Tom.5

                              BETA
Shhhh! Don't say it aloud! The Commission will hear you.

                              GAMMA
I don't believe they're listening.
       (yells at the monitor)
Did you hear that?!
       (pauses while she, ALPHA and BETA look at the
       monitor expectantly)
Nothing!

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5 "Major Tom" is the name of the astro-
naut who loses contact with Earth in
David Bowie's "Space Oddity" (1999).

6 Fiona Candlin explores unease in and
around practice-based art Ph.D. re-
search, noting that "Like any oth-
er Ph.D., practice-based Ph.D.s are
also the focus of much anxiety but,
significantly, those anxieties reach
beyond [the personal doubt of the
researcher] and are often shared by
supervisors, examiners and senior ac-
ademic management" (2000). With this
in mind, "Future (re)vision" aims to
playfully highlight The Committee of
Examiners and Senior Academic Manage-
ment as both a source of anxiety and
as a leadership context for overcom-
ing feelings of disconcertment and
inferiority in the culture of art
research.

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> BETA

Have you attempted touching them with the haptic emergency
notification system.
> > (resumes the fetal position in the charcoal-colored
> > Eames recliner)

> ALPHA

I've tried that. I've tried them using all the senses.
I've even tried contacting The Committee of Examiners and
Senior Academic Management[6] and...nothing. They won't
admit it, but I reckon there's a problem.

> GAMMA
> > (after several moments of silence)

> GAMMA (Continues)

So we've come full circle. It's like it was *before.*

> ALPHA

You don't know this. Let's sit tight and wait until we get
another P.O.V., OK?

SCENE 2

(Silence punctured by the occasional
Doppler effect as space junk floats
past. Seven orbits later, ALPHA and
GAMMA are seated around a small table
drinking coffee from mugs branded with
the Virgin Galactic logo. BETA remains
curled up in the fetal position on the
charcoal-colored Eames recliner.)

                    BETA
I've been thinking about something you referenced
earlier...about how it used to be.

                    GAMMA
      (with emphasis)
Before?

                    BETA
      (with emphasis)
Before. You observed you thought we'd come full circle.
Meaning?

                    GAMMA
Meaning my intuition tells me there's been a relapse. The
High Commission's silence bespeaks concern. It may be The
Culture has
      (pause and then whispers)
withered.

                    BETA
It's conceivable. The fertility enjoyed at the time of our
departure seemed unsustainable by historical metrics.

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ALPHA
The Culture was sprouting — fast and wild! It was exciting
to watch it outgrow itself, hybridizing unexpected species
of research. This grafting depended, of course, on The
Culture's courage to pare away dead wood that no longer
supported its shared needs.
    (with enthusiasm)
Come on, you two. Say it with me!

GAMMA
I believe I'll pass.

ALPHA
    (chanted while standing and marching on the spot)
Bloom and cut! *Bloom* and cut!---No IFs, ANDs, or BUTs!
Everybody!

ALPHA, BETA, GAMMA
    (BETA and GAMMA reluctantly join in but stay seated)
Bloom and cut! Bloom and cut!---No IFs, ANDs or BUTs!

ALPHA
Yeah. Those were the days, post-Anxiety.
    (smiles to herself)
Recognition from other disciplines of research was
blossoming. Confidence was growing like a weed — both
inside and outside The Culture.

GAMMA
    (sighs)
We had to know a failure was coming with so many changes
taking root.
    (all three women sigh)

BETA

What do we do now?7

ALPHA

Wait.

BETA

Yes, but while waiting.

---

7 This clutch of lines is borrowed from Beckett's Waiting for Godot. In Act I Estragon says, "You stink like garlic!" to which Vladimir responds, "It's for the kidneys." And then Vladimir wonders, "What do we do now?" And Estragon says, "Wait." This is followed by Vladimir's rejoinder, "Yes, but while waiting." And Estragon suggests, "What about hanging ourselves?" (N.D.)
At stake in the immediate script's deep space scenario aboard SpaceShip7 is what Kathy Macleod and Lin Holdridge term "the material positioning of the artist as a subject of his/her own enquiry, as well as subject to semiotic systems of social signification" (Macleod and Holdridge 2002, 5). In this way, this script shares with Beckett's play a concern with existential questions about how a researcher might engage in the world and what significance this engagement might have.

8 The prefix "re" provides a vehicle of return in Future Reflections Research Group's performative presentations and experimental papers. It serves as a way for the group to talk/write itself into existence. The method of "re-ing," to twist a noun into a verb, is modeled in part on Harri Laakso's reading of Maurice Blanchot's sense of research as "turning." According to Blanchot, "the centre allows findings and turning, but the centre is not to be found… It is true that the turning movement in research resembles the movement of a dog that, when its prey is motionless and menacing, believes it has captured its prey by encircling it, while in fact remains solely under the fascination of the centre to whose attraction it submits" (as quoted in Laakso 2006, 144). Laakso talks about this imaginary centre opening out through a process of "unworking." Drawing on this idea, Future Reflections Research Group aims to "unthink" and subsequently "rethink" its project, process, performance and presentations. Practiced

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ALPHA

Well, in light of what we've been saying, I vote we "re"[8]
to pass the orbits. We've been so focused on the future
and the present, we've hardly thought about the past.

GAMMA

It'll make a mess as it always does — the recollections,
the revisions, the recycling, the reinterpretation. We'll
be "re-ing" all over the place through this return.

ALPHA

I say we give it a spin. The creative memory work will do
us good. Members, prepare to "re".

> (ALPHA presses a button near the
> monitor. A female voice layered over
> of an instrumental version of "Space
> Oddity"[9] counts down from ten to
> one. The women listen to this seated
> upright with their hands on their
> knees and their eyes closed. As they
> listen, they roll their necks, as if
> preparing to channel something.)

---

recursively through public retellings
of the group's herstories, this ap-
proach defers meaning. Positions slip
and fix through time and space and
among the individual collaborators
as well as the group. This constant
shifting differs from Ph.D. research.
In contrast to the thesis, which
should coalesce into stable out-
come(s) to qualify for recognition,
the art research conducted by Future
Reflections Research Group remains
in perpetual flux. The group holds
fast to Blanchot's sense of research
as not only "...understood as a mere
academic theoretical and intellectual
enterprise, but also as work inside
the creative space — research as
the investigation of the conditions
of the possibility of the art expe-
rience" (Laakso 2006, 143). Future
Reflections Research Group deploys
"re-ing" to circumscribe its practice
as a space for critical and creative
engagement.

9 Bowie 1999.

BETA

Do you (re)call our first conference abroad, *The Art of Research Seminar 2007* in Helsinki, Finland?[10]

ALPHA

Hot dog! *A.R.S._07* was a long time ago.

BETA

We presented "Future Response: Is the Question the Answer?"

ALPHA

    (rubbing her hands together enthusiastically)
That's right! Those were the days of PowerPoint, before ESP*from*you*to*me! We pre(re)corded the paper and synced it with PowerPoint slides showing snippets of the text.

---

[10] The Art of Research Seminar 2007 is used here as an example for three reasons. First, Future Reflections Research Group's presentation at this seminar profoundly shaped the collaboration's subsequent development. Second, the structure of the Seminar was representative of platforms for disseminating art research in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Hence, critique of this particular meeting draws attention to broader issues in contemporary art research culture. And third, the proposed experimental platform for The Art of Research Seminar 2009 suggests the format of the 2007 seminar was reconfigured. The developments from one event to another may serve as a barometer for observing development in the theory, practice and culture of art research more generally. Future Reflections Research Group would like to thank the hosts and delegates of The Art of Research Seminar 2007 for their ongoing dialogue on this development.

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                          BETA
There were three stations. One was furnished with a flip
pad, where we wrote esoteric equations; at another we made
cryptic gestures inspired by Constructivist ballet and air
traffic control signals. There was a third station, but
it's slipped my mind.

                          GAMMA
        (looking distantly out the window)
Airplanes.

                          ALPHA
        (expressed in mock surprise)
Really?! I thought we'd be too high for them at an
altitude of 35,786 km?!

                          GAMMA
        (shaking her head, mildly annoyed)
No. The third station was where we made paper airplanes
out of surveys that we flew into the audience. Later the
audience made planes out of these same surveys and flew
them back to us.

                          BETA
We were interested in this (re)sponse.

                          GAMMA
Actually, we were interested in *their* (re)sponse — in
the (re)sponse of *that* audience at *that* specific moment
and the possibilities of constitutive understanding in
that time and space. Our paper, "Future Response: Is the
Question the Answer?" was a useful diagnostic in this (re)
gard, sensitizing us to the (re)sponsibility involved in
this way of working and the challenges of creating a space
for (re)sponse, for the freeplay of utterances among all
those assembled.

BETA

Distributed across time and space, this paper asked for
several kinds of (re)sponse. There were the email surveys
about art (Re)search sent out to the other Seminar
delegates in advance. There were the (re)sponses during
the performative presentation: the folding and flying of
the paper planes (a nice way to collect data); the shows
of hands for the straw polls and —

GAMMA

    (interrupting)
Have you forgotten our small epiphany? It was there, at
A.R.S._07, we came to appreciate the different kinds of
engagement — of (re)sponse — granted by the Seminar's
rhythm. The more structured sessions told us they
were fruitful, and we agreed. But the real harvest was
elsewhere: reflections shared while walking to and from
the hotel; in the elevator; a tête-à-tête over coffee at
the Seminar dinner. We engaged with other (re)searchers
more intimately during these moments in between.

ALPHA

Personally, I thought the Q&A session following our
performative presentation was crackerjack. I'll never
forget it. The Chair of our session asked us why, given
our expressed hankering for delegate (re)sponse, we'd left
no time for discussion. Good question!

BETA

Because?

GAMMA

Because it fingered the chasm between what we *claimed
the artwork was doing* and what *it was actually doing...in
practice*. The question clipped the tension between *showing*
and *telling* in our (Re)search — and this, of course,

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                          GAMMA (Continues)
strikes at the very breast of *art as (Re)search*. We were
pushing against the notion of...
      (both art and research are said while signing
      quotation marks in the air)
"art" and (slash) as "(Re)search" as necessarily
communicable. Much ink was spilt over this, over the rub
between art and its interest in creating apprehensions
— its commitment to showing new ways of perceiving the
world...and...
      (distinctly)
(Re)search — (Re)search as a knowledge acquisition
enterprise intent on producing clearly articulated
outcomes characterized by, among other things, true,
justified belief[11] — outcomes affording easy access, easy
knowledge transfer.

                          ALPHA
Right on! Easy to share — to access (slash) *assess*.
      (pretending to drum)
Ba-dum BUM!

                          GAMMA
      (speaking faster and faster)
Of course, there were other notions of knowledge in
circulation in 2007, notions variously (re)ferred to as
"tacit," "embodied" and "ineffable" knowledge.[12] Champions
of this practical knowing (re)cognized art (Re)search
as speculative engagement relying on experimental and
hermeneutic methods that addressed themselves to specific
and situated products and processes.[13]

---

11 Scrivener 2002.
12 Barrett 2007, 3.
13 Borgdorff 2007, 23.

                         BETA
Take your time. There's no need for exertion.
     (feigning a yawn)
We're not going anywhere soon, and we've heard this
before.

                         GAMMA
(Re)turning to this tension between *showing* and *telling*,
the problem for us was the way that making *claims* swaddled
the art as (Re)search.

                         ALPHA
     (said dubiously)
Swaddled?

                         GAMMA
The metaphor mirrors well: Swaddling is the age-old
practice of tightly binding the limbs of infants against
their bodies with strips of cloth. There was a belief this
(re)striction was good for them. It kept them safe. It was
also held to be essential for developing proper posture.
Later, of course, John Locke among others determined
swaddling was inhumane.[14] I am suggesting, by analogy,
that claims swaddle the artwork in art (Re)search. They
may insure it has proper posture as (Re)search, but they
severely (re)strict the artwork's capacity for self-
expression.

                         BETA
The artwork in art (Re)search can become barren — barren
when the artist-(re)searcher is (re)quired to articulate
its significance. I presume this is what you mean by the
distinction between *showing* and *telling*.[15]

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[14] Wikipedia "Swaddling" (accessed   [15] Kosuth 1991, 245-250.
   August 15, 2009).

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ALPHA

Well, I for one remember this being a problem in art (Re)
search presentations when PowerPoint was all the rage, and
earnest artist (re)searchers would stand behind laptops
set on plinths and —

GAMMA

You mean podiums.

ALPHA

Yeah podiums. That's what I said. Artist-(re)searchers
would stand behind
        (with emphasis)
podiums and show images of their work and (re)port on
their
        (with emphasis)
inquiry. But it was a "big ask", you know. It's not easy
to make claims without declaring intentions.

BETA

Of course, this scheme confounded the art coefficient,[16]
one of the great organizing principles of late twentieth-
century art.
        (turns to ALPHA)
I'm referring here to Marcel Duchamp's sense that the
viewer in addition to the artist — artist-(re)searcher or
otherwise — completes the —

ALPHA

Thanks, B. I'm familiar with the concept

BETA

It seems the "show and tell" approach of art (Re)search
presentations, with their tendency towards *telling* rather

---

16 Duchamp 1989, 138–140.

                         BETA (Continues)
than *showing*, not only swaddled the artworks but also the
viewer (slash) audience by denying them an opportunity to
interpret the artwork as (Re)search and —

                            GAMMA
The violence these presentations did to the artworks was
painful, matched only by the strangeness of
     (with emphasis)
the disconnect.
                  (All pause for a silent count of
                  three.)

                            ALPHA
The disconnect?

                            GAMMA
Yes.
     (with emphasis)
The disconnect. All too often the (re)searcher said her
art (Re)search was doing one thing but the artwork — even
in (re)production (slash) (re)presentation — proposed
something else.

                            ALPHA
But surely there's space for various interpretations?
     (pauses while looking back and forth at the others)
And besides, I'm thinking it's a question of timing. You
know what I mean?
     (pause)
It's one thing to make claims about your artwork as art
(Re)search when it's in process. It's another to (re)flect
on it afterwards. Of course, many of these conferences
were designed to support and encourage emergent artist
(Re)searchers while they're still in the throes of their
Ph.D. and —

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BETA
      (interrupting)
But isn't sustained (re)flection (slash) (re)flexion what
distinguished art (Re)search from art more generally at
this time?

ALPHA
That's a strange way to put it. It almost sounds like
you're saying practitioners who weren't doing art (Re)
search with a capital "R" weren't (re)flective (slash)
(re)flexive.
      (looks at BETA disapprovingly)
But whatever. That's another discussion. Right now I'm
just (re)hearsing the observation that in the case of art
(Re)search the knowledge in the
      (with emphasis)
inquiry is often only (re)cognized in (re)trospect — *a
posteriori*.[17] And as part and parcel of this, methods in
art (Re)search Ph.D.s typically present too late to be
staked at the beginning of the degree. We might consider
this when discussing the history (slash) herstory of art
(Re)search presentations and their (re)ception.

---

[17] Macleod and Holdridge 2002, 7.
The authors argue that when it comes
to both generating the practice-based
component of art research over the
Ph.D. and engaging it in the viva,
the practice unfolds in what they
term 'live-time': the significance
of the research arises through its
encounter in contrast to existing
independently thereof. Macleod and
Holdridge insist this knowledge is
achieved a posteriori because art
research avoids 'predictive method-
ologies,' meaning the trajectory of
the research is not fixed in advance.

A related reason why the knowledge
is more a posteriori stems from the
reflexive tendency of art research.
The folding back of this research
onto itself in response to its own
development means its significance is
deferred until the research is 'com-
plete'. Upon its realization, the
project is available for reflection
in a very different way, to the ex-
tent its broader significance for the
practitioner's practice as well as
contemporary art more generally may
be easier to grasp.

                           BETA
I'm confused. You've slipped from "interpretation," to
"knowledge" to "methods" to "history (slash) herstory"
but your point, I believe, (re)lates to how things shift
through what used to be termed
        (with emphasis)
"writing up" the (Re)search.

                          ALPHA
Well, I was considering the logic behind The Culture's
push for new ways of disseminating (Re)search, both work
in progress and "(Re)search expressions", a term that
later eclipsed "(Re)search outcomes" in fidelity to art.
Art (Re)search became more attentive to art's interest in
creating apprehensions and uncertainties and proposing
new encounters for understanding.[18] But I'll take any
opportunity to riff on writing and (slash) as art (Re)
search and —

                          GAMMA
        (interrupts with much annoyance)
Here we go again. This issue has preoccupied you since —

                          ALPHA
Since I noticed this peculiar situation. There was a time
around 2009 when you couldn't get writing as art (Re)
search noticed for love or money. But plop the very same
text into the discipline of
        (with emphasis)
art writing, and it was welcomed with open arms. Why was
that?
        (pause)
Anyone?
        (pause)

---

18 Scrivener 2002

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Anyone?
      (pause)

                         GAMMA
Are you really going to make us say it?

                         ALPHA
It's hard to believe now, but there was a sense back then
in some circles —

                         BETA
      (interrupting)
Only some circles —

                         ALPHA
in enough circles, that writing in the context of art (Re)
search was for, well, as you mentioned, B., "writing up"
— that is, the written aspect of the thesis. It took some
time for The Culture to embrace the difference between
writing *on* art (Re)search and writing *as* art (Re)search.
      (pauses to sip coffee, begins speaking line into her
      cup, while slurping and wiping her mouth.)
Of course you didn't need an object to have artwork -
an artistic text would also. Many types of text were
possible. But there had to be a difference between text *as
art* and text as, well, something else — *not art.*

                         BETA
Not always easy to differentiate.

                         ALPHA
For sure and yet! "Art, it can be argued, *describes*
reality. But unlike language, artworks — it can also be
argued — simultaneously describe *how* they describe it...
What art shows in such a manifestation is, indeed, how it
functions. This is best revealed in works which

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ALPHA (Continues)

feign to *say*, but do so as an art proposition and reveal
the difference (while showing its similarity) with
language."[19] Artist-writers[20] explored the threshold of
what writing as art could *show*. These mavericks enacted
the *unsayable* through language by experimenting with
stress, pace, rhythm, pitch, projection, intonation,
syntactic framing through word order, the emotive
possibilities of punctuation, the noise and —[21]

BETA

We're beholden to their efforts.

ALPHA

Yeah. They helped our performative presentations and
written papers (re)gister as something closer to art by
creating a context where writing functioned in this way.

GAMMA

But there was also, well, yes — aren't you forgetting
the impact of new technologies on writing in (slash) on
(slash) around (slash) art (Re)search? I'm amused, BETA,
that you've not (re)ferenced this given your aspirations
to being tech savvy.

BETA

Touché. New technologies were impacting across arts
education. The telematic society enacted an epochal shift
in this (re)gard, a movement from linear thinking

---

19 Kosuth 1991, 247.

20 I am here referring to the work of
Mary Anne Francis, Maria Fusco, Kate
Love and others who have helped to
draw attention through their practice
to writing as art research.

21 Mey 2006, 206.

22 Ibid., 205.

23 Ibid.

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BETA (Continues)

(and writing) to more rhizomatic forms of networking
embodied in digital technologies.[22] The essay, the written
thesis, and the 5000-word journal paper were reconfigured
into forms that drew out the verbal and the sensual as
specialized but nevertheless contingent modes of meaning
making. As information moved across symbolic media,
heretofore unperceivable significance was transcribed,
and the tension between image and text seemed to dissolve
through technologies that more easily conjured up
polydimensional performances of thought.[23]

ALPHA

It was the kids.

BETA

Correct. The Now Generation was an important catalyst in
this (re)gard. Their new literacies, acquired through the
daily practice of Web 2.0 and subsequent technologies,
prompted this epochal shift. On the one hand, these
emerging (re)searchers had neither the attention nor the
patience to work in the ways of our and older generations;
on the other, the Now Generation simply couldn't grasp the
historical preoccupation of (Re)search with an "original
claim to new knowledge".
        (smiles, amused)
They took it as given that knowledge is always already
collaboratively produced. "The Divorce of Arnolfini" in
2012 was a test case in this (re)gard. Not only was this
the first collaboratively authored practice-based art
Ph.D., but it was also manifest entirely through text
messaging that was syndicated for (re)ading and (re)sponse
all over the World and beyond. (Re)sultantly, the static
hardcopy format of the traditional Ph.D. became much more
dynamic and —

                    (A chorus of women's voices coming
                    from the monitor says, "The work
                    punctuates the flow of discourse
                    across its surface, and its meaning
                    becomes apparent through this
                    process."24)

                         GAMMA
          (leaping up off the charcoal-colored Eames recliner)
Well it's about time! ALPHA, quick. What does the
calibration indicate? Is it a message from the High
Commission?

                         ALPHA
          (turning to the monitor and flicking various
          switches)
I'm not sure. The system hasn't (re)gistered it. It may be
an old message that's warped back through (re)collection.
The system appears to be "re-ing" right along with us.

                         GAMMA
A (re)minder a (re)mainder.
          (sighs, audibly and returns to the charcoal-colored
          Eames recliner)

                    SCENE 3

                         GAMMA
If we've finished "re-ing," I'd prefer to orbit in silence
for a while. We've discussed questions of (re)ception,
(re)sponse and (re)form in art (Re)search around the time
of *A.R.S._07* and I'm growing weary.

---

24 O'Riley 2006.

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ALPHA

(energetically)

Not quite yet. We haven't discussed the semiotics of
A.R.S._07 as a space.[25] The way the Seminar signified by
virtue of it being, well, "conference-esque".

GAMMA

I, for one, (re)call this was key.

ALPHA

It was structured like a conference and sponsored by and
held at a university. Events like this were complicit in
conditioning the significance of the art (Re)search...as
well —

BETA

(interrupting)

Of course, the time-honored structure of the academic
conference was the primary vector for distributing art
(Re)search in the early twenty-first century and before.
This may seem peculiar with today's face-to-face online
Althings,[26] but that was how it was back then.

---

[25] Gaines writes in 'Communication and
the Semiotics of Space' that "[t]he
study of space as a semiotic phenom-
enon suggests that the meaning of
space, as a sign, is generally under-
stood in relation to other concerns.
Communication draws attention to the
content of messages while space con-
tributes to the meaning of those mes-
sages without being obvious about its
role in constructing meaning" (Gaines
2006, 273).

[26] Latour 2005 writes: "Of all the erod-
ed meanings left by the slow crawl-
ing of political geology, none is
stranger to consider than the Icelan-
dic Althing since the ancient 'thing-
men' — what we would call 'congress-
men' or MPs — had the amazing idea
of meeting in a desolate and sublime
site which happens to sit smack in
the middle of the fault line that
marks the meeting place of the At-
lantic and European tectonic plates."
Here "Althing" has been adopted and
adapted to denote a fictional equiva-
lent of the contemporary conference.

                    ALPHA
Yeah, but I don't get it. Much was made about the
semiotics of the White Cube[27] as the dominant art world's
inner sanctum. But why weren't we thinking more about the
semiotics of the conference? Art students were steeped in
critique of the ideological strategies of gallery display,
how the White Cube signified its content as Art, with a
capital "A". The conference operated similarly, as —

                    BETA
        (interrupting)
A kind of (Re)search universal, an ideal context for
disseminating knowledge outcomes. A familiar modernist
insight, you might say, albeit now old-fashioned.

                    ALPHA
Okay. But there was already a well-established tradition
of site-specific work by 2007; artists had been operating
outside of the gallery for decades. Why do you (re)ckon
the conference structure predominated instead of more open
platforms for dissemination — aside, that is, for the
obvious (re)ason, which is
        (with emphasis)
that the time-honored academic format of the conference
lent an air of
        (also with emphasis)
(re)spectability to art (Re)search as an emerging field of
knowledge acquisition.

                    GAMMA
        (said under her breath while picking lint off her
        coat)
Air of respectability? Miasma more like it.

---

27 O'Doherty 1986.

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BETA

Yes of course, concerns about (re)spectability
predominated discussions of art (Re)search, and they
seemed especially acute at this moment in time.[28] This
goes back to the Anxiety that GAMMA intuited 7.03
orbits ago, and her fears it may have (re)lapsed. And
don't forget The Culture didn't know, then, how the new
technologies would impact the *quality* of art (Re)search.
There were concerns depth would be compromised through
the workings of The Now Generation, which favored more
distributed, iterative and fragmentary forms. Forget
not these were the days when rigor was fetishized at
the expense of (re)levance.[29] There was titanic Anxiety
over the outputs of practice-based art (Re)search as
necessarily heterogeneous and amorphous, making its
assessment difficult.[30] The discursive character of the
conference structure was tyrannical in this (re)gard.

GAMMA

Because you hold those verbal presentations were a mode of
dissemination quite antithetical to the tradition of art
rooted in contemplation through visual engagement, however
ocularcentric this proved to be?

ALPHA

Obviously!

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28 In 2007, universities in the United
Kingdom were preparing to sub-
mit their research outcomes to the
2008 Research Assessment Exercise
(R.A.E.), which compares and con-
trasts their efforts. The demands
of this submission raised questions
about what comprises "respectable"
art research.

29 Wood 2000, 44.

30 Candlin 2000.

GAMMA

I'm not sure I agree with you about this..."tyranny"
of the conference structure. It didn't do the kind of
violence you are suggesting to
    (with emphasis)
all the artworks as (Re)search. Many of them *yes*, but not
all. Granted, the problems with producing art (Re)search
specifically for an academic conference are the stuff of
another discussion.

ALPHA

I want to (re)turn to our paper for *A.R.S._07.* We weren't
reporting *on* our (Re)search findings here, in "Future
Response: Is the Question the Answer?". We aspired to
actually conduct art (Re)search — to make art — using the
presentation as a platform and the conference as a site-
specific context. And yet our performative presentation —

GAMMA

    (interrupting)
Didn't easily register as either art or (Re)search, and
you're missing a much more nuanced sense of why.

ALPHA

Which is?

GAMMA

The rub between the semiotics of the conference as a self-
proclaimed academic space and the ontological character of
"art space"[31] — which brings us back to the White Cube.
Have you forgotten how, in practice, perceptions of art
(re)mained astonishingly crude back then. This wasn't only
the case in art (Re)search but the art world(s) as well.
In theory, art could be anything. But in practice, some

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[31] Osborne 2001, 192.

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GAMMA (Continues)

expressions (re)vealed themselves more effortlessly than
others, owing, in part, to being snug with tradition. I'm
thinking here of painting, sculpture —

BETA

(interrupting)
Back to the White Cube and the Artist Placement Group's
battle cry of 1970:
        (yelling and marching on the spot)
"Context is half the work!"[32] This call to action (re)
mained resonant some forty years later, with the gallery
still serving to demarcate art.
        (ALPHA moves to object)
        (BETA puts up her hand to stop ALPHA'S interjection
        before continuing)
And before, ALPHA, you (re)call — yet again — that site-
specific practice was well established by 2007, you might
(re)member this variety of art making was (re)cognized
as a negation of gallery-based work. In other words,
because site-specific practice was defined by what it was
not, it still (re)lied on the art space of the gallery
for its definition. My point is simply this: for art to
"present" outside of the gallery, it had to (re)create
the ontological character of "art-space" [read the White
Cube], thereby transforming the semiotic character of the
space it occupied.[33] For only then would it "present" as
art and not something else.

ALPHA

You're talking about the conditions of art. But what
you're
        (with emphasis)

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[32] Eleey 2007.   [33] Osborne 2001, 191.

                         ALPHA (Continues)
really saying, or at least what I
      (with emphasis)
think you're saying, is that *A.R.S_07* wasn't an art space.
And this helps to explain why "Future Response: Is the
Question the Answer?" didn't "present" to use your word,
as art — as an artwork.

                         GAMMA
The artwork wasn't "present". It didn't *present* for many
reasons. Yes, among these was the conference structure,
which (re)sisted the signification of its content as
anything other than "academic" — or at least aspiring to
this
      (tasting her words)
distinction.

                         ALPHA
You're saying our performative paper, "Future Response: Is
the Question the Answer?" didn't have a snowball's chance
of being received as art in this context.

                         GAMMA
      (nodding slowly)
(Re)portage *on* art (Re)search was encouraged at *A.R.S_07*
and at other art (Re)search conferences; though, as
we've (re)hearsed, it wasn't easily accommodated by the
conference format at the best of times. But (re)portage *as*
art (Re)search simply didn't (re)present.

                         BETA
The situation was further complicated in our case. We
thought we were doing one thing but it was only through
actually doing it — through putting our hunches, impulses
and intuitions into practice — that we (re)cognized our
aspirations to do something else.

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GAMMA

We hadn't yet intuited our interest in developing *a
theory and practice of collaborative art (Re)search as an
approach to making art as (Re)search*. It was only later,
much later — and through much "re-ing" — of turning the
(Re)search around and around and passing it back and forth
among us*...*
     (pauses and rubs her hands as if sensing something)
that we...
     (looks down and then out the window)
that we (re)cognized this desire.

BETA

For *A.R.S._07*, we were inspired...

ALPHA

     (laughs jokingly)
Inspired?

GAMMA

Yes, we *were* inspired—and we *aspired* to make an artwork
— to "present" a performance — *about* art (Re)search. Our
paper, "Future Response: Is the Question the Answer?" took
art (Re)search as its content and form.

ALPHA

Self-referential to a fault, borderline solipsistic, but
we won't go there.

GAMMA

The performative presentation said it was creative art
(re)search, with its "artnes residing in the speculative
play of forms, the codes and conventions of (Re)search
as an apparatus for creating new knowledge through
the research question, methodological approaches and
theoretical context, the dissemination of fundings and
above all "clarity" and "rigor".

                        GAMMA (Continues)
        (with emotion)
that which is often othered by these conventions — the
unknowing, the unsayable — we hoped to voice through the
stations and surveys and flying the paper airplanes.
It was about enacting an encounter. Yes! It was about
creating space for not knowing (slash) unknowing and not
saying (slash) unsaying in the Seminar.

                           ALPHA
You'll (re)call we were surprised for a couple of reasons.
First, we assumed other (re)searchers would performatively
engage with the site-specificity of the Seminar. We were
also surprised our playful presentation seemed to leave
others at *A.R.S._07*...well, dumbfounded. There was very
little (re)action — at least not initially.

                           BETA
Though some useful commentary was forthcoming in
the moments in between when we engaged other (re)
searchers more intimately. I, for one, had a fascinating
conversation about the ethics and efficacy of performance
as argumentation with a (re)searcher from Sudan and —

                           GAMMA

        (interrupting)
I beg your pardon,
        (with emphasis)
*I had that conversation with a delegate from Ireland. Not
you. There wasn't even anyone from Africa at the* A.R.S._07
that I can (re)call! You're appropriating my memories and
spinning them. You see, this is what "re-ing" does to us.
We blur the boundaries of our individual herstories into
something shared and —

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                         ALPHA
        (interrupting)
"Future Response: Is the Question the Answer?" was
experimental. It took risks. If we were smart, we'd
recover the dumbfounded-ness it engendered as "shock".
Shock is good for art — very (re)tro, reminiscent of
the historical avant-garde. Shock was all the rage at
the final *Documenta*. And besides, dumbfounded-ness may
have been an appropriate (re)sponse to our performative
presentation, given our interest in the "unknowable and
unsayable".

                         GAMMA
Developmentally, *A.R.S._07* streamed our (Re)search through
new vectors. But the question arising from this interface
only whispered itself to us later, much later. It said:
"What are the necessary characteristics and conditions of
an art (Re)search paper to be (re)ceived as performative
art (Re)search?" Yes, *A.R.S._07* catalyzed our subsequent
(Re)search into — Shhh! Did you sense that?
                    (Pulsating lights illuminate each of
                     the three researchers.)

                         ALPHA
Finally, The High Commission.

                         BETA
        (rubbing her hands together slowly)
Is it them at last? I perceive an embodied communication.
What does it mean?

                         GAMMA
Shush. Be still and feel.

ACT II

SCENE I

(ALPHA, BETA and GAMMA appear frozen
in their previous positions, bathed in
the pulsating lights, which flash off
their mirrored badges. The same female
voice heard in the countdown earlier
reads the following text: "A recurrent
scene in sci-fi movies shows the earth
withdrawing from the spacecraft until
it becomes a horizon, a beach ball, a
grapefruit, a golf ball, a star. With
the changes in scale, responses slide
from the particular to the general...
Horizontality doesn't seem to have the
same moral virtue...But history, the
view from the departing spacecraft,
is different. As the scale changes,
layers of time are superimposed and
through them we project perspectives
with which to recover and correct the
past. No wonder art gets bollixed
up in this process; its history,
perceived through time, is confounded
by the picture in front of your eyes,
a witness ready to change testimony at
the slightest perceptual provocation.
History and the eye have a profound
wrangle at the center of this
'constant' we call tradition.)"[34]

(Blackout.)

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[34] O'Doherty 1986, 13.

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