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Studio Enquiry and New Frontiers of Research

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Given the growing complexity of human existence, there is a need for new ways of representing ideas and of illuminating the world and domains of knowledge. A growing recognition of the limits of traditional ways of representing the world has given rise to a search for alternative approaches to transform and represent the contents of consciousness or what can be known of lived experience. Researchers are recognising that scientific inquiry is just one type of research and that ‘research is not merely a species of social science’ (Eisner 1997: 261). Dissatisfaction with positivism and behaviourism as reductive modes of knowing has also come from within the science disciplines themselves. In his work entitled, *The Discontinuous Universe*, (1972) Werner Heisenberg states that the knowledge of science is applicable only to limited realms of experience and the scientific method is but a single method for understanding the world. Moreover, the notion of scientifically-based knowledge as statements of ultimate truth contains an inner contradiction since ‘the employment of this procedure changes and transforms its object’ (Heisenberg 1972: 189). The work of Heisenberg and others including: Lincoln and Denzin (2003), Schwandt, (2001) and Schon (1983) reveals that knowledge is relational and that different models of inquiry will yield different forms of knowledge.

Practice -based inquiry has a role to play in extending new frontiers of research. Elliot W. Eisner draws on the work of J. Schwab in positing the centrality of practical and experiential knowledge as a basis for discovery (Eisner 1997: 261). Understood through the Greek term *phronesis*, this form of inquiry requires deliberation and “wise moral choice” or what I would call the attribution of value based on unfolding action and experience.

Experience operates within the domain of the aesthetic, and knowledge produced through aesthetic experience is always contextual and situated. The continuity of artistic experience with normal processes of living is derived from an impulse to handle materials and to think and *feel* through their handling. Sensation, feeling and thought are progressively differentiated phases of our embodied relationship to objects in the world. In this framework one can say that creative arts research is “material thinking” that illuminates particular knowledge and data derived from interacting with the environment

(material and social) and then locating this knowledge in relation to what is already presented in theory and general domains of knowledge.

The relationship between experience and the domain of the aesthetic can also be understood by going back to the Greek concept *aesthesis*: ‘The whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarefied domain of conceptual thought... That territory is nothing less than the whole of our sensate life together – the business of affections and aversions, of how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces (Eagleton, 1990:13). Post enlightenment separation of the arts from science along with scholastic constructions of discourse or knowledge as “incorporeal” (Carozzi, 2005) has deflected understandings of how aesthetic experience plays a vital role in human discovery and the production of new knowledge

The application of new knowledge derived from research depends on how well such knowledge is replicated and understood by others. However, mechanisms that have traditionally valorised and validated creative arts practices have focussed on product rather than process. Moreover, such mechanisms have tended to rely on the mystification of artistic products as commodities rather than an elucidation of creative arts practices as alternative modes of understanding the world and of revealing new knowledge derived from lived experience. The tendency to focus on product rather than process has also continued to influence discourse on studio enquiry amongst practitioners operating within the university and broader research arena where approaches and methodologies of artistic practice are not clearly articulated nor understood.

Because the approaches of studio enquiry often contradict what is generally expected of research and are not sufficiently fore-grounded or elaborated by artistic researchers themselves, the impact of practice as research is still to be fully realised. The generative capacity of creative arts research is derived from the alternative approaches it employs—those subjective, emergent and interdisciplinary approaches—that continue to be viewed less favourably by research funding assessors and others still to be convinced of the innovative and critical potential of artistic research. Such approaches cannot be wholly pre-determined because they emerge from action or practice in time, or what may be understood via Pierre Bourdieu,(1990) as “sense activity” that is not solely predicated on the logic of thought. That studio production as research is predicated on an alternative logic of practice often resulting in the generation of new ways of modelling meaning, knowledge and social relations, is still a relatively foreign idea within in the wider university research community. Rather than attempting to contort aims, objectives and outcomes to satisfy criteria set for more established models of research, I believe there is a need to generate appropriate discourses to convince assessors and policy-makers that within the context of studio-based research, innovation is derived from methods that cannot always be pre-determined, and “outcomes” of artistic research are necessarily unpredictable. Facilitating meta-research and publication of discourses that demonstrate how the dynamics of the circulation and consumption of the art product operate as ongoing relational processes that often outstrip the logic of economic exchange and conventional understandings of what constitutes cultural capital is also an ongoing concern of creative arts researchers.

Acknowledging that the myth of the solitary artist attempting to solve the problems of the world is obsolete will help to remove major barriers to understanding the philosophical dimension of artistic practice. Artistic researchers need to be less defensive and reticent about their practical approaches and theoretical contexts and more pro-active in inserting creative arts research discourses and methodologies into other disciplinary research arenas. We also need to be more articulate about how creative arts practice engages with, and can extend theoretical and philosophical paradigms. In summary, the task for studio researchers goes beyond generating appropriate discourses to establish the value of their activities as research to that of taking an interest in the deployment and circulation of outcomes of artistic research beyond the studio process and initial points of economic exchange. This in turn, may open up possibilities for refiguring and expanding what is commonly understood as research, knowledge and cultural capital.

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