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APPENDIX

Developing and Writing Creative Arts Practice Research: A Guide

Estelle Barrett

The following pages contain notes to assist practitioner researchers in designing and writing of practice as research.

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1. Creative Arts Practice as Research: Staging the Research

One of the crucial questions to be addressed in studio research is: 'What did the studio process reveal that could not have been revealed by any other mode of enquiry?'

A re-versioning of the studio process and its significant moments through the exegesis or research paper is a means of locating the work within the field of practice and theory. It is also part of the replication process that establishes the creative arts as a stable research discipline able to withstand peer and wider assessment and hence be validated alongside research in other fields.

In order to present a proposal, and later, to write the introduction (which becomes a refinement and extension of the proposal), practitioners need to view practice as research and to design the studio enquiry as a research project before commencing. This can be daunting, since the outcomes of creative practice cannot be pre-determined. It is useful to view the enquiry as praxis: a movement between what is known and what will be revealed.

The staging part of the whole research project can be viewed as a provisional plan of what will become the introduction to the research paper. The latter is best written once the studio enquiry is well under way. The introduction typically answers the following questions:

- What is the subject or topic to be investigated?
- What are the specific areas of interest and what ideas and positions have other studio practitioners taken in relation to these?
- How does the project relate to previous practice and theory in the field?
- What is the research question or hypothesis?
- What is the research objective or aim—what will be achieved at the end of the process?
- What is the thesis or main argument?
- How will this be developed in the research paper?

STAGES OF THE RESEARCH

Stage 1	<p>ESTABLISHING THE FIELD:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASSERTING CENTRALITY AND NEED FOR THE ENQUIRY • STATING CURRENT PRACTICE AND KNOWLEDGE 	Introducing the topic and background showing how the project is significant and/or relevant by summarising what is known and formulating the problem.
Stage 2	SUMMARISING PREVIOUS PRACTICE AND THEORY	Summarising from the perspective of this research and showing the relationship between this research and the whole field.
Stage 3	<p>JUSTIFICATION:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INDICATING A GAP IN KNOWLEDGE • RAISING A QUESTION 	Justifying the need for this research by showing there hasn't been enough research in this field yet, or there have been inadequacies or omissions in previous theory and practice.
Stage 4	<p>INTRODUCING PRESENT RESEARCH:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STATING PURPOSE • STATING HYPOTHESIS/ THESIS • OUTLINING APPROACH METHODS OF STUDIO ENQUIRY AND ANALYTICAL OR CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS • OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS OF THE EXEGESIS OR RESEARCH PAPER 	Clarifying the research project itself, by stating its purpose and giving an outline of the studio process and chapters of the exegesis/research paper.

Notice that the movement from stage 1 to stage 4 can be depicted as a movement from general to specific, beginning with introduction to the whole field and then stating the specific aims and outline of the research. This development can also be described as an argument designed to convince the reader of the importance of the research. The usual place where this type of justification is made is at Stage 3, where the researcher indicates how the studio enquiry is necessary either to fill a gap in accepted knowledge in the field, to solve previous problems or correct errors.

2. Creative Arts Practice as Research: The Literature and Practice Review

In creative arts research, the literature review extends beyond the reading of texts to the engagement with the work of other practitioners. It is a means of locating the research project in the field by providing the contexts of theory and practice.

Three Components of the Literature and Practice Review

The Literature review will assist in developing a hierarchy of themes which may allow the researcher to:

- broaden the topic;
- narrow the topic, determine scope of the research;
- assist with movement from the general to the specific;
- allows researcher adjust the critical focus in early stages of the research.

Depending on the creative arts discipline in which the project is located, the literature review will include:

- scholarly texts—books catalogue essays, articles, reviews and other written material including online and CD ROM;
- visual material—paintings, performances, films, exhibitions, videos, virtual galleries, any body of practical work including fiction, visual diaries and other visual documentation;
- referencing and citation.

Primary and Secondary Sources

The balance between primary and secondary sources used will relate to the research methodology. The degree to which primary sources (other than the works produced for the project) will be included is determined according to their centrality to the project. In the field of visual art for example, there can be some limitations related to the use of secondary sources for analysis and discussion—material, spatial and tactile and other sensory aspects of experiencing the work may be lost.

In any of the disciplines where human subjects are involved—either in interviews or as actual subjects to be represented, researchers must comply with ethics clearance procedures set by the institution administering the research.

Usefulness and Functionality of Primary Sources

Primary sources can serve a range of functions:

- provide context and pedigree for the practice;

- locate the research in both a historical and contemporary context;
- provide points of methodological and practical comparison and discussion;
- indicate a gap, or elucidate significance of the research;
- demonstrate how practice informs theory.

Directed Reading and Discussion

Research reading should be:

- inspirational;
- raise immediately relevant questions;
- inspire or clarify practice;
- advance the research thesis.

The relevance of subject matter and types of practices involved in the studio enquiry will determine what will be covered and discussed in the literature review (it is easy to get side-tracked by other fascinating discoveries!). The paradigms in which the enquiry is operating, and the conceptual and methodological frameworks, will also be influential as is direct reading and the consideration of the work of other practitioners.

Above all, the research question/thesis statement should direct the literature and practice review. It is useful to apply the following questions to materials and ideas that have been sourced:

- How does it support my position (thesis or hypothesis/practice)?
- In what way can my position/practice/thesis be a critique or interrogation or clarification of this of this material, ideas or practice?
- In what way is this to the side of my position and must therefore be omitted or shown to be not directly relevant to the research?
- How does it provide background/contextualise my practice and thesis?
- Is the theoretical paradigm or fundamental concept contained in this material part of my analytical/methodological framework?
- What gap does this project fill in relation to the understandings, methods, ideas that are contained in the reading or practice being considered?

The Primacy of Practice

Practice is primary; it should never illustrate theory. It is easy to lose track of this when conducting the literature review.

Citation and Referencing

In creative arts research writing, citation and referencing should be consistent and comprehensive and footnotes should be kept to a minimum to allow coherent dialogue between theory and practice.

3. Creative Arts Research: Materials, Methods and Conceptual Frameworks

Research Methodology

Creative arts research methodology has many components that may be understood through the term “bricolage” (see earlier chapters in this book). The materials and methods used by the artist are not innocent—they are encoded with historical knowledge and conventions and are therefore inextricably bound to conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Scientific research deals with a number of conventions that relate to materials and methods: assumptions, apparatus, instrumentation, procedures, observations, methods of data collection, ethical considerations, safeguards and calculations. In established fields of research research, many of the above are relatively fixed and pertain to the scientific method. Creative arts researchers can adapt some of these conventions and will need to add others according to the particular nature of the studio enquiry.

Materials, Methods and Assumptions

The materials and methods used in the studio form part of the enquiry itself—often the process involves inventing new methods and using new or unconventional materials. Materials and methods that are relatively fixed in science research, are also encoded, though many science researchers would take the meanings that adhere to their use as ‘givens’. In artistic practice, we constantly question the underlying assumptions and meanings related to the materials and methods that we use—it is not just about making meaning with what we have at hand, but of making new ways of making meaning through practical invention.

Examples:

- Oil and Canvas—“old masters”, western patriarchal tradition;
- Tapestry, craft based practices using domestic materials—deliberate insertion of unconventional materials as feminist critique and intervention;
- Digital technology—allows new and different ways of revealing and modelling.

Reasons and Justification for Choice

The researcher will need to explain reasons for choice of materials and methods and link this to the broader conceptual approach. Possible aspects to consider include:

- Influence, indebtedness, intertextuality;
- New form of expression or way of revealing;
- Critique;

- Technical solution to a problem;
- Philosophical or social considerations;
- Area of expertise, inspiration, desire;
- Other? (This will be influenced by the area of practice involved).

Genres

The forms or broad approaches selected will also carry meanings and assumptions. The artist as researcher may want to celebrate critique, extend, revise or even incriminate the work of earlier practitioners. Depending on the nature of the enquiry, there may be very specific reasons for selecting a particular genre and these will need to be outlined so that some relationship or comparison can be made with earlier and more contemporary practices. A writer may deliberately choose fantasy or science fiction as part of the approach and methodology. Each of the creative arts disciplines draws on antecedents in designing the studio enquiry. In many instances creative arts research projects may cross disciplinary boundaries.

Procedure/Processes

The researcher will need to explain the following:

- What will be done;
- How it will be done;
- Time frame and relation to researcher's previous work;
- Recording of observations and documentation of the studio process.

Approach and Methodological Frameworks

In science this might involve measurements, tables, graphs and so on. In artistic research data collection might involve the keeping of visual and other journals, sketches, photographs, filmed documentation, recordings, interviews and other inventive methodologies. The approach used will reveal "data" to be discovered and discussed.

Observations:

- What happened?
- What changed?
- What was revealed?

- What is significant—(what was revealed that could not have been revealed through any other method of enquiry)?
- How does this compare with the work/ideas of others?
- What were the problems encountered?

Ethical Considerations

From the outset of the project, the researcher will need to consider certain implications related to the mode of practice:

- Nature of representation;
- Permission of subject to use material in research;
- Appropriation of materials and copyright issues;
- Permission to tape record conversation;
- Invasion of privacy;
- Confidentiality;
- Other?

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

This is often the most difficult aspect for creative arts researchers who often assert that their work should stand alone as practice. However, no practice occurs in a vacuum and in order gain the endorsement of a higher degree, artistic researchers must fulfil the requirements of scholarly research.

Creative arts research is a relatively new discipline, which requires a certain degree of meta-discourse or explanation of just how practice operates as the production of knowledge. This requires showing how the dialogue between theory and practice emerges in the project. Conceptual and theoretical frameworks provide a means through which to discuss practice as research and to locate the studio enquiry within the context of historical, social, political and contemporary ideas relating to practice. Part of the research process involves the identification of analytical and interpretive frameworks that relate to the area of concern. Such frameworks will often provide interpretive models to be applied in the discussion section of the research exegesis or paper. Often, the contribution to knowledge in creative arts research, is the discovery of new methodologies and interpretive frameworks.

Examples of broad frameworks or paradigms that may be familiar to arts researchers include:

- Marxism;
- Freudian Psychoanalysis;
- Feminism;
- Iconography;
- Formalism;
- Semiotics.

In conclusion, materials, methods and conceptual frameworks shape and determine the kind of knowledge that will be produced through studio enquiry.

4. The Exegesis: Discussion of the Studio Research Process

It should be remembered that the function of the research paper or exegesis is to discuss and replicate the process of studio enquiry within the context of theoretical ideas and practices that are relevant to the researcher's own work as well as within the broader context that views creative arts practice as the production of knowledge.

This section of the paper is normally covered in the fourth section or chapter and comes after the researcher has located the project in the field of theory and practice through reference to relevant reading and the practices of others. It focuses very closely on the actual studio process and the outcomes of that process as *research* and should consistently relate back to stated aims and objectives and the hypothesis or thesis statement.

The visual diary and/or journal notes, archival material and other documentation will be crucial here. If process work has been well-kept and dated, it will provide the basic material required for critical engagement in the writing of this part of the paper. Discussions should involve more than mere description and can include:

- critical engagement and cross-referencing with theory and practice;
- Identification of significant moments and breakthroughs;
- Outline of specific details of materials, methods and processes that allowed the breakthroughs or new understandings to occur;
- Making of comparisons between this project and the work of other practitioners including researcher's own contemporaries in the field of practice;
- Determining whether the project has opened up potential for further practice and enquiry in the area.

Originality

This is often not easy to identify or articulate, but the use of comparison will often illuminate how the project goes beyond what has already been done. It is useful to look for small advances on previous ideas and practice and to ensure sincerity and authenticity of the process is made evident. It is also important to avoid pomposity and the making of grandiose claims.

When To Do It

This part of the exegesis is written when the bulk of the studio work is complete. However, most research students write as the work proceeds because discoveries are made along the way. Often the final body of work to be exhibited extends on earlier discovery and this can come in a later section. Some retrospective adjustments to the research paper/exegesis are usually needed once all studio work has been completed. There should be a sustained dialogue between progress of studio work and writing.

Risks in Discussing and Writing About The Studio Process and Completed Work

This section of the paper should be relatively straightforward. Researchers in other fields are required to do this and are accustomed to maintaining the distanced and more objective discourse that accompanies traditional research approaches. Risks attendant in the writing of this and later sections of the creative arts research paper may include:

- Illustrating theory in the studio practice;
- Incommensurate or conflicting demands of the two processes that may lead to a loss of inspiration—practice is primary and it is always useful for researchers to return to spontaneous making of work if they are blocked;
- Writing (and reading) may limit the kind of visual work produced, especially if there is very little theory and practice in the chosen area of enquiry.

Finding a balance between influence and inspiration is not always easy. It is important that the creative arts researchers avoid any tendency to make work that is easily translated into writing or is forced to fit into theoretical ideas. With an appropriate research design and methodology, this should not occur.

5. Discussion of Outcomes and Significance

This section of the exegesis is usually done when the bulk of the studio work is complete and the researcher has considered material from journals and other archival material as well as scholarly research. Whilst this part of the exegesis should be easier than earlier sections because theoretical and methodological frameworks have been established, there is still a need to make choices about what will be presented and how the material will be woven into the general argument. Understanding the relationship between the various sections of the research writing will help the creative arts researcher to clarify what should be included in this part of the writing.

Consider the conventional writing schema below:

INTRODUCTION	Poses a question or problem, outlines background states aims, hypothesis, thesis statement.	WHY? WHAT IF? THEN...
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS LITERATURE REVIEW	Locates the research in the field and identifies a gap in knowledge.	WHO?
MATERIALS METHODS	Outlines what was done to answer or investigate the question—describes process of investigation (established and relatively stable).	HOW?
DISCUSSION RESULTS OUTCOMES	Closely analyses or discusses the results or what emerged.	WHAT?
DISCUSSION SIGNIFICANCE	States what outcomes are significant in terms of the research question/thesis within the context of other practices and theoretical discourses. Articulates broader application of findings and reiterates value of practice as production of knowledge	SO WHAT?

It should be noted that this schema outlines an approach that mirrors the approach of more traditional research and research writing.

Creative Arts practice as research: an amended writing schema:

INTRODUCTION	Poses a question or problem, outlines background states aims, hypothesis, thesis statement and briefly outlines approach to be taken.	WHY? WHAT IF? THEN...
LITERATURE REVIEW CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS	Locates the research in the field of theory and identifies a gap in knowledge. Establishes interpretive paradigms.	WHO? WHEN? WHERE?
PRACTICE REVIEW	Locates the research in the field of creative practice; context of practice includes discussion of antecedents as well as contemporaries, and locates a gap or need for further practice.	WHO? WHEN? WHERE?
MATERIALS METHODS	Provides rationale and outline of what was done to answer or investigate the question. The research may draw on conventional research methods and practices, but is <i>emergent</i> , not completely pre-determined or fixed. Describes the studio process and its significant moments. Reiterates conceptual frameworks in relation to studio process.	WHY? HOW?
DISCUSSION RESULTS OUTCOMES	Analyses and interprets the body of work or artefact that emerged in relation to research question and or the hypothesis/thesis.	WHAT?
DISCUSSION SIGNIFICANCE	States what outcomes are significant in terms of the research question/thesis within the context of other practices and theoretical discourses. Articulates broader application of findings and reiterates value of practice as production of knowledge.	SO WHAT?

In some instances creative arts researcher will have a more thematic arrangement of sections with titles that reflect these. However even in the most unconventional theses, the approach outlined here will provide a cohering framework for writing up the research.

Re-versioning/Retelling

This part of the research paper/exegesis is a re-versioning or retelling of the process as well as the discussion work itself. The discussion should focus not only on the researcher's own processes and revelations, but should also evaluate these within the context of relevant theoretical ideas and in relation to the stated aims and objectives as well as the ideas and practices of other practitioners in the field.

The discussion should always relate back to your thesis statement and hypothesis and will involve comparison of your work with the work of others as well as your own earlier work.

Visuals

This section will include the bulk of your visual images, though you may have inserted some images (of your own work and the work of others) to make various points in earlier parts of the exegesis.

It is crucial that all visual are labelled and numbered. Where they have been taken from elsewhere, all material should be suitably referenced at the point of insertion in the paper as well as in a lists of plates and the bibliography.

Discussion of the significance of the work

The significance of the work should focus on the question: *What has the studio enquiry revealed that could not have been revealed through other modes of research?*

Significance may also be related to:

- The connection and/or affinity the work has with other practices;
- How it has advanced theoretical ideas, understandings and practice in the field;
- Whether it has questioned/challenged existing techniques, methods and ideas;
- The level to which it has allowed the researcher to advance or resolve problems issues related to their own practice and personal modes of expression and understanding;
- The degree to which the research can be extended and applied in future practices and theory including applications beyond the field of creative arts.

6. Writing The Conclusion

No new information is added in this section. However, there is still some place for synthesis in terms of setting down broad generalisations arising from the discussion of the process and outcomes or results of the studio enquiry.

The conclusion serves the following functions:

- Presents generalisations that validate or qualify the thesis statement or hypothesis—these are at a broader level than those made in the discussion section. The generalisations and conclusions must relate to aims objectives and questions posed at the outset of the project;
- Points out the implications of the enquiry for theory and practice. Such implications are more speculative or far reaching than those discussed previously and may extend beyond the field of creative arts;
- Reiterates the value and significance of the project and of creative arts research methodologies and their capacity to reveal new knowledge;
- Makes recommendations or indicates direction for future work;
- In some cases the conclusion may also point out the limitations of the research process.

7. Practice as Research: The Abstract

WHY? HOW? WHAT? SO WHAT?

The abstract is sometimes the hardest part of the exegesis to write. It should be no more than one page in length and is best done after the exegesis has been completed.

The abstract is a 'mini' exegesis – it summarises the following:

- Aim;
- Methods/content;
- New understandings/outcomes;
- Significance and relevance of the enquiry.

The abstract should answer the following questions:

- Why was the research conducted?
- How was the research conducted?
- What were the main outcomes and results?
- What were the principal conclusions derived from the results or outcomes?
- So what is the significance of the research conclusions and outcomes?

If possible the abstract should also state what the studio enquiry revealed that could not have been revealed through other modes of enquiry/research.

8. Writing The Creative Arts Research Exegesis: A Summary

Overview

Creative arts exegeses can take many forms including some very experimental and creative ones. It is often risky to use unconventional forms of writing, though sometimes such deviations work very well. Irrespective of the form chosen, it is necessary for the research paper or exegesis to fulfil the functions outlined in the suggested format below.

It is also crucial to write about the studio production and outcomes *as research*. The exegesis is primarily concerned with *process* rather than product. Researchers need to consider what they hope to discover or achieve and describe the methods and approaches used to make the discovery. The following questions should guide the writing:

- What did the studio enquiry reveal that may not have been revealed through other modes of enquiry?
- What methods and approaches were developed through the studio production that allowed the discoveries to be made?
- How does the completed work perform, model or demonstrate the new knowledge/understandings gained through the studio process?
- How might these understandings be applied both within the field and creative arts discipline as well as beyond it?
- How does practice inform theory?

Front Pages

The Title Page:

This comes first and should contain:

- Full title of the work;
- Name of writer;
- Qualifications of writer;
- Statement of which degree is being fulfilled;
- Institution and date.

Candidate Declaration Page:

This page is in template form and is a declaration that the work has not been submitted elsewhere for an award.

Abstract:

This is a summary of your exegesis in no more than one page. It is a 'mini' exegesis and should include: background, aims and objectives, major outcomes and significance of the project.

Acknowledgements:

In no more than one page, acknowledge those who have assisted the project in any way including supervisors, receipt of scholarships/awards and other.

Table of contents:

Includes a list of chapter titles and their commencing page numbers.

List of Plates and Illustrations:

These should be listed using appropriate referencing format, but in order of appearance and showing page numbers where they are placed in the exegesis.

The Introduction

This is a crucial opening to the thesis and is a summary of the entire project. It covers the following in brief, but not necessarily in the order presented below:

- Statement of aims and objectives;
- Articulation of research questions;
- Hypothesis/thesis statement or argument (derived from the research question[s]);
- Centrality and relevance of the topic;
- Current practice and knowledge in the area—brief outline background as well as context of practice and context of theory;
- The project's relationship to current practice and knowledge—for example will it extend critique, reappraise what has already been done or is known;
- Indication of gap/need for your research—rationale and statement outlining significance of the research and why the research is worth doing;
- Brief outline of materials, methods and conceptual frameworks and justification for applying these—include definition of terms where appropriate;
- Outline of content of chapters.

The Body of The Exegesis

This will vary but is usually consist of four to five chapters or sections. The titles of these chapters can reflect the major themes related to the project rather than the functions as implied by the sub-headings below.

Section One:

- Locate the research in the field of practice. Consider at the outset, which artist/performers will be used to contextualise and/or illustrate the central thesis or argument. This section involves reviewing both literature on practices as well as direct engagement with actual examples of creative practice—exhibitions, performances and other artefacts;
- Elaborate details of material, methods and approaches of past and current practices as they relate to the project;
- Explain how the studio enquiry might challenges or extend contemporary and other practices and show how the research undertaken will fill a gap or extend knowledge and practice in the field;
- It is important to refer to artistic practice and its contribution to knowledge in the area of concern rather than to privilege theory.

Section Two:

This chapter outlines of the context of theory. It should locate the studio enquiry in the field of theory through literature review. It should also outline conceptual frameworks and philosophical or discursive paradigms that provide a context for the studio work as well as a model for analysing and assessing the significance of the outcomes of the research as practice. This chapter develops a framework for analysis and interpretation of the outcomes of the studio enquiry and may also indicate broader applications of the findings.

Section Three:

This should include discussion of the studio process. Diary/journals/notes as well as process works are discussed where relevant. It is important to identify significant moments and breakthroughs in the research process and elucidate what was revealed in those moments or how they allowed the researcher to advance the enquiry through practice.

This section will be an extension of arguments through critical and comparative engagement with practice and theory as developed in early sections

Section Four:

This section usually involves close reading, discussion and analysis of major work or outcomes of the project—performance, creative writing, paintings be exhibited etc.

It should focus on how the work demonstrates breakthrough, originality and discovery of new knowledge. The researcher can refer to the artists discussed in the context of practice chapter and show how the work produced has extended the field, and provided new insights and understandings. Analysis will be informed by the theoretical paradigms and frameworks developed in the earlier part of the thesis.

This section may also include discussion of how the outcomes of the research may be applied beyond the field or discipline within which it is located.

9. The Conclusion

This section involves a summing up of outcomes, significance and applications of what has been revealed through the studio process. It can also point out limitations of the project and the degree to which directions that have been opened up for future research.

10. Citation and Referencing

Citation and referencing should be comprehensive and consistent. For practice/exegesis projects the use of footnotes should be kept to a minimum to ensure coherent dialogue between visual material and the writing.

11. Appendix

Attachments of additional material referred to in the exegesis can be included where it extends understanding of the research process.