# CREA90001

# Methods in Artistic Research

Syllabus and Lectures - 2025

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# Welcome Lecture

Greetings! My name is Danny Butt, and I am Senior Lecturer in Interdisciplinary Practice and Graduate Research Convenor in Design and Production at Victorian College of the Arts, in the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music at the University of Melbourne. I acknowledge that I am located here on the lands of the Yallock-Bullock of the Boon Wurrung, part of the unceded sovereign Boon Wurrung/Bunurong territories which stretch down to Wilsons Promontory and back up past the Southbank Campus. I acknowledge the elders past, present of the Boon Wurrung and the Kulin nations, and all First Nations people in their continuing struggle for self-determination and effective control of the lands and resources stolen from them. As Stólö scholar Dylan Robinson and colleagues point out, this kind of acknowledgment of Indigenous Peoples on whose lands we gather in the settler colonies is becoming bureaucratised, but it should put into question the relationship between speaker and those listening. They say that for the acknowledgement protocol to be appropriately relational it has to be specific to the situation of dialogue in which such an opening is made, and not simply limited to "the land" in a monolithic way, but to all foundations of justice for which Indigenous peoples collaboratively call.

Robinson's book, which we will look at, is a great example of how research helps us get to more specific understandings of our own practice and the practice of others. Or perhaps, we can understand through knowing our place and where we have come from, that it is through the practices of others, past and present, that we can work and get to know our work. The purpose of this subject is to start us on this collective journey, and I look forward to getting to know you all over the coming weeks.

There are a series of seven modules in the subject which we will run through over the pre-semester period. In each module, there is a short lecture from me, and most of them have tasks which you should post online before each class. Our focus in class time is on working more collaboratively on thinking about your own research projects and sharing them with each other, which is the main way we learn in research. You'll also hear from graduates who have been through it before. You will find that some people's research shares methods and approaches with your own, but others in the class might seem to be working in very different ways. In my experience, trying to understand someone else's research process always helps me understand more about my own, and I encourage you to embrace the opportunity to connect with your colleagues from other disciplines in this subject.

As well as the tasks for class, there are two assessments. These are part of work you are required to do for your confirmation of candidature, so you should find them useful for that. The first is an annotated bibliography of relevant works, due mid semester. This will be a basis for the literature review in your second assignment, the draft confirmation report due at the end of the semester, including a short presentation. There are no grades associated with this subject, once you complete the requirements you will be marked as having completed the subject.

The class time for this subject will be on campus. Practical details and guidance are on the Learning Management System Canvas, also known as the LMS, which you probably know about if you are watching this lecture! I will make sure that everything about the subject that is important is posted there, so keep an eye out for the Announcements page. You can also ask Canvas to email you when new announcements are made which is useful.

My contact information is in the Canvas subject - do be in touch if you have any questions or concerns around the subject. Next up, you can go to the modules section for the first lecture.

# Session 1: What is Artistic Research? Situation and Speculation

*While the MFA and PhDs in the Victorian College of the Arts are classed as research degrees by the university, the status of artistic practice as a mode of research is a relatively recent phenomenon. The developments of research programmes are changing both graduate study in the fine arts and the very concept of research. The readings will outline the main issues in debates around artistic research methods. The tasks will assist you in framing your enquiry in more technical research language: What is the 'site' or location of your research enquiry? Who are the people whose work you can build on in your understanding?*

What is artistic research? On your brief reading you should now be aware that there is not a simple answer to this question. Perhaps an easier question is "what does research mean in a creative arts school?"

The answer to that is the programme you are doing now, which is classified as a graduate research programme in a university and requires that you undertake research, but unlike the other parts of the University where research outcomes are examined solely in writing, you also submit a creative work which should "demonstrate a sufficiently comprehensive investigation of the artistic form and creative content." [guidelines]

It is useful to remember that the creative arts in our Faculty such as painting, sculpture, performing arts, and design were not historically disciplines that were taught in European Universities - music is the exception. They were not liberal or higher arts, but were taught in guilds and trade schools as mechanical arts - the work of the body rather than the work of the soul. The recognition that these disciplines are involved in research is a relatively recent idea. Of course, you could study art history and theatre studies in the humanities, but these were knowledge about reading and the reception of culture, not knowledge of making art.

In the 1980s and 1990s, tertiary education, including graduate programmes, grew rapidly as governments saw an educated workforce as integral to service-based "knowledge" economies. Technical schools, educational colleges, and other previously distinct educational institutes were brought into unified systems of funding, accreditation and assessment with universities, or became universities themselves. During this period, many disciplines were recognised for their research component for the first time - nursing, education and management would be a few of the "practice" disciplines that entered the academy and developed graduate research study. So despite a few decades of debate and discussion on practice-based or practice-led research, the question of what artistic research
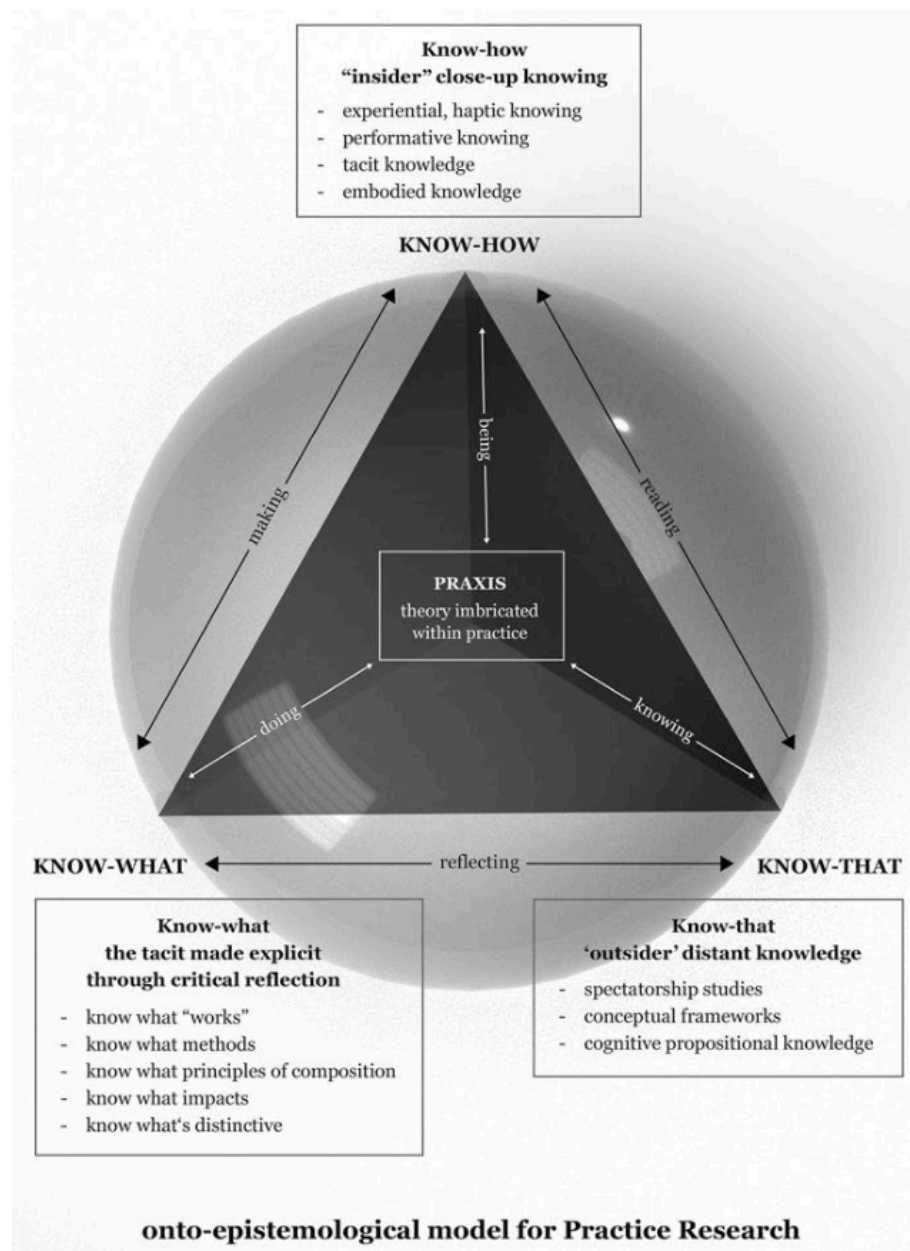
is is still being worked out. In the chapter from my book you will get an overview of the key issues in that institutional history. The VCA was one of the last independent state funded colleges - The University of Melbourne started accrediting VCA courses in 2000, and we became part of the University proper in 2007. Not that long ago in University years! But kind of long enough to be settled in.

What we can say about artistic research is that its rise coincides with changes not only in the University, but in creative arts related professional fields. We have seen the rise of research-based practices that are not local enterprises, and are dependent on international and interdisciplinary networks for their operation - in the visual arts, the biennale circuit would be one example. During the 1990s and 2000s, many more artists became involved in universities and teaching, whether or not they saw themselves as proper academics, and there was also a growth in arts publishing. So theory became not only something for the critic, but for the artist and the artistic scene. And of course, with the rise of social media, we have a new global discourse and writing plays an important role and now the vast majority of artistic circulation takes place on Instagram. Whether we like it or not, we are in a domain that looks a lot like research, so much so that Henk Slager in a recent symposium diagnoses a "post-research condition" - we are researchers even if we aren't thinking about ourselves as such.

You have a more specific problem - your practice no doubt involves research already, but now you have to produce creative work that explicitly materialises your research practice. Robin Nelson provides a summary of adjustments you need to make in your transition from practitioner to practitioner-researcher:

1.  Specify a research inquiry at the outset.
2.  Set a timeline for the overall project including the various activities involved in a multi-mode inquiry.
3.  Build moments of critical reflection into the timeline, frequently checking that the research inquiry remains engaged and evidence is being collected.
4.  In documenting a process, capture moments of insight.
5.  Locate your praxis in a lineage of similar practices.
6.  Relate the specific inquiry to broader contemporary debate (through reading and exposition of ideas with references).

Here is Nelson's account of the relationship between the three modes of knowing that you hold in relation as an artistic researcher:

**Know-how**
**"insider" close-up knowing**

- experiential, haptic knowing
- performative knowing
- tacit knowledge
- embodied knowledge

**KNOW-HOW**

being

making

reading

**PRAXIS**
theory imbricated
within practice

doing

knowing

**KNOW-WHAT** ←——— reflecting ———→ **KNOW-THAT**

**Know-what**
**the tacit made explicit**
**through critical reflection**

- know what "works"
- know what methods
- know what principles of composition
- know what impacts
- know what's distinctive

**Know-that**
**'outsider' distant knowledge**

- spectatorship studies
- conceptual frameworks
- cognitive propositional knowledge

**onto-epistemological model for Practice Research**

**Fig. 3.2**   Onto-epistemological model for Practice Research. (Graphics Leyao Xia)

"Know-how" and "know-that" are probably reasonably familiar modes of thinking for you. But this idea of "know-what", the "tacit made explicit", is both the struggle and the opportunity in artistic research.

It is this requirement for explicitness that brings with it the written component. We will talk more about writing later, but for now I just want to remind you that the bulk of the writing we associate with creative practice is from the position of the critic, which is a very different voice to occupy than that of the practitioner. In my experience, attempting to apply the

historical or critical modes of your discipline to your own work is not very productive - it is easy to sound overblown when comparing one's own work to giants in the field or situating it in a context of influences that are by necessity famous. But on the other hand, trying to remain modest and simply describe your process' materiality and technique does another disservice to the reader: most of the labour that goes into making creative works is boring. How is a written component possible that can genuinely address all the dimensions of artistic enquiry? In my experience, the most successful submissions keep sustained engagement with critical dialogue in their discipline around related practitioners; while finding their own form of writing that is relevant to the statement made by the creative work. You have to give your ideas and yourself some room to move, especially early on in the process. As Guillermo Gómez-Peña puts it, our work is both important and unimportant, like water – it has to keep flowing.

However, it is not only the written component which brings explicitness that Nelson discusses. In research, practice itself becomes propositional, but for a different audience: you are making more for the informed peer, rather than the amateur public. This is a challenge because most art hides the labour that went into it in order to appear magical to the audience. A research practice, on the other hand, is more like an audition to join a society of magicians - your evaluators know tricks of their own, and they want to know whether or not you know what you are doing and whether you have something to teach them. What in your submission will help you join the club?

Haseman and Mafe identify six conditions of practice based research that are useful to consider in staging your research:

1. Resolving the 'problem' of the research problem
2. Repurposing methods and languages of practice into the methods and language of research
3. Identifying and deploying emerging critical contexts which are networked out of [their] practice
4. Identifying and engaging with the 'professional' frames within which practice is pursued
5. Anticipating and deciding on possible forms of reporting
6. Deliberating on the emerging aspirations, benefits and consequences which may flow from the demands and contingencies of practice

I think these usefully allow you to see the research situation as both very close to you, yet also highly artificial. After all, isn't all art artificial? John Hockey and Jacquelyn

Allen-Collinson interviewed a whole bunch of art students in your position to try and shed light on this problem of how unnatural it is. Your predecessors have found that, as we know, thinking through writing is not the same as thinking through artmaking. This problem (having to think in two ways in the one project) is compounded by deep fears in students that documentation of their creative work would ultimately inhibit that special creativity, and that their powers of aesthetic expression would be greatly reduced by the new-found 'objectivity' from academic study. However, they also found that in acquiring new modes of rigorous, academic thinking, students can feel a sense of great empowerment, particularly in being able to connect their practice into different disciplinary domains.

I can relate to this - while I have practised in a number of fields, and design was the one that gave me a "career" before academia, writing was probably the discipline that I have been best trained in as a child. Before my research study, I found writing, even critical writing, to be an exercise in creativity. Research has more or less killed this sense of creativity in my writing - I now feel too responsible for what it does. However, this has also made my approach to writing more precise, and made my writing more connected to and useful to others: rather than writing being mostly for myself, and implicitly for a community, it now functions mostly in the context of community, and that is more deeply satisfying and I think sustainable than the way I wrote previously. For example, I don't feel the need to get off regular old white man takes on the state of art or the world, and for that I can thank research. And I have also enjoyed liberating the creative aspects of life from the structures of writing practice I used to inhabit, for example through practice with the collective I occasionally still work in, Local Time, where I don't do so much writing at all. Kant suggested that creativity is in the natural world, and between there and the human-based rules is the space of art. I like this formulation because it means that creativity is everywhere, and we can always access it when we let go of the constraints of rules for a while.

You will have your own journey with your practice, but I just want to encourage you to embrace the crisis in your practice that research can bring, and to stay connected to the community here in the class who are all finding out what lies beneath our habits. Over the time in your programme your practice will change and you will get new ideas from people that take you in new directions. But it is likely you will end up not so much a different person from these travels but more who you already are, just deeper in it. Enjoy the journey.

## Session 1 Task

Purpose: This task will prompt you to reflect on works in your own fields, and practice using concepts to connect them. You will find this exercise useful when you come to the bibliography assignment.

150-300 word writing task: Select two creative works that have a resonance with your own research enquiry. Your response should include at least these 4 sentences:

1. distinguishing feature(s) of the first work
2. distinguishing feature(s) of the second work
3. description of a concept which highlights a connection between the works
4. a quote from an author which points to the implications of this concept for practice more generally.

See the below example.

> Two works that have resonance in my own enquiry are Suzanne Lacy's *Three Weeks in May* (1977) and KUNCI Study Forum and Collective's *School of Improper Education* (Sekolah Salah Didik) (2016-2020). *Three Weeks in May* involved a range of events, performances and practical teaching workshops that accompanied a map of the occurrence of rape in Los Angeles over the three weeks. It specifically engaged institutions of the media and public sphere as an awareness raising campaign that highlighted the voices of survivors of sexual assault. The *School of Improper Education (Sekolah Salah Didik)* is an alternative teaching space at KUNCI headquarters in Yogyakarta, "inviting those who have been improperly educated to engage in the space as well as disrupt it." Drawing from the work of Jacque Rancière and Javanese education process such as *nyantrik*, but also critiquing the implied basis of education in the family, the process allowed self-devised projects such as learning community sign language. A term that connects both these projects is Foucault's idea of subjugated knowledges, "blocs of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematising theory." (p.81) It is not necessarily knowledge of the non-elite, but knowledges outside existing systems, that the two projects have sought to foreground.

> Foucault, Michel. 1980. "Two Lectures." In Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, edited by Colin Gordon, 78–108. New York: Pantheon.

**Required Readings:**

Nelson, Robin. *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022 (2nd Edition). "Chapter 2: From Practitioner to Practitioner-Researcher". [Link]

Haseman, Brad, and Daniel Mafe. "Acquiring Know-How: Research Training for Practice-led Researchers." In *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, by Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, 211-28. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009. [Link]

Taylor, Dena, and Margaret Procter. "The Literature Review: A Few Tips on Conducting It." Writing Support, University of Toronto.
<http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/types-of-writing/literature-review/>

Knott, Deborah. Writing an Annotated Bibliography (2004). Writing Support, University of Toronto. <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/types-of-writing/annotated-bibliography/>

*Recommended Readings:*

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. The Craft of Research. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006. Chapters 1, 3, 4. [Link]

Butt, Danny. Artistic Research in the Future Academy. Bristol: Intellect 2017. Chapter 3, "Artistic Research: Defining the Field." http://dx.doi.org/10.26530/OAPEN_631389

(If you are glutton for punishment you can read the whole book here, but please don't share this link in a public forum:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/186ayTDc3MVw9yXvxdoJKXfz7ru9KKXf2/view?usp=sharing

Boal, Augusto. "A Theoretical Foundation." *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed.* Trans. Adrian Jackson. London; New York: Routledge, 2006. 11-43. [Link]

Hockey, John, and Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson. 2005. "Identity Change: Doctoral Students in Art and Design." Arts and Humanities in Higher Education 4 (1): 77–93. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1474022205048759 [Link]

Dunbar, Zachary. 2014. "Practice as Research in Musical Theatre - Reviewing the Situation." *Studies in Musical Theatre* 8 (1): 57–75.
https://rest.neptune-prod.its.unimelb.edu.au/server/api/core/bitstreams/2dc70d6b-d5d3-53ef-82e2-675dafbc5bce/content

Batista, Miguel Ángel Herrera. 2021. *The Ontology of Design Research*. New York: Routledge. Chapter 1, "Design Research: A First Approach to the Problem." [Link]

# Session 2: Subject and Standpoint

*Who are you as a practitioner - what skills do you bring, what attitudes and interests and desires are at work in your work? What trajectories does your previous work offer to build on or depart from?*

We know that in the sciences, research has been about the search for facts that can be stabilised as truth. In the first few centuries of science, this would be more about discovering God's design, as almost all those adopting the term scientist were Christian, and it is only very recently that facts are seen to be separate from God. This is why historian of science Donna Haraway describes science as incorporating a "god-trick", a viewpoint of omniscience, a way of seeing that sees everything but is a view from nowhere.

While art history and other philological disciplines in the humanities have adopted scientific genres of research, usually in the creative arts we are concerned less with facts than interpretation. What makes interpretive work plausible to its readers is not supposed objectivity, but that it both takes a specific individual standpoint but also takes into account other possible interpretations.

In science studies, this is known as standpoint theory, and many versions of it prevail - Indigenous standpoint theory has been highly influential. In non-Indigenous scholarship, we associate it with feminist inquiry which has sought to return the body to the question of knowledge, to understand that every action of observation or speech has a person who makes it and a place it is made from. This is pretty obvious now and few people in the arts attempt to adopt the view from nowhere, but for a while the condition of postmodernism, as the wearing out of Western consensus was known, was a widely contested term.

What does this fragmentation mean for the idea of a universal body of knowledge in the University? Spivak says of deconstruction, it is not saying "there is no truth, there is no history. It simply questions the privileging of identity so that someone is believed to have the truth. It is not the exposure of error. It is constantly and persistently looking into how truths are produced." For Harding, this kind of reflexive approach, considering one's own position, is not aimed at making oneself 'correct' in some abstract way, but it is a way of tracing limits in one's own knowledge in order to work more effectively with others coming from different perspectives. This is an important ethic in academic scholarship - you will need to plausibly elaborate your own position in relation to those very close to you, understanding and articulating your difference in what you know and how you can use it.

This is not simply a process of foregrounding the biographical "I" as a way of limiting the scope of your work. You will be aware of how historically, there is resistance to the first person "I" in academic scholarship: one of the first questions that people writing a thesis ask is "can I use the first person in my dissertation?" Mostly, people want to use the first person to avoid making objective claims that they know can't be proven. But I think it is becoming clearer in the social media era that to say "I think (X)" doesn't allow you to just say whatever you want about X without consequences. We already know that it is you thinking and saying it whether you use the "I" or not - what we want to know as readers is why should we read you writing it. What we are looking for is not your correct opinion. There is no shortage of facts in the world, most of them are ignored. We want to read your *thought*, as this is what stimulates our own thinking. We want something real – in Foucault's framing, fiction does not represent truth, but it can present the effects of truth more powerfully than journalism or other "factual" discourses. Just because writing is speculative doesn't mean that it's not rigorous or deeply connected to reality.

Foucault described the process of thought in negative terms, much as we think of negative space in a drawing. He says, "thought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives it meaning; rather, it is... freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem." Note here how for Foucault just diagnosing your own standpoint is not really how thought happens. It is in understanding the elements from which your own standpoint is constructed, and putting it out for critical scrutiny by yourself and others that you can move concepts around.

The key is translating this sense of movement into your practice. Practice is typically sedimented with all kinds of conceptual problems that we never bother to reflect on, or are not able to reflect on because our assumptions have built up over time in the world around us, and become like polluted water to fish who've never known anything else. Conceptual thought, or theorisation, uses knowledge to dislodge all of this material - as Foucault says again, "knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting". It can feel destabilising to take a knife to one's own practice, exposing the softer flesh beneath the thicker layers of habit. But if you understand that this is a temporary activity in research that allows you to reorient yourself and reconstruct your practice, you will find that the theoretical work allows you to make your practice more your own, and it will give you more flexibility as you approach new situations.

Session Two Task:

Purpose: This task will prompt you to analyse your own practice as the basis for future work.

150-300 word writing task: Describe a work from your own history that you feel has raised questions to be answered in the future. Include an image / 15 secs of audio/video if you wish, and at minimum the following sentences.

1. Describe the work
2. Describe the state of your practice at that time
3. What else was happening in your world that was having an effect on you at the time you were making the work?
4. What questions remain in this work that you might build out of in the future?

See the below example.

> Local Time: Muri (2015) was a performance that chartered a tourist vessel to give an alternate version of its standard tour to sea life habitats in the Muri lagoon in Rarotonga. The journey was framed by a conversation among members of the local Muri community and the Muri Environment Care Group who discussed the customary maintenance of this environment and the forces shaping its future development. For Local Time, our work had mostly operated in Aotearoa New Zealand, inviting mana whenua / traditional owners to activate spaces within an art context. This work was influenced by our more temporary presence as part of the Oceanic Performance Biennial, and also the international discussions on climate change - taking a more proactive engagement with global environmental issues rather than the more specific questions of land governance we had engaged previously. The question of becoming part of an existing activity, rather than attempting to develop a way of bringing people together from scratch, has continued to resonate in our work.

**Required Readings:**

Robinson, Dylan. 2020. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Introduction. [Link]

**Recommended Readings:**

Treloyn, Sally. & Charles, R. G. (2014). "How do you feel about squeezing oranges?: Reflections and lessons on collaboration in ethnomusicological research in an Aboriginal Australian community". In K. Barney, (Ed.), *Collaborative ethnomusicology: New approaches*

*to music research between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians.* Melbourne, VIC: Lyrebird Press. 169-186. [Link]

Thornley, Jeni. "Island Home Country: Working with Aboriginal Protocols in a Documentary Film About Colonisation and Growing Up White in Tasmania." in *Passionate Histories: Myth, Memory and Indigenous Australia.* Ed. Frances Peters-Little, Ann Curthoys, and John Docker. Acton, A.C.T.: ANU E Press, 2010. 247-280. [Link]

Sarda, Shveta. "'Before Coming Here, Had You Thought of a Place Like This?'–Notes on Ambivalent Pedagogy From the Cybermohalla Experience." *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments Against Neoliberal Globalization.* Ed. Mark Coté, Richard J.F. Day, and Greig de Peuter. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. [Link]

# Session 3: Method and Archive

What is a method in artistic research? Derrida reminds us that the term method comes from the Greek *hodos*, a path. It is the way we get somewhere. As you will remember from the first session, there is a kind of abstraction involved in artistic research, where you look at your own work from afar, like a spy.

In making work you are often just headed to a place. But when you have to describe to someone else how you got there, you start mapping, or representing the path. Then your project becomes not just the way you travelled, but potentially the way others could also travel. At the very least, they can learn something from the journey.

"Method" may seem to be an unusual term, a bit fancy for the process of making work. But not all methods are formal experimental methods. A recipe involves ingredients and a method: the method for sauteeing garlic may be banal, but when you haven't yet done it a thousand times, having a description of it can be useful. Despite cooking being possibly my main creative activity, I've recently started baking bread occasionally and absolutely relied on other bakers' articulations of how to do it to know what to look out for, and working it out for myself would have been much slower. But there were some ways that having made a few thousand tortillas in my life also helps with learning to bake bread, just not in any straightforward way. So the first place to start is to understand that you probably already have a range of methods that you use, both for your creative work and for your scholarly research. You just may not have had to describe them yet, or more difficult, you may not have had to work out what is useful to describe for the purposes of allowing others to understand more about the way that you work.

There are reasons to use certain methods, which we will discuss later on when we get to methodology. But for now let's just think about what methods mean in a research sense. For science studies scholar Sandra Harding, a method is a "technique for gathering evidence". Again, this probably sounds a little fancy in relation to the methods you might employ in drawing, painting, using a camera, recording, or performing. But remember that in a court of law, evidence takes on many forms, some direct and concrete, some more circumstantial and ephemeral. All the evidence can be used to build a case. How does this relate to creative practice? Well, while you might have an intuition that a certain kind of activity or exploration is going to bring a satisfying artistic outcome, you probably do not just directly discover that immediately. More likely, you experiment - using your tools to generate a whole range of materials that never actually make it into the final work. This is the work on the way

to "the work". If you think about that material as your evidence base in your research practice, it will become clearer what your methods are.

In scientific research, methods are talked about as if everyone knows what they are. Social scientists who've studied how scientists actually work have shown us that a lot of this knowledge is local and not something you can find described in a journal article. If you consider all the elements involved, methods become very specific. In artistic research, we understand this human aspect more clearly: we know an important part of a method is the craft of learning it. It is not enough to know what to do from looking it up on YouTube or ChatGPT before you try it: tightrope walking might be a good example. All sports are a decent metaphor for this - as Spivak formulates it, knowing the rules of the game is not the same as being able to play.

Thinking about craft in relation to method also brings in the problem of time. At the beginning of your study, the two to four years you have ahead of you can seem like a long time. As you start thinking about the time required to learn new methods, this time shrinks rapidly. For that reason, having some self-consciousness about your methods can be a good way to identify what new methods you may want to adopt and to experiment with those in time to integrate them into your practice for production of the final work.

Now, let's return to your evidence - what is it and where does it go? The evidence is stored in archives - archives created by you, and archives created by others that you can access. The question of the archive could really take up this entire subject. But let me make a couple of points from the vast array of scholarship on the archive.

Firstly, the archive is not a neutral bucket into which material is deposited. Archives have not only a structure; that structure gives a process of determining what is inside and what is outside: a logic; an ideology. An archive is not a static representation of the past, it is a way of thinking that produces the future. We can think here about the work of community based archives (like the Australian Queer Archives) that attempt to give action a context and home for future community members. Acknowledging a history opens you to the future. The archives you construct for your own work will similarly influence "what happens" with your future methods. If your archive is a medicine cabinet, everything will look like a pharmaceutical, or more importantly you will naturally look for pharmaceuticals to place into your cabinet for use later.

So your archive is a material thing you make, whether it contains drawings, sculpture, notes, recordings or your browser history - but it will also be a resource for you to use later. This idea of time is important - your final submission for your thesis will not be a cohesive whole

birthed at once, but a lumpy mass of things that you have produced at different times. The role you think something is going to play earlier in your study is probably different than what it will play later. For that reason, having some self-consciousness about your archives can help you to think through your project and also understand what your research has generated.

Of course, when it comes to the written component, you will need to explicitly cite material you use from others, as we will talk through in the library sessions on referencing later on - so your archive will include references. In research through creative work, stealing from others is more common, if not more ethical! For most of art school's existence, the creative arts have involved copying the works of the masters - the idea that you would do your own thing is a recent phenomenon. The idea of method is useful because it gets away from the sense of expressiveness in creative work: the creation is more in what you make, rather than what you intend. Most practitioners know this intuitively, but thinking about method can help you set up these processes that will take you somewhere.

## Session Three Task:

Purpose: This task will help you break down your own practice into research language.

150-300 word writing task: Description of a method that you may use for the major part of your research (for those doing creative work + thesis, this should be the creative work).

Include at minimum the following sentences:

1. The mechanisms for paying attention to or perceiving external phenomena - how do you see or hear or sense?
2. The tools and techniques of registration and materialisation of your research attention - how do you make things?
3. Archival technique - when you consider how the final works and their durable record will be provided for examination, how will you hold the works for future reflection and consideration?

See the below example.

> Local Time's method adopts processes of relationship building influenced by whakawhanaungatanga, the Māori philosophy of "making family". Rather than recording conversations or documenting them, our typical process would involve the four of us being present, in order to form our own comparative sense of what these conversations activate. The "archive" is thus distributed between us, and we all carry

part of the puzzle. Activations of this work are likely to take the form of site specific performance, involving some kind of collective activity involving non-Indigenous participants according to a protocol developed in consultation with mana whenua. These may involve exhibitions, discussions or events.

**Required Readings:**

Harding, Sandra. "Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?" *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*. Ed. Sandra G. Harding. : Indiana University Press ; Open University Press, 1987. 8-14. [Link]

**Recommended Readings:**

Brown, Carol. 'Field Guide for Choreography as Research' in Researching in/as Motion. Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts, Helsinki. https://nivel.teak.fi/adie/field-guide-for-choreography-as-research/

Parker, Sandra. 2019. "The Dancer as Documenter: An Emergent Dancer-Led Approach to Choreographic Documentation." Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices 11 (1): 67–80. [Link]

Lupton, Ellen, ed. 2011. *Graphic Design Thinking: Beyond Brainstorming*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press. Chapter "How Designers Think" [Link]

# Session 4 Methodology

*What assumptions are embedded in the methods of research: could they be different? What do the conceptual frameworks you are using indicate about the research and how it will operate in the world? What adjacent frameworks will you need to distinguish your work from?*

Methodology is one of the most fundamental concepts in research, and also one the most confusing. Firstly, we have to distinguish methodology and method. As we have discussed, the method is the way of doing things. As we add the Greek *logos* we bring the senses of theory, science, or words, but also the sense of "reason" or in the Christian tradition the word of God. In our last lecture, Sandra Harding described method as the "technique for gathering evidence." She describes methodology as "a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed." Recently retired Professor Barb Bolt locates method in the context of practice and the conceptual framework in the context of theory, with methodology being understood as the way these two interrelate in the project. You'll learn more about that when we work with her exercise on conceptual frameworks.
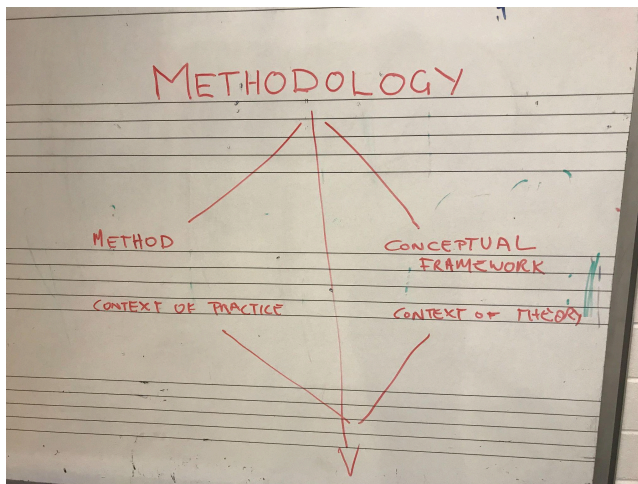


Another good definition of methodology in relationship to method comes from the philosopher Abraham Kaplan who wrote, "the aim of methodology is to describe and analyse research methods, throwing light on their limitations and resources, clarifying their presuppositions and consequences, relating their potentialities to the twilight zone at the frontiers of knowledge."

I think it is helpful to see research methodology not as something you "choose" but as something you discover over the course of your project. If we return to Bolt's diagram, you can see that at the top or beginning of the project, you likely have a plan that has both a

theoretical idea you can describe in words, and a sense of the practical work you might do to realise the idea creatively. Once you embark on your study, you'll begin reading in the context of theory and renovating the contextual framework through that reading. In other words, your theoretical work will start to take leave from your own project and become an autonomous thing that you work on, or perhaps it's more accurate to say that you will just go and spend time in that conversation which up until now may not have included you. Meanwhile, your practice will also be something you experiment with, and while that experimentation might be influenced by your reading, it's more likely you just have more concrete problems of practice to explore connected to specific things you want to make. The gap between theory and practice thus continues to grow until you reach a stage where you no longer have time to experiment, or some new connection takes place that points toward a conclusion, and from this turning point onward theory and practice begin to uneasily work their way back together in the final work you present for examination, but yet you still have two separate parts to the thesis, the creative work and the dissertation, which are heterogeneous, but nonetheless are internally organised around certain shared concepts.

As an aside, note that sometimes this turn, or sense that the end is now in sight (even if a long way off), can happen quickly - lightning is one of the most hackneyed metaphors for creative inspiration, but if you think of it as a model for how energy can suddenly connect between two distant points in an event, it makes sense why people use it. You just have to remember that it comes not from a single place, but from tension and resistance. Often, flashes of insight come after a long period of fruitless labour on a particular problem, and then when you lift your head up for a bit, all of that energy gets reorganised at once. In any case, from my point of view, there are two kinds of research projects - those that don't know what they are yet, and those that are not yet finished. If you keep focussed on expanding the scope in the early stages, and keep sensing for when you've found concepts that can hold your practice, you're attending to your methodology.

Your methodology is a big part of your academic personality, it is what connects you to others in the scholarly community, because it articulates the values behind your research. Methods can be simply different: playing the saxophone is not the same as playing drums. But behind the playing of the instrument is a set of values of what is interesting sound to make, and what the relationship is to rhythm, tone, or the many other elements that make music. Practitioners of free jazz, for example, would often not simply be concerned with what approaches to improvisation meant for them personally, but for the shape of the entire field of jazz or even the idea of what music is. This sense of understanding your position in the world of your discipline, and your critical analysis of it, is really what methodology is about.

This critical analysis is important - for many researchers and practitioners, being irritated or feeling negatively toward the methodology of others can also be a great stimulus to working in your own way.

For me methodology is not really something you select logically, but is more about discovering your own itinerary and the history of the methods and frames which are already there in your own work and that of your intellectual and aesthetic peers and ancestors. By the time you get to the end of writing your thesis, if all goes well you will be able to articulate something of your methodology, and understand more concretely how it differs from others.

So your task with methodology is not to find the right method and to use it. Your task is to develop your understanding of methods connected to your practice, both in the creative and theoretical aspects of your research, and to situate yourself effectively in relation to them. You want your analysis of the state of affairs in your discipline to align with an expert reader who shares an understanding of your methods and contextual frame. They may not agree with what you say or how you say it, but they should agree that you know what you are talking about. Bruno Latour calls this 'infrareflexivity', "the attempt to avoid a text not being believed by its readers."

Thinking through methodology is a bit like psychoanalysis - by paying attention to these abstract concerns in a reflective way, we don't really get any direct piece of data we can use in our project, but we gain understanding in how we are situated in relation to others past and present, the things we can do and the things we cannot do. That can be helpful when things get stressful - to know that there are bigger things going on than you. But you wouldn't want to spend every day in psychoanalysis, and it's the same with methodology. You can understand its power and keep it in its place, and understand that its function is to help you get through your life in research.

**Required Readings:**

Briggs, M., ten Buuren, K., & Hodge, M. (2022). "Agency of Movement(s): Yarn between Professor Brian Martin, N'Arweet Professor Carolyn Briggs AM PhD, Kate ten Buuren and Maya Hodge." K. Burren & M. Hodge (Eds.), *Collective Movements: First Nations Collectives, Collaborations and Creative Practices from across Victoria* (First Edition, pp. 18–31). Monash University Museum of Art. [Link]

**Recommended Readings:**

Raqs Media Collective. "How to Be An Artist by Night." *Art School: (propositions for the 21st Century)*. Ed. Steven Henry Madoff. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009. 71-80. [Link]

Raqs Media Collective and The Collective Eye. "Raqs Media Collective, An Interview 2021–2023 (By) The Collective Eye" Retrieved 15 January 2024, from https://works.raqsmediacollective.net/index.php/2023/10/12/collectiveeyeinterview/

Léuli Eshraghi, Tess Allas, Bruce McLean, Kimberley Moulton, and Rosanna Raymond. 2016. "On First Nations Agency in Our European-Based Cultural Institutions." *Artlink* 36 (1): 42–49. [Link].

Eshrāghi, Léuli. (2022). "Dawn Rising: Great Ocean Art Histories." *Indigenous Aesthetics and Knowledges for Great Ocean Renaissances* (pp. 9–31). Common Room. [Link]

Milani, T. M., & Borba, R. (2022). "Queer(ing) Methodologies". *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design*. SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529770278 [Link]

Butt, Danny and Local Time, 2016. "Colonial hospitality: rethinking curatorial and artistic responsibility", *Journal for Artistic Research* 10 (2016) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/228399/264279/0/0.

Gough-Brady, Catherine. 2020. "Using Film as Both Embodied Research and Explication in a Creative Practice PhD." *Media Practice and Education* 21 (2): 97–108. [File]

Gomez-Pena, Guillermo, and Lisa Wolford. 2002. "Navigating the Minefields of Utopia: A Conversation." *TDR: The Drama Review* 46: 66–96. [Link]

# Lecture 5 Ethics

*As a researcher at the University, you are obliged to follow the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](), as interpreted through the [National Statement](), and where appropriate engage with the University's Ethics processes. However, there are also ethical considerations outside the bureaucratic.*

*Artistic production more than ever is concerned with the politics of representation: what are the structural relations of power that underpin how images and texts about people are produced and consumed? These issues have been long-debated in Indigenous contexts, with Linda Tuhiwai Smith's 1999 book* Decolonising Methodologies *setting an agenda for 20 years of discussion on the politics of colonial knowledge.*

*The ethics process in the university, on the other hand, comes from a completely different history: an attempt to avoid coercive scientific and medical research that has at times exploited unwitting participants.*

*These disparate histories of ethical reform come together in practice-led research in the academy: during this session we consider both the ethical aspirations and political realities of creative research in an academic context.*

There are a lot of philosophical ways to think about ethics, but to me the easiest way in is through the saying "the end justifies the means". In the realm of politics, there are collective goals that we feel our actions are working towards, but as we do this work we navigate the many relationships of power at each moment. For Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the ethical resides less in what we say we are going to do but in how we respond to the agency of others who are implicated in what we do. The ethical is our own unique task, often interrupting more abstract political goals.

In the University, the history of ethics review comes from the medical sciences, where the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki by the World Medical Association took from the Nuremberg Code the principles of informed consent, and the welfare of individuals taking precedence over the needs of society and scientific knowledge. The Declaration also recommends the identification of vulnerable groups who may not be able to make freely informed decisions, and for extreme care to be taken when engaging those populations. In Australia, these documents are interpreted through the [Australian Code of Conduct for Responsible Research]() which asks Universities to ensure that research in their institutions follows the code. The University's ethics system attempts to sort out ethics in advance of any research taking place. At the higher levels, it also privileges non-academic assessors as a brake on

the natural tendency of researchers to justify inequities in power by what they see as the natural benefits of their research to the world.

This process of ethical review has spread from medical research to research in all disciplines, including the creative arts, when other people or animals are involved in research. Even if the research is not an experiment as such, you will still need approval from an ethics committee for what you are going to do before you begin. In the humanities and social sciences, the role of such future-focussed and internal review by ethics committees has come in for critique, particularly in ethnographic research, where the whole point is to discover the ethical responsibilities as a participant in community activity once you start; and in oral history where the bureaucratisation of research is seen to prevent researchers from engaging effectively with communities of practice. The critiques question the ability of ethics committees to engage the ethical scene of research engagement and community, and suggest that review panels are as much concerned with degradation of research prestige, and associated legal and liability issues for the University, rather than being focussed on the actual well-being of communities.

Indigenous scholars have mounted the strongest critiques of University research and research ethics. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Haunani Kay Trask and Eve Tuck have diagnosed the extractive nature of Western research practices, where the benefits to the researcher are clear and the risks are borne by communities who have no representation in the institutional management or review of research. Māori researcher Maui Hudson points out that institutions are concerned with "internal ethicality", focused on respect, harm minimisation, compensation and concern - your standard white institutional considerations. However, Indigenous critiques have also asked for consideration of 'external ethicality', including justice, community engagement and cultural responsibility. These are not things that institutional ethics committees typically take into account. By imagining the way our work is perceived by others, rather than focussing on doing good, we perhaps get closer to the ethical stakes in a project. In my own practice as chair of a University ethics committee, I think it is fair to say that the members of the committee are typically trying to find a middle ground between supporting the researcher, understanding the community impact and paying attention to the University's interests. Barbara Bolt (2015: 63) points to a distinctive role for artists in exploring these questions as 'artistic researchers graduate into the artworld, and in that world it is the community and not the ethics committee that will be the arbiter of efficacy and the ethics of the work'.

When it comes to your own project, you are probably aware already that in the era of social media, any high profile work will be available to widespread external critique. This is a

substantial change to 30 years ago, where opportunity for widespread visibility as a critic was reserved for a minority. So it will help from the beginning to be aware of the ethical norms evolving in the field and to find your own relationship to them. Outside of any direct feedback you receive from an institutional ethics committee, you will find the process of considering the ethical implications of your work useful from an artistic standpoint.

More challenging for creative artists is navigating the institutional review by the University. This is mostly because, as we've seen, institutional committees want to examine the ethics of a project in advance of any engagement with human participants. For many people working in the creative arts, the development of a project is iterative, it reshapes itself as it goes and engagement with communities is at the beginning of the development process, rather than at the end when the method is settled. The key here is developing the concept enough so that the *types of ethical issues* that are likely to emerge in the project can be articulated. If some of the details of the engagement change later, you can always submit a variation to the committee though this can be a little time consuming and tiresome also, so it's a good idea to be fairly clear about what you want to do before applying. Ethical questions are also tied to the methodology in deep ways, as all of the methods you might use have their own relations of power which are not all under your control. You will find that doing an ethics application requires you to think through step by step what is going to happen in your project, and for that reason it is good to do it after you have begun to settle on your conceptual framework.

Like other forms of managerial and propositional writing, such as grants, it can feel like you are doing violence to your creative concepts and your material by putting them into dull questions, with prespecified outcomes. But if you embrace the way that this process makes you commit to the structure of your relationships with other people, it becomes a very useful part of your project planning. Almost every graduate researcher I have worked with through the ethics process comes out feeling clearer about their project plan on the other side, and at that point you will find it easier to turn creative attention to the aesthetic dimensions of your project.

## Session 5 Task

Purpose: This task will be a good starting point to identify any ethical issues of relevance to your research.

150-300 word writing task: Describe ethical considerations for your proposed research. Include at minimum the following sentences:

1. Brief description of people or animals directly involved in your proposed research (if any), including any distinguishing characteristics. If not, consider whether people not directly involved in your research could find negative consequences from your research.
2. Power dynamics that should be addressed ethically by you as a researcher in your relationship with participants. Consider particularly: coercion in participation; burden of participation; identifiability of participants and any impacts; risks in interaction to participant and researcher
3. If appropriate, potential of the project to cause harm in communities not participating - refer to the Durant case study as an example.

If there are any clear steps you can take to reduce negative impacts please include these.

Example:

> We intend to interview practitioners experienced in collaborative practice and document these interviews in audio and video form. The main ethical issue arising from the project is the use of data captured in the interview project and its subsequent publication. Although the participants are public figures and will be explicitly discussing their processes of work, there is a chance that through selection and editing of material that the artists in question will feel misrepresented with distortion of their practice and subsequent devaluing of that practice by the professional context.
>
> Our strategy for resolving this issue is to ensure that all the artists recorded explicitly approve a transcript, audio edit, or video edit of their representation the first time a text, audio or video product is created from the research. We will also make available to the participants copies of all material emerging from this interview on request, including original recordings. Participants will have the right to request destruction of held material.
>
> Outside of personal harms, given that the residency where the interviews take place involves Māori practitioners, we are aware that there are specific consultation processes may be required among whānau, hapū, and iwi regarding the contributions of identifying individuals participating in the project before publication.

Required Reading:

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 1999. "Ethical Research Protocols" in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Dunedin: University of Otago Press. 118-122. [Link]

Bolt, Barbara. (2019). Beneficence and contemporary art: When aesthetic judgment meets ethical judgment. *The Meeting of Aesthetics and Ethics in the Academy: Challenges for Creative Practice Researchers in Higher Education*, edited by Barbara Bolt and Kate MacNeill. London: Routledge, pp. 153–166 [Link]

Miranda, Carolina A. 2017. "Artist Sam Durant Was Pressured into Taking down His 'Scaffold.' Why Doesn't He Feel Censored?" *Los Angeles Times*, June 17, 2017. https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cam-sam-durant-scaffold-interview-20170617-htmlstory.html

Recommended Reading:

Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "R-Words: Refusing Research." in *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities*. Ed. Django Paris and Maisha T. Winn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013. 223-248. [Link]

Butt, Danny. 2020. "Ethics and the Infrastructure of Artistic Research: Thomas Hirschhorn's Gramsci Monument." In *The Meeting of Aesthetics and Ethics in the Academy: Challenges for Creative Practice Researchers in Higher Education*, edited by Barbara Bolt and Kate MacNeill, 25–37. London: Routledge. [Link]

# Session 6: Writing Practices

*The theory/practice gap is one of the most enduring discussions in practical disciplines that are newer to the university sector, including the fine arts. However, once you start to see theoretical writing as a type of practice, and that all "talking about" practice involves some kind of theory (even if inexplicit), then the relationship between academic writing practices and other practices can be both more fluid and less coercive. Creating words is different than creating images which is different than creating sounds or the movement of bodies or objects. How does writing connect to practice beyond and behind the typically descriptive or promotional? How can written language both support and critically interrupt our established habits of work, and what might the both together bring that is different than either by themselves?*

*Graduate research submissions in the creative disciplines in universities almost always involve either a fully written dissertation, or a body of creative work plus a supplementary written component. For many creative practitioners, writing is the most challenging part of working in the academy. This session aims to open up writing as a context of artistic and theoretical potential, and give practical opportunities for reflection on the processes.*

Many artists have in their biographical narrative a troubled relationship with writing, particularly as it is taught in the educational system – in some cases that's why they become artists. Therefore, entering a graduate research degree which requires the writing of tens of thousands of words can be more than a little traumatic. What doesn't help is the widely held idea that academic writing has to be done a certain way and in a certain voice.

The first thing you should be aware of is that the only thing academics agree on is that everything academic varies by discipline or even sub-discipline, including what good writing is and what an appropriate format is. If you look at the graduate research policies on the thesis, they say very little about how you should write, except to specify a maximum number of words. Everything else depends on your discipline. That means, you can look to your own field and probably find many different approaches to writing. It is certainly possible to be unconventional, although you will find that developing your own convention is a difficult task, and it is far easier to learn to work with existing conventions. Regardless, you will have to become fluent in these conventions as you go through the reading and writing process. But as I discussed in the first lecture, researchers who have talked to people doing what you are doing have found that developing confidence in writing and languaging your practice is one of the most tangible benefits of undertaking a graduate research degree.

In the European-descended systems, there has been a long debate about what role writing should take in the education of artists. Back at the beginning of the US College Art Association a century ago, when discussing the idea of developing undergraduate degrees in art, there was a robust debate between the East Coast where the idea was that knowing the great works of art in history would provide one with an appreciation of what good art is, while on the West Coast the more instrumental approach would say that the best way to know a good line is to try and draw one. Today, we understand artistic research as requiring both forms of learning. As art education moved from the trades and into degree-level education, there was agreement that some part of the study would use the same medium of the rest of the university: writing. In the UK, Contextual Studies would become approximately 20% of the undergraduate educational programme. As research degrees evolved in the studio disciplines, in the early days PhD students would submit a full 80,000 thesis alongside their creative works, as the works themselves were seen as supplementary. Today, the University of Melbourne is typical in requiring a minimum 10,000 word dissertation for Masters by Research and 40,000 words for PhDs with creative works.

Outside of the scale of the written component, you also have to consider the function of the dissertation. University guidelines for our disciplines suggest that the creative work and the written component are assessed as a whole:

> *The dissertation and the creative output should be considered as complementary, mutually reinforcing parts of a single project addressing a research objective. In some cases it may be argued that the relationship between the two parts contributes to the originality and creativity of the whole… The dissertation must do more than simply describe the creative output and how it was undertaken. While it will often include information on the materials and methodology used and place the creative output in an artistic, intellectual or cultural context; the dissertation must make an independent contribution to existing scholarship.*

Many dissertations do not focus on the creative work but investigate an area relevant to the creative work. In this case, the candidate is expected to argue for the relevance of the written component within the overall structure of the submission.

Your writing and the time you spend making creative work often run on different timelines. As you get used to your own rhythms you can start to make use of the different energy when you sense it is there. Reading is a good way to move concepts around in your mind, and writing is a good way to clarify the relationships between those concepts. This process of reading theoretically will influence your practice, but usually not in a straightforward way.

Rather, the rearranged concepts will allow you to consider new ways to approach your work. And then, as you produce your work, more conceptual problems will emerge, which will stimulate more reading. Many people get frustrated that writing takes time away from making, but if you can hold onto the way they are different ways of thinking then you will find the back and forth less stressful. Most of all, if you can see them as different kinds of material thinking, where words are also material, not just conceptual, you can see that making work in both formats (craft) is a fundamental way to work through theory and practice inside your project. Here, the difference between practice-led research and research-led practice starts to break down - thus we use the more open term artistic research.

But what to write? I said before that there are many different ways to write in an academic way. One rhetorical problem in the creative arts is that the writing we usually read about artistic works is written by critics, who write for both a specialist and a general audience. But if you try and take this role of a critic in relation to your own practice, you will find a number of problems emerge. Descriptions of what the work is will often end up including a lot of what you did to make it, whereas as we noted earlier, often part of what makes creative work magical is that all of that is concealed in some way. Then, critics also want to talk about influences or things the work reminds them of in the cultural field, whereas if you end up referencing famous artists it just sounds like you have an outsize ego. Finally, the critic's ultimate goal is typically to both encourage a large number of people to experience the work as well as to argue for its value - whereas your written work will be for two or three examiners who have already experienced the work.

Your task as a thesis writer is to firstly, demonstrate to examiners that you have been able to identify a field of practice, understand it, and independently show mastery of the reading and writing techniques that construct it. At PhD level, you should also propose an original contribution to this field. What this means is that you need to read enough in a specific area to know the contours of a field, and then write enough to demonstrate that you can understand critical tensions in this field - showing the critical consequences of very small differences. You will show through your bibliography that you can respectfully work with the ideas of others and make an interpretation which would be understood as accurate by people with expertise in that area, even if they disagree with your interpretation.

We haven't yet talked about style. If you look through the PhD and MFA theses from VCA that are in the library and University database, and in our workshop, you'll find a range of styles. Style to me usually emerges from your inner sense of rhythm and pace that is the result of your years of reading and writing, your sense of what works. But it is also something that can be adapted consciously, both through attention to detail and in the broader

considerations of genre. If you think about dancing, if you took a practitioner of the waltz, they might not be great at breakdancing, but they could likely learn more quickly than someone who hadn't danced at all, because they know something of how to orient their body in dance. Or maybe not, because they are probably not very good at sensing the rhythms of hip-hop, and their training might be a barrier! But I think you can get better at different kinds of writing the more you try it out. At least for me, the process of trying different genres and voices of writing has been useful.

A research degree in the creative arts is a good place to experiment not only with what you are interested in reading and writing about, but also how you do it. A lot of developing technique in writing is about copying, so reading writing that you like and thinking about why you like it is the surest way to getting better at writing. Even if you try and sound like someone else, you'll find it's impossible so don't be afraid to play around.

## Session 6 Task

Purpose: This task is about sharing writing with others in a reflective way, as is common in graduate research theses.

150-300 word writing task: A description of writing that has influenced your conceptual thinking about your practice. This may be a genre or an individual's work. You should include at minimum the following sentences:

1. Description of the writing and its location in a broader field of production
2. Conceptual concerns in the writing that have been influential for you
3. Description of how this has potentially shaped your practice or your aspirations for future practice.

See the below example.

> The work of Guillermo Gómez-Peña integrates writing for performance with collaborative theorisation and journalistic or essay style writings and manifestos. He uses the idea of "broken languages" in thinking of the differential ways language finds itself spoken from and toward different bodies. His commitment to finding diverse forms of expression has helped me understand both the necessity to break default genres in order to open up consideration of the politics of language, and to open new ways of linking writing to practice. See, for example, Gómez-Peña, Guillermo, and Elaine Peña. 2005. *Ethno-Techno : Writings on Performance, Activism, and Pedagogy.* New York: Routledge.

**Required Reading:**

Cybermohalla Ensemble. "On Writing." *Cybermohalla Hub.* Ed. Nikolaus Hirsch and Shveta Sarda. Delhi/ Berlin: Sarai-CSDS/Sternberg Press, 2012. 14-20. [Link]

**Recommended Reading:**

Richardson, Laurel, and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre. "Writing: A Method of Inquiry." *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks; London; New Delhi: Sage, 2007. 959-978. [Link]

Berlant, Lauren and Stewart, Kathleen. "Preludic" and "Writing, Life" in *The Hundreds*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019. 9-10. [Link]

Davis, Lydia. "Thirty Recommendations for Good Writing Habits" in *Essays One*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2019. [Link]

Macharia, Keguro [k'eguro]. "On Ndege Means Bird." *Imagining Freedom*, July 11, 2023. https://keguro.substack.com/p/on-ndege-means-bird.

Williams, Joseph M., and Gregory G. Colomb. 2012. *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace*. Boston: Longman. [Catalogue Link]

# Session 7: Creative Works - performance publication, document

*In a graduate research degree with a creative work component, University regulations require examiners to assess both the quality of the work; its demonstration of awareness of contemporary work in the field; and for the work to demonstrate a testing of research question(s) or problems. In most cases, the examiners will encounter the work along with an extended abstract before they encounter the dissertation and durable record of the work. Therefore, the work is typically what carries the burden of contribution to the field. While written components are easier to specify formally through a word count, the question of what a creative work submission looks like is a very open field. This session opens dialogue on how your creative practice can materialise your research enquiry.*

*The research degree in the VCA is usually examined in two components: an exhibition, performance, or other creative work (or its documentation / "durable record"), and an accompanying written component. The standard word length of an entirely written research masters is 40 000 words, with a maximum of 50 000 words, and a PhD is approximately 80 000 words, with a maximum of 100 000 words. Where a creative work is submitted it often constitutes 50% of the submission, so that approximately 40 000 words is submitted as a written component for a PhD and 20 000 for an MFA, but this can be as low as 25% (10 000 words for the MFA) in some disciplines, depending on the nature of the project. Check the handbook for your regulations.*

*Written components in the research degree typically follow a more conventional format when compared to creative works, and through the bibliography they have a structured means of demonstrating the inquiry that has taken place. Presenting creative works for examination is less straightforward: what might be appropriate for the market or a professional outcome sometimes hides many elements of process that examiners are looking for.*

However difficult writing is for the creative artist, it is by far the simplest part of the examination process, simply because it is easier to specify what it is. Regulations specify word counts for the written component, the types of referencing are more or less standard, and the ways that examiners read it are more predictable. When it comes to creative works, what, exactly is enough work for a masters or PhD? How would you measure it - music regulations sometimes measure duration, but as we know you can't measure how significant an art show is by the square meterage of paintings or the weight of the sculptures. All we can say is that as an artist you make some kind of statement in a material form, and people who work in the field will evaluate that statement, based on their own perception, the conventions of the field, and the guidance that you provide the examiners your durable record or documentation of the work.

In graduate research at the VCA, three examiners will typically experience the exhibition or performance, and then receive the dissertation up to six months later, and then write their examination report on both. The "first impression" will be the creative work, and in our disciplines, examiners require the work itself to make a contribution through their inquiry. The creative work and the dissertation are seen to be "mutually reinforcing" parts of a single research project - this doesn't mean that the dissertation describes the work or project, just that you want the work submitted to be clearly connected to research problems that will also be addressed in the thesis. As well as the performance or exhibition, you are also expected to submit a "durable record" of the creative work that examiners can refer to.

Angela Piccini notes that the durable record often consists of "internal documentation," a "mass of heterogeneous trace materials" arising out of the process of creating the work. If you work in the performance field, you are probably more used to "external documentation" where you create a representation of a live work which will never again appear in the way it did, but this typically does not illuminate how the work developed. The problem then becomes whether the professional document, which inevitably circulates as a stand-in for the work itself, can effectively represent the work. It can do this in the professional domain, but not so effectively in research. So you are going to have to think about the archive in your process of developing the creative work, and doing some mapping for your examiners.

The term "exposition" has been popularised by Michael Schwab in relation to submissions to the Journal of Artistic Research that use the underlying Research Catalogue, a hybrid publishing platform which allows text and media elements to be composed together. The earlier use of the term exposition from the old French and the Latin is of an *explanation* or *narration*, which is probably what you're thinking of when you think of how language works alongside art-making in a research context. It puts outward (*ex-*) one's position.

From the 19th century the "exposition" is also a fair or exhibition, as in the Crystal Palace Exposition in London in 1851 - later being shortened to the "expo" in the sense of giant displays of new technologies and the marvels of industry. I grew up on the Gold Coast and of course went to the [World Expo 88](#) as a child - a major project on Brisbane's Southbank that provided a rationale for the gentrification of the south side of the river and an displacement of river access for the local Murri community that had been there for generations, though the organisers did their best to keep this out of the media. The Expo focussed on "Leisure in the Age of Technology" and held a number of national and corporate pavilions all underwritten by tourism and real estate development, which should sound familiar if you know the history of Biennales and large international festivals. So I like the terminology for this reason as well.

For Schwab, the key element is that expositions as submissions to JAR should "expose" artistic practice as research. I think this terminology is useful. Firstly, it suggests a way out of the tedious artistic practice vs practice as research debates of the 1990s/2000s by acknowledging that all art practices involve some kind of inquiry and production of something new which can be understood as research. But it also acknowledges that the default modes of artistic practice do not present the knowledge or enquiry in a research frame. On the contrary, as we have said, making good art often involves *hiding* all the work that went into it, so as to maintain its mystery in the interface with the audience/viewer, whereas in research we want to "expose" it.

As a metaphor, think of selling a specialist car to a standard driver versus selling to a car enthusiast. If you have the car broken down into its component pieces in your garage to be inspected, this would put off a casual buyer who would see an unfinished car. But to someone who knows how to put it all together, a deconstructed car with exposed parts can more easily allow the enthusiast to evaluate all its components to "know what they are getting". [I'm just guessing with this metaphor, in real life I am not very interested in vehicles other than surfboards]. Similarly, when presenting your work for the purposes of research study, you are presenting not primarily to the masses, but to a smaller group of people with knowledge about the terms of your inquiry. Therefore, you can think about exposing the parts of your work to them in ways that you might not do for a general audience.

**Required Reading:**

Dally, Kerry, Allyson Holbrook, Miranda Lawry, and Anne Graham. 2004. "Assessing the Exhibition and the Exegesis in Visual Arts Higher Degrees: Perspectives of Examiners." *Working Papers in Art and Design*, no. 3. Faculty of Art and Design University of Hertfordshire. [Link]

**Recommended Reading:**

Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "1990: L.A., "The Gold Field"," in *Roni Horn. Earths Grow Thick* (Columbus: Wexner Center for the Arts Publication, 1996), 68. [Link]

Conquergood, Lorne Dwight. 2002. "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research." *TDR: The Drama Review* 46, no. 2: 145-56. [Link]

Schwab, Michael. "Expositionality." in *Artistic Research. Charting a Field in Expansion* edited by Paulo de Assis and Lucia D'Errico. London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019, 27–45.

Note: Historical VCA Theses are here: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/335 and Conservatorium of Music Theses are here: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/320 . Recent Fine Arts and Music Theses are here: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/192987

# Assignments

## Assignment 1: Annotated Bibliography

Due: Mid-semester

Using the skills you have developed through the Library and research sessions, develop a short bibliography that lists the key sources and materials that you will use to develop your research project. It is expected that you submit a bibliography of 10 entries. Each entry must be correctly cited and accompanied by a 100-200 word statement, indicating its relevance to your project. We encourage a broad range of materials to be referenced: books, articles, and websites, as well as manuscripts, films, photographs, artworks and so on.

This bibliography will begin to map out a set of conceptual and contextual parameters for your research - it's not only work that you like (though hopefully you do), but work that explores some of your own questions or concerns. You should introduce the overall bibliography with a research statement of 100-200 words which puts forward your research question(s) or problem(s).

Submit the assignment through the LMS, and also post here as an attachment

Annotated Bibliography MFA Sample.pdf

Please post your own Bibliography in a reply to this thread below after submission - the idea is to form a small archive of what we are collectively reading and to learn from each other.

# Assignment Two: Draft Confirmation Report

Written Assessment Due: End of Semester

In the first six months of candidature (for full time MFA students) or 12 months (PhD) you are expected to give a confirmation seminar and to write up a confirmation report for your committee. This report is a university-wide requirement, and it is suggested that it includes:

- an abstract of approximately 100 words that includes a concise statement of the research question/problem/aims/hypothesis
- a critical summary and analysis of relevant literature
- an explanation of the conceptual framework to be used and/or a summary of experimental methods and equipment requirements
- a summary of preliminary data, resources developed, etc.
- a bibliography
- an argument for the relevance and importance of the study.

As should be clear, this report will draw upon and extend your bibliography exercise. We encourage everyone to solicit advice and help from your respective supervisors. We also encourage you to share your work with your colleagues. The aim of this assignment is to ensure that you start the second semester with your research goals clarified and your research skills able to sustain the topics you are exploring.

Notes:

1) This is a draft confirmation report that you will submit, and you will have an opportunity to revise it for your confirmation presentation.

2) Length varies via discipline, but according to University guidelines is

- at least 3000 and up to 10000 words for a doctorate
- at least 2000 and up to 5000 words for a masters

Note that this would include a review of literature, which would include the material in your annotated bibliographies.

For those of you part time, or PhD, and still many months away from confirmation, your report will be even more provisional! But still, it should represent the work you have done since your proposal to enter the programme, and it will be a useful exercise to bring it

together at this stage.  It will be a good opportunity to get feedback on the plan before confirmation, and remember that it is an ungraded assignment - it's really just part of your research that you package up into the one place.

Sample draft PhD Confirmation report shared with permission from Laura Skerlj here.