Resarching the Unresearchable;
Marking the Unmarkable:
evaluating performing arts practice as research publication.

Judith Pippen

RESEARCHING THE UNRESEARCHABLE
According to the language of current definition by Australian funding bodies, performing arts practice is unresearchable, performance unmarkable. This paper begins with the Australian Research Council definition of research, points to the possibility of a new epistemology of performing arts practice and hazards a series of validation hypotheticals for admitting performing arts practice as research publication.

The Arts enter the research arena
All art making is an innovative process. The histories of each art form demonstrates rigorous inquiry through generations of artists’ engagement with their métier. However, it was not until the establishment of Unified National System in the late 80’s that arts schools entered the university sector and were challenged to formalise their modes of inquiry to meet an academic definition of ‘research’. As part of the Unified National System, Arts communities in the university sector have had to come to terms with their research culture. Parr notes that art schools (and I add more lately drama schools) ‘had not taught Honours programs nor post-graduate research degrees, nor had they been provided with the funds to establish research infrastructure. Nor had most staff been prepared by postgraduate research training or had models to go by other than those provided by professional practice.’

The Australian Research Council (ARC) defines the characteristics of research for which it recommends funding as follows:
• it contributes to our understanding and knowledge through conceptual advances and discoveries; and/or
• it leads to practical outcomes of importance to the research endeavour itself and to applications of social and economic value.

It exercises the much mistrusted imagination to argue for performance as research within these parameters. The wording of the definition: ‘knowledge’, ‘conceptual

43 While ARC’s definition of research is laid out for its own context - (the allocation of grants), Parr points out that ARC has a role in setting the research agenda at a national level for the university context. Geoff Parr, discussion paper ‘ARC funding for the Creative Arts’, prepared for the Research Coordinating Committee, University of Western Sydney, May, 1994: 4.
advance’ and ‘economic value’, springs from a traditional approach to ‘knowing’ which posits a ‘real’ and knowable world awaiting the objective gaze of a researcher who can add to a quantifiable information store that can be put to work to earn dollars and cents.

In its mission statement, the Australian Research Council lists five major benefits that flow to the community from basic research in the higher education sector:

1. Contributions to the quality of our culture.
2. Graduates of high quality.
3. Direct application of research results.
4. Increased institutional capacity for consulting, contract research and other service activities, and

The benefits listed echo the outcomes required from positivist research - validity, generalisability and applicability. Yet in many research approaches or research conversations across disciplines in the Humanities; such as constructivist, poststructuralist, postmodernist and feminist, these issues are seen as increasingly problematic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lather, 1993; Reinelt and Roach, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Patti Lather claims that we have shifted from the primacy of the positivist paradigm and entered an era of paradigm proliferation she has called the ‘post-paradigmatic’ diaspora. Truth is no longer a matter of mathematical certainty; the belief that any research is ‘objective’ is challenged and methods of validation are no longer uniform. Within Academies of the Arts Australia wide researchers have been actively engaged in addressing these contentious issues within their research discipline (McCaughey, D’Cruz, Wissler, Richards, Parr, McCullogh, McKechnie, Walton). One of the most contentious issues within arts disciplines is the issue of arts practice as the sole expression of research. Fearing a flood of applications from the Arts once they had been admitted to the university sector, the Australian Research Council inserted a clause to exclude projects resulting in arts practice. Visual Arts had a national body - the National

---

45 Patti Lather, Public Lecture, QUT, 7.3.96.
Council of Heads of Art and Design Schools (NCHADS, now ACUADS, Australian Council of Art and Design Schools), which formed towards the end of the 80’s and who could push ahead their agenda of having arts practice acknowledged as research. Following negotiations with the then NCHADS, ARC made an amendment to the discouragement clause. The paragraph, previously excluding activities in ‘creative arts’, was amended to include the word ‘solely’:

The programs do not support those activities that lead solely to the creation or performance of a work of art, including visual art, musical compositions, drama, dance, designs, and literary works. Federal Government support for these activities is provided through the Australia Council for the Arts (italics added).

While the amended clause in the ARC document introduces the possibility of an art form constituting part of the research process it suggests that it is not sufficient in itself and would need to be accompanied by a written exegesis as is customary in other disciplines, thus establishing a double dialogue for the evaluation of arts practice as research. As the Australia Council will not fund research, arts practice as research occupies an ambivalent place in the funding arena.

DEET, now DEETYA, has also discriminated against the arts and revealed its ignorance of what is involved in arts practice. Geoff Parr highlights problems relating to ‘the classifications the index provides for arts research outcomes, and to the minuscule weightings given to theses classifications’.

In 1995 DEETYA included public exhibitions and performances as scorable items in listings of

---

47 The music equivalent, the National Council of Heads of Tertiary Music Schools (NACHTMUS), built on ACUADS experience when they formed, through discussion in 1993/94. The Tertiary Dance Council of Australia (TDCA) has been running for over a decade. The Council of Heads of Australian University Theatre Studies Institutions (CHAUTSI) was only formed in 1996, it is chaired by Adrian Kiernander of UNE. The theatre context is characterised by diversity, as was noted by D’cruz (1995), or by ‘separate but co-existent groups’ as Peter Lavery, Head of QUT Academy commented recently in conversation with the author. The National Arts Training Network which meets separately, consists of Heads of comprehensive visual and performing arts schools with conservatory style studio based pedagogy which are located in or associated with universities, thus maintaining the polarity between training and research, each looking to their own aspect of the theatre culture. A National Symposium on Research in the Performing Arts has been initiated by VCA. Conference organiser Alison Richards is targeting key decision makers for May, 1997 to formulate cohesive strategies in relation to such issues as performance as research, documentation/archiving, dissemination.


49 Parr, 1996:3. David Williams of ANU is currently director of a project to investigate ranges of publication equivalents and the status of research in the creative arts. A breakdown of ARC funding released by Williams demonstrates that while creative arts in universities occupy 5% of students and 5% of staff, its funding ratio is 0.6% of total funds. ‘Research in the Creative Arts Project: A progress report’, ACUADS meeting, Hobart, February, 1997.
publications, but performances were only scorable if they consisted of a major performed work which was previously unpublished material. This does not make provision for directors or actors interpreting existing work.

Questions arising from encounters with academic definitions of research and from the constraints placed on arts practice by funding bodies, include the appropriateness of written forms of exegesis in relation to art works versus the status of art as a research mode in itself, and about the relationship of professional practice to research process and product.

**Professional practice and research**

Dunn, in a recent paper delivered to a Research Conference in Wollongong,\(^5\) distinguishes research from professional practice in the visual arts by the way in which we:

- respond to the requirement for appropriate indicators that are useful to us and acceptable to those in other fields, principally in the Humanities,
- develop an appropriate peer review process and
- fulfill the requirement of accessibility by professional peers.

These distinctions make clear that Dunn wishes the 'appropriate indicators', to be devised by artist/researchers, but be communicable to other disciplines and acknowledged as appropriate research indicators by them as well. However, when it comes to peer assessors and professional peers, I am sure Dunn doesn't envisage inviting the Professor of Mathematics to evaluate his exhibition. No dialogue, no matter how many times you doubted it could induct the sad professor into the arts conversation any more than the artist could be inducted, by dint of their being a researcher, into the evaluation of a physics dissertation. So, distinguishing research from practice still implicates practice and fellow practitioners. It is up to arts academics to claim their unique ground in the university sector.

Some academics in the field of fine art have had a head start on those in music, dance and drama because, in addition to the activity of NCHADS, some schools were integrated into the university sector earlier than others and have had longer to identify the issues and contest ARC processes. The Tasmanian School of Art at Hobart is a case in point. Therefore, even though my main focus is performance as research, I will refer to some of the insights of my colleagues in visual arts as beacons for us all.

In a recent NCHADS document, for example, Sue Rowley argues that:

> All artworks are to some extent, about the theory and practice of the discipline. A painting, for example, is likely to address currently unresolved

---

\(^5\) Richard Dunn, 'Visual Arts: Research or Practice', 15.4.94.
issues in the discipline, whether they are of form, technique, or representational strategies. Further the painting is likely to implicitly locate itself within the history of the discipline based concerns are articulated in the visual resolution of the painting, and others in the discipline will recognise what is being attempted and with what success. Conversely, those outside the discipline (or related fields of art history, art theory or art criticism) may find it difficult to judge the success of the work because they lack the relevant expertise, and possibly the visual literacy to read the work. (1993:3)

Arguing in this vein Rowley claims that ‘Visual Arts constitutes a mature discipline which currently generates sufficient knowledge and practical applications of social, cultural and economic value’51 (1993:7) and that Visual Arts research ‘whether presented in visual form or in written and spoken forms with which the ARC is more familiar, is capable of meeting ARC criteria for funding (1993:2). The same case may be made for performance, where a body of practice with a long history and increasingly cross cultural connections exists alongside a body of theory going back to Aristotle. Many innovative actor/academics, director/academics participate in the production of new work or interpretations of texts in the existing theatre culture. Expert readers, I would claim, of either the discipline-related-knowledge of performance theory and/or of the knowledge-in-action of performance practice can reach accord about the status of a piece of work presented for peer review.

If arts practice as research is to secure a place in the academy some of the key issues needing clarification are:

- the parameters of research in the specific arts discipline (or increasingly fractured disciplines)52 in which the proposed research is to take place;
- the coherence of proposed methodological frames within these parameters;
- the complex issue of validation by peer review and
- strategies for the dissemination of the research to professional peers.

---

52 Glenn D’cruz identifies at least four major approaches or conversations within the field of theatre studies. ‘The first focuses on practical training for the theatre, film and television industries; the second is more concerned with analysing and theorising the performance event from the point of view of contemporary critical theory; the third major perspective foregrounds educational drama and theatre-in-education, while the fourth approach concentrates on the explication of canonical dramatic texts and theatre history’ (1995:37). Even in the twelve months to two years of the writing of this piece the movement to explore performance as research has developed, certainly in the QUT Academy, to the point where it can be distinguished from any of the four mentioned and constitute a fifth approach. D’cruz’s point is that the discipline of theatre studies lacks a coherent epistemological profile, which is borne out in the present discussion.
The first issue, that of definition, hinges on what particular arts conversation you are engaging in, and whether arts research in that conversation should conform to a general definition of research founded in the physical and social sciences, suggesting the viability of the importation of methodologies from these disciplines, or demand a new epistemology and the emergence of methods coherent with it.

Parr sounds a word of warning here from his experience in this visual arts:

One concern is that experimental visual art will, under the influence of science methodologies, become distorted and thereby lose its relevance to the field. Another is that visual arts within universities will favour the rational, at the expense of the emotive and intuitive aspects of art: it raises the spectre of a vain, dispassionate and cerebral art, theoretically authorised and expressively neutralised. (1996:4)\(^\text{53}\)

All this suggests that the performance as research endeavour does not sit comfortably within academia. If there is to be a serious contribution to the research conversation within the arts and across disciplines, then it is time to articulate more clearly our own epistemology. Gay McAuley suggests that the epistemology of theatre practice has much to offer as a research paradigm for a range of theoretical discourses. McAuley argues that theatre ought more properly to be seen as a central paradigm 'by people attempting to rethink the nature of textuality, ideas of authorship, the role of the reader in the construction of meaning, and the socially situated nature of meaning making' (1996:142). This manner of thinking demonstrates that the dynamics of theatre can be abstracted into a theoretical framework with application across broad fields of research interest as well as concretised into 'practice'. McAuley bemoans the fact that theoretical discourses have not acknowledged the theatre and applied its practices.

It is as though the very success of Theatre Studies departments in marking off their terrain in the academy during these years has contributed to a kind of quarantining of theatre knowledge within these departments. Yet theatre knowledge and theatre practice have an important contribution to make in domains that go far beyond the theatre. (1996:145)

**Framing an epistemology for arts practice**\(^\text{54}\)

There is an increasing awareness among researchers across a range of disciplines that 'all knowledge and claims to knowledge are reflexive of the process, assumptions, location, history, and context of knowing and the knower...validity


\(^{54}\) Ground work in developing a new epistemology for arts practice as research has already been done in the fields of Art and Design (Rowley, 1993; Parr, 1994) and Performance (Richards, 1995, and recent work in negotiating revised DEETYA categories by Dunstone and Wissler, 1996).
depends on the ‘interpretive communities’, or the audiences...and the goals of the research. (Altheide & Johnson, 1994:488).

The ontology inherent in the ARC definition of research excludes alternative views of cognition in which knowledge is not tied to the postulation of a real world or of an objective observer but is a matter of action that works. Introduce an alternative understanding of ‘knowledge and the knower’, identify a distinct ‘interpretive community’ and positivist rules for validation no longer hold. Humberto Maturana, for example, puts objectivity in parenthesis and returns responsibility to the individual knower. 55 He understands knowing as having viable procedures to operate adequately in an individual or cooperative situation (c.f. Maturana, 1992:174). 56 In an explanatory process that he entitles ‘consitutive ontology’, Maturana offers a view of cognition that gels with that of radical constructivists. 57 Von Glasersfeld ties this understanding of knowledge back to the thinking of Giambattista Vico (whose treatise of 1710 was largely ignored). ‘One of Vico’s basic ideas was that epistemic agents can know nothing but the cognitive structures they themselves have put together...Over and over he stresses that ‘to know’ means to know how to make’ (Von Glasersfeld, 1989:123).

Such an understanding of knowledge inextricably links theory and practice. Yet within academic culture a split has been generated and conserved between the two. Schön states that universities ‘are institutions committed...to a particular epistemology, a view of knowledge that fosters selective inattention to particular competence and professional artistry’ (1983:vii). The epistemology of practice that flows from this approach to knowledge he calls ‘technical rationality’ (Schön, 1983:27); a hierarchical mode of thinking in which practice is at the bottom of the hierarchy and theory at the apex. ‘The researcher’s role is distinct from, and usually considered superior to, the role of the practitioner’ (1983:26). In such a mode of thinking performance as research is unresearchable because the knowledge on which it is based is not articulated in the same manner as the knowledge implied in the definition of research and therefore has no credibility.

55 He does this by demonstrating that the nervous system cannot distinguish perception and illusion in the living of them (1991, lecture notes). He traces the autonomy of the living back to cellular autopoiesis: i.e. the dynamics of cellular life in which molecules are produced by the molecules that produce them (Maturana and Varela, 1980:9).

56 Humberto Maturana is a biologist who lectures in the University of Chile. For twenty-five years he has researched questions about how life began and about cognition. Over the last ten years he has developed a coherent explanation of cognition that can accommodate multiple realities and offers mechanisms for bracketing objectivity and validating experience. Two readily accessible sources for his thinking are: H.R. Maturana and F. Varela (1992) Revised edition, The Tree of Knowledge-The Biological Roots of Human Understanding. Shambala: Boston and L. Fell, D. Russell and A. Stewart, eds. (1994) Seized by Agreement, Stamped by Understanding, Hawkesbury Printing; University of Western Sydney. See also Pritoj Capra, (1996) The Web of Life. Harper Collins: London.

57 For a discussion of constructivist approaches see T.A. Schwandt, ‘Constructivist, Interpretivist Approaches to Human Enquiry’ in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:118-137.
Performance, under this regime, could still become the object of research for the semiotician, the anthropologist, the historian, but not stand up as research-in-itself. At present positivist and post positivist paradigms are applied within the arts without due consideration of any ontological discrepancies (e.g. grounded theory). I would argue that you can’t have the real-world cake still cooking under the text of Strauss & Corbin (1990:11,47), and eat the cake too of the embodied, dynamic, polysemic, ephemeral human act of performance or other art making. On the other hand, abandonment of certainty about the ‘real’ world and acknowledgment that ‘the world everyone sees is not the world but a world which we bring forth with others’ (Maturana & Varela, 1992:245) admits theatre performance into the research conversation as a world of experience with its own coherence, its own way of knowing, of reaching understanding and therefore its own forms of evaluation.

Schön rightly identifies the crux of the problem of the separation of theory and practice as what constitutes ‘knowledge’ in the research culture, and he builds a case for the practitioner’s capacity for ‘reflection-in-action’ as a form of knowledge previously unrecognised as valid research process: ‘practitioners themselves often reveal a capacity for reflection on their intuitive knowing in the midst of action and sometimes use this capacity to cope with the unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice (1983:ix)\textsuperscript{58}.

If arts research is to avoid both the schylla of justifying itself in terms of ‘basic research’ and the charybdis of being relegated to a ‘minor profession’\textsuperscript{59} arts researchers, after Schön, must look to an explanation of their process of knowing. Hence the integral role of theories of cognition that can support a new epistemology for arts practice. I briefly point to the work of Humberto Maturana as a viable option for researchers ready to frame their research in terms of a radical constructivism\textsuperscript{60}.

Maturana uses the term ‘effective action’ to point to the existence of knowledge. I know that I know because my activity in the world is effective. ‘Knowing is effective action, that is, operating effectively in the domain of existence of human beings’ (Maturana & Varela, 1992:29). This approach provides a new biological


\textsuperscript{59} A minor profession is marked in Nathan Glazer’s categorisation as such by ‘their ambiguous ends’ quoted in Schön, 1983:23.

\textsuperscript{60} I would suggest that its ontology also bears exploration by poststructuralists, deconstructionists, feminists and branches of the postmodern which seek meaning and yet acknowledge the radically diverse ways humans have of making sense, or nonsense, of their experience. Maturana’s way of thinking is a via media between the certainty of a realist epistemology and the unmarkable terrain of solipsism. Dell (1985) has already pointed to the potential of this manner of thinking for the Social Sciences.
explanation of knowledge that supports Schön’s position and offers promise of a new epistemology of practice.61

The positivist epistemology of practice, as has been mentioned, reflected a ‘hierarchy of kinds of knowledge which was also a ladder of status. Those who create new theory were thought to be higher in status than those who apply it’ (Schön, 1983:37). A radical constructivist epistemology of practice identifies knowing with doing-all knowledge is effective action. Thus effective performance can generate the explanation of performance, effective acting can generate the explanation of acting and effective actor education can generate the explanation of actor education. It does so if we practice reflectively so that we know how we know what we are doing, (i.e. we identify the generative mechanism without which what we are doing could not take place)62. This reflecting-in-action marks a particular stance towards inquiry with its own kind of rigour; a rigour which demands a certain quality of attention, a refined kinaesthesia, the surrender of certainty and availability to structural and emotional change through dynamic interrelationship with others and the biosphere63.

Multiple forms of validation
Such constant renegotiation of situations and physical recollibration of the embodied suggests a kind of recursive validation. New challenges are met and negotiated by shifts in thinking, emotioning and behaviour, not necessarily as sequential events, but in the organismic response of the artist/researcher64. Such patterns of behaviour recur throughout the research and life of the researcher. Each new experience in arts practice not only validates or negates the one before but can generate a whole new level of inquiry—hence the descriptor ‘recursive’65.

Parr furthers the case for such reflective practice as research and addresses the question of how it should be assessed in the following way:

Investigation is embedded in practice. It is practice which clarifies the issues; practice which produces the new knowledge. Practice has theoretical

For Schön’s discussion of knowing-in-action see 1983:49f.
Fritjof Capra relates this new paradigm to the ‘deep ecology’ of Arne Naess (1996:7) and connects the thinking with ecofeminism (1996:8).
Maturana uses the word ‘recursive’ to mean not just repetition, but the kind of renewal of an action that is generative (like a wheel in contact with the ground that means travel can happen).
inquiry as part of its fabric; but only sometimes is this expressed in
constructed written argument—more often it is expressed through artwork
with all their nuances, ambiguities, paradoxes, evocations and revelations.
The written may be present as notes, appended to sketches or diagrams,
jottings of ideas and lists of references: this is their natural form because
they emerge in parallel to thinking with things. 66

The onus is on both researchers using alternative modes of enquiry and the bodies
that assess their credibility to devise appropriate processes for review of their
research which ensures fair and equitable treatment in the broad research arena into
which arts activities have been admitted and at the same time honour the
uniqueness and the deep human significance of the discipline area. Theatre
academics set the agenda by engaging with ARC processes, contesting inadequate
definitions of research, refining epistemologies of practice and fostering debate and
methodological experimentation amongst their post graduate communities.

It is my contention in this paper that it is not useful to think in terms of one
universal form of validation of arts practice. The hypotheticals which follow are
five ways of thinking about possible processes of, or transgressions of, validation
of performing arts practice. I was struck recently by a reference to the Iroquois
‘Rule of six’: ‘for every perceivable phenomenon devise six possible explanations,
know that there may be sixty more’ 67. Likewise, in embracing a radical
constructivist ontology, multiple explanations of reality are to be respected. Each
explanation must find its way of cohering, or adapting to its incoherence, and
thereby find a path to validate, or subvert validation, in their explanatory path’s
research endeavour. Lincoln and Guba remind us that evaluation outcomes are not
descriptions of a ‘true’ state of affairs, but meaningful constructions which ‘make

MARKING THE UNMARKABLE
Once we generate an epistemology of arts practice as research, how do we
approach the question of validation of such research as a publication? The model
currently favoured mirrors that of the peer review of an article for journal
publication. The validation hypotheticals which follow offer several ways of
thinking about and thinking through the question of whether a double dialogue (as
in performance product plus exegesis) is necessary to mark a live theatre
performance as research publication. The issues Dunn raised of ‘appropriate
indicators’, ‘peer review’ and accessibility by professional peers are addressed
implicitly in this model and further issues arising are identified. The hypotheticals
are further founded on the present fledgling structure of the validation of
performance as research by a process initiated by the Australasian Drama Studies
Association, where their Association provides a nexus for application for the

66 Parr, 1996:5.
5, No. 1:5.
assessment of a performance as publication and a registrar of those successfully reviewed by peer assessors.

I argue that the playfully serious construction of these hypotheticals is a coherent manner in which to proceed in the radical constructivist epistemology I have espoused, because it offers several alternative forms of validation, each constructed according to its own hypothesis, rather than arguing for one ultimate form of validation.

Summary of validation hypotheticals
1. Double dialogue is necessary because of the biological incompatibility of aesthetic apprehension and analysis.
2. Double dialogue is not necessary when performance is the research site and the researcher is not an artist/stakeholder.
3. Double dialogue is not necessary if performance is the primary ontology.
4. Double dialogue is not necessary if you have collaborative conversations between researcher/artist and audience/peer assessors.
5. Double dialogue is necessary but the written exegesis could be given the same aesthetic status as the performance if you re-mark the performative possibilities of writing and move towards a poetics of drama research.

Validation hypothetical 1
A DOUBLE DIALOGUE IS NECESSARY BECAUSE OF THE BIOLOGICAL INCOMPATIBILITY OF AESTHETIC APPREHENSION & ANALYSIS
Hypothesis: a double dialogue is necessary for the validation of performance as publication because the evaluation of the art of performance demands an aesthetic response and the evaluation of the performance as contributing to conceptual advance demands a critical/analytical perception and these two I will argue, following the reflective path of Humberto Maturana, are biologically incompatible states of human emotioning that cannot be collapsed into one another and must therefore be separately experienced and evaluated.

Key questions and responses:
1. Can performance speak for itself as a publication in the present structure of traditional academic discourse?
No, because performance-in-itself is situated in a different domain of human activity than traditional research endeavours.

2. What distinguishes these two domains, those of performance and research?
What distinguishes them is the state of emotioning in which we live them. The incommensurability of the two discrete emotional states means we must take a double loaf at performance as publication.
Emotion according to Humberto Maturana is both experienced as a ‘body disposition’ and revealed through specific actions (1992:3). The operation of our system in one state precludes its operation in another. Thus we cannot love and

116
hate in the same biological event. Nor, if we accept this claim, can we have an aesthetic experience and function analytically. So what constitutes these different states such that they are biologically incompatible?

**Performance**

I will argue that the basic 'body disposition' of performance is 'play' which I am defining as those body dispositions that are revealed in behaviours in which one opens imaginatively and energetically to new possibilities in circumstances, objects or others and allows one's state of emotioning to flow with the circumstances, objects or others resulting in acts of spontaneity. Our 'thinking' in play is lateral and freely associative. In allowing ourselves to engage aesthetically in this state we are engaging kin-aesthetically with all that has brought us to this point through exposure to and participation in a body of practice and our absorption of the 'basic wisdom' (Parr, 1996) of our artistic community. We operate out of a physical comfort/discomfort. This is what makes us an 'expert reader', or not, of the artistic excellence of performance.

**Research**

The basic state of emotioning for research on the other hand is reflection. Reflection is constituted by those body dispositions that are revealed in behaviours in which one imaginatively and energetically focuses on distinguishing and naming patterns in the behaviour of oneself or others or the products of either, and proceeds to distinguish oneself in the process of distinguishing itself. Thinking strives to be logical and coherent and within the language of a particular body of knowledge. Thus the language employed and the conceptual frameworks evoked belong to an existing conversation (culture, academic community) by which the reflecting has been generated, and with which the reflecting process aims to engage and advance conceptually. Engagement with this conversation is what makes us an 'expert reader' of the research excellence of performance (and/or the coherence of a written exegesis of performance).
MODEL 1: DOUBLE DOMAINS OF VALIDATION OF PERFORMANCE AS RESEARCH

Researcher as artist/reflective practitioner:
*rehearsal style
*editorial & artistic choices
*application to ADSA for publication of performance
*assessors appointed

PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

DOMAIN OF AESTHETIC VALIDATION
*expert reader &/or
*specialist committee
*untrammelled aesthetic experience (i.e. no briefing)
/issues: ‘expert’, ‘specialist’

Reviewers write brief aesthetic response/how work sits in body of practice.
/issues: aesthetic codes,
/‘body of practice’

DOMAIN OF RESEARCH VALIDATION
Second viewing or second set of reviewers? Video (‘Spur of memory’, Phelan, 1993:146)? Researcher offers written text or conversation re key questions, methodology, intended conceptual advance. Mutual setting of parameters of assessment (issues: what can be bracketed?, assessment criteria)

Reviewers write brief report re conceptual advance.
/issues: ‘body of knowledge’

ADSA arbitrates
citates, archives

Issues arising:

- Are both domains of validation of equal weight in either academic or popular perception? No, because of history of positivism.
- It is useful to distinguish the body of knowledge and the body of practice? Yes if these can be viewed as different domains rather than hierarchically.
- Is it the art or the artist you are really assessing? It is the effective action of the artist.
- Can you have a successful research project that produces ‘bad’ art? Distinguish - performance is: – ‘site of research’, the answer is ‘yes’;
  - performance as research publication, I argue that the answer is ‘no’.
Validation hypothetical 2

DISTINGUISH: PERFORMANCE AS RESEARCH ‘SITE’ WHICH DOES NOT REQUIRE ‘DOUBLE DIALOGUE’ BECAUSE PERFORMANCE-IN-ITSELF IS NOT THE ISSUE.

Hypothesis: if performance becomes the ‘site’ of research, that is the researcher is not an artist/stakeholder but enters the field as an ‘outsider’ and approaches the performance as an artistic product and phenomenon for research, then the aesthetic quality of the product they are studying is not an issue in the validation of their research which means that it does not require a double dialogue for publication because it is not the performance-in-itself which is at issue. Rather it is an extension of dramatic text as a site for research (e.g. reception studies, feminist studies, post-colonial studies) and would conform to processes of validation already established in these approaches.

Validation hypothetical 3

NEW DISCIPLINE CONSTITUTED BY EMBEDDING INVESTIGATION IN PRACTICE AND READING PERFORMANCE-IN-ITSELF AS EVIDENCE OF RESEARCH

‘To attempt to write about the undocumentable event of performance is to invoke the rules of the written document and thereby alter the event itself.’ Phelan (1993:148)

Hypothesis: Through this conference and ensuing conversations we are establishing a new research paradigm in which investigation is embedded in performance practice and the performance product of participants in this conversation will represent the culmination of both their theory and practice and be able to read as a whole as the reflection of such (Parr, 1996:4). The artist uses distinct forms of inquiry ‘...the theorist uses an essaying form of enquiry and the artist an imaging form of enquiry’ (Parr, 1996:6). So how does one read performance-in-itself (without written documentation, accompanying thesis or conversational explanation) and validate it as ‘publication’?

Hypothesis: that it is possible for ‘expert readers’ in arts fields to accomplish the perceptual see-saw of untrammelled aesthetic apprehension and analysis within a shared research conversation around a body of practice, in which case there is no need for a double dialogue. David George suggests phenomenological epocho-we simultaneously engage in each reality and observe ourselves doing so; which operation requires a ‘re-formatting of consciousness’ (1996:17).

Re-formatting consciousness

aesthetic apprehension

- state of emotioning of ‘play’
- kinaesthetically sensing competence through comfort/discomfort, based on prior experience of body of practice, stylistic, thematic, aesthetic preferences.
MODEL 3: VALIDATION OF PERFORMANCE-IN-ITSELF AS PUBLICATION
Where performance is the primary ontology.

Issues arising:

- Is the re-formatting of consciousness biologically possible?
- Can conceptual advances be ‘intuited’ when there is no verbal language regarding them in the exchange?
- Is it necessary for peer assessors to have articulated their aesthetic? To whom?

Validation hypothetical 4
DIALOGUE IS NECESSARY BUT IT IS NOT A ‘DOUBLE’ DIALOGUE, IT IS A COLLABORATIVE CONVERSATION
Hypothesis: the phenomenon of performance, because of its ephemeral nature, the complexities of its dynamic structure and the variables involved in its execution, (Richards, 1995) requires collaborative conversation between researcher and reviewers to isolate the focus of study and enable the framing of mutually
acceptable assessment criteria that can locate the event in a volatile research medium where the phenomenon will not stand still for analysis. Therefore having anonymous reviewers seeing the performance once and having no contact with the researcher is inadequate, given the nature of the phenomenon of performance and the rigour demanded of research. Is this what Phelan is alluding to when she suggests devising a 'combined critical methodology' (1993:167)?

**Issues arising:**

If 'performance' is defined most broadly as: ‘carrying out a task...’ (George, 1996:16) or ‘working out of anything ordered or undertaken’ (States 1996:1), in presenting a work for publication who is carrying out the task? e.g. if the director is presenting the performance for publication, what the reviewer sees is the director’s intentions filtered through someone else’s text and the independently creative body of the actor/s. What other research endeavours piggyback on so many other talented players? What can be discerned, I argue, are aesthetic choices, from which the expert reader may surmise a conceptual framework - or not. The question they are answering is, perhaps: does this performance demonstrate effective action on the part of the director/actor?

However if the two parties engage in **collaborative conversation** ('braiding of language and emotioning' Maturana, 1992) they will come to an understanding of the intention of the research and the 'aesthetic' integral to it. The expert reader will then be able to review in one sitting and assess conceptual advances in the light of the generative mechanism of collaborative conversation.

**MODEL 4: VALIDATION VIA COLLABORATIVE CONVERSATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLLABORATIVE CONVERSATION 1. researcher/reviewers 'appropriate indicators'</th>
<th>VIEWING PUBLIC PERFORMANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COLLABORATIVE CONVERSATION 2. researcher/reviewers, shared evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joint report to ADSA citation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conversation versus arms length approaches**

**conversation:** relational, honest owning of ideas, presuppositions, aesthetic code, supportive for artist/researcher, generative, group consensus, understanding.

**arms length:** product focus, safety/risk of relative anonymity, biases unexposed, judgemental approach, presupposes shared experiences, common aesthetic judgements; possible ambivalence, discord, misunderstanding.
Validation hypothetical 5

REMARK THE PERFORMATIVE POSSIBILITIES OF WRITING SO THAT PERFORMANCE AND EXEGESIS ARE BOTH POETIC UTTERANCES

Hypothesis: that the creative generation of written analysis by the reflective practitioner be treated as a performative utterance. Performance and poetic/analytical writing both enter the domain of performance, but are neither reproductions of each other nor representations of each other. Both address research issues and deal with them in the mode which constitutes them: action and spoken language on the one hand and written language on the other. Neither one is the slave to the other, the text is not mere documentation, but a poetic look at the phenomenon under study; the performance stands its own ground as thesis-in-action. Drama, John O’Toole has reminded us, lends itself to a poetics of research. Both the art of writing as performance and the performance-in-itself have coherence within their domain of performativity. Each has potential expert readers. Both are necessary for validating the presence of performance as research in contemporary academic discourse.

MODEL 5: PERFORMANCE & ANALYSIS BOTH PERFORMATIVE UTTERANCES

![](image)

Conclusion
Such hypotheticals are making marks, not drawing definitive lines. Their purpose is to play with possibilities outside familiar patterns of validation and to break up our certainty that there is a single best way to validate performance as research. This serious game with validity returns the power for cohering research to the particular researcher and their interpretive community.

Judith Pippen
QUT Academy

---

References


