

Evolution: Art and Design Research and the PhD

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Response, Questions, Considerations: Research through Art and Design; Art and Design through Research; Practice Theory; Theory-led Practice; Practice-led Theory

It seems that there are some key dilemmas that, while maybe well-rehearsed at this point, come up predictably in discussions of practice-based research, so we may want to take up some of them, including: means for increasing the recognition of practice-led research in academic institutions; arguing for the role of research through practice in non-academic settings—so the utility of design or art practice to conduct research activities that impact the broader fields of art and design; the outcomes of practice-led research—what are they and how are they evaluated?; and the question of shifting expectations around terminal degrees and the impact on existing academic structures.

That said, one of the more interesting conversations Parsons could have would be to engage questions about (a) working through practice to produce theory, and (b) working through an engagement with theory and critical inquiry to devise proposals for making that engage the critical concerns often raised in more "traditional" academic inquiry.

This kind of conversation could get bogged down in particulars that leave out what might be most exciting about practice-led research as a framework for working through theory and practice in new ways, so it would be interesting to figure out how to ask for, say, examples of this kind of work from Parsons, or to push a discussion about *why* practice-led research as opposed to other forms of research.

Questions and points provided by breakout discussion groups as initial points of departure:

Research and Practice

- What are the methods and questions that art/design could benefit from research practice? There are "experiential questions" and "perceptual questions."
- What constitutes research practice and research material?
- How to investigate open-ended processes? / Open-ended investigative creative process.
- How to get the quantitative out of the qualitative? And how to assess/apply this?
- Could research in art be a form of knowledge seeking or making knowledge!?
- What forms of language and articulation can be used to define, manifest and communicate creative research practice?
- How to map out the "un-known," i.e., non-linear creative practice? In a traditional PhD model a candidate sets out to answer a specific question—how does this pertain in disciplines that are enabled by one question leading to the next, a non-linear trajectory.
- Identifying the gap between the knowledge is a goal at the PhD level.

- What is the project of the student? Where is the knowledge that is produced by the student located?
- What differentiates the PhD level from the Master's level?
- What constitutes research practice and research material?
- How to moderate the desire of finding the spaces of not knowing?
- PhD programs with very specific agendas, i.e., narrow in focus, do not enable a more discursive and diverse range of research to take place.
- What are the ways in which art and design research practice could interact within the social realm, out in the world? Creative problem solving that leads to solutions to existing social problems.

Practice/Theory Hybrid

How do we define practice?

- Needs to be coupled with research; ongoing; awareness of history and context within which you are working; collaborating with others.
- What about proof of practice? This is an important part of writing.
- Practice and theory are different outcomes of research.
- Practice is a way to describe the internal form of the work we do.
- Some artists are doing research and theory as the art practice itself.
- Looking at and putting together one's research can sometimes be seen as related to design.
- Emphasize how research itself is a design process.
- Emphasize why it is so important to articulate where we are coming from.

Writing

- Theory is usually assumed to be part of an art program but not of a design program.
- Importance of context and scholarly text.
- Seeing it as a form of production could lessen anxiety about it.
- On the other hand, writing can enable a different kind of illumination and understanding about practice in completing a rounded body of work.

PhD

- The PhD itself is based on the idea of creation of new knowledge—this is what defines that level of education and specialization.
- Research and practice further each other.
- Exegesis Model—I interpret my work for others to understand.
- Critical Model—I am an art critic.
- Point of confusion in what model to use—examination, dissertation, how the program works.
- A PhD program with different pathways reflective of different research methodologies and outcomes.
- Can we do one without any writing? What is the outcome of the research? If the physical object is an expression of research, then why is that not enough?
- Creation without research is dangerous—we can miss how we connect the ideas to culture, society, other work, etc.
- But how to reconcile the creative and the analytic sides?
- In a studio PhD, what constitutes “the work” of a visual artist?
- How do we qualify visual work and award a doctorate?

- What about a multimedia presentation to show all the work completed?
- Why do artists engage in this program? Because some art practices are deeply rooted in scholarly research.
- Problem: How to prove the concept? What is the measurable form of expression?
- What happens to art education? If only scholarly research artists get PhDs, and PhDs become the new required credential to teach college art, then art students will be taught solely or mostly by artists who are researchers, eliminating all other types of influences.

Two Summarizing Issues:

- Proof of concept
- Expression of theory that has no written outcome

Parsons should write a groundbreaking program(s). We have the advantage of both being late (internationally) and early (domestically) to the PhD table.

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