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Making us: Methodologies of researching learning and teaching in the university studio

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In Elizabeth Ellsworth's *Places of Learning*, she asks the question, "how does the fact of human embodiment affect activities of teaching and learning?" (2005, p. 2). In the crit in the university studio, a way of recognise the embodied experiences of affect and sensation is to think and speak 'outside the realm of languages', (Ellsworth 2005, p. 2) to consider the relations between the human, and nonhuman as material. To understand how the crit is embodied as an experience and how it is understood within the conception of learning and teaching is to multiply and develop complexity in the understanding of the ways that both students and teachers understand their experiences of the crit.

The experiences of three artists are examined in this paper. These experiences were articulated in a larger study of the crit in the university art involving 19 fine art students and their lecturers. Thinking about how these voices give an intention, a stance and in relation develops different knowings to build evidence to support and problematise claims about studio pedagogies. They voice a critical practice that as Judith Butler identifies, is a response to the ethical demand upon it. A critical practice contextualises and forms "a self who is stylized in response to the ethical demand upon it" (Butler 2002, p. 9). Looking at critical practice enables us to determine how the crit is useful in studio pedagogies and the crit where relations, materially, spatially, temporally and simultaneously are complex to unpick and untangle. Barad's notion of intra-action (2007) informs this understanding by attending to how the crit allows artists to think through other ways of becoming practicing artists through relations in making artworks, constructing academic texts and arguments, and by not doing particular activities as careers.

Attending to intra-action (Barad, 2007) in the crit allows ways to think through relations in making artworks, constructing academic texts and arguments, and by not doing particular activities as careers to become practicing artists. The three voices I am using in this paper are voices that articulated 'not like that/more like that' stances

about types of practices in our conversations. To think through these responses as an intention, a stance, and as relations is a way to consider and untangle ways of becoming in pedagogies that embody different knowings; it is way of building evidence to support and problematise claims about studio pedagogies that are inherently fluid because of the contextual relations taking place. It echoes Ellsworth in suggesting that,

...some pedagogies and curriculums work with their students not because of “what” they are teaching or how they are teaching it. Maybe they are hits because of who they are offering students to imagine themselves as being and enacting (Ellsworth 1997, p. 40).

In Context

The study, *The role of the crit in the university art studio*, developed from a curiosity in thinking about how learning and teaching in the art studio was contextualised and about its relations. After working in a range of university art studios over 15 years, I wanted investigate how the ways we teach student artists and make ourselves in these relations and contexts as artists and artist lecturers (Shreeve, 2009; Logan, 2013). I chose to examine the crit because it is highly regarded (Fry, Kitteridge & Marshall, 2009), celebrated (Schön, 1985) and sometimes dreaded (Blair, 2006; Webster, 2003). It is an event that is visible, audible, spoken, embodied, aspirational, expected, imagined, unmade and made; it is contextualized within and unique in studio pedagogies (for example, James, 1997; Blair, 2006; Webster, 2003). It is where the relations between people, the art, and the processes of making art are evident. I wanted to consider the ways how linking theory and data (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) could attend to the practices of studio pedagogies, lecturers, artist students and the space we make within the pedagogic relations in the studio.

This investigation used a qualitative methodology. In the second semester of 2012 I observed crits (group reviews or group tutorials could be other names) in two university art schools in a metropolitan city in Australia. Students and lecturers volunteered to be interviewed; nineteen students were interviewed after their crits and two lecturers were interviewed approximately half way through the crit schedules. I followed up with 10 students after their assessment period during their final year exhibitions. All the names of students and lecturers are pseudonyms and the universities have been de-identified. In the context of this paper, I am using the responses from separate conversations I had with three third year art students about

becoming practicing artists and the artworks, and how they shifted their making and thinking - or not - after their crits.

Glimpsing Affect

The artwork or ideas presented both cited discourses and matter that could be to be mutually constituted in the production of knowing. Elements in each of the artists' artwork or ideas were recognisable. For me artwork or ideas cited other artists' artwork, continued a process of working through ideas, and responded to the cited artists in ways that extended ways of thinking about how they as artists worked. There was mutability in the ways the artworks and ideas could be read and in the ways the artists were thinking and reading through their artwork and ideas. In some of the artwork, the notion of play and pleasure, and of experimenting, was evident through the iterations of the process of making, how the artists had thought of presenting the artwork, and how they presented and responded in the crits.

Emily's work was an installation of piñatas of Australian indigenous animals made from papers printed with wood grain. The fringed papers were glued onto a heavier card form animal and suspended from the ceiling in the stage area of the room. They were a performance in waiting. David's work documented the library process of stamping dates in the back of borrowed books. The process, no longer in use, was photographed and printed as large format colour images over a metre in area. They had a grandness in scale, magnifying the procedural and temporal lists of stamped dates. Lily had returned to art school after taking a year off aboard. Her art practice was interested in landscape, the physical and the physiological. She was interested in how landscape interprets emotion and memory. The presentation she made was about her ideas of work to make, and our discussion was about how it shifted between the crit and our interview. In the interviews we discussed the artwork or ideas presented and each of the artists, Emily, David and Lily discussed their ideas of what they think an artist is/does/becomes/being. It is these ideas that speak to notions of affect and sensation. It is in these ideas, and in the context of challenging practices and assumptions that the crit operated in, both confirming and unnerving notions of what being and becoming an artist as an experiment in thought.

Becoming Artists

An Intention

Emily described her presentation as giving a historical context of her work, personal meaning behind it and the construction of the work. She structured the presentation in

a way that connected the context, the meanings for her and how she had made the artwork at the end of her introduction of the work. In the discussion after the presentation, Emily's piñatas garnered feedback that challenged her intention in making artwork that was highly crafted with both process and intention; it challenged the way she had contextualized the work in ecological discussion of indigenous animals and loss. Some of the feedback critiqued her intent of her artwork and the difference between of craft making and art making,

I think maybe they feel like we are just layering the simple act of just, kind of, the act of making with too many meanings and in their eyes (the lecturer) its maybe too convoluted in that way. Whereas my view is that if I didn't have the concept then I wouldn't have made the work in the first place because that is what initiated the work, so it's not like I really wanted to make some piñatas and I thought "Hey, what can I do? Oh I'll just think of some reason and kind of infuse it with all these concepts as an excuse" because that's not how the work came about.

... I mean I can see how the two can overlap but the intention is important. ...if you want to make a scarf because you want your neck to be warm, you can't really call that art, or if you want... The thing that really used to bug me, I'm on Etsy and they had these question and answers with sellers on Etsy and a lot of these people – and sure the stuff that they were making is nice but they were making whatever say for example scarves, they're not making it to be art, they're making it because they think it will sell and be useful to somebody. And one of the questions that would always be asked is "Why did you become an artist? What made you become an artist?" and these people are going "I've always been creative and an artist". But I'm like 'You're not an artist!'

It's about the intention and I'm not making things because I think they'll sell, I'm making them because I feel the need to make them. I guess that's the division for me.

A stance

David's artwork documented a process no longer in use. His artwork both appropriated imagery of the coversheets and the due date slips stuck in the back covers of art books. They were from the university library, a documentation of the knowledge that he could gain. In discussing the crit, he had noticed a gap in the way

he thought studio pedagogy should build an argument in both the artwork and in an academically engaged way as a written response.

Look I think it would help to possibly have a mix of the two. Maybe throughout the semester, like you do have to do project proposals, but there is never really – apart from in art history where you are talking about other people's work and you write essays – which is a requirement. Within the art school there is no requirement to dissect your own work in quite an academic way, which I think could be helpful... I think sitting down and planning – like its nice to be confident talking to people one on one or in a group situation, but it's a very different thing to actually formulate a concise argument and learn how to write in that context.

For David, his preparation in doing his crit was to write about his artwork academically,

Not maybe as well as I should but I do try sometimes just to clarify my own position I'll just sit down and write a couple of pages about what I'm doing, even when it's not necessarily a requirement but it's just like building notes – building up to the talk, rather than just having dot points I'll try to have a mini essay and then kind of break it down in to dot points. I think that's kind of important to have a stance otherwise it can be a bit boring if you are wishy washy, I think it's interesting when you stand up and say "I'm interested in this and this is how I see this issue or this topic".

I think so, I think that with a level of discourse within the art world you've kind of got to engage and have your own point because there is so much, and there has been so much that if you don't have your own specific angle on it, that is your own, it's not really going to be interesting or important.

In relations

Lily had returned to finish off a double degree in education and art. Though her art practice was interested in landscape, the physical and the psychological, Lily's interests in art also concerned the pedagogical aspects of learning through artistic actions and activities.

I'm doing a project in Africa. I've spent a bit of time living in the community and teaching there. I spent four months living there last year, which was part of my time off. I started a little project to build a community learning centre in the village. A lot of my time is spent doing that, so last week I was telling (the Lecturer) about it and talking to them and showing the new website and everything.

They asked "Why don't you just do that, your project for your art?" And I was like "But that's not art, I don't see it as art, I just see it as my project that I want to do and I want to teach in this centre and I want that to happen". "Yeah, but you know, talking about Bourriaud and relational aesthetics and how life is, how everything is relational".

So the things I am doing outside of my life I should, ah, outside of Uni and whatever, I should bring in to and use it. And it's more about relational aesthetics now and talking, they said I could just... we came up with the ideas of creating the promo material and invites and everything for events and then materials that I can actually use in the community centre, so to teach... So it's a lot about teaching as well, and the involvement about teaching...

That's basically what it's changed to. I've kind of, with art, I kind of just saw it as a separate thing to whatever I was doing outside, so I think it's really nice that I can have that correlation between my life and something that is actually real and happening and that I am sort of doing and actually using it as my basis of my project in the studio.

Rather than thinking the crit and the artists who presented as actors on the periphery of the action, I am attending to the intra-activity of the crit in the art school as a within and as a part of a complexity of multiple art worlds, multiple ways of becoming and pedagogies of sensation. In its intra- activity, - the ways that the crit 'discourses and matter are understood to be mutually constituted in the production of knowing' (Barad, 2007, p. 71) - the crit is an event that intra-acts with people, the objects and artefacts they make and the processes (pedagogical and otherwise) that they make them with. In attending to these three voices I am thinking through how each of them '*intra-act with the materiality of their world in ways that produce different becomings?*' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 113) and how the crit is an experience that challenges practices and assumptions. It is a close examination of the artist responses to the

pedagogical activities of the crit and their imagined transition into being an artist after art school. I am not presenting the data as disembodied from theory, such as numbers and themes that are meant to represent and interpret who and what they are, rather I present three partial voices that are then 'plugged' in into theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Jackson and Mazzei describe this iterative way of working with a small amount of data with a number of post structuralist theorists' philosophical concepts as a way to achieve 'a reading of data that is both *within and against interpretivism*' (2012, p. vi) and allows the reader to work within this space. Working across data in this way is imbued with the complexity and fluidness of interdisciplinary work that is not simplified or reduced. Working through data and theory, context and circumstance is embedded, and questions and extends the notion of the participant voice "speaking for themselves"(Jackson & Mazzei, 2009, pp. 1-2) and themes in the data (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. vii). In working in this way I want to acknowledge the transitional space that the participants in this study were in, graduating from art school, and the partiality of the imagined and the aspirations that they discussed in our conversations.

Within A Mutual Process Of Making

The crit is an embodied act; it is a 'made' pedagogic encounter of action, affect and sensation. Emily, David and Lily voice an inkling; a partial notion of what becoming an artist is, or is not, for them. It is in this space where thinking through reflexive and diffractive methodology (Barad, 2007, pp. 90-1) it is useful to conceptualise these as not as a duality, or an opposition (an either/or) but as a contextual relation of becoming in intra-action. These particular interview responses were animated. Emily wanted an artist intention in her artwork. David recognized the skills missing in academic writing about his artwork could be a lack in studio pedagogy. Lily wanted her work to about the contextual relations in her life. Emily, David and Lily had contextualised understandings of the becoming of an artist as they understood, and these understandings had affect.

The crit makes relations to the pedagogy of the studio, materially, spatially, temporally and simultaneously that are complex to unpick and untangle. Making sense of embodiment in the crit was about questioning positions and stances of the 'how' and 'what' and how the artists in the study embodied this *in-between-ness* by making artwork, showing and talking about it in the crit. Then later, talking and showing me the processes of their thinking through the crit and their artmaking. This

stance of questioning is about desires interfering and resonating, with the 'how' and the 'what' of the crit,

...especially challeng[ing] those assumptions and practices whose histories have privileged language over sensation, objects of experience over subjects of experience, the rational over the affective, and knowledge as a tool for predication and control over learning as play and pleasure. (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 2)

Recognising the importance of play and pleasure in this space is a way to understand the process of making artwork, and the desire it holds. By challenging assumptions and practices, looking at art work as subjects of experience made within the institution of art schools where understandings of artwork and how it is assessed is predicated by localised notions of academic success (Orr, 2011) and artworld currency or contemporaneity (Belligui, 2009) iterates the relations that mediate from within and as a part of the crit and the wider intra-action (Barad, 2007). The crit is an experience that covets and desires being 'within' and 'a part of'.

Affect is well travelled ground in the literature surrounding crit in the architecture, art and design studio pedagogical literature. Much of the discussion in the literature is about the negative affect of the crit where students were derailed, and acculturation and gate keeping practices are palpable (Webster, 2003; Blair, 2006). Conversely affect is about "the capacities to act and be acted upon" (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 1) that is neither positive or negative, but the all of that. Affect is a pedagogical force (Ellsworth, 1997). Affect is the thing that stays, the capacity to gather it and how it can 'form dispositions and thus shape subjectivities' (Watkins, 2010, p. 269) are the aspects that I have attended to in the data. It is relational, contextual; it is the stuff that stays with people, the objects and artifacts they make and the processes (pedagogical and otherwise) that they make them with. It is the visceral response, the

...vital forces insisting beyond emotion - that serve us towards movement, towards thought and extension, that likewise suspend us... (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 1)

It is in this pedagogical space that the crit operates in the *in-between-ness* (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010; Ellsworth, 1997, 2005). Beyond emotion, or conscious knowing, *in-between-ness* is a force with the capacity to call to action and be called into action. In

the *in-between-ness* of the crit, it is in the ways humans and the non-human interact, resonate and respond, and also at the same time, are silent or shirk the call and response.

In this discussion of embodiment and affect, I have attended to the idea of sensation: the data as a way of understanding the sensation of understanding what becoming an artists is for Emily, David and Lily. Pedagogies of sensation address the learner and the teacher “as *bodies* whose movements and sensations are crucial to our understandings” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 27) rather than attending to us as having bodies. This subtle difference attends to notions of practice and as becoming as practicing artist as embodied activities that are contextual, entangled within relations both human and nonhuman. Simon O’Sullivan describes the encounter with an artwork as ‘a cut, a crack’ (O’Sullivan, 2009, p. 1) forcing us think, challenging and disrupting. This rupture is also affirming, ‘a moment of the encounter that obliges us to think otherwise’ (O’Sullivan, 2009, p. 1). This otherwise is important when attending to the contextual relations in the crit. In the crit the relations are a force that are pedagogical. Relations are connected, and in the *in-between-ness* of crit, the residual of the sensation/the encounter, it sticks.

This paper is a critical thinking through the ways embodiment in the crit can enable different knowings of being and becoming an artist, building evidence to support and problematise claims about the crit in studio pedagogies. It is a preoccupation with the notions of *what* is the role of the crit, how does embodiment affect activities of teaching and learning, and in the contextual relations of the crit in the university studio how do we make ourselves, our artwork, and our research. The crit contributes to learning in the studio as a mutual process of making understandings, known and unknown. It is pedagogically of its localised context and acculturated to local notions of art making, and assumptions, expectations and imaginations of becoming an artist.

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