

Praxis Now: Frayling's 'Research in Art and Design' 24 years on

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Author Biographies

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Dr Megan Keating is a multidisciplinary artist, crossing installation, painting and animation. Her works explore intersections between the natural environment, technology and culture. Meg is particularly interested in traditional paper cutting folk art techniques, which she re-contextualises through new media, painting and cut-out works. Meg has expertise in HDR coordination, HDR training, visual arts practice and contemporary painting and is currently the Research Coordinator at the School of Creative Arts and Graduate Research Coordinator for the College of Arts, Law, and Education.

Dr Helen Norrie is a design academic working across scales from the curation of ideas through text and exhibitions, to the design of buildings and urban environments. Trained in architecture, Helen teaches in the School of Architecture & Design at the University of Tasmania (UTAS). She is the theme leader of the Regional Urban Studies Laboratory (RUSL) with the UTAS Creative Exchange Institute (Cxl). RUSL is a collaborative urban design research project that develops practice-led research through the medium of design, engaging directly with local councils and communities to examine urban spatial, temporal and social issues in small towns and cities.

Dr Svenja Kratz is a new media artist interested in transdisciplinary creative practice, particularly the intersections between science and art. In 2013 she completed a practice-led PhD across contemporary art and biotechnology in a creative partnership between QUT's Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation (IHBI) and the Creative Industries Visual Art discipline. Her research interests include art- science practice, speculative design and transdisciplinary research methodologies. Svenja is currently Science Art Lab + theme leader within the Creative Exchange Institute and works as a Lecturer in Interdisciplinary Creative Practice at the School of Creative Arts at the University of Tasmania.

Dr Zoe Veness is a designer interested in object-based practice including synergies between art and design, issues of materiality and process, and body-object relations. Zoe completed a

practice-based PhD in 2014 at UNSW, Art & Design. Her work has been selected for exhibitions in Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Korea, Singapore, London, Germany and USA, and is held in private and public collections including the National Gallery of Australia and the Art Gallery of South Australia. Zoe is currently Studio Coordinator of 3D Design at the Tasmanian College of the Arts, University of Tasmania.

Abstract:

Christopher Frayling's iconic set of value propositions in art and design research is now 24 years old. Identifying three dominant modes of artistic research – research-*into*, research-*through*, research-*for* – Frayling outlined a set of values that, arguably, remain pervasive today. Though often broadly translated into 'practice-led' and 'practice-based', new interdisciplinary models have blurred previously static boundaries. This paper is part discourse and part report. Examining the ever-shifting and often porous terms of higher degree research in the creative industries, we reflect on the value of Frayling's model in understanding methods and methodologies in new collaborative, inter and transdisciplinary models of research.

We report back on the move towards praxis modes of research methods across the research degree programs at the University of Tasmania, examining how new evaluative tools blur paradigmatic definitions of 'practice-led' and 'practice-based'. Through a 'conscious uncoupling' (Paltrow & Martin) of methods from their disciplinary hosts, we emphasise a praxis model of research training that closes the gap between practice-led and practice-based modes of enquiry. With an emphasis on core values we speculate on new terms for Frayling's praxical knowledge. We set out a range of value propositions for future frames of evaluation. In particular, we interrogate potential models for collaborative practice in higher degree research and methods for incorporating and valuing interdisciplinary outcomes.

Introduction*

Christopher Frayling's reflections on the modalities of research in creative practices are now some 24 years old. Initially prepared in 1993 for a research symposium held at the Royal College of Art, the publication of the informal but rigorous reflections a year later signalled a new paradigm for artistic research. His definitions of what would later be defined as research-led and research-based modes of practice (Evans and Le Grice, 2001; McNiff, 2004) in particular marked out a distinct trajectory that would be reflected in the then-new PhD programs at the RCA and beyond.

In the two-decades since Frayling, the culture of research in the creative industries has shifted considerably. With some current candidates entering research higher degrees born after Frayling's publication (and with recent completions still to walk) it is no bad time to reflect on the usefulness and pervasiveness of these early definitions. There is a specific necessity of arming ourselves with weapons of definition that respond to the emergence of a new culture of research training in Australian higher education.

We report back too on our own institutional realignment with core values of creative research. We are not alone in seeking to locate and define these values and recognise the pressing requirement of matching strategic aims at an institutional and national level. And we do so across levels and across disciplines. Last year we reflected on the implications for non-traditional research in the current research exercise and grant procurement process (Wise, Keating, Kratz, 2016).

We argue that whilst the terms outlined in Frayling – '*research-into*', '*research-through*', '*research-for*' – have become increasingly amorphous, central tenets of difference remain core to our understanding of the conditions of contemporary research. Rather than setting out new terms, we suggest a purposeful '*undisciplining*' as a precursor for a value-centred future for the doctoral program (Haider et al. 2017; Haddon, Juliff, Fountain, Kunda, 2017).

* This paper is a partial expression of a series of conversations held between five academics in the context of a contemporary Australian art school. Those five academics all hold PhDs. One is an architect, another working in craft and technology. One holds a PhD in practice-based studio art and is an early awardee of doctoral programs in practice-led research (from late 90s). The other is a recent graduate of an interdisciplinary program in Art-Science. The last is an art historian with a doctorate from a UK institution. These conversations were held in the context of renewal, reflection, and reaction. The renewal, which we'll touch on briefly, was part of a larger curriculum focus towards praxis and the advancement of interdisciplinary creative research methodologies. The reflections were expressions of values, processes, hopes and fears; with all five participants receiving PhDs from five different institutions, awarded across twenty years, across four Australian states and one from the UK, the conversations were lively and informative.

1. Frayling: 24 years on

Volume 1, Number 1. The first paper in a set of now discontinued *Royal College of the Arts Research Papers*. At the time Christopher Frayling was Professor of Research at the RCA and would, in 1996, become its effective head as Rector (until 2009). The paper served a simple but effective purpose: defining the types of research currently undertaken in creative practices across art and design schools. Written prior to the mass restructuring of UK art schools that saw independent institutions amalgamate (as in the University of the Arts London and University of the Creative Arts) or become aligned as faculties of existing universities, Frayling's paper is an early indication not only of where we were, but of where we were heading.

Frayling outlines three modalities of research. The first two of these are simple enough: *research-into* creative processes, its historical and material conditions, the philosophical modes of enquiry of art; *research-through*, the documentation and experimentation into creative practices (material research, cognition and the psychology of art, action research). *Research-into* the creative arts were already well established, with doctoral programs in many universities in place since the 1930s and beyond (established in Australia in the late 1940s). The second of these modalities, *research-through* was still relatively fresh in the institution but nevertheless had well-established boundaries and criteria for evaluation established since the 1980s (Zimmerman, Forlizzi, and Evenson, 2007).

The third of Frayling's modalities, *research-for*, was the lightbulb moment for many. For whilst it had been established that the practices of art and design were researched [for Frayling, research is a pre-existing 'cognitive condition' of art and design, a gathering of materials and terms], there was little understanding of the conditions under which the work of art and design could be considered 'as Research,' with a big R. *Research-for* art and design, as Frayling notes, was considered anathema to many critical practices, used only as a means to an end. For *research-for* modalities then, Frayling concluded, there remains an understanding that what is at issue is a philosophical and political problem of terms – how to turn research into Research:

'Research where the end product is *an artefact* – where the thinking is, so to speak, embodied in the artefact, where the goal is not primarily communicable knowledge in the sense of verbal communication, but *in the sense of visual or iconic or imagistic communication.*' (Frayling, 1993)

Frayling's research-*for* modality quickly became the cornerstone of the paradigm now widely practised in Australia, Europe, and increasingly the U.S, that of 'practice-led' research.

More than two decades on, hundreds of publications later, what is there left to discuss? The vast majority of Australian universities have one or more programs in practice-led research in the creative industries. These were hard-fought and well-won battles that saw the legitimisation – if only in a restricted sense – of the practice-led doctoral degree. [We say 'restricted' as there remain distinct terms and conditions applied to the forms of research admissible to the evaluation matrices of the academy. Doctoral completions, yes. Peer-reviewed journal outcomes, yes. The recognition of non-traditional research outcomes, well ... we're still working on that (Wise, Keating, Kratix, 2016).]

So why reconsider Frayling now?

2. Where we are.

The 2016 ACOLA review of Graduate Research Training published a wide-ranging set of recommendations regarding research preparedness, training, collaboration, and evaluating impact (ACOLA, 2016). Written from within, by a network of academics mostly within SET/STEM (Buchard, 2017; Davis, 2017), concluded that graduate research cultures within Australia were, on the whole, healthy. In many areas world leading. Yet despite the optimism of the report there remained concerns regarding the diversification and engagement of research with the outside world (let's broadly call that 'industry' for now). How then to measure and evaluate impact and engagement took on a new set of values.

The 2015 Watts White Paper on Higher Degree Research came to not too dissimilar conclusions. The strength of Australian research is not measurable in terms already outlined through the collective evaluative terms of HERDC and ERA. The impact of research is, Watts argued, articulated through its sustained engagement with external agencies and industries, multi-platform approaches to dissemination, and through the creation of new networks of knowledge production.

Perhaps the most pressing of all, preceding the ACOLA and Watts reviews, NISA rolled-out a new Research Block Grant funding formulas that sought to further incentivise high-cost industry and indigenous scholarship. Low-costed research would receive less recognition than under the previous formula. Timely PhD completions would now play a more significant role in determining block grants, with traditional HERDC outcomes (journals, books, etc.) taking a

less significant role in the defining of an institution's research profile. An opportunity perhaps, if we can find the right measure.

3. University of Tasmania

Following NISA, ACOLA and Watts and its own institutional strategic plan, The University of Tasmania has reacted to the demand for closer alignment through a renewed commitment to the development of disciplinary, interdisciplinary and collaborative HDRs. At the heart of this is a flattening of relations. Candidates are now junior colleagues, their research achieving greater recognition than ever before. Of course, the space between the research of the candidate and the colleague has always been one that, in the creative industries, has always been purposefully ameliorated. This new paradigm, however, charges this acceptance of higher degree research with a new potency, if not equal to, then certainly an active participant in the research culture of the university (Tower and Grbich, 2016).

4. Praxis: closing the gap between practice-led and practice-based modes of inquiry

The revision of our own HDR took the form of an exorcism of sorts. The problem lay in the emergence of hybridised creative research methodologies forged out of relations to other disciplines (something Frayling takes issue with).

As early as 2007, Estelle Barrett emphasised the value of 'piggybacking on other methodologies'. And as useful as Barrett's diagnosis of the then emergent doctoral program is, we argue that the threat to contemporary artistic research is not its valorisation but rather that of its methodologies (Barrett, 2007). For Barrett, writing more than a decade ago, the fate of the creative doctoral program was far from secure and every opportunity to increase the value of the degree through collaboration should be grasped with both hands. In James Elkins' later review of the field in 2009, 26 Universities in Australia and NZ offered at least one form of doctoral program in creative practice (Elkins, 2009). The figure today is now well over 30. For the new post-ACOLA paradigm the issue is not therefore, '*should there be creative practice doctoral programs*' but, rather, '*what are the methods and outcomes of a creative doctoral program that mark out the degrees of difference from other doctoral programs?*'

In our own internal restructurings, curricula review, the introduction of new associate degree pathways, and the emergence of new Bachelor of Creative Arts and Design degrees for 2018, we sought to examine the gap between the practice-led paradigm and the new practice-based modalities in research that have emerged in its wake. If practice-led research emerged from inquiry generated *from and for* an art practice, practice-based research articulated that practice emerged from the inquiry (Elkins and Whitehead, 2012). Where practice-led projects

articulated the capacity of the artefact to evidence knowledge in the world, practice-based projects saw the articulation of knowledge through the artefact. These are crude summaries of course. And within Elkins' own earlier resistance of practice-based forms of knowledge, the point of differentiation between 'led' and 'based' resided precisely in what was an assault on the authority of the work of art (Elkins, 2009). For others, the possibilities offered by practice-based projects was to liberate the work of the art and refocus its communicative potential (Hockey, 2003; Scrivener, 2004).

We sought to use that point of tension and differentiation to return to first principles and reconstitute a stronger, more inclusive sets of values that recognised the importance of new modalities whilst remaining respectful of existing practices. We retained a strong commitment to the imperative that accepted the work of art to be an artefact of knowledge. We retained a commitment to advancing studio-based methodologies but positioned such methodologies within a critical dialogue with post-studio and site-based practices. We maintained the vital examination of archives, histories, materials and processes and twinned these with an expanded study of auto-ethnographic material and the ethics of the digital. New collaborative methodologies would feature strongly in this new program: how do we work with external stakeholders; how do we generate networks of research; what are the practical and ethical concerns of collaborative research?

As Grbich and Tower argued, the culture of distributed knowledge production in the creative industries is one that demands an erosion of pedagogical hierarchies that enables what Jacques Ranciere named 'intellectual equality.' (Ranciere, 1991, Grbich and Tower, 2016). Even more recently, Mina Heikinaho suggested that such distributed forms of artistic research can resist more than hierarchies of pedagogy, that these forms can serve as powerful social functions of art in the world (Heikinaho, 2017). It is in this spirit that we engage new stakeholders to further erode the hierarchies and challenge the gatekeepers of research.

Decoupling as method

Without falling into another rabbit-hole of cultural studies and weak analogy, we propose what Chris Martin and Gwyneth Paltrow described in lieu of the officious terminology of separation and divorce as a 'conscious uncoupling.' Though it elicits sniggers then, and now, it nonetheless evidences the want to respectfully reorient a relationship and decouple a mode of practice from its present institutional frame. What would it mean to 'decouple' contemporary creative practice research from its disciplinary orthodoxies? Those orthodoxies, emergent in the 1990s and 00s in response to a particular challenge posed by the amalgamation of art schools and the University and the emergence of the first generation of creative practice-led

doctoral programs, remain valuable of course. But we are noting a turn - *and New Materialism may be just one* - that seeks to move away from the 'piggybacking' and valorising methods of the past into a return to first principles (Barrett and Bolt, 2013). The possibility offered by Frayling of *practice-for* remains, as Frayling noted himself, somewhat a future ideal. A renewed commitment to the artefact, over that of its researching, and the methods that underpin its creation, may be one future possibility. For now, the tension between 'led' and 'based', and between 'through' and 'for', remains a vital tension, one that generates as many possibilities as it shuts down.

An anxious conclusion

Christopher Frayling identified three modalities: the existent-*into*, the emergent-*through*, and the future-*for*. Frayling's early definitions serve a useful purpose of definition amongst the viscous nature of creative research where outcomes may at first appear into, through, *and* for. Frayling saw that there were essential values that defined the practices and outcomes of those modalities, values that might be worth returning to.

We live in anxious times. Our anxiety in this instance is, we suspect, that the artefact of art is under threat of replacement from the artefact of research. Recently, Honjohn Lin articulated this continued anxiety as such that, 'if an artwork can be replaced by art research, then what differences does art research stand for, in comparison to artwork? What will this research, specifically, target with and contribute to the field of knowledge?' (Lin, 2012) This resistance that has been around for some time now, for as Adam Geczy noted nearly a decade ago, 'it is finally the originality of the research claims rather than the art that are at stake' (Geczy 2009).

Our response to such anxieties then is that of a return to Frayling's earlier vital points of clarity. A renewed commitment to research-*for* – and its artefacts, the work of art – and a respectful differentiation of practice-led, practice-based, and alternative forms of research that have emerged in its wake.

Epilogue

In Elkins' reports on creative doctoral research (2009 & 2012), he noted vital points of difference that in many respects articulate the problem and the cure. For Elkins, the value of the Nordic doctoral program remains in the vital closeness of artistic-values in the production and assessment of the research. Whereas the UK and Australian model emphasises the bureaucratic model of research, heavy on specifying and quantifying the outcomes in terms that qualify for national assessment exercises (Elkins, 2012). Though Elkins' suggests a

sweeping and polarising expression, such point of differentiation remain a vital source of discussion.

On what foundation do we base the expression of research values today? The emergence of practice-led and practice-based doctoral programs have led to an enriched and diverse set of value propositions for higher education research. The variety of these research expressions indicate the richness of the field and towards possible futures. Research-led and research-based definitions, the 'research-for' and 'research-through' of the past 20 years, remain useful points of tension that we wish to sustain, at least for a little while longer yet.

If the first twenty-years of the creative research agenda was dominated by a necessary ontological imperative, 'what forms of knowledge does art provide in the world?', then the next twenty-years, we suggest, necessitate a teleological turn, 'what value do these forms of knowledge serve in the world?' We suggest a respectful return to points of difference articulated in Frayling, to articulate the careful points of differentiation between *into*, *through*, and *for* through the expression of practice-led methodologies and a renewed commitment to the artefacts of research that place the objects, images, performances, and affective registers of that research at the front and centre of its ethos.

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