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The intertwining of researcher, practice and artifact in practice-based research

Background

For centuries, doctoral research demanded a written document, and only a written document. Its purpose was to record for posterity the discovery or formulation of original knowledge that could contribute to the vast body of knowledge acquired by academia since knowledge first began to be recorded in such a manner.

But in recent years some in the health and education professions wanted to conduct doctoral projects that contained more than just research, because their professional activities required more than just research. They deal with real life and real people in the real world putting their knowledge into practice. In short, they wanted to create a *practice*-based research methodology.

There were some in academia who saw the possibilities in a new approach. And so, some schools in a few countries started accepting what is now known as *Practice-based Research* as an appropriate—and approved—form of research that could lead to solid scholarship and original knowledge.

Artists saw the (relative) success of their (perhaps more academic) colleagues, and decided it was their turn. They felt that their art—their dance, their painting, their sculpture, their novels, their music, their poetry—were all created through a process of research through practice. And that that art deserved to be accepted as worthy doctoral research *in itself*.

Orthodox dissertation committees insisted that while art was very nice, it was necessary to have a written document to explain it all. The artists responded as dancer Isadora Duncan once famously did: "If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it."

A compromise was reached. The artist would produce an artifact; the committee would receive a written dissertation. This way they would have an object to put on their school's library shelves. The comprehensiveness and length of that dissertation will vary, depending on the academic institution. In content it can be *entirely* stand-alone, in that no artifact is needed to convey, or help convey, the information n the document. In this case, the artifact is more of an appendage, an interesting example of the conclusions reached in the written document.

It can also be *partially* stand-alone, in that the artifact makes it much easier for the reader of the document to understand information in the document that can be fully understood only through some sort of experience other than text on a dissertation page. And, it can be *totally* dependent on the artifact, in which case the artifact not only illuminates, but completely and solely expresses the research and its

conclusions.

The next step, which is likely not far away, is for the artifact to be integrated within the written dissertation. The artifact will no longer be a separate entity, but will then be a integral part of the dissertation, even if the artifact is shown only as an image or other reproduction of the original. This is the logical extension of what has happened so far..

"New media", i.e. web/computer-based publishing, have now made it relatively easy and economical to produce digital-based documents that can contain graphics, audio, images, video, animation and more. The concept and execution of digital media is done by millions of people around the world every day. It is unlikely that the forces of tradition will be able to keep their text-only documents pure and unsullied by media.

The good news is that multi-media dissertations will enhance not only the experience of reading such a dissertation, but enhance also the prime reason for a dissertation in the first place: to document an original body of knowledge. Multi-media dissertations will enable wider and more rapid communication of the knowledge within the dissertation. Academics around the world will gain, the general public will gain, the author of the dissertation will gain through dissemination of her work, and the university will gain through its association with this widely-dispersed document and its contribution to knowledge.

Multi-media dissertations may not yet be here (and although of obvious value, are not essential to Practice-based Research) but artists still continue to fight for recognition as authentic academics. And the Practice-based Research doctoral is now beginning to descend to lower levels, currently even appearing in some masters level programs. It is here, and unstoppable.

Introduction
Practice-based Research (PbR) is a research methodology in which an artifact is *created* by the researcher. In almost all cases, there will be a written dissertation to accompany the artifact. This dissertation serves two major purpose. Firstly, it describes in depth the process of creation, relevant hypotheses, details of the methodology, the parameters of the project, data obtained, and the conclusions. It also provides a medium of dissemination of the knowledge obtained through the research, and it may also enhance understanding of the artifact itself. Secondarily, in some cases it serves a *political* purpose in that many universities are still less than welcoming to this type of research project, and require that a lengthy and traditionally structured written document be included in the final presentation. Since the purpose of PhD or MA research is not only to contribute original knowledge to the existing academic stock, but to obtain a graduate degree for the researcher, it is obvious that the researcher will therefore create the required written document.

Practice-based Research is becoming more prevalent throughout the creative academic fields, so that it can now be conducted by current, or would-be, architects, planners, artists, choreographers, software designers, filmmakers, videographers and many other professionals. The UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council, for example, includes (but not exclusively) under the term artist: "visual artists; performers; musicians; creative writers; architects; poets; choreographers; scenographers; theatre or film directors; designers; those working in the applied arts, fashion, curatorial practice, or film, video

and/or other multimedia"[1]. For convenience, in this paper I shall refer to all of these varied researchers as "artists", or more generally "researchers" or "practitioners".

Reference is frequently made in excerpts in this paper to "PhD". It should be noted that while PbR originally began at the doctoral level, it has descended into masters level programs, so the reader should recognize that in this paper the term "PhD", unless otherwise indicated, applies to both graduate levels. Also, in order to simplify the his/her dilemma, I will use "her" throughout.

This essay intends to demonstrate the uniqueness, the appropriateness, the value, the strengths and weaknesses of this research methodology.

What is Practice-based Research?

First, there is no universally agreed-upon definition of Practice-based Research. That discussion continues. To further confuse matters, there are other terms for this methodology, perhaps because the methodology has not yet formalized, rather than due to major differences in methods. These differences are more semantic than actual. *Practice-led Research* puts the emphasis on the practice rather than the research. *Research-led Practice* puts the emphasis on the practice. *Arts-based Research* is obviously specific to the arts, as is *Software Development as Research* to software. *Practice-as-Research* goes even farther. As Sarah Atkinson says in her sonic session for this module, "Practice-as-Research "refers to an output in which the art work is a research expression in itself. These kinds of PhDs where the practical element constitutes the entire submission are rare".[2]

I suggest that all of these are *subsets* of *Practice-based Research*, in that this nomenclature avoids both specific field of study and the concern as to which element of the project—research or practice—is dominant. For that reason, I will use that term or its abbreviation (PbR) throughout this essay.

In many, if not most, cases in PbR, the research practitioner is also the research subject. Together the two aspects—researcher and practitioner—produce an artifact as a result of the research. This is an artifact beyond the written dissertation itself. This artifact is something created by the practitioner— created as a result of, or enhanced by, the research of the practitioner. The research is a learning experience for the practitioner/researcher, the artifact is a more-or-less *tangible* product or expression of that research and its conclusions, and the written exegesis is an exploratory and explanatory documentation of the research process, and a recording of its goals, results and conclusions.

Estelle Barrett is concerned with the kind of research insights that can develop out of practice. She defines these insights as "praxical knowledge", a philosophical term borrowed from Martin Heidegger, and states that this knowledge "implies that ideas and theory ultimately are the result of practice rather than the reverse." She says further that theorizing *out* of practice is a very different way of thinking

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1   Arts and Humanities Research Council, *Research Funding Guide*, ver. 1.8, December 2009, p5
    http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Documents/Research%20Funding%20Guide.pdf accessed 7 January 2010.
2   S. Atkinson (2009) "Practice as Research" Sonic Session, *Practicing Media Research* module, audio file, available only
    to module students. As Atkinson points out, "rare" but not unknown. For example, Leeds Metropolitan University offers
    two masters level programs (MA Screen Media Cultures and MA Business) where the student can do a written
    dissertation *or* a project-based project.   Leeds Met's Postgraduate Prospectus 2010 –
    http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/lbs/courses/catalogue/professionaldevelopmentcat.pdf, accessed 7 January 2010.

than applying theory *to* practice.[3] Yet that is exactly what can happen during the PbR process.

Bruce Archer, one of the early advocates of PbR, wrote in 1995:

> "Some artists and designers, and some other creative practitioners, claim that what they ordinarily do is research. They argue that their art works or design products or other creative practitioner output constitutes new knowledge. Moreover, they claim that the act of publicly exhibiting, installing, manufacturing or distributing their works, constitutes publication. Therefore, they say, creative practitioner activity is synonymous with research activity. To what extent can such a claim be justified?" p.10

> Undoubtedly, in some circumstances, a striking art work or a radically new product or other innovation can itself constitute new knowledge, tacit or otherwise, that can be highly significant leading to major changes in people's perceptions, circumstances and values. Clearly, too, a great deal of practitioner activity entails some research of orthodox or unorthodox kinds, in support of the main thrust of the practitionership. It is not quite so certain, however, that the practitioner activity itself is quite the same as research activity, however much research it may be have been supported by." p. 10 [4]

How does PbR differ from other methodologies of research?
The key difference is that the researcher, practitioner and artifact all combine to be the *subject*. Unlike some methods of research, PbR does not analyze artifacts or texts created by someone else, recently or in the distant past. It does not directly study an individual or group of people, although the effects of the artifact on people (an audience) may enter into the research. Although the researcher will do a survey of appropriate existing literature, that which the project studies does not exist until the research project begins to create it. It is birthed by the project itself.

PhD student Peter Chapman has said: "The intellectual strategy for 'discovery' in the creative arts appears to be one in which material is brought forward for analysis, discussion and reflection, through making, rather than through observation or reason. Indeed, this is perhaps what gives it its unique cultural significance. Rather than being understood as somehow not intellectual, the creative process should be recognised as complementary to mathematical, scientific and philosophical thinking. Artefacts are not merely central in terms of outcome, they are central to the very realisation of outcomes, and hence must take centre stage from the very outset of a PhD programme."[5]

The collection of data is another area where PbR is likely to differ greatly from traditional research methodology. Simply put, there may be none. At least not in the traditional sense. With some types of research, data might be obtained, perhaps even quantitative. Audience reactions can be surveyed, The size of an audience (or number of viewers) can be determined. Reactions and audience size might be compared between two different versions of the same artifact. Time and costs could be considered. There may be data available when comparing different forms of materials or tools used in the creation. But the process itself does not let itself to producing data as do more empirical forms of research.

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3   E. Barrett and B.Bolt (eds) 2007, *Practice as research: Context, method, knowledge* I.B. Tauris, London
4   B.Archer (1995) "The nature of research", *Co-design, interdisciplinary journal of design*, January p6-13
5   S. Scrivener (2004), "The practical implications of applying a theory of practice based research: a case study. *Working Papers in Art and Design 3,* Vol 3

The research process
One of the characteristics of PbR is trial and error. The methodology is a cyclical process. When a work of art or other artifact is created, the artist is most likely trying to produce in the material world something that exists to this point only in her mental world. The clearer that vision is internally, the easier it is likely to be expressed as she wishes it. In a perfect world, perfect internal clarity might lead to perfect exterior creation. Alas, this is seldom likely. So the artist must perform a cyclical process. Exactly how that process might work depends on the chosen medium. With a painting it might simply involve painting over a section of the canvas. With music, it could be changing a few notes or a passage. With a metal sculpture, adding or removing a piece (with a marble sculpture, one might have to consider a changed but smaller sculpture). With dance, a different gesture, position or movement. With a novel, removing, adding or rewriting a paragraph or a chapter. With a software program, it could be re-coding the program or re-designing the user interface.

This cyclical process is one of the things that make PbR unique. It is a living process. While other methodologies may include an iterative process, in that a protocol might be modified before being repeated in a different situation, the cyclical process in PbR is a feedback loop in which there is a continual back and forth exchange between the developing artifact and the researcher. The researcher is continually experimenting, changing, and coming up with new ideas. In most cases, there is little if any lag time between the recognition of the need for change and actually making the change. It is not only a living process, but frequently an immediate real-time process.

A hypothesis does need to be created, but not just to fulfill academic requirements. The artist is always going to begin with a form of hypothesis, whether she is aware of it or not. "I wonder if I can do this", "If I do this, what will happen", or "If I do this and that, will the audience understand what I'm trying to convey?" It may be that the hypothesis changes during, or even arises out of, the practice, but for academic purposes at least there will be one or more hypotheses.

For academic purposes the researcher will need to search both literature and recordings (performance, visual, audio, printed, or artifacts themselves), not just for ideas but to see what works and what does not. And of course she will review her own past work (if not consciously, at least unconsciously). The artist *could* tell herself, "But I just create. I don't need to see or read about the works of others or discover what critics think. I produce for myself." This is a legitimate point of view for an artist, but not a legitimate point of view for an artist wishing to obtain a graduate degree, and who may wish to expand her awareness and knowledge of her field, her work, and her self.

The artist is also advised to keep a log of her thoughts, research, creative actions of the day whether she considers them a success or failure, and even her emotions. At the least, she may find it interesting at a later date. But most likely it will prove valuable when actually compiling and analyzing her research results and writing her dissertation.

Looking at the relationship between artifact and research, rather than artifact and practice, Hazel Smith and Roger Dean consider PbR to be a bi-directional process in that creative practice affects academic research, and research in turn affects, and even leads to, creative work. They see both processes as

"interwoven in an iterative cyclic web."[6] I would sum up by saying that artifact, research, and researcher/practitioner are all part of this interwoven, cyclical and inseparable process.

Exegesis and artifact

Since in most cases a written exegesis is required, it is important to look at this document and its relationship to the artifact.

There are ways of producing very creatively written documents which will satisfy examining boards. Chris Rust refers to an interesting example:

> "A colleague in creative writing has reported a PhD project in which the central activity was the writing of a novel. The novel, on its own, did not make clear the nature and outcomes of the enquiry which had taken place and, in other similar cases, research students have provided a conventionally structured and argued thesis to allow the research to be understood and examined. In this example, however, the student chose to provide a series of fictional documents (spoof interviews, correspondence and diary entries) representing a debate about the novel, which fulfilled the same purpose but allowed him to use the form of communication in which he had the greatest competence, and one with which his audience was also very familiar."[7]

Aukje Thomassen and Marieke van Oudheusden discuss the role of the exegesis (and the artifact) in the context of the MA European Media program at the Utrecht School of the Arts:

> "The relation between the thesis and the individual project is a relationship with mutual influence. The thesis provides a research based theoretical and contextual framework for the practical work performed in the individual project. The individual project should bear evidence of theories, propositions and assumptions. The individual project should be embedded in the thesis part as a case study. Relevance of theory and design should be shown at an early stage." Section 4.0

> "Theory and practice cannot be seen as separated parts. Theory and practice are partners of conversation who should be equally balanced. The intention is that the exegesis approach should contribute to a willingness to look beyond the immediate concerns of making an artefact; it should enhance an integration of ideas and results from the underlying research into the creation of the artefact....In our understanding the artefact is an illustration and shows research, the thesis underlies the artefact and describes the connection between the research and the product. The artefact is partly the outcome of the research and is as important as the accompanying thesis." Section 4.1[8]

Michael Biggs discusses the dissertation-artifact balance and the presumed importance of the artifact.

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6   H. Smith, and R. Dean (eds.) 2009, *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts* (Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities) Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press

7   C. Rust and A. Wilson (2001) "A Visual Thesis? Techniques for reporting practice-led research", *Proceedings of 4th European Academy of Design Conference*, Aveiro, Portugal April 2001

8   A. Thomassen and M. van Oudheusden, (2004) "Knowledge creation and exchange within research: the exegesis approach", *Working Papers in Art and Design 3*, Vol. 3

"One can now find regulations that specify that a PhD thesis should be 80,000 words, but in art and design, and other areas that offer so-called practice-based research, the word count can be reduced to 40000 words when the thesis is accompanied by a submission of artefacts...Therefore if as much as 50% of the word count is remitted in the case of artefact-thesis submissions we must conclude that the University considers that 50% of the relevant content can be communicated via the artefact. These artefacts are not just illustrating the thesis, they can be up to half of the argument of the thesis and of meeting the criteria for the award of the doctoral degree."[9]

A third goal
It could be suggested that a PbR researcher should achieve *more* than the usual two goals. 1) Achieve high standards and contribute original knowledge; and 2) earn the researcher an advanced degree.

I would suggest that the PbR researcher consider a possible third goal. 3) Because PbR dissertations are somewhat new at most academic institutions, and looked at less than kindly by many traditional academicians, I believe that the successful PbR researcher has an obligation to those who in the future will be contemplating a PbR degree, and to those in the past who have led the way. This means that the author/researcher/practitioner must strive to set and reach the highest standards for herself, both academically and creatively. If her dissertation can be pointed to by graduate students in other universities around the world as an example of the quality scholarship a PbR project can produce, she will have accomplished this third goal.

Strengths
One of the great strengths of PbR is that it exists at all. It was devised because traditional methodologies were *not* appropriate for the creation of an artifact. PbR was invented to provide a methodology that would be in concert with the creative process. To some extent, PbR is for many creative research projects not just the most appropriate methodology, it is the *only* one.

Presumably, all research methodologies have an effect on researchers. The effect on PbR practitioners can be particularly interesting because it is not common for artists to do the sort of expressed reflection on themselves and their work that can be required in this academic process. Artists conducting PbR projects report that they themselves have experienced significant changes during, and after, the course of the work. (See Student section)

In discussing the particular ability of PbR research to be disseminated, Michael Biggs states: "Research that can be communicated or disseminated is more desirable than research that cannot be communicated or disseminated, because it will have greater impact in its field." As he continues, "PbR has an experiential component and should be communicable to others."[10] (See Dissemination).

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9   M. Biggs (2004) "Editorial: the role of the artefact in art and design research" *Working Papers in Art and Design 3*, Vol 13.

10   M. Biggs (2004) "Learning from Experience: approaches to the experiential component of practice-based research" in: *Forskning, Reflektion, Utveckling*. Stockholm, Vetenskapsrådet, 2004, p. 6-21.

Weaknesses

Rather than weaknesses, I see challenges and specificities in using PbR. Unlike the case for researchers using standard and accepted methods of research, the PbR researcher assumes an additional challenge in that there is strong resistance to PbR at many universities. She must at those schools not only prove that her use of the methodology is of acceptable academic standard, she must prove that the methodology *itself* is valid, and justified to be considered a credible academic tool.

Another possible weakness is that the method is not for every researcher; it is by definition designed for those who wish to *create*.

Appropriateness

One can consider appropriateness in two ways: for the subject, and for the researcher. PbR is obviously appropriate for many, if not most and possibly all, projects whose subject of study is an artifact and its creation. But it is also more suited for certain types of researchers. Victor Burgin suggests that a visual arts PhD program may "provide a supportive environment" for three types of candidates:

> 1) An accomplished visual artist and who not only wants to write, but is capable of writing, a long dissertation; 2) one who received a thorough introduction to a specialist academic literature as an undergraduate, but has little experience of practical work in visual arts. This candidate is primarily interested in producing a written thesis, but seeks the close contact with an environment of art production that few humanities departments can provide; and 3) one who makes works of art and who also reads enthusiastically. This student is interested in ideas, and turns concepts encountered in reading into practical projects. The research of this type of candidate typically has a mainly practical outcome, with academic work playing a subordinate and 'instrumental' role.[11]

Burgin comments that the third type of student is in his experience the most commonly encountered kind on a visual arts PhD degree course.

Estelle Barrett presents a question which must be considered before selecting PbR as the chosen methodology for a project.

> In the arts, conventional modes of valorisation such as the gallery system, reviews and criticism focus on the artistic product and hence, lack sustained engagement with the creative processes as models of research. Such engagement is necessary to articulate and validate studio practices as modes of enquiry.
>
> A crucial question to initiate this engagement is: 'What did the studio process reveal that could not have been revealed by any other mode of enquiry?' [12]

Michael Biggs and Daniela Büchler reverse Barrett's question in a manner both intriguing and important: "What would be lost if a non-traditional form (PbR) were not used, i.e. if the content of the

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11 V. Burgin (2006) "Thoughts on 'research' degrees in visual arts departments" *Journal of Media Practice*, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 103-104

12 E. Barrett (2004) "What does it meme? The exegesis as valorisation and validation of creative arts research" *Text* Special Issue No. 3 April, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue3/barrett.htm> accessed 3 December 2009

non-traditional academic thesis were presented in the traditional form."[13]

I would suggest that both Barret and Biggs-Büchler can be answered as one. It is that process and relationship between researcher, research, and artifact which is the key to PbR's uniqueness. It is revealed through the use of PbR and would be lost when subject to a traditional methodology.

Practice-based research for media projects
Practice-based Research opens up new opportunities for media research. Traditional media research has focused on text, delivery, technological object of receipt, context, reception/decoding, and effects on viewers/listeners/readers. Now research can be done on creation and process by the practitioner herself. Media in particular lends itself to Practice-based Research, because it involves a creative process and produces a created artifact.

If a practitioner in the creative media wishes to obtain an advanced degree in academia while also practicing her art, PbR is an excellent methodology for doing this. It does in most cases require a mindset that is not generally part of a typical creator's everyday toolkit.

The practitioner must add on to her normal creative practice the burden (willingly, presumably) of daily writing, self-observation, self-questioning, and analyzing what she is doing and why she is doing it. She must be clear in her intention (although this intention may become clearer as the project progresses). Most importantly, she must recognize that her extra-practitional work is not simply to log or keep a journal. Her purpose is to do research; that is how and why her successful completion of the project will reward her with a degree, and how she can acquire new knowledge and insights to further her work. In order to conduct academic research, she must have not only intention in mind, but a specific intention to discover, and thus to contribute and disseminate, original knowledge, which can then be used by others to advance their own work and explorations.

This new knowledge can come from her practice, the artifact she produces, or both. It can even come from the interaction of audiences with her artifact. But it must come from somewhere.

Practice-based research for software development
Andrew Brown proposes a variation on Practice-based Research for the software industry[14]. He refers to this more specialized methodology as Software Development as Research (SoDaR). Brown suggests this special nomenclature because of the unique nature of software development, which is both interactive and cyclically iterative. This methodology would seemingly apply to most digital projects.

Brown divides the approach into three major stages which I would describe for more general and less educational usage as: 1) identification of the specific audience needs (learning, entertainment, information gathering, etc.) which require or can be assisted by the development of software; 2) design and production of the software; and 3) implementation and refinement of the software through use by its target audience. These stages align with the common stages of the software development cycle:

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13 M. Biggs, Michael and D. Büchler (2008) "Eight criteria for practice-based research in the creative and cultural industries" *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education* Vol. 7 Issue 1, p. 5-18

14 A. Brown (2007) "Software development as music education research", *International Journal of Education & the Arts* Vol 8, No. 6 11 July, <http://ijea.asu.edu/v8n6/> accessed 3 December 2009

planning, designing, developing and testing.

Because of its interactive, iterative process, SoDaR offers great flexibility for the testing of hypotheses. In fact, one can imagine that it could make it relatively easy to set aside one's original hypothesis and proceed with another related hypothesis with minimal effort. Because the proposed artifact can in most cases be re-designed so quickly, the researcher can respond to discoveries and try new approaches, either to investigate the same hypothesis or a new, related one.

Brown also points out that a dissertation is not the only written record resulting from the project. There is also the source code for the software program itself. While perhaps intelligible only to a relatively small percentage of academics, it nevertheless is available for inspection by academic and non-academic programmers throughout the world. And, if it were licensed under some form of Open Source, it could be utilized, modified and expanded by others into new and varied contexts and purposes.

Inappropriateness

Although obvious, it should still be pointed out that this methodology is not appropriate for the student who wishes to attain her degree at a school which does not accept the methodology. This is still currently quite limiting. Nor is PbR likely to be appropriate for the student who wishes to study an artifact, but not *create* one. It is, however, *not inappropriate* for a student who arrives in a research program with no creative experience. She can serve as an excellent subject for a project which examines the progress of a neophyte from rank beginner to a creator.

Cautions

One of the risks with PbR is the need for the researcher to mesh her creative energies with the structured academic requirements. Ian Jarvis discusses the dilemma of balancing between the inherent needs of art research projects and the equally powerful need of normative assessment criteria. "The risk extends to the possibility of self-censoring and self-abnegation of practice-led research, by constraining the explorative reach of art research projects in a concern for safety in assessment."[15]

A related warning has to do with the resistance to PbR in many universities. PhD student Peter Chapman related "The first major problem was that of the understanding, or lack of it, of the practice based doctorate by the broader academic community. This misunderstanding (opposition) manifested itself in some subtle ways. But the opposition was not always subtle."[16]

Audience

Biggs and Büchler suggest that "Research takes place in a context of relevance that is supplied by the audience."[17] In response to an identical research question, a theatrical community might expect and comprehend a very different form of answer than would an audience of physicians. Since the decoding of a project's question and answer will be done very differently by different audiences, care must be

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15 I. Jarvis (2009) "Significant method: a questioning of the importance of articulating method in practice-led research (a case-study)", S*tudies in Material Thinking*, Vol. 3, http://www.materialthinking.org/volume-3.php, accessed 8 January 2009

16 Scrivener op. cit.

17 Biggs and Büchler op. cit.

taken in the manner of encoding. The practitioner must keep in mind the desired context of the project's results and its potential, and desired, audience when establishing the nature and methodology of the project.

Students

Because of the unique quality of PbR in that the researcher is to a varying extent also a subject in the project, it is important to look at the effect of PbR on researchers.

Nancy De Freitas noted that the use of documentation "encouraged attentive, reflective processes" and that the process generated "growing confidence and excitement" in students in one postgraduate program that she studied. Here are some of her student comments:

> "The documentation has drawn me closer to the works and all the elements I use." "I see it as a way of releasing ideas and not losing good ideas, even in the professional context where the work may be driven by rigid issues, budgets etc." "I value my work more." "The documentation makes a difference from me as Annie (not real name) 'playing' to me as Annie, a reflective artist. It gives me a feeling of validation, it gives me confidence." "Also allowed me to take small steps and recognise them as significant." "I invested more of myself." "Value my own perspective more – greater confidence." "It is valuable because it is self propelling - it is encouraging." "It gave me pleasure to recognise certain features – it was a good experience." "The documentation process set up a safe framework for me to work." "Also my mental connection with the work was changed – I felt I could see more."[18]

Another example of how PbR can change a practitioner/researcher comes from artist Nithikul Nimkulrat. She states: "After the creative process ends and the artifacts eventually get displayed in an exhibition, the practitioner-researcher plays the researcher's role and looks back at the preceding artistic process. The practitioner-researcher analyzes and contextualizes the resulting artifacts as well as the creative process that went into it using the documentation created during the process and any relevant theories."[19]

At the conclusion of her paper, she writes: "As a researcher, I would not have realized how I could employ and analyze my artistic process as evidence relevant to my research without the help of documentation. As a practitioner, without multiple methods of documentation, I would have never been critical of my own creative process."[20]

Dissemination

Because of the nature of many creative artifacts, and depending on their ability to be photographed or sonically recorded, the Internet opens up many opportunities for the dissemination of an artifact and its associated documentation. The Internet and "new media" distribution also provide the opportunity for potential funders to discover the artifact. Jonathan Dovey sees great opportunities for academia to

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18 N. de Freitas (2007) "Activating a Research Context in Art and Design Practice", *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,* Vol 1, No. 2, July
19 N. Nimkulrat (2007) "The role of documentation in practice-led research" *Journal of Research Practice* Vol. 3, Issue 1, Article M6, <http://artsresearch.brighton.ac.uk/links/practice-led/Nimkulrat_2007.pdf> accessed 3 December 2009
20 ibid.

create its own independent networks of research-based production and distribution. He argues that the "Long Tail", as discussed in Chris Anderson's book "*The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More*"[21] creates funding opportunities for academic research projects once the creative industries fully understand that the "big hit" is no longer the only indicator of success.[22]

Elements from the process of PbR can also serve as a presentation of the thinking of the researcher. For example, Graeme Sullivan discusses how architect Frank Gehry uses models in the early stages of his design process to visualize, think, and experiment with his architectural project. Many of the models, composed of such materials as cardboard, blocks and crumpled paper, are described by Sullivan as being like "sketches in space". The models begin as "massing models" to establish volume and scale, proceed to more refined "study models" and then move to "site models" which are further refined and take into context the environment in which the structure will be sited.

In addition to being a vital part of Gehry's own research and design development, these models serve as *presentational interpreters*, which can be, and have been, viewed by a wider audience to aid them in understanding the thinking—and learning—that Gehry went through during the process.[23]

Artifact as attractor
One interesting likelihood associated with PbR is that once someone reads a written dissertation on the production of that artifact, that person is quite likely to want to see the artifact "in the flesh", or at least a video, photographic or some other appropriate representation of it—if the artifact is not already itself in such a format.

Perhaps even more interesting is that it is conceivable that some people who are first exposed to the project only through seeing or hearing the artifact, might be interested in reading the dissertation itself, in order to learn more, and understand more in depth, about the artifact and its creator. This would not be unlike DVD viewers who wish to use a disk's "extra features" to find out more about the video they have just watched.

Conclusion

Practice-based Research is a method that is more than merely appropriate for research of the artistic creative act and its output. It can become an integral part of the creative process, enhancing the quality of the produced artifact at the same time that it enhances the craft and self-understanding of the researcher/practitioner.

The method allows a unique interaction between researcher and process, researcher and artifact, researcher and herself, that can lead to results that meet high academic standards, contribute unique original knowledge, and produce an exergesis and artifact that can be easily, and widely, disseminated.

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