

Introduction: Practice as Research, Politics, Affect, and the Camera

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This introduction is intended to ground some of the exploratory field presented by the materials in this journal issue, on which the three loci of alternative methods and histories, devised filmmaking practices, and cross-disciplinary methodologies are situated. The contributors to the journal are all artmakers who use the camera—some established, some new, some actively working in academia, some working as professionals, several who work across all of these contexts. At least three things unite the contributors. First, we are all interested in new methods of making art. Second, we share a political commitment. This doesn't necessarily mean we share values or ideas about politics, but rather the conviction that our work is in some way of political import. Third, we all use cameras in our practice. Separating these three areas inevitably provides a false image of what we are doing, because they are so often intertwined. For many of us, making art in new ways that involve cameras is a method of doing politics, and separating out any one of these elements means that a working image of the whole is lost. At the same time, rather than trying to provide such an image, what the theoretical separation of these aspects of the contributors' approaches enables is a way of locating the value of this collective work in various academic and cultural contexts, inaugurating, refreshing and contributing to significant conversations about the use of cameras in making art politically.

This essay is therefore focused around three political topics which run throughout the structure of the collection. The first area, concerned with the fact that we are all invested in new methods of making art politically, relates closely to debates about the nature and method of practice as research in the creative arts in general and screen production in particular—practices that generate new approaches to making and documenting artwork. The second area, political import, discusses the way that new practices might generate different ways of knowing and how these might provide alternative strategies for engaging with the world than those given by liberal and neoliberal institutions and ideologies. The final area considers artmakers who use cameras in a range of different related media. It argues for the importance of the camera in today's cultural climate, and how that importance might be harnessed in as yet undocumented ways of valuing through artmaking and political action.

Practice as Research and New Methods of Making Art

There is a growing area of academic writing that is specifically concerned with practice as research relating to those who use cameras as an integral aspect of their practice. Following a now established academic usage (e.g. Nelson 2013; Barrett and Bolt 2007; Smith and Dean 2009), we take practice as

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research to mean doing something (practice) that generates new ways of knowing (research). But rather than presenting methodologies for knowledge production, the contributors focus on methodologies for processes through which we can engage in knowing. We also recognize it is not usually as simple as that. The multiplicity of methods by which this can be achieved are numerous. For example, Smith and Dean distinguish between practice as research, research-led practice and practice-led research (2009). Hansen and Barton follow the movement from creative development to research-based practice (2009). Riley and Hunter explore the differences between practice as research and performance as research (2009). Over the past decade, there have been ongoing debates about what practice as research actually means—what knowledge is, what scholarly knowledge is, and what the relationship between practice and the way we disseminate knowledge about practice is and/or should be.

Practice as research in performance studies has been a key academic progenitor of practice as research methods across a range of mediating materials. Practitioners using cameras evoke disciplines that use screens as exhibition methods. Both film and television production, for example, almost always use both cameras as production tools and screens as exhibition methods. Given these artmaking contexts, one of the early collections with some contributions similar in terms of subject matter to this one is *Practice-as-Research: In Performance and Screen* (Fuschini et al. 2009). In that collection, Jonathan Dovey's essay points out that innovative works are "rarely accommodated within the genres available to the hitfactory of mass media" (Dovey, 61). It is also our experience that the practice of making, or training in the making, of innovative works, however well-studied in film studies, has been difficult to sustain in film production programs. The dominance of a "hitfactory" in the industry has made it difficult to develop practice as research for filmmaking. Two recent collections focused on screen production are *Screen Production Research: Creative Practice as a Mode of Enquiry* (Batty and Kerrigan 2017) and *The Palgrave Handbook of Screen Production* (Batty et al. 2019). In addition, the journal *Media Practice and Education* (formerly *Journal for Media Practice*) has published many articles by those using cameras that document their work (for example, Nevill 2018) and sustains debates around what media practice as research is and could be. For example, a 2018 special issue focused on the question of "practice and/as media industry research" (Freeman 2018, 117–21).

However, it is important to recognize that while there is an evolving interest in screen practice as research, it remains a nascent area within the larger field of creative practice as research, certainly when compared with a discipline such as dance within performance studies (for example, Foster 1988). As Batty and Kerrigan articulate in their introduction, "screen/media/video production has been more tentative in its approach [than other disciplines] and has a less developed set of research literacies" (2017, 3). Or, as Leo Berkeley points out in his essay for that collection, "it is challenging to point a postgraduate research student in filmmaking research to a body of literature, that even in contested terms, provides a grounding in how they can make their film as a research activity" (Berkeley 2017, 30). The editorial focus of the present collection, and the approach to what practice as research is and what it means to write about it, specifically addresses these concerns and would like to sit alongside that 2017 volume in its offer "to provide a global benchmark of sorts from which others can contribute and move the discipline forward" (Batty and Kerrigan 2017, 3). These essays embrace a similar spirit of tracing the contours of an exciting new way of doing research. At the same, time they would also specifically like to enter the larger contemporary research impulse toward process-based methodologies that question underlying assumptions and to argue that practice as research with a camera and in filmmaking is young enough to be able to establish itself in alternative ways of working and communicating about that work.

Batty and Kerrigan write that creative practice research

requires peers to determine whether or not the work makes a unique contribution to knowledge. For this to happen, the contribution and how it has been arrived at has to be articulated clearly and systematically, and in the academy language is the currency of such an explication. (2017, 10)

For us, one of the great benefits of practice as research is that it challenges notions of what knowledge is, and that it can produce new ways of knowing. During the enlightenment in the West, the development of scientific and philosophical methods altered not only what we knew, but also our understanding of what constituted knowledge. For example, in *Event*, Slavoj Žižek outlines the difference between the development of a scientific ontic/ontological attempt to discover the world as it is through the application of scientific methods, and the approach of Immanuel Kant's transcendental philosophy, which instead attempts to discover the "universal structure of how reality appears to us" (2014, 5). Both methods not only produced new knowledge but developed new ways of knowing. Alternatively, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Thomas Kuhn famously argued that scientific revolutions involved paradigm shifts, new methods of understanding and processing data that are potentially incompatible with methods available until that point. We think that one of the most exciting things about creative practice as research is that it may enable such revolutions, even if they take place on a smaller scale than changing the course of science, because it can generate new ways of relating to and communicating with other people, other materials, the world, through artistic practice. It can generate new ways of knowing.

One of the important insights of practice as research in performance studies is that how we know, and any knowledge about what we know has material form. Historically, this idea can be traced to the idea of embodied knowledge, which Shogo Tanaka (2013) shows derives from the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Tanaka takes up Merleau-Ponty's discussion of touch typing, describing the knowledge inherent in this practice as one "that is not a reflex but rather comes about through repeated bodily practice. It is not distinctly explicit or conscious and hence we cannot articulate it as an objective designation. The knowledge of typing is deeply embodied" (Tanaka 2013, 48). There is a clear connection here to particular kinds of creative practice, most obviously those that use repetitions of bodily movements, such as acting or dance. For example, in the case of the actor's embodied knowledge acquired through many years of practice, that way of knowing is latent in the materiality of the actor's body. Embodied knowledge is closely related to tacit knowledge (Knudsen 2017), or knowledge that comes about through repetition of a particular task, whether we think of that task as primarily corporeal or not. These definitions effectively extend the realm of embodied knowledge to practices that may not seem at first to involve the body in the same way as acting. Thus film directors and producers develop their own ways of knowing even if their bodies are not always thought of as their instruments of knowing or expressing as much as their minds or their ability to orally communicate—as if the brain and voice were not part of the body. We follow Tanaka (2013) in refusing this Cartesian mind/body distinction, taking a position where all knowledge has material form, is embodied, in a film, with a camera, or equally in a piece of academic writing.

Staking the claim that materiality as artmaking practice is not only a way of knowing or expertise, but can also generate knowledge is important because knowledge implies not only a refined way of doing things (expertise) but also transferability. When actors work together, they understand something about what the other person is doing, not only through reduction of that doing to a

linguistic articulation, but through trained somatic contact with it. The knowing generated by artmaking practices is thus, in part at least, the enactment of the artmaking practice and the material contact it affords with media and the other practitioners and audiences. The production of new ways of knowing is the enactment of new artmaking practices, which is a dominant area that links the practitioners in this journal.

This conception of the potential of practice as research problematizes attempts to locate the research value of artmaking practice generating new knowledge in academic language. Such an attempt will inevitably involve a reduction of one way of knowing—artmaking practice—into the kind of knowledge that can be articulated in academic writing. Batty and Kerrigan note that academic language is the currency of determining whether an artwork contributes to knowledge, and that for purposes of sustainability and growth, it is important to legitimize screen production itself as a research practice within academia. The approach was vital to the early years of practice as research in the arts and humanities in the 1990s (see Nelson 2013), even though the distinction between ways of knowing had been present in the sciences for decades—for example, in the distinction between pure and applied physics.

However, conceptualizing material practices as knowledge presents challenges that can disrupt the knowledge-based form of this scholarly currency. The recent philosophical impetus toward process (for example, Deleuze studies) has meant that the ways of knowing in practice as research may challenge established ideas about what constitutes knowledge. It is by no means a given that conventional academic language should be the currency of knowledge in the university context or anywhere else. This idea is not new; for example, in 1993 Christopher Frayling wrote about the connection between art and knowledge that “the thinking is, so to speak, embodied in the artifact, where the goal is not primarily communicable knowledge in the sense of verbal communication” (1993, 147). However, if part of what practice as research points to is the diversity of ways of knowing that creative practice can offer, it may also challenge other academic assumptions about the communication of knowledge and the value of research. For example, if a big part of the value of art making is the emergent impact of the processual method, the reproducibility of the work within a preexisting knowledge paradigm may be of scant importance. Simultaneously, the manner in which different ways of knowing coexist and constellate have to be considered. The contributions to this issue of *Performance Matters* would like to participate in the conversations about theoretical work ongoing in this area.

For example, Christie, Gough, and Watt’s *A Performance Cosmology: Testimony from the Future* (2006) anthologizes documentation of the practice as research work of many practitioners working in performance studies. The structure of the book is original, conceived as a series of field stations on a journey through the Aberystwyth-based Centre for Performance Research’s history. Because it comprises “speculative essay, fiction, interview, fragmentary recollection or chronological table, it has been hard to create a necessary distance” (Christie, Gough, and Watt 2006, x). The reader is encouraged to approach it as a non-linear collection—the editors write “Journeys rarely end at the intended destination and even less frequently begin at their point of departure. . . . We wish you new discoveries on your journey through this cosmology—from whatever point or port you choose to enter it” (xi). *A Performance Cosmology* thus juxtaposes multiple forms of documentation and encourages the reader to do the labour of constructing a path through the work. Similar approaches to documenting process through critically reimaged typographic materials have marked texts in performance studies for some time, from, for example, Matthew Goulish’s “Memory is This” (2000) to Lynette Hunter’s *Disunified Aesthetics* (2014). The journal *Performance Research* has a consistent

record of supporting such experimentation, but it is far from widespread, or even acceptable, in academic publishing.

In a completely different way, the film-philosophy movement in film studies has embraced the materiality of knowledge production in its commitment to notions of films that think neither as humans do, nor according to a reductive form of knowledge as expressed in philosophical writing. For example, in *Filmosophy*, Daniel Frampton argues that film thinks according to its particular aesthetic properties, and he locates the site of the production of this knowledge in what he terms the filmind (2007). Alternatively, John Mullarkey argues that “film and viewer *make each other* through a coordination of speeds that generates a thought that is truly cinematic only when it is ‘truly philosophical,’ that is, by disrupting all previous categories as to what might count as philosophical thought” (2011, 96). Key to this disruptive process is the idea that “*Knowing is a part of a material process, not a representation*” (96, italics in the original). Thus both performance studies and film studies have embraced challenges to established ways of knowing by considering the means by which different ways of knowing may interact and constellate, and by conceiving of knowledge as material process.

This journal issue hopes to take up this challenge by documenting the various ways its authors communicate their practice. The articles do not represent an attempt to translate the knowledge generated by a work to an academic form, even as they sometimes emulate it to ease access for the reader. Instead, they attempt to respond to artistic practice that enters into a new context for discussion, alongside the work of the practitioner and other contributors, such that traditional forms of academic knowledge are present but not privileged. Thus, interviews sit alongside reflections on process, experimental writings, and traditional academic essays, which, in turn, all sit alongside the works the authors have made and the material processes by which they made them. A constellation of ways of knowing forms links, dissonances, and productive tensions as the reader encounters them. But this is also a collection of explorations *for* practitioners. Another key function the writings in this issue attempt is to perform as documents that can interact with artmaking practices using cameras in order to begin to attune artists to what is going on in their practice and thus inform its future development. The documents given here are neither solely knowledge repositories nor instruction manuals but may feed back to those engaged in artistic practice to attune them to what is going on when they work with cameras and allow them to act on this in the future.

Politics and Affect in Working with a Camera

A practice as research approach that focuses on ways of knowing also impacts on ideas of how research is designed, and what the relative importance might be to the research of the researcher’s experience of what it is that they do. In terms of research design, such an approach does not always advocate identifying research questions in advance of practice. To do so can limit what the research is doing to preexisting discursive fields of academic inquiry. It is the case that something must be designed in artmaking practice before commencing—but the very act of asking a research question that has to be answered before the creative process is undertaken limits the type of knowledge and the types of answers that process is likely to generate. Rather, the design of processual practice as research might seek to allow situations in which new ways of knowing may expand or emerge. Alain Badiou describes something similar to what such design aims at in his notion of the event. For Badiou, an event is a fundamentally ethical happening, something that “happens in situations as something that they [the human animal] and their usual way of behaving in them cannot account

for” ([1993] 2001, 41). A Badiouian event “compels us to decide a *new* way of being” (41). Practice as research that generates new ways of knowing does not originate with a question but the intention to create an event.

Events mark a break with established structures of knowledge. This leads to the key question of how we know events are occurring, since to *know* this in an *established* way would paradoxically invalidate the break that is supposed to have occurred. Through the notion of the event, the production of knowledge can be linked to the production of affect. Affect is one location where we might seek evidence of events, in distinct somatic responses to particular situations of artistic practice (Manning 2012). Batty and Kerrigan (2017) point out that if we use their premise of what practice as research is, then the practitioner’s experience does not seem particularly relevant to practice as research—excepting those cases where the research design would specifically necessitate this. Of course, any data that we use in research must be justified. However, in affective artmaking practices, an embodied moment of affect becomes a method of understanding, perhaps what dancers call the “felt sense” (Gendlin 2003; Rome 2014) that an event and a new way of knowing is becoming present. This kind of practice also involves the artmaker being attuned to the knowledge that emerges through the material processes they use, and being able to recognize how what is happening at a particular moment in a particular situation enables artistic response (Hunter 2019). Affect is not only a feeling but can become a wellspring that forms artmaking process: the way performers need to “listen” to one another or respond to a place, or the way a documentary cameraperson reframes in response to the evental moments that they film. Affect manifests itself very often in the artmaker’s body as physical feeling, responsive sensation, and/or thought. As such, the artmaker’s experience of their body becomes a key site of inquiry in thinking about and documenting affective practice. “What goes on in my body when the event occurs?” and “how might my body respond to that situation in an artmaking process?” are key questions for an affective politics of the camera (Hunter 2018).

Affect is also intrinsically intertwined with political events (Massumi 2013). The contributors to this issue share a commitment to political change through artmaking practice. What this means is not that our art contains overt political messages, or that we think more people will vote for the political party that we support. Rather, we view artmaking as a politically engaged practice. The filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard famously said that “the point is not to make political films but to make films politically” (Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin 1968, in McCabe 1980, 19). As with apparatus theory, art has the power not only to convey certain messages but also to encourage audiences to see the world in particular ways that may be governed by particular ideologies. Perhaps the most famous examples of this idea in film studies are Laura Mulvey’s notion of the male gaze and the way it informed Hollywood cinema’s propensity to encourage misogyny in the viewer (1975) and Jean Narboni and Jean-Louis Comolli’s article “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism” (1969), which showed how the form of Hollywood films such as *Young Mr. Lincoln* (dir. John Ford, 1939) encouraged viewers to identify with particular ideological viewpoints and operations. This political result of identification with ideology came about not because of a reductive “message” encoded in films, but because of the way films were made, using a production line model in a capitalist “factory of dreams” that tried to extract maximum profit from audiences. There are plenty of exceptions to this rule, but the point is that the way of making something is always a politically situated practice, and that the method of production directly affects the specificity with which audiences are politically situated in relation to that something.

Therefore, changing the way that films get made may allow filmmakers to engage audiences and themselves politically in alternative ways. If we use cameras to engage with the world in new ways, then we are doing a new politics. This is one place where politics meets affect. As a site that potentially disrupts established ways of knowing and allows new ones to emerge, affect, and the way we develop process from affect, is profoundly political. We call this “politically affective practice.” It is political because it is related to politics, as are all structures of expression. It is affective (as opposed to effective) because the political change it produces is measurable only by the way that those who engage with it—audiences and practitioners—are fundamentally affected by that engagement in terms of their socio-political presence. This kind of political change draws on the term “emergent,” theorized from the distinction between the sociocultural discourse of liberal hegemonic political structures and the sociosituated performativity (Hunter 2019) of the groups positioned alongside those structures. The distinction has been carefully articulated from phenomenology in fields such as AfroAmerican studies (Wynter 1992), Indigenous studies (Wilson 2008), and feminist studies in science and technology (Haraway 1988). It is in this sense that our definition of practice as research takes on a political meaning. To conduct work that seeks to enter into discursive realms of established, often institutionalized knowledge production is to pass over the possibility of ways of knowing, making, and living that sit alongside this structure, a possibility for which this collection strongly advocates.

Copresence with the Camera

This approach hopes to contribute to debates around practice as research in film and media studies, screen production, and creative practice in general. The *Copresence with a Camera* issue is firmly interdisciplinary, and its title is carefully chosen. Many of the contributors are doing significant work by making things that might be identified as films, yet they do not come from film studies or film production backgrounds. They may not even think of themselves as filmmakers, and may indeed find film conventions anathema to their political needs. As well as traditions of filmmaking, the contributors draw heavily on traditions of artmaking and practice as research in other disciplines: from installation work, to lecture format, to digital holographs. This journal issue directs the reader to the materiality of the “camera” rather than the “screen” because it is concerned with the processes of making work. While many of the artmakers here exhibit on screens, and some consider the screen an essential element of their processes of making, cameras provide a more appropriate locus to centre the contributors’ practices. These artmakers have backgrounds in a range of academic disciplines—film production, film studies, theatre, fine art, digital arts, cultural studies, African American studies, and performance studies, to name a few. The issue calls on interdisciplinarity through shared concerns with the common and disparate affordances that cameras can generate, and through examples of work that clearly merge different artmaking practices, for example, live performance work that merges interactive theatre with live video feeds.

Cameras can act as tools that help artists to develop politically affective ways of working within their practices. This means that there are two common methods of making works with cameras not represented in the issue. In the first method, the practitioner has a goal and picks a particular tool to achieve it—I know that I want to entertain an audience by adapting this screenplay into a Hollywood film, and I know that using a camera allows me to do this. In the second method, the reverse happens, and the camera is loaded with a set of presuppositions about what can and/or should be achieved by using it—this camera comes preloaded with a set of filters, or software programs, so I’d better apply them to my images. According to the first method, the camera is a

mere tool to fulfil the vision of the artist. According to the second, the artist is a mere tool to fulfil the vision of the camera, or at least the people that design, make, and market it. In contrast to these methods, the practitioners writing in and interviewed for this collection work *with* cameras as material things. The work is rarely, if ever, goal-oriented in the ways described above, in which it ties in with a product-driven idea of research design. Here the documented processes of practitioners working with cameras reveal what practitioners and cameras can do together as a whole greater than the sum of its parts. That is why we have called this collection *Copresence with the Camera*: it is about the things that can happen when particular people team up with particular machines. By using cameras, we can see, experience, and capture the world in ways that are not conceivable without it. We can change ourselves and offer a platform from which audiences and other practitioners may do the same.

Cameras are not only interesting tools but also highly important things in the twenty-first century, and the relative democratization of access to them has made this more the case than ever before. Cameras are important culturally; everyone with a smartphone has a camera that can open the door to social media apps. YouTube has proved a massive success—at least in volumetric terms—in distributing user-generated content. Cameras are important politically: among other functions, cameras are now frequently used not only to propagandize for power but also to document abuses of power. It is also clear that more and more artmakers are using cameras in their work, and that cameras appear to hold still untapped latent potential for those both within and without traditional filmmaking contexts. But many things are not yet clear—the effects of democratization of access to cameras are ethically and artistically ambiguous: they have been both integral to and abusive of political movements as diverse as Black Lives Matter and the Iranian anti-government protests of 2009. Cameras are more important than ever, but how that fact and the democratization of access to them might be harnessed to make interesting, valuable art remains only partially answered. This issue of *Performance Matters* attempts to offer an image of a constellation of artmakers using cameras to make art in a variety of ways that challenge normative practices and open up the camera to seeing things differently.

All of this is to argue for a situation in which the artmaker's claim to ways of knowing is taken seriously as artistic process, and that creative practice as research might seek to bring academic knowledge closer to a perception of knowing as experienced and used by artmakers rather than the other way around.

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