***15 Books: ENDGAME***

A preamble

A/n aide memoire – of sorts

Whose memory? Perhaps an open question as memory is shared here in the sense that as I look back at these 15 books which have in some way influenced my thinking on the subject of art-research my thoughts gather in all the authors I knew, all the colleagues I’ve worked with, held endless discussions with, all the PhD students whose work has informed –sometimes changed- my thinking –all of them are drawn into

this memoire.

The memoire might also be an expiation of guilt from the educator who finds an endless ambivalence about the relationship between the research rules and accepted norms of research, particularly at PhD level and what actually happens when an artist begins to tackle a subject of enquiry because the rules can obviously obtain: research questions; subject of enquiry & field; research methods; findings; summary; recommendations to the field, all accepted and worked through by several generations of artist researchers. It is as so often a question of precise interpretation: that is the specificities of the methodology; the ways in which the subject of enquiry might remain elusive; the understanding that the research findings might be in a constant state of flux, even post submission; do the recommendations to the field come in the same guise as those in any other discipline? Etc, etc..

I have always over-analysed, made things too complicated. This rolling out, recorded text is an attempt simply to stick to what I find in these fairly arbitrarily selected 15 books. I have avoided too much interpretation, tried to stick to what has been published. Most books are the result of several years of accumulated material and requisite evidence and often much of the material has already been published, is well known to the relevant networks of interest. This means that it is well worn, maybe even out-dated. Old hat. Passé. What now? Those artists taking PhDs now, those designing and organising this W-A-P exhibition at the Stanley Picker Gallery- maybe other artists, film makers, designers or whoever -are all producing different kinds of publication, much more vital and energetic. Exciting. I shall begin this endgame memoire -of sorts.

1

Dombois, F et al (Eds) (2012) *Intellectual Birdhouse Artistic Practice as Research*, Koenig Books, London

This is the first book because it opens up to art’s conflicting stories and presents what art can do, beyond theory and practice labels. The first essay ‘Spying on Sparrows’ by Jan Svenungsson prints an excerpt from De Chirico’s novel, *Hebdomeros*. The protagonist, Hebdomeros left his district to seek out pine trees in a particular park from whose branches he could spy on sparrows. He did this so repeatedly that he became part of the tree; he became *platformised*; he was ‘turning into a piece of wood’ on a platform the viewer could only imagine and from which the sparrows ‘looked really monstrous’. Svenungsson sees this image as not fully realisable, as specifically ‘unfulfilled’. An ambiguous experience, which Svenungsson sees as a dilemma and a central finding relating to the separating domains of words and visual images so often assumed to be complementary. Like this author I’m interested in ‘the artist who experiences a sincere need to express him or herself *in addition to* visual work, in words.’ Like him, I’m interested in the tactics used by artists whose texts elude easy understanding- *Hebdomeros* does not have paragraphs or single lines of thought ; it is a kind of piling up of thought which Svenungsson understands as a trigger to De Chirico’s late paintings, an ‘implicit reference’.

*This extra knowledge does not, however, in itself explain the quirks of the novel’s narrative. There is no way to know exactly what is supposed to be taken away and learned either from text or image. …..Precision in either form of expression, visual or textual, is the tool which will bring us to this point of uncertainty and promise*.

The introduction speaks of art’s conflicting stories:

*Depending on one’s point of view and the questions asked, Artistic Research becomes legible as an integral part of various narratives- and its agents and outcomes similarly tell us not one but many different stories.*

The editors nail their interests in the introduction:

*The intellectual birdhouse that interests us is an open architecture that is set up outside, in the field or forest, and brings together many different living things. It is a place in which space is also given to local and material thought, resisting transparent translation. We are interested in deep knowledge, which cannot be skimmed off to be consumed without effort*.

*Intellectual Birdhouse* sets itself as critical agent against what is seen as the fictitiousness of the knowledge economy, which it compares to ‘the reality of art’:

*…..and who would have thought that art would become the link to reality in a world that is losing its grip in the name of knowledge?*

Contributors to IB seek an intellectual position beyond theory or practice designations and speak of the difficulties in negotiating in the context of existing discourses and intellectual frameworks. In the context of the framing of the PhD such difficulties assume even greater proportions. In the ‘Logic of Blindness’, the thirteenth essay, Marcus Steinweg sees art as ‘an affirmation of contingency’ as it deals with discovery and as such an artist needs ‘to affect all knowledge with a constitutive not-knowing, with its blindness, its dizziness and the irreducible remainder of disorientation.’ Steinweg abhors the construction of coherencies ‘at the price of reductive simplifications, in order to offer pedagogical assistance to the subject, promising it orientation by providing it with *consistencies*.’ Steinweg offers the image of the incommensurability of orders within what is known as fact and that which is to be pursued precisely because it is not-yet-known, the ‘impossible’ as against ‘the possible’ already inscribed within authoritative regimes. He writes, art has ‘a pact with contingency’ and with what remains elusive. My own research (1996-2000) started with an understanding of these ideas of not-knowing, of the powerful contingency of art practice marking it out in ways which appear specific but whose full meaning remain elusive. The first PhD which generated these thoughts was Elizabeth Price’s PhD titled *sidekick*, (University of Leeds, 2000). At its core this enquiry demonstrates sets of relations, studio to factory, manufactured tape to artwork, writing to making work- through a research soliloquy addressed to that process. It is deliberate. Thoughtful. Provocative and elusive. On one level it acts out Marcel Duchamp’s concept of the rendezvous: the endless return as the central artwork, ‘boulder’ was endlessly repeated, elusively in *Art Monthly* and in a post PhD submission exhibition at Gimpel Fils gallery in 2007.

Against perhaps an endless talk of not-knowing –for good reasons- we must place artists’ very considerable knowledge of what it is they do and how they might go about more appropriately deploying their skills and understanding than existing regimes of research might predict. The single most useful essay to begin to rethink how this might be done is also in IB ‘Fine Art And Research’ by Jonathan Miles. Miles attempts to connect philosophical ideas pertaining to invention, presentation and sense in contrast to the research norms of method, representation and signification. Miles writes that he sees this as ‘a more developed platform’ for understanding ‘what might be at stake’ for art-research. This could take us back to Christopher Frayling’s caution about what he framed as research *for* art, the one kind of research which played into power politics. (RCA Papers, 1993). It might be appropriate here to quietly wonder if philosophical thinking might offer a means to substantiate art-research PhDs. As an aside James Elkins said he was offering philosophical ideas about appropriate types of what he calls studio art PhDs (2009), but what he offered instead was a typology. More of this later. What Miles is at pains to do in IB is precisely what Elkins asked for in 2009, which is for art-research PhDs to take the art ‘along with its making’. This can only be done by those commentators and PhD supervisors who actually understand what it is to make art. An obvious fact but one which gets entirely subsumed in many of the publications setting out what a PhD in the practice of the Arts should be. My own sense of unease about commentaries seeking to insist on what research for a PhD should be was compelled by international discussions in 2005/6 which sought to pin down specific research methods, methods which, according to some commentators (eg Michael Friedman) were to be outlined in advance of establishing the full enquiry as a way ensuring methodological certainty. Against this, Miles in ‘Fine Art and Research’ sets the enduring philosophical problem raised by Immanuel Kant in his three Critiques of the precise relationship between cognition and sensibility, of knowing and perceiving and how within this conundrum art might offer –as opposed to theory – endless interpretation. This might be crucial as ‘the work of art answers its own laws only if it is incommensurable on the grounds of theory’. What is important to art practice is invention, not the methodological certainty of deductive reasoning. Miles nails complex issues accurately in my view:

*Although art repeats itself in all artworks, the central desire that motivates the production of art is for originality, a form of singularity that is anti-habitual, heterogeneous and eruptive.*

Miles goes on to say that art is both a thing and a speculation ‘that allows each individual work of art to disturb the historical lineage to which it nevertheless belongs’. He adds,

*Research processes in art require a deep understanding of how our conceptual vocabulary has been formed. It is at this point that we find a relationship between the formation of both language and form within the work of art.*

Will this lead to a kind of closed shop of thought about art or does it do again precisely what James Elkins called for in 2009, that is a conceptualisation of the art-research PhD? I think rather Miles begins to offer sound guidance to fellow supervisors of PhDs about how to negotiate across and through the normative assumptions of research procedures, such as method, representation and signification through a careful consideration of terms more appropriate to art and its histories and vocabularies, that is invention, presentation and sense. Invention is well worn conceptually in art’s histories. Here, Miles sees it through a Derridean perspective to open it onto ‘the future of a possibility’, a practice that disrupts conventional use of discourse upsetting expectation and initiating movement through its ‘singularity’. Is this ‘logico-discursive’? Does it adhere to the capacities of the imagination? Or to Derrida’s truly complex thinking? What is precisely accurate here is this:

*With practice –based research, the possibility that is opened up is that both the works of art in question and the process of theorisation could in some way occasion the reworking of their relationship, which has little by way of established ground.*

Whatever one might feel about the substitution of method by invention or representation by presentation or signification by sense this idea that the inventive capacities of art practice might disturb existing theoretical construction nails what seems to be little understood about the potential disturbance of art to theory. John Matthews (1991) asserted the Surrealists’ poèmes-objets were newly theorising entities because they are both poems and sculptures, simultaneously, a conceptual invention. Can one go as far as to say they are ‘theoretical objects’ as Mieke Bal asserts for Louise Bourgeois’ *Spider*, (1993), seen by Bal as a complex entity which disturbs surrounding discourse in the use of existing concepts. In this Bal and Miles concur because this line of thought delivers the understanding of invention as side-stepping representation: the invention presents itself. It opens up what Miles calls the ‘play of presentation and representation’. This ‘play’ between invention and method and presentation and representation reflects the complexity of process which art sets in motion. I can barely follow Mile’s return to Kantian thought in relation to the concept of presentation but the idea of presentation suspending ‘the powers of the subject’ –of course endlessly in retreat in substantial art practice- to determine meaning in material form, yes, that I do understand. And the following:

*Aesthetic presentation operates through a form of structural dislocation, firstly through the detachment of aesthetic judgement from practical and cognitive fields, which allows for art to be dissociated from functional contexts……the importance of aesthetic judgements lies in the work of presentation…..presentation displays the journey of becoming*.

It is perhaps a question, in the end, as Miles suggests as to whether we privilege theory over thinking, thinking which is immanent and comes through the practice of art, art as it reveals itself, as it is, or not. Such thought is a kind of ontological moment of realisation. Or is this non-sense? Miles tries to take the reader beyond theory ‘as an inherited form’. Art produces its context:

*In effect, understanding should be focused on the becoming of art, which in the contingent sense is the reframing of context*.

A momentary disturbance perhaps, certainly a tension between what is already in place and what has been newly conceived as art. Miles deploys Kant, Derrida and Nancy’s thinking to shift the rhetoric of the research process. In his view art places questions in relation to theory. Surely this is what research must do:

*The potentiality of research precisely relates to the investigation of a whole number of striations that occur when placing different fields in relationship to one another.*

Art is always in pursuit and avoidance of a specific theoretical ground:

*Practice-based research in the Fine Art context will always give rise to controversy, since it is without ground in the proper sense; but this can be an opportunity, as opposed to a defect.*

The essay ends on a note of hope:

*The seeming exhaustion of the figures of thought within contemporary art, the possibility of a new structure of desire capable of inventing novel figures, is the basis of a dynamic research culture. In the words of Derrida, such a notion of research would be ‘allowing the adventure or the event of the entirely other to come’*, (Derrida, 2007).

None of the above would be possible without a condition of uncertainty, which is the domain of art. At the very end of IB Renée Green calls for the ‘infinite possibility’ of art to be recognised and suggests that this could be realised through novel modes of networking and collective working, which she describes as ‘collective assemblages’.

How is it possible then to return to books? I hope that those books I’m trawling through either offer up collective assemblages of views which seriously engage with the issues surrounding art as research or my reading offers complimentary insights to existing and yet-to-exist collectives of thinking in this arena.

2

*Geist* no. 11,12,14 2007-2008

This next book is definitely in a book format but it is a journal which published one-off, stand alone projects where each project determined the presentation of material. In fact, the presentation in terms of cover is low key: mint green, white border; *Method* placed at the centre of the front cover just above a sun or moon circle which radiates white lines. This issue is *Geist* no. 11,12,14 2007-2008. The project was not repeated. The publication was based in Stockholm. This issue of *Geist* is the result of a working group being brought together to deliberate on ‘the purpose of inquiring about the meaning and status of the method within artistic practices and in artistic research’. Two main goals emerged: to propose different ways of approaching the question of method and to discuss the possibility of such a discussion in relation to the concepts of field, method and practice. One of the key questions (following on from Miles’ essay in IB), is:

*What are the possibilities pertaining to methodology where practice rather than theoretical reflection is the point of departure? What kind of practices can stage, or be staged by, such a methodology?* Also:

*How is knowledge mediated?*

The introduction begins with useful speculations about how a practice might ‘recurrently restructure its own conditions’. Right away the group defines art’s capacity to de-stabilise logical rules. However, how to go about defining art’s methods and whether they are ‘qualitatively different’ from other research methods is left hanging. The project in hand then concerns how method works within its field and its practices. The decision was taken to start with artists describing individual practices and the ways in which each incorporate this question.

This is how the first and most compelling essay starts:

*Every method holds its own aesthetics and carries its own gestures, discourse and history within the work of art. Methods manifest their performances in the work*.

This is a bid by Magnus Bärtås to talk of an *aesthetics of methodology*, which he conceives as a conceptual strategy, one which is definitely contingent and constantly changing and being re-examined. Bärtås describes method as threefold: constructing a motif; finding a technique and the one which most concerns his text, the ensuing narrative, which is constantly re-modelled from within the practice. But, as Bärtås admits artists do not readily talk about their work; they have to find an appropriate means for a kind of self-alienation to do this. He quotes Allan Kaprow in 1950s advising fellow artists not to take the process of writing too seriously because it is only in that way,

*when the words become most perfectly soliloquized that they take on something of an air of authenticity*. (We can think here of the numerous research soliloquies by researching artists, eg Maureen De Jager, (KU, 2019.)

Bartas cites Ian Wilson’s speech-acts with approval because they are ‘an aesthetics of thought with its own style and formalism’. They also can be seen as the subject, method and narration of Wilson’s work. But Bartas is aiming for a more complicated narrative construction removed from what word savvy artists have already produced, an art method which works horizontally and vertically. A kind of multi-dimensional narrative, fluid in nature.

Saul Albert writes the next attempt to respond to one of the key questions: of knowledge production. Albert approaches this as a question of a field as knowledge production. In his own art work he sees his practice as ‘not-just-art’, a phrase borrowed from Matthew Fuller in A *Means of Mutation*, 2007, who describes his art as proliferating and opening onto what is *not*-art. Albert then describes this field of knowledge production as a ‘blank domino’ which can be coupled to any other field. Then ducks the question. This essay is robustly cynical about the whole business of attempting to fit not-just-art to any of these key questions:

*This question doesn’t really mean anything outside the self-justifying imperatives of the academic institutions and their reflexive struggles to adapt to their dwindling relevance in knowledge production.*

The next essay by Tone Hansen also asserts that art must break away from imported methods. Hansen says he has always resisted any theoretical discussion concerning methods of knowledge production. He considers that even the drive to construct art methods distinct from academic models already in place will have a conservative impact on art. Tensen moves on to consider how methods of presentation which keep the art current might be useful. Jan Kenneth Weckman, in the fourth essay, offers the image of art practice and its methods being a ‘fictitious laboratory’ for knowledge production. Weckman indicates that there is no single methodology that could be sustained as a model: methods could hit against the concerns of form. Eventually, Weckman begins to configure a testing relationship between theory and art, where in his view there should be a meeting point, perhaps through seeing each as modes of rhetoric; art then as pertaining to media, form and narrative would lead to the *rhetoric* of art, as method. This is explored by the contributor group who give a response at the end of this issue of *Geist*. The feeling is that Weckman’s contribution is the most significant (or is it simply the most articulate?) because Weckman sees rhetoric as a device to link across different fields because it is rhetoric which links ideas, forms and methods and is central to communication across fields of thought. Rhetoric is both the content and the determination of method. If this were to be taken up as an approach to methodological questions, then through its application divisions between artistic and other methods, between art and theory, for instance would cease to be major concerns:

*The difference between theory and practice is put out of play and a perspective opens where artistic practice can be understood as theoretical practice*.

However, if one places Bärtås’ approach to an aesthetics of method and its concomitant destabilising of rules, next to Weckman’s acceptance of rhetoric and its capacity to disappear the divisions between practice and theory, we can see that rules, in this case, of rhetoric are in play. Weckman’s essay is in strong contrast to ‘No-How: stopgap notes on ‘method’ in visual art as knowledge production’ by Sarat Maharaj which proposes we think about non-knowledge, ie knowledge which is not without knowledge but must be approached differently. After a series of examples of artists’ practices, including Marcel Duchamp’s on his ‘Large Glass’, Maharaj writes this:

*I am left with the thought that method is not so much readymade and received as something that has to be ‘knocked together for the nonce’ – that has to be invented each time with each endeavour.*

How then to approach the relationship between the particular and general? Drawing on Deleuzian thinking Maharaj suggests a kind of fluid inter-modality of the singular and the generalizable. This seems full of potential, of indistinct possibilities, which of course may not draw us nearer to any plausible rethinking about method and fields of knowledge.

There is no easy answer to any of these key questions but this issue of *Geist* pays serious attention to a host of related questions. The editors respond to each of the essays in detail (pps259-334) attempting to find observations which might unify the findings. This proves difficult and seems inevitably to recoil to the central divisions between any conceptualisation or system and sensibility. Finally, finally, the editor group GOU opine that any categorising process is designed to keep anxiety at bay: methodological certainty; the EU Bologna Process; How-To research manuals, the drive is the same, ‘to put things in their place’. GOU offers dissent from this. Hence this collection of essays; its extensive response to the Bologna process opens onto a richly diverse set of speculations about how to approach questions of method from the perspective of art practices which determine how knowledge is to be mediated. The key understanding for me when I first read this journal/book was Bärtås’ articulation of an ‘aesthetics of method’, an understanding which encompasses distinct processes and modes of thinking, practice and immanent knowledge construction.

3

Kiljunen, S & Hannula, M (Eds.) (2002) *Artistic Research,* Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki

The next two books come out of the very lively and influential research arenas for the arts in Finland. The first, *Artistic Research* edited by Satu Kiljunen & Mike Hannula came out in 2002. It was the first publication which helped to fuel my own thinking after two phases of research into art-research PhDs (1996-2000; 2001-2002). It is now difficult for me looking back at this book written 17 years ago because when I came across it it acted as a clarion call to think more deeply about what a PhD through the practices of art might be. Now, I have complex demands on my own understanding which has drawn so much from submitted PhDs, from working closely with artists on their PhDs in progress and from participating in PhD research seminars. There is no doubt in my mind that the real stimulus for me comes from this live source. Now, when I look again at Kiljunen and Hannula’s essays and the others in this book I’m looking much more objectively. I note now that Hannula is a doctor of political science. This explains how in this and future publications he insists on a close investigation of links between the arts and the sciences (2005; 2008) often edging towards an irritation with art-research in that comparison. However, that is to run ahead.

In *Artistic Research* of 2002 the concerns are ‘the meaning of artistic research, its essential characteristics, its message and goals, and ultimately, what art at its best could be’.

The introduction by Hannula states that artistic research breaks from objective science research and seeks other domains, not through what might be anticipated, ie art history, philosophy or sociology of art but through means which are yet to be determined. Artistic research is a new field. Hannula predicts that there are no easy answers yet but what seems to be available across essays by participants is the question of self-reflexive practice as distinct and more generally available beyond arts practices:

….*artistic research is always considering with great deliberation and seriousness what it is and might be, and what it should be.*

A good place to start. Kiljunen outlines in the first essay, ‘Artistic Research in Fine Arts’ the importance of the research cultures being built by artists with substantial art practices, whose knowledge and skills can be used by other researchers. Since Marcel Duchamp, Kiljunen thinks art has proffered a conceptual basis. The PhD in the Finnish Academy of Fine Art is a ‘demonstration of artistic skill and scholarship’. Interestingly theory appears as a separate and crucial component in the training programme. This appears to set up an uneasy relationship to the clear view that artists are social actors within the different contexts of art and it is these, the contexts, which determine the practice. Does this bend one’s thinking to the integration of the theoretical and practical? It seems there might be a slight mismatch between ambitions for the future and what is in place in terms of supervision and existing research cultures because the ambition for the publication is definitely to expand and more fully develop discussion about art: its philosophy and history of ideas; its fundamental concepts whether philosophical, semiotic, psychoanalytical or sociological and its various relationships to society, ethics and politics. Kiljunin’s idea is that this might lead to a new kind of theory. However, the research seminars seem to fall into 3 types: seminars on students’ work; on books (art-theoretical concepts; theory of contemporary art; politics and changing status of the artist etc.) and on group visits to exhibitions. Theory seminars are thought to be the lynch pin of the seminars and crucial to the development of status and parity for the new artistic research higher degrees. The emphasis is firmly placed on publication and the public processes of evaluation of artistic research within the broader cultures of academic research in this training programme.

The second essay by Sven-Olov Wallenstein ‘Art and Research’ underpins the ambition to lay claim to theoretical mastery by outlining ‘a short history of the concepts of art and research’ leading to a consideration of theory and practice in contemporary art. Here Wallenstein underscores the tension between the drive for artistic autonomy and the competing drive towards integration with other areas of practice and experience. Here art opens itself to a kind of anthropological investigation, also to criticality. It is this which Wallenstein wants to emphasise: what kind of criticality and how might it fit with wider research domains? How is it theoretically charged in other words. Or this may not be quite accurate because what Wallenstein finally advocates is a more open dialogue between art and science where both parties admit to uncertainties and seek to open out onto mutual areas of concern, which could be ‘a productive uncertainty’. Could this produce perhaps a space for the ‘temporary construction of concepts and thinking’. Back in 2002 I think I rather ignored the call for an art and science collaboration. Probably because any science is outside my fields of knowledge. But how foolish in a way: stepping outside of one’s own field of expertise and working in a sustained way with fellow researchers can lead to new ideas and modes of thought and practice. The issue for me is I have only encountered art and science collaborations which don’t appear to have done this.

Juha Varto continues Wallenstein’s line of enticing artistic research towards understanding common themes: in this case ’bringing-forth’, bringing things into existence. Heavily dependent on Husserl’s notion of intuitive insight Varto advocates going beyond familiar categorisations. This is a practice of continually testing from many different angles and positions, recognising differences. It is a task in which ‘fantasy’ takes a major role drawing on the world as it is, imagining it otherwise and returning to it. Varto writes:

*Fiction is the first, most shapeless verbal form of poiesis. It has not yet fixed its meaning, but it is testing the endurance of words, opening up familiar expressions into new directions, and enshrouding in words that which cannot be expressed as itself (incomplete, fragmentary, and augmentative) if one uses categories, concepts, and metaphors…..Fiction will always remain open: it permits returning and interpretation without destroying the original goal of verbalisation.*

Such a process reveals how a becoming or a ‘bringing-forth’ is achieved. It is a question of finding and creating new and testing research practices which are constantly renewing themselves.

Although all the essays in *Artistic Research* measure what they advocate against the benchmark of scientific research, what is outlined: constant testing of research practice, no easy acceptance of existing categorisations, deploying the imagination (here described as fiction) to rethink what is already in place, all these remain usefully in play. Tuomas Nevanlinna asks in the fourth essay ‘Is Artistic Research a Meaningful Concept?’. The argument here revolves around the concept of truth: how is truth arrived at in artistic research? To cut a long argument short- through an identification with its type which is experimental research, which inevitably starts with a question. In Nevanlinna’s view this would then lead to the schema question-hypothesis-experiment-conclusions. This would need to be ensured as:

*Generally speaking we may say that all the basic criteria of scientific research relating to generalisability, repeatability and accumulation are ruled out in artistic research….[and] …..aesthetic knowledge is knowledge about the singular.*

Finally, in a summarising essay Hannula examines similarities between hermeneutics and artistic research. Hannula then pursues the idea of questions being asked about who I am and where I am and where and with whom I might want to be. It is about being-in-the-world. Also about developing the capacity to be critical of it, ‘to call one’s accustomed perspectives and values into question and distance oneself from them’. In artistic research the writer presents her/himself as part of the field. Hannula calls for clarity and specifically:

An exposition of the subject matter and underlying premises and motives of the research

An exposition of the inherent premises in the subject and approach of the research

Appropriation of the chosen research tools and the subject

Assessment of the end result

Adaptive re-formulation of research practices required by artistic research and autonomous appraisal of the criteria of adequacy

This last is the most interesting in that it calls for the artistic research to go back to square one and retrace all steps hyper-critically. This calls for:

*…..a willingness to discover and examine new modes of operation and new criteria through the pre-conditions, requirement and opportunities of their own field.*

I have been reading this essay as if it were the last word, but it is not. There is a final essay by Tere Vadén ‘Openness, Criticality and Language – Notes on the methodology of practice-based experimental research’. This essay again poses artistic research in relation to the benchmark of scientific research: the first as unique and particular and the second as generalizable and repeatable. Vaden outlines how it is only through openness that the experimental nature of artistic research can assume a verifiable status as research. After all, the academic tradition calls for a mastery of the framework for the research and its traditions and the capacity to critically add to them in ‘novel and creative ‘ways. In Vaden’s scenario the researcher must:

*……make it clear for herself, and also bring it out in her work, what experience means to her, what it is when she is engaged in making and experiencing art, and what it is when she is engaged in making and experiencing research.*

This draws Vaden to engage with the inter-subjectivity of language:

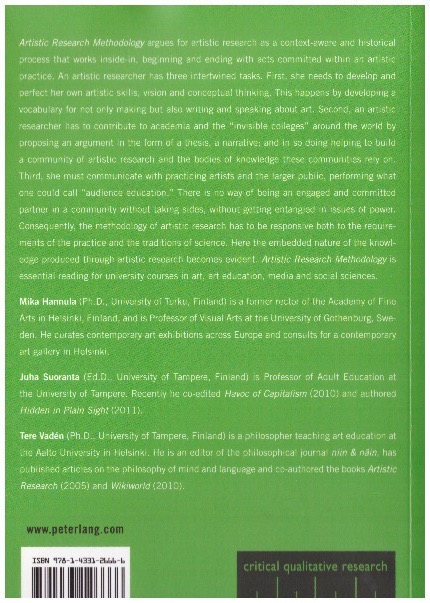
*The intersubjectivity of language, its collectivity is not based primarily on its universal definitions and lexical meanings, but on shared forms of life.*

This is a call for understanding how non-conceptual interpretation can be opened onto and through shared research processes like experimentation; research through art experimentation calls conceptual knowledge into question and can deliver unanticipated non-conceptual interpretations according to Vaden. Again, relentlessly binary, although that is not the intention. However, there are so many useful ideas here about critically evaluating artistic research, not allowing it to be hermetically sealed off from broader research arenas where, in my view, it can be useful.

4

Hannula, M, Suoranta, J & Vadén, T, (2014) *Artistic Research Methodology Narrative, Power and the Public*

This next publication was of less use but its intentions must be recorded because it is in essence a HOW-To publication from 2014. The twelve years between *Artistic Research* published when research through art practices was a new phenomenon and this publication from the same network of researchers- have seen an exponential growth in art-research and a host of publications advocating one kind of approach or another to artistic research. The tone of this most recent book from the research cultures in Finland is almost admonitory. The book jacket reads as follows:



When I first read this book I really don’t think I took in its essential purpose as one publication amongst many on ‘critical qualitative research’.

Its position is to advance how artistic research might establish its methods within the broader arenas of research and most particularly in relation to the research traditions within the sciences. It directly calls for a separate thesis enclosing an argument which will establish artistic research and its bodies of accumulating knowledge. However, the Foreword by Juha Varto proclaims, right at the beginning that,

…in art we are dealing with something that is otherwise than knowing.

Varto writes that in art we are always on the periphery of knowledge and that art is dealing with phenomena which might be considered marginal but might sometime appear as ‘strangely important’ as happens in any paradigm shift. Varto rehearses again standard research components regarding truth and falsifiability, generalisation and categorisation, all of which ‘do violence to the richness and diversity of the reality out of which it is picking its phenomena’. Varto sets out to make a case for finding different ways to challenge the power that knowledge has already established through rational discourse. This author returns the artistic researcher to the arena of the sensible, sensory reality, eye, ear, touch, smell and insight. But this is to be balanced against the Preface, where the editors, Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta and Tere Vadén set out the three necessary components of research through artistic practice: to reiterate, the development of a personal vocabulary and skills to speak about the art-research; the development of a thesis to set out an argument regarding the work to return the research to the wider community of researchers and the communication and public dissemination of the research to a wider grouping of artists as ‘audience education’. The first of these tasks is developed quite fully here and designated as research ‘inside-in’, attempting to nail a research practice specific to artists’ practices. The second is underpinned by a separate section on reading, how to read and how seminars might be conducted and the third brings the final phase of the book to a close as it is a key finding from this group that artists undertaking research must be accountable to their constituency of fellow artists in helping to educate them into appropriate and valid research practices. Before we get to that point, it might be useful to identify what kinds of qualitative research methods are being advocated here.

The methods advocated are inherent and internal to the logic of practice; they are open-ended and self-critical; they can be characterised as ‘in-side in’ methods. They can also be understood as participatory, reflective and performative. There is a very clear indication of the importance of context: the context where the research takes place is seen as a site, a situation in constant need of articulation, discussion and reviewing. It is seen as a site which is in construction; it is a process; it is situated but not stable. This process pays due attention to what is taking shape in adjacent sites both contemporaneous and historical. It is dependent on reading, seeing and talking with other researchers equally engaged in ‘acts of experimental thinking’. The researcher must be willing to open up to alternative perspectives, to change perspective, to identify limitations of one’s thinking; research is characterised as a never-ending self-reflective and critical creative process, also as a creative treatment of actuality. A basic formula for artistic research is given which presents clearly the two part division between acts inside the practice and argument for context, tradition and interpretation. The insistence on context is instructive: the situatedness of all research, its embedded nature if carefully represented will display the ‘complexities, tensions, even contradictions that are inherent in phenomena studied.., the editors assert. This situatedness is key to actualising the context as a ‘sense driven and material encounter with the world and aesthetic meaning. This should not split artistic research into the ways of doing and making and those of thinking about these processes. Writing needs to underscore how this works:

*One has to stay inside the practice, work inside it and bring the results back there. The rhetoric and matter, the form and the content cannot be completely separated.*

This How-to book seems to weave its way between advocating particular research methods geared to the specifics of research-art practice and generalizable methods appropriate to any research. The advice is sensible in terms of general approach, outlining approaches to getting started:

What is the topic and the research question

What kind of materials are used in addressing the question?

How are these materials used? How are they read, interpreted?

On what viewpoints, theories or concepts is the approach based?

Why are they used?

How can results, methods, material and viewpoints be criticised?

All the How-to guidance here is geared towards insisting on both keeping with artistic skills and knowledge and their extension but also adhering to artistic research as ‘theoretical academic performance’. Should this claim a ‘warring space’ for the artist-researcher, this must be offset against the wider arenas of conflictual thinking. Here, Jacques Derrida’s thought is brought into play. This section ends with a quotation from Henk Slager’s book about the pleasures of art-research as it is,

*Concentrated on artistic probing, establishing connections, associating, creating rhizomatic mutations, producing assemblages, and bringing together: including that which cannot be joined.*

Hardly a How-to advocacy but Slager has written a different kind of text in ‘The Pleasure of Research’. This current book, book 3, *Artistic Research Methodology* obviously has a brief to provide appropriate methodologies for artistic research. One approach is the narrative interview, hence this chapter: ‘Face-to-Face, One-to-One: Production of Knowledge in and through Narrative Interviews’. This concept of a story or a narrative goes back to the previous publication edited by Hannula and co.. Methods here are characterised as plural and contradictory; they reflect the specific issues of how and what kind of knowledge is produced in and through those practices being deployed, hence in the one-to-one interview the knowledge acquired is detailed and specific, not intended to reflect a generality but as a means to make contact and form connection to the specifics of a particular context:

*Instead of moving horizontally within the topic and theme, it tries to find ways into moving vertically, digging deeper into nuances. It does not ask what something is but how something is, there and then (ie, bound in space and time), in and through an individual perspective as it is perceived and conceived.*

In depth narrative interviews can then lead to how: how ‘the content of a concept, image, symbol or act is defined’ in these very specific cases and why that is. Narrative interviews, it is claimed return the interviewee ‘to the present moment’. They have, perhaps, a kind of live value. This seems to me to be pretty accurate in relation to my own interviews of PhD students and supervisors, 1996-2000 and 2001-2003. In this chapter, the narrative interview is described as a ‘unique type of production of knowledge’. At its best the interview must aim to break ‘the wall of routine’. It may aim to get at what is not said and to get at this there should be some shared knowledge between participants. This will be essential to lead to the desired goal of:

*…..critical interpretation of what is said, how the context is constructed and orchestrated, and how it relates to [the interviewer’s] own views and visions.*

In the ‘practical case’ part of this text, the emphasis is placed back onto probing art practices and the necessity, as the authors perceive it of extracting from practitioners precisely what they do when they do what they do in order to challenge ongoing practice and to encourage rethinking and thinking differently and thinking ahead. The essential technique advocated here is the capacity to listen and to remove oneself –as interviewer- from one’s own habitual thinking and prejudices and presuppositions. The narrative-interview requires in-depth conversations and intent listening. Hardly a revelation but perhaps this must be seen against what Hannula perceives as artists’ reluctance to fully and publically discuss their working practice.

In the next chapter of *Artistic Research Methodology* entitled ‘Methodology and Power’ there is an attempt to propose what artistic research does which is unique. The proposition is experimentation and the intimate reliance on bodily, sensory human existence, being ‘immersed in it’. This raises the question of why, why do artist researchers immerse themselves in their research; such deep involvement then requires definition and explication-from out of the experience of the research which cannot be laid out beforehand. The thrust of the whole chapter is to nudge researchers to become more adroit at being self-critical and to draw themselves towards self-conscious change, assuming the power of their methodological process and its potential impact. A list of questions is provided:

Who designed the research problem?

For whom is the research relevant? According to whom?

What knowledge will the community gain? According to whom?

What knowledge will the researcher gain?

Likely positive outcomes for the community

Possible negative outcomes

To whom is the researcher accountable?

These questions align with the publication which proved very popular in research cultures in the arts by Graeme Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, published in 2005, which underscores what I take to be the broader social/political and institutional requirement that art and artists be accountable to the social good. In the book under my elbow now, there is a consistent use of Sociological methods, ethics and approaches to lead the artistic researcher to more professional approaches to research. In chapter 6 the artistic researcher is exhorted to see herself as ‘policy advisor, ‘public speaker’, as critic, also hedges its bets by acknowledging that artists are critics of the ideology of the market place. A nest of conflicts could be prised open here. This will lead me to change the order of my 15 books because I think I prefer the straight-down-the-line approach of the first How-To book I found immensely useful, an Open University publication by Estelle M. Phillips and D.S. Pugh, both seasoned PhD supervisors, who did not position their advice within a specific discipline. I am becoming increasingly annoyed by the drive in this *Artistic Research Methodology*/How-to publication to exhort artists to pursue a sociological research tack as a means of ensuring clear sight of a larger context to which the research is unalterably accountable. I may well have spoken too soon, however because just as I begin to wonder what on earth compelled my interest in the first place, I find this advice on an admirable research process from the sociologist Wright Mills, who influenced my own MEd research:

*Find your notes and files and rearrange and remix them. Re-sort your notes and papers. Try to do it in a relaxed manner. Be aware of the research questions at hand, but be also receptive to “unforeseen and unplanned linkages”.*

*Be playful; it loosens up the imagination. Play with the phrases and words: look up synonyms to learn all the possible connotations. This sharpens your pen and you will learn to write more precisely. In addition such an interest in words gives you an opportunity to evaluate the level of generality of every key term. Given the need you can either “break down a high-level statement into more concrete meanings” or “move up the level of generality: remove the specific qualifiers and examine the re-formed statement or inference more abstractly….So from above and below, you will try to probe, in search of clarified meaning, into every aspect and implication of the idea*.

This exerpt from Mills’ work goes on to advise on taking classification seriously; a close consideration of extremes ,ie a high disparity of viewpoints; reflecting on historical considerations, and finally

Remember that “how you go about arranging materials for presentation always affects the content of your work.” (Mills (2000b, pps 212-217)

Chapter 7 in *Artistic Research Methodology* is devoted to what to read and why. Again, reading inevitably serves to contextualise the field and provides tools for, as proposed here, thinking ahead in a creative and imaginative way. The authors advise on reading fellow artistic researchers’ writings, hinting that they are not being read and questioning why this might be the case. It is useful to note that in this section on reading, there is the following emphatic assertion about building research cultures:

*Needless to say, achieving an organic research culture and collective is not easy-and it has to be worked on and maintained constantly and coherently for years…..it is simply impossible to label an act as serious and meaningful research if that act is not aware of and does not know what has been published and discussed in that particular field before. Because if you do not know your history, you are not anchored, not situated, not even, well, a researcher. You are doing plenty of other stuff……..but no, it is not research.*

We will be led back to this position soon enough by James Elkins in his publication on *Studio Art PhDs* but we must move on. The tack which is central here and will be taken up again in a very positive way by John Llewellyn’s book on *The Hypo-Critical Imagination*…..is that reading opens up the imagination to changing perspectives, imagination helping the researcher to think differently, to alter positions, to recharge viewpoints. It is a potentiality but not, the authors insist, ‘an answer’. It is a means to establish where you are reading from, which singular and particular place interconnected to its own past, present and future. *Artistic Research Methodology* ends with four case studies of artists’ research being identified through ‘narrative interview’ designed to indicate how necessary it is for artists to challenge themselves, their working methods and ideologies over and over again. The conclusion reiterates the book’s key concerns and underscores the importance of publishing what is being done with propositions such as the creation of an “invisible college” or a “development forum in the field” of artistic research which could lead to ‘a theoretical and methodological framework, which gives context and support for the development of artistic vision and sentiment as well as challenges’ all the participants – in the end- to be highly conscious of issues of power: through close understanding of context contemporaneously and historically and being sensitive to ‘the ways in which knowledge creation is dependent on and influences who we are both as collectives and individuals. A conflicted text book which ends on an appropriate note. This is essentially about a recognition of what must be acknowledged if parity with broader research communities is to be achieved and fostered. This is also the issue raised back in 1993 by Christopher Frayling in his essay as part of the RCA’s research papers publication, when he said the issue for the third of the three types of research on-going in art, research *for* art, was one of power relations.

5

Estelle M. Phillips & D. S. Pugh, (1994) *How To Get A PhD A Handbook for Students and their Supervisors*

I have now changed the order of the 15 books because *How To Get A PhD A Handbook for Students and their Supervisors* by Estelle M. Phillips and D. S. Pugh is chock full of sensible advice, not all relevant to the full development of PhD research cultures in Fine Art through the practice of art but this is definitely a hands on and useful publication. My edition from 1994 is the 9th reprinting. This is a book geared towards ‘effective doctoral education’; straightforward, clear, cogent and somehow uplifting because of its clarity. The index to contents lays out the different pragmatic sections on ‘becoming a postgraduate; getting into the system; the nature of the PhD qualification; how not to get a PhD; how to do research; the form of a PhD thesis; the PhD process; how to manage your supervisor; how to survive in a predominantly British, white, male, full-time academic environment; the formal procedures; how to supervise; institutional responsibilities and finally departmental responsibilities. It is designed as a ‘survival manual’ for PhD students. It opens with a clear recognition of how initial confidence and research drive can be easily eroded under the relentless challenges of research. It also openly supports a proactive approach to students and their supervision, a call to freely discuss on-going work and not be daunted by any lack of appreciation but to stick to a set of practical strategies to ensure they enjoy a good chance of successful management of the process and eventual submission of a PhD. So much of this publication might seem obvious but I found it needed to be said in a clear unequivocal way. The authors make it clear that the PhD is independent study and as such, you, the student must carefully choose where to do the PhD and with whom; right from the start, they advise establishing a sound relationship with a supervisor, also being clear about distinctions between methods of research and clearing away some of the myths about deductive research, for instance. Right away the authors set out what gaining a PhD and becoming a fully professional researcher entails.

*The PhD means broadly:*

*Your peers think you have something to say and want to listen to you.*

*This implies a command of your subject to evaluate what and where your contribution might be.*

*You have a knowledge of certain appropriate skills and techniques and their limitation.*

*You can communicate your research effectively and through a world-wide peer group whose publications*

*and deliberations are part of your knowledge base.*

As I’m writing this, desperately trying not to write too much I can see that I have already used words and phrases which are not quite as precise as those used by Phillips and Pugh. In a nut shell, at this point early on the research process, the researcher must have a researchable topic, have the appropriate techniques required and be able to put them to use and communicate what is being found out with some cogency. The authors state bluntly that you cannot get a PhD if you do not know what the standards are. Concommitant with this, is the understanding that gaining a PhD entitles you, the student to supervise other PhDs, which means you do need to be conversant with-and have encountered other PhDs. Also, if you need to ask a supervisor if your work is good enough you are not yet ready to undertake a PhD: PhD research necessitates the capacity to evaluate your own research. The aims of a supervisor section is entirely practical inviting the student to understand that supervisors have different agendas for wishing to supervise: the motivation could be as narrow as to build up their own portfolio of successes but it may well be to build a research culture related to the supervisor’s interests and to draw in new stimulus. A recognition of the different party’s aims is laid out for consideration: supervisors; examiners; universities and research councils. There is a series of action summaries at the end of each chapter which again directs a PhD student towards being fully aware of the mechanics of the PhD as a project to be managed. No chance or blind hope involved. Chapter 4 is titled ‘How not to get a PhD’. Here the advice is again blunt but sound:

…..*if a student doesn’t want to do the requisite work but just wants a PhD, then it’s a no go; then there’s the issue of both over-estimating what is required and under-estimating this; being supervised by someone who has not understood what a PhD requires; not having a ‘thesis’ ie a specific project enquiry; taking a new job before completion*.

The next chapter on ‘How to do Research’ is equally straightforward. It starts by asking the crucial question: what is research? And outlines what is or would not be the suitable scope of a PhD enquiry. The chapter then enters into the what of research as a kind of intelligence gathering and the why which requires analysis; then on to ‘good’ research which is characterised as an open enquiry. In such an enquiry, constant discussion with peers is essential:

*This continual testing, review and criticism for its own sake by researchers of each other’s work is an important way in which thinking develops. Conventional wisdom and accepted doctrine are not spared this examination because they may turn out to be inadequate. Of course they may not turn out to be inadequate- they may stand up to examination. This is why non-researchers often regard research results as being demonstrations of the obvious or trivial elaborations of established knowledge*…..because

The struggle of research is to find out the right questions. On this quest, the ‘basic’ types of research are outlined:

*Exploratory research*

Tackling new issues or problems where little is known; new concepts and theories might need to be developed. It involves ‘pushing out the frontiers of knowledge in the hope that something useful will be discovered’.

*Testing-out research*

Probes the limits of previously accepted generalisations and seeks to reformulate them.

*Problem-solving research*

Starts with a specific problem and seeks a renewed definition and method for a solution. *This will usually involve a variety of theories and methods, often ranging across more than one discipline since real-world problems are likely to be messy and not soluble within the narrow confines of an academic discipline.*

Naturally, the authors advocate the testing-out approach. Why would they not when it so neatly introduces the training researcher to test the premises and habits of thinking within their discipline within a secure framework. Artists have on occasion taken this approach, much more readily through enquiries which are historically based or to some extent ones which deal with new technologies but the exploratory research approach attracts my attention again as it did when I first read this book in the mid 1990s. Then I did not consider this book in direct relation to other How-To books in the field of Fine Art/Art practice. The relief of it is that it is not extolling or attempting to extol any theory or its own approach to what its authors consider to be art-research, it is simply a guide to students who wish to undertake PhD research. It helps to begin to pick your way through what the start points, the setting up, the managing of a PhD involves in all its dimensions. There is no axe to grind in these pages. When the authors indicate that exploratory or problem-solving research is more difficult, they simply mean that when perimeters are not in place there is a much higher chance of the research derailing and of non-completion. The reader then knows where things stand. The action summary here underlines the need to stay within an area of competence in terms of procedure, techniques or skills base and also to meet regularly with peer groups and to encourage meeting deadlines.

I can imagine many artist researchers discarding the next chapter on ‘The Form of the PhD Thesis’. For two decades now I have argued strongly against the ‘thesis’ as a specific written document encompassing the research. However, in this How-to book there is a usefulness in reading about the norms of research from enlightened and seasoned PhD supervisors. This chapter outlines the different components of the thesis:

*Background theory*

The field of study within which the work is undertaken. *So you must be aware of the present state of the art: what developments, controversies, breakthroughs are currently exciting or engaging the leading practitioners and thus pushing forward thinking in the subject*.

*Focal theory*

Where the researchers spells out very clearly and in great detail what is being researched and why to push forward academic discussion in your field.

*Data theory*

This leads to the justification for the relevance and validity of the data used to support the thesis. *In the social sciences you might need to engage in an epistemological discussion about which interpretative framework (eg. Positivist, Marxist) it is appropriate for you to use to maintain your position.*

All these elements and the advice is definitely to read relevant research papers and publications in your field, may not seem appropriate but all this should entice the artist researcher to think more precisely about if this does not fit then why? And how? How does an art enquiry establish its contribution to research? What are the mechanisms? Can these components be adapted? The supposition that the background theory and the focal theory are changed through the PhD holds true, surely even if different words are required to identify this process.

These are the assumptions of a civil and mechanical engineer examiner about the requisite need for originality in the submitted PhD:

*Setting down a major piece of information in writing for the first time*

*Continuing a previously original piece of work*

*Carrying out work designed by the supervisor*

*Providing a single original technique, observation or result in an otherwise unoriginal but competent piece of research*

*Having many original ideas, methods and interpretations all performed by others under the direction of the postgraduate*

*Showing originality in testing someone else’s idea*

These are obviously far too limiting. The authors, Phillips & Pugh offer 9 more, including:

*Bringing new evidence to bear on an old issue*

*Making a synthesis that hasn’t been made before*

*Being cross-disciplinary and using different methodologies*

*Adding to knowledge in a way that hasn’t previously been done before.*

The form of the thesis is standard in this book and does include the literature survey but could this advice be adapted to read:

Introduction (including Aims)

Review of the field of enquiry (rather than literature survey)

Method

Results

Discussion

Conclusions

Nicely simple, as is the advice on getting on with the writing: viz generate the main points; organise them into a structure; construct the research presentation in sequenced, paragraphed writing. So obvious. Why do I continue to find this text a relief? It reveals the full status quo and the full cost of not sticking to it; it also offers sound advice to the student who has not thought through the implications of doing a PhD and the fact that this entails full responsibility for it. In the chapter on ‘How to manage your supervisor’, there is careful advice about what should be anticipated as part of the two-way relationship. From the supervisor’s perspective the handing in of work which is worthy of scrutiny on time; attending meetings; being honest about how the research is going; accepting advice and retaining enthusiasm. The authors advise that a PhD student needs ‘to educate their supervisors’, suggest when communication from their point of view is not entirely satisfactory. The formal procedures for changing supervisor are outlined. A whole chapter is devoted to ‘How to supervise’. I wish that all supervisors just glanced through Phillips and Pugh. Students have rights: that their work is carefully attended to before each supervision; that the supervisor is available when needed; that the response to submitted work is sympathetic and that any criticism is constructive and that adequate feedback is available; supervisors should have a good knowledge of the area of research and they should structure supervisions in such a way that there is an easy exchange of ideas; supervisors should convey that they want the student to succeed with their submission, that the work is valued. Phillips and Pugh advise a phased supervision: an early phase with very regular meetings and short goals; an intermediate phase where the supervisor encourages the student to clearly evaluate the work undertaken and a final phase including an exchange of ideas based on detailed critical analysis of the enquiry from the student. What does the supervisor aim for?

A doctorate completed on time

Publication in the form of journals etc and conferences

Networking with peers and conducting seminar type contact

Advancing the topic

Providing stimulus

It is easy here to insert more appropriate types of going public in art-research PhDs

Finally, Phillips & Pugh outline the institutional responsibilities: the provision of guidelines, resources ; structured induction; facilities for individual departments to sustain supervision of research; language provision for foreign students; training of supervisors; teaching credit for supervision; appropriate regulations for registration; monitoring progress; upgrading from MPhil to PhD; appointment of external examiners; provision of a forum for the review of the PhD; appropriate selection of PhD students and supervisors. Again, all this is entirely obvious but also so easily overlooked, most especially the institution’s responsibility to provide competent and appropriate supervision in an area of relevant knowledge and also to set out to the PhD student what that supervision should entail both from their and the supervisor’s perspective. In pursuit of a much keener sense of wanting to support individual student research than is widely available, Phillips and Pugh suggest institutions should appoint a research tutor with a brief to monitor and improve the functioning of doctoral education; that there should be constant reviewing of the selection methods and criteria for accepting students into a department and that group collaborations and meetings amongst students should be widely encouraged. This is sound but widely available advice. Why go back over it? It is calming and grounding. We all need to know what a PhD is understood to be and simple and clear research guidance even if not totally relevant to one’s own field cannot fail to be useful on some level.

6

Elkins, J, (2009) *Artists with PhDs The New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art*

The next book *Artists with PhDs The New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art*, edited by James Elkins is intended to sound a warning bell to fellow academics in the US about the ‘frightening prospect’ of artists being required to have a PhD, also to set out what should be the preconditions for such a development in the broader university research cultures. The introduction indicates that the book is designed to open out discussion on the ‘new’ PhD; it includes a list of the publications relevant to its purposes, cited as the only publications to date, (which incidentally, is inaccurate).

The seven publications are set out verbatim :

*The Printed Project*, Issue 04 edited by James Elkins, 2005

*Thinking Through Art reflections on art* as *research* edited by Katy Macleod & Lin Holdridge, 2006

*Artistic Research* edited by Annette Balkema & Henk Slager, Dutch Society for Aesthetics, Vol 18, 2004

*Art Practice as Research Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, by Graeme Sullivan, 2005

*Thinking Through Practice: Art as Research in the Academy*, e-book, (Melbourne), 2007

“a collection of essays on PhDs in Finland” viz

Elkins asserts that ‘the new literature is not difficult to master’. He also asserts that a barrage of administrative literature will follow the take-up of this new degree and advises that:

*The question is not whether the new programs are coming, but how rigorously they will be conceptualised.*

Elkins also warns that art ‘as a whole may even become more academic and intellectual- more involved with theory, possibly even more alienated from skill and technique’. He adds,

*But it is best to understand it, rather than writing polemics against it*.

Elkins outlines the format and individual chapters in the book. Judith Mottram’s essay is first and is introduced as necessary ‘homework’ for anyone needing to understand the state of play in the UK, which is the ‘place where the new degrees got started’. This is introduced as the most accurate history of the degree in the UK as it is based in quantitative analysis of data collated from the website Mottram and colleagues set up to cite current and submitted PhDs in the UK, ADIT. (Unfortunately the data when I looked at in ADIT (2005/6), The Art & Design Index to Theses was not up to date). The second chapter is by Timothy Emlyn Jones who surveys the literature which has emerged to ‘justify the new degrees in the UK’. Elkins suggests that this essay ‘remains the best, and best documented, defence of the concept of research in the arts and advanced degrees by research’. Then Elkins writes:

*From there things get more polemical……(*talking again about the literature of which he disapproves*) Some of it is informed by poststructuralist ideas of dialogism that come from sources such as Levinas, Derrida, Deleuze, and Nicholas Bourriaud; and some is associated with subaltern studies and post colonial theory (for example , essays on the PhD by Sarat Maharaj). In this book I identify this tendency by an essay by Henk Slager, who directs the first PhD-granting institution in the Netherlands. Slager draws on various post structuralist paradigms to argue for a sense of art research that is transdisciplinary, post-humanistic, mobile, and unquantitative. This kind of argument is often made in support of an idea that art research is different in kind from other research, with its own often difficult and ambiguous characteristics.*

In contrast to this essay by Henk Slager Elkins placed a contribution by Mick Wilson which cites a deeper historical context for the new PhD through traditions for the visual arts in European universities. Aligned to Wilson’s essay is one by Victor Burgin who clearly outlines the problems attached to this PhD culture, the key problem of which is how to assess these PhDs, ‘a problem no one knows how to solve’ according to Elkins.

A second essay by Jones serves as another warning to the US about what to avoid in setting up new cultures around this PhD. This is underpinned by the essay by George Smith, the first academic in the US to set up a PhD programme for artists which teaches *only* theory. Next comes an essay by Hilde Van Gelder and Jan Baetens ‘The Future of the Doctorate in the Arts’, which offers useful ideas on creative writing, for instance, and sets out the case for the ready adoption of the Art PhD. The final paragraph from Van Gelder and Jan Baetens’ essay –and conclusion- reads:

*The evolution towards a practice-led PhD is a major transformation of the research landscape, inside and outside of universities. In the UK companies such as Philips, Ikea and Habitat have provided a strong financial impulse for young PhD doctorates in product design…….We can only recommend other countries to follow the UK example, and to embrace the new doctorate without any reluctance.*

In the introduction Elkins writes,

*I am not a neutral editor here, and I will not hide the fact that I think a great deal of theorising about research and the production of new knowledge is nonsense. I just don’t think it makes enough sense to say that art research is “mobile”, “dialogic”, “contextual”, “topical”, “unquantitive”, “between zones”, “nomadic”, or “implicated in poststructural paradigms” – to quote a few authors who have written on the subject. This kind of theorising, I think, either tortures the concepts of research and new knowledge to make them answer to Fine Art practice, or abandons them for an uncertain celebration of complexity. Dialogic, Deleuzian, postcolonial, and other poststructuralist approaches could make the kind of sense that would allow the PhD in studio art to be accepted throughout the university, but at the moment they don’t, and I don’t think it helps the visual arts to be packaging their initiative in this way.*

This statement is a lead in to Elkins’ essay –chapter 9- designed to inform the discussion of the concepts of research and new knowledge to offer an alternative to the existing attempts to theorise the subject. In contrast to the unsatisfactory literature concerning ideas about research, Elkins places the essay by Charles Harrison, “a wonderfully lucid essay” in the editor’s view based in ‘art and language’ practice.

The final essay in Part One of *Artists with PhDs*-chapter *11-* is again by the editor, James Elkins. Here he sets out what in his view would be the most helpful scenario for the new PhD, avoiding its ‘conceptual entanglements’. Here, the editor comments on the other contributors’ essays as a helpful means to generate debate. As an Art Historian (married to an artist) and much published Elkins has no doubt as the value of his contribution to the debate. Ditto Part Two of the book, where artists engaged in PhDs from Australia (although one is an MFA student) outline their dissertations. Before entering into the body of this book, it might be useful to note that in the Acknowledgements, Elkins cites in ‘a note to readers’ his own previous publication, *Why Art Cannot be Taught*, (University of Illinois Press, 2001) He adds,

*I still think that art cannot be taught. But on the way to not teaching, a lot of interesting things can happen*.

I intend to gloss over much of this publication, simply through lack of time: there are aspects of it which require my full attention and some detailed note taking. If I take a short cut to any of these essays in *Artists with PhDs* it will be replicating the editor’s approach to publications across the EU, however, like Elkins I do have a drive to be useful: education is a serious business. But is advice of a superficial kind ever useful? I must leave that question hanging. I think I shall take up the editor’s invitation to skim through Mottram’s essay, ‘Researching Research in Art and Design’, which starts with further warnings about this new PhD culture not understanding the field of research more broadly and failing to understand the value, specifically of quantitative analysis in this context. Thus, the ADIT index, the index to Theses in Art & Design is a quantitative source of data which should be consulted by any individual or institution seeking to generate a new culture of PhDs in the creative arts, in the author’s view. This index provides an historical survey of early PhDs (incomplete) which indicates that the total of PhDs by 1985 was 100. At the time of Mottram’s essay it may be exponentially higher. Mottram raises the question which exercises her colleagues, what is the PhD for? The response is,

*Doing a PhD is about becoming an expert in something that there are few experts in*.

The PhD also includes developing research tools and methods and deploying them to address a specific research problem or question, a ‘high level problem solving’. Mottram is at pains to define research in Art and Design and cites Christopher Frayling’s essay from 1993 (RCA research papers) teasing out how the third of Frayling’s typology, research ‘for’ art is ‘tricky’ and seems to characterise undergraduate work in Fine Art. This Mottram opines indicates ‘very little about’ the capacity to organise, evaluate or interpret, all requirements of the PhD. Hitherto, Mottram notes PhD studies have researched into historical practices and new techniques and technologies, corresponding to Frayling’s first two types of research in 1993. As yet, there are few ‘models’ of research ‘for’ practice. This analysis is set against the RAE Research Assessment Exercise findings that 40% are –in 2009- Fine Art and largely art practice based, whereas research in Design is ‘more evenly distributed’ across practice and text publications. Also noted in relation to an analysis of abstracts by artists is the slipping into language more suited to a catalogue essay than language demonstrating ‘academic precision’. Finally this essay outlines the need to build a body of knowledge using the wide range of PhD submissions to enable an understanding of what types of ‘questions and approaches’ might be useful to further develop.

In ‘Research Degrees in Art and Design’, Timothy Emlyn Jones offers an outline of possible methods of research in Art and Design. In the section of the essay specifically devoted to the consideration of these practices as research he cites Donald Schön, whose work from around 2005 to the date of this publication has been extolled many times in a range of publications relating to art research, most particularly from Gray’s School of Art, Aberdeen. This is the idea of ‘knowledge in action’, which is knowledge ‘through use’, how knowledge is embedded within the practical dimension of Art & Design. (Strange that Emlyn Jones deploys both research and new knowledge freely in this context). For any development of appropriate cultures to take effect this is what Emlyn Jones advocates:

*A full literature review*

*A review of examples of enquiry though artistic endeavour in modern history*

*A sociology of artists*

*A theoretical basis for intuition*

*An advanced theorisation of how knowledge may be embodied in or represented by a work of art*

*An aesthetics of artistic method as distinct from one of artistic style*

*A comparative methodology of artistic production across cultures*

*An international consensus in the definitions and boundaries of those subjects loosely bunched as art and design, so that debate of specialisation and interdisciplinarity might be better facilitated. This might ensure the A&D become bona fide academic research fields.*

To this end Emlyn Jones sets out the different components of research, starting with the review, which might need to be rethought as comprehensive knowledge in Art might be elusive, also the Viva Voce requires careful consideration in relation to issues of examiner value judgement which avoids complications of taste. The essay ends with a model of three types of PhD submission adopted by Glasgow School of Art: a written thesis; a dissertation and portfolio and a portfolio with commentary. In EJ’s view the slighter the word count the more robust the defence of the thesis needs to be. The question of what constitutes a PhD enquiry in A&D remains open. The essay ends with an acknowledgement that ‘the medium of communication must be the works themselves, not descriptions of them or assertions about them’ and ends with a plea for the new cultures to assume a generosity to the wider research communities so that ‘our own disciplines will become valued within university education and by the world beyond’ through our ‘relevance’.

I shall gloss over ‘Art and Method’ by Henk Slager because his later publication *The Pleasure of Research* I consider as book 14. Sufficient to say that Slager’s essay is not defensive and is based in another three years of experience of submission of PhDs in the practices of the arts. Essentially, Slager disputes the ascendant model for the arts PhD which is an arts historical model. Slager advocates an experimental, ‘laboratory style’ environment which explores novel forms of knowledge and experience and the endless epistemological questioning of what art is and whether the institutional foundations of the concept of art should be deconstructed. Here is how this essay ends:

*In artistic research one should speak of a continuous, self-reflexive movement questioning the situation and determining the artist’s positon with regard to the spaces of analysis. The result is not a fixed concept or a static point, but the indication of a zone, leaving unmarked room for the continuation of artistic experiment…..One could argue that the non-localisable zone of artistic research is characterised by reflecting interactions, accelerating speed, and mutating flows of thought.*

These flows of thought cannot be ‘legitimised’ beforehand and ‘that is the essential characteristic of artistic research’.

Mick Wilson’s ‘Four Theses Attempting to Revise the Terms of the Debate’ substantiates an argument for a genuinely critical practice within the institutional setting, that is a thorough questioning of the terms and assumptions of existing pedagogical and organisational practices. Such a practice must necessarily recognise the diversity of arts practices and what he describes as the ‘textual turn’ of work in the arts, a ‘turn’ which would refute the wasteful debate about the relationship between art (as research) and the written text. This is essentially a call for the institution to become critically reflexive to meet the demands of this new culture. The performative aspect of art practice, and its rhetorics is fertile ground for this, not stale bureaucratic questioning about ‘how can this be graded’. Wilson ends with what he would prefer as a response to Art PhDs:

*Wow, what the hell is this thing happening here, now?*

On the basis of what is happening here, now, George Smith also contributes an essay. He has set up the first theory only PhD for artists in the US on the basis that theory aids practice. Smith found that artists ‘plunge into theory head first’! He sees what his course is doing as training artist-philosophers but as yet, he asserts that this course remains on the margins of academe, which is where James Elkins would place most of what he has encountered as PhDs in the practice of the arts, that is outside of historical or archival trawling, as exemplified by his ‘Three Configurations of Studio-Art PhDs’. But we run ahead. Now to heed what Elkins writes, the key essay in this edited collection which unusually dismisses the contribution of many of its contributors.

This final essay in Part One of *Artists with PhDs*, titled ‘On Beyond Research and New knowledge’ takes up the claim made in the introduction that the concepts of research and new knowledge should have no place in this new PhD culture: they are defined as ‘artificial imports from the UK’. That is the first of three intentions, the second is that these new PhDs should be ‘fully at the level of PhDs in the fields to which they make reference and the third is to use this new development to assess the coherence of the university as a whole. The other intention is to see *Thinking Through Art* (edited by Katy Macleod & Lin Holdridge) as ‘a barometer of thinking about the university as a whole’ because through the mismatch of what Elkins calls studio art and the wider university central questions about theory and the work that theory is intended to do are raised. On this question hangs *The Relation between Research As it is Used in Studio Art*, and *Research As it is Used in Other Departments* *of the University:* in the university (proper) research is work which is verifiable and repeatable. In order for the methods of ‘studio art’ to be included and accepted in other areas of the university Elkins asserts that the list provided by Emlyn Jones about the kind of research which needs to be undertaken would have to obtain, ie including ‘advanced theorisation of how knowledge may be embodied in or represented by a work of art; an aesthetics of artistic method as distinct from one of style’ etc. However, Elkins dismisses Jones’ attempt to cite a science model as perhaps useful to rethinking research in the arts by saying that scientists would not find art of interest and it is best to drop the term research. Elkins continues to dismiss the concept of new knowledge: he lays out how all the attempts to assert new knowledge for research through art constitute ‘special pleading’ and therefore would rule that term out as opening doors within the university research arenas. Thus ruling out these terms is the first step towards sensible advice for the potential new studio art PhD in the US. The categories deployed to substantiate a practical and intellectually sustainable argument are as follows:

*Using Understanding Instead of New Knowledge*- dismissed because understanding would become a weak substitute for knowledge

*Using Interpretation Instead of Knowledge*-this is better because it could open dialogue with other fields

*Using Writing Instead of Research*- here there is an acknowledgement of an essay in *Thinking Through Art* by Kerstin May entitled ‘The Gesture of Writing’ but again Elkins dismisses it because the theory to which it aligns its argument, that of Vilém Flusser is about writing not visual art or visuality.

Finding a *New Theory to Replace New Knowledge* harbours Elkins’ main bone of contention with the essays contained in *Thinking Through* *Art*, in that most of the essays cite theories which do not pertain to visuality. (Would he include Mieke Bal’s construction of theory from a close consideration of Louise Bourgeois’ “Spider” in this dismissal?) Elkins argues:

*It has been a trope in art history from the 1970s to the present that the discipline borrows theories from other fields, and that it borrows them after other fields have abandoned them*. (Elkins references his own paper ‘The Unease in Art History’, *Qui parle* 6 no.1, 1992)

Finding a new theory is not the same as adopting and adapting theories from other disciplines and does not ‘provide the indigenous accounting that is required according to the logic of the university, of every field’.

*Avoiding New Knowledge by Talking about the Nonconceptual*- Elkins sees this as more fruitful as work in the studio is ‘nonverbal, uncognized, tacit, extra-linguistic, nonconceptual’. Hence this new culture must argue the case ‘outside language and logic’. Elkins turns to Immanuel Kant to reinforce the nonconceptual argument for art. However, Elkins does approve of the recognition of the conceptual/nonconceptual divide in a few essays in *Thinking Through Art*, the first by Kenneth Hay who teases out the relationship between aesthetics and conceptual judgement; the second by Jeff Collins who probes the relationship between discourse and its disruption, ‘discours’ and ‘figure’ in Derridean terms. Elkins offers a third possibility which is theories of nonsense or madness. This idea is followed through in the next section:

*Redefining Research So It is Not dependent on the Sciences*. Here Elkins refutes any attempt to purloin science as a fit for art. He agrees with Charles Harrison in his own publication that arguments extolling a scientific model either fail to meet the ‘rigorous standards’ of science or become overly defensive and inadequate as argument. What is required here is talk about the ‘unpredictable results’ in art methods, ‘together with a solid theory demonstrating that their results will, in fact, be unpredictable’. A proof, in other words of research viability. What makes the case for an appropriate ‘conceptualisation’ of the ‘studio art PhD’ is the following section:

*Avoiding New Knowledge and Research by Emphasising Practice*- this section pays tribute to the contributors to *Thinking Through Art* who emphasise practice rather than theorisation, like Tim O ‘Riley, whose work is however dismissed because of its ‘idiosyncratic citation’ and sources of reference. There is one essay that Elkins approves of, as follows:

*I was very glad to see Elizabeth Price’s essay “sidekick” in* Thinking Through Art*, because it is a brilliant example of a particular kind of artist’s writing. It is a pure research report………definitely in the spirit of a scientific research*.

Price’s use of parody has not been recognised, nor her close attention to Marxist materialism. Nonetheless, Elkins sees this PhD as a lab report and as such it relates to what he intends to advocate:

*Avoiding New Knowledge and Research by Proposing the Art Object Itself as Knowledge and the Product of Research*, this is a question (via Wittgenstein) of the non-verbal of art showing ‘instead of saying’. However,

*If the art object itself is to be the new knowledge, instead of the dissertation, a great deal more work will have to be done to define what kind of thought inheres in the object itself, and what might be said of it*.

The clue here is to see art as ‘enabling thought’.

Finally, Elkins again insists that for art to have any validity *in a university* it must adapt to the wider concerns of an academic environment. This entails the complete avoidance of random and idiosyncratic citation, and PhD studies which in Elkins’ view are ‘poetic’ but not academic. In another of Elkins’ strangely contradictory assertions he goes on to advocate ‘doubt’ instead of theory, the ‘unknowing’ that one of the contributors to *Thinking through Art*, Iain Biggs, mentioned. This is the tag for indicating that the central requirement of the ‘studio art PhD’ is to elucidate ‘the act of making’, if it is to seek acceptance in the university. Elkins sees this as a constructive way forward:

*Universities have not been set up to think about the confluence of making and studying, understanding and knowledge, practice-led research and research led practice, writing and seeing, studio art practice could be the place to carry those discussions forward*.

He adds,

*Or it could just be another extension of threadbare concepts from UK pedagogy, twisted to fit the instrumentalised academic practice of contemporary art*.

In this context, it is useful to turn to his ‘Three Configurations of Studio –Art PhDs’. In a nutshell-as time is getting short- the three configurations are, that the:

1. Dissertation is the research which informs the art practice: that is, art history; philosophy; art theory; art criticism; other fields
2. Dissertation is equal to the artwork, which would be a new inter-disciplinary field, unless each was separate
3. Dissertation is the artwork or vice versa: here, the dissertation can be read as art or the art as the dissertation. In this type of PhD there is, according to Elkins, no research component. Central to his thinking here is the PhD by Elizabeth Price! However, do not imagine that this assertion is easy to dismiss; here is how he introduces this last model:

*The final option that occurs to me is to imagine the scholarly portion of the thesis inextricably fused with the creative portion, so that the artwork is scholarly and the scholarship is creative, perhaps a history of art as if it were fiction?*

In the end Elkins returns to the inevitable question of assessment: who is equipped to assess these new PhDs? This is the question raised at the very beginning of my own empirical research into student and supervisor experience of the PhD. In my research it was raised by a design historian who thought the PhD through art practice was fine but could not see how it would be assessed and by whom. In Elkins’ mind this relates again to –as he sees it-random trawling and citation of disparate and unrelated disciplines:

Why? Because the purpose of the candidate’s forays into different disciplines is to mine them in order to further ….artwork. Hence the normal scholarly criteria of truth, the production of new knowledge, thoroughness, clarity, and scholarly protocol just do not apply.

Elkins goes on to indicate that the art historian supervisor would need to address any submission according to standards of ‘rigour’, ‘argument’, and ‘research’…..He adds as a final comment:

*It seems the problem of evaluating creative-art PhDs simply cannot be solved unless disciplines give up their shapes and readers step outside their normal interpretative habits: exactly what might make the new degree so interesting, and at the same time ensure it cannot be commensurate with other degrees.*

I hope this is an accurate reading of what in the past has been-for me- an incendiary book. It is a publication which was no doubt written quickly to avert what I imagine the editor conceives as a threat to academic standards through the new ‘studio-art PhDs’. It certainly contains inaccuracies and curiously conflicted appraisals of its own essays as well as those included in *Thinking Through Art*. However, there are issues noted here which I still mull over.

7

Macleod, K & Holdridge, L, (2005) *Thinking Through Art reflections on art* as *research*

Now, to *Thinking Through Art reflections on art* as *research*, a book edited by Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge. I introduce it now because one of the aims for these notes is to retain a neutrality in relation to these 15 books. I have pored over them in the past. I have been by turns infuriated, humbled, dispossessed of what I thought I knew and now I will force myself to attempt a reasonably objective take on the book I co-edited. Like most books, it was the result of nearly 10 years work for me: my research into student and supervisor experience of undertaking PhDs through the practices of art started in 1996, roughly three years after I had been asked to supervise at PhD level. Lin Holdridge was a mature student on the Art History course at Exeter School of Art & Design, University of Plymouth. Once Lin became my research assistant, my research took off not just in the sense that Lin’s organisational skills meant we could organise conferences, attend as many as possible and a develop a university wide consortium to discuss the new PhD but also continual discussions about what we considered to be this new culture of research. *Thinking Through Art* came out of the inter-university consortium as well as my empirical research into on-going and submitted PhDs and an AHRC project that Lin and I undertook on ‘methodological models of good practice’, 2001-2002. *Thinking Through Art* is in three parts: the first part intends to open up discussion about this PhD *for* art, as it had come to be defined after a seminal essay by Christopher Frayling (who wrote the forward for this book); the second part is written by and devoted to artists’ PhD submissions; the third is concerned with its educational possibilities- to be brief.

The introduction states right away that the contributors are ‘reflecting’ on art in the context of the experience of artists undertaking doctorates:

*One of the main purposes of this book is to question how art and the* *processes of art might be understood, and in particular, to pursue what art might offer intellectually when it is framed as academic research and thus how it might sit within a broader academic arena.*

This siting of Fine Art within a university academic tradition and the status thereby conferred upon it as an academic discipline underpins many of the issues considered in this book. (NB This sentence could have been written by any of the many commentators attempting to appropriately site the PhD by art practice within the wider university research arenas).

In the first part ofthe book two issues highlighted for artists undertaking PhDs are the relationship between making and writing and the status and citing of theory within the PhD submission. The question of methodological certainty and the prediction of research outcome is raised, also how to appropriately supervise and examine these PhDs. Above all the book intends to reflect,

*The complexity of artists’ research findings and their implications for art in a more generic sense, from various and diverse perspectives….*

The intention is to try to understand what is being submitted as PhDs through the practice of art and the implications both for the host discipline and more widely within research arenas. The introduction describes the ways that chapters interrelate.

For instance, in Part 1, Nicholas Davey, Clive Cazeaux and Kenneth Hay demonstrate how the binary opposition of theory to practice might be rethought through identification of the conceptual within art practice (in stark contrast to Elkins’ (2009) resistance ); Kenneth Hay, Ken Neil and Peter Dallow elucidate how the material practices of art both take from and return us to the world ( a process distinct from many other disciplines in the university). Part 2 follows artists’ conceptual, perceptual and experiential problems encountered during the PhD and the ways in which they have sought to work through the doctoral process. The central issue is seen as how to present thought when ‘its origination comes through the visual and/or the practice of art’. Part 3 points to how there might be a much fuller understanding of the potential and possibilities for future development of the PhD by art practice (which I’m calling an art-research PhD)

Ultimately, *Thinking Through Art* is of its time:

*The predominant theme which emerges … remains how art and the processes of art might be understood as academic research*.

Crucial to the potential siting of art within the university is the attempt to explain how identifying art *as* research might offer a possible means of beginning to understand the self-reflexive process of art, not subject to written explication and fully deployed necessarily in the PhD. This is described by Stephen Melville as a process which,

*Explores the terms of visual practice in a field for which language is an unalterable given; in doing so it aims at a visuality not so much supplanted by language as possessed of an articulation or thinking internal to it. This would be what it means to speak in terms of a ‘theoretical practice’ or ‘theoretical object’. Theory here would be less something a critic or historian brings to the work…..than something to be traced in it, and writing would belong to such work as part of its unfolding, a continuation of the conditions of its appearing.*

(Melville, 1995)

In Melville’s view it is the process by which art declares what it is, that is it reveals itself as a particular and specific kind of, say video work. This line of argument opens onto Heidegger’s notion of ‘radical interpretability’, also Kant’s third critique, the *Critique of Judgement* and the process of viewing a natural phenomenon as something other than it is or appears to be. (This will be taken up by a future book, *The* *HypoCritical Imagination* by John Llewellyn). In this introduction, written at least 15 years ago I can see that the text swings between taking up various approaches to possible theorisations of the practice of art to insist on what is called its ‘intellectuality’ and taking up practical issues which have arisen during Macleod’s research into PhDs by art practice. The issue of how to judge art as a PhD is taken up in relation to Melville’s idea of art as a ‘theoretical practice’ or ‘theoretical object’. While this claim cannot be substantiated it does recognise the cognitive complexity of artists’ PhD work. The question remains as to how to judge art in the context of the PhD- which could be straightforward as acknowledged by an art historian supervisor I interviewed, who said, that in this context art could be seen as a,

*Series of linked developing propositions…..a developing sequence…..a series of propositions which are contingently true*.

However, the question of how to more fully understand art *as* research is central to this book’s concerns:

*The artists, philosophers, cultural, art or design historians contributing to this book, all have a vested interest in a more rigorous understanding of what it means to make and present art at an advanced level of academic achievement. We are all actively engaged in the construction of this new culture as supervisors, directors of research and colleagues of artist researchers. We need to know how and for what purposes art functions, not at the margins of a higher education institution but at its core: its doctorates and its cultures*.

Looking back now, it is hard for me to acknowledge that this carefully conceived book probably would not interest academics from more established research cultures. I cannot spare time now to enter into a long reflection but I can cast you back to Elkin’s book, *Artists with PhDs*. The random citation of sources remains a problem. Nonetheless, *Thinking Through Art* came out of sustained conversations about how to maintain the practices of art within the institutional framing of the PhD because all the contributors understood art to be a cognitively complex process and in this context, highly exacting and intellectually challenging. Macleod & Holdridge wrote:

*Our research indicates that the defence of art, even in the context of the PhD Viva, has not been a central part of training programmes: artists do not expect to robustly defend their research artwork. ….It could be said that artists’ interpretations of the methodologies which produce research artworks might help return the discipline to its own principles as well as justify the claim for art as research.*

This robust defence of the methods and approaches of art practice as determining whether art is research or not, the importance of their full examination was crucial in 2005/6. Questions concerning the precise field of the enquiry, how research questions were to be pursued and were pursued, the relationship between any written text and the research artworks all needed to be clear; in other words ‘the processes of thought which have driven the research’ need to be presented; ‘the exigencies of written text, realising artworks, representing theory, reworking a technique or any of the hybrid modes adopted’ by artists. Jim Mooney’s methodological chapter is cited here, titled,

‘Research in Fine Art by Project: General Remarks Toward Definition and Legitimation of Methodologies’. Here Mooney sets out how his research is to be understood. One of the most illuminating observations is that art, like poetry, can only be re-read, not just read because ( as Terry Eagleton puts it) ‘some of its structures can only be perceived retrospectively’. In the spirit of this re-reading Macleod & Holdridge cite Mieke Bal’s re-reading of Louis Bourgeois’ “Spider”, which leads to Bal’s understanding of this work as a ‘theoretical object’. Bal considers “Spider” to be

*effective in conveying, persuading, making us experience experience itself on all levels of the intellectual, the aesthetic, the mind, and the body.*

This is underscored by reference to Barbara Bolt’s post PhD reflections on what happened when she was painting a subject, a nude reading a specific book, which curiously informed the material practice of painting so that it became ‘the thing itself’, performing its subject, ‘a double transgression of language by flesh and flesh by language’. On the back of this, Bolt asserts the performative capacity of art which produces rather than represents reality and in this art returns us to reality, one of the themes pursued by Macleod & Holdridge in order to get at the material practices of art as both provocative and useful and why the existing repression of art within doctoral study is perhaps short sighted.

The introduction to TTA ends:

*Our research has demonstrated that to refuse what art is and does is to reject its interpretative currency and criticality. In complex times which become increasingly hard to grasp, it would seem profligate to dismiss the potential of artist scholars to ‘draw us beyond ourselves and throw us back upon our own subjectivity and agency’, despite the difficulty this might present to broader research cultures.*

Now, looking back, these two sentences demonstrate both the strength and the weakness of TTA. It is a book in which all the contributors are highly invested in art education. It seeks to demonstrate how art-research PhDs could add to PhD cultures more broadly within a university. Its three part structure sets artists’ PhD enquiries between philosophical investigations of relevant ideas and reflections on the educational potential of artists’ research enquiries. It does not provide proof of research probity in this context but it does provide considerable insight into the possibility, for instance, of a theorisation of an aesthetic of art methods, which was subsequently called for by Timothy Emlyn Jones (2006 & 2009). It may be that new research into the cognition of materiality- by Catherine Hales, for instance- might address some of the issues raised. However, having taken a break, I feel I do not want to trawl through TTA. It was not an influential book which could be seen in the same way as the other fourteen books in these notes. The research underpinning it, of course, was profoundly influential and it was out of this research that the contributors to the book were selected. But, but what I feel I must do now is open these notes to a more obvious looking back, looking back and attempting to see what these books are more clearly. I do know, for instance, that James Elkins’ *Artists with PhDs* (2009) publication retains a powerful puncturing of my thought- and confidence. It is this question of fully knowing what your work does and how it sits, where, and in what company. TTA of course fits within a host of publications dedicated to research ‘by the practice of the arts’. I find all of them ultimately unsatisfactory, including TTA. It is because they all attempt to lure in different and disparate theory to demonstrate how art performs *as* research. The main reason why I can exempt *Intellectual Birdhouse* from this is that the first essay by Sven Svenungsson presents the highly complex and conceptually charged story by de Chirico of the character Hebdomeros’ transformation from viewer, to natural form ( a plank of wood or branch), to object of the reader’s gaze. No explanation is provided by Svenungsson but the careful demonstration is there, without distraction. De Chirico’s story offers a perfect source for re-reading, reading once as short story/fiction and twice or more, as a particular structuring of thought, a complex cognition. What I am still wholly exercised by is why such complex cognitions, the conceptual schemata of art practice somehow eludes understanding or acceptance by academic arenas other than Fine Art. Is it because discourse is unalterably determined by the theoretical argument of named theorists? Wouldn’t that rule out any blue sky experimentation? Or should any open-ended experimentation be ruled out anyhow? I still wince when I think about what Elkins wrote in response to some of the texts in TTA when it was obvious that he had not read them carefully, had assumed that all contributors were artists who had submitted PhDs, ie not hermeneutic philosophers or Derridan scholars or directors of highly successful PhD research programmes etc, but still there’s that sting. It is true that the citation of theory must be appropriate to whatever is being presented. My preference would always be for whatever theory is deployed- that is theory drawn from other disciplines- is inherent within the methodological purposes of the research. The first example of what this would mean, was Elizabeth Price’s *sidekick*: here, in particular, her underpinning theory is Marxist materialism. There is no citation, no special pleading in the sense of half understood grasping at someone else’s ideas. Price’s PhD is a complex cognition, an invention which presents itself as it is on its own terms. Precisely what Jonathan Miles called for in ‘Research in Fine Art’ in *Intellectual Birdhouse*, but is it theory? It operates an ‘intellectual tension’ perhaps more useful than the ‘radical separation’ forced by existing academic apparatus. I’m not entirely sure why I exempt Miles from my criticism of all the various commentaries on what a PhD is or should be, except that his essay does seem to lead cogently to the entirely appropriate conception of art research disturbing theory and opening up a potential third space ‘within which what constitutes art and theory is being negotiated’:

*In order to theorise what research in the arts might be, it is necessary to go beyond theory as an inherited form, making it necessary to risk the formal limits of what is understood by ‘theory’.* (Miles, 2013)

It is a question of seeking to get beyond existing contexts, being in pursuit of what is not yet understood, of producing new contexts as the research makes its contingent way through various and differing understandings of a research subject, which ‘reframes its context’. Miles sees this mobility not as a minus qua Elkins but as,

*The potentiality of research precisely relates to the investigation of a whole number of striations that occur when placing different fields in relationship to one another.* Miles adds, just in case we get in a muddle here,

*This is not to attempt to solve the age-long dispute between philosophy and art; rather it is to deal with its fall-out within metaphysical thinking about art-which goes back as far as the Ancient Greeks*.

It is a question as Miles say, of what questions art poses next to philosophy and theoretical construction. If I think back to TTA, one of the most compelling essays was by Kenneth Hay who ran an incomparably successful PhD group back in the 1990s. It included Elizabeth Price and Hayley Newman. Ken deployed theory devised by Della Volpe in ‘Concrete abstractions and intersemiotic translations: the legacy of Della Volpe’ through which Hay defines art as a ‘determinate abstraction’ that is as an abstraction which is concrete and capable of ‘acting in the world’. Della Volpe’s CAC circle constitutes almost an aesthetic of art method which abstracts from the materials of the world, reconceives these materials and returns them to it, as new conceptualisations; a material and rational process also, in this context reflecting Marxist materialist logic. Surely this might indicate the importance of having supervision by artist-scholars, distinguished thinkers, not hidebound by the academic apparatus- as Miles names it.

There remain a nest of problems and confusions in my mind, particularly when I try to think clearly about whether or if it might be appropriate to determine art in this particular context of advanced practice, as Hay calls it, as ‘theoretical object’. Hays names a ‘concrete intellectuality’. I like this. It indicates how the intellectual resourcefulness of art acts in the world. I continue to find that the most robust art-research PhDs shift existing or current thought, open up unexpected questions, cause reflection on what has been taken for granted. To get back to the sore, to itch it again, when Elkins describes Price’s PhD as a ‘brilliant example of a laboratory report’ he seems to have assumed that this PhD is a straightforward accounting of the process of making, some kind of proof of what has been done and how. But this PhD is an intellectual tease; it has parodic and intellectual force and agency. I could never accept that argument and certain forms of research identification and proof were entirely necessary after encountering this PhD. It changed my thinking, the direction of my research and even where I chose to work.

8

*Hannula et al (Eds.), (2013) Artists as Researchers-* *A New Paradigm for Art Education in Europe*, Helsinki

It’s getting late which means that I shall stay on this tack of allowing my own reflections to dominate how I view these selected books- for today because I am now geared towards thinking about my own research, its sources of stimulus, its case studies and those findings which changed the way I think, which means I must now add a source which again I found humbling. This is Roger Palmer’s essay in *Artists as Researchers-* *A New Paradigm for Art Education in Europe*, edited by Mika Hannula, Jan Kaila, Roger Palmer and Kimmo Sarje. I probably bought this book because I saw it as a continuation of Hannula’s useful publications but when I read through it and now when I think about it, it is only the essay by Roger Palmer which held my attention. This essay is not brilliantly written or exacting intellectually but it provides a reproof, which was timely in 2013. Palmer asserts early on in his consideration of the PhD which is ‘practice-led research in Fine Art, that the compelling aspect of it is that it,

*Generates serious and lasting debate as to its validity*.

Yes. That nails it. Palmer makes it clear that this debate is not simply conducted by the wider research arenas but by art schools who hitherto have depended on artists practising in the field of art studios and galleries and contexts outside the institution. Palmer sees a likely scenario of future art schools becoming overly academic, and unrepresentative of the rapidly changing art worlds. In relation to the institution, Palmer sees an opportunity for artists to comply with regulations as well as to subvert them: for instance at Leeds University where he ran a PhD culture, artists’ PhDs had to be submitted within a hard bound box or book but the PhD submissions had extended what might be anticipated in finding novel ways of displaying art research work within the box format. Palmer goes on to cite the PhD by Elizabeth Price. He begins by outlining Price’s response in three issues of *Art Monthly* to Peter Suchin’s critique of PhDs by artists in his piece entitled ‘Rebels without a Course’. Price’s argument is that art ‘is a legitimate submission for academic degree at any level because making art is a thinking theorising process – it is intellectual in and of itself’. This proves to be Palmer’s introduction to a discussion of Price’s PhD submission in 2000 at the University of Leeds. Palmer describes the submission: three slim volumes, *sidekick*, other unfinished works and ‘undead’. He goes on to say he spotted on p97 of *sidekick* a definition which stuck in his mind, that is after lengthy descriptions of Price’s winding of tape onto itself to produce a work, at some point called ‘boulder’,

*Tape brings with it the expectation of a support, a vehicle to which it is applied, some thing which temporarily contains or secures. It is always an appendix, a sidekick.*

Palmer indicates that *sidekick* is more than the adhesive tape-sphere-boulder, as it is displayed in various contexts, it is an object subject to change, through its different presentations. Palmer goes on to cite three more PhDs submitted at Leeds University, in which,

*In each case, a performative practice is examined through a process of creative documentation, using the written component of the PhD submission as a radical, reflexive and integrated element of the project.*

A project which draws in diverse cultural contexts to ‘infect’ the very notion of a thesis.

Palmer returns to Price’s *sidekick* to find in ‘undead’ a single sheet of A4 paper which reads:

*Undead will be exhibited at Arthur R Rose, 2-11 July 1999 as part of ‘making something out of nothing’, in addition to this, No. 7 of the edition will be inserted here 12 July 1999.*

Also inside the ‘undead’ folder is a copy of *Art Monthly* no 228. A staple is attached to the upper right hand corner. Inside is a single sheet of lined paper with 7 again at the top right hand corner on which is hand written, Dept of Fine Art University of Leeds

Later, Palmer finds an advert comprising two areas of black with a white horizontal strip and a hand painted skull and cross-bones. On one of the black areas is the following:

‘*undead’ is an artwork disseminated as a free edition of up to 5000 between 2-11 July, 1999. from arthur c rose at 54-58 tanner st london (elizabeth price 1999*)

Palmer finds another copy of *Art Monthly* 228 and sees a printed version of the same ad. He makes this find at a distance of 13 years. I got hold of Price’s copy of the ‘faxed’ facsimile of *sidekick* in 2000. I had never understood the full PhD although Price had sent me documentation of the whole submission I had not had access to ‘undead’. This was because the University of Leeds refused to acknowledge this PhD until 2002 and would not release it to me in 2000. Palmer writes that uncovering this sequence of extensions to *sidekick*

*felt like a discovery, a publication that contains a unique art work by Price that, through an act of over-painting, using black paint on black ink, is also a cancellation, in that the white skull and cross-bones has been obliterated*. He adds,

Perhaps this is what she means by a ‘demonstration of a relationship between thinking and doing’ of ‘making something out of nothing’?

Chastened by not having known this, am I to make something out of nothing? I have written and talked about this PhD many times and did not know this vital bit of research evidence. Palmer ends *Recherché: Artists’ Researches and the PhD* with a sharp look at the current education system invaded by entrepreneurial values and business models. He writes:

*Like any Fine Art qualification, the practice-led PhD has its limitations and its dangers. Worst of all is that it should assume a place as an accepted standard or currency rather like an academic credit. …..serious art can lodge itself in the most unlikely of contexts, where it might take a month of Sundays to discover the work and another to ponder its meaning*.

9

Hlavajova,M, Winder, J & Choi, B, (2008) *On Knowledge Production: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art, BAK*

This next book, I’ve taken out of its original order because I want to look at theory, how the theorist Irit Rogoff conceives theory. This will be in part an irritated response to James Elkins’ (2009) unequivocal understanding of what theory is and how it functions; it is also an underscoring of how ethical practice by any practitioner takes action in our worlds: it has agency. Irit Rogoff’s essay, What is a Theorist? Is included in a publication by BAK ( Basis Voor Actuele Kunst) edited by Maria Hlavajova, Jill Winder & Binna Choi; it is one of many publications by BAK all geared to be instrumental to change, to new practice and thinking differently about enduring social, political, artistic, educational certainties – and iniquities.

Irit Rogoff’s essay has four parts, under the titles, ‘Undone’; ‘Without’; ‘Unfitting’; and ‘Practicing’. Under the first heading ‘Undone’ she writes this:

*A theorist is one who has been undone by theory.*

Rogoff sees the work of a theorist to ‘unravel the ground on which it stands’ as opposed to the accumulation of theoretical tools, materials and models of analysis and maintaining positions. In this context Rogoff asserts that the old boundaries between making and theorising, historicising and criticising have been eroded. She adds,

*Artistic practice is being acknowledged as the production of knowledge and theoretical and curatorial endeavours have taken on a far more experimental and inventive dimension, both existing in the realm of potentiality and possibility rather than that of exclusively material production. …..Now we think of all these practices as linked in a complex process of knowledge production ……*

Rogoff claims one cannot ask what is an artist without also asking what is a theorist. She goes on to chart her own move across disciplines in order to reflect on the ‘urgent concerns’ of each historical moment as a performative and participatory exploration. On the basis of what is already in place being questioned in the light of the urgency of the moment Rogoff started with the limitations of her own thought; she attempted to rethink given structures rather than to add thought to existing ones. This led her from the discipline of Art History to Visual Cultural Studies, an area where she felt she could think beyond or outside of naturalised values and the ‘truth claims of knowledge’.

*Critique, in all of its myriad complexities, has allowed us to unveil, uncover, and critically re-examine the convincing logics and operations of truth claims….*

But adds that this can lead to an ascendant critique which looks from afar at the subject of scrutiny, avoiding ambiguity and what might be ‘hidden within the folds of existing knowledge’. She has taken an intellectual path of pursuing that which is not yet articulable because what is being examined is also being lived through.

‘Without’ pursues this idea of not being fully in charge, not quite having the right tools to articulate these ‘urgent concerns’, ‘conjunctions of problems’. Rogoff cites September 11 as a crisis where the models of knowledge were unequal to the task of fully understanding how to deal with it. It did not blow away existing models of knowledge but interrupted them:

*Had we not been through these models of analysis, post colonialism and globalisation, we would not have understood our state of simultaneously knowing and being unable to know, which characterises the condition of being without*.

Hence, being without does not exclude, say, historical models but tries to adjust what is already known to the competing narratives of a current condition, a current historical moment. This necessitates a close re-thinking of questions of methodological certainty, much more difficult to relinquish than discipline boundaries; it means giving up,

*The certainty of an approach, of a problematic, of a set of analytic frames that we can use to tackle whatever issue of problematic we are preoccupied with……..*

Giving up in order to produce an intellectually broader, more politically inclusive and more imaginative field of activity, to open onto areas of ‘disavowal’. One of the first encounters of ‘disavowal’ for Rogoff within academe is the subject which is not yet formulated, a practice becoming increasingly necessary to PhD study. It is the constitution of a subject. She continues:

*I think we are in that phase when all of the work goes into the constitution of a subject for the work……So many of our PhD supervisions now dance around the inconvenience of what the dissertation is about, of what its subject is, of what we might name it when it finally comes into the full exploration of its concerns*.

Neil Chapman and I attempted to tackle this in ‘The Absenting Subject research notes on PhDs in Fine Art’ (*Journal of Visual Art Practice* Vol 13.2, 2014) but Rogoff here expresses this pursuit of a subject deftly. Rogoff underlines the political repression of an AHRC funding scheme which requires a repackaging of all this uncertainty ‘into a set of plausible questions, methods, assertions’ when the work to be undertaken exists between ‘the twin poles of doubt and certainty’, knowledge which is being ‘undone’. Rogoff asks whether it would be better to ask rather than where research fits existing schemas, what effects it might produce. Her own work seeks a ‘disrupted-through-analysis’, an ‘actual cultural making’ which she says she has glimpsed occasionally through an artist’s work.

‘Unfitting’ opens onto what might be required to get at an ‘actual cultural making’ which would be experimental conjunctions of ideas across politics and images. This would be a fluid space not working against boundaries, which so often leaves them in place. Rogoff adds,

….*the work of unfitting ourselves is as complex, as rigorous, as important as the work that goes into fitting within a disciplinary paradigm or that of expanding it in order to accommodate our concerns.*

For Rogoff herself a shift in her academic and intellectual drive- her stepping outside of established disciplines and writing with art rather about it- has been determined by

*the shift to a performative phase of cultural work in which meaning takes place, takes place in the present rather than is excavated for. Where its operations are not through signifying processes or through entering a symbolic order…..but through forms of enactment.*

Stepping into an area where there are limitations to what is articulable but where action might be possible.

Practicing

Rogoff writes it is these processes of being ‘undone’ and of ‘unravelling’ that set up the practice of theory. This supercedes theory informed practice, as a practice which ‘invents new viewing positions’ and ‘contextual fictions’, which expands the limits of ‘what knowledge might be and how it might be arrived at’, perhaps through a momentary disturbance in the ordering of things, an ‘uncapturable mode of knowing’, where existing knowledge is not up to the task currently presented.

This essay, *What Is a Theorist?* by Irit Rogoff took the centre ground for me in BAK’s publication On Knowledge Production: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art. This is a book which invites its contributors to reconsider ‘the field of art as a site for the production of knowledge, where knowledge is critically analysed rather than ’put on display’. In other words, participants are invited to consider what is knowledge? Who authorises knowledge and why? What is it that we know? What uses can be made of knowledge arising from art? Can it be, as Sarat Maharaj claims that art opens a space for new knowledge to emerge? Or, is a viable approach to work outside any institution of learning to investigate novel modes of knowledge transmission? This leads onto the second essay which proved useful on this practice of participant engagement, collective projects with uncertain ground, rather than a search for ‘truth’. This promotes an unhinging of existing knowledge bases as critical speculation and experimentation are fully deployed towards a ‘definite inconclusiveness’ to cite Sarat Maharaj. Clementine Deliss provides the title ‘privacy + dialect =capital’. What does this mean? Essentially that the work which interests Deliss as researcher, publisher and curator is ‘accessible only to a few’; it seeks to contradict or aggravate the consumption and production of the cultural and educational industry. Deliss ‘initiates’ dialogues between diverse artists and researchers, locations, contexts and institutions. She introduces some of the projects for her publication *Metronome* as ‘philosophical tropes’ as using fiction and disguise and translation to open up ‘metaphorical thinking’; in one project she asked her participants to imagine a new faculty of knowledge, where the intentions of this faculty might be presented through a photograph, illustration, schemata or plan? The result was 140 images of activities, of active artworks in faculties named, the faculty of anonymity; of subversion; of trust; of physiognomic perception; of fetishism; of stairs and labyrinths; of misunderstandings etc How to name knowledge then becomes a central issue, its methods, its exponents, how this transfer of knowledge could ‘remain inclusive, permeable, and yet precise’.

This approach asks first what are the methods of acquiring knowledge? These are entirely open questions. Deliss questions the institutional requirement for visible outcomes. This leads to research in art being ‘standardised into prose, outlines, and reports and in certain cases bolstered with ideologies of sustainability or continuity’. Deliss outlines how she uses her ‘idiosyncratic platform’ within an institution to conduct conversations about problems where the structure of the discussion itself is revealed during the conversation, a process she defines as ‘recursiveness’. Any understanding of what comes out of such practice requires a kind of de-coding to unlock both the conversation itself and the environment within which it was conducted, its contingent relations. Deliss has worked in the Livermore Laboratory, the US’s second largest weapons lab for atomic and hydrogen bomb research, observing the methods by which the scientists’ work undertaken there is anonymised, sometimes through fictional interpretations. Deliss adds,

*The relationship between specialist knowledge production and the formation of a new community [ her new faculty] that searches for a renewed sense of autonomy in knowledge production brings us back to the need for codified currencies of exchange that may not be compatible with the more populist strains of the cultural industries or programs for the public understanding of science.*

This codifying of knowledge production lends secrecy to what Deliss calls her deconstructive and ‘transvesting’ procedure. She owns a sense of ambivalence about this but sees it as necessary in the face of the increasing homogenising of approaches to knowledge production. Her aim is to work against her own ‘security system’ as an artist, to disclaim her own identity:

*The question of knowledge production when combined with notions of communal practice and identity, especially anonymity, is bound to lead to a series of quite different formulations.*

Deliss targets orality as a means of passing knowledge, perhaps new knowledge from person to person, emphasising the ‘interpersonal translation’ of the production of knowledge, which operates across cultures, languages and disciplines, and keeps reflection and discussion open, to find approaches to ‘that which is not yet known’.

10

Borgdorff, H*, (2012) The Conflict of the Faculties Perspectives on Research and Academia,* Leiden

The next book, book 10, *The Conflict of* the *Faculties Perspectives on Research and Academia* by Henk Borgdorff takes up this same challenge of defining precisely how not-yet-knowing can be intellectually useful. Its central advance is a borrowed theorisation (Latour, 1999) which attempts to nail the capacity of artistic research to construct ‘realities’, as ‘constructive realism’. Borgdorff writes:

*In the context of artistic research, artworks are epistemic things and events that have not yet been ‘understood’ or ‘known’…..that resist any such epistemological grip. Art’s knowledge potential lies partly in the tacit knowledge embodied within and partly in its ability to continuously open new perspectives and unfold new realities…..a distinctive not-yet-knowing against a backdrop of ever receding knowledge horizon*.

Borgdorff sees this epistemic thing as an engendered reality, a kind of revelation of what ‘something real’ could be. It is difficult now to be acutely interested in this argument. The reason I found this book and its set of papers delivered round Europe of interest was two-fold. Firstly, I recognised in the author whom I had met at various symposia and conferences as an extremely dedicated educationalist and secondly, it is clear from the first essay that this book is written under the shadow and impending further instrumentalisation of the PhD across Europe through the Bologna Process, (Borgdorff is a professor of research in the Arts at the University of the Arts, in The Hague, Netherlands). This would mean that the written text, argumentation, the literature search, the demonstration of new knowledge would all be perceived as suitable to the task of presenting one set of rules for doctoral study and submission. Questions of equivalent status and value, agreed research standards and truths, the acceptance of a particular understanding of theory and how it performs would all be instated in the drive to create a single framework for higher education for the three tiers of BA, MA and PhD ‘courses’. This book was published in 2012, nineteen years after Christopher Frayling quipped in his paper for the RCA Research Papers, (1993) that the new PhDs which promoted research *for* art would precipitate inter-institutional wrangling: the question is, says Humpty Dumpty, who is to be master. Perhaps it is inevitably a question of who is to be master, what is masterful, what is mastery of a discipline. Terms I barely recognise.

The first chapter in *The Conflict of the Faculties* is titled ‘The Conflict of the Faculties’! It is largely devoted to outlining Borgdorff’s stake in constructing this publication and acknowledging those people who have been instrumental in the development of its thinking to the point where the author can claim:

*This book is about transformations- the transformation of artistic practices to artistic research, and the transformation of academia*

*to a domain that also provides for non-discursive forms of knowledge, unconventional research methods and enhanced modes of presentation and publication.*

But is it? In the second chapter the author claims that his investigation is as metatheoretical, as metascientific, as foundational research and should be seen as such within the domains of philosophical science. The drive here is to align the PhD through art research, cited here as artistic research, to ‘academic research’ and to present what artistic research can contribute to wider research communities. (Those of us who are responsible for building and supporting research cultures in schools of art within universities have inevitably taken this tack). Borgdorff cites art’s specificities: the focus on the singular, the aesthetic-affective, the transgressive, the unforeseen as offering an ‘alternative culture of knowledge’. He seeks to clarify this with reference to the specific characteristics of art-research/artistic research by posing eight questions:

How can we differentiate artistic research practices from artistic practice?

What are the ontological, epistemological and methodological attributes of artistic research?

How can the relationship between artistic research and academia be characterised?

What position does artistic research programme occupy in science and technology policy and classification?

Under what terms does artistic research qualify as academic research?

What are the similarities and differences between artistic research and other academic research fields and how does artistic research related to other life domains?

What criteria may we employ in assessing artistic research?

How is such an assessment framework rendered in concrete practice in a peer-reviewed journal?

We have been here so many times before. What is new here is the last question as it relates to one of the central intentions of the book, to provide a substantial platform for and justification of JAR, the *journal for artistic research* and its satellites, RC, the research catalogue and SAR, the society for artistic research. *The Conflict of the Faculties* is a practical book which seeks to demonstrate how and in what ways artistic research can be taken to the required university academic standards; how it can be assessed or peer-reviewed, also how the publication of artistic research projects can be presented so that they meet the needs of different constituencies: professional artists, art institutes and art students. (None of the artist-researchers at Kingston University has shown any sustained interest in JAR or its satellites. The main reason being that the art presented has not been considered interesting or challenging). My own view is that the earnest pursuit of equivalence and shared standards is a blunt instrument to measure across disciplines and this endless pursuit by Hannula et al as to how understanding knowledge based in the sciences and technology studies, detracts from penetrating ideas within art-research. Does this view conflict with my appreciation of Clementine Deliss’ research into science laboratories in BAK’s publication? Not especially as I view Deliss’ research as in similar vein to the Artists’ Placement Group in the UK back in the 1960s where artists would be seconded into industry or science labs or wherever, to act as thoughtful intruders, disturbers of the status quo and intelligent thinkers; people whose own assumptions were already ‘unhinged’ as Rogoff might have said and who did not opine about theoretical positioning; their intention was to precipitate new kinds of agency, to act in the world, not to justify their thinking as academics employed by art institutes. This may be to be too harsh a comparison as one of Borgdorff’s central intentions is to see a research programme as a project, a ‘proposition’ as unfixed in the same way that art-research needs to *find* a methodological structure; it is inevitably in pursuit. Borgdorff claims that in this emerging research programme the relentless antipathy of practice to theory or vice versa will ‘disappear’ ‘as we learn to understand art’s epistemic potential’.

The next chapter, ‘The Debate on Research in the Arts’ addresses the need to more fully understand artistic research as a basis for new research programmes: to understand exploratory forays into materials; an acknowledgement that art deploys ‘concepts, theories and understandings’. For theory in a conventional sense, Borgdorff transposes training, specifically in his own academic context of music education where the professional training of academics is paramount. In this orbit of training we can see that this activity is also thoughtful. The whole chapter pursues artistic research as useful. It constitutes a plea for funding for professional research training which is equal to the funding of the sciences. Again, this has a practical orientation. The chapter ends:

*The faculties of the human mind are not subject to a value hierarchy. The institutional faculties, in which those human faculties are challenged and utilised, therefore have the right to equal treatment.*

Equivalence, standards, parity, quality, use value, economic value; where is the ‘useless splendour of art’? Its glorious inventions, its daring? The subversive or simply the non-conformist intellectual project in all its heightened complexity and imaginative re-thinking of what is already in place seems missing from this book. However, what it does convey is the urgency of the fight back against any easy acceptance of institutionalised and inter-institution norms for the PhD, also the need for a vehicle for the appropriate publication of artistic research. These require attention.

I wrote a review of *The Conflict of the Faculties* for *The International Journal of Education Through Art*, (Vol 9.1, 2013) designed to encourage a serious reading, not because of its attempts to re-charge the theoretical grounding of art-research but because it genuinely seeks to attack the problem of the relationship between it and academia. I was interested in Borgdorff’s argument for artistic research to be seen as a useful contribution to academia and how this could lead to a two-way relationship with art serving to transform or at least extend knowledge of research to other disciplines. Then in 2013, I indicated that this book provides ‘a thorough investigation and clarification of artistic research and the ways in which it performs’. I also noted that TCF does not offer a single line of argument and the overlap between chapters, acknowledged by the author, and the distracting relationship between them. I also outlined the book’s chapter content. Here it is:

…..*the first two present the specific and particular characterisitcs of artistic research, orientating the reader to further thought about method, outcomes and forms of documentation; the third and fourth chapters embark on an elucidation of research more generally, to make the case for what the author calls the non-discursive, and research methods which are unconventional and contingent to their contexts. Drawing on the social sciences, the history of science and Bruno Latour’s concept of ‘constructive realism’, the author makes the case for renewed realism wrought by research, which has opened up new areas of experience and understanding, a process relevant to both artistic and scientific research, [in his view]. In these central chapters the author allows for a mutual and enlarged understanding of what research is and how it performs across artistic research and research where the prevailing paradigm is scientific. Chapter five, entitled ‘Where are we Today?’ provides a useful survey of the current status of the field of artistic research, leading into a renewed argument for a new paradigm of research constructed from knowledge and understanding of our experiential worlds. Chapter 5 is underpinned by chapter 6 which presents the hybrid nature of artistic research as boundary work, operating within and across very different domains. Chapters 7 & 8 consolidate the theory advanced in Chapters 3 & 6 (I’m not sure anyone ever ploughed through this review), while Chapter 8 leads into Chapter 9, presenting Hans-Jorg Rheinberger’s theoretical ideas to validate the not-yet-knowing of artistic research, that is its illumination of knowledge not fully grasped or graspable*. [ I have already covered the material from Chapters ten and eleven]

In this review for *The Journal of Education Through Art*, I end by applauding Borgdorff’s ‘intertwinement’ of artistic and scientific domains of research. Looking back, I no longer find this convincing. I do think that much more robust thought and analysis needs to be applied to specific examples of PhD submissions and their host cultures, including the processes of selection of candidates to undertake PhDs and the processes through which external examiners are selected and how the Viva is conducted, including how institutional guidelines and rules are applied. This is practical- and follows on from my obvious enthusiasm for Philips and Pugh’s *How to Get a PhD*. The far more tantalising challenge of whether and how any theorisation of art-research operates is still left hanging: ‘constructive realism’ or ‘border work’ across disciplines or any of these ideas or borrowed theories seem inadequate to this task. Wha*t The Conflict of* the *Faculties* offers is a well substantiated claim for the need to fully publish art-research.

11

Bolt,B, (2004) *Art Beyond Representation The performative Power of the Image*

The next book, *Art Beyond Representation The performative Power of the Image* by Barb Bolt follows on from this in the sense that the central theorisation is based in Heidegger’s concept of ‘handlability’. For me, this book is a retrograde move from Bolt’s earlier, less resolved, post PhD essay in *Unframed Practices & Politics of Women’s Contemporary Painting*, edited by Rosemary Betterton, (which was published in the same year, 2004 but must have been written earlier). In *Unframed*, Bolt determinedly pursues how painting is a ‘performative act’ as a means to ‘question representationalist understandings of painting’. Her thesis is ‘painting is not a representational practice’ that in the process of painting there is ‘the potential for a mutual reflection between imaging and reality’ and that in this process ‘this performative act’ produces ontological effects which are *not* representational.

Bolt’s essay in *Unframed…*starts out with her practice of painting based in her experience of two paintings in each of which a figure is reading a book, two very different books, one of fiction and one of theory. Bolt notices a difference in what emerges through her painting:

*The painting takes on a life of its own. It breathes, vibrates, pulsates, shimmers and generally runs away from me. The painting no longer represents, nor does it merely illustrate…..It performs*.

Bolt describes how her two paintings of the same sitter reading very different kinds of book, somehow became a medium which is both ‘sign and not sign’ (borrowed from Elkins, 1998), more than a representation, somehow a medium which carries what she sees as ‘a materialisation of the facts of matter’ ‘the thing itself’- borrowing from Olkowski, (1999). This is an idea which extends back to Jean Paul Sartre’s essay ‘On Writing’ from decades earlier, as far as my reading is concerned, in which Sartre looks at how the flash of yellow in the sky in Tintoretto’s painting of *Golgotha* is not a representation of the agony it is ‘the thing itself’; Tintoretto’s painting takes on this contingent consciousness, if that’s an appropriate way of explaining this phenomenom and of course, Sartre’s thought owes much to phenomenological enquiry. Sartre’s essay, (1946?) is also what the critical theorist Irit Rogoff describes as her means to more fully understand art, which is to write alongside it. Bolt sets out in *Art Beyond Representation* to do just this. She enters into what she describes as the ‘flexion between bodies and language’… the ‘stutter of words ushered in through this flexion’. The concept of stuttering is borrowed from Giles Deleuze (1994), the kind of stuttering of language itself, an idea borrowed by Kate Love in her PhD to describe the impact on language of a trauma which could not be described in writing. It is a question of bodies and the language system, where the body becomes not inscribed by language but becomes it. An argument heavily dependent on Deleuzian thought. And this is exciting,

*The point is to make language cry, to make it stutter, mumble or even whisper* (Deleuze, 1994)

Writing is rupturing meaning. According to Deleuze this works when there is a disjunction between the semantic and sound systems. An event where life crowds in to interrupt language as it were. Just wonderful ideas but what does writing carry in relation to art, to painting? Is it best to seek an understanding of how matter performs? This is how Bolt proceeds to speculate about a ‘visual stutter’, substantiated with reference to Ferdinand de Saussure and C S Pierce’s seminal work on signs and referents which, drawing back into theory of the ‘dynamic object’ constituted perhaps in moments of seeing – as with Paul Cezanne- where the painting is almost let go, to be what it is, without prior formulation. What Yves Alain Bois calls ‘worlds under construction’ (1998). And so the references and continuing theories, based in linguistics and semiotics pile in to determine this ‘performativity’ where ‘the language mimes the motions of the body and the landscape’. But painting is not language in this sense. What excited me about the essay in *Unframed…* when I first read it was this idea of a stuttering, which I saw as a kind of uncontrollable energy, an idea that could go in many different directions. When it is pinned down as it is relentlessly in *Art Beyond Representation* through theories borrowed from linguistics, semiotics, phenomenology, ontology etc the force and energy of that hit, the slash of yellow, the book that becomes other than a painted object, seems to recede. It is again this endless tussle between what art presents and what words do, how each perform and how this performative capacity could be said to apply across and between their distinct materialities. I find Barb Bolt’s findings incontestable, it is just I have misgivings about her theorisation of them. Nearing the conclusion of *Painting is not a Representational Practice*, Bolt writes:

*I would argue that just as life gets into images, so imaging also produces reality….the material practice of painting can transcend its structure as representation and, in the dynamic productivity of the performative act, produce ontological effects.*

Bolt ends the essay by describing the process of the artist losing herself, giving herself over to the work. She then goes back to Heidegger to describe this experience as ‘giving herself over to the being of art, that is the work of art’. This seems to take this reader back to the question of mastery: how to master (I use the word advisedly) an experience which is opaque to written explication. In my experience of the best PhDs in this area of art-research the only way of producing substantial research, as advanced art is to formulate the findings within the research works: critical reflection on whatever is produced can be fascinating but fails to fully demonstrate the depth of knowledge and understanding *in the work.* I am also painfully conscious that borrowing theories from disparate sources, which many of us do and cannot do without, is a distraction. Think of Marcel Duchamp’s ‘Large Glass’. How many dissertations and tracts have been written about it? Mike Nelson’s ‘Coral Reef’. I know this is fatuous in the face of edifices of knowledge but why is it that the practices of art are so little understood?

Bolt actually freely admits this in *Art Beyond Representation*:

*The problem of thinking and writing about art practice is a difficult one. Is it possible, for example, to articulate a logic of visual practice or does practice escape such theoretical contemplation altogether?*

Also,

*The focus on artwork rather than on practice, has produced a gap in our understanding of the work of art as process*.

And again,

*In research on art, the theorisation effect works to subsume the question of ‘art practice’ into that which can be identified, classified, evaluated and interpreted by historians and theorists……We find that the “unruliness” of practice is difficult, if not impossible, to insinuate into the discipline that has come to be known as Art History.*

*Art Beyond Representation* most definitely aims to draw the reader closer to understanding the practices of art, its logic:

*The relation between the artist, the complex of practical knowledges, the materials of practice and the novel situation, forms the central concern of this book. Is it possible to postulate a theory of practice that may help us understand it as a generative process?* (a radical, material, performativity)

These are Bolt’s aims in this publication. However, it did not illuminate how to get closer to the complex, material formulations of the work under scrutiny-for this reader, at this moment. I will probably have to reconcile myself to an acceptance that we are all stepping round complex experience and art formulations which just need to be presented as such. See Elizabeth Price’s *sidekick*. It requires no external theorisation. It simply requires due and sustained attention and thought which directly responds to what it is and does, as a PhD and art, a ‘concrete intellectuality’, an indefinite rendezvous.

12

Llewelyn, J, (2000) *The HypoCritical Imagination Between Kant and Levinas*

This next book is a work of Philosophy. I was introduced to it by a fellow researcher in the field of research into art as research. It is a publication in the series of Warwick Studies in European Philosophy edited by Andrew Benjamin. Of the 15 books this is one of the most influential but how far I have properly understood it is entirely debatable. It is *The HypoCritical Imagination Between Kant and Levinas* by John Llewelyn. There are two key reasons why I have returned to this book many times: the first is that it is a work of brilliant philosophical thought and daring; the second is that its thesis is the power of the imagination to see and conceive things as other than they are. In other words its aim is to address how the imagination functions. I will add a third, which is of a different order and that is how it seeks to spell out precisely how the imagination is put to work through the poetry of Emily Dickinson. I was introduced to Dickinson’s poetry by a super cool, white socked American scholar over fifty years ago when I was studying English as an undergraduate at University of Leeds and have retained a passion for her work ever since. Thus, this book can be seen as a wild card: no earnest accounting for PhDs by art practice troubled by endless quotation of inappropriate theoretical source or companion discipline, this presents a different nest of problems. Firstly, my inclination to cherry pick my way through what is an incredibly demanding and complex read; secondly my lack of knowledge of Emmanuel Levinas’ phenomenological thought and limited knowledge of Immanuel Kant’s oeuvre outside the three Critiques: *Critique of Pure Reason; Critique of Practical Reason* and *Critique of Judgement*. Towards the end of the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant wrote that more and more he had become intensely preoccupied with:

*…the starry heaven above me and the moral law within me*.

Of course this chimes with Dickinson’s poetic sensibility. But let’s not run ahead. Here is the fly cover introduction to *The HypoCritical Imagination*, no doubt written by the editor of the series, Andrew Benjamin:

*In this boldly provocative study John Llewelyn argues that imagination has not been given its due. He asks whether imagination might reach out as far as to touch the rational feeling that in the Critique of Practical Reason is named moral respect, reverence or regard. Might imagination stretch still further, below the moral law that is the ultimate object of awe for Kant to something like the an-archic enigma that Levinas calls the face? Is imagination given its due by being extended beneath the Kantian root, across and below the discourses of all three Critiques, turned not simply, as neo-Kantian slogan enjoins, ‘back to Kant’, but back too beyond him, hypocritically back beyond every root; so that only in doing justice to the imagination in this way would justice be done…..’to the things themselves’?*

The key thesis for my purposes is that Llewelyn pays due attention to how the imagination can be said to perform, its essential power to open onto what does not yet exist:

*I heard a Fly buzz- when I died* –

Emily Dickinson

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the imagination can be seen as the root of sensibility and understanding, while in the *Critique of Judgement* it can be seen as cooperating with reason, to reduce this to my words. Llewelyn stretches this to leap into the ethical return to the other from Levinas’ thought, the imaginative conceiving of self and other in terms of address -which we can see in Dickinson’s work. Llewelyn’s argument hangs on the lack of ‘bifurcation’ or separation between imagination and reason in Kant, in attending to Kant’s idea of the schematisation involved in judgement of concepts and intuition, a kind of splitting within imagination’s capacity; this leads to what Llewelyn defines as ‘imagination being beside itself’. What a dazzling idea. However, the attentive reader must be cautious. This is how Llewelyn introduces chapter eleven, the chapter on the work of Emily Dickinson:

*Chapter 11 treats of an aesthetic dimension of the ethical, bringing out the connection of the aesthetic imagination and the ethical imagination with truthfulness, indicating that epistemological representation is, in an extended sense of both terms, political representation*.

I find the concept of truth here tricky. It raises the endlessness of what might be considered truth: Dickinson’s work here is used as illustration- and how could it be otherwise in this context? But, Dickinson’s work and its singularity does not necessarily conform to any philosophical concept of truth. However, Llewelyn’s philosophical take is the internal contradictions through the performativity of what exists in the saying and what is said:

*…..it announces something that exceeds psychological weakness and strength. ‘Imagine…’ is essentially, logically, grammatically promissory. Imagination as the performance of a thought experiment is inherently prefatory to what is exterior to the imaginable, prefatory to what is unimaginable……the to-come, the avenir, the future*.

Here it is: it is that which is unimaginable onto which the imagination opens. In fact, one can follow Llewelyn to the realm of ethics through the imagination’s capacity to perceive what is, beyond what is and the return to what might be contrary to current facts: the *is* conceived of *as-* *if* or *as*:

*The ‘as’ of imagination is the ‘common root’ of allegory, analogy, simile, metaphor, symbol and simple predication.*

This is imagination’s business as perceiving-*as*. Not logical but causal, perceiving *as -if* not to predict because the imagination is not purposeful in that sense. It is a kind of ‘counter-factual conditionality’, imagining otherwise. When we ask, what if? When categories or law are suspended, to allow for judgement. It is an interruption in understanding between what has happened and what might be anticipated. This draws in concepts of the unsaid and the unsayable (the refusals within semiotics), where imagination is ‘the hinge between reason [what is and what cannot be said] and sensibility [where perceiving otherwise is possible]’. Llewelyn is attempting to get at how the imagination ‘wonders’, or is amazed.

As I’m writing this, I’m conscious of just how far I have had to simplify Llewelyn’s argument. I shall trust it is in a just cause. Why not? The full force of clashing disciplines comes into play as I tease out meanings that I think might be relevant or useful to my project within Fine Art, just as Llewelyn has deployed a poet’s work to tease out and demonstrate how the imagination can be said to function, as a kind of doubling back, which he sees as a possible ‘ethical return’ to what is, which I see as a Duchampian rendezvous, the endless return to ‘things in themselves’.

Part 1 of *The HypoCritical Imagination* is devoted to interlocking readings of Kant; Part 2 Levinas’ work on criticism, and ‘hypoCrisy’, also Arendt’s reading of aesthetics as political. I need to get to Part 3 ‘To the things themselves’ to Michel Henry on Kant and the idea of respect as affectivity to lead into regard for the other within aesthetics as ground work to chapter 11. Henry’s argument seems to hang –in this context-on the consideration that objectivity and subjectivity should not be separated, that affectivity is the ground or ‘essence’ of reason. This grounding is ontological and phenomenological because it is about being in the world. A kind of truth to being or having respect for the fact of being, of the self as immanent to its being through affectivity. In chapter 10, as a lead-in to the chapter on Emily Dickinson’s work, Llewelyn takes up the phenomenological theme of art responding to the world, as ‘witness to it’ enabling a complex responsiveness, of seeing and being seen. Merleau-Ponty approaches this phenomenom with the example of how artists will so often paint themselves in the act of painting,

*…..thereby supplementing the things they saw with what the things saw of them, as though to attest that there is total or absolute vision outside which nothing remains and which closes upon themselves*. Merleau-Ponty *Eye and Mind*, 1964 (p197)

Merleau-Ponty goes on to write about the ‘blurring’ of ‘essence and existence, imaginary and real, visible and invisible…..[the]silent significations’. For Llewelyn this opens onto the question of aesthetics as also ethics, that is bearing witness as also bearing witness to that which is other, an ethical understanding of things in the world. An invitation for them to return the gaze through making present, through’ ‘presencing’ what is present. In this act, the art act (my words) teleologicality is suspended: the act is disinterested. In Llewelyn’s words:

*The pictorial moment of the phenomenological reduction is the deontological moment of ontology that puts in parenthesis the superstructures and substructures-not least the economic ones- of the world of everyday life, in order to make more evident the deeper structures on which they are based.*

This suspension in Llewelyn’s view also cuts out any relationship with science at this point because of the ‘unresolved’ and ambiguous nature of this suspension. This instant of fully presencing. That poem of Emily Dickinson’s *I heard a Fly buzz-when I died-* goes on,

*The Stillness in the Room*

*Was like the Stillness in the Air –*

*Between the Heaves of Storm*

Emily Dickinson

In relation to Paul Cezanne’s endless paintings of Mount Ste Victoire, Llewelyn notes how through the interchange between mountain and artist, painting and viewer, ‘signified and the signifier change places with each other all the time’ as each phenomenon makes sense of each.

Now to chapter 11 titled ‘Alethaesthetics Ethics as an aesthetics of truth’. The chapter starts with another of Dickinson’s poems:

*Tell all the Truth but tell it slant-*

*Success in Circuit lies*

*Too bright for our infirm Delight*

*The Truth’s superb surprise*

*As Lightning to the Children eased*

*With explanation kind*

*The Truth must dazzle gradually*

*Or every man be blind –*

E.D.

It also starts with a lengthy exposition of how the banal, that is the diurnal or daily might also become the ‘new’. This leads into an approach to Dickinson’s work which recognises how the banal or everyday is actually made new. Llewelyn quotes Archibald MacLeish, a fellow poet, who writes:

*She has a little harbour of frequently voyaging words any one of which would now be regarded as leaky enough to sink an ordinary lyric: Grace, Bliss, Balm, Eden, Calvary, Chosen, Morn, Noon, Bee, Bind, Earl, Pod, Plush, Peninsula, Circumference and so on. Her poems somehow support them: she is able somehow to persuade us to read them not as worn-out generalisations, borrowed, many of them, from the hymnals from which she borrowed her metrics, but as symbols whose very banality makes them, in the innocence of her context, new*. MacLeish, (1960)

Dickinson’s vocabulary and metrics are borrowed, her poems full of repetitions but somehow – in the strange context –amidst the dashes and capital letters and syntactical strangeness the ‘symbolic force’ of these words soars. What Llewelyn calls the ‘oddity’ of these works is because as E.D. writes, the poems ‘ slant’. These poems also can be read across from one to another. Susan Cameron first pointed this out in 1979 indicating a renewed sense of time unfolding from one poem to the next, a rendezvous between poems. This takes on a different interpretation here in this book as ‘revoked referentiality’ (Hartman, 1980) and also –getting to the core of the argument- what Llewelyn calls a hypo-criticality, which reaches beyond the phenomenological and returns to it, explained under the philosopher’s pen as:

*The hypocritical passes below and beyond conceptuality to preconceptual indeterminancy. If it does this while letting go of conceptuality and words altogether it descends to the indeterminancy of the il y a. Far from doing this, the Dickensian poem retains a devotion to concepts and words but combines this with a devotion to indeterminancy.*

I’m beginning to quote from *The HypoCritical Imagination* directly now to withdraw from its determination because quite frankly-at this moment- I cannot care about its philosophical accuracy. It is not the accuracy of this philosophical gamble which reaches through from Kant’s separation of feeling and reason in *Critique of Reason*, to interpret the question of judgment in *Critique of Judgment* where alignment might be plausible and newly invigorated with reference to Levinas’ concept of facing the other as ethical –no. I am a jackdaw looking for the bright shiny insight: in this case, renewed insight into Dickinson’s work. And here it is: it is that these tiny poems are not complete in themselves, they are somehow unbounded, quatrains and poetic forms, borrowed like the vocabulary but set in an unending company of companion poems to speak of unboundedness, a mirroring of what she experiences when she thinks of her God. And yes, they are also ‘irreconcilables’ both ‘emphatic’ and ‘indeterminant’. I agree with Llewelyn, these poems are about speaking the truth and it is through the accuracy of the precise configuration of the words within their formulation as poems – in sequence but ….but…do these poems really account for the pre-essence, the ‘an-archic enigma’ of witness to the other, the ‘face’ as Levinas names it which does justice to ‘the things themselves’? Here I sit glued to the computer screen, nearing the end of *The HypoCritical Imagination*, knowing that in my many previous readings I have lifted what I wanted, just as I know this to be highly unethical but maybe we are all caught up in some kind of appropriative game, which is more or less sophisticated and knowledgeable. How can Llewelyn write, for instance in this chapter devoted to Emily Dickinson’s poems:

*This interconnectedness of the just, the good and the beautiful is what makes it feasible to speak of an aesthetics of truth.*

This must then be about belief. It cannot simply be about the justness of words and attending to both words and to what the words address. Could Llewelyn have chosen any of a number of poets? George Herbert, for instance. Here responsibility to the ‘addressee’ and to the subject matter expressed must be equivalent. But then I return to a sentence or two which I warm to on page 196:

*To say that ethical responsibility entails aesthetic responsibility is to say something that holds not only for moments of high poetic and poetic tension, but for moments when one’s attention is slack and one utters what may seem utterly and irresponsibly banal.*

Llewelyn identifies this process as ‘tapping the poetry beneath the prose of the world, by saying the thing as though for the very first time’. I have to applaud. This is the moment when the singularity of the poem transcends literal meaning and gains symbolic force- through its aesthetic. In Llewelyn’s argument, the detailed analysis of a poetics, the ethical must also be aesthetic. He does write, ‘The ethical entails poetics’. Necessary to the ethical is what I shall call imaginative disruption of what is. Hence, the imagination can be said to remove ‘distinctions between imagination, intellect, sensibility and reason’. The poetic moment has a ‘disintegrative function’, essentially between a singularity and the generalizable. We know this ‘counter-factual’ space so very well, those of us who make art.

13

Fisher, E & Fortnum, R, (2013) *On Not Knowing How Artists Think*

This next book, *On Not Knowing How Artists Think*, edited by Elizabeth Fisher and Rebecca Fortnum was rather over shadowed for me by *Intellectual Birdhouse*, which was published in the same year, 2013. I leapt towards it because of its cover, an image of Sarah Cole, very heavily pregnant, apparently right out at sea in a bright blue pedalo boat marked by a number 8 on front and side. Immediately then there was an ambivalent response, that title which I dislike intensely and that image of an artist whose work I admire. At the time, in 2013 after skipping over essays by impressive contributors I fixed on another essay by a philosopher, Rachel Jones, to which I shall return. Flicking through again I stop at the conversation by Cornford and Cross, ‘Mobilising Uncertainty’ again artists whose work I admire and I find this from David Cross:

*I keep returning to making art because it still holds out the possibility of overcoming the stale dichotomy between theory and practice*. Cross continues,

*I find the idea of praxis intensely appealing; if there’s to be a chance of transformative, self-aware action, then maybe not just the method, but the aim, could be to mobilise uncertainty.*

Yes. The mobilising of uncertainty, the provocation of new thoughts and unanticipated meanings. And this through a collectivity of collaborators and participants. This seems highly appropriate. Cornford and Cross also have reservations about this idea of ‘not-knowing’:

*The condition of ‘not knowing’ seems able to serve very different aims-from curious philosophical enquiry and intuitive aesthetic experimentation, to the attention deficit resulting in advertising, or even the cultivation of ignorance in public relations and political spin.*

I shall retreat now to that safe space of ‘curious philosophical enquiry’ to which I seem inevitably lured. In this essay by Rachel Jones, ‘On the Value of Not Knowing Wonder Beginning Again and Letting Be’, not knowing is set against the long philosophical history of reason posed against *not* knowing:

*Not knowing constitutes on the one hand an inevitable effect of the perspectival limits that allow us not only to think, but to exist at all, as the temporarily individuated entities that we are: and on the other, a condition of becoming, of the possibility of the not-yet and still-to-be, without its emergence being overshadowed by what already is and has been.*

The condition of becoming must be open to the encounter with the un-familiar, perhaps the familiar made strange. Jones takes the reader through Luce Irigaray, to a surprising source of wondering, René Descartes in his *The Passions of the Soul*, where wonder is seen as instrumental to seeking to know. Jones, of course, follows a deliberate route through Irigaray which I shall skirt over to describe this not-yet-knowing as also not-yet-encoded, which leads so easily in this skirting over to Sarah Cole’s flirtation with philosophical ideas about the sublime, linked in this essay firmly back to Kant to repeat ( as we have already done) the well worn caesura between reason and the senses, where the sense might overwhelm but then, in the due process of recuperating understanding return to make intelligent, reasoned sense of what has been encountered -and caused wonder. However, as Jones leads the reader back to Sarah Coles’ *Birthplace Heterotopia*, the artist about to give birth, right out at sea in a flimsy pedalo boat, actually on the very day her baby is due, somehow laughs at the all-embracing concept of the sublime, most particularly in relation to Kant’s understanding of the place of women in society. Here, now or then in 2004, Cole precipitates a newly unsettled understanding of the woman alone, about to give birth, lost at sea and about to produce new and un-known life, a birthing into uncertainty. Jones captures this image of being-at-sea within Irigaray’s thought about the woman who is ‘other’ in western culture but-and these are my words and where I move away from Jones’ references to Lyotard’s thought- in this state of ‘other’ the condition of possibility of course is intensified. I ‘wonder’ too if it is Irigaray’s own cultural and racial position of otherness which affords her always to see the profound possibilities for respecting ‘otherness’, the ethical and political conditions from which our choices are made, to either identify with otherness, people or things being other than they are, or closing down against this.

Jones returns to Kant and the enduring question of reason as against, well let us say, in the context of Irigarays’ thought, other ways of knowing, bodily knowledge, for instance. In the context of the exhibition which gave rise to Jones’ essay ‘Material Intelligence’, techne or practical skill of ‘the intelligence of matter’. Jones ends the essay through a brief reference to Jill Bennett’s concept of ‘vital materiality’, that complex, bodily knowledge which exceeds the means to express it and which is part of the material practice of making work. Jones writes that the knowledge of what materials can and cannot do:

*… this knowledge will emerge between the vital materiality that we are and that which we encounter and with which we interact.*

It is, according to Jones, a question of the intelligence of matter. This essay ends:

*Material intelligence would then belong neither wholly to human beings nor to matter. Instead it would emerge in the interactions between them, made possible by the way human beings always already are bodily and material beings themselves, as well as by an acceptance of the not knowing that allows human intelligence about matter to be coupled with the guiding intelligence of matter. It is this between, perhaps, that the creative practice of art and thought can take place.*

I had almost lost sight of Coles in her bright blue pedalo boat, that Mobius strip of an 8 clearly marked on its small, bright blue, plastic frame.

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Slager, H, (2012) *The Pleasure of Research,* Helsinki

I am now again in retreat but this time from a philosophical essay which somehow forgets the wild experimental pleasure of a work, say, *Birthplace Heterotopia* by Sarah Cole, which knowingly teases existing theoretical constructions, including her own close reading of Luce Irigaray’s works, to say nothing of Kant’s foundational theoretical and philosophical thought. I’m retreating to *The Pleasure of Research* by Henk Slager. Slager is part of the European Artistic Research Network (EARN) and is central to quite a few international initiatives and publications, including several I have already noted here in these 15 books. Slager seems also to be a figure slightly apart from say, the relentless justificatory publications on Artistic Research, (*Journal of Artistic Research*, its accompanying peer-reviewed, *Artistic Research* Catalogue and *The Conflict of the Faculties* by Henk Borgdorff) all admirable but on one vital level, missing the point. Slager has run at least nine curatorial projects, including *Critique of Archival Reason* (Dublin, 2010); *Artistic Anthropology*, (Seoul, 2010) and *Any- Medium- Whatever,*

(Venice Biennale, 2011).

*The Pleasure of Research* opens with the usual positioning passages insisting on art research being context savvy and exploring how this ‘new’ capacity opens up the freedom to deploy a wide range of contexts such as architecture, design, film, history, sciences, technology, biology, philosophy and in doing so elicits the question of how it should be judged, (a question raised in my research in 1996) However, Slager passes rapidly on to propose-and maybe to dare to hope that a graduate school might be ‘a sanctuary for artistic thinking’; he seems to be advocating such a graduate school as an institution within an institution where it might have a ‘catalizing effect’ ‘generating bases and nodes’ and networks capable of thinking ‘beyond corporatized social networks’. He begins to argue against the Bologna-process’s ‘propensity to format for the sake of cognitive capitalism’ and its ‘quantification of quality’. Slager quotes Tom Holert:

*The problem is, once you enter the academic power-knowledge system of accountability checks and evaluative supervision, you have either explicitly or implicitly accepted the parameters of this system……even if one copes with them, contests them, negotiates them, and revises them*. *(Artistic Research,* 2005)

We have already encountered *Artistic Research* (2005) in book 3. I had forgotten Holert’s essay, an example of this reader not paying due attention. I have been reading Slager’s text as new, as different because I wish it to be, because it espouses a polemic I like, which is the need for art research to inhabit a space of critical agency through experimental laboratory type research arenas offering ‘spaces of possibility’. This would be beyond the confines of current institutional vocabularies of knowledge transfer, knowledge assessment, professionalisation, quantifiable outcomes and marketability, the ceaseless protocols of outcome, value, impact and monitoring. Slager writes,

THE CREATION OF A SPACE FOR FREEDOM OF THINKING IS THE CORE TASK OF THE ART ACADEMY

I pressed the wrong key and this last sentence came out in capital letters. I shall leave it as it is. In this first essay in *The Pleasure of Research*, Slager advocates an autonomous space for PhD art education, one which would be non-specialist, anti isolationist and anti hierarchic. He sees the PhD as fulfilling ‘the role of the conscience of the art academy as an institution’, its critical consciousness based in its autonomy. Slager goes on to attempt an analysis of common ground within PhD art research or artistic research, ground which breaks free from art history and hermeneutics. After glancing across various commentators’ contributions to this question, he comes up with the idea of ‘experimental aesthetics’,

*…..the situation of artistic research as experimental aesthetics is ultimately characterised by the continuous movement between fluidity and rigidity, laboratory and herbarium, smooth space and striated space, non discipline and discipline, the particular and the universal.*

I am not sure that this specifically adds to current understanding of art research methods. However, the next chapter is concerned with methods: it deploys Giles Deleuze’s concept of the rhizomatic, of mapping as a central-and well worn-theme. However, the concept of endless entry points of reversibility and openness to modification and change, yes. This remains of intense interest and use. Also, the reference to Roland Barthe’s *The Pleasure of the Text*, where the two plains of language as it conforms to what has been learnt and that which takes one beyond or ’to another edge’ which is mobile, blank, full of disruptive possibility. Slager thinks that one could account for artistic research in the same way that Barthes touched the edge of semiotic probity in the 1970s and begin to see that it forces an edge between ‘artistic knowledge production and the pleasure of the process of thinking’, its ‘non-discursive intensity’. Slager characterises such research as ‘fluent, nomadic, deterritorializing’ with the capacity, through its singularity, of not just moving across the particular and the universal but dissolving these categories. He ends the chapter near the thesis of the last book:

*That singularity of singularization of knowledge is the intrinsic condition of the experimental, the unpredictable but potential quest for the not-yet-known designated as artistic research.*

Round and round we go. Except that the next two sections describe artistic research projects presented in exhibitions. The next section in The *Pleasure of Research* describes work in an exhibition, curated by Slager which explores amongst other ideas ‘the zone of methodological reflection’. This acts as introduction to the central theme of undoing any functionality of photographic images to introduce ‘marginal forms of dysfunctionality’, a reaction to the inter-university drive towards the validity of research outcomes as academic knowledge production. The following section again describes work which is sited in public spaces, seen as multi-site specificities, ‘ambulant fields’ mobile and fleeting spaces, transient spaces to consider the material conditions of location, to open onto discursive and fluid networks. Some of this work-too briefly described to really grasp- critically reflects on transient populations, arrivals and departures; displacement and the unending conflicts of differential perspective and plurality of views. This sense of multiple perspective is underscored by the next chapter titled ‘Critique of Archival Reason’. Here Slager sets out what might characterise artistic research in this context: broadly, not systematised control but ‘artistic probing’; not powerful control but ‘affective associations,’ ‘fluid taxonomies’, ‘artistic pleasure’ to disturb the symbolic order, a kind of ‘blind spotting’ and also ‘action based: recording against record, identifying against identity, and archiving against archive’. An active and resistant work ethic.

In the last chapter Slager draws together all the different ways of researching covered in his book: mapping as experimental method; temporary autonomous arenas; questioning medium specificity; site specificity in contrast to public space, divergent spaces; counter-archival display strategies and so on. Finally, this book seeks its rationale alongside Barthes’,

*Text of Bliss: the text that imposes a sense of loss, the text that discomforts, unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language*.

This extreme articulacy through words might be why Sarah Cole turned to that last essay by Rachel Jones (book 13) to describe her work –to herself- on her own website. A distressing fact and one which stalks us all. We need to trust our own ability to present our work. Any research project must be claimed by its originators. Cole, to my knowledge, was not engaged in research when she produced *Birth Heterotopia* but still that lack of confidence in one’s own articulacy when there is such compelling need for artists to present what they already know and do, is disappointing.

Finally, and back to Slager. He writes:

*…..the most important categorical imperative of a topical artistic research practice seems to be an awareness of the urgency to draw attention to novel models for imagining otherness……..difference and multiplicity.*

This could lead to ‘coming communities’, human communities ‘free from ontological determination and homogenising connections between geographic location and identity’. This is the last sentence in *The Pleasure of Research*. I am not entirely sure what it means. However, ‘imagining otherness’ in all its different dimensions and specificities, this is what art-research, according to those artist-researchers I have worked with can do. *The Pleasure of Research* is not a How-to book: I see it more like a manifesto – for change; for experimental laboratories where artists could hatch counter-valent strategies critical of academic stasis, leaden concepts of what knowledge is and how it is produced and should be presented. Or, am I simply intruding here? Am I running away from this project of ‘close reading’, reading into a book which accords, finally with my own intellectual desires? *The Pleasure of Research* is yet another publication in a line of publications from Helsinki and Finland in which art education is taken very seriously and most especially at PhD level. But, I still like the idea of a manifesto, a declaration that change is necessary and this is the schema - in brief- by which it will come into action.

15

Calvino, I, (2009) *Six Memos for the Next Millennium, The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1985-86,* Trans. Patrick Creagh

This is the last book, a work of literary philosophy. This is book 15. It was conceived as six (intitially eight) lectures to be given by Italo Calvino, for the University of Cambridge as part of the Charles Eliot Norton Lecture series. The substantial notes, written over an eight month period, were never delivered as lectures because Calvino died. His wife, Esther Calvino prepared the manuscript of this current book for publication. There are several intriguing factors here: the first is that Calvino had various titles in mind when preparing these lectures, such as “Some Literary Values, “A Choice of Literary Values”, “Six Literary Legacies”; also there were to be six lectures and now, in this book in my hand, there are five. The sixth was to be devoted to ‘consistency’. In a forward Esther Calvino writes:

*I found the others, all in perfect order, in the Italian original, on his writing desk ready to be put in his suitcase.*

The last lecture was to be written in Cambridge, where these ‘memos’ would join with other brilliant writings by, for instance, Seamus Heaney whose Eliot Norton Lecture, *The Redress of Poetry* has been another highly influential writing for me. I need to digress here. Heaney does what Calvino does in that he shows how literature works: neither essay critiques or acts as critical review of the literatures quoted; each somehow captures how writing works in the world, has vitality and agency. I am not at all sure I can put this into my words. I hadn’t intended to do this but I must go back to Heaney’s first essay/lecture ‘The Redress of Poetry’. This essay starts with a defence of poetry in the sense of an endless quest of poets, and others to find it ‘of present use’, in the face of its dismissal as such, especially during ‘the troubles’. Heaney’s careful writing begins by showing how imagination can be said to ‘press back against the pressure of reality’, to imagine a counter-reality alive with all the contradictory and conflicting impulses and troubled consciousness of the actual lived experience; poetry is described as ‘self-delighting inventiveness’ which at its best seems to ‘recover a past’ and ‘prefigure a future’, to offer somehow a ‘redress’ to present contingencies through its ‘language life’. The ‘language life’ as I understand it, is its structural form. In this essay Heaney shows how George Herbert’s metaphysical poems breathe form, a kind of pulsating rhythm, metre, even shaping of poetic form, which play out deeply felt conflicts in Herbert’s attempt to devote himself to a religious calling.

*In this ‘redress’ there is no hint of ethical obligation; it is more a matter of finding a course for the breakaway of innate capacity, a course where something, unhindered, yet directed, can sweep ahead to its full potential*. Heaney, (1995)

Does this help? This sounds too romantic, as if there might be some kind of whimsy involved instead of what Heaney is getting at which is the tough exigencies of the poet’s craft which has to know its traditions and conventions, be alive to its subject but also to reach beyond these through its inventive structure, which if sufficiently wrought and intensely conceived will make ‘redress’ to the present. Both Heaney and Calvino fully know the traditions and conventions of their literary form. Both sought to leap ahead beyond what could have been predicted.

To get back to the ‘memos’, the five lectures conceived by Calvino, are ‘Lightness’; ‘Quickness’; ‘Exactitude’; Visibility’ and Multiplicity’. I will concentrate exclusively on ‘Lightness’ because I think this, this concept of ‘removing weight’ through lightness of touch is highly relevant to my notes, my end game- and to art-research. Calvino had written a very brief note before the start of the ’memos’ in which he alludes to the state of literature, the uncertain future of the book. Then he adds,

*My confidence in the future of literature consists in the knowledge that there are things that only literature can give us, by means specific to it.*

He goes on to cite certain values, qualities or peculiarities of literature that he says ‘are very close to my heart’. Please substitute art for literature and you will have a sense of my close reading here. Even the first two sentences of ‘Lightness’, this equivocation I can own,

*I will devote my first lecture to the opposition between lightness and weight, and will uphold the values of lightness. This does not mean that I consider the virtues of weight any less compelling, but simply that I have more to say about lightness.*

The intention in Calvino’s essay is to demonstrate how weight is removed from language: he writes that his work has over the past forty years sought to remove weight – from people, from heavenly bodies, from cities and from the structures of stories and from language itself. He aims to show its value now, at the time of writing, and to project it into the future. Immediately Calvino talks about how he had attempted to remove his writing from the ‘opacity and weight’ of the world. He writes,

*At certain moments I felt that the entire world was turning into stone: a slow petrification, more or less advanced depending on people and places but one that spared no aspect of life. It was as if no one could escape the inexorable stare of the Medusa…..*

The next two thousand words or so explore how only Perseus can come to his aid; this is Perseus who flies on winged sandals, who avoids Medusa’s gaze by looking in his shield to see the image so that he can then cut off Medusa’s head. As Calvino pursues Perseus he refuses to analyse this myth, because as he writes, *The lesson we can learn from a myth lies in the literal narrative, not in what we add to it from the outside.* Medusa’s blood gives rise to Pegasus, a miraculous horse which Perseus is said to ride and take flight. But, as Calvino indicates the story continues with Medusa’s head carried by Perseus in a bag; it becomes his burden. But in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* another startling image is drawn when Perseus, after a dreadful sea battle, needs to wash his hands, seeks a place to put down Medusa’s head. Ovid shows how delicate is the bed of leaves and plants on which this ghastly head is placed and the delicacy of Perseus’ act which allows for coral adornments and nymphs to adorn the monstrous head. Calvino does not wish to comment on this but to show it- and to supplement it with reference to the work of a modern poet, Eugenio Montale, whose foul and black winged Lucifer is contrasted with images of ‘mother of pearl trace of a snail/ or mica of crushed glass’. It is as if Montale is invoking hope in the thinnest of trace, in ‘glimmers’ of light against the dark force, which is Lucifer.

Calvino then turns to the everyday to seek this same poetic capacity. He finds this in Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness* *of Being*. In this novel images of lightness reveal the relentless weight of current conditions within which it was written. Calvino uses this as an introduction to his own approach to writing when conditions are tough, or ‘heavy’, which is to change perspective and seek ‘fresh methods of cognition and verification’. He then turns to science, questioning whether this turn might be relevant. He does this to open up an ancient thread, right back to Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*. Here,

*…..knowledge of the world tends to dissolve the solidity of the world, leading to perception of all that is infinitely minute, light and mobile.*

In Lucretius’ work, it is the invisible particles, this airiness that he sees as prevention from the crushing weight of matter. Calvino adds,

*The poetry of the invisible, of infinite unexpected possibilities – even the poetry of nothingness – issues from a poet who had no doubts whatever about the physical reality of the world.*

Lucretius leads us to tiny motes of dust, swirling in a room, in a shaft of light, or spiders’ webs wrapping around whatever comes their way. It is the imagination of the poet, who, like Ovid, can transform what we might barely notice into …., we can think of Arachne’s fingers deft and skilful as they weave being turned into spiders’ legs, which then also weave, a miraculous web. For Calvino, both Ovid and Lucretius see their worlds through philosophy *and* science, for Lucretius it was Epicurean philosophy and for Ovid Pythagorean. But, a timely caution,

*In both cases the lightness is also something arising from the writing itself, from the poet’s own linguistic power, quite independent of whatever philosophic doctrine the poet claims to be following*.

We are concerned here with ‘lightness of thoughtfulness’. Calvino illustrates this with reference to Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. In this story, Cavalcanti avoids a group who might pin him down or worse take his life by nimbly jumping over a tomb, an image of transcending at one with Boccaccio’s beliefs in rising above the particular through contemplation, the philosophy of Averroism: Cavalcanti leaves the mob with the tomb. Calvino seeks this agile leap as an image for the new millennium. He applauds this lightness, and demonstrates how Cavalcanti’s poems dissolve solid matter in what Calvino calls ‘simulacrums’ and how these works share their lightness with knights or beloved women or wind or water or gold, equally. This leads into a comparison of Cavalcanti’s lightness of effect to that of Dante as in *Paradiso* III.123. Calvino adds,

*At this point we should remember that the idea of the world as composed of weightless atoms is striking just because we know the weight of things so well. So, too, we would be unable to appreciate the lightness of language if we could not appreciate language that has some weight to it.*

I hope this conveys another thread in my long, long notes: this splitting of the weight of language which deals with the ‘concreteness of things’ as compared with that which evokes dust, or elements that hover or float or transmute. But Calvino is not interested in any kind of vagueness, it is the precision within how lightness is worked that he finds compelling. He turns now to Emily Dickinson’s poems, and their high level of abstraction:

*A sepal, petal and a thorn*

*Upon a common summer’s morn-*

*A flask of Dew-A Bee or two-*

*A Breeze-a caper in the trees-*

*And I’m a rose!*

*E.D.*

Is this what might almost not dare to be expressed? It somehow attains ‘emblematic value’ like poor Don Quixote tilting at a windmill and being hoisted into air or Queen Mab’s chariot in *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Calvino turns to the figure of Mercutio, again in Shakespeare, his light generosity of spirit, and then to Cyrano de Bergerac, an atomist with ‘cosmic excitement’. Trips to the moon, language and images which evoke the moon. Calvino sees the eighteenth century as filled with figures ‘suspended in the air’, the *Thousand and One Nights*, for instance.

But it is the moon which he allows to hover; its ‘silent calm enchantment’ is brought alive through Leopardi:

*Already all the air darkens, deepens blue, and shadows glide*

*From roofs and hills at the whitening of the recent moon…..*

Now, Calvino begins to draw together the threads, some of which I have glossed over. He asks,

*Which thread should I pull on to find the end in my hand? There is the thread that connects the moon, Leopardi and Newton, gravitation and levitation. There is the thread of Lucretius, atomism, Cavalcanti’s philosophy of love, Renaissance magic, Cyrano. Then there is the thread of writing as a metaphor of the powder fine substance of the world….*

…the use of words as a perpetual adjustment to the infinite variety in the world and as a means to produce flight from the weight of the world; the magic carpet, the Pegasus or…. the man on the bucket! Calvino ends with Kafka’s *The Knight of the Bucket*, such a short story, written in 1917 at the point of war. The knight takes his empty bucket to seek coal; the bucket acts as a horse; he hovers above the coal merchants’ shop and asks for coal, any coal but the merchant’s wife refuses and shoos him away, with her apron. Our hero takes flight, flies off beyond the Ice Mountains. This strange story, in Calvino’s mind causes ‘endless reflection’. He ends this ‘memo’ on lightness thus:

*Thus, astride our bucket, we shall face the new millennium, without hoping to find anything more in it than what we ourselves are able to bring to it. Lightness, for example, whose virtues I have tried to illustrate here*.

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