

“*THE LANGUAGED EXTERIOR AND THE FELT INTERIOR*”:

UNDERCURRENTS OF LOGOCENTRISM WITHIN PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH SCHOLARSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Despite the intention to legitimise creative arts research methodologies within academia, undercurrents of logocentrism have been maintained throughout its scholarship. In the effort to support creative practices within academia, scholars of creative research have adopted a lexicon and logic that position practice as a natural, original, and/or internal process, compared to theory, which is often described as external, artificial, deferred, and/or capable of corrupting the integrity of artistic practice. Drawing upon Jacques Derrida’s critique of the speech/writing relation within Western metaphysics, this provocation summarises the language used around artistic practice and theoretical knowledge within the scholarship, suggesting that, in its radical germination, a logocentric undercurrent has been maintained that reinforces binarism, hierarchies, and an overlooking of cultural influence on creative practice.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Oscar Davis is a PhD candidate at the School of Communication and Creative Arts at Deakin University, Australia. Majoring in Literary Studies and Astrophysics at Monash University in 2017, Oscar went on to undertake an Honours Course in Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne in 2019. His PhD thesis involves writing an exegesis with an accompanying novel, *Static Sun, Phantom Breath*, which implements and explores a post-structuralist analysis of practice-led research and the relationships between theory and practice, and culture and nature.

KEYWORDS

Practice-Led Research—Creative Research—Logocentrism—Practice/Theory—
Jacques Derrida

1.0. Introduction – Creative Research: An Alternative Paradigm

The somewhat recent inclusion of creative research methodologies within academia was partly motivated by artist-researchers advocating for artistic practice as a valid form of research, and partly by the recognition that artistic practices can provide knowledge that is unattainable by traditional methodologies alone. In advocating for the importance of creative arts research, Estelle Barrett highlights its creative, academic, and social-justice potentialities:

An innovative dimension of this subjective approach to research lies in its capacity to bring into view, particularities of lived experience that reflect alternative realities that are either marginalised or not yet recognised in established theory and practice. (Barrett, 2010b, p. 143)

On one hand, scholars of creative arts research have demonstrated Barrett's words, challenging and expanding traditional and positivist understandings of research, theory, and creative practice. On the other hand, the discourse around creative arts research has maintained what will be later discussed as logocentrism. While there are several synonyms and associated terms that describe such research methodologies – practice-led research, practice-as-research, practice-based research, research-led practice, non-traditional research outcomes, performative research – throughout this article I will use the term *creative research* as a placeholder for these methodologic terms.

While a core element of creative research's scholarly advocacy is to challenge traditional assumptions of practice and theory, this article discusses the rhetoric amongst artist-researchers that contradict or even problematise the arguments posed by its movement (such as Barrett's). While I do not intend to discredit creative research and the scholarship that has helped to legitimise its important presence within academic research, I believe there is now enough scholarship to identify and critique certain patterns that appear within its lexicon and logic. This article should be read as a provocation to a larger research project and aims to set up my preliminary ideas and theories. Ultimately, I argue that either intentionally or unintentionally, many artist-researchers position creative practice as a natural, original, and/or internal process, compared to theoretical knowledge, which is external, artificial, deferred, and/or capable of contaminating the integrity of artistic practice. Such a rhetoric is problematic because it reinforces a division between the (artistic/natural) Self and the (cultural/theoretical) Other, ultimately concealing moments of instability, and foreclosing an engagement with the alternative or marginalised realities Barrett encourages. While in this article I will only be analysing several specific examples of logocentrism

among creative research discourse, later works of mine will map in detail how dominant the rhetoric of logocentrism is within the scholarship.

Although the scholarship of creative research appears fairly heterogeneous in its means, there remains a ubiquitous determination to legitimise creative research as an important addition to traditional research methodologies, and to focus on how creative practices and artefacts can lead to subjective, tacit, symbolic and affective forms of knowledge. In relation to the methodological approaches to creative research, there is a dominant structure in which artist-researchers begin their research with their creative practice, and through a complex process of reflective and exegetical engagements, produce new contributions to knowledge. Graeme Sullivan (2009) describes the creative research process as a movement from the “unknown to the known”, whereby “imaginative leaps are made into what we don’t know” which, in turn, leads to “critical insights that can change what we do know” (p. 48). Instead of starting from established theory where “new knowledge is constructed within the spaces and places opened up by the gaps in existing information systems” (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48), Sullivan encourages creative research that utilises serendipitous and intuitive methods that aren’t framed by prior knowledge.

In posing an alternative to traditional research methodologies, scholars like Sullivan claim it challenges historical positivist privileging of theoretical knowledge over (creative) practice within research. According to Michael Gordon (2019), “the Western tradition of rationalism, positivism, and objective empiricism” (p. 190) has caused the dichotomisation of theory and practice, particularly in “the pursuit of proving ultimate truth about reality” (p. 190). From Gordon’s description, traditional research methodologies are driven by a desire for objective, primary, and universal theories. Drawing upon the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Barrett (2010a) challenges the devaluing of practice in traditional research methodologies:

Bourdieu contends that because knowledge of the condition of production comes after the fact and occurs in the domain of rational communication, the finished product, the *opus operatum*, conceals the *modus operandi*. In his explanation of how the alternative logic and processes of practice are subsumed into rational analysis of the product and are thus often forgotten, Bourdieu exposes the basis upon which the ongoing privileging of positivistic and instrumentalist approaches to research persists. (Barrett, 2010a, p. 4)

Barrett’s use of Bourdieu’s theories hints towards the desire Barrett and other artists-researchers have to demonstrate that knowledge can be gained from an artist’s practice, and not just via the *opus operatum*.

While creative research has importantly given value to forms of knowledge that have been generally undermined or unrecognised within academia, I argue that the discourse around practice and theory within creative research's scholarship reinforces a similar logocentrism to that which Jacques Derrida critiqued when discussing the speech/writing dichotomy in Western philosophy. Logocentrism (or the metaphysics of presence) is a dominant notion throughout Western thought that privileges presence over absence, speech over writing, and nature over culture, to name a few dichotomies. Furthermore, logocentrism, according to Derrida (2016), is the "exigent, powerful, systematic and irrepressible, desire for [a transcendental] signified" (p.53), which, according to Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday (2020), is "the structuralist illusion of an ultimate referent at the heart of a signifying system which is portrayed as 'absolute and irreducible', stable, timeless, and transparent – as if it were independent of and prior to that system" (p. 744).

Regarding the speech/writing dichotomy, several of Derrida's texts address this desire for a transcendental signified within Western metaphysics. Derrida discusses how the lineage of Western philosophy has privileged speech due to its apparent closeness to thought, immediacy, and the natural (1981 p. 21; 2016, p. 32), whereas writing, in contrast, is positioned as an external representation of speech (2016, p. 36). According to Derrida (1981), Western metaphysics has reduced writing to a "phenomenon of exterior representation, both useless and dangerous" (pp. 24-25). Briefly summarising the beliefs of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Judith Butler (2016), in the introduction to the Fortieth Anniversary Edition of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, states that, "in his discussion of script, Rousseau considers writing to be 'exterior' to, and so distant from, the internal truth of language that is linked with voice and feeling [i.e. speech]" (p. xix). In the second half of *Of Grammatology*, Derrida questions the logocentric assumptions in the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who positions speech as a quality of nature, and writing as an aspect of culture, as well as a form of communication capable of contaminating nature.

Logocentrism determines a sense that Being is presence (2016, p. 13), and that binary relations are ontological and stable hierarchies. Logocentrism positions one half of a binary as ontologically prior, transcendental, or more essential than the secondary or supplementary term, such as nature over culture, speech over writing, or presence over absence (Lucy, 2004, p. 72). Derrida's deconstruction of logocentrism is not only an effort to identify the self-concealing biases within Western metaphysics, but to show the instability within seemingly fixed hierarchical binaries (Lucy, 2004, p. 12; Wortham, 2010, p. 33). In other words, to show that neither

term can be ontologically labelled as the sole origin or centre of the relation (Lucy, 2004, p. 60).

Drawing on Derrida's deconstruction of logocentrism, I claim that a similar hierarchy has been established in creative research's scholarship when referring to *creative practice* and *theory*. From surveying the scholarship, I argue that comments about practice and theory from artist-researchers appear to reinforce three logocentric relations:

Practice	Theory
Genesis	Derivation
Internal	External
Natural	Corrupting

Importantly, my aim to unearth such logocentric patterns among the scholarship isn't meant to discredit the ambitious and important work many artist-researchers have produced in their aim to challenge traditional and hegemonic understandings of research. Rather, through a shared goal and passion, and with Barrett's idea at the forefront of my mind, I aim to build from the scholarship in order to further strengthen the academic and ethical imperatives of the field. What follows are three subsections that elaborate on the discourse that reinforces practice and theory's connotative links to these three logocentric relations.

2.0. Surveying Creative Research's Well-Trodden Landscape

2.1. *Genesis vs. Derivation*

Throughout the scholarship on creative arts research, creative practices have been positioned as the original initiator of the methodology, and theory as deriving from practice in a delayed process. While it may seem like a tautological argument to argue that in practice-led research methodologies the research is initiated and *led* by the practice, the framing of practice as being the genesis, and theory as derivative, has caused certain hierarchical (and logocentric) connotations to form. Annette Iggulden (2010) exemplifies such a rhetoric:

My work is never theory driven, although theory has played its part in my understanding of the issues I address through my art. In fact, no matter how much I might think I have conceptualised the work, the idea is always secondary and often sacrificed to my intuitive response to working with the materials. (Iggulden, 2010, p. 67)

Intuition and its associated terms are often stated as being central methods within artistic research. The frequent referencing of intuition alongside creative practice fashions a connotative link between practice and origin, because what occurs before an “intuitive” moment of creativity is assumed to be conceptually unattainable, if not unknowable or transcendental. I am not arguing that the use of what gets called intuition as a method is problematic. Rather, the assumption that intuition comes from a pre-discursive or transcendental origin reinforces logocentrism and discourages an introspection into the socio-political mechanisms that define creativity.

It’s important to emphasise that a reason why terms like intuition, hunch, improvisation, serendipity, and surprise are often used is because they are methods already circulating amongst artist-researchers – to quote an early advocate of creative research, Carole Gray (1996): these artist-researchers are “using predominantly methodologies and specific methods *familiar* to us as practitioners” (p. 3) (my emphasis). Intuition, as a familiar method to artists, enacts the creative drive, which then leads to conscious theorisations. The connection between practice and genesis is not only reinforced by artist-researchers to legitimise creative research, but it is indicative of a rhetoric heavily embedded within a pre-existing discourse.

As opposed to practice’s connection to origin, theory is often described as temporally and/or logically derivative of the creative practice. This connection is predominantly linked by the method of *reflection*, where artist-researchers reflect on their artefacts and/or creative processes in order to produce or articulate theory (often in exegetical form). Notions that theory ‘emerge out’ of practice positions theory as a secondary or derivative element. The temporal and/or spatial distance between theory and the origin causes a logocentric rift to occur, leading theory to be associated with more than derivation, but with otherness, foreignness, artificiality, exteriority, and corruption.

2.2. Interiority vs. Exteriority

Related to practice’s connotative link with genesis, creative research’s scholarship often positions practice as being an *internal* process that comes from within the artist-researcher, as opposed to theory which is

located or realised *externally*. Dianne Reid's (2010) observations exemplify this connotation, describing her dance film research as an attempt to converge the relationships between "form and content, between spectator and performer/author, between the *languaged exterior and the felt interior*" (pp. 56-57) (my emphasis). Even though artist-researchers like Reid aim to converge such relations, there is still a prior assumption and division between the interior – a space most raw and proximal to the artist-researcher and their practice – and the exterior – a space differed and distant to the artist, whereby language and culture assist, disrupt, and/or supplement their practice.

Theory's exteriority is often reinforced by an assumption that it supervenes on practice via cultural and institutional mechanisms. Theory is associated with what J.D. Dewsbury (2014) explains as a "will to write" (p. 148): "The will to write stands opposed to the desire to write: it is not an internal, personal, need but an external, institutionalized demand" (p. 148). Or similarly, as Thin et al. (2020) explains, theory is "out there in the world" (p. 15), as opposed to the internally sourced practice. Such notions not only reinforce an ontological separation between practice/theory and interiority/exteriority, but it also assumes that an artist-researcher's practice and sense of interiority are somehow (initially) removed from exterior elements, such as the world and theory.

In contrast to theory's exteriority, the rhetoric of creativity's interiority has been a dominant notion outside and prior to creative research's inclusion into academia. Paul Dawson (2005) in *Creative Writing and the New Humanities* explores the changes in Western approaches to creativity at length, indicating that at the time of the Renaissance, artistic creation shifted from being seen as a mimesis to an act analogous with divine creation (p. 25). The word 'creative', according to Dawson, signified an "internalisation of divinity" (p. 26), which was further established by the Romanticists, whose creativity "sprang from the unique personality of the artist in the form of his passion" (p. 32). In recent times, Dawson believes that the idea of artistic creativity has been democratised, whereby "creativity is not the gift of a talented few but a latent faculty in everyone" (p. 45). Still, it isn't a stretch to argue that the internalisation of creative practice has been sustained from the Renaissance to what is found in contemporary creative research scholarship. This is evident in a quote by Nelson Zagalo and Pedro Branco (2015), who state: "the creation process is enclosed within us, and because of that has always existed since we exist" (p. 5). While the first half of this quote reinforces practice's internal association, the second half hints towards a more crucial idea: namely, the naturalisation of practice, where practice is understood as being an intrinsic part of the artist's being.

2.3. *Natural vs. Corrupting*

This subsection ties the previous subsections more closely to logocentrism, highlighting how the association practice has with genesis and interiority positions it as more authentic, pure, and, hence, natural act of creation. Contrastingly, any elements that seem external or derivative of practice (i.e. theory) can culturally influence or corrupt that practice due to its very temporal and spatial separation from the creative origin.

Within creative arts scholarship, practice is often connoted with notions of purity, freedom, and instinct. But more so, utilising such qualities of practice lead to more “authentic” artistic acts and valuable knowledge productions. In a visual metaphor, Graeme Sullivan (2009) reinforces that research led by practice is compatible with “an open landscape of free-range possibility” (p. 48) whereas traditional research methodologies in which theory leads the practice occurs within “a closed geography of well-trodden pathways” (p. 48). Using the landscape as an analogy, research is ‘open’ and ‘free’ when practice is central and the initiator, whereas theory causes the natural landscape to be corrupted or ‘trodden’.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida (2016) identified in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s works (and that of western metaphysics) the belief that writing is a supplement to speech (p. 7), and that it is the “dissimulation of the natural, primary, and immediate presence of sense to the soul within the logos” (p. 40). In a similar (or related) way, scholars and students of creative arts have also expressed a concern that theory is either a limited mimesis of practice, or that theory can corrupt or constrain the natural flow or qualities of creative expression. Such an attitude has been present within academia even before creative research’s fairly recent inclusion into higher research degrees and positions. For several decades, artist-researchers have noticed the anti-intellectualism among creative arts students, as well as a culture within universities that shelter creative arts students from an engagement with theory (Dawson, 2005, pp. 13-14; Gray, 1996, p. 8; Shelnutt, 1989, pp. 7-9). Gabriele Esser-Hall’s (2000) observations not only demonstrate creative art’s student’s aversion to theory, but also the deeply embedded association practice has to nature, and theory to corruption:

Amongst students of art practice a resentment against theory is evident, because with its emphasis on an imposed structure and method, it presents itself as the ‘Other’, that is part of a hierarchical education system. Theory is perceived as relating to practice as the rigid to the freeflow, the constructed to the playful, the prescriptive to the creative – almost as captivity to freedom. (Esser-Hall, 2000, p. 289)

While many artist-researchers have indeed resisted anti-intellectualism by scholarly engagement with creative arts methodologies, the rhetoric around practice's purity or wholeness seems to devalue or discourage a theoretical engagement with creative practices and artefacts. By deeming practice as a natural part of the artist's self, other questions, opportunities, and deeper reflections are easily foreclosed.

3.0. Reversing and/or Maintaining the Hierarchy

There are two consequences in aligning practice and theory with the logocentric relations of genesis/derivation, interior/exterior, and natural/corrupting:

1. Creative practices are being positioned as transcendental and prior to cultural influence
2. Binaries and hierarchies are reinforced

To focus on the first: Graeme Sullivan's (2009) notions that creative research involves a movement from the "unknown to the known" (p. 48), and is most effective when working within an "open landscape of free-range possibility" (p. 48), clearly exemplifies the transcendental desire embedded within the wider scholarship. If the transcendental signified refers to an "ultimate referent at the heart of a signifying system", which is "independent of and prior to that system" (Chandler & Munday, 2020, p. 744), Sullivan's theories insinuate that creative practices act like such a referent, functioning in a space that is prior or separate to theoretical or cultural influence (i.e. an "open landscape").

The same can be said for how so-called intuitive practices are being described as natural and internally located. Because "intuitive" practices are positioned as *a priori* techniques that occur in a space separate to cultural and theoretical influence, historical approaches to intuition and its associated terms are being adopted (and ignored) without scrutiny. The desire to initiate practice within a transcendental "unknown", or even the belief that an artist-researcher *can* practice within such an *a priori* space, encourages an overlooking or concealing of:

- a. How culture influences practice
- b. How practice and theory are interconnected
- c. The mechanisms that internalise and naturalise practice

Positioning practice as transcendental limits the extent of self-reflection: particularly, reflection on the mechanisms that not only influence one's practice, but are also the very mechanisms of naturalisation and internalisation. By artist-researchers unintentionally or intentionally upholding practice as transcendental, they reinforce the assumption that

any explanation or translation of that practice, i.e. theory, is a corrupting and/or limiting mimesis of the practical findings. This rhetoric is the outcome of the same logocentric tradition that has led people to see writing as “useless and dangerous” (pp. 24-25), according to Derrida (1981).

Judith Butler (2016) in the introduction to *Of Grammatology* discusses the translatability of texts from one language to another, which I feel is relevant to the discussion:

If one says that in every translation something remains irreversibly lost, that remains true, but if ruin or loss is what conditions or precipitates translation, then we cannot precisely describe this as the loss of the original. The formation suggests that the original was intact, even nontranslatable, from the start. If ruin is there from the word go, then what is original? (Butler, 2016, p. x)

Butler’s insight prompts similar questions regarding the ontological positioning of practice and theory within the discourse around creative research: is theory always contained within practice due to its very capability of being corrupted, and vice versa? And if either or both are true, what does that mean for the original, internal, and natural assumptions of practice? In the risk of extending and oversimplifying Butler’s claims, it would appear that corruption, derivation, and exteriority are always already qualities of creative practice due to the condition that theorisation can come from or within it.

To address the second consequence of describing practice and theory in logocentric relations it’s important to recall that in many ways the creative research movement was/is an attempt to challenge the positivistic (hence, logocentric) privileging of theory over practice. Furthermore, because artist-researchers have sought to bring into focus what was historically devalued within academia, they have, within their own discourse, *reversed* the positivistic hierarchy, now favouring practice over theory. While in many ways this is understandable, and seems to subvert traditional notions of research, creative research scholars still privilege that which appears original, internal, natural, and prior to cultural influence, hence, maintaining and concealing a lexicon and logic embedded within a conservative logocentric tradition.

This maintenance of logocentrism even after, or rather with, the reversing of dichotomic hierarchies is discussed by Derrida (1981). Regarding speech and writing, he writes:

Plato said of writing that it was an orphan or bastard, as opposed to speech, the legitimate and high-born son of the “father of logos.” At the moment when one attempts to interrogate this family scene, and to

investigate all the investments, ethical and otherwise, of this entire history, nothing would be more ridiculously mystifying than such an ethical or axiological reversal, returning a prerogative or some elder's right to writing. (Derrida, 1981, pp. 12-13)

Butler (2016) elaborates on this, reiterating that Derrida's task isn't to "invert the hierarchy, positing nonpresence over presence" (p. xiii), but to "understand how such binary relations become established within a hierarchical framework and come to exhaustively constitute the field of linguistic intelligibility" (p. xiii).

To apply this to creative research scholarship, a central contradiction is evident within the very conflict to resist and to repeat logocentrism: on one hand, there is a desire to challenge objective reasoning, giving credence to tacit, subjective, and affective forms of knowledge; on the other hand, the practical methods used to produce such forms of knowledge are being positioned as original, natural, and authentic, and hence, privileged for seemingly having these characteristics. Would it not align more closely with creative research's advocacy to encourage methods that challenge logocentric thinking, such as focusing on elements that appear artificial, derivative and/or external? Or to go further, to deconstruct the very matrix of the nature/culture divide in which the practice/theory relation has been placed (or birthed), rather than just reversing it? I'm not claiming that this doesn't occur within creative research projects, but rather that the *lexicon* and logic of vocabularies adopted and used within creative research's scholarship maintain such logocentric hierarchies and conceal moments of deconstruction.

4.0. Conclusion: New Understandings, Different Questions.

Within the creative research community, I argue that there is a need to challenge the desire to 'other' some quality of research, such as theory, in order to legitimise practice, because if the discourse around creative research continues to insist on an interior and original centre, it begs the question of what is then labelled an outsider? Under a logocentric tradition, according to Derrida (2016), "evil is exterior to a nature, to what is by nature innocent and good. It supervenes upon nature" (p. 158). Ultimately, it is crucial for artist-researchers to challenge a correlation between exteriority, otherness, and corruption, because without scrutiny, dangerous power divisions that extend beyond the practice/theory relation can be reinforced or formed.

There are moments, however, in creative research's scholarship where artist-researchers resist this logocentric pull. Estelle Barrett discusses the

importance of artist-researchers reflecting on their process from a distance, questioning how their practice and knowledge production relates to broader institutional discourses. Closely relating to Butler's comments in the previous section about hierarchical frameworks, Barrett quotes the following from Foucault to support her type of creative research reflection:

We would no longer hear the questions that have been heard for so long: Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authority and originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse? Instead there would be other questions, like these: What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? (Foucault, 1991, as cited in Barrett, 2010b, p. 138)

In understanding how the discourse around practice and theory echoes a similar rhetoric to that which Derrida critiqued in the speech/writing dichotomy, there is still a need to revisit the meanings of theory and practice, and how they relate to one another. Are these terms fixed and always doomed to be linked but divided into a hierarchy? Is the very language available to artist-researchers already intertwined with logocentric qualities? And how can artist-researchers interrogate the long historical procession that has made them assume their practice is a natural, possibly divine, part of themselves? What I hope this provocation encourages is the development of research methodologies that not only include creative practices but challenge hierarchies and binarism, extending past academic research and into the very lexicon and reasoning we use as artists and researchers.

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