

THE CREATIVE PRACTITIONER: CREATIVE ARTS AS NON-TRADITIONAL RESEARCH OUTPUTS (NTROs)

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ABSTRACT

For an extended period, the creative arts, encompassing visual and performing arts, have grappled with the need to validate their status as bona fide research endeavours. The prevailing assumption, rooted in a historical divide between the arts and sciences, has often downplayed the research dimensions intrinsic to creative practice. This essay attempts to unravel the origins of this misconception and question whether it stems from indifference or ignorance. Our exploration seeks to rectify this misconception, affording the creative arts their rightful place within the academic landscape and academia. By delving into the creative practitioner's world, we uncover the value, effort, and significance embedded in creative works, which warrant recognition as legitimate research outputs. This reevaluation brings to light the intricate processes, critical reflections, and intellectual rigour inherent in artistic creations, akin to scientific methodologies. In dismantling the biases that have long hindered creative practitioners, this essay encourages a broader understanding of research that extends beyond traditional paradigms. In doing so, we contribute to a more inclusive academic environment, bridging the gap between the sciences and the arts, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and recognizing the invaluable contributions of creative practitioners to the realm of knowledge production.

Keywords: Creative Practitioners; Creative Talent; NTROs; Practicing Academics

1. INTRODUCTION

This extended abstract highlights the often-misunderstood role of creative arts as non-traditional research outputs (NTROs) in academia. It begins by acknowledging the historical struggle of creative arts to justify themselves as a valid form of research, questioning whether this misconception arose from indifference or ignorance. The essay aims to clarify the value, effort, and significance of creative works in the academic landscape. It delves into the definitions of research within the creative arts, distinguishing between "traditional outputs" and NTROs, reflecting the unique nature of creative endeavors. It emphasizes that research, whether traditional or non-traditional, is conducted systematically to expand knowledge and enhance understanding of culture and society. It further highlights the need for creativity and innovation within the arts, and how creative practitioners engage in research-like processes to push the boundaries of their discipline, offering fresh insights. The essay thus discusses the importance of literature reviews and production-based outputs in creative arts processes, demonstrating how they situate creative works within a broader context and foster critical thinking.

The concept of practice-based research is introduced, encompassing practice-based and practice-led research. Practice-based research involves creative artefacts as the basis for knowledge contribution, while practice-led research generates understanding about the creative practice itself. These research modes are carried out by practitioners in the creative arts and have given rise to innovative concepts and methodologies. The studio is presented as the primary site of knowledge acquisition for artists. It serves as a space for learning, self-awareness, and self-management, with systematic documentation of artistic processes playing a critical role in practice-led research. The essay also discusses the validation of creative works, emphasising that art-based research requires its own evaluation standards focused on vigour rather than traditional rigor. It acknowledges the challenges artists face in securing research funding and gaining recognition for their studio-based inquiry. And argues for a deeper understanding of the processes and methodologies of artistic research and the relevance of theoretical and philosophical paradigms in the creative arts.

Defining Research: Creative Arts as Non-Traditional Research Outputs (NTRs)

In 2015 (with an updated version in 2021), the Australian Research Council (ARC) made a clear differentiation between what they termed "traditional outputs" and "non-traditional research outputs (NTRs)." Traditional outputs typically encompass scholarly books, chapters in scholarly books, refereed journal articles, and refereed conference papers, following established academic conventions. Whereas NTRs comprise a diverse array of creative expressions, including experimental works in music and visual arts, creative writing, dance, design, website development, and commissioned reports for government or non-government organisations. These non-traditional research outputs vary significantly in form and mode of production, leading to distinct administrative classifications. In the context of NTRs, research can be defined as the creation of new knowledge or the innovative application of existing knowledge in a creative manner. This creative process yields new concepts, methodologies, and understandings within a particular discipline. It may involve the synthesis and analysis of prior research, provided that it results in novel and imaginative outcomes. Research, whether traditional or non-traditional, is systematically undertaken to expand the body of knowledge, thereby contributing to the understanding of humanity, culture, and society.

The inclusion of creative arts within the research landscape is not a mere formality but a means to cultivate new knowledge and skills. This cultivation is intrinsically linked to principles of innovation and creativity, which are fundamental in all academic disciplines. Creative thinking, defined as the ability to generate new ideas, questions, and hypotheses, lies at the heart of the creative process in the arts. It empowers students and practitioners to experiment, evaluate ideas, and create unique final products and processes. In the creative arts, practice-based processes play a central role in generating original contributions to new knowledge. Creative practitioners, whether artists, designers, or performers, must engage in research-like processes to expand the boundaries of their discipline and produce works that enhance the collective knowledge of their field. They continually explore new techniques, materials, and concepts to create original works, contributing to the body of knowledge in their area.

The significance of literature reviews in creative arts processes cannot be overstated. Literature reviews enable practitioners to contextualise their work within a broader framework, comprehend the evolution of artistic ideas, identify gaps or opportunities for innovation, and engage in critical thinking by evaluating existing scholarship and drawing inspiration from diverse sources. The creative process in the arts is far from arbitrary; it involves structured research, development, problem-solving, and reflective practices. This cyclical and interconnected nature of creative arts processes underlines the essence of research in the creative domain, where each phase contributes to the growth of knowledge,

skills, and artistic expression. Defining research in the context of creative arts as non-traditional research outputs (NTROs) recognizes the unique character of creative endeavours. Creative practitioners engage in research processes that foster innovation and contribute to the body of knowledge within their disciplines. NTROs encompass a wide spectrum of creative expressions, enriching the intellectual landscape by embracing creativity and promoting the understanding of human experience through the arts.

2. METHOD

The study, initiated in 2018 explored the various forms of creative practices and their outputs. In which, the University Guidelines for Non-Traditional Research Outputs (NTROs) proposed a holistic and inclusive perspective of acknowledging creative works. The guidelines are not prescriptive in nature but flexible to cater “to myriad and novel forms and means of dissemination,” with a list of examples. It functions as a general outline for consideration that is inclusive of factors such as; the NTRO must have been made publicly available, the authors must be clearly cited, there must be one or more digital files that are the publicly available output itself, a definitive version of the output, or a representation of the NTRO that facilitates assessment of its research content, and a research statement must be provided for all types except Research Reports for an External Body; the research statement for portfolios of NTROs covers all the individual NTROs that make up the portfolio, rather than submitting a separate research statement for each NTRO. Therefore, what is proposed by this discussion is the alignment of the creative research process that is of equal importance.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research and Creative Outputs

Barrett and Bolt (2007) sets up and introduces art as the production of knowledge in efforts to assess quality research in the field by, “extending understandings of the processes and methodologies of artistic research as the production of knowledge and assessing the potential impact of such research within the discipline and the broader cultural arena.” They argue that the emergence of the discipline of practice-led research highlights the crucial interrelationship that exists between theory and practice and the relevance of theoretical and philosophical paradigms for the contemporary arts practitioner. In which, as introduced earlier, the discipline of creative arts covers fields such as: design, creative writing, music, dance, film/video, painting, and theatre, to say the least. However, as Barrett and Bolt highlight, the problem is that “Despite some recognition of output of creative arts research in terms of the development of nation criteria and the establishment of other equivalences related to funding and higher degree by research examinations, it continues to be relatively difficult for artistic research projects to gain national research grant funding. There has also been little recognition, endorsement and validation of the processes and outcomes of studio-based inquiry as scholarly activity and research alongside other disciplines in the university.”

As a result, there is a need to align contexts of production, consumption, and scholarly research in the creative arts with the potential of additional qualitative criteria for measuring the value of creative arts research and for understanding its approaches and methods. Defining the ‘subjective’ and the ‘personal’ in creative arts research – because creative arts research is often motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns, it operates not only on the basis of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on that of tacit knowledge. Bourdieu argues that tacit knowledge and the alternative logic of practice underpins

all discovery; and yet the operation of this logic is often overlooked because it is subsumed into the rational logic of discursive accounts of artistic production (cited in Barrett, 2007). Tacit knowledge is always implicated in human activity and learning and refers to embodied knowledge or “skill” developed and applied in practice and apprehended intuitively – a process that is readily understood by artistic researchers who recognize that the opposition between explicit and tacit knowledge is a false one (Bolt, 2004 cited in Barrette, 2007). The following comparative framework of the research/creative process is introduced below. While the descriptors for each research/creative phase may differ, the process remains significantly similar.

Table 1: Comparative Framework of the Research vs. Creative Process

	Phase I		Phase II				Phase III	
The Research Process	Ideas Concepts Themes Concerns Issues	The Proposal	Literature Review, Theoretical Conceptual Framework	Method Planning for Execution Pilot test	Testing Execution	Findings Results Conclusion	Thesis Articles Books Publications	Awards
The Creative Process	Ideas Concepts Themes Concerns Issues	The Proposal	Background of Research Fieldwork Framework Design	Planning Timeline Master breakdown	Design, Draft Production Rehearsal	Verification Endorsements Acknowledgements	Creative works Designs Paintings Artwork Films Scripts Novels Compositions Exhibitions Screenings Festivals Competitions Performance	Detailing Quantifiable Issues Standards Benchmarks Local International Peer reviews Awards Copyright

Reference: Wan Aida Wan Yahaya, 2019

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploration into the validation of the creative arts as legitimate research endeavours has shed light on the long-standing misconceptions that have hindered their recognition within the academic landscape. The historical divide between the arts and sciences, driven by assumptions of indifference or ignorance, has often downplayed the research dimensions intrinsic to creative practice. However, this essay challenges these misconceptions and emphasised the importance of recognizing the creative arts as a valuable and integral part of the academic sphere. Through our journey into the creative practitioner's world, we have explored the depth of value, effort, and significance embedded in creative works, all of which justify their status as legitimate research outputs. Creative practitioners engage in intricate processes, undergo critical reflections, and demonstrate intellectual rigour akin to the methodologies found in scientific research. This reevaluation has illuminated the parallel paths of creativity and scholarship, demonstrating that the arts are not merely forms of self-expression but also sources of valuable knowledge.

This essay encourages a broader understanding of research that extends beyond traditional paradigms. In doing so, we pave the way for a more inclusive academic environment that bridges the gap between the sciences and the arts. Interdisciplinary collaboration becomes not just a possibility but a necessity,

as the synergy between these two domains can yield innovative and groundbreaking results. Moreover, recognizing the invaluable contributions of creative practitioners to the realm of knowledge production is essential in fostering a holistic approach to research and academic progress. Creativity is not a separate entity but an integral part of human experience, and its role in expanding our understanding of the world is undeniable. Embracing the creative arts as legitimate research endeavours not only enriches academia but also elevates the status of artists and their work, providing them with the respect and recognition they deserve.

In conclusion, efforts to validate the creative arts as bona fide research endeavours are ongoing, but our exploration has illuminated the path toward a more inclusive, interdisciplinary, and enlightened academic environment. It is a call to action, urging academia to acknowledge and appreciate the profound impact of creative practice on the production of knowledge, and in doing so, forge a brighter and more innovative future for the arts and sciences alike.

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