



Entanglements and the Many-Worlded *Doing* of Research-Based Practice, Practice-Based Research, Practice-as-Research, and Postqualitative Inquiry in the Academy

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The following chapter examines four key ways practice is emergent within Higher Education in the Northern, Western academy. These modes are apparent not just as conceptual configurations and conversations in the academy, but directly structure contexts (in terms of assessments and accreditations) for thinking in, with and through *practice*. Practice is a site of contestation—a world through which the academy grapples with its own shifting identities. Traditionally, as a site of *theory*, the academy arguably finds practice to be slippery, too wet, too much mess, and far too prone to the trembles and remakings of bodily and embodied knowledges that signal that there may be more than one world. Worlds of knowing that don't all trace their thick presents back to a European, Enlightenment

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heritage. Practice is altogether too embedded in the daily reality of hands and/or eyes, and/or ears, and/or skin, and/or feet, and/or temperatures, and/or sensate knowings and all the affective, repetitive, less-than-lofty ways of being and knowing the world. And so, certainly practice must be a ‘thing’ that is in content danger of being uncritical, untheoretical, under-evaluated.

I want here, now to ask how practice was ever divided from theory in the first place. To do this, I argue that we pay attention not to the many differences the academy might spot and inculcate in their heart of every scholar setting out on an academic journey. Differences that include the idea that theory is somehow critical and practice, in the first instance, is not. Rather than understand both theory and practice as ‘things’ that have always existed in separation, I would like to propose that we pay more attention to the flows of knowledge and knowledge-making that exist around these apparently distinct and discreet phenomena. In order to do this, new patterns and configuration of theory/practice emerge. At stake and thus in need of urgent critical consideration are timelines and temporality; the material of justice or justice-mattering in and beyond cause and effect; eros and the erotic in affective and sensate registers and Western epistemic practices as they confront the many worlds implicit in artistic research knowings. As Lola Olufemi states: “[i]f I ask you to connect point A to point B and you draw a straight line, what do you think you think of history. If you draw a circle, do you think of history as living commotion?” (Olufemi, 2021. p. 3). As mentioned at the outset, the specific version of the academy discussed here is Northern and Western. It is the positioning that the editors of this book (both together, a slippery combination of mixed heritages and multiple genders) have found a temporary pause to articulate the differencing, circular, spiralling momentums passing through us. Thus, the broad phenomena *practice* and *theory* or *practice* and *research* discussed in a few specific formulations here, perform only a few modes of thinking about the realities of artistic research in an academic context. Nonetheless, these modes begin the dance, the breath, and the being-with that I hope will diffract in the relationships to position, and momentum, that you make through the apparatus of your own artistic, scholarly, educative, activist, and other life/lives.

JUSTICE MATTERS

What happens if ‘we’—where ‘we’ is always a contested site, a grouping never arbitrary and always made—scholars, artists, academics, and educators loosen the vow some of us made to the intersectional, to the *cross-roads* of practices alone and enlarged it to imagine with/in a pulsating, beating, material-discursive flickering resonance more akin to and with Barad’s notion of *entanglement*, as a way to imagine how we might ‘do’ our work. Why then, work with ‘entanglement’? As Barad states in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, entanglement absorbs the notion of the subject/object divide as a primary ontological foundation upon which the universe is built, into one where separable phenomena are *cut* by modes of observation into being. The universe is no container in which separate entities meet, bump, or collide in encounter. Rather, at the most primary root, being is *entangled*, emerging in separation by virtue of what she calls a ‘cutting-together-apart’, where one part of the entanglement observes or measures another part. I love Haraway’s notion of tentacular thinking (2016) as a way to start to understand this kind of logic—one arm of the octopus can act independently and observe the other arm, but it still remains an octopus for the most part, all the way down! You can do some similar thinking with mushrooms (Tsing, 2015).

The interesting thing to note here is that the phenomena do not come together to *intersect* across a field. Rather, in line with the idea “matter simply *is* ... a doing,” as Karen Barad puts it’, and ‘Matter *is* what it does or “how it moves”, as Thomas Nail puts it’ (Gamble et al., 2019, p. 112). By re-framing the ontologic and epistemic into an entangled *onto-epistemology* that performs not through examining movements or phenomena encountering each other *in space*, but rather *as part of the ongoing flow of movement itself*, ‘we’ scholars, artists, activists, and educators get to do very different things with methodologies. And methodologies and their methods make worlds. There’s nothing in-active, non-political, or disengaged about this approach to methodology. Relationality here does not destroy or absorb the notions of activism, action, or justice. I would argue that the resonances these modalities present, sound in tones that are quite the reverse, discordant to the idea of new materialisms as somehow devoid or in danger of drowning justice in some kind of hyper-relationality. By re-imagining the practices by which modes of lives, living, death, dying, and all other things along the spectrum are constituted, we open our deep material inscriptions to many, many more

worlds. The ‘trick’ is to un/learn how ‘we’ might *practice* the world anew *as part of the entanglement* (and here the ‘we’ is very much about inclusions, exclusions, necropolitical violences, and all sorts of marks on bodies that score our modes of living into different identities, giving rise in entanglement to the activisms such *relations* rely on and cut apart to move in the world, *as the world*).

Why is this important? Because justice *matters*. Because the way we practice even the smallest acts and doings, re/affirm the flow of movement that we call the world at small and large scales. This isn’t an intersectional flow, a matter of dams and rivers and tributaries of thinking-doing that go to make up a map of the world—one that remains materially the same whether you are observing from space or fighting at the border. Such a form of thinking, an inside–outside as primary ontological base, does not account for the material flow of meaning-making moving across different specificities, *as different specificities*. Constituted through *entanglement* and as a matter of movements, justice is a resonance that is as central and specific to existence as time. Time: a phenomenon/that is at large an apparatus through which we might create *history* and at the same time, at small, an intimate companion, constantly changing the body into something else. In this configuration, justice might also become a phenomenon/a intimately threaded through with time in all its movements. Justice for *then*, justice for *now*, justice to *come*. Justice unfolding in the body and across bodies at the same *time*. As Wolgemuth et al. (2021) state: justice is *pedagogical*. It’s about un/learning the world *as* the world. So what kinds of worlds do we enact, destroy, protest, create, voice, sound, erase, undermine, affirm, and *move* together?

Of course, the next question which follows on this one’s heels is *how*? This collection brings together a range of such ‘what’s’ and ‘how’s’. The how’s are threaded through with an urgent call to rearrange the resonances and diffractions of this ‘thing’ called research into ways that are informed by a performative kind of new materialism. The editors and contributors each wrestle with ghosts—the inherited hauntings of research from worlds that affirm vitalisms, or essentialisms, metaphysics, or fixities that have held the world in place. For sure, these ghosts resonate, they clang and buzz and sound inside the movement of each piece of research. But what is happening *here, now* inside the shifting pages of this book is a call to artists, scholars, activists, and educators to

find new ways to diffract ‘our’ thinking through the prism of a new materialist praxis that is as committed to justice—to justice-matterings, as it is to the development of arts (indeed we believe that these are entangled).

The ‘how’ therefore is utterly entangled with the ‘what’ and ‘why’. These aren’t separate phenomena that exist in their own four-sided, tick-box squares—the ones that appear on ethics forms (*‘detail how will you conduct your research, in the box below please’*). Such forms see how, what, and why as sectional, perhaps even inter-sectional but rarely ever *intra*-sectional or entangled. In the mode offered here, the projects described invite an engagement that tears up the lines of such boxes and rearranges them in new patternings. These patternings invite new ways of practicing the multiple phenomena ‘research’. And such an onto-epistemic approach is nothing short of world-building. Nothing short of deeply *pedagogical*—where learning, doing, resisting, cutting-together-apart, moving, and resonating are part of an entanglement that makes worlds.

SOME MODES

The following is a brief entrance-point into some of the modes or territories (to call to mind Deleuze and Guattari’s *de/re/territorialisations*) cut-together-apart (Barad, 2007) by the academy that currently define, and so in the new material logics offered here *create*, artistic practice as a form of critical knowledge-making. Perhaps these definitions function as apparatuses through which the entanglement of matter and meaning is diffracted into a particular system of flows and resonances, an ordering that marks bodies and creates deep positionalities. In turn, these positionalities make the world—make many worlds, moving through one another in endless momentum, each with a particular relationship with justice.

Isn’t that what an epistemology is? A way of knowing the world that re-affirms it each time it moves around? But instead of knowing a world of separations and separate subject positions that have always already existed and thus may become strangely resistant to change, the modes presented across the volumes entangle ‘how’ we know with ‘what’ we know; an onto-epistemology that allows for multiple worlds to exist together-apart, where, instead of presenting a one-world as foundational, “a world that has granted itself the right to assimilate all other worlds and, by presenting itself as exclusive, cancels possibilities for what lies beyond its limits” (de la Cadena and Blaser, 2018, p. 3), we are invited to see the world(s) as diffractive, material-discursive encounters that emerge together.

This is risky and rebellious stuff. It points to a complete reappraisal of what Audre Lorde called ‘the masters’ tools’ and thus requires we take a very real and very responsive ‘look’ at how we configure justice across worlds. Rather than dismantle the master’s house (to refer to Lorde’s essay *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House*), these apparatuses build their worlds inside the crevices and gaps that such one-world territorialisations sometimes overlook. Knowledge-making from such margins, such multiple positionalities, experiences, bodies, and lives, is perhaps more in tune with the complex buzz of a multiple-ly sonorous world. Research doesn’t just have to be from the perspective of one-world singularities that airbrush out difference in a violent act of *that doesn’t matter*. Matter is very much the matter here. Matter and meaning. Examining how we fold these together in our practices might offer us clues into what kinds of justice might become possible for complex times.

RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICE

The configuration *research-based* or *research-led* as it is sometimes called can be associated with any discipline that works with the timeline or teleology that goes: *first research then practice*. This timeline is no stranger to the academy. Its flow runs straight—from mind to body, from thought to implementation. But perhaps this kind of timely dance doesn’t need to be looked at in terms of how purely Cartesian or ‘traditional’ it might be. Instead, it offers us the opportunity to enquire into what we *really* mean by ‘research’. What constitutes research as a phenomena? Is ‘research’ a matter of books and articles? Is it a matter of interviews, fieldwork, or studio time? Or philosophy? Or is research in ontological terms, a *thing* that is in itself constituted by the dynamic flow of a multitude of tiny practices, always on the move?

Being *research-based* or *research-led* is perhaps simply a call to define clearly what we mean by research. That definition goes on to become the entrance-point from which we start to *collect, create, cite, and write* the first few steps of the territory we cut. This is not, however, to conflate research with practice where the configuration *research-led/-based* is blurred to create a kind of *practice-led* practice by broadening what we mean by research in order to simply absorb it into practice alone. I argue the point is more subtle than that and invites us into the all-important critical consideration of our own epistemologies and ontological framings. Instead of conflation, what considering the constitution

of this thing called ‘research’ requires us to do when we embark on research-led practice is really think closely and critically about the way we cut-together-apart the territories of research-as-phenomena and practice-as-phenomena. The *led* or *based* part defines the timeline, the privileging of modes in a *first this then that* approach to the ordering of the world. This can be urgent and necessary work, an apparatus built out of a timeline or teleology that allows us to shed light on material configurations of a phenomena where a body of knowledge *about* a phenomenon allows for a particular re/construction of that phenomenon.

This can be useful when the research is pointed in service of cause-and-effect outcomes, such as certain kinds of medical research and engineering, but also for artistic research pointed in service of policymaking/changing, or activist theatres/arts. First, we learn about the community or phenomena, then we act. As Wolgemuth et al. state, ‘*For me it comes back to the question of what does it do? The sensitization is important, but when we are communicating feelings, talking about the materials that matter, we have to ask ourselves whether the matter is salient to the moment, whether bringing it forth enacts justice. And just a list of ‘her skin, the sun, the reflection’ to me that’s a description*’ (2021, p. 587).

The point here is well made. In a cause-and-effect pointed research project, certain timelines in terms of the way the research is conducted can be expedient. The researcher makes a certain specific configuration that is implied in the timeline of *research-led* and that configuration goes on to create a certain kind of research cut-together-apart from a specific kind of phenomena. But this isn’t the only way to create research that impacts the world. And if we are true to Audre Lorde’s call to rethink the tools, then how might tools and apparatuses such as implicit timelines and teleologies go on to de/territorialise worlds in an urgent present?

PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH

So now let’s reverse the flow, from practice to research. Here the way we define practice now becomes the entrance-point, the diffractive apparatus through which we begin to create the configurations we have become a part of, from the moment we first decided *I want to do some work here, now*. The want, the desire, is also important to notice. Desire is practice in action. And it is also a research practice in its own right.

In her essay *The Uses of the Erotic*, Audre Lorde first defines her terms. Here, the erotic is all about joy, desire, and satisfaction. It is an

‘emotional’, ‘psychic’ play of phenomena. It has nothing to do with pornography, which is what Lorde suggests is what patriarchy tries to make out of it, to reduce it to. Once we know the erotic within us, we can ‘know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion [and so], we can then observe which of our various life endeavours brings us closer to that fullness’ (Lorde, 2017, p. 8). This kind of erotic knowledge, Lorde calls dangerous to patriarchal, racist or other such violently divisive power structures, as such powers cut apart the sensate joyful, desirous way of being in the world *as the world*, which might configure sexual encounter, but is not reducible to sex alone. For Lorde, the erotic lies in all the kinds of ways we know the world (epistemological), experience encounter (axiological), experience the fullness(es), meaning(s), and joy(s) of just being alive (ontological). And so,

This is one reason why the erotic is so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognised at all. For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy, which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinise all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within each of us. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe. (ibid., p. 11)

The ‘grave responsibility’ is key here, as is the motion to meaning-making. Eroticism has a critical intelligence to it. Eroticism is a *practice*. Thus, eroticism has its own inherent intelligence and knowledge-making aspects to it. It is another way to know the world as the world.

When we come to *practice-based* or *practice-led* research, we arguably allow for the entrance-point into the research to be made out of such forms of becoming-research practices. The affective, sensate sense of the paint, the stage, the woods, yes—even the *sun on her skin*, have an implicit political technology embedded within them that places the knowledge(s) cut apart by the academy and deemed extraneous, or even dare I say it pornographic in terms of revealing the reality of the research experience in the same way pornography reveals so much of the flesh that it skins the *erotic* out of the frame—leaving it to flee to the elsewhere. The politics here is nothing less than those bodies, experiences, knowledges, and so

on in themselves: the ones whose specific marks mean that they too must remain erased; that they too must flee to the elsewhere. Those undesirable bodies, savage bodies, colonised bodies, feminised bodies, female bodies, trans bodies, queer bodies, and *other bodies*.

When we reverse the timeline and privilege practice *first*, then the research, we make a political kind of commitment to these forms of embodied and situated knowledge(s). We start to work with *many* other worlds, p(l)aying attention to the kinds of knowledges that the surfaces we encounter, touch, resonate with, feel are part of practice, from the most mundane everyday to the most complex, institutional, organisational, and academic. From the perspective of entanglement, this is simply another way to cut-together-apart the world. It is a diffraction, a specific configuration, just as research-based/led practice is. It's all about entrance-points. Each one has its own unique and very beautiful kind of politics. Its own specific configuration of how to *do* justice-matterings.

PRACTICE-AS-RESEARCH

At this point in the discussion of different modes, we come to play with a tiny preposition. Such a small thing that has such a resounding impact in the world. *As*. In the spirit of remaining specific and critical with our definitions, *what is 'as', really?* What does it mean? We might need to be careful because *as* can create a reductive formalism if not held and worked with, with care. And we have already discussed how the definitions we approach our research with imply huge apparatuses that make worlds.

The inherent representationalism of '*as*' is something worthy of note. It points to the power and potential of diffraction. *A as B. A = B.* But can anyone phenomenon really be reduced to another without any emergent *diffraction patterns*? Write the *A* on top of the *B*, and particular diffraction patterns emerge. These patterns also include you, your pen, the page you write on, or your screen and the pixels that disappear and reappear *as if never having been anywhere in between, as if flickering in and out of existence, from virtual to actual and back again.* Now reverse the flow—the timeline. Write the *B* on top of the *A*. See yet more diffractions! More differences differing from each other. Now if you like, return to the question of *as*. What is *as* but a swirling, shifting, swerving, resonating, *moving ontology* of diffractions?

Finding the critical entrance-point into *practice-as-research* from here, what we might draw our attention to now is the diffractive possibilities of

practice-as-research. How do practice and research mapped through each other (rather than onto), create new patterns of difference-making. To note here, we aren't looking for what *differences* are made. What solid, countable spot-the-difference type of difference can we account for. This comes at a later point in the configuration, if we want it to (see timelines emerging as a kind of cutting-together again...). What the *as* allows us to do, what is built into its apparatus, is it allows us to see the *processes* by which the research (and all its actants) make difference.

This is the power of *practice-as-research*. It arguably invites us to momentarily exit the kind of cause and effect exemplified by processes that have a very clear teleology or timeline, privileging one or another flow for a clear and necessary critical reason (usually in service of enacting certain kinds of justice) and allows us to examine the way difference is actually made. Arguably, this is urgent if we want to uproot in/justices all the way down to their pulsing atomic-epistemics. Once again, we find another way to approach justice-matterings from inside the entanglement, creating new modes of approaching justice, opening ourselves to the chaos of the many worlds that breathe life into the one we casually call 'ours'.

POSTQUALITATIVE INQUIRY

In a way postqualitative inquiry shifts and slides through all of these, informed by the ghostly heritages of artistic research practices positioned with/in the academy. What postqualitative inquiry does perhaps, is diffracted these heritages *through* the varied thinking apparatuses brought by posthumans and new materialisms. The attention paid to the entanglement of matter and meaning is key here. What does it mean to think at the fringes and edges of orderly flows of time, space, and matter *as a radical act of innovative research*? As Lather and St. Pierre write, 'The ethical charge of our work as [postqualitative] inquirers is surely to question our attachments that keep us from thinking and living differently' (2013, p. 631). Perhaps this is what makes the 'inquiry' part of postqualitative inquiry so interesting. A postqualitative inquiry is threaded through with a continual attention and awareness paid to its processes and how such diffractive practices matter the world through research. And as de la Cadena and Blaser, and Savransky remind us, *there are many worlds*.

Thinking about justice-matterings, the becoming-just, or in more simple terms a commitment to re/scribing an ethics that might move

as an entangled part of the complexities of post-2022 worlds, Sedgwick's work on the reparative buzzes and lights up in the passages of this diffractive approach to research. If as Sedgwick (1997) states, paranoid research practices sift and search for moments of unjust practices pulsing in the overlooked places of any research project, then too, what she calls the 'reparative' mode is also cut-together-apart inside of text/doing. If the matter has been ripped from meaning and vice versa, creating the need to think urgently in terms of flows and timelines and appropriate *orderings of things* in order to best meet justice halfway, then it is indeed right and timely to meet such rippings at the site of the fissures they have created and is created by, to play just enough by injustice's rules, using its own deep languages against it. But if we are to take Lather and St. Pierre (2013) at their word, what would that mean in terms of questioning the kinds of attachments—the habituated ways of cutting-together-apart of the world—in order to think and do it all differently *this time*. This call to an entangled approach to reparative research practices has nothing to do with an outside, with pressing eject, with a 'stop the world I want to get off' and play in the eternal soup of sensation. What makes a posthuman, new materialist approach is the quality of entanglement itself. It is an eternal interior, made of fleshly and nonfleshly matterings that are constantly on the move *as movement* (Nail, 2019).

Paranoid and reparative modes of postqualitative research privilege are not just an investigation of the flow of timelines per se in a kind of 'what mode is being given precedence this time?' But a deep attention is given to the way that phenomena arise. As we know from Barad (2007), the way we observe is an entangled part of the mattering. What postqualitative research allows for (but perhaps doesn't always succeed in enacting) is the reparative that Sedgwick calls for so urgently. This is how postqualitative inquiry, artistic research of many forms, new materialisms and posthumanisms, ethics and justice, and the positionality of doing/being research practices might diffract through one another to produce new research.

CUTTING THESE THOUGHTS

The approaches to the phenomena Research-based Practice, Practice-based Research, Practice-as-Research, and Postqualitative Inquiry spoken about so briefly here are not in any way a survey of the deep and varied histories, historicities, voices, modes, and meanings of any, which would require a dedicated, if not encyclopaedic amount of work. Rather, this

short piece here offers an entrance-point into modes crafted from a very particular view of entangled phenomena in and for research. What such an apparatus, crudely put together as it is, is threaded through with, is a deep commitment to the profound potential of these modes of research to fail and fail better at creating new configurations of ethically responsive, open, sensate, voiced movements in this often violent act that we call ‘research’.

This book is an attempt at such re/configurations of artistic modes of thinking/doing the world anew. This particular entrance point that you read in the position of *here, now*, whatever that position may be, invites you to do so through the moving parts of this apparatus, including, time-lines and teleologies, eroticisms and sensate practices, multiple and many worlds rather than singularities, critical paranoia and reparation. Because the world has never been less than many, or fully made.

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