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Towards a Manifesto on Research-Creation

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After-effects/After-images: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum (Manchester, 2013).

7   See Laurence De Garis, "Experiments in Pro-Wrestling: Toward a Performative and Sensuous Sport Ethnography," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 16, 1 (1999): 65–77.

8   Garnet Hertz, "Critical Making," 2012, http://www.conceptlab.com/criticalmaking. See also Matt Ratto, "Critical Making: Conceptual and Material Studies in Technology and Social Life," *The Information Society* 27 (2011): 252–60.

9   Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (New York, 2013), 2.

10 Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience* (Minneapolis, 2014).

11 See megafone.net.

12 Another project currently underway at the MML is titled "Audio Toy Box." It involves making and sharing open-source circuits and physical interface schemes for interactive, sound-centred children's toys. Following Barthes, we have noticed that "toys always mean something" (Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* [1957], trans. Annette Lavers [New York, 1972], 53), often in ways that mirror societal norms and expectations. Society's ableist tendencies are reflected in the toys that are usually given to children. The MML toys, on the other hand, are designed to be cross-ability, but with adaptations that make them stimulating for children with developmental delays who need extra help with their communication skills. Our propositions encourage parents and specialized educators to customize the toys/games and develop their own physical interfaces for children to explore. While not expressly "art" on the level of the objects created, these new toys, in their relationships among discovery, repetition, and play, are performative, improvisational, and musical.

13 An *Encuentro*, "part academic conference, part performance festival," is organized every two years by the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics. For *Encuentro* 2014, see http://www.concordia.ca/events/conferences/encuentro-en.html.

14 For more information on the Performing Disability/Enabling Performance working group at *Encuentro 2014*, see The Disability Performance Working Group, "Work Group Statement," 12 September 2014, http://mia.mobilities.ca/encuentro/work-group-statement/. Participants, in no particular order, included Tamar Tembeck, Yvonne Schmidt, Carola Garcia, Janet Gibson, Margaret Ames, Ashley McAskill, Danielle Peers, Faye Ginsberg, Lindsay Eales, Kelsie Acton, Koby Rogers Hall, Maria Schirmer, Heather Vrana, Véro Leduc, Laurence Parent, Jennifer Jimenez, Stephen Sillett, Baraka de Soleil, and Eduardo Farajado.

15 Stella Young, "I'm Not Your Inspiration, Thank You Very Much," *TedxSydney*, April 2014, Transcript available at http://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much/transcript.

Towards a Manifesto on Research-Creation

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As the above contributions show, over the past ten years research-creation has slowly shifted the landscape of artistic practice, pedagogy, and funding in Canada. Alongside the progressive turning of art schools into universities, debate over whether art can—or should—count as research, whether research-status is antithetical to good art, and whether research-creation constitutes a specific genre of artistic practice has led to a proliferation of panels and conferences, articles and books. The issues raised are many, but most interesting to me has been tracking how "inter-theory" debates, characteristic of the critical discourse of interdisciplinarity, shift when pushed to cross so-called "practice/theory" lines.

Based on this research, in the winter of 2014 I developed the first seminar taught at the University of Alberta explicitly on the topic of research-creation in Art and Design. The course, *Debates in Art and/as Research*, began with the reading of two books:

Thomas King's *The Truth About Stories* and Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*.[1] Neither made obvious sense to my students given the topic; neither refers explicitly to the nebulous and contested territory of research-creation. What they allowed us to do, however, was to begin by considering the way that research-creation practices work to tell new stories within the academy.

As most readers will know, research-creation is the main term used in Canada to speak about arts-based research. Terminological precursors to research-creation (such as practice-based research, practice-led research, and artistic research) find their origin in over thirty years of international discussion focused mostly in Western and Northern Europe and Australia.[2] While structurally tied to its status as a national funding category designed to increase available research funding for artists working in universities in Canada, research-creation

has, more interestingly, emerged hand-in-glove with recent shifts in artistic production and discourse such as "art-as-social-practice"[3] and "the pedagogical turn."[4] These shifts have had profound effects on the art work/events/projects that animate contemporary biennial, triennial, and exhibition circuits. They have also impacted the art history, theory, and criticism surrounding such work. On my reading, this shifts the ways in which we are called upon to teach contemporary art and art history. That said, research-creation not only challenges dominant hierarchies within departments of art and art history but, as the contributions above highlight, has impact beyond these.[5] Taking research-creation seriously, as a relatively new term on the academic stage, gives those of us operating across the university as artist-researchers/researcher-artists the opportunity to re-envision and re-craft—to re-story—our disciplinary practices. Rather than uncritically adding one disciplinary apparatus to another, research-creation marshals new methods that allow us to tell new stories, stories that demand new research literacies and outputs.

It is with this approach in mind that I assigned students in my Debates in Art and Research seminar *The Truth About Stories* and *The Companion Species Manifesto*. I invited them to read The *Truth About Stories* for the way that it asks us to be attentive to the "[s]tories we make up to try to set the world straight,"[6] those out of which we are crafted, and those we participate in crafting. Following this, I suggested reading *The Companion Species Manifesto* for the way it models an approach to research rooted in process and context specificity; for the way it is attentive to relational making practices in which entities (humans, races, dogs, disciplines) do not precede their relating and in which "the relating is never done once and for all."[7] Mobilizing different idioms and with different audiences in mind, these books distinguish between stories that hurt and stories that heal; stories of hierarchy and of cooperation; stories of autonomy and of responsivity.

In a room of students who self-identified as art historians and artists (along with a few sociologists and performance studies scholars), I suggested that these texts model an approach that is relevant to research-creation. I proposed research-creation as a methodology that sidesteps disciplinary allegiance and thereby reconfigures artistic cultures and practices across the university. Rather than letting one's research questions be conditioned by structures of legibility and value given by, say, one's self-identification as painter, early modern art historian, or feminist theorist, I suggested we might instead begin from our own version of the questions that Haraway asks herself: "Whom and what do I touch when I touch my dog?" and "How is 'becoming with' a practice of becoming worldly?"[8]

To take these questions seriously is to suggest something about the way that research-creation re(con)figures our approach to disciplinarity.

In saying this I am not arguing against the value of disciplinary competence and rigour. Attention to disciplinary inheritance is crucial. However, in asking us to unhook ourselves from a primary alliance to disciplinary identity, the critical discourse of research-creation wedges open inherited forms of legibility and value that configure our daily activities as academic practitioners. Research-creation thereby becomes important to the investigation of well-trod, but still necessary, territory in the arts and humanities—territory that is crucial to the future of a university that seems to be increasingly emerging as the enduringly neoliberal "university of business" or the "all-administrative university."[9]

It may be important at this point to be clear on the following: mine is *not* an argument for the validity of artistic practice as, de facto, a legitimate form of research, though I agree with the contention that certain artistic practices may be considered forms of research or publication according to academic standards. Indeed, it seems to me that simply giving art the status of research echoes early feminist interventions into the canon that took the form of "add women and stir"—a tokenistic inclusion that did little to change the logics that structured the exclusions in the first place (this, of course, is an argument that was made forcefully in 1971 by Linda Nochlin in her germinal essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"[10]). Rather than focusing on artistic labour *as* research, I am interested in the epistemological and ontological structures that deny it research status in the first place;[11] I am interested in institutional attempts to account for and support research-creation, and in how these might shift how we teach contemporary art history.

The specificity of research-creation that is at stake here is not only conceptual. As part and parcel of questioning the stranglehold of disciplinary legibility on our practices in the university, as teachers, as researchers, as colleagues, today, we must attend to the ways that the disciplined university, with its merit boards and granting agencies, are structured to assess faculty outputs on the basis of contribution not to "new knowledge" *in general* but to new knowledge within *a discipline*. This often renders those who would work *practicetheoretically* both illegible and, in the most hostile of assessments, suspect. In this context, I argue for research-creation as crucial to the development of new academic literacies that challenge traditional modes of knowledge in the university. Research-creation is a particularly potent way of speaking across and *with* disciplinary, political, ideological, methodological, and affective (diffractive) differences in the academy today.

To return to the context of the seminar and texts with which I started: to do research—of any kind—is not simply to ask questions, it is to tell stories-that-matter. It is in recognizing this, I proposed, that a truly ethical research practice emerges.[12] In the first few pages of *The Truth About Stories*, Thomas King (through Jeanette Winterson, though we cannot ignore the echoes of Lacan here) asserts that language is not something that we speak; *it* speaks *us*.[13] Research methods and disciplines, too, precede us. Speak us. We enter into them and they work to craft the possible forms of our questions. It is in this context that it becomes crucial to ask, when examining our research practices: which stories animate us, and why?

Alternate research stories create alternate research worlds. Conversely, different story-telling strategies (methods) emerge from different world-views. If, in Haraway's words, the world is "a knot in motion,"[14] research-creation demands that we re-assess which knots we are tying with our research stories. At its most compelling, as many of the contributors to this *Polemics* suggest, research-creation invites us to reassess our inherited modes of publication and pedagogy in ways more attuned to the modes of creativity needed to face ecological and economic crises that are actively remaking how we might conceive of the work of the university today.

Notes

1   Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* (Minneapolis, 2003); Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago, 2003).

2   Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Practice as Research: Context, Method, Knowledge* (London, 2007); Brad Haseman, "Tightrope Writing: Creative Writing Programs in the RQF Environment" (Queensland, Australia, 2006); Patricia Leavy, *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice* (New York, 2009); Michael Biggs, *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts* (London, 2012).

3   Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York, 2011).

4   Irit Rogoff, "Turning," *e-flux journal* 0 (November 2008) http://www.e-flux.com/journal/turning/; Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London, 2012).

5   For example, Concordia's *Hexagram* and *SenseLab* and York's *Future Cinema Lab*—among many others—develop research-creational collaboration not only across the arts, humanities, and social sciences, but with the "hard" sciences as well.

6   King, *Truth About Stories*, 60.

7   Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 12.

8   Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, 2008), 3.

9   Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why It Matters* (Oxford, 2011).

10 Reprinted in Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York, 1988).

11 While it is true that such inclusions *can*, at times, work to change these exclusionary logics by performing an implicit critique, such implicit critiques are, more often than not, over-determined by an assimilative logic that maintains the values that structured the exclusion in the first place.

12 This is the subject of my monograph on Art and/as Research, in process. In it I specify a difference between the kind of research ethics modeled by research-creation methodologies and those managed by university ethics boards.

13 King, *The Truth About Stories*, 2.

14 Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 4.