The 'little r' in Artistic Research

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www29.griffith.edu.au/comprovisers

www29.griffith.edu.au/little-r
Background

‘Artistic research’ increasingly accepted in the academy, e.g:

- Qld Con Research Centre Artistic Practice as Research cluster
- EU Journal for Artistic Research

Artistic research accepts subjectivity (aka ‘little r’ research) as opposed to traditional scientific methods (or ‘big R’ research).
Artistic practice and reflection can develop in tandem and with improvisation & composition.

Many of our research students are required to present original works and a reflective exegesis but they have few opportunities to see academic staff do the same.

Despite ERA 'equivalency' rhetoric, there is a tendency to privilege traditional modes of publication.

Hence The Comprovisers, a gathering of staff at the QLD Conservatorium to explore improvisation and the co-creation of music. [www29.griffith.edu.au/comprovisers](http://www29.griffith.edu.au/comprovisers)
Background

www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415581691


The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts

Edited by Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlsson

The Conflict of the Faculties

This book is about artistic research – what it is, or what it could be. And it is about the place that artistic research could have in academia, within the whole of academic research.

Well written and well argued, this book will probably become a reference for many studies to come and required reading for anyone active in this domain.

— Frans-Willem Korsten

Leiden University Press
We frame an exposition (Schwab, 2012) to reveal so-called ‘little r’ thinking in music making, and as such to meet the OECD (2008) definition of research as,

... any creative systematic activity undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this knowledge to devise new applications. Includes fundamental research, applied research ... and experimental development work leading to new devices, products or processes.

Huib Schippers (2007) provides a succinct context:

... thousands of deeply considered and split-second decisions are made using music notation or memory ... consulted or remembered recordings in private collection and libraries and performances; learned, acquired and developed values; experience and assessment of audience reactions; and probably most importantly an aural library, which, for a mature musician, would typically consist of 20,000 to 50,000 hours of listening, learning and playing.
i) a scholarly research **paper** with artistic research questions, method, analysis and conclusions; and

ii) live **music performance components** that will feature the voice, acoustic instruments and digital arts technologies.

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**Exposition**

To present familiar and unfamiliar thinking about musical practices:

• How may musical thinking and preparation be considered ‘research’?
• How can both music and text best serve to answer these questions?

Presentation / performance components focus on three aspects:

1. **musical improvisation** (the beginning of a new work);
2. **structure, form and repetition** (in the composition of the piece);
3. **technical production, capture and representation** as a ‘final’ work.


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The ‘little r’ in Artistic Research Training

Paul Draper and Kim Cunio

In a recent visit to a European conservatoire one of the authors here was asked to have been part of an examination team to experience a week of a so-called ‘research festival’. This provided an intensive framework for graduating Master of Music candidates to defend their research projects in compelling blends of talk, text, screen and performance. At end of week, students and administrators reflected on this over dinner. Of particular impact was the apparent ease with which students expressed themselves to offer deep insights into the meaning of their own artistic practices while never seeming to offer any less than complete transparency, validity and trustworthiness. To which the institution’s principal enthusiastically exclaimed, “Ah no, not the British ‘big R’ rhetoric. We do ‘little r’ research here — and we’re proud of it!”

These notions of ‘big and little r’ we find provocative and inspiring, while at the same time resonating with text understandings that are beginning to emerge in our own institution in Australia. In this chapter we therefore explore this further via recent insights and activities of the authors in practicing artists and supervisors of student research projects. To do so, we now turn to examine the local context and recent literature which informs our approach.

**Context**

Following the so called ‘Downsizing reforms’ of the Australian federal government in the late 1994s, Colleges of Advanced Education and vocational institutes were amalgamated with universities. Similar to the later Bologna processes in Europe, this was the beginning of accountability processes which imposed the policy metaphor of public service departments and governments (Bennett, 2002). In the arts, this included the implication that research is produced via familiar formats of text-based arguments by the theorist and much less so by the practicing artist. This seemed to be a natural fit with conservatoire where musicology and composition were taught and disseminated along traditional lines that could easily be recognised by bureaucrats, while performance staff continued to teach (albeit somewhat invisibly in relation to their own research traditions). More recently, the triannual Excellence for Research in Australia (ERA) evaluation exercise established the recognition of creative works. However, outputs continue to be measured along the boundaries of theorists or artist — in the case of the former, via books, journals, citation indices, grant successes and so on; in the case of the musician, via relatively low level proxy measures which include proof of (wry) a performance, some form of peer review, and a self-authored 250 word ‘research statement’. Nowhere is there the opportunity for researchers to portrait both theoretical and artistic outputs and be recognised for this – yet oddly, this is exactly what is asked of the higher degree research candidates who are supervised by these same academics.

Apprentice, research training in music provides a supervisory team comprising a theorist as the ‘principal supervisor’ to assist in dissertation writing, the literature review and method, together with an artist from the field in question to advise on practical matters but often positioned as an ‘associate supervisor’. Perhaps this may have been reasonably conceived given that many practical staff were mature age musicians employed as teachers since before university amalgamations and consequently their skill base did not usually include expletive writing. However it is clear that such higher degree qualifications can easily be skewed to inessential representations just as Dietrich Langes writes,
Exposition

LET’S PLAY
(& record ....)

play:  D on Rye (Improv section A)
With music software, early ideas can easily placed on the page, manipulated, repeated and added to in a fluid way where the actual composition takes place after the recording of the individual parts (Cunio, 2009).

The same acoustic guitar and piano improvisations were recorded, edited, structured, repeated where salient.

.... then invoking the question ‘what next?’ as a logical musical research idea (and which was not a question that could have been asked earlier). Vaggione (2001) writes,

... musical processes ... are not situations ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered: they are rather composed (since they did not exist anywhere before being composed), and hence they cannot be considered properly as modelling activities, even if they use – and deeply absorb – models, knowledge, and tools coming from scientific domains ... In fact, music transforms this knowledge and these tools into its own ontological concern: to create specific musical situations (musical ‘states of affairs’).
Exposition

AND NOW LET'S PLAY

B

Logic screen #1
Kim - bass
Paul - Strat

play: D on Rye (Improv section B)
Method, design, and ‘composition’

Onward .... we sent each other files to find a common sound world, and discussed ...

A Ry Cooder inspired theme – 'D on Rye'

We improvised the A section theme, added a B section, more instruments, then a C section groove

Logic screen #2

play: D on Rye (Improv section C)
Exposition

Logic screen #3

Let's groove ....

play: D on Rye (performance bed)
Presentation, dissemination, and ‘product’

The final stages of our project involve the ways in which we consider our preparation for dissemination (another emergent question).

Some might see this to be via the trajectory of making an album, working with a record company or publisher, or by self-publishing a sound recording though an outlet such as Apple’s iTunes store.
Publication

In the 21st century social networking world of course there are many opportunities for other than this and so we explored common approaches including:

• this performance itself as an outcome;
• the on-going curation of a website around the project;
• the viral nature of cross-posting documentation and media on other social networks, seed video and audio hosting /embed sites;
• and the ‘mastering’ of works for multiple formal outlets including via scholarly in-text publication and indeed, on-line commercial music outlets.
Mastered for iTunes

White paper & plug-in
images.apple.com/itunes/mastered-for-itunes/

Sonnox pro codec
for AU, VST, RTAS & AAX


Logic screen #4
Discussion

Differentiating between the internal, technical aspects of music and the artistic goals which a project may set out to achieve. While the two are essentially interrelated, for performing musicians this may often be difficult to reconcile given their long experience of taking lessons, doing practice, then performing outcomes vs. an often much later conceptual undertaking that may apply to research projects. Henk Borgdorff (2012) elaborates...

Art practices are technically mediated practices. Whether this involves the acoustical characteristics of the musical instruments, the physical properties of art materials, the structure of a building or the digital architecture of a virtual installation, art practices and artworks are materially anchored.

Artistic practices are technically mediated at a more abstract level of materiality as well. Consider the knowledge of counterpoint in music, of colour in painting, of editing in filmmaking, or of bodily techniques in dance.
As researchers we need to be clear about technique and artistic aspirations, the latter of which in our experience extends far beyond the do-ing of it, to the say-ing of it, and importantly – to whom? From Borgdorff (2012):

[artistic research] does not limit itself to an investigation into material aspects of art or an exploration of the creative process, but ... reach[es] further in the transdisciplinary context.

Experimental and interpretative research strategies thus transect one another here in an undertaking whose purpose is to articulate the connectedness of art to who we are and where we stand.
Discussion

• Do we really believe that music is research?

• What does the computer do to us as musicians?

• Does doing research increase our music making potential?

If some music is already ‘research ready’, does the simple process of making it constitutes a research outcome?

How do know when music is not research?

AND

How can we transition that music into a research paradigm?
Discussion

Little ‘r’ = reflection?
Identification of research question and problem
---- methodology ---- literature -----
analysis of creative works ---- findings of the research ----
contribution to epistemology
---identification of areas for future research.

Big ‘P’ = Project?
Identification of practical project ---- funding and other logistics
---- creation of works at benchmark standard
---- documentation of works ----
incorporation of works into larger creative output
analysis of works within dissertation or paper.


References - other works by the authors


Barclay, L. (2012). Personal website. [online]. Available at leahbarclay.com


... and one more thing

Possibilities

play: Possibilities (performance bed)
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play: D on Rye (final mix)  play: Possibilities (final mix)