



# An interpretative framework for practice-based research in architectural design

Jill Franz

Queensland University of Technology, AU  
<j.franz@qut.edu.au>

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There is a growing body of literature to do with practice-based research. In general, the discussions have tended to favour art more than design; and, with respect to design, comparatively very little deals with the built environment. This paper describes a conceptual framework that was developed to guide both the supervision and process of practice-based research in architectural design. In describing the framework, reference is made to a specific PhD study operating within the art/design nexus.

In part, the framework was developed from a review of issues raised locally (QUT, Brisbane), nationally (Australia) and internationally by art and design academics. Subsequently, the framework assumes a tertiary academic context and more specifically a philosophy doctoral level of research. Indeed, it argues that because of the commercial nature of design practice, academia (incorporating the collaborative situation with industry) is the most appropriate place for research about, of and through design.

The framework acknowledges both commonly discussed issues (including those central to the Conference) and other issues not considered in the discourse to date. From the art domain, current literature recommends, among others, the following as a basis for moving forward:

- Aligning the intention, process and outcomes of "traditional" research with research in the creative arts in recognition of the criteria historically used to allocate and distribute research funds;
- Identifying the levels of research activity within the discipline, their relationship with dominant research models and their implications for infrastructure, thesis structure and presentation, examination and publication. This should also include explicating what does not constitute research activity, for example, professional practice where the primary intention is not to contribute to the stock of general or discipline-specific knowledge;
- Identifying the extent to which peers are expert in the field and able to appreciate the art making aspect of the work.

In addition to these issues and as a foundation to practice-based research, several design academics call for identifying the characteristic and distinguishing aspects of design and design knowledge in order to explore how such research can be undertaken without resorting to the use of technological or humanities models/methodologies. They argue that in this way design and design research will have value in its own right thus maximising its potential to contribute conceptually and practically and compete equally for funds.

What has not been highlighted to date and what is argued for in this paper is that practice-based research advocates/represents an interpretative, non-dualist way of operating in the world. Given that dominant models of research, education and commercial design practice tend to favour dualist, deterministic models, there is an urgent need for this situation to be examined beginning with fundamental ontological and epistemological issues. This includes such things as revealing and exploring conceptions of significant concepts, for example "research" and "design", held by the stakeholders. In other words in the case of the student, this means making explicit the philosophical suitability of the student to undertake the research and of the supervisor to guide the program of research. Without such an

approach, the movement forward will be fraught with unnecessary contradictions and complexity.