



An alternative model of "knowledge" for the arts

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I would like to offer a paper at the 'Research into Practice 2' conference on 'arting' and 'knowledge'. I propose to explore the activity of 'arting' in relation to conceptions of 'knowledge' and 'imagination', drawing on the work of Nietzsche, Bachelard, Deleuze and Guattari, Adorno, and others.

I feel that the recent trend towards practice based PhDs, and an emergent research culture in art and design, raises questions about the nature of studio practice as 'knowledge', that are in some respects pressing. Some practice based PhDs have imported models of knowledge and academic research from other disciplines which fit awkwardly with studio practice. There is a growing awareness that the criteria used to evaluate practice based PhDs, and the criteria used within art and design to evaluate practice, are not one and the same, and that it is possible to satisfy the criteria of the former without the studio practice itself being of a particularly high standard. I am interested in exploring a model of art practice in relation to ideas of 'knowledge', in order to stimulate discussion as to whether there might be alternative basis for developing practice based PhDs.

Both Bachelard and Adorno addressed the twentieth century crisis in epistemology, and saw an alternative less problematic model of 'knowledge' in the arts. Bachelard's work on the philosophy of science, his signalling of the 'epistemological break' that took place with the discovery of relativity theory and such as Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, had considerable impact on Derrida, Foucault and others of that generation of thinkers, but is now little debated in the arts. Bachelard argues for the rejection of the Newtonian model of 'knowledge', and for a new model of 'knowledge' which is contingent, centred on concerns that have traditionally been associated with 'imagination', the relation of the 'insides' and the 'outsides', and rooted in practice as both its ground and horizon.

Bachelard's work may offer ways developing a less problematic model of 'knowledge' for the arts, which is simultaneously less antithetical to studio practice than the Cartesian and Kantian models have been, which could usefully be debated in art and design at this juncture.

It is envisaged that the paper will consider the following issues: If 'knowledge' is generated from art practice, what form(s) might this 'knowledge' have? What is the relation of 'imagination' and 'knowledge'? How does the 'imagination' operate? What are the characteristics of a well developed studio practice?