



Art as action or art as object? the embodiment of knowledge in practice as research

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This paper explores whether artworks themselves can embody the knowledge generated in Practice as Research (PAR). Specifically, I examine the type and mode of this knowledge, and in which aspect of practice (artwork, creative process, reflection thereon) it might be said to emerge. More generally, I am interested in the potential of different philosophies of art for explicating and grounding our sense of art's epistemological value.

The paper begins by summarising an argument put forward in a previous presentation (at PARIP 2003), which drew on philosophical accounts of practical reasoning to elucidate the epistemological distinctiveness of PAR. These accounts analyse the reasoning processes embedded in activity and thus furnish a basis for the claim that practice itself (rather than the reflection upon it) embodies knowledge of a form irreducible to its theoretical or verbal articulation. The pertinence of these ideas depends on a conception of PAR as a form of intentional action, here termed the "intentional action model". This conception is relatively easy to sustain where the performing arts are concerned since both the process of making work and the matter of performance itself (people dancing / acting) are activities. But the model seems less applicable to visual art / design practice which produces material objects with ontological autonomy from their creators. Basing PAR's claim to knowledge on the artist's exercise of practical reasoning or practical wisdom neglects the autonomous objects that are the outcome of the making process.

Nonetheless, there are philosophies of art which urge us to reach behind artworks' objectification to rediscover a sense of them as forms of artistic action. Such writings imply that the knowledge-content of art practice resides in what the artist does rather than in the thing she produces. This paper, however, argues against this view, suggesting that it courts the risk of intentionalism and solipsism, as well as relegating the artwork itself to a position of merely derivative importance. Drawing on insights from philosophical hermeneutics, the paper proposes an alternative perspective on artworks as themselves the embodiment of knowledge – a knowledge shared in the audiences' encounters with those works. My aim is to open such issues for discussion through a dialogue between philosophy and practice, rather than to propose definitive conclusions or pragmatic approaches to current issues in the PAR debate.