



Foucault's 'What is an Author': towards a critical discourse of practice as research

Estelle Barrett

Deakin University, AU
<ejbarret@deakin.edu.au>

volume 4 content
journal home pag
conference home pag
copyright

[abstract ° full paper](#)

to cite this journal article

Barrett, E. (2006) Materializin
pedagogies. *Working Papers in Art and
Design* .
Retrieved <date> from URI
http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/artdes_research_papers/wpades_vol4/ebfull.htm
ISSN 1466-491'

A vexed issue for many artistic researchers is related to the need for the artist/researcher to write about his or her own work in the research report or exegesis. In the creative arts, the outcomes that emerge from an alternative logic of practice are not easily quantifiable and it can be difficult to articulate conclusions objectively given the emotional and ideological investments and the intrinsically subjective dimension of the artistic process. How then, might the artist as researcher avoid on the one hand, what has been referred to as 'auto-connoisseurship', the undertaking of a thinly veiled labour of valorising what has been achieved in the creative work, or alternatively producing a research report that is mere description or history?

In this paper I suggest that a way of overcoming such a dilemma is for creative arts researchers to shift the critical focus away from the notion of the work as product, to an understanding of both studio enquiry and its outcomes as process. I'd like to draw on Michel Foucault's essay 'What is An Author ' to explore how we might move away from art criticism to the notion of a critical discourse of practice-led enquiry that involves viewing the artist as a researcher, and the artist/critic as a scholar who comments on the value of the artistic process as the production of knowledge.

Foucault's essay provides artistic researchers with a template for more objective and distanced discourse on the practice-led research process and its writing. It allows researchers to locate themselves within contexts of theory and practice and provides an analytical framework though which researchers might locate themselves and their work within the broader social arena and field of research, As I will show with reference to the work of Donna Haraway and a number of commentaries on Pablo Picasso's Demioselles d'Avignon, an application of Foucault's ideas need not negate those subjective and situated aspects of practice as research.