



"Agnostic" thinking: creative writing as practice-led research

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volume 5 content
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The emergence of practice-led research within the academy has brought into focus a problem of knowledge. While epistemological issues are always under consideration in research communities, what constitutes knowledge is, for the most part, rather narrowly conceived, and still typically relies on a kind of theological structure: that there exists what is knowable, and worth knowing; that there exists what is testable and worth testing; and that there exists something that accords with "the truth".

Practice-led research - research conducted by creative practitioners as part of their practice - starts from a different position, and builds in a different manner. It approaches research, and the interpretation of findings, in an agnostic rather than theological manner.¹ That is, practitioners focus on exploration and accident rather than on hypotheses and pre-negotiated approaches, and typically use a interpretive process, concerned with relatively informal problem-solving, and with intuitive leaps, rules of thumb and educated guesses.

Such research is less concerned with interpreting "hard" evidence, and more concerned with exploring an issue or situation. It relies on the phenomenological and the concrete, operationalizing what Paul Carter (2004) characterizes as *material* rather than abstract thinking. But at the point of interpretation, it is often caught between competing imperatives: to produce knowledge according to a "theological" standard, or to remain open to ambiguities and uncertainties; that is, to undertake empirical or logical analysis, or to follow Keats' notion of Negative Capability. We discuss this with reference to how creative writers undertake and interpret their research in their work, discussing the similarities and differences between writing and other art forms in the academy.

Endnote:

¹ See Sophia Vyzoviti 2007 *Folding architecture: spatial, structural and organisational diagnoses*, Singapore: Page One Publishing: 8.