

Artistic Research

A Performative Paradigm?

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Introduction

Over the past decade or so the term “performativity” has come to pervade contemporary discussions around the visual and performing arts—the performative arts, performative arts practitioners, performative arts based research, performative strategies, performative pedagogy, performative sound design, ad infinitum—ushering in what has been termed the performative turn.¹ While initially there tended to be a conflation of the terms performativity, performance and performance art in discourses around contemporary art and aesthetics, it could now be said that all art is ontologically performative. In her essay “The Experiential Turn”, published online as part of the Walker Art Center’s inaugural *Living Collections Catalogue*,² Dorothea von Hantelmann tells us, “(t)here is no performative artwork because there is no nonperformative artwork.”³ According to the terms of “the performative” it could thus be argued that even the most illusionistic of representational art as exemplified in trompe l’oeil painting is performative—the pictorial equivalent of speech act theory. Thus von Hantelmann argues that it “makes little sense to speak of a performative artwork because every artwork has a reality-producing dimension.”⁴

In “The Experiential Turn”, Von Hantelmann picks her way through the tautological theoretical terrain and the popular take up of the performative to argue its value in understanding the experiential turn in contemporary art, that is, contemporary art’s concern with creating a/effects on its viewers. She comments:

A concern with an artwork’s effects on the viewer and with the situation in which it takes place has indeed become a dominant feature of contemporary art since the 1960s. Although I am aware that a new notion will cause new problems, I want to suggest the experiential turn as a term that might be more appropriate and useful to describe these ongoing tendencies in contemporary art.⁵

What does this slippage of the “performative” into “experiential” in contemporary art mean for art? More specifically for this essay, what does this mean for the emerging discipline of artistic research? How does one assess “experience” for example? Does it reduce art merely to a phenomenological investigation of art’s reception, or does the evaluation of such work in the research field collapse artistic research into ethnographic or auto-ethnographic research on the one hand or scientific measurement of responses and psychometric testing on the other hand? Or is there something else at stake?

In this essay I return to J.L. Austin’s elaboration on the term performativity to evaluate its value for the arts as a theoretical and methodological tool for understanding the impact of artistic research in contrast to the way it has been popularly taken up across contemporary visual and performing arts. I address the following questions: What is performativity? And what would be the characteristics of a performative research paradigm? Is it enough to say that the performance/production is an event/act/production that becomes the thing done and experienced by an audience? Are all performances/productions performative? Against what criteria do we assess the success or failure of a performance/production? Finally, can a

performative model make valid “truth” claims that will be recognised by the broader research community?

The essay argues that the performative needs to be understood in terms of the performative force of art, that is, its capacity to effect “movement” in thought, word and deed in the individual and social sensorium. These movements enable a reconfiguration of conventions from within rather than outside of convention. Seen in the context of other research paradigms—namely the qualitative and quantitative paradigms of research—I will argue that what is at stake are the possibilities that a performative paradigm offers a new perspective on research not just in the social sciences and humanities, but also in the sciences.

A Performative Paradigm?

In 2009, I published an essay entitled “A Performative Paradigm for the Creative Arts” in *Working Papers in Art and Design*.⁶ This essay had developed in response to my experience in supervising creative arts MFAs and PhDs in artistic research in Australia, where an exhibition, recital, performance or other form of creative work constitutes the major component of the submission in conjunction with an exposition that provides a meta-discussion of the context, methodology and research findings of the research. In this model, the art *is* the research and the written exposition provides the discursive contextualisation for the research project.⁷ While art has its own eloquence that is non-reducible, through the form of the exposition the “art” becomes data for discussion. What has become apparent, however, is that artistic research or creative arts enquiry reveals new modes and methodologies that could be considered to constitute a new paradigm of research distinct from the dominant modes of qualitative and quantitative research that provide the default modes of research in the academy. This new paradigm of research could be deemed the “performative paradigm”, a mode of research characterised by a productive performativity where art is both productive in its own right as well as being data that could be analysed using qualitative and aesthetic modes.

Making a claim for a “new” paradigm in research cannot go unremarked. In her introduction to *Material Inventions: Applying Creative Arts Research* (2014), Estelle Barrett has drawn on Thomas Kuhn’s notion of paradigm change, as elaborated in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970), to argue that with its new methodological approaches and modes of knowing, the creative arts can “lay claim to its status as a new paradigm or ‘successor science’”.⁸ In addition to the “subjective and situated approach of artistic research... the tacit and intuitive processes, the experiential and emergent nature of its methodologies and the intrinsically interdisciplinary dimension of this mode of research that is derived from its material and social relationality.”⁹ Barrett also identified a number of other attributes that qualify creative arts research as a new paradigm. These include processes that allow:

new objects of thought to emerge through cycles of making and reflection; a recognition of the generative potential of the ambiguity and the indeterminacy of the aesthetic object and the necessity for ongoing decoding, analysis and translation and, finally, the acknowledgement that instruments and objects of research are not passive, but emerge as co-producers in

collaborative and, in the case of audiences, participatory approaches that may not be pre-determined at the outset of the research.¹⁰

Thus, while in the scientific quantitative paradigm the validity of research lies in repetition of the same, the performative paradigm operates according to repetition with difference. This is the generative potential of artistic research. In this essay I propose to revisit the stakes involved in this “new” discipline of research in order to think through whether the widespread adoption of the term “the performative arts” across the contemporary arts and performance has undermined or consolidated such a claim.

The Research Context

Brad Haselman’s article “A Manifesto for Performative Research” (2006) anticipated the performative turn in artistic research. He proposed and argued for a performative research model for the creative arts, distinguishing it from qualitative and quantitative models that constitute the dominant research paradigms in traditional research. Drawing from his own field of theatre, Haselman argued that:

*when research findings are presented as performative utterances, there is a double articulation with practice that brings into being what, for want of a better word, it names. The research process inaugurates movement and transformation. It is performative. It is not qualitative research: it is itself – a new paradigm of research with its own distinctive protocols, principles and validation procedures.*¹¹

Haselman points to the fact that while qualitative research methodologies such as reflective practice, action research, grounded theory and participant-observation have informed what was initially called practice-led research, this mode of artistic research can not merely be subsumed under the qualitative research framework. He suggests that the distinctive research strategies, interpretative methods and outcomes arising in and out of creative arts, which are drawn from the working methods and practices of artists and practitioners point us towards a new research paradigm. He termed this methodology “performative” research.

A performative paradigm potentially offers the creative arts a radical new vision and a way of distinguishing its research from dominant knowledge models. Haselman’s work has been significant in boldly asserting a performative paradigm and claiming it for the creative arts. However, before we make claims for a performative model for the creative arts, there are a number of urgent tasks that need to be addressed. Firstly, there is a need to define the terms of a performative model in relation to the existing theories of performativity. Secondly, like the qualitative researchers before them, artistic researchers need to carefully mark out the territory of a performative paradigm and differentiate it from the established research orthodoxies by refining its protocols and procedures; defining its concepts, methodologies and interpretive methods and assessing whether a performative paradigm really can hold its own within the broader field of research.

Defining the Terms: What is Performativity?

What Does it Look Like?

The term “performativity” was introduced to the world by J.L. Austin in a lecture series entitled “How to do things with words”, delivered as part of the William James Lectures at Harvard in 1955. While his lectures were not well received at the time, their publication as *How to do Things with Words* (1962) incited interest among intellectuals across the humanities and social sciences. The central, most profound and enduring aspect of these lectures was Austin’s claim that certain speech utterances or productions don’t just describe or report the world, but actually have a force whereby they perform the action to which they refer. Austin’s example of the words “I do” uttered during the marriage ceremony or a judge’s proclamation “I sentence you to ten years in prison”, exemplify that the power of the speech act to have real effects in the world. Thus Austin observes: “In these examples it seems clear that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it... the issuing of an utterance is the performance of an action.”¹² He called these language acts performatives.

While the creative arts, and in particular Theatre Studies and Performance Theory, have come to claim the term performativity as their own, its usage is not necessarily true to Austin’s elaboration of performativity. In Performance Studies for example, as James Loxley points out, the term performativity is used as an adjective that “denotes the performance aspect of any object or practice under consideration”.¹³ He continues, pointing out the implications of this take on performativity: “To address culture as ‘performative’ would be simply to examine it as some kind of performance, without the specific implications that would follow on from an invocation of the line of thought first developed distinctively by Austin.”¹⁴

It is precisely this “take” that has led to the wholesale and, I would argue, uncritical adoption of the performativity by the visual and performing arts. If the proponents of artistic research (and I would consider myself to be among their number) are to successfully argue for a performative paradigm in artistic research,¹² we will need to be far more rigorous than this usage would suggest.

In his early work on language, Austin distinguished performative utterances from *constative* utterances. The *constative* utterance is concerned to establish a correspondence between statements or utterances and the “facts” being described or modelled. The performative utterance, on the other hand, does not describe anything. It does things in the world. Performatives are never just reportage, but the utterance or production invokes a causal link between the utterance and things that happen in the world. In their capacity to be both actions and generate consequences, performative utterances enact real effects in the world.

Through the work of such people as John Searle,¹⁵ Jacques Derrida,¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari,¹⁷ Jürgen Habermas¹⁸ and, in particular, Judith Butler’s groundbreaking work on performativity and gender,¹⁹ and subsequently its application across the visual and performing arts by Barbara Bolt,²⁰ Dorothea von Hantelmann,²¹ Erica Fischer-Lichte,²² Marsha Meskimmon²³ and others, Austin’s work on the performative speech act, has become part of the established vocabulary of academia and the influence has spread far beyond its linguistic foundations. The concept has come to infect the other disciplines, particularly the creative and performing arts, but also other disciplines such as ethnography and education. In the shift from a textual reading

of cultural productions to a performative understanding, performativity has invited new ways of analysis, modes that focus on process, participation, events, expressive actions and experience. In Searle's hands, Austin's ideas become incorporated into a "general theory of the speech act"; through Derrida's notion of *différance*, we come to understand the dynamics of the iterability; in Butler's theorising, Austin's frame of reference is expanded to demonstrate how performativity can include bodily acts as well as speech acts; Deleuze espouses the forceful, transformative and creative potential of the performative; and Von Hantelmann, as we have seen, focuses attention on the production of experience in contemporary art.

While Deleuze's transformative understanding of performativity remains fashionable in film theory and among visual artists, Butler's theorisation of the performative act has inspired Performance Studies and Theatre Studies and has framed its theorisation of performativity. It is this understanding of performativity that retains the greatest currency in the performing arts and to a lesser extent the visual arts, while Von Hantelmann's *How To Do Things with Art* (2010) has profoundly influenced the concept's uptake in contemporary visual art and aesthetics.

However, I would like to return us to Butler's understanding of the theorisation of performativity as a way of thinking about the performativity and iterability in the creative arts, which can enable us to move on from the modernist idea of the singular gesture of the heroic artist as genius, to a more nuanced understanding of creativity that underpins artistic research. Drawing on Performance Theory in her theorisation of gender performativity, Butler distinguishes between "performance" and "performativity". She argues that performance presumes a subject while performativity contests the very notion of the subject. Thus while performance can be understood as a deliberate "act"—such as in a theatre production, performance art or painting by a subject or subjects—performativity must be understood as the iterative and citational practice that brings into being that which it names.

In her claim that performativity is an iterative and citational practice, Butler is very clear that performativity involves repetition rather than singularity. Performativity is: "not a singular 'act', for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition."²⁴ While there might be "too perfect performances", "bad performances", "distorted performances", "excessive performances", "playful performances" and "inverted performances", Butler, like Austin, argues that performativity is conventional and iterative.

The notion of conventionality and iterability may not sit comfortably with our preconceptions of the originality of art or the singularity of the performance. Nor does it conform to the commonly held assumptions that the "shock of the new" ushers in the transformative power of the art. Butler's elaboration that the notion of performativity as an iterative and citational practice at first glance may not adequately account for the singular "performative" acts, that come under Von Hantelmann's banner of experiential art. However, Von Hantelmann's focus is on the "experiential" aspect of the work—its reception rather than at the level of process and production. In this sense, Von Hantelmann's gaze is somewhere else than Butler's. It retains its focus on the singular

unconventional act and in doing so negates the foundational assumptions that underpin Butler's notion of performativity—iterability and convention. Von Hantelmann's account is compelling in understanding a particular mode or model of contemporary practice. However, it does not help establish a performative paradigm that may be used to account for research in the creative arts. An “experiential turn” and a performative paradigm are two different, if related, beasts.

It is clear that if a performative paradigm is viable it has to be able to do the work expected of a research paradigm, it has to be able to define its terms, refine its protocols and procedures and be able to withstand scrutiny. I would suggest that Austin's performativity, filtered through the writings of Butler and Derrida may enable us to define our terms and begin setting out first principles. Here Butler's account of performativity helps in this task.

Butler's theory of performativity relates to the formation of the subject. In Butler's thesis, there is no subject who precedes the repetition. Rather, through performance, “I” come into being. She argues that “there is no performer prior to the performed, the performance is performative [and] the performance constitutes the appearance of a ‘subject’ as its effect.”²⁵ While Butler's work specifically addresses the way in which sex and gender are materialised in the everyday, I would suggest that there are some curious similarities between this materialisation and the way in which “art” becomes materialised.

It could be argued that there is no artist who precedes the repetitive practice of art (and it is repetitive). Through practice, the artist comes into being.²⁶ Art practice is performative in that it enacts or produces “art” as an effect. “Artists” engage with, re-iterate and question the “norms” of “art” existing in the socio-cultural context at a particular historical juncture. Similarly, art practice conceals the conventions of which it is a repetition. The re-iteration that operates in an artist's practice produces a “naturalized” effect, which we come to label as an artist's style.²⁷ Butler's argument that the “process of materialization stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface”,²⁸ can be exemplified in an “artist's style”. The disciplinary operations of “art business” encourage such repetition and re-iteration. It is to this sedimented or habitual style, that “art business” attributes value. The sedimentation or stabilisation that produces the effect of boundary, fixity and surface is a consequence of the habit-provoking mode of discourse. However, is that all that happens? What about originality and original knowledge? Isn't this precisely what art and art-as-research purports to do, regardless of the so-called death of the avant-garde?

Within the repetitive and reiterative behaviour, Butler figures that possibilities for disrupting the “habit” or the “norm” exist. Within the re-iteration, repetition or citation of the discursive law, “too perfect performances”, “bad performances”, “distorted performances”, “excessive performances”, “playful performances” and “inverted performances” create what she calls (de)constituting possibilities.²⁹

Excessive and ironic performances and parodic re-iterations shift the ground of what is considered the “norm”. In political and artistic practices, these subversive performances have been employed strategically. The avant-garde, and more recently feminist, queer and

postcolonial practices, have actively engaged in prying open the gaps and fissures produced through re-iteration, in an effort to disrupt and to get outside or beyond the “norm”. Avant-garde artistic practices, in particular, have made strategic use of the “too perfect”, “distorted”, “playful” and the “inverted” performances in an attempt to create the “new”.

Elsewhere I have argued that self-conscious attempts at transgression do not in themselves create originary knowledge.³⁰ I argued that the “shock of the new” is not the action of plunging audiences in crisis, but rather it is a particular form of understanding that is realised through practice—our dealings with ideas, tools and materials of production (including our bodies) in practice. I suggested that that originary knowledge or the new is revealed through handling, rather through conscious acts of transgression. Here my understanding of “handling” or handleability can be understood as iterative and citational practice that artists engage in their everyday artistic practice.

Derrida tells us that the iterability—whether it is in performing language, performing gender or performing art—is the mechanism through which there is movement and transformation.³¹ He uses the term *différance*, to demonstrate that each iteration is a “constitutive, productive and originary causality”. He continues: *Différance* is the “process of scission and division which would produce or constitute different things or differences”.³²

When Butler talks about gender “trouble” she alludes precisely to the productive nature of iteration. Performative utterances are subject to trouble precisely because the repetition of a conventional behaviour does lead to bad performances, infelicitous performances and excessive performances. Repetition is never repetition of the same. It is always repetition of difference. In everyday life we don’t always welcome the misfires and bad performances. In the creative arts and artistic research, on the other had, it is these “misfires” that become the source of innovation and movement. This is the “stuff” of research.

If, as I have argued the research process inaugurates movement and transformation through iterability, what are the forms of this transformation and how are they to be interpreted and evaluated in a realm of research? Thus far, my account of performativity provides an alternative account of how “the new” emerges through iterative practice, rather than through the singular act. We see this “pattern” in our own practices and those of our colleagues and students. It allows us to begin to recognise the conventions (context of theory, context of practice) and map the ruptures that shift practice. Further, it allows us to understand both art as an effect and also what art does in the world. This is all very well, but how does this model of research fit with the standards of proof demanded in the qualitative and quantitative domains of research?

The Burden of Truth: Truth Claims

It is around the questions of “truth” and “standards of proof” that the creative arts need to set out the stakes involved in research and differentiate science-as-research from the domain of knowledge that has assumed the name “artistic research”. Here the discipline has much work to do to stake out its claim. Like the social sciences and humanities before it, the development of artistic research has proceeded in the shadow of the research “model” par excellence, that is,

science-as-research.

Through its systematic procedures, methodological consistency and ongoing peer review, science lays claim to “objective truth”. The equation of objectiveness or objectivity with truth (through measurement and calculation) has become the hallmark of the tradition of science-as-research. Through its propositional form and its ability to establishing a correspondence between statements or modelling of the world and the world, science establishes true or false statements. Similarly, the social sciences and humanities produce descriptions that correspond to facts in the world.

The creative arts, in contrast, are often criticised for the subjective and emergent quality of their research. Artistic often seems nebulous, unquantifiable and untestable: its procedures and methods emerge in and through the work rather than being prescribed in advance by the discipline. In the academic world at least, artistic research continues to be seen as lacking credibility because the methods cannot be replicated exactly, a principle central to scientific research. The lack of correspondence in findings between studies, the lack of replicability or innovation in artistic research is still not a goal that is valued by the sciences. Yet, following Butler, this lack of correspondence is precisely what is the originating force of the performative principle. However, it does not meet the “standards of objective truth” that enables science to make its truth claims. How then do we establish our truth claims against the “veracity” of science?

Austin’s early distinction between the *constative* and the performative is useful for thinking about how we might begin to distinguish a performative paradigm from the qualitative and quantitative paradigms and make an alternative “truth claim”. While *constative* utterances and statements establish a correspondence between the description or modelling of the world and something in the world, performative utterances productions *do* something in the world. *Constative* statements and descriptions are the propositional or discursive statements of qualitative and quantitative research. Quantitative and qualitative research methodologies rely on *constative* statements or utterance to establish truth claims. Here truth is seen as correspondence. In other words: they are representationalist.

Performativity offers an alternative model, one that is no longer grounded in the truth as correspondence, but sets up a different paradigm altogether. Here I propose to return to the foundational understanding of performativity. Firstly, we have established that the performative model of language is not based on the correspondence between a statement and the facts of the situation, but the utterance/production is actually already part of the facts. The performative act doesn’t describe something, but rather it does something in the world. This “something” has the power to transform the world.

Secondly we have identified that the underlying principle of performativity is iterability, and *a priori* iterability is subject to the dynamics of *différance*. Thus good performances, bad performances, playful performances and the excessive performances are all generative of difference. Thought in terms of *différance*, performative research necessarily begins to bud and

grow in a disorderly fashion. While operating against the backdrop of convention, re-iteration and citation produce repetition with difference, rather than repetition of the same. According to this principle, as I have argued elsewhere, even representation is mutable.³³

While science methodology demands that experiments are replicable and only verifiable if replication produces the same, the performative principle demonstrates that iteration can never produce the same. This is the “novelty” that the UK review of Practice-led Research in Art, Design and Architecture found in its assessment that one of “the distinctive qualities of practice-led research is its propensity to disrupt the status quo and produce research that is novel both in its contribution to research and in its very nature.”³⁴

However, the “discovery” of the fundamental condition of iterability strikes at the very heart of science-as-research’s “standards of proof”. In scientific experimentation, binding adherence to standardised procedures constitutes the rigour of research and establishes the validity of its “truth” claims. Through the standardisation of procedure other researchers are able to replicate the study in order to validate results from research. However, Heidegger identifies the prescriptiveness of the scientific methodology as part of the problem with science-as-research.³⁵ He argues that science-as-research is a testing of the unknown in terms of the already known; a confirmation or refutation in terms of a law already established. Through Butler and Derrida we have seen that originary knowledge emerges from the mutability that is inherent in iterability. Perhaps then, there is a “flaw” in the very procedures through which science-as-research aims to establish its truth claims. In science, as in art, we might suggest that the paradigmatic shifts have occurred through this mutability rather than repetition of the same.

A Performative Model of Research: Assessing Successes and Failure

So far, I have set out to demonstrate that through citation iterability, rather than the original unique act of artistic genius, the performative paradigm can account for the novel nature of artistic production. However, for artistic research to establish the credibility of a performative paradigm, it must also establish criteria whereby it can interpret and validate its research within the broader research arena. In Haseman’s account, practice is performative in that it brings into being what it names. “The name performs itself and in the course of that performing becomes the thing done.”³⁶ At its most basic level this could mean that a performance, an interactive digital work, an immersive environment or a novel would constitute the thing done. However, if we pay heed to Austin, we must acknowledge that some utterances and performances will be successful while others will fail. The problem in artistic research (and all research for that matter) is that there will be production in some form. How then, do we assess the success or failure of the performance? This returns us to Barad’s question: Are all performances performative?

We have established that the performative act doesn’t describe something but rather it does something in the world. It may seem simplistic, but in the first instance we need to ascertain just what “it” (the research) has done. This takes the focus away from describing, explaining or interpreting a work into a new realm of understanding.³⁷ What are the theoretical and pragmatic tools that we can bring to bear on this task? Here Austin’s tripartite categorisation of the speech act provides us with the basic concepts for commencing this task. In Austin’s later work, he gives

up the binary distinction between *constative* and performative utterances in favour of the more complex notion of the speech act. In elucidating the speech act he identifies a triadic relation—the locutionary, illocutionary and the perlocutionary dimensions of the speech act. Whilst the locutionary dimension deals with semantic meaning, it is the illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions that are of most interest to us here. Performativity is not first and foremost about meaning. It is about force and effect.

In Austin, explains James Loxley, “the illocutionary force of any utterance is the function it performs or the effect it achieves.”³⁸ The words “I find you guilty” exemplify this illocutionary speech act. It is a performative utterance that has a force. “The name performs itself and in the course of that performing becomes the thing done.”³⁹ From Haseman’s perspective, the production in itself can be seen to be performative. Thus from his optic, it could be argued that even the most illusionistic of representational art is performative. To return for a moment to the trompe l’oeil painting discussed earlier: can it really be seen as the pictorial equivalent of speech act theory? In many respects, the trompe l’oeil painting could be said to be a constative visual utterance rather than a perlocutionary utterance. Actions have effects, and it is the effect of the performative act that is encompassed in the perlocutionary utterance. The perlocutionary aspect of an utterance, explains Loxley, is any effect that the performative speech act “achieves on its hearers or readers that is a consequence of what is said.”⁴⁰ The effects of the performative can be discursive, material consequences and/or affective. The effect that is brought about by the words “guilty” is that the person found guilty may go to prison.

How then do we assess the effect in artistic research? While quantitative research may seek a metric to measure the effect, it would find it difficult to deal with the fact that in artistic research there is “no object independent of its production or its creator”.⁴¹ Similarly qualitative research may seek to observe, describe and interpret these effects on an audience, but again this is difficult to achieve in artistic research, because, as Erica Fischer-Lichte points out, there is no distinction between the production, work and reception.⁴² I would argue that Austin’s notions of the illocutionary and the perlocutionary provide a focus to our interpretive task and a way of addressing the success or failure of our performative productions.

Re-assessing the Stakes and Reach of a Performative Paradigm

So far in this essay I have identified the current tendency in art to an oxymoronic use of the terms “performative art” and have argued that the singularity in the use of the term in contemporary art loses that repetitive and iterative character of performativity as defined by Butler. In order to evaluate whether the term still retains currency or value for artistic research, I have returned to foundational work of Austin and Butler to demonstrate how procedures within the creative arts, like science, are based around repetition and iterability. I have argued that while in the scientific paradigm assessment of the validity of research lies in replication of the same, in a performative paradigm this requirement does not have validity. A performative paradigm would operate according to repetition *with* difference. Through reference to Austin’s conceptualisation of the illocutionary and the perlocutionary, I have argued that the interpretive methods of a performative paradigm stakes its “truth claims” in force and effect as it relates to

the particular performative event. This contrasts with science-as-research, which still holds dear the notion of an “objective truth” and truth as correspondence. Thus at a simplistic level it could be said that science-as-research is a model that works according to Austin’s constative utterance. It describes or models the world, its methodology is replicative and the interpretation of “data” operates on the logic of truth as correspondence (Figure 1).

SCIENCE-AS-RESEARCH	ART-AS-RESEARCH
Constative: describes/models the world	Performative: does things in the world
Methodology: repetition of the same	Methodology: repetition with difference
Interpretation: truth as correspondence	Interpretation: “truth” as force and effect

Fig1. Science-as-Research and Art as Research

Elsewhere I have drawn on Latour’s notion of “immutable mobiles” to demonstrate how the science as a research methodology has the propensity to reduce the world to data.⁴³ Immutable mobiles can best be described as inscriptions or “mappings” distilled from “raw” data or “reality”. By inscriptions, Latour refers to the marks, signs, prints and diagrams made by humans. These inscriptions form into chains or cascades. The key character of these chains or cascades is an unchanging form that can be moved across vast distances and presented in other places in the absence of the things they refer to. Absent things are transmitted with optical consistency. To illustrate operation of the logic of immutable mobiles, Latour cites his experience as a scientist working in a laboratory. He gives the example of the transformation of rats and chemicals onto paper. In a laboratory situation, he argues, “anything and everything was transformed into inscriptions”.⁴⁴ These inscriptions, he observes, are “combinable, superimposable and could... be integrated as figures in the text or the articles people were writing.”⁴⁵ This transformation of flesh into data is one of the hallmarks defining our contemporary lives. Yet, at the heart of science-as-research, as art-as-research is “raw life”.

Here I wish to return to Barrett’s observations concerning the “performative” potential in artistic research, that is, the “recognition of the generative potential of the ambiguity and indeterminacy of the aesthetic object” and the acknowledgement that the instruments and subjects of the research are co-producers in this collaborative venture we call research.⁴⁶ Can this “model” be applied across so-called qualitative and quantitative modes too? Is this an aspect of the research that tends to be leached out because of the need to reduce “bare life” to data through the inscription process of the exposition in these fields? While this question is outside the scope of this essay, it does raise questions about the performative aspects of other research methodologies.⁴⁷

If, as I have argued, the aim of a performative paradigm is not to find correspondences but rather to recognise and “map” the ruptures and movements that are created by artistic research, then isn’t that the same as for science? Here the work of art is not just the artwork/performance or event and science is not just the reduction of the world to data as immutable mobile. It is the effect of the work in the material, affective and discursive domains. The scientist has the problem that while they have a method, this method dislocates them from the rawness and nearness to “the thing” in itself. The problem for the artistic researcher is often recognising and mapping the transformations that have occurred, since artistic research is emergent and

experiential, involving a subjective and situated approach that draws on tacit and intuitive processes that makes pattern-making difficult. Sometimes the transformations may seem to be so inchoate that it is impossible to recognise them, let alone map their effects. At other times the impact of the work of art may take time to “show itself”, or the researcher may be too much in the process and finds it impossible to assess just what has been done.

Austin and Butler provide us with some concepts that help us focus our interpretative efforts. Through tracing the complex and multi-dimensional relation between the illocutionary and the perlocutionary we may begin to map the forces and effects of particular “events” in relation to the events in themselves. Through this we may gain some apprehension of the effects produced by our performative productions. This may start to sound suspiciously like the term “impact” that is regularly touted as one of the key markers in assessing research outcomes. How might that play out?

Performativity and Artistic Research

What does “impact” look like and does an attempt to map it diminish the power of art in itself? In the research context, questions of “impact” are often difficult to assess. How has the work shifted or extended practice? What new knowledge understandings are made possible by it? The impact of the work of art is revealed over time and there is no immediate or clear way of assessing it in a snapshot view. However, as the first audience or viewer of the work, the artist-as-researcher has some responsibility for the “knowledge claims” that can be made for the work. How do we know what the work has done and how may we articulate this?

The effects of the performative in art are multi-dimensional—they may be discursive, material consequences and/or affective. How then do we assess these effects? Our task is to find ways to map the *movement* in concepts, understandings, methodologies, material practice, affect and sensorial experience that arises in and through the research experience. This leads to a series of possible questions that a researcher may ask of the research:

- How did the research shift material practice in the field?
- What methodological shifts occurred through this process?
- What was revealed through the work? What did it do?
- What new concepts emerged through the research?
- Do these new concepts shift understandings and practices in the field and/or in other discursive fields?
- Does the work a/effect its audience aesthetically, kinaesthetically or affectively?
- Does the work shift the way we perceive the world?

These shifts or movements are not confined to, or unique to, artistic research, however, it is imperative that artistic research is able to argue its claim to new knowledge, or rather new ways of knowing.

In setting out the different ways in which the work may be performative, I would like to return to Von Hantelmann’s concern with experience and her argument for the experiential turn in art. Certainly the experience of the audience is a central aspect of the performative power of art

and this has been picked up and argued through the work of others, for example Widrich in her discussion of the mobilisation of spectators as performers in relation to performative monuments.⁴⁸ However, Widrich also points to the fact that the performative is not merely an adjective of performance. Further she argues that art, whether it is performance art or a monument, is not always performative. This contradicts Von Hantelmann's claim, cited earlier, that there is no nonperformative artwork.

Widrich's argument for the performative relates to the performative *force* of art, its capacity to "effect changes in social reality" through conventional gestures.⁴⁹ This change or "movement" in thought, word and deed in the individual and social sensorium that is enabled through theories of performativity is central to understanding the transformative power of art. The transformative power or reconfiguration that occurs through art is something that Von Hantelmann recognised in *How to Do Things with Art* (2010). Here she argued (using the work of James Coleman, Daniel Buren and Tino Sehgal) that it is not just:

a question of the phenomenological conditions of the exhibition space but also of art's discursive framing. And it is not just about rendering visible, or exhibiting these discursive framings and conventions as in Institutional Critique, but about operating with them, i.e. recognizing the potential for construction and change that lies in their usage... The efficacy of these works stems from the constitutive power of conventions, which are taken up and then modified in their usage.⁵⁰

Hence, it is the "too perfect performances", "bad performances", "distorted performances", "excessive performances", "playful performances" and "inverted performances" that reconfigure the conventions in art and hence effect the movement in word, thought and deed that we have come to identify as the performative.

In her work on performativity, Von Hantelmann's concern has been about art in itself. The concern of this paper has been about what happens when art becomes research. Here, one of the tasks of the artistic researcher is to articulate a meta-discussion around the effects of their artistic research.

It is a truism to say that words are inadequate to the task of encapsulating the material fact and the experience of the work of art and one could argue that any the kind of mapping process is a distancing device that creates objective "data" and denies the embodied experience that is central to our encounters with art. This may be true, but it is not the task of an essay, research statement, artist's statement, catalogue essay or dissertation to stand in for or describe the artwork. The artwork must stand eloquently in its own way and if it doesn't it fails. However, through mapping what the research does, artistic researchers are able to demonstrate not only how art can be understood as research, but also how its inventions can be articulated. This will not deny the artwork its eloquence but enable us demonstrate and argue the impact of artistic research in the broader realm, and particularly in the academy where we now have seat at the table of research.

Footnotes

End notes

1. The term “the performative arts” has been adopted as a catch phrase used in common parlance to describe much contemporary visual and performing arts practice. It has tended to be used in relation to forms that involve some form of performance or draw on the tradition of performance art where art is evaluated in terms what it does rather than what it means or signifies. For some, such as the Mountain Standard Time Performative Art Festival Society, “the ‘performative’ describes practices that originate from a visual or media arts background and involve the live presence of the artist.” For others, such as the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, University Gallery at Washington University in St. Louis, the “stress of the performative is on process, participant, event, execution, and expressive action.” Pol Dehert and Karel Vanhaesebrouck adopt the term “performative practice” and “performative actions” to encapsulate the idea of a “living experiment” in their article “From *Wunderkammer* to Szeemann and Back: The Artistic Research Exposition as Performative and Didactic Experience”. In *The Exposition of Artistic Research: Publishing Art in the Academia*. Leiden: Leiden University Press. 2014. pp. 206–219. Qualitative researcher Kip Jones talks about the “performative” use of arts-based research in his article “A biographic researcher in pursuit of an aesthetic: The use of arts-based (re)representations in ‘performative’ dissemination of life stories”. See Kip Jones, “A biographic researcher in pursuit of an aesthetic: The use of arts-based (re)representations in ‘performative’ dissemination of life stories”. In *Qualitative Sociology Review* 2. no.1. April 2006. pp. 66–85. While the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark, initiated an annual festival, ACTS—Festival for Performative Art, in 2011. This festival “presents ephemeral art forms taking place ‘here and now,’ and which in a humorous, critical or sensual way relates to the world, we live in”.

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2. The Walker Art Center’s inaugural catalogue, *Living Collections Catalogue*, is devoted to the notion of performativity in contemporary art and performance. In her introduction to the catalogue, Elizabeth Carpenter noted that in “its attempt to come to terms with this topic... the most pressing question is that of how a collecting institution such as the Walker, with its vital and internationally renowned performing arts programs and commissions (including dance, music, and experimental theater), might go about transforming its acquisition strategies to include the collection of not only ‘performative objects’ but performance itself.” <http://www.walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/introduction/> (Accessed 2016-04-12). ↑

3. Von Hantelmann, D. The Experiential Turn. *Living Collections Catalogue*. Walker Art Centre. 2014. <http://www.walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/> (Accessed 2015-10-01). ↑

4. Ibid. ↑

5. Ibid. ↑

6. This paper is a reworking of the original essay that was published as “A Performative Paradigm for the Creative Arts?” (2009) in the series *Working Papers in Art and Design*. See <https://>

www.herts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/12417/WPIAAD_vol5_bolt.pdf (Accessed 2016-04-08). ↑

7. Michael Schwab and Henk Borgdoff's edited book *The Exposition of Artistic Research: Publishing Art in the Academy* (2014) teases out some of the nuances and differences in the creative arts "exposition" in Europe and Australia. ↑

8. Barrett, E. Introduction: Extending the Field: Invention, Application and Innovation in Creative Arts Enquiry. In *Material Inventions: Applying Creative Arts Research*. E. Barrett and B. Bolt. (eds.). London: I.B. Tauris. 2014. p. 3. ↑

9. Barret, E. and Bolt, B. *Practice as Research: Context, Method, Knowledge*. London: I.B. Tauris. 2007. p. 7. ↑

10. Barrett, E. Introduction: Extending the Field: Invention, Application and Innovation in Creative Arts Enquiry, p. 3. ↑

11. Haseman, B. Tightrope Writing: Creative Writing Programs in the RQF Environment. In *Text* 2007. <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april07/haseman.htm> (Accessed 2016-04-08). ↑

12. Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words*, J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (eds). Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1975. p. 6. ↑

13. Loxley points out that for Austin, performativity is an adjective *and* a noun. The words are actions *in themselves* and do something in the world (performatives). See J. Loxley. *Performativity*. London and New York, NY: Routledge. 2007. p. 140. ↑

14. Ibid. ↑

15. Searle, J.R. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. London: Cambridge University Press. 1969. ↑

16. Derrida, J. Sending: on representation. Trans. P. Caws and M.A. Caws. *Social Research* 49. no 2. 1982. pp. 294-326; Derrida, J. *Différance*. In *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*. A. Easthope and K. McGowan (eds.). Sydney: Allen and Unwin. 1992. pp. 108-132; Derrida, J. *Limited Inc*. Trans. S. Weber. Evanston, IL: Chicago University Press. 1998. ↑

17. Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Félix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translation and foreword by Brian Massumi. London and New York, NY: Continuum. 2004 [1980]. ↑

18. Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Vol. II: *Lifeworld and System*. Trans. T. McCarthy. Boston, MA: Beacon. 1987 [1981]. ↑

19. Butler, J. Imitation and gender insubordination. In *Inside/out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. D. Fuss (ed.). London: Routledge. 1991. pp. 13–31; Butler, J. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, New York, NY, and London: Routledge. 1993; Butler, J. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd Edition, New York, NY, and London: Routledge. 1999. ↑
20. Bolt, B. *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*. London and New York, NY: I.B. Tauris. 2004. ↑
21. Von Hantelmann. *How to do Things with Art*; and Von Hantelmann. The Experiential Turn. ↑
22. Fischer-Lichte, E. *The Transformative Power of Performance*. Trans. Saskya Iris Jain. London and New York, NY: Routledge. 2008. ↑
23. Meskimmon, M. Walking with Judy Watson: Painting, Politics and Intercorporeality. In *Unframed: Practices and Politics of Women's Contemporary Painting*. R. Betterton (ed.). London and New York, NY: I.B. Tauris. 2004. pp. 62–78. ↑
24. Butler. *Bodies that Matter*, p. 12. ↑
25. Butler. Imitation and gender insubordination, p. 2. ↑
26. There are similarities here with Heidegger's assertion that art creates the artist and the artwork. ↑
27. Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation*, pp. 152–153. ↑
28. Butler. *Bodies that Matter*, p. 9. ↑
29. Ibid. p. 10. ↑
30. Bolt, B. The exegesis and the shock of the new. *Text Special Issue Website Series*. Number 3 April. Illuminating the Exegesis. 2004. <http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/speciss/issue3/content.htm> (Accessed 2016-04-17). ↑
31. Derrida. Sending on representation; Derrida. *Limited Inc*. ↑
32. Derrida. *Différance*, pp. 112–113. ↑
33. Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation*. ↑
34. Rust, C., Mottram, J., and Till, J. *A Research Review for the United Kingdom Arts & Humanities Research Council of Practice-Led Research in Art Design & Architecture*. 2007. <https://archive.org/details/ReviewOfPractice-ledResearchInArtDesignArchitecture> (Accessed

2015-10-01). [↑](#)

35. Heidegger, M. The Age of the World Picture. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. William Lovitt (trans.) New York; Harper and Row. 1977. pp. 115-54. [↑](#)

36. Haseman, B. Rupture and Recognition: Identifying the Performative Research Paradigm. In *Practice as Research: Approaches to Arts Enquiry*. E. Barrett and B. Bolt (eds.). London and New York, NY: I.B. Tauris. 2007. p. 150. [↑](#)

37. It also points up the problem with the term exegesis. Drawing from the Greek *exegeisthai*, exegesis means an explanation or interpretation. [↑](#)

38. James Loxley's monograph *Performativity* (2007), provides working definitions and explanations of the illocutionary and the perlocutionary dimensions of the speech act. See p. 168. [↑](#)

39. Haseman. Rupture and Recognition, p. 150. [↑](#)

40. Loxley, p. 169. [↑](#)

41. Fischer-Lichte, p. 17. [↑](#)

42. Ibid., p. 18. [↑](#)

43. Bolt. *Art Beyond Representation*; Bolt. 2004. [↑](#)

44. Latour, B. Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands. In *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present* 6. 1986. pp. 3-4. [↑](#)

45. Ibid., p. 4. [↑](#)

46. Barrett, E. Introduction: Extending the Field, p. 3. [↑](#)

47. The question of “what gets left” out in the reporting of scientific research is instructive. In artistic research the methodology is often the “innovation” or new knowledge. Here the exposition often describes process, not as something to be replicated, as in science, but as novel and unique. However, as in artistic research, the scientist or the social scientist or the humanities scholar will assume different orientations during their research—from “being in it”—flush with the other co-producers in the research process, to a more distanced orientation where the researcher steps back to look for and try to find and understand the patterns in the data. In the “happening” phases of research we are in the realm of the illocutionary and perlocutionary. Only when the researcher steps back does the constative process of description begins. [↑](#)

48. See Mechtild Widrich's monograph, *Performative Monuments: The Re-materialisation of Public Art*, Manchester and New York, NY: Manchester University Press. 2014. p. 8. [↑](#)

49. Ibid., p. 9. [↑](#)

50. Von Hantelmann differentiates the concept of the performative from that of the avant-gardes arguing that the avant-garde position sees itself as working from outside of society rather than being embedded with "convention". Von Hantelmann. *How to Do Things with Art*, p. 179. [↑](#)