

# Practice as a Symptom of Research

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What is the distinction between “pure practice” and “research-focused practice?” It is typical to undertake background research in order to produce most forms of creative practice. This kind of research activity may involve finding out how to use a particular medium, how to refine a technique, or simply reviewing what similar work already exists. Many creative practitioners would claim to undertake research in this way. But any creative practice coming from this process cannot necessarily be described as research. It would be better to describe it as an output of a reasoned research activity. So how can research as described here be distinguished from research that comes from practice itself? Often in creative contexts, research is understood as a discrete activity and the making of practice is seen as another. The key to addressing how practice can be defined as research is in how both practice and research are brought into relation with one another. Importantly, for practice to be research, it must contain a certain knowledge-building capacity. This paper will consider what defines practice as research. It will claim that practice can only reveal new knowledge when it is understood as a symptom of research. My goal is to attempt to bring about a homology between research and practice through the notion of the symptom.

*Keywords:* research, practice, symptom, Jacques Lacan, philosophy, creative.

## Introduction

What prompts this paper is a perceived difficulty, across different creative fields and disciplines, in pinning down the distinction between what I term “pure practice” and what might be identified as something like “research-focused practice.” While practice as a form of research is a widely accepted concept, particularly in the sciences, in the creative arts it carries with it a degree of confusion. This confusion stems from the difficulty in teasing apart two distinct forms of practice that take place in the creative arts. The first form is what we might recognize as practice motivated by creativity. It is a practice that usually draws its inspiration from lived experiences. This is what I shall refer to as “pure practice”, not for its purity but in order to distinguish it from its counterpart, “research-focused practice.” Research-focused practice is practice understood as emerging from the basis of a focused research endeavor. The aim of this paper is to reflect upon the distinction between what I have, for clarity, defined as “pure practice” and that other equally elusive activity of so-called “research-focused practice.” I shall argue that whatever pure practice is, it should not be thought of as research. Primarily, this is because its purpose is to bring enjoyment or pleasure or some other experiential quality. But more importantly, it should not be thought of as research because it does not fit comfortably within the even more nebulous framework of creative research. Consequently, what motivates this paper is a consideration of the qualities of practice that constitute research and that fit inside a creative research framework. It seeks to ask how we can distinguish between these two forms of practice. And it reflects on how the features of creative practice we think of as being research are distinct and different from those that go to make up that of pure practice.

It is important to make the distinction between the two kinds of practice in the way I have outlined because many artists and academics appear to confuse them, conflate them, or simply fail to understand their difference. Undoubtedly, such confusion can be a useful diversion. It is a misunderstanding that has enabled some academic practitioners to make creative work and claim it as research in order to gain funding or status or simply to justify their own roles within the academy. But it is equally

a legitimate confusion. After all, many artists undertake some kind of research before they begin making work. Why, then, is the work they produce not necessarily research-focused practice? I hope to contribute an answer to this question. The lack of clarity about what actually constitutes research within the context of creative practice means almost any creative work *could* claim to be research, and this clearly undermines both practice and research. Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with creative work that is not research. And calling practice research should not necessarily legitimize it or give it any greater importance. That said, within much of the academy, research appears to give practice a certain symbolic authority. Inevitably, there is a more practical explanation for why this is so. Many artists claim to be undertaking research simply because to be an artist who is not doing research often means they are excluded from income streams that emanate from research activities. Victor Burgin made a similar argument, pointing out that academic research became a part of art school education simply because this was where the funding was.<sup>1</sup> Burgin explains that before being aligned with academic research activities, artists carried out their own practice-orientated research. In the face of pressure to win grants and funding across the sector, artists had to become researchers who could be funded through the same model as other academics in other disciplines. There is then a difficulty at the heart of the relationship of art education to the idea of research and vice versa. This is certainly the case within the UK, where the Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise drives the funding for all research within all universities. In the arts, it would seem to be less viable to support faculty staff who are simply making creative work with no thought to research or no demonstratable impact (“impact” is one of the currently fashionable terms in research circles). Instead, in the context of the REF, creative faculty staff now need to find in their work a research component that can be measured and audited. Whichever position you choose – that research doesn’t fit into a creative context or that art and creativity do not fit within a research context – both place a limit around their disciplines.

Historically, the process of reconciling creative practice within a higher education research context such as a PhD usually results in choosing

1 Victor Burgin, “Thoughts on ‘research’ degrees in visual arts departments”, in *Journal of Media Practice* 7:2 (2006): 101–108, doi:10.1386/jmpr.7.2.101\_1.

between a “practice-led” or “practice-based” approaches to a project. In these models, practice is used as a tool within the research process. Both are now relatively well established and commonplace in universities within the UK. Both usually result in the PhD candidate submitting some kind of practice alongside a written thesis. The distinction comes from where the practice sits within the project. Within practice led approach, the practice is part of a project that tends to address questions about practice itself. Whereas a practice-based approach proposes that the contribution to knowledge is found within the practice. With these two approaches, the question as to how practice fits within the project, in effect what it does, can occasionally be reduced to a brutal trade between the number of words contained in the written thesis and the volume of creative work produced. This transactional approach should be a genuine cause for concern and for many PhD candidates since it is a vexing question that overrides them addressing what the ultimate purpose of their practice is. However, I suggest the key to addressing how practice can be defined as research is in how both practice and research, in the broadest sense, are brought into relation with one another.

So, how is it that research and practice have been assumed to be connected and how is it that what underpins those assumptions does not always stand up under scrutiny? This almost certainly goes back to distinguishing between pure practice and its research-focused counterpart. What I hope to do here is not to bring these two – research and practice – together, to make sense of them by thinking of them in an interchangeable way, or to try to unify them in any way. Instead, I will articulate a way to recognize and highlight the distinctions between them. This means I will not be attempting to connect practice with research and research with practice by highlighting the ways they link together. Rather, my aim is to try and abstract them from one another so that they can both be understood differently. Here, I follow Marx’s approach when he analyzed the commodity form within capital, where he abstracted the former from the latter. It was only by isolating the components of capital that its mechanisms can be understood. I shall therefore take the same approach with practice and research, abstracting them in order to, hopefully, understand how they fit together.

In addressing the relationship between the practice and research, I will try to understand practice as symptom of research. I take the notion of the symptom from the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan,<sup>2</sup> but its application is much better understood through much of the work of Slavoj Žižek.<sup>3</sup> For Žižek, a symptom is not the „fundamental truth” about something but the response or effect of such a truth.<sup>4</sup> Thus, to attempt a symptomatic reading of practice is to look at its effects and impacts and try to ascertain whether research is the root “cause.” My claim is that practice can only be understood as a symptom of research if it is capable of revealing new knowledge. And a consequence of acquiring this new knowledge will be that something changes, something is different to how it was before. Within a research context, creative practice in and of itself is not enough. To be clear, creative practice can clearly be described as always being more than itself. Amongst its many qualities, creative practice will likely be able to demonstrate a relationship with much broader terms or categories such “aesthetics” or “art” or even with its own autonomous nature (which is to say it can be comprehended as an object in itself). However, having a relationship with these will not necessarily qualify practice as research. Instead, for practice to be research, it must contain a certain knowledge-building capacity; in other words, it needs to make a contribution to our understanding of the research question or problem it addresses. Of course, practice that is considered to be research may simultaneously be categorized in terms of art or its aesthetics: research does not disqualify practice from these qualities. But the crucial factor is being able to identify how new knowledge, in service of research, is created. If practice is a symptom of research, we should be able to reasonably ascertain its epistemic qualities. The challenge is how we distinguish between knowledge of the practice itself and knowledge that addresses a wider research question. We could certainly argue there may always need to be movement between the latter to the former.

What I claim is an important distinctive approach is how any knowledge-building capacity can only be unlocked when we explore, not the hidden or obscured meanings behind practice, but the question as to

- 2 Jacques Lacan, “Columbia University: Lecture on the Symptom”, *Culture/Clinic*, vol. 1 (2013): 8–16.
- 3 Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom* (London: Routledge, 1992).
- 4 Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991).

why practice is taking the form that it does. Thus, any knowledge of the work is not operating at the semantic level but at the level of its symbolic structure. Framing our questioning about practice in this way helps identify it as a symptom of research, where what matters is how research takes shape within and from out of creative practice. A paradoxical consequence of aligning practice to research is that practice may appear to act against its own interests. Understood as research, practice creates a position that undermines its own genus: it ceases to be pure practice and then becomes something more. As I have stated, what I intend for this paper is for it to make a contribution to identifying the homologous structure between research and practice through the notion of the symptom. But first we should think briefly about what research is.

#### What is research?

To ask what is research is to pose what may be a simple question but to, potentially, expect a far more complex response. A straightforward definition of research is that it is a systematic study addressing an underlying question. With this in mind, the aim of research is to find out something we did not know before, to elicit some form of new knowledge, or to reach a new set of conclusions. Of course, research is a multifaceted term, and we should not ignore what it is composed of: intentions, outcomes, questions, and processes.<sup>5</sup> The important point being that dependent on disciplines and the object of study, research never resolves itself as an easily defined activity.

For creative people, for the many makers and artists whose outcomes tend to be a form of creative practice, it is typical to undertake background research before making work. This kind of research may involve finding out how to use a particular medium or working out how to refine a technique, or it may simply be a review of what similar work already exists in order to inspire or provide a direction of travel for a new piece of practice. Many, if not all, creative practitioners would claim they undertake research that follows this pattern. They would also probably recognize it as intrinsic to the process of making their work. But it is important to recognize that

5 Gerlese S. ÅKerlind, "An academic perspective on research and being a researcher: An integration of the literature", *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(1) (2008): 17–31.

the practice emanating from this process cannot itself be described as research. I suggest a better way to describe this kind of practice is as an output of a reasoned research activity. These kinds of creative outputs – paintings, performances, films, sculptures, or photographs, for example – that do not address an overarching research question, fall within the category of pure practice; they are not research. Although the research may be foundational to the making of the work, its principal aim is not to formulate new knowledge; instead, its focus is the creation of a piece of practice. This is an important point to both clarify and understand. Not all practice, even if it emanates from research, can be understood as being research itself. Even if research appears to be part of the process making, the output should not automatically be categorized as research. Thus, in what I have termed pure practice, the research phase brings into being a body of creative work, but the practice does not necessarily qualify as research. However, we should ask why a work of pure practice, produced through this or similar sorts of processes, does not have a knowledge-building capacity that can then be categorized as research.

Contrary to what McNiff suggests, creative practice used as the primary mode of enquiry does not itself make research.<sup>6</sup> Why? Since many practitioners would claim that practice is a primary form of enquiry for them, it is important for a further qualification that relates directly to research. In short, there needs to be a much clearer relationship between the practice, the pursuit of new knowledge, and its subsequent articulation. In effect, this relationship needs to be identifiable. Not all creative practice addresses this, even if it understood as the primary mode of enquiry as McNiff claims. Perhaps the most crucial question is to ask what motivates the enquiry. But if it is to be understood as research, we need to find out more about the practice than a sense of its origins. In this regard, I think it unlikely a set of pre-formatted questions about practice would help anyone find out whether it is, indeed, research focused. What is needed are not a set of rigid frameworks to which practice adheres and against which we measure it, but a reflective, interrogative, approach that seeks to highlight the connections of practice to the kinds of new knowledge that drives research.

6 Shaun McNiff, "Art-based research", in J. G. Knowles and A. L. Cole, eds., *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 29–40.

It seems that some of the confusion around whether practice can be understood as research comes from how much of the research within the creative sectors has a tendency to reflect on questions about itself. This makes the focus of creative research a process of finding out things about creativity and its methods or reflecting on the processes of making or the experiences of viewing or listening. The problem with these inward-looking questions, this self-analysis, is they do not provide a sufficient distance from practice itself. It is as if we are asking an experiment to experiment on itself. Asking questions of practice through practice also presupposes an objective distance from which a new conclusion can be formed. For example, if practice is engaged with mark-making then making more marks is not uncovering anything new. I am not suggesting there can be no research that reflects on itself. As I identified earlier, this approach informs most practice-led inquiries, and it is most certainly justified. Here, I am merely advising a modest level of caution since there is a danger of self-reflection becoming the default way of elevating all practice into a form of research. As a broad principle, I suggest what should motivate research-based enquiry are universal concerns rather than particular ones. Although we can balance this slightly by suggesting, what should animate research is how it addresses universal issues in a particular way. And as with science, the particularities of experimentation should be testable and repeatable. Nevertheless, if research is seen as a process of discovery, then it should be universally relevant and it should appeal to something greater than itself.

Let us consider an example. When Gary Winogrand said, “I photograph to see what the world looks like photographed”, he was proposing a particular form of creative enquiry. But if we were to take Winogrand’s work and contextualize it around his statement, would it constitute research? The answer rests with the statement itself. Here, Winogrand is asking a question of method. He is applying a method – photography – to his subject matter and considering what it does. I accept that Winogrand’s enquiry served to elevate the world’s relationship to photography, but when taken at face value, simply representing the world through a medium like a photography cannot in itself be research. To be clear, what I am suggesting is that taking



a photograph – or indeed producing a painting, a sculpture, or any other autonomous piece of artwork – cannot, in and of itself, be considered to be research focused because the work alone does not make a contribution to knowledge. Of course, it would be possible to claim that if Winogrand takes a photograph of something we’ve not seen before, then there is something visually new produced, but we should be careful not to confuse the photograph’s “distinctive” qualities with those that relate to an undertaking that is focused on research-driven outcomes. Of course, some artistic research may well have contributed to the process of making the work but, as I have made clear, this does not make the outcome something we can consider to be research-focused practice. In what sense, then, can Winogrand’s work be considered to be research focused? The answer is in where the new knowledge emerges. The problem for Winogrand is that his method is too self-reflective. The only new knowledge we can really gain from this is particular to each individual photograph. Crucially, the symptomatic clue to the research would not be clearly evident in Winogrand’s work, any more than it would in any other photograph of any subject. There is no rendering of the research in the photograph; instead, all we see the representation of the subject. This likely accounts for why photographs are consistently interpreted as texts when they lack an epistemic depth in and of themselves.

We can, nevertheless, redeem Winogrand in some way by suggesting he was asking the wrong question. What he needed to know was not what the world looked like when it was photographed but why the world looked like it does in a photograph or why do photographs take the form that they do? In this context, Winogrand’s work would inform a process of research but it would not be sufficient on its own. I claim that if Winogrand were fixed on his question of seeing what the world looks like when it is photographed, then his practice could not be understood as research.

### What is a symptom?

What does it mean to understand practice as a symptom of research? I use the notion of the symptom throughout this paper to reconceptualize practice because as Lacan stated, “symptoms *also* say something.”<sup>7</sup>

7 Jacques Lacan, “Columbia University: Lecture on the Symptom”, *Culture/Clinic*, vol. 1 (2013): 12.

A symptomatic reading of practice assumes practice masquerades as something else. To put this another way, there are two distinct forms of practice: one stands in for research while the other represents a creative expression linked to emotions and feelings. It is possible that practice can do both, but it is important to decide which of these primarily motivates practice.

To understand practice as a symptom of research is to allow it to become articulate, as saying something to us but in a different way. It is not a textual reading of the work; instead, it is a reading that interprets where practice has come from, what made it appear. Symptoms are a direct connection back to a source or cause. During the Covid-19 era, we cannot ignore our newly acquired relationship to symptoms. The things we recognize in ourselves that mean we have something else, something we might be afraid of or perhaps not worried about at all. But the symptoms are not actually Covid itself; they are indicators of how the condition manifests in different ways, in different people. The process of indicating something is not unlike how semiotics operates, where the signifier points to the signified. Therefore, when practice is understood as a symptom, it can also be thought of as a signifier of research. This then locates it within a symbolic network rather than through any empirical connection to knowledge. Paradoxically, if we consider practice as a symptom, then practice cannot actually be the research because, in the same way that a signifier is never the signified, a symptom is always understood as being distinct from the disease. Thus, practice should be understood in how it is differentiated from the research question it informs. It is still connected to it and addresses it, but it is not the question itself. Therefore, practice can really only point to research: it can only indicate the form of new knowledge it shapes. In some ways, this is a restating the problem of practice that reflects upon itself. When it is fashioned by a kind of meta-analysis then it is also (problematically, given what I have just stated) the research it is pointing to. The self-reflexive properties of practice problematize the idea of practice as a symptom that points toward research. The solution to this is in how a self-reflective practice can demonstrate a universal principle in a particular way. In this context, the practice would be pointing to a research question or problem that could be universally applicable.

A symptom is an exception to normal conditions. If it is not, it will simply become the standard conditions and will not be understood as a symptomatic indicator. Crucially for my argument, what this means is we need to abstract practice from research; we need to recognize the nature of its distinction from research. The problem with the relationship of practice and research is that understanding it always begins by bringing the two together, whereas what we should be doing is abstracting each from the other. How then do we approach practice as symptom? What we must not do is attempt to discover any hidden secret that lies behind practice. But at the same time, we should not ask “what is the hidden *research* behind this work?” Instead, the question we should pose is “how and why is it that research has been transposed into this form of practice?” In asking this we arrive at the structural relationship of both research and practice. Another way to think about this is to consider the performative dimensions of practice, of practice being made to assume a role within research. Here, we should avoid a misrecognition of practice as research, such that it is interpellated into research simply because it is “called” into being or in some way willed into being research. This returns us to the point made above about artists making claims for their work to be understood as research. There can really be no retroactive account of research. Of course, unexpected things can emerge from the process of research, things that we can’t predict or be expected to take account of. But what cannot be done is to begin with a form of pure practice and to turn that into research in order for it to gain a different form of recognition. In short, the route to understanding the relationship between practice and research comes through separating and distinguishing the two from one another. Once abstracted from the other practice appears as a postulate, a stand-in for research activity. It takes on an “as if” quality: as if it were research. We can then allow ourselves to see practice as if it were research because its *material character* feels as though it holds something that pertains to knowledge and therefore to research. In this guise, it is as if the undefinable quality of practice becomes understood as a container of unquantifiable knowledge. But what are we to do with the undefinable essence of practice? As an audience, if we want to understand

anything about practice, we are required to undertake a subjective interpretative act. We look for and find meanings, intended or otherwise. However, when practice is linked to research, we must resist any temptation to interpret it, since interpretation itself cannot be knowledge. Nonetheless, if we are not to interpret work, how can we approach it? Here, the notion of a symptom allows us to understand not the secret behind practice but why practice takes the form that it does. This analytical procedure for understanding practice then relieves us from having to find the hidden kernel behind work and orientates us toward asking the question as to why does practice take a particular form? This immediately brings us to a related problem. With the arts or any creative practice, when we try and identify what it is about it that can be considered research, it then consequently seems to lose something of its status as art or creative practice. Once we interrogate practice for its “research-ness”, it immediately loses the very thing which makes it appear to us as a form of creative work.

Crucially, I believe there is a certain misrecognition that defines all creative and arts practice. Therefore, it cannot empirically offer something consistently knowledge forming. It is a requirement of practice that it has an element of “not knowing” about it, which is to acknowledge that something always has to elude us, to be ungraspable about practice. To fully know practice in a way that is empirically useful for research is to dispense with the speculation required by practice itself. In essence, what defines practice is an unfathomable “x”, the *je ne sais quoi* of the work, which cannot be pinned down to any of its particular properties. If this is the case, is it even possible to identify the knowledge building properties within practice as research?

We may, rightly, want to ask where knowledge is located within practice. What are creative practice’s epistemological characteristics? First, art tends to fail at adequately paraphrasing reality; it does not fully explain it. Similarly, creative practice cannot be explained by simply reducing it down to the constituents that make it. No one can reduce a painting to its components of canvas, frame, and paint and find anything especially useful. Nor can practice be fully explained simply by saying how it makes someone feel. How, then, do we grasp what practice is? It seems that when practice reveals

itself, it immediately loses something of its connection to its self. So, if we can't know practice in this way without undermining it, then all we are left with is celebrating its own elusive qualities. In Barbara Bolt's *Practice as Research, Approaches to Creative Enquiry*, Bolt's own contribution is a chapter entitled *The Magic is in Handling*.<sup>8</sup> The title itself highlights something of the enchanted nature of practice that academics and artists often assign to it. Claims the very same magical practice can also be empirically understood as research seem paradoxical. I suggest neither magic nor enchantment can realistically be included into research activities. But it may be useful to think of practice in terms of the lived, embodiment of research. This would then understand practice as being the phenomenology of research. In this way, perhaps practice appears to contain some of the substance of a research-focused endeavor without being it itself. It is research in its essence if not in a way that can be empirically measured. But where phenomenology may help, it also frustrates things since there are two experiences being studied: the experience of the practice and the experience of the research. This brings us back to intention. Does practice intend to be practice or to be research or can it be both? As phenomenology claims, we can acquire knowledge through our senses, but is what we acquire knowledge of the practice or knowledge of the research? Here, phenomenology *feels* (I use this word deliberately to highlight the value of intuition) useful but it also does not adequately address the problems it brings. To briefly recap, practice is not research simply because it emanates from a process of discovery – all practice is formally something new – it is only research when it is situated within a matrix of new knowledge. It is contingent upon research in the way that psychological trauma maybe contingent upon any number of small, triggering interactions. What my formulation offers is practice as a symptomatic form of research, the manifestation of research in another form. It is a way to approach practice as being distinct from research in order to understand their relationship.

#### Practice as a symptom of research

Until now, I have been trying to find research within practice, but it will be helpful to understand how practice directly affects research. If

8 Barbara Bolt, *Practice as Research, Approaches to Creative Enquiry* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

practice really is to be understood as research, then there must be a transformation of research as it is integrated into any practice. Consequently, after the experience of practice, the research can no longer be the same. Here, what matters is not the practice itself but the process or means out of which practice appears. One troubling characteristic of practice is its intuitive aspects, the way practice emerges from a sense of what works or what doesn't work. Generally, in pure practice this is good thing; it is an instinct that guides artist in their making. But intuition can also run counter to explicit knowledge. I would like to briefly focus on intuition as it offers something to how practice is made. Some artistic researchers claim the opposition between explicit knowledge and our intuited, tacit knowledge is a false one. They say knowledge and intuition can be thought about in the same way. But what this misses is how, in trying to account for intuition as something empirically testable, intuition itself is then rendered as an explicit knowledge. It is then no longer intuition, since it becomes something like a prescribed set of behaviors or methods. I claim that it is precisely the invisibility of intuition that needs to be inscribed into practice, as it is the basis of our sense of creativity and expression. By acknowledging it as being entirely unaccountable, intuition short circuits the idea of practice as research or any knowledge claims. What practice does is move us on to a different place, and its agency comes about through motivating an exploration. It reveals something to us about where the next stage of our journey might be. To describe this through a different context, let us consider of the films from the Daniel Craig era of James Bond. In this series of films, Bond's intuited gut instinct often drives the narrative. The action sequences can be understood as being like practice, as they are a symptom of the plot. The plot itself – like research – relies upon the action even though it continuously tries to resist it or operate outside of the action. Action sequences can therefore be read as the points at which the empirical features of narrative have broken down and where action, quite literally, speaks louder than words.

What then does practice as a symptom actually mean and how is it useful? Perhaps more importantly, how does it change our understanding of practice and of research? I suggest that reading practice as symptom

indicates the very limit of research; it is the point at which research has become something else entirely. Research-focused practice is always, in some way, alienated from its research, but what we need to do is to cultivate the imbalance between research and practice. We should be celebrating the disharmony between these two distinct activities. One of the possible definitions of practice as symptom is how it also contains something of non-knowledge. To try to find knowledge within practice usually serves to un-ravel the practice as a creative work. Perhaps it is better to accept that creativity can only be experienced while it sustains its own distance from everything else. The more we attempt an epistemological understanding of it, the less it becomes really meaningful as practice. Similarly, the more we examine and take apart an engine the less likely it will take us on a journey anywhere. What we see in the relationship between practice and research is an imbalance that is constitutive of them both. It is not that without one the other has no purpose. Instead, in bringing two distinctive activities together, we see the way each includes the other only because their presence indicates a fault in the other. Research-focused practice is knowledge of research that cannot be expressed in any other way.

### Conclusion

I have set out a position in which practice and research are configured antagonistically to each other. I am aware this could be read as if they are mutually incompatible. I should stress that this is not my intention. In fact, what I am keen to do is twofold. First, in attempting to offer ways to abstract each from the other, I hope to understand the distinguishing features of them both. Second, my motivation to do this stems from what I see as a homogenization of research and practice or practice based/led research, such that it has become difficult to distinguish and perhaps more importantly determine what each actually is. It is almost impossible to interrogate creative practice to determine what it is or how it affects us. As I have said, any attempt to do so undermines the very essence of what creative practice is. What then should we look for in terms of practice? Perhaps we can ask what it is that practice directs us toward? What is that it persuades us to

do? What agency does it afford us in order that we can proceed onward? These are important properties for all practice, especially practice that is a component of research. I maintain that what we need from practice is an epistemic response that is both contained within it yet at the same time seems hidden from us. In this sense, research is inscribed into practice only when we cannot directly access it in the way that we would wish to as part of our rigor as researchers. In other words, the more we look the harder it is to find. This in itself might make us question our role as researchers or makers of practice. What practice as symptom offers is a way to validate the effect of practice and connect it to research. While this is not the end of my thinking around this subject, I will close with some shameless self-referencing. I recently wrote about morality and ethics in the HBO TV series *the Wire*. In it I considered how the characters were looking for a confirmation of who they are and where they belong. I stated:

[the characters] “self-reflective determinism also translates to how an audience is not simply entertained by a television series or movie but also requires some form of validation back from it. It is only by realising that such a validation is impossible that the audience is then able to work toward reconciling its own inner tension by knowing that everyone is situated in the same impossible circumstance”<sup>9</sup>

I suggest that there is something similar at work in the practice as symptom formulation. Only in recognizing the impossible relation of practice to research can we begin to be truly successful at both.

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9 John Hillman, “The bigger the lie, the more they believe: morality and ethics in *The Wire*”, in *Better Living Through TV: Contemporary TV and Moral Identity Formation*, ed. S. Benko (Washington DC: Lexington Books, 2022), 49–63.



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Santrauka

## Praktika kaip tyrimo simptomas

Johnas Hillmanas

*Reikšminiai žodžiai:* tyrimas, praktika, simptomas, Jacquesas Lacanas, filosofija, kūryba.

Šiame straipsnyje gvildenami įvairiose kūrybinėse sferose ir disciplinose išskylantys sunkumai nusakant skirtumą tarp „grynosios praktikos“ ir to, ką galima būtų vadinti „į tyrimą orientuota praktika“. Jei praktikos kaip tyrimo formos samprata yra visuotinai priimta, ypač gamtos moksluose, tai meno srityje ją suvokiant kyla nemažai painiavos. Straipsnyje bandoma aiškiai apibrėžti praktiką kaip tyrimą, nusakyti bet kurios tyrimu laikomos praktikos savybes ir atsakyti į klausimą, kaip šios savybės skiriasi nuo grynosios praktikos bruožų. Esminis klausimas apibrėžiant praktiką kaip tyrimą yra tai, kaip praktika sąveikauja su tyrimu. Teigiama, jog šio klausimo negvildenanti praktika negali būti naudinga tyrimo procesui. Trumpai tariant, tam, kad praktika taptų tyrimu, reikalingas tam tikras gebėjimas kurti žinias. Straipsnio išeitinė probleminė pozicija yra antagonizmas tarp praktikos ir tyrimo. Jie atskiriami vienas nuo kito siekiant aiškiau suprasti jų unikalius bruožus ir juos apibrėžti. Praktikoje tikimės apčiuopti užslėptą episteminių atsaką. Šia prasme tyrimas reiškiasi praktikos pavidalu tik tais atvejais, kai jis akademiniais kriterijais besivadovaujantiems tyrėjams neprieinamas tiesiogiai. Tik pripažinę šį iš pažiūros neįmanomą praktikos sąryšį su tyrimu, galėsime sėkmingai užsiiminėti jais abiem.