

PREFACE

The idea of producing a new anthology in arts-based research arose in the context created by a donation that was made by the Swedish foundation ‘Creative Man’ (*Skapande Människa*) to Riksbankens Jubileumsfond. The resulting fund was used to award prizes and scholarships to artists working close to science in the period 1996–2006. Towards the end of that period, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond was looking for a sympathetic project in the arts to conclude the practical projects that had been undertaken. Henrik, as their adviser, recommended that they fund a project on arts-based research and Riksbankens Jubileumsfond invited us to submit a proposal that would address this on a fundamental level. We identified the need for a book that would ground the current debate on research in the arts. Riksbankens Jubileumsfond accepted our proposal, generously added a substantial budget to cover administrative costs and honoraria, and asked us both to develop the proposal and act as editors. In May 2007, we discussed the initial concept of the book at a lunchtime meeting we had at a restaurant in Lund, Sweden. At that time, Michael was being funded by the Swedish Research Council (*Vetenskapsrådet*) as Visiting Professor at the Department of Theoretical and Applied Aesthetics at Lund University. Henrik was still advising the research-funding agency Riksbankens Jubileumsfond on matters concerning arts-based research. Unfortunately the meal was a bit of a disappointment – among unforgivable blunders throughout, at one point we were even denied the proper ‘sense of place’ when our order for a bottle of Ramlösa, the famous mineral water from Skåne, was substituted for a carafe of carbonized tap water! One positive outcome of this traumatic experience was our resolve to not accept any further substitutes for what we knew we wanted.

Another outcome of the meeting was the establishment of an editorial stance. We agreed that it was more important to find similarities than differences in the landscape that we were exploring. Differences, for example in terminology, were all too apparent: practice-based research, practice-led research, art-based research, artistic research, etc. Nonetheless, these terminological differences indicated an underlying common view that there was a new and problematic activity emerging in the creative and performing arts. The activity was being led by art schools and universities with arts faculties, so it

seemed to us to be an academically-led issue. As a result of this activity being funded as research, it was impacting on other disciplines that were interested in new research approaches, and, since it was also producing creative outputs, the activity was also beginning to impact on the professional world of the creative industries. This was not news to either of us, but we both felt a certain frustration at the lack of progress on the fundamental nature of research in the arts following about 20 years of international discussion. To aid us in ensuring the international relevance of our work, we established an Advisory Board consisting of: Bruce Brown, Halina Dunin-Woyseth, Yudhishthir Raj Isar, Torsten Källemark, Michael Jubb, Chris Wainwright and Evelyn Welch.


We decided to compile a critical anthology of new writings that could provide a firmer platform for the further development of the debate in the years to come. In particular, we wanted to make a book that made specific assertions about what this phenomenon was, or was not, so that subsequent scholars would have something definite to agree with or to criticize. We were, ourselves, critical of earlier books that we felt had failed to take such a stance and that preferred to adopt an ambivalent attitude to the subject. As a result we felt that such books failed to provide students, supervisors and professional researchers with tools that could improve the rigour and quality of what they were trying to do. Inevitably, our quest required us to find a group of arts-researchers in this emergent field that shared our agenda; or at least agreed sufficiently that a stimulating but not contradictory anthology could emerge. Finding these contributors took some time.

The process of selection began with a literature review, which identified experienced authors who were leading authorities in the field of research in the creative and performing arts. Through the literature review it also became clear that, because this was an emerging field and there were therefore, as yet, few visible benchmarks, it was not obvious which were the key works or concepts. National agencies such as the research councils, the bodies controlling graduate education, and organizations conducting activities such as national research evaluations, had all published criteria and definitions. However, if one sought the genealogy of these arguments, one was often referred to case studies of pioneering PhDs and funded research that we felt, naturally enough, could not themselves provide an adequate account for the activity of knowledge-building or art-research production. We therefore thought it important that a section of the book be dedicated to a careful consideration of the foundations of arts research: a consideration of the conditions that any activity needs to meet in order for it to function meaningfully as research in a subject, duly acknowledging and modified by the considerations of what might characterize this activity in a culturally determined field such as the arts. We did not think that arts research would be primarily concerned with exploiting new materials or technologies, nor with sociological aspects of arts production or consumption, since these could already be accommodated by research in materials science or social sciences, etc. Instead we intended the foundational discussion to identify the particular conditions and needs that were not already met by existing research models, so that both the subject and the aims of arts research might be established from, as it were, first principles.

But in saying this, and in saying it in this way, we recognized that we were already adopting a somewhat deterministic voice that could be regarded as alien to the ways of understanding materials and ideas in the creative arts. We recognized that the scientific model, construed in its broadest sense as *Wissenschaften*, was only one possible voice

with which to describe fundamentals – if we could be permitted to continue to use that term for a moment – and that other voices would need to be included in the anthology. In particular we wanted to find ways of discussing the experiential aspects of the creative arts whilst maintaining a position on auto-ethnocentricity that would enable researchers from other disciplines to understand what was being claimed and make use of the discussion. By so doing, we intended to form a bridge between traditional research and these non-traditional concerns that would facilitate comparison and evaluation activities across academia. Aspects that emerged as non-traditional in our reading included an instrumental role for the individual creator/researcher, for their sense of self and embodiment, for their constructive perspective on the phenomena of experience, and how these are construed and communicated to others through artefacts and creative production. While these aspects were not necessarily unique to the creative arts, design, music, etc., since one can find autoethnographic approaches and *auteur* theory, for example, elsewhere, nonetheless the agency of the researcher/user seemed to call for some acknowledgement in our discussion. So too did the agency of the artefact, and the user's experience of it.

We also noted the apparent omnipresence of writing in research. Although the media of the creative and performing arts are essentially non-linguistic, research in these areas seemed to embrace and sometimes even exaggerate the use of text compared with other disciplines that are arguably equally non-linguistic, such as mathematics or medicine. As a result, we wanted to allocate some space in the book to a consideration of the role of written and spoken language in the formation and communication of understandings. Such understandings take shape in relation to specific problems and their solution for a particular interest group. From this we saw a need to consider the context in which all this research was being undertaken, for whom it was done and the perceived outcomes and benefits from both within the specific context and more widely. We were also aware that a common description of research is that it produces communicable knowledge. This implies that the means of communication – whether the PhD thesis, the research report, the creative artefact, or the medium of creative practices and art production – all needed unpacking if they were to tell us about the core nature of research as a practice in this field. And since we were both academics, we wanted all of this to remain situated not only in a relevant relation to professional creative production but also in relation to other academic disciplines. In accordance with our editorial stance, we were not and still are not, sympathetic to 'special pleading', i.e. that these creative disciplines require completely novel conditions and are therefore incomparable with other academic disciplines. History showed us that each of today's apparently traditional and unproblematic disciplines in the academy had at one time been the problematic newcomer, and that now-established methods and subjects – such as qualitative research and cultural studies – had difficulty in establishing themselves in the period immediately preceding ours.

Owing to our aim of identifying shared issues that were not unduly influenced by parochial national interests  we had assembled an international team. As a result we might have produced from an even more fragmented book than the ones that we had been criticizing. We were able to avoid the risk of fragmentation and turn diversity into a benefit through the generosity of Riksbankens Jubileumsfond who, in April 2009, funded a workshop in which we had the opportunity to bring together our team of authors from

all over the world. This two-day workshop, which was held at the Royal Society of Arts in London, was an unusual opportunity in the production of such an anthology because it gave us the chance to share face-to-face our views on arts-based research, as well as our points of agreement and disagreement. We organized the event at a time when the authors had prepared and shared drafts, but before they committed to final versions of their chapters. All the authors were invited, and were flown over for the event. As a result, we were able to find some level of collective agreement about what we wanted and what could not be substituted. Group discussions also encouraged a greater synergy between the chapters in the book. The outcomes of this workshop helped both the individual authors as well as the editors. It helped the authors through their involvement in group discussion of emerging core themes. The editors benefited from the consensus that the book should be structured in three parts: foundations, voices and contexts. Of course, despite our best efforts of selection, we found that our authors did not agree on all points. However, it was notable that they did seem to agree in principle that arts-based research was not incomparable to other forms of research. Indeed, arts-based research would only have value – or its value would be enhanced – to the extent that it could be compared, its quality assessed and its contribution identified in the light of an understanding of research in other areas and of the social and cultural value of artistic production. This was facilitated by our authors' experience of several different national research evaluations and quality assessments in their own countries.

In this book it was never our intention to attempt to cover all art genres by dedicating chapters to individual media or art forms. Even at the stage of receiving the commissioned abstracts we could see that the majority of the authors more often referred to visual or fine arts when giving concrete examples rather than to other art genres. However, this tendency did not reflect the actual proportions of doctoral theses or research projects in the creative and performing arts as a whole. It could be regarded as a manifestation of what has been called the 'visual turn' (alluding to the linguistic turn in philosophy), which has resulted in subjects such as visual anthropology, concepts such as 'the Gaze', theories such as picture theory and methods such as Geometric Data Analysis. Such oculo-centrism tends to diminish the creation and experience of culture and arts through other senses, such as the aural and the embodied mind. Instead, we have tried to balance the diversity of subjects by providing a kind of progressive order from theories to practices, and to find the meta-level commonality expressed in our three parts. It is at this level that we chose to make our editorial introductions, enabling us to exercise our editorial stance that similarities are more productive than differences in this debate. Towards the end of 2009, and thanks to very positive reviews that came from both academia and the professional arts world for the need for such a book, our publisher Routledge saw that this anthology had an impact to make in both the academic and the practice market, and to act as a focus for the next round of debate. For this reason, we commissioned two Forewords, one addressing the theme as an element of the European Research Area and the other as an element of the professional preparation of both researchers and practitioners. Furthermore, the platform that Routledge have given us in their Companion series strengthens our aim that the book should provide an authoritative grounding for further informed discussion and research on the theme of research in the arts.

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