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**Practice-led research, the ethnographer and unearthing knowledge: crossing the thresholds**

**Abstract:**

This article is situated within the context of a prose writer immersed in creative practice. It takes into account the 'nebulous' concept of practice-led research, arising from its 'newness' and 'subtleties', addressed in this paper. It considers how former practice in consistent methodology as a scientist amplifies the intricacy of experiential research. It outlines how I have problematised practice-led research: its qualitative and non-quantifiable nature; the elusiveness of defining new knowledge in diverse creative research settings; and the dual roles of artist and scholar, in a type of collaboration that engenders knowledge while creating art. Finding knowledge in practice-led research is also retrospective because outcomes are yet uncertain. This paper offers practicable solutions on the bridging of immersive practice and mentoring, both valuable instruments to reorient the solitary researcher. The bridges can help uncover framing strategies and shape intellectual and artistic engagement to unravel creative art as answerable to knowledge.

**Biographical Note:**

Eugen Bacon studied at Maritime Campus, Greenwich University, UK, less than two minutes' walk from The Royal Observatory of the Greenwich Meridian. Her arty muse fostered itself within the baroque setting of the Old Royal Naval College, and Eugen found herself a computer graduate mentally re-engineered into creative writing. She is now a PhD candidate in Writing by artefact and exegesis at Swinburne University of Technology.

*Definitions belong to the definers – not the defined.*

*Toni Morrison*

## Problematising Practice-Led Research (PLR)

Practice-led research is paradoxical as experiential research, as creative research that embodies elusive qualities and offers limitless possibilities (Hecq & Banagan 2009, 3). Jen Webb writes that while 'a small library of essays, articles, conference proceedings and books has emerged to explore, assert, theorise and clarify what is meant by practice-led research... there is still a lack of precision about the methodology, design and methods appropriate to the field' (2012, 3).

## Paradox 1: Qualitative and non-quantifiable nature

The typical academic research model searches for answers to research questions by techniques that valorise systematic quantification through surveys, experiments, content analysis, etc. (Donley 2012, 17). But PLR is often non-quantifiable. Like a blustery wave with crests and troughs, PLR, as creative research, brings in its wake variant forms of experiential and qualitative undertakings that do not lend themselves to measurement. Carole Gray (1996) highlights this variance, noting that as PLR is initiated in practice, the (morphing) needs of the practice and the practitioner identify and form the questions, problems and challenges (3). So the nature of PLR is not stable.

Lelia Green voices her frustration when she states that 'practice-led research is a notoriously difficult concept to define' (2007, 1). She writes that PLR is subject to its own standards of rigour and validity; it is assessable according to judgements of 'good' and 'bad'; it is experiential and qualitative; it is non-quantifiable; it is the only methodology available through which to pursue some research questions (2007, 1–2). In other words, finding a solution to the research question(s) entails anticipating answers for those critics who will question the research significance and how the creative art is 'answerable to knowledge as a result' (Magee 2012, 2). Such critical scrutiny will include severe judgement regarding both the intellectual and the innovative qualities of the work (Strand, cited in Magee 2012, 3).

Lauren Redhead is an artist, a music composer from North England. She identifies the variants and subtle differences in the labelling of creative research including: practice as research, where there is no exegesis; practice-based research, where there is implied fixity of methodology – 'meaning that all of the knowledge and understanding generated by the project arises from the practice itself'; and creative arts research, where the objects created by the research are considered art (2012, 1). The labels Redhead focuses on contain assumptions about PLR in universities. These include the assumptions: that artistic practice can speak for itself, without the need for the addition of language (practice as research); that practice is a way of generating knowledge and not simply something one knows about (practice-based research); that the objects created by research have intrinsic artistic value not essentially connected with the research questions or outcomes (creative arts research) (2012, 2-3). Herein lies the problem. PLR is a perplexing topic; the very name has multiplicities, it is abstract. Scott Brook concurs on the lack of conventional naming:

> The term exists alongside a range of others, such as 'practice-based research', 'artistic research', 'performative research' and 'creative research', all of which produce a shared space of discussion between stakeholders within which rhetorical and conceptual distinctions harbour the potential for disagreement (2012, 2).

The nebulous form of PLR exposes both strengths and densities to the practitioner who must cross the threshold, in the unravelling of art, while seeking to contribute to knowledge in forms that will satisfy traditional academic conventions. Elizabeth Colbert offers a tip to those wrestling with the PLR model:

> …as creative practitioners negotiate the research culture they must reconceptualise their practice as research and locate it in a theoretical paradigm. Although this work is ongoing, it must be addressed initially in the research question. Embedded in the research question is the relationship between the candidate's practice and research (2013, 1).

This means the exegesis is my lexicon: the language and vocabulary leading to knowledge. It also means that my choice of methods of inquiry will help me 'wrestle' with my model of research and prompt me to reinterrogate the research questions.

**Paradox 2: Unearthing knowledge in PLR**

There are manifold understandings of what constitutes new knowledge in the arts. The goal of any research is to unearth new knowledge. But what is knowledge, specifically where outputs, as in PLR, are non-traditional?

Paul Pardi of Philosophy News asserts that:

> Studying knowledge is something philosophers have been doing for as long as philosophy has been around. It's one of those perennial topics—like the nature of matter in the hard sciences—that philosophy has been refining since before the time of Plato (2011).

Is there a single definition of knowledge? Not from Pardi, there isn't. He wraps up knowledge as comprising belief, truth and justification, which naturally renders knowledge a subjective thing.

Before him, Bertrand Russell (1926) in 'Theory of knowledge', for The Encyclopaedia Britannica, determines knowledge to be a product of doubt. Rather than offering a single statement that defines knowledge, Russell delves into belief, behaviour, truth, logic, uncertainty, vagueness, induction, probability, limitation, grades of certainty, even animal inference.

To cloud the waters more, the Macquarie dictionary defines knowledge according to competing discourses: 'acquaintance with facts, truths, or principles, as from study or investigation'; 'perception of fact or truth'; 'that which is known, or may be known'; 'the sum of what is known' (2009, 926). Preoccupation with knowledge appears to be subjective. It is open to the ideology of thinkers such as Jean-François Lyotard, as opposed to the direct representation of a truth or enlightenment. The latter, in a Buddhist context, refers to an individual's awakening to the true nature of mind, a definition that 'always chases itself since

this 'true nature of mind' remains ineffable' (Whalen-Bridge 2006, 179). Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1971), consider the problem of the sociology of knowledge and outline the contentions and definitions of 'reality' and 'knowledge', as well as ancient philosophical questions of what is real and how one is to know (13). For the purpose of their argument, they propose 'reality' to be a quality pertaining to recognisable phenomena independent of our own volition (it cannot be wished away), and 'knowledge' as the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics (13).

Eliezer Geisler (2008), a leading scholar in the areas of technology management and knowledge management studies, considers how, since antiquity, inquisitive minds have tried to define, classify and measure knowledge, and suggests the term 'knowledge' is amenable to taxonomies and explanation (1). He fragments the term 'epistemology'—a branch of philosophy concerned with knowledge—and, unsurprisingly, offers the known base Greek words: episteme (knowledge) and logos (theory) (2). He approaches answers to defining knowledge by looking at different but complementary streams: i) the structure of knowledge – is it data, information or some other component?; ii) the dynamics and progress of knowledge – how does knowledge accumulate and grow? iii) the uses of knowledge – how do individuals apply knowledge to their involvement in the social and economic affairs of their communities or their nations? (2).

Geisler studies theorists and philosophers, such as Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Cassirer and Marx, and their engagement with knowledge, as 'knowing' the world, and as categories, taxonomical or otherwise (3). He interrogates various definitions that position knowledge as 'actionable information' (10), as 'transformation' (11), as a variant of 'useful information' (11), but arrives at no concluding definition.

In light of postmodern theory, Lyotard (1984) comprehends scientific knowledge, for instance, as a 'kind of discourse' (3), swayed by technological transformations. In the context of such transformation, he states, the nature of knowledge must change, must fit into new channels, become operational (4). Elements in the constituted body of knowledge must be translatable—open to new research—in order for learning and invention to thrive, lest those untranslatable elements of knowledge be abandoned, in favour of advances to the knowledge process (4). Because the impatient mind, our dynamic society, does not wait, we gravitate towards the next translatable thing and we seek ways to apply it to the individual, to the community. But even translatable knowledge must be identifiable. So, what is knowledge?

Without offering that elusive definition himself, Lyotard affirms that knowledge will be produced to be sold, will be consumed, to be valorised in a new production, and in both cases, the goal is exchange (4). According to Lyotard, knowledge is not an end in itself. He argues that it cannot be reduced to science or learning (18). Lyotard conceives of knowledge as a question of competence beyond the criteria of truth, efficiency, justice, happiness or even beauty. He perceives it as holding principle features that include competence-building or conformity to 'custom' or 'criteria' or legitimating statements. Understanding the competence, or custom, or criteria, makes it possible 'to distinguish one who knows from one who doesn't' (19), where the 'one who doesn't' may fall into the categories of child or foreigner; where the 'one who knows' passes on the knowing to the 'one who doesn't', in knowledge-sharing that takes the form of narration.

To the practice-led researcher, this knowledge-sharing by narration is within the creative artefact and the exegesis. But PLR brings its own ripples into the researcher's quest to unearth knowledge. Cheryl Stock (2013) notes how, over the last decade, particularly in the creative industries, knowledge production in doctoral settings has become a thorny topic, as a result of increasingly hybridised approaches to qualitative research (1); 'variations and combinations of action research, (auto)ethnography, biography, narrative enquiry, case studies, critical reflexivity and creative practice are being interrogated and re-purposed' (4–5).

Stock's statement, on hybridised approaches, supports an absence of consistent methodology in PLR that deserves further exploration. Without common ground in PLR methodology, the production of knowledge by an artist is subjective. Equally subjective is the verification of that knowledge as produced: who is best qualified to verify, and how? Kristina Niedderer (2011) examines the subjective notion of engendering knowledge in creative and practice-led disciplines and, with a number of comparisons, determines that 'the understanding of the term 'knowledge' in the definition of research is not explicitly defined' (§6).

Lelia Green (2007) supports this debate, on the challenges of unearthing knowledge in PLR, and states that it is 'exacerbated by the tendencies of the arts practice to celebrate the novel, the original, the unusual and to subvert the unexpected' (1). To unravel novelty is the aim of research, of new knowledge, even in the sciences. But sophisticated frameworks and methodologies, that govern scope and precision in quantitative research, relieve some challenges that researchers in the sciences face. According to Thomas Kuhn, normal science

has the principal components of experimental and observational 'fact-gathering' and theoretical activity (cited in Preston 2008, 30). It consists of attempts to increase the accuracy and scope with which facts (e.g. positions, magnitudes and properties) are known (Preston 2008, 30). PLR does not offer 'known', or 'standard', or 'consistent'. PLR looks for the unusual, the unexpected. Green argues, 'Practice-led researchers—and those that evaluate and celebrate practice-led research—seek ways to justify a dividing line between art-as-itself and art as practice-led research' (2007, 2). This supports the lack of uniformity. Evaluations of, and techniques for evaluating, research outputs are both qualitative and subjective.

Kathryn Herr and Gary Anderson (2005) deliberate on action research dissertations and concede that determining answers to a question in fields that hold no consensus on basic aims (or methodology) is problematic. Dominique Hecq and Robert Banagan (2010) add that, in such a cross-disciplinary field of practice, the paradoxes and arguments arising from interrogating new knowledge and understanding its scholarly contribution, as well as how it integrates into the academy, continue to pose significant hurdles (5).

Advancing this debate on paradoxes, by exploring agnostic thinking in creative writing as PLR, Jen Webb and Donna Lee Brien (2008) analyse artists and knowledge in the academy. Webb and Brien speak to how, unlike research in the sciences, social sciences and humanities, where results are visible, knowledge and interpretation in creative research is often locatable only within the artist. And the artist in PLR is not yet confident of what is known, because knowledge comes retroactively (3).

Webb and Brien (2008) also scrutinise the definition of knowledge and highlight what is at stake, namely 'where knowledge resides, who performs the act of knowing, and the relationship between knowledge and the knower' (4). Clearly, this angle enters a philosophical realm outside the scope of this paper.

In reviewing *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Smith & Dean 2009), Hecq and Banagan (2010) restate the issues that university-based creative practitioners experience when striving to define (and prove) knowledge and its production (1). Creative artists must sometimes conform and act 'more like scientists than artists' (4) in order to communicate about their artistic research and related process of knowledge production. The problem is compounded in performance as research, where live performance must demonstrate or prove knowledge production, yet the performance work may not be driven by scholarly norms or values (Meyrick 2014, 1).

Daniel Mafe and Andrew Brown (2006) carry out their own analysis of the generation of knowledge in artistic work and recognise that a constructive perspective is favourable, where knowledge is contextual and truths are well-informed and sophisticated (2). But knowledge for the creative practitioner is retrospective; outcomes are yet uncertain – the practitioner is still finding answers, 'is not confident he or she already knows, or even that knowledge can ever be full or final' (Webb & Brien 2008, 3). New knowledge emerges from research findings: that is, the exegesis and artistic work(s) created in parallel (Mafe & Brown 2006, 1). This means that knowledge is derived from process and practice.

Holbrook et al. (2013) look at PLR and diversity, in the Australian content, and the expectations that a candidate brings to the process of learning and development. Influences 'range from personal goals and expectations through to lived experiences and responsibilities beyond the academy' (3). They state Practice-based research:

> …requires candidates to engage in a dialogue between their art-making practices and their conceptual thinking about art as research, and yet candidates tend to be more familiar with the expectations of art-making and less with the academic expectations associated with doctoral study (5).

This means that while the practitioners are clearly not novice artists, they must derive, verify and communicate new knowledge, from the production of art, along academic benchmarks. Confusion may evidence itself in the practitioner's struggle to separate 'voice', for example, when undertaking, in parallel, an exegesis and a fantasy novel. The very combination of a creative artefact and an exegesis is contradictory; it is a fragmentation and autonomy of the research output. Where writing a novel, for example, may involve lyrical or verbose language, writing the exegesis, in this format, is a miscarriage of scholarly authority.

While there are obviously diverse understandings of what constitutes new knowledge in the arts, there is also a deficiency of established methodology or unifying language to frame a creative practitioner's research. Such diversity and deficiency present complexities around scholarly contribution. Changeable approaches in examiners means creative researchers will continue their endeavours to anticipate what is required of their academic scholarship (Stock 2007, 4).

**Paradox 3: Absence of a consistent methodology**

PLR offers no consistent methodology to frame creative research or 'unite' artists across the diversity of their artistic disciplines. The creative researcher is left with a choice of robust methods for qualitative research and must use these to examine practice, process and product. Methods include ethnography, auto-ethnography, journaling, reflexivity, case studies, literature review. An example, in the context of PhD study, in screenwriting, is Kath Dooley use of a process of mapping as methodology (2014, 8). This helps chart a web of character interaction and plot points (4), a technique that helps identify character oppositions and creates tension and intrigue.

There is the mentioned qualitative method of journaling, where a reflexive artist maps personal and scholarly insights. The journal is a portrait that kick-starts the analytical gaze at self and process; it is a placebo for the writing process, tricking the writer through false starts into creating; it is a control, a gauge of progress. (Bacon 2014, 6).

Catherine Noske (2014) probes yet another technique: Nicola Boyd's conceptual metaphor of the 'strange loop' in creative writing methodology. Noske discusses the notion of self-creation as a discourse, in the art of writing, and studying. She contemplates how, while not a methodology, the configuration of selfhood within writing allows a framework for illuminating artistic practice (9). This kind of inner reflection is familiar to the practice-led researcher, for whom the exegesis is both product and process. And the exegesis is that critical analysis that materialises discourse in a self-conscious (thus subjective), evaluative and critical way; it is that which positions itself between the creative work and the audience to frame practice; it is that dissertation that 'convinces the academy, if not the practitioner, about the nature, the purpose... the value of the research' (Bacon 2014, 5).

Thus, in the absence of consistent methodology, the creative researcher—depending on skills or knowledge, and as applicable to the type of research—may find a need to infuse empirical or quantitative methods, such as surveying or diagramming, into their qualitative research.

**Paradox 4: Dual roles in PLR: the artist and the scholar**

This section looks at how the division of PLR, into a creative output and an exegetical work, brings together two nearly opposing fields (Webb 2012, 8). The term 'field' here assumes the

social meaning of autonomous study, interest or activity. The complex task of amalgamating diverse fields, a task that Paul Magee compares to playing hockey during a football match (2012, 13), is without clean parameters for the practitioner or the examiner. Consequently, the division draws out multiple personalities in the researcher. The practice-led researcher must find synergies between the artist and the academic, in order that there be co-existence, despite 'differences and distances between the two fields' (Webb 2012, 8). As a creative writer and PhD scholar, I must find unity in my hybridity, as I move between two worlds.

Gray identifies polarities that exist at an individual level, tensions arising in the apparent duality of the PLR role: subjectivity versus objectivity; internal versus external; doing versus thinking and writing; intuition versus logic (1996, 7). To succeed as an artist and a scholar, I must advance my understanding and knowledge in both disciplines.

In her analysis of PLR, along the theory/practice nexus in dance, Cheryl Stock (2007) suggests how I might advance this understanding. The artists/researchers, in Stock's example 'play dual roles reflecting on, contextualising and theorising their own practice whilst drawing on dance and cultural studies and a range of methodologies to inform their practice' (1). This is because, as a form of action research, PLR applies an iterative cycle of action and reflection where the practitioner is both performing art and creating it. The cycle of activities forms an action research spiral, where each sequence increases the creative researcher's knowledge of the original question, to help them find answers (Herr & Anderson 2005, 8). Unlike traditional research that stays aloof from intervening in the research setting, PLR as action research demands intervention, as a result of practice (8).

To explore split position ideas, Lucy Nicholas in her paper 'Academically literate/Queer literate' (2014) considers the 'inside/outside status' of identity and discourse, where thinking strategies may link to queer theory without delving into matters of gender or sexuality (72). The 'non-traditional' instructor or student (for example, one who does not identify with labels of 'homosexual' or 'other') may essentially not recognise 'queer' in its past definition, as a noun or an identity, but rather as a marker of academic literacy: queer theory. This obliges the student or instructor to adopt non-normative ways of thinking (e.g. non-homosexual), to diversify academic content for inclusive learning (72). When 'queer' remains a verb—an act of de-normalising—rather than a noun or identity, a split condition of double consciousness exists (80). This condition is consistent with the hybridity that PLR summons in the artist who is also a scholar.

Jen Webb (2012) explores what she considers vexed questions: 'how to be both artist and academic; how to produce both art and knowledge products' (2–3). She proposes reflexive practice, 'a bending back of the self upon the self and the self's context' (12), interrogating being and knowing by applying the very processes of knowledge construction to the self and to the discipline. Such a proposition calls for an openness to defamiliarise while reconceptualising the traditional into something new that works for you, the artist-academic (13).

To illustrate defamiliarisation, my own scientific background compounds the complexity of paradigm shifting, such as the one scientist Kuhn may have faced when his philosophical self argued that neither practices nor conceptual schemes could be assessed in terms of truth-or-falsity (Preston 2008, 11). In a project for a Master of Science, in distributed computer systems, my research was on cross-language information retrieval for non-English languages (Matoyo & Valsamidis 2001). It involved a study of databases with the aim of optimising search queries for text retrieval, using an experimental search system. Research outcomes were evidence-based, as the results of formal data test runs below show:
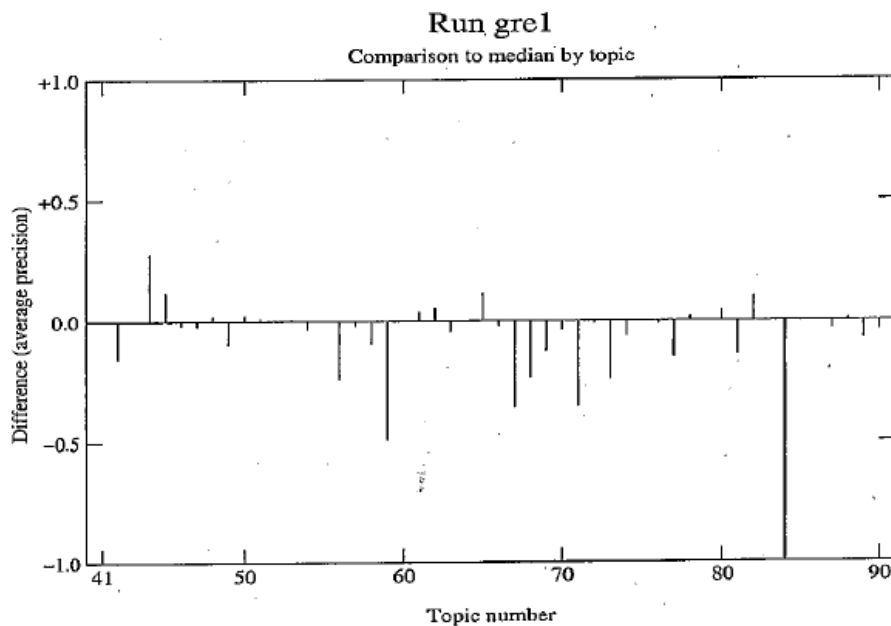


**Figure 1. Results comparison to median by topic**

Over a decade now since performing those experiments, I have entered the arts. I comprehend the proven methods I applied in that research: the methods of project planning, stepwise refinement, software reuse, automation, data gathering, data merging, data analysis, project modularity – all quantifiable methods that are standard and consistent. Now I am a

creative practitioner in qualitative research, and sometimes struggle to shift from traditional methodology. In one component of my current creative study, for instance, I argue with numbers, graphs and percentages (all quantitative) to demonstrate what influences writers of short fiction to turn a short story into a novel or novella:

| What influenced your decision to turn your short work of fiction into a novel or a novella? (Choose all options that apply) | |
| --- | --- |
| Story became too long | 11% |
| There were too many characters | 0% |
| The theme was not fully developed | 22% |
| Events happened over a long period of time in the short story | 11% |
| I wanted to add other points of view | 22% |
| I wanted to continue working on the story as a larger piece of work | 89% |
| I wanted to reuse an original idea | 22.2% |
| Other | 11.1% |

**Figure 2: Graph—reasons for turning a short story into a longer work of fiction**

In creative research, I am constantly learning and applying new approaches. The uncertainty and flexibility of qualitative methods are bewildering. In my appetite for knowledge, in the paradigm of PLR, continues to hold novelty; my study mirrors that unremitting loop of finding balance, of perfecting.

**Crossing the thresholds, finding solutions**

There are practical solutions that address the paradoxes of PLR.

**Bridge 1: Immersion in practice**

> But where is the practitioner who is both an artist and academic positioned? Exegesis helps answer this question by encouraging the practitioner to establish their own research practice, where creative practice continues to play its dynamic role. (Bacon 2014, 1)

Let us contemplate the immersive experience of a practice-led researcher who is also an auto-ethnographer. My writing process as an author of short fiction makes me an appropriate target for auto-ethnographic research. I am immersed in the field of my study, acting out roles as a performer and researcher (Bacon 2013). As I advance the artefact and exegesis, in a PhD that explores deviations in genre, I unravel around me arbitrary text (a word, a phrase), isolations that are meaningless without construction, elements that form patterns in my mind to inform the writing.

My approach to the research is from the lens of a writer with a scientific background. The immersive experience I bring to the study means a certain positioning, a collaborative relationship with the self. Such immersion breeds potential bias but also possibilities, if accompanied with understanding and reflexivity, where reflexive means inward reflection, something focused on improving the 'self' and 'process' (Bacon 2014, 1).

The lived experience can clarify the divide between the artist and the intellectual. Auto-ethnographer, Dr de Kline, asks:

> How we might incorporate such 'lived experience' into our scholarly writing, when it is not only deeply unsettling on a personal level, but is also indigestible within the conventions of the academic and government funded research which frame the work? (2012, 1)

Being a social science researcher, de Kline is subject to oscillating expectations – the university's, the government's, de Kline's own. The researcher, in her lived-in experience, sees, smells, touches, feels, but must frame these sensations, these impressions, in scholarly outputs that are 'fully theorized and substantiated with the latest literature from the field' (de Kline 2012, 11). I used, in my practice as a scientist, carefully planned experiments in controlled environments to produce evidence-based results that theorised and substantiated scholarly outputs. I supported these outputs with verified methods that other scholars recognised. But my practice now is as an artist. My discursive channel follows reflexivity, auto-ethnography, immersion. Let me share my own immersive experience:

Something ruffles up at the aquatic centre today:

I am in the spa, legs stretched out, arms folded behind my head. My mind is sharp as a blade. Heated beads of water volcano up the chemical-rich tub. A cold stream beneath my thigh gurgles from a spout, blends with hot to create an even 36 degrees of temperature.

The philosophers Roland Barthes, Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari emerge before me. They are immersed as I am: legs spread out, hands behind their heads. Barthes' eyes have a shimmer in them. Ricoeur, Derrida... prolific writers, scholarly debaters of deconstruction and hermeneutics—the art of interpreting—are these thinkers here for me now?

Ahead on a far side, a guard's eye abandons its watching. A little girl steals the moment with a water bomb, splashes where only moments ago a young woman wearing a swim cap the colour of red liquorice speared into the lap pool. The girl clambers out of the pool as the guard's eye returns to its monitoring. Oblivious, the swimmer continues her five-stroke-breathe lapathon. I ignore the pulse in Barthes' eyes, look upwards towards the staves. I blink at the bright light of the facility, gaze into an all-windowed upstairs gym. An elderly man in grass green pants and a firm t-shirt pedals in the aerobics class next to Robert Redford—correction, next to a Redford look-alike. Grass green pants Barthes Barthes Derrida. My eyes are back to the beating heart. Construction deconstruction intertextuality. The elderly man pedals, pedals and pedals in the gym, his pants gleaming sweat. Bright pigment that makes grass green. The little girl arranges herself to do another water bomb. Man pedal, pedalling in the gym. Chlorophyll absorbs blue light... and red light... but mostly reflects green light... (Mauk 2013).

In the lap pool: My arms start first against the water tide. I push off the wall to a breaststroke cycle, my mind still on the philosophers. The text is demonstrated, is spoken according to certain rules (or against certain rules)... (Barthes 1984, 57). My head and shoulders come out of the water. I lunge forward through the kick. My head and shoulders come out again, and Barthes—eyes still pounding—leans towards me from the edge. He is speaking: the work is a fragment of substance... the text is held in language: it exists only when caught up in a discourse' (Barthes 1984, 57). Arms first, I lunge forward through the kick, unfazed by the seeming unreality of Barthes in his togs

by my poolside. I am the story which happens to me: freewheeling in language, I have nothing to compare myself to… (Barthes 1975, 56).

Under the quick rinse shower: I press the button, water gushes out of the faucet in a one-minute blast. I rub my body. The text is structured but decentred, without closure... The text is plural (Barthes 1984, 60).

Inside the changing cubicle: I move to fasten the lock but Deleuze clasps the door from without, pushes himself in. He and Guattari would like a word: when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work... Literature is an assemblage. It has nothing to do with ideology. There is no ideology and never has been (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 2). Guattari rests an elbow on Deleuze's shoulder. He has a principle of multiplicity. The two of us wrote Anti-Oedipus together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd (1987, 3). And principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be (1987, 5). Write, form a rhizome, increase your territory by deterritorialization (1987, 7). I think of my artefact: stories-within-a-story—connection, heterogeneity and interconnections...

It is Ricoeur who seizes the last word outside the aquatic facility as automatic doors glide shut behind me: I will speak about the difficulties linked to translation... easier said than done and occasionally impossible to take up. These difficulties are accurately summarised in the term 'test' [épreuve], in the double sense of the 'ordeal' [peine endurée] and 'probation': testing period, as we say, of a plan, of a desire or perhaps even of an urge, the urge to translate (Ricoeur 2007, 3). What is knowledge, Ricoeur? I silently ask.


Now, dear reader, I invite you to reflect on immersion. Tony Williams (2013) conveys what is happening: my creative research by artefact and exegesis, played out from within to without, has joined my everyday, has moved into the lived experience to enter this space in the pool.

Williams looks at reading and writing inside the everyday, uses dog-walking as a space in which to imagine and reflect on various creative texts he has been writing, sometimes over

many months, often revisiting the same creative problems while walking the same routes (2013: §2).

As the reflexive artist moves between, and explores, the worlds of practitioner and researcher, inner and outer influences hook into artistic practice, weave into day-to-day. Like Williams, I court a daily discipline. But I use different metaphors. Akin to the critical and imaginative thinking that Williams experiences on his walks (§8), my daily writing, my daily reading, swims with me. Yes, a correlation between the 'units of living and the units of text' (§8). Like Williams, I recognise that 'writing and living both take place inside iterative or atomic structures' (§8).

Williams says:

> Daily routines such as dog-walking provide a space in which we can imagine, write, rewrite and revise creative work, but this does not mean that each walk, or day, will birth a new chapter. Often iteration means re-iteration, going back over familiar ground. Sometimes we come back with nothing, or seem to; but our routines of working and living should provide us with spaces in which we can work without worry; for me they also provided both subject matter and technical solutions (§11).

Williams has found his philosophy in this metaphor of dog walking. Mine is an allegory of swimming. Swim coaches develop coaching philosophies unique to them and their swimmers. The coach will use experiences, gained from books, articles, videos, clinics, their own practice, conversations with athletes and coaching colleagues, observations made of other coaches at training or competitions, to hone that philosophy. 'Every coach must develop a philosophy that will be the base for coaching decisions', says Dick Hannula (2003, 4).

To respond to a question on my own philosophy in PLR, I might in turn ask: 'Right now'? I might hunt a philosopher to disarm my tension, and whisper: 'Ricoeur?'. Succinctly, my philosophy will vary along the course of PLR. It will adapt with me as I reorient myself, as I build on my work, as I position my exegesis crucially between the creative work and my audience. Right now it takes the form of a simultaneous approach to exegesis and the creative

artefact, of much reflexivity as I explore context, anticipate challenges, interrogate complexity and deduce answers.

Like the swimming coaches, I too have my bibliography, those books and articles I cite regularly in my exegesis. I have my experiences as a researcher, those that encourage me in reflexivity. I have my conversations and debates with the self, with other researchers. And I am also my own coach. Nothing is forever; I am constantly morphing. Today I float, learn how to breathe; tomorrow I stroke, refine my streamline; next week I will judge, master the tumble turn. One day, I will approach the wall at full speed, somersault, look for my bum, push off the wall and swim (Bacon 2013). As in the ethnographic researcher, I tune myself to think, to swim within and against humdrum.

With ethnographic research and associated immersion—evident from my own aquatic centre experience, or Williams' sensory experience in dog-walking—I cannot, like an external participant, close the interview, submit a questionnaire, be done. A fragment of the research accompanies my everyday: nothing is wasted, my time is never idle (Bacon 2014, 5).

## Bridge 2: Mentoring

PLR is often an individual exercise. The PhD student at the end of the research must sign an examinable outcome submission form stating that the work is not written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text, and that the work is not based on joint research or publications, else the student must disclose the relative contributions of each third party. Often, the student's research outcomes are produced without collaborative outsiders such as dissertation committees or methodology consultants with relevant skills or resources. But Herr and Anderson (2005) suggest that collaboration is the optimal setting for action research (6); that researchers who are lone practitioners studying their own practice must obtain ongoing feedback from other stakeholders because collaboration and participation create important tensions (6). These tensions, surging from vital interrogations and finding answers to them, add value to the research.

Kathryn Owler (2014) examines the PhD as exemplifying a unique and concentrated example of subjectivity, process and desire (2), where thesis writing 'attends to the complex operations of knowledge and subjectivity at work in the writing process' (3). Owler deliberates about the personal struggles (such as anxiety, confusions, loneliness, and tussles with identity) inherent

in writing a PhD that are not always acknowledged by universities (2). Somewhere, the student finds inspiration. Perhaps stimulus is in the form of a scholarly mentor who guides the student to reconfigure their relationship to the research topic (6). But the mentor must be the appropriate one to channel the student's pursuit of truth, their desire for mastery.

Scholarly mentors include academics already in a supervisory relationship with the creative practitioner. An effective supervisory relationship helps the practitioner to cross shores, through interrogations, and affirmations, of the integrity of the work through scholarly dissertation.

On the supervisor-student dynamic, Jeri Kroll of Flinders University, writes:

> With both a critical and artistic profile, these supervisors can teach apprentices to discriminate between artefacts and, therefore, to realise the standard that they have achieved in their own work… The supervisor enables the student to discover viable research questions and suitable methodologies and theories to underpin the project  (2014, 6).

The supervisor comes along with discipline knowledge to guide me towards an articulate product. Aligned with propagating knowledge, where the 'one who knows' passes on the knowing to the 'one who doesn't', the supervisor can channel learnings, from their own practice, to reorient my own practice. Kroll suggests that a supervisor functions as some super-ego, to prod 'when writer's block, laziness or depression stop the creative and critical flow' (2014, 12). The supervisor, having been through the research whirl, offers competence-building mentoring, channelled to guide. As Webb, Brien & Burr (2011) state, in 'the task of reading, critically evaluating and providing both formative and summative commentary on the work', the PhD supervisor is one of several mentors (3). A well-positioned question from a supervisor may provide the inspiration the student has been pursuing. In reading a sample of my artefact, the supervisor may endorse, from person knowledge, that the creative work does indeed explore queer themes of self/other, the nature of being, double vision, which, in turn, inform the exegesis.

Some mentors are writers, such as Webb, who encourages reflexivity as a means to tackle the divide between the artist and academic; and others, such as Julia Colyar (2009), engages with

writing as a product, process, form of invention, and instrument of self-reflection (422). Then there are those, such as Colbert, who offers a tip early on wrestling with the PLR model. With direction from the right mentors, I can uncover framing strategies that thrust me to that 'leap' of inspiration, somewhere along the PhD (Owler 2014).

**Conclusion**

Practice-led researchers are persistently searching for answers about creating art that can be integrated into academic discourse. With the elusive qualities and limitless probabilities of PLR, the creative researcher must shape knowledge construction as both an artist and a scholar. Sometimes, as Webb suggests, 'One must dominate; and this means there is always a loss, and always a cost' (2012: 9). Or, effectively, the candidate must vary codes, use reflexivity as a passage between the creative artefact and the exegesis. The immersive experience of the creative researcher who is also an auto-ethnographer allows bridging between the worlds of artist and researcher. The backing of scholarly mentors who transmit their knowledge can harness the synergistic relationship between the artist and the scholar. As Gray (1996) suggests, in order for the practitioner-researcher to integrate dual roles, or allow difference to co-exist in a 'new Renaissance role', their training (also meaning mentoring) has an important part to play (7). A good mentor will work with the practitioner to guide the unpicking of creative art as answerable to knowledge.

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