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Faire Oeuvre

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Performing Practice-Based Research

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Article abstract

A manifesto for practice (or, how practice animates thought, and thought practices).

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Faire Œuvre

Erin Manning

1. Make it a practice

Orient from the pull of a tendency. Don't worry about the initial materiality, or the form it seems to take. Let the force of its potential lead. It can be a line in a text, a poem, a philosophical concept. It can be a textile, a quality of smell, a movement, a handful of earth.

Move into the singularity of its directionality. Try not to overfeed it. It doesn't have to be everything. Push up against it. Let curiosity lead.

To practise is to engage with a set of conditions. To practise is to explore how tendencies are produced. To practise is to follow those tendencies in a process of repetition. To practise is to develop an attunement to the differential of repetition.

2. Follow the practice where it leads

A practice is nothing more than a commitment to an unfolding. Return to it. Don't worry too much about encompassing it. Be wary of globalizing tendencies. If it's a concept, play around with it. Bounce it against other concepts. See what shape it takes. If it's a movement, enter it from all its openings. Follow its verve.

A practice always teaches. It teaches how to enter. It demonstrates a limit. It fosters a threshold. Be in the curiosity of that teaching. Let yourself be pulled into it, by it.

3. Don't set up unnecessary frames

Try not to value practice from the outside-in. Practice produces its own valuation. To produce a valuation is to sidestep the paranoia of what already needs to count, to be counted in. Try to resist the impulse to include, to add, just for the sake of having met criteria. Try to resist the impulse to look smart, or to make *like an artist*.

If artfulness leads—if what moves the practice is its own aesthetic yield—you will be moved by the practice and its own modalities of valuation. Allow yourself to become interested in those valuations even if they don't conform to dominant tendencies. Be curious about how they deviate from existing frameworks but don't dwell here.

4. Live outside genre

It is tempting to organize within genre. To make it a method. To call it “practice-based research” or “art-based research” or “research-creation,” thereby setting it apart from whatever it was it wasn't supposed to be. Deviate that tendency.

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Work that does its work, *faire œuvre*, resists predetermined categories. How could any research not be practice-orienting? How is thought *not* a practice?

The problem is here: thought has been dissociated from practice, and art has been dissociated from thought.

Instead of beginning in category, instead of justifying with method, trust the practice to move thought. Let the thought shape you. Recognize that you were never other to the thinking, that the practice was always making you (think). Be curious about what emerges as thought when it is not excised from practice. Find, in practice, the vulnerability of enunciation and write or speak or move from there. Include what is ineffable. Make the in-between of its uneasy iteration palpable.

5. Call it research

Research is practice's yield. This yield is aesthetic. It carries the sensibility of a process. Attune to how best to articulate, to move that sensibility. Be sensitive to its leaky edges. Find languages to prolong it. Be wary of capture.

Capture happens in many ways. We capture process every time we begin with critique. To critique is to stand outside and delimit the potential from the outside-in. Nothing is easier than critique. Where the stakes are more potent is in the midst. Work there, in the quality of mutual inclusion, of approximation of proximity.

Approximation of proximity resists cause-effect, in-out. It builds bridges, produces adjacencies. Difference without separability.

Immanent critique lives here. Immanent critique—feeling-out a process from within its emergent problematics—fosters capaciousness. How does a practice open up thought? If a practice is not touching thought's limit, if thought isn't producing the conditions for emergent process, schizz the practice. Move into, move with, the cut.

Schizz is anathema to critique. Where critique finds fault from an exterior vantage point, the schizz is a propulsing tendency from within that shifts the geology of an environment. In the act of the cleave, the schizz not only redirects: it produces new forces.

To schizz is to compose with the condensation of a tendency to redirect it.

Research happens in the redirection. Research is the granular excavation of what shifted in the schizz. What new orientations revealed themselves? What new problems foregrounded themselves?

6. Don't make it about you

It's tempting to call it "my" research. But practice takes us with it: it is not ours. To follow practice where it leads is not only to learn from practice how to better attune to the immanent valuations of emergent processes, it is also to foster modes of encounter with thought that refute the capture of whiteness, of neurotypicality.

Neurotypicality is the systemic operation of centring whiteness as the beacon of knowledge-formation. Neurotypicality is the dominant method of any institutionalized environment. Not only is neurotypicality the enforcer of knowledge, it is the shape knowledge takes.

Any enforced separation between practice and thought is neurotypical. Whiteness breeds here, defending the stakes of what counts, and who counts.

Every time you say that you know better, every time you impose a territory for thought, every time you make it about you, the performance is one of colonialism. This is white, and neurotypical.

7. Be in thought's movement

There is a risk. It's possible that the practice won't yield writing. In academia, a hard line continues to be drawn between what counts as knowledge and what doesn't. There isn't a ready solution for this problem. Practice-based research unfortunately does not yet extend beyond language, outside words.

One way to foster an adjacency is to resist the formatting of language as denouncing. Make language propositional. Allow language to open itself to the rhythms of its own ineffability. Don't worry too much about genre. It's not *about* poetry, or *against* academic writing. It's *with* the practice of language's own immanent detours. Some of these detours may need a citational architectonics. This can yield a beautiful shorthand—all those minor socialities co-composing!

8. Edit!

Practice is a commitment to editing. To practise is to be in the attunement of the daily difference of what practice yields. That is to say, practice is never the same. To enter into it is to enter into its minor differentiations, and to become attuned to what they can do.

Make language practice. Allow language to form its own orienting tendencies. Invent words! Don't be afraid of concepts! Excavate from the concept where it can lead. Don't dwell in refutation. You can get stuck there.

Once the work begins to do its work, engage with how it edits itself. Build attunement to what is in excess, to what clouds the singularity of its orientation. Be interested in what subtraction can do. Think "practice-based" at each layer of the process. Allow things to fall out. Be aware of what "you" are adding and wonder about whether you are inserting yourself. Is this some kind of insurance policy to keep you safe? See if you can let it go. Let the work do its work.

9. Faire Œuvre

When a work does its work, it is practising. This is as true of an artwork as it is of a poem or a story or an academic paper. To be too focused on genre is to seek to control the process from the outside-in. Let the work take you with it.

Like any architecture, a work produces a surround, and is produced by it. Trust that the work will find modes of engaging with the ecologies it provokes, and convokes. This might mean delving into a conceptual arena that lies adjacent to what the work's working is unfolding. It might mean a

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footnote taking us on a parallel path. Try, when gathering the architectonics of the surround, not to impose a paranoid frame onto the work. Don't write an artist statement that is defensively marking a territory. Refrain from producing an enclosure for yourself, and your work.

Faire œuvre is not “making” work. It is being made by the work's working. This is practice-based research. Any other kind of research is not alive with thought, is not teeming with tendency. Practice-based is simply how thought moves into the materiality of its activity. To think, to be in the movement of thought, is to hone practice, and to let practice lead the way.