

Introduction

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Article abstract

In this issue, *RACAR*'s editorial team is pleased to present *Polemics*, a new section which, like the curated *Practices* section introduced last year, will bring up-to-the-minute and sometimes controversial issues into the journal, while featuring art and ideas of any place and time. Each spring issue of *RACAR* will include a *Polemics* or a *Practices* section.

Polemics focuses on matters of pressing interest to the broad visual arts community in Canada. Each *Polemics* will be developed and introduced by a guest editor and will include brief, provocative essays that speak to a single contemporary topic from different perspectives. For the current issue, the guest editor, Natalie Loveless of the University of Alberta, brings together four voices from our community who reflect on research-creation as “an important contemporary queering of the academy” and a vigorous challenge to traditional disciplinary lines.

Polemics

Short Statements on Research-Creation

Natalie S. Loveless, University of Alberta, Guest editor / rédactrice invitée

Abstract

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Résumé

Dans ce numéro, l'équipe éditoriale de *RACAR* est heureuse de présenter *Polémiques*, une nouvelle section qui, comme la section *Pratiques* introduite l'année dernière sous l'égide d'une commissaire invitée, proposera des débats sur des sujets d'actualité et parfois controversés, à propos d'art et d'idées de toute époque et de tous pays. Chaque printemps, *RACAR* publiera une *Polémiques* ou une *Pratiques*.

Polémiques examine des sujets d'intérêt pressant pour la communauté des arts visuels. Chaque *Polémiques* sera développée et introduite par un rédacteur invité ou une rédactrice invitée et comprendra de brefs essais provocateurs qui se pencheront sur un sujet actuel abordé de différents points de vue. Dans ce numéro, Natalie Loveless de l'University of Alberta a réuni quatre voix de notre communauté réfléchissant à la recherche-creation, qu'elles qualifient comme étant un « queering » important de l'académie et un défi de taille aux frontières disciplinaires traditionnelles.

Introduction

NATALIE S. LOVELESS, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

I am grateful to the editors of *RACAR* and to Risa Horowitz—guest-editor of *RACAR*'s inaugural *Practices* section (Spring 2014)¹—for their foresight in championing a space for research-creation in the Universities Art Association of Canada and its journal. This inaugural *Polemics* section could not have come about without their efforts. It has two aims: first, to advocate for the importance of research-creation for those of us teaching in art, art history, curatorial and museum studies, and design programs in Canada today; second, to cultivate a space not only for research-creation practice and pedagogy, but also for its critical discourse.

What follows is a polemic. Not only because the contributors disagree with each other on certain points, but more importantly because of the differences between their perspectives and those introduced in the Spring 2014 *Practices*. In it, Horowitz articulated a concern that has been the basis of numerous collegiate conversations between us, namely that the research-creation guidelines published by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) force artists to develop discourses alien to their practices. My response to this concern is twofold: regardless of discipline, any SSHRC applicant knows—or discovers—that the process involves "pretzelling" themselves for legibility outside their own field; furthermore, applicants looking to receive a "social sciences and humanities"

grant should engage with one or both of these literacies in their research. In other words, it is my contention that SSHRC research-creation grants should not be for *any and all* artists working in the university, but specifically for artists whose work reaches into the social sciences and humanities.²

Developing research-creation literacy means embracing an interdisciplinarity with regard to practice/theory lines, that is, working *practicetheoretically*.³ Indeed, research-creation not only hybridizes artistic and scholarly methodologies, it also legitimizes hybrid outputs. The earlier *Practices* brought to our attention a familiar binary—echoed by Glen Lowry below—according to which research-creation uses "art to create knowledge rather than...knowledge to create art."⁴ While this constitutes a common framing that is worth examining and debating, I feel that it misses the point of research-creation as I understand it.

To use "art to create knowledge" is not uncommon in, say, art history. But the product is generally a text recognizable as art historical research and best funded by a standard research grant. To use "knowledge to create art" is a longstanding studio (and post-studio) practice. If the final product takes artistic form alone, and is meant to circulate in galleries, museums, art journals, etc., it is "art" and best funded by the Canada Council for the Arts. This, at least, is my (potentially provocative) contention.

Debating methods and research is the practice that produces fields, disciplines, and departments, and I engage in this polemic to honour research-creation as a changing, hybrid set of practices. From my point of view, the risk in specifying research-creational approaches is not "entrenchment" (a commonly

debated fear that Horowitz highlights in her introduction) because the disciplining of disciplinary frames, methods, and questions is a process always in flux; always “undisciplining” at the same time as it disciplines. Rather than reaffirm the need for “artists to define our own terms of reference,”⁵ this *Polemics* focuses instead on a proliferation of artistic methodologies and outputs. Viewed through the lenses offered below, I would like to propose research-creation as an important contemporary queering of the academy: hearkening back to Judith Butler’s invocation of Michel Foucault in *Gender Trouble*,⁶ we might look to artistic “acts” rather than to artistic “identity.”

Together, the following contributions speak to current debates in research-creation methodology and assessment in the Canadian university. They are motivated by the belief that it is important to accommodate various kinds of research-creation. Indeed, to train in research-creation at Concordia University is a far cry from doing so at the University of Alberta. These are conversations that—as with the impact of feminist and critical race studies on the academy—can only happen once a certain degree of recognition has been established, recognition granted

by UAAC and *RACAR*, that I consider crucial at this key moment in the critical discourse of research-creation in Canada.

Notes

- ¹ Risa Horowitz, ed., “Practices / Pratiques,” *RACAR* 39.1 (Spring 2014): 25–39.
- ² I hasten to add that I do think that this is an important issue. My point is that limiting research-creation to the project of securing research funding for studio artists working in universities, while itself an important political and practical issue, limits the scope of what the critical discourse of research-creation can and should become. We need a “both/and” conversation here.
- ³ Natalie Loveless, “Practice in the Flesh of Theory,” *The Canadian Journal of Communication Studies* 37, 1 (2012): 93–108.
- ⁴ Risa Horowitz, “Introduction: As if from nowhere... artists’ thoughts about research-creation,” *RACAR* 39.1 (Spring 2014), 25.
- ⁵ Horowitz, “Introduction,” 25.
- ⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990).

Props to Bad Artists: On Research-Creation and a Cultural Politics of University-Based Art

GLEN LOWRY, EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN

Good Research? Bad Art?

This value-laden binary elicits groans. Yet it takes us to the heart of a trenchant critique of new forms of academic, research-based art and institutional culture change. The duality also highlights ethical questions about the efficacy of creative-practice research and the pitfalls of university-supported creative projects. SSHRC established its research-creation program to target creative practitioners, yet word on the street is that it is rigged against *real* artists who make *good* art. Among professionals, there is a sense that despite the generous budgets and timelines, academic support comes with strings attached. Or so I hear in the “art school,” the specialized art and design university.

Old enough to remember Michael Jackson’s re-appropriation of *bad*, his ability to popularize its idiomatic use to mean *good*, I am skeptical of judgments hidden beneath the guise of aesthetic discernment: *good* (work *we* appreciate because it affirms

ideals we are educated into) vs. *bad* (work that fails to respect established mores, particularly those underwritten by academic study). I am also old enough to have read the *sick* work of Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, bell hooks, among other feminist, queer, and racialized academics, and appreciate their interrogation of the Manichean values valorizing literature over potboilers, classical concertos over Hip Hop, and art over television. I offer this provocation as a spirited word-up to artists who trouble disciplinary differences to reach across a creative practice (art) and scholarly investigation (research) divide. I am inspired by colleagues at Emily Carr University and beyond who recognize the need to cross this divide, and I seek to reframe discussion of creative practice research in relation to ethical concerns about the function of contemporary culture: academic and creative practice.

Before discussing research-creation, I need to acknowledge the tenuous position of creative-practice research within Canadian universities. Not only are the specialized art and design