In the existing higher education environment, *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* is a timely book. For creative practitioners based in universities, the problem of defining knowledge and knowledge production has taken on urgent import because of governmental and institutional imperatives. Practice-led research and its many avatars are reshaping practitioners' understandings of both their fields of expertise and the significance of their practice. Further, the current Excellence in Research for Australia trial program (ERA) puts enormous pressure on arts practitioner-researchers to pinpoint what exactly about their work constitutes research and is an original contribution to knowledge. These timely questions are all addressed from different perspectives and with differing magnitude in this complex and erudite book.

*Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* will be of interest to arts practitioners working within the academy as well as other researchers who work across disciplines in the humanities, for it takes pains to elaborate methodologies, contexts and outcomes while emphasising the process of enquiry and its relationship to research itself. In addition, one would hope that *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* also comes across the desk of policy makers and administrators. Whether this was the editors' hope is not stated, for the book is clearly designed as a research initiating and training tool and is structured on what may be called 'work in progress' model. A comprehensive introduction lays out the book's framework and individual chapters by practitioners from different disciplines to
provide concrete examples of practice-led research and research-led practice in creative writing, music, film, dance, and the visual and media arts, each contextualised by a theoretical essay. The 'Appendix' reproduces the 'Questionnaire to Creative Arts Practitioners' devised by the editors for their survey of practitioner-researchers in higher education whose rationale, findings and significance are expounded in the introduction.

The aims of the book are, as stated in contributors' brief as well as in the introduction, 'to examine "the relationship between research and creative work not only in terms of practice-led research but also of research-led practice" and "to explore the multidimensional, reciprocal and iterative relationship between research and practice, including comparisons between research and practice in the creative arts and sciences"' (10), arguably a tall order given the breadth of the proposed interdisciplinary field of enquiry.

Among other exciting areas that cut across interdisciplinary concerns, this book probes into international scholarship regarding innovative developments within higher education, including the consolidation of the creative arts as acknowledged disciplines and the concomitant urge that creative practice be recognised as a valid field of research. Creative arts research indeed requires a certain degree of meta-discourse or explaining just how practice operates with regard to the production of knowledge. This demands showing how the dialogue between theory and practice emerges in the research project.

Conceptual and theoretical frameworks provide a means through which to discuss practice as research and of research as practice and to locate the enquiry within the context of historical, social, political and cultural frameworks of the research. Research here is treated 'not monolithically, but as an activity which can appear in a variety of guises across the spectrum of practice and research' (3). However, in many ways the book draws on a scientific model whereby research deals with a number of conventions that relate to materials and methods: assumptions, apparatus, instrumentation, procedures and processes, observations, methods of data collection and ethical considerations. Some of these conventions are in fact adapted and incorporated into more idiosyncratic methodologies as is the case, for instance, for the 'iterative cyclic web of practice-led research and research-led practice' (Fig 1.1: 20).

Upon closing Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts we are left wondering if the book asks more questions than it answers, and conclude that to generate debate may have been one of its aims. But in order for a debate to take place, there needs to be a conversation. And in order for there to be a conversation, one needs a common language. Like the phantom limb, this common language, although absent, is activated subliminally, but its action (or rather, by analogy, its articulation) is blocked. So, while the interdisciplinary approach of this collection may have been its strength, we feel that it is also its weakness. We also feel that in a way the book keeps the binary distinction between research and practice, or between theory (a word rarely used) and practice - do the research / read the theory, then produce the work; or produce the work, then explain it in theoretical terms. What is indeed the new knowledge produced in this
way? How might it be different from knowledge produced in artworks outside the university context?

In the utilisation of either practice-led research or research-led practice, the emphasis is on data creation rather than data collection, where research and practice are reciprocal. For Brad Haseman, for example, 'both the artwork itself and the surrounding practices are research' (6), which ties in with Chapter One, where the concept of 'emergence' is first introduced (28), only to recur throughout the book, but never to address the question of where exactly the research element lies. Nor is the question actually addressed of what is the original contribution to knowledge that an artwork makes. Simply because an artwork is new doesn't make it original or ground-breaking in terms of knowledge production.

There is little doubt that these elusive qualities are what make practice-led research and research-led practice so appealing as a field, due to their limitless possibilities. At their core, the common goal of both areas is to move knowledge 'from the unknown to the known' (6). Finding methods for artists to examine their own practice has the potential to open vast new avenues of knowledge and may, in fact, assist in redefining exactly what knowledge is. The description of practitioners' methods, engaging consistent methodologies in some form, and developing a common vocabulary appear to be and remain the sticking points though.

Throughout the book, the reader is introduced to a number of different artist-practitioners from fields such as creative writing, dance, new media and performing arts, to name but a few. These individuals then explain their methods and findings. This is a critical point. What seems to be lacking in this realm is a common language whereby cross-discipline practitioners can be read and interpreted in a linear or dialogical fashion. What is one writer's 'Practice-Led Research' (7) may be another's 'fossicking' (8), while another's 'ecosophical praxis' (187) is allegedly in line with someone else's 'creation of new knowledge' (260). It takes more than a bit of interpretation on the part of the reader to connect the dots and, troublingly, there is no clear way to clarify whether or not those dots are meant to be connected or if they are supposed to be connectable. Are the various authors in fact saying the same thing and simply using different definitions or descriptions?

Part of the origin of this confusion might lie with the editors' original project. Their data was gathered through the distribution of a questionnaire to a 'wide range' of 'artist/practitioners' in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The editors state that the questionnaire 'was intended to allow the respondents to approach the topic relatively freely' (15). The respondents did just that, as have the fourteen authors of the twelve chapters. This is part of an ongoing, larger, divergent problem between practitioners and the institution.

Between the covers of this book of course lies a wealth of knowledge put forth by some of the most notable names in the field. However, wading through and deciphering the domain-specific jargon and trying to piece the chapters together with cohesion is an undertaking requiring
diligence.

Nonetheless, as a collection of individual practitioners stating their individual cases and introducing some thought-provoking propositions as well as hard facts, the book is a resounding success. In Chapter Nine, for instance, Jane Goodall eloquently recounts how her career in the academy and, in particular, the humanities instilled in her certain quite fixed and rigid disciplines and perspectives regarding what research is and how it 'should' be conducted. She then goes on to describe how difficult it was to free herself of that yoke in order to write fiction successfully. As an academic, her research cast her in the role of investigator. But, she says:

the spooky art of fiction writing involves a commitment to improvisation and randomness, a submission to the erasure of authorial design, a readiness to be mesmerised by place and possessed by psychological energies from competing directions. (207)

There is no analysis of 'the muse' or any attempt to claim that she has figured out the answer to the seemingly unsolvable riddle of creativity. That is what makes her accounts of her personal journey so interesting. She has immense respect for the processes of creating, and at the same time gives permission for the work to become real, with a life of its own. And to backtrack only to show how this book can be read, in Chapter Four Shirley McKechnie and Catherine Stevens, writing about contemporary dance, offer hope and optimism in the form of pointing out technological advances that are changing the way abstract data can be accumulated and analysed.

But to focus on the findings of the individual offerings would be to miss the larger point of the collection. Looking at the book as a whole, one comes to understand the immensity of the issues regarding the longterm prospects of this form. Academia, in its convergent approach to problems grounded in the fields of 'hard' science, will inevitably insist on a unifying cross-discipline language to be established and agreed upon, so that cross-discipline collaboration can be undertaken. Such a starting point would no doubt facilitate the sharing of knowledge and practice, which would accelerate the growth of this seemingly bottomless well of knowledge. The question for the leaders in the field appears to be whether or not they are willing to relinquish their divergent approaches and reach a consensus, or at least a common language. The consequences are severe, no matter what the decision.

Thus we find ourselves in a conundrum. It would appear that in order for the institution to partake in and communicate about practice-led research and research-led practice in a way that is both comfortable and familiar, creative artists may find themselves needing to 'narrow down' their perspective, acting more like scientists than artists. A convergent solution would no doubt affect the way artists conduct their research and, in doing so, could limit the accumulation of this new knowledge.

On the one hand, Graeme Sullivan and then Simon Biggs ask in Chapter Two and Three if it is 'contradictory to employ artists within an institution that then requires them to submit their creative practice for assessment as research' (28). On the other hand, the editors argue that
'the consensual assessment technique, developed and applied by Amabile and colleagues … is essential' but with the caveat that:

peer assessment in the arts is something of a minefield because of the highly subjective element in judging artistic work and the tendency for ground-breaking work to be greeted with opprobrium rather than praise. (26)

So what are we to do?

Many of the contributors appear to be already engaged in a scuffle with the pedagogical institution of academia itself. As Baz Kershaw poignantly states in Chapter Five:

When the challenge of 'artistic research' meets established hierarchies of knowledge, the result might match that mythical moment in physics when an irresistible force meets an immovable object; an inconceivable disturbance. (106)

Clearly, there is a chasm that regrettably remains between the artist as practitioner and the institution. For practitioner-researchers, we would argue that until there is discussion and negotiation which results in the discovery of some form of common ground, that gap will remain - and could conceivably grow. The paradoxes (and no doubt, arguments) that result from any inquiry as to how this cross-disciplinary, multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary field of practice is integrated in an accessible and meaningful way into the academy are significant hurdles which must be overcome, and will remain large concerns for would-be practitioners until some form of agreement is reached.

Patience on the part of academia may be the best solution, as the editors themselves make an astute observation when they point out that time may be the most important factor in the growth of this field for:

On a pragmatic level, once attainment of a doctorate becomes a more common feature of the career of creative practitioners, it will also be one that they anticipate at the outset of their careers. (33)

What we might be able to look forward to is a large group of academics who will use methods which fall into 'practice-led research' and 'research-led practice' as a solitary methodology throughout their study, so that upon completion of a doctorate, there will be experts in the field who can provide an easily integrated approach, due to their own experience. If that becomes reality, then the future of the field is bright indeed. However, one has to wonder how long the guillotine of funding, resources and integration into the institution will wait.

It is clear from our review that we value and even admire the editors' work. We hope that we have succeeded both in conveying what they set out to do in a very rich book and also in drawing attention to the need for practitioner-researchers to find a common language that can only be beneficial to the creative arts, for as this book certainly makes clear, despite alternative modes of production, and concomitant
potential for methodological, procedural and even political change, the status of knowledge and knowledge production in the creative arts remains a vexed topic.

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