

## thinking though knowing through doing

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I approach the *doing together* event having tasked myself to produce a sonic essay that will function as a performance autoethnography of the event.

My disciplinary background in music and sound means it makes sense to me to approach the event from this perspective.

The question of *what to do* and *how to do it* remains open, however.

I am interested in interdisciplinary perspectives on practice research: there seems to me to be an imperative to learn from each other, and to be open to the pathways to knowledge that might come from stepping outside of the usual confines of one's discipline.

It seems self-evident that there will be some similarities and differences between music and art practices, and that my task is partly one of documenting the unknown.

I am looking for methods of participating, methods of listening, methods of recording, methods of *doing*.

June 2024.

The work of producing the sonic essay ***thinking though knowing through doing*** is also an extension of the ways that I have been working in my own practice. I have been working on a methodological critique project called 'The Practice of Practice Research', where I take a phenomenological approach to the experience of practice and research. This is the approach I have taken in the sonic essay. But throughout the *doing together* event I also observed a similar approach in the focus on doing, and articulating through doing, as a method of understanding methods. The approaches taken in the workshops invited me to think about ways for me to *do things together* with the other participants in order to explore what took place over the two days of the conference. For example, the *Inventory of Behaviours* (Kidd et al) looks at the peripheral behaviours of artists and invites participants to recreate them. But this work also invited me to establish a link with my own creative and research practice, and to ask, 'what are the peripheral sounds and behaviours of sound; and what are the limits and boundaries of performance and sound in this context, and in others?'

I have thought about what it means to have a musician's or a sonic perspective on an event such as *doing together*, or on any such sharing of experience, research and knowledge. To me, this is about how to reflect those experiences in sound as well as designing a method for doing so. It is about considering *sounding* as a form of *doing* rather than treating sound only as a trace of actions that have already happened. This involves seeking ways to reflect—and to engage others in those reflections—beyond the written word. This is an extension of the intention of *doing together* to undo the traditional conference format. By presenting unfolding reflections here in the format of a sonic essay, I re-enact the experiences in which these sounds were recorded, continually re-evaluate them, and I invite listeners to do the same. I invite listeners who weren't present when the sounds were made to take part in the *doing* of those sounds.

I'm using a set of methods drawn from field recording, performance lectures, performance (auto)ethnography, and my own creative practice. It is an opportunity to consider if notions and methods of making and doing are the same across different areas of creative practice research or if and how practice researchers can offer our differences to each other.

As someone who works predominantly in the area termed 'experimental music', I consider with the activity of listening as a productive, rather than simply reflective, method. In this area of practice and research, what it means to do this is described in these quotations from Salome Voegelin's book *Listening to Noise and Silence*:

Listening is a subjective task that demands an attending engagement with the work for the time it plays rather than for the time I am prepared to listen, and grasps my being to understand that of the work. I am producing the work in my temporal presence, and that might take a while. This while is lonely and there is no guarantee that any judgement formed will be lasting or communicable. (Voegelin, 2010, p27)

[T]he sonic meeting is agonistic rather than antagonistic: it generates the community, as contingency, in the playful chance of exchange. (Voegelin, 2010, p190)

I am offering this method as a way of *doing with* the *doing together* event.

This is also a form of performance (auto)ethnography. (Denzin, 2003) Denzin describes this by writing that 'a performative discourse simultaneously writes and criticises performances,' (2003, pxi) and that performance (auto)ethnography is a form of performative writing (informed by Peggy Phelan and Della Pollock):

that shows, rather than tells, [that] speaks performatively, enacting what it describes [is] evocative, reflexive, multivocal, citational, and always incomplete. (2003, 'The Move to Performance Ethnography', fn15)

While 'performance' might be a word that I am comfortable introducing from a music and sound context, everything that is *done together* can be considered somewhat performative even where it is removed from the context of the stage. This also links with the discipline of performative writing, which both understands writing as a practice and a way to investigate this practice in a material semiotic way. Della Pollock describes performative writing as one that 'recasts rhetoric as a constitutive aesthetic.' (2004, p95) She describes it as having six aspects: it is evocative, metonymic, subjective, nervous, citational, and consequential. (2004, pp80–95) All of these descriptors are relevant to the activities that were undertaken while we were *doing together*.

These contexts contribute to my understanding of the performance lecture as dual form that is both reflective and productive. This form provides the opportunity for the exploration and articulation of knowledge that has been created in practice research, but is also a further opportunity to experience and perform the materials of practice research practices, leading to further possibilities of knowledge creation. John Cage

describes similar possible aims of the performance lecture in his practice. About his performance lecture *what are we doing? where are we going?* he writes,

the grand thing about the human mind is that it can turn its own tables and see meaninglessness as ultimate meaning. [...] Let us say Yes to our presence together in Chaos. (1961, p195)

And in his essay on Robert Rauschenberg, Cage states:

I am trying to check my habits of seeing, to counter them for the sake of greater freshness. I am trying to be unfamiliar with what I am doing. (1961, p106)

I also link these ideas with Conor Wilson's description in the introduction to *doing together* of the workshop as a kinaesthetic method, a testing site or research method, and an output of form of documentation in itself; reflecting the same plurivocality as the performance lecture.

This is my method of interacting with your methods.

The specific practices of this method have been to create micro-recordings and snapshot sonic observations throughout the two days of *doing together* 2024. The recordings are mostly ambient. This is a method that draws on aleatory materialism, expanded by Althusser as 'the materialism of the encounter' in the essay *The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter* (2006: 162-203; 167-8). My aim was not to document the events but to intervene in them; to highlight—as was also mentioned by Andrew Southall during the event— 'ways that we both do and don't do'.

In relation to the ethnographic side of performance autoethnography, I have also produced a framework through which to view and organise these experiences. I split this into three categories, which interest me but which I also saw reflected in the titles and descriptions of the *doing together* sessions:

### **process – method – ethics**

Above, I have already described some processes and methods that took place during the event and in the creation of the sonic essay. In relation to ethics, the aesthetics and ethics of care were particularly reflected in the titles of many of the sessions at the event, in particular drawing on caring for objects, caring for the environment, and creation as an act of care and a method of articulating narratives of caring. The posthuman, also, was addressed in terms of AI, decentred anthropomorphic perspectives and speculative realism. The curator and art theorist Nicolas Bourriaud considers the material nature of artworks in these spheres as urgent, when describing the concurrence of the climate crisis with a global cultural crisis in the book *Inclusions: Aesthetics of the Capitalocene* (2021). He argues for,

an inclusive aesthetics that calls for a training of the gaze, decentred – at last, relocated within a plurivocal universe that includes non humans. (2021, p11)

Perhaps the training of the 'listening gaze' could also be scrutinised: how, and to what, do we listen, and what does it mean to attend to sound in this context? Bourriaud states that,

this aesthetics could validate the end of the dyads that structure predatory western thought and aim to completely dissolve them. (2021, p12)

*Proposition.*

My solution to all of these threads is a proposition. I don't want to explain, justify, or theorise what took place during *doing together*, or my role in those events, but rather to think about how practice as a method was evidenced through this *doing*, to reflect this back to the *doers*, and to engage others in listening as a form of *doing*. As I seek to do this, I notice that this is fragile and precarious. Fragility and precarity could also be considered with respect to knowledge in the workshop format, just as they were by those participants who created a greenhouse with Claire Loder and John Taylor. Such fragility and precarity is something that is often experienced, enjoyed, and celebrated in these moments of doing, but not always sustained beyond them. Practice researchers could consider what Sara Ahmed has termed, 'a political economy, or an uneven distribution of attention.' (Ahmed, 2006, p32) This would invite us to question how the manners in which we engage in the workshop can become productive as well as receptive, which means acknowledging, articulating, and sustaining what has happened. This means asking how our practice research experiences become 'effectively shared'?

For me, one way forward is to acknowledge all practices as embodied practices. This challenges the narrative of thinking and doing: are these really different or separate activities? And if so, could their differences be evidenced? Or, rather, can they evidence each other? There is, further, a question of vernacular aesthetics, and whether the workshop is perhaps a place where these are created? These are questions rather than statements, but starting to answer them recognises that what is proposed becomes a method of creating a material with its own properties. By 'effective sharing' I do not necessarily refer to disseminating the specific information or ideas explored in individual workshop events, but rather to the ways that new meanings and relationships are uncovered through, during and beyond the workshop might be shared and sustained.

Recognising that material semiotic processes lead to embodied knowledge production in our own critical-creative experiences might equally create new material-semiotic processes: so this is a process of unlimited semiosis in which artist-researchers can participate but not necessarily begin or bring to a close: creative practice research is therefore a practice of heterogeneity. Further, it is possible to recognise artistic practice as a method of philosophical enquiry, and philosophy as an embodied practice. Or, to recognise *doing* as a form of thinking (and thinking through embodied, tacit and non-propositional knowledge). The following two statements also link the *doing* of creative practice with philosophical thought:

Gilles Deleuze: '[p]hilosophical theory is itself a practice, just as much as its object. It is not more abstract than its object. It is a practice of concepts, and it must be judged in the light of the other practices with which it interferes.' (2005, p268)

David Kornhaber: one can 'say that the work of performance is fundamentally philosophical,' (2105, p25) [...] 'I know the converse to be true (that the work of philosophy is fundamentally performative).'

 (2015, p32)

In an event such as *doing together*, there are multiple moments of knowledge that each individual participant may have experienced. It seems impossible to acknowledge and sustain them all, or perhaps only to carry them forward in a hybrid form. To understand this, one might take Annemarie Mol's conception (from healthcare) of the 'body multiple'. She writes that,

Ontology is not given in the order of things, but that, instead ontologies are brought into being sustained, or allowed to wither away in common day socio-material practices. (Mol, 2002, p6).

Similarly, for those of us who took part in *doing together*, ideas may have come into being and then died away; this is something which can be allowed to happen during this type of event. But it still makes sense to ask how does this process continue beyond and exceed the event? There is also an ethics of doing so: of sharing and creating an ecosystem of access to knowledge, and of extending the potential for further phenomenological experiences while trusting in our own experiences and the validity of those of others.

These reflections have also translated into the sonic essay ***thinking though knowing through doing***. I have combined the recordings that I have made with a text that filters and reflects moments from *doing together*, sometimes taking these as propositions for thought, presented as the possibility for future meaning-making than a single interpretation. The sonic essay does not represent linear time but the filtering of these words and sounds through the ethnographic framework that I brought to them. My editing interventions have been minimal, in order to present a sonic picture of the event that has elements of the documentary, the serendipitous, the organic.

Let us say Yes to our presence together in Chaos.

Text for the Sonic Essay *thinking though knowing through doing*

**process**

pauses

recording

pauses – intervals

how long should I speak for?

should there be slides?

pauses – intervals – rest

stoneware – earthenware – raku – slip

colossal stingray

intervals – pauses

things which happen by accident

rest – pauses

worn characteristics

soft with hard bits

stoneware – earthenware – pauses – intervals

recording – slides

pauses – intervals – rest

scores for turntable orchestra

ways to interact and see what happens

stoneware – raku – slip – earthenware

stoneware – slip – earthenware – raku

raku – slip - stoneware – earthenware

stoneware – earthenware – raku – slip

raku – slip – earthenware – stoneware

slip – stoneware – earthenware – raku

slip – earthenware – raku – stoneware

what comes next?

intervals

rest

**methods**

recording

a self-destructing mechanism that performed for twenty-seven minutes

more certain of its method

writing for the perspective of your own body

writing that measures, explores and defines spaces

a history of record players, most of which have been thrown away

an exhibition constructed in a hole

methods of personification

a mechanism of history, most of which has been thrown away

objects that all do the same thing, but there are so many different variations

using bodies to measure, explore and define spaces

objects that all do the same thing for twenty-seven minutes

more certain of its mechanism

more certain of its history

more certain of its record players, most of which have been thrown away  
more certain of its methods of personification  
more certain of its history of record players  
there are so many different variations  
constructed in a hole  
objects that all do the same thing, most of which have been thrown away  
a mechanism of history, but there are so many different variations  
using bodies to measure recording  
a history of record players, but there are so many different variations  
using bodies to measure a self-destroying mechanism  
using bodies to measure for twenty-seven minutes  
using bodies to measure methods of personification

### **ethics**

recording  
personal – general  
a culturally significant form of work  
maintenance art  
interviews will be typed and exhibited  
can you account for all objects left in your care?  
can you record why objects have been left with you?  
can you schedule the default return of objects to the owner?  
can you assess and mitigate any potential risks to people or other objects from incoming objects?  
general  
how do you feel about spending whatever parts of your life you spend?  
how do you feel about spending whatever parts of your life you spend not as a banal necessity?  
can you uniquely identify newly-arrived objects?  
can you account for all objects that have left?  
can all objects leave?  
interviews are taped and replayed throughout the exhibition area  
personal  
what is not tolerated?  
what will you be held to account for?  
who will be silent?  
creating a richly individuated common language not as a banal necessity  
what might the future hold?  
working will be the work

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