



Locatedness and the objectivity of
interpretation in practice-based
research
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As the conference 'call for papers' indicates, there is a contrast between the unambiguous language in which scientific research is set, and the language of the arts where (to quote the 'call for papers') there is 'a more pluralistic approach to interpretation which values the fact that different generations and different cultures find their own value in the artefact'. The contrast can be made even stronger by highlighting the point that art and design operate at the levels of affect and association, addressing the senses and the emotions, and playing with meaning, with the consequence that even people within the same generation and culture may find ambiguity in the work. How are subjectivity and ambiguity to be accommodated in a research culture, when that culture requires art and design to be forms of knowledge, to be forms which (to return to the conference paragraph) allow the construction of 'the grounds and argument from which the conclusions derive' and which satisfy the requirement of being 'quite clear and explicit about what is being claimed as original'? Surely the potential for difference and uncertainty within the judgments we make about art and design is wholly at odds with the uniformity and certainty which typify conventional knowledge claims?

I think two concepts are doing the greater part of the work in this question: subjectivity and knowledge. The problem for practice-based research is that the alleged subjectivity of art undermines the claim that art might contribute to knowledge. With this arrangement, subjectivity is opposed to knowledge, or opposed to the objectivity which knowledge is supposed to have. However, this opposition only stands because the terms have been too starkly drawn. I want to explore the space in between the alleged polar opposites of subjectivity and objectivity. The context for my study is the series of recent debates which challenges the tradition of subject-object philosophy. Many, if not all, of the debates have arisen in recognition of the inadequacy of the subject-object distinction as a foundation for theories of knowledge, morality, art and experience in general.¹ One recent episode in the series is the concept of immanence developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, although the concept has its roots in the work of Bergson and, I would argue, Kant (Deleuze and Guattari 1994). What this philosophy makes possible, I argue, is a way of thinking which asserts that interpretation runs *all the way down*, so to speak, in the making and viewing of works of art. Because interpretation runs 'all the way down', it needs to be 'located', and it is the 'locatedness' of interpretation which provides the condition for its objectivity. I set out this theory of objective interpretation and explain the concept of 'locatedness' with reference to Kant and Deleuze. In addition, I demonstrate how this approach leads to the generation of 'located' objective research outcomes, and demonstrate the kind of language in which such outcomes are described with reference to an example of current practice-based doctoral research at Cardiff School of Art and Design, Wales, UK.

The idea that research needs to be located is not new. Research is located in the sense that the researcher conducts a literature or contextual review in order to identify: (1) the traditions and texts which define the history of the subject; (2) recent relevant theory and practice within the subject; and (3) the particular aspect or question which she wants to pursue. As a result of these three features, it becomes apparent: (1) which concepts and debates create the backdrop for the research; (2) which authors, texts and artefacts will be the principal points of reference (initially, at least); and (3) which question or questions the researcher should be addressing as they proceed. Two recent studies of practice-based research draw attention to this process: Gray and Malins (2004), and Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén (2005). On the one hand, Gray and Malins describe the importance of arriving at a particular 'place' with a sense of direction which takes the form of a specific research question (2004: 67), while, on the other, Hannula et al. maintain that the significance of research derives from its being set within and available to a wider subject community (2005: 109-16).

While I endorse the aspects of direction and availability which Gray and Malins, and Hannula et al., respectively emphasize, I want to assign 'locatedness' a much more fundamental role, and to argue that attending to the implications of 'locatedness' for practice-based research can also help to provide a model of objectivity for the research. This greater, 'more fundamental' status comes from the role that 'locatedness' has to play once one adopts a theory of knowledge which steps away from the binary subjective-objective opposition, and which has interpretation run 'all the way down' in all areas of experience, including artistic experience. The two ideas are linked, as I shall explain.

To say that an artwork always occurs under interpretation means that it always occurs in relation to certain concepts and themes in the history and theory of art and aesthetics. Even the meanings, associations, and emotions which are stimulated within me while standing in front of a work will be conceptual in as much as they are particular or determinate events in my experience. This is on the understanding of concepts we get from Kant. On his understanding, concepts are not terms which stand in opposition to experience or which try to reduce the particularity of experience to generalities. Instead, they are the constituents of experience which give it shape and intelligibility. For example, I am able to perceive a mug against the background of a table because the concepts 'mug' and 'table' are active within my experience.² On this basis, interpretation runs 'all the way down' in the sense that there can never be a moment of experience which is does not have some quality or other, where this quality is shaped by a concept. This is a counter-intuitive way of describing experience, one which runs against the theory of experience that, I venture, informs 'common sense' understanding. This view, I suggest, is a form of empiricism which has it that it is the world that gives shape to human experience: we receive the world through sensory impressions and, over time, we learn to build up concepts and words for these impressions and to recognize them as objects. Kant too acknowledges that we can build up and acquire concepts from experience. The main difference between his thought and empiricism (his philosophy was a reaction against the shortcomings of empiricism, after all) is that *it is concepts*, and not objects in the world, *which structure experience*. To look at the white on the wall opposite me. An empiricist would maintain that I am receiving impressions of whiteness and plaster, and it is

the determination or information contained within these impressions that gives me the experience of looking at the wall. In contrast, while Kant acknowledges that we receive the world through the senses, he argues that the senses on their own are mute, and that the intelligibility or determinateness of the experience comes from the concepts of 'white', 'wall', and 'plaster' which are active in our experience.

Let us look at an artwork produced as part of a practice-based doctoral research programme to illustrate my claim: *Head Projection 5* by Jan Bennett, a research student at Cardiff School of Art and Design (figs. 1 and 2).³ What concepts are at play here? Answer: all the words which describe the physical make-up of the work, and which describe our responses to them. I shall italicize the first instance of each concept in what follows. The work is a *video projection* onto a *cast polyurethane foam and wax head*, with *glass eyes*. The video is made up of a series of *film clips* of *people blinking* and *speaking*, together with images that evoke *schematics*, *measurement*, and *incision*, such as *lines* and *graphs* (fig. 1). A range of affects and associations is generated by watching the projection. At times, one is *uncertain perceptually* whether the head is *living or not*. A sense of *unease* and *disquiet* is created by the *disjunction* between the *inanimate head* and the projected images of people's faces blinking and speaking. The *absence of sound* turns the unease into a feeling of *alienation*, making the head seem *remote* or *cut off from us*. Figure 2 is a photographic work, created as an initial study of the effect of *schematic lines* on the *human face*, where the face selected is one that suggests - and here I invite readers and viewers to be as poetic and associative as possible - *surgery*, *difference*, *otherness*, and (how should I describe the emotion in the woman's face?) *placidity* or *submissiveness* or *indifference*. The photograph was later used as a still in the projection.

As concepts, the words which I have italicized are not that unusual or surprising. They could be some of the words that are exchanged in any discussion of the practicalities of making the work or in personal or aesthetic responses to the work. But, of course, this is not just practice, but practice-based research, practice made in response to a research question. So more concepts await introduction, via the question which is guiding Bennett's research: 'How does my practice *participate* in the *progress-transgression opposition* manifest in *artistic* and *scientific representations* of *biotechnology*?'. The interests which led Bennett to want to conduct practice-based research were the variety of imagery used in scientific discourse surrounding biotechnology, and *artistic responses* to or *appropriations* of biotechnology. Her initial literature and contextual reviews indicated that discussion across both scientific and artistic accounts of biotechnology was *polarized* in terms of progression (the claim that biotechnology makes '*advances*' possible in *human being*) and transgression (the claim that biotechnology creates beings which *exceed* human being). How might her practice, which largely takes the form of *portraiture*, participate in these exchanges between art and science, and between progression and transgression?

So far, it might appear that my emphasis on concepts amounts to highlighting key words: *portraiture*, *progression*, *transgression*, *biotechnology*, *artistic response*, etc. (From this point onwards, I shall stop using italics to indicate concepts within Bennett's research.) I agree, it does, until one asks Bennett's research question. To

reiterate: 'How does my practice participate in the progress-transgression opposition manifest in artistic and scientific representations of biotechnology?'. In asking this question, aren't we also asking on behalf of all art-practice-based research the questions: 'How does practice contribute to wider debate?'; 'How does practice contribute to knowledge?'. What my approach in terms of interpretation 'all the way down' achieves is the recognition that all practice can be described in terms of concepts. Two related consequences follow from this: (1) the personal or aesthetic judgments we make about practice are *depersonalized* (this, I admit, might sound alarming, and I shall return to the point at the end of the paper), and (2) practice and the associations or contexts which surround it are presented as a field of concepts. As a result, objectivity can be achieved: (1) on account of the acknowledgment that personal or aesthetic judgments are not wholly subjective, and (2) on account of the obligation which, in this case, Bennett has to assess the relations between concepts that have been created through her practice and through the responses it has elicited. For it is in terms of the relations between concepts that novelty will arise. The two consequences - depersonalization and the field of concepts - are linked in as much as the affects or associations which are customarily dismissed as subjective can now sit alongside all the concepts which are active in shaping the research programme, to be considered for how they (the practice concepts) impact upon the other (research programme) concepts. On the Kantian model presented here, the concepts used in a personal or aesthetic judgment, instead of being the mere point of view of an individual, are in fact terms which shape an experience.⁴ Their objectivity or research significance, however, comes not from the fact that they have been applied - this would be tantamount to simply pointing things out: that's a head, that's unsettling, that's a form of alienation - but from identifying and assessing how one concept is located in terms of another.

Let us return to Bennett's work to see this location process in action. How might it participate in the *progress-transgression opposition* manifest in *artistic and scientific representations of biotechnology*? Firstly, the research question provides us with concepts we can put to the work. How does *Head Projection 5* participate in the *progress-transgression opposition* (fig. 1)? As I suggest above, a range of affects and associations is generated by watching the projection: perceptual uncertainty about whether the head is living or not; unease and disquiet from the mismatch between the inanimate head and the images of blinking and speaking; and a feeling of alienation. There is also a reassuring calmness from the projected images: the projected eye and lip movements are not rapid but measured. Straight away, these observations provide an indication as to how the work participates within Bennett's research context. Clustering the observations together leads to an artwork which *unnerves* and which creates *ambiguity*: a head that is animate yet inanimate, alien and remote, yet also reassuring. The significance of the concepts 'unnerving' and 'ambiguity' lies to some degree in the fact that they have arisen in response to the work, but lies to a greater degree in how they might be located within discourse on art's position in relation to scientific imagery and the political and ethical values attached to biotechnology.

For 'participate' is arguably one of the most important concepts (if not *the* most important concept) in Bennett's research question. To gain a sense of how art might participate in relation to science, technology and the human, one must turn

to art history and philosophical aesthetics. The range of stances which art might adopt is considerable (once again, I shall italicize concepts): art as *the progression towards a spiritual absolute* (from Hegel), as *the promotion of transformation* (from Nietzsche), as *the display of constructed experience or a constructed world* (from phenomenology), as *revelling in modernist uncertainty* (from Blanchot), as *the pursuit of excess* (from Bataille), as *a challenge to orthodox form and a display of alternative possibilities* (from critical theory), as *the manifestation of the abject* (from Kristeva) or as *a transition from subjectivity to immanence* (with Deleuze and Guattari).⁵ As soon as one becomes aware of the range of concepts that are historically and philosophically available to the artist, the concepts identified by Bennett through her *Head Projection 5* assume additional significance, for now they have to be located within the network of possibilities offered by history and philosophy. I am not suggesting that Bennett has to subordinate her concepts to those already available within history and philosophy. Neither am I suggesting that all she has to do is add her practice concepts to the field. It is the relation between concepts which is vital, for it is through identifying and assessing how one concept stands in relation to another that judgments about practice can be located. Thus, Bennett should look to see who her historical or philosophical conversation partners might be, since it is through these texts that the implications of 'unnerving' and 'ambiguity' can be worked out. What does the 'unnerving' artwork do? Consider Freud's essay and secondary literature on the uncanny. What is happening when we are 'unnerved'? Consult theories of art and knowledge which address those moments when we lose perceptual certainty. What is the aesthetic and political force of ambiguity? Nietzsche may be relevant here, on account of his aesthetic ontology which has the world perpetually moving from one state to another, or Blanchot, due to his insistence that all questions must remain open.

This exercise, of locating key concepts in relation to wider debates, shows how Bennett's practice participates in her research question. To have identified concepts for the possible modes in which her practice operates means she is in the position of being able to claim that her practice participates in the progression-transgression opposition in relation to biotechnology through its promotion of (let's say) ambiguity and the uncanny. Of course, much more work remains to be done. But my main point is that the production of concepts which apply directly to her practice has enabled her to identify one respect in which her practice contributes to a research territory.

This approach has the potential to generate a large number of conceptual routes and cross-referrals for exploration. It could be said to generate too many. The 'unnerving' and 'ambiguity' concepts are reached through the study of just one artwork. It is possible that another of Bennett's works could prompt a different series of conceptual responses. As we have seen, the second work I introduced from Bennett, a photographic study used as a still in *Head Projection 5* (fig. 2), takes us in a different direction, with concepts of *schematic lines*, *surgery*, *difference*, *otherness*, and *placidity*. In addition, there is the daunting list of aesthetic theories - from Hegel to Deleuze and Guattari - of how art affects human being. Not all the avenues can be explored, or should be explored. Part of the value of the conceptual location process is that conceptual relations, for example, between concepts drawn from practice, from theory, and from other practitioners'

work, will knit together, creating one or more thematic clusters. Of these, perhaps one or two will be developed, with a new body of practice being made in response to the selected theme(s). The selection will be determined by whichever set of concepts is deemed to be the most novel or to have the most impact in relation to the research question, where both novelty and impact can be articulated in terms of the relations that can be built between concepts drawn from the practice and from other aspects of the research, such as the theoretical study or case studies of other practitioners.

Both the installation *Head Projection 5* (fig. 1) and the photographic still from the installation (fig. 2) were made during the first half of Bennett's research programme, and so emerged at a time when other elements of the research, such as the theoretical reading and questionnaire design, were still underway. In other words, she was still in the process of identifying sources which might contribute relevant perspectives on how art practice in general can participate in the progress-transgression opposition manifest in artistic and scientific representations of biotechnology. It was also not entirely clear how her own practice was situated in relation to the question. Neither of these circumstances are problems. In fact they are virtues, since they allow the concepts at work in her practice at the early stages of the research to be considered alongside those from her visual review, theory and questionnaire in focusing the research at its later stages. One of the concerns I often hear anecdotally from practice-based research students is that their artwork stops in the first half of the programme because they are too busy becoming familiar with research methods or conducting their literature reviews. On the concepts 'all the way down' model presented here, the artist-researcher can remain practising from the very outset of their research programme, on the understanding that the concepts which are at work in their practice will stand alongside concepts from other sources in shaping the specific area that they will go on to explore as their research progresses.

When written-up as part of the documentation of the work, the aesthetic evaluation (since it is based on concepts drawn from personal, aesthetic judgment) might run as follows. At the time of writing, Bennett is in the process of documenting the piece, and so the description below is my attempt at an aesthetic evaluation (I repeat some of my remarks from my argument above):

A range of affects and associations is generated by *Head Projection 5* (fig. 1). They cluster together to result in a work that is unnerving and ambiguous. The projected blinking eyes and speaking lips make one uncertain as to whether the head is living or not. The projected eye and lip movements are not rapid but measured, giving the impression that the creature (if it can be called that) is calm or wants to reassure us. But any sense of calm or reassurance is countermanded by other aspects of the work. Focusing on the eyes and lips, one can see a disjunction between the inanimate head and the projected images of people's faces blinking and speaking. To see two images in one space - the glass eye and a projected blink - is unsettling; it is as if two beings are fighting for control. The sinister quality is heightened by the absence of sound. We watch the lips move but no words come out, making the creature seem remote or cut off from us.

Isn't the above commentary highly subjective though? These may be my

responses, but I cannot guarantee that others will respond in the same way. How can I present this as an example of objective, aesthetic evaluation? My response to this question will also be my expanded explanation of the act of depersonalization, referred to above as part of the process of removing subjectivity from aesthetic judgment. The observations appear subjective because the common sense view of experience tells us that 'subjectivity' is the name we give to those judgments which are not verifiable on the basis of objects, laws or repeatable patterns in the world. But why should we let the common sense view of experience pass unchallenged, and why should we let it uncritically distinguish subjectivity from objectivity? Thanks largely, I suggest, to a combination of empiricism and capitalism, we have come to view experience as something which we *receive from the outside* and as something which we *have on the inside*, our inside. This is empiricist in the sense that it relies on the image of experience as the receipt of external sensory impressions, and capitalist in that we think of experience in the form of items that are had and, therefore, broken off from an otherwise continuous relation with the world (Marx's point from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*; 2000: 214).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail the shortcomings of empiricism, and Kant's response to them (via his reply to Hume). What I can do, however, is spell out how, from a Kantian perspective, the above aesthetic judgments are not subjective. This is on two related accounts (already introduced above): depersonalization, and the field of concepts. Firstly, by Kant's lights, the judgments are 'depersonalized' in the sense that their content or determinateness is removed from the 'inner space' in terms of which empiricism configures the self, and situated instead within the concepts that organize experience. These are not concepts which belong to any one individual subject; it is not the case that the mind holds or possesses the concepts and chooses which concepts to apply to experience. This would be an overly idealistic thesis, in the sense that it would mean that the human subject can direct the course and content of their experience through deciding which concepts to apply, much like pressing stencils into dough. Rather, the concepts are always already active in shaping experience, in shaping the continuous flow of meaningful events in which subjectivity takes place. I worded my 'mug on the table' example carefully. I perceive the mug on the table not because *I impose the concepts 'mug' and 'table'* but because they are *already active in shaping my experience*; they are being applied 'before and behind me', so to speak.

Secondly, having been depersonalized, the concepts have to be located. Rather than being left to float 'before and behind' the human subject, they are made to cohere with concepts from other research sources, such as art history and theory, work by other artists, and audience questionnaires. All of the aesthetic judgments made regarding Bennett's *Head Projection 5* can be examined in relation to theses on the cognitive, critical and ethical dimensions of art from art history and philosophical aesthetics. As I have demonstrated, two lines of investigation which Bennett could pursue are the themes of ambiguity and the uncanny. Establishing how these concepts cohere with other sources will be a matter of identifying and reflecting upon those sources that correspond with or 'speak to' the ambiguity and the uncanny in her practice.

'Correspondence' is meant here not in the sense of a one-to-one match but in the sense of a conversation. Let us focus on ambiguity as an example. As noted above, Nietzsche may be relevant on the grounds that his aesthetic ontology has human being and the world perpetually moving from one state to another. In fact, Nietzsche is potentially a very important correspondent in that aesthetic ambiguity, the state of being uncertain as to whether one thing or another is signified, is made integral to an ontology in which human form and identity is always undergoing transformation. 'A painter', he writes, 'without hands who wished to express in song the picture before their mind would, by means of this substitution of spheres, still reveal more about the essence of things than does the empirical world' (Nietzsche 2000: 58). Perhaps the most important conversation to have with Nietzsche, as far as Bennett is concerned, would be one on how ambiguity in art impacts upon human transformation. True, this could be a Philosophy PhD in itself, but Bennett is not obliged to become a Nietzsche scholar. Rather, this part of the research would involve carefully selected reading of secondary texts on Nietzsche's aesthetics and ontology which, in turn, would identify specific primary texts from Nietzsche to consider. The implications which arose *for* Nietzsche's philosophy would not have to be pursued. Instead, Bennett would concentrate solely on how Nietzsche and Nietzschean interpretation *has implications for ambiguity and human transformation in art* and, more particularly, how these implications might affect her practice and the concepts which apply to it. The correspondence might take the form of responses to questions such as: What does a work of art that exemplifies transformation (a key concept in Nietzsche's aesthetics) look like? What form or property should Bennett start with in her next artwork if the idea of a set of properties 'belonging' to human being is challenged by Nietzsche?

Works by other artists addressing biotechnology, such as Patricia Piccinini and, in particular, her piece *The Young Family* (fig. 3), are a second source of correspondents on ambiguity. Assessing how ambiguity operates in Piccinini's practice will help to locate it in Bennett's practice in as much as it will be shown to be a property which applies not just to Bennett but to a wider body of art, and which admits a range of possibilities other than those at work in Bennett. As we have seen in Bennett's *Head Projection 5* and (briefly) in Nietzsche's aesthetics, questions of biotechnology and human transformation create ambiguity in as much as we are left in a state of not knowing whether one thing or another is signified. In Piccinini's *The Young Family* (fig. 3), a number of transpositions or 'transplants' have been made: the creatures have human limbs, although their feet resemble hands, and their faces have human features. The realism in the piece is crucial too: the attention to detail works against the notion that an artwork is in view in order to promote a sense of uncertainty over what is perceived. If the work were overtly a representation, a form which defamiliarized its object through abstraction or expression, then our feeling of uncertainty would possibly be less, since our state of not knowing could be accounted for in terms of abstraction or expression. Furthermore, there is the contradiction that such 'life-like' detail is not animate but instead a motionless sculpture. Thus, in Piccinini's *Young Family*, ambiguity can be seen to function in specific ways: the transplant, the uncertainty that comes with realism, and the life-like creature which is nevertheless motionless. These are distinct from Bennett's ambiguities: the head which may be alive or dead, the disjunction between the inanimate head and the

images of people blinking and speaking, and a face which speaks but which emits no sound. Quite how Bennett orients herself in relation to Piccinini will be part of the process through which Bennett locates her practice conceptually. The orientation will involve Bennett reflecting upon how the concepts which are active in her practice are also present in other artistic and theoretical contexts, and upon the conversations which might take place between them. This makes the research sound highly textual, yet, on the model I am presenting here, practice can be where this orientation takes place on account of the fact that it will be practice informed by the concepts as they are revised, added to or discarded in the conversation process. What direction should ambiguity be taken in, given the different possibilities displayed by Bennett and Piccinini? Is one area of ambiguity - the transplant, the uncertainty that comes with realism, the head which may be alive or dead - more potent than others in addressing human progression or transgression through biotechnology?

The fact that the concepts we summon and utter in aesthetic judgment can be located in terms of wider artistic and theoretical debate demonstrates how art practice can contribute to knowledge, with the contribution to knowledge more likely than not taking the form of artworks whose concepts make novel claims possible within the relevant debate. This is not the imposition of theory onto practice, but an approach to both which has them interact through the common currency of concepts. The significance of the 'location' metaphor in all of this should not be overlooked. The context for my study is the series of recent debates which challenges the tradition of subject-object philosophy. The subject-object distinction, it is argued, is not a cogent foundation for theories of knowledge, morality, art and experience. Without the tidy and convenient (but ultimately unworkable) distinction between subject and object to delineate human being in the world, another form of orientation must be found. The emphasis placed on 'location' here is part of a recent line of thought which argues that it is the coordination between other factors (concepts in my case) that represents a more coherent metaphysics.

As I announced at the start, one of the more recent episodes in this line of thought is the concept of immanence developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, although I would argue it has its roots in Kant. Immanence in Deleuze, according to Mullarkey, is not about 'the experiences of a pre-constituted subject (myself or an Other), but [about] those experiences that fissure my subjectivity' (Mullarkey 2006: 14). Mullarkey refers to subjectivity, one half of the opposition under scrutiny here, so we cannot take its meaning and scope for granted. What do he and Deleuze take it to mean? Experience, Mullarkey adds, is 'immanent to itself and not to an individualised subject' and so, as a consequence, with Deleuze, 'one does not ask how the subject gains its experience but how experience gives us a subject' (2006: 14). I think Mullarkey's earlier statement can be modified to drive the point home: immanence in Deleuze is not about 'the experiences of a pre-constituted subject (myself or an Other)', but about those events that fissure experience in a way that my subjectivity becomes possible.

Deleuze and Guattari refer to their position as 'radical empiricism' on the basis that it shares empiricism's notion of sensory experience as the basis for human being and knowledge.⁶ Their version is radical in the sense that it pushes further

the doubt in Hume's empiricism regarding the source of the self. Hume observes:

when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. When my perceptions are remov'd for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may be truly said not to exist. (Hume 1978: 252)

Without any sensory foundation for the concept of self, Hume attributes the identity we (supposedly) have as a self, the continuity between one sensation and the next, to nothing more than custom, to the '*customary* association of ideas,... the smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought [of transition] along a train of connected ideas' (Hume 1978: 260). The force of empiricism, Deleuze and Guattari write, 'begins from the moment it defines the subject: a *habitus*, a habit, nothing but a habit in a field of immanence, the habit of saying I' (1994: 48).

How is this line of thinking relevant to the objectivity of interpretation in practice-based research? One direct response: it insists that the 'I' is suspended; it tells you to let go of the notion that the sensations you have, the experiences you enjoy, and the concepts you apply are yours. These phenomena still occur; experience is not being denied. It is just that I am asking you to entertain that they do not belong to you; rather, to adopt Mullarkey's 'turnaround' phrasing from above, you occur within them. Admittedly, this is not an easy thing to do. If I take a sip of orange juice, the taste which it has for me is mine. If I am in an art gallery and I enjoy the dance-like quality of a line in a painting, the sight of the line, including its dance-like quality, is mine. These 'inner experiences' - often referred to as 'qualia' - are generally held to be ineffable, private, immediately apprehensible in consciousness, and intrinsic to experience. But, recalling Deleuze and Guattari's response to Hume, this sense of 'myself' is not intrinsic to the experience. It is something that is applied to it, just as, with Hume, the sense of continuous identity is applied by custom to a series of sensory impressions.

The approach I have adopted here owes more to Kant than to Deleuze. As such, it might appear that I am being eclectic, darting from Kant to Deleuze via Hume. But they are tied together by a vital thread: both Kant and Deleuze respond to Hume's appeal to custom by introducing a framework of concepts (and percepts and affects too for Deleuze) which shape and organize experience. The two key points to draw from my application of Kant are: depersonalization (or the suspension of 'myself'), and the recognition that experience does not come to us in ready-made, identifiable chunks but, rather, is always shaped and determined by concepts, is always interpreted 'under a description'. This framework, I suggest, places art practice research in a very interesting position as regards the construction of knowledge. Standing before a work of art, pouring or mulling over its qualities and effects, is no longer an entirely personal affair. Furthermore, the perceptions, associations, and effects that are experienced are not just events that we receive or that happen to us. Instead, by virtue of the fact that they are meaningful events in the course of experience, they will have been shaped by concepts. Without the traditional subjective-objective distinction to draw upon as a way of locating these experiences, for example, describing one's reaction to an

artwork as a subjective judgment (with all the problems that entails), another means of location has to be sought. The means suggested here has the artist-researcher find relations between the concepts they use in their aesthetic responses to their practice, on the one hand, and relevant concepts in wider, historical or philosophical debate, on the other. It is through this process of location that the interpretive judgments made about practice become objective.

Illustrations



Fig. 1. Jan Bennett, *Head Projection 5*, 2008, video projection onto cast polyurethane foam and wax head, with glass eyes.

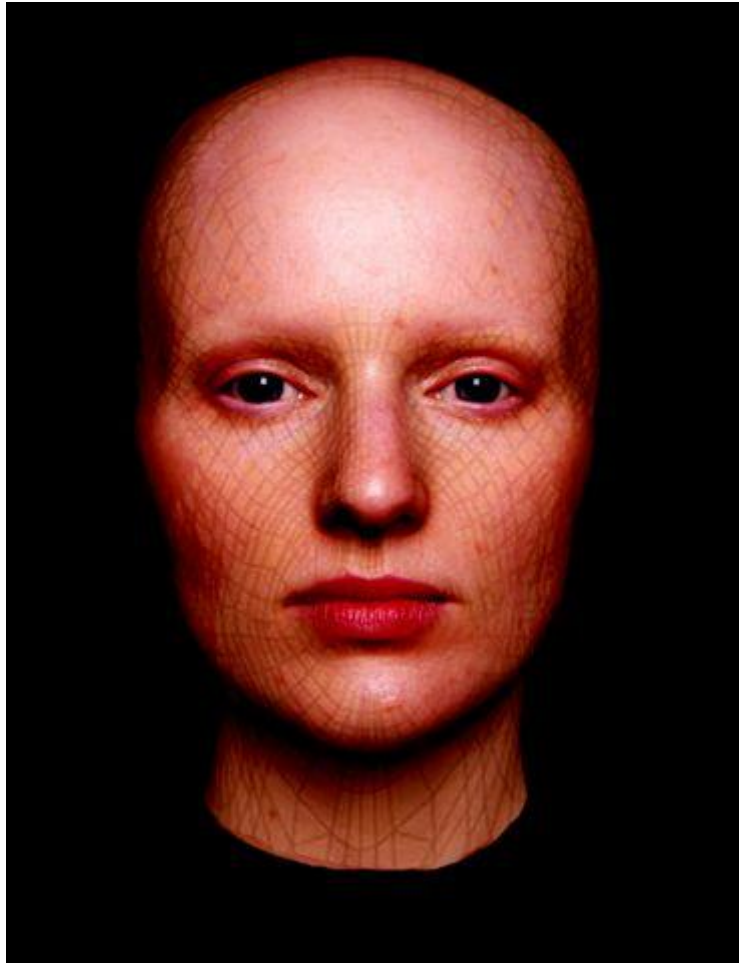


Fig. 2. Jan Bennett, *Head Projection 5* (detail), 2008, digitally manipulated photograph used in video projection.



Fig. 3. Patricia Piccinini, *The Young Family*, 2002, silicone, polyurethane, leather, plywood, human hair. 80cm high x 150cm x 110cm.

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Endnotes

1 Problems for the subjectivity-objectivity distinction become apparent as soon as one recognizes that a line between the two sides of the distinction cannot easily be drawn. To give one example. Knowledge, as it is customarily understood, is objective either because it conforms to the way things are in the world (a correspondence theory) or because it satisfies the tests and requirements specified by a community of individuals or a network of institutions (a coherence or power theory). But both sides of this 'either-or' are contestable. The correspondence theory has the problem of explaining how a human invention, such as a statement or an interpretation, fits a non-human invention, i.e. reality. Even a photograph, that form of representation which non-photographers so often hold up as the paradigm of perfect imitation, introduces elements which prevent the image from matching its object, such as scale, different intensities of colour and tone, and the relations created within the frame. In contrast, the coherence theory, with its assertion that knowledge occurs *within the subject* and *between subjects*, faces the criticism that it loses contact with mind-independent reality. Testing a knowledge-claim involves not a check between proposition and reality but between one human subject's point of view and another. But this, according to the critics, means that propositions are left 'free-floating', i.e. out of touch with reality; propositions cohere with each other but do not correspond to the world in itself. A further charge made against the coherence theory is that it reduces reality to a series of subjective reports which, without any notion of correspondence to serve as an anchor, are open to manipulation by political forces.

2 As Kant makes the point:

If, in counting, I forget that the units, which now hover before me, have been added to one another in succession, I should never know that a total is being produced through this successive addition of unit to unit, and so would remain ignorant of the number. For the concept of the number is nothing but the consciousness of this unity of synthesis.

The word 'concept' might of itself suggest this remark. For this unitary consciousness is what combines the manifold, successively intuited, and thereupon also reproduced, into one representation...

All knowledge requires a concept... [A] concept is always, as regards its form, something universal which serves as a rule. The concept of body, for instance, as the unity of the manifold which is thought through it, serves as a rule in our knowledge of outer appearances. (1929: A103-106)

3 I am grateful to Jan Bennett for granting me permission to use her research as an example.

4 In stating that concepts are active in aesthetic judgment, for example, 'the head is unsettling', I am in fact contradicting Kant's explicit assertion in the *Critique of Judgment* that aesthetic judgments are made without concepts (Kant 1987). For Kant, concepts are only active in (what he terms) determinate judgments, judgments which carve up the world into external things or which make verifiable descriptions, such as, 'the head is made from polyurethane foam'. However, my

sleight of hand is not entirely opposed to Kant's thought, for although he states (for good reason) that aesthetic judgments are made without concepts, the coherence of his critical system (from the *Critique of Pure Reason* to the *Critique of Judgment*) nevertheless requires that a concept is active in aesthetic judgment. The concept he introduces to make his system coherent is purposiveness (*Zweckmässigkeit*), the appearance of nature as if it had been designed for human perception. As I have argued elsewhere (Cazeaux 2004), this amounts to a concept which has the human mind look for concepts which might fit or be appropriate to the artwork of aesthetic object in front of it. On this basis, aesthetic judgment is always the result of a search for concepts, with the ones offered above in response to Bennett's *Head Projection 5*, such as 'unease', 'disquiet', 'disjunction' and 'alienation', being examples from the search that the artwork prompts us to carry out.

5 For an indication of how the concepts listed are explored and expanded by their respective authors and traditions, see my *Continental Aesthetics Reader* (Cazeaux 2000). The only concept not covered in the *Reader* is the uncanny in Freud. For a good guide to this, see Royle (2003).

6 Deleuze's philosophy is also called 'transcendental empiricism', for example, by Colebrook (2002), Mullarkey (2006) and Bryant (2008), on the grounds that it articulates the formations which rise out of or transcend the plane of immanence, such as percepts, affects and concepts, to give shape and texture to experience.

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to cite this journal article:

Cazeaux, C. (2008) Locatedness and the objectivity of interpretation in practice-based research. *Working Papers in Art and Design* 5

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ISSN 1466-4917