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THINKING ABOUT RESEARCH AND CREATIVE ENDEAVOUR

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Are the binary oppositions postulated between theoretical and practical knowledge, and between western and African philosophy—as in the call for this conference—valid or useful for artistic research? This paper asks where this conceptual division should best be located and poses the question of whether it is valid, sustainable, and helpful to distinguish between African and European "modes of knowledge."

1

Since 2019, there is a system in place for artistic output by university staff to receive a subsidy from the Department of Education's research budget. As the papers at this conference attest, a lively discourse around arts as research has developed. This could suggest a harmonious situation in which there is a general acceptance that work done by artists—or, perhaps, especially by those artists who are also teachers and academics—is a form of research. But how comfortable is the situation?

I want to reflect on the question of whether an intellectually coherent case for art as research can be made, and interrogate a number of views or assertions that appear to have coalesced around the approach to art as a form of research.

It is necessary to make an important initial distinction between two strands of thinking about this matter. In the first of these, art is seen as research. In the second, art is not necessarily seen as research but as the outcome of activities that are, or resemble, research activities. It is mainly the latter of these two views that has infused a significant body of writing thus far.[1]

2

The introduction of research subsidy for artistic output marks a significant change in the definition of research that the Department of Education (DoE) has implemented until recently: that research is written output, judged to be a contribution to knowledge by peer reviewers. With some exceptions, the Department has accepted, before and after 1994, that publication in approved peer-reviewed journals serves as a proxy for assessments, which it would itself not be able to conduct. In doing so, it followed the established international practice whereby the peer-reviewed scholarly journal is the gold standard of research output. The peer-reviewed article also forms the basic indicator of research activity, impact, and reputation in international rating systems for universities.[2]

In managing its research budget, the DoE has thus far relied on the judgement of individuals who were deemed to know what research is and required no official guidance: scholars in the relevant field. In the absence of recognised proxies for the assessment of artistic outputs, the new system will rely on the appointment of peer reviewers by universities themselves. How well this will work remains to be seen, but it is safe to say that the system is likely to be cumbersome and labour-intensive.

All of this raises an interesting question. Can we identify, within the various artistic research communities in the world, characteristics of any written or other output that would clearly place it into the category of research and, therefore, enable peer reviewers to make reliable and accurate assessments?

Wilhelm Dilthey famously distinguished between two kinds of scholarly activity,[3] which broadly overlap with the "two cultures" deplored by C. P. Snow many years later.[4] In a nutshell, Dilthey's concept of *erklären* (explaining) refers to the formulation of generally applicable laws of cause and effect that govern recurring phenomena in the natural world. His concept of *verstehen* (understanding) was partly developed in response to the occasionally bizarre attempts by 19th-century scholars to apply this methodology in the humanities: to establish the "causes" of artworks in Hippolyte Taine's famous trio of *race* (inherited disposition or temperament), *milieu* (environmental circumstances), and *moment* (the momentum of historical and current cultural influences, what we nowadays loosely call the *Zeitgeist*).[5] For Dilthey, this form of *erklären* was not adequate to the challenges posed by the uniqueness of the historical event or cultural object.

As Dilthey saw it, aesthetics is one of the cultural systems that help us develop a fuller understanding of the human world. Understanding artworks, which are historical objects on the one hand but remain available for scrutiny in the present on the other, requires a more intuitive process (*Einfühlung*) than those followed in the explanatory sciences.[6]

The concept of *verstehen* and further publications by Dilthey were the most important point of origin for interpretive activities that have become known as hermeneutics.[7] We note the obvious, but nevertheless key, fact that the object of study is the artwork, and that, to talk in our parlance, the research is the study of that object, not the object itself.

These are broad categories that enable a basic ordering of the scholarly field, and I am by no means suggesting that in any particular case, there will be a clear dividing line between *erklären* and *verstehen*. But, returning to the question posed above, whether there is a universal or, at least globally accepted, *norm* for research, some reflection tells us that there is indeed one element that can be identified as common across the explanatory and interpretive sciences, the sciences of *erklären* and *verstehen*.

Research provides and must provide, within itself, through reference or in written form, the evidence for its own claims to truth or validity. This implies primarily two things: that the data supporting the claims must, in principle, be accessible to scrutiny by the reader, and that the way in which the data has been processed to reach conclusions must be made explicit.

This is admittedly a somewhat simplified and idealised representation. But the truth of what I'm saying comes clearly into view if we consider the expectations that will be familiar to anybody who has submitted work for peer review to scholarly journals. Apart from making the data accessible and the methodology transparent, researchers are also expected to locate their work within an existing field of knowledge and indicate what new knowledge they are contributing to that field.

Research, as commonly understood, is intimately tied to ideas of improvement, progress, and the growth of knowledge. None of this would be possible if the basic requirements of clear, accessible data and transparent theoretical assumptions and methodology were not met. This transparency has one overriding purpose: to make the research accessible to the possibility of being proven wrong. At the heart of conventional science is the acceptance of the refutability of what is presented as truth.

As Karl Popper would put it: science—or, in a more careful version, good science—is characterised not by its verifiability, but by its refutability.[8] It asserts truth in such a way that the avenues by which that truth has been reached, and therefore the ways in which it can be shown to be mistaken, are open to scrutiny. Because of this provisionality, the word "truth" becomes, strictly speaking, redundant. The hypothetical status of the assertion ensures that it can always be corrected or rejected.

In its most general terms, the Popperian picture, though mainly intended to describe the "hard" sciences, applies to the social and human sciences as well. The sociolinguist, for example, would provide evidence for their hypothesis about a phenomenon in a particular community, combined with explanations on how that group was defined, how many people were interviewed, how big the sample was, how the data was processed, and so forth. A paper that doesn't do these things and cannot be refuted is likely to be ignored—or to remain unpublished.

More ambitious theoretical propositions that extend beyond the analysis of specific historical events occupy a special position by drawing on observational data to posit broad generalisations. That normally gives them an ambivalent status. It is, for example, open to question whether Sigmund Freud's theory of the unconscious is

culturally specific, or can be falsified in any strict sense of the word. It certainly claims to apply to human beings in general. Even more interestingly, the interpretation of Karl Marx's view of history ranges from people who would call it purely speculative to others who would claim that it has been falsified by historical events, to others who still see it as scientific truth.

The Popperian view of the scientific procedure has, of course, been challenged. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, the very influential Thomas Kuhn developed the idea of the paradigm to argue that most sciences operate within an institutionally accepted framework that is only rarely opened up to serious debate and possible rebuttal. Paul Feyerabend went much further than this, rejecting the idea that science is practised in accordance with any rationally ordered procedure and that it is, in fact, an anarchic enterprise; "Anything goes," Feyerabend claimed.[9]

Even though it wasn't presented as a polemic against Popper, perhaps the most fundamental challenge to the Popperian view of science and knowledge came from Michel Foucault. In Foucault's accounts of the history of sex and madness, language is intimately connected to discursive regimes, which capture us within conceptual frameworks that define the contours of our world.[10] By connecting language to authority and the exercise of power over human subjects, Foucault, by implication, rejected the relative innocence and self-correcting nature of the scenario presented by Popper. What remains, perhaps, unanswered is the question of whether research and scholarly work can escape the strictures of discursive regimes or are bound to remain the servant thereof. It is fair to say, however, that in Foucault's world, the desire for power and control trumps the desire for knowledge.

Foucault is a bit like Marx and Freud: his interventions have been so powerful that, in many ways, we live in a post-Foucauldian world. Yet, it is hard to conclude that this scepticism has dislodged the basic tenets of how Popper conceived of science. In fact, in his influential books, Foucault essentially does what the social historian does: assembling historical evidence in support of a theory on the relationship between language and power.

3

The above, necessarily reduced, outline illustrates how hard it is to defend the view that art is research in the conventional way that research is broadly understood. In the history and philosophy of science, the claim that art is research is by no means self-evident and, in fact, is quite startling. The reasons for this may be fairly obvious, but a brief discussion would shed some light on the characteristics of artistic output, as opposed to research output.

The transparency and refutability that characterises research can be imagined only in the most pedantic kind of art, art that we tend not to value and may even reject. Whereas research tries to use language that limits the scope of how it can be interpreted, art tends to do exactly the opposite: to suggest a variety of possible meanings. Art tends to resist meanings that can be captured in easy formulations and scholarly hypotheses; instead, it explores complexity, nuance, and ambiguity. This is closely related to a second key characteristic.

If art is a site where meaning is interrogated and complexified, this creates a relationship with the recipient that differs significantly from that which obtains in research more generally. Art establishes a different kind of contract with the reader. Whereas the physicist or the historian would attempt to communicate their findings with as much clarity as possible, the artist would, in most cases, resist such clarity

almost intuitively. Art is an invitation to meaning-making, a provocation more than it is straightforward communication. This is not simply a characteristic of art itself, but also of the way in which we have been conditioned by social convention to approach it.

Language is at the core of these differences. In other disciplines, a range of methods are employed to reduce the possible misunderstandings and ambiguities that could arise from language: the refining of common words to assume a more circumscribed meaning; the invention of new terms for new things; the design of a strictly codified or mathematical language.

As a result of contributions made by structural linguistics and semiotics, we have come to accept that a variety of languages are at the disposal of artists. These languages may range considerably in the stability of meaning associated with them. In most cases, the artist and the receiver will not attempt to reduce this complexity; instead, it is embraced as fertile ground for semantic and cultural exploration.

Perhaps the best way in which to state this is by saying that one of the most important common elements in the creative arts is the use of languages to identify, explore, and interfere with social meaning. By seeking to produce precise meaning, both the social and the physical sciences cordon themselves off from the messiness of everyday speech. The arts, on the other hand, try to reach towards and have an impact on the very domain that endangers the coherence of other sciences.

A third deviation from standard research outputs encapsulates perhaps the most important way in which art occupies a discrete and unique domain. I suspect that Dilthey was the first to fully acknowledge that the cultural object is not only *meaning* but also—and indeed, primarily—*form*. In fact, it is meaning produced through form, or what one might also call structure and internal coherence (or, in some cases, meaningful incoherence).

As any artist would know, the form of a particular artwork is not simply a received form, as is almost always the case in standard research outputs. It is a creative and critical engagement with inherited form, form *against* form. Think of Penny Siopis' "history paintings," which draw on the history of the genre while interfering with that genre in order to produce a form that uniquely combines convention and innovation.[11] W. H. Auden wrote sonnets comprising 21 lines,[12] and there are many more examples of authors deviating from the classical "rule" of 14 lines and description followed by some sort of movement to a metaphorical or metaphysical plane of meaning.

It is partly through formal means, which often entails the transgression of familiar form, that the artwork can be said to establish the conditions for its own intelligibility or create its own "rules" by which it communicates. This is related to what, in literary theory, is referred to as the fictional status of the literary text. Aristotle already grappled with the difference between historiography and tragedy writing. His answer, that the tragedy aims at verisimilitude rather than historical accuracy in order to show us the patterns of the world rather than literal truth (in other words, a different kind of truth),[13] resonates with the many ways in which literary experts and theorists of language have thought about the "as-if" world of fiction.[14]

It is almost unnecessary to point out that the performing and visual arts, too, do not produce standard assertions about the world, and do not normally claim empirical truth for any of their details. Like the author of a literary text, the artist selects, combines, organises, and transforms elements from the known world into a "text" that the reader is challenged to decipher. Art, like literature, shows a mirror to or shines a lamp on, the real world.

4

Against this background, some surprise at how we nowadays try to validate art as "research" would not be out of place. Such attempts create two possible dangers: that of reducing the multi-layeredness and multivalence of the work of art, and that of exposing artists to expectations that they cannot or, in my view, should not meet.

The more modest and most prevalent claim: that the process of making art is a research process; that artists follow research procedures in arriving at an end product, is easier to defend but creates some difficulties of its own.

The phrase "practice-led research," which seems to be the most regularly appearing concept in these matters, asks for a bit of reflection. It suggests that research is the primary activity by making it the noun, whilst indicating that it takes its cue from practice; that, in fact, it would not be possible without practice.

It is, of course, true that in planning and executing their work, artists do embark on activities that one would be happy to call research: writers filling up notebooks, composers studying scores or previous performance of a particular work, and so on. We all know, however, that such research is not necessarily systematic and that it mostly serves the sole purpose of enhancing the credibility of the creative work. Marlene van Niekerk studied the repair of fridges and farming methods in detail in writing *Triomf* and *Agaat*, respectively. But no reader of these two novels would think that the research was doing anything but ensuring a reliable factual basis for the construction of a fictional world.

The term "practice-led research" creates a number of difficulties that are hard to dismiss.

First, experience and observation tell us that no scholarly intention, no hard work, and no amount of research can ever guarantee that the work resulting from it will be deemed important, valuable, or influential. There simply is no necessary relationship between input and the quality of the output.

Second, the implicit claim in the phrase "practice-led research," that the process of making is particular to the arts as opposed to other sciences does not survive close scrutiny. Scientists, too, are in many cases led by practice. In the course of experimenting, they often make unexpected discoveries. They also are familiar with many other things that artists and everybody else know about: the apple falling on one's head, the sudden flash of insight, the serendipitous events, even the dream.

I suspect that the following applies to most scholars in most situations: if the results of their work can be presented in a coherent and falsifiable way, it ultimately does not matter in which roundabout and coincidental ways those results may have been reached. That is the domain of unlimited conjecture and freedom where, indeed, "anything goes." What matters is the outcome. It is easy to see that the same applies to creative artists as well. They may have followed many different avenues to arrive at the work in completed form, including substantial chunks of reading and research, but ultimately all of this, interesting though it may be, is peripheral to the value ascribed to their work.

It is possible to imagine, or even produce, a work based on clear research processes. A director could decide to produce Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* as farce and, in the course of doing so, study the history and technique of farce, look at Chekhov's own rather opaque statements on comedy, train the actors to perform in a suitable way, and even try to record audience responses. I once saw such a performance in London–and it was abysmal.

In some circumstances, it may be possible, even desirable, to frame a creative project as a research process. In the Chekhov example, a process familiar in both the

natural and social sciences is discernible: developing a hypothesis, mustering evidence to support it, and testing whether the result confirms or refutes the hypothesis. In such cases, there cannot be any obstacle to recording the processes in the shape of an excellent conventional research article, even though the performance itself may have had a negligible impact.

There may be a place for such controlled procedures, perhaps especially in teaching practices. But there is an abundance of evidence from artists themselves that the creative process is only ever partially deliberate; that, instead, it is more likely to be chaotic, subjective, haphazard, experiential, unpredictable—and nevertheless thoughtful as well. William Kentridge's *Six Drawing Lectures* is an example of this, and so is Jeremy Wafer's PhD writing on his own work,[15] and some of Siopis' statements on her practice as a painter. According to Siopis, the only planned element in her ink and glue paintings was to set up the conditions under which the materials could interact with themselves and the movement of her hands.[16]

Art is a response to, in principle, an unlimited variety of impulses, only some of which could be comfortably accommodated under the heading of research. Maybe the best way to approach this is to say that research activities, or activities resembling research, can be and sometimes clearly are—but never have to be—*one* of the many sources of creative energy and inspiration at the disposal of the artist.

The concept of research applied thus far by the DoE and South African universities, while clearly rooted in global understandings of research, is ultimately a bureaucratic tool. It cannot and should not be allowed to serve as a normative framework for what artists do. Interestingly, the recognition granted to creative output shows some residual doubt in the DoE as to whether artists really belong in the house of the academy as full citizens. The requirement for three peer reviews instead of two has been dropped, but recognition is still limited to two points and commissioned work (some works, musical scores for films, for example, cannot be done without receiving a commission) are excluded from recognition, while the same restriction does not apply to architects and designers.

5

Perhaps, then, the packaging of art or art-making as a form of research is to be understood as a gesture towards the recognition that artists have now gained. We sing for our supper. Nevertheless, there is good reason to ask to what extent the view of art as research is productive and sustainable.

Too strong a focus on the peculiar nature of "research" in the field of arts may blind us to other, more compelling, areas of commonality between the arts and other fields of endeavour. It is instructive to consider what the learned Ernst Cassirer says in *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften* from 1942.[17] Briefly, Cassirer argues that on important levels, there is *no fundamental difference* between the humanities and arts, on the one hand, and the natural sciences, on the other. He advances two reasons for this.

First, natural scientists, social scientists, and artists all put forward propositions about the world—but they do so in different ways. In the case of the arts, this happens in symbolic form.[18] As the same can be said about all forms of human communication, this requires some clarification. Cassirer is referring to the simple fact that the arts communicate in specific languages, or what one might also call symbolic systems, which have been established by convention over time. As we have seen, these practices differ significantly from what normally applies to conventional research in that the complexities of language (and here I mean many languages) are explored, instead of being reduced for

the sake of unambivalent communication. Cassirer's distinction between "thing perception" (*Dingwahrnemen*) and "expressive perception" (*Ausdruckswahrnehmen*), where the former is characteristic of the physical sciences and the latter of the cultural sciences and cultural objects, is particularly enlightening. For him, privileging "thing perception" is simply prejudicial because it assumes that the physical sciences have a more secure evidential basis than other human endeavours. This he disputes. The cultural sciences "take their evidence from the sphere of expressive perception—and, in the first instance, from our lived experience in a human community sharing a common system of 'cultural meanings'."[19] That sphere is obviously less concrete, less precise, and more opaque than what obtains in the physical sciences, but not for these reasons less secure. To all of this, one should add, as indicated above, that the symbolic form draws attention to itself *as form*, as an object that requires analysis and interpretation in order to release its meaning.

Second, in both the explanatory and the interpretive fields the proposition—and here I'm summarising Cassirer in terms later made familiar by Popper—is always provisional; it never is simply presented or received as truth. Even in the exact sciences, there very seldom is an immediate acceptance of whatever is put forward as a statement about the world. As in the arts, the proposition sets in motion a process of reception, evaluation, critical response, endorsement, and re-evaluation. In the case of the artist, Cassirer sees the process of reception and evaluation as a form of consolation for what he calls the tragedy of the individual artist, who almost never feels that the end product matches the ambitions with which they started. The sense of loss implied by this finds compensation in the knowledge of having produced a gift to the world that may have a significant afterlife.

As a neo-Kantian, Cassirer strongly believed in the possibility of the aesthetic experience being shared—and here he makes a quite startling claim.[20] If the continued evaluation and re-evaluation of a work of art reaches a sufficient point of convergence of judgement, the certainty reached thereby does not differ meaningfully from the certainty reached when a scientific hypothesis is generally accepted.

This probably is too optimistic a view. It does not take sufficient account of cultural diversity or of the enormous fluctuations of judgement that can occur over time due to context and taste. Reading Harold Bloom's celebration of Shakespeare as one of the inventors—together with the Bible—of our idea of the human being,[21] it might be easy to forget that there were times when Shakespeare was not considered an excellent dramatist.

What is to be gained from revisiting Cassirer?—The insight that while the physical sciences, the cultural sciences, and cultural objects make use of different forms of evidence for the claims they make, and work in different ways with language, there is, from his broader philosophical perspective, no justification for a hierarchy privileging "research" over, say, a painting or a musical composition; and that such a privileging could end up reducing rather than enhancing the richness of cultural meanings contained in the world of the arts.

6

To be sure, the new system in which artistic work is recognised and rewarded as a legitimate output for teachers at universities is to be welcomed. Yet, if this system were to encourage a situation where art is recognised only to the extent to which it is based on or led by research; or if artists were to shape (or possibly distort) their work as research merely in order to receive a subsidy for it, there would also be a loss involved. What

needs to be acknowledged and recognised above all is the value of the artwork *in its own right*, as a specific form that works in particular ways with language, conventions, and social meaning. It may even be possible to defend the view that the value of the arts resides exactly in the fact that it is *not* research.

Addressing the question of whether art is a contribution to knowledge is a theme for another paper. Many philosophers of aesthetics have indeed argued that this is the case, but always with important qualifications that tend to foreground a new apprehension of the world (or of the self in that world) instead of any straightforward "knowledge."

Artistic practice is a domain wherein the specific contexts in which knowledge operates are interrogated, as well as the effects of established or politically supported knowledge within that context. This identifies a critical and questioning role for the arts. The invitation to this conference, as well as many of the papers and performances delivered here, speak of a strong desire to challenge, rather than work within, conventional ways of doing and thinking. These can and should be explored, even though I wish to express some reservations about the direction in which the debate seems to be moving.

The following implicit or explicit claims can be extracted from a reading of the conference invitation as well as the summary of many papers and performance:

- That art is a particular or special, maybe even a unique, form of knowledge production;
- That artistic practice in Africa should, or must, or will reflect epistemologies and philosophies that are characteristic of Africa, and thus seek to liberate itself from conceptual frameworks and methods inherited from colonialism;
- In the invitation to the conference, these claims are augmented by notable statements: that the distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge has its roots in Aristotle; that it corresponds to the Cartesian distinction between body and mind; that this distinction is "fundamental to much of western philosophy"; and that the distinction is inimical to more holistic notions that are "generally accepted as axiomatic in African philosophy and world views."[22]

Putting all these statements together, a bold and tantalising claim emerges: that in combining practice and theory in the making of art, artists are almost inevitably resisting western distinctions between body and mind, and associating themselves with more African philosophical notions. That would turn art into a liberating activity almost by definition. And that sounds too easy to be comforting.

Two questions arise. First, is the depiction of "western philosophy" emerging from these statements intellectually sustainable? Second, is it productive for artists in Africa to locate themselves primarily in opposition to western notions that underpinned the colonial enterprise and linger on in postcolonial situations such as ours?

Discussing these notions with any pretence at thoroughness lies outside the scope of this paper, and also beyond the scope of my expertise. Nevertheless, some critical observations and questions may be in order.

How to untangle the different terms used for different kinds of knowledge and practice in Aristotle's writings is a matter still being discussed by specialists.[23] But one thing seems clear: there is nothing in his writing on tragedy—the only artistic genre he treated systematically—to suggest that he was working with a strong distinction between theory and practice. Aristotle normatively extracted from the tragedies at his disposal a theory on tragedy in general, trying to answer questions as to the appropriate subject matter, structure, and effect of the play on the audience. The *Ars Poetica* is a

treatise on how form and function are inextricably connected in the writing and reception of tragedies.[24] Is this theory led by practice or practice led by theory? The two are so entangled as to make the question almost meaningless.

René Descartes' core proposal on the relationship between body and mind was first launched in the *Discours* of 1637,[25] and is based on his observation: I can have doubts about the existence of phenomena outside myself, but not about myself as a thinking and doubting being—at least not while I'm alive. This gives priority to mind and consciousness over matter, hence the well-known and often quoted statement: *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). However, as has been demonstrated by many, the argument cannot be deemed conclusive. Descartes does little more than use the fact that I can doubt the existence of matter to posit that mind is indeed fundamentally separate from matter. This does not address the possibility, amply confirmed by recent biological and neurological investigations, that mind is an enormously complex material system.

Two other things are worth noting. Given his radical separation of the two, Descartes never really resolved the question posed to him by Princess Elisabeth: how mind and matter interact, how the ghost gets the machine going. Secondly, despite this fundamental philosophical problem, the mind-matter distinction reverberated throughout the Enlightenment with its focus on rational enquiry and human progress. It is the supposed superiority of the rational mind, and the claim that westerners were eminently in possession of this, that features in Hegel's racism,[26] but also in many other works and particularly in "scientific" racism. Much of the critique of colonialism took its cue from the contradiction between the stated aims of the Enlightenment and the failure to apply the ideas of human freedom and equality in the territories colonised by Europe.

Whereas Descartes was most certainly very influential, his body-mind distinction can no longer be deemed fundamental to western philosophy. The distinction between theory and practice in the conference invitation obviously brings to mind another philosopher: Immanuel Kant and his distinction between *reine Vernunft* and *praktishe Vernunft*. A key component in Kant's epistemological project was to resolve the contradictions between those philosophers who saw the mind as the origin of knowledge, and the empiricists who insisted that all knowledge is derived from the sense, i.e., the body.

Philosophers generally agree that the relationship between these two forms of reason is not conclusively resolved in Kant's writings. It is worth pointing out, however, that Kant tends to give priority to practical, and not to theoretical, reason. He was sceptical of the delusions the supposedly theoretical mind—severed from an engagement with the practical world—could come up with.

7

Resistance to the racist legacy of colonialism is an obvious point of reference for any artist working in Africa. My concern is that it might also distract attention from many other forms of abuse that can no longer be deemed "colonial." This raises the question: how helpful can the view of the West as a monolithic imposition on conquered peoples be in the current fragmentation in South Africa? The little excursion to Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant above shows that some scepticism is justified towards any view that the assumed rational mind, in opposition to the more unruly body, has been predominant in western thinking. Other strands of western thinking include a focus on the immediacy of bodily experience. Think of the exquisite passages on pain in Friedrich Nietzsche and the prominent position given to locatedness in the work of some existentialist thinkers, not to mention the later contributions of Emmanuel Levinas.

The view that in African epistemology a greater unity of mind and body has generally been accepted as "axiomatic" requires further interrogation, which I am not equipped to do, but it would be surprising if a simple picture emerged from further examination. Axiomatic means unquestioningly. Even if the statement were true, then, surely, we should never identify for ourselves a position where we simply accept ancestral wisdom, whether this is European, African, or Oriental. Apart from this, adopting an "essentialist" way of thinking may lead towards a renewal of binary—and colonial—oppositions. Self-othering is a very old trap.

Despite all this, the exploration of ways of doing and thinking that differ from traditional methods is a very strong impetus in many of the contributions to this conference. Taking my cue from this and from some of the references made above, I wish to make two concluding observations.

A key element that strongly distinguishes the making of art from a scholarly endeavour is the crucial participation of the body: the musician playing an instrument, the hand of the painter—the examples are too numerous to mention, with the body movement artist perhaps occupying a prime position. Thinking about the body as it is involved in the making of art raises the possibility of conceptualising that body as a thinking body; a body with its own intelligence rooted in processes of making; a body only partially controlled by the mind and, thus, unlikely to be under the sway of any explicit research intentions. Every such body has its own history, which may be a history of suffering and repression. But art-making provides at least one important opportunity to explore the agency of bodies that may otherwise be perceived as victims. If the repressive apparatus of colonialism was above all exercised on the black body, that body eminently lends itself to becoming a site of liberation.

My second observation relates to the very particular ways in which art explores a combination of formal elements and (related) social meaning. Here, I would suggest, lies one of the reasons why a conference on art and research has attracted such interest. Art is not captive to the traditional protocols of research; it does not make its case in the way physics and sociology do. Whereas it isn't always clear what the legacy of movements like #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall has been in terms of the desire for "decolonisation," which was so strongly articulated at the time, many would find in the arts an arena for an active, even an activist, engagement with the ways in which we experience and think about our location in Africa at a particularly fraught moment, when the attempts to address the persistent legacy of a repressive past have so often degenerated into a betrayal.

8

We need recognition for the research that can and does go into art-making at times. What we do not need is for art to be collapsed into the aridity that characterises so much research, into a set of expectations that it cannot and should not meet. We need recognition for the fact that art, as a symbolic means of communication, makes as much a contribution to the world as research contributions in other fields, and does so in its own particular ways. Anything less than this is half a loaf. Works of art require engagement with their formal competence, but also with the social meanings that they present as a challenge to the reader, without reducing that complexity for the sake of the kind of transparency of meaning that is seen as merit in conventional research outputs.

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Notes

1 Most notably in Farber, *On Making*.

2 In assessing research productivity, the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, to mention but one example, looks at the number of publications in academic journals listed in Elsevier's Scopus database (6%), and the number of citations in the same database (30%).

3 Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*.

4 Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*.

5 The key figure in developing this kind of positivist approach was the Frenchman Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893), who strongly advocated the application of scientific method in the study of art and literature.

6 "We explain through purely intellectual processes, but we understand through the cooperation of all powers of the mind activated by apprehension"; Dilthey, *Selected Works, Vol. 2: Understanding the Human World*, 147.

7 The most important of these is to be found in Dilthey, *Selected Works, Vol. 4: Hermeneutics and the Study of History*.

8 This is based on the rejection of inductive methods in favour of deductive procedures. The statement "All swans are white" can only be fully verified when all possible swans have been observed. It can, however, be falsified by the sighting of one black swan if the statement is read as a hypothesis flowing from a limited number of observations, even a single observation. Popper's views on science can be traced back to *Logik der Forschung zur Erkenntnistheorie der modernen Naturwissenschaft*, but the most comprehensive explication can be found in *Conjectures and Refutations*.

9 Feyerabend, *Against Method*.

10 Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité. Vol.1: La volonté de savoir*. Later published as *History of Madness.*

11 Olivier, *Penny Siopis*, 53–67.

12 Auden, *Collected Poems of W. H. Auden*, 224-231.

13 A key statement occurs in Chapter IX of the *Poetics*: "[I]t is not the function of the poet to narrate events that have actually happened, but rather, events such as might occur and have the capability of occurring in accordance with the laws of probability and necessity." *Aristotle's Poetics*, 16.

14 The most influential of these derives from ohn R. Searle's speech-act theory first proposed in Searle, 'The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse'. Whereas fictional statements correlate in many ways with real-world statements, they are "as-if" statements that make no claim to verifiable truth.

15 Wafer, 'Survey'.

16 Olivier, *Penny Siopis*, 251-62.

17 Published in English in 1961 as *The Logic of the Humanities*.

18 Cassirer's work on symbolic forms appeared in three volumes as *Philosophie der Symbolischen Formen* and was only published in English in the 1950s.

19 Here, I have relied fairly strongly on Michael Friedman's explication in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; Friedman, 'Ernst Cassirer'.

20 In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant makes the bold theoretical assertion that, whereas the aesthetic judgement relies on individual perception, it makes a universal claim as all people must, in principle, be deemed capable of sharing it.

21 Bloom, *Shakespeare*.

22 Arts Research Africa, 'Call for Contributions'.

23 For a taste of the complexities, see Parry, 'Episteme and Techne'.

24 Aristotle, *Aristotle's Poetics*.

25 Descartes, *Discourse on Method, Optics, Geometry, and Meteorology*.

26 An extensive treatment of these notions is to be found in Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*.

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