In all domains of knowledge, the recent decades have seen moves to reassess the roles and possible interactions between the types of knowledge validated by academic research and forms of knowledge acquired through practical experience. Across a wide spectrum of disciplines, positivist epistemologies which assume that knowledge is only admissible as knowledge if it is founded on empirical evidence, rationally analysed, have been challenged – not necessarily in order to replace them but to assert the equivalence of other categories of knowledge. The new epistemological paradigms – variously referred to as action research, reflective practice, reflection-in-action, embodied knowledge, practical knowledge, tacit knowing – recognise that experienced practitioners in any field possess knowledge which may not be conventionally articulated. They assert that practice is not merely the application of theoretical knowledge to instrumental ends (its traditional function in positivist epistemology) but a form of knowledge in its own right, a knowledge which might be called art, intuition, creativity or skill, all terms denoting a kind of knowing which does not derive from a prior cognitive operation. The extent to which such epistemologies have acquired legitimacy in research and teaching in medicine, education, architecture, management and so on, is evident from the proliferation of practice-orientated journal titles from academic publishers: *Action Learning: Research and Practice* (Taylor & Francis), *Action Research* (Sage), *Action Research International* (SCIAR), *Educational Action Research* (Taylor & Francis), *Psychodynamic Practice* (Taylor & Francis), *Journal of Media Practice* (Intellect), etc.

Inevitably these developments are inseparable from the ways in which the production and transmission of knowledge are organised within institutions. Any shift in the perceived value of a particular category of knowledge implies a shift in the status of those who produce it. All the traditional disciplines are taught in institutional contexts where the producers of ‘pure’ knowledge (the core disciplinary ‘truths’) have historically enjoyed higher status than those who apply it instrumentally. In medicine, for example, the curriculum is not only organised sequentially (pre-clinical, then clinical) but also delivered in different places, with core knowledge (chemistry, anatomy, physiology, etc.) being taught in university medical schools, and applied skills acquired in teaching hospitals. Similar stratifications are found in mathematics, engineering, architecture, town planning, psychotherapy, management, education etc. In all these disciplines, even though pure and applied branches of the subject might be taught within a single institution or a single department, science-based knowledge is seen as the disciplinary foundation, and its acquisition not only precedes the acquisition of skills-based knowledge but is taught by different personnel. The division of labour which assures this arrangement is at the same time a hierarchy of labour, tacitly reflecting the hierarchy of different categories of knowledge. Donald Schön, in his classic work on cognition *The Reflective Practitioner*, describes universities as “institutions committed to a particular epistemology [which] fosters selective inattention to practical competence and professional artistry”.

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many fields beyond the five professions with which his study is concerned.

How have the developments outlined above played out in our own subject? No less than the disciplines mentioned above, theatre studies developed as a divided community. This seems paradoxical. The legitimation of theatre studies as a discipline within the humanities depended on an acceptance of performance – that is to say of creative practice, of the application of art, of skill, of ‘embodied knowledge’ – rather than dramatic literature as a valid object of study. Yet in the academic study of theatre, for most of the time, practice and research have co-existed more or less independently, at best indifferent to each other, at worst in a state of mutual antagonism, and always in competition for resources. This is what Dwight Conquergood referred to as “the apartheid of knowledge that plays out inside the academy as the difference between thinking and doing, interpreting and making, conceptualization and creativity”.

Generations of theatre scholars have regarded as outlandish the suggestion that they might teach practical theatre skills. Some theorists and historians have even prided themselves on never going to the theatre. Of course, alongside observing and analysing performances, or interrogating material artefacts, documents and other evidential surrogates for performance, other theatre researchers have often engaged in practice for a variety of purposes: to explore the potentialities of a text or to embody a particular textual reading of it, to test a theoretical proposition or perhaps more diffusely to acquire a better, more informed understanding of the medium. Or even for recreation. In theatre-historical research the practice of ‘reconstructed’ performance has a long and continuing place as a means to verify a hypothesis or as an aid to historical imagination. But rarely, until recently, has anyone claimed the status of research process for an original creative performance.

The current prominence given to concepts such as practice as research, practice-based research, performative scholarship etc., challenges previously established boundaries between creative practice and research in the creative arts. Large claims have been made on their behalf. Kershaw and Piccini write of the creative and performing arts disciplines being “at a watershed, the negotiation of which might well determine their place and purpose in universities for decades to come.” The ‘practical turn’, as I will call it, resides in the claims of creative work to be considered as a valid research process and/or a research outcome. The claims that creativity itself constitutes an investigative tool, and that creative works constitute legitimate research outcomes equivalent to articles and monographs, pose a range of questions concerning the epistemology, documentation, dissemination and legitimation of research. It is commonly accepted that the purpose of research is to contribute original knowledge or understanding, but is originality the same thing from both artistic and research perspectives? What, in fact, is the product of an enquiry conducted through practice – the artwork or the knowledge that it makes available? How are these distinguishable from one another? And in what form can they be communicated to the scholarly community? There are, then, a number of complex problems raised by the framing of practice as research. At present, while it would be complacent to think that convincing answers have been formulated to any of these questions, the fact of their being asked signifies a radical change in the research landscape.

Several factors have contributed to the repositioning of practice in theatre studies. The epistemological revolution mentioned above supplies a general context, but in the specific case of theatre studies a particular impetus seems to have been the growth of performance studies. Whereas creative practice has generally operated at the margins of
The practical turn in theatre research

Theatre studies, Schechner situates it at the heart of performance studies. He writes:

Artistic practice is a big part of the performance studies project. A number of performance studies scholars are also practising artists working in the avant-garde, in community-based performance, and elsewhere; others have mastered a variety of non-Western and Western traditional forms. The relationship between studying performance and doing performance is integral.6

From the start, performance studies developed in ways which blurred the distinction between researcher and practitioner (for example through the tendency of many performance theorists to favour interventionist action through the medium of performance) or else, as in Conquergood’s case, rejected the distinction outright. According to Conquergood “the division of labor between theory and practice, abstraction and embodiment, is an arbitrary and rigged choice, and like all binarisms it is booby-trapped”.7 In 1999 as the then chair of Performance Studies at Northwestern University he claimed that:

What is really radical about theatre, performance and media studies at NU is that we embrace BOTH written scholarship AND creative work, texts and performance. Printed texts are too important and powerful for us to cede that form of scholarship. But it is not enough. We also engage in creative work that stands alongside and in metonymic tension with conventional scholarship. We think of performance and practical work as a supplement to – not substitute for – written scholarship.8

I would question how radical that position really was in 1999, but it is worth taking note of the public emphasis he chose to place on it. More recently (2006), Northwestern’s performance studies website preferred to talk about its ‘historic commitment to performance as a method as well as a subject of research’ and to assert:

In the midst of the proliferation of performance theory from all corners of the academy, the department remains anchored in its long-standing tradition of viewing performance as an experiential practice and pedagogy, an embodied way of knowing, and not just an abstract concept.9

Now the practitioner-scholar is becoming an increasingly familiar figure in theatre studies departments too. Some academics who occupy university posts also work in professional theatre. Conversely, professional artists are increasingly employed or sponsored to pursue creative work in universities. Of course, opportunities for creative artists to work in institutional contexts as creative artists have long been available in the form of residences with grant support from arts funding bodies or private sponsors. What is new is the framing of their creative projects as research, and the commissioning of scholarly research from creative artists by universities and research councils. In the UK, the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funds a programme to bring researchers from universities and creative centres together, or to bring artists (defined as “producers of original creative work”)10 into the academy. For example, under its Fellowship in the Creative and Performing Arts scheme the distinguished playwright Howard Brenton was funded for three years to work in the Department of Drama and Theatre Arts at the University of Birmingham. Brenton’s project (The Playwright and the State) was to investigate, from the perspective of a professional playwright, the nature of political drama and the relationship between the playwright and the state at selected moments in the development of western theatre. The process combined theoretical and practical research and resulted in a number of practice-based or practice-as-research outcomes. These ranged from a series of experimental ‘lab-texts’ using theatre as a laboratory to explore relationships between political systems and dramatic
forms, through to more traditional forms including a book and a series of research colloquia.

The opening up of this two-way street is generally seen as a positive development. However, as Kershaw has noted, “some are critical of what they see as the academy’s colonizing of performance practices and of the problematics of the economics of [practice as research] in universities, arguing that much of it would simply not ‘work’ in an industry context where economics govern production”\(^{11}\). Elsewhere it has been argued that using the term ‘professional’ to identify artists in this context actually serves to “reinforce the academic/practitioner divide”.\(^{12}\) Or that the framing of creative practice as research problematizes creativity in unhelpful ways. One practitioner-researcher summarised his ambivalence as follows:

> It’s as if there is a grievance because artists who enter the academy (often in search of a regular income) are no longer allowed simply to be artists, and must adhere to a series of research-driven regulations in order for their artistic practice to qualify as practice-led research. And yet there seems to be an extraordinary opportunity for artists entering the academy to use the impositions of the university system as a means to re-think many aspects of their practice and, in so doing, contribute to the developments of ideas both inside and outside the academy.\(^{13}\)

The erasing of the sharp professional versus academic distinction, then, is not without problems but it has undoubtedly contributed to the pressure to reassess the role of creative practice in a research environment.

The stimulus to undertake such a reassessment is of course more than disinterested curiosity. In part it reflects a struggle to gain institutional recognition for a de facto development among practitioners of the discipline. At the same time, it reflects the pressure on humanities subjects to demonstrate their relevance to wealth-creation. There are clear political incentives for them to do so, given the economic importance of the creative industries in post-industrial economies. Governments everywhere have recognised the potential of creative arts disciplines to generate wealth-creating knowledge and have set up mechanisms to ensure its transfer to the commercial sector. The dilemma for theatre studies is that it cannot cut itself from such obligations and opportunities, but if it seeks to justify itself only in these terms it will be entering a Faustian pact.

In the UK, where practice as research (PaR) has risen steadily up the research agenda in the last twenty years, its evolution is intimately connected to the structures for funding and assessing academic research. If discussion of PaR has had a greater urgency in the UK than elsewhere, this is partly a consequence of strongly interventionist mechanisms for funding advanced research. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the PaR debate only acquired its present urgency when university departments started to be funded selectively, making it necessary to devise criteria specifying how creative practice can count as research, and how such research can be measured qualitatively.

At this point it becomes necessary to say a little more about the formal structures for evaluating and funding research in the UK.\(^{14}\) Dwelling on such details risks appearing parochial but is unavoidable because the research funding mechanisms supply not merely the context in which debate has taken place but one of the debate’s main drivers. Since 1989, the periodic Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) has been a major stimulus leading to formal definitions of what, for institutional purposes, constitutes ‘research’. Using peer review panels and metrics, the RAE is given the task of measuring the quality and quantity of research output in the public domain, department by department, in every subject, across all British universities. From the start it was apparent to disciplines such as
theatre studies, music, and art and design, that if whole categories of staff or departments were not to be excluded *a priori* from recognition and funding, then it was necessary to explore ways in which practice might qualify for inclusion the RAE. Similar debates were triggered in all departments as each subject explored the boundaries of research at the applied end of its disciplinary spectrum, but the anxieties were most acute in subjects like creative arts which had strong traditions of employing practical methodologies in their teaching. In the initial, somewhat tentative stages, as Martin White explains, the discussion of practice focused on the concept of ‘research equivalence’ (i.e. the equivalence of practical work to publication). This clearly prioritised writing as the dominant medium of production and dissemination. And, by focusing on research output, the implied (and more radical) notion that the practical experimentation leading to that output represented the basis of the research process was not at the time widely accepted or understood. Subsequently, this notion has moved closer to the centre of the continuing debate.

Success in the RAE is crucial to the research culture of British university departments, both for reasons of status and esteem, and because it determines the allocations which are the principal source of financial support for research infrastructure in the UK. However, when the results of the 1996 RAE were published, there was widespread suspicion that practice-based research had been evaluated less favourably than conventional scholarship. The pressure for the discipline to establish common ground on the issues of PaR thus intensified, and in preparation for the next (2001) RAE the national subject association for theatre studies made a formal submission of recommended criteria. In essence (again paraphrasing White) the proposal was that while any creative practice *might* qualify as research, all creative practice, although possibly of high quality and derived from kinds of intellectual investigation, was not *automatically* research in the terms of the RAE. Rather than attempting the impossible by trying to impose prescriptive criteria to cover all possible cases, it was considered the researcher’s responsibility to justify his or her practice as research. To be considered as research, the work would need to show that it could (a) interrogate itself critically, (b) locate itself within its research context, (c) contribute original knowledge or understanding, and (d) give rise to other forms of discourse which allow it to be disseminated. This formulation has remained (more or less) the baseline for funding bodies and research councils, though it is by no means automatically accepted by all practitioners.

But if the quality of the research content was to be assessed, then as Martin White puts it:

> ways in which projects might be ‘stored’ and ‘retrieved’ for the purposes of dissemination or assessment had to be developed. Inevitably, this raised issues of documentation: how could the ephemeral practice maintain itself as a – or perhaps the – key element of the research rather than be subsumed in the medium of print? What new forms of presentation and dissemination, beyond the conventional book or article, needed to be developed? How could a researcher who work was based in practice achieve the international reputation [which is] central to the UK system of research assessment?15

One early suggestion was that a research performance might generate a dossier in which the research sources are documented and analysed. This suggestion, however, exposed the problem that the process of documenting a project could potentially consume more time and resource than the project itself.

Subsequently, attention has come to be fixed on electronic media such as DVDs. If anything this has confused matters. On the one hand this is because of the problematic
relationship of electronic reproduction to live performance (as previously explored by Phelan\textsuperscript{16} and Auslander,\textsuperscript{17} among others) which has led to endless—and, in this context, largely irrelevant—discussions about the respective ontologies of live and mediatised performance. On the other hand, the increasing tendency of mediatised performance to assert its own status as a creative medium has generated experimental work, but at the cost of compounding the confusion about whether the resulting artefact should be considered as a documentary record or an original work in its own right.

Not all practitioner-researchers in fact recognise the obligation to document their work, or else see it as threatening to eclipse or displace the creative work. According to one of the contributors to an online discussion site on PaR edited and published in 2003:

The role of documentation can be unduly stressed—even to the extent that documentation (rather than the live performance work itself) may be seen as the primary dissemination mode. The best dissemination of PaR is to show the work as widely as possible in its original live form.\textsuperscript{18}

Yet this seems to contradict the commonly held view that a creative output or performance can not stand on its own as a record of the process. It was countered by another contributor who maintained:

The ‘problem of documentation’ explored by Auslander, Phelan and others is really a pseudo-problem in this context. Surely the documentation is not required to ‘capture the work’ but to report critically on the method and outcomes. The problem, it seems to me, is really one of how to validate any specific instance of practice as research and then how to evaluate that (particular) practice. […] We might have an absolutely brilliant DVD that documents the process of creating a performance, and critically reflects on that process, without providing any evidence that the process was research (= gave us new insights).\textsuperscript{19}

If there is, at present, anything resembling a consensus about how to recognise practice as research, it is in the area of postgraduate training and qualification. This is natural and unavoidable, given that PhD programmes generally have regulatory frameworks requiring institutions to specify what outputs are allowable, what constitutes originality, and so on. The majority of British universities currently recognise and support postgraduate research programmes which include practical research. While the precise regulations vary from one institution to another, an indication of what constituted common ground in 2001 is given by the report of a national working party which brought together representatives from music, drama, dance, art and design, and creative writing.\textsuperscript{20} Some disciplines, it appeared, had more established understandings of practice-based research and were more comfortable with the notion of the research equivalence of practice. In music, for example, there was little difficulty about accepting composition as equivalent to more traditional research outputs, possibly because the more fixed method of notation makes it more stable and accessible than a performance. Choreography seemed to have acquired (or to be acquiring) a similar status in dance. Leaving aside subject-specific differences, however, there was general agreement that creative output on its own was unlikely to be acceptable as the outcome of a research process. In order to fulfil the core requirements for a research degree (i.e. “that it must display independence and originality, must be conducted systematically and presented in a form which can be understood by peers, and recovered by future researchers”) it would almost certainly be necessary for it to involve an external apparatus of critical reflection and documentation. The written component, it was agreed, “should be more than a factual report, should define some critical and intellectual perspective, and should not merely ‘justify’ the practice”.\textsuperscript{22} Other matters ad-
dressed included methodology (for example, methods for tracking and documenting the research), the implications for research training (since students undertaking practice-based research required particular skills in addition to those needed for traditional research), and for assessment (using new modes of assessment more appropriate to the research being assessed).

Recent thinking in the UK may be best represented by an investigation into protocols and regulations governing PhD by practice as research in twenty British universities, which resulted in a set of draft guidelines, covering areas such as applications, supervision, types of projects, examination procedures, and criteria. Under the heading “Scope and components of the project”, for example, the guidelines recommended that:

- The admission of creative practice in a PaR PhD context is premised on the notion that research questions in the performing arts can be rigorously worked through in a range of practices (of which writing is only one).
- Any prescriptive model of creativity and reflection is avoided in order to enable students to develop their own praxis. The specificity of each project, its scope and the location(s) of its examinable presentation(s) in terms of PhD submission must be established in the applications and admissions procedure above.
- The balance between written and practical outcomes will be determined by individual students with their supervisors under the auspices of regulatory frameworks of the institution concerned. Normally, a written submission of 40,000 words will constitute 50% of the project and there will be a minimum of 20,000 words or 25% of the project.
- The practical component must demonstrate a high level of skill in the manipulation of the materials of production and involve a research inquiry.
- Practice should be accepted as methodological process of research inquiry and a mode of dissemination of research in its own right.
- The written outcome will contextualize the project and include a retrospective analysis of the process and outcomes, reflecting on chosen research methodologies and production processes and the relation between them.

Under “Criteria” the guidelines read:

- PhDs involving PaR should meet the established generic criteria of ‘making a contribution to knowledge’ or ‘affording substantial new insights’. In some cases, though by no means all, the practice itself may be original (in the sense of unlike anything which has gone before, rather than in the simple sense of the product of the maker’s creative imagination). In other instances, new knowledge or substantial new insights will be afforded by ideas in practice (writing being just one of several practices in this context). As with PhDs in other disciplines, including across the Sciences, Humanities and Arts, the requirement is for a modest, but new, contribution to a body of knowledge. Examiners should take care not to require more of PhD candidates by PaR simply because PaR is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Despite the references here to “new insights”, the guidelines obviously encounter difficulty in saying where originality is located in terms of PaR. The problems involved in treating originality in art and in research as equivalent are amply recognised, if not resolved, elsewhere. Kershaw writes about the need to define carefully “the differences between aesthetic innovation, and the uses of such innovation placed at the service of explicit research agendas designed to produce new knowledge or insights”. The issue was widely aired at the Practice as Research in Performance (PARIP) symposium held in 2001 at Bristol University. Angela Piccini reports one group’s concern to uphold the distinction between practice as research and artistic practice. Whereas artists might legitimately remain unaware of their work’s relation to the wider artistic context, it was considered
paramount that practitioner-researchers explicitly identify and justify their contribution to knowledge within their field. The group argued that practice as research should obey the norms of scholarly research practice, in which the claim to new knowledge is made explicit in a commentary or abstract, supported by the academic apparatus of bibliography, abstract, literature review, citations, etc. The group also maintained the need for research to produce “a set of separable, demonstrable, research findings that are abstractable, not simply locked into the experience of performing”. Likewise, the UK Council for Graduate Education in a separate report on practice-based doctorates maintained that creative output must have an “academic research perspective” if it is presented as part of a PhD submission. The suggestion again is that reflective generation of knowledge within a research context, rather than artistic innovation, is what counts in this context. But, it went on to suggest, the practice-based doctorate advances knowledge partly by means of practice. An original/creative piece of work is included in the submission for examination. It is distinct in that significant aspects of the claim for doctoral characteristics of originality, mastery and contribution to the field are held to be demonstrated through the original creative work.

Elsewhere, the report maintained that high artistic quality in the creative work constituted a necessary condition, if not a sufficient condition, for the award of a PhD. It is hardly surprising, then, that in her discussion of practice as research in dance Anna Pakes observes: “This ambiguity about whether practice as research has to demonstrate artistic innovation or originality in cognitive terms is yet to be resolved”.

While the most acute anxieties arise in connection with contemporary performance practice framed as research, practice-based research has also developed a significant presence in theatre historiography. There has always been a small but devoted group of advocates of reconstructed performance. Indeed, as Erika Fischer-Lichte tells us, some of the earliest research under the disciplinary label of Theaterwissenschaft (theatre studies) took precisely that form. This was the work carried out in Germany by Max Hermann in the early twentieth century. Having located the specificity of theatre in what might now be called ‘eventness’, with all its implied ephemerality, Hermann had to confront the problem that the object of research can never be present to the researcher. Accordingly, he devoted his efforts to reconstructions of past performances as a way of compensating for the lacuna. But, according to Erika Fischer-Lichte, “as early as the 1920s, Hermann realised that led to a dead end. So, he gave up the futile attempt to reconstruct past performances and restricted his efforts to reconstructing their spatial conditions.”

Hermann’s perceived failure did not deter later scholars from reconstructing past performances—not necessarily in the expectation of being able to observe under laboratory conditions the spark of living theatre but often with less grandiose and perhaps more achievable aims. In the 1960s and 1970s at Lancaster Tom Lawrenson undertook reconstructions both of historical performance spaces (such as the Hôtel de Bourgogne in the early seventeenth-century) and of landmark productions (such as Gaston Baty’s 1936 adaptation of Madame Bovary). In the first of these experiments the aim was to learn more about how a scenic convention from a different era (in this case décor simultané) actually functioned in practice. The second was carried out with a view to experiencing (as opposed to intuiting) how a highly distinctive plastic aesthetic was articulated in space and time. Whilst laboratory work of this kind clearly has utility in resolving particular questions, understanding specific practices, or
even sometimes yielding unexpected insights, it is easy to feel a sense of disappointment at the seeming disproportion of scale between effort and results. This disadvantage is offset to some extent if, rather than serving for a one-off experiment, the reconstructed performance space constitutes a permanent resource capable of housing different types of embodied research. A current project of this type is Martin White’s full-scale reconstruction of a Jacobean indoor theatre to support research into the material conditions of professional performance in early seventeenth-century English theatre. The Architectural Research Group, a wing of the Shakespeare’s Globe research programme, is likewise pursuing a project to build an Inigo Jones Playhouse alongside the most well-known reconstructed theatre, the Globe, at Southwark in London.

The primary challenge involved in reconstructed performance spaces is how to interpret historical evidence. Reconstruction of past performances poses an altogether greater set of challenges. Robert Sarlos, one of the most enthusiastic advocates of reconstructed performances, sees their utility primarily as aids to the researcher’s historical imagination. Arguing for an approach that unites scholarly and creative approaches, he says

I firmly believe it is within the scholar’s reach – sometimes working as artists, sometimes with them – to deepen the artist’s and spectators’ understanding of the Elizabethan and many other theatrical golden ages.35

Sarlos proposes that

Armed with data, the historian should approximately traverse the road followed by the original group of artists and create a dynamic, life-size, spatial and temporal (hence, four-dimensional) model. No matter that it cannot be an exact replica of the original work – it will bring all participants, including spectators, closer to the sensory realization of the style and atmosphere, the physical and emotional dynamics of a bygone era, than can mere reading.36

The effect of “sensory realization” is most potent when the theatrical form is most remote from modern-day aesthetics. A well-known example is Dunbar Ogden’s stagings of the twelfth-century church music-drama *Ludus Danielis* which have allowed spectators to appreciate the extraordinarily moving qualities of one of the most beautiful artworks of medieval Europe.37

Conversely, of course, it is precisely in such cases that the impression of sensory realization is likely to be most misleading. The hurdle at which even the most brilliant reconstruction necessarily falls is the impossibility of reconstructing audiences of the past. Both Max Hermann, approaching the question as a theatre historian, and Nikolai Evreinov, approaching it as progressive practitioner (in his Ancient Theatre), eventually renounced their attempts to recreate the experiential dimension of past performances. Confronting this difficulty head-on, Gilli Bush-Bailey has taken a contrary approach to embodied historical research. As she notes,

the integrity of historiography as research practice can only be undermined by an inevitably presentist approach to historically distant dramatic texts and performance style when examined in the modern workshop.38

The strategy adopted to address this difficulty was not to try to replicate the spirit of the original performance but to inscribe the researcher’s historiographic consciousness in the reconstructed performance. So, when researching working relationships between actresses and female playwrights in seventeenth-century theatre, her reconstructed performance (of Ariadne’s *She Ventures and He Wins* at the playhouse in Lincoln’s Inn Fields in 1695) staged the historical elements within a meta-play specially written to explore the context of the play’s first production, and in this way
combining the more secure elements from approaches to performance reconstruction with a new piece of writing that would incorporate and demonstrate my own research on the female theatre practitioners who created [the original play]. This example of embodied creative research might be seen as an innovative response to Tracy Davis’s call for a specifically feminist historiography to explore aspects of the theatrical past which are simply not recoverable from conventional documentary evidence.

Conclusion

The term ‘practice as research’ embraces a number of emerging and still controversial developments. Given the evident state of flux, there is no single conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing. However, several observations may be advanced by way of provisional conclusion.

First, if we accept – as we surely must – that all performance constitutes research into theatre, then ultimately there is nothing new in practice as research except its framing as research in terms that are acceptable to the academy. As Maria Shevtsova points out, research about the theatre, of which academic research is a significant part, depends on the research of the theatre, that is, of its practitioners. Rarely, if ever, does academic research pre-empt the work of practitioners.

Second, however, framing creative practice as research in an academic sense necessarily involves practitioner-researchers in a set of obligations to the research community which they are not required to engage with as creative artists. Practice as research can hardly constitute its own end without becoming solipsistic. The fact that most of the published material involving PaR is concerned with debating the conditions and consequences of its validation by the academy, rather than with communicating specific insights or knowledge generated by it, is evidence that at present these obligations are still a source of tension, and their nature is either imperfectly understood, or contested.

Thirdly, and rather obviously, if the practical turn does constitute a new direction for academic theatre research, the current state of understanding of its possibilities is still at a tentative stage. Attempting to survey the small but growing published corpus relating to PaR, one encounters far more questions than clear-cut answers. A degree of scepticism is therefore appropriate. However, the number of postgraduates currently working on practice-base projects virtually guarantees that the field will continue to grow in significance. It therefore seems vital to continue asking the questions.

Finally, it is evident from this summary account that, rather than constituting an identifiable methodology, PaR actually denotes an expansion in multiple directions simultaneously, in other words an expansion of the range of possibilities open to researchers. Ideally, practice as research would be understood as an option among several, a tool to be used in combination with others, in the way that Schechner once spoke of the need to combine “aspects of the ‘scientific method’ with some of the traditionally intuitive methods of the arts”. Gilli Bush-Bailey’s embodied feminist research combining elements of positivist historiography, creative writing, and performance perhaps serves as a paradigm for a methodology which utilises different types of evidence and moves between multiple discourses. It definitely seems desirable that recourse to practice, having emerged from one ghetto, should become naturalized in this form rather than confine itself in another.

Notes

1 As long ago as 1946 Lewin used the term ‘action research’ to describe an intentional


4 Baz Kershaw – not unproblematically – distinguishes between practice-based research and practice as research in the following terms: “I take practice-based research to refer to research through live performance practice, to determine how and what it may be contributing in the way of new knowledge or insights in fields other than performance. Hence, practice-based research may be pursued for many purposes – historical, political, aesthetic, etc. – and so researchers may not need to be theatre scholars to pursue it. By practice-as-research I refer to research into performance practice, to determine how that practice may be developing new insights into or knowledge about the forms, genres, uses, etc. of performance itself, for example with regard to their relevance to broader social and/or cultural processes” (Baz Kershaw, “Performance, memory, heritage, history, spectacle – The Iron Ship”, in: *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 21 (3), pp. 132–149).


8 Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p. 18.

9 http://www.communication.northwestern.edu/performancestudies/graduate/, Consulted 21.7.06.


11 Piccini/Kershaw, “Practice as research”, p. 119.


14 These have been prescribed in successive official publications of the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Martin White has concisely summarised the historical process in “Practice-based Research in the UK – an overview”, paper given to the American Society for Theatre Research conference, New York 2000 (unpublished). I am indebted to Martin White for allowing me to draw on his paper for the following account of RAE-related discussions between 1992 and 2000.

15 White, “Practice-based Research”.


19 Thompson, “Notes and Queries”, pp. 161–162.


23 Robin Nelson/Stuart Andrews, “The regulations and protocols governing ‘Practice as Research’ (PaR) in the performing arts in the UK leading to the award of PhD”, http://www.bris.ac.uk/parip/par_phd.htm, Consulted 21.7.06.


26 Piccini, “An Historiographic Perspective”.


36 Postlewait/McConachie, *Interpreting the theatrical past*, p. 201.


39 Bush-Bailey, “Putting it into practice”, p. 83.


42 See *Select Bibliography for Practice as Research in Performance* (http://www.bris.ac.uk/parip/bib.htm, Consulted 21.7.06).