

# MIRROR|MIRROR|ON THE WALL: A STRUCTURED REFLECTION FRAMEWORK TO IMPLEMENT VISUAL RESEARCH AS PRACTISE-BASED ARTS RESEARCH DESIGN ILLUSTRATED WITHIN AN APPLIED PHOTOGRAPHIC EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

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## **Abstract**

*Although various South African universities engage with art practice research methodologies, the research designs employed have not been clearly articulated or interrogated as of yet, leaving some work to be done towards answering Loxley and Prosser's (2005) call for a refinement of arts-based research methods. This paper presents a framework for structured reflection as research methodology within practice-based arts research - employing a synthetic research approach between the textual component and creative artefact production, with the creation of the artefact as integral component of the research design and research output, as opposed to analysis of the creative artefact. In this, an arts practice research design should be both explicit yet appropriate to the type of research questions encountered in practise and still to the outputs expected within an arts context (Biggs 2004:10). The role of the creative artefact is described as the research output, presenting not only new knowledge but also new forms of knowledge that tend to be transformative (Halford & Knowles 2005) and geared towards understanding rather than explication (Sullivan 2005), with a fundamental underpinning in phenomenological discourse as qualitative research strategy (Sokolowski 2000:85). Concepts such as phenomenological intentionality and the understanding of embodied experience and the lived world (Sobchack 1999) provides an ontological context for reflection to grapple with and validate the potentially tacit and subjective knowledge (Moustakas 1994:99) of the creative artefact. The textual component thus engages, through the proposed structured reflection framework, with the visual artefact component in four contexts, nominally defined as the conceptual context, the critical context, the methodological context and the process context. The textual component thereby functions as a framing device that has to be read in relation to the artefact component. In this application, a strategically adapted 4-stage model informed by Johns (2002) on structured reflection, Sullivan (2005) on arts practise research, Dewey and Kolb (in Neil 2004) on experiential learning models, is considered most appropriate, making use of the research journal (Newbury 2001) as core to guiding reflective practice. The proposed framework is illustrated in an applied photographic educational context, where again phenomenology functions as underpinning philosophy and learning is facilitated and guided by means of reflective practice. Educating through guided reflection for arts-practice research from an undergraduate level onward is proposed as a way forward to improving practice and expanding practice-based arts research, especially at the still ill-defined yet historically centred-on-practise, Universities of Technology, and in so doing contributing to the possibility of differentiating a unique identity in the South African Higher Educational arena and expanding its potential contribution to the nature and scope of knowledge creation.*

**Key Words:** *practise-based arts research; reflective practice; guided reflection; phenomenology; research journal; photography*

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The international paradigm shift in arts research practise towards the process of artefact production and the visual has recently been reflected in the South African higher education engagement therewith, as evidenced in the NRF *Practise-as-research Report (2009)* involving the University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University, UKZN-PMB and Rhodes University, as well as the *On Making: Integrating Approaches to Practice-Led Research in Art and Design Colloquium (2009)* hosted by FADA of the University of Johannesburg. In this emerging context, the focus of this paper is to suggest a possible research framework for reflective practice that addresses some of the challenges faced by practice-based arts researchers in a rigorous manner, whilst at the same time acknowledging the artists specific way of knowing and engagement with phenomena. The proposed framework is developed by means of a hybrid research design based on a) model-building by means of a literature review on salient, yet critical, points on regarding the creative artefact (CA) as knowledge representation in a research milieu and b) reflection-on-teaching and reflection-on-experiential learning informed by a phenomenological perspective. The proposed framework is illustrated within a

third year applied photographic educational context, directed towards guiding reflection on 'artefact production' that allows structured deductive inferences and refinements to be made to the framework design. This approach allows the researchers to establish causal relationships and allow predictive claims under certain conditions to be made (Mouton 2001:177) regarding the functionality thereof in practise-based arts research (P<sub>b</sub>AR).

The seminal paper by Frayling (1993), entitled *Research in Art and Design*, opened the debate into the manner in which the idea of arts-practise could be conceptualized as research (Durling, Friedman & Gutherson 2002:9). P<sub>b</sub>AR, i.e. research in which a creative artefact (CA) is the *basis* of the contribution to knowledge, is defined by McNiff (2008:29 in Loxley & Prosser 2008:35 ed.) as "the systematic use of artistic process as a primary way of understanding and/or examining reality and/or experience by a researcher through the actual making of an artistic expression, an artefact". P<sub>b</sub>AR is an adaptable form of inquiry that crafts 'in material, matter, media, text and time' (Sullivan 2005:4), extending the possibilities of knowledge generation in research practise. Since art practice has a rationale of its own, this perspective foregrounds "the epistemological value of what the artist-researcher actually does" (Pakes 2004:2), allocating to process the function of constructing transformative knowledge (Sullivan 2005:180) and to the CA the function of embodiment of knowledge.

P<sub>b</sub>AR aspires to 'provoke, challenge, and illuminate' (Sullivan 2005:174) issues, rather than corroborate and strengthen argument, allowing a critical urgency to enter (Sullivan 2005:180). Key texts include Sullivan (2005), Loxley & Prosser (2008), Newbury's *Visual Studies Journal*; Biggs' *Working Papers in Art & Design* and Legget's *Creativity and Cognition Studios (CCS)* with most offering "a compelling argument that the creative and cultural inquiry undertaken by artists is a form of research" and exploring "themes, practices, and contexts of artistic inquiry and positions them within the discourse of research" that questions the sufficiency of building on limited notions of rationality and empiricism to guide inquiry (Sullivan 2005:50). This thrust towards P<sub>b</sub>AR demands a critical re-evaluation of research frameworks and methodologies that dominate research discourse on the CA (cf. Loxley & Prosser (2008), Rose (2001); Mitchell (1994), Hall (1997), Sullivan (2005)) to allow for a more reflective research practise (Sullivan 2005:xvii).

Loxley and Prosser, in *Introducing Visual Methods* (2008), assert that 'learning how to effectively incorporate the [creative artefact] into contemporary research designs is a methodological priority', acknowledging that 'the role of arts-based research in general and visual arts research in particular makes a strong claim for inclusion in the qualitative research family but has some way to go before being accepted as a rigorous and valid approach. [Arts] researchers should give serious consideration to refine art-based research methods'. Emergent P<sub>b</sub>AR methods and designs based on synthesis include arteology, psycho-biography, auto-ethnography, visual phenomenology, context-definition/experimentation models and visual research. Unfortunately, very few of the mentioned research designs offer any clear method/s of implementation.

P<sub>b</sub>AR involves a 'significant shift away from the textual representation' (Dewsbury 2003 in Halford & Knowles 2005) towards research that is 'critical, contextual, kinaesthetic. [The] visual artefacts allow a means for sensing new forms of knowledge' (Halford & Knowles 2005 ed.) capturing 'the ineffable, the hard-to-put-into-words' (Weber 2008: 44-45 in Loxley & Prosser 2008:37), evoking multi-dimensional knowledge production that encompass 'individual, historical, cultural, and political content and contexts' (Sullivan 2005:173) which cannot be easily reduced to words.

The challenges and difficulties facing the P<sub>b</sub>AR practitioner interested in doing research are three-fold. The first concerns fundamental issues of validity and credibility, as, to a large degree, the CA seems to be still regarded as representing 'intuitive, tacit and subjective knowledge' (Mathison 2007:1) and not suitable for representation of knowledge attained in a research study and as a 'communicative device for reporting findings' (Mitchell 2008). The second is concerned with the role of the CA in the final exegesis and the third relate to the procedures of the research design itself.

### **If I could say it with words...**

Regarding the first challenge, i.e. as to the CA as knowledge representation, Sandra Mathison (2007:1) remarks that, "[the visual CA], in fact, is no more suspect than any other sort of data, such as numbers or text. [Visual CA], like any other data, can be used to question, to imagine, to critique, to

theorize, to mislead, to unite, to argue, to narrate, to explain, to teach, to represent, and, as such, their value as data and knowledge should not be ridiculed or avoided". Mathison (2007:1) further remarks that this use of '[the visual CA] in research and evaluation challenges a taken for granted assumption that legitimate knowledge of what is or what is not valued is best expressed in words, whether spoken or written'.

The criticality lies in epistemology. If knowledge is broadly considered as the individual contextualised internalisation of values, beliefs, information, skill, expert insight and experience (Davenport & Prusak 1998 *in* Durant-Law 2003:3), the Aristotelian classification of knowledge as theoretical, productive and practical (Smith 1999), offers an entry. Theoretical knowledge is knowledge in search of answers, essence or truth, whilst the productive is knowledge concerned with making, and the practical is concerned with judgment (Smith 1999). All three classifications consist of explicit knowledge, i.e. knowledge that is "articulated, recorded, formal, systematic" (Durant-Law 2003:3) and tacit knowledge, i.e. 'personal context-specific knowledge that is difficult to formalise, record or articulate' (Polanyi 1996, Tiwana 2002 *in* Durant-Law 2003:3). Both practical and productive knowledge involves the assessment of the character of practical reasoning, not associated with the positivist deductive or inductive modes of reasoning, on the argument that the rationality of a practice directly influences its epistemological legitimacy (Pakes 2004:1).

Aristotle's formulation of the practical syllogism acts as the underpinning for this alternative model of reasoning (Pakes 2004:1). The practical syllogism is 'a formalisation of the reasoning that makes sense of and justifies particular actions [and results]' (Pakes 2004:1), suggesting that when deciding how to act, the individual starts with intentions, balancing them against the specific set of circumstances, to produce an action and a result (Pakes 2004:1). Practical reasoning goes beyond the 'controlled concepts, thinking processes and forms of knowledge [to where the unique relationship between knowledge and the reasoning process] appear as either the device whereby the knowledge is produced, the manifestation of the knowledge's exercise or the logical expression after the fact of action' (Pakes 2004:1). Its logic is the logic of satisfaction in correspondence with "purposes and circumstances, not of truth and falsity" (Pakes 2004:1).

The CA, as repository of productive and practical knowledge, is of a tacit interpretivist nature, demonstrating an individuated comprehension of reality (Mathison 2007:1), representing, to the creative practitioner, 'questions and ideas' (Sullivan 2005:181) concerning knowledge contained and 'caught in experience and situations' (Sullivan 2005:189). Then, as to credibility of the visual CA as knowledge container, Mathison (2007) suggests the following considerations: (1) the quality of the research design "established procedurally" and, in the context of P<sub>b</sub>AR, offers that "a unique attribute of an interpretivist research design is the inclusion of a personal account of how and why the study was done" (Mathison 2007:10), (2) an adequacy of attention to multiple perspectives/context, i.e. to the CA, the author thereof and/or audience (following Rose 2001), through a density of detail, oftentimes textual by nature, including personal interpretation, intention and information, as well as CA presentation, where 'sequenced, repetitive, variations of a set of themes, provide their own context [and] teach viewers what they need to know in order to arrive, by their own reasoning, at some conclusions about what they are looking at' (Becker 1998:14 *in* Mathison 2007:12). Tufte (*in* Mathison 2007:12) explains "the more intense the detail, the greater the clarity and understanding", and (3) credibility is dependent on the extent to which the study contributes to knowledge where the focus is not on 'the rhetoric of scientific proceduralism, but a rhetoric of believability, often a call to join the [researcher] on a journey of understanding and knowing" (Wagner 2004:150 *in* Mathison 2007:18).

### **On the black book and such...**

The second challenge begs the question as to what exactly the role of the CA is in the research exegesis. Ross Gibson's view (*in* Candy 2006:9) is "the text is not an explanation of the artwork; rather, the text is an explicit, word-specific representation of processes that occur during the iterative art-making routine, processes of gradual, cyclical speculation, realisation or revelation leading to momentary, contingent degrees of understanding. To this extent, the text that one produces is a kind of narrative about the flux of perception-cognition-intuition. The text accounts for the iterative process that carries on until the artwork is complete and available for critique, appreciation, interpretation, description, evaluation". Similarly, Mitchell (2008:374) comments that 'at the heart of visual work is its facilitation of reflexivity in the research process. This point is a critical in understanding arts-based research".

Thus, the visual research exegesis contains a textual and artefact component; the key idea, as Scrivener (2000:10) suggests, is that an arts-practise report be structured around reflection to a format that could include 'identification of issues, concerns and interests to be worked within the project' (Scrivener 2000:10), a review of 'theory, knowledge and information relevant to identified issues, concerns and interests' (Scrivener 2000:10), reflection on process production and a summative reflection that 're-contextualises/re-frames issues, concerns and interests in response to material produced' (Scrivener 2000:10).

The exegesis becomes a framing device for understanding the project and its various contexts; an idea re-iterated by Baxter et al. (2009:9-10) that, in order to frame a project as research, the researcher would have to provide:

- a statement of intent outlining the problem or question to be addressed;
- a contextualisation of the enquiry in respect of the location or environment of the study; within the discipline and a body of theory; and in relation to the researcher's own work previous to the study;
- an outline of the method/process followed including ethical considerations where applicable.

Thus, the researcher would have to provide a self-reflection on the project'.

The exegesis, by means of a reflexive textual framing, orientates the project in relation to what it set out to explore, the success of its realisation as well as the knowledge obtained about individuated practise in the process of conducting the project.

## So, how do we do it...

This concept of reflection in/on practise is not new, and brings us to the third aspect, the problematic surrounding the research design to be employed. As mentioned, very little in terms of guidelines exist for the design of a visual research study (Sullivan 2005:92). But, we are not completely in the dark.

Within the social sciences, a number of qualitative research strategies present themselves that attempt to encapsulate life as it is lived and experienced by the individual (Boeree 1998:2). Such an interpretivist attitude manifests itself through an enthusiastic introspection, strengthened by an 'ontological idealism and epistemological relativism' (Loxley & Prosser 2007:7), underpinned in phenomenology as ontology.

Phenomenology argues that there is only one source of certainty: the embodied experience (Lauer *in* Makaryk 1993:26, Reynolds 2005:5). It focuses on the description of reality as it appears to the individual, i.e. individual interpretation is the basic structure of experience (Moustakas 1994:10). Merleau-Ponty (1962) proposed that interpretation need not necessarily be rational, but is influenced by intentionality. Then, phenomenological intentionality refers to how we are conscious of phenomena (Moustakas 1994:68), which Sokolowski (2000:85) explains through perception, remembering, imagining or anticipating.

Perception describes ever-changing presences and absences through which we come to some understanding of the aspects of identity and consciousness (Sokolowski 2000:17); remembering is the internal re-enactment of previous perceptions in the present; imagining is the displacement of the self into 'an imaginary world, but the real world around me remains as the believed-in, default context within which I imagine, from which I am displaced' (Sokolowski 2000:72); anticipating being the imaginative projection of the self into future situations that have not been lived through (Sokolowski 2000:73).

These intentionalities are classified as the internal domains of experience (Sokolowski 2000:85) whereas intention to external reality is made through description (description of direct perception), signification (e.g. words on a page that make us conscious of that which are absent), indication (stones next to a path is taken as a trail marker) and picturing (a piece of wood with marks on is read as a picture). This ontology of phenomenology offers a conceptual construct by means of which P<sub>b</sub>AR could be framed through structured reflection, facilitating the development of a research design 'to identify what should be attended to in the process [of visual research as method], its form and documentation' (Scrivener 2000:9).

Reflection is a meta-cognitive strategy of active exploration which facilitates the understanding of 'experiences, action and decisions taken' (Schneider 2006). Dewey (1933) (*in* Schneider 2006), explains reflection as 'as active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends'. A practitioner engages with reflection when 'the [unexpected] arises and an attempt is made to understand and resolve it'. Then, reflection is the functional process of phenomenological reduction whereby the subjective experience is interrogated 'leaving intact all of its attributes, [yet] throwing into

relief both consciousness itself and the object it apprehends' (Makaryk 1993:140), divided into either reflection-in-action or reflection-on-action, as argued by Schön (1983).

Reflection-in-action is described as 'that process that allows us to reshape what we are working on, *while* we are working on it. It is an on-going experimentation that helps us find a viable solution' (Schuh 2003) that allows the practitioner to develop a specialised 'repertoire of expectations, skills, techniques and solutions' (Schön 1983:60) in resolving concerns-of-practise as they arise, which, more often than not, goes unrecorded.

In contrast, reflection-on-action is driven by our need to learn from experience in order to extend the repertoire of knowledge, described as 'thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome' (Schön 1983:26).

Scrivener (2000:8) comments that, 'there is, then, an argument for suggesting that the practitioner could benefit if reflection was recorded and reported more systematically' concluding that it is in the methodical recording of praxis that the researcher is able to describe the individuated phenomenological intentionality of the process of practise that frames the artefact and through phenomenological reduction in reflection that the knowledge is made more accessible, 'both to the researcher and those to whom the project is communicated' (Scrivener 2000:8).

Since the research design in P<sub>b</sub>AR is dynamic, exploratory and revelatory, reflexive practices are used to shed new light on what is known and to consider the possibility of what is to follow (Sullivan 2005,:191-192), as the Visual Research Centre of the University of Dundee (2009) explains, 'the framework of the "practice-based research in art and design" is still very open and integrative. It allows the artist researcher to develop his/her own methodology within a research process which is highly individual and dependent on the specific subject matter'.

Sullivan (2008) argues that 'this is the only way that we can capitalize on the extraordinary capacity of art and cultural production to come up with new views and visions and theories and practices of significance'.

Yet, though acknowledging the particularised research design needs of each study, such an approach does not assist in commencing research, as many aspiring artist-researchers flounder about for a significant period of time, reading all-and-sunder in order to find a way, a means, a strategy of engagement. It is with this mind that a structured reflection framework for visual research in P<sub>b</sub>AR was designed that could be followed in a logical and direct way without being prescriptive or, in any fashion, all-encompassing. It serves as an outline towards exploration of the various contexts that inform and are fundamentally embedded in CA production, as illustrated in the simulated core of the visualisation diagram, where, if any single context is removed, a different entity will result, whilst offering a point-of-entry into the research process itself.

Specifically, these contexts could be described as:

- Critical Context  
The critical context engages with the nature of the medium employed, its epistemological and ontological underpinnings, critical theories and historical tradition in order to situate the production of the CA in a broader socio-cultural and theoretical debate.
- Conceptual Context  
The conceptual context explores the relevant background to the idea as construct and fundamental underpinning informing the CA.
- Process Context  
The procedural context focuses on the dimension of production, reflecting on choices, both aesthetic and materials-based, explored in the production of the artefact. It is in this phase that critical reflection on the evolution of the artefact/s are discussed, illustrated, including any discoveries made, either from an experimental or aesthetic point-of-view.
- Methodological Context  
The methodological context immerses the researcher in the underlying ontology of the operational research rationale. When these contexts are integrated into a reflection model, as summarised by Kuit & Reay (2001:131), a framework emerges.

In this application, an adapted 4-stage model is considered most appropriate, which include (1) the action of CA creation undertaken as core moment in the research process, (2) the description of the action to understand the individual embodied experience thereof, (3) a reflection that examines the practitioner's motivations and choices in relation to the process of CA production and (4) and evaluation and consideration of alternative strategies and other possible options that again feeds into the act of CA creation, as illustrated (fig. 1).

The framework arranges the identified four stages for structured reflection into three phases, recorded in a research journal (*cf.* Newbury 2001), with:

- phase one offers an initial reflection that positions the researcher's intent at the start of the project,
- phase two being continuous cyclical reflection on the results of process, i.e. how choices made during production corroborated or contradicted the initial visualisation and,
- phase three as the summative reflection on learning through engagement with reflective practice, that will, in Johns' (2002, p 10) words, prompt 'the practitioner to deconstruct her experiences in ways that hopefully will lead to understanding and insights that can be applied to new experiences' and, most importantly, lead to PbAR that stands up to rigorous peer reviewing processes.

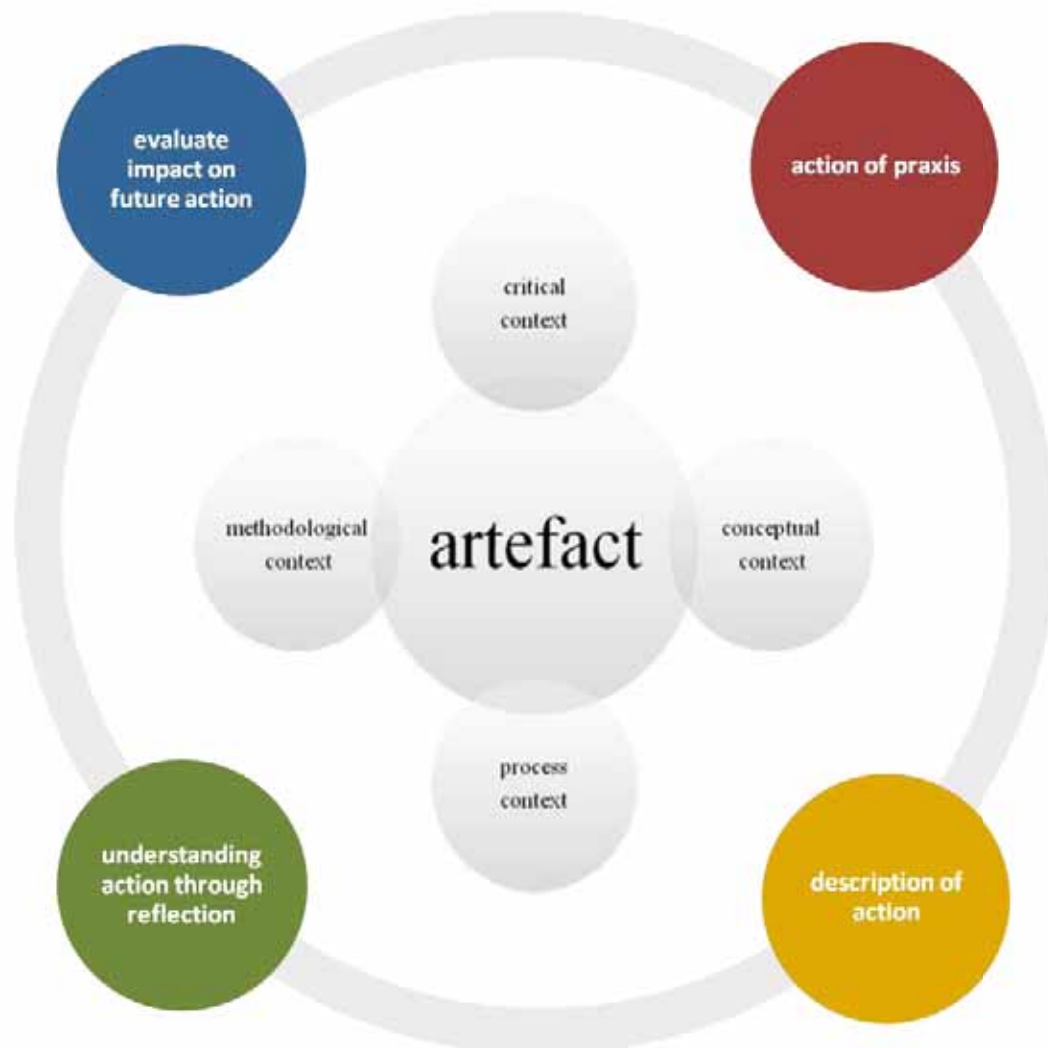


Figure 1 The model for structured reflection in practise-based arts research

## The proposed framework...

### *Phase 1: Initial Reflection*

In your research journal,

- Describe/Explain my creative approach in relation to technique, aesthetic, genre/subject. What does my work look like at present? Why does it look the way it does? What do I want my work to look like? How does this relate to my values and norms? Is there a conflict between the appearance of the artefact and my mental construct thereof? Add visual illustrations if, and where, appropriate of both my own work and examples of work that have appeal to me. Look meticulously at the visual illustrations. Describe each in relation to both the above and the relevant following aspects.

Aspects to consider might include, as examples (not exhaustive):

- When considering my aesthetic approach, what is my relationship to the following? Light, Color, Line, Shape, Rhythm, Pattern, Contrast, Texture, Volume, Perspective, POV, AOV, Balance, Format, Motion, Narrative, Horizon. How attentive am I to an aspect? Is it important in my approach? What does it contribute to my aesthetic? What does it contribute to the meaning in my work? Is there a conflict between my interpretation/use thereof and the conventional interpretation thereof?
- When considering my *technical approach* (photography as illustrative example), what is my relationship to the following? Tripod/Handheld, Camera Format, Frame Ratio, Frame Orientation, Lens Focal-length, Presentation, Focus, Exposure, Image Quality (Granularity/Tone Reproduction/ Definition/Color Reproduction), Photographic Processes & Techniques. How attentive am I to the aspect? Is it important in my approach? What does it contribute to my process? What does it mean to me to make use of a specific aspect? Is it duly considered, i.e. intentional? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Describe the relationship between my approach and my understanding of truth. Is it objective or subjective? Essentialist or Fragmented? Explain. Is there a conflict between the idea of the artefact and my relation to truth? Explain.
- How is the tradition of the genre in the discipline I am working in influencing my aesthetic visualisation of the project/artefact/s? What limitation does this impose on my generation of concepts/ideas? On my technique/process? On the aesthetic of the artefact/s? What opportunities for exploration emerge? Explain. How are the aesthetic choices I made different from or similar to the visual tradition of the genre? Add visual illustrations if, and where, appropriate of my own work and others that have appeal to me as an individual. Look meticulously at the visual illustrations. Describe each in relation to the above
- Describe my relationship to the phenomena (subject). How am I conscious of the subject? How do I relate my experience of the subject to my internal expectation? Is it through sensory perception? Is it by means of memory? Is it through imagination?
- What is my underlying idea/motive for the project at hand? Describe it. Referring to literature from as many fields of enquiry as possible/relevant on the concept/idea, provide information thereof as background. Following, what specific aspect thereof do I wish to be the focus of my enquiry at this juncture? How is my conceptual underpinning of the project influencing the visualisation thereof? How does it affect my approach in relation to technique and aesthetic?
- Illustrate by example, the work of other practitioners on the concept/idea. How does their work affect my approach? What limitations do the above impose on my visualisation of the project/artefact/s? How do I visualise the difference between their work and my own? What opportunities for exploration/originality emerge? Explain.
- What do I understand to be the relationships between the artefact to be created and the reality/concept/idea to be depicted? Is it to describe or record or document? Is it to aestheticise? Is it symbolic and/or metaphorical? What limitations do these impose on my visualisation of the project/artefact/s? What opportunities for exploration emerge? Explain.
- Explain why a P<sub>b</sub>AR is considered suitable to the investigation of my concept/idea. What are the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research design/approach/method selected? Are these imminently suitable to P<sub>b</sub>AR? If so, explain why? Explain the process of the research to be conducted? Are there aspects of the study that can only be communicated via the artefact? Explain. What do I consider to be the role of the reflection in my research? How will I conduct this? How will I record this? What will my final submission for qualification look like?
- Reflect on how my personal preferences regarding aesthetics | technique | genre/tradition | concept/idea | research design are influencing the visualisation of the project? Is this relevant to the enquiry at hand? Explain.

### *Phase 2: Cyclic Reflection*

Describe my

- initial intended process. Which aesthetic criteria will convey the intended idea to my expectation? Is there a limitation on aesthetic approach due to technical means available to me? Is there a limitation on aesthetic approach due to financial means available to me? Which technique criteria will convey the intended idea to my expectation? Is there a limitation on technical means due to financial considerations?
- Initiate cycle of practise production based on the above.

- Reflect on the surprises I have encountered while working with the chosen aesthetic/technical/subject/genre means/approach? What opportunities for exploration emerge? Explain. Is this relevant to the enquiry at hand? Explain. How have these surprises reframed my practice?
- Initiate cycle of practise production based on the above.

Repeat phase 2 until completion of project

### *Phase 3: Summative Reflection*

How has this project enabled me to:

- Confront and clarify the beliefs and values that inform my practice? Understand my work in relation to that of others? Access, critique and assimilate relevant theory within personal knowing in ways that enable me to make sense of my experience and inform my practice? Understand my own individuated subjective perspective on the concept or idea?
- Understand my practise in terms of its ontological underpinnings and epistemological value?
- Add value to my discipline? Become a visual researcher?
- Focus on, understand and explore new ways to solve particular problems in my practice? Develop an understanding of my authorship and personal style?
- Make connections between the present experience and past experiences whilst anticipating how I might respond in future situations in relation to my personal approach in terms of my interaction with Technique/Equipment | Aesthetics | Subject | other? Explain.
- Improve my practise?

### **To illustrate...**

Recursively, within the higher educational sector, the introduction of P<sub>b</sub>AR options must filter down to undergraduate level. As illustrated, traditional notions of 'knowledge' and 'research' is challenged repeatedly with P<sub>b</sub>AR. Reilly (2002:4) explains, "a traditional area of epistemological enquiry has collapsed; taking with it some of that which remains of the quest for certainty in 'knowledge', and this has implications for the arts". As such, debates on the nature of knowledge should not only be included in the curriculum but should also inform didactic strategies.

Since phenomenology not only informs our understanding of consciousness and experience, but also implies a way of being in the world with an attitude of enquiry to assist understanding of experienced phenomena (Hultgren 1995), aspects of which are almost automatically included in studio teaching practice, our experience can be expanded by the sharing thereof when a more structured didactic approach is taken to prepare students for P<sub>b</sub>AR. Didactic strategies informed by phenomenological thinking imply that an environment conducive to learning rather than teaching must be created, that allow for new, non-traditional types of knowledge to be acquired and emerge.

Kovacs' statement that "[t]he art of teaching inspired by the phenomenological attitude is not a power of imposition allowing the illusion of autonomy, but an attitude of unfolding the actualizing forces of the human person" (1979 abstract) is echoed by Hultgren (1995) with a focus in teaching on 'letting learn'. Hultgren (1995:381) goes on to stress the importance of facilitating the realisation of authorship through development of the students' own voice. In this, guided reflection is a commonly employed strategy.

As useful, constructive reflection is not automatic, natural or easy for most students, they need to be assisted both in developing the general habit of reflecting and in a structure for reflection (Johns 2002: 8) which assists them in achieving the goals set out for them in the programme they are studying, or by themselves for a specific project. From a didactic point of view, it is this guided structured reflection that facilitates learning and are of primary importance in a UoT context – the improvement of practice. Within a context of arts practice education, we propose that guided reflection should have the following outcomes<sup>1</sup>:

1. Guided structured reflection with specified outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> The illustrations provided are examples of journal entries made by third year students during a group project interrogating the individuated meaning of Sharpeville, both as historical and spatial construct in South Africa, during 2009. These illustrations are far from ideal examples of reflection. Rather, they are ideal illustrations for the motivation for and nature of guidance of reflection.



Boud & Walker (2002) list 'reflection without learning' as one of several common problems that can arise in the facilitation of reflective practice. They state that "without a focus on conceptual frameworks, learning outcomes and implications, reflection can become self-referential, inward looking and uncritical" (Boud & Walker 2002).

2. Providing opportunities for discussion of structured reflection activities.

The journal entry (fig. 2a) is discussed with the learner, prompting her to reflect on the motivations for her technical choices (fig. 2b). Johns (2002:7) stresses that guidance of reflection could be facilitated, both through the provision of a suitable structure and individual/group consultation sessions, where the reflection is reviewed with the student/researcher in order to reveal possible areas that are neglected or overemphasised, enabling the theories-in-use to be grounded in relation to the theories espoused (Schön & Argyris 1974 in Smith 2001:20). Figure 3 is an example of a journal entry that records the results of a discussion session, where the student had an idea about her abilities and the images that were created, which was questioned and led to her reflecting on possible reasons for her results.

3. Encouraging multimodal reflection.

The phenomenological way of being *in* the world is an essential attribute that must be developed in aspiring researchers. It is essential to acknowledge and reward reflection through other media than the written word in a practise-based program. Figure 4 shows the use of multimodal reflection where the visual of a student's father's compass communicates as much as the quote recorded in her journal.

4. Developing reflection on learning.

Through reflection on learning students construct their own knowledge and achieve deep learning (Biggs & Tang 2007:50) and at the same time provide evidence of this learning. Working and being educated in the arts is bound to change the individual's concept and understanding of the self as well as the society they live in. Figure 5 illustrates how encouraging a habit of reflection on practice can prompt development of both practice and the individual.

5. Development and improving of specific skills through reflection as set out in initial outcomes for specific projects.

It is recommended that the framework for structured reflection be modified according to intended outcomes. This serves the purpose of focusing reflection on the educational outcomes required.

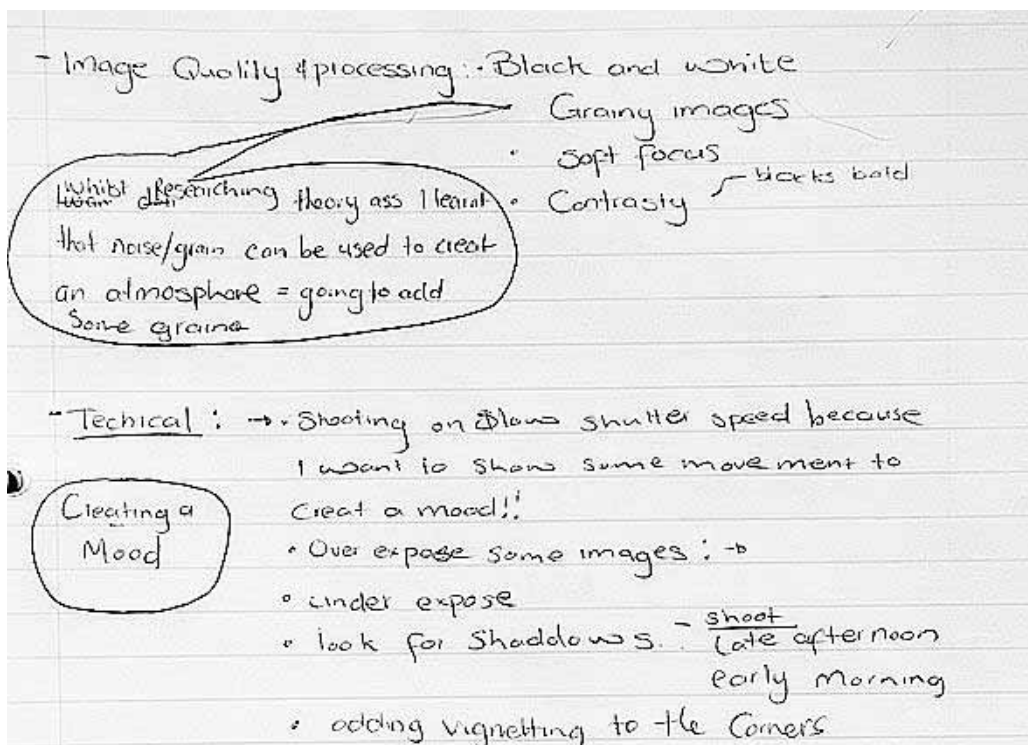


Figure 2(a): Example of a journal entry that utilises aspects of the proposed framework

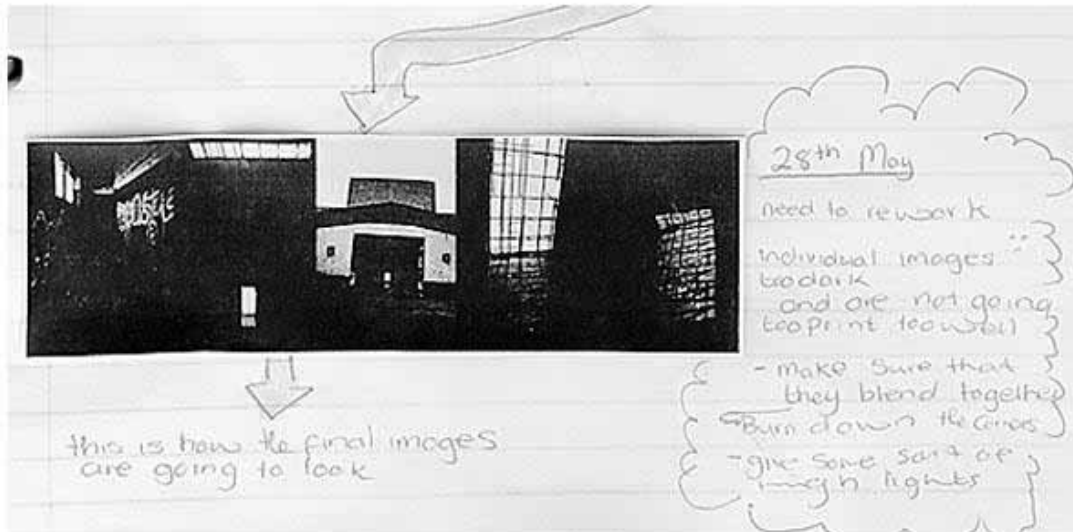


Figure 2(b): Journal entry on improvements to be made on an image (educator guided)

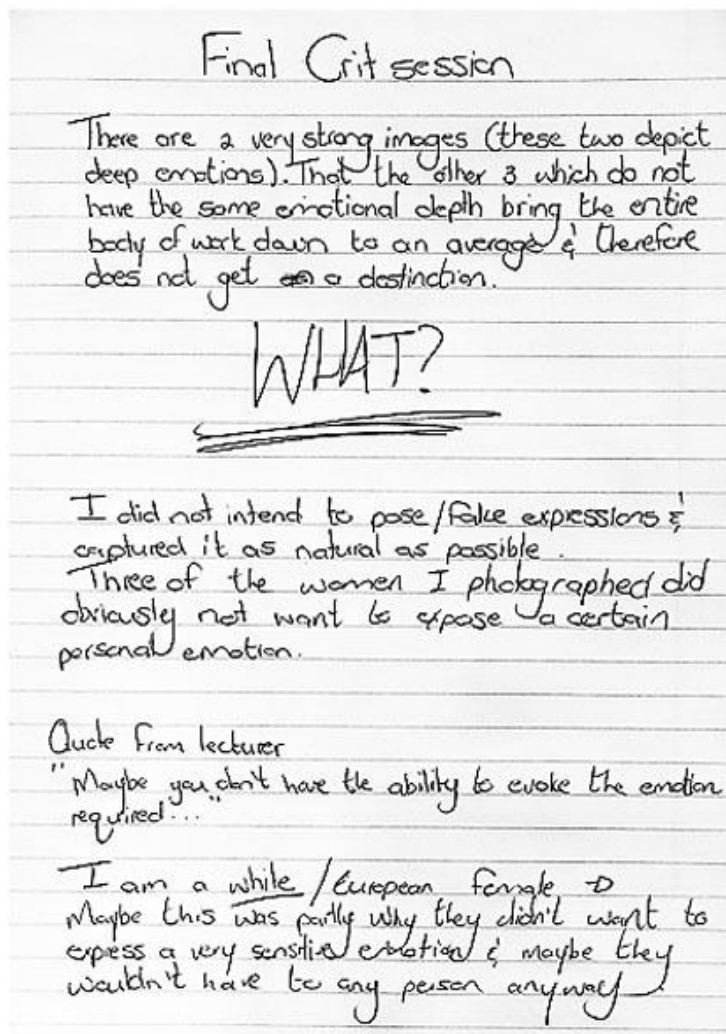


Figure 3: Journal entry illustrating reflection stimulated by a discussion session.

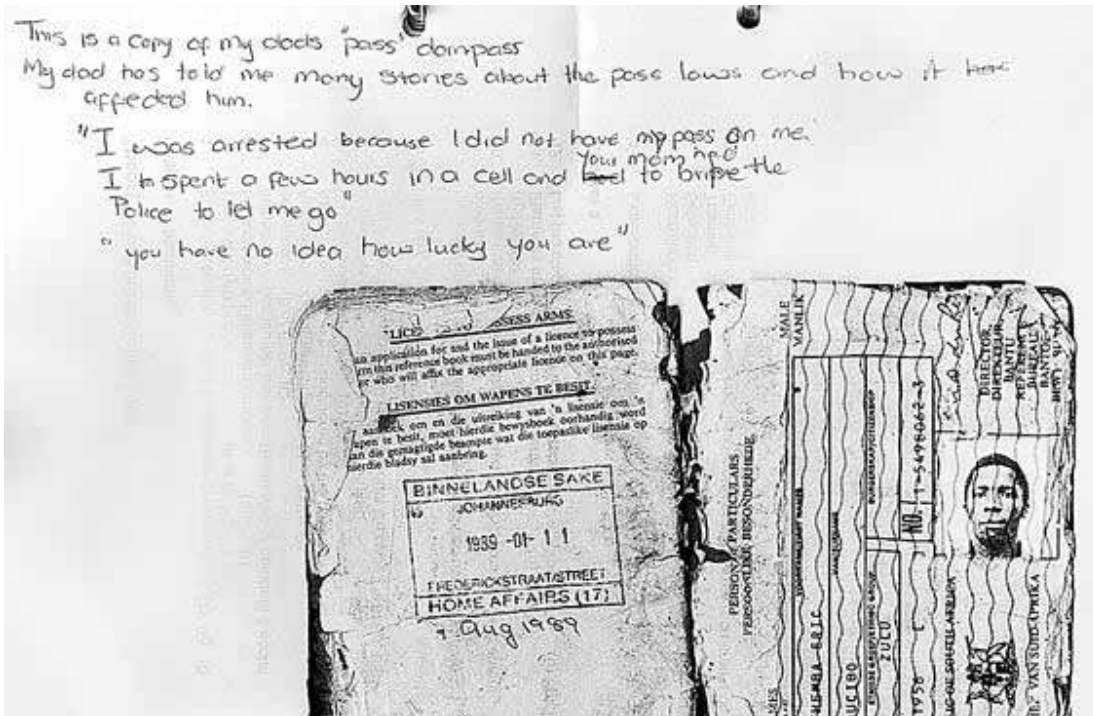


Figure 4: Multimodal journal entry

The images are not coherent, don't tell the story. This is because there is no shooting plan. The other thing is there are no technical decisions being that have been made. There is fear of engagement, in as much as I'm engaging and getting used to these elderly women, I'm still a bit scared to go all the way.

It's quiet clear that I should use a tripod, but I feel it will restrict me, already I feel bound by my own fears I think the reason I'm scared is dealing with older people ~~has never~~ <sup>at a personal</sup> level has never featured much in my life. Thus I have not found a woman to spend the day with, I know I should but something inside of me is holding back. I've never ~~seen eye~~ <sup>seen eye</sup> to eye with women most of my life, I grew up as a tom-boy therefore spent most of my time with boys. My mom & I only started getting along in my late teens, building a relationship with a total stranger is quite a challenge even if it just for a day.

Figure 5: Journal entry illustrating the transformative possibilities of reflection

## To conclude...

It is evident that the arts have a significant contribution to make in the quest for knowledge and understanding of both reality and our experience thereof, but doesn't necessarily follow conventional routes to achieve this aim (Sullivan 2005:28). Practise-based arts research (P<sub>b</sub>AR) presents new prospects for researchers, however, if the significance of the creative artefact (CA) as research contribution to human knowledge is to be fully understood, there is a need for a broader conception of inquiry into the nature of knowledge and its representation, one that incorporates the Aristotelian productive (skill) and practical (creative) as modalities (Smith 1999, Sullivan 2005:34). These creative responses are not confined to any particular research method and rely on intuitive, inventive, open research designs that support the creative process instead of confining it (Sullivan 2005:56). Since CA production includes both premeditated aspects and on-the-spot decision making, structured reflection within P<sub>b</sub>AR is proposed as a framing device to the creative artefact in the final exegesis, assisting the practitioner and audience in both understanding and learning. However, due to the open-ended nature of such a process, many aspiring researchers find it difficult to begin the engagement with practise in a systematic fashion, to which a framework is proposed, the usefulness of which was preliminary explored in an undergraduate educational. Specifically, five aspects were identified as outcomes for guided structured reflection based on the framework as informed by the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of P<sub>b</sub>AR as discussed in this paper. It is recognised that familiarisation with the method and techniques of structured reflection and the critical underpinnings of P<sub>b</sub>AR at undergraduate level are essential to building research capacity. Specific case-studies would assist in refining such an approach to research through practise, the improvement of learning through practise and establishing visual knowledge representation in research. Then, the opportunity exists, especially for Universities of Technology which have a historical focus on applied education and research, to establish and differentiate their knowledge contribution to the higher educational sector and it is recommended that the framework be more fully explored in both the undergraduate and postgraduate arenas.

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## Short Biography

**Jakob Doman's** own experience is grounded in a combination of experience in the commercial advertising and fine art arenas for which he has been honoured with D & AD and Clio-Awards and shortlisted for the Daimler-Chrysler Prize. As a researcher, he focuses his interests on the diverse fields of aesthetics, digital image signal processing and practise-based arts research methodologies. By creating a synergy from these seemingly disparate fields, he employs a multi-faceted and holistic educational approach that, hopefully, offers intellectual stimulation and creative awareness.

**Anneke Laurie** holds an MTech degree (*cum laude*) in photography from the Vaal University of Technology where she is currently a lecturer in photography and a member of the Bodutu Art Gallery curatorial committee. As a photography lecturer she believes that photographers are more often found than made. Ms Laurie believes that teaching is as much a journey of discovery together with one's students as it is imparting knowledge and skills. Her research is focussed on visual communication and visual literacy which I integrate with my photographic and teaching practice. She has exhibited fine art and documentary photography nationally in both group and solo exhibitions.

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