

SCOPE

Contemporary Research Topics

art & design 25:
Fashion
October 2023

Designer Process

<https://doi.org/10.34074/scop.1025009>

RESEARCH AS A TRANSFORMATIVE PROCESS

col Fay

Published by Otago Polytechnic Press.
Otago Polytechnic Ltd is a subsidiary of Te Pūkenga,
New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology.

CC-BY the authors;
© illustrations: the artists or other copyright owners or as indicated.

RESEARCH AS A TRANSFORMATIVE PROCESS

col Fay

There do not exist things made, but only things in the making, not states that remain fixed, but only states in process of change.

Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind* (Bergson, 1946)

In 2001, Elizabeth Grosz writes of the inquiry of architecture while standing outside of architecture. This is the intersection of philosophy meeting architecture. Within this dialogue she utilises the vehicle of writing and research to establish a sense of engagement, something by which she can interrogate the commonality of two disparate threads in order to identify that which binds them. The notion of research here is a means of constructing new knowledge. It is also an opportunity to explore established knowledge with an intention of interrogating that convention, thereby offering a new interpretation to manifest through innovation. Grosz speaks clearly here of the process of design-ing.

Research is an instrument of enquiry manifesting through a practise of doing and thinking. These methods are not mutually exclusive, but rather seen as parts of the activity of discovery, of exploration, and therefore the activity of designing. Peter Downton (2003) examines concepts of research as it relates to design as a collective term. For Downton, the methodology of research aligns to the level of enquiry being sought. He differentiates this methodology from the process of research in order to acknowledge the multiple methods of acquiring information in order to support design – that is, validation of research as a process and a legitimate means of practise in design. “Design is a way of inquiring, a way of producing knowing and knowledge; this means it is a way of researching” (Downton, 2003, p. 2).

In the creative industries, many practices engage in what is considered ‘creative play’ – that is, physical manipulation of materials and techniques in order to answer a question. An appreciation of this practice is ‘research through design;’ as an approach, it enables

the design process to become the research instead of a design 'test' to validate the research. The strength of this type of methodology is that it offers an opportunity to experiment and 'fail' without the expectation to reach a conclusive answer. This approach to research challenges traditional notions of research in that it offers the potential of design solutions to be numerous or, as Grosz suggests, "in a process of change," rather than "a state that is fixed." This offers the concept of research as something to be engaged through cross-disciplinarity and non-hierarchical methods. The value here lies in what Downton refers to as the "social negotiation" of design. Design reveals its embedded meaning through the ability of the artefact to communicate. Explaining a completed design is engaging in the practice of storytelling or transcribing the narrative of the project, which enables the transmission of knowledge.

The methodologies examined in this issue of *Scope (Art and Design)* demonstrate how diverse the ways of making sense of or examining a design intent can be, and illustrate the complex 'language' of the maker. Here evidence of knowing and knowledge is stored in the work, a referent of the explorative processes engaged in. Revealing the explorative process places appreciation on research as an active and critical method of inquiry which reveals the evolving knowing of the maker.

Among the narratives explored in the designer pages we see commonalities (a common language) appear, a collective knowing that unites the authors through a shared understanding of their discipline. Some qualities of 'knowing' revealed within these pages suggest craft practices, methods that harness the physicality of material exploration, construction and application, while others utilise the collective voice of others, an oral knowledge respectfully ensuring that the narrative continues to evolve without loss of cultural relevance. Continuum here is not about research as a fixed process, but rather a desire to attain a deeper relationship or to search for the limits of a given inquiry in order to expand the field of existing knowledge and generate further iterations.

The evidence of all inquiry undertaken here is the individual's personal, ongoing exploration, a particular method of 'mark-making' (and in that I include 3D ideation methods such as models) which provide the context for new 'marks.' In order for us to potentially recognise our own 'marks' as valid methods of inquiry, we must review their process as an opportunity to be included in the shared and sharing experience of research.

Research as a transformative process informs new practice, not through modes of acquisition – often resulting in or leading to derivative artefacts – but through experimentation and play, thereby moving research from an informative process into a transformative process: the process of learning from and making meaning of the experience.

col Fay is a modernist, with a preference for form and structure over decoration. She holds a MFA, and has a longstanding interest in those aspects of design that involve the body, jewellery, exhibitions, fashion and architecture. Her understanding of the importance of process and the role in which artifacts aid design development provides a unique and strong viewpoint for this introduction.

REFERENCES

- Bergson, H. (1946). *The creative mind*. Philosophical Library
- Downton, P. (2003). *Design Research*. RMIT University Press
- Grosz, E. (2005). The Thing. In I. Grewal, C. Kaplan, & R. Wiegman (Eds.), *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (pp. 131-144). Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822386551-010>