

Nina Trivedi

University of Westminster, London, United Kingdom

**J. Gary Knowles, Teresa C. Luciani, Ardra L. Cole
and Lorri Neilsen eds. 2007. *The Art Of Visual
Inquiry* (Volume 3, Arts-Informed Inquiry Series).
Backalong Books & Centre for Arts-Informed
Research. 346pp.**

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The Art of Visual Inquiry, third in the Arts-Informed Inquiry series, is a collection of essays primarily intended for artists, practice-led doctoral researchers and social science researchers who are currently pursuing or have completed doctoral degrees. The contributors focus on their art practices, specific research projects and exhibitions. Certain essays revolve around the theoretical discourse surrounding the definition of research-led art practices. Divided into three main sections, *On*, *Through* and *For*, the book focuses on the intersection of art and social sciences. A key definition is provided in the introduction of the book to explain that 'by arts informed research we mean research that brings together the systematic and rigorous qualities of social science inquiry with the creative and

imaginative qualities of the arts'(xii).

The writers included in this anthology are artists or arts professionals in the education sector. They are writing from their own perspective on their work, practice or specific exhibitions. The book begins by noting a type of dissatisfaction with research or arts-based research. I gathered that the dissatisfaction has to do with the problems surrounding the relatively new standing of the art practice-led PhD or, as Dieter Lesage states in *Who's Afraid of Artistic Research? On Measuring Artistic Research Output*, 'the beginning of a fierce battle for the definition of research (2009, 12).

In the first section of the book, *On*, the chapters focus on how research as inquiry is done and what artists choose to focus on in their practices. A connection between

visuality and photography is made. Moreover, the question of visuality versus the verbal is brought to light. Many of the chapters are written in a personal narrative style about artist's practices. There are some references to alternative methods and methodologies when considering visual inquiry; however, I think there needs to be more detail on these alternative methods in relation to how this book, and series, is asserting itself within the realm of arts-informed research. The most compelling chapter in this section is by Alexandra Cuther, in her text 'Boundary Hunters, Art for the Sake of Research'. When writing about critics of practice-based PhDs, Cuther writes that 'these critics have also argued that the art produced in arts informed inquiry would not "cut it" in the art world, and that it tends to be therapeutic, narcissistic, banal and solipsistic' (77). The art of a practice-led PhD should be able to defend itself outside of its theoretical framework. I think this is a central question and concern in the wider discourse surrounding practice-led PhDs: namely, at what point and in what instance is the art illustrative? The notion of the artwork being aesthetically superior arises, and I think this would have made for an intriguing chapter if it could have been elaborated.

The second section of the book, *Through*, is about process. The chapters begin with the process of silence, craft in quilting and theo-

ries of walking. In Chapter 11, de Cosson, Irwin, Kind and Springgay state that 'visual inquiry advocates a position of being in the presence of research. This space of in-betweenness is a shifting place where identities collide and work together in tension' (137). This idea of an interstitial space for potential thoughts outside of binary thinking is very appealing, and something Jan Verwoert has written about (see Verwoert 2008). Again, this concept and discussion of what the potentialities could be is something that I would have liked to have seen expanded upon in the chapters or book as a whole. An interesting question of documentation comes into play, which is also seen in Chapter 7, 'Boundary Hunters: Art for the Sake of Research', with regards to the documentation of an artist's own large format paintings in an archival manner for a portfolio. Again, this is something the two chapters could have engaged with in more detail as a rich discourse on the relationship between the archive and the artist that exists in art theory.

The third and final section of the book is called *For*. This section is concerned with why artists make the work they make. In Chapter 23, 'Context Matters: Visual Inquiry and Qualities of Engagement', Maura McIntyre and Ardra Cole state that 'research becomes a site of aesthetic contemplation, when feelings, intellect, and perception are given space to come together to make

meaning' (313). This is a good summary of the role of this book as a whole, and indicates why I think certain readers would find it of interest. The final chapter, 'Viewing the Visual in Theses and Dissertations' by Sameshima, Sbrocchi and Knowles, concludes well with descriptions and analysis of actual practice-led PhDs and examples of graphic design elements in their dissertations, in which they incorporate the dissertation or text as an artwork.

With relation to Maria Lind's definition of the curatorial as 'An endeavor that encourages you to start from the artwork but not stay there, to think with it but also away from and against It' (2009, 1), could there be an aspect or element of the curatorial in the Canadian definition of arts-informed research? The artwork seems to be a beginning point for much of the writing in the book. Furthermore, Kathrin Busch, in 'Artistic Researcher and the Poetics of Knowledge' writes:

Another form of artistic research is art that understands itself as research, in that scientific processes or conclusions become the instrument of art and are used in the artworks ... This is where art and science begin to blur, insofar as scientific argumentation and artistic criterion are seamlessly intertwined, and artistic work does not claim to produce a 'work' in the classic sense of the term, but rather (often critical)

knowledge, so as to use artistic means to analyze the present day and its social conditions and their structures (2009, 9).

This may be closer to how the editors and writers define their practices or arts-informed research. The potentialities and the open-ended questions are the most interesting aspects of the book for me. These types of questions garner and generate provocative discussions with regards to how we define practice-led or based research and its methodologies.

The *Art of Visual Inquiry* is reliant on the Canadian context, and definition of PhDs and references to the Canadian structure and its funding concerns are noted throughout the book. This book will still appeal to doctoral researchers in other countries, as the essays are mainly personal accounts and descriptions of art works. The book, and series, aims to create a wider discourse in the field of research-led art practice. This is a tightly woven series of essays and I imagine it should be read as part of the overall series of books. As it stands alone, without having read the previous two books in the series, I was hoping for more links and connections to the overarching theoretical concerns of research in art practice, and references that would tie the art practices together, beyond the constant references to Roland Barthes. Nonetheless, it remains a thought-provoking look

into how artists write about their own work, how they are defining research-led art practice and the question of the visual in the process of inquiry.

References

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