

Whither the Aesthetic Alibi?

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The aesthetic alibi

The aesthetic alibi is a special case of freedom of speech which provides dispensation to otherwise offensive material if it takes place within the protective shield of an aesthetic frame.

Martin Jay (1998)



Guillermo Vargas Jiménez *Exposición N° 1* 2007



Marco Evaristi *Helena* (2000)



Ondrej Brody and Kristofer Paetau *Dog Carpets* (2007)

Sophie Calle, *Suite Vénitienne*, 1980





Willem Popolier *Showroom Girls* (2011)



Marina Abramovic *Lips of Thomas* (1975)(2005)

Mike Parr, *Integration 3 (Leg spiral)* 1975, printed 2001



Sigalit Landau, *Barbed Hula*, 2000





Monika Tichacek, *The
Shadows No.14*, 2005.

Ethics/Aesthetics

- a distinction exists between an aesthetic practice and an ethical practice
- an ethical practice demands that individuals be treated according to the dominant ethos of the community in which they live
- the avant-gardism of artistic activity and its challenge to dominant social mores could be considered to be in opposition to ethical regulation.

Jacques Rancière (2009; 2010)



Research Context

- Creative arts education in Australia part of a unified higher education system in the early 1990s;
- Shift from professional training (art schools, conservatoires) to the higher education context;
- Art reframed within a research framework as 'practice as research' ;
- Became subject to the processes and procedures set in place to oversee all university research including ethics.

Principles of ethical conduct

- Research must have merit and integrity;
- Be conducted in accord with the principle of beneficence: ie maximize benefits, minimize risks to participants;
- Consent - informed voluntary.

VITO ACCONCI

Thurs. February 21, 1:00 PM



CLAIM

"I'm in the basement, blindfolded, seated on a chair at the foot of the stairs- I have at hand two metal pipes and a crowbar- I am talking aloud, continuously to myself- talking myself into a possession obsession."

Sill Lecture Hall 143

**EASTERN MICHIGAN
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Research Proposal

I'm in a basement, blindfolded, seated on a chair at the foot of the stairs ... I have at hand two metal pipes and a crowbar. I am talking aloud continually to myself, talking myself into a possession obsession....

Claim (1971)



Vito Acconci *Claim*, 1971

Seeking and giving consent

- a person's decision to participate in research is to be voluntary, and
- based on sufficient information and adequate understanding of both the proposed research and the implications of participation in it.
- requires an adequate understanding of the purpose, methods, demands, risks and potential benefits of the research.

The aim is mutual understanding between researchers and participants.

Beneficence

The likely benefit of the research must justify any risks of harm or discomfort to participants. The likely benefit may be to the participants, to the wider community, or to both.

Researchers are responsible for:

- designing the research to minimise the risks of harm or discomfort to participants;**
- clarifying for participants the potential benefits and risks of the research; and**
- the welfare of the participants in the research context.**

Where there are no likely benefits to participants, the risk to participants should be lower than would be ethically acceptable where there are such likely benefits.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Are any of the following topics to be covered in part or in whole?

• research about parenting	YES	NO
• research investigating sensitive personal issues	YES	NO
• research investigating sensitive cultural issues	YES	NO
• explorations of grief, death or serious/traumatic loss	YES	NO
• depression, mood states, anxiety	YES	NO
• gambling	YES	NO
• eating disorders	YES	NO
• illicit drug taking	YES	NO
• substance abuse	YES	NO
• self report of criminal behaviour	YES	NO
• any psychological disorder	YES	NO
• suicide	YES	NO
• gender identity	YES	NO
• sexuality	YES	NO
• race or ethnic identity	YES	NO
• any disease or health problem	YES	NO
• fertility	YES	NO
• termination of pregnancy	YES	NO

RISK ASSESSMENT

Are any of the following procedures to be employed?

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| • use of personal data obtained from Commonwealth Gov't Department/agency | YES | NO |
| • use of personal data obtained from State Gov't Department/agency | YES | NO |
| • Involves use of personal information from a non-government organisation | YES | NO |
| • deception of participants | YES | NO |
| • concealing the purposes of the research | | |
| • covert observation | YES | NO |
| • audio or visual recording without consent | YES | NO |
| • recruitment via a third party or agency | YES | NO |
| • withholding from one group specific treatments or methods of learning, from which they may "benefit" (e.g., in medicine or teaching) | YES | NO |
| • any psychological interventions or treatments | YES | NO |
| • administration of physical stimulation | YES | NO |
| • invasive physical procedures | YES | NO |
| • infliction of pain | YES | NO |
| • administration of drugs | YES | NO |
| • administration of other substances | YES | NO |
| • administration of ionising radiation | YES | NO |
| • tissue sampling or blood taking | YES | NO |
| • collecting body fluid | YES | NO |
| • genetic testing/DNA extraction | YES | NO |
| • use of medical records where participants can be identified or linked | YES | NO |
| • drug trials and other clinical trials | YES | NO |
| • administration of drugs or placebos | YES | NO |



Research Ethics and the Creative Arts: A Pilot Study

Study Methodology

- Online survey of staff from VCA and Music at the University of Melbourne:
 - Visual Arts
 - Music
 - Performing Arts
 - Film and television
- Qualitative and quantitative elements in the survey

Scope of research

- Research background and experience with ethics;
- Difficulties in applying the guidelines;
- “fit” between University ethics guidelines and industry “standards”;
- Perceptions of whether research ethics inhibits or enhances research;
- “Value” of ethics guidelines for framing the research;
- Creative machinations – fitting the research to the guidelines.

Findings

Research ethics inhibits research?

Inhibits	Number
Strongly disagree	3
Disagree	2
Neutral	4
Agree	4
Strongly agree	5

Findings

Research ethics enhances research?

Enhances	Number
Strongly disagree	5
Disagree	7
Neutral	2
Agree	2
Strongly agree	2

Findings

The “fit” between University ethics guidelines and industry “standards”

Differences	12
No differences	4

“the criteria for ethics clearance militate against the kind of exploratory, risk-taking activities identified with the creative process” and that the ethics process operates “as an inhibition, as a silent regulation of conduct and that as a subtle determination of content ambition and daring” (respondent K).

“the mere mention of these considerations [the ethics guidelines] is enough for the student to self-censor” (respondent A).

Findings

Difficulties in applying the guidelines in a creative arts research context

- Red tape
- Framing of current ethics processes on bio-medical model
- Mitigates experimentation
- Limits the development of studio-based research
- Q: Is all practice research? Creative arts research v's creative development

Ethics inappropriate for the creative arts?

“At the early stages a creative, practice-led project can have broad aspirations with much of the ‘actual’ still to be discovered ‘through’ the process. This can be too intangible to explain within

For the visual artist, methodology is another name for a failure to experiment, a failure to invent. There are methods, but not formalized and they should always be ready to be abandoned. ethics approval”

“if you are going to take the ethics process seriously then you are bound to carry out your research exactly as you have stated in the ethics application. Creativity doesn't always work like that and it may be that [it is] only through trial and error that you end up with your art”

“The true arena of ethics determination is in the community—art viewers and the public.”

“Some artistic practices may be deemed unacceptable to the University when at the same time they are perfectly acceptable in the art world and in the broader cultural context.”

Implications

- 'The ethics process (operates) as a silent regulator of conduct and a subtle determination of content';
- Ethics process introduces limitations that work against "cutting edge" research;
- Mitigates experimentation at the heart of practice;
- Impost on artistic freedom and license:
- Fundamentally changing the nature of creative practice within and beyond the academy, i.e. affects what artists actually DO.



Emergent methodologies

- Ethics procedures encourage a static assessment of ethical concerns
- Creative practice methodologies will often unfold without pre-determined stages
- It is the unanticipated that can prove to be most productive and revelatory
- A hurdle ethics assessment process by comparison is a blunt instrument

Ethics in the context of creative practice

Ethical know-how or situated ethics

‘a moment to moment’ awareness

“This continual redefinition of what to do is not at all like a plan selected from repertoire of potential alternatives: it is enormously dependent on contingency and improvisation, and is more flexible than any plan can be.”

Francisco Varela 1999, p. 55


Actions

- Build knowledge on the part of ethics committees
- Recognise and articulate the **emergent methodologies** in artistic research
- Develop skills to respond to particularities of context ... **a situated ethics**;
- Tease out interaction between ethics and institutional risk management
- Courage on the part of artistic researchers

A possibility of training creative practitioner/researchers in ways in which they might incorporate ethical know-how once outside the academy

What can art do?

- a provocation or conscience that produces discomfort, bother and worry.
- can bring its audience to crisis.
- works at the edges to test the boundaries.
- it is the conscience of a culture.



By the second hour, I think I was – I'm glad this didn't happen – but I could have killed somebody. So it was a dangerous piece for me, but at the same time it made me start thinking.

Vito Acconci MoMA archive oral history 2012