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Practice as Research in Performance: a Personal Response

The second conference called by the organizers of the 'Practice as Research in Performance' project (PARIP) was held from 11 to 14 September 2003 at the University of Bristol. PARIP is not an organization, but an AHRB-funded research project into the nature and academic implications of performance practice as research, in terms both of the discipline of Drama and Theatre Studies in the university, and the related issues of research assessment and funding. Its conferences aim to give academics in the field the opportunity to add their voices to the debate, and indeed to help shape its outcome. Bella Merlin, a Contributing Editor and Book Reviews Editor for NTQ, is author of *Beyond Stanislavsky* (Nick Hern Books, 2001). She attended the PARIP conference on the cusp of her personal decision to return to the acting profession from her post in the University of Birmingham, and as this issue goes to press is appearing in the Out of Joint production of David Hare's *The Permanent Way*. Here she combines a report on the conference with some personal reflections on practice, research, and practice as research.

I CONFESS: I don't go to many conferences. When I do, I usually return with a notebook of accumulated facts and a few shifts in my perception of the particular conference subject. Rarely, however, do I undergo a significant transformation such as that which I experienced during the extremely inspiring and emotionally charged second conference of the 'Practice as Research in Performance' project, or PARIP 2003. Granted, I was on the brink of a major circumstantial change of my own before I went to the conference: after walking the secure corridors of the academy for five years, I handed in my notice at Birmingham University in July 2003 to return to the ranks of the self-employed, and to scurry back to the battlegrounds of 'the industry'.

The reasons for my resignation proved to be curiously pertinent to the content of the PARIP conference: I had found myself struggling to marry my acting practice with the inevitable constraints of a salaried post. While contemplating the decision to quit the academy, two key questions had preoccupied me: why on earth should performance practitioners want to do academic research in the first place; and ultimately does it boil down to the pragmatics of financial security? Both

of these questions inevitably cropped up in PARIP 2003, devoted as it was to Practice as Research.

In this paper, I shall summarize some of the key concerns of PARIP, in terms of its overall remit and in terms of the specifics of the 2003 conference. I shall then focus on three particular areas as highlighted by a 'working party' of which I was a part for the duration of the weekend. Along the way, I shall touch upon issues surrounding Practice as Research as they arose at the conference: issues such as accessibility, evaluation, relevance, funding, dissemination, epistemology, and documentation. It is important to acknowledge that this paper is located very much in my personal response. I present it as a provocation to further discussion and negotiation, and in no way do I speak on anyone's behalf but my own. Other delegates at the conference, as well as the keynote speakers and contributors, will undoubtedly present their own views through PARIP's website and other journals.

Debates were refreshingly heated and excitable, and my very desire to begin this paper within hours of returning home indicates the success and potency with which

PARIP 2003 framed its conference enquiries. What emerged, however, is that there is an air of anxiety pervading our institutions. Sir Gareth Roberts's review of research assessment (currently circulating for consultation) and the potential threat of some worryingly draconian measures at an institutional level have certainly unsettled my own colleagues at Birmingham, leading me to feel that my exit from the academy isn't so surprising. There is no doubt that the current debate surrounding Practice as Research is explosive, and I offer this paper as one small firework in a much grander display.

An Overview of PARIP 2003

From 11 to 14 September 2003 the Department of Drama at the University of Bristol, UK, played host to the second conference undertaken by PARIP. PARIP (Practice as Research in Performance) is described in its literature as 'a five-year, Arts and Humanities Research Board-funded project' which is led by Professor Baz Kershaw, Dr Angela Piccini, and Dr Caroline Rye. It is not an organization, but a *funded project* (a fact that delegates lost sight of on occasion in the course of the four days).

The project's aims are clearly expressed on its website,[1] though its broad objective, as outlined in the conference booklet, is to explore, consult on, and document a range of practices 'that are submitted as research activities and outcomes alongside the traditional writing practices of the universities'. PARIP is arguably a response to Research Assessment Exercises and the current climate of 'research or be damned' which dogs scholars in all disciplines, but which causes deepest anxiety among those for whom the investigation and dissemination of 'knowledge' need not depend upon – indeed, in many cases, consciously seeks to reject – the written word as its primary conduit.

It is worth emphasizing at this point that PARIP considers research activities placed '*alongside* the traditional writing practices' (my emphasis). In other words, it is not seeking to dismiss the single-authored monograph, at present unquestionably positioned at the top of the research output hierarchy.

However, the conference certainly *challenged* the sovereignty both of single authorship and of the written word, as will be touched on below.

The four-day gathering consisted of three keynote speeches (presented by Simon Jones and Jon Dovey of Bristol University, and by Carol Brown of *Carol Brown Dances*), a variety of performances and installations (by contributors including David Woods and Jon Hough of Ridiculusmus, and Humphrey Trevelyan of University College, Wales), and a series of Presentation Sessions. Each of the latter comprised one 45-minute contribution (often combining performance with elements of a more traditional conference-paper format) and one 15-minute presentation (essentially a conventional paper, but often substantiated with video footage or the live demonstration of practical research undertaken).

Contributors included Susan Melrose (Middlesex University) on 'The Curiosity of Writing: or, Who Cares about Performance Mastery?'; Anna Pakes (University of Surrey, Roehampton) on 'Practical Embodied Knowledge: the Epistemology of Dance Practice as Research'; Clive Myer (University of Glamorgan) on 'Film Practice as Film Theory: the Place of the Viewer and the Viewed'; and Jonathan Pitches (Manchester Metropolitan University) on 'Tracing the Living Link: Documentary Complexity in the Archive of Biomechanics'. This list gives just a taste of the impressive range of disciplines represented, along with some of the thought-provoking issues arising from Practice as Research. Following the two formal contributions to each Presentation Session, the second half opened out into an hour-long discussion.

Underpinning PARIP 2003 were six key questions, which often formed the focal point of formal contributions to the Presentation Sessions and fuelled the accompanying discussions. The six conference questions were:

1   How does 'practice as research' problematize notions of 'professional' and 'academic' practices?

2   What might be the various epistemologies of and knowledges generated by practice as research?

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3 What kinds of resourcing/plant/infrastructures are needed for practice as research?

4 What makes an instance of practice 'count' as research? Does practice as research involve different methods as a result of its framing as research distinct from 'pure' practice?

5 How might the multiple locations of practice-as-research knowledges be conceptualized and assessed/evaluated/judged? And who decides?

6 Must practice as research include some form of disseminable 'reflection' or is the practice in performance/screening contexts sufficient to stand as research outputs? What might be the role of documentation across the media?

While I shall be concerned with aspects of all six questions, I shall explicitly address the three (1, 2, and 6) which struck me as most pertinent to my own experience of research into text-based acting processes. Before doing so, however, issues of 'ownership' and 'transformation' warrant some elucidation.

Taking the Reins

The six key questions had arisen out of the first PARIP conference in 2001 as well as out of negotiation with the research community. Having thus identified certain underlying concerns, the PARIP directors had formulated the questions as a springboard for discussions throughout the 2003 conference. Indeed, the role of discussion within PARIP 2003 was extremely significant, with each of the four days incorporating an hour-long session, for which the delegates were allocated to one of six working parties. The remit of the working parties was to address the six conference questions and, over the course of the four days, to generate a series of suggestions or action plans for the PARIP directors to develop and disseminate – both through subject-specific bodies such as SCUDD and into the wider academic community.

The conference often found itself negotiating binaries – including theory versus practice, the academy as against the industry, and the written word versus embodied knowledge. However, one of the most striking 'binaries' for me was the inherent desire among the delegates to create a 'them and us' ten-

sion. Suspicious questions quickly arose in the working parties such as 'What is PARIP? And what are they up to?', 'What's their "agenda"?' It seemed to be only with some caution that we, as delegates, accepted the fact that the work led by Baz Kershaw under the title of PARIP is a piece of *funded research*: PARIP is *not* an organization. Furthermore, it is research aimed at identifying what exactly the problems of practice are for the academic community and how we can begin to formulate viable criteria by which our research might be evaluated.

To this end, the extensive inclusion of discussion forums in PARIP 2003 served two key purposes. Not only did it allow for the sharing of practice between different areas of the media (dance, film-making, visual arts, text-based performance, music, to name but a few), but it also encouraged delegates to take the vital though not always comfortable step of *being* the conference, rather than simply *being at* a conference. This 'transformation' went one step further. Although initially we tried as a collective to seek out the Enemy Within (the PARIP 'mafia') or the Enemy Without (the RAE and the AHRB), it was only with time that we understood that we *are* PARIP, we *are* the researching practitioners. We have 'ownership' of the discussion forums. The 'agenda' is whatever we choose to make it.

Furthermore, there is no 'them and us' scenario, as representatives of the Enemies Without (the RAE panels and the AHRB assessors) are also members of our very community. We all have common interests, not least of which is to raise the status of practical research within the academy.

This is why I described PARIP 2003 as transformative. The emphasis on discussion within the conference (given the fact that one discussion session was also set aside for regional PARIP groups to meet) catapulted delegates into a position of proactivity. Dialogue between research communities was actively opened up, whereby we could begin to define the criteria upon which we want our Practice as Research to be built, assessed, and evaluated. This proactive stance seeks to diminish the extent to which we feel we have

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to jump through hoops created by formal bodies whose approach to research may be more traditional than that of our own comparatively young Practice as Research.

That may sound like a wonderfully liberating position to be put in. Yet we didn't exactly leap at it. The reluctance of the corporate body of PARIP 2003 delegates to accept this responsibility – perhaps even to acknowledge that the possibility for this responsibility lay within our aegis – struck me as being symptomatic of our discipline. Performers and performance-based work have been historically marginalized. I sensed at various points in the conference that actually we were happier at the margins. We were happier being the angry 'young' people, spitting against the wind.

It was with a strange sense of awakening that we began to take the reins. This 'transformation' became particularly apparent to me through the smaller working parties into which we were divided each day. Our particular working party became something of a conference haven, in which a kind of honesty (which inevitably diminishes in a more open forum) was able to find its voice.

Since this is a subjective overview of PARIP 2003, I shall draw upon some of the issues arising from this working party, and respond to them personally. Although it was felt by the end of the weekend that the six conference questions were somewhat redundant, I shall none the less frame my response in the context of three of those questions.

Problematizing the Notion of Practice

How does 'practice as research' problematize notions of 'professional' and 'academic' practices?

As a performer straddling the academy and the industry, I found myself intrigued by the question, 'Why do practitioners research?' Or rather, 'Why do practitioners enter the academy in the first place?' One answer is to do with freedom: we want to be creators of our own work, in a way in which – certainly as a 'jobbing' actor – it is not always possible or easy to achieve once you are out there in the industry. We want the freedom to find

our unique angle on our discipline through the research that we wish to undertake; we want the freedom to replace the need to satisfy the commercial market with the opportunity to explore the marginal and the controversial.

But ultimately we all need to put bread on the table. Do we seek the funding for our practical research in the industry – through lottery funding, businesses, arts councils, etc.? Or in the academy, through research boards, institutional funds, bursaries, and so on? Throughout the weekend of PARIP 2003, I struggled with the notion that the professional/academic tension was fundamentally a question of economics. The cynic in me came to the conclusion that the performance practitioner who goes into the academy (myself included) is a person of a certain age, who either needs to get a mortgage or finds themselves with young children, or – in the case perhaps of corporeally orientated practices – someone who is finding that the body just can't do it any longer. The thought of regular salaries, a pension scheme, long holidays in which your own projects may be pursued, the possibility of applying for larger funding pots than the regional arts councils may offer – all these make the move from the industry to the academy extremely attractive.

Yet there are unquestionably researching practitioners out in the industry who are just as active as some of my colleagues in the academy when it comes to practice which is reflective, reflexive, and pioneering. (Katie Mitchell's scientific experiments funded by NESTA at the National Theatre Studio spring to mind.) Indeed, one advantage of pursuing such research in the domain of the industry is that there are no RAE hoops to jump through. (If Katie Mitchell wants to explore the impact of symbolist painting on performance practice, she can do it. The process *is* the research, and she doesn't have to write it up in a peer-reviewed journal.)

I also find myself pondering – as I stand at the brink of diving back into the cold waters of the freelance world – whether there isn't something about the academy that provides a 'comfort zone' which ultimately debilitates the pioneering practitioner. In a discussion

at one Presentation Session, John Cage's *4 Minutes, 53 Seconds* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* were cited as searing pieces of revolutionary practice. But that's just it! Both creators were practitioners, whose artistic curiosity and performative needs outweighed the pension scheme scenario.

When I asked one young scholar why he had wanted to do a practice-based PhD, he replied that it was political, that he wanted to advance his career. However, I would again argue that what he calls 'political' is what I would call economic: it's just that the semantics are different. Indeed, in most cases, it struck me that PhDs, whether traditional theses or practical in execution, were primarily undertaken for pragmatic reasons: these days a doctorate is the basic requirement for any academic post.

However, there must be a less cynical response to the question, 'Why do practitioners research?' As our working party acknowledged, there are many elements stacked against us in the academy, not least of which are administrative models imposed upon the Humanities from the Sciences formulae. Heavy teaching loads, high contact hours, and the allocation of one research day per week don't always conjoin to make Practice as Research the soft option which some might suspect it to be. Therefore: what are the aspects of our academic jobs which enhance our practical research, when clearly many of us are struggling for recognition not only by those nameless, faceless 'enemies', the AHRB and the RAE, but by our very own colleagues in our very own departments? In such cases, the argument that the academy provides a 'support network' or 'environment in which the work can be constructively critiqued and discussed' is questionable.

Academic versus Practical Rigour

Of course, one significant factor is the teaching. Our particular working party celebrated the enormous extent to which our teaching contributes to our understanding of our praxis. Yet herein lies another problem that arose during the conference: to what extent can research be pursued within the context of practical teaching work? Personally I struggle (yet again) with this issue. I have no doubt that my understanding of my own specialism (Stanislavsky's active analysis and psycho-physical acting processes) has been developed and explored through my undergraduate teaching and directing. However, I would also argue that my students – while deeply talented, intelligent and committed – are not equipped, on a non-vocational university drama course, with the appropriate skills-base for me to advance my practical enquiries to a point at which I would want them formally categorized, accepted, and assessed as practical research.

This viewpoint was substantiated by Jacky Bratton and Gilli Bush-Bailey (Royal Holloway) in their 45-minute presentation concerning a revival of one of Jane Scott's melodramas, for which they received an AHRB Innovations Award. Having begun their initial research with undergraduate students, they reached a threshold over which they were only able to cross once their AHRB funding facilitated the employment of professional actors, a movement director, musicians, and a musical director.

This territory also raises questions of *vocational* rigour as well as *academic* rigour, and here I believe the waters of Practice as Research become perplexingly muddy – not only with student-based practical research, but also with professional academics veering into the realm of performance practice. I shall stick my neck above the parapet here and say that some of the problematizing of 'professional' and 'academic' practices arises when the vocational skills of the practical researcher simply aren't up to the job. I suspect much of the suspicion surrounding Practice as Research arises either when students are seen as the main embodiers of whatever new knowledge the researcher is bringing into the academic field, or when the academic's own practical skills are not sufficiently finely tuned.

I want my research practitioner to be both a consummate intellectual and an accomplished performer: if we want Practice as Research to be taken seriously in the

academy then surely we must aspire to excellence both in our research methodologies and in our practical articulation of that research. I must confess that there were moments during the course of PARIP 2003 when I sensed an *amateurism* creeping into some of the performance work which made me, even though I myself would claim the status of research practitioner, deeply suspicious of the field.

This is always a very difficult terrain to walk: it was noted in the Midlands regional discussion group that there was a reluctance to talk about the work presented at the conference, on which I commented, 'Well, the reasons are obvious, aren't they? Politics and politesse.' With any performance work, the thought always exists that it could be us up there next time. We want the velvet-glove treatment with our own work; therefore, we may well remain politic about others' practical work in the meantime.

However, if we want our performance-based research to be funded, assessed, and considered as legitimate academic praxis, we inevitably have to find a feedback strategy and an accompanying vocabulary which addresses the hybrid of practical excellence and theoretical rigour that arguably must reside in serious Practice as Reseach. From my personal experience working in the industry, our work is assessed at the point of audition, followed by journalistic reviews and audience reception, leading – hopefully – to further employment. In the academy, a comparable form of evaluation is needed to ensure that strategies are transparent; and peer review at the performance stage seemed to emerge as a much-sought-after avenue of assessment.

One further answer to the question, 'Why do practitioners research?' arose in our working party: self-transformation. Certainly this aspect of research should not be under-estimated, though I feel it should always be counterbalanced by the advancement of knowledge. In fact, this juxtaposition of 'self-transformation' and 'advancement of learning' can readily be transmuted into the tension between 'process' and 'outcome' – which leads me on to Conference Question 6.

Tensions between Process and Outcome

Must practice as research include some form of disseminable 'reflection' or is the practice in performance/screening context sufficient to stand as research outputs? What might be the role of documentation across the media?

The second half of this question is extremely complex and warrants a paper in its own right, addressing resources, quality of documentation, the requirements of live and mediated performance, etc. However, I wish to address the first half of the question from the perspective of 'process' and 'outcome'. One of my own pieces of Practice as Research was undertaken during a sabbatical in Spring 2002, when I worked with professional Russian and British theatre practitioners to write a new play steeped in aspects of Stanislavsky's active analysis.

Although I performed the piece in my department's studio theatre, it was made clear to me by my Head of Department that the performance itself would not be considered a legitimate piece of research. At the time, I was unhappy about this, as I felt that the processes involved in the writing of the piece, the dramaturgical rigour, and the approaches to rehearsal had been undertaken in a theoretical and analytical context involving particular research questions and a coherent methodology. However, as the conference unfolded, I found myself siding with my Head of Department, who would have happily considered the published writing-up of my particular performance experience to be a legitimate research component, but not the piece of work itself.

My shift in perspective has come about for a number of reasons provoked by PARIP 2003. First of all, I now appreciate that it was the *process* that was innovative, and not necessarily the outcome: anyone viewing the final theatre piece would not have seen anything particularly groundbreaking in terms of performance or script. However, the process by which the play was created and rehearsed was entirely research-orientated. And when the process *is* the research, how can it be assessed satisfactorily, short of an RAE panel member attending rehearsals –

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unless, of course, I translate that experience into disseminable material through the medium of words, whether it be through discursive presentations in research seminars or conferences, or through the written word in book form or article?

In fact, that's exactly what I now want to do. I want to contextualize it, I want to take the reader on the journey of the investigative questions, I want to negotiate the challenges, failings, successes, and obstacles. And since PARIP 2003, I have managed to secure a book contract in which I shall do that very translation, primarily because I feel that that negotiation can only be done – with the necessary and appropriate academic rigour – outside the performance mode. Of course, the book will be a different research 'outcome' from the performance, and PARIP 2003 certainly raised the issue that any disseminable reflection may be considerably different from the work itself. Moreover, within their respective contexts, one research outcome is no more or less valid than the other.

But am I now contradicting myself? Have I implied that the prospective book will have more research currency than the play did? Of course it will depend to an extent on whether the book contributes effectively to a body of knowledge. But then, wasn't I, as an actor, a literal 'body of knowledge' as I performed the play, using processes informed by the research methodology? This is all contentious stuff: as I've said, it is an explosive debate. The conference, importantly, generated a desire for academics to engage in that debate.

What is 'Disseminable Material'

The issue of what might be considered 'disseminable material' warrants further unpacking, and three particular questions arose from the working party discussions which seem noteworthy here. First of all, might it be that relatively few spectators can appreciate or extract research that is embedded in 'embodied' performance? (And does that matter?) Secondly, do we want an audience to 'see' our research in our performance? (Arguably, no. I'm not sure that I would have wanted my play to be seen by a spectatorship con-

textualizing their viewing from a research perspective.) Thirdly, is there a general resistance among performance practitioners to conventional methods of dissemination?

The first and third points throw up issues of accessibility and indeed relevance: there was some debate during the conference about the 'purity' of what we are doing as practitioners – whether it should be able to 'stand for itself' in its own right. Juxtaposed against this notion of purity is the need for our work to be accessible to the general public, so that we are forging our research – however unique, innovative, and cutting edge – out among the community. Here I am reminded of Ziyad Marar's words in *The Happiness Paradox*: 'There are indefinite ways to be unique, but only those ways that have meaning to an audience can be a significant expression of, and so satisfy our desire for, uniqueness.'[2]

I suggested earlier that one of the attractions of the academy to the practitioner is a certain freedom to explore our unique areas of research. Yet surely we *need* an audience for our work, don't we? Although does that audience need to 'get' what it is that we are exploring? Should we be free to 'express' our researched knowledge in as liberal a format as possible? As Marar continues:

If the applause is too easily achieved we worry about whether we have really been free after all (our banality damned by faint praise); on the other hand, instead of applause we may receive blank silence, or worse, a Nietzschean sneer 'at our worthiest goals and hopes'. Either outcome risks the terrible pain of humiliation. These fears can lead us to deny the importance of the audience in the first place – to deny the need for justification and to imagine our freedom as truly unencumbered. But this denial is self-deception, or 'bad faith' in Sartre's terms. The paradox of freedom is that it is worth nothing if it is not justified, and justification . . . only really comes from other people.[3]

Coincidentally or not, the term 'bad faith' came up several times during the conference.

The correlation of audience and dissemination is a key issue: with the ever-increasing pressure on academics to disseminate their work internationally, the 'localized' nature of an audience for live or mediated perform-

ance inevitably raised concerns among the PARIP delegates. It was even argued during the four days that the knowledge 'embodied' by our students through our teaching is another means by which our work is disseminated: on the one hand, such dissemination can be seen to expand our audience, on the other, it localizes it to an even greater extent.

While I sensed that there was no real resistance to dissemination in general – after all, we are practitioners who naturally want audiences to see our work – there was a resistance to material being disseminated through the written word. Personally, I choose the documentation of my practical work to be the written word, particularly where my research is process-driven. And I have no problem with that. There seemed to be a resistance, however, among some colleagues at the conference to the RAE's 2001 requirement of a 400-word contextualizing document to accompany any item offered as practical research. Again, I struggled with this resistance. (I seem to be struggling a lot in this paper – a sure sign of healthy intellectual grappling?) At Birmingham, as with many drama programmes, we ask no less of our undergraduates undertaking practical work. As a writer and director, I have had to provide programme notes to accompany work steeped in active analysis. And following the conference, I have even less problem with that, as colleagues convinced me of the value of reflective documentation.

A final issue raised by our working party with regard to dissemination and accessibility to an audience was 'spectator context'. Within most experiential performance work, there are techniques, disciplines, and creative consciousnesses used which can't necessarily be articulated through research vocabulary as it currently stands. Yet we are striving to move the debate forwards. Therefore, in order for Practice as Research to be assessed in and of itself without accompanying, logocentric documentation, do we have to create a certain kind of spectator with a certain kind of vocabulary? Which leads me to Conference Question 2.

The Epistemological Dilemma

What might be the various epistemologies of and knowledges generated by practice as research?

The working party of which I was a part had a lively debate on the day that we chose to address this topic, though unsurprisingly more questions were raised than concrete answers were proffered. At first, it seemed as if the diversity of disciplines present at PARIP 2003 rendered the question too vast for us to answer in any coherent manner. And, indeed, by the end of the conference the desire for unity or interdisciplinary collaboration had been balanced by an acceptance that there were certain discipline-specific issues that needed to be addressed in isolation.

That said, the interdisciplinary interaction was tremendously fruitful. For example, I became aware in the Midlands regional group, which was dominated by dance practitioners, that in many ways their understanding of 'embodied knowledge' is highly sophisticated, as one might expect given the nature of their discipline. My own specialism – text-orientated performance work – is such that I am constantly seeking acting processes whereby the word becomes 'living', 'of the moment', 'in the moment', 'holistic', and other such phrases. This might account for my readiness to accept the written word as a valuable means of complementary documentation to my own practical research.

There was also a sense within our working party that, having chosen to enter the academy, we needed as practitioners to embrace the inherent complexities of our situation and endeavour to find new paradigms and vocabulary. An underlying paradox exists within our work: we make music, dance, theatre, documentaries, etc. because we want to provoke, delight, educate, entertain our audiences. And yet in order to locate our practice within a research context, we are encouraged to provide frameworks and epistemologies by which it can be 'assessed' and 'evaluated'. As a theatregoer, I don't set out to *judge* what and whom I am watching; yet as a reflexive practitioner, it is my job to

evaluate both my own work and that of my fellow practical researchers. How can we begin to accommodate this dialectic? I can offer no definite answer.

Two key issues arose within our working party – bearing in mind that we had all attended different Presentation Sessions in the day, so our discussion was influenced by the range of case studies presented at the conference. The two issues were: first, that the paradigms need to be shifted; and second, that we need to negotiate with those controlling power and funding (the RAE panels, the AHRB assessors, and not least our own departmental colleagues) so that they recognize and acknowledge that the paradigms *are* shifting. Yet in forming a new vocabulary, how are we to 'concretize the somatic'?

In an attempt to fuse the binary of theory and practice, a number of phrases were offered over the four days, some of which quickly entered general currency. Among these was Susan Melrose's suggestion of 'theoretical practice', and the proposal to exchange the word 'knowledge' for the word 'knowing'. Ideas were raised regarding new currencies of evaluation: for example, how might 'pleasure' or a more 'libidinal economy' fit into our criteria for assessing practice as research? (I'm intrigued to know how any proposed pleasure paradigm would be assessed . . .)

Acknowledgement was made of the fact that much of the knowledge gained through practical research may not be linguistically available to us – indeed should we be trying to look for its logical articulation? While the debate was heated and inspiring, I found myself retreating from any proactive responsibility, and I was left wondering who was going to come up with the concrete answers to these questions, and when a decree would be issued announcing that the New Paradigms were now in place.

I personally liked Sally Mackey's notion of 'praxitioners', and in terms of my own personal transformation over the course of PARIP 2003, I found myself turning, almost atom by atom, from an 'actor' into a 'performance praxitioner' (certainly one way to flummox the car insurance brokers).

Conclusion

So where does all this leave us? To begin with, I congratulate the PARIP directors on a vastly enjoyable, a strikingly timely, and a pleasurably perplexing conference. There were many more areas of great interest and provocation not touched on in this paper, not least of which were collaboration and the displacement of the single-authored monograph. With regard to the topics raised here, I am clearly in no position to offer any definitive answers. Indeed, it would not be for me to do so. While all the delegates were actively encouraged to *be* PARIP, it of course remains for the official directors to compile the relevant feedback information.

What is important, however, is that researching practitioners remain proactive in the complex and delicate task of promoting status, defining criteria, and evolving epistemologies. And that proactivity can begin on the local level, simply in terms of departmental dialogues. In the meantime, I shall imminently return to the industry to engage in a very exciting piece of practical research, as one of the actors in David Hare's new 'state of the nation' play, *The Permanent Way*, with Max Stafford-Clark's company Out of Joint and the Royal National Theatre. By the time that the final stages of PARIP kick in with their proposed conference in 2005, I fear that I shall no longer have a voice in the academic arena.

I hope that my fears are unfounded. Although PARIP is specifically AHRB-funded to investigate academic issues, I hope that links remain with professional practitioners in the industry, so that questions of vocational rigour and relevance to the wider performance public can remain on the agenda. With Arts Council grants increasing for artists' research and development proposals, it may be that the walls between the industry and the academy, between practice and research, may eventually become truly porous.

References

1. See website at www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/Drama/.
2. Marar, Ziyad, *The Happiness Paradox* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), p. 61
3. Ibid., p. 62.

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