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## REPRODUCTION AS A SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH METHOD: "THE SPANISH GUITARIST"

**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to give a wider understanding of the value of practice as a learning method. It is important to understand the practical benefits of artistic research in the development of creative thinking. Here it is emphasized the relationship between the exegeses or research paper and the studio practice in artistic disciplines. We see how practice as research not only produces knowledge that may be applied in multiple contexts, but it has also the capacity to promote a more profound understanding of how knowledge is revealed, acquired and expressed.

**Key words:** reproduction, practice, replication, studio-based work.

In order to explore the knowledge and other outcomes of studio-based practice I will refer to a case study: my own reproduction of the work of Edouard Manet called "The Spanish Guitarist". This is the first work to be accepted in the Parisian Salon in 1981. In addition, this work was well received by the school of realistic painters and got a medal of honor. Currently it can be seen at "Metropolitan Museum of Art", New York.

The reproduction of Edouard Manet's painting was an exercise for the course called "Image Analysis", taught by conf. univ. dr. Doru Pop. The character in the picture is Radu Stefan, fourth year student at the Faculty of Theatre and Television, department of "Cinematography, Photography and Media".

The main purpose of this paper is to evaluate how creative art research methodologies may lead to a more critical and innovative thinking of the practitioner.

Different assumptions about how the knowledge is acquired have been developed over time. Empirical approaches em-

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phasize universal laws, whilst hermeneutics is based on the individual understanding, subjective interpretation and plurality of views. These approaches should coexist in the process of creative act. On the other hand, another element must be present in the scientific research, namely the studio practice. It is important to understand the relevance of the research that has practical articulations in expanding our ability to discover new ways of shaping our creativity and produce new meanings. The creative work is on the base of learning through personal experience and on the base of the development of multilateral thinking.

Pierre Bourdieu argues that tacit knowledge and the alternative logic of practice underpins all discoveries. This logic is sometimes overlooked because “it is subsumed into the rational logic of discursive accounts of artistic production” (qtd. in Barret, Bolt 4). The purpose of reproducing a work of art is to develop an intuitive skill and ability. This notion of intuitive knowledge is closely related to what Bourdieu has theorized as the logic of practice or the logic of a game in which strategies are not predetermined but appear and operate according to the challenges of spontaneous decisions took under pressure. For example, here are some pressures that I met: a model who quickly lost his patience while installing the equipment, the organization of the studio practice, the indications for the model and the vigilant attention on the continuity of details, the mental and then digital overlapping of the real image with the original

painting, continuous rectification of the elements related to the body language, composition etc. ...

### **The subjective and relational dimensions of the artistic process.**

Learning through practice can be seen as a de-contextualization from an established or universal discourse to an individual universe, based on particular experience. In order to apply this idea on my case study, I had to analyze the work of Manet and to reinterpret and revalue the message through my own filter. He talks about a poor guitarist with a certain charm given by his body movement while singing. We can imagine that singing is his passion, in any other context. This state of mind is visible on his body (we can feel the energy of his passion) and it was impossible to imitate it in the faithful reproduction (Reproduction no. 1) because Radu’s lack of passion for this music genre. In contrast with first picture, (Reproduction no. 1), the second one (Reproduction no. 2) gets closer to the Spanish guitarist’s attitude. In staging itself as an artwork, the particularity of experience is then returned to the universal: two singers who have basically the same story “behind the scenes”. Going further with the process of creation, Paul Carter suggests that “material thinking” creates new relations of knowledge subsequent to production. Another useful term for understanding the emergent aspect of artistic research and the dynamics of the circulation of artistic products is Barbara Bolt’s notion of “materializing practices” (Barret, Bolt



in the right leg of the singer, in the guitar's finger board, in the white scarf that hangs behind the head and in the shadow of the left leg.

This geometry is built mainly on the lines of the body which is in a very complicate pose for a man sitting on a bench: his right leg is up, both knees are bent, none of the legs touch the floor, the right leg is higher than the left one, he has straight

5). This implies an ongoing, performative engagement and productivity both at moments of production and consumption. If we put this in the creative field, we can say that an art critic should be a creator of art works.

Therefore, we discover another purpose of reproducing a realistic painting in a picture. During the process of creation I came to the "consumption" of Manet's work of art with different eyes than I did before. I can say I went beyond the simple "consumption" to the "assimilation" of it in different ways. For example, when you first look at the painting, it seems to be very realistic and easy to replicate. After analyzing the picture in terms of composition, we observe a complex and rigorous geometry. There is a network of horizontal lines of the bench and the vertical lines of the body shapes and another network of lines given by the legs and its shadows. If we make a visual layout from the two diagonals of the bench which align with the bottom corners of the canvas, we realize they are repeated

back, the head faces left side but the eyes look on the right side, the left shoulder is closer to the viewer and the head is bent a little backwards. Thus, reproducing this pose made me understand that the visual harmony between the compositional elements and the lines of the body is not "real" but "realist". After completing the case study, a big question mark arose in my critical approach on the Manet's work. I was thinking that maybe the talent of this painter belongs to the fact that he can create precise geometric compositions with horizontal and vertical lines using the flexibility of the human body. Is this exaggerated position of the guitarist a personal touch and a subjective approach? It is used with the purpose of having a perfect composition?

The exegesis or so-called "mime" is defined by concepts like: skills, habit, inventions and ideas which are transmitted from person to person by imitation. Richard Dawkins borrowed this concept from the Greek "mimema" which means "anything is imitated or copied" (qtd. in

Barret, Bolt 13). The same author describes “memes” as cultural replicators. Going further with this idea, he describes imitation as a basic foundation of culture. Imitation can be seen both as a replication or a re-versioning of the artistic work, “as well as a reflective discourse on significant moments in the process of unfolding and revealing” (qtd. in Barret, Bolt 160). This mechanism of reproduction is currently exploited more in terms of the result and not on the process itself. An example could be the reproduction of Manet’s paintings on shirts, flyers and brochures. The product is used as a commodity. We are not interested in the process of creation; all that matters is to have a result which is as close to the original work as possible. Thus, an understanding of the mime as a vehicle for fixing ideas in our collective consciousness allows us to see that conventional valorization of the artifact as products precedes the appreciation of the value of creative process.

More than just gathering information based on text and image, practice develops the relation between the creative act of writing and the result itself. The dialogue between practice and the subjective, critical thinking of the artist in the moment of creation is crucial for articulating and asserting the result. The acquisition of theoretical knowledge about Manet’s painting helped me to develop a critical thinking about his creation, which worked



as an invisible map while reproducing the painting. We can take as example the way Edouard Manet chose his subjects during time. At the beginning of his career, following the art current “Realism”, he developed a social sensitivity for common people. That’s why he chose a Spanish singer from a French environment. Such subjects did not interest him later, as he became an impressionist painter. At that time he used to represent the bourgeois medium where to he belonged.

### Replication as Valorization

Creative learning methodologies are based on practical and experiential knowledge. The Greek term “phronesis” describes this kind of inquiry which requires “deliberation, wise moral choice and the attribution of value based on unfolding action and experience.” (qtd. in Barret, Bolt 162). In this sense we can say that exegesis highlights particular knowledge derived from the interaction of the material and social environment. Then, the acquired knowledge is related to the original work



and to other theoretical information from other domains of knowledge. It is important to understand the innovative potential of the mimesis which lies in the relation between creative arts and their practice. In this sense, I chose to have an accurate reproduction of Manet's painting for the first shot and I tried to use elements as similar to the original work as possible. The studio based work brought me many difficulties, such as the fact that the bench had a diagonal which does not correspond to the geometry of the original painting. Because I wanted to avoid any major intervention in post-production and to respect the "realism" of the painting in my picture, I had to reconstruct one of the bench's legs using boxboard. Another difficulty was the fact that post-production retouch was inevitable.

### Replication as Evolution

Evolution is a change, an adaptation to a new environment. This idea stands for the modern adaptation of the Spanish guitarist (Reproduction no.2). Dawkins

defines evolution as a process that involves "reproduction with a certain degree of fidelity and innovation, and a certain degree of infidelity" (qtd. in Barret, Bolt 159). The elements of infidelity are crucial and allow us to have multiple interpretations and understandings of a work. To prove this fact, I will refer to the elements of light and shadow from my study-case. In Manet's

painting there is a contrast between the dark side on the right, where the jacket seems to dissolve in the background, and the bright spot in the upper left side. This contrast gives a certain dimensional discrepancy to the painting. In the first photographic reproduction I tried to maintain the same lightning and dimension of the planes, but in the second one I wanted to have a better delimitation of the character from the background. This decision is folded on the idea that the second character comes from another world, from a universe that requires a three-dimension space. Thus, I introduced another spot light to give some back light to the character and make him look closer to the XXI century.

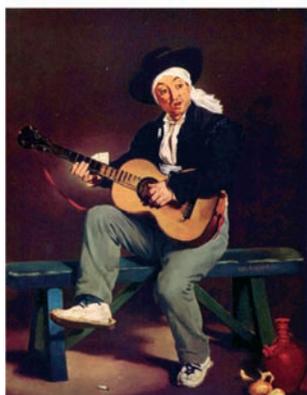
During the studio-based research, I learned the most from the constant challenge of finding spontaneous solutions to problems. For example, Manet's model was a left-handed guitarist who used a right-handed guitar. Radu Stefan had difficulties in holding the guitar on the left side, like Manet's model. In order to avoid a false body posture, I had to



spontaneously reorganize the whole composition and use an imaginary “mirror” effect for foreseeing the result. Thus, I applied to the final picture a horizontal flip in post-production. Depending on the Radu’s reactions and abilities of imitating the Spanish guitarist’s position, I had to constantly review my work-plan. This is the basic premise of the methodology of learning through practice described by David A. Kolb (qtd. in Barret, Bolt 5). In a practice-based research there is a unity between problem, context and innovative solution. Finding a solution needs theoretical knowledge acquired before the studio-based work. For example, understanding the elements of visual composition is crucial in the process of creation. When my model told me he cannot lift his right leg high enough, I had to move the guitar so as the lines of the guitar and the leg remain parallel. It can be noticed a shift from intention to action and vice-versa. First, there was the intention to keep the elements of composition as similar as possible,

then the problems show up and finally I had to make some compromises and came up with innovative solutions. After experiencing all these I became aware of the double articulation between theory and practice, where the theory emerges from practice and practice is documented through theory. This is, again, another mechanism of learning and acquiring knowledge through creative arts practice.

On the other hand, we cannot ignore our relationship with the subject/object of study- a focal element in the learning methodology based on practice. The interaction with the subject was by far the biggest challenge. As I mentioned before, the pose of The Spanish guitarist in Manet’s painting is unique and impossible to replicate precisely. Muscles are much tensed and give us the impression of movement in a passionate moment of singing. Moreover, it seems that the only thing that prevents the Spanish guitarist from standing up, excited by his music, is the fact that he is posing for a painter and not playing for an audience. The greatest



difficulty in the photographic process was the fact that Radu was not playing but imitating the gesture in an artificial way. I played some guitar music from my laptop in order to help my model to get in that mood. The hum attempts of Radu proved to be a failure because of the age breakdown from that time to nowadays. This made the first picture less successful. Radu could not show the passion of playing a classic guitar which is out of his interest, dressed in uncomfortable and awkward clothes for the XXI century. Therefore a continuous adjustment and guidance was needed throughout the process of taking the picture. When we started to take the second picture, which portrays an electronic guitarist with all the elements of our times (beer and cigarettes), Radu's character came to life and got into role (although he is neither actor, nor singer).

The problems I encountered in the visual reproduction, despite the existing plan, gave me the opportunity to develop the practical and material part of my visual thinking. For example, when I

first saw Manet's painting, I thought he used one spot light in a studio. Setting the *mise-en-scène* made me understand that the shadows of the objects on the floor and the lightning of the guitarist's face require simultaneous presence of two spot lights. Before this practice, the perception of the painting was based on my mental visualization and different assumptions about the process of creation. The studio-based work offered me a different kind of "knowing" and "understanding" – a science which arise while handling elements in practice. We are talking about Paul Carter's concept of "material thinking" mentioned above, which mixes both Martin Heidegger's theory and practice (qtd. in Barret, Bolt 6).

Material thinking gives us the chance to reconsider the actions that occur in the creative process of practice. In this sense, the materials from various stages of production are not just passive objects to be used as by the artist as simple tools, they become intelligent objects which interplay with the artist's creative mind. For example, the position of the cruse and the onion shows a well-calculated compositional structure, as the garlic belongs to the diagonal that ends on the guitar's arm. Another challenge in the creative process was finding the new elements for the second reproduction to be both in the relation to the original painting and to be representative for the new settings. These elements are: the model, the old/modern clothes, the bench, the cruse/the pint, the classical/electronic guitar, the onion/the cigarettes and so on. The cruse and the

onions talk about the poverty of a Spanish guitarist in the nineteenth century while the pint and the cigarettes outline nowadays lifestyle. The story of the two characters is the same; the only difference is the context of the age they live in. Although the objects are not directly connected, their manipulation is similar and same is the intention of producing meanings. Drawing on Martin Heidegger's ideas, Don Ihde refers to "human actions or embodied relations involving the manipulation of artifacts to produce effects within the environment" (qtd. in Barret, Bolt 6). This idea is another fundament of learning through practice. These processes and their precise operations cannot be predetermined and are predicated on the tacit and alternative logic of practice in time. The relationship between physical events and mental phenomena is possible only through practice, same as the relationship between the creator, the artifacts and the subject. Going further with my study-case, there is a double parallelism between Manet as a painter (the materials/resources used by him, the complexity of his subject) and me as a photographer (with other types of resources/ materials/ subject). There is a transposition from painting to photog-

raphy. By changing the medium it was possible to value the replication both as a meme and as evolution. To understand better how practical methods of learning stimulates the imagination, I would mention that the idea of reproduction by transposition came later in the creative process. First, I wanted to have only a faithful reproduction of the original painting in a picture (Reproduction no.1) but then, as I started undertaking the entire creative process, the second idea was born. This confirms all the arguments on the advantage of using practice as a method of scientific research.

In conclusion, I would underline the importance of learning the aesthetics of realistic image through practical reproduction. The difficulty of creating a visual product similar to the original work, offered me a unique context for acquiring knowledge which would have been impossible to achieve through the theoretical discourse. Reading about Manet's painting gave me only a superficial (but needed) background in the creative process. A strong connection between mind, eyes and hand was needed in order to develop a material thinking.

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