**Research Reflections Conference**

**York St John University, September 8th 2016**

**Six Myths (or Half-Truths) About Research: Six Provocations.**

**Gary Peters**

1. **Research is a ‘process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared.’ (REF)**
2. **The researcher must have a research question.**
3. **The researcher must have a clearly delineated research methodology.**
4. **Research directly enhances teaching.**
5. **The researcher must be passionate about their research.**
6. **Research is primarily active: hence the descriptor ‘research active.**

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**Research is a ‘process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared.’ (REF)**

There are three areas of contention here:

1. Does all research have to be a ‘process of investigation?’ No. This limits research to a linear, developmental model that does not necessarily map onto artistic, practice-led research, which might (hopefully) be far more wayward and erratic in its movement.

2. Does all research have to lead to ‘new insights?’ No. Novelty is not a prerequisite of research. And much that passes as new is trapped in a model of negation (of the research of one’s ‘peers’) that is totally dependent on the old to produce negative innovations in thought that are often, for that reason alone, trivial: a form of ersatz novelty.

3. Does all research have to be ‘effectively shared?’ No. Most research is not effectively shared. Badly delivered conference papers by academics driven into panic every time the 2 minutes to go card is held up. Rushing through what remains without any thought to the audience who are confused, lost, asleep or, more typically, awaiting the opportunity to draw attention to their own research during so-called ‘questions.’ Articles in academic journals that no one reads, marvelous books that no one can afford. Being a narcissist and my own biggest fan, I often (thanks to Google Scholar) read pieces that cite my work. The citation usually amounts to my name and a date in brackets…that’s it. Occasionally one finds a brief discussion of the work itself, invariably completely misinterpreting it. Perhaps, then, we can think of some more effective ways of sharing research.

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**The researcher must have a research question.**

Unfortunately, this particular model of research has, in being universalized (like all ideologies), contaminated both art practice and arts research. As thinkers as diverse as Collingwood and Gadamer have agreed: you can only understand an artwork if you can identify the question it is intended to answer. Bullshit! No wonder so many art practitioners are wary of doing research: too often they confess they have no big research question they need to ask. Rather, they just want to interrogate what they actually do and the answers they have already come up with. Of course answers raise questions, but then the research dynamic is completely different.

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**The researcher must have a clearly delineated research methodology.**

Along with the demand for a research question, the accompanying demand for a research methodology is probably responsible for damming up a great intellectual sea of potential researchers. It also results in the marginalization and lack of ‘sharing’ of research that does not buy into the dominant methodological fashions. Descartes introduced the idea of method into modern thought, something that has been bulldozed out of our consciousness by the methodology-machine that drives contemporary research culture. A method is something that is developed to fit the task in hand, it is not necessarily shareable, and it is not something that pre-exists the project, it grows out of it. The creation of a method is in fact an essential part of the research itself.

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**Research directly enhances teaching.**

This is a half-truth, but unfortunately it is the wrong half that is usually promoted. The idea that active research leading to specialist knowledge in any field leads to better teaching is a cruel joke: most of the worst teachers I’ve ever had were world-leading researchers in their fields; while without doubt the best teachers I’ve ever had were complete dilettantes and intellectual charlatans. The reason for this is that teaching is not about filling up the spaces of ignorance with specialist knowledge, but rather providing strategies for dealing with the deep uncertainties that students (and charlatans) feel so intensely. Of course, research can (and should) itself be conceived as a confrontation with the unknown, the uncertain and the doubtful (including self-doubt) all of which should be central to good teaching: but this is the half of the truth that is consistently forgotten.

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**The researcher must be passionate about their research.**

Why? In most other areas we find passion a somewhat dubious trait. Have you ever had a conversation with a member of the Land Rover Owners Club? Quite. While passion might sustain a level of commitment to a research project it also completely befuddles one’s faculties. Passion is essentially destructive, linked to the pleasure principle and the death-drive. It creates fanaticism, enemies, paranoia, camps and conflicts that are heated for sure, but often pig-headed, inflexible, arrogant and myopic (sound familiar?): all in the name of academic debate and ‘effective sharing.’ In fact the biggest barrier to genuinely interesting research is passion. Take me: I’ve written by far the two best books on improvisation (no, really) and yet I couldn’t care less about improvisation: researching and caring are far from being inseparable.

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**Research is primarily an activity: hence the descriptor ‘research active,’ and the demand that we all at YSJU become research active (within 5 years!).’**

I put this one in just to annoy my esteemed colleague Prof Matthew Reason. He doesn’t like (or believe in) the concept of passive creativity that I take from the thought of Gilles Deleuze. So I would like to add, perversely perhaps, the idea of research as a form of passivity and consider the possibility of being ‘research passive’ rather than ‘research active.’ If research activity is a process of investigation, research passivity would be the contemplation of what we have already contracted though habit: the habits that, through that which has acted upon us, make us who and what we are. When people shy away from research because they don’t see a project unfurling before them into the future, I remind them, along with Dorothy of Yellow Brick Road fame, the road always starts here where you *already* are. To contemplate where you are and how you ended up there can (and should) be the foundation of excellent research.

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