

Straw Godzilla: Engaging the academy and research ethics in artistic research projects

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ABSTRACT

In Australia, the university ethics approval process is guided by the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. The National Statement does not provide a hurdle to be overcome or avoided, nor is it a Godzilla-like monster that must be slain for truth to survive. Rather the National Statement provides an affirmation of an abiding respect for all life and a mechanism for beginning the intelligent questioning, theorization and contextualization for a work of art. Focusing specifically on the emergent discipline of artistic research, this article addresses the question of how the supervisory process may take on the 'spirit' of the National Statement to engender genuine ethical debate, rather than merely focus on the instrumental obstacles that seem to get in the way of the research. It specifically addresses the emergent field of artistic research and the concomitant resistance to ethical regulation of artistic research, in which bureaucratic instrumentalism and compliance or censorship are considered to potentially emasculate the vitality of an art work and the ability of art to serve as a truthsayer or agent provocateur. In this, the attitude of the supervisor toward research ethics in artistic research is considered a key factor in determining their students attitudes towards the ethics process. This article will present several initiatives undertaken with the intent of more fully engaging supervisors and students with research ethics.

KEYWORDS

research ethics, practice-led research, artist as research supervisor

ARTICLE HISTORY

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Introduction

In Australia, the university ethics process and the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007, Updated December 2013), on which this process is based, are not hurdles to be overcome or avoided, nor are they Godzilla-like monsters that must be slain for *truth* to survive. Rather the *National Statement* provides an affirmation of an abiding respect for all life and a mechanism for beginning the intelligent questioning, theorization and contextualization for a work of art. Art has the capacity to open up debate on the central ethical dimensions in life and artistic research is one space in which this debate can be focused. How then can supervisory processes engender genuine ethical debate, rather than merely focus on the instrumental obstacles that seem to get in the way of the research?

This article will address the role of the supervisor in ethics training within the context of practice-led artistic research. It proposes that among artistic researchers, there persists a resistance to and mistrust of the university apparatus for administering ethical conduct within research projects. Whilst the research by higher degree programmes at a particular institution will no doubt cover the topic of research ethics within seminar classes, arguably, the attitude toward ethical

protocols and training in artistic research depends to a great extent on the attitude that the supervisor has toward research ethics and research design within a particular institution. If the attitude of the supervisor is one of hostility and non-engagement with research ethics then it is likely, if the project even proceeds, that the research will lack quality in both the design implementation and the art making in and of itself. How then might ethics be communicated to the supervisor and by the supervisor to the graduate researcher, not as a bureaucratic, burdensome necessity, but rather as the foundation of a vital approach to research, one that arises from potent art making, and that in itself makes a valuable contribution to knowledge? This article proposes that research methodology and design are fundamental to the development of ethical research. It offers some examples of interventions and approaches that open out the question of ethics to both supervisors and researcher and the ethics committees who are armed with the task of assessing these applications.

Background

The Australian *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007), more commonly referred to as *The National Statement*, establishes a working set of guidelines for the ethical conduct of research within Australian Universities and other institutions that carry out research. The National Statement expresses the idea that:

ethical conduct is more than simply doing the right thing. It involves acting in the right spirit, out of an abiding respect and concern for one's fellow creatures. This National Statement on 'ethical conduct in human research' is therefore oriented to something more fundamental than ethical 'do's' and 'don'ts'—namely, an ethos that should permeate the way those engaged in human research approach all that they do in their research. (*National Statement*, 2007, p. 3)

With its genesis in the Nuremberg Code (1947), subsequent revisions leading to the Helsinki Declaration (1964) and continual refinement and development via, mainly, medical research organizations, the *National Statement* in particular and the ethos of ethical research in general is very familiar and well understood by, for example, the health sciences researcher. Other disciplines such as anthropology have a discipline specific code of ethics, for example, the American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics (2012), that may sometimes appear to conflict with the *National Statement* or local research practice, but in general the concept of ethical research is well embedded within discipline-specific research practice and regulated through a discipline-specific research organization, such as the American Anthropological Association, an individual institutions code of ethical research practice or in fact the *National Statement*. However, the artistic researcher, being a relative newcomer to the academy, does not arguably have the same background and training in research ethics as the other more established disciplines and may regard documents such as the *National Statement* as a significant and unnecessary impediment to artistic practice and applied arts research.

The Artist as Researcher/Research Supervisor

In order to better understand the situation facing artistic researchers working in Australia (and in our own institution), a team of researchers (all members of the Victorian College of the Arts Human Ethics Advisory Group or HEAG and supervisors of graduate researchers) conducted a pilot study examining the intersection between creative arts research and research ethics. Through an online questionnaire targeting researchers at the Victorian College of the Arts and the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, the research investigated the experiences that artistic researchers, supervisors and graduate researchers had of the university's ethics protocols and procedures; their attitudes towards the process of ethical clearance; and the perceived impact of ethical regulation on artistic research and art more generally. The research was also concerned to understand how the

attitudes held by supervisors impacted upon their research and the advice they gave to their research students.

The respondents for this pilot study were drawn from across the range of creative arts disciplines, including the visual arts, music, film and television and the performing arts. Eighteen staff members responded to the survey.¹ Whilst some of the respondents had experience in qualitative and quantitative research methods, the majority of the respondents worked primarily with practice-led artistic research. The respondents were asked the following questions: Have you had any difficulties in applying the University of Melbourne human or animal research ethics guidelines to any of the research projects you supervise or are involved in?; To what extent do the requirements of the University of Melbourne human or animal ethics guidelines differ to creative arts practice external to an academic environment?; To what extent have you found that the University of Melbourne human or animal ethics guidelines *inhibit* your research or the research of your students?; To what extent have you found that the University of Melbourne human or animal ethics guidelines *enhance* your research or the research of your students?; Do you feel that the ethics guidelines are an important consideration when framing a research question or devising the methodology for a project?; and finally, have you altered or have you advised a student to alter the parameters of a project or its methodology because you felt that ethics approval would be too difficult to obtain? Given the nature of the questions, it was considered that it was essential that the respondents remain anonymous and be aware that this research had been authorized by the VCA HEAG.

The findings from the survey revealed significant differences between the experience of researchers and supervisors who were working with traditional quantitative or qualitative methodologies and those researchers working in the emerging field of practice-led research. Whilst the respondents working with more traditional research methodologies had few issues with the ethics process (beyond those common to most researchers), those working with practice-led research methodologies expressed a great deal of dissatisfaction with the ethical regulation of practice-as-research. From the responses in the survey, it emerged that researchers believe that the ethics protocols, processes and procedures in universities operate as a silent regulator of conduct and a subtle determinant of content and practice in artistic research.

One of the key issues identified by the study was a research methodological one. Practice-led research methodology is emergent and specific to each project (Barrett & Bolt, 2007). One of the respondents described the emergence of a particular project's methodology as a 'cumulative, incremental and the process driven with the discovery along the way' (Respondent L). This is all very well until the researcher is required to apply for ethics approval. The ethics application process requires the researcher to clearly set out their methodology, articulate the method through which they will gather their data and identify the attendant risks involved for the participants in the research prior to commencing their research. Given the 'serendipitous, convulsive, errant nature of artistic research', one of the respondents (Respondent K) expressed the view that the ethics approval process limits the development of studio-based research, arguing that it circumscribes experimentation and spontaneity, which is at the core of artistic activity. This respondent also commented that 'the criteria for ethics clearance militate against the kinds of exploratory, risk taking activities identified with the creative process'. The fact that the methodology is 'discovered "through" the process ... can make the methodology too intangible to explain within the ethics approval' (Respondent L). (Bolt, Vincs, Alsop, Sierra, & Kett, 2010, p. 10).

The view, held widely amongst the artistic researchers in the study, that the requirements of the ethics process strike at the very heart of creative practice, and that the emergent, unpredictable and experimental nature of practice-led research is fundamentally in conflict with what was described as the predetermined nature of the ethics application process has implication for graduate supervision. The researchers are also supervisors and, for many, their primary experience with the ethics process has been through their supervision of graduate researchers. What impact

does this attitude have on the supervision of graduate research projects and what strategies can be adopted to address this tension?

Through the survey, we were keen to ascertain how the attitude of the supervisor towards the ethics process affected their own research or the advice that they gave their students; whether researchers had modified their research in order to either obtain ethics approval or conversely avoid having to negotiate the ethics process, and whether they had given similar advice to their graduate researcher.² The responses to the question: *Have you altered or have you advised a student to alter the parameters of a project or its methodology because you felt that ethics approval would be too difficult to obtain?* revealed a focus on research supervision rather than the researcher's own research.³ Two important findings emerged from this question. Firstly, supervisors tended to guide their students to frame the project to avoid ethically risky or fraught projects. Thus respondent R quite candidly admitted that 'I encourage students to carefully frame a research question/methodology so as to qualify for minimum risk assessment'. (Respondent R), while respondent F offered that, 'students are some- times advised to avoid potentially risky projects—for example working with Indigenous underage subjects ... would need to be very carefully assessed' (Respondent F). A further response demonstrated the caution with which supervisors approached the question of ethics: 'I have not asked a student to alter a project, but I have pointed out the difficulties facing them regarding ethics approval if they proceed with the project as it stands now' (Respondent Q).

A second critical finding related to graduate researchers' tendency to self-censor and shy away from ethically difficult issues if they or the supervisor thought their project might have trouble getting ethics approval. As respondent A observed:

The mere mention of these considerations [the ethics guidelines] is often enough for the student to self-censor. I would not advise this but it is a clear deterrent for them. Even students involved in painting portraits begin to wonder if they will need ethics clearance and begin to shift their practice to avoid the issues. This is a terrible result and unnecessarily punitive. (Respondent A)

Self-censorship and/or suggestions by the supervisor that a graduate researcher should avoid 'difficult' research topics during their studies to avoid negotiating ethics has implications for what research and what art are produced in the academic setting. Further, it also has the potential to affect what art is produced in the real world. How do we equip emerging with the courage and the skills to take on the 'hard' topics whether they are in an institution or not? Any artistic research that takes humans or animals as its subject or involves them as participants in the research process will require ethics approval. Artistic research that engages with Indigenous people always requires a high degree of ethical scrutiny, as does art that involves children, photography that takes humans as its subject, documentary film-making, performance work, socially engaged art and the use of animals in art.⁴ The avoidance of research in these areas because it will require ethics approval would constitute a lack of courage. Further, it tends to skew artistic research in the Academy and undermines 'training' in artistic research.

The tendency to self-censor during their research training is exacerbated by a perception that research in the institution is different from practice in the real world. There still exists an attitude that 'ethics' is something that one has to engage with *only* while one is enrolled in a higher research degree at a university. It is therefore seen by supervisors and graduate researchers alike as 'a bureaucratic hurdle to get over'. As one of the respondents observed: 'There is no real-world-working-as-studio-based- artist application' (Respondent O).

Whilst graduate researchers working in the university are required to observe the University's *Code of Conduct for Research* and adhere to the guidelines provided by the *National Statement*, artists working in the community are not similarly constrained. The ethos of risk-taking and rule-breaking that governs artistic practice in the 'real' world, and which permeates discourse around avant-garde and contemporary art and art practice, creates resistance to a process that requires careful attention and adherence to protocols that are concerned to minimize risk and discomfort. The idea of the 'ethical researcher' is not one that sits comfortably with an artistic tradition that aims to 'worry'

boundaries. Furthermore, undergraduate students do not have to ‘worry’ about ethics since they are not considered as researchers and hence not governed by the *Code of Conduct*. In the survey, respondent O also observed that there is a failure to address the question of ethics at the undergraduate level and this leads to students being mystified by the process at postgraduate level. The ambivalence and even hostility towards the ethics process is, according to one of the respondents:

amplified by a commonly held perception that, even in the university, activities framed as ‘art’ don’t need ethics clearance, whilst ‘art-as-research’ becomes subject to the ethics process. This is reflected in a lack of commitment to the university ethics process ... and contributes to the belief that ‘ethics’ acts as ‘an enormous impost on artistic freedom and licence.’ (Respondent A)

Thus, the view that ‘there is no real-world-working-as-studio-based-artist-application’ of the university ethics process points to a fundamental ambivalence towards artistic research and the belief that ethics is an impost and something one only has to negotiate if and while one is ‘doing’ research in the institution. Once one graduates, it is business as usual.

Philosophical debates around the question of ethics and what an ethical artistic practice might look like tend to get lost in the complexity and pragmatics of negotiating institutional ethical requirements. Here it becomes important that supervisors are equipped to deal with the complexities of the ethics process and also be able to address the broader philosophical questions of ethics that artistic practice and artistic research can raise. Thus, the attitude of supervisors to this process becomes central to the type of research culture that develops within the institution.

Artists Bayles and Orland (1993) contend that there is an instinctual suspicion deeply embedded within the art-maker’s DNA, and that the individual artist surrenders creative and intellectual potency through engaging with the orthodoxy of the Academy. They observe that:

the thought of working in the art education system—either as a student or faculty—may sound about as attractive as standing beneath a steady drizzle of dead cats. Viewed from the outside, most schooling gives every appearance of being not only destructive to the individual, but irrelevant to the great sweep of history. (Bayles & Orland, 1993, p. 80)

It is this antipathy that forms the seed of the resistance to the policy climate of the institution and its demand for compliance to those rules and protocols that govern research. For the artist, the *National Statement* represents one quality of surrender that is not too far removed from those other disciplining institutional practices of ‘risk assessment’, ‘occupational health and safety’ and ‘intellectual property’. Indeed, the language of the *National Statement* does little to dispel this idea. For example, the phrase ‘acting in the right spirit’ (*National Statement*, 2007, p. 3) may suggest that there is a regulated monopolar understanding of the word ‘right’ in this context. Further, the parental use of the word ‘should’ as in ‘an ethos that should permeate’ begs the related questions: ‘why should?’ ‘What if I don’t?’. This question is not asked from a position of reactive impertinence, but rather from a genuine desire by the artist to challenge institutional thinking where the artist mistrusts the rationale of regulatory policy.

There is also a less heroic but significant aspect to the resistance that the artist shares with the rest of the academy and that is to prioritize maximum time to art making/art researching and teaching. Bayles and Orland state that, ‘one way or another you have to preserve time both for making art and for sharing the art making process with your students’ (Bayles & Orland, 1993, pp. 84–85). Therefore, resistance to engaging with research ethics may be embedded within behaviours that indicate a general resistance to the increasing managerialism of the university, and not research ethics specifically. They suggest that the best strategy for cultivating quality time for research is simply to avoid ‘like the plague’ all activities that don’t directly contribute to art in itself. For many, the ethics process is a tedious bureaucratic process, one that, as we have seen, is considered antithetical to the avant-garde spirit. Thus, for research ethics to be meaningfully embraced within arts’ institutions, and bearing in mind that the principle supervisor will set the tone for engagement with research ethics, there is a need to develop approaches and strategies within the institution to

encourage a buy-in to ethics both at a philosophical and institutional level. Firstly, what approaches can encourage the supervisor to understand the ethics application as a positive foundational step in research design for each student's research project? Secondly, how can we encourage supervisors to understand that research ethics is not a list of moral 'dos and don'ts' but is instead a way of thinking about research that enables a greater depth of human engagement and has real effects on a wider audience.

Our artist practices do have a social impact and hence ethical considerations are important. This is not to suggest that the artist as researcher is contumacious by nature. Rather, we need strategies for those supervisors struggling with the relevance and administration of research ethics, to understand that research ethics is always about a dialogue, and that their input is valuable to understanding what is essential about human beings.

Models of Engagement

The perception that 'there is no real-world-working-as-studio-based-artist-application' points to fundamental ambivalence towards art-as-research and the belief that ethics is something one only has to negotiate if one is 'doing' research in the institution. The problem persists: How can we engender an investment in the ethics of research on the part of the artistic researcher (whether they are a supervisor or a graduate researcher)?

Developing creative arts research projects within a research setting has required adjustments both on the side of the supervisor and the creative researcher (not mutually exclusive) and on the side of the institutional gatekeeper, the ethics committee. The creative researcher is required to articulate their research in a way that makes sense to the ethics committee and 'fits' within an ethics framework that is defined by the science research model. For ethics committees, creative research remains an unruly beast. The notion of the aesthetic alibi, that is, the idea that art is a privileged field that allows artists exemption from normal social and legal constraints, is not a valid rationale for artist research that is seen to conflict with the fundamental principles set out in the *National Statement* or the *Code of Conduct of Research*. Thus, art projects that aim to provoke or subvert the rules of the institution will not be given favoured treatment just because they are art.⁵ Reconciling an ethos of artistic autonomy and subjectivity (that has been shored up by the aesthetic alibi) within the ethics guidelines is a high wire act with attendant risks.

The tension between the role (some) creative artists see for themselves as an *agent provocateur* and the protocols of the research institution at times seems unresolvable. In the UK and in Europe, a number of artistic researchers have initiated events that focus on engendering debate around ethics and art in order to break down this divide. Anna Dumitriu's (2012b) research project, *Trust Me I'm an Artist: Towards an Ethics of Art/Science*; Gina Czarnecki's *Wasted Debates* roundtables; and Nicola Triscott's arts/science ethics advisory panel initiative are three such initiatives that provide a forum in which the ethical issues that arise in artistic research have been introduced into public discourse (Triscott, 2012). *Trust Me I'm an Artist* is a collaborative research project devised by the UK artist Anna Dumitriu in collaboration with Bobbie Farside, professor of Clinical and Biomedical Ethics at Brighton and Sussex Medical School. The project investigates ethical issues arising in some art and science collaborations and the roles and responsibilities of artists, scientists and institutions. Dumitriu and Farside stage public events where artists present their proposed research projects to a panel of 'ethics experts' in front of a live audience. The project is dissected and discussed both in terms of very practical institutional ethics questions but more broadly about the broader philosophical and ethical questions that it raises.⁶ This ongoing series of dialogues addresses such questions as research with animals, self-experimentation and working with bacteria. Gina Czarnecki's Artists Ethics Advisory Panel (2012 and ongoing) round table discussion on the use of human remains in art has similar aspirations. These UK initiatives and the Australian biological art laboratory Symbiotic A address the ethical issues that emerge on the boundary between art and

science and involve artists, scientists and ethicists in the debate. The question for us was: How can these models be used to develop programmes and approaches that engender debate amongst supervisors and graduate researchers in the broader field of art?

She'll be Right: Ok!

At the Victorian College of the Arts and the Melbourne Conservatorium, at the University of Melbourne, two particular strategies were explored with the intention of making the 'ethos' of research ethics more relevant and engaging to supervisors and graduate researchers. Our aim was to test whether ethical reasoning in and of itself was an inhibitor to art making or was actually a straw man or Godzilla creature that allowed for institutional disengagement. Firstly behind the scenes, the administrative human interface for ethics application was streamlined with the explicit intention of transforming research ethics from an ostensible exercise in 'administrivia' to the beginning of a dialogue that would enable quality research outcomes. Workshops were run and individual consultations were held with the graduate researcher to work through the ethical implications of the research project so that the graduate researchers came to 'own' their research and understand the ethical implications of the research design. However, the problem remained: What was the buy-in from the supervisors?

Secondly, in order to engage both graduate researchers and their supervisors in ethical issues around artistic research, an ethics symposium—*She'll be Right!*—was organized as part of the research methodology courses for Honours, MFA and PhD researchers. Their supervisors have been invited to be involved. While the title of the symposium refers to the Australian 'casualness' towards institutional rules and regulations, the structure for the symposium drew on the model of *Trust Me I'm an Artist*. The aim was to make it 'real' rather than hypothetical by involving the Victorian College of the Arts HEAG and using actual ethics applications, which were presented by the researchers to the ethics committee.⁷ The aim of the symposium was to make visible to workings of the ethics committees—the issues that they considered and the critical debates that their discussions addressed, and open up debate beyond the institutional requirements of the ethics process.

The symposium allowed current research students to put their projects to the test in a two hour 'live' ethics committee meeting with responses from Victorian College of the Arts HEAG and then invited discussion from the floor. In the first year, approximately 60 graduate researchers (Honours, MFA and PhD students) and a small number of supervisors participated in the symposium. The first symposium was organized around two artistic research projects—firstly, an actual ethics application for an online survey by Tara Cook. This application had received approval from the VCA HEAG. A second presentation, by the performance artist Stelarc, allowed a broad ranging discussion about the ethical questions around bio-art posed by Stelarc's ongoing performance and partial life projects, such as *Extra ear—1/4 Scale* (2003) and *Ear on Arm* (2007) and his *Alternative Anatomical Architectures* project.

Cook's application was concerned with digital imaging and pixilation and involved an online survey. The project itself was considered minimal risk. It revealed no particular ethical or risk management issues of concern to the assembled ethics panel. However, it allowed the discussion to open up more broadly to the question of using social media as a research tool. Central to this discussion were questions of how potential research participants were approached to participate in the project and how informed consent could be negotiated in this realm.

Cook's application was also a valuable example to examine in this seminar context precisely because the questions it raised were connected to the apparent disjuncture between the terms that the artist researcher was using and the way these terms were understood by the HEAG. This has much to do with the nature of the ethics application form. The ethics application form used at the University only allows for textual information to be included—no images or sound files, for example. The ethics committee (HEAG) has to make its deliberation without the visual, kinesthetic or aural

examples and other information that would help them understand the complexity of the artistic research project. How does one translate the complexity of practice into simple language that may be understood by an ethics committee, some of who will be from other disciplines?⁸ The question of clarity of explanation is a significant issue where the terms expressed in the application appear vague and ambiguous. It was useful to have the artist researcher in the room to explain the meaning of terms particularly in relation to seeing the way the terms related to the visual art slides that the artist showed at the symposium when setting out the research project. From the point of view of the VCA HEAG, the immediacy of clarification and the relation to visual examples sped up the whole process significantly. The panel was able to address issues with the researcher that enabled both parties to come to a different understanding of the ethical issues at hand in the project. From the perspective of the supervisor and graduate researcher, there needs to be clear and concise writing; there can be no ambiguity of terms or in setting out the research design. Conversely, the local HEAG needs to advocate for including relevant visual and audio material as part of the ethics application. The danger here is that currently the application process becomes slow and cumbersome when more information/explanation is needed to clarify the application. This time lapse may be read by supervisor and graduate researcher as a result of slow, bumbling bureaucracy, whereas the language of the ethics application, the research design or the contextual basis for the research may be lacking in sufficient depth and clarity. Therefore, the supervisor has a responsibility to make sure that the language of the application is unambiguous, and that the research design is in and of itself a logical process.

The second part of this seminar was devoted to the work of the Australian performance artist Stelarc, whose artistic work and artistic research investigates practically and philosophically the question of 'aliveness' and, in particular, the complex relationship between biological and machinic aliveness. In the symposium, Stelarc discussed those works that specifically tested the limits of *the* human body by using his own body as a canvas. The discussion included his suspension works from the 1980s, the *Stomach Sculpture* (1993), whereby he had a crab-like robotic object and endoscopic camera inserted into his own stomach; and the *Third Ear* (2007), which involved a surgical implanting of a prosthetic cell-cultivated ear on his forearm. These works raise complex issues around ethics, the material production and the institutional display of art and, in the context of the symposium, the question of 'risk assessment'. All seminar participants expressed genuine concern for Stelarc's well-being and in this moment, risk management was understood as a valuing of Stelarc's health. Stelarc outlined the dilemma facing the doctors who performed the *Stomach Sculpture*, the fundamental conflict between the Hippocratic Oath, which ethically requires doctors to demonstrate respect for human life, and Stelarc's ongoing commitment to challenge the limits of the human body and his position that the human body is obsolete and therefore open to robotic and biological modification. His presentation raised questions, such as: What is the data in such a work?; Who is the participant in the work?; Does Stelarc need to gain ethics approval for such projects when he is the sole participant and the 'action' is on his body?; and what is the relationship between ethics and 'duty of care' in projects where the sole participant in the research is the artistic researcher?

Following on from the success of the first symposium, a second *She'll be Right!* symposium was held in April 2014.⁹ Its aim was specifically to address the question of self-censorship that the survey had identified as being detrimental to the development of courageous and edgy research. A PhD researcher and artist, Amy Spiers, was approached to present at this symposium precisely because her research pushed at the boundaries of those questions of discomfort and provocation.

Amy Spiers discussed *Nothing to See Here (Dispersal)*, a collaboration with Catherine Ryan that was part of Melbourne's *Festival of Live Art* in March 2014. The work was a response to the Occupy Melbourne protest in 2011, part of the broader Occupy movement that has occurred throughout the world. In Occupy Melbourne, like elsewhere, the protests were broken up and the crowds forcefully dispersed, leaving empty barricaded spaces of no entry. In two staged performances, Spiers and Ryan adopted the crowd dispersal techniques used by the police to choreograph a

'performative' encounter with a regime of power. During the 45-minute performances, the audience- becoming-crowd was variously directed, herded, divided, expelled or corralled into cordoned-off spaces, and denied any possibility of 'free' assembly or movement by the uniformed 'controllers'. These controllers were instructed in and employed the techniques of crowd controllers, security guards, ushers and police to 'divide and separate' the audience (Spiers, 2014, pp. 1–2). The strategy employed by the artists was inspired by Jacques Rancière's (2001) analysis of social control, which posits that political order is not merely maintained by political repression, but rather is effected through strategies of controlling visibility (to see is to believe) and the flow of people in public spaces. By making visible such forces, Spiers and Ryan aimed to deconstruct and reveal the mechanisms by which political order is maintained in 'public' spaces. The means they chose to achieve this were not just to produce a performance that evoked a sense of dis-ease, but rather one that provoked and enacted dis-ease and discomfort in its audience (Bolt, 2014, pp. 1–2).

Nothing to See Here (Dispersal) presented the audience with an artwork that is in conflict with one of the key principals of the *National Statement*, the principal that researchers should design their research to minimize the risks of harm or discomfort to participants (*National Statement*, 2007, p. 13). The discussion that followed debated questions about an artist's responsibility to social justice above questions of discomfort to a participant. If art cannot create discomfort, what is its value? Is it unethical *not* to create discomfort when faced with social injustice?

Square Pegs in Round Holes—The Ethical Review of Messy Research

In August 2013, the Victoria/Tasmania University Ethics Network 2014 organized a seminar *Square Pegs in Round Holes: The Ethical Review of Messy Research*. This work- shop brought together members of the human research ethics committees in Victoria and Tasmania with the aim to broaden university ethics committee members' knowledge of newer areas of research whose research methodologies do not fit neatly with the traditions of quantitative and qualitative researchers and that raise complex issues for ethics committees—participation observation, auto-ethnography, emergent research, art as research, situated ethics and the impact of the digital revolution on ethics. The workshop included field-based examples from anthropology/ethnography, the arts, action research and journalism and focused on the ethical challenges that faced researchers undertaking research. Tamara Kohn presented on anthropological and ethnographic research; Catherine Bell on art and research in a hospice setting; Lawrie Zion on journalism research; and Barbara Bolt and Robert Vincs concluded with a session on visual and performing arts research in a session entitled 'Bewitched, Bothered and Beneficent'.

Bewitched, Bothered and Beneficent took as its central theme the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research's acknowledgement that:

For ethical review bodies, there can be a profound tension between an obligation on the one hand to give maximum scope to participants' freedom to accept risk, and on the other hand, to see that research is conducted in a way that is beneficent and minimises harm. (*National Statement*, 2007, p. 17)

The presentation that was made by the authors used a number of fictional scenarios that were based on actual artistic projects, where the participants were asked to assess the potential ethical concerns from a research perspective and construct feedback to the fictional artist researcher. For each hypothetical example, the workshop groups were given an executive summary in plain language, a summary of what the research participants would be doing and a summary of the importance or relevance of the project as a research contribution.

Case Study 1 sought ethics approval for a visual artist to photograph a series of children's faces (children between 6 and 10 years of age, pre-puberty) and then col- lage these facial images into layered, multi-textural, multi-media artistic works. The case study drew on the controversial installation *Everything is F******, by artist Paul Yore, a work combining collages that juxtaposed

children's heads onto naked adult male bodies with toys and other found objects, that was exhibited at Linden Gallery in Melbourne in 2013.¹⁰ Case Study 2 investigated the nature of 'transcendent experience' that can be created through computer generated immersive entertainment systems. The research tests the effect of a computer programme that has been created to produce deep immersive entertainment and has the potential to induce transcendent states within a dance club environment. Case Study 3 investigated the choreographic possibilities for humans in suspended positions and involved restaging and filming an extreme suspension event. This scenario was a performance remount of one of Stelarc's (2014) suspension works. The fictional arts researcher/ethics applicant proposed an investigation of the phenomenological aspects of preparing and performing a suspension work understanding that the last performance of this work (in actual reality) resulted in the performer passing out and needing medical attention. Finally, Case Study 4, *Confronting the Bacterial Sublime: Building a Biosafety Level 2 Lab in a Gallery*, drew directly from Anna Dumitriu's project *Trust me I'm an artist*. In this project, the artist sought ethics approval to enable the audience to participate in supervised access and hands-on practical art and microbiology workshops to enable them 'to experience what it feels like to be confronted with the intricate behaviours of living bacteria in their most sublime form'¹¹ (Dumitriu, 2012a).

Each of the 'advisory groups' reported back to the whole seminar group explaining their advice to the fictional applicant and the reasoning behind the advice given. What was surprising in each case was that the primary consideration from each of the faux HEAGs was not whether the work was morally or ethically fraught, but rather the concern was the clarity (or lack of clarity) of the research question and the efficacy of the research design. The unequivocal advice was that the research should not proceed unless it could be shown that the research methodology would reasonably produce a research outcome that was demonstrably centred within the contextual literature for that discipline, and that a clear public benefit could be demonstrated.

Conclusion

Art making and art research has an intimate co-dependency with the moral, social, political and economic values that define a culture. In this way art making exists within an ethical context and not beyond it. Therefore, it is not reasonable to argue that art making is restrained by the requirements by research ethics protocols except to the extent that applying for ethical clearance takes time away from art making. The value of the hypotheticals and events such as *Trust Me I'm an Artist*, *She'll be Right* and *Square Pegs in Round Holes* are manifold. Whilst the actual ethics process is often clothed in mystery due to the confidentiality of the process, such events allow complex and difficult ethical issues to be debated. Permitting the ethics approval process to be made transparent to both supervisors and graduate researchers allows researchers to observe how questions of ethics are addressed in ethics committees and understand why it is important to be able to clearly articulate their projects in a way that a 'lay audience' can understand. Finally, such events provide a forum for a broader discussion of ethical issues that arise in creative practices and offer scope to discuss the expanded notion of 'research' that creative research offers.

While the initiatives that were developed led graduate researchers to become increasingly engaged with the process of ethics, and ethics committees to become more aware of the unique character of artistic research, the challenge remains to engage supervisors with the ethos of research ethics at 'the coal face'. There, research ethics may be understood as the foundation for research design. This will invariably make the research expressed as text and artefact more compelling. The requirement of research ethics is for the supervisor of an applied arts research project to be fully familiar with the *National Statement*, hold an attitude of dialogue with the local HEAG and to understand the transition from art making to art as research. The, 'It's OK, I am an artist' attitude directed toward the institution and the requirements research ethics arguably leads to poorly articulated research design, rambling methodology and incomprehensible outcomes. Furthermore, it does not prepare an artist to work ethically within the arts industry. The annual symposium and the efforts of

the VCA Research Office to develop 'ethics' as a dialogue with critical principles, rather than a set of rules, have led to a greater engagement with graduate research students. However, the scepticism of supervisors towards the ethics process and requirements is an issue that remains to be tackled until the next generation of artist-researchers working within in the academy normalize research ethics and art making into a singular activity.

Disclosure statement.

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Notes

1. The questionnaire was administered via a 'Survey Monkey' online questionnaire.
2. There is very little research on the impact of the supervisor's advice on graduate researchers' research.
3. From anecdotal evidence, it would appear that artists working in the academy tend to apply for ethics only if their artistic research is funded by research grant money or is conducted under the auspices of the institution.
4. See the NMHRC publication *Values and Ethics—Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research* (2003).
5. see Anthony Julius' book *Transgressions: The Offences of Art* (2002).
6. See www.artscienceethics.com to view the different projects involved in this ongoing dialogue about ethics and art/science research projects.
7. Considerable attention was given to establishing and ensuring a duty of care of the presenters who accepted an invitation to present at the symposium.
8. The VCA HEAG consists of academic staff from all of the creative disciplines in the school; Indigenous Arts, Community and Cultural Partnerships, Performing Arts, Music, Film and Television and Visual Arts.
9. Key staff from the Office for Research Ethics and Integrity at the University of Melbourne attended this symposium.
10. See ABC Arts Online (2014) <http://www.abc.net.au/arts/blog/arts-desk/Artist-Paul-Yore-ac-quitted-of-pornography-charges-141001/default.htm>.
11. See <http://artscienceethics.tumblr.com/BacterialSublime> for a full video of the presentation of Anna Dimitrui's event *Confronting the Bacterial Sublime: Building a Biosafety Level 2 Lab in a Gallery*.

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