

This paper is a comparative analysis of two prominent theories of learning within contemporary postgraduate creative education, Realism and Rationalism. I critique each theory in relation to the other, identifying areas of convergence and divergence and use my practice as a means of reflecting and diffracting each theory. Accompanying the development of my work, is my interest in the ancient origin of these learning theories and the extent to which they are applicable to creative education today. There is no discernible theoretical model of learning in the work of Plato and Aristotle<sup>1</sup>, but I am interested in aspects of their philosophical ideas which address the purpose of education and how knowledge can be formed. I will consider their theories of art particularly in relation to contemporary theories of learning which turn away from form-oriented learning to include environments and events, materials and narratives as integral to how we learn.

The plausibility of Realism can be applied to a large area of subjects, including ethics, aesthetics and most commonly science and mathematics. For the purposes of this paper it is necessary to define that I am interested in Realism for the thematic practices it encourages within creative postgraduate education which propose that knowledge can be found through an understanding of a separate, primary reality, where qualities such as objectification, measurement, experimentation and the use of etic epistemology are the primary methods for understanding the nature of things<sup>2</sup>. Within Aristotelian Realism is the belief that forms are intrinsic to objects and can not exist independently of the objects themselves. Interestingly however, Aristotle seems to reject this idea when he addresses art and argues instead for an idealised universal form which artists attempt to capture in their work<sup>3</sup>. Accompanying this is the idea that art imitates nature. Arts imitation of nature, is specific to 'Useful Art' which has like nature, certain ends in view and learns from natures production, mistakes, limitations and possibilities. Useful art differs from objects of aesthetic imitation. Nature for Aristotle "is not the outward world of created things; it is the creative force, the productive principle in the universe"<sup>4</sup>. The objects that art seeks to reproduce are mainly an inward process, a psychical energy working outwards; deeds, incidents, events, situations, being included under this and arriving from an inward act of will or some activity of thought or feeling<sup>5</sup>.

Aspects of Aristotelian Realism contrast with aspects of Platonic Rationalism which find reality only in the world of ideas and the formulation of knowledge as an innate process. The poet or painter holds up a mirror to material objects and catches a reflexion of the world around him

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<sup>1</sup> Bates, B. *Learning Theories Simplified*, 2nd ed. Sage, 2019, p.5

<sup>2</sup> Morgan, S.T. *Epistemology and Ontology*, <http://www.stmorgan.co.uk/epistemology-and-ontology.html> (viewed 31 March 2019)

<sup>3</sup> Author forthcoming, Aristotle, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/aristotl> (viewed 31 March 2019)

<sup>4</sup> Butcher, S.H. *'Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art'*, fourth ed, Dover, 1951, p.117

<sup>5</sup> op.cit, p.123

which is only a reflection of the Ideal<sup>6</sup>. If we are to consider the existence of a daisy in Hyde Park for example, according to Plato's Rationalism any representation of the daisy is a copy of a copy, twice removed from the truth - the idea of the daisy, the actual daisy and the artist's imitation of it. If art is mere imitation then, only a reflection of real things, Plato raises an important argument through Socrates's conversation in *The Republic* that artists might be doing more than just imitating objects, they may in fact be creating reality:

"Tell me, do you think that a craftsman of this sort couldn't exist, or (in one sense, if not in another) create all these things? Do you know that there's a sense in which you could create them yourself"<sup>7</sup>.

Such an argument intriguingly lends itself to forms of practice led research in creative post-graduate education which can challenge creative practice as knowledge generating and as I shall suggest later, question divisions between existing and conceptual realities through methodologies of practice. The separating out of creative practice from research practice, only challenged within the last two decades within Universities, could be said to find its origin in philosophies of Aristotle and Plato which place art on a lower knowledge level, below that of divine reason. The dominance of the humanities, theory, criticism and historical investigation, have been heavily prioritised over creative practice but they are starting to be considered as equally formative in the production of knowledge and how we acquire it<sup>8</sup> even if young people are not taught to 'read' images in schools or colleges in the same way as they are literature<sup>9</sup>.

Where Aristotle's and Plato's theories of art are both form-orientated, contemporary theories of learning such as Hazel Smith's and Rodger T. Dean's model of creative making and research processes, considers the process of developing knowledge through the concept of iteration<sup>10</sup>. The process of acquiring and extending knowledge is bi-directional they claim, with research-led practice, like practice-based research, dynamically informing how academic research can impact positively on creative practice. Research-lead practice has informed the trajectory of my creative practices as well as the methodologies I have used to learn.

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<sup>6</sup> op.cit, p.159

<sup>7</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, Translated by Lee, D, second ed. Penguin, 2003, p.337

<sup>8</sup> Smith, H. and Dean, R.T. in *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, ed Edinburgh, 2014, p.1

<sup>9</sup> Kennedy, M. Last art history A-level axed after Michael Gove cull of 'soft' subjects, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/oct/12/last-art-history-a-level-axed-after-michael-gove-cull-of-soft-subjects> (viewed 29th March 2019), 12th October 2016. In 2018 Art History was removed as a "soft" subject from the UK A Level curriculum under the educational reforms started by the UK education secretary Michael Gove

<sup>10</sup> Smith, H. and Dean, R.T. in *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, ed Edinburgh, 2014, p.19

Drawing within my practice is an example of this. A drawing I made of a daisy in Hype Park began as an attempt to describe as realistically as possible the form, structure and colour of a daisy before abstracting it. I was interested in theories of abstraction in Painting at the time and the idea that we can only abstract authentically if we develop a sound knowledge of Realist methods in the first instance. This was partly inspired by the development of Mondrian's abstraction which began with landscape aesthetic realism. The process of drawing the daisy using methods associated with direct observation and a separating out of subject, interestingly lead to a sense of the slow discovery of a complete form and an understanding of its environment through a dialogue established with the 'real' object.<sup>11</sup> The practice of slow looking and a sense of an internal form discovered through drawing, could bring us back to Aristotle's theory of forms as inherent in objects, but also support Plato's notion of the shadowing appearance of reality revealing the slow appearance of a third realm of forms. However, both theories of imitation feel limited in reference to this work as the act of drawing was not confined to mimesis. Drawing was like an open door, leading me to acquire further knowledge and explore other practice based methods of investigation in drawing.

In a series of instinctual drawings I made in response to crocus plants<sup>12</sup> I drew four drawings in consideration of what might be happening to the plants when I was not observing them. The context of drawing was interior and did not involve direct observation but interestingly lead into a description of the form of a crocus. The first image started off as a circular, blue form which I made quickly. This lead into a series of lines that were similarly condensed but breaking up. Then a softer image of purple and blue related marks developed, leading into the final two images which were more communicative in the sense that I became more aware of the relationship between marks and how the colour, form and weight of each mark dictated the expression of the next. In the final image, I am finding the form of the crocus flower on the left hand side of the page.

Links with Rationalism might be considered here, if knowledge of the crocus form was acquired from within and did not rely on sense-oriented learning, in that I was separate from the object (crocus) but still able to draw it. Aspects of Aristotelian Realism might also be considered, particularly in reference to the argument that art is the after effect of a sensation, the borderline between receptivity and sense, making reference to a world independently known but uniting with a separate reality<sup>13</sup>. Aristotle's rejection off signs and symbols associated with the object through imitation, leads us to consider whether the crocus drawings function as signs or descriptions of essences associated with the object (crocus). Roland Barthes's reflections on Aristotelian philosophy as "somehow constrained by the principle articulation of the Greek language" and his appeal towards the benefits of gaining "a vision of the Irreducible

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<sup>11</sup> Gallwey, L. Daisy Drawing, in Finding Landscapes, <https://www.lucygallweylandscapes.com/drawings-of-margarite-daisy>, Wix, (viewed 31st March 2019), 2015

<sup>12</sup> Gallwey, L. Crocus Drawings, in Finding Landscapes, <https://www.lucygallweylandscapes.com/crocus-drawings>, Wix, (viewed 31st March 2019), 2018

<sup>13</sup> Butcher, S.H. Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, fourth ed. Dover, 1951, p 125

differences which a very remote language can, by glimmerings, suggest to us<sup>14</sup>” are useful when considering what we ‘learn’ when we draw. Semantic reading and its emphasis on meaning being found not “caught”, “fluid, shuddering with fait ebullition<sup>15</sup>” reflect on practices and outcomes in some drawing practices which may in the activity of responsive mark making, not be searching for a transcendental signifier but a silent, non disruptive presence as knowledge. I am not certain whether I was signifying or describing something with the crocus drawings, but there was something very instinctual about the process of making them, connected to Nature as if it was teaching me something.

Quiet presences and multitudes of meaning question the nature of forms that appear to us unexpectedly and influence our learning. Realism’s proposition that things exist in reality separate from our conceptual schemes is complicated when the process of learning takes an unexpected course and materials and processes appear expectedly. I became interested in the fragmentary appearance of forms and their unexpected appearance during my Masters. I now have four projects where I found fragments associated with images, while doing something else, without meaning to find them. Other people have sometimes been involved in this, taking me to places where we have found things or they have given me fragments unexpectedly<sup>16</sup>. In all these situations, events and experience were the learning method through which my creative practice developed. My work for the recent Hidden exhibition at the RCA, ‘The Island’, evolved from finding 15th Century pottery fragments on an island in Venice, beginning with swimming then sitting, talking, looking together and then seeing the pottery fragments unexpectedly while talking<sup>17</sup>.

Gilles Deleuze’s theories challenge traditional theories of substance such as those proposed by Aristotle and Plato, which propose that reality ought to be understood in terms of the determinate state of things. He encourages us to see events as changes immanent to a confluence of parts or elements, subsisting as “pure virtualities” and distinguishing themselves only in the course of their actualisation in some body or state<sup>18</sup>. For Plato, forms were fixed and had a limit, but temporal causes and effects had an impact on the object. Stagoll defines Deleuze’s idea that “there is no distinct, particular thing without the events that define it as that particular, constituting its potential for change and rate of change<sup>19</sup>”. The Venetian pottery fragments might demonstrate this well. Changes to parts of this once complete object, were occurring within the object and around it and involved a series of time-frames. Consid-

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<sup>14</sup> Barthes, R, *The Empire of Signs*, Translated by Howard, R. ed. Noonday, 1992, p 6

<sup>15</sup> Barthes, R ‘Roland Barthes’, translated by Richard Howard, ed. Hill and Wang, New York, 1977, p 97

<sup>16</sup> Gallwey, L. *Fragments in Finding Landscapes*, <https://www.lucygallweylandscapes.com/ceramics>, Wix, (viewed 31st March) 2018

<sup>17</sup> Gallwey, L. *The Island in Finding Landscapes*, <https://www.lucygallweylandscapes.com/the-island>, Wix, (viewed 31st March 2019, 2018

<sup>18</sup> Stagoll, C. *Event in The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed Parr, A, ed Edinburgh, 2010, p.89

<sup>19</sup> *op.cit*, p 90

eration of instantaneous events intrinsic to the integration of various forces not singular forms, has broad implications for learning and creative practice. Jane Bennett, in 'Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things', argues in agreement with Jacques Rancière that "the habit of parsing the world of dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings) is a "partition of the sensible"<sup>20</sup>. Creativity does still fight to be understood, particularly where mess is involved and Bennett makes us aware that this may be the result of learning separation from vital materialism. Using Darwin's model of "small agencies" like the activity of worms who work in partnership with human culture in their endeavours to sustain life, Bennett argues for "heterogeneous assemblages in which agency has no single locus, no mastermind, but is distributed across a swarm of various and variegated vibrant materialities"<sup>21</sup>. Returning our attention to form and environment within creative practice, could be seen as part of this process, with creative practice establishing a vital connection with vibrant, non human agencies to sustain healthy political ecologies. The political and theoretical implications of Bennett's argument leads us not only to readdress the materials, technologies and processes we use within creative practice but how they could be linked to learning methodologies that include and develop environmental initiatives.

Realism can be challenged further when we consider how knowledge can be found through narratives, either presented by others or created by ourselves. It is interesting how in part three of *The Republic*, 'Education: The First Stage'<sup>22</sup>, Socrates in his conversation with Adeimantus, begins his discussion on the parameters of State building through discussion of the inclusion or exclusion of certain stories, particularly Homer, for the moral corruption and fear his works illicit in the young, future Guardians of the State:

"We shall begin educating minds and character, shall we not?"

'Of course'

'In this education you would include stories would you not?'

'Yes'

'These are of two kinds, true stories and fiction. Our education must use both, and start with fiction<sup>23</sup>'"

Plato proposes that the purpose of education is to train the character and the mind and the intellectual content of poetry and music should be censored and classified into elements which are good and bad for future guardians of the state. I would alarmingly reject such an approach to learning, but there is applicability here in the idea that the development of ourselves accompanies learning and how happy and successful we are in our learning is partly the result of the stories we are introduced to even at postgraduate level. Plato's discussion of the form of poetry is also useful when considering the separating out of the individuals own

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<sup>20</sup> Bennett, J. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, ed Duke University Press, 2010, preface

<sup>21</sup> *op.cit*, p.94-96

<sup>22</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, Translated by Lee, D, 2nd ed. Penguin, 2003, p 68

<sup>23</sup> *op.cit*, p.68

voice amongst layers of speech which Plato defines in poetry as direct and indirect, with direct involving 'representation'<sup>24</sup>. The process of rejecting imaginative identification is not useful within creative postgraduate education, but the process of finding your own voice when faced with the pressure to create innovative and original practice is. We can go to the library and look up what is current in art theory and practice and propose what we might make next, but developing an authentic response to our own interests and abilities, could be said to produce much more progressive and enjoyable practice, rather than that which is devoted to constantly referencing and reacting to others work.

*"We must reject the conception of education professed by those who say that they can put into the mind knowledge that was not there before - rather as if they could put sight into blind eyes"*<sup>25</sup>.

Within my current practice I am advancing methodologies which demonstrate how form-oriented learning is intricately contented to historical, environmental and social concerns and should not be rejected as outdated within contemporary art practice. Rather, it should be explored further for its capacity to opening up new contexts and methodologies of investigation, particularly when landscape is concerned. Inspired by research for this paper, part of my current work addresses how materials shown in dialogue with certain forms might affirm ontological principles and open up new pathways into creative practice. Dialogues in and out of forms can be established when we embrace active, independent and shared social schemes for creative practice. The environments in which we learn heavily impact on the work we produce, and I am interested in how these might be challenged and re-created in and outside of Universities to really advance our learning.

*"What was scattered gathers, what was gathered blows apart"*<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> op.cit, p.85

<sup>25</sup> op.cit, p.245

<sup>26</sup> Heraclitus, Fragments, Translated by Haxton, B. ed. Penguin, 2003

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