

Representation of memory and the (de)construction of the sense of place in religious heritage

Introduction:

One of our deepest needs is for a sense of place and belonging. A common denominator in this is human attachment to place and how we find identity in it. Therefore, place, is not simply what we see, but a way of seeing: we see it with our eyes but interpret it with our mind and ascribe values to place for intangible or spiritual reasons. The place can, consequently, be seen as a cultural construct in which our sense of place and memories inhere, which is the case of religious heritage.

This study explores some of the concepts related to sense of place and memory and how place permeates much of our thinking of the processes that move us between past and present, community and individual; between the apparent fixity of ritual and celebration and the wandering so characteristic of memory, sometimes leaving traces and producing stratifications, other times selectively erasing them.

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Research objectives:

This study aims to present the development of a personal practice-as-research approach [Figure 1] and a conceptual ‘discovery-led’ research cycle [Figure 2], related to artistic activities developed in religious heritage sites through an analysis of a site-specific performance that took place in the Cathedral of Viseu (Portugal). This performance was based on the (de)construction of the sense of place, which promoted this model and its corresponding cycle, emphasizing Henri Frédéric Amiel (1821 - 1881) thought: "any place is a condition of the spirit".

Methodological approach:

“(…) artistic research is ‘aesthetic research’ – the very word ‘*aisthesis*’ refers to sensory perception – in a somewhat similar sense that the ‘inventor’ of aesthetics, Baumgarten, explained it in the 18th century: aesthetic knowledge is knowledge about the singular.

It cannot be generalized into laws, and it applies to the singular and the unique, but it is still knowledge.” (Nevanlinna, 2002: 70)

Nevanlinna's quote reflects upon what might be artistic research through *praxis*, and proposes that it might be "aesthetic research" in a sense close to the one that Baumgarten gave it – *aisthesis* is a sensorial perception – and therefore aesthetic knowledge is a knowledge about the singular.

What made the task of approaching the representation of memory and the (de)construction of the sense of place as interesting as challenging, was that it seems the answer is always very individual and is always in permanent questioning: there is no fixed model, there is no recipe.

The construction of each personal practice-as-research approach might constitute itself as "a kind of productive uncertainty, a zone for temporary 'constructions' of concepts and thinking”

(Wallenstein, 2002: 46).

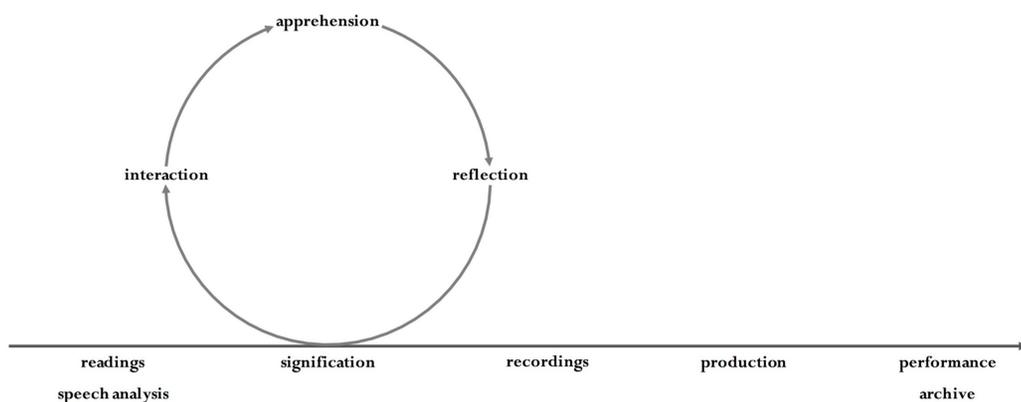


Figure 1. Personal practice-as-research conceptual approach

Due to the sense of place of a place and our artistic *praxis*, a conceptual ‘discovery-led’ research (practice-led research and research into practice, through practice) model was developed within the practice-as-research approach in which “the researcher enters an initially inchoate field, at most having a barely formed speculative question or hypothesis, then using his or her professional experience insights and skills, embarks of a research journey in which initially even the research pathway may not be clearly defined” (Rubidge, 2005).

Conclusion:

The conceptual model, although apparently without direction at its commencement, as the research progresses underlying research questions make themselves known and the research gradually focuses its attention on those question. This kind of research relies initially on the workings of what neuroscientists such as Guy Claxton (1994) call ‘the undermind’, Gerald Edelman and Giulio Tononi (2001) name as ‘primary consciousness’, and António Damásio (2000) discusses as the first stages of ‘extended consciousness’. Here observations, and responses to those observations, are intuitive, and may not initially reach the level of ‘higher-order’ or reflective consciousness. It is only later that the artist becomes conscious of the implications of the results of their responses, and begins to reflect upon their implications to an evolving research process, as presented in the conceptual ‘discovery-led’ research cycle.

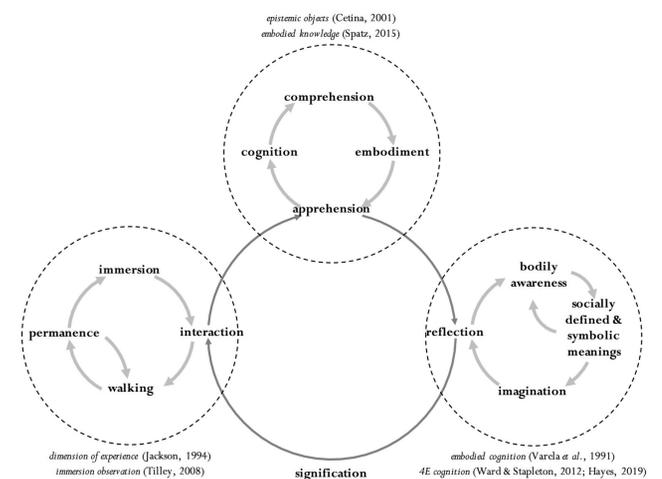


Figure 2. Conceptual ‘discovery-led’ research cycle

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Acknowledgments:

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