

been auspiciously expanded to include the social, the economic, and/or the political, it has ultimately become quite unspecific.

In contrast, a *particular* approach attends to site not as something that pre-exists either formally, conceptually, or ideologically, but as something that is constructed performatively out of the exchanges between artist, environment, and audience. It is an ongoing series of interrelational and open-ended processes: always partial, always situated, multiply layered, often contradictory and messy, and produced by active agents negotiating between all kinds of positions and working through all kinds of relationships. Neither located in exclusively conceptual/ideological zones, nor tempted by geographical essences or totally unified social consolidations, a *site-particular* position is about becoming situated and valuing particularities rather than holding the other to some ideal standard and/or pretending that specific experiences are the same everywhere. The *site-particular* is not about essentializing site by either physically hinging the work to a specific place, use, reading, or by materially unhinging it and pretending that specific experiences are the same everywhere.

Rather than superimposing a ready-made grid upon events and situations, or operating in a relativist flat field where anything goes, *site-particularity* offers a long-term dynamic of to-and-fro within locational possibilities and limitations, made and remade. Nor is *site-particularity* a tool with which to “understand” site, but rather a conversation, a process of collaborative construction: a reciprocal and simultaneous way of shaping and being shaped, a continual relearning, rehearsing, and improvising of different ways to recognize and respond in the moment and with full awareness as new situations are encountered. The *site-particular* does not merely look toward relativist/postmodernist alternatives as a reaction to universalist/modernist ideals, but toward situated work that reassesses, troubles, and avoids romanticizing either settler or nomad trajectories.

Notes

1. Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).
2. Site-contingent, context-specific, site-determined, community-specific, site-oriented, and so on.
3. Richard Serra's work can be read in this manner.

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Situated Knowledge

Lynette Hunter

The term “situated knowledge” has two quite distinct disciplinary connections. The first is with a long twentieth-century tradition in studies of knowledge that comes from the margins of society, from black feminist thought,¹ from non-mainstream science,² and from those outside accepted forms of social communication.³ The second connection is with the study of learning that takes place in the process of engaged observation and practice, such as craftwork in silver, or children's acquisition of language,⁴ or more recently, computing skills. This latter use is tied closely to studies in tacit knowledge.⁵

The two disciplinary fields have come together in studies of knowledge deriving from practice rather than written verbal proficiency in rational logic and analysis – including the practice of writing. These newly valued areas of knowledge include not only centuries-old training systems in dance, acting, and other performance media, but also, for example, indigenous people's traditional knowledge. In common with traditional knowledge, situated knowledge systems are not closed. They do not prescribe sets of rules or fixed delineations of content.⁶ They are intensely practical rather than pragmatic, and are intended to respond in sophisticated ways to quite different contexts. Unlike scientific knowledge in which the effect of the observer is often a “problem” and many experiments are devised in order to minimize it, in situated knowledge the whole point is that the observer is engaged. It is only through their engagement that knowledge can be manifested,⁷ and the observer is both the practitioner who makes things and the audience or respondent.

To give an example from everyday life: the way that women think has often been referred to as “intuitive”; however, over the last two decades this knowledge has been shown to be firmly rooted in observational experience and the pragmatics of daily testing.⁸ The book *Women's Ways of Knowing* has been immensely influential in this field. Intuitive knowledge is not usually articulated as a set of ideas, but is continually put into practice through interaction with others.⁹

An example from performance practice comes from Inuit teaching structures, in which storytelling is the most important verbal form of conveying knowledge. In storytelling the performer does not record an immutable "fact," nor do they try to persuade about a specific situation, nor do they enact an "essence" of meaning. The story-teller performs a story that only becomes knowledge when the listener retells the story in their own way, in their own context, a contextual rehearsal. With a story, the responsibility is on the listeners to hear, interpret, understand, and put into practice in their own specific situations.¹⁰ This kind of knowledge is profoundly embedded in performance traditions from around the world and is quite different from "catharsis" which is experienced in the moment of the performance. A related twentieth-century concept is Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt*, which describes an audience response that does not become emotionally identified with the plot of a play, but rehearses the story in their own contexts in order to generate a specific political action.

One of the most well documented case studies of situated knowledge comes from social studies in science and technology which have explored the impact of increasing numbers of women scientists on the disciplinary field of the biological sciences, demonstrating the gradual shift not only in the subject matter of experiments, but also in the practices undertaken in the laboratory.¹¹ In the arts, we could look, for example, at work on visual art as research defined as "not characterized by an objective, empirical approach [...] [striving] for generalization, repeatability and quantification" but "unique, particular, local knowledge."¹² Many other examples may be found in research on dance. For example, recent choreographic work by Hilary Bryan through Rudolph Laban's "Space Harmony" analysis of movement, engages with the Fibonacci series in mathematics, in harmonic architectural relationships in crystalline forms (such as the icosahedron), and the 12-tone scale in music, through the body movements of dancers.¹³ Bryan is articulating the situated knowledge embedded in human movement that enacts basic patterns that generate the more well recognized knowledge in other areas such as mathematics.

This last example raises a conundrum for situated knowledge: if the knowledge in engaged observation and practice is articulated in more quantifiable ways, is it suddenly inaccessible to contextual rehearsal – does it become "fact"? I would argue that the arts are made up of practices in which contextual rehearsal is always available, if not necessary. In the arts, situated knowledge becomes a situated textuality, knowledge always in the making, focusing on process but situated whenever it engages an audience.

Notes

1. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Routledge, 1990).

2. Sandra G. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991).
3. Lorraine Code, *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations* (London: Routledge, 1995).
4. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation, Learning in Doing: Social, Cognitive & Computational Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
5. A. Janik, "Tact Knowledge, Working Life and Scientific Method," in *Knowledge, Skill, and Artificial Intelligence: Tact Knowledge and New Technology*, ed. Bo Goranzon and Ingela Josefson (London: Springer Verlag, 1987).
6. Louise Profeit-Leblanc, "Four Faces of Story," *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* 7, no. 2 (2002).
7. Lynette Hunter, *Critiques of Knowing: Situated Textualities in Science, Computing and the Arts* (London: Routledge, 1999).
8. *Ibid.*, "Listening to Situated Textuality: Working on Differential Public Voices," *Feminist Theory* 2, no. 2 (2001).
9. Mary Field Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).
10. Lynette Hunter, "Equality as Difference: Storytelling in/of Nunavut," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* Fall (2005).
11. For example, Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988).
12. H. Slager, "Methodology," in *Artistic Research*, ed. Annette W. Balkema and Henk Slager (Amsterdam: Ier & Boog, 2004), 12–13.
13. Hilary Bryan, *Ego Alter*, dance choreographed for the production of *Share* at Mondavi Center for the Arts, Davis California and COUNTERpulse, San Francisco, 2005–7.