

RESEARCH ESSAY

Knowledge Between Attempts: Rehearsal as a Research Method

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Rehearsal produces knowledge in the interval between an instruction and its unsuccessful realization. A missed cue, awkward transition, or disputed intention can expose assumptions that polished performance conceals. What makes rehearsal a inquiry inquiry rather than preparation whose evidence disappears at opening night? Rehearsal becomes inquiry when attempts are documented as tests and when failure can revise the question, not merely delay the preferred result. The central difficulty is not a shortage of examples but a mismatch between the scale of the evidence and the scale of the conclusion. Concentrating on notes, video, discarded versions, performer sensation, technical conditions, commitment rationales, and changes in the working question keeps the relation between practical failure and conceptual discovery within view.

A workable inquiry combines iterative case alignment in which each attempt alters one variable while preserving space for emergent observation with a ledger of notes, video, discarded versions, performer sensation, technical conditions, determination rationales, and changes in the working question. The ledger separates direct observation, stakeholder explanation, technical condition, and later explanation. Side-by-side inquiry then turns on whether the process records why a version changed and what knowledge survives its abandonment. This procedure leaves room for ambiguity while preventing ambiguity from becoming an excuse for claims that no possible finding could weaken.

Fieldwork language can inflate ordinary production work or turn performers into data sources without time, consent, credit, or benefit. The force of the objection lies in its attention to scale. A practice may benefit one encounter while producing harm after repetition or institutionalization. Using whether the process records why a version changed

and what knowledge survives its abandonment across those scales keeps the position from confusing a compelling episode with a durable public good.

Actors try three distances for a confrontation. The closest arrangement intensifies speech but blocks the sightline of wheelchair users, transforming an aesthetic experiment into a finding about access and dramatic authority. This first case matters because it reveals a mechanism at human scale. The decisive detail is not simply the artifact or action, but the order in which contributors encounter its features. Read through the relation between practical failure and conceptual discovery, the scene shows that significance is assembled by choices that can be recovered, compared, and challenged.

Provenance changes the meaning of detail. Notes, video, discarded versions, performer sensation, technical conditions, choice rationales, and changes in the working question acquire authority through preservation, description, and access, each of which can favor one account. A source-critical reading therefore connects the relation between practical failure and conceptual discovery to the history of the record itself. It accepts the conclusion only where whether the process records why a version changed and what knowledge survives its abandonment survives that additional layer of mediation.

A dance phrase repeatedly collapses at one transfer of weight. Slow video suggests a technical cause, while performers identify fear created by the floor's inconsistent grip; neither account is sufficient alone. This case reverses the earlier balance between visibility and control. What becomes easier to see may become harder to govern, and what appears collective may depend on concentrated authority. The reversal makes the dynamic between practical failure and conceptual discovery a contested achievement rather than a stable property of the form.

Together, the cases distinguish category from operation. Two examples can share a medium yet organize the connection between practical failure and conceptual discovery differently because control, duration, and access have changed. Iterative juxtaposition in which each attempt alters one variable while preserving space for emergent observation makes that difference legible. The concept remains useful only when it identifies a mechanism and when whether the process records why a version changed and what knowledge survives its abandonment can be evaluated rather than assumed.

Projects should agree on documentation and ownership, schedule reflection, credit embodied insight, and distinguish exploratory records from materials intended for publication. These actions are modest by design. They do not resolve every conflict; they move conflict to a stage where affected people can still influence form. Evaluation should follow effects over time rather than end with a launch, premiere, publication, or exhibition opening.

Scale introduces another critical demand. A selection that supports the connection between practical failure and conceptual discovery in one encounter may change after repetition, touring, digitization, or administrative standardization. Fieldwork should follow selected cases beyond their exemplary moment and ask whether whether the process records why a version changed and what knowledge survives its abandonment continues to hold when new actors inherit the form without the relationships that first sustained it.

Future inquiry should also study refusal. People who decline participation, documentation, preservation, or understanding may identify costs that cooperative cases hide. Their reasons should not be treated as missing data to overcome; they can refine the meaning of the link between practical failure and conceptual

discovery and expose where the proposed criterion assumes forms of openness that are not equally safe.

The interpretation remains limited in three ways. Notes, video, discarded versions, performer sensation, technical conditions, judgment rationales, and changes in the working question cannot capture every informal judgment; person involved accounts may change after outcomes are known; and iterative juxtaposition in which each attempt alters one variable while preserving space for emergent ob-

servation produces situated rather than universal conclusions. These limits do not invalidate the inquiry, but they require claims about prevalence, intention, and long-term effect to be stated separately and supported at the appropriate scale.

At issue is a model of responsibility suited to mediated cultural life. Responsibility does not demand perfect control, but it does require a credible account of dependency, uncertainty, and foreseeable consequence. The proposition gains

force by naming what remains outside its reach.

The side-by-side inquiry replaces a broad celebration of the form with a testable account of its operations. Rehearsal knowledge lives not only in the chosen solution but in the map of possibilities that the ensemble learned to reject. Between attempts, operation thinks aloud and leaves evidence of how a work became capable of knowing what it does.