

Annotated Bibliography

Practice-based Research

Compiled by Mick Winter
Practicing Media Research
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Stage One

I have selected Practice-based Research (PbR) as the research method to explore. I was not so much drawn to this method as reluctantly dragged by the needs of my masters project itself. My proposed project is to create an artifact—a mobile phone application. It became obvious that a practice-focused method was the only option that would deal with the planning, production, usage and testing of a software artifact.

Although this research method grew out of the arts, health and education, it is also suitable for software applications that involve interactivity with a user/viewer. It is likely the project will require other research methods as well.

This method evolved out of the desire from artists to produce dissertations that were based on the *practice* of their art rather than the *theory* of their art. In order to satisfy traditional academic structures, many practice-focused dissertations consider the completed artifact to be simply a demonstration of the project's research. Thus the term “practice-led”. However, some dissertations are appearing that emphasize the artifact more than the written dissertation, and are considered “practice-based”. The balance between my written exegesis and artifact will be determined at a later time.

Stage Two

Monographs

Smith, H and Dean, R (eds) 2009, *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts (Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities)* Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh

The editors state that their primary goal is to “discuss the methodological, theoretical, practical and political issues surrounding creative practice and research within the university.” They discuss the bi-directional process of creative practice affecting academic research (“practice-led”), and research in turn affecting, and even leading to, creative work (“research-led”). They see both processes as “interwoven in an iterative cyclic web”.

Main sections of the book include methodology, case studies, and a focus on education and politics. The essays cover a wide range of disciplines, including creative writing, dance, music, theater, film, and new media, with contributors from the U.K., the U.S., Canada, and Australia. Contributors discuss methodologies, their own creative work as a form of research, research training for creative practitioners, and the politics and history of these research methods within the university. This monograph is currently one of the two key books available on this research method. Hazel Smith and Roger Dean are both research professors at the University of Western Sydney.

Barrett, E and Bolt, B (eds) 2007, *Practice as research: Context, method, knowledge* I.B. Tauris, London

The editors have designed the book as a pedagogical tool, structured on the model used by most research programs. They include research examples that are primarily studio-based in arts and performance—particularly dance—but also include such areas as creative writing and video. All are relevant, if not specific, to other forms of creative expression. As is common in such discussions, essays bring in ideas from such luminaries as Foucault, Heidegger and Bourdieu in order to intellectually justify the claim that artistic practice is as valid a discipline as the more traditional forms of research.

This is currently one of the two important books available on this research method. Estelle Barrett is a Senior Lecturer, School of Communication and Creative Arts, Deakin University, Australia. Barbara Bolt is a practicing artist and Senior Lecturer in Visual Media, University of Melbourne, Australia.

Print-Based Journals

Biggs, M and Büchler, D 2008 'Eight criteria for practice-based research in the creative and cultural industries' *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education* Vol. 7 Issue 1, p5-18

This article is founded on the position that research in the creative and cultural industries (CCI) is a subset within the larger field of academic research, and the axiom that research is a cumulative process (and thus the work must be original because “there is no point in accumulating something we already have”). Their goal is to make connections and demonstrate the commonality between the smaller and larger fields.

Based on this, the authors have formulated two sets of four criteria for practice-based research. The first four criteria they consider essential because they are considered to be givens—traditionally and dominantly—within the greater academic community. The second four they consider to be associated more with the specific interests of creative practitioners. They propose that any PbR project should meet all eight of these criteria, although they present the second set as open to discussion—and argument—by the CCI community.

The ideas presented in the article are of considerable value to someone planning a PbR project, offering both aid and assistance as well as warnings of pitfalls. Michael Biggs and Daniela Büchler are members of the Faculty for the Creative and Cultural Industries, University of Hertfordshire.

Dovey, J 2008 'Dinosaurs and butterflies – media practice research in new media ecologies' *Journal of Media Practice* Vol. 9(3), p243-256

Dovey advocates for a new version of media studies. Unlike some, he does not call for a total break from Media Studies 1.0 to 2.0 to match the corresponding move from Web 1.0 to 2.0. In fact, he considers that media studies are already evolving in that direction as the field gradually shifts much of its focus from large-scale to user/audience/creator small-scale media, and the audience moves from its location in the living room to “everywhere”. But he does believe that media studies needs to catch up

with its students and take advantage of the “Long Tail”—as coined by Chris Anderson. Dovey sees great opportunities for academia to create its own independent networks of research-based production and distribution. He argues that the Long Tail creates funding opportunities for academic research projects once the creative industries fully understand that the “big hit” is no longer the only indicator of success.

While the article does not discuss Practice-based Research as such, it points to opportunities for funding and for dissemination of digitally-based artifacts. Jonathan Dovey is Professor of Screen Media in the School of Creative Arts at the University of the West of England in Bristol.

Leggett, M 2006 'Interdisciplinary collaboration and practice-based research' *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* Vol. 12(3), p263-269

Leggett's focus is on the collaboration between artists and scientists to produce interdisciplinary practice-based research. He seeks to bridge the historical gap between the two groups, and points to the change from “stand-off” to “physical integration” within disciplines at many universities. But he also points to “administrative convenience” and “professional anxiety” as remaining constraints to collaboration.

As a case study, he discusses a poster he made in the early 1970s that combined both graphic art and technical information. At the time it was cutting-edge but, as he demonstrates, today scientists and artist are working together to create highly-sophisticated interactive media art that is taken even further by users, who experientially move the work beyond that which even the producers might have imagined. The article is interesting in that it demonstrates how scientists and artists are slowly connecting, but is of little relevance—other than encouragement—to someone considering a PbR project. Mike Leggett is a student at the Creativity and Cognition Studio in the Faculty of Information Technology, University of Technology Sydney, Australia.

Web-based Journals

Barrett, E 2004 'What does it meme? The exegesis as valorisation and validation of creative arts research' *Text Special Issue No. 3 April*, accessed 3 December 2009 at <<http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue3/barrett.htm>>

Barrett takes her theme from Richard Dawkin's idea (briefly expressed in the first edition of his book *The Selfish Gene* and since expanded upon by many others) that a *meme* is a self-replicating “cultural replicator” or a “building block of culture”. She then goes on to claim that a cultural artifact such as a “tune, painting or poem” is not in itself a meme, but rather a vehicle for the meme. In the area of creative research, she considers that the exegesis should be seen as the meme as it can provide the necessary replication. This is the opposite of what Dawkin actually said (“examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions”). Nevertheless, if one keeps this in mind, her article is of value to the researcher who is interested in disseminating his or her completed creative work and who recognizes, as does she, that the exegesis can be an “illumination of the meme”.

Estelle Barrett is a Senior Lecturer, School of Communication and Creative Arts, Deakin University, Australia, and co-editor of the book *Practice as research: Context, method, knowledge*.

Brown, A. 2007 'Software development as music education research' *International Journal of Education & the Arts* Vol 8, No. 6 11 July, accessed 3 December 2009 at <<http://ijea.asu.edu/v8n6/>>.

Brown proposes a new approach within research called “Software Development as Research” (SoDaR). In his paper he explains “how software development can externalize ideas, stimulate action and reflection, and provide evidence to support the educative value of new software-based experiences.”

His paper focuses on the development of a software program called “jam2jam”, designed for computer-assisted music improvisation over a network. He uses this development to demonstrate three stages of SoDaR: 1) identification of the learning opportunity, 2) design and production of the software, and 3) implementation and refinement of the software through use in an educational setting. The standard development cycle includes planning, designing, developing and testing. Brown shows how this process lies within standard Action Research, and also uses Activity Theory to understand the experiences of the software users. The paper would be of great value to a software designer conducting practice-based research, and of some value to research in related areas.

Andrew Brown is Associate Professor in Music and Sound at Queensland University of Technology.

Nimkulrat, N 2007 'The role of documentation in practice-led research' *Journal of Research Practice* Vol. 3, Issue 1, Article M6, accessed 3 December 2009 at <http://artsresearch.brighton.ac.uk/links/practice-led/Nimkulrat_2007.pdf>

Nimkulrat considers that she conducts “practice-led” research in that “the two roles (practitioner and researcher) appear to be equally important.” She sees that practice and research continually intertwine through her process of creating fiber art, and that she is continually switching between the two roles.

Her focus is on how to document that “interplay”, and to do it she uses research logs, diaries and journals. Her comments are practical and useful. She recognizes that at the end she becomes pure researcher, compiling and analyzing her documentation. During the process she has logged not only what she did and why, but what she felt, emotionally and even sensorially—since her medium is both visual and tactile. She concludes that as a result of her research method, she has evolved from practitioner to practitioner/researcher. Nithikul Nikkumrat wrote this paper as a doctoral student in the School of Design, University of Art and Design Helsinki.

Blogs

Rust, C 2009, Christ Rust's Blog, weblog, accessed 24 November 2009 at <<http://chrisrust.wordpress.com/category/issues/practice-led-research/>>.

Chris Rust is Professor of Design and Head of the Art & Design Department at Sheffield Hallam University, England. He is also Director of Sheffield Institute of Arts. His research is “concerned with the role of tacit knowledge in design, arising from our experience of research projects in which designing plays an instrumental part in investigations into problems in other disciplines.” The section of the blog reached by the URL deals with practice-based research.

Rust's main teaching role is in the MA Design Program and he is currently doing extensive work on

practice-based research methods, which he describes as “Investigative Designing”.

Sullivan, G 2009, Art Practice as Research, weblog, accessed 24 November 2009 at
<<http://artasresearch.blogspot.com/>>

The blog of Graeme Sullivan, discusses ideas and shares information about art as a form of research. Sullivan is the author of *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, and an associate professor of Art Education, Department of Arts and Humanities, at Teachers College, Columbia University. His research involves an ongoing investigation of critical-reflective thinking processes and research practices in visual arts.

An example from the blog articulates not just what PbR is, but the type of student most suited for this research methodology. “(Victor Burgin in Elkins, 2009) articulates clearly three types of candidates for doctoral study: 1) the practicing artist who can write (and is willing) a long dissertation, 2) a liberal studies/literature person who has little art-making but is in fact literate, and 3) an artist who 'reads enthusiastically' and is into theory, concept, and visualization modeling. The dilemma he poses is how to legitimize and assess the culminating dissertation.” Burgin's advice is representative of the useful and real-world observations that can be found on Sullivan's blog.

Social Networking Site

Creativity and Cognition Studios 2009, LinkedIn group, accessed 3 December 2009 at
<<http://www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=1926740>>

Creativity and Cognition Studios (CCS) is a multi-disciplinary environment for the advancement and understanding of practice in digital media and the arts. It provides artists and technologists with a space in which to collaborate, experiment and create, as equal partners, in practice-based research.

Through practice-based research, some of the resulting knowledge is embodied in an artifact. While the significance and context of that knowledge is described in words, a full understanding of it can only be obtained with reference to the artifact itself. Artifacts in practice-based research can range from paintings and buildings to software and poems.

Video podcasts (vodcasts)

***Designing a research question*, YouTube video podcast, University of Hertfordshire, 1 October 2008, accessed 22 November 2009 at**
<<http://www.youtube.com/user/strideproject#p/search/10/KEuzeL06IwM>>

Students (particularly) and tutors reflect on the student's insights into designing a research question for a dissertation on a practice-based research. Comments include: “Do something that's going to be in front of you every day...something that grips you”, “Do something that nags away at you...that you really, really want to solve or find out more about”, “Something too abstract, too distant from your life, wouldn't be enough to hold you.”, “You have to choose something you know you can live with.”, “It emerged and grew and grew. And then it had to be narrowed down.”

The videos were made in connection with a project entitled: ‘Students’ and Tutors’ Reflections and

Insights into the Dissertation Experience' (STRIDE) at the University of Hertfordshire. This video series was awarded Example of Excellence by the JISC Learning Literacies. The STRIDE resources "are aimed at reducing the sense of isolation and heightening motivation to complete the largest piece of academic work students have tackled to date".

Writing the Dissertation, YouTube video podcast, University of Hertfordshire, 7 September 2008, accessed 22 November 2009 at
<http://www.youtube.com/user/strideproject#p/search/1/dR2r0fQqp_k>

In this short vodcast, supervisors in the STRIDE project discuss writing the dissertation in practice-based projects. Although brief, the vodcast is filled with very practical tips, including "People always say, 'I wish I'd started earlier.'", "Keep an account of the process. That will really inform the writing.", "Just write. Any old rubbish. If you have to go out, write what you think the next three paragraphs would have been about, because you're on a roll and you'll forget where you were rolling to.", "Get somebody else to read it, because you'll read what you think you've written.", "People often underestimate how long it takes to make sense of the data.", "Work out how many words each section will take, so it doesn't look so overwhelming. So that it looks like a series of essays."

Although it may appear simplistic, the information in the vodcast is extremely practical, and represents not just good advice but a history of mistakes made by students. The STRIDE project was overseen by Joanna Teague, Senior Lecturer Professional Learning, School of Education, at the University of Hertfordshire.

Official Website

MeCCSA: Media, Communication & Cultural Studies Association 2002, Durham, accessed 20 November 2009 at <<http://www.meccsa.org.uk>>.

MeCCSA's website clearly states its mission and functions. It is the subject association for the field of media, communication and cultural studies in UK Higher Education. Membership is open to all who teach and research these subjects in HE institutions, via either institutional or individual membership. The field includes film and TV production, journalism, radio, photography, creative writing, publishing, interactive media and the web; and it includes higher education for media practice as well as for media studies. MeCCSA's Practice Section supports and publicises events at which media practice is presented, particularly those in which the contexts of practice research, practice pedagogy and professional practice are foregrounded. This information is disseminated through
<<http://www.meccsa.org.uk/discussion-list>>.

Offline newspaper article

Glassie, J 1999 'Blackboard: Punditry: Have doctorate, will comment', *New York Times*, 1 August, accessed 26 November 2009 at New York Times website,
<<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/08/01/education/blackboard-punditry-have-doctorate-will-comment.html?scp=1&sq=Punditry:%20Have%20Doctorate,%20Will%20Comment&st=cse>>

This New York Times article reports that Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida is about to

welcome its first candidates in a doctoral program titled “Public Intellectuals”. The program is to combine “interdisciplinary humanities studies with practical training in the art of the public persona.” Concentrations included gender issues, spirituality, public policy, media and popular culture, the environment, creative strategies and social movements.

While the article does not state what form of doctoral dissertation will be conducted, the combining of studies with practical training would seem to be a natural for project-based research. Candidates entering the first class include a woman wanting to establish a code of ethics for teachers, a photographer wanting to inject more “social content” into her work, and an environmentalist wishing to “build bridges between the scientific and communal conversations.”

Music track

De Hartman, T and Gurdjieff, G, 1971, 'Holy affirming, holy denying, holy reconciling', on *The Music of Gurdjieff* (CD). New York, G-H Records. <<http://www.westsong.com/music/holy.mp3>>

De Hartmann was a Russian composer who was a student from 1917-1929 of George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, a Greek-Armenian mystic and spiritual teacher. De Hartmann co-wrote the music Gurdjieff used with the series of formalized dance-like movements that were one of the exercises taught by Gurdjieff to his students. The music is derived from Greek Orthodox liturgical music, and Caucasian and Greek folk traditions. It was later adapted for the 1979 Peter Brook film *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, based on Gurdjieff's book of the same name.

This piece of music, composed and performed by Thomas de Hartmann, was chosen because it is an example of transformative media, capable of transforming both the performer (practitioner-researcher) and the audience. While that transformation is internal and subjective, research can be conducted to record an individual's brain waves before, during, and after listening to this piece, through which changes of a beneficial nature are likely to be observed.

One advertisement

Leibovitz, A 2009, 'Some journeys change mankind forever', *San Francisco Magazine* September, p7. <<http://www.sanfranmag.com>>. Image accessed 25 November 2009 at <<http://www.louisvuittonjourneys.com>>



Two elderly men and one middle-aged woman are outside in the night air. She sits on the hood and they stand next to a junky old pickup truck. They stare at the moon and the stars through slightly cloudy skies. The three people are: Sally Ride (age 58), first American woman in space; Buzz Aldrin (age 79), Apollo 11, second person to set foot on the moon; Jim Lovell (age 81), commander of Apollo 13.

Chosen because it illustrates the yearning for something greater, something beyond the everyday. The photograph by Annie Leibovitz is compelling in itself, but becomes even more so when we see the names of the people in the photograph. They themselves have traveled into the space at which they gaze, and one of them has set foot on that distant moon in the sky.

Their missions into space were primarily research, and they themselves were both subjects and active practitioners of that research.

Item of material culture

Jobs, S 2009, 'iPod Nano' *Apple Computer*
<<http://www.apple.com/ipodnano/>>



An indispensable, all-purpose tool for field recording and later data transcription and analysis. Also serves as in-the-field entertainment for quiet intervals between project activity. Project subjects can listen to or view music, podcasts, audio books or other recordings as part of a project. Performance artists can record audience reactions and even integrate video recording of audience into their performance piece. The iPod Nano was chosen because it does both audio and video recording, is lightweight and of compact size, and is affordable. Produced by Apple Computer and available online, at more than 240 official Apple stores in eight countries, and at other retail outlets around the world.

Films

***Julie & Julia* 2009, motion picture, Columbia Pictures, distributed by Columbia Pictures, USA.**

Julie Powell, a contemporary New York blogger, learns about herself as she accepts her own challenge to cook every recipe in Julia Child's renowned cookbook, *Mastering The Art of French Cooking*. Her endeavors are juxtaposed throughout the film with segments on Child's life in post-World War II France, where she is learning the art of French cooking.

Julia Child chose cooking as her art form. The sections of the film on her life show her learning the craft, and then the art, of French cooking. While food was her art, her initial practice was the research into, and learning of, the skills to create that art form. She then needed to learn how to translate those skills into instructions in a cookbook that would clearly allow the reader to replicate the same result. In short, her practice consisted of both cooking and, perhaps more importantly, writing.

***The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* 2005, motion picture, Touchstone Pictures, distributed by Buena Vista Pictures, USA.**

A science-fiction comedy that was originally on BBC radio (1978), then in a series of books (1979-1992), later on television (1981), and then a motion picture. The series was created by Douglas Adams.

The title also, and more specifically, refers to the travel guide that is mentioned frequently in the series. Ford Prefect, from a small planet in the Betelgeuse neighborhood, is an example of practitioner-as-researcher. As he directly experiences travel throughout the galaxy, he also records these experiences

and the information he gathers so that they can be used in the electronic *Hitchhiker's Guide* to assist other travelers. Prefect is a friend of Arthur Dent who, upset that his house is going to be demolished by a highway project, is then informed by Prefect that Dent's planet (Earth) is also going to be demolished by a highway project—more precisely, a hyperspace bypass constructed by Vogon construction ships. The adventure ensues.

Bonus Feature

Although the following does not fit any of the required categories, this compiler felt it was too valuable a document to ignore, and so used it as his twenty-first entry.

Candy, L 2006 'Practice based research: a guide' *Creativity & Cognition Studios*, University of Technology, Sydney. accessed on 3 December 2009 at
<<http://www.creativityandcognition.com/resources/PBR%20Guide-1.1-2006.pdf> >

This document offers a guide for both general reader and research student. It states that practice-based research is designed to produce an artifact which is necessary for full understanding of the knowledge acquired—whereas practice-led research leads to new knowledge about the practice itself which can be fully described in text form without an artifact. The guide offers information on the historical background of PbR, and provides a detailed thesis outline, relevant questions and answers, a lengthy bibliography, and definitions and terminology.

This is an excellent guide for any student considering conducting practice-based research. Linda Candy is an associate of the Creativity and Cognition Research Studios at the University of Technology, Sydney where she supervises practice-based PhD students and advises on methods for the study of user experience. [See also
<<http://www.creativityandcognition.com/content/category/10/56/131/>>].