

The Art of Media Research: An Introduction

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Today, the traditional boundaries between theory and practice have undergone a transformative shift, resulting in the emergence of an innovative approach known as practice-based research. At its core, practice-based study positions artistic practice as a form of inquiry, emphasizing experiential engagement with tools, artifacts, experiences, and processes for conducting research. Unlike traditional research paradigms that often prioritize textual analysis and theoretical critique, this approach combines practice and theory in a complementary way, advocating for a more immersive, experimental, and participatory understanding of objects and phenomena. One of the defining features of practice-based research is its commitment to generating knowledge through creation, echoing the idea that research is a means of "seeking knowledge where it did not exist before" (Busch 64). Art, in this context, presents something new to experience.

To elaborate on the nature of art-based research and its contribution to the formation of new knowledge, Linda Candy and Ernest Edmonds emphasize an important aspect: a loop that begins with practice and eventually feeds back into the practice, yielding "new knowledge about practice that informs practice" (63). In this framework, "the role of the artifact as an art object is not illustrating anything but is a subject of interest in itself" (65). Whether through film, digital storytelling, interactive design, or other mediums, artists actively contribute to knowledge

formation, deepening the understanding of underlying theoretical concepts. As Kathrin Busch writes, "art and theory are nothing more than two different forms of practice interrelated through a system of interaction and transferences" (66). This symbiotic relationship enriches academic discourse and brings academia into a dynamic conversation with the evolving realm of arts.

The growing recognition and integration of practice-based research have also emerged as a significant influence in the rapidly changing landscape of media studies. Technological advancements continue to redefine our engagement with media and technology, prompting scholars and practitioners to recognize the need for a more hands-on exploration and understanding of the field. Furthermore, practice-based research serves as a catalyst for innovation and adaptation within the field of media studies. As media and technology evolve, methodologies for understanding and interpreting them must also evolve. By actively participating in the creation of media artifacts, researchers are better equipped to grasp the nuances of contemporary media landscapes and respond to emerging trends in real-time. This adaptability enhances the relevance of media studies for today's world and positions it at the forefront of socio-cultural transformations influenced by the pervasiveness of media and technology.

In this framework, it is important to acknowledge the variety of ways in which practice-based research can be performed. Practice-based research challenges the notion of a one-size-fits-all methodology, recognizing the diverse array of media forms and platforms. From traditional realms like television and cinema to the ever-expanding digital domains of social media and virtual reality, this approach adapts its methods to suit the unique affordances and challenges presented by each medium. In doing so, practice-based research reflects its fluid and adaptive nature to contribute to the field of media studies.

Undoubtedly, one of the key advantages of practice-based research is its ability to encourage collaboration between researchers, artists, and industry professionals, creating a fertile ground for the cross-pollination of ideas. A filmmaker collaborating with a sociologist may yield insights into the societal impact of visual narratives, while a journalist working alongside a computer scientist might explore innovative ways to leverage emerging technologies in news reporting. As scholars engage in production and creative practice to perform their research, they grapple with questions of aesthetics, ethics, and cultural impact, fostering a deeper awareness of the intricate interplay between theory and practice. This dynamic and interdisciplinary environment not only contributes to a nuanced understanding of technology in its diverse adaptations but also holds the potential to influence the industry and cultural production itself.

Practice-based research in media studies stands at the forefront of an exciting convergence between academic inquiry and creative expression. By embracing the transformative potential of hands-on engagement, scholars pave the way for a more holistic and responsive approach to understanding the complexities of the ever-evolving media landscape. This interdisciplinary methodology challenges traditional research paradigms and opens up new avenues for collaboration, innovation, and critical reflection within the vibrant field of media studies. This special issue of MAST seeks to further explore the potentials in the art of media research and how practice-based study can direct us to new possibilities, experiences, and knowledge.

In “*Blue Lines at Blackrock: Digital Wayfaring and Mobile Media Art*,” Marsha Berry takes her media practice as a point of departure to explore the dynamic and often overlooked aspects of everyday experiences. Her research strategy employs a non-representational ontology to delve into the emerging field of mobile media and the implications of embodied experiences

in media arts. Focusing on digital wayfaring and the use of smartphones in creative processes, the article explores the concept of “lifeworlds” with mobile media art as a form of practice-based research. Berry offers a detailed account of the creation process behind the video poem *Blue Lines at Blackrock* and argues for the potential of digital wayfaring and smartphone technology in artistic expression for media research.

Kazuhiro Jo and Paul DeMarinis employ a media archaeological approach as their method of practice-based study to revisit the historical narratives of sound reproduction. Embracing the aesthetic values of mechanically reproduced sound, the authors position their artistic practice within the broader contexts of media art history. Based on the artworks titled *Mary Had a Little Lamb* (2019) and *We Were Away a Year Ago* (2023), the article discusses how the linear history of media and the perceived novelty of contemporary technologies can be challenged and questioned. Proving the creative potential of media archaeological methods in art-based research, Jo and DeMarinis offer a refreshed view to understanding of the technologies of sound reproduction.

In their contribution, Mark Goodall and Karen Thornton focus on *New Postscripts*, their collaborative project that reworks J.B. Priestley’s WWII broadcasts between May 1940 and March 1941 in the style of a radio program for a contemporary audience in Bradford. One of the original features of the *New Postscripts* project is its incorporation of diverse voices to remake Priestley’s work. The project stands as a compelling example of art-based research that celebrates the enduring power of radio and sound art. It challenges conventional notions about the influence of different media forms, affirming the significance of sound art in conveying new ideas and values. Made through interdisciplinary collaborations, this art-based research underscores the significance of creative practice in contributing to both the historical

understanding of medium of sound and its evolving impacts on contemporary culture, making it a valuable and relevant exploration for scholars and practitioners in the field.

In “Exhibiting Computational Language Art,” Nick Montfort offers valuable insights into the conceptualization, implementation, and material engagement with four of his artworks titled *Round*, *Autofolio Babel*, *Process Pages*, and *Tech Section*. Montfort’s practice-based research provides a nuanced definition of computational language art with an emphasis on the aesthetic aspects of the integration of computation and language, both as the artist’s primary mediums in this series. The article links computational language art to the rich traditions of story generation research and generative AI systems, showcasing its evolution and diverse manifestations. The artworks are programmed and designed to particularly encourage viewer interactions, emphasizing the engagement with the material aspects of computing. Montfort’s contribution highlights the potential of computational language art as a unique and thought-provoking form of artistic expression that combines computational processes with literary and artistic sensibilities.

In a collaborative work, Brian House, Annie Aries, and Marcel Zaes Sagesser develop their artistic research through delving into the socio-technical contexts of *Metric Displacement*, an installation they have built during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their article combines multidisciplinary insights from media studies, sound art, communication and network theories to contextualize the artwork. The authors investigate the implications of their quarantined teamwork and the impact of digital networks on this artistic collaboration. *Metric Displacement* draws our attention to the unseen materiality of digital network infrastructure, revealing that network connections are not, as usually promised, smooth, perfect and without friction. The article positions sound art as a critical practice that reveals the invisible power structures embedded in networked communications. By using sound to expose the material conditions and

disruptions in networked interactions, the installation offers an alternative perspective to the often idealized view of digital connectivity.

In her article “Rotoscoping Saint Agatha Out of her own Myth in an Aesthetics of Reparation,” Bernadette Wegenstein navigates the tropes of her art-based research through a multidisciplinary approach to her animation film. She combines ethnographic exploration, feminist intervention, and cinematic analysis to reinterpret the Saint Agatha myth remade in her work. Wegenstein integrates historical representations with contemporary voices to shed light on the enduring impact of trauma on both an individual and a community's emotional fabric. Her feminist intervention employs a rotoscoping technique to reverse the patriarchal gaze and tell the story of Saint Agatha in her own way. The article's emphasis on feminist interventions aligns with the growing body of research within media studies that seeks to challenge and reshape traditional narratives through diverse perspectives. By employing a practice-based research methodology, the author enhances the understanding of trauma recovery in the context of media studies, demonstrating the transformative potential of creative practice in addressing gendered narratives.

Delving into the theme of protocological thinking, in “Prodigious Protocols” Maja Bak Herrie explores an outstanding art project by French artist Stéphanie Solinas titled *Le Bureau des Miracles*. The project is recognized by its innovation in merging art, SMS technology, and participatory communication. Herrie's article is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Claire Bishop's aggregative knowledge production to provide new insights into the potential of Solinas' art project. It examines how the use of technology challenges and transforms participant engagement, reflecting on some intriguing questions such as “what it means to see, operate, and know along the lines of the protocol”? Foregrounding a multiplicity of aspects in reading Le

Bureau des Miracles, Herrie's piece contributes to a broader discourse on art-based research and its essential role in knowledge production.

Works Cited

Busch, Kathrin. "Artistic research and the poetics of knowledge." *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* vol. 2, no. 2, 2009, pp. 1-7.

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