

Master's thesis seminar 2
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METHODOLOGIES & THEORETICAL CONTEXTS



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Lecture content

Task for this time

What is Methodology?

How is it connected to theory? / Theoretical contexts

Task D.L. 9.10 (16.10)

Choose 1–2 methods related to your own research and explain why you chose them.

Also describe what kind of information you think these methods will provide.

Submit your answers by the d.l. by emailing them to: susanna.suurla@aalto.fi

Research methodology is:

- the philosophy or general principle guiding the research
- an ensemble or a construction including scientific/theoretical/empirical **beliefs** and **principles** and chosen method(s) *of* and *in* a certain field of study
- overall approach to your topic/subject/project etc.

Research methodology is:

- the system of methods and principles **used in a particular discipline** (artistic, ethnographic, qualitative, quantitative etc.)
- A canon of research methods and the cognitive (how we know what we know) assumptions -> includes the issues to think about (e.g., constraints, dilemmas, ethical choices within the research field you belong to)
- A strategy for acquiring new knowledge

Some vocabulary

- Term: field specific established concept
- Theory: an entity of knowledge or explanation system within which concepts and laws, i.e. interrelationships, are used to explain, understand and predict things
- Hypothesis: proposed solution of the problem under study, must be testable

Basic structure of the research

- Hypothesis (felt need, urge to create, initial inspiration, initial idea)
- Collect data, information gathering, generation of ideas, reflection
- Definition of problem, selection, classification, analysis
- Development, models, sketches, experiments, field work
- Illumination (clarifying), synthesis (combining/ summing up), articulation

Basic structure of the research

- Verification, testing, theory building, generalization
- Refinement (organized system / method, regulation of gathered data), resolution/outcome, presentation
- Critical context, human response / feedback
- Revise hypothesis, improve artwork, alter concepts

Basic structure of the research

- How you articulate and discuss *all these phases* is impacted by the methodological framework you choose!
- Check earlier theses in your major + scientific articles in your field which are related to your topic -> helps to gain insight on what might be the proper methodological frame for your study

Qualitative & Quantitative Research Methodologies

Qualitative research methodologies

- involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (e.g., text, images, video, or audio) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences
- explore f.ex. **attitudes**, **behavior** and **experiences** through methods such as interviewing, observation, participatory workshops etc.
- attempt to get an in-depth opinion from participants
- aims at deep understanding of the phenomena of the research

Quantitative Research Methodologies

- a systematic investigation of a phenomena using quantifiable (measurable) data
- employs statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques
- collects information from existing and potential phenomena by using sampling methods such as surveys, online polls, questionnaires and structured interviews
- reaches more people, but the contact with those people is “lighter” than in qualitative research

How to choose from qualitative/quantitative?

- Neither is 'better' – they are just different
- Both have strengths and weaknesses

The words you use give you an idea to whether a qualitative or a quantitative research approach is more suitable for your project

- Quantitative: 'how many', 'test', 'verify', 'how often' or 'how satisfied'
- Qualitative: 'discover', 'motivation', 'experiences', 'thoughts', 'problems', or 'behaviour'

Use both? = Mixed Research Methodologies

- The terms **triangulation** or **mixed method** are used when a combining qualitative and quantitative forms of inquiry
- These are used to counteract weaknesses in either method or to support the other approach
- Used to increase the credibility and validity of research findings

Methodologies in Art and Design Research

Researchers in Art & Design

- Often use methods established in Social Sciences and Natural Science (qualitative/quantitative)
- The methodologies adopted from different disciplines reflect the specific nature, structure and intentions of that discipline
- There are also established methodologies for conducting art and design research / artistic research, such as Practice as Research, Artistic Research and Design Research

Characteristics of Art and Design Methodologies

- often a discovery-led process, led by not yet knowing and dealing with uncertainty
- information from living through the process and subjective experience has value – especially in artistic research works
- a self-reflective and self-critical research process

Often includes dealing with:

- Collection of data / research material (visual, written, oral, [material sampling, experiences] etc.)
- Selection, analysis and synthesis of said data
- Testing against known visual and performance norms
- Human reactions and responses
- Compromise in regard to context, function, ergonomics, manufacturing and material constraints etc.

Examples of research methodologies

Practice as Research

- a form of research which incorporates **practice** in the methodology
- practice and its creative outcomes contribute to the outcomes of the research process and in answering the research question
- a variety of models: practice-as-research, practice-based, practice-led, mixed-mode research practice, practice through research and artistic research
- a flexible approach, allows to incorporate a variety of methodologies and methods within its bounds

Action research

- a philosophy and methodology of research generally applied in the social sciences.
- seeks transformative change through the simultaneous process of taking action and doing research, which are linked together by critical reflection.
- Often conducted when researching performance processes etc.
- More info: <https://infed.org/mobi/action-research/>

Ethnography

- Used in social sciences
- ‘the recording and analysis of a culture or society, usually based on participant-observation and resulting in a written account of a people, place or institution’ (Simpson & Coleman 2017)
- Can be used for e.g. studying traditional performance costumes in indigenous cultures.
- More info: <https://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/ethnography>

Case Studies

- a detailed study of a specific subject, (e.g., a person, group, place, event, organization, or phenomenon)
- commonly used in social, educational, clinical, and business research
- usually involves qualitative methods, but quantitative methods are sometimes also used.
- are good for describing, comparing, evaluating and understanding different aspects of a research problem.

(More info: <https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/2655/4079>)

Auto-ethnography

- a research method and **methodology** which uses the researcher's personal experience as data to describe, analyze and understand cultural experience.
- a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context.
- Can be used for e.g. describing / defining / exploring personal experiences within the artistic research process.

(More info: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/viewArticle/1589/3095>)

Research approaches

- Historical
- Philosophical (theoretical)
- Experimental (pre-, post-testing, control)
- Comparative (cross-cultural)
- Descriptive (using surveys, causal-comparative methods)
- Naturalistic (interpretative, phenomenological, qualitative enquiry)
- Practical (creative, expressive/productive)

Things to consider

- Adapting or borrowing from a 'standard' methodology (may distort the research)
- Inventing methodological devices (may remain esoteric & project-specific → little use when applied to other situations)
- Employing research methodologies from different disciplines may also be tricky, as some such as the practice as research (PaR) and action research, which though similar, have differences in their definitions

Things to consider

- when choosing your methodological approach, it is advisable to study and understand it
- This allows for consistency in the terminology you employ for defining your methodology

THEORY & THEORETICAL CONTEXTS

WHAT IS THEORY

Dictionary definitions

: a plausible or scientifically acceptable general principle or body of principles offered to explain phenomena

: a body of theorems presenting a concise systematic view of a subject

WHAT IS THEORY

Dictionary definitions

: the general or abstract principles of a body of fact, a science, or an art

: the analysis of a set of facts in their relation to one another

THEORY CAN MEAN MANY THINGS

- General perceptions achieved through intellectual functions
- An entire field of research
- A systematic information system developed within a discipline
- Also used to express hypotheses expressing specific cases
- Consist of a systematic, theoretical and empirical set of 'laws' and the assumptions related to these 'laws'

SOME COMMON THEORIES in ART AND DESIGN RESEARCH (also used in humanist sciences)

- Hermeneutics (theory and methodology of interpretation)
- Semiotics (theory and study of signs and meaning)
- Phenomenology (philosophy of experience)
- Materialism esp. new materialism (all facts are dependent on physical processes)

Hermeneutics 'timeline'

In antiquity: Hermes

Medieval times: interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom literature, and texts on philosophy and law

19th century: Ernst Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey

20th century Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer

Hermeneutics (theory and methodology of interpretation)

- Earlier: especially the interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom literature, as well as philosophical texts.
- Modern hermeneutics includes both verbal and non-verbal communication
- Is broadly applied in the humanities, especially in law, history and theology, and also art studies

Hermeneutics as the interpretive method:

- focus is on a limited issue -> through dialogue with the subject an increasingly wide range of contexts, concepts can be interpreted
- The process of interpretation progresses from the whole to the parts, and from the parts to the whole = a hermeneutic circle or spiral, a hermeneutic dialogue.
- The preliminary understanding provided by the tradition guides the progress of interpretation

SEMIOTICS or SEMIOLOGY 'timeline'

Premise 1:

Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913): study of “the life of signs within society.”

Premise 2: American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914): sign as “something which stands to somebody for something”

20th century: influential French scholars Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Julia Kristeva

Semiotics/the study of signs

- Widely used in fields such as aesthetics, anthropology, psychoanalysis, communications, and semantics.
- Whilst very popular in performance studies and analysis in the 1990's and early 2000, since 2010's the use of semiotics to understand and study performance or art has been largely debated against as the theoretical interest in the field has been not interested on how 'things mean' but on how they 'perform and do things'.

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Phenomenology 'timeline'

A philosophical movement starting from the late 1800s & philosophical discipline:

- Edmund Husserl (1859-1938): All knowledge is based on experience
- Martin Heidegger (1889-1976): The conditions of being and its temporal basis
- Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961): Corporeality & Perception

Phenomenology

Studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view.

- Literally, it is the study of “phenomena: appearances of things, or as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, the meanings things have in our experience.

Phenomenology

- Widely used e.g., in qualitative research: social sciences, humanities, psychology, and cognitive science, health sciences, architecture, and human-computer interaction, dance and performing arts research.

Feminist Scholarship

- Emerged in the 1970s as more women began careers in higher education
- Influenced both by feminist movements as well as by philosophical training
- Until about the 1990s, one could not study “feminist philosophy.”
- Some prominent thinkers: Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, Karen Barad

- Examines gender and social roles, experiences, interests, chores, and feminist politics in a variety of fields, such as anthropology and sociology, communication, media studies, psychoanalysis, political theory, home economics, literature, education, and philosophy.
- Often focuses on analyzing gender inequality. Themes explored include discrimination, objectification, oppression, patriarchy, stereotyping, art history and contemporary art, and aesthetics.

Materialism 'timeline'

- 800-200 BC ancient Eurasian & Greek philosophy
- Modern philosophy: Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and Pierre Gassendi (1592–1665), Denis Diderot (1713–1784), William Wordsworth (1770–1850)
- Dialectical materialism based upon the writings of Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820 –1895) have been applied widely in social sciences, economics etc.
- New materialism: emerged roughly in early 2000's

Materialism

- A form of philosophy which holds that matter is the fundamental substance in nature, and that all things, including mental states and consciousness, are results of material interactions of material things.

New (or neo) materialism

- Part of what may be termed the post-constructionist, ontological, or material turn
- Focuses on unearthing and denaturalizing power relations and dualist understandings of the world
- Inquiry often focuses on issues of matter and materiality, agency, bioethics, and politics.

New (or neo) materialism

- Emerged mainly from scholars in feminism, philosophy, science studies, and cultural theory.
- Cuts across and is cross-fertilized by both the human and natural sciences
- Prominent thinkers: Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, Jane Bennett, Vicki Kirby, and Manuel DeLanda
- Widely used in contemporary performance & costume research

So why do these theories matter?

While you do not need to remember the details of these it is important to understand that:

- Most theories interact with each other and have long histories of interaction
- Theories do not arise in a vacuum
- All contemporary understandings of any theory arise through historical continuums, no theory is one and only - > there are many kinds of discussion within it

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WHAT IS THEORY IN MY RESEARCH ?

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Discussion points:

In what ways is theory used in my field of study?

What are the benefits of having e.g., costume design specific theory?

Research field-specific theories

- Arise in relation to the needs of the field and are formed in the practice of the research field.
- Often phenomenon-based and apply general broader theories such as neo-materialist, feminist or phenomenological approaches.

- Individual studies become 'theories' when several studies on the same phenomenon and find consensus on the key ideas of the theory in the field. And the discussion of these ideas is active.
- These contain assumptions and new terms and concepts – which is why writing in your own language is important in order to establish terminology.
- For this reason the new, more theoretical terminology of costume design is currently mainly in English.

Example: Costume Agency

- Term emerged around 2010-2017
- First in articles, then research project, critical costume 2020 conference, even more articles
- The discussions on costume agency tend to draw theoretically from new materialism, feminist and anti-colonial scholarship and theory as well as phenomenology.
- After the 2020 conference the term seems to have established it's meanign in the costume research community

WHAT IS THEORY IN MY RESEARCH?

Discussion points:

In which way would I like to use theory in my research?

WHAT IS THEORY IN MY RESEARCH?

Discussion points:

How to find relevant theory for my own research?

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READ!

- Original texts by ‘inventors’
- Fresh texts about methods and methodologies
- Articles (and debates) about theorizing in your field
- Guides for literature review these often also discuss theorizing

TASK 3 for next time

- a) Read the article: 'Efficient and Effective Academic Reading' (article can be found in my courses – reading material)

- b) Find one theoretical source material (research article, book chapter, video that is connected to research) you think you might use for your research and write a statement describing why this theory/source/concept is relevant for you.

Be prepared to discuss both orally in the next meeting + have the actual reference info