

Research Through (Artistic) Practice: Methods and Approaches

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1 Context

Research Through (Artistic) Practice:
An Overview of Methods and Approaches

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- 1 Microscope Science, Pexels
Photo: Edward Jenner
- 2 History books, Getty Images
- 3 *Liekkiponi* (2021), Petra Aaltola
Photo: Pekko Vasantola

Frayling: Research ___ art and design⁴

- into
- for
- through

⁴ Frayling, C. (1993). Research in Art and Design. *Royal College of Art Research Papers*, 1(1), 1-5.

Multiple possibilities

- A lot in common
- Also a lot of differences
- Different possibilities require distinct methods

When preparing your thesis plan, bear in mind⁵..

What?

The identification of a 'hunch' or tentative proposition that will eventually lead to a defined and viable research question

Why?

The need to answer your research question in relation to a wider context—i.e., the reasons for which your work will be relevant

How?

The deployment of an appropriate methodology and specific methods for gathering relevant, sufficient, and adequate information that, pertinently processed, will yield novel insights

⁵ Gray & Malins (2004). *Visualizing Research: A guide to the research process in art and design*. London: Ashgate, p. 12.

2 Methods and Methodologies

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What's a method?

What's a methodology?

- What's the difference?
- Why is this distinction important?

What's the purpose of a research method?

- a To gather or generate research material (i.e., data collection)
- b To extract information from this material (i.e., data analysis)

A coherent selection of methods allowing for both the collection and analysis of data comprise what we call 'a methodology'.

—i.e., a methodology is also a branch of knowledge. It allows us to articulate and systematically explain *how* we do what we claim to know how to do.

Common methodological approaches in the Arts

Ethnographic research

Action research

Artistic research also termed *practice-led* or *practice-based* research

Ethnographic research

- Approach

Consists of the systematic study of cultural phenomena from the point of view of the people being investigated.

It enables you to describe and explain, as well as form interpretations and views, of human action in its social context or environment [6].

Ethnographic research is based on fieldwork.

- Typical methods

- a. Thick description
Observation (non-participant/participant)
Interviews

- b. Thematic coding
Content analysis
Discourse analysis
Conversation analysis

6 Genzuk, M. (2003). *A Synthesis of Ethnographic Research*. Center for Multilingual, Multicultural Research Digital Papers Series. University of Southern California.

Ethnographic research also accommodates other approaches such as autoethnography⁷ and at-home-ethnography⁸

Autoethnography involves analyzing one's personal experiences in order to yield insights at the scale of cultural experiences [7].

At-home-ethnography allows researchers to investigate a context to which they already belong [8].

⁷ Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An Overview. *Historical Social Research*, 36(4).

⁸ Alvesson, M. (Ed.) (2009). At-home ethnography: Struggling with closeness and closure. *Organizational Ethnography*. SAGE.

Groth⁹



⁹ Groth, C. (2017) *Making Sense Through Hands: Design and Craft Practice Analysed as Embodied Cognition*. Aalto University, Doctoral Dissertations.

Mäkelä & Aktas¹⁰



¹⁰ Mäkelä, M. & Aktas, B. (2023). Learning with the Natural Environment: How Walking with Nature Can Actively Shape Creativity and Contribute to Holistic Learning. *Int Journal of Art and Design Education*, 41(4), A6.

Action research

- Approach
 - Consists of intervening in a specific context, environment, or situation [11].
 - Aimed at addressing issues that require *actionable* solutions, it allows researchers to investigate problems faced by specific communities while improving and developing these communities' problem solving abilities.
 - Its starting point is practical action.
- Typical methods
 - a. Participant observation
 - Workshops
 - Interviews
 - Questionnaires
 - Participatory activities
 - b. Statistical analysis
 - Interpretive analysis
 - Thematic analysis

¹¹ Bradbury, H. & Reason, P. (2001). *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research* (2nd Edition). SAGE.

Pinto Torres & Nango¹²



¹² Pinto Torres, N., & Nango, E. (2022). Pictograms for reporting and resisting: Students of Amazonian nationality join the fight against mainstream media in the 2022 social mobilization. *Voz de la Confeniæ*, 23, pp. 55-58.

Artistic research

- Approach

It is based on the professional skills of artists and on methods that have so far been applied in practice but not considered in the production of theory [13].

Artistic research employs art making as a primary mode of inquiry, rather than continuing to borrow research methodologies from other disciplines to study artistic processes (e.g., anthropology, sociology, or critical studies).

Artistic research can yield novel insights into artistic processes, but it also has the potential to shed light into a wider array of phenomena.

- Typical methods

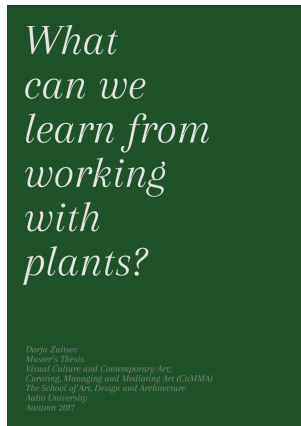
- a. Can you think of any?

- b. Can you think of any?

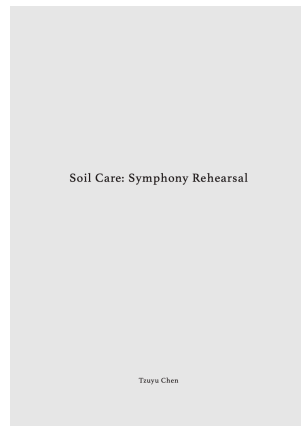
¹³ Varto, J. (2018). *Artistic Research. What is it? Who Does It? Why?* Aalto Arts Books.



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Further reading

- 13 Varto, J. (2018). *Artistic Research. What is it? Who Does It? Why?* Aalto Arts Books.
- 14 Zaitsev, D. (2018). *What can we learn from working with plants?* Master's Theses Collection, Aalto University.
- 15 Chen, T. (2020). *Soil Care: Symphony Rehearsal.* Master's Theses Collection, Aalto University.

3 Practice-based Methods?

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Art-making, crafting,
fashioning, drawing, singing,
walking, performing,
tinkering, intervening,
repairing, sewing, mending,
threading, knitting,
imagining, speculating,
storytelling, prototyping,
(dis-)assembling, cooking...

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How?

—i.e., a methodology is also a branch of knowledge.
It allows us to articulate and systematically explain
how we do what we claim to know how to do.

Tacit knowledge

“We know more than we can tell”¹⁶

How can we explain all these things we claim to know?

¹⁶ Polanyi, M. (1966). *The Tacit Dimension*. London: Routledge, p. 4

Make sure you are able to capture and record the experiential aspects of your artistic practice.

You will need them later to extract insights and draw conclusions.¹⁷

¹⁷ Mäkelä, M. and Nimkulrat, N. 2018. Documentation as a practice-led research tool for reflection on experiential knowledge. *FormAkademisk*, II(2), pp. 1-16.

Most common methods

Studio diaries

Photography/film

Prototypes/artifacts

Other forms of studio
documentation

Questions?

Feel free to reach out
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