



PROJECT PROPOSAL: USING COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH TO INTERROGATE THE CULTURAL VALUE OF UK ARTIST LED PUBLISHING

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BACKGROUND

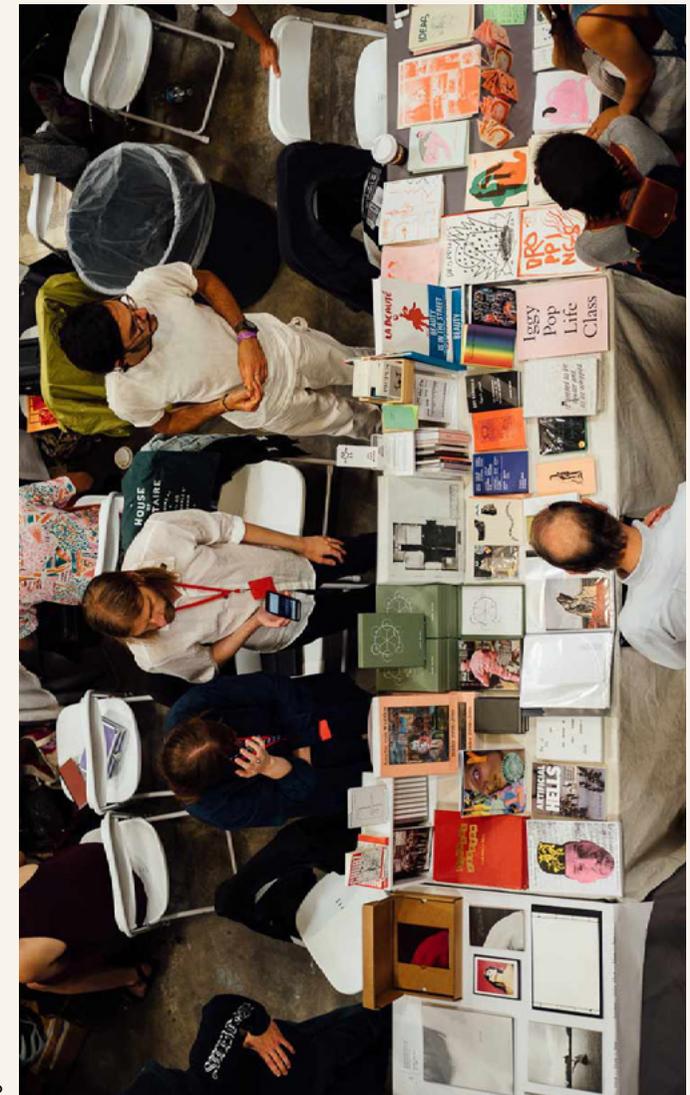
This PhD seeks to address the paucity of research on the motivation, reasoning and cultural value of UK artist led publishing.

It is hard to measure and quantify an idea like value in relation to culture due to the utility of the methodologies employed and the extent to which the results illuminate our understanding (Holden, 2004) but we should not avoid it if we are to better understand and articulate the contribution that the arts make to all our lives (Arts Council England, 2014).

In existing research the prevailing question of cultural value is described in two ways, intrinsic and instrumental. Today the predominant view is that the arts have value because they promote the goals of economic exchange and growth alongside additional social benefits via community cohesion, the reduction of social exclusion and isolation, and making communities feel safer and stronger (Arts Council England, 2014). These benefits are called “instrumental” because the arts are seen as an instrument for achieving them. The intrinsic benefits of the arts experience, such as aesthetic pleasure and captivation, are viewed as having strictly private, personal i.e. of individual value. They are primarily qualitative and thus less amenable than the instrumental benefits to the increasingly results-oriented, quantitative approach that characterizes public policy analysis (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras and Brooks, 2005).



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This PhD project will not seek to re-define what is cultural value but will analyze the current models employed by the UK arts sector to interrogate the cultural value artist led publishing has. This is an important issue due to the impact of the intrinsic and instrumental value debate playing a key role in how the majority of arts are funded (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016).

Pichler (2019) is one of few voices discussing the issues and value of artist led publishing, an umbrella term that encompasses art publishing, publishing as artistic practice, alternative media, publishing in or as counterculture and zine-scenes. The 'artist book' is a key term in this research domain and was coined by Dieter Roth in the mid 1950's as a radical practical experiment resulting in a complete reconsideration of what makes a book (Dieter Roth et al., 2013). Pichler (2019) discusses this term as problematic as it does not accurately reflect the heterogeneity of artist led publishing, it is a narrowing of what constitutes art publishing and as such can be exclusionary. Pichler (2019) suggests that instead of focusing on the term book, i.e. a sequential collection of pages, loose leaf or bound, circulating in multiple reproductions, we should be discussing 'publications'. This term encompasses digital files, hybrid media and forms we are yet to imagine (Pichler, 2019) which in turn impacts traditional notions of value.

Bodman (2017) also discusses the use of inclusive language when engaging in critical work in this field of knowledge and although she identifies the work she produces

as 'artists' books', her research points out an inclusive terminology can be an umbrella under which any practice associated with books could sit. Sherman, Cohick, Drucker and Liberty (2021) also explore the issues with terminology, intentionally using four different terms (art book, artist book, book arts and book work) when addressing the interconnected institutions and power structures that form the field of artist led publishing as a means of highlighting this issue in current criticism and research. The issues around privilege and unintentional exclusionary behaviours is important for the context of this study, in the design of my methodology I will seek to engage a variety of practitioners across disciplinary boundaries to discuss these issues with a view to providing a deeper insight into how this intersects with the framework of contemporary cultural value of artist led publishing.

Pichler (2019) suggests that artists and authors must not leave the field of contextualizing and theorizing publishing practice to scholars and economic stakeholders of the art world. Kelley (2016) points out that 'most of the artists who influence me are absent...historical writing becomes the duty of the artist'. The practitioner perspective is a vital component in determining the cultural value of the medium, helping us to understand for whom and why publications are produced (Sherman, Cohick, Drucker and Liberty, 2021). As a publishing practitioner I am well positioned to chart the dominant UK voices in this field of knowledge, providing opportunities to share information in an accessible way that evokes a connection and conversation (Coghlan, 2014, pp.58–61).



Collaboration in publishing practice is well documented and a key characteristic of the medium. Always a space for experimentation, the medium has been a platform for innovative collaboration since its invention, and never more than in the modern era--when painters, poets, editors, typographers, and binders have each contributed to the production of works whose whole becomes something far more than its parts (Cristofovici and Montefalcone, 2015). The inherited illusion of medium-specificity is being forgotten; artists are working alongside one another, sharing materials, duties, and authorship (Maziar, 2021). Collaboration permeates every level of publishing practice, even the way in which materials and processes are used, as Schlesinger notes, 'exquisite typography, printing, editing, binding, materials, etc. even when highly understated or reserved, are an equally important form of collaboration' (Cristofovici and Montefalcone, 2015). The interplay of words and images in and of itself is fundamentally collaborative.

As a publishing practitioner, this key feature of the medium was the starting point for my rationale in proposing a collaborative arts-based approach to the research design, further reading provided a deeper level of understanding on how I can harness the collaborative nature of artist led publishing. The arts lend themselves to collaborative working and the control participants have over the research process is central to the transformative potential of this methodology (Foster, 2016). Elliot Eisner (2007), a leading protagonist of arts-based research, describes his vision of a practice that is

'considerably more collaborative, cooperative, multidisciplinary, and multimodal in character'. He continues; 'Knowledge creation is a social affair. The sole producer will no longer be salient'. A collaborative research process offers opportunities to raise critical consciousness, highlight social relations and to promote a deeper understanding among participants, facilitators and audiences (Foster, 2016). In proposing a collaborative approach to this study I am aiming to create a 'pool of ideas, concrete attempts and experiences' (Scheidler, 2017). Bernadette Corporation (2019), liken cocreation to the way in which we see a city, one person can never see a city, you can't just see it empirically, it has to be informed and imagined by many people. My selected participants as producers of artist led publications are trying to make sense of their world, their practice and its social and cultural value; as the researcher I am trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2013). The knowledge generated from this collaborative approach can be employed by cultural institutions, galleries, library special collections, research and community groups and practitioners which in turn will provide more opportunities and funding for practitioners in a constrained economic climate.



The primary aim of this research project is to interrogate, and better evidence the cultural value of both the making activities of these artist led publishing practitioners and the publications/artefacts they produce. This project aims to provide insight on the goals, impacts and politics of this diverse community and contribute to the artist led publishing research community as championed by Bodman (2017) and her collaborators. This research will provide opportunities for practitioners of the medium to better understand their practice, how to position it in the wider cultural value debate and help this young field mature with greater equity among its diverse players (Sherman, Cohick, Drucker and Liberty, 2021).

By doing this, this project will contribute to the internal conversation about the role and future of artist led publishing. These conversations will help to identify future topics for investigation and to generate ideas and suggestions for how to strengthen, expand and enhance the practice.

THESE AIMS LEAD TO THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES:

1. To document and interrogate current perceptions of the cultural value of artist led publishing
2. Engage in and contribute to critical discourse on the development and understanding of the medium
3. Work collaboratively with practitioners to explore themes and generate new knowledge about the cultural value of artist led publishing

THIS PROJECT INTENDS TO ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. For whom and why are artist led publications produced?
2. How do practitioners define or describe the cultural value of their work?
3. To what extent do these factors impact the development of practice?

These questions will be answered through a practice led mixed-methods qualitative study with two phases. Data will be collected in Phase 1 and explored in more detail in Phase 2 depending on the results generated from participant data and subsequent analysis.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

Collins (2019) advocates an inductive rather than deductive approach to research projects of this type. An inductive approach has an emphasis on qualitative data and provides an opportunity to establish different views of a subject or situation. This approach works well within the context of this project due to there being little published research on the subject as discussed in the overview of the literature and as Collins (2019) argues this allows for the exploration of the subject to generate data and then reflect on the themes that emerge from it. This reflection is key to my research design, the themes that emerge from the data will inform action research, the 'vehicle' through which my research will take place (Collins, 2019). I am essentially proposing a practice led mixed-methods qualitative study underpinned by an interpretivist research philosophy. Collins (2019) suggests that interpretivism studies usually focus on meaning and may employ multiple methods in order to reflect different aspects of the issue.

The first phase of data collection will follow an interpretive paradigm with an ethnographic methodology, the aim of this research phase is to understand the UK artist led publishing community through observation and description. This will first require the development of participant criteria which will be generated through literature. Through rigorous

primary and secondary research including exhibitions, talks, workshops, conferences, online forums and social media I will identify practitioners who I can approach for an interview whilst being mindful of exclusions and issues of hierarchy, power and privilege. The focus of the interviews will be developed from the research questions I have identified above: why participants publish, how would they define or describe the cultural value of their work or choose not to and to what extent this impacts their work and development.

Due to the impact of COVID-19, time, geographical and financial constraints traditional face to face interviews will not be viable within the context of the project. Taking inspiration from the research of Stacey and Vincent (2011) at the University of Melbourne and their work on alternative ways to collect interview responses with multimedia stimulus, I will develop an interview publication which can be sent to each respondent either in the post or via email. This publication will include more details about the PhD project, a QR code linked to video and image content and their interview questions. On a practical level the use of an interview publication provides an opportunity for substantial savings in organisation, travel and transcription. From a research design perspective this is important however it is the positive impact on data collection discussed by Stacey and Vincent (2011) that I am



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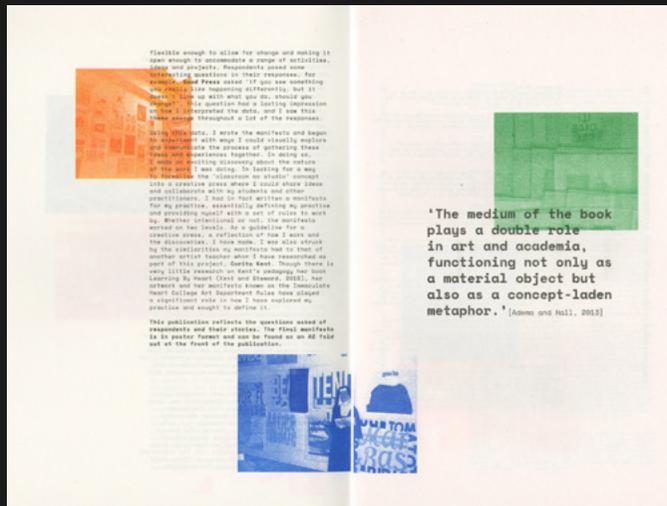


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METHODOLOGY



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interested in. These researchers reported that this approach to qualitative data collection ‘enabled presentation of the same questions and multimedia stimulus material to every interviewee. Provision of a personal copy of the interview material, including all the stimulus resources, to the interviewees provided for a richer interview than would have been possible with a face-to-face interview in the more limited timeframe that would have been imposed. The opportunity for interviewees to reflect on questions and edit responses resulted in high quality data and interviewees found the electronic interview convenient and satisfying’ (Stacey and Vincent, 2011). Additionally, having trialled this data collection method in previous research projects within the proposed creative community I have received positive feedback from participants for the tactility, design value and inspiration this method instilled in them. They have reported that in a simple way I have used the visual language of practitioners to start a dialogue.

Participants will have the option to respond to their interview questions in any medium they choose, if they prefer to write by hand, add imagery alongside their answers or in a publication format of their own devising, they can do so. I will put a return system in place to receive their responses using a postal service or a digital system using email and WeTransfer. This is an important factor in the

research process as it provides an opportunity for participants to respond in their own visual language which can provide further richness to their responses. This technique may also provide an incentive to participants who do not feel comfortable writing, those who are dyslexic for example. This arts-based approach to data collection, as discussed by Coghlan (2014), can capture ‘reflexive, insightful and creative capacities of participants’ (Coghlan, 2014, pp.58–61). Coghlan (2014) goes on to suggest that arts-based data collection has another potential use after analysis as tools of dissemination (Coghlan, 2014, pp.58–61). An example of this can be seen in the work of Taking Action!, a national arts based research project in Canada led by Indigenous youth with local hip hop artists to explore the issues of Aboriginal identity and resistance (Flicker, 2012). The creative outcomes of these activities were used as ‘data sets’ which were analysed to understand the perspectives of participants. After analysis the recorded tracks were used as dissemination products (Coghlan, 2014, pp.58–61).

I will use interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to identify important or significant themes to explore in the next phase of the project through action research. I have chosen this analytical technique for several reasons. Firstly, the relevance to my chosen research philosophy,

interpretivism, which is used to group together diverse approaches including phenomenology and hermeneutics. Collins (2019) characterises the aim of interpretivism as a way of understanding the world as it is experienced and made meaningful by human beings. This analytical framework is described by Tuffour (2017) as a highly useful methodology in providing a rich and nuanced insight into the experiences of research participants. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2013) go much further in their analysis of IPA, describing the aim of an IPA study is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world resulting in the meanings, particular experiences, events and states hold for participants. IPA also emphasises the role of the researcher, in order to understand the world of the participant(s) a process of interpretive activity is required which depends on and can be complicated by the researcher's conceptions (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2013). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2013) characterise this process as a two-stage interpretation process, or a double hermeneutic.

Depending on the data collected in Phase 1, the second phase of data collection should there be sufficient grounds, will follow an action research paradigm with an exploratory methodology. The aim of this research phase is to inform the UK artist led publishing community's understanding of itself, its practitioners and its social and cultural value. This will be achieved through

practice led collaborative participation between myself and these stakeholders. I will work collaboratively with practitioners to produce new publications to reflectively explore the themes identified in phase 1. Within the action research phase of the research design I will use technology to facilitate the collaborative nature of the data development where required. I will develop a system using collaborative creative tools such as the Adobe Creative Cloud, WeTransfer, Email, Slack and where possible Risograph printing techniques. The art making and artefacts produced will facilitate new knowledge and understanding (Jokela and Huhmarniemi, 2019). As is typical of arts-based action research in order to effectively analyse the data produced throughout these activities an effective and robust system of reflection will be developed for both the researcher (myself) and participants. This is described by Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2019) as key in ensuring the evaluation and review of the project, and in turn the knowledge gained from the project, does not become too one sided. Savin-Baden and Wimpenny (2014) argue that analysis and interpretation in arts research are used to embrace the relationships between the data (the experience of the phenomena), knowing (theory), doing (praxis) and making (aesthetic creativity). Within the context of this study and the field of knowledge it aims to contribute to, reflection on the action that has taken place as a stand-alone analysis technique will not suffice and could serve to harm the legitimacy of the study or the validity of the findings. Jokela and

Huhmarniemi (2019) suggest that the collected reflective documents, visual records and diaries can be used as part of the data alongside artefacts and artistic outcomes. I will then apply narrative analysis to this data to focus on the ways in which participants have shared stories to explore, examine and reflect on their experiences (Savin-Baden and Wimpenny, 2014). The product of this mixed-methods qualitative study will be both thematic and narrative based insights into the cultural value of artist led publishing practice.

I will disseminate my findings through publication and if relevant, an exhibition.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

PHASE 1

PARADIGM	TYPE OF RESEARCH	METHODOLOGY	METHODS
INTERPRETIVE (INDUCTIVE, QUALITATIVE)	DESCRIPTIVE	ETHNOGRAPHY (RESULT OF RESEARCH AIMED AT UNDERSTANDING)	OBSERVATION

PHASE 2

PARADIGM	TYPE OF RESEARCH	METHODOLOGY	METHODS
ACTION (INDUCTIVE, QUALITATIVE)	EXPLORATORY	EXPLORATORY ACTION RESEARCH (RESULT OF RESEARCH AIMED AT CHANGE)	PARTICIPATION

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

From an ethical point of view, it will be necessary to develop and maintain a trust relationship with the participants of the study. In this way, complete transparency and honesty will be necessary. In terms of ethical considerations, this is a low to medium risk study, as part of the methodology includes human participants. Opt-in voluntary, informed and indicated consent will be obtained from all participants through a detailed description of the aims of the study, what is expected of them over a specific amount of time, that they can refuse to answer any questions and offer an opportunity to participate anonymously. They will also be informed of the way in which their data will be stored and used. I will provide a mechanism for participants to withdraw at any time, change their anonymity status and at the debrief stage of the study, provide a final opportunity to provide consent before exhibition/publication.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

As a practitioner beginning my career, compelled by the models of reflective practice in higher education both as a student and a teacher, I have been asked to define my practice and interrogate its impact or value beyond the intrinsic. This is a common experience for practitioners and issues of how we frame, define or place our practice is directly impacted by our access to, and knowledge of, critical discourse of the medium.

This study seeks to explore questions about the cultural value of this medium in order to provide new insight and opportunities to widen the scope of practice and participation. As the scale of participation in and range of approaches to artist led publishing have blossomed in recent years, now is a key time to develop new critical tools for assessing artist led publishing and its broader impact on cultural and artistic practice. This research will provide opportunities for practitioners of the medium to better understand their practice, how to position it in the wider cultural value debate and help this young field mature with greater equity among its diverse players (Sherman, Cohick, Drucker and Liberty, 2021).

The knowledge generated from this project can be employed by cultural institutions, galleries, library special collections, research and community groups and practitioners which in turn will provide more opportunities and funding for practitioners in a constrained economic climate.

Upon completion of the Project Approval process, the proposed next step of the project is to begin conducting a review of the existing literature focusing on the below areas:

- 1 CULTURAL VALUE SYSTEMS IN USE BY FUNDERS AND ORGANISATIONS
- 2 THE ORIGINS AND HETEROGENEITY OF UK ARTIST LED PUBLISHING
- 3 IS THE UK SPECIAL IN ANY SENSE IN RELATION TO ARTIST LED PUBLISHING (CULTURAL MOVEMENTS?)
- 4 MAPPING THE UK ARTIST LED PUBLISHING SCENE – KEY/DOMINANT AND 'ABSENT' VOICES

YEAR 2 JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC

PARTICIPANT CRITERIA



INTERVIEW PUB DEV



PHASE 1 DATA COLLECT



PHASE 1 ANALYSIS (IPA)



PHASE 2 ACTION RES



ANNUAL PROG 2



YEAR 3 JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC

PHASE 2 ACTION RES



NARRATIVE ANALYSIS



WRITE UP



PUBLICATION



POTENTIAL EXHIBITION



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