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Filmmaking in Academia: Practice Research for Filmmakers, by Agata Lulkowska. Routledge, 2024, 164 pp.

Hande Çayir

Creative practice researcher Agata Lulkowska was the only person in her department pursuing a practice-based PhD at a time when there was almost no guidance for researchers like her (xii), an experience I can relate to as the holder of a practice-based PhD myself. Considering that I graduated as recently as December 2025 and was the first practice-based graduate in my department, this field can still be considered relatively new for some universities, at least in formal, institutional terms. It is no surprise, therefore, that filmmaker and lecturer Murat Akser notes in the book's endorsement, "finally, a book on film practice as research arrives", pointing to a timely and urgent need in the field (i). It is also important to note that while this formal recognition is new, academics had long been making films and critically reflecting on them (see, for example, Ross McElwee's thesis film at MIT, *Charleen or How Long Has This Been Going On*, 1980).

Structured across eight chapters, *Filmmaking in Academia* focuses on establishing the legitimacy of practice-based research within the university system, rather than offering technical instruction or a historical overview (10). Lulkowska mentions the realities of pursuing a self-funded PhD and developing zero-budget projects, endeavours often dismissed as "too risky" for formal funding (2). The book confronts the perception of creative practice as the "poor cousin" of traditional research (6), instead encouraging scholars to operate beyond rigid disciplinary boundaries. It also directs readers toward intellectual allies, such as Erik Knudsen's *Finding the Personal Voice in Filmmaking*. Ultimately, by referring to researchers (particularly those in the early stages of their careers) as the "principal investigator of [their] project" (77), Lulkowska acknowledges their agency and professional capability, providing a sense of validation that is sometimes absent in certain institutional environments.

Chapter One, "What is (filmmaking-based) practice research?", provides definitions while discussing the identity of the creator-researcher and the development of a creative-research plan. By shifting the focus from "successful work" to "new insights", the chapter explores the components of practice research (27), approaching it "as a form of conceptual art" (26).

Chapter Two, "How to tame your inner artist: creative practice versus practice research", adopts a tone that is at times reminiscent of *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron. It expands on themes explored in Lulkowska's podcast, *Taming Your Inner Artist* (2022–23), co-hosted with Sharon Coleclough, to assist readers in navigating the tension between artistic creation and academic enquiry. The chapter also examines Homi Bhabha's concepts of "hybridity" and the "spaces-in-between" within creative research (37), while providing brief

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guidance on funding opportunities for such interdisciplinary projects, especially for UK-based filmmaker-researchers (43).

In Chapter Three, "Navigating interdisciplinary quagmires", Lulkowska advocates that one must thoroughly understand established rules before attempting to break them. The author cites Picasso as an example, noting that he established a foundation in "traditional" painting before departing toward the famously adventurous periods for which he is now known (47). Key questions posed in the chapter include: "What other disciplines are adjacent to your line of enquiry?" and "Do you need to coin new terms and definitions to describe your work?" (57). The chapter discusses how filmmaker-researchers can master multiple disciplines and negotiate industry funding pressures to create original research without compromising academic standards.

Chapter Four, "How to design effective (and ethical) methodologies," discusses the strategies for effective research design, autoethnography, and ethical considerations. The chapter notes, "if your research questions cannot be answered without your practice, you're in the right place" (62). It also emphasises the importance of refocusing the research question when in doubt and encourages researcher-practitioners to create their own methods if none exist to fit the purpose. Some questions guiding the chapter are: "Are you catching your participant on their 'bad hair day'? Will they regret saying what you make them say? Are you using their opinions to support your argument they might not fully agree with? Do they know where and how your film will be used?" (76). These questions, combined with my film-research practice, led me to reflect more on the power dynamics in filmmaking: What happens when the film belongs not to the researcher but to the participant? Within a culture of film ownership driven by capitalism, how can a fair distribution of authorship be possible?

Chapter Five, "How to balance practice, theory, and reflective evaluation?", begins by questioning "[…] whether the artwork itself is enough to be seen as research (cannot my film speak for itself?)" (86). This creates a tone that invites me to track the sentences in parentheses; it is as if the most vital insights are being whispered quietly into the reader's ear from within those brackets. The chapter reminds us that "writing is an inherently creative process" when it comes to contributing to knowledge alongside films (86). The chapter then focuses on Donald Schön's concept of reflection-in and reflection-on-action, as well as Linda Candy's extensions: "Reflection-for-Action, Reflection-in-the-Making Moment, Non-Reflective Actions, Reflections-at-a-Distance, and Reflections-on-Surprise" (89). In my opinion, scholars who truly embody these reflective practices remain rare in wider academia, though they are increasingly emerging in niche fields that are moving beyond the legacy of positivism. In addition, Lulkowska introduces the term *filmquiry* (a mix of film + enquiry) (94). She also argues that "doing nothing" can actually be beneficial (104), noting that taking a break can eventually lead to enhanced "productivity".

Chapter Six, "What is next? How to disseminate your filmmaking-based research?" guides readers to platforms such as *Open Screens*, *The Journal for Artistic Research*, *The Oxford Artistic and Practice-Based Research Platform*, and *The International Journal of Creative Media Research* (where you can find Volume 9, 2022, *Recontextualising Practice-Based Research*, guest edited by Lulkowska). The chapter reconsiders who the audience is, as well as the where, how, and when of dissemination. To broaden the context, readers can also consult the "Filmmaking in the Academy" special issue of *Media Practice and Education* (2018), as well as peer-reviewed platforms such as *[in]Transition* and *Screenworks*.

Chapter Seven, "Whose impact is it?" discusses how to evidence impact and societal benefit, Lulkowska cites Reed, noting that, "you don't have to change the world; if you make one person's life better, you have achieved impact" (126). The chapter also mentions the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and its positionality in relation to "practice as research". It then prompts us to consider useful activities related to the film, such as workshops for young people, stakeholder dialogues, and the sharing of methods and processes to inform the field (130). Lulkowska cites Reed to highlight that true impact often occurs naturally: "If we can all be ourselves and pursue the research and impacts that inspire us most, then we will feel drawn instinctively to impact, without even having to use the word 'impact.' Many of us won't even realise that what we're doing might be considered 'impact.' We are simply doing what we love." (133) When reading Lulkowska's book, I found myself re-evaluating my own project's impact, engaging in a dialogue that some readers will likely experience. The chapter concludes with a case study of the controversial film *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer and Christine Cynn, 2012). The film's impact was identified by the REF as reaching new audiences, intervening in the discourse on the 1965–66 Indonesian genocide, mobilising debate, and contributing to the understanding of human rights (132). However, it has generated controversy; some of my colleagues have raised ethical concerns regarding *The Act of Killing*'s center around perpetrators.

While Chapter Eight focuses on "conclusion or building an effective supportive system", it also touches upon the role of a supervisor: "how many successful completions have they led?" (143). This made me think that PhD students rarely speak to other post-graduate researchers before joining a programme of study, but some supervisors clearly list on their web pages who they are currently working with. These names can serve as indicators. It is possible to contact these researchers to gain insights from their personal journeys. The chapter may also make the reader wonder whether "practice as research" is art, research, or both. What I find intriguing in this chapter is Sophie Hope and Josephine Coleman's work on "the career pathways of artists with PhDs" (150). There is some advice in the chapter, such as "talk about your research" (154), which is worth remembering, especially if you tend to be timid.

As with any text, there are a few areas where further development could enhance the reader's experience. Firstly, from a technical standpoint, the YouTube links in the digital version I reviewed redirected to general landing pages rather than specific recordings, ensuring these direct connections would be valuable for a book so rooted in visual media. Secondly, while the introduction to autoethnography is clear, the book could be further strengthened by connecting the practice to its foundational literature, although I realise this may exceed the book's intended scope. Thirdly, the discussion of intra-, multi-, cross-, inter-, and trans-disciplinary approaches is intellectually stimulating (58). Given the practice-based nature of the work, including a visual diagram would benefit visual learners, as demonstrated in the work of Andrawes et al. (2021).

Taken as a whole, the book has the feel of a coaching conversation. Written in a jargon-free style, *Filmmaking in Academia* offers practical insight into practice-based research, from the conceptualisation of research-films to their production, dissemination, and impact. It serves as a guide for those interested in entering academia through film practice and as a resource that scholars in creative practice may find useful to share with their students, particularly the "things to consider" questions at the end of each chapter. By asking a simple but fundamental question, "What is the reason you are making the film?" (65), the book invites readers to clarify their intentions. Once this is addressed, much of the work begins to take shape, and Lulkowska's evaluative prompts accompany the reader through what follows.

While Lulkowska continues to contribute to the field through the "Rebellious Research: Creative Practice Research Seminar Series", whether those who are truly rebellious, boundary-pushing, "unruly," "disruptive," and "ungovernable" remain within the system (Burnard 00:15:02)? In this regard, one might look to Sara Ahmed's work, *Complaint!* While sharing "best practices" is encouraged in academia, I wonder when I/we will stop rushing and begin to learn from our "worst practices." What is more, while the industry promotes practice-based and collaborative projects, how can we develop and maintain the necessary infrastructure to support these students and researchers? I hope that we, as a community, keep these dialogues alive to better understand the inner workings of our practice and continue to add value to our field and our lives.

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