Book Section:

Mixing Methods in Audience Research Practice: A multi-method(ological) discussion

Emma McDowell

Audience research in the performing arts is a field united by its research object – audiences – yet constituted by a wide range of methodological approaches from varied disciplines. As researchers seek to understand audience experience and cultural value from diverse perspectives, they often incorporate a range of different methods within their research designs. This chapter will examine some common definitions of and assumptions made about mixed-methods research practice. It will explore examples from audience research in the performing arts, identifying how audience experience is conceptualised differently across disciplines. The more detailed case studies will demonstrate some of the inherent epistemological and analytical challenges of conducting mixed-methods research. I will also consider how the different underpinning logics of the research design and analysis can inform one another. As we shall see, theory, methods, and data may map onto one another in a 'complementary' fashion, or alternatively produce what Bazeley and Kemp refer to as 'generative' strategies of integration (2012).

The chapter will examine case studies of mixed-methods practice as manifested within three research contexts: audience reception studies; an interdisciplinary art/science collaboration; and a participatory methodology. The discussion will conclude with an example from my own research practice, concerned with the meaning-making processes of contemporary theatre audiences, which has been influenced by this diverse research context. I will go on to argue that mixed-methods practice is not only capable of broadening the epistemological discourses of the field, but its ontological horizons as well – expanding our framing of what constitutes performing arts experience.

Defining mixed-methods research

It is important to note that combining methodological approaches is by no means a new practice, but is thought to date back (at least) as early as the anthropological and sociological studies of the early 1900s (Johnson et al.

2007, Robinson and Mendelson 2012). Nevertheless, in the twenty-first century, scholars acknowledge an increase in the number of mixed-methods approaches: for example, Lincoln and Denzin identify the rise of mixed-methods research as one of the most profound recent changes in the qualitative research field (2008, 1597). While this may have resulted in more discussions on the mechanics of mixing methods (e.g. issues of sampling and validity), some scholars maintain there has been comparatively less focus on paradigmatic issues in design (Bazeley and Kemp 2012, 55) or the 'methodological or theoretical underpinnings and implications of integrative research strategies' (Mason 2006, 10). It is to the latter that this chapter aims to make a contribution.

It is common practice for researchers to define mixed-methods approaches as those that include methods that derive from both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms (Creswell and Tashakkori, 2007). Mixing or including methods from both paradigms within a research design is often seen as a way of circumventing (or transcending entirely) the false dichotomy created by the so-called 'paradigm wars.' The basis of this dichotomy is founded on the idea that qualitative research only originates from the interpretivist or constructivist paradigm and quantitative research from the positivist paradigm (Walmsley 2019, 131). However, this viewpoint places a restrictive focus on the choice of methods alone, and fails to acknowledge that methods do not, in fact, 'belong' to any paradigm in a strict sense. For instance, the survey, a popular method in much audience research, is regularly used in both quantitative and qualitative research. Like many research methods, surveys can be used to combine logics from both. By integrating a quantitative choice of options in a survey question alongside an opportunity for qualitative explanation, quali-quantitative survey design, as a type of 'within-method' triangulation (Flick 2016, 53), aims to give a sense of how answers might relate to one another, thus building up a richer context in which to analyse them (Sedgman 2016, 51).

The imperative of mixed-methods research to include both so-called qualitative and quantitative methods is considered by some to reinforce unhelpful distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research paradigms (Yin 2006, 42). Many argue that the simplistic differentiations between quantitative and qualitative knowledge (e.g. numbers vs words, behaviour vs meaning, deductive vs inductive logic, can generalise vs

cannot generalise), all break down in practice (Brannen 2005, 175). As Mason argues, it is as if 'these categories and that division encapsulate all we are capable of knowing' (2006, 10). We will see in the subsequent examples of research practice explored in this chapter how methods seen to be derived from opposing paradigms can be, and often are, mixed together according to the dominant logic of one paradigm. For the purposes of this chapter the terms qualitative and quantitative will still be used, while acknowledging that a broader definition of mixed-methods research practice is also needed.

This broader understanding is especially significant for performing arts audience research. While we may argue that pragmatically we are concerned with the same research object – audiences of the performing arts – we are often conceptually concerned with quite different fields of experience. For instance, Christopher Balme constructs a typology detailing three distinct approaches within theatre studies to the investigation of spectatorship and audience research: the study of individual experiences (for example, the psychological, cognitive, emotional domains of spectatorship); the theoretical or 'ideal' audience experience (e.g. in semiotics, aesthetics or reception theory); and the public as collective group (e.g. explored in sociological or arts management research) (2008, 36).

Balme's first category could include, for example, research conducted at the level of the individual's experience as an audience member. Research by Stevens et al. (2007) aimed to capture the psychological reactions of people watching live performances of contemporary dance by combining psychometric testing with eye-movement tracking technology. The research team mixed 'qualitative' open-ended descriptions of experience with 'quantitative' ratings to live performance based on a given scale. They used the former to drive and refine the latter (ibid, 33). This is a fairly typical example of a sequential mixed design, where data generated at one stage informs other phases (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson 2006, 52), but is nevertheless underpinned by an overarching dominant quantitative logic (i.e. the qualitative descriptions are transformed into quantitative categories). This is in contrast to the work of spectatorship scholar/artist researcher Dani Snyder-Young, who is concerned instead with Balme's second category: the relationship between the 'ideal' audience experience (in this example, defined by the intentions of the artistic teams) and the 'observable' impact on audience experience (2019, 150). Snyder-Young describes their

methodology as 'rooted in qualitative inquiry': they conduct interviews and attend performances and post-show discussions, triangulating patterns of responses between their observations and analysis with the observations and data generated by other members of the research team (ibid, 150).

Audience research broadly concerned with Balme's third category – the public as a collective group – is exemplified in evaluation and impact studies in the sector, which place arts and cultural events within a broader economic, political and social context. As the sector is populated by diverse agendas and stakeholders, research in this area often prioritises a systematic triangulation of different perspectives in order to build a more compelling or 'complete' picture. The comprehensive evaluation of the 2008 Liverpool Capital of Culture programme captured clusters of information across the full range of 'stakeholder groups', such as those identified as a target demographic or originating from specific economic, media and business contexts (Garcia et al. 2010). Data was collected separately across the project from 'over 30 qualitative and quantitative research projects' (ibid, 58) using a broad range of methods, such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observation, cognitive mapping, surveys, questionnaires and community workshops. A significant proportion of the analysis occurred afterwards, characteristic of a 'concurrent mixed design' (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson 2006, 52), to produce individual (and overall) impact and evaluation reports across areas such as governance, delivery, brand perception, communications, cultural vibrancy, economy, tourism, access and participation.

These three examples of mixed-methods practice illustrate how different conceptualisations of the performing arts audience experience depend on particular disciplinary contexts. The different methods and data are transformed and combined together to varying degrees and at different stages of the research process, depending on the researchers' priorities: what they deem to be important about, or characteristic of, the research object itself. The next section will explore case studies of research practice in more detail, in order to examine how complementary or generative strategies of integration may be used in practice, how they relate to logics that underpin their research questions and approach, and constrain analytical processes.

Case study 1: Mixing data in mixed-methods research

> In the cold light of data analysis, we are forced to reflect on different kinds of 'truth' and 'validity' and to take account of the fact that our different types of data are constituted by the assumptions and methods which elicit them (Brannen 2005, 176).

In their book *Shakespeare and Chekhov in Production and Reception*, John Tulloch presents a collection of case studies which represent 'a methodological exploration into theatre production and audience research over several years' (2005, 2). This provides a useful illustration of how researchers from the media reception studies tradition make pragmatic use of different methods and how this mix of methods may be used to justify a methodology's rigour or validity. For example, the methodology of the 'Reading Chekhov project,' promises a 'fine-grained, processual approach,' and includes the method of an accompanied visit with family and friends to a performance followed by an 'ethnographic' post-performance discussion over dinner (ibid, 155). Here, Tulloch acknowledges that while they were not a neutral observer, and did at times, input evaluative remarks into the discussion, they were 'relying on the interviewee's insistence that what is quoted from them here was not especially predetermined by the interviewer's involvement', going on to suggest that 'their views of the production were unchanged by the interview process' (ibid, 156). Here it is clear that the role of the researcher is implicitly intended to be regarded as an objective collector of speech data from spectators.

This underlying quantitative logic is reinforced throughout the work by references to avoiding 'intervening variables' transforming data into scales to include in further surveys (Tulloch 2005, 100) and into restrictive categories for analysis. Of course, treating responses in this way is not a neutral act: by categorising another's utterances, we are masking differences and creating similarities. We are essentially defining the grounds for comparison. In research, as much as in everyday life, we often assume that if we use the same words or phrases, we are talking about the same thing. We know in our everyday communications that regular misunderstandings are often based on 'nothing more than different meanings of terms used by different people because they 'talk past' one another' (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson 2006, 54). It is easy to ignore this context when we are treating language as nothing more

than 'speech data' which holds intrinsic meaning to the researcher outside of the specific contextual research interactions through which the data was produced.

The dialogue between the different methods in Tulloch's study ultimately boils down to considerations of their complementary strengths and weaknesses, which are judged to be inherent qualities of the methods themselves. For example, in a later study, Tulloch acknowledges that the survey questionnaires given to student audiences to fill out in an educational setting will have 'their own mode of address, especially if completed in the classroom' (2005, 277). They then attempt to counteract the 'weakness' of this particular method, by seeking further clarification from students through focus groups that their answers were valid. Tulloch then concludes: '*of course*, these survey responses were the students' "real" reasons for liking the production of Much Ado' (ibid, 277, original emphasis).

In order to rank two entities, one has to first establish some sort of initial ground of similarity between them (Graeber 2001, 223). When one compares the strengths and weaknesses of different methods, the comparative criteria underlying these judgements are based on the assumption that they are indeed applicable to all methods – i.e. that it is possible for the strengths of one method to 'reach over' into the weaknesses of another, thus compensating for them or eradicating them entirely. In practice however, we know that it is far more complex than this. Put simply, using a focus group may well provide more detailed and 'rich' responses than an online survey, but they do not 'pick up' where the other 'left off.' They are distinct research interactions in their own right and thus necessarily incomplete in their own right. When we cast our methods against one another in this way, citing their complementary strengths and weaknesses, we inevitably hold them to (the same) account. Furthermore, these initial grounds of similarity will be based on many factors, including 'the philosophical assumptions that researchers bring to their enquiries' (Creswell and Tashakkori 2007, 305), judgements about what they deem to be important about the phenomenon they study, and what is possible for their methods to do.

As a cultural materialist with experience in ethnographies of production and reception in television, film and theatre, Tulloch does acknowledge that the case studies have been influenced by this particular theoretical perspective

(2015, 6). Nevertheless, it is clear from the reviews of the book at least that the work was received as multi-methodological, described as: 'largely using detailed ethnographic and qualitative research' (Davis 2006, 203), 'using a variety of methodologies' (Young 2006, 127) and combining quantitative and qualitative audience research (Minton 2006, 385). The work is invariably described as a series of studies mixing methodological approaches, yet it provides a clear example of an integration strategy that in practice applies constraints to methods and data according to one consistent (quantitative) paradigm, reinforcing Bryman's observation that strategies do not always match practice (2007, 17). What we might expect from a multi-methodological study instead is a reflexivity that goes beyond a simple consideration of the assumed strengths and weaknesses seen to be inherent in the methods employed. It could be argued this is lacking in this type of mixed-methods research, which clearly calls on multiple methods, but nevertheless betrays a fairly consistent positivist epistemological positioning.

The common use of triangulation, illustrated in this case study, relies on the historical (mis)understanding of triangulation as a metaphorical tool for validation (Flick 2008, 781). This is informed by the assumption that more than one measurement, or process of measurement, provides a more accurate and/or convincing rationale than that produced by one. This type of 'between method' triangulation (ibid, 786) can lead to the entrenching of the universalistic discourse that mixed-methods research provides better outcomes more or less regardless of its aims, compared with single methods research (Bryman 2007, 8).

Similarly, we have seen in the evaluation and impact study of the Liverpool Capital of Culture, for example, how audience research as a sector-based practice often aims to integrate experiences and perspectives of different stakeholder groups. While the inclusion of these perspectives is not in itself problematic, it is clear how easily the suggestion that this practice automatically creates a more 'complete' or 'valid' picture might be instrumentalised for political aims. An example of both the allure of this approach, and its potential pitfalls, is the Culture Counts methodology adopted by Arts Council England in 2014. Here it was explicitly stated in a report that the consensus on a series of metrics of quality between those surveyed on a particular arts or cultural event, suggested that they were approaching some level of 'truth' (Bunting and Knell 2014, 40), where quality

emerges out of a created consensus as an objective and universal entity. We see here in this example how easily the politics of methods and research becomes 'the politics of reality and truth' (Law 2007, 604) through the strategic triangulation of certain perspectives (and the subsequent exclusion of others).

Both these types of triangulation employ what Bazeley and Kemp refer to as a 'complementary' strategy for integration in mixed-methods practice (2012). Complementary strategies depend on keeping the distinction between, and therefore integrity of, their methods, with the aim of preserving the validity of the data these methods generate. However, while this may be commonly used in mixed-methods research; it is not the only integrative strategy: Bazeley and Kemp also refer to 'generative strategies' which aim to generate new understanding of a research topic (2012). This strategy is not too dissimilar to Mason's qualitative logic of mixing methods which aims to transcend, rather than reinforce boundaries (2006, 10).

Systematically triangulating perspectives across different audience or stakeholder groups, or – as in the next example – across disciplines, can be used to produce new knowledge by developing an understanding of how we arrive at different accounts and the purposes that these accounts serve. While aiming for a 'broader, deeper, more comprehensive understanding' of the phenomenon in question, this more generative strategy of triangulation tends to aim for a consideration of 'discrepancies and contradictions in the findings' (Flick 2008, 784) rather than a focus on consistencies and patterns or to corroborate findings generated by different methods. However, these generative strategies for integration may well begin to deconstruct those methods and practices upon which the integrity of distinct research disciplines depend.

Case Study 2: Mixing disciplines in mixed-methods research

> Thinking in an interdisciplinary way is more complex and challenging than simply adding one discipline to another as if it were a case of just […] quantitively multiplying knowledge by drawing together various methods and results of research from different realms. […] One never just integrates a new culture without both changing it and also letting

go of what one thought one was to begin with. (Ó Maoilearca and Lagaay, 2020, 1)

Interdisciplinary collaborations are generally considered to have the advantage of allowing researchers with a 'deep domain knowledge that is only made possible by long immersion in a particular subject area' develop and test new methodologies, alongside researchers with different training and assumptions (Tribble and Sutton 2013, 28). It bypasses the need for one researcher alone to be trained in a range of different methods and research techniques, but instead enables a pooling of disciplinary expertise, skills and experience within one project team. In terms of methodology, interdisciplinary research teams may decide to adopt an approach that incorporates methods from their 'home' disciplines, as is the case with this next example. Where disciplines share similar paradigmatic assumptions, researchers may be able to find a common language easily and thus slot together in a complementary strategy, building knowledge together according to an agreed pre-existing framework. But there are also projects that primarily aim to initiate new understanding of a research topic through the unfolding of relations between different disciplinary perspectives on theory, methodology, and methods.

An example of this is the *Watching Dance* project (2008-2011) which brought together a team of audience researchers and a team of neuroscientists to investigate the phenomenon of kinesthetic empathy. Kinesthetic empathy was determined by the neuroscientists as particular patterns of neurophysiological activity occurring during the 'watching' process that were considered to be, based on prior studies of mirror neurons, similar to those recorded during the 'doing' process (Reason et al. 2013, 50). The arts research team was concerned with a more conceptual understanding of kinesthetic empathy. In one strand of activity, the project staged dance performances in two different ways to suit each team's needs, enabling each research team to place certain constraints on the participants' experiences of the performances to align with the knowledge frameworks of their own disciplinary dispositions. For the neuroscientists, an experimental lab setting with shorter performances was set up, and for the audience researchers longer performances took place within a theatre setting. While compromises had to be made (e.g. varying the length of the performances), the artists, their performances and the audience members (expert and non-

expert ballet and bharatnatyam dance audiences) were kept the same across the two contexts in order to allow for some comparison (ibid, 42).

In their review of the *Watching Dance* project, the research team cite Vera John-Steiner's taxonomy of creative collaboration to argue that the majority of arts/science collaborations tend to focus on 'parallel' processes of 'multi-disciplinariness in which the scientists do the science and the artists do the art' (Reason et al. 2013, 45). In the case of this project, by keeping the integrity of their individual disciplinary approaches, both teams were looking at the same thing pragmatically, but somewhat different things conceptually. One was concerned with 'cortical excitability at the time of watching', while the other with 'spectator experience as articulated in dialogue post-hoc' (ibid, 48). Yet in the analysis stages of this project, the research team did become increasingly interested in moments when the different strands 'provided similar perspectives upon the same elements' or when 'neuroscience, audience research and reflective practice methods could operate closely together' (ibid, 52-53).

However, while instances of confirmation between methods were of interest to the team, they claimed that divergences and inconsistencies between the approaches were hard to ignore. This 'inter-methodological' dialogue between these disciplinary approaches concerned not just the research object, but the varying nature of knowledge, and had the potential as a generative strategy to challenge 'established and invested positions held by individuals and institutions' as well as 'engage with the [...] complexity of the nature of experience being researched' (Reason et al. 2013, 43-54). While the *Watching Dance* team embarked on the project with a set of shared research questions and a sense of a shared goal, they acknowledge more could have been done to conceptualise how they were going to connect their different ways of investigating these questions, and what form of collaboration they were attempting (ibid, 46). This is easier said than done of course. As Kershaw and Nicholson argue, these moments of dissent, confusion and even antagonism in collaborative practice can be very 'research-rich' (2011, 2). On a broader scale however, there are risks to this type of generative interdisciplinary working, as it ultimately seeks to challenge, and in some cases dissolve, the very structures that research disciplines depend on for their continued survival.

Case study 3: Mixing ontologies in mixed-methods practice

> Ethnographic practice is 'always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among others, one which requires presence, listening and a dialogue toward a possible new thing' (Madison 2018, xxi).

This chapter has so far argued that an understanding of mixed-methods practice as solely characteristic of a study's choice of methods is impoverished. This is not least because it ignores the underlying paradigmatic assumptions that constrain and shape the foundational context in which all stages of the research sit. Similar to the *Watching Dance* project, this next example of generative practice invites us to question established notions of how knowledge is constituted (and by whom), but it does this by incorporating a range of methods within a participatory ethnographic practice, working with arts participants and organisations as 'active collaborators' (Murray et al. 2014, 2). As part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council's (AHRC) Cultural Value project, *Approaching Cultural Value as a Complex System* aimed to produce 'a rich, evocative, polyvocal and complex account of the value of the arts and culture to people's everyday lives' (Walmsley 2016, 1). While the project was managed by a team from different disciplinary backgrounds, the methodology developed through the project was founded on the shared commitment of the researchers to 'participatory knowledge production' (Murray et al. 2014, 7).

Initially, the research team designed a 'two-stranded methodology' to separately approach 'two quite distinct registers and ways of thinking about cultural value' (Murray et al. 2014, 43). The first strand involved conducting interviews with cultural partner organisations to learn about their understanding of cultural value. The second strand involved the pairing of five academic researchers with five audience-participants who attended a series of events together. However, as the project progressed, the researchers shifted the focus to instead providing space for organisations, audiences, and academic researchers to collaborate together. To do this they facilitated workshops 'to feedback the contents of those conversations' and 'engage in further collective thinking' and used workshop techniques that included 'collectively produced maps and diagrams' (ibid, 8). This enacted an epistemological shift away from knowing 'about' cultural value to a more

anthropological knowing 'with' or even '*through* experience-as-it-is-happening' and the specific ways in which is it lived (Murray et al. 2014, 43, original emphasis).

Unlike the *Watching Dance* project that aimed to work across two very different paradigms, the *Approaching Cultural Value* project incorporated a range of methods within a consistently qualitative research paradigm. The multiplicity of modes and interactions with participants, including creative and participatory methods (drawing, writing, workshops) and more traditional exchanges (informal interviews), under the umbrella methodology of 'deep hanging out', afforded a 'longer-term, more honest and equal relationship' between researchers and participants, or 'co-researchers'. This was, according to Walmsley, central to the project's methodological contribution (2019, 127). This methodology foregrounds a key ethical challenge to participatory research practice, and perhaps audience research practice more widely, concerning ownership and inclusion. Choices need to be made about how we capture, integrate and communicate these research activities – how to make sense of them – and crucially who does this work. The research team attempted to engage 'in the most even distributions of power' possible by creating 'conversational conditions' for the fieldwork and opportunities for participants to 'invoke, discuss and articulate the "importance of the arts" to them in whichever ways they chose' (Murray et al. 2014, 32). This includes, crucially, what participants felt was important about, or characteristic of, cultural value and wellbeing from their own lived experiences (ibid, 10). Nevertheless, it is acknowledged by the research team that their co-researchers' participation in the project was inevitably shaped, constrained and enabled by the professional academic research team.

As with many audience research projects, the terms of the co-research partnership were determined by the professional context in which the academic researchers were working. They ultimately had main analytical control over the research outputs, and how these were subsequently disseminated through formal research networks. For instance, the majority of the final project report written by the academic team categorises recurrent themes and commonalities of engagement across participants' experiences. However, this is not an attempt to triangulate these experiences in the pursuit of a diversely-experienced 'truth' of engagement with the events. Notably, two out of the five audience-participants insisted on writing their own

accounts in the report; while the remaining three elected to collaborate with their academic research partners on the writing of theirs (Murray et al 2014, 10). All the participants' accounts, which make up a quarter of the final report, combine descriptions of their lives, personal histories and narratives with their own fluid and overlapping analysis of how they live their lives through the arts (ibid, 21). It is clear that the group (sampled from the seemingly uniform category of 'past attenders / participants') brought with them not only a range of personal experiences and histories, but also diverse and rich theories and conceptualisations of art itself: Barry talks of art as a way of interacting with themselves and other people as a 'socio-personal' process and self-recognition through creation (ibid, 13). For Nicola, artistic engagement is and should be about inclusivity and being an engaged citizen (ibid, 19), whereas Kim details how art can provide 'detachment' and release, describing it as 'a platform for people to re-tell or re-conceive their stories (ibid, 15).

We have seen how researchers can conjure up notions of competence, validity and completion through the systematic triangulation of perspectives. Even if their relativistic assumptions describe their knowledge of the social and cultural realm as always incomplete, this idea is founded on the constitution of a shared but nevertheless fixed reality: a social and diversely experienced constructed 'out-thereness' (Law 2007, 599). But as the *Approaching Cultural Value* report concludes, '[v]alue does not exist "out there" to be investigated, captured and brought back to the centres of knowing' (Murray et al. 2014, 36). The project does not approach cultural value as an epistemological question, in search of a methodological 'magical bullet', but instead shifts cultural value to an ontological question, formed by lived experience of the arts as fluid, overlapping and ever-changing (ibid, 31). Crucially this shift away from the attempt to know things, towards a 'knowing-with/through' has the potential to enable a greater recognition of how we enact certain social and cultural realities directly through our research processes and interactions.

Case study 4: Multiplicities and mess in mixed-methods research

> Realities are not flat. They are not consistent, coherent and definite […] it is time to move on from the long rear-guard action which insists that reality is definite and singular (Law 2007, 605).

The final example is from my own research practice, which has been influenced by the diverse research methods, disciplinary traditions and practices explored in this chapter. I have always been interested in the divergent approaches to, and expectations of, performing arts experiences. I am particularly curious about the inevitable challenges that understanding complex and dynamic audiencing processes might pose for the dominant framing of performing arts experience as a stable, fixed entity or 'product'. With these interests, my PhD research, 'From transaction to enaction: reframing theatre marketing,' has applied sociologist Jennifer Mason's 'facet methodology' (Mason 2011) to the study of interactions between audiences, theatre-makers and cultural intermediaries in contemporary theatre practice. In partnership with HOME arts centre in Manchester, this project places a focus on the relations between processes of theatre-making, audiencing and sense-making of these groups through live theatre performances and related communications activity.

Facet methodology, as a structuring tool, mobilises the metaphor of a gemstone to anchor and orient the researcher 'epistemologically and ontologically throughout the research process' (Mason 2011, 78). The facets refer to the faces of a gemstone, which as a stable, fixed and indestructible object, might present itself as an odd choice for this study of fluid sense-making processes. Yet it provides a helpful reminder of the reifying action of research activity: facets are made up of clusters of methods, as situated interactions, and these are deliberately concretised and crafted through the carving of the facets, or research design. Rather than an additive logic of 'qualitative-plus-quantitative terms,' Mason proposes a multi-dimensional view of mixing methods (2006, 15). The interplay between facets is not uniform, in the same way that a gemstone may reflect or refract light rays in different directions and at different intensities depending on how its facets have been carved.

In my research, the different facets are overlaid across research fields, as sites of interaction between participants. They concern organisational marketing and communications practice, the theatre event as a staged artistic interaction, and how these individuals make sense of these through their own experiences and the experiences of others. The final facet of the study is dedicated to exploring the research process itself as reflexive sense-making

practice, attempting to align the 'outcomes' of the research with my own understanding as a researcher. The idea behind this facet is the foregrounding of Mason's conceptualisation of context as 'associated surroundings' with an emphasis on the agency of the act of association (2006, 18). Rather than framing context simply as a background element, we can instead emphasise the researcher's agency as actively 'paint[ing] context in different ways across a micro-macro canvas' (ibid, 19) throughout the research process. This is an idea that informs, and is informed by, the enactive theoretical framework which underpins this project.

As you might expect, the research activity had to therefore include a range of interactive modes: from formal, structured interactions such as rehearsals, meetings, performances and interviews, through to informal discussions in HOME's foyer, bar and in communications online and offline with participants. Particularly for the strand of activity primarily concerned with how audience members live their experiences of the theatre performances, there was a need to think creatively, and multi-dimensionally, about methods. The group of 30 audience-participants had varying degrees of previous experience with theatre, and HOME specifically. I encouraged them to choose for themselves how to engage with the research (and with me) across the seven months of the project – be it through post-show chats, email threads, WhatsApp instant messaging, or sharing more creative responses such as embroidery or painting. The idea behind this fluid approach to methods was to provide the participants with as much agency as possible within the confines of the project's parameters. As the project is concerned with how audiences articulate, communicate and make sense of their experiences, it includes considerations of how they chose to participate in the research.

However, this was not purely an epistemological consideration. The strategy for mixing methods was a generative one; it heeded the warning of the *Approaching Cultural Value* project to resist 'the temptation to reify cultural value' (Murray et al. 2014, 33). The methodology afforded a range of contextual and situated ontological narratives to emerge from participants. They often understood their lived experience through the research by frequently shuttling back and forth between multiple (micro-/macro-) dimensions. Sense-making is messy; we often shift between different ways and modes of knowing, between seemingly rich descriptions of embodied

experience, and grand theorising and explorations of larger societal issues such as social justice, creativity and equality. Here the value(s) and meaning(s) enacted through the micro-narratives of participants' (cultural) experiences was in perpetual interplay with these wider societal macro-contexts, just as it is in our everyday sense-making processes.

Indeed, as researchers of audiences for performance, we should know better than anyone that explanations do not always need to be 'internally consensual and neatly consistent' in order to have capacity to explain and hold meaning for others (Mason 2006, 20). Take allegory for instance, which John Law describes as the art of crafting and holding together 'multiplicities, indefinitenesses, undecidabilities' and 'relaxing the border controls that secure singularity' (2007, 603). By contrast, in academia we are often pushed to use writing conventions that reproduce a version of 'common-sense realism': to adopt the objective voice, and to revel in logic and singularity rather than multiplicity and mess (ibid, 603). In this way, there is clearly much potential to learn from researchers using creative methods and/or practice-as-research traditions, such as performance ethnography which transforms data into a 'sensual, symbolic, rhetorical and communicative event' or performance (Madison 2018, 45). The aim of my use of Mason's facet methodology then, involves a layering and crafting of multiplicities, in an attempt to capture these messy, fleeting and ever-changing narratives, to make sense of them as a researcher and as an audience member, through my own lived experience and through the experiences of others.

Conclusions: Implications for mixing methods in audience research practice

This chapter has outlined a range of examples of audience research from different backgrounds, standpoints and traditions in order to reflect the diverse approaches to mixing methods taking place in research practice. We have seen even when there is no epistemological meeting point for the different data, there arguably often is a dialogue between them, underpinned by paradigmatic logics at play in research questions as well as choices made according to individual and disciplinary dispositions. It is through an exploration of these examples of practice which integrate different data, methods, perspectives, disciplines, ontological and epistemological positionings that we are able to better consider the different

modes of interdependence that emerge, however implicitly or explicitly 'mixed' they are.

While there are dominant approaches to mixed-methods practice, audience research is a diverse tradition, and arguably audience researchers cannot rely on the discipline to provide a set of agreed-upon 'tried and tested' strategies of integration. We can keep our data, methods or methodologies separate and discrete, holding their integrity and integrating them through a complementary strategy such as in the first *Shakespeare and Chekhov in Production and Reception* example. This might mean aligning methods in such a way that the data generated from them can be mixed to form a more 'complete' picture. However, by doing this, we need to acknowledge the acts of assimilation and transformation that make these different methods and data fit in such a way. Similarly, we also need to recognise when working across methods that afford different ways of knowing that they may not be different in a complementary way: their strengths may not fill another's weaknesses, and thus may not compensate for them.

To risk stating the obvious, methods do not mix themselves. The mixed-methods researcher has a choice to make between a myriad of different potential approaches to what they mix, how they mix and when they mix. If our mixed-methods practice focuses on the transforming and combining of data, then we may be placing an emphasis on the outcomes of the research – what is outputted from our processes of enquiry - rather than the processes themselves. By working across methodologies or epistemologies, either across disciplines (as in the *Watching Dance* project) or through co-research (as in the *Approaching Cultural Value* project), we are placing an emphasis on the philosophy of knowledge and how our ways of knowing are constrained or afforded by our methodologies.

The diverse methodological origins and researchers from different disciplines no doubt brings a rich and enriching methodological mix into play. But if we rely solely on complementary strategies of integration, we are in danger of imagining a universal consensus where there is none. While we can learn a lot from related disciplines' approaches to studying the processes of audiencing, the real opportunity for audience researchers rests in collaborative and inter-methodological practice across disciplines, that aims to raise questions about the nature of knowledge (Reason et al. 2013, 43-44) and allows for a 'building

up a shared understanding of research rigour together, rather than hierarchizing approaches and reinventing the methodological wheel anew' (Sedgman 2019, 171). We have seen how interdisciplinary collaborations, such as those exemplified in the *Watching Dance* project, have the opportunity to bring together more than just disciplinary teams with a rich established practice of methods to investigate a single phenomenon. If the constraints of the research context (such as funders' agendas, disciplinary cultures) allow, this generative, inter-methodological practice would allow 'different ways of thinking and researching, including the empirical and the philosophical, to sit alongside each other without requiring narrow synthesis or hierarchical subordination' (Reason and Lindelof 2017, 13). This is why it is crucial that we broaden our understanding of mixing methods to include those studies that hold different epistemologies in a looser tension (or what Mason describes as a qualitative mixing of methods), where research design is conceived as a starting point, rather than a definitive framework, and works to transcend, rather than reinforce, boundaries (2006, 10).

With more generative strategies, we can also deepen our understanding of the contradictory, messy world of lived experience. The final report for the *Approaching Cultural Value* project makes the case for more 'collaborative audience-organisation relationships' by concluding that 'established methods of ethnographers and cultural anthropologists' – that is, 'deep hanging out' and 'thinking with' audiences – can help establish 'front-line reflexive practice' in arts and cultural organisations (Murray et al. 2014, 23). The implications of this type of participatory research are manifold for the sector in a pragmatic sense. It also allows research practice to actively and directly engage its 'community of users' and the wider public with scholarship (Conner 2013, 10), where increasingly 'notions of multiplicity, perspective, and inclusion' in particular are central (Jacobsen et al. 2019, 4). As the project concluded, if we are to adopt the ethos and attitude of 'a participatory, emergent, knowing-with cultural value' (Murray et al. 2014, 34), then a growth in research practices that are less centred around a series of outputs and outcomes, and more focused on the processes of living and experiencing arts and culture, is key.

Even within a positivist paradigm, our research processes are still arguably framing and interpreting the experiences of others through the choices that we make: for example, by drawing attention to particular performance

practices and not others, or particular audiences' experiences at the exclusion of others. Inherent power and knowledge relations are always at play. As Lincoln and Delvin maintain, all stages of our research processes, from design through to analysis, are influenced by both epistemology 'as a more philosophical or paradigmatic concept' *and* standpoint or perspective as 'a more embodied and sociocultural one' (2008, 305). While this reflexivity is clearly central to our work on an individual level as researchers, so too should it be to the work of the field as a whole. We have an ethical imperative to question the interconnections within an ideologically-locked circle of knowledge production, where 'only particular types of perceptions and agreements' are given space and thus 'only a distinct narrative which contributes to a certain discourse is conceivable and in a sense allowed' (Granger 2018, 218). As audience researchers of the performing arts, we can turn to these encounters of each other, with each other and through each other – not as an experience of, or as a fixed characteristic of, a universally experienced performance, but produced through specific processes of knowing and framing, contingent on situated and contextual interactions.

In conclusion, we can see how mixed-methods research practice can incorporate processes that mix or work across methods, disciplines, epistemologies and paradigms through all stages of the research process, from beginning to end. Audience research is not a discrete field, or discipline, or research tradition with a clear set of agreed-upon methodologies and methods. The field is as diverse as the researchers who work in it and the research practices that constitute it, and could be more still. It is not so much a question of whether we *should* hold this diverse practice together in one field, but *how* we might do this most effectively within and beyond our institutional structures, to make room for both complementary and generative strategies of mixing methods. Perhaps then, the field of audience research, not just mixed-methods research, could do with foregrounding and developing its own set of integrative strategies.

References

Balme, Christopher. 2008. 'The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies'. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Bazeley, Pat and Lynn Kemp. 2012. 'Mosaics, Triangles, and DNA: Metaphors for Integrated Analysis in Mixed Methods Research' *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*. 6(1): 55-72.

Brannen, Julia. 2005. 'Mixing Methods: The Entry of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches into the Research Process' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*. 8(3): 173-184.

Brannen, Julia. 2015. *Mixed Methods Research: A discussion paper: ESRC National Centre for Research Methods NCRM Methods Review Paper*. http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/89.

Bryman, Alan. 2007. 'The research question in social research: What is its role?' *The International Journal of Social Research Methods: Theory and Practice*. 10(1): 5-20.

Bunting, Catherine and John Knell. 2014. Measuring quality in the cultural sector. The Manchester Metrics pilot: findings and lessons learned. Arts Council England. https://artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Measuring_quality_in_the_cultural_sector.pdf.

Creswell, John W. and Abbas Tashakkori. 2007. 'Differing Perspectives on Mixed Methods Research'. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*. 1(4): 303-308.

Conner, Lynne. 2013. Audience Engagement and the Role of Arts Talk in the Digital Era'. Palgrave Macmillan: New York.

Cull Ó Maoilearca, Laura and Alice Lagaay. 2020. *Introduction*. The Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy. eds. Cull Ó Maoilearca, Laura and Alice Lagaay. Routledge: Abingdon.

Davis, J. 2006. Review: Tulloch. *New Theatre Quarterly*. 22(86): 203.

Flick, Uwe. 2008. 'Triangulation'. In eds. Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 777 – 804. 'The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research.' 5th edition. Sage Publishing: Thousand Oaks.

Flick, Uwe. 2016. 'Mantras and Myths: The Disenchantment of Mixed-Methods Research and Revisiting Triangulation as a Perspective'. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 23(1): 46-57.

Garcia, Beatriz, Ruth Melville and Tamsin Cox. 2010. 'Creating an impact: Liverpool's experience as European Capital of Culture'. Liverpool City Council, University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University. https://static.a-n.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/4175572.pdf.

Graeber, David. 2001. 'Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of our Own Dreams'. Palgrave Macmillan: New York.

Granger, Charissa. 2018. 'The Sonorous Spectacle: World Music Practice as Discourse', PhD diss., University of Göttingham.

Jacobsen, Kelsey, Mealey, Scott, and Jenny Salisbury. 2019. 'Disruptive Presence: Twenty-First Century Shifts in Spectatorship and Audience Research'. *Performance Matters.* 5(2): 1-5.

Johnson, R. Burke, Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie and Lisa A. Turner. 2007. 'Toward a Definition of Mixed Methods Research'. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research.* 1(2): 112-133.

Kershaw, Baz and Helen Nicholson. 2011. 'Introduction: Doing Methods Creatively' 1-1-16. In 'Research Methods in Theatre and Performance'. Eds. Kershaw, Baz and Helen Nicholson. Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh.

Law, John. 2007. 'Making a Mess with Method' in eds. Outhwaite, William and Stephen P. Turner. 2007. 'The SAGE Handbook of Social Science Methodology'. Sage Publications: London.

Lincoln, Yvonna S. and Norman K. Denzin. 2008. 'Epilogue: Towards a 'Refunctioned Ethnography'. In eds. Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln. Pp. 1585-1595. 'The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research.' 5th edition. Sage Publishing: Thousand Oaks.

Madison, D. Soyini. 2018. 'Performed Ethnography and Communication: Improvisation and Embodied Experience'. Routledge: Abingdon.

Mason, Jennifer. 2006. 'Mixing methods in a qualitatively driven way'. *Qualitative Research.* 6(1): 9-25.

Mason, Jennifer. 2011. 'Facet Methodology: the case for an inventive research orientation.' *Methodological Innovations Online.* 6(3): 75-92.

Minton, Gretchen. 2006. Review: Tulloch. *Comparative Drama.* 40(3): 383-386

Murray, Stuart, Lorraine Blakemore, Helen Graham, Jonathan Gross and Ben Walmsley. 2014. 'Approaching Cultural Value as a Complex System: Experiencing the Arts and Articulating the City in Leeds'. Arts & Humanities Research Council: Swindon.

Onwuegbuzie, Anthony J. and R. Burke Johnson. 2006. 'The Validity Issue in Mixed Research'. *Research in the Schools.* 13(1): 48-63.

Reason, Matthew, Dee Reynolds, Marie-Hélène Grosbras and Frank E. Pollick. 2013. 'Researching Dance Across Disciplinary Paradigms: A Reflective Discussion of the Watching Dance Project' 39-56. In ed. Shaughnessy, Nicola. 'Affective Performance and Cognitive Science: Body, Brain and Being'. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama: London.

Sedgman, Kirsty. 2016. Locating the Audience: How People Found Value in National Theatre Wales. Intellect: Bristol.

Sedgman, Kirsty. 2019. 'Uncharted Territories in 'Empirical Audience Research''. *Performance Matters.* (5(2): 169-172.

Snyder-Young, Dani. 2019. 'Studying the Relationship between Artistic Intent and Observable Impact'. *Performance Matters.* (5):2. 150-155.

Stevens, Catherine, Renee Glass, Emery Schubert, Johnson Chen and Heather Winskel. 2007. 'Methods for Measuring Audience Reactions'. In Conference Proceedings of the International Conference on Music Communication Science, December 2007, 155-158. https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.540.3078&rep=rep1&type=pdf.

Tribble, Evelyn B. and John Sutton. 2013. 'Introduction: Interdisciplinarity and Cognitive Approaches to Performance' pp. 27 – 38. In ed. Shaughnessy, Nicola. 'Affective Performance and Cognitive Science: Body, Brain and Being'. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama: London.

Tulloch, John. 2005. Shakespeare and Chekhov in Production & Reception: Theatrical Events and their Audiences. University of Iowa Press: Iowa City.

Reason, Matthew and Anja Mølle Lindelof. 2017. Experiencing Liveness in Contemporary Performance: Interdisciplinary Perspectives. Routledge: Abingdon.

Robinson, Sue, and Andrew Mendelson. 2012. A Qualitative Experiment: Research on Mediated Meaning Construction Using a Hybrid Approach. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research.* 6(4): 332-347.

Walmsley, Ben. 2016. 'Deep Hanging Out in the Arts: An Anthropological Approach to Capturing Cultural Value'. *International Journal of Cultural Policy.* 24(2): 272:291.

Walmsley, Ben. 2019. Audience Engagement in the Performing Arts: A Critical Analysis. Palgrave Macmillan: Cham.

Yin, Robert K. 2006. 'Mixed Methods Research: Are the methods genuinely integrated or merely parallel?'. *Research in the Schools.* 13(1): 41-47.

Young, Stuart. 2006. Review Tulloch. *Modern Drama*. 49(1): 127-129.