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# Innovative Methods to Understand Impact in Creative Practices

## A Short Survey



*The literature considers how creative and ethnographic methods, or “small data,” can temper the effects big data and metrics have had on understanding, evaluating, and measuring the cultural value of creative practice. It will survey how creative practices, processes and projects are currently measured and benchmarked in the public sector and higher education in the UK, the US, and Australia. It concludes by outlining innovative methods to evaluate and understand impact, while maintaining the benchmarking set out by the ARC and REF.*

## **Introduction**

Creative practitioners are increasingly asked to demonstrate impact of their work, which has led to challenges to understand the complexity of artistic practice and its cultural value. How can we trace impact, and if there is impact, for whom—the creative practitioner, the community, the museum, all of the above? What is the benchmark for success—symbolic shift, demonstrable policy changes, increased funding, more industry partnerships? These questions need to respond to national assessment systems like the Australian Research Council (ARC) Engagement and Impact and the UK’s Research Evaluation Framework (REF). How can creative practices offer innovative methods as tools for tracking impact?

Creative practices’ value has traditionally been the intrinsic and indeterminate yet in recent years has been measured by its instrumental, or economic value. In light of more socially-engaged practices and the “turn towards community,” value takes on a more diffuse meaning. More often than not, the goal is social change, and this involves groups of community stakeholders who are consulted and become invested in the process and outcomes of the art project, and ultimately need to contribute to understanding its impact. Within this process, more and more non-art agencies and government departments—such as health and urban renewal (i.e., placemaking)—are seeking out socially-engaged projects. These shifts reinforce and broaden the scope of instrumentalisation in the arts based on its social use, and therefore compound the complexity of impact assessment because of the number of stakeholders who may or may not have differing definitions of success and impact. Johanson et al. (2014) outline the difference in state and local funding in the context of arts participation and demonstrate the need for new evaluation frameworks because of the recent shifts to community and socially-engaged and participatory, public art and audience participation.

## **Big and Small Data**

Since 2010, the significance of big data has been unmistakable. Organisations are embracing the belief that the path to success is quantifying human performance through metrics. What results is that rewards and value are placed on those numbers. As a society we have shifted from measuring performance to fixating on measuring itself. Ash et al. outline the enormity of how big data has come to function in society, beyond metrics and marketing: They state, “Unpacking a digital dispositif involves charting the wider discursive and material practices that interact in relational, contingent and contextual ways to shape the design, deployment, normalization and use of digital technologies in ways that serve and sustain particular kinds of interests (the economy, social capital) in society, consolidating and channelling the exercise of power” (2018, 37), resulting in what Crawford (2014) describes as “data-driven regime[s] of truth,” Muller describes as the “tyranny of metrics” (Muller 2018) and that we have fallen into a “metrics syndrome” (Goldbard 2013).

Understanding the implications of big data requires nuanced and targeted methodological approaches. Kitchen and Lauriault outline the differences between small and big data, and with their description that includes “small data can focus on specific cases and tell individual, nuanced and contextual stories” (2015, 466). As danah boyd and Kate Crawford (2011) note, much of the debates around Big Data need to acknowledge that no matter how “big” the data it is always subjective. Data questions are riddled by the searchers’ own perception and thus inherently human in their scope. Moreover, they argue the need for transparency and access to the ways in which the algorithms shape definitions of society.

As ethnographers Laura Watts and Dawn Nafus argue, big data needs to be imagined as more than just algorithms collected by “the cloud”. Rather, “Data Stories speak, not of clouds, but of transformations: in things, in energy, and in experience” (2014). With this in mind, there would seem to be affinities between the goals small data studies and ethnographic interventions into big data, and several researchers see the affinities between ethnographers and data scientists. Ford (2014), for example, states, citing Burrell: “Ethnographers get at this the labor-intensive way, by hanging around and witnessing things first hand. Big data people do it a different way, by figuring out ways to capture actions in the moment, i.e. someone clicked on this link, set that preference, moved from this wireless access point to that one at a particular time.”

Small data won’t replace big data but counters the overarching use of it. There are several consequences that result from “scaling” up small data big data. Kitchen and Lauriault describe “small data are thus exposed to the new epistemologies of data science, fostering growth of new approaches such as the digital humanities and computational social sciences...small data are set to continue being an important component of research endeavors” (2015, 473-474). They discuss small data in the context of geography and cities and state, “small data will continue to be a vital part of the research landscape. There will not be a paradigm shift in the near future in which studies using big data replace those employing small data (2015, 473).



### **Quantifying Culture**

In the last 15-20 years or so, Australian funding agencies, government departments and educational institutions have shifted from measuring arts and creativity in purely economic terms to a more complex mixed methods approach to evaluation. The field of cultural measurement spans disciplines and sectors. The issues generally run along polarized lines: the intrinsic v the instrumental, the elite v the popular, the amateur v the professional, private v public spaces of consumption, qualitative v quantitative evidence, and the publicly-funded v the commercially-oriented. Placing these issues in opposition elides the contextual nature of definitions such as culture and these (often manufactured) boundaries distress debates about what constitutes the value of culture and how it can be evaluated and captured (Crossick and Kaszynska 2017, 6).

Importantly, the term culture remains contested: whose culture (values) and who measures, so finding methods that attend to cultural difference and its complex relation to class, Indigeneity, and ethnicity are critical (MacDowall et al. 2015). *Making Culture Count: the politics of cultural measurement* (MacDowall et al. 2015) offers critical histories and creative interventions (Badham and Hope 2015), it presents new approaches (Dunphy 2015) to valuing for culture in local, national and international contexts. What is significant about this study is they give focus to the normalised terminology used in cultural evaluation: namely, the term “culture” in relation to evaluation, and the terms value, evaluation, and measurement and their context specific meaning (diverse communities understand value and relationships differently (MacDowall 2014). The editors link these problematics to the resulting effect on cultural measurement and its political implications. MacDowall states, “These debates highlight the ways in which evaluation is ultimately about value: that behind the series of abstract technical operations and measures lie a series of value-laden, political decisions. In a system where economic values and measurements are dominant, articulating alternative values can be a challenge” (2014, n.p).

Further, they highlight a less cultural evaluation, public value, and big data based on intrinsic, instrumental and institutional values of art. Developed in Western Australia, Culture Counts (<https://culturecounts.cc>) is a “subscription based digital dashboard designed to assist in gathering data about different qualities of cultural events...it uses an indicator and metrics-based framework to collect, categorise and report on three sources of information gathered from standardised surveys, claiming to redress the lack of consistent language in culture’s assessment” (Phiddian et al. 2017, 1). It would allow “the arts sector to benchmark the quality of an arts or cultural experience by developing internationally recognised metrics for evaluations, and by supporting the means for data collection, reporting and analysis against these measures (Gilmore, Glow & Johanson 2017, 283).

In 2016, the team from an ARC-funded “Lab Adelaide” (LA) (Meyrick, Phiddian & Barnett) published *The Conversation* article about Culture Counts: “Why a scorecard of quality in the arts is a very bad idea” that sparked a transnational discussion. They state:

In essence, Culture Counts is a quantitative scorecard for artistic quality, with a set of standardised categories translating a set of verbal descriptions into numbers. For example, if a surveyed audience can be prompted to say of a cultural experience that “it felt new and different” or “it was full of surprises”, it would rate highly on a 5-point scale for “originality”. That number would then sit on the dashboard beside other numbers for “risk” and “relevance”.

The group argues that Culture Counts is an inadequate tool for three main reasons. First, they feel it is reductive, and reduces descriptive analysis to numbers. It elides the social context that gives the artwork (whether exhibition, creative organisation, arts project etc.) meaning to the reader. Second, a metric assumes all arts practices and their processes are the same, despite the range of genres, modalities, audiences and objectives. Lastly, these metrics could be politically manipulated; that is, some qualities in the artworks may be seen as better than other (e.g., innovation). As a result, works that “don’t address government or funding agency priorities are likely to be de-funded or not funded in the first place” (Meyrick et al. 2016).

In other words, their critique see cultural evaluation as anything but neutral. The researchers continue by questioning the desire to measure the subjective, and claim that “In our three years studying the issue of how quantitative and qualitative methods can be combined to convey the value of culture, we have seen nothing to suggest that a metric for ‘good art’ can or should exist” (Meyrick et al. 2016). Phiddian et al. (2017) further this point by suggesting this implies homogeneity of art practices and purpose/goals. With the impetus to assess impact, this reality might give creative practitioners of specific genres an opportunity to devise their own assessments of impact, and further, be tapped to translate that knowledge and conduct genre specific evaluations for industry.

LA are not alone in their concern for its adaptation in total: outside academia, artists, including those who represent collectives like Nicole Beyer, Director of Theatre Network Australia and co-convenor of ArtsPeak (the confederation of national peak arts organisations) are of Culture Counts:

After the Culture Counts trials here in Australia, the anecdotal feedback I have heard is that it didn't really give participating organisations anything significant to work with artistically, that the main benefit was that it provided them with some data and graphs to use in acquittals back to funding bodies...On the face of it, tools that help organisations to gather more information about audience and peer response to their work, to feed back into their processes, is useful. And industry-wide metrics could be a reasonable way for arts organisations to benchmark themselves. However, I think it is a problem when we oblige organisations to use those metrics in a rigid way, creating more admin burden (Watts 2016).

Gilmore et al. have written an extensive review of *Culture Counts*—Manchester Metrics and in Victoria. Amongst many conclusions they identified in audience response options to rank as high/low; agree/disagree, “rather than formative, nuanced or creative.” In their study they found Culture Counts didn't build capacity in to understand and articulate their experience with art (2017, 292). They state: “the narrative of Culture Counts has a near perfect homology with the sector's developing interest in big data, data culture and the power of digital technologies to understand consumer behaviour and markets” (2017, 291).

However, there are supporters of *Culture Counts*, namely David Throsby and John Smithies, and during its Arts Council of England's trail in Manchester (Manchester Metrics), it was declared a success (with further funding from the Council's Big Data tranche) to refine the metrics and art forms and to make it more user friendly to the non-profit market (Gilmore, Glow & Johanson 2017, 284). Throsby challenges LA's main arguments: it's not possible to assess the quality or value of cultural phenomena using quantitative measurement, and once a set of measurements are formed and used, the data can be used or misused. While Throsby has been a proponent of valuing the intrinsic value of art, he sees Culture Counts as a move in the right direction to “bridge the gap between theory and practice...an appropriate way to achieve such an integration of the theoretical and the practical is to deconstruct the broad notion of “quality” or “cultural value” into a set of more specific quality dimensions, attributes, characteristics or criteria that reflect in detail what might motivate a discussion about artistic quality” (2017, 315).

John Smithies articulates how Culture Counts emerged out of a need for the arts section to understand itself and to have some consistency in doing so and to be sustainable. For Smithies, there are three good reasons for Culture Counts: it is accessible to participants in rural areas and because it handheld; two, it doesn't require a highly skilled person to work it; and three, the database is purpose built and can be modified to fit the organisation's needs (2017, 324). Further, Smithies sees the “fear of ranking detracts from the purpose of the measurement—self-reflection, acquiring new knowledge and insights to share with colleagues experimenting with creative ideas” (ibid, 325).



The response to Culture Counts demonstrates the subject of evaluating merit and impact of an essentially subjective field. Defining and measuring cultural value through programs like Culture Counts has and continues to be a hotly contested interdisciplinary debate that has social, economic and policy implications. This review builds on the premise that wholly big data metrics are problematic and considers the significance of creative practice and small data ethnography in providing different modes of measuring impact.

The rise of big data has had a palpable effect on cultural and creative industries (see CCI in Australia). Yet, in the US, the Rand Corporation has stated this: "After years of encouraging arts organisations to measure their instrumental impacts we've determined that what they really need to measure are their intrinsic impacts." Alan Brown, amongst many others who have devised more elaborate evaluation frameworks, has responded with the *Architecture of Value* which has three focal points for understanding value: at the individual level, shared between people, and at the community level, and three time frames for when this value is realized (at the time of the event, in the period following and the cumulative effect of experiences over time)"(A New Direction, 2013).

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) offers case studies, tip sheets, and guidelines for evaluation. Ostensibly, they advocate for a mixed methods approach. For an exhaustive transnational assessment of the shift from more quantitative and to more qualitative evaluation forms (and numerous case studies) in the UK, Australia, Canada and the US see the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council's report, *The AHRC Cultural Value Project* penned by Crossick and Kaszynska (2017).

### New Frameworks of Evaluation/Impact

Outlined below are frameworks that support the power of creative practice to transform social problems remains. Clearly, there needs to be ways to evaluate the efficacy of claims to ameliorate problems whether this mandate is because of funding bodies, or personal and artistic growth. On offer are less reductive, more holistic, participatory, and aesthetic frameworks to understand impact and efficacy of creative practices. And despite the contested nature of impact as an agenda, the debates around its meaning and dissemination has given the academic and creative practice community an opportunity to find innovative research methods in diverse settings and create new forms of knowledge. Moreover, creative approaches to methods, knowledge exchange and translation, and pathways to implementation emerge through interactive workshops, sensory ethnographies, network analysis (the study between discrete objects, AHRC 2017) longitudinal studies all help support a narrative-driven stories of impact.

Over the course of three years, Animating Democracy (animatingdemocracy.org) developed *New Aesthetic Perspectives* (figure 1) that takes into consideration diverse cultural approaches to understanding aesthetics. It was developed as a way of understanding efficacy of community and socially-engaged art projects that often work across sectors and have diverse public/ audiences/ communities. It moves away from aesthetics based on beauty to one based on a social ontology, which aligns with many socially- and community-engaged art aims and goals.



Figure 1: New Aesthetic Perspectives: Animating Democracy

*New Aesthetic Perspectives* helps us understand how the arts make a difference in culture by using diverse and plural notions of aesthetics as benchmarks. Growing out the community arts tradition, this framework allow artists and researchers a set of benchmarks in which to evaluate their program or work. *The Americans for the Arts Social Impact of the Arts* is an interactive wheel, which gives users the ability to see connections across sectors (social justice, economy, health and wellness, infrastructure, innovation, for example) and how the arts affects each of these (figure 2).



Figure 2: Social Impact Interactive Wheel: Americans for the Arts

Stephen Duncombe (2016) outlines in “Does it Work: the a/effect of activist art” several benchmarks to help artists understand if their work did what they claim. Even though Duncombe refers specifically to activist art, his framework can translate into more humble creative practice projects. What is important from this article is the attention paid to affect and effect, or a/effect. Duncombe doesn't try to resolve the ineffable qualities of an art experience “to inspire dreams of a better world” with demonstrable outcomes, but sets them in conversation with each other. For Duncombe, identifying the aims and intentions of a work identify first: “activist artists might want their art to do in order to have a baseline with which to judge whether or not they have succeeded or not” (2016, 124). These aims range, for example, from altering perception, creating disruption, imminent material shift and imminent cultural shift. Duncombe's method to evaluate the success of the aims and intentions includes questions for the publics, audiences, and communities, but it quite thin on the form of these questions and how they might be interpreted and by whom.

Kim Dunphy's (cited in MacDowall et al. 2015) "Holistic Framework for Evaluating Arts Engagement," (figure 3) gives focus to larger social values such as participation, local knowledge and cultural democracy). The Art and Humanities Research Council in the UK extensive study, "Understanding the Value of Arts and Culture" reinforces the need for different approaches to cultural value and evaluation. The authors state, "What emerges from the *Cultural Value Project* is the imperative to reposition first-hand, individual experience of arts and culture at the heart of enquiry into cultural value... value needs to give far more attention to the way people experience their engagement with arts and culture, to be grounded in what it means to produce or consume them or, increasingly as digital technologies advance as part of people's lives, to do both at the same time" (Crossick and Kaszynska 2017, 7).

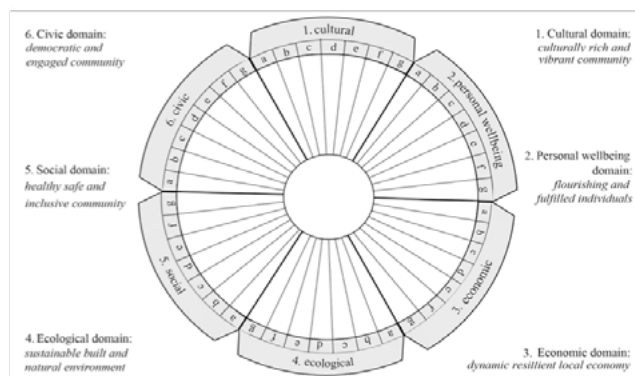


Figure 15.3: Domains of change depicted as a connected whole

Figure 3: Kim Dunphy's Holistic Framework

In 2019, Creative Victoria launched an "Evaluation Exchange" (2018-20), designed to help organizations evaluate their social impact programs. The program involves workshops for evaluators to learn the best method to evaluate the program. No information about how this will be done is available on the Creative Victoria website, however, the BYP—the commissioned group has extensive literature on theirs. BYP group: "We are delivering an evaluation capacity-building workshop series for Victorian creative industry organisations and practitioners" (BYP Group). And while they have interesting evaluation frameworks such as Dr Ed Pauly of the Wallace Foundation's, six steps in evaluative thinking: **Step 1:** Define your purpose and audience; **Step 2:** Clarify what you think success looks like; **Step 3:** Develop indicators of change; **Step 4:** Collect the data; **Step 5:** Interpret the evidence and go deeper if needed **Step 6:** Communicate the results (figure 4). Included in their framework are theories of change and an extensive resources such as templates for audience surveys, yet the tools used to evaluate change and impact appear to be fairly traditional; i.e., quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Figure 1: The six actions of evaluative thinking



Figure 4: BYP Group: Six Actions for Evaluative Thinking



## Methods

“Good evaluation gauges progress and degrees of success. It compares what we set out to achieve with what we have achieved, and what we might achieve in the future” (Smithies 2017, 325). I think we can all agree with this statement, but technical questions remain: what methods are best to evaluate the impact of diverse creative practices? How should those assessments be translated and to whom? More specifically, what are some ways in which we can understand impact as small data so that it can sit alongside or augment more quantitative measurements and give focus to the *affect* and the demonstrable shifts and the intrinsic values to creative practitioners and diverse stakeholders?

The main focus here is the importance of ethnography to provide nuance, context and motivation needed to challenge the enormous weight and implications when it comes to thinking about big data and its effects in the world. So, the question is: what can be done to intervene in how big data is experienced, disseminated or understood in research? Big data might tell us *what* we consume and when but it doesn't capture the *why*. Thus the need for mixed method approaches that can provide context and content. As Crossick and Kaszynska outline in the AHRC report, “Matarasso was right 20 years ago in saying that the solution is to develop ‘sensitive, creative, people-centred approaches to evaluation which begin to address the outcomes, rather than the outputs’” (Matarasso 1996, 13 cited in Crossick and Kaszynska 2017, 132).

How can we engage methodologically with ways of discussing, naming, measuring, creative engagement/ impact frameworks? How can new ERA systems reflect more nuanced approaches? It is also important to remember, as the AHRC reminds us: “the tools used to collect data are determined by the methodological framework of analysis, which is in turn connected to explicit and implicit assumptions made by the researcher about what constitutes knowledge and what theoretical frameworks should be used to analyse and make sense of data” (Crossick and Kaszynska 2017, 120) and the issue is the “character of the knowledge and understanding that is being sought, because each approach will have its own benefits and drawbacks” (ibid 9).

Further, it's important to consider the “social life of methods” which refers to how the techniques or tools chosen reflect the choices of those who use them, coupled with those methods being implicated in the social world. The art and the artist are enmeshed in the social world as well, and with that the people who make and who experience it—through viewing, audience, and participation (ibid, 121; Campbell et al. 2017; Lury et al. 2011).

The most common form of qualitative assessment continues to be ethnographic, which includes interviews and participant observation, and these forms of small data offer interventions into tyranny of big data (Kitchen and Laurieault 2015 warn against the scaling up of small data and this would be especially true when it comes to culture). Importantly, for cultural value and measurement, the resulting ethnographic evaluation often provides vox pop quotes done through “rapid ethnographic assessment” and surface observations, which may give a sense of impact but delivers nothing by way of understanding the cultural values and long term impact—for practitioners and audience/community—generated through a project. Quick evaluations might miss the impact trajectory that may or may not shift the perception of meaning or experience of impact. This aspect is particularly important as more artists and designers partner across sectors on socially- and community-engaged projects.

What is missing is the slow, deep and textured analysis of value generated for the audience or community. Yet, it is not always possible to create detailed narratives of cultural processes; therefore, employing creative and participatory forms of evaluation as a way to better understand impact can help creative practitioners, communities, and funding agencies some of the more nuanced ways creative practice has affect and effect for everyone involved in the making, receiving, and funding.

## **Impact Statements**

More recently, there's been a push for tracking the *impact* of creative practices projects, which adds another layer of complexity to this already contested debate. In the UK, Andrew Pettigrew's call for "Scholarship with impact" (2011) has been fully embraced (Kelemen and Hamilton 2015, 2) and has found its way to the Research Evaluation Framework (REF) where "researchers were required to adopt a case-study approach to demonstrate impact in terms of 'an effect/change/benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia'" (REF Assessment Framework 2011).

No longer is it adequate for researchers to focus on activities and textual outputs. They now must prove the importance of their ideas and activities in "real world" scenarios. Pettigrew suggests "impactful research can be defined in terms of five categories: 'Instrumental, conceptual, capacity building, cultural change, and enduring connectivity impacts'" (2011, 350 cited in Kelemen and Hamilton 2015, 4) While this may be understandable in light of funding and policy issues confronting universities both in the UK and Australia, Romme et al. raise another concern: "this has underlined rather than disassembled the binary between theory and practice by treating knowledge as a commodity for consumption. Moreover, existing institutional arrangements are largely demotivating initiatives to create and sustain genuine and durable dialogical encounters among the plurality of actors that make up the landscape of the social domain (cited in Kelemen and Hamilton 2015, 3).

REF Impact Statements, while a rich source of small data, present different challenges. Academics suddenly are to become authors of case studies, and this focus on impact draws out the tension between academic integrity and commercialisation. Further, Kelemen and Hamilton see impact in the "real world" as one way to reinforce a framework where research is done "on" instead of "with" others (ibid). On the other hand, "the impact agenda has also underlined an emerging sensibility to different ways of working with people in face to face settings, a 'participatory turn' of collaborative and community-based research (Gubrium et al., 2015 cited in Kelemen and Hamilton 2015, 6). In addition, the authors see the impact agenda as a way for academics (creative practitioners too, I would argue) to highlight the social value of their work, and Impact Statements are one way to demonstrate social engagement. Kelemen and Hamilton—through the Community Animation and Social Innovation Centre (Keele University, UK)—have developed "cultural animation" as one method to work inside of the impact agenda (more on this in the methods section).

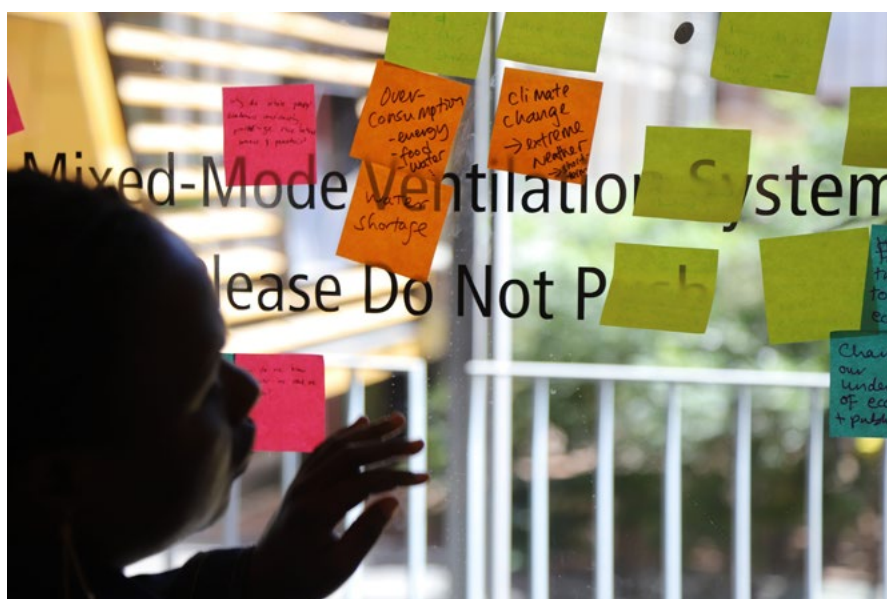
What is critical moving forward is the reality that *impact is a more discursive exercise*. The ARC Engagement & Impact Framework measures impact over six years. The ranking is partly on demonstrating the impact in the public realm—adopted policy, industry implementation, larger exhibitions, for example—and partly on how the university supported the impact research journey. This second part is important because it means universities need to think about *how they measure what* and how they foster the growth of a project from conception to *research translation*. Up until ARC E&I, for many, documenting this journey has remained informal and anecdotal. This requires us to rethink our methods and how impact is strategically conceptualized from the beginning of the project. This means codesigning with innovative techniques, and translating with key partners and stakeholders who will implement the knowledge transmission (Jungnickel 2019; Hjorth et al. 2019) in sustainable ways.

Arguably, a narrative, or story, can be creative. Yet, guidelines restrict just how elastic that term can be in a given context. The ARC Engagement & Impact Framework and REF's impact stories provide impact indicators of reach and significance. Constructing the impact narrative is about identifying the pathway to impact, or impact activity. It becomes "the story" the who/what/why, which "develops the sequence of events, creating engagement through understanding." The evaluator (practitioners included) establish the how/where/when so they can trace appropriate evidence (McEwan, 2018, based on REF guidelines).

Impact statements that use the above framework are becoming more important for creative practitioners. The Royal College of Art, for example, has published several of their impact case studies for creative practice. These studies detail how the College's research demonstrates social, economic impact, and as a consequence, makes it more attractive to industry and employers; i.e., they "prove" how the College has been ranked—"In 2015 and 2016 the RCA was ranked number one art and design institution in the world in the global QS rankings, in recognition of its excellent research and research impact and its reputation with employers"(RCA, nd).

**\*Creative methods to assess impact:** There are few ways to creatively assess impact; this usually comes in the translation of the impact. Creative practice ethnography—using dialogic methods such as talking circles, play, a wishing tree, offers one way for practitioners to use their practice as a “performative evaluation, a kind of research method, or a mode of representing and visualizing feedback” (Spectre 18, 2013). Photography, film and visual arts, poetry and creative writing, music, drama and performing arts. These art methods help uncover hidden perspectives, add and strengthen participants' voices. Elements of this process connect to Participatory Action Research which aims to challenge the hierarchies structured into research. Engaging an artist, designer or arts-based researcher can help better reflect the spirit of the experience you are evaluating, encourage the participation of those often not heard in the evaluation process, unearth new insights, and make space for other ways of learning (see Simons & McCormack article on Arts-based methods from 2007).

Wiles et al. outline three new innovative research methods, of note here are creative methods developed by David Gauntlett. They state, “his particular innovation has been around the creation of metaphorical models, particularly those created through the medium of Lego Serious Play. His method involves asking people to make their own model that represents some aspect of their personal or social identity; the research ‘data’ consists not simply of the created product, but also observation, discussion and analysis of the *process* of its production, in particular, the participant's interpretation of what they have produced and what it represents for them. This creative reflective method provides, Gauntlett argues, insights into how individuals present themselves, understand their own life story, and connect with the social world. Gauntlett has argued that this method provides an “alternative to traditional interviews and focus groups in that it provides insights that do not emerge through more conventional methods and is accessible to participants who find verbal methods challenging” (cited in Wiles et al. 2013, 21-22).



Cultural Animation draws on visual and sensory methods coupled with community engagement: “as a form of community arts engagement which literally animates the underlying dynamic of a community. It is this enlivening process that makes this approach a valuable method of social enquiry as well as a powerful way of representing and communicating important issues.” The group uses drama-based techniques to accentuate the relational, processual and emergent nature of social life and its networks...the ability to discuss, dispute or to share meanings rather than the assumed academic privilege to simplify accounts on their behalf” (2015, 7-8). As they state, Cultural Animation could be “perceived as a viable solution to the so-called ‘relevance gap’ between theory and practice, as well as being a way of addressing the challenging demands of ‘impact’” (ibid).

Lynn Frogett's Visual Matrix: The method enables the symbolization of imaginative and emotional material, which might not otherwise be articulated and allows “unthought” dimensions of experience to emerge into consciousness in a participatory setting” (2015). This method requires flexibility and self-reflexivity of the researcher, and an understanding that the social and personal are enmeshed in a network of interacting influences. The techniques for this approach having the researcher facilitate using “stimulus materials,” sitting in a “snowflake pattern,” sitting in a circle to reflect, and creating image maps of participants expressions.

**\*Creative methods to translate impact:** Using art methods to reflect art work makes sense and can make a project's impact more accessible to everyone. Left out of most evaluations are the materials, the experience of making and/or collaborating, and the relationships developed. This approach is particularly useful for practitioners who are tasked with understanding the impact of their work on the world and at the same time achieving a nuanced understanding of their underlying motivations and intentions of their creative practice (Spectre 2013, 12).

As such, another option would be for “Artists and cultural policy makers would insist on their right to convey cultural value and meaning with the tools best suited for that purpose: story, image, metaphor, and experience” (Goldbard in MacDowell et al. 2015, 226). Some community engaged practitioners have developed their own systems of cultural measurement, even using metrics as a basis for their creative practice. For example, the Rimi Protokoll collective uses demographic data as the basis of theater performances and The Cultural Code Initiative uses cultural data as the basis for digital artwork (Spectre 2013, 10). Use of new media “to interrogate their ever-growing data resources, with a view to developing data-driven techniques and a toolkit of data visualisation and data storytelling approaches (AHRC 2017, 126).

Creative methods also connects to creative practice ethnographies as a way a transmission, as Jungnickel (2019) describes as “thick transmission” (2019) Techniques might include: digital storytelling, photography, animation, satirical works, and collage. Such methods can also be used in groups where groups are youth, vulnerable, disadvantaged, or disabled (where sensory, kinesthetic, multisensorial, tacit experiences of the world are primary; i.e., nonverbal). These outcomes translate evaluations and research findings into more accessible forms so that wider audiences (beyond academia or policy makers). For example: “Transcripts of social work interviews with the children were modified into screenplays to be animated by communication design students. The animated documentary has advantages over the expository documentary mode including protecting the identity of the subject and creating an affective video that constitutes a dual-process model of entertainment providing for a more socially connected pleasure” (Rose, n.d.).

Art writing can be part understood as a form of interpretive evaluation that helps shape the how a work is understood and its distribution in the public realm furthers a work's reach, and subsequent impact (Duncombe and Lambert 2012.; Lippard 1985). Increasingly, art writing in the expanded field opens up a space in which art writing can be more creative by including some of the forms described above.

**\*Participatory methods for evaluation for community and socially-engaged work:** this approach helps engage the group to determine the project's value. Participatory evaluations give agency to participants and are particularly useful in long term/socially- or community-engaged art and co or participatory design projects. For example, Akama et al.'s workshop (2018) format and its efforts to use uncertainty as a technology in these workshops points to the promise of seeing the workshop as a possible ethnographic intervention into big data. Workshops that address the impact of projects can then invite participants to engage with the processes and outcome. The experiential exercises also encourage self-reflexivity. The various unknowns and "uncertainty" (as Akama et al. 2018 define it) open a space in which workshops can harness these unknowns to see possible ways in which participants can disrupt uniform impact statements. Depending on the project, this approach might be useful to understanding impact of the co or participatory design projects.

Workshops like the Visual Matrix or other creative workshop activities enable individuals to reflect on the personal and social impact of their work, and provide a provocative, speculative, and a nuanced account of a given project.

It is important in this context that the evaluation is not only about the success or the ethics used in the process, (for instance in a participatory design context) but the success or failure of the project as a whole (i.e., the design or art outcome). In this context, often times it is strategic to embed the evaluator/ethnographer in the project from the beginning so that they act like an interface between artists, audience, community, or funder. Here, agency is given to the local and expert, and the result, ideally, is empowerment. The participants or community become subjects in their own projects, not objects to be reflected upon.

Arguably, this aligns with the aims of action research and builds on Yolande Wadsworth's pioneering community based research book, *Do it Yourself Social Research* first published in 1984, with its most recent edition in 2011. This book maps out how community, small nonprofits, or individuals can conduct and subsequently understand their own research. Drain et al. places this approach in a participatory design context where the outcomes lead to "understanding community challenges and contextual knowledge, assessing technology based on its effectiveness, likelihood of adoption and generalisability and assessing empowerment based on creative capacity building and social inclusion" (2018, 16). For more examples from the UK, see *Evaluation in participatory arts programmes A selection of approaches, models and methods developed across Creative People and Places 2013-2016*. Included in this, are more insights from Culture Counts and local impact studies.

A Blade of Grass—a funding agency specifically for socially-engaged art practices—as a matter of practice embed their evaluator (ethnographer/researcher) in the project from the beginning of the project. They act as an interface between the institution, the artist, and the community in question. This dialogic approach opens up many ways to evaluate and then track the impact through the process of making, generating dialog and feedback with and through the partners and community. The group acknowledges that impact happens over time, and understands that this shifts understandings of cultural value and the effects a particular project may have. A Blade of Grass uses multiple ethnographic interviews and then narrates a story of impact through the various iterations of the project.

Simons and McCormack, although encouraging of the benefits of creative methods that allow an embodied, multidimensional, and multisensory understanding of a project whether as a means to evaluate or as part of the outcomes, are also "drawing attention to the danger of the performance assuming authority over the evaluation and limiting the audience's potential for engagement with the findings," along with the concern that people might have inhibitions about their artistic ability (2007, 308). In

their “Beyond the ‘Toolkit Approach’: Arts Impact Evaluation Research and the Realities of Cultural Policy Making” Bellfiore and Bennett (2010) warn of the oversimplification of arts tools might have in translating to policy. Yet the AHRC report identifies the need for (creative methods) programs to be embedded in an organisation’s cultures as well as the funders and policy makers involved in the process (2017, 128). Ultimately, as Crossick and Kaszynska point out:

They [arts methods as hermeneutic method] each contain a strong element of reflexivity, and an awareness of the impact that the researcher’s subjective perspective has on the research. Some make ambitious claims that creative research methods capture and convey different, non-discursive forms of knowledge. findings. Issues are legitimately raised about ensuring methodological rigour, scaling up for evaluation purposes, and the generalising of findings. The way to ensure methodological rigour using arts- and hermeneutics-based methods will be the same as with methods in many other areas, that is to say through ensuring good research practice resting on the principles of multi-modality (cross-tabulating different techniques and approaches) and iterability (verifying one’s findings through seeking other opinions and modifying in this light) (2017, 145).

In conclusion, this literature review has considered how small data—as ethnography and creative and participatory methods—can provide more nuanced, textured and sensory approaches to determining value of cultural practices for multiple stakeholders, including the artists themselves. New evaluation frameworks point to more holistic and reconfigured aesthetic experiences to determine culture efficacy and value. And to understand these frameworks, small data interventions shift the ways knowledge is translated and transmitted to better account for the complexity of creative practice impact narratives.



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