Defining the Unknown: The Role of Practice as Research in Experimental Animation

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ABSTRACT
Purpose: This paper is an effort to establish clarity on the nature and structure of practice-based research (PbR) in animation studies. It is also an attempt to situate PbR the discourse on research. The focus is on justifying PbR as a valid, rigorous methodology supported by clear pedagogy.

Methodology: Structured questionnaires will be used to investigate (1) three related aspects of material thinking: Experiential, Tacit knowledge and Embodied knowledge related to animation; 2) methods of artistic and animation production as these demonstrate knowledge; 3) criteria/quality assurance measures to assess this knowledge in an academic setting. Participant observation and design methodology are sources of data from a practitioner in the digital art practice in Kenya are used is against a backdrop of contemporary interpretations of the theories of phenomenology.

Findings: Preliminary findings indicate that Practice based Research (PbR) is a relatively new approach for doctoral research within Kenyan Universities, where scientific modes of inquiry dominate. There is a lack of clarity around the use of PbR in animation studies at PhD level, and this affects the ways in which creative research outputs are understood. Further, it explains the dearth of policy papers on the evaluation of such creative outputs and innovations.

Practical Implication: The study contributes to our understanding of PbR as a valid research method in the arts and related creative fields in Kenya, how such research is carried out, evaluated and presented, as well as debunking the assumption that textual research as having more value than artistic research.

Originality: There is scant research by Kenyan scholars on PbR as employable to animation studies at PhD level. This paper contributes to discourse on artistic/animation.

Keywords: Practice based Research, material thinking, phenomenology, artistic research, Animation Studies