

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS A RESEARCH METHOD IN DESIGN RESEARCH AT UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

It is generally accepted that the process of design is “messy,” in that the final design “emerges” from an engagement of the designer with a plethora of sources, stimuli, interactions, commission demands, client needs (and wants) and other practices that engage with the problem at hand. By contrast, most definitions of research and research report writing emphasise the notion of a “systematic investigation” leading to a solution of the problem. Furthermore, most research requires the demonstration of so-called “new knowledge.” Thus a research report has to (a) demonstrate evidence of some form of systematic thinking, has to (b) present the findings of that systematic thinking, and has to (c) argue the case from this for “new knowledge.”

This article argues that the method of autoethnography provides a system that is an effective research strategy for fulfilling these obligations, as it provides a strategy for evidence gathering and evidence interpretation that is embedded in the temporality of emergence as a critical design process. The paper will argue firstly that the “auto” – that is to say the “I” of the designer, with his or her subjectivity and experience -- locates the designer centrally in the creative project. Secondly, the “ethno” (culture) locates the design in the culture of design practice. In this sense the interrogation of and the use of design practice are used as part of the critical reflective moment, in the process of triangulating raw data for interpretation purposes. Finally, the “graphy” (that is to say, writing, used in this sense as both the visual language of designing and written language of reporting) suggests systems of capturing and documenting raw data as it comes to the fore in a temporal manner to provide evidence for the emerging new knowledge.

On the one hand such new knowledge is inevitably embedded in the design itself (it is “written into” the design), but on the other hand the new knowledge is also embedded in the practice of reflection/reflexion. Arguably the autoethnographic method fosters this reflective/reflexive practice, and, tentatively, might bridge the possible gap between the “designer’s handbook” and the demands of research output and new knowledge.

Key Words: *autoethnography, culture, creativity, innovation, research, design research.*

Introduction

This article concerns itself with developing a particular type of system that will assist in the capturing of new knowledge during specific types of design-based research processes undertaken at South African tertiary institutions. Such research might culminate in a degree or in an article, but the deciding factor is that it needs to engage with the demands of research outputs, processes and procedures.

There are as many definitions of research as there are books on research. However all have similar characteristics, in that they suggest that research is (1) a systematic pursuit of new knowledge about the world and its operations, that (2) in the process new insights and new procedures are possibly developed, and that (3) set practices, theories and views are either used to substantiate such newness or are in themselves challenged. All research results therefore have to be supported by the collation and interpretation of evidence. All definitions also agree that the new knowledge needs to be placed in a public arena in some form – usually a written form.

It is generally accepted that any research follows two separate yet interlinked trajectories. On the one hand there is the trajectory of the actual doing of the research – the data collection, the engagement with raw data, the development of the potential new knowledge and the like. This trajectory is a process-driven one and is therefore time and place dependent, it is emergent, and it negotiates

exigencies as they arise. The second trajectory is a rhetorical one and is to be found in the 'document' that might be called the 'research report.' In essence the research report is a product that captures the findings of the research and argues and persuades for the relevance and acceptability of such findings. Generally the research report is developed after the completion of the research process and is dependent upon the processes for the organisation of the emergent findings into a coherent and persuasive whole. Such a 'post-organisation' relies upon the accepted rhetorical strategies of a research report. In terms of design research, therefore, the actual making of the design would follow the trajectory of 'doing research,' whereas the final product would follow the rhetorical needs of the research report.

At many universities, both in South Africa and abroad, there has been much debate about the nature of the 'research report' in the creative tertiary institution departments. (See, for example, the articles in Barrett & Bolt, 2009; Macleod & Holridge, 2006; Gray & Malins, 2004, for the range of the debate). Positions in the debate have ranged from the one side of the argument that claims that the design itself – the final set of blueprints, for example -- is in and of itself a type of 'research report,' in that it could not have come into existence without the coherent, critical, conceptual and creative processes that are required to develop such a design blueprint. This is the argument that adheres to the notion that the creative output *is* the equivalent of research output and therefore should be assessed and recognised as such – the design *product* is the culmination of the research *process*. On the other side of the argument the 'traditional' position is held, namely that a research report emanating from a tertiary institution should be presented in written form – the design process and the design product should be captured in a 'written' research report as this adheres to the demands of the academia. 'Hovering' in between these two positions are the development and recognition of so-called Practice-Led research (PLR) or Practice-Based Research (PBR) models. In this approach the argument is made that new knowledge is generated *because* the design process has been undertaken. In other words, any new knowledge, new insights and new applications have come about because the design process has been documented in some way and such knowledge, insights and applications have become apparent through an analysis of the specific *process* of design for a specific project. Put another way, the design product is one thing, but the epistemological gain (new knowledge) is another. The argument contained in this article speaks predominantly to this last case and poses the question: how can the actual creative design process for a particular project be captured so that such epistemological gain can be discovered? I argue that the methodological processes of autoethnography can assist in this endeavour, because this methodology assists in capturing the creative and innovative processes as they occur in and through the designer.

A provisional definition of autoethnography draws on the 'auto' (or self), the 'ethno' (or culture) and 'graphy' (the processes of 'writing' – for this article such 'writing' might include any process that commits idea to form). The article will argue that the creative process of design is embedded in the culture of self (the idiosyncratic artist/designer), the culture of design practice and the culture of evaluation or assessment (the culture of gatekeeping). Autoethnography therefore could become a methodology for capturing and analysing new knowledge as it emerges from the interplay between these three 'cultures' in the practice of design.

Creativity and innovation

Before turning to autoethnography in theory and practice it is necessary to set in place a clearer understanding of the notion of creativity and innovation, as this will provide a structured approach to engaging with the method. Hallam and Ingold (2007: 1-8pp) suggest that conceptually (and in application) there is a difference between creativity and innovation. Innovation has generally been regarded as the assessment of how a developed *product* might change or enhance an environment. Thus one talks of 'innovative products.' Creativity on the other hand might be defined as the *process* undertaken that might arrive at the innovative product. This separation between creativity and innovation is useful as it parallels the notion of 'doing' research and research report (the product of the research process) in many ways. Thus, much as doing the research and writing the research report is interlinked, so creativity and innovation are too.

Sawyer (2006, see specifically the chapter on sociology, 117-136) in his interrogation of such interlinking posits a useful understanding of the creative process and, more particularly, how decisions are made during the creative process. Sawyer posits in his chapter on the sociology of creativity that there are three dynamics at play in the act of creativity that influence the decision-making processes in

the development of the innovative product. These three are (1) the influences and input of the individual (or the *idiosyncratic*), (2) the domain (or *medium* or *discipline* and all that this entails) and (3) the field (or the *gate-keeping mechanisms*). Sociology informs one that a person is the product of the interface between the individual, on the one side, and the environment, time and culture into which he or she is born, on the other. Furthermore, the individual is a product of his or her own unique attributes, preferences, abilities and proclivities, and contributes in his or her own way to the development of the environment and culture. Thus the individual shapes and is shaped by the environment.

Given this one can argue, in the first instance, that in the design process the designer draws on his or her own experiences, insights, training and idiosyncratic views on the matter at hand to attempt to solve the problem that has been set. One can call this decision-making profile the individual's unique *cultural idiosyncrasy*. In this sense the 'cultural idiosyncrasy' refers to a specific designer's profile, which might differ from another. 'Culture,' in this sense, refers to all the factors that have shaped that specific designer up to the point of engaging with the specific design project. However, the project/problem is located and needs to be addressed within the design environment, which is the domain of design practice (in this case).

Sawyer's second aspect of the innovation process notes that decisions around what to include in the product (or how to address the problem that will lead to the product) also draws on the demands of the *domain*. In this he refers to the mechanisms, methods, practices and approaches that are generally accepted within the specific design (in this case) modes of doing things. Also included in the domain are those artefacts and designs that have entered the domain as models and that can be used as exemplars -- this refers both to processes, and to extant design products that might be used as examples of 'excellence.' To a large extent the individual designer learns about the exemplars and learns the practices and approaches through formal educational structures that have developed such practices and approaches through time and experience -- structures such as subjects like 'History of Design' or 'Theories of Design.' To a large extent one could define the domain as the *culture of practice*. Nevertheless, what has entered the domain (either as practice or as exemplar) has done so through the 'blessing' of the experts, Sawyer argues.

There exists a cluster of people who are considered the leaders in the field either in terms of design expertise, or design critique (or both). These are to a large extent the 'gate-keepers' of the domain -- the innovators, educators and experts of design practice and exemplar excellence. Within the design discipline one might add the commissioners of particular projects, who have to accept the final product or design. Sawyer calls this coterie of expertise the *field*. A designer, therefore, needs to (or perhaps inevitably does) engage with what is, or might be, considered 'acceptable, fresh, insightful, ground-breaking' (or whatever 'term of novelty' that might be used) in the eyes of the experts or the field, and to adapt his or her design to that end. One might call the field the *culture of gate-keeping*. The gate-keepers have theoretical, philosophical, technical and aesthetic paradigms that they bring to bear in the adjudication and assessment of new products. These paradigms are embedded in the domain as well but have been placed there by the field. (It can also be argued that part of the field's mandate is to draw on its own idiosyncrasies, which may be called 'inspired insight'). The aspirant designer 'learns' about these theories and other aesthetic paradigms during his or her training, one would argue.

In essence, in any act of creativity that leads to an innovative design product decisions are made by the designer according to the tensions amongst these three. In other words, the decisions around inclusion or exclusion of certain aspects of the design are made as the designer wrestles with the demands of idiosyncrasy, domain and field. Put another way, the designer engages with the tensions between his or her own idiosyncratic culture, culture of practice of the medium, and the culture of gate-keeping (or pursuit of affirmation by the experts) in attempting to solve the problem and produce the product.

Cultural practice working premises

Critical for the argument made in this article is the idea that 'culture' as shall be used is about the generic dynamics that abound in the making of culture, not in a particular culture. In other words, 'culture' as used here is not necessarily anthropological in nature, but attempts to 'parallel' the dynamics of 'anthropological cultural practice.' Chang (2008: 21-23) posits seven working premises to

attempt to explain the dynamics of cultural practice. As one works through these premises one is mindful of the threefold creativity cultures at play – idiosyncrasy, practice of discipline and gate-keeping. The seven premises are the following:

Individuals are cultural agents, but culture is not at all about individuality. This suggests that in as much as the individual shapes the cultural practice, so the cultural practice shapes the individual. For the threefold ‘cultural’ dynamics at play in creativity this would imply that as the individual brings the creativity for a particular design project to bear, the designer and the design are not unique but are a product of in the interwoven practice of self, practice and control. Furthermore, in the process of the particular project design, the ‘three cultures’ are also in the process of redefining the designer’s ‘self, practice and control.’ Put another way, the designer makes the design, but the design ‘makes’ the designer. Provisionally, autoethnography as a method might assist in documenting this dual process and the discoveries made through it.

Individuals are not prisoners of culture. If design were a replication of culture only then it would not be creative. Furthermore, design practice is not a prison that binds all design to replication. Nor are parameters of control (gate-keeping) overbearing but are porous upon persuasion, insight and the accumulation of new developments. (It might be added that such porosity is also dependent on shifting power positions and changing paradigms). Thus one can argue that a ‘gap’ arises between replication and innovation. The research question therefore might be: how does one capture the workings of the designer in that ‘gap?’

Despite inner-group diversity a certain level of sharedness, common understanding, and/or repeated interactions is needed to bind people together as a group. (This principle also addresses another Chang premise, namely: *each membership contributes to the cultural makeup of individuals with varying degrees of influence*). One of the central tenets of design (and creativity) is the push and pull of idiosyncrasy. However, the idiosyncratic is bound (or ‘framed’) by like-mindedness of designers and their practice. Designers share practice, share an understanding (or at least an acceptance) of the necessity of validation and to certain extent share the criteria for such validation. Ironically, perhaps, it is the ‘sharing of the necessity for uniqueness’ that binds designers and the discipline together. It is in the shared *interaction* that the discipline or cultural practice of design is developed. Furthermore, it is the shared *discourses* of practice, critique and process that bind designers. One of the purposes of this paper is to posit the potential for a shared discourse of *research* practice for designers through the use of autoethnography.

Individuals can discard a membership of a cultural group with or without “shedding” their cultural traits. (This premise must be read with the last of the Chang premises: *Individuals can become members of multiple social organisations concurrently*). Central to this premise is the fact that the design researcher often has to do exactly this – it is fully expected of a designer to ‘put on’ the mantle of the idiosyncratic to generate potential *new* ideas, but then to take up the mantle of practice *to make the design ‘work.’* This potentially implies eschewing, engaging with or contradicting the mantle of the idiosyncratic concept. ‘Making the design work’ implies shedding the idiosyncratic and the practice mantle and taking up the mantle of gate-keeper or critic to test the efficacy of the design. Most designers slip easily amongst these three mantles. However, as I shall argue, *it is for the documenting of the movement from mantle to mantle that a research method is required. This is because it is in the reflexion of the movement that new knowledge (about the self, the practice and/or the controlling mechanisms) may come to the fore.* Autoethnography may provide such a method.

Without securing official memberships in certain cultural groups, obvious traits of membership, or member approvals, outsiders can acquire cultural traits and claim cultural affiliations with other cultural groups. It is, of course, the purpose of education to make outsiders who demonstrate the interest or potential to become ‘official members of certain cultural group,’ official members of that group! In this sense education provides a gateway to acquiring design practice and the tools of design gate-keeping. Diplomas and degrees appear be documents that officially grant the holders membership of the culture of design, acknowledging and rewarding their idiosyncratic worth, their mastery over the culture of practice, and their critical ‘gate-keeping’ insight. However, there is a second implication to this premise, and that is that members of other disciplines (sociology, psychology, cultural studies, engineering and history, for example) can slot into certain parts of the threefold cultural groups that this article is suggesting, to greater or lesser extent and worth. By the same token, designers should be able (or allowed, following the premise) to access the practices of those other disciplines. This

point is made here because it will become evident that in the justification both of the design as part of the research, and as part of the new knowledge that is generated through design practice, those disciplines might have to be accessed. The psychology of the design process might be deemed an example. A second example illustrates how the movement patterns of a community might influence the design of the interior of a particular space. The movement in the 'gap' between a design approach to a problem and a psychological approach to the same problem (as that gap is 'discovered' in the process of designing for a project) needs to be documented, because this is where another type of 'new knowledge' may be found. The processes of autoethnography might offer such a method of documentation.

The interrelationship between research and design

There is a remarkable parallel here between the problems of design and the problems of research. Fundamentally a researcher encounters a problem that needs to be solved. The first approach is perhaps an intuitive one, based on an idiosyncratic approach. This is then assisted, shaped, tempered and formed by extant methods and approaches that are located in the culture of research practice (or the research domain), and the product is presented in the persuasive way that the culture of gate-keeping (or the field) requires – the assessment or peer-review mechanism demands.

As argued in the introduction, there are three extant concerns in the research methods that this article pursues, and they are that (1) any research has to produce 'evidence' to support the conclusions it reaches (and that this evidence has to be gathered and collated in a form that is acceptable to the 'field'), (2) that research needs to generate 'new knowledge' (or 'epistemological gain') and (3) that design processes are in and of themselves 'messy' ones that at times defy the 'strategic and systematic' approaches to doing research that research seems to require.

Gedenryd (1998 -- much of what follows in this section on the 'messiness' of design practice is taken from this work) has argued that the approach to designing is 'messy,' in that, whereas in traditional research there appears to be a systematic and linear trajectory, in design the approach taken by most designers is haphazard and non-linear. According to Gedenryd, in traditional research a problem is identified, a strategy to solve the problem is developed using extant methods and methodologies, and, systematically and under stringent control mechanisms, the strategy is implemented, the data gathered, collated and interpreted, and the findings made. However, in the design environment matters play out differently. Gedenryd, drawing on extensive surveys of the design practices of designers, notes that once a problem is identified and described, most designers first develop a large number of potential answers to the problem (generally called 'thumbnails') in a very quick fashion. One might call this the idiosyncratic culture at work. Once these are completed, the designer then interrogates each one and selects four or five that seem to the designer to hold the most benefit or promise. Here one can see the possibilities that all three cultural groupings are at work, in the reflexive, decision-making process. Once this is done, the designer then does 'mock-ups' of these to further interrogate their potential. One could argue that in this phase the idiosyncratic comes to the fore once more. Part of that process begins to include further enquiry into the efficacy of the mock-up as a potential final solution to the problem. Thus the culture of practice and the culture of gate-keeping predominates. It is at this stage that further research is done so that the justification for the product can materialise. Put another way, the potential exists that the culture of practice of other disciplines might be harnessed to assist in the justification. Once this stage is completed and final selection is undertaken, the final product is produced. In essence then, Gedenryd argues, the process works backwards and forwards between problem, potential solutions or solution, gathering of information, further experimentation, refinement, adaptation and complexity. In short, seen against the light of traditional research, the process of reaching a conclusion is messy; it calls for a divergent thinking approach to creativity, it is emergent and appears to be very improvisational. If it is so, then it inevitable opens areas of interrogation to see whether these areas offer new knowledge at any stage. Thus a method of capturing the process needs to be developed, and this article argues that such a method might be autoethnography.

However, one could argue that the process is not as haphazard as is generally believed. If Sawyer's argument holds, then the designer, in the emergent process, is continually making decisions as to what to include (and by extension what to change, or exclude from what is being worked on) even at the thumbnails stage, but definitely during the development of the mock-ups and the final product based on his or her idiosyncrasies, knowledge of the domain and expectations of the field.

Furthermore, such a process plays out in two dynamics namely the *reflective* moment and the *reflexive* moment. The *reflective* moment occurs from moment to moment (sometimes appearing to happen 'unconsciously') as the designer ponders quickly what has just happened and then applies the next moment, which in turn is assessed reflectively, and so the creative process appears to 'flow' or emerge (seemingly reasonably spontaneously). Decisions are made quickly, seemingly intuitively, and then implemented. Decisions are made based on immediate problems that arise. The *reflexive* moment, on the other hand, occurs later in the process and tends to appear to be a much more conscious, deliberate and ponderous process. In the reflexive state the designer seeks to find, refine and define or justify the final decisions made in the product.

Two important concepts materialise here. In the first instance the reflective moment appears to be part of the haphazard, raw data development from which the final product will emerge. In the second instance the reflexive process brings one closer to the traditional view of developing the research report, as findings are developed from the raw data -- trends and tendencies are discovered, coherence is sought (and substantiated) and conclusions reached and justified. There appear to be two parts to the process. The first part concerns the capturing the raw data as it emerges. This is a reflective one caught in the moment of deciding to capture this bit of information and not that one, for example. The second part of the process of coming to conclusions is a reflexive one that happens predominantly in the final stages (or at key moments) in the research. Key to this understanding, therefore, is the concept that reflective practice (the first part) might be seen as a problem solving strategy, whereas reflexive practice (the second part) might be seen as a theory building practice where epistemological gain is discovered or 'new knowledge' is found (and documented).

Where is the new knowledge in the research/design interface?

The question now arises in the design/research interface: is there more to data capturing during the design process than capturing the development of the product? This paper argues that, given the fact that the design product currently in South Africa is not seen as a sufficient basis for the research equivalent and therefore for the acceptance of "new knowledge" or epistemological gain, such an addition or parallel process must be sought. In other words, it is not enough to justify the decisions made in the design from extant theory or practice – research needs to generate something more in terms of new knowledge, new insights, new processes or new criteria. Fundamentally, I argue, research needs to present some form of epistemological gain.

The argument that follows develops two interwoven strands of thinking. The one strand argues that new knowledge can be gained within the three creativity strategies that Sawyer notes – the idiosyncratic culture, the culture of practice and the culture of gate-keeping or the decisions around the pursuit of 'excellence'. The 'gaps' illustrated from the argument this far suggests that the design process provides rich data to develop new knowledge in these dynamics. The second strand argues for a process of recording the data that develops during the design process as part of the methods of design research. These methods might be found in the approach known as autoethnography.

Autoethnography as method

The research method known as 'autoethnography' has developed within the broad frame of the notion of 'Qualitative research methods.' Because it falls within this ambit, it draws on the ontological position that the world is experienced and therefore can only be tangentially described and predicted. The epistemological strategy that goes with this ontological paradigm is one of interpretation rather than facts and definitive conclusions. Given this, the position of the researcher within his or her own paradigm needs to be embedded in the research process and taken to be part of that research process. This implies that, for research to move beyond the seemingly idiosyncratic nature of interpretation (or that all interpretation is only idiosyncratic), a method needs to be developed that can lead to the acceptance of some form of epistemological gain. Fundamentally qualitative research methods employ the process of 'triangulation' to deal with the potential fallibility and idiosyncrasy of the research in the generation of new knowledge. Triangulation implies the interrogation of data gathered from a number of sources that are reacting to a particular given circumstance, situation, or, in the case of this paper, the design process. Triangulation calls for the search through the haphazard, emergent and disparate data available from diverse sources, in a process of seeking trends and tendencies, so that these overarching trends and tendencies can be interpreted in the

pursuit of new knowledge. In essence, these trends and tendencies, interpreted against extant literature, can produce epistemological gain in the area under investigation.

It is accepted that such new knowledge hovers between the idiosyncratic on the one hand, and stable and generalisable new knowledge on the other. However, whereas quantitative research methods generate new knowledge that might be seen as generalisable (that is to say, applicable in all places but at that point in time), qualitative research methods engage with the specificity of time and place. Thus, the description of the emergent new knowledge is taken to be valid by a reader of the research report because the reader recognises similarities between the situation, context, place and dynamics described in the research report and the reader's own (for example). Therefore the validity of the new knowledge is embedded in the interpretive strategies of the reader of the new knowledge. This has brought about the strategy of 'thick description' as developed by the ethnographer Clifford Geertz. Arguably the end product that is a design might be considered a 'thick description' *par excellence* in that it demonstrates and presents all aspects of the project. However, it may not, in the first case, justify the decisions made in the design, nor, in the second case, and in line with the demands of research, present epistemological gain.

Returning, therefore, to design and research this article has argued so far that the design process is emergent and therefore the very act of emergence becomes important. The conceptualisation of a method to accommodate this might lie in the methods of autoethnography. (It needs to be noted that I draw predominantly on the work of Heewon Chang [2008] for what follows). The term itself contains the threefold dynamics at play: 'auto' refers to the 'self' (the designer, in this instance), 'ethno' refers to culture (and from the argument I have been making, such a concept of culture is indeed threefold – idiosyncratic culture, culture of practice and culture of gate-keeping), and 'graphy,' which speaks to the act of writing (or, speculatively, any act that commits form to idea). For autoethnography the key data gathering and analytical process is captured in the practice of narrative. Because design is emergent, that is to say the product emerges from the process of designing, and because such emergence occurs over time, in essence what comes about is a *narrative of design*.

The tool to capture such a narrative is the diary or journal. Such a diary or journal should capture the events that occur during the development of the design, as these events unfold. These events can be visual, inspirational, theoretical, cognitive, comparative, theoretical or simply anecdotal. Inevitably the visual diary (perhaps also known as a 'designer's handbook') forms part of the thumbnail to mock-up to design trajectory, but it is the written diary approach that is also important as this provides two research moments. In the first place, the *reflective* strategy is at play – the designer, operating in specific time and event moments, captures the decision-making thoughts as they unfold in the time that they unfold. Critical to the approach is that this must not be done retrospectively as this might induce editing, censoring or establishing of trajectories of thought too early in the process. Furthermore, that which is captured in the journal might engage with any or all three of the 'cultures' as outlined about, namely idiosyncratic culture, culture of practice, and culture of gate-keeping. These three strands of information or raw data will form the pool from which the new knowledge will emerge. (Speculatively it can be posited that the designer, following a standard qualitative method, 'conducts' a series of interviews with himself or herself to capture the lived experiences of doing the design.)

In the second instance, the journals provide the grounds for the reflexive process where the researcher (from the vantage point of having completed the design) can analyse the raw data to search for trends and tendencies amongst the masses of information (written and visual) captured during the process. It is in these times that the new knowledge or epistemological gain percolates to the surface as a result of this reflexive analysis *post* design.

It is important to note that such new knowledge might fall into any one (or more) of the three cultures enumerated. It might be, for example, that the designer discovers something about himself or herself (a style flaw or strength, a clinging to a dominant approach and so on, for example); it may be that the new knowledge delivers new insights into design strategies, methods, processes or technologies, or it might be that the new knowledge engages critically with the established parameters of critique, questioning validity or certainties, for example. The autoethnographic approach, if it is adhered to, provides evidence of such shifts.

It can be argued that the strengths of this method lie in three areas. Firstly the centrality of the designer with his or her proclivities, experience and 'talent' is proclaimed and validated. However (and

secondly), in contrast, this centrality is tempered by the inevitability of engaging (in triangulation mode) with the culture of practice and the culture of gate-keeping. Finally, the method insists on a large range of rich data that is to be captured and to be analysed in pursuit of the gathering of evidence for new knowledge. It is often in this rich data that the veins of new knowledge are to be found.

Conclusion

This article has argued that there are strong parallels between the research process and the design process. It has, however, argued that the design process is potentially 'messy' and therefore a method needs to be sought to capture evidence from the process as the design process emerges and unfolds. Such a method is autoethnography. The article posits that new knowledge or epistemological might be found in many areas, but the article has focused on the three areas encapsulated by the notions of the culture of idiosyncrasy (the individuality of the designer), the culture of practice (the demands and context of the medium) and the culture of gate-keeping. In this last cluster the commission of the design might be included. Fundamentally the article has argued that it is the design process itself that generates the new knowledge, and not the design product and its embedding in society. If this is so, then autoethnography provides an excellent research method to capture that new knowledge.

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Short Biography

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