

Journal of Media Practice Symposium 4
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Information for participants

Abstracts

John Adams

The Assessment of Practice

John will preface a discussion on the assessment of media practice with some contextualising and thought-provoking comments.

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Rozina Breen

Teaching Radio: Tensions between theory and practice - pedagogy and instinct.

“As with many other areas of the media, there is a certain amount of hostility between those who work in radio and those who theorise about it: practitioners tend to regard grand theories as irrelevant and theorists are often unaware of the pressures under which broadcasters have to work.” Fleming (2002:4)

So, what happens when practitioner turns theorist - where do our loyalties lie and what expectations do we carry both of ourselves as well as from others?

Teaching radio in higher education, I often find myself reciting a mantra to students: *Radio production requires pragmatism and creativity, but also integral to good programme-making is the importance of ‘feeling’ one’s work.* Pragmatism is relatively easy to deal with. As a recent convert to academia - having left my role as a senior current affairs producer with BBC Radio 4, I’ve learned not to be so hostile towards the theorists. Textbooks are certainly not irrelevant and often inform our practice. Indeed, theory guide us towards the essential methodology required in any storytelling exercise.

But is it possible for the theorists to inform about emotion? Practitioners of radio, by the very nature of what we do, necessarily ‘feel’ our work - we are held hostage by the narrative, what we ourselves are learning about a subject, and of course this decides which voice we use in telling the human story:

“We navigate the world taking in not just the nominal, stated, surface-content of spoken information, but also unstated, subtextual emotional cues, forceful but nearly untranslatably subtle information contained in tone of voice. This information about personality comes to us through phrasing and melody. Without even being acknowledged, it comes to us that this or that character we are listening to in a radio piece is in an emotional state of: ferocity, or silliness or fury, despondence, detachment, lightheartedness, confusion, ignorance, authoritative confidence—these are just a few samples among many delicate, elusive emotional circumstances that determine a listener’s take on the meaning of a piece as surely as any list of concrete facts does.” Kramer (2006)

As teachers of radio, how should we best serve our students? Is it possible to instruct on ‘feeling’? Can ‘subtextual emotional cues’ be learned or are they simply hardwired? And what impact will such pedagogical enquiry have on the already rocky marriage between theorist and practitioner?

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- Kramer, Mark (2006) *Manifesto - Voice and Meaning*, [The Transom Review](http://www.transom.org/guests/review/200611_mark_kramer/), Volume 6 Issue 4. [internet article] http://www.transom.org/guests/review/200611_mark_kramer/ Mark Kramer is Founding Director, Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism - The Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University.

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Jeremy Bubb

Angels With Folded Arms

This presentation will discuss aspects of Practice as Research in direct relation to a short film written and directed by Jeremy Bubb. It uses multiple images and makes reference to a range of aesthetic forms to tell the story of an irreversible moment in the life of two young lovers.

The session will start with a screening of this short film and look at other examples of practitioners who have arguably stepped 'outside the outcomes of research' to create a dialogue with works and/or authors who have influenced their own practice. The question will be explored as to whether a response to a 'work' that is a 'work' in itself can be an embodiment of new knowledge, and if so, can this be justified as research offering a "contribution... to the advancement of knowledge, understanding and insight." Additionally, the presentation will address the question of whether 'words are the most efficient means of establishing a context', or are there other options open to practitioners.

Angels With Folded Arms (mini DV, 8 minutes) describes a scene from a 14th century diptych. Jack thinks this shows the heavenly creatures with something to say but can't. Is this also true of Amy, his long standing girlfriend who has just returned from a research trip in France?

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- Biggs, M A R(2003) *The Role of 'the work' in Research*, PARIP conference paper. <http://www.bris.ac.uk/parip/biggs>

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Susanna Capon

Time to take stock

Looking back to the inaugural 1997 conference where we first debated the issues surrounding Media Practice, it is now time to take stock. What have achieved? How far have we come? Are the major battles (as we saw them then) fought and won? Or are we still ploughing a sometimes lonely furrow? In a decade which has seen enormous changes in the industry

around us, how have we adapted in terms of what we teach and what we research? Are there new mountains to climb or is the record still stuck on that old practice/theory divide groove?

This paper aims to explore these questions and will take a look at the history of media practice in H.E, survey the present situation and even perhaps point the way to some new ways of doing things in future.

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Charlotte Crofts

Practice Research, Knowledge Exchange and HE

This paper will use my current practice research project on the impact of digital technology on feature film production to reflect on the implications of the current KTP or Knowledge Exchange agenda on media practice research and education.

In the course of making my film I have not only interviewed key figures at Panavision, Technicolor and Kodak, but also been offered contributions in kind, including camera hire, film stock, developing and printing, in support of my project.

My research into digital technology also included beta-testing the, at the time, novel 'prosumer' technology of HDV. My institution funded the purchase of an HDV camera for my research in part as a way of prototyping possible directions for future equipment purchasing for the undergraduate programme. Indeed, many institutions that teach media practice are setting up long term relationships with multi-national companies, or organizing events with industry partners (such as the Sony sponsored Matrix East Research Lab at UEL, Bournemouth Media School's Sony HD TV studio, the D-cinema conferences – Westminster and Megapixel - Anglia Ruskin and the Film and Digital Media Exchange).

But, do we need to question these relationships? Is it healthy for an academic institution to be in the pocket of these companies? What does it mean for the objectivity of the research? Should media and cultural studies disciplines strive to be different from business schools and the medical/pharmaceutical model? Should I reject free film stock from Kodak?!?

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Tony Dowmunt

Writing Nearby: notes on the film/text relationship in my practice-based PhD

Starting from Trinh T Minh-ha's well known statement from the commentary of *Naked Spaces - Living is Round* ('I do not intend to speak about, Just speak nearby') I will show a clip from my film *A Whited Sepulchre*, then talk about some of my preliminary thoughts about the writing that I'm currently working on, that will combine with the film to (hopefully!) make a

PhD. At the moment, these thoughts focus around two main issues: the correspondences and contradictions between film and text production, and the implications of my using of autobiography and video diary making as research 'methods'.

Tony Downmunt

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Roy Hanney

Thinking, Fixing, Delivering: planning and delivering student-led creative projects

For Media Practice Educators, the use of student-led 'projects' as an educational tool is fundamental to our pedagogic approach. Yet within this community there is little critical engagement with the question of what is a 'project' or the nature of the process of managing and delivering a 'project'. Amongst the student population there is even less understanding of these concepts and little practical experience of what is required of them to work effectively as part of a group or team to deliver a project. For the author the use of small-scale project management techniques has facilitated a number of 'live projects' on an undergraduate programme in media production and this paper will explore the way in which this approach has impacted on the management, delivery and assessment of student-led practical projects in the field of media practice. The experience of delivering a project utilising formal project management methodologies offers student the opportunity to gain employability skills that match the kind of 'real world' processes found in the creative industries. However it is apparent that formal project management methodologies, such as the UK Government approved PRINCE2, would overwhelm students with a burden of paperwork out of proportion to the endeavour required to complete small-scale media practice project. Consequently there is a need to determine the optimum level of detail required for planning small-scale projects such that the method or approach can be easily embedded within the framework of a module. Reviewing basic terminology such as quality, creativity and innovation provides a framework for consideration of the optimum balance between managing 'process' and 'delivery'. A key factor when discussing the administrative burden that comes with implementation of creative projects for real clients in an environment where the project team may have little if any practical experience of delivering projects. The adoption of PRINCE2 as a conceptual, process driven framework rather than a didactic overarching model allows for a flexible and reflexive approach to small-scale project management and the production of a level of documentation that supports student learning and enhances the quality of the project output. This 'lean', 'lite' or 'small-scale' process model enables the student project team to gain transferable skills; enhances employability; offers tutors a clearer insights into the process of student productions and gives confidence to employers that students can deliver effective 'live projects'.

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Trevor Hearing

A Midsummer Night's Video Dream

(presented the day before Midsummer)

Federico Fellini said "Film is a dream for the waking mind". Steven Spielberg has recently expressed interest in experiments into plug into the nightly cinema in our skulls. In this video paper I use my performative practice as an academic film-maker to explore and document connections between our sleeping and our waking minds and consider how this could be developed academic video practitioner. What might be the constraints which would influence "academic" or "professional" directions in developing this idea? What might be the different directions for each trajectory? And how does this illuminate the different discourses of consciousness in my own life as an academic and a programme-maker?

There is a well-rehearsed and significant body of theoretical work relating dreams to art, literature, and film but very little practice exploring this territory. Recently in popular culture film makers have begun to explore lucid dreaming (*Waking Life*, *Pan's Labyrinth*, *The Good Night*) and comparisons have been drawn with interactivity in 'Second Life'. Using a performative methodology I reflect on how the practice of personal image making could contribute to understanding and analysing the process of creativity in the production of the moving image. I also ask how I might roll out the research to develop it as a nation-wide interactive video practice experiment which could be disseminated through television and the web as a popular culture "dream night" experience for a wider audience.

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Tapani Huovila

Visualisation as a message

Traditionally, it has been considered that a story (a) gives information as a text or as a speech with a photo, but I want to stress that a story gives information also (b) with the layout of the story and the whole newspaper or internet page.

How to make practical layout work or study visual design in mass communication? I see that we can approach the theme from general "rules" of visualisation, from photo to layout and design and even to moving picture, video. The page in a newspaper can be understood like a photo - it is only more abstract. Accordingly, the photo, newspaper and internet pages are based on the same general rules of the visualisation and so it is reasonable to teach and research them in the same context.

I try to outline general principles which give us the tools to analyse layout and design in practical work and on the level of society.

(1) We have a message we want to send. The visualisation can support our message or it can be a message itself. Firstly, we have to find and decide what is the main idea of our message. The headline and the visualisation reflect the main idea of our story.

(2) Secondly, after we have got the main idea, we have to plan what is the most suitable visual form to express our message. The visual idea for the photo, for the story layout or the internet page layout has to be found. We can use the language of the lines and form, tension, colour, rhythm, balance, photo and layout composition, directions of the elements etc (see the

'Message of Composition', attached as an Appendix in this document) to express our message.

(3) Thirdly, we can study the message of our story and visualisation on the level of society (see the appendix Influence in society). How have we defined the names for our signs (de Saussure)? Is our visualisation an icon (direct), an index (indirect) or a symbol (Peirce)? What kind of messages do we have in our composition on the level of individual recipient or on the level of society and culture? What kind of associations there are in our composition? We can get help for example from the study of sociology, gestalt psychology, psychoanalysis or the study of gender.

(4) Finally, we can try to guide recipients to look through the elements of our photo or page in a given order. We place a main element, which readers notice firstly and from which readers go to second element and so on. We can not do this exactly, but we can try to make paths along which readers can notice all of the stories in publication.

* * *

I have written an English language book "Layout as a Message" (1996 and 2000), a Finnish language guide book for newspapers "Sanomalehden ulkoasuopas" (1998, together with Hannu Pulkkinen and Matti Taipale) and "Look" - visuaalista viestisi" (visualise your message, 2006). Layout as a Message can be read on my web page (<http://users.jyu.fi/~huovila/lay.html>).

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Helen Kennedy
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A professional obsession: keeping up and the fast art of web design

How can we be research-active whilst simultaneously keeping up with the fast art of web design? It's a question we ask ourselves a lot. We ask it because we are academics, teachers of web design, and occasional web designers. We ask it because web design as we learned it over 10 years ago bears little resemblance to web design as it is practiced today. And because, in amongst our teaching, research and media practice activities, it is expected that we will find the time to keep up. Keep up, and sometimes catch up.

We have found a way of squaring the media practice/teaching/research relationship with Inclusive New Media Design, our current research project, which takes as its object of study the work of web professionals. Inclusive New Media Design aims to explore the best ways of encouraging web designers to make websites which are accessible to people with cognitive disabilities, through a series of workshops, interviews and observations. With its focus on web accessibility and *cognitive* disability, as opposed to motor or visual disability, our project engages with best practice in a cutting edge, hitherto unexplored and challenging area of web work.

A concern to "keep up" is what, in part, motivates our research subjects – all practicing web professionals – to participate in our project. Concerns about keeping up are prevalent amongst web designers, as suggested by Kotamraju (2002) and Gill (2007). For our research subjects, one way of addressing this concern is through the concept of professionalism, which

informs the diverse strategies they adopt for keeping up and the different kinds of learning in which they engage. In this paper we unpack what being a web professional means to our research subjects.

Our findings about keeping up and learning in web design have implications for how we communicate with web designers about making accessible websites, whether they are first year undergraduates or seasoned professionals. They suggest that multiple, mobile and pervasive learning materials, that can be accessed in flexible bursts and in a range of locations, might be an effective strategy for disseminating findings and influencing practice.

Our work on Inclusive New Media Design also influences how we teach. In this fast-changing field, our findings suggest that rather than equipping students with software skills, what they need to learn is how to be professional, how to keep up, how to learn. Passing on the strategies adopted by our research subjects is one way of disseminating our findings amongst our students. Passing them on through podcasts, microblogging and other innovative teaching methods is a way of allowing our research findings to shape our teaching.

We also believe that our findings about the importance of professionalism and the meaningfulness of this concept to web practitioners are significant to the wider media research community. Not only because they contribute to the growing body of literature and research focusing on media work, but because they offer insight into a “professional obsession” to keep up, surely faced by all media practitioners.

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Paul Kerr

Silent Voices, Absent Viewers: Making History Hip

This paper is about how a proposal to make a Channel Four documentary about the last legal voyage by a British slave ship (before the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807) became a programme about a young British black man’s search for the truth about his slave ancestor. Part of the reason for this shift – from past tense to present tense, from social history to genealogy, was the discovery of this descendant – a dreadlocked youth drugs worker – C4’s ideal on-screen protagonist and, at the same time, the channel’s ideal viewer/demographic.

This paper is a case study of the last television documentary I produced before becoming a full time academic, “The Last Slave”, broadcast on Channel Four in the UK in March 2007. The paper traces the programme from initial idea to television screen in an attempt to explain why it took the form it did – and by implication addresses British public service broadcasting’s recent retreat from History on Television towards the ‘experiential’, from past tense to present tense. It will argue that this retreat is a symptom of public service television’s wider accommodation with the aesthetics of so-called ‘reality television’ in an attempt to attract an audience which is being lost. The paper will situate the documentary, ‘The Last Slave’, within the modes of ‘experiential’ history currently dominating commissions in the area of British television history.

More specifically it follows how what set out to be an oral history of the voyage of one British slave ship became, first, the story of one slave and then, the story of one young descendant of that slave following in his ancestor’s footsteps. In unravelling that process it reveals the pressures placed on the production by commissioning editors under pressures for ratings – and the right demographic – of reduced budgets, and consequent multi/de-skilling and

recruitment and reliance on ever younger, less experienced and less expensive crews, of independent production companies struggling to survive a shrinking PSB market, of the need to make international sales, of scheduling, of the impulse to imitate successful formats and of 'blacklisted' and, equally worryingly, what might be called 'white-listed' creative staff.

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Diane Myers

Zen and the art of access – the challenges facing documentary makers in securing access to organisations and contributors

This paper seeks to examine the methods by which documentary access is achieved and the issues facing programme-makers in their relationship with contributors and organisations in access-driven documentaries. In exploring how securing access affects relationships within the production process, a distinction is made between the final construct which emerges as the documentary and the process of access itself.

It puts forward the hypothesis that with the rise of reality television and docusoap, securing "access" has become a lost art, but that its methods are nevertheless of value in making sense of the world and may also be relevant to academic inquiry.

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Chris Paterson
Anna Zoellner

The efficacy of professional experience in the ethnographic investigation of production

This paper addresses the general problem of gaining access to media production settings for ethnographic research, and discusses evidence that professional media production experience in the field of study is increasingly becoming an essential criterion in gaining access for long term ethnographic investigations. Numerous authors have commented on the dearth of new research from the site of media production (Deuze, et al, 2004; Bockowski, 2002;; Cottle, 2000, 2007; Singer, 2008). They have variously noted how this leaves the academy unformed about production especially in regard to production environments experiencing considerable change to due globalization, conglomerate control, convergence processes, multi-skiling, and the increasing digitization of production (and there are few this excludes). Authors have explored various difficulties of access to media production settings (Puijk, 2008; Batabyal, 2007; Garcia, 2004; Schlesinger, 2000). While only Batabyal specifically addresses the question of the impact of professional experience, various authors have hinted at its value, especially as a means of encouraging greater disclosure from the

media professionals whose work practices are being examined. The authors will explore dilemmas posed by such a decrease in scholarly distance, such as the potential loss of objectivity and an increased researcher effect due to intimacy with research subjects. The question of prior experience also relates closely to the classic quandary of participant observation versus 'pure' observation of media production. Each author has conducted ethnographic research on production as a former practitioner; the paper will reflect on those experiences and the extent to which prior professional experience facilitated or inhibited ethnographic investigation. This paper is intended more as a discussion of methodological issues relevant to the overlap between the roles of media practitioner and media researcher, but it will also be informed by comment from a wide range of contemporary media production researchers informally surveyed by the authors under the auspices of the IAMCR Working Group for Media Production Analysis. At a time when numerous obstacles inhibit new production research (Paterson, 2008), it is vital to consider various means through which new production research into a fast changing media production environment might be facilitated.

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Sylvie Prasad

Who are Ya?

A mobile film directed by Sylvie Prasad
Running time: 7mins

" Masculinity has somehow acquired a more specific, less abstract meaning than femininity... You like football? Then you also like soul music, beer, thumping people, grabbing ladies' breasts, and money... It's easy to forget that we can pick and choose"

Nick Hornby (1992)

This work is an exploration of belonging, of what Nick Hornby has described in his book *Fever Pitch* as losing one's identity in a parallel universe. The parallel universe he is referring to is

Arsenal football club. Hornby sets out a complex and often contradictory view of masculinity through football and for a mother trying to understand the transformation of a son into *Gooner*, a point of reference for the work.

This is also a work about mobile technology and a new kind of documentary making by young people. Everything from the mundane to the profound can be captured digitally and repeatedly. The camera phone has revolutionised the style and form of communication; made possible a visual conversation. Moreover, this work embraces the sociability of image making, the exchange and the sharing and its role in constructing a sense of identity and belonging.

Current discussions on the use of mobile phone technology in film-making polarise questions of aesthetics and debate the possible emergence of new cultural patterns. This presentation will seek to further an exploration of these ideas and its relevance for teaching and learning.

Sylvie Prasad has published work on celebrity and cultural politics. Her work as a photographer has been exhibited widely including a residency at Charlton Athletic FC (2000), *Shadow Cities* (2004) and *Night Flight* (2005) at Museum Man and the Institute of Visual Arts Liverpool, UK. Her first short film *Who are Ya?* (2008) was screened at the Filmmobile International Conference and at the London Gallery West.

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Sally Reardon

Parallel Universes: complexifying what journalists tell researchers.

Three years ago when I entered academia after 15 years working in television news I felt, as Barbie Zelizer describes '...like I'd entered a parallel universe. Nothing I read as a graduate student reflected the working world I had just left' (Zelizer 2004).

Why is this? One of the issues is the shortage of research into news production – an area Simon Cottle describes as under-theorised and under-researched (Cottle, 2003). Part of this problem is lack of access to newsrooms. This leaves the interview with a journalist as a vital tool for a researcher, not only because of limited time allowed inside the process but also because a lot of the editorial decision-making process happens inside the producer's head and can be difficult even to identify, let alone analyse.

However, interviews have too often been treated as a transparent transferral of information which has then been used selectively to support a pre-existing theoretical point while material which does not fit is ignored or classed as a kind of journalistic false consciousness. This can lead to a selective misunderstanding and misinterpretation of data.

In media research discourse analysis has been widely applied to the output of journalism. However, there has been less application to what practitioners say about this output. My research hopes to remedy this gap. For this project I am interviewing journalists from a number of UK television news producers including BBC, Sky and ITN, and analysing the discussion about day-to-day routine, story selection and exclusion, and production processes. The framework for this analysis takes two forms; firstly, a discursive psychology approach associated with Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell (1987) to examine *how* journalists explain their working practices and professional identity; secondly, a more textual discourse analysis to look at *what* the content of the 'facts' uncover about current television news values.

I will argue this detailed kind of analysis leads to a more complex understanding of what journalists are communicating when they talk to researchers. Furthermore when applied, as above, it opens a window into the discursive construction of news values and journalistic identity. This could help bring Zelizer's parallel universe closer to those teaching the next generation of media students.

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Lizzie Thynne

The Finlandization of Memory

In July of this year Lizzie Thynne's mother was admitted to a care home. Through the objects, letters and photographs left in her flat Thynne started a video exploration of her mother's life history as well as her own using these remnants of her childhood and her mother's past. The paper will use clips to explore Thynne's approach to this work in progress.

In trying imagine the life that is now reaching its end, she makes connections between an individual story, marked by forced migration and breakdown and wider historical experiences of war and exile, specifically the displacement of the Finnish people from the isthmus of Karelia. Thynne's mother was born in Terijoki (Zelenegorsk, now part of Russia) and her family was evacuated from her childhood home when the Soviets invaded during the Winter War in October 1939. Her mother's father, a member of an advance 'Panzer' unit was subsequently killed in the Continuation War as the Finns, now 'co-belligerent' with the Germans, pushed into the Russian territory of Eastern Karelia. The film incorporates the family's diverse memories of these traumatic events, inflected by the subsequent cultural memory of the war and its aftermath. Unlike the other smaller Baltic neighbours of the USSR, Finland remained independent and did not become a Soviet satellite. However, it was the only capitalist country that had a border with Russia and the need to placate Soviet paranoia resulted in what was known as 'Finlandization' and the surrender of Karelia was one of the events silenced in national memory for half a century. The end of the Soviet Union has in recent years resulted in a rearticulation of this history and the revisiting of their old homeland by the displaced Karelians.

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Anna Zoellner

“We need a certain angle!” - An ethnographic study of the development process of television documentaries

This paper addresses the development process of documentary programmes and explores how production factors influence the creation of documentary content. In the context of global economic integration and liberalisation, cultural production has been dramatically transformed, altering the production context and broadcasting environment for documentary producers. The introduction of new communication technologies and the development of a global television market place for documentary programmes have added to changes in documentary production. As a result not only the production but the content of documentary has changed, visible for example in the rise of reality- and celebrity-based non-fictional programming and the dominance of constructed and formatted programming. This paper focuses on the power of the producer to shape media content and asks how this power is negotiated within the current broadcasting commissioning system.

Drawing on literature in media production, cultural production and documentary theory, the paper distinguishes production influences on three levels: the inter-organisational, the organisational, and the subjective level, and analyses their impact on the development of documentary television content.

Across these three levels, this research project analyses the decision-making processes during the development stage of independent documentary production prior to commission, and asks how decisions about programme content are made and why specific content is selected for development. In the tradition of ethnographic media production studies, a combination of media ethnography and semi-structured interviews is applied to answer these questions. Two independent production companies in Great Britain and Germany form the basis of a two-month participant observation complemented by interviews with media practitioners.

This paper will outline the applied research design and discuss methodological implications before addressing initial findings of the research project which is currently in the ethnographic fieldwork stage. These initial results confirm an editorial power bias in favour of the commissioning editor, and highlight the influence of time and the pressure for success on media workers and their products. In addition, the main influences on the selection of specific contents are discussed.

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Appendix

[insert Huovila diagram 'Message of Composition']