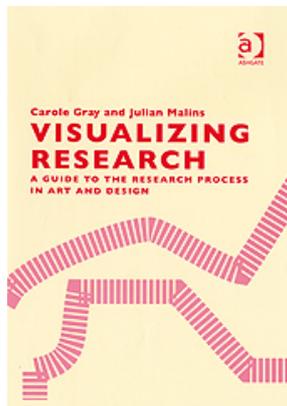


CQUniversity, Australia

Donna Lee Brien



Carole Gray and Julian Malins

Visualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design

Ashgate Publishing, Farnham UK & Burlington USA, 2004

ISBN: 978-0-7546-3577-2

230 pp

Carole Gray and Julian Malins' *Visualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design* was published in 2004 and has been available since then in print and more recently in e-book format. Although this means that this important early guide to creative arts research has been available for some six years, and there have been considerable developments in our collective understandings of practice-led and practice-based research in the intervening period, on a recent reread, I can attest to this volume still having much to offer on this subject. Moreover, although focusing on visual arts and design, this volume has significant relevance for research in the specific area of writing.

The Australian Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research's OECD-derived definition describes research as 'creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man [sic], culture and society' (DIISR 2010: 6). Much of the work undertaken by writers, both inside and outside the academy can, therefore, be classed as 'research' in these terms. Creative writers working in the higher education sector obviously make a contribution to these 'stocks of knowledge' with the content of their scholarly books, articles and theses about writing, but this definition means that creative works can also be assessed as research if they can demonstrate that they also add to these knowledge stocks. It is the conceptualising and processes of creating new knowledge and its demonstration that lie at the heart of what is now understood in universities as creative practice-based research.

The book sets out to guide postgraduate students in Art and Design through this new knowledge generating research process. I especially like how it does this in a detailed and what could be characterised as a logical way. I use the word logical here as, in my experience, this text not only meets many of the questions beginning and emerging researchers have, but does this largely in the categories, and often the order, in which they have them. In a series of chapters, the volume thus guides practitioners into research, via understanding the importance of methodology and mapping the field in order to locate one's own research in that field, defining the research question, deciding on a methodology, and writing a developed research proposal. It then offers guidance on how to manage the research project, including detailed information on how to collect data and evidence and develop claims from these. It then offers guidance on how to evaluate, analyse and interpret this material, giving examples of analysis and tools that can be usefully employed in analysis. Although this discussion is very much situated in art and design creative practice, it is easily applicable to writing projects. A very useful chapter then details the definition of new knowledge and how to recognise it, and then outlines how to communicate the findings of the research project in a thesis. The tenets of this communication can also readily be extrapolated into writing a research article for peer review.

I have personally used this book with masters and doctoral level students in writing in developing and working through their research projects. I have found it, moreover, useful for emerging and established researchers, in its clarity and comprehensiveness. It includes series of tips and hints that I return to again and again, such as suggesting that a thesis may need a glossary as well as a set of keywords. In many cases, much confusion over terminology and how it is being employed in a particular research project can be clarified in such a glossary of terms. In Gray and Malins' words: 'This is all in the pursuit of accessibility and transparency, and to reduce the risk of your research being misinterpreted and/or misunderstood' (174). Many theses that I have examined would have benefited from this inclusion, and following closely the guide to communication of findings outlined in this work.

Another aspect of this book that I like is how it derives from a deep belief in, and promotes, the relationship between research, practice and teaching in the creative arts. This is what makes it a valuable aid for established researchers who are struggling to more comprehensively and efficiently integrate these components of contemporary academic practice. This is especially useful when time to dedicate to the various components of our work is the scarcest commodity we have.

The book includes a large number of diagrams, visual illustrations and other figures (some 45 in total) that are very helpful in explaining the processes and concepts. A useful website <http://visualizingresearch.info> presents colour versions of these visuals. The website also develops and, helpfully, updates a number of features of the book. For instance, each chapter of the book ends with a series of 'reflections and actions' for the reader to undertake in relation to the material explored in that section. The website provides example tasks to extend this resource and, in this, provides especially helpful illustration of areas which can seem complex without detailed examples. In common with many other printed texts which now provide extended

online bibliographies, the website includes links to some of the resources cited in the book.

In an era when practice-based and practice-led research is in the process of becoming more widely accepted as research, Gray and Malins' advice to argue for its worth and virtues: 'clearly and patiently' is further elaborated in the directive that: 'We should not do this defensively, but assertively from a position of self-belief and confidence' (xi). This is still a valid suggestion. This work is, moreover, a solid handbook to assist researchers in producing the kind of research outcomes that back up that argument with evidence, and in demonstrating that they have produced these outcomes.

Works cited

Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR) 2010 *2010 Higher education research data collection: specifications for the collection of 2009 data* at <http://www.innovation.gov.au/Section/Research/Pages/highereducationresearchdatacollection.aspx> (accessed 17 July 2010)

Donna Lee Brien, BEd (Deakin), MA (UTS), PhD (QUT), GradCert Higher Ed (UNE), is Associate Professor of Creative Industries at CQUniversity, Australia. Widely published in the areas of writing pedagogy and praxis, creative nonfiction and collaborative practice in the arts, Donna has an MA and PhD in Creative Writing. Her biography John Power 1881-1943 (Sydney: MCA, 1991) is the standard work on this expatriate artist and benefactor and is still in print, and Donna is also the co-author of The Girl's Guide to Real Estate: How to Enjoy Investing in Property, 2002; and The Girl's Guide to Work and Life: How to Create the Life You Want, 2004 (both with Dr Tess Brady, Sydney: Allen & Unwin). Founding Editor of dotlit: The Online Journal of Creative Writing (2000-04) and Assistant Editor of Imago: New Writing (1999-2003), Donna is on the International Editorial board of New Writing: the International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing (UK) Coolibah (Spain), and the new food studies journal Locale. She is the Immediate Past President of the Australian Association of Writing Programs and Special Issues Editor for TEXT.