

Communicating Art and Design Research

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Abstract

Our aim in this article is to discuss the potential of different types of communication of art and design research. In order to do this we will first challenge the myth that there are subject-specific output formats, or in other words, the idea that exhibitions are particularly suited for the communication of art and design research or that journal articles are particularly suited for the communication of traditional research. Having determined that the format of communication is not subject-specific, we reveal that the meaningful exposition of research is the one that communicates the content that is significant to a community. It is within this framework that we will reconsider the potential that the different exposition formats have for the communication of significant art and design research content.

Keywords

Research assessment, exhibition, output type, art research, design research, publishing.

Mythologies

Prior to discussing the exposition of *art and design* research and publishing *art and design* in academia, we will consider what is an exposition of *any* kind of research and what it is to publish *anything* in academia. In this first discussion, we want to address a preconception that we feel is widely held: that publishing in academia consists in the production and dissemination of books and journal articles. Although this is indeed the most common format of academic output, we want to challenge the idea that it is synonymous with publishing in academia. If one looks at contemporary academia one will find a much wider range of output formats than just these text-based ones, for example academics produce patents and objects and artworks as well as papers and chapters and reports. From our previous experience in a range of different academic cultures we have come to understand that publishing, as an act of dissemination, can occur in a number of formats and communicate various content (Biggs & Büchler 2011b). We have identified environments in which there is a top-down definition of what constitutes academic publishing based on a conventionalization of format, of which Brazilian academia is an example. We have also identified more responsive environments, such as UK academia, in which the definition of what constitutes publishing is constructed from the bottom-up, as a function of the content that needs to be communicated.

The definition of publishing in academia that is adopted by the Brazilian academic community can be inferred from the so-called 'Lattes platform' (CNPq 1999). This is a national database – named after the Brazilian scientist César Lattes – which each researcher populates with all sorts of professional and academic activity. The Lattes is an online resource that can be accessed by the community at large, acting as both an informal peer review system as well as a formal assessment tool towards the production of official institutional rankings. All academic promotions and research funding awards are made based on the curriculum vitae that each researcher keeps regularly updated on their personal Lattes pages. What is interesting to observe in the organization of the platform, besides the impressive efficiency and community endorsement of this system, which contains more than 1.6 million curricula, is how it expresses what Brazilian academia sees as research and what falls outside and can therefore be claimed, at best, as professional practice. The Lattes has the advantage of enabling the researcher to include a wide variety of activities. However the fact that the database makes a distinction between bibliographical output – being that which is traditional, text-based, and used to assess academic productivity – as opposed to technical or artistic output – which is, by exclusion, non-academic professional practice – results in defining for the research community that academic research is synonymous with bibliographic production. In Brazil, academic research is traditional text-based output and is contrasted with professional practice. In our view, the structure of the Lattes platform defines top-down what is publishing in academia because users have to enter their data via a series of drop-down menus, and they cannot create new fields of entry that might better express the academic content of that activity. In practice, a journal article can only be entered under 'bibliographical production' (academic) whereas an exhibition can only be entered under 'artistic/cultural production' (non-academic). The implication, of course, is that the exhibition format cannot contribute academic research content because that kind of content comes only in the format of text-based bibliographical entries. From observing the structure of the Lattes platform we can understand that, to the Brazilian academic community, publishing in academia can refer only to outputs that come in traditional text-based formats, i.e. journals, books and book chapters, scholarly translations, conference proceedings, etc.

In contrast to the Brazilian system, we characterize the UK as having a bottom-up definition of publishing in academia. We base our opinion on the nature of the UK Research Excellence Framework

(REF), previously called the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which is a periodic quality assessment in which institutions submit a representative selection of their best research under subject headings. In 2008, the RAE received submissions under 20 categories of standardized output types which were assessed without preference for type. Within the list one can find output types such as Authored book, Edited book, Chapter in book, Journal article, Conference contribution, Internet publication, Scholarly edition, Research datasets and databases, Research report for external body and Confidential report, all of which would be classified as 'traditional text-based' formats, and therefore academic, under the Brazilian Lattes system. The important difference is that the RAE2008 list also contains as permitted academic outputs, types that the Brazilian system considers to be non-academic professional practice: Performance, Composition, Design, Artefact, Exhibition, Devices and products, Digital or visual media, Patent/published patent application and Software. The fact that this list derives from a consultative exercise in the design stage of the national research assessment, and that the researcher is allowed to submit any of these activities as academic research, is what characterizes the UK academia as a more responsive environment. Furthermore, there is an additional RAE2008 output type called 'Other form of assessable output' which is user-defined and therefore allows the researcher to bypass the question of physical output format and describe the content of the research activity differently (RAE 2009).

RAE2008 assessed national research activity, organized under subject-based Units of Assessment (UoA). However, the categories of output submission were not subject-specific but are equally available to all researchers. This means that exhibitions and journal articles could be, and indeed were, submitted by any subject area. For example, in RAE2008, researchers in the Computer Science and Informatics UoA submitted exhibitions, and researchers in the Art and Design UoA submitted journal articles. This structure has implications for the definition of what it is to publish in UK academia: no longer can one assume that academic content comes only in the format of the journal article or traditional text-based media. In the UK, academic publishing can occur just as readily using non-textual formats, such as exhibitions. Similarly, on the basis of RAE2008, one cannot assume that the format of an exhibition implies that the content is about the subject of art and design because the exhibition format is both available and used in other subject areas.

From this discussion of academic myth and practice, in this article we define 'publishing in academia' in a broader sense, in a way that reminds to the concept of the 'exposition of research'. Instead of focussing on the format of the outcome, the exposition of research focuses on the content of what is being communicated. We claim that the exposition of research not only sets out information and data but also supplies a reading or interpretation of that data. Thus we can say that the data is not just 'exhibited' but instead that the content or meaning is revealed or exposed. This 'exposition' is an intentional act to communicate a particular interpretation and the interpretation of the data constitutes the intellectual property of the author. This is the 'argument' that one finds in academic publishing. If one construes publishing in academia more broadly – as the exposition of research – one can see a variety of formats from which to choose, so the question then becomes: Why do certain communities seem to favour some formats over others?

This question can be answered within a framework that connects meaningful actions to significant outcomes (Biggs & Büchler 2011a). What is meaningful to a community is determined by the values that the community holds. These values determine what the community sees in the world and where their interests lie. Values and beliefs are invisible, often even to the community and individuals themselves, but they reveal themselves as espoused justifications and rationalizations that determine what should be done that is in line with those values and beliefs. Behaviours and actions are the

manifestation of values and emerge in accordance with the espoused doctrine by which a community defines itself.

In the case of the traditional academic community, a core value is the accumulation of knowledge. The accumulation of knowledge in an academic context is not merely the accumulation of quantity but is a selective process in which old knowledge is superseded by new knowledge in the pursuit of an objective truth (Searle 1993). This kind of accumulation is embodied, for example, in the structural arrangements for publishing peer-reviewed journal articles. The link from the core value of accumulation of knowledge to the manifested behaviour of publishing in journals can be traced through a series of espoused values and rationales. For example, there is the espoused value that in order to produce significant knowledge it is necessary to communicate outcomes explicitly. The need for explicit communication leads to the convention that a text-based format must be used because of the apparent precision of language. A journal is such a text-based format, but its significance to the academic community is not merely that it enables explicit communication; it also sustains the core value of accumulation in other ways. For example, the journal's peer review process ensures that the knowledge that is communicated is original, topical and cutting edge. Expressing the contribution in written form also facilitates explicit argumentation for the nature of the original contribution. Furthermore, the frequent publication of issues of the journal means that this format sustains the concept of accumulating new knowledge, in contrast to the book, which establishes and confirms the corpus of existing knowledge in the field. The journal article allows for the dialectical building of new knowledge in a way that challenges and overturns old knowledge through a process of conjecture and refutation (Popper 1963). Thus we can explain the dominance of the journal article format in traditional academia in terms of fitness for purpose, i.e. not only the content of the article but also the format of peer-reviewed journal article publication, facilitates knowledge building that is regarded as significant by the traditional academic community.

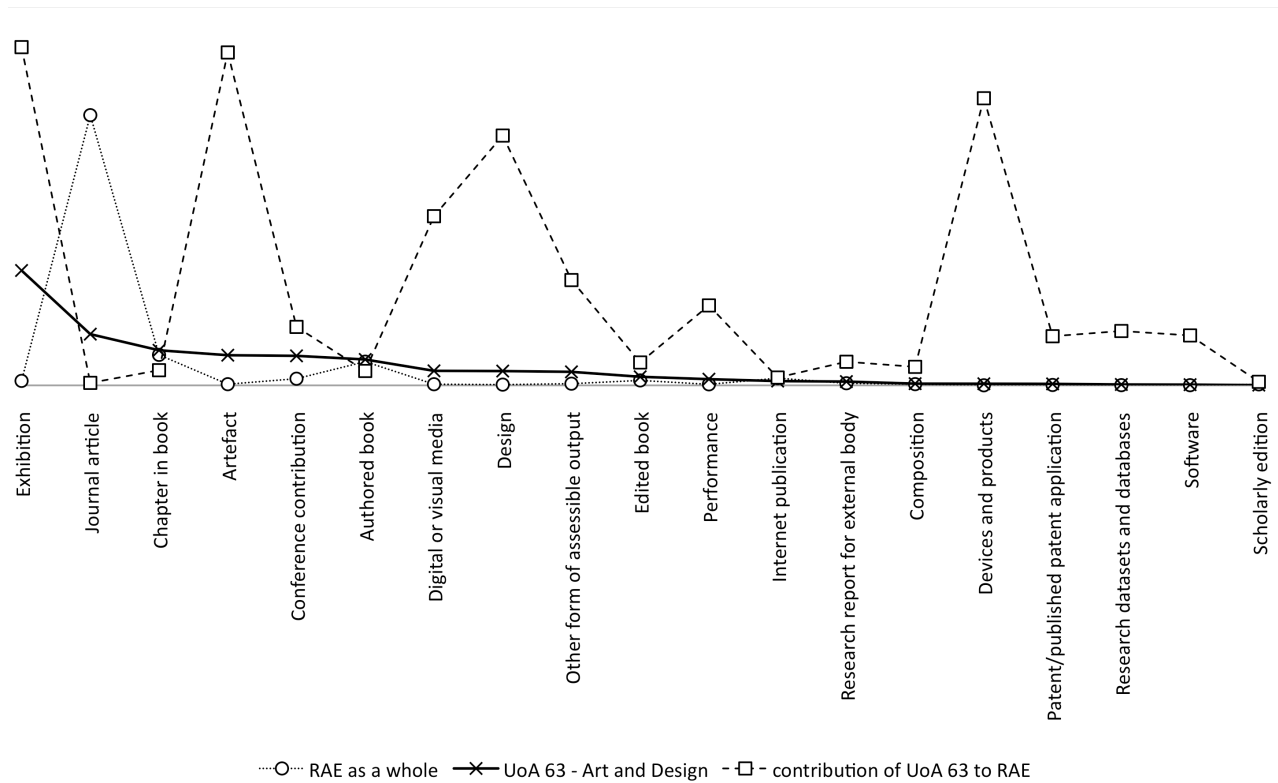
In the case of the art and design community, value is placed on the experience that is provided by the direct encounter with the artefact (Biggs & Büchler 2011a). Experience as a core value is espoused in the necessity of showing, presenting or displaying created artefacts. This leads to the convention that sense-based formats, such as the exhibition or performance, are the most appropriate for fostering the meaningful experience. The fact that the exhibition is primarily a sense-based rather than text-based medium fits the community's core valorisation of the experience, and responds to the understandings and conventions that the community espouses. However the exhibition has other defining characteristics that make it especially suited for enabling the experience through the direct encounter with the artefact. For example, the exhibition displays artefacts in a venue that is accessible to the audience. The exhibition format therefore contributes by enabling first-hand contact of the audience with the artefacts, which in turn enables experience. The exhibition also brings all these elements together in the same space and at the same time, and thereby offers a forum dimension, which further contributes to the communication, expression and encounter, with the work, creator and audience more generally. The forum dimension of the exhibition facilitates a proliferation and surplus of interpretations and experiences, which is regarded as a benefit and a strength in the community (Gadamer 1975). Subsequent exhibitions in the same venue do not render previous ones redundant but instead add to the richness of multiple experiences. Individual experience is meaningful to the community as it is a fruit of the direct encounter with the artefact. Finally, the exhibition allows an unmediated experience of the artefact that has come straight from the studio. The creator has designed an experience in the studio that is embodied in the work and, the theory goes, by moving the work into a public display space and exposing the viewers to it, each

viewer will be able to live an experience. Furthermore, the viewer, through experiencing the work, co-creates its meaning which is also significant to the community. Therefore the exhibition format enables the lived experience in a way in which formats that document, record, reproduce or in some way represent the work, cannot duplicate to the satisfaction of the art and design community.

Realities

In order to understand the relationship between the format and content of expositions in academia, in 2011 we undertook a review of the type of exposition used by academic researchers in the UK. As our sample we chose the publically available data from RAE2008, for three reasons: it is a large database of over 200,000 research outputs representing all subjects in academia, it classifies and describes various output types, and its breadth and depth offers a view of academic practices that is not restricted to the UK. In addition to an analysis of output types we also undertook an in-depth quantitative and qualitative analysis of the outputs submitted under 'UoA63 – Art and Design'. The reasons for selecting this UoA were, first, that it contains art and design broadly understood and second it is the UoA that submitted to the largest number of output categories (19 out of 20). We compiled and analyzed the full population of 7966 outputs that were submitted to UoA63. Our database revealed both the range of expositions used by art and design researchers and compiled qualitative data about their claims for research content.

The line graph and table below will enable us to discuss some of the findings of the study. We have reproduced the graph and table here as a visual guide to the patterns and tendencies that can be observed, and on which we will comment in the remainder of the article. It should therefore be highlighted that although we have included the percentage of use of the 19 output types in the table, the statistical values do not form our focus. The information in the table is included for the interested reader and because it supplies details for the line graph – this visualization we find more relevant to the discussion that follows.



RAE2008 Outputs by Type	RAE as a whole	UoA63 – Art and Design	UoA63 contribution to RAE
Exhibition	1.25%	32.01%	94.24%
Journal article	75.29%	14.27%	0.70%
Chapter in book	8.50%	9.78%	4.23%
Artefact	0.33%	8.41%	92.76%
Conference contribution	1.86%	8.23%	16.30%
Authored book	6.61%	7.22%	4.01%
Digital or visual media	0.32%	4.05%	47.14%
Design	0.21%	3.99%	69.60%
Other form of assessable output	0.47%	3.77%	29.34%
Edited book	1.38%	2.40%	6.38%
Performance	0.29%	1.73%	22.28%
Internet publication	2.01%	1.20%	2.19%
Research report for external body	0.59%	1.06%	6.58%
Composition	0.34%	0.48%	5.16%
Devices and products	0.02%	0.45%	80.00%
Patent/published patent application	0.11%	0.42%	13.69%
Research datasets and databases	0.06%	0.25%	15.15%
Software	0.05%	0.20%	13.91%
Scholarly edition	0.28%	0.08%	0.99%

The line graph exposes three relevant findings for academic publishing and the exposition of art and design research. Our first finding relates to RAE2008 as a whole and describes what was submitted as academic research by UK institutions. We found that the Journal article was the largest single contributor format. If we add to this the second and third largest contributors, Chapter in book and

Authored book, we find that these three text-based output formats account for just over 90% of the total submissions. From this number it would appear that the myth that we set out to challenge in the beginning of this chapter is not a myth at all but is corroborated by the actual practice of academic researchers in the UK. However the myth that we were challenging was not that it *is* thus but that it *must be* thus – that academic publishing is inherently in text-based format and that this is not a choice but a natural state.

This leads to our second finding, which is about the production of art and design research and the use of exposition formats, and is visible in the line that represents the UoA63 submissions. As a counterpart to the myth that academic publishing focuses exclusively on text-based formats, one might correspondingly expect that publishing art and design in academia would focus exclusively on non-textual, 'non-traditional' formats, such as the exhibition. Although the exhibition is indeed the format that was adopted the most in UoA63, the proportion of exhibitions submitted was by no means as expressive as the proportion of journal articles submitted to RAE2008 as a whole. Furthermore, the range of formats used in UoA63 was much more evenly distributed and consisted of a much more balanced combination of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' formats. The formats that were used the most by the art and design community were Exhibition, followed by Journal article. In the next bracket of significant participation we found Chapter in book, Artefact, Conference contribution and Authored book. Finally, in the last bracket of significant participation were Digital and visual media, Design and Other form of assessable output. This is a less dramatic percentile spread if compared to RAE2008 as a whole, and there is an even mix between traditional and non-traditional formats.

The third relevant finding describes the contribution of the UoA63 submission to RAE2008 as a whole. This line shows the exposition format that contributes the greatest volume of submissions from UoA63 to the UK academic scene. In this sense, one could argue that it suggests in which exposition format the art and design community produces most impact on the shape of academia. In other words, academia will take its cue from what is submitted under these categories to define what about the format is publishing in academia. For example, nearly all of the exhibitions submitted to RAE2008 came from UoA63. This means that the art and design community of researchers is defining how the exhibition format contributes research content – how art and design is published in academia through this kind of exposition. Ultimately it means that the UK academia as a whole only has the UoA63 submissions of exhibition to go on when defining publishing in academia through this type of exposition. Likewise, the UoA63 submissions under the Devices and products output type, also almost single-handedly defines for UK academia as a whole what it is to produce research through this format. However, because the art and design researcher community makes little use of this type of output format, it is perhaps less aware of its impact on the definition of the nature of exposition through the Devices and products output type. To a lesser extent the same can be said about the Design and the Artefact output types, i.e. the UoA63 production submitted in these formats impacts very highly on the RAE as a whole. On the other hand, the Journal article – that art and design researchers adopt as their second most popular exposition format – is inexpressive in the RAE2008 production as a whole. This suggests that while there is a role for the journal format for the art and design researcher, what is communicated in that format potentially impacts little on academia because of the inexpressive volume that the UoA63 Journal article submissions represents in the RAE2008 as a whole.

In the second bracket of significant participation we found output types that relate to the 'book' format, be it Authored or Chapter in book, as well as Artefact and Conference contribution. If we

superimpose the graph line for 'RAE as a whole' and the one for 'UoA63' we can see that the lines come close together in these formats. The proximity of the two graph lines expresses that the proportion of use of these formats is comparable in the two communities. However what is perhaps less obvious is related to the profile of each line and requires a comment about how to read each of the lines in relation to their profile. The reading will reveal that although the proportion of use of the book categories is comparable, the significance of these categories to the communities in question is not. The line for the 'RAE as a whole' describes an extreme curve in which the Journal article eclipses all other forms of output. This expresses a fundamental difference between the Journal article format and all other types, in which the former is relevant as a form of publishing in academia, and the others are not. The implication is that the other forms are less significant to the academic community when it comes to communicating meaningful knowledge. On the other hand, the line for UoA63 describes a much more uniform curve and therefore suggests that there is a relationally between the categories. One can consider the Exhibition as the preferred format but the Journal article is also important, as are the next seven output types. In the relational curve described by the UoA63 submissions, the formats used are different but equal in their potential to produce meaningful contributions. We can therefore discuss the categories that are found along the line of the UoA63 submissions in a comparative and relational way.

Meaningfulness

If we turn our attention to the qualitative dimension of our study, we can discuss the potential role of exposition formats for art and design research. Initially, let us address the presence of the 'book' categories alongside the Artefact output type in the second bracket. This made us think of the book as artefact rather than as merely a vehicle for publishing content. Because the art and design audience is used to and indeed values the engagement with artefacts, one of the roles of the book format as an exposition of art and design research is to enable the direct encounter with the artefact. We could speculate that the content of the book is embodied in the book much as it would be in an exhibited work. This description of the book remits to the 'artist's book' output type which is familiar to the art and design researcher. Other forms of book publication come to mind such as the artist's log, the sketchbook, etc. In contrast to the traditional book, the important features of the book-as-artefact are a consequence of its physical form — it is significant that pages are opened and turned in a sequence, when one page is open another page is closed and there is a temporal dimension to the experience of the book format. In contrast, the book-as-content is not wedded to the physical properties of the bound book format. In the traditional book, these aspects are not significant but merely facilitate access to the text string.

The art and design researcher makes considerable use of the Journal article as an exposition format. However, the role of the journal article for the art and design researcher might be different to the role for more traditional research areas as we explained earlier. Sometimes when the art and design researcher uses the journal format they may be doing so for the same reasons that the traditional researcher uses it. At other times we might expect the art and design researcher to be using the journal format to express the values of the art and design community. In such cases, we might expect to find the format being transformed to better fit the needs of the community, in order to enable, for example a sense-based experience. Indeed one can find new forms of journals emerging in the art and design area. The transformations that are being implemented in journals that cater to art and design include open-access, multimedia, user-defined content, forums for discussion, visual-only or visually led submissions and community-led review processes.

The Conference contribution output type is also used to an expressive degree by the art and design community. As in the case of the journal article, the art and design researcher uses the conference format as a vehicle for accessing and testing content against the criticism of an informed audience. This is very much how traditional research areas employ the conference format. However, it is the congregation dimension of the conference format which is perhaps more significant for the art and design community. Given the importance placed by the art and design community on the experiential aspect, the conference as congregation provides an opportunity for the direct encounter. The forum dimension of this format of exposition, in which exchange of ideas is not only possible but also encouraged, contributes to the production of multiple interpretations of the content that is being presented. Furthermore, there is a dynamic between author and audience in the conference format that offers the potential for interaction. We have seen this potential explored by presenters at conferences in the field, in events where the formal divide between author and audience is disrupted in favour of an open floor in which the content is co-created through dialogue.

We identified a tendency in the UoA63 submissions to transform the given output categories so that they reflect what is of value in that format for the art and design community. This was visible in the experimental initiatives in the journals that have been developed in the field, the concept of book-as-artefact and the tailored conference exchange. The 'Other form of assessable output' output type further reveals what is at times insufficient or unsatisfactory about the named RAE2008 output types and also what is instrumental about the concept of output for the art and design community. Under the 'Other' format, the researcher is asked to give a description of the output and also to detail what is relevant about that submission. This information revealed to us that the 'Other' output type enabled the art and design researcher to submit an output of physical type that is not named in the 20 RAE2008 output types, to compile and combine various outputs and output types, and to place emphasis on a particular type of content rather than format of output.

On a practical level, the 'Other' output type is used when the existing named categories do not cater to the output that is being submitted. Certain activities that are relevant as a demonstration of meaningful research but that do not fit under any of the named output types are for example having led a research project, organized a conference/event/symposium, founded/edited a journal, established a professional group/organization/centre. The 'Other' output type is also used to include a mixture of named output types, for example, something described as a funded research project which serves as a vehicle for several journal articles, conference participations, organization of an exhibition and related symposium and which ultimately resulted in the researcher being invited or awarded a residency in a prestigious art and design institution. What is interesting to note about such submissions is that when the relevant details are explained, the researcher often focuses on the relationship between these activities. There is also a focus placed on the output as phenomenon rather than the physical manifestation of the research. This suggests that the experience of the activities is more relevant to the art and design researcher than the actual physical result of it, which might be a journal article, artefact or exhibition.

Whereas for RAE2008, the concept of output is primarily categorized by physical type, the concept of output that the art and design researcher holds is revealed by their use of the 'Other' output type. For example, art and design researchers will include a period of time as a unit of output, as in the case of an artist residency, internship or a research fellowship. The duration of an experience is what makes it meaningful rather than a particular materialized output. There are also some art and design researchers for whom a thematic interest supplies the underlying thread that is of relevance rather than the particular work itself, e.g. an artist who explores the theme of death and his/her project is

populated by a series of different activities and outputs that are related to that theme. Sometimes the creative process or style of working provides the conceptual unit, such as when a series of action paintings are produced or the output of a collaborative project is less important than the participatory experience itself. Art and design researchers also seem to emphasise the importance of the personal exchange that occurs in the process of work and life. This is visible when invitations and commissions result from natural networking and are central to the resulting output – this is especially so when these encounters evolve from common interests and focus. There is also a tendency of the art and design researcher to relate current work to earlier, original and pioneering initiatives with which the researcher was involved. This often highlights the notion of a larger body of work as an indicator of a longer trajectory that defines the individual. Each of these expressions of art and design research focuses attention away from the physical object as the bearer of content to the content itself, but that may still be conceptualized as a coherent unit.

We have discussed the meaningful exposition of art and design research through the discussion of output formats and how art and design is published in academia. At this point we would like to return to the claim we made at the beginning of this chapter about the exposition of *any* kind of research, so that we can conclude what is significant as exposition of *art and design* research. We claimed that exposition remits to content rather than format. This is what we found when exploring what was relevant about the format of the art and design research expositions to the art and design community. The meaningful experience for the art and design community does not come in a particular format but essentially involves exchange and interaction, collaboration and co-creation. It guarantees involvement of an audience and dynamic engagement but does not of necessity include a physical manifestation as output – the output as result is more significant. What is of relevance is the relationship between elements that enables the proliferation of interpretations rather than the singularity of a specific format and its consequently determined content. To achieve effective publishing of art and design in academia, art and design researchers need to construct meaningful encounters between the audience and the content, in which there is an exposition of what is significant about that content.

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