

In July 2018, RMIT Europe hosted a workshop to discuss best practices for creative, impactful research methods. The primary theme was failure. Interdisciplinary participants respond to the following questions:

- How has my work or method failed in a particular project?
- What do we learn from failure?
- What are some of the habitual failure expectations we make when we design our research?
- How does failure play into the process of creative research design and practice?
- How can we think about doing impactful methods and what are some of the failures?

Through series of provocations about the limits of contexts, disciplines, content, ethics and situations, we explored various tropes around failure – failure not just as a creative opportunity for re-calibrating methods, research questions and external expectations, but also as a way of knowing the world, and; most importantly, failure as a vehicle for critiquing larger issues around the challenges of the academic landscape.

The goal of this workshop was to explore our own experiences of research failure, build our conceptual understandings of, and practical solutions for, innovative creative methods that address challenges in doing collaborative, interdisciplinary work.

The participants included researchers from a wide range of disciplines including sociology, anthropology, geography, digital media, design, and creative arts. We began with a series of provocations around certain disciplinary histories and research methods for understanding and learning from failure in the field. Through a series of scenarios and examples, failure was discussed as a generative space for recalibration, adjustment and attunement. These examples were then discussed in terms of various contexts: understanding and working with failure for students; with peers and partners, and; future interdisciplinary collaborative scenarios.



Figure 1

## KEY THEMES

The discussions and creative activities resulted in the following five ways of conceptualising failure:

- Failure as catalyst to interrogate and re-imagine creative research
- Failure as a mode of 'Staying with the trouble' (Haraway 2016) – see Figure 1
- Failure as critical juncture/s – see Figure 2
- Failure as catalyst for attunement/ recalibration
- Failure within the larger academic framework

## IMPACTFUL DIRECTIONS AND MOVING FORWARD

The workshop concluded by mapping ideas for the future of creative methods through a series of iterative collaborative projects under the #FAILURISTS Collective.

**Four initial projects** will be shaped for different audiences – students, researchers and broader publics. The projects will foster research development, impact, publication, and funding:

### CO-WRITTEN MONOGRAPH

The book will seek to provide a series of four rubrics for thinking through failure:

- *Failurists*: Introducing and situating ourselves in relation to creative, interdisciplinary research methods. Failure as critical juncture/s – see Figure 2
- *Positionalities*: The politics of failure — who can and cannot fail, why, where and how it is understood. Ways of relating to, defining, experiencing and working with failure in particular research contexts and careers, taking into account culture, gender and disciplinary edges. Failure within the larger academic framework
- *Situations*: Critical junctures as the in-between space where failures may emerge and the affectual, embodied and ethical issues that arise.
- *Attunement*: Interconnecting the positionality and situations through recalibrating and tinkering, and; specific techniques/method of thinking about and creatively engaging with interdisciplinary methods.

The book will pay attention to the specificities of failure by keeping IN diversity, mess and multiplicity. For example, feelings of shame and anxiety, tactics of forgetting and remembering.

### GRANT APPLICATIONS

The collective will apply for funding through different schemes such as ERASMUS+ and ERC. The ERASMUS+ will continue our postgraduate pedagogical work through facilitating a series of knowledge transmission events in Europe. The ERC will be a transdisciplinary project designed to collate and examine different experiences and understandings of failure in research practice across HASS and STEM disciplines. The aim is to better understand and learn from a range of research failures.

### PLAYING WITH FAILURE CARD DECK

A deck of cards will be produced as a playful tool for designing creative research methods. These cards will illustrate key concepts, techniques, and methods for engaging with failure as a generative tool in interdisciplinary research. They will be printed and available in digital form and shared as provocations and pedagogical aids.

### CARAVAN FOR CURATED CONVERSATIONS

Impactful outcomes from the collective will include a touring socially-engaged artwork called the Caravan for Curated Conversations. (CCC) This moving living lab will showcase, examine and curate experiences of research failure. The curated conversations will take place in a caravan designed to facilitate conversations exploring research practice. The CCC will premiere at the RMIT Engaging for Impact conference in Melbourne in February 2019 (18-25th). Other locations to be confirmed.



## PARTICIPANTS

**Dr Jaz Hee-Jeong Choi** is a Vice-Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow at the Digital Ethnography Research Centre at RMIT. Previously, she was the Director of the QUT Urban Informatics Research Lab, and founded the SIGCHI FoodCHI Network. Her work explores designing with and for care, impactful research methods and co-creative urban transformation.

**Dr Naomi Bueno de Mesquita** works at the University of Leuven, researching Performing Arts, Cultural Anthropology and Geography. Her current research project is called "Field-based learning: multidisciplinary mobile mapping methods".

**Professor Anna Hickey-Moody** is in the School of Media and Communications at RMIT University, Melbourne. She trained in performing arts and social anthropology at the University of Adelaide and has worked with socially engaged arts practice and ethnography since the late 90's. She is an Australian Research Council Future Fellow 2017-2021 and RMIT Vice Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow.

**Distinguished Professor Larissa Hjorth** is an artist, digital ethnographer and the Director of the Design and Creative Practice Enabling Capability Platform. Previously, Hjorth was Deputy Dean, Research and Innovation in the School of Media and Communication (2013-2016) and co-founded the Digital Ethnography Research Centre (DERC) with Professor Heather Horst.

**Dr Kat Jungnickel** is a Senior Lecturer in the Sociology Department at Goldsmiths, University of London. She is Co-Director of the Methods Lab and has recently published a book from her ESRC funded project about the history of cycle wear - *Bikes and Bloomers: Victorian women inventors and their extraordinary cyclewear* (2018 Goldsmiths Press).

**Professor Sybille Lammes** is in the School of New Media and Digital Culture at Leiden University. Her background is in new-media studies and play studies. She has published extensively on play and methodology and is an ERC Laureate Fellow.

**Dr Debora Lanzani** is a Research Fellow in DERC at RMIT and co-editor of *Digital Materialities: Design and Anthropology*. Her research focuses on understanding how digital technology and its processes of imagination, creation and production are being made in the context of Urban Labs / companies in Europe.

**Dr Amparo Lasén** is Professor of Sociology at the University Complutense de Madrid and member of the research group Sociología Ordinaria. Her research focuses on what could be called the digital ordinary: the social implications and entanglements of digital mediations, especially in relationship with affectivity, the configuration of contemporary subjectivities intimacies, and everyday life.

**Professor Annette Markham** is in Information Studies at Aarhus University, Denmark, and Digital Ethics at the School of Communication at Loyola University Chicago. She has served on the executive committee of the Association of Internet Researchers since 2013 and has published widely in the areas of Internet Studies, Digital Identity, Qualitative Methods and Ethics in Research.

**Dr Nina Wakeford** is an artist and sociologist at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her research focuses on the development of visual sociology through inventive methods and practice-led research.

**Dr Clancy Wilmott** is a lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Manchester. She has a background in digital geographies, media studies and cultural studies, with an emphasis on creative and experimental approaches to researching digital everyday lives.

# #FAILURISTS



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