



# London Interdisciplinary Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership

## Advanced Research Methods in Social Sciences

<b>Course Code &amp; Title</b>	LISS233 Turning research failure into finding – what happens when your chosen method doesn't work?				
<b>Convenor(s)</b>	Dr Rhian Scott				
<b>Institution</b>	King's College London	<b>Department</b>		LISS DTP	
<b>Academic Year</b>	2022-23	<b>Term</b>		Summer	
<b>Number of sessions</b>	1	<b>Research Platform</b>	• Qualitative Research (QuL)	<b>Length of Session(s)</b>	2hrs
<b>Day, Date</b>		<b>Start : End</b>		<b>Room Location</b>	
Friday 19th May 14:00-16:00		14:00-16:00		Via Zoom	
<b>Enrolment Links:</b>	Available to book on SkillsForge from <b>Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2023</b> . Click to log in and register: <a href="https://training.kcl.ac.uk/kcl/#/he/dev/eventDetails;em.providerCode=LISS,providerOrgAlias=kcl">https://training.kcl.ac.uk/kcl/#/he/dev/eventDetails;em.providerCode=LISS,providerOrgAlias=kcl</a> Questions? Visit our Training FAQ here: <a href="https://training.kcl.ac.uk/kcl/#/he/dev/eventDetails;em.providerCode=LISS,providerOrgAlias=kcl">Frequently Asked Questions - LISS DTP (liss-dtp.ac.uk)</a>				

### Course Description:

*Too often failed methods are omitted from our research outputs; however, my argument is that the reason that certain methods fail, can provide important learnings about the subject matter itself. The workshop will demonstrate the advantages of a flexible and open methods approach to fieldwork and encourage students to reflect on their own experiences with failed methods, what they did to overcome this, and what this taught them about the research subject. This workshop will provide participants the opportunity to hear from others they might not normally engage with and come away with ideas about how best to turn a failed method into an empirical insight and write it into their research.*

*I will open the workshop with a presentation of my own methods and fieldwork experiences during my DPhil at Oxford University:*

*My initial preference for an immersive ethnography was based on a month of intense reading at the start of my DPhil about the ways in which artists occupy and use their studios, and the ways that studios have been researched to date.*

*There is a small but growing body of work in Geography that draws out the various sensory and felt processes, practices and spaces of creativity and that poses critical questions about where and under what conditions creativity can happen (Fariás and Wilkie, 2016; Hawkins, 2015; 2017; Pratt and Johnston, 2013; Tolia-Kelley, 2012). This work directs attention towards the micro-geographies of creative workspace, including artists embodied apprehensions and everyday experience of creative workspace. Such emergent and contingent readings of creative workspace tend to be grounded some form of immersive ethnographic analysis, such as prolonged participant observation with artists in their workspace. Most of these literatures are developed around academics becoming actively involved in different forms of creative experimentation, curating exhibitions and becoming their own creative practitioners (what Hawkins (2011) calls the 'doings of art') and working with and alongside artists to blur disciplinary boundaries and develop new ways of experiencing*



*creative workspace as sensuous, lived and performed (Dixon et al., 2001; Engelmann, 2017; Jellis, 2015; Ash, 2016; Fariás and Wilkie, 2016; Hawkins, 2015; Straughan, 2016; Houdart, 2016).*

*Such work seeks to develop new immersive forms of participant observation that better allow us to situate creative practice more deeply within its multiple intellectual, affective, sensory, and emotional dimensions and registers. Participant observation is a well-established ethnographic methodology which requires researchers to fully immerse themselves in the field(s) under study and it commonly involves lengthy fieldwork experiences that involve a high degree of exposure to the research subject (Gobo, 2008). Cook and Crang (2007) describe it as a qualitative method that exposes the researcher to the subtleties of relations within a research situation. Participant observation has also been the most popular method to be experimented with, in a series of recent geography-art interventions into the artist's studio (e.g. Fariás and Wilkie, 2016; Foster and Lorimer, 2008; Ursprung, 2008).<sup>1</sup>*

*Its ability to develop stronger sympathetic registers with the research group and a more intimate understanding of the research subject therefore seemed highly contingent with the aims of my DPhil work, which includes examining the experience and meaning of the contemporary artist's studio from the ground up. My aim was to draw on these literatures to and combine them with recent literature on urban precarity, to better understand the ways in which urban precarity can help open up new ways of reflecting on artists' experiences of their studios. Taking the growing precariousness of affordable creative workspace to be symptomatic and expressive of London's broader political economy, my DPhil posed questions about the ways in which this wider urban context (i.e. urban precarity) is made present and palpable to the artist at work in their studio, through its different spatial registers (e.g. atmosphere, affect, materiality, temporality). Why then did the method not feature as part of the research? The answer is that, originally, it did.*

*My initial research proposal involved prolonged engagement with the everyday-ness of the studio. I anticipated that this might involve spending several months working intensely with a smaller group of visual artists, observing and participating in their activities and practices, and gaining first-hand experience of the different sets of social and material relations that unfold in the studio. Despite these intentions, the reality of conducting this method on the ground was quite different. Having made contact with a number of potential participants, despite their interest in the project, they were strongly averse to the prospect of participant observation, in large part for one of two reasons. First, respondents were concerned that this method would be too disruptive to their art practice - the majority of artists involved in this study rent individual studios and expressed a preference for working alone. The few who do share their studio, were concerned about the disruption this method might cause to their peers. The second concern was about the compatibility of participant observation with the artist's flexible and ad-hoc studio routine - concerns were expressed about studio schedules being difficult to pre-plan, and thus the practicality of this method and the impact it might have on restricting the artists own flexibility. Despite reassurances about my willingness to accommodate flexible work schedules, and my offer to shorten the period of participant observation, these concerns persisted. These endeavours were not entirely fruitless; the reasons given as to the unsuitability of participant observation were used to inform some of the interview questions and became an interesting thematic of the study.*

*I will expand on this thematic during the presentation in relation to my empirical chapter 'temporal experiences of the studio':*

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<sup>1</sup> Fariás and Wilkie (2016) present a set of empirical case studies that explore and examine the studio as a key setting for aesthetic and material production. A number of these cases involve geographers working alongside artists in a range of studio-based projects for extended periods of time, which breaks down barriers between geographers and artists and displays a number of geographers as creative artists.



## London Interdisciplinary Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership

### Advanced Research Methods in Social Sciences

- *Artists were only spending small snippets of time in their studios, rather than 'slaving away in their studios' as the literature would have us believe. This turned into an interesting research point and became the grounds for one of the core empirical chapters of my thesis - focussing on how artists experience time in the studio and how this relates to the affordability of their workspace (i.e. they need to work more to cover the costs, and as such are rarely there)*

*The session will close with a set of recommendations and take-aways. These will be co-created with participants during the workshop discussion – some initial ideas are below:*

- *Challenge preconceived ideas of the topic by trialling different methods and examining our assumptions. If all the literature is pointing us to one method, we need to ask how this is shaping our understanding of the subject matter, and how might different methods help to open the research subject up in new ways?*
- *Trial a combination of methods and compare results to build insights about what the 'success' or 'failure' of a particular method tells us about the research subject itself*
- *Consult with participants and ask them which method they feel would work best before going into field*

#### Reading List:

NA

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There is a growing amount of work into understanding and using failure better in our research. Arguably most of this is situated within the International Journal of Qualitative Methods (IJQM). I will draw on this to frame my presentation including:

- Why we need to share our failures: Sousa, B, J., and Clark, A.M., 2019. The ubiquity and invisibility of research failures: a call to share more. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 18 (1-3).
- For positive consequences of failure see: Cohen Miller, A.S., Schnackenberg, A., and Demers, D., 2020. Rigid Flexibility: Seeing the Opportunities in "Failed" Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 19 (1-6).
- Why interrogation of 'failure research' has been limited see: Gregory, K., 2019. Lessons of a failed study: lone research, media analysis and the limitations of bracketing. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 18 (1-10).
- Learning from 'deviant' interviews/when the interview goes off topic see: Jacobsson, K., and Åkerström, M., 2012. Interviews with an agenda: learning from a 'failed' interview. *Qualitative Research*, 13(6), 717-734.
- Failed audio diary method see: Bernays, S., Papparini, S., Namukwaya, S., and Seeley, J.A., 2019. Failed Method? Reflections on using audio diaries in Uganda with young people growing up with HIV in the BREATHER trial. *Qualitative health Research*, 29(5), 719-730.
- Failed video ethnography see: Gregory, K., 2020. The video camera spoiled my ethnography: a critical approach. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 19 (1-9).



## London Interdisciplinary Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership

### Advanced Research Methods in Social Sciences

#### **Eligibility:**

*Open to all PhD students undertaking social science methodologies, however those undertaking qualitative research involving focus groups, immersive ethnography and qualitative interviews are most likely to benefit from the workshop.*

#### **Pre-course preparation:**

*Prior to taking part in the workshop, participants will be given a worksheet to complete. The worksheet is designed to help them reflect on a time where their chosen method may not have worked in the way they intended and what they did to overcome this challenge. After a presentation about my own methods experience and learnings, participants will be invited to share their own experiences in the form of a focus group/workshop.*

#### **Number of students:**

*Minimum number required to run: 7 (this is small enough for a focus group/workshop discussion)*

*Maximum number of places available: 20 (to ensure that everyone gets the opportunity to share their experiences and views)*