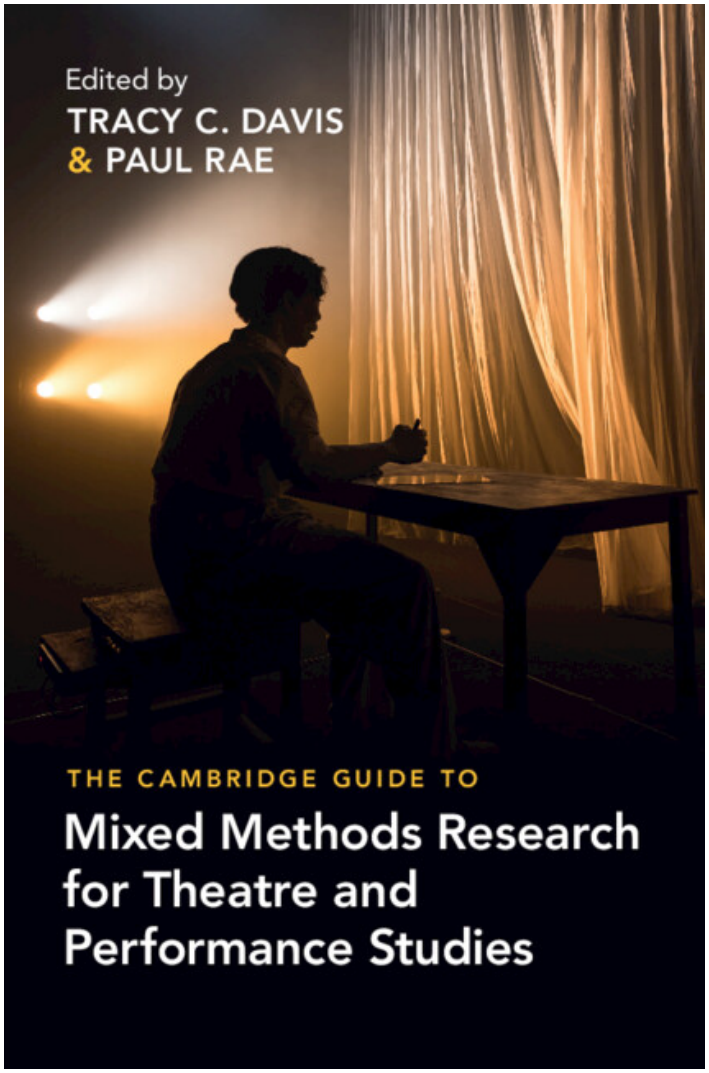
Rezension zu

Tracy C. Davis: The Cambridge Guide to Mixed Methods Research for Theatre and Performance Studies.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2024. ISBN: 9781009294881. 348 Seiten, 85.00 £.

von **Hanna Huber**



In recent years, theatre scholars at German-speaking universities have shown increasing interest in rethinking methods and methodologies, which is demonstrated by the publication of two edited volumes in 2020. (Balme/Szymanski-Düll 2020) Also the Department of Theatre, Film and Media Studies at the University of Vienna, publisher of *rezens.tfm*, hosted a methodological lecture series from 2019 to 2022 to encourage discussion on research methods among staff members and students, and published selected talks in 2023. (Seier/Hulfeld/Schätz 2023) *The Cambridge Guide to Mixed Methods Research for Theatre and Performance Studies*[1] by Tracy C. Davis and Paul Rae resonates with this debate, as it does not only share a wealth of tools for research, but sets a new focus on interdisciplinary intersections and the benefits of "mixing methods".

In the 21st century, interest in Mixed Methods Research (MMR) has flourished across disciplines and countries. According to a *data-driven* definition commonly used in the social sciences, MMR is defined as the meaningful combination and integration of "both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a multiphase program of inquiry". (Creswell/Plano Clark 2007) However, in particular arts-based research, blending traditional research methods with artistic approaches, follows a *conceptual* definition of MMR: the integration of different methodologies and epistemologies, which goes beyond the qualitative-quantitative binary. (Smith/Shannon-Baker 2023) In *The Cambridge Guide to Mixed Methods Research for Theatre and Performance Studies*, every contributor seems to discover, explore, and develop their own concept of MMR. Thus, the book invites readers to embark on a journey to new modes of blending research activities and approaches in Theatre and Performance Studies (TaPS).

The Cambridge Guide is structured in three sections, correlating with the three phases of a research process: The chapters subsumed under the heading "Planning" are dedicated to the conception and design of a research project; "Doing" focuses on methods for garnering information; and "Interpreting" discusses methodologies for explaining research phenomena. Four of the altogether fifteen chapters have the format of dialogues, i.e. conversations between the editors and scholars on methodical approaches of their research projects. The multifaceted guide presents a great variety of methods and methodologies in TaPS; but how is the "mixing" understood and accomplished by the individual contributors?

Ben Spatz interprets methods as ontological and epistemological frameworks. In the chapter "Methods Dialogue: Difference", he describes having experienced his scholarly practice of the humanities and his post-Grotowskian artistic practice as separate streams of research. By bringing together "these two

Diese Rezension ist erschienen in [rezens.tfm] *2024/2 | Veröffentlichungsdatum: 2025-05-15*
https://rezenstfm.univie.ac.at/index.php/tfm/issue/view/2025-1 | doi:10.25365/rezens-2025-1-01

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meanings of the term *research*" (p. 47), Spatz discovered the benefits of moving back and forth between the scholarly and artistic position. "When we mix methods, we are mixing worlds. It is part of ourselves that are being mixed, not only at an individual level, but the worlds that we are part of, that we are, that are part of us" (p. 51). In 2017, Spatz founded the *Journal of Embodied Research*, a peer-reviewed, open-access, academic journal that exclusively publishes video articles – a new format that also investigates and contests the relationship between textuality and audio-visuality in academic research.

This approach of conducting and presenting research outside textuality correlates with Katerina Teaiwa's demand that decolonizing knowledge must go hand in hand with decolonizing the *form*. "Pacific people come from embodied oral cultures, where nothing was written down until Christianity and colonization and Europeans arrived in the Pacific" (p. 273). Teaiwa found an embodied approach to research: Instead of using written notes during field work, "I try to commit everything to memory as I experience it, and I let it settle in my body" (p. 275). During her PhD project on the impacts of colonial phosphate mining on Banaba in Kiribati, she discovered dance as knowledge system that conveyed a different story to what locals were telling her. "The words and the actions were not *in sync*" (p. 273). Teaiwa used dance as embodied research practice; "so the mixed model approach is a creative survival technique as much as an actual method for research or a way of teaching or presenting knowledge. It is my ontological reality: how things are" (p. 276).

Comparably, Julia M. Ritter developed an improvisational, compositional approach, when analysing the immersive experience of the New York City production of *Sleep No More* (*SNM*) in February 2012. In her position as spectator, audience participant observer, and ethnographer, she simultaneously navigated between the roles of analytic instrument and analyst. In this regard, the research process as itself unfolded as "a compositional one that emerges in 'tandem' with the work being researched" (p. 150). Through an additive mixed methods approach, Ritter collated data from her own experience of improvised performance, interviews with audience members, and writings of fans. Internet-based research on *SNM* fans' written and visual responses inspired Ritter to physically improvise to recall sensations and to engage in prose-style writings, which "provided me with opportunities to be self-reflexive about my experiences" (p. 161) and "drove my theory-building" (p. 162). Her work is exemplary for combining creative ways of analysis as valid approaches to enquiry, which she describes as "Lived Bricolage" (p. 146).

Also Natalie Alvarez uses the concept of bricolage, when describing the field research conducted for her 2018 book *Immersions in Cultural Difference*: She draws on Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln's idea of the "methodological bricoleur-theorist, who moves within and between multiple overlapping paradigms, methods, and perspectives in order to get at competing visions and understandings of a given phenomenon" (p. 119). Witnessing encounters between soldiers and actors playing Afghan villagers during immersive military training exercises, she used intersecting discursive fields (e.g., affect theory, postcolonial theory, ethical philosophy) as interpretative frameworks to explain her observations. Alvarez describes her research experience as not merely a shifting between disciplinary and theoretical vantage points, but an "overlaying of frameworks" (p. 120), and notes, "I've come to recognize that qualitative methods are inherently mixed" (p. 119).

Several contributors experience the "mixing" in an overlap between the research activity and the activity researched. Julius Bautista investigated self-inflicted physical pain of the *namamaku* (ritual nailees) during the annual commemoration of Christ's passion in the Philippine province of Pampanga. Relating to Dwight Conquergood's concept of "co-performative witnessing", Bautista joined the rehearsals and performance in the role of San Juan and observed that "the proximal intimacy prioritized by a radically empirical approach avoids the objectification of research subjects by directly sharing in their temporary and sensory world" (p. 182). He experienced his body being "both the instrument and the key to understanding" (p. 180), comparable to Ritter who describes her position as both "analytic instrument and an analyst" (p. 150).

When describing their projects, some authors do not explicitly use the term "Mixed Methods Research"; it is thus left to the readers' interpretation. In Tony McCaffrey's contribution on Different Light Theatre, an ensemble of learning-disabled artists in Christchurch, I view his understanding of MMR in the interchangeability of who is researcher and who is researched. Since 2005, the theatre company has pursued and presented research in different contexts. After a performance of *The Lonely and the Lovely* at the Disability Studies in Education conference in 2013,

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the actors went amongst the audience of academics with questionnaires. McCaffrey notes, "[t]his was an attempt to flip the script on the expected research relationships between non-disabled researchers and disabled research subjects" (p. 264). The integration of research activity permits learning-disabled artists to give and take voice. McCaffrey convincingly demonstrates how "Different Light's research-informed performance feeds performance research" (p. 266).

Other contributors understand MMR as the cross-over of different research traditions. Michael McKinnie points out, "[e]very field has observational biases, in terms of both its predispositions to look for data and its understanding of what the best position for perceiving that data will be" (p. 74). Therefore, practising interdisciplinarity – borrowing "moves and trick" from other disciplines – is useful because "they make disciplineary gaps generative for studying the real world" (p. 85). Jonas Tinius discusses the benefits of using "fieldwork as method" (p. 199) for investigating theatre and theatricality, performance and performativity.

Only few contributors follow a *data-driven* definition of MMR: Awo Mana Asiedu combines qualitative (participant observation, group discussions, interviews, performance analyses) and quantitative methods (questionnaires) for audience research in Ghana. Derek Miller demonstrates the utility of computer technologies for humanist scholarship and argues, "[d]igital methods give us a handle on this larger universe of theatre […] and help us explain the theatrical system within which individual shows, buildings, or careers thrives or fail" (p. 142f). This observation correlates with my argumentation on the utility of mixed methods for festival research: While quantitative data evaluation helps investigate and visualise an entire festival network, qualitative methods like performance analysis or archival case studies permit researchers to zoom in on individual shows and venues. In combination, quantitative and qualitative methods grant a richer understanding of a complex phenomenon. (Huber 2023)

Combining different methods also helps researchers meet the requirements of a research field. Emine Fişek's multi-sited, multi-authored project on performance and migration in the context of the European migrant crisis combines performance analyses, semi-structured interviews, and archival research on institutional and production history. The project demonstrates that the practicability of methods depends on the sites' material context, availability of archives, feasibility of ethnographic documentation, and the political situation. "Certain methods will harvest a great deal of material in one context, while unearthing far less in another" (p. 95).

Taken together, the volume's contributors interpret the activity of "mixing" methods and methodologies in relation to interdisciplinary approaches, researchers' positionalities, scholarly and artistic activities, textual and embodied practices, intersecting discursive fields, and interpretative frameworks. Paul Rae begins the conclusion by pointing out that TaPS research "conventionally […] involves the specific combination, sequence, or blending of research activities and the explanatory frames used to interpret the diverse kinds of data they produce" (p. 300). In other words, the mixing of methods and methodologies is inherent in TaPS research but was not labelled as MMR before. Rae goes one step further and proposes "a different way of thinking about mixing", namely "the mixing of methods and non-methods" (p. 300) or – referring to John Law's recommendation of "method assemblage" in *After Method* (2004) – the combination of conventional research activity and "the other activities underway in any given situation where researchers find themselves" (p. 301). Several contributors (e.g. Spatz, Teaiwa, Ritter, Bautista, McCaffrey) describe occasions "when the moment of research becomes aesthetically indistinguishable from or coextensive with what is being researched" (p. 310), alluding to enactive and performative dimensions of their research activities. Following the observation that an "aesthetic overlap of performance research and performance practice" that can "intensify and energize both activities" may also "produce a blind spot", Rae advocates for greater methodological transparency (p. 319). *The Cambridge Guide to Mixed Methods Research for Theatre and Performance Studies* does justice to this demand and gathers a wide variety of sincere insights into international researchers' practice and experience. By extending the *data-driven* definition of MMR (i.e., the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods) and approaching a *conceptual* definition (i.e., the combination of different methodologies and epistemologies), the volume invites readers to be curious to discover the wealth and creativity of TaPS researchers in applying and mixing (inter)disciplinary tools and tactics.

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[1] Editor's note: We commissioned a review of this volume on methodology, although Anke Charton, a member of our Department, contributed to it. This exception seemed legitimate to us because we consider the volume to be highly relevant for Theater and Performance Studies. In return, however, we have excluded Anke Charton's contribution from the review.

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