



Peribiophoty

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Creative practitioners inside academia are often tasked with explaining how their embodied practices constitute research. The *Peribiophoty* project reverses this paradigm to ask: how does academic research constitute embodied practice? By considering the personal and intellectual contexts (peri), surrounding academics and their biographies (bio), through audio-visual representation (photy), we investigate how academic thinking is embodied thinking. The notion that "traditional" research only involves the brain is challenged by the audio-visual representations of thoughts and ideas embedded in objects, experience, time, and interactions. Peribiophoty makes its propositions about academic thinking through embodied presence and rhythmic juxtapositions of gesture, things, place, text on screen and voice. It evokes the narrative pasts and selves of the project's literature, history, and digital games scholars as substantively entangled with their ongoing research programs and demonstrates that their academic research is necessarily an embodied and embedded practice.

Keywords: history; literature; creative research; embodied cognition; digital games; narrative self; romance novel; historical fiction; history; forgery



VIDEO ARTICLE

Available to view here: <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.9985>.

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STILLS FROM THE VIDEO ARTICLE



VIDEO ARTICLE TRANSCRIPT

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[00:10]

‘The animate body in its world is a mind.’ (de Jaegher and di Paolo 2007: 488)

[Tom Murray]

What you’re going to see here is five films about five really interesting scholars of history who think about history and re-imagine the past in ways that are similar and ways that are different.

[Karen Pearlman]

And Tom and I just wanted to give a brief introduction to some of the motivating ideas behind this series of five films. And for me, I think that my own research into the past has a lot to do with finding things between the lines. Finding things that aren’t in the documents, with imagining the lives and the bodies and the way that people might be in the room together. So much more interesting to me always than the records of the wars and so forth. So, I was really excited when all of our colleagues came to us with these ideas about how they live with, through, and about the past in their imaginations.

[Tom Murray]

And I should say that my super says Tom Murray, and that I’m interested in film and I’m also similarly interested in history.

[Karen Pearlman]

And I’m Karen Pearlman. And... what he said.

[Tom Murray]

So, thinking about the ways that people re-embodiment the past has been important. And there’s a few threads that seem to run through these stories. A couple of people talk about avatars, avatars of the past, so they think about themselves — and that’s a really important point, I think Karen — that what we’ve done here is to think about people’s biographies, about who they were as kids, as teenagers, and how, not like there was any kind of revolutionary kind of moments where they suddenly

realized everything about what they were going to do, but progressively, the things that have fascinated them as kids have found their way into their research ... that there's a kind of lineage from themselves as a child to what they do now.

[Karen Pearlman]

Another thing that runs through all of them that I found really interesting is, well, in my terms, I might call it a kind of a feminist perspective, but I think it's, even... its feminist in the broadest possible sense of being a refocusing away from the kind of 'there is a single great man of history' towards there are all of these *livenesses* that we engage in together. And that these are actually significant and not just, oh yeah, what happens in the kitchen or so forth. So that was very important to me.

[Tom Murray]

And I suppose that one of the key *livenesses*, to use Karen's word, is about story. And each of these people that we're going to look at over the course of this series deals with story in a different way and kind of unpacking story a little bit: it's about creativity, various forms of creatively accessing the past through stories, narratives, avatars.

[Karen Pearlman]

... fragments, myths...

[Tom Murray]

... emotions, bodies ...

[Karen Pearlman]

... clothes, bodies. Yeah...

[Tom Murray]

... pasts, photographs, objects, kind of the materiality of the past and how that works in their stories and their thinking. The materiality of their own past, of course, which kind of constitute them in some way, which is part of what we've got here, maybe? Like, my side seems to be about cameras, and your side

[Karen Pearlman]

It's all about editing, buddy. Yeah, yeah, always.

[Tom Murray]

I feel that's pretty good.

[Karen Pearlman]

I think that's what we have to say.

[Tom Murray]

Hope you enjoy.

[04:20]

Peribiophoty

An audio-visual representation (-photy)

Of the personal and intellectual contexts

surrounding an individual's lived experience (peri-)

That co-ordinate and make biographical sense of that life (-bio-).

[Stephanie Russo]

I lived in a house with a lot of things. It wasn't one of these sparse modern houses. It was a old fashion house with a lot of trinkets around all of the time of various descriptions.

Even electronics had to be decorative in the house. I guess the television with a doily on it is an anachronism, something so modern and new, at least to my grandparents, as the television. And of course, you find a way to incorporate it into the kind of esthetic of the house as it was. So I think, in a way, I was surrounded growing up by anachronisms, that very kind of frilly, lacy, textile-saturated childhood.

'the concepts and beliefs we have about the world are grounded in our perceptual-action experience with things' (Kirsh, 2013)

I don't think I felt so much an anachronism as a person as I felt like I grew up in an imaginative, anachronistic space that was early twentieth-century Canada. There was a tension between the world that I lived in and the world that I read about, and that became really apparent to me when I was reading one of the Anne books, which is *Anne of the Island*. So, Anne goes away, grows up, goes away to college ... It's all very, you know, adventures, dating, etc. But then she gets married and she has to stop working. And that didn't make sense to me because the people that I was surrounded by in the real world were women who worked, everybody I knew worked. It wasn't like anybody was a housewife. And so that was the moment I think I became aware that this imaginative world that I'd created was romantic and nostalgic and sentimental, but it wasn't good for women. And that's, I think, a real feminist awakening for me because it just seems so unfair.

Stephanie Russo

Yes, it's you know, she had a nice sort of married life and whatever in the books, lots of children, fun times and whatever. But she couldn't be a person.

I think I'm actually reacting against conventionality in historical fiction in my latest research. An anachronism is not something you're supposed to do in historical fiction. So you're supposed to be accurate. You're supposed to do your time in the archives and you're supposed to have this sort of slavish devotion to facts. So I've become really interested recently in historical fiction that doesn't do that, that inserts and pushes against that conventionality and pushes against that idea that historical accuracy is the determinant of quality.

Dickinson

(Smith et al. 2019–2021)

So, the work that I'm researching at the moment is historical fiction that breaks those boundaries, that has, you know, Emily Dickinson twerking to hip hop, that has Catherine the Great inventing the cocktail.

The Great

(McNamara et al. 2020–)

Take the example of the television show *Dickinson* about the poet Emily Dickinson. Alena Smith, who is the creator of *Dickinson*, I think does something really interesting. She posits that people in the past felt and reacted to things in the same way that we feel and react to things. So she uses the example of the feeling 'Bitch Please'. And she says that the feeling 'Bitch Please' must have existed in the past, but they just didn't have the language to express it in the way that we do.

BITCH

PLEASE

So what she does is she makes her 19th century characters say, 'Bitch Please'. That's a shorthand for us to understand that that feeling must have existed, even if actually Emily Dickinson didn't say 'Bitch Please'. So I'm interested in historical fiction that doesn't kind of treat history as this kind of sacred thing, but that actually tries to break and smash our ideas of history. And that's what anachronistic historical fiction does, I think. These texts are reframing historical fiction as something that is about now.

I do have memories of wishing that I lived in the past because I thought the clothes were better.

I like to take that bird's eye view to see patterns and to see replications across time and to observe the way that things have either stayed the same or changed, or both.

[08:53]

[Hsu-Ming Teo]

I think the contestability of the past and the way people remember the past differently... For me, it's one of the key things about working as a historian, and it's one of the reasons why increasingly I moved from history into historical fiction.

Peribiophoty

Video Essays (-photy)

investigating the lives (-bio-)

and surroundings of academics and their embodied

practice of scholarly research (peri-).

This is something that all historians know. There is no historian who thinks that they tell the absolute truth about the past. You gather all the kinds of things that... all the evidence that you have — material, textual or otherwise — about the past, and then you tell a story about it.

What I'm interested in with romantic fiction, particularly romantic historical fiction, is, first of all, the fact that women get to tell their version about the past. Because, I think, as we all know, history has been a very male-dominated profession and activity. Women's history and romantic fiction is like a double helix, it has been intertwined for a really long time. For women to write romantic historical fiction is to tell a story about the past in a way where they are guaranteed a happy ending, something which is optimistic and hopeful and which gives them the resources, you know, emotionally and otherwise, psychologically, to deal with things in the present as well.

Beverly Jenkins is an African-American historical romance writer who has been incredibly important in taking African-American women's history and disseminating it. So, she calls herself a kitchen table historian. She's read all of this stuff, and she can tell a story about, you know, about black heroes and heroines and protagonists who do all kinds of things, who suffered the same kinds of trauma. But because it's in the genre of romance, she plots it in such a way that that she leaves the reader with a happy, optimistic ending. And I guess increasingly I feel that the injection of hope into that story about the past is really important. Otherwise,

we, you know, we hear all of these stories about the past and it's all about all the terrible things that people did and we get angry.

Hsu-Ming Teo

But where do we find the resources to move on from that and do something powerful? And so for me, romantic, and the romance genre, is important because it plots a narrative towards hope.

'...most historical sequences can be emplotted in a number of different ways, so as to provide different interpretations of those events and to endow them to different meanings.' (White 1990: 129)

I come from a family which has had a very, very traumatic past. You know, they had the curse of living through interesting times. They lived through the racial riots in Malaysia in 1969. So my experience, I guess, is not conflict-free. There's family conflict, and like all other migrants who came over in the seventies and eighties, I did experience racism.

But within the context of a life, you know, like structurally we want things to be different. Individually, you know, what is in my control is the power to make, to make a choice, and to make a decision. So when I look back at my life, I can emplot my life story in several different genres. If I emplot my life story as a tragedy, I'm looking at the trauma, I'm looking at the moments of racism. And then at the end of it, I'm angry and I'm bitter and I'm resentful. And that's not where I want to end up. Right. And that's of no help to me, and it's of no help to anybody else as well.

Or I can look back at my life and my career and I can focus on all the positives, all the good people, all the people who have helped me. Right. What I am emplotting is a romance. Right. It's like, yeah, terrible things happen. But there were all of these good things along the way as well. Same life, two different genres and quite a different outcome.

The last line to my first novel, *Love and Vertigo*, is about repairing the past. The protagonist says, 'maybe this is all we can ever do: to make up to the living our debt to the dead'. For me, this line pretty much encapsulates what I'm trying to do as a writer, a writer who uses history, and also a cultural historian who is exploring the past, a literary historian who's looking at romantic historical fiction.

[13:55]

Peribiophoty

Interplay of spaces, times and cultures (peri-).

Dynamics of living action (-bio-)

The digital play of light, sound and movement (-photy)

[Rowan Tulloch]

The first game I remember having a real impact on me is a game called Fahrenheit 451.

Fahrenheit 451

(Byron Preiss Visual Publications et al. 1984)

And it's a kind of adventure game, text-adventure game, a little bit of graphics, but you, you know, you type things — 'go north' or 'give a book to so-and-so'. And it was all about trying to save books from the evil fire-fighters whose job it was to burn books and destroy knowledge.

to the north you can hear occasional low growls. Near you is a pile of dead leaves.

examine pile

Under the leaves you see an old, rusted grating set into a patch of broken concrete.

open grating

With a scraping sound of metal against concrete, the grating is jerks free. You set it aside. A drainpipe with a metal ladder fixed to one side descends into the darkness.

down_

But I remember one of my kind of most visceral, visceral memories with the game is the ending. You have to sacrifice yourself. You end up you end up dying. So there I was as a six-year-old, martyring myself for literature, martyring myself for knowledge.

The key thing I'd like to do with my research is to shatter that myth that play is separate to culture. For me, that holds play back and doesn't let us explore what could be the most powerful medium of the 21st century.

'The field of play is where, to a large extent, a sense of self is generated.' (Mearns 1993: 6)

I think there's something so personal about videogames. You know, you're putting yourself into it. You're doing these things ... you're responsible for what happens. So when you have these these moments that challenge you, they actually challenge your sense of self.

Sid Meier's Civilization VI

(Firaxis Games et al. 2016)

That's really powerful. It makes you go: What led me to do that? Within the game, sure. But also beyond beyond that, what are the systems of power in society that mean these patterns are repeating? And I think at an emotional level that is deeply impactful.

Grand Theft Auto V

(Rockstar Games et al. 2013)

So games are always representations and kind of fictional and fantastical representations of the past. It's not that they're accurately portraying what happened, but they give us this window into rethinking the past and also reflecting on, on the present. Because videogames are such a kind of contemporary media form, they do get us to question our current place in the world and our relationship to our history.

Minecraft

(Mojang Studios et al. 2011)

Games can be understood as a form of public history. They're a way of connecting the general public with these kind of historical scenarios and situations.

Wonder Boy in Monster Land

(Westone Bit Entertainment et al. 1987)

There's an amazing moment when you're playing a game where you transition from pressing buttons to doing the action your character's doing. And I've always found that moment, that moment of immersion really, really fascinating.

Chase H.Q.

(Taito et al. 1988)

I love that that experience of being in someone else's shoes and literally inhabiting their world, trying to hit the ball or duck or weave, lean into the corners, and all those those sort of sort of things.

There's a guy called Stephen Flusty, who has these five kinds of what he terms 'interdictory spaces'. So these are spaces designed to slow down or filter people so desirable people are kept in and undesirables are excluded. So there's stealthy space, slippery space, crusty space, prickly space, and jittery space.

STEALTHY SPACE

SLIPPERY SPACE

CRUSTY SPACE

PRICKLY SPACE

JITTERY SPACE

Stealthy space are those spaces that are hard to find. Slippery spaces are hard to reach. Crusty space has someone saying, 'you can come in, you can't'. Prickly space you can be in, but it's not comfortable to occupy. And jittery spaces is a space that is under surveillance, so you never feel comfortable, you're always being watched, you're always policed. And I'm fascinated by how well that concept translates to videogames and talks about the power relations in video games, that you're always in these slightly hostile environments. And I'm interested in what that says about power, what that says about the relationship between video games and these other kind of processes of power.

Gone Home

(Fulbright Company et al. 2013)

I think with games, what's interesting is so many are fantastical, but the one that has spoken the most to me about my experience of the world is a game called *Gone Home*. So *Gone Home*, it's set in the late nineties. It's all around the riot girl movement.

Open door

Turn faucet on

Close door

Close door

Turn on lights

Turn off lights

Open sliding door

Examine magazine

Pull string

Pull string

Open door

Pull string

And for me, this there's something quite nostalgic about my relationship with that. It wasn't exactly the same, but it mirrors my engaging with the mid-nineties punk community, my sense of finding people with similar politics, similar kind of progressive and radical beliefs, and a similar kind of taste in music. So there's a lot of kind of overlap between my life and that game.

[18:43]

[Rachel Yuen-Collingridge]

I like to leave open the possibility that I'm wrong, always, because that at least seems to leave open the idea that there are other possibilities, other chances.

Peribiophoty

Embedded context (peri-)

Embodied life (-bio-)

Audio-visual synthesis (-photy)

Everything, I think, in my life has been about the fragment. My doctoral work was on the fragment: Pre-Socratic fragments, tiny snippets of texts stranded in otherwise large pools of other people's work. So, raw stuff, brutal material, extracted, identified, and then interrogated, gently coaxed out and turned into something that can be analyzed.

So, my name is Rachel Yuen-Collingridge, and I work on forgery in the ancient world.

Rachel Yuen-Collingridge

My later work has all been on papyrus fragments, but the earlier parts of my life are all parts of fragments as well.

'Reality itself is post-produced and scripted by complicating time ... by comparing events across time, by fabricating memories.' Soda Jerk (2015: 142)

When I was an infant, the person who looked after me quite a lot of the time was my grandmother. She would regale me with long stories about her past and her present, things that she thought the things she saw, the things that she cared about. But all of this came to me in a smattering of Cantonese, which I didn't understand. The kind of gulf of experience was also expressed by that inability to break through that linguistic barrier in many respects. But because she'd looked after me when I was young, there must have been some Cantonese that kind of settled in the back of my brain.

You would sit there through *yum cha* and there'd be word, word, word, Japanese.

word word word

JAPANESE

Word, word, word, jade, word, word, word, violence.

word word word

JADE

word word word

VIOLENCE

And that's all I got. What do I do with these fragments?

To stitch them together, to create a story, would be to kind of contravene the authenticity and the integrity of the story that she was telling. To kind of overwrite it, overlay something on top of it. To leave them as fragments is to leave a kind of nonsense, a mess, in place of what was a whole person and a whole life. And so I can't occupy either position very comfortably. And I swing between the two.

So there are various small, fragmentary stories that I have, which I now look back on and can't quite figure out how much of me is in those stories and how much of her is in those stories.

One thing very important about Chinese culture is that you have to look after your elderly people. They're given respect and they're given free tea. And when she was looking across the Australian landscape for something that gave her that sort of respect, she found McDonalds. She loved McDonald's because McDonald's was the only place to give her a discount for being an old woman outside of the Asian sphere. She would go and get McDonald's chicken nuggets and then she would carefully chop them up and she would add them to a traditional Chinese soup with lotus roots and all sorts of things mixed in together. And that was, for her, a comprehensive cultural assemblage that made sense.

So whenever I engage in looking at forgeries now, I enter this space of not thinking: Here is a situation in which the forgery must be discredited, discredited, ousted from the academic world, never discussed of again, thrown into the oubliette of academic deviance... Instead, I see in the forgery this kind of creative moment of trying to resolve problems and differences in the world.

One of the forgers that I work on quite intensely is Constantine Simonides. Here was a Greek in the 19th century. What he would have witnessed at those times is this constant flood of French and German scholars coming, trying to buy up all of the manuscripts from the monasteries. I kind of think there's something super ingenious about a man in that context who thinks: Why don't I just give the Europeans what they want by creating a version of Greece and giving it to them so we can hold on to what Greece really is.

And he creates this amazing manuscript. He says, you know, it's a very ancient early manuscript. And this manuscript just happens to prove that the Greeks invented photography, electric light bulbs and so forth and so on. All of his desires for where Greece should be in the world, embedded in the stories that he creates in this manuscript. He isn't just an individual who wishes for things in the world. He gives them physical form, material reality. He created thousands of tiny little pieces that affirmed Greece as kind of the origin and the gatekeeper, the holder, the preserver of everything in antiquity.

Fragment III. of the Gospel of St. Matthew

(Simonides 1861: 44–45)

Fragment II. of the Gospel of St. Matthew

(Simonides 1861: 42–43)

Fragment I. of the Gospel of St. Matthew

(Simonides 1861: 40–41)

Fragment VI. — The General Epistle of James

(Simonides 1861: 56–57)

Papyrus: Greek Manuscript (Forgery)

(National Museums Liverpool. World Museum.)

It's not that there's simply the ancient world and we go through and we learn about it. You have basically a conspiracy over time. It's constantly looking at that past and deciding this is the part of the past that we want to hold onto. That invention is not just simply an act of creation, it's an act of longing and desire about what that past is to be with us.

So after my grandmother died, my sisters and I, we thought we should go and do *Bai Sun*. This is the kind of ritual that you should do at the gravesite. We knew we had to do this ritual. It was very, very important to do this ritual. We had no idea, no authentic connection with having done this ritual. So we, between ourselves, concocted this ritual. Of course, we're going to have the three different meats because, you know, that's the traditional thing to do. Well, we'll need an incense burner. Yes, it's very important. Probably three incense sticks. We were making this up on the fly.

And so we went to the site, we poured the tea, we thought about our grandmother. And we kind of solemnly did this. And we didn't really know whether we were doing it right. The only thing that kind of held that ceremony together with our

desire for it to be authentic, a desire for it to be a moment of communion with our grandmother, with what it is to be cultural for us in a context in which we had no access to that culture.

There's got to be a way of holding and being happy with disjunction — of being able to be contradictory and to be able to hold a fragment and see its potential to be part of a whole lot of wholes. It does kind of feel like never wanting to get to quite the end of something, so you can hold all of the pieces there and all of their potential just at that point before they have to be kind of committed to being some version of oneself, or of history.

[25:49]

[Malcolm Choat]

I like the sense that two people can understand the past differently and imagine it differently, so that the same event — and we know this, of course — the same event can be recollected in completely different ways, can be written in different ways. In the past, I strove to determine which of them was true. And it took me decades to work out that they both were. And this applies not just to our memories, but to everything we understand about history.

peri – Personal, intellectual, cultural, spatial, and/or temporal context

bio – Life story, embodied

photy – An audio-visual creation synthesising context and life to make a

Peribiophoty

I think I could talk about my family in two frames that intersect in a way I've never necessarily thought that they would. On my father's side, which was English emigres in New Zealand. We never really got much further than our grandparents, because the history of that side of the family, it either wasn't important or had been charted in a very programmatic kind of fashion — lines in a family tree.

My mother came from an Italian family. The Italian side of my family existed in stories all bound together in this oral tradition of tales that people told each other at exhaustive length. My mother seemed to have regarded it as her mission to collect and write down this history, and this resulted in boxes and boxes of notes at our home, which now I'm not sure what will ever happen with them. My father's said to my mother over dinner once: 'Looks like you've got one good article here'. Which is how an academic would think about it. I don't know what my mother intended to come from it, but I think something should.

We had a very creative childhood, my brother and I. We created worlds which were inhabited by avatars of us, kings of planets. My brother ruled the moon and I ruled Jupiter. A sort of fully realized series of worlds that had their own histories and also began to influence other aspects of our play so that our backyard cricket came to be cast in the form of matches between these two planets. We never fleshed out that part of the deep history. What we did flesh out with the many wars that had been fought between the Moon and Jupiter, and these two kingdoms, and we illustrated them at great length. And it's sort of taken me 35 years to realize that what we were actually doing at that time was history, that we were thinking the past into existence. What we're all doing when we practice history these days is essentially the same practice.

We're all creating the past with our imagination of it. And I think if you tried to take that creativity out of it, that process where we thought these worlds into existence, then you wouldn't understand how I got to this point, where I have this sort of fully articulated understanding of the importance of forgeries in our study of the history. And not only that, but that it forced me to reconceptualize my own mission as a historian and what we were doing with history full-stop.

'...autobiographical memory as a revisable and negotiable record of the personal past, an extravagant structure that is constantly updated and subjected to ongoing retrospective revision.' (Sutton 2006: 285)

Papyrus: Gospel of Jesus' Wife

(King 2012)

The Gospel of Jesus' Wife was a small fragment of papyrus, in Coptic, said to date to the fourth century, which was purported to have Jesus saying the words, 'my wife'. At the time there was great fanfare and lots of articles written about it. It later turned out that it was as close to certain to be a forgery as anything in the papyrological world that we know.

Papyrus: Christian Letter

(P.Oxy. 12.1494 = P. Macquarie inv. 614)

In many ways that can be seen as one arm of the start of my journey into being interested in forgeries. But that journey over the last ten years of studying forgeries was accompanied by a complete reconceptualization of myself as an historian and of what I thought history was. It wasn't a moment where it struck me how important this was and how this was going to change my historical journey.

Papyrus: Early Christian Letter

(P.Oxy. 12.1592 = P. Macquarie inv. 615)

It was a process of realizing that what was important in history wasn't what happened, but why it's important to us. That everyone in the past has the same status, if you like, of someone in the present. And we can think about them as mothers and daughters and husbands and sons and kings — and not only just as kings, as people that were lost to the sort of history that I was taught.

Papyrus: Letter of Peter

(P.Oxy. 10.1300 = P. Macquarie inv. 613)

But if we allow ourselves to imagine what their lives were like, and if we allow ourselves to think ourselves into their world, then we start reconnecting with them as humans.

Our practice of doing history is so close to what the forgers are doing in many ways that we need to understand it as one practice and not separate off forgery in the same way as we separate off people working creatively about the past — that this is all one process of imagining the past.

[31:44]

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