Editors' Note: *The following essay is in certain respects a 'commissioned' item. Martin Barker heard its author present the substance of it at the Sheffield SPARC Conference in April 2015, and encouraged its author to write up her account. At one level, this is primarily a set of reflections on her experience as a holder of one of the UK-based Collaborative Doctoral Awards, awards which are premised on a working relationship between a university and a commercial or policy body. Sarah Price here reflects on the different 'formations' of academic and commercial styles of doing and presenting audience research. At another level – and the reason in particular that we invited Sarah to allow us to publish this – it connects back to a much longer and wider tradition of thinking about the differences between 'administrative' and 'critical' modes of communication research – a division, and a debate which effectively took off from Paul Lazarsfeld's (1941) essay on the topic. This is a topic which never quite goes away. We publish this essay as a starter-contribution to what we hope will be a wider and longer-term revisitation of this topic – see the* **Editorial Introduction** *to this issue.*

Academic and commercial research: Bridging the gap

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In the last few years, collaboration between arts organisations and academic researchers has been promoted by an increasing number of organisations.[1] In 2012, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) created Knowledge Exchange Hubs with the purpose of connecting 'excellent research in the arts and humanities with a range of creative and cultural organisations' (AHRC, *KE Hubs for the Creative Economy*). I myself am part of the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award programme, which joins PhD students to external partners for the full three years of their research. In addition, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) which assess the research quality of UK Higher Education Institutions now includes an evaluation of 'impact', that is the extent to which research is beneficial to the

'economy, society [and] culture […] beyond academia' (REF 2012: p.26). Within the arts industry, the Arts Council England (ACE) announced their Research Grant Programme in January 2015, designed to 'promote greater collaboration and co-operation between the arts and cultural sector and research partners' (ACE 2015). Collaboration is undeniably looked upon favourably at the moment, yet there is very little acknowledgement of the difficulties of such partnerships. While, at its best, collaboration can provide access to untapped knowledge and new ways of understanding the field, all too often this is prevented by insurmountable differences in research philosophy.

From my own area of live classical music audiences, the need to share knowledge between academia and industry is pressing. When I began my PhD and started to explore previous research, I was struck by the divide within the literature. On one side, there is research carried out by arts organisations, market researchers and government bodies. For reference here, I am calling this 'commercial' research. On the other side, there is the growing body of work from academics in business schools, arts management, sociology, psychology and my own field of musicology.[2] There is very little interaction between the two fields. The bibliographies of academic articles and commercial reports are dominated by work carried out within their own sector with few citations from other forms of research. This makes it difficult for any researcher to discover the relevant literature in the other sector. Anecdotally, there is a corresponding lack of awareness of the research done by the other side. There are exceptions to this, of course; research coming out of arts management schools is particularly good at straddling the divide (for example O'Reilly and Kerrigan 2010), and there are various researchers who work as consultants and continue to publish in academic journals.[3] Nevertheless, the two sides of the same field are far from being integrated. At first, I thought that the problem was simply one of awareness, but it has become clear that the divide runs much deeper. Researchers bring ideological baggage into their collaborations. Examining the structure of a typical publication from each sector can reveal a great deal about the philosophical differences on each side of this divide.

Consider an article in an academic journal. To begin with, the reader will be given a detailed explanation of the current state of the field. This will include a host of references to previous literature proving the need for this piece of research, paying due respect to other notable authors in the field and also proving the author's credibility. Then, if it is an empirical project, we will have an explanation of methods, which will justify each decision made and acknowledge all possible bias in the results. The author will then demonstrate how the data was analysed, through quotations or statistical analysis. They will describe complex findings which 'revel in contradictions' (Williamson, Frith and Cloonan 2011: p.462). They will end, almost apologetically, by stating their new contribution to knowledge, once again recognising the limitations of the project. To finish, the bibliography will be long, referring to literature written in recent years as well as ten, twenty, thirty years ago or more. This is, of course, a caricature, but I want to highlight how strange this could look to someone who is not within the academy. Readers have to sift through a lot of text to find any new contributions to knowledge. Additionally, when they begin reading, they are

immediately faced with a long list of literature they might not have read or even be aware of. This would surely be alienating to anyone not accustomed to presenting their findings in this way.

As someone who came from an academic background into this field, I found commercial research reports to be equally alienating. To present an equivalent overview, in a market research report, often the first thing the reader will encounter is an executive review. This is a bullet-point list of all the headline findings and the author's recommendations on what to do with them. This is then followed by a full report elaborating on the methods and statistics used to draw these conclusions. This discussion of methodology, however, is often short, with little justification of why those choices were made or acknowledgement of their limitations. How statistics were analysed is also often not disclosed. For example, the algorithms used to produce the ACE's regular audience segmentations are still kept confidential (ACE 2011). Sometimes even the questionnaires used to gather data are not made available to the reader, particularly if the author is a researcher by profession as they need their research tools to remain confidential in order to charge for their services. Consequently, to an academic, commercial reports can lack credibility. You may have noticed that I have not mentioned a bibliography; there are often very few references to previous research. Unless the reader is familiar with the field, they would have no sense of what is new knowledge or on what previous knowledge this research is being built.

Consequently, for collaborative researchers, the way in which they present their findings can be a barrier to gaining a wide readership. I am not suggesting that one way is better than the other as both are designed to suit their research function. The standard formats of these publications therefore illuminate the philosophical differences in research in the two fields.

The aim of academic audience research is to better understand both the art form and the people who consume it. Although academics are increasingly concerned with producing knowledge that has practical application, the structure of an article is still based around aspiring for some sort of universal truth and generalisable findings. As Williamson, Cloonan and Frith (2011) have noted, in academic research, methodology and analysis are disclosed fully because the results should be able to be replicated by other researchers. The value of the research is in its transparency and reproducibility. If it can be replicated in other settings and still yield the same results, the researcher has found a wider truth beyond the specifics of their case study. For this reason, academics are reverential towards previous literature. Bourdieu, for example, is still regularly cited in academic audience studies, even though *Distinction* (1984) is based on audience research from the 1970s, because it is believed to tell us more than just the specifics of that population. As a consequence, articles are structured to dwell on previous literature before making a new addition to knowledge.

In contrast, commercial reports are designed to inform action and produce change. Executive reviews provide the headline findings to busy industry professionals along with recommendations on how to implement this new knowledge. It is therefore accepted that

the findings are quickly out of date. In addition, the research is seen as a snapshot of a particular audience, a specific time and place, and therefore not generalisable to all populations. For these reasons, commercial reports typically do not include a lengthy bibliography. Furthermore, a large proportion of research from this sector would not be available to the author because commercial research is designed to inform business decisions and, therefore, its 'value is defined in part by its confidentiality' (Williamson, Cloonan and Frith 2011: p.461). It provides the organisation with a competitive edge. The whole field is consequently structured around careful confidentiality, at the expense of developing a coherent body of knowledge. Nowhere is this clearer than in Tim Baker's (2000; and, significantly, republished in 2007) report, aptly titled 'Stop Reinventing the Wheel'. Here, he presents a collection of findings from commercial research projects on classical and contemporary music audiences, many of which had previously been kept confidential. In the introduction, he laments the repetition of research between arts organisations because it is not shared with the wider industry. I would argue that the issue is made worse by the belief that research is not generalisable beyond its specific setting.

As a collaborative researcher, it can be difficult to negotiate these opposing attitudes to confidentiality and to the value of previous research. A research project may only be of value to an organisation if it is confidential, yet research funders often require findings to be disseminated more widely. Indeed, public availability of findings is a key principle of academia, although it is worth noting that this is often behind a pay wall and not accessible to those outside the academy. In addition, arts organisations may want to investigate certain research questions because they are pertinent to their audiences. An academic may however struggle to get funding because too many similar projects have taken place. Commercial research may therefore be seen as too business-driven, too focussed on the bottom line to explore interesting questions and share their findings. Whereas academia can be accused of ivory-towerism, producing research only of interest to other academics rather than helping organisations with the knowledge they need.

One possible consequence of this is Knowledge Incompatibility, whereby professionals are unable to accept the findings of a research project.[4] If, for example, an academic advised an arts organisation to change its staffing structure, drastically alter its artistic mission, or, indeed, disband, the organisation would be unable, legally, financially or culturally, to implement any of this advice. Consequently, academic knowledge cannot be 'transferred' to the external partner. A similar but rather more hostile result of this difference is Knowledge Resistance. As explored by Williamson, Cloonan and Frith (2011), Knowledge Resistance is when academic knowledge is rejection outright by external partners because it contradicts their prior beliefs about the industry. In both of these cases, the distance academics have from the inner workings of an organisation – the very distance that is valued in Knowledge Exchange partnerships – can be a barrier to having an 'impact' in both sectors.

So how can we move forward? Collaborating partners need to be aware of these differences of philosophy before devising a project and keep them in mind when planning,

carrying out and writing up research. What might be second nature to one partner could be completely alien to another. For this reason, I believe long-term partnerships are more successful, as they give both partners the chance to understand the other research field. They also foster the personal relationships and trust needed to find compromises between radically different research aims.

It seems that collaborative research and 'Knowledge Exchange' in academia are here to stay. At their best, they can offer routes not only to new sources of funding but also to new ways of understanding our disciplines. However, projects undertaken without awareness of the differences between commercial and academic research fields can produce far more problems than results.

Biographical note:

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Notes:

[1] An earlier version of this paper was given at the Sheffield Performer and Audience Research Centre's 'Understanding Audiences for the Contemporary Arts' Symposium, University of Sheffield, 29 April 2015.

[2] The terms 'commercial' and 'academic' are laden with value judgements and as such highly problematic, but for simplicity I use them here as descriptors.

[3] For example, Alan Brown and Jennifer Novak (2007; 2013) and Bonita Kolb (2000; 2001).

[4] Many thanks to Martin Barker for this suggestion.