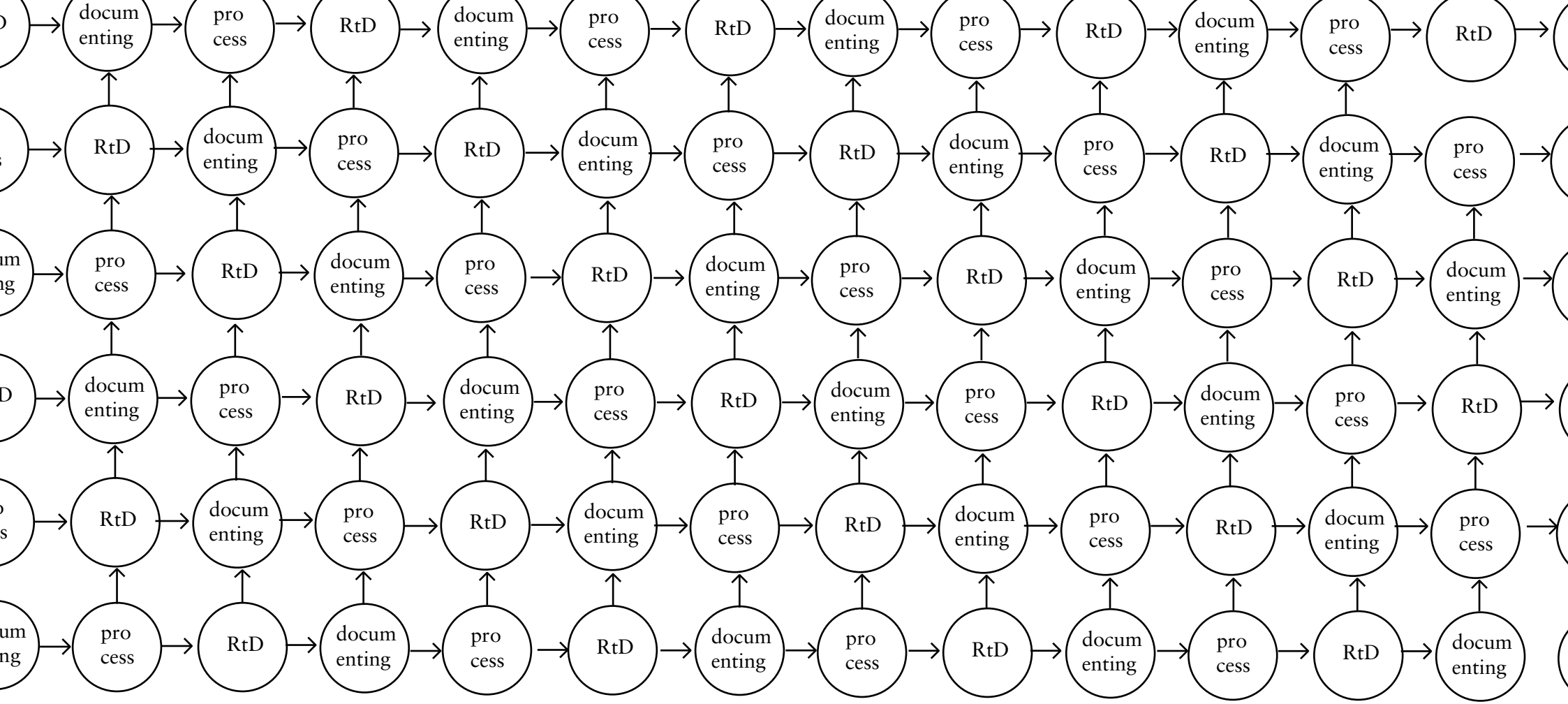

Documenting Process in RtD

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MRes Research Proposal - RCA

Introduction

Over the last couple of decades, Research Through Design (RtD) has emerged as a powerful approach for articulating knowledge generated through the process of design. RtD is close to the design practice - it is a "recasting [of] the design aspect of creation as research" (Findeli, 2004). Researchers using RtD "learn about the object of their inquiry through the constant evolution of the artefact" (Godin & Mithra, 2014).

Background

As RtD is significantly based on the practice of design, the epistemological foundation of the approach is different from many other fields. Biggs and Büchler (2007) describe how "rigor in [RtD] research is the strength of the chain of reasoning, and that has to be judged in the context of the question and the answer". In RtD, it is through the design process that important decisions are made and insights are gained - the chain of reasoning is embedded in the process and for knowledge to be trusted and accepted "designers are expected to report their process, to provide justifications for decisions"(Claisse et al., 2019).

Documenting process is particularly important in RtD because so much of the generated knowledge results from what happens around the design being generated. A lack of documentation of process means that it becomes hard to justify and legitimise the knowledge gained through the design process (Scrivener, 2002).

Documenting Process in RtD is about furthering RtD methodology through the speculative design of tools and environments for document

ing process. There is an acknowledged need to develop “more rigorous documentation of progress and evolution of RtD projects” (Zimmerman et al., 2010).

The project will take an interdisciplinary approach to explore questions like:

- **which aspects of process can and should be captured?** - inspired by Owain Pedgley’s (2007) work, one must prioritise what should be documented in order to prevent data overflow.

- **How can the creation of documentation become ongoing and integrated into the RtD practice?** Current practice often involve assembling documentation at a post-design stage as annotated portfolios (Gaver, 2012).

- **How can the environments in which process takes place become self-documenting?** - inspired by the fascination with creating self-documenting programs in software development (a field which is also in great need of better documentation)

Research Methods

These question will be approached and explored through a practice-based research-through-design process. The project will mainly center around the creation of speculative designs that challenge existing thinking about documentation. The speculations will take the form of pointers: prototypes that point, through their design, towards possible properties of a documentation environment, practice, or medium.

The focus on environment, practice, and medium is grounded in the belief that an interdisciplinary approach is needed to progress the practice of documenting. Environment calls attention to the importance of place and for the incorporation of insights from fields outside design. Much insight into practice can be gained from design, but also other creative and exploratory fields. Medium addresses concerns about the affordances of different analog and digital environments and calls for technical exploration of documentation.

To support the creation of pointers, the primary knowledge-generating practice of the project, two separate supporting processes will also be undertaken:

- **Custom-made tools will be made to scaffolds the prototyping process.** These are tools which augment the prototyping process: enabling greater expression and freeing head-space to think about the creation of pointers.

- **A wiki will be created to aggregate insights from across fields in a way that is accessible.** This wiki will be interdisciplinary as it will survey the broadest set of fields possible. It will feature tools native to RtD, such as Peter Dalsgaard and Kim Halskov's Process Reflection Tool (2012), but also documentation from other contexts such as makerspaces (Tseng, 2015), and media design (Victor, 2014).

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