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Introduction

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding for postgraduate student training in the departments of Art and Design at De Montfort University and Loughborough University provided us with this opportunity to organize a two day conference. The committee formed by research students was charged with addressing various interdisciplinary approaches in Art & Design research, as well as practical and theoretical methods for making links and engaging with other disciplines. The objective was to explore interdisciplinarity as a new trend that brings together different disciplines, forming new connections and contributions to collective knowledge. Ultimately, the aim was to promote and encourage interdisciplinarity as a way to enhance creativity in research. It became apparent that this conference would be a chance to discuss the problems that emerge while crossing or linking various fields of study. The committee saw this conference as an opportunity to debate a range of questions, share difficulties and open up discussion on interdisciplinarity within art and design research. The conference aimed to discuss the diverse aspects of working with unfamiliar concepts and approaches and to address the challenges and trends of interdisciplinary research that contribute to art and design.

The choice of the keynote speakers was crucial as it reflected our aim to present papers from various disciplines as well as to include theoreticians as practitioners, and practitioners as theorists. With this in mind, we approached Professor Simon Biggs, Dr Nathan Crilly and Dr Martyn Dade-Robertson and asked them to be our keynote speakers and chairs for each open discussion session. With the keynote speakers confirmed we sought to select presentations that would supplement and even challenge keynote speakers' ideas. We hoped to challenge the traditional understanding of the university as a site of clearly divided departments with limited opportunities for collaboration.

We sought presentations that addressed methodological and theoretical developments, approaches, and tools as well as practice-based methods for transferring ideas and stimulating creativity across disciplines. The call for presentations and performances addressed the following themes:

- *Theoretical developments*: The history of disciplines and interdisciplinarity. The parallel between interdisciplinarity and other intellectual spaces. Why interdisciplinarity? How can interdisciplinarity redefine disciplines? Can art and design be treated as a separate sphere or is it now totally immersed in transitions, linkages, crossovers? How does interdisciplinarity stimulate theorists and artists?
- *Methods and tools*: How to cross from one discipline to another? How to connect varying or similar paradigms? How to make a whole from a plurality of disciplines? How to translate the sources: modify or stay 'true' to them?
- *Practice based research*: The relationship of theory to practice in interdisciplinary research. Individual projects with an interdisciplinary approach. Collaborative projects across the disciplines - advantages and possible problems. How interdisciplinary research might be best performed.

We received a large number of abstracts balanced between Art and Design, theory and practice, including postgraduate students, recently qualified PhDs and professional academics and artists. In selecting the abstracts, the review panel based their decisions on the relevance of the abstracts' content to the call, the originality and quality of their content and potential discussions that they could provoke.

The committee divided papers into separate thematic sessions, each addressing various aspects of interdisciplinary approaches within art and design research. In structuring the conference and the publication in this way, we hoped to embrace disciplinary overlaps and re-configurations and to show the complexities, methods and the migration of ideas and art works that cross disciplinary boundaries.

The first session entitled *Interdisciplinary scholarship* focused on the opening up of the disciplinary structures in the humanities and related disciplines. It raised questions as to whether universities are flexible enough to nurture challenging methodologies and constructive criticisms of their conservative nature. While they are innovative in introducing linkages between science and technology fields, humanities

departments in universities are at times still quite rigid and fixed. Processes of inquiry have slightly changed and the object of study overlaps various fields but methods still remain insufficiently versatile. A major problem that faces us today is how to change the institutional structure in order to fully apprehend the possibilities that emerge from interdisciplinary research. By introducing interdisciplinary scholarship to design research, Dr Nathan Crilly identified crossing and bridging disciplines as providing new opportunities and raising awareness of potential contributions between fields that complete or challenge each other. Defining or re-writing interdisciplinarity and the university as the site of knowledge production were recurring themes that re-emerged throughout the two days between presenters and delegates. Gale Moore highlighted problems that arise while engaging in disciplinary crossings relating to practical research and pointed out the huge potential for contemporary knowledge production by employing cross-, multi-, trans- or inter- disciplinary practices. Louise Marie Combrink addressed aspects of interdisciplinary research with reference to practice and presented a workable model that not only crossed disciplines but also combined theory with creativity.

The next session, *Spaces of interdisciplinary approach* explored the relationships between research and practice further. Re-thinking the implications and the use of various methodologies can facilitate the integration of theory and practice. Dr Liz Stirling's paper presented an example of research that visualises a link between disciplines, critiques and practices; spatial design, psycho-geographies and semiotics were investigated in a series of maps whose structure presented cross-referencing.

Processes of inquiry considered the narrative nature of interdisciplinarity and the problems that emerge if simply borrowing loose terms from certain disciplines. Concepts and methods must not only be applied but also questioned. The session identified art practice as a means to bridge knowledge and production and addressed the entanglement and disentanglement of concepts that partially overlap and the outcomes that unexpectedly emerge. Conjunctions and concepts displace fixed positions, enabling change and a plurality of methods and ideas. Dr Martyn Dade-Robertson referred to 'information architecture'

and information visualisation as possible tracks facilitating the discovery of unexpected and concealed relationships between disciplines.

Looking beyond intended to highlight the possibilities of loosening the boundaries between humanities and enabling the development of further academic branches. The juxtaposition and layering of various methods and disciplines facilitate the clarification and development of mechanisms in and between fields of study.

The second day of the conference was opened by the session entitled *Re-designing disciplines*. This session aimed to encourage discussion of the structure and constraints of different disciplines. Robert Harland and Maria Cecilia recognized the need to redefine design arguments and refer to philosophical concepts in order to develop further interdisciplinary human-centred design education. This raised the question whether it was possible to orientate and investigate interdisciplinarity as a dialogue in an exchange of ideas leading to disciplinary methodological or ideological compromise.

Dialogue as participation intended to challenge the conservative nature of research by opening up possibilities for linking concepts. Dialogue can enable an exchange of ideas and methods, create a reciprocal transaction in confronting and applying concepts or art objects. The session identified the emerging model of interdisciplinary as not fixed but constantly revised, as in a conversation provoking discussion.

The last session, *Creative research*, focused on projects that reframe interdisciplinarity, making disciplinary boundaries, forms and structures more porous and permeable. If an art work incorporates various concepts from different disciplines, it can migrate ideologically and become more dynamic - sometimes literally in its use of technology. Negotiation, reassessment and the transformation of concepts imported from one field of study to another can enable unexpected outcomes. Professor Simon Biggs presented examples of his individual interdisciplinary research projects and some of the unexpected developments that emerged after uniting disciplines.

All the significant themes emerging throughout the two days were brought together in examples of practice and performance. Julie

Henderson's art works referred to the creative element emerging from bridging disciplines, spaces and zones. Andy Wood's short projection of *There's a crowd* investigated the process of improvisation. William Aitchison performance entitled *24 / 7 / 52* negotiated the notions of order and chaos, reconfiguring elements and generating meaning.

The interaction of presentations, theory and practice-based researchers and performers provoked discussions on the methods, theories and tools of interdisciplinarity and formed a bricolage of diverse ideas and references. The open discussions chaired and stimulated by the keynotes, following the papers sessions, raised some important questions that could possibly contribute to future projects.

The *Interrogations: Creative Interdisciplinarity in Art and Design Research* committee would like to thank to AHRC for funding the project. The success of the project and the experience we have gained is invaluable to all of us and will help us in developing our future careers. We are also grateful to Loughborough University for hosting the conference and School of Art and Design for additional funding. We would like to thank De Montfort University and Loughborough University for all their goodwill and support. The committee wishes to thank Professor Gen Doy and Dr Jane Tormey for supervising the project, and all their support and involvement. We are grateful Professor Simon Biggs, Dr Nathan Crilly and Dr Martyn Dade-Robertson all accepted our invitations and contributed to the conference both by presenting papers and chairing discussions. Their time and effort is much appreciated. Also, we would like to thank to Nicola Counley and Sandra Leeland for all their invaluable help and suggestions, and also Hema Naran for administrative support at De Montfort.

Basia Sliwinska
'Interrogations' Conference Committee
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