

1. IMAGE: INTRO SLIDE

Rationalising practice as research: making a new graphic adaptation of a Trollope novel of 1879.

2. IMAGE: DISPOSSESSION

In the United Kingdom, practice-based research has been the subject of pedagogic debate for over a quarter of a century, in particular in the context of both the study methods and the adjudication of higher research degrees. However, there is still no agreed pedagogic definition of practice-based research in the visual and performing arts in Britain (Candy 2006:03). A report of the country's Arts and Humanities Research Council, revised in 2008, could not identify '...any established or accepted prior definition...' (Rust, Mottram and Till 2008:10).

The term 'practice-based' is widely used to describe the use of practice as a method of research, and its products as research outputs in themselves, not requiring the mediation of a text (Candy 2006:01). The term 'practice-led', on the other hand, refers to the processes and products of practice as topics for theoretical analysis utilising text, so that '...the results of practice-led research may be fully described in text form without the inclusion of a creative work.' (Candy 2006:01).

There is not a dearth of definitions, however, but rather a wide variety, predicated upon the developing programmes of individual places of study. Candlin identifies an extreme diversity of required research outputs, from the visual-only outputs required by Leeds Metropolitan University's PhD by Visual Practice on one hand, to the requirement at the University of Hertfordshire for a written thesis of eighty thousand words to accompany visual material, on the other (Candlin 2000).

The diversity of definitions of both methods and outputs is derived as much from a continuing debate on theoretical questions, arising out of debates about the practical issues of teaching and assessing research degrees.

Three theoretical questions underpin the debates. First, are non-text outputs, artefacts, and the methods of their production, able to communicate knowledge rather than simply constituting knowledge? Second, by what criteria can this knowledge be adjudicated within an academic environment? Third, what is the status of these outputs and methods relative to the production of text?

Discussion about the ways in which artefacts communicate knowledge as research outputs is underpinned by different conceptions of intentionality and interpretation. Arguments against the intentionality of text rather than arguments that make explicit how non-text artefacts communicate are predicated upon the idea that artefacts presented as outputs require an interpretative framework, but that this framework is centred upon the artefact itself. Issues arise about the artefact relative to interpretation rather than the artefact relative to intentionality (Fiona Candlin 2000).

For some educationalists, the interpretative framework for artefacts is provided by text, refocusing the terms of adjudication upon the intentionality of the researcher relative to their own production (Newbury

1996, Candlin 2000:02, Rust, Mottram and Till 2007:12). In this situation, the researcher is both producer and commentator, effectively undertaking a dual practice where process and outputs are methods of research to be studied as they occur, rather than the outputs of study alone (Quinn 2007).

Elsewhere, Stephen Scrivener has identified this unique role in what he describes as 'creative-production' (ie. a tradition of studio practice), requiring the representation of the researcher's personal journey in practice as a template for future studio practitioners to follow (Scrivener 2000:02). Scrivener arrives at the 'creative-production' model, requiring recording and reporting, because he makes a distinction between traditional studio processes and instrumental or problem solving models of learning, utilised in science and design, such as those developed by educationalist Donald Schön (Schön 1983).

Biggs, Burling, Freidman and Gutterson are critical of this interpretative framework on the grounds that, although the model can be generalised, there is no way in which to adjudicate the relative competence of individual practices or researchers. They retain a focus on interpretation, arguing that establishing professional consensus will provide an interpretative framework for artefacts as outputs, independent of text.

Following Anne Douglas, Karen Scopa and Carole Gray, Michael Biggs argues that developing an agreed interpretative framework for practical outputs is the role of the institution or rather, of educators precisely identifying their community of expertise (Douglas, Scopa, Gray 2000:03, Biggs 2002:04). In this sense, they argue that interrogation of these definitions in an academic context will advance little in discussions that focus on media. Rather, the relationships between theory and practice can be made an indivisible component of theoretical method, if they are identified as discourse relationships, based in an essentially social conception of communities of expertise, including academic communities of expertise.

However, Scrivener argues that the possibility of considering the outputs of problem solving as demonstrations of process, rather than as entirely instrumental outcomes that finally leave process behind (Scrivener 2000:07). Hence, some practical outputs are able to provide a view on their own production: they are demonstrative.

As demonstration, these outputs create an interpretative framework that derives from the setting of a problem itself. In this sense, Douglas, Scopa and Gray write '... the role of practice is part of the methodology of the research and is therefore relative and heuristic...' (Douglas, Scopa and Gray 2000:05).

These two approaches currently dominate, in a field of institutional habits that remains profoundly inconsistent. Each approach retains conceptual problems that parallel problems of adjudication, relative to the establishment of a general model in which agreed methods are both rooted in the theoretical needs of a wide variety of practices and provide, in themselves, gauges of relative competence that can be maintained across practical disciplines, over time.

This month (November 2014), the European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA) project Step-change for Higher Arts Research and Education (SHARE) will publish a major review of current approaches to practice-based research. Although the number of contributors is high and their

fields of expertise numerous, it remains to be seen if this is a strategic or a comprehensive review. In seeking to be "...servicable to many different agendas and projects" by cataloguing existing institutional contradictions, *The Handbook for Artistic Research Education* runs the risk of demonstrating a strategic lack of rigour. We shall see.

It is in light of these positions that I will outline three practice-based research projects with outputs in different media, describing a single approach utilised first to establish discipline-specific consensus on the basis of which theoretical comparisons could be made and, second, to provide benchmarks for the adjudication of relative competence.

3. IMAGE: Courir cover

Dispossession (2015) is a 94 page colour graphic adaptation of Anthony Trollope's 1879 novel *John Caldigate*. It is the primary outcome of a 2012 commission from the University of Leuven to develop, draw and rationalise a new graphic novel relative to Trollope's. *Dispossession* will be published in an English edition, and as *Courir deux lièvres* (To run two hares) in a French edition, in support of a 2015 academic conference on the occasion of the bicentenary of Trollope's birth.

More complex than rationalising the changes that I made to Trollope's plot in the graphic novel, was the development of a number of rules to govern the graphic novel's visual storyboard in visioning the world of *Dispossession*, that is, the prefiguring, at planning stage, of the ways in which the reader relates to the action in each panel and the way in which panels relate to each other.

4. IMAGE: rules

In *Dispossession*, the rules that I developed constrained the storyboarding of action by dictating: a limited range of distances between viewer and scene; views of discrete actions, not divisions of actions; rhythmic changes of scene and episode on the page; consistent rhythmic changes of point of view in a visible 1-2-3 rhythm; no extra-diegetic narrative; as small an amount of verbalisation in the plot as possible; generalisation: this treatment applied in all circumstances.

5. IMAGE page from Dispossession

This regime responded to the challenge of replacing Trollope's literary voice, his *John Caldigate* style of writing, and facilitated the further task of being able to theorise this replacement. More than his plots, Trollope's writing style, his techniques of understatement, create the overwhelming sense of the world in which he lived.

6. IMAGE: JC page One

The first word of *John Caldigate* is 'Perhaps'. 'Perhaps it was more the fault of Daniel Caldigate the father than of... And yet,...', the narrator continues: '... of whom his neighbours said' and: 'It was rumoured of him, too, that...' Producing this sense of equivocation through the visual style of the graphic novel was key in showing, rather than telling, the plot. An underlying research question became: how does one draw 'perhaps'?

Image: *Dispossession* page

You will see from this account of the inter-disciplinary framing of a research problem that Trollope's source text, including the historic milieu of

the 1870s in which it was produced and read, could already be described as a theoretical subject. In relation to the comprehensive idea of this theoretical subject, a rationale for a hierarchy of significance in the moves and traces of the new graphic novel became self-evident, that is, shown, in comparison with other genres in the register (the consistent round of changes of point of view, the maintenance of the location of the reader at a distance and the use of colour as both temporal and geographic demarcation and as a art-historically referential way of depicting meteorology and aesthesis).

7. IMAGE: Dispossession

Similarly, the idea of Trollope's text as subject located every decision and drawn mark. Aside from questions of interpretation or intention, the theoretical chimera of 'the whole text' guided the production of the new work at as many points of comparison as a reader might possibly make. Treated in this way, Trollope's text functioned heterophenomenologically, relative to the practice of drawing, allowing the specific practice itself to substantiate tests for relative competence within an agreed field.

Rationales for substitutions (that is, theorisations that substantiate one approach rather than another) lie at the heart of remediation and adaptation projects in particular. In a sense, such rationales for remediation always constitute the topic of research as well as providing opportunities for the development of project-specific methodologies and possible benchmarking subjects in these activities.

8. Image Dispossession

However, the concept of remediation itself doesn't describe the scope of heterophenomenology as a basis for rationalising practice-based research. In the context I'm discussing here, heterophenomenology is, rather simply, the establishing of a theoretically neutral subject in research situations where either consensus and/or subjectivity are theoretically indissoluble, against which to test proposed courses of action, to generate and test theorisations and to evaluate outputs. In this context, the heterophenomenon is never an impartial subject, and hence cannot be set aside as a failed impartial subject, as Tan Kock Wah has argues. Rather, it is a constructed, that is, imagined subject, created strategically in order to break the solipsistic deadlock between consensus and qualia (described rather succinctly as 'the way things seem to me' by Daniel Dennett), by theorising an impossible third position which is self-consciously rationalised as a benchmark.

9. IMAGE: Colchester round.

Briefly describing two further projects, I will arguing for the strategic availability to practice-based research of this use of heterophenomenology. *Colchester Round* was commissioned for the opening of a new contemporary art gallery in the city of Colchester in the south of England in 2011. The project brought together four groups of Colchester musicians and invited each group to choose a piece of their own music to pass to the other three groups. Each group arranged, played performed and recorded the others' pieces in their own manner.

10. IMAGE: MUSICIANS

Musicians, unlike visual artists, share a language. Consensus as to the limits and possibilities of that language was an *a priori* condition of the project. However, musical genres vary radically from each other, as do the

visible social milieu that support and accompany them. Articulating the differences in the habits, histories, societies and music of the four groups was the focus of the project, by making these differences into social and musical terms of engagement. The four groups of invited musicians were different types of people playing different types of music from each other: The Band of the Parachute Regiment (a military marching band), Colchester Waites (a medieval bassoon ensemble), Sanctorum (a heavy metal band) and Quire (a community choir of retirees singing mostly shapenote and gospel music).

It is easy to identify both the heterophenomena and the uses made of them by each group of musicians and in evaluating the project as a whole, rationalising changes in practice by referring to a number of new theoretical subjects. For each of the groups, the habits, music, personalities and environments of each of the other groups acted heterophenomenologically as new unified subjects with which to adjudicate an activity beyond both habit and consensus. Because of the shared presence of music as a language, true hybridity was able to occur, producing new pieces of music that were generically comprehensible, if unfamiliar or unheard. As with my use of Trollope's text, in *Colchester Round* reciprocal benchmarking of one genre and environment by the others was achieved as each group focussed upon a new theoretical subject in the form of the pieces passed from group to group.

11. IMAGE: Truce Tableaux Blades of Glory

Truce Tableaux is a series of 8 short films made in 2012, with a group of young people from the Essex towns of Barking and Dagenham, in collaboration with a Barking theatre and a commercial film production company. Each film attempted to visually recreate a cinematic moment (or still) from a contemporary Hollywood movie, featuring the young actors, using no costumes, make-up or special effects and shooting at found, that is, unaltered locations in Barking and Dagenham. Each short film presents the moments before and after the filming of these stills.

12. IMAGE: Truce Tableaux 2: Chicken Run

Here, the Hollywood movie stills relate to the short films as Trollope's text relates to the graphic novel *Dispossession* or the passed-around pieces of music in *Colchester Round*. Each still compresses the entire experience of each movie into an expansive but stable, that is imagined, set of rationalisations that are able to respond, relative to the new short films and the recreated stills within them, to scrutiny and interrogation as subjects.

13. IMAGE Dispossession cover

Finally, I must stress that, whilst spontaneously revealing, inter-disciplinarity is not a requirement of heterophenomenology in the sense that I propose it as a useful strategic activity in resolving problems arising from lack of consensus in the adjudication of research projects involving practice. Rather, the three projects that I have outlined indicate the flexibility of the simple strategy of imagining a subject where non existed before and utilising descriptions of its characteristics to test both the methods and outputs of practices to which it relates as a research tool.

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