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Exploring Creative Research Methodologies in the Humanities

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An increased focus on creativity and innovation has pervaded higher education institutions and policy in recent years, with Jeremy Heaton noting that creativity is now essential to compete for "funding, people and reputation" in the research sector (Heaton, 2005, p. 254). Many universities have successfully developed information material, training opportunities, and creativity hubs in order to "demystify" and support those staff looking to engage with creative research practices. However, some older universities have less prominent focuses on creative work beyond the specific group of departments (typically arts subjects) that are already active in creative research and teaching.

This chapter looks at how creativity (and, implicitly, creative labour) can be put to work in humanities research more broadly, considering some of the advantages, implications, and barriers that creative approaches can offer the work of a humanities researcher in order to provide reflection and advice for those seeking to put "creativity to work" in their research context. In many ways, exploring creative methods in humanities is a well-trodden path. However, there is all too often disengagement between theory (and policy) on the one hand and practice on the other hand. In order to try and negotiate this disconnect, this chapter offers a practical, rather than theoretical, view, exploring the well-discussed theory "at work" in a real-world context.

Central to this chapter is a detailed case study of the new Oxford Centre for Creative Research (OCCR), offering a reflexive account of the issues that were

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faced in both setting up such a centre and providing the adequate training and support to our colleagues in the centre's early days. This account is in no way a conclusive definitive guide to the setting up of a similar centre but rather addresses many of the issues facing researchers in engaging with creativity ranging from the theoretical and technical to the institutional and political, in order to present both a practical model to others wishing to engage in such an endeavour, as well as consider some broader considerations about the nature of creative work in research institutions.

Context

With its disparate system of colleges, faculties, and divisions, the University of Oxford faces a significant challenge when connecting up like-minded staff. With that in mind, the university developed The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH) in 2013 to foster interdisciplinary collaboration amongst humanities researchers, helping to develop academic, industry, and performing arts collaborations. Following and adapting some of the paradigms set up by its older counterpart, the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) in Cambridge, TORCH has proved to be a hugely successful addition to the university, instigating numerous dynamic and attractive research projects, whilst at the same time removing the institutional barriers which in the past may have frustrated burgeoning knowledge exchange and public engagement activities.

However, whilst a "trans-disciplinary knowledge environment has a greater capacity to inform creative work" (Johnston & Ridley, 2007, p. 35) than a disciplinary one, such an environment in itself is not sufficient to encourage the creative thinking required of university researchers. As Jackson & Shaw (2006, p. 5) note, whilst academic staff commonly recognize the value of creativity in student learning, they are often reluctant to take on the extra work that is perceived as necessary for applying creative processes to their own research. I noted that, informally, lecturers often relay an anecdotal view along the lines of "there's always so much pressure to show creativity, but really my research is niche and traditional—and I'm fine with that! In reality I have no idea how to bring creativity into my research."

In order to stimulate creative research amongst the existing Oxford community, it was clear that there was a need for a central hub that could provide the resources and support that colleagues needed in order to develop more creative approaches to their existing research practices. Together with a small group of like-minded academics, I began to envisage what such a space might

look like and the validity of such a space in the context of existing provision. After taking into consideration the requirements and desires expressed by our colleagues, we set out to create a new academic centre with the aim of both elucidating and celebrating creativity as a tool for research and public engagement in the humanities.

Whilst the Oxford system with its mixed subject staff common rooms seems to perfectly facilitate this sort of cross-subject creativity, the importance of engaging with contrasting and sometimes antagonistic ideas and material in order to encourage creativity is not always obvious to researchers. Creativity is so often enhanced through collaboration and the recognition of difference (Sawyer, 2007), and whilst difference, provocation, and appropriation occur regularly in the context of academia (through conferences, colloquia, peer review, review articles, etc.), these typically fall into disciplinary boundaries. Helping researchers to engage with the potential creative stimulus available in the diverse research community around them was considered crucial, therefore, as was encouraging the openness to actively identify and seek possible linkages with their colleagues. It was also important to show that creative collaboration can take numerous forms, from research projects to researcher-practitioner collaboration, and so on (see John-Steiner, 2000, pp. 46–55).

Our main aim in creating the centre was to provide a space for researchers to explore the discourse on creative research, as well as creating and presenting their own nontraditional and artistic responses to research interests in their work. Part of the challenge of this new project was demonstrating creativity as a meaningful addition to the researchers' existing methodological toolkits, in addition to showing how creative elements might help strengthen existing projects and funding bids. By creating a space that explicitly valued creativity, we hoped to allay some of the worries colleagues had from their perceptions of creative research, such as being led towards producing careless or unrigorous work, which was, for many of our participants, a significant barrier to their adoption of creative research into their work. A major part of this process was to facilitate researchers to recognize and articulate their experience and understanding of creativity, so that they might better understand its relevance to their own work.

Engaging the Research Community

This led to the centre's first university event; a round-table discussion looking to define "creativity" and "creative research", and help contextualize broad ideas of innovation and reflection within existing university life. In a diverse

research community such as Oxford, it is important to promote anything even tangentially creative to help open a dialogue with researchers and help them engage with creativity at their own pace. Finding the panel's answers (roughly, creativity can be many things; it depends on how it is packaged!) made many of the participants initially anxious, but after an in-depth discussion on some of the ways in which creativity can be clearly and persuasively seen in certain projects, attendees became increasingly excited and inspired. Using best practice models alongside more active training models subsequently became a strong component of the centre's rubric.

To enable researchers to feel comfortable to explore these issues, it was evident that the project needed to have a real and meaningful significance for all of the centre's potential users, namely all research-active academics across the University's humanities division. Numerous conversations with this group of researchers (the centre's primary stakeholders) confirmed that it was of paramount importance that the centre was to be positioned at the forefront of contemporary research in order to maintain a position of academic respect and precision, as well as attract a continuing supply of submissions from high-profile thinkers. This stress on the importance of getting community validation echoes the well-known ideas of Csíkszentmihályi that:

> Whether an idea or product is creative or not does not depend on its own qualities, but on the effect it is able to produce in others who are exposed to it. Therefore it follows that creativity is a phenomenon that is constructed through an interaction between producer and audience … [c]reativity is not the product of single individuals, but of social systems making judgments about individual products. (Csíkszentmihályi, 1997, p. 314)

In order to establish this peer review, we felt it was important to gain the support of a group of prestigious academics in these humanities to sit on our advisory board, many of whom already incorporated creative research into their own work. This board helped practically throughout the centre's inception, as well as supporting the more engaged and active researchers amongst us through informal mentoring; an asset which we found to be one of the best resources in fostering creative thinking.

In addition to supporting the instigation of new creative research, the centre had aspirations to promote such work to a broader non-academic audience through further events, both in the university and on a national scale, to showcase research that incorporates creative practice in its methodology. In doing this, it was important for us to broaden the way academic work was presented to a public audience, as well as giving a platform to that broadening

already taking place within the university. These events/performances and related media coverage would help to not only disseminate research but also further the knowledge exchange in the community. Some of these events include:

- Three lunchtime talks at the Oxford Said Business School as part of their existing "Engaging with the Humanities" programme. These talks explored themes in creativity in business, examining the role of creative arts in enriching brand identity. They were presented in lecture-recital formats and delivered by researchers and artists David Barnes (visual art and industrial practice), Donna Kurtz (cultural heritage and creative curation), and Toby Young (songwriting and philosophy).
- A staging session for researchers in the modern languages faculty whose work deals with the performative aspect of literature and drama. This session focused specifically on how to incorporate live staging into research to explore issues of perception and phenomenology.
- Together with the Tavistock and Portman Centre, a specialist mental health trust in London, the centre hosted a day-long symposium, art show, and concert exploring the relationships between mental illness and the creative process.
- To launch the new show of Somerville College's artist in residence, Patrice Moor, the OCCR curated an interdisciplinary event exploring the theme of "body portraiture" (inspired by Patrice's set of hand portraits), involving musical and poetic portraits alongside talks about the physicality of portraiture from Oriana Walker, a researcher in the philosophy of science.

Terminology

As Gibson (2005) notes, there are many often confusing and contradictory discourses around creativity, which extend to the culture of creative research. This lack of clarity around definition—and indeed evaluation—of creativity proved initially problematic both to the practicalities of setting up the centre and encouraging our colleagues to become involved. Many colleagues were, quite rightly, wary of our attempts to differentiate creative research from their existing activities and echoed Frayling's (1993, p. 4) concerns that "research is a practice, writing is practice, doing science is practice, doing design is practice, making art is a practice … [isn't] all research a 'creative practice'?" Fundamentally, we agree with this notion, but it was evident in these conversations that the researchers making such claims often had no concept of *how*

their research was creative and whether the creative elements could be enhanced, developed, or replicated. By acknowledging and engaging with the creative nature of this work—particularly in light of the abundant literature on creativity—and opening up these tacit assumptions for conversation, the centre hoped to offer tools for these researchers to better hone their processes and outputs: something we explored more thoroughly in our training provision.

One possible method of conducting creative research is practice-based research: that is, an investigation conducted to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice, as opposed to practice-led work where the research leads primarily to new understandings about the mode of practice, which may or may not also be practice-based (Dogantan-Dack, 2015; Gauntlett, 2007; Smith & Dean, 2009). Many researchers were sceptical of this term, suggesting that practice-based research implied for them only artistic outputs, with any accompanying verbal material denigrated to becoming "accompanying documentation" rather than intrinsic. In addition, in spite of the strong theoretical grounding in this area, it was evident that colloquially the terms "practice-based" and "practice-led" were often used interchangeably, leading to a mixed feeling that both of these research methods were for artists only, and therefore removed outside the purview of non-practitioner researchers.

We also became aware talking to researchers that there are multiple differences in the use of these terms in individual subject areas. For instance, in the visual arts, practice-based research emphasize the creative process, with the artefact playing a vital part in the new understandings about this process' engagement with core research questions (Kroll & Harper, 2012), whereas in health research, the same term might be used to describe a clinical trial or the evaluation and revision of certain healthcare protocols, policies, and procedures, and where the implementation of a new intervention or policy is key (Barrett & Bolt, 2010).

It is clear then, from both the literature and our anecdotal conversations, that the term "creative research" does not represent a single concept with a shared meaning; indeed to instil the prerequisite playfulness (Craft, 2003), we found that celebrating some of the diverse meanings was very positive for engaging the largest group of researchers we could. The term creative research became extremely useful as something which included a blend of both traditional outputs obtained through creative processes (discussed in more detail later) and practice-based outputs undertaken by researchers in their own idiosyncratic way, without the onus to fit their work into an existing terminological frame.

However, we did feel it was important to separate this, albeit broad, concept of creative research from arts-based research (sometimes known as "creative research methods"). This typically refers to participatory research, where participants are invited to express themselves in nontraditional ways, using "the making of artistic expressions … as a primary way of expression their experiences" (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. 29), though again, there are numerous subtly conflicting discourses around this term. This set of approaches is typically grounded in subject-orientated work in the social sciences, demonstrated in the successful Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded "Creative Research Methods project" co-organized by researchers at Birmingham City University and the University of Westminster. As this sort of qualitative work was outside the remit of many of the humanities scholars we were trying to engage with (perhaps with the exception of anthropologists), it did not seem prudent to include it in our activities. However, we made sure to highlight the aims and distinctions of these methods and offered one-to-one training for interested researchers who wished to explore them further in their own work.

Resources and Training

One of the major difficulties in propagating our ideas to colleagues was to overcome the researchers' worry of maintaining an appropriate level of critical interrogation and rigour in their work. For some disciplines like English, music, archaeology, anthropology, and (perhaps surprisingly) classics, creative approaches to research—typically through practice-based work—were seen as commonplace, or at least part of the recognized toolkit of a researcher. In others, however, notably areas like politics, philosophy, and law, there was a major dissonance between conventional methodological approaches and the activities we were suggesting.

To try and bridge some of these gaps, it was important for these researchers to understand how the creative work we were promoting would enhance their research. It is a common aphorism that interdisciplinarity is often let down by lack of knowledge of the "other's" methods, and being wary of this, we focused on promoting the benefits of creative dissemination so as not to appear to be "treading on anyone's toes". The format we initially opted for was the small-scale training workshop—favoured by other avenues of research skills training for Oxford academics—to act as a pilot programme and a space to test our ideas. From an open call around the humanities departments, nine researchers signed up for the first group of three of these training sessions, ranging from

doctoral students to an associate professor. It is perhaps unsurprising that these workshops were taken up by mostly postgraduate and early career researchers, keen to distinguish themselves in an already-crowded market. Whilst we encouraged researchers with pre-existing creative or artistic interests, we also welcomed those who were inexperienced with artistic methods but open to using them. Sessions were held in a large arts studio space, offering a flexible environment that provided a "blank canvas" of inspiration and could easily hold both full group and breakout sessions for more detailed individual work.

Triggs (2006) points towards a need for the contextualization of the challenges facing researchers when adapting such creative research to their own fields, so we decided to arrange the training programme to echo the established research methods courses which researchers were typically familiar with. These courses present a mixture of theoretical context (e.g. epistemology), general skills (e.g. academic writing, presentation skills), and subject-specific training. This format shaped our choice of topics over the initial three-session course, focusing in turn on creative processes, theoretical grounding—specifically focusing on how to validate and justify these creative approaches—and alternative methods of presentation (i.e. non-written dissemination).

As an early career researcher myself—and therefore more junior than several of the participants—I was very aware that my role in these sessions was as facilitator rather than teacher. The model discussed below relied on both my skills in this regard and the ability to work closely with participants in the small group context. Pedagogical theory helped me to find focus and objectivity in the designing and delivery of a training course that would have the "low floors, high ceilings and wide walls" (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 46) needed to inspire creative thinking. Feedback was taken from researchers verbally at the end of each session, and then in a written evaluation form at the end of the course.

Session 1: Research Methodologies and the Creative Process

The first training session opened with a discussion of both the relevance of this model to the researchers and—perhaps most importantly—what sort of creativity they hope to achieve. The creative process can be seen to have two possible outcomes: the first being complete innovation (or H-creativity), where something entirely new is created which does not already exist in the world; the second, conceptual blending (also known as P-creativity or the

"theory of bisociation"), where materials that do not "fit" together normally are combined in order to create new meanings and discover unimagined connections (see Koestler, 1964). At a research level, conceptual blending is perhaps a more desirable outcome than innovation: to paraphrase Kant, you can create original nonsense relatively easily, whereas discovering and presenting interesting new connections presents a far better demonstration of research skill, knowledge acquisition, and intellectual rigour. We therefore started exploring how material can be reformed in this way by asking researchers to work with a colleague from the group whose work lay in a contrasting field to discuss the commonalities of their research. Researchers found it easy to negotiate this common ground and then due to their innate curiosity naturally developed this into new connections and ideas.

Next, we looked at various ways of considering the creative process, starting with Wallas' (1926) influential four-stage model:

- Stage 1: Preparation
  - Finding appropriate materials
  - Explore existing rules/methods of reasoning
- Stage 2: Incubation
  - "Letting go"
  - Interruptions start subconscious thought process.
- Stage 3: Illumination
  - "Eureka" moment
  - Materials move from subconscious to conscious
- Stage 4: Verification (or critical analysis)
  - Ideas are critiques and packaged in the best way for consumption
  - Artwork is formed to enable most effective communication.

The broad shape of Wallas' model has proved fundamental to thinking about creativity, and its linearity forms the basis of nearly every other model or theoretical tool; for instance, those by cognitive scientist Margaret Boden (2003, 2010), psychologist Csíkszentmihályi (1997), and anthropologists Hallam and Ingold (2007). All of these models hold a similar sense of process to the Wallas' model, whereby material is collected (or derived), explored, and produced into a creative object. These models all function in a similar way, based on the premise that creativity is a mode of thinking, which brings together diverse and random material into a cohesive work. When discussing

Wallas' model, researchers were quick to notice considerable similarities with the research process, namely starting with an idea, working through it, and packaging it up in the appropriate way for dissemination. They were, however, less used to considering the importance of an incubation period in their work, often stressing that there's no time to let thoughts ferment under the strains of institutional teaching and research goals. Several of the researchers noted that this approach is more methodical than they were expecting a creative process to be and were surprised at the foundation of such a formal framework. As Wallas (1926) notes, the best use of the preparation stage for the learner is to "voluntarily or habitually follow out rules as to the order in which he shall direct his attention to successive elements" (p. 71). Dividing up the creative product into these two options proved useful to the researchers, who remarked that they thought the institutional rhetoric expected complete innovation, but they felt happier and more confident exploring conceptual blending.

Whilst some of the researchers were initially a bit sceptical of the efficacy of this model, many reported notable improvements in the (self-defined) creative content of their work when they, for example, spent extra time playing with their children. The work of National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) scientist Robert Lang provided a useful best practice example. Lang is a physicist and mathematician who used origami as an escape from the pressures of his research work. However, in the process, he realized that he often found solutions to mathematical problems subconsciously through this origami and later explored the real-world applications of origami to engineering problems, such as creating a "flat-pack" lunar exploration device. In return, his scientific approach has helped enable him to extend his origami practice, through use of technology and advanced geometry. This case study emphasizes the importance of play in all its forms and clearly appealed to many of the course participants.

Later, in the session, we also considered the importance of ambiguity in creative work. Whilst ambiguity is typically valued in the arts for its richness of interpretive possibility, research practices typically value the clarity of quantifiable outcomes (Hargreaves, 2008, pp. 228–229). Risk-taking, however, is often discussed in the literature as a mode of thinking rather than a specific process (Groth & Peters, 1999, pp. 180–182; Furedi, 2006), which this discussion intended to explore. It was important that the researchers understood that creativity is a complex and messy process (Sternberg & Kaufman, 1999) by developing a willingness to engage in "successful failure".

Groth and Peters (1999) suggest that a key barrier to creativity is fear, typically of the unknown, of ridicule and of failure. With researchers having

invested a great deal of time, money, and effort in their academic careers, encouraging them to create calculated failure like this could be seen as daunting or even threatening (Hargreaves, 2008, p. 230). However, whilst foreign to many of the session's attendees, exercises that are designed to fail are crucial to breaking past this anxiety, and by doing them in a group situation like this one, a strong and supportive feeling of community spirit is typically formed. In addition, these exercises often reveal the most unusual and unpredictable results (Johnson, 2010), as well as developing the sort of flexibility required of creative researchers.

The session concluded by looking at how to apply incubation and ambiguity to existing research methodologies and methods in order to show that risk-taking does not have to preclude engagement with more rigorous research approaches. Gaut and Kieran (2014) suggest that creativity flourishes with imitation and rule following, noting that "rule-orientated" methodologies provide useful templates to frame the more unpredictable creative activities, which in turn help to ground these activities in a real-world setting.

Session 2: Theoretical Context

Our second session on theoretical context was perhaps the most familiar ground for the researchers. Its purpose was to provide a space to consider the ontological and epistemological contexts and consequences of these creative approaches to knowledge around like-minded colleagues. Extending the earlier discussion of rigour, this session addressed the value of non-verbal forms of expression in engaging with complex academic discourse through the written word. It also highlighted a tacit assumption shared by a few members of the group over the primacy of the written word in fully comprehending the object of inquiry.

In addition to suggesting ways to frame creative knowledge work, this session offered some more practical advice for justifying this work in the researchers' day-to-day professional lives, for example, in writing research bids or applications for internal funding. We began by looking at platforms that support and promote creative research in numerous forms (such as fiction, poetry, visual, and auditory media) including journals *The Still Point*, *Dovetail*, and *OAR* (*The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform*), focusing specifically on the sort of content they are soliciting and how to approach them. All three are interdisciplinary projects aimed particularly at early career and doctoral researchers in the humanities and demonstrate the broadening interest in creative research amongst the academic community at the moment. We

also looked at how to frame and promote creative research to more mainstream publishing bodies, taking the example of cultural theorist Nick Sousanis, whose doctoral thesis *Unflattening* was written entirely in the form of a comic book, becoming the first visual monograph ever to be published by Harvard University Press.

We then discussed how these approaches might be incorporated into research bids—particularly looking at AHRC and Leverhulme grants, as two organizations which have actively solicited creative research—as well as the possibility of submitting practice-based work as part of the REF (Research Excellence Framework). Whilst many of the researchers were wary of this, creative researcher practices (particularly practice-based research) have received increased attention from funding and assessment bodies, as the implications of this work become more widely understood. A particularly useful discussion was had around the relationship between creative outputs and pathways to impact, with researchers noting that creative outputs—if organized effectively—can offer huge scope for engaging both academic stakeholders and the broader public with research outputs.

Session 3: Practical Applications

The final training session looked at some of the practical skills needed to be able to extend the theory from our initial sessions into practice (Schön, 1974). Art and design education puts emphasis on strategies of learning by doing, through free-form, hypothetical, embodied, and playful activity-based learning (Snodgrass & Coyne, 2006), and we wanted to imbue the initial task with an element of this playful immediacy. Inspired by Baudelaire's (1846) notion that "the best response to a painting might be a sonnet or an elegy" (p. 32), we began by looking at the notion of artistic responses. Taking a short, evocative poem by Emily Dickinson as a provocation, we asked the researchers to make a simple series of marks on some blank paper; marks which could take any form, including a literal drawing, some written contemplation in poetry or prose, a spontaneous utterance, or a careful critical reflection. Many of the researchers were surprised how natural this sort of creative response was to them, and after the initial block such a challenge naturally presents, they reported feeling able to express themselves clearly and concisely.

For the rest of this session, we focused on developing this creative immediacy into a more considered piece of work. Most of the researchers who signed up to these sessions had a certain level of proficiency with an art form (including poetry, music, dance, painting, sculpture, and photography) and

with these, I focused on adapting my comments and materials to help them engage with this media—typically hobbies—for academic purposes. For those who did not have any specific proficiency in these areas, fiction writing proved a useful starting point as a creative form that was similar to their existing skills in academic writing, though of course there were additional barriers put in place by the fact that this was their first attempt at engaging with this medium.

First, I asked researchers to write down an idea from their recent research, ranging from the politics of Silk Road trade routes through to Medieval Italian poetry, before spending the rest of the session working individually with each of them to support and facilitate the expression of this idea through their preferred creative medium. Whilst initially daunted by the challenge, every single one of the researchers engaged positively and proactively with the task. This echoes Knight and Yorke's (2003, p. 88) findings that—contrary to pedagogic thought in the last century—rather than being prescriptive in teaching specific techniques for the student to copy, it is more effective to teach the critical skills required to let the student discover their own best practice and means of expression.

A significant problem that the researchers faced was judging what they deemed to be creative. With a training to be sensitive to plagiarism—of both content and ideas—many sought a desire to be coached in the production of original artefacts (echoing Austerlitz, 2007), which they realized was also associated with the pressures of innovation that pervade academia. In order to address this tacit assumption, the session sought to equip researchers with the required tools—and indeed confidence—to evaluate both the individual merits of their creative work and its effectiveness in conveying the concepts and ideas they wished to communicate. Throughout the training sessions, we looked to elements of art school learning practices in order to accomplish this; a key model being the collaborative and group-based feedback of the art school critique.

Prescriptive assessment criteria often seem to "fit particularly awkwardly with creative work which is inevitably about outcomes that cannot be predicted in advance" (Fryer, 2010, p. 549). As such, feedback is crucial in the development of the learner's approach to their work. Ramsden (1992) finds the nature of teacher-led feedback problematic, especially if the assessment—in this case informal and formative—becomes the sole responsibility of the teacher. If feedback becomes a one-way transmission process, the teacher becomes solely responsible for transmitting feedback to students. Teaching and learning between peers is inevitably different from teacher and researcher, as the researchers are less likely to be overwhelmed by one another's knowledge and expertise (Slavin, 1995).

These concerns are particularly relevant in the highly personal work of creative practices. One model of feedback in a creative discipline that engages well with this criticism is the art school critique, referred to as a crit. Crits are an important and complex pedagogic tool in arts education, whereby an artist will show one of their works to a group of teachers and fellow students at a designated time, often alongside other artists' works. They will instigate feedback, often on specific aspects of the work, and as such it is fundamentally a learner-led process of assessment.

Mers (2013) charts the key elements of the crit as being:

- The artist may choose to give an introduction to the work that is on display, including mention of motivation, inspiration, and the work's genesis.
- The artist may ask to receive feedback on specific elements or may request a cold reading of the objects at hand, in which case no introduction is presented.
- Often, stated intentions and observed results are compared by the visitor(s).
- Suggestions may be offered for alternate approaches, both intellectual and material.
- Practice and results are situated in relation to historical and contemporary art world contexts, often in reference to the specific areas of expertise represented by visitors.

Central to this is the reflexive evaluation process that this discussion fosters. The systemic self-discovery that emerges from a shared interest by the group in an artist and their work helps the artist to see the work in a more objective light. To best facilitate this, the art and design lecturers must aim to assess student artwork in relation to student intention, what they are trying to "do", and how they are doing it (Cannatella, 2001). This proved particularly effective in the training sessions, as in addition to the process of self-discovery it facilitated, the crit method offered researchers a safe space to explore collective risk-taking outside their comfort zone. Feedback from researchers also highlighted how it helped to enable a feeling of community around the creative tasks, which may hopefully lead to the establishment of a wider community of creatively engaged researchers.

The crit's success lies in the way it enables new directions at an earlier stage of the process by making feedback less personal, and also the framework it gives assessors to offer rigorous and constructive feedback which directly relates to the researchers' intentions. Another method we incorporated into sessions in order to better engage with the learners' intentions was a series of reflexive-writing tasks. Creative subjects are inherently rhizomatic in their knowledge:

there is no single correct end result or way to get there (Cross, 1984). However, every creative individual has a rigorous process that needs to be developed through structured educational outcomes in order to enable them to see the creative potential in their work, engage with the ambiguity of the creative process, and reflect on their relevance to a typical research situation.

Reflexivity

In their article "What makes great pedagogy", Husbands and Pearce (2012) describe the most important facet of effective teaching as giving "serious consideration to pupil voice" (p. 86); yet often it is assumed that researchers of doctoral level and above have the prerequisite skills to convey their voice. When engaging with new approaches like this, it is easy for learners to become overwhelmed by the new "language" they were working with, and consequently we found it important to "clear the playing field" by factoring in active opportunities to engage the student voice. This also helps reinforce to researchers that self-expression—also termed "authenticity" in the literature—is important, specifically the ability to create work which shows a personal understanding of any pre-existing material, whilst simultaneously holding a critical distance to that material (Amabile, 1996, pp. 72–75).

Reflexive-writing tasks (designed to emulate autoethnographic journal entries) offered the researchers space to express their personal views, as well as providing a platform to think through their ideas in a way which would encourage more developed reflexivity than verbal discussion might, using the journal as any mix of documentation, rationale, justification, position statement, and critique of their work. The activity is designed to accomplish certain tasks in furthering student work (as set out in ibid.):

- Students should describe and help to clearly perceive the various material, tactile, visual, auditory, and other qualities of works that are presented.
- Students are expected to aid the student in clarifying the methods and processes of art making that she or he employs and the implications that those processes have for reading the work.
- Students help discern and contextualize the motivation for making these particular works/types of art, mobilizing the student's broader interests and contexts, both personal and intellectual.
- Students may be expected to help determine the quality of work/assess the promise that a student shows, also as part of advancement and/or graduation requirements.

By the third session, the researchers had begun to use these opportunities well and expressed positive feedback about the task's efficacy at channelling new thoughts and helping researchers to engage better in their creative processes. It also helped me to know the researchers' thoughts and goals better, which in turn led to a more effective process of feedback. Knowing the student in a creative situation lets you understand their work in a far deeper and more holistic way; understanding not only the processes that went into the work (rather than just the end piece) but also their influences and goals. As Orr (2007) notes:

> When artwork is being assessed in the studio the lecturers in my studies privileged the assessment views of lecturers who had worked most closely with the students whose artwork was being marked … [For] art and design lecturers, the work and the student are entangled. The assessment approaches adopted reflect their interest in the individual students and their particular learning trajectories.

This was echoed in the feedback comments of a postdoctoral researcher, who said:

> It was very useful for me to return to the journal during the session, in order to better understand my own thoughts and process. I also really liked having the space to reflect on aesthetic issues away from training space, and have a structured way to format it. It was really stimulating, and helped me get the most out of all my new discoveries from the training sessions. My concern would be that it is quite a time-consuming process, and I'm not particularly confident that I would practically be able to emulate it amongst my other (rather substantial) research and teaching commitments.

These practical issues of time management are understandable in the current research environment. However, other researchers were more comfortable treating these reflexive exercises as a flexible tool to use once or twice during the creative process rather than a formal "straightjacket".

Further Opportunities

After the training sessions, we wanted to create a follow-up opportunity for researchers who wished to further explore some of the ideas and techniques from our sessions in a "real-world" context. I had recently been employed to curate an event for King's College, Cambridge (October 2015), combining

elements of research and artistic response to celebrate 500 years of the college's iconic chapel. I organized the chance for two researchers to have a space in the chapel to present visual or performed artwork, as part of the evening. Five of the researchers applied, and after consultation with the event's organizers at King's, two of the most promising were selected to showcase their projects at this event.

The first of these works was a poem entitled *Coming Into Senses* by Jen Thorp, a postdoctoral writer and scholar of Australian Literature. Taking inspiration from Neil MacGregor's seminal monograph "A History of the World in 100 Objects", this piece used the image of a woman reminiscing about her ex-boyfriends as a metaphor for our obsession with capturing, collecting, and repainting the past. It also helped unwrap the distinctly human fascination we have with collections, offering some suggestions of how we might engage with the powerful memories held in such spaces. The second work was a piece of mixed media visual art entitled *A Collection for King's College Chapel (500th Anniversary)* by artist and historian Rob Good. This work provided a meditation on the passage of time and our obsession with taxonomy and collection as methods of engaging with the past. It consisted of two cabinets standing on a plinth, in the form of an altarpiece on top of an altar. The front cabinet appeared empty and pristine at first glance, but on closer inspection, contained dates (between 1446 and 1515) cut from history books, suggesting the calm and controlled march of history and the inevitability of progress. The back cabinet contained the remaining uncontrolled mass of sprawling text from the same books, threatening to escape from the cabinet representing the remains of history in the form of unprocessed fact. Around the base, four candles suggested a vigil, inviting observers to pause and reflect on their own attempts to weave narratives out of past events. Both of these works were received extremely well by the event's attendees, and I was deeply impressed by the skill and thoughtfulness with which these researchers engaged in the process.

Conclusion

Whilst it will take longer to fully assess and measure the impact of this new centre and its aims, we have received much positive informal feedback, and plan to develop and tailor our work to fit even closer to researcher needs and expectations. One unexpected outcome of the process was realizing how important best practice examples and events are for researchers, which we continue to foster in addition to the core-training programme, in order to gradually expand the centre's core community of academics.

In attempting to create this new framework for research, however, we became gradually aware of the concern that "in attempting to give visibility to the processes of research and practice that we don't simply fetishize process … [and] construct heroic narratives of doing research" (Hutchens, 2016). It was also important to encourage "bottom up" creativity, where creative activity is encouraged at a ground-roots level without being mediated by attempts to institutionalize it from above. This is in part to negate the dangers of "possessive individualism"—where an individual is conceived as the sole proprietor of their skills—instead fostering a collaborative and inclusive creative community (Florida, 2002). This is particularly dangerous in academia, where objective conditions typically force knowledge workers to look out for themselves first rather than engaging with the intersubjective nature of their labour.

Artists and knowledge creators share the common distinction that, unlike an industrial worker, they typically work under their own direction and are in total control of their work because of its inherent meaningfulness. The meaningfulness of creative research will be at the core of a future academic age where innovation will trump knowledge (Reid et al., 2010). In this post-industrial and post-information age, 13 years after the significant Cox review of Creativity in Business, the creative knowledge worker is gradually being placed at the forefront of society. Within the uncertain future environment of academia, researchers—particularly those in the humanities—will constantly have to justify and defend their intellectual and economic value, and creative research centres or hubs like this one will surely play an important part in offering academics some of the tools and skills needed to be able to achieve this. In promoting creative research, we are all in this together.

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