



University of Brighton

Arts and Humanities

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

College of Arts & Humanities Annual Research Festival 2016
Sallis Benney Theatre (Monday 11 July)

Researchers across the Arts and Humanities disciplines and at different stages of their career reflected on this year's festival theme 'The Network of Research' on the opening day.

1. "If you are not clear what you are saying, you will not be heard."
Professor Dennis Doordan's keynote speech

Professor Dennis Doordan is a Visiting Professor from the University of Notre Dame, Indiana (USA) and co-editor of *Design Issues*, a journal devoted to the history, theory, and criticism of design. Doordan made a thought-provoking case for pluralism, that he defined as the commitment to engage with diverse perspectives.

Diversity, Doordan stressed, does not preclude coherence, and pluralism does not always lead to confusion; in an age of pluralism, clarity replaces consensus. If one is not clear about what is being said, one will not be heard.

So how does the researcher make their writing clear? Doordan's advice on writing an article was to start with the first draft, make the last paragraph the first and cut the length of the article by 1000 words; this would immediately make it clearer and more concise. 'Engage me', Doordan exhorted. 'You are asking the reader for time and attention. Why? What is your work about, what will we know when you're finished?' And beyond that, what is the capacity of the idea to expand, to grow?

Doordan described research as a sustained conversation between individuals with different perspectives. By contrast, he defined enquiry as a generative process that comes before, and reaches fruition through, research and practice. Enquiry, he explained, is a requirement to research. Research, on the other hand, supports (empirically), interrupts (by questioning), and builds/creates practice (through pedagogy).

When one starts writing, one is starting a conversation. This implies an audience. In research, the audience includes past contributors to the conversation, contemporaries and future readers. But one needs to know who else is interested in what is said, and reach that community, so that the conversation can continue with them. The burden is on the researcher to explain all of this, and to explain it clearly. The researcher's audience is constantly making a decision to follow. Doordan repeated that nobody knows more about the work than the researcher; however an editor knows the audience.

Doordan suggested researchers should develop a hybrid portfolio, including on the one hand traditional projects and contributions (such as publications), and on the other, work in new media and formats (for instance social media and online work) to ensure they are participating in current conversations.

'Be aware where you position yourself in an age of pluralism', declared Doordan. What the researcher needs to do is not just to say what they are interested in, but also to move people to action.

2. Taking you to unexpected places

Annebella Pollen and Olu Jenzen's AHRC-funded projects

Dr Annebella Pollen is a Principal Research Fellow working in the field of material and visual culture. She is currently an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Leadership Fellow. Her project, *The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift*, is an investigation into the Woodcraft groups from 1916-2016.

Pollen discussed the way her networks include partners on research projects, archives, galleries, publishers and organisations and people outside academia. She noted how networks help one to gather information, to share ideas, as networks of practice. She stated that networks could be a way to keep one sane, especially when on research leave, as they provide content, structure, and stimulation.

Pollen stressed that research stems from relationships, and that networks will reveal contested histories: not every party is looking at a subject from the same angle and in the same way (institutional history, personal history, etc.). She suggested that this could lead to an ever-expanding project.

Dr Olu Jenzen, Senior Lecturer in Media Studies, was awarded an Early Career Researcher AHRC development award for *The People Pier's* project. The project investigates the popular culture of pleasure piers and cultural regeneration through community heritage, focusing on Hastings and Clevedon as case studies of self-titled 'community piers' – a new phenomena. It shows how, by using their popular culture heritage as a community resource, with oral history revealing rich musical heritage, piers can be enriched.

3. On shaving the yak and being light glue

Professors' PechaKucha

Four of the College's recently appointed professors took participants through a whirlwind tour of their research in a Pecha Kucha style presentation, in which 20 slides are shown for 20 seconds each.

Jo-Anne Bichard, a social anthropologist working with designers, posited networks as critical (criticising ideas) and crucial (giving ideas) for research. **Karen Cham's** career in designing intelligent machine interfaces relies on a network linking academic and industry. **Charles Holland's** network also linked his professional architecture practice with academia; he is currently working on an atlas of 'rurburbia' (the rural equivalent of suburbia), looking at the green belt as a form of design. Finally, **Kelly Snook** joined together the arts, science and technology, looking at exploring harmony in the solar system, based on the works of Kepler, through interactive audio-visual immersive environments.

Snook introduced the audience to 'the art of yak shaving: doing something important you need to do before being able to do something important that you need to do before you can tackle the important thing you want to do'. The panel following their presentations enabled the professors to reflect on research as a process of 'joining the dots' – as a creative process – positing the artist as 'light glue'. They stressed that interdisciplinarity was essential.

4. Performing networks

Louise Colbourne, early career researcher

Louise Colbourne explored the festival theme through a performative drawing of her personal network, which visualized groupings and connections. An artist/producer with a particular interest in interdisciplinary film practices and expanded cinema, Colbourne produces programmes of video art, film, performance and music for festivals and galleries. She defined herself as 'not a Curator', more an artist facilitator. She described her current exhibition 'our machines', exhibiting artistic work towards usership of arts and immersive experience. Colbourne lectures at the university's Hastings campus.

5. Networks that challenge and layer

Three doctoral students introduced their work in progress

Gavin Fry's practice-based research explores the reasons why men made art textiles in Britain between 1980-89, looking at the textile language rather than textile history. Fry seeks a network that challenges him, that disagrees with him: a 'pushmi-pullyu' network. For him, a network needs to be broader than the project, idea or discipline. Fry suggested that networking was putting incongruous things together: incongruity makes things more memorable.

Ekua McMorris's doctoral project investigates the colonial gaze and the creation of the other. McMorris looks at photography as a tool to 'create' an image of the other through auto-ethnography. She considered how colonisers taking photograph believed they were taking an accurate image of the subject, but contributed to categorizing native people, enforcing colonialist ideology, and disseminating images of social and cultural difference.

Jason Porter's research 'negotiating silence' explores the suppression of homosexuality in Nazism. Porter emphasised that he networks with things or places as well as with people. He highlighted that layering networks help build versions of history that can be contradictory, and that enable us to engage with contradictory and complex texts.

6. The uses of uselessness

Practice-based research and performance by Claudia Kappenberg

Claudia Kappenberg's performance explored the relationship between uselessness, art, and humanity. She quoted artist Monica Ross: 'That is the great thing about performance, in that it is absolutely useless'. Performance is a fragile medium: its uselessness is both its strength and its weakness. Uselessness opens a door for things to happen. Kappenberg referred to historical views of uselessness and affirmed, as a representative of the General Assembly of Garden Gnomes, that all human beings have a right to uselessness.

7. Network, space and time

Closing remarks

The closing panel identified networks as a space that protects one's personal obsession to continue leading one's research. Networks can bring matters to the surface so that researchers are not lonely individuals but work with a community. Perhaps community is a better term than network; it can be a more emotionally

engaged work, while networks can be more instrumental. Yet one can build a community as well as a network, to support one's research.

Networks stretch across space and also time. Successful established scholars understand their conversation as taking place across time. Materials and tools are what one makes them and one also has a conversation with them. Networks are also for sharing: research needs to enrich a conversation. When practice-based research results in a design or an artefact, it should be shared beyond its form; if it is in a visual form that is not articulated clearly, it is not successful.