Creative Collaboration

Developing a New Model for Play Centered Creative Collaboration.

Jon Place and Messua Poulin-Wolff

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE NEW UNIVERSITY
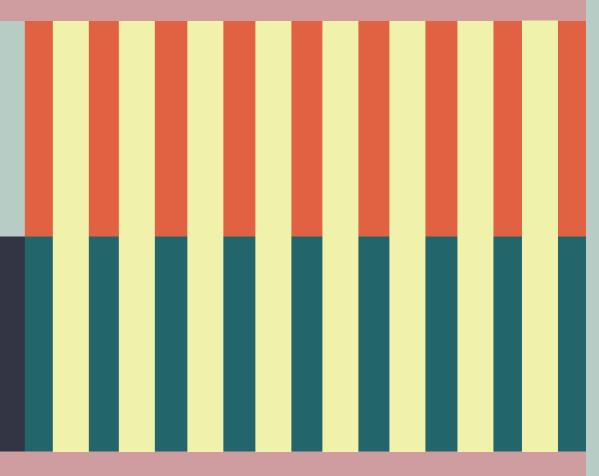EST. 1891

Introduction

In spring 2024 the Course Leader for Fine Art, Messua Poulin-Wolff and the Course Leader for Graphic Design and Illustration Jon Place ran a pilot scheme with 4 student research assistants to develop and trial a new module for creative collaboration. Working with false colour imagery from satellite and drone map data provided by Dr Joseph Fennell from the Open University the team employed a cross-disciplinary approach to data visualisation. Incorporating Design Thinking techniques inspired by Jake Knapp (alongside John Zeratsky and Braden Kowitz) and bespoke interactive collaborative processes. The end goal; to create a framework that can facilitate future collaborative possibilities between the School of Art, Design and Performance and external clients to produce artistic outputs informed by meaningful connection between researchers/clients, student participants and creatives.

Working closely with the client the student research assistants and academics worked together in a responsive, reactive and playful manner in an intensive week-long workshop. The participants spent this week creating and answering questions inspired by their individual reactions to the research data. Exploring new uses, new users and expanding the reach of and application of the research. Constructing new ways to engage users with knowledge exchange through creative and conceptual thinking. Transforming the data into an experiential artistic output or product.

Radical Playgrounds

The idea for this new model mirrors Joanna Wasza and Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius concept of 'Radical Playgrounds' which they define as: ' an invitation to a free space of collective learning and unlearning, one that is open to trying things out, and safe to err, radically non-competitive and offers a variety of activities: a place to practice and reflect on the socialising and political potential of play.' In the pilot program this developed over the course of an intensive workshops was a studio environment led by phenomenological interactions with research output. Creating a space that was playful, experiential, and exploratory and above all collaborative rather than competitive. Each participant worked off of eachother to crowdsource a range of solutions and outcomes.

Through play and responsive active participation the students brought the human back into the data, removing it from its initial context and transforming its use. Through play we have brought the human element back into our research communication, and the act of creative play as deconstruction and analysis of complex ideas.

Wasza, J. Foerster-Baldenius, B. (2024) Radical Playgrounds: From Competition to Collaboration. [online] Available at: https://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/programm/2024/radical-playgrounds/ueber-radical-playgrounds [Accessed 26 Apr. 2024].

'To play is to be in the world. Playing is a form of understanding what surrounds us and who we are, and a way of engaging with others. Play is a mode of being human.' - Miguel Sicart

Results

To see examples of work created during the pilot program scan QR code for images.

Methodology

In these dynamic settings, the original images undergo a process of digestion, filtered through the participant's body, broken down and transformed into unique creative output as embodied thought. This image of digestion should be understood through the scope of thinking through making and the notion of improvisation with materials. To think through the act of making, ask a short re-examination of the creative process, too often understood as a direct input of thought into matter. In art practices, artefacts are not produced by projecting pre-determined forms but developed through material improvisation. In this perspective, creative outcomes are generated on the one hand in the flows and transformations of materials and on the other hand in the movement of the imagination and the sensory awareness of the maker (Ingold, 2010) Thinking and making keep bouncing at each other; ideas are developed in response to the materials and reflected upon. This position of the non-hylomorphic nature of the creative act underlines the unique human capacity to process information through creative embodied experiences (with the prerequisite of a body, as highlighted by the image of digestion). As such, the participants become image-processing devices that generate playful interpretations of the initial data through creative improvisation.

Ingold, Tim. (2010) 'Textility of Making', Cambridge Journal of Economics, 34, 91–102. Available at: 10.1093/cje/bep042.

Participant One:

Participant One's meaningful reaction took them away from the source materials into their own personal journey of discovery. The data acted as a jumping off point, but through their own engagement with the radical playground they entered a period of personal development and expression.

'This week was probably the most creative I have ever felt and been in my entire life. It felt good to have been productive, to have the creative freedom and be experimental. I think satellite imagery, being at the core of the project, was interesting. I never thought much of it before, and I didn't think the amount of work we produced, inspired by these images, would be possible. Half the time, I couldn't tell what was in the images and I didn't think they were very nice to look at, but it's amazing how something like this can inspire a whole project and what comes out of it.'

The intensive and experiential nature of the exercise allowed them to expand their own understanding of process.

Participant Two:

Participant Two focused on, amongst other things, the intangible qualities that existed within imagery itself, focusing on the unique colour palettes that define false colour imagery. Looking to understand the very nature of the process itself through their interaction with the properties they found most engaging within the source imagery.

'Energy and atmosphere makes a place what it is. I did capture some of the curves and circular shapes of the map imagery from the beginning in this piece but wanted to expand upon these shapes having them be the sort of spawn point for all the other strokes such as the ink and paint I used. By having them be the sort of growth point I like to imagine it would capture the energy of the landscape. I also started to consider layering. As seen in the false colour imagery, the colours do not replace the map they simply overlay to highlight an area. This layering and overlapping is what makes them feel radiant and jump out at the viewer in my eyes.'

Participant 2 had a much richer and deeper connection with the source imagery, whilst still parsing it through their own unique interactions.

Participant Three:

Participant Three's went in a different direction and began linking the research to something they could relate to. The connections that where made allowed them to parse and understand the alien information through their existing relationships. As a non-expert their week developed into understanding an outsider's perspective, and finding links between knowledge and understanding.

'Moving on from smaller scale work of Monday afternoon, we started working large scale on un-stretched canvas. By drawing some of the shapes we had created yesterday on a larger scale. The drawings became looser and more abstracted. It was also a challenge as working on a large scale, as the starting images were no bigger than A4. One of my favourite parts of my canvas drawing was the pink spots I created. This is because it looked like something you would find under a microscope. It was inspired by one of the drawings I did on the first day where I was trying to colour in all the white gaps in the map and the ink in the pen bled through paper to the other side. I thought this made an interesting result, almost like heatmap.'

Contact:

This is an ongoing research project. If you are interested in future collaboration or can see an application within your own research/outreach program please contact the project leads.

Jon.Place@bucks.ac.uk
Messua.Poulin-Wolff@bucks.ac.uk

Future Applications

Education
This framework based on the idea of play and 'Radical Playgrounds' can be used in classrooms to enhance learning as a form of Situated Learning (Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger, 1991) and Community of Practice. (Etienne Wenger. 1998)

Knowledge Exchange/Academic - Industry Collaboration
Used to develop creative outcomes that visualises and communicated research to new audiences. Within and outside the university community. For example, this initial pilot scheme is developing a touring exhibition and textile-based product as a knowledge sharing activity for the researcher at The Open University. Engaging a potential user-base outside of academia.

A creative interdisciplinary model might be used to bring awareness and distinct perspectives to data and technological field through a different form of engagement and larger outreach. Developing novel products and unconventional creative problem solving.