

Institution: University of Greenwich

Unit of Assessment: (UoA 34) - Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory

a. Context

Our research asks how creative practice should address the challenges of the digital age. In a time period where digital convergence is disrupting the material conditions of 'creative' environments and practices by reconfiguring and disrupting linearity, narrative expectation and the experience of space and time, what we understand art to be, and its ability to have a wider social function and impact, are being reconsidered. Crucially we as a research group ask: why, in an age of unparalleled access to technologically enabled creative tools and channels of communication, do so many sections of society seem incapable of understanding one another clearly? Research in this unit examines how technologically enabled communications can enhance and promote creative exchange of a kind that can act as a trigger for social and economic regeneration.

Researchers in this unit at the University of Greenwich are therefore committed to carrying out research that has targetted impact. This is the case in relation to our commitment to work with local organisations who might benefit from the research in so far as it allows a range of socially disadvantaged groups to have the opportunity of seeing at first hand the work that goes on in the university. We are also committed to a programme of research that expands the parameters of performance in a technological context with the long term aim of adding to the ways in which performing arts can be staged in order to engage with the audience in new and innovative ways.

Academic research has been planned to be outward facing and inclined towards making contact with groups and businesses outside of the university which are actively engaged with creative practice, to enhance community engagement. More broadly there is a commitment to addressing the challenges faced by academics engaged in the critical assessment and practical application of creative practice in a contemporary, technologically mediated age. Specifically in this respect we have collaborated with Emergency Exit Arts, Kids Company, and the technology providers Watts Hassan Associates on projects that place creative practice in a community context.

b. Approach to impact

During the assessment period, the approach of the group has been organised around the common question of "How can our work make a tangible effect on specific sections of the community?" To date we have concentrated on research that reaches the following groups:

- young people excluded from mainstream education and identified as being at risk in relation to alcohol and drug use;
- local arts organisations committed to providing greater equality of access to the arts;
- SMEs interested in developing technological solutions for increased participation in areas of creative practice.

The work of researchers in art and design can and should be capable of escaping from the academy and reaching a wide range of potential stakeholders and beneficiaries. With this in mind the work being carried out by this group has two key strands:

- Firstly, to take what have been traditionally esoteric themes particular to the academic world and restage them in performance environments that are accessible to the wider public. Our work in relation to the Oedipus project exemplifies this. Complex issues of technological anxiety and the displacement of populations were explored using the

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reinterpretation of a classical text in contemporary form.

- Secondly, to take specific creative practices out into a range of social situations and quantitatively and qualitatively evaluate how useful they are in opening channels of communications between various advantaged and disadvantaged groups. Members of staff in the research group have been active in finding partners to work with. Once identified we have met with potential collaborators to discuss how we should proceed. In the case of our relationship with Kids Company we engaged directly as members of the Rebound Steering Group, and also met with potential beneficiaries of the project to discuss the possible advantages of integrating creative practice into their learning environments. In terms of our own performance based work we were able to utilise internal university seed funding to develop a small test performance that led to our interaction with Tate Britain and eventually an invitation to perform there. In both cases research expertise that had been developed within the group was deployed in projects that would go on to have discernible impact.

c. Strategy and plans

In terms of strategy the group is committed to achieving its goals in relation to the two points above. In order to do this we will continue to develop key work in these areas. Specifically we intend to build on the success of Studio for Electronic Theatre, and have been awarded considerable internal funding to do this:

Mobile Multi-Media Laboratory (with N. Salihbegovic): **£30K** RCIF – 2009

Electronic Arts Performance Media Lab - **£25K** ((with N. Salihbegovic) RCIF/HEFCE competitive Bid

Oedipus – Codebreaker. Promotional event and DVD (2012 £5,000 HEIF funding)

We have an established network of contacts and are planning a series of performances intended to attract as wide and as numerous an audience as possible. We are also planning collaborations with the community arts group Emergency Exit Arts (<http://www.eea.org.uk>) and the technology provider Watts Hassan Associates. Together with these organisations we are preparing a substantial Digital Research & Development bid that will be submitted in December 2013.

We are also working with the National Maritime Museum with whom we have held a number of collaborative events, as well as renewing our close links with Tate Britain and specifically the *Late at Tate* event that encourages new audiences to engage with art and performance. To this end we have been invited by organisers of *Late at Tate* to perform at a collaborative event that is taking place at the Maritime Museum on 28 Nov 2013.

In terms of community engagement, in an initiative related to the Rebound Project we will be inviting 10 young people from Kids Company and The Urban Academy to a weeklong creative workshop at the university. We also have plans to work with the organisation Social Butterfly Effect (<http://www.socialbutterflyeffect.co.uk/proposal/>) with a view to hosting creative technology workshops for young people who have been excluded from mainstream education. Initial meetings have taken place and more are planned for the very near future.

Further to this we are also working very closely with the Greenwich foundation to explore ways in which the heritage of the Old Royal Naval College can be best utilised and developed for public engagement. This involves taking work that is being carried out inside the university and presenting it in public spaces. This kind of engagement with audiences in public spaces represents a key aspect of our strategy for future impact. It also represents a key aspect of our plan to target external funding to create and execute large and significant projects as our research grows.

d. Relationship to case studies

The key aspect of impact central to both case studies is the drive to take complex academic thinking in terms of theoretical and philosophical formulations and practical experimentation into new arenas so that they can be experienced by audiences previously disengaged from the academy and society,

- SET takes classical texts and universal myth and philosophically applies them to the contemporary world. By doing so in a manner that combines music, image and spoken word and which invites audience members to participate in the performance, it is able to raise pertinent contemporary political issues without alienating anyone. Examples include *Oedipus@Tate Britain*; *Memory in the Deadzone*, which has prompted invitations for its author to meet and engage with a range of political figures, and *Echostate*, a virtual presentation to an event open to the public in Berlin, hosted by Humboldt University. We were invited to give the presentation after the organiser of the Oscillation series of events had read Dr Stephen Kennedy's paper *S Sonic Economy*.
- The Rebound Project more specifically seeks to engage potentially vulnerable young people in film-making as a means of communicating with them on the topic of substance abuse. We have been actively participating in the Rebound project, an EU-funded substance awareness programme working with young people to increase their resilience in terms of drugs, alcohol and other potentially dangerous situations. The project uses film to produce teaching materials that can engage young people. The project is coordinated by the University of Heidelberg. From 2011 it began rolling out the project across Europe and the University of Greenwich was invited to be a creative partner and given the role of research and development in relation to cross cultural translation and production of locally based films. These films are now being used as part of the programme in the UK (<http://vimeo.com/channels/rebounduog>).