Unconference: proposal

Mediating tacit knowledges: a visual and sonic essay

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We will be using images by filmmakers AdamDar: Malika Autalipova and Timur Nusimbeskov, who worked with us in Central Asia to document the project.

Bios:

Eleanor Dare is the Head of Programme for MA Digital Direction at the RCA, a course which addresses the future and present of storytelling with emergent and traditional technologies. She is also Reader in Digital Media at the RCA, with many publications addressing epistemology and digital culture. https://www.rca.ac.uk/more/staff/dr-eleanor-dare/
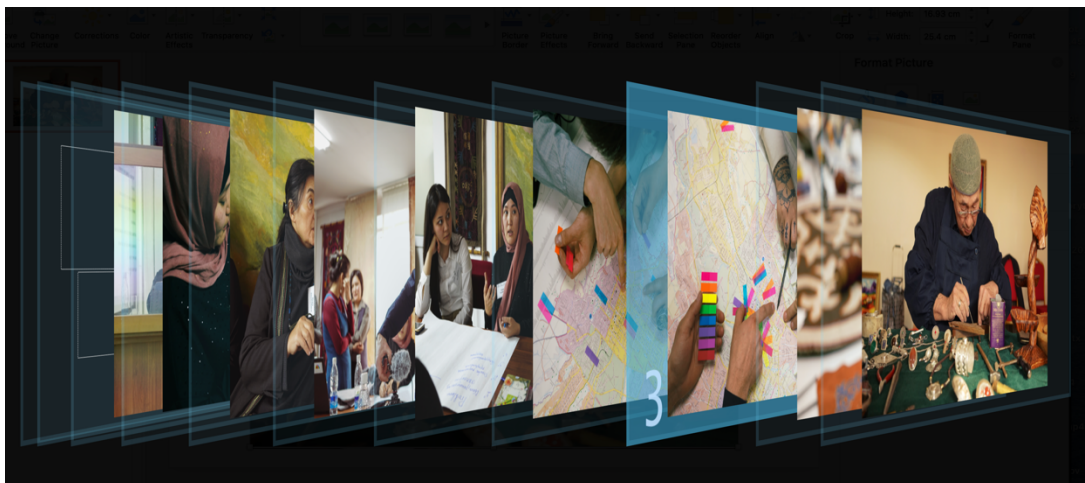
Joseph Pochodzaj is a Tutor in MA Visual Communication at the Royal College of Art. His work and research focuses on the relationship between graphic design and socio-political engagement – exploring how visual communication can create platforms for debate, activate forms of dialogue and directly influence our understanding of political issues within the public sphere.
http://studio.joepochodzaj.com/

Rathna Ramanathan is the Dean of Communication at the Royal College of Art, she is an international practitioner and researcher known for her expertise in intercultural communication and typography, as well as nonmainstream and experimental publishing practices.
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Tom Simmons is a Senior Tutor in Research and Research Leader for the School of Communication. His research focuses on the politics and aesthetics of sound in interconnected communities, communication systems and situations, including its social, cultural and environmental implications.

Images by AdamDar, for Crafting Futures, 20

Mediating tacit knowledges: a visual and sonic essay

Crafting Futures is a British Council funded project which addresses global threats to material and intangible craft practices and heritages. As researchers in the School of Communication, Royal College of Art, our role has been to co-create methods for *knowing with*, not knowing *about*, the largely tacit community knowledge of craft in Central Asia and its surrounding networks of meaning.

Contemporary communication practices, such as those that stem from and cross expanded areas of graphic communication, sound, creative and critical writing, and digital storytelling are ubiquitous, often passing unnoticed as they blend with the materiality and culture of everyday life. While having economic, social and cultural purpose, they tend to be primarily harnessed for commercial gain (McKinsey, 2017) and valued for their sensory and material qualities (Barnard, 2005). However, as Balaram (2011) observes, human need is the origin of design, and this is not just physical but psychological, socio-cultural, ecological and spiritual. When applied in situations involving multiple organisations, individuals, local and marginalised communities, including contexts relating to traditional crafts, contemporary communication practices can mobilise diverse global voices and suggest new critical perspectives regarding the contribution of arts/humanities research to trans-local development challenges. From 2019 we worked with craftspeople in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to generate visual and sonic narratives; at the centre of our research methodology is the imperative of countering and moving beyond naturalised colonial assumptions about what counts as knowledge.

The project methods arose from discussions and image/sound making workshops with craft leaders, practitioners and intergenerational craftspeople. We found the ideas of De Santos (2018, 2016) and Appadurai (2006), useful in bringing mindfulness to the assumptions, power relations and biases of our backgrounds, the idea of *Knowing With* (de Sousa Santos, 2018, 15) not *knowing about*, has informed the way we have co-designed, framed and run the workshops and discussions which we will present in the proposed visual and sonic essay. As Appadurai (2006) states, research risks remaining an elite process and is 'normally seen as a high-end, technical activity, available by training and class background to specialists in education, the sciences and related professional fields. It is rarely seen as a capacity with democratic potential, much less as belonging to the family of rights' (Appadurai, 2006). We have aimed to prioritise the *Right to Research* (Appadurai, 2006) for all those we have worked with. At the same time, we are acutely aware of the dangers of idealising our own methodology, and the construct of participatory practice. We are careful, therefore, not to frame the actions and discussions we have held with participants as 'data' to be harvested. We concur with de Sousa Santos, that although we are in no way against science:
we need other conceptions of time, we need other conceptions of productivity, we need other conceptions of spatial scale. I have focused on the ecology of knowledges, on the need to bring together different kinds of knowledges. Scientific knowledge with popular vernacular knowledge and other non-scientific ways of knowing, artistic knowledge, performative knowledge (de Sousa Santos, 2016)
We do not see our role as supporting the reduction of embodied actions and lived experiences to numeric units. Through film-making and visual storytelling workshops, themes of identity, sustainability and materiality were contingently defined and documented by 70 participants. Our visual/sonic essay will present that work and its processes while also addressing key questions:
+ How was this knowledge generated, why and for whom?
+ How does the role and framing of community affect the generation of knowledge?
+ How can communities counter cultural & economic isolation and foster new networks of knowledge?

References

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