

AMI & ED: MOVING IMAGE ART VS DEAD MODERNIST ARTISTS

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Abstract

AMI and Ed. (artists' moving image and education) is a doctoral education action research project which challenges the emphasis placed by mainstream art educators in England upon modernist canonical approaches to pedagogy. The research compares pedagogies in England and Australia regarding the provision made for modelling 21st century moving image art practices. The qualitative data, recorded by the use of semi-structured interviews and surveys, highlights an opportunity for teachers and learners to contradict the systemic art-market values of modernist production, and to introduce digital video as a means of artistic and democratic communication. In terms of producing an effect, the research has stimulated the production of an online learning resource.

AMI & Ed:

A Premise for Action Research in the Art and Design Classroom

Over the past decades the moving image has, perhaps inevitably, become a crucial aspect of contemporary art.
(Elwes, 2005: ix)

Emerging from critical pedagogy, education action research, and visual ethnography, the *AMI and Ed* research project is founded upon premises regarding a widening gap between the real world experiences of art and design practices, and those pedagogies responsible for connecting the art and design education with the world outside of the classroom. Specifically, digital communication technologies have accelerated the discrepancy between contemporary art practices in actuality, and art practices as filtered by and then regurgitated by teachers in the UK for the consumption of young art and design students in secondary education (11-19 years old). Drawing upon five years of linear research conducted in schools, colleges, universities, art centres and galleries in the UK and in the Australian states of New South Wales and Victoria, the project builds upon recent reports and studies (Potter, et al., 2007; DCMS/BFI, 2011) investigating the impact of moving image upon learning and teaching in the UK (United Kingdom).

visual arts-based moving image work, a definition which includes experimental film, video art, installation art, performance art, personal documentary, essay films and animation and is inclusive both in terms of context and critical discourse.

(LUX, 2011)

If you cast your mind back to school days, what are your recollections of the art classroom? Perhaps there were paintings of flowers, inspired by late Nineteenth century artists, dotted around the walls? Maybe a print of Picasso's *Guernica* looked down upon you? The odd reproduction of an Andy Warhol screen-print? Was there a malnourished house plant lurking somewhere in a corner, waiting to be placed within a still-life, next to a swathe of cloth and a battered trumpet? If you re-visited this classroom, would you be surprised if little had changed? Would the apparent absence of contemporary artists using contemporary media really surprise you? Is the preponderance of DWEAM (Dead White Euro-American Male) artists within the classroom and the attendant paucity of provision for moving image art practice, a cause for concern in the 21st century (smith, 2012a)? If one agrees with Marshall McLuhan's overview of new forms of media, that they are 'new languages with new and unique powers of expression' (McLuhan: 272) then this perceived gap between pedagogic and contemporary art practices might generate some level of concern regarding the education of future world citizens. Education action research allows for educators to work as researchers within the system in order to affect positive change.

Figure 1: Video Installation Made With Excluded Students



(mark smith, 2012)

Results from a survey of art teachers conducted in 2009 (smith) showed that few Turner Prize nominees were presented as models of artistic practice to students during formal art and design classes in secondary education. The annual Turner Prize is awarded by an independent jury of their peers to a British artist under fifty years old for 'an outstanding exhibition or other presentation of their work in the twelve months preceding' (Tate). Thus, the Turner Prize provides a highly visible measure of contemporary art practice. Even fewer Turner Prize nominees whose work encompassed moving image practices were cited as examples of contemporary practice by those art teachers who were canvassed. In direct contradiction to formal teaching practices within secondary education in England, art and design pedagogies which exist on the fringes of the mainstream (such as was recorded in a centre which caters for students excluded from schools) encourage the uptake of digital moving image practices as a form of self-expression. In 2012, I was able to work with a small group of young people learning in such a marginalised environment, and together we produced a video installation (Figure 1) which enabled them to create a visual impact upon the Cultural Quarter, in the city of Leicester.

AMI & Ed: Field Research in the UK

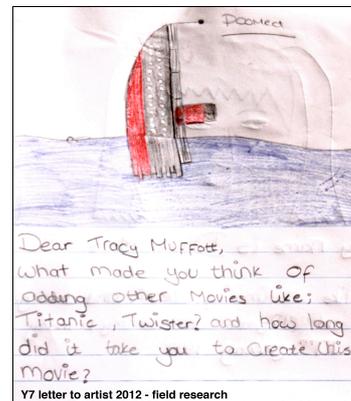
The *AMI and Ed.* research project, based at Loughborough University in the geographical centre of England, is an examination of the impact of introducing artists' moving image practices upon teaching and learning in secondary and high schools. In one such school in the UK, Year 7 students, who were eleven and twelve years old at the time, were introduced to a variety of artists' moving image works. Their responses were recorded using elicited video recordings, drawings, and texts, as well as my own photographic and written documentation of their oral and physical responses. A month of school-based field research was completed in April 2011. The AMI (artists' moving image) work which produced the greatest response from the student group was Tracey Moffatt's *DOOMED* (Figure 2), a mash-up (mélange) of disaster movies. This collage of staged filmic moments of natural and unnatural destruction provides its audience with an entertaining take on an anxiety-laden societal state of mind, fed by news footage of earthquakes, tsunami and bomb explosions, and fictional accounts of man-made and extraterrestrial destruction on a global scale. The work also provided the stimulus for some interesting in situ discussions. In post-screening surveys, students indicated that *DOOMED* was the video work which had had the greatest impact. In addition to whole class discussions, students were asked to construct questions (Figure 3) for the artist, Tracey Moffatt.

Fig. 2: Still. *DOOMED*, Tracey Moffatt



(*MOVE: Video Art in Schools*, 2009)

Fig. 3: Student Question



(*AMI & Ed.*, 2011)

AMI & Ed: Methodology

Methodologically, the data recorded during the *AMI and Ed.* action research project is situated within visual ethnographic practice. The action research aim of the project has been to focus upon the linear development of creative capacities within the group of research participants, thus highlighting the benefits for secondary and high teaching and learning which may result from the implementation of artists' moving image studies within formal studies. The *AMI and Ed.* action research project therefore sits within the broad church of critical pedagogy.

The *AMI and Ed.* research project has been designed with the idea of revisiting participants in subsequent years firmly to the fore. As Stephanie Taylor notes, ‘the ethnographer makes the enormous personal investment of moving into a community for an extended period’ (Taylor, cited in O’Reilly. 2005: 1). At this juncture, those young students whom I first met in 2011 have already been revisited, with further data gathering planned for later in 2014. I am hopeful that the elicited video recordings, photographs, and research notes gathered during this linear study will, over the coming years, produce a body of data which will support the hypothesis that the study of artists’ moving image practice will ultimately benefit both students and educators. Subsequent to the publication of the final research report and the *artistsmovingimage* Internet learning resource, the intention is for the *AMI and Ed.* research project to affect some small influence upon regional, national, and international thinking about secondary and high school art and design curriculum content and delivery.

Contemporary Practices: Art and Design Education

There is already a body of critical education research which has examined the implementation of the secondary school art and design curriculum and found it wanting with regard to the introduction of contemporary art practices. For instance, in 2004, Downing and Watson’s research report from a year long study found scant evidence of either the inclusion of contemporary art practices within programmes, or research into contemporary art curriculum content at Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4. They concluded that ‘there is little evidence of the form this teaching [dealing with contemporary art practices] takes or the content of the curriculum delivered’ (*ibid.*, 2004: 2-3).

Why this apparent reticence on the part of teachers, curriculum planners and institutions to move the curriculum forwards to 21st century art practices might be due to any number of factors. However, there is a tendency for ‘executive’ teaching styles (Jarvis, 2005: 5), so embedded within present day education in the UK, to act as brake on individual efforts to update content and delivery of curricula. Notably, art and design is a subject which is in a state of continual flux, with schools of thought and practice changing every few years (Hill, 2012: 42). Perhaps most importantly, artists are renowned for challenging the status quo, and that may not be behaviour which befits executive style teaching. Noam Chomsky pointed out to teachers the institutionalised expectation that change was not welcome and that one should keep quiet and ‘instil your students with the beliefs and doctrines that will serve the interests of those who have real power’ (Chomsky, 2000: 24).

The *AMI and Ed.* research project has ascertained that artists’ moving image learning resources are not readily available within those secondary schools in England under immediate examination; AMI related teaching and learning is not commonplace in the secondary art classroom; there is a reluctance on the part of teachers to embrace artists’ moving image works as a predominant factor in contemporary art practices (smith, 2009) which may in part be a result of perceived limitations of expertise outside of their chosen mode of creative practice.

those who can remember the most taxonomies are considered the smartest, even though that knowledge may have no relationship to life experience. Teachers won't give up taxonomy because their own authority is based on it.

(Shamberg, 1971: 21-22)

Provision and Delivery of AMI Learning Resources

My role as an actor within the classroom has been as a temporary teacher, with the attendant emic responsibilities of behaviour management and time-keeping (Fetterman, 2010). At the start of each session, videos were screened using either DVDs or QuickTime movie files, with the democratic proviso that the student group decided when to stop the playback of each separate moving image work. Every student was offered the chance to comment upon their immediate reaction to a screening via the use of 'traffic lights'. Each student group was presented with three coloured squares. One red. One orange. One green. Red is for... "Please... no more!" Orange means "OK so far... let's give it a little longer". Green is obviously "LOVE IT... LEAVE IT ON!" When the number of red squares equated to 50% or more of the displayed 'traffic lights' the playback was stopped. During the contact hours, a broad range of works were screened, from industrial output such as Walt Disney's *Dumbo*, through to Samantha Moore's animated documentary, *An Eyeful of Sound*. Planning the screening aspect of the field research took well over a year and is still a matter for reflection and development. Already mentioned above is Tracey Moffatt's *DOOMED*, the AMI work which garnered the greatest attention from the research participants. *DOOMED* forms part of the Kaldor Art Projects' learning resource, *MOVE: Video Art in Schools*. This DVD package has been distributed free of charge to secondary schools in Australia since 2009, with the express purpose of stimulating 'students to further explore the world of contemporary art' (Kaldor, 2010). In comparison to schools here in England, the majority of Australian secondary and high schools are markedly well provided for in terms of studying artists' moving image. Teachers may freely access the *MOVE* resource, with its various AMI works. Each work has an accompanying text, which is designed specifically to assist teachers and students investigate AMI practices. Australian teachers have commented upon the *MOVE* resource's ability to re-engage students, who might otherwise be at risk of failing within formal education settings (smith, 2012b).

AMI & Ed: Concrete Results

In terms of supporting pedagogic practice in the classroom, one practical result of the research has been the construction of an online learning resource, www.artistsmovingimage.com. Consisting of a collection of contemporary digital video artworks and accompanying texts, this resource will provide learners and educators with the means to experience and discuss the work of artists using video as a medium of choice. The *artistsmovingimage* website will be uploaded for public use in late 2014. Based upon examples of best practice from around the globe, this learning resource attempts to reconcile curriculum requirements with technological developments in both

contemporary art practice and resource dissemination. One of the works included in the resource, *the man* (Figure 5), provided an example of what may be accomplished using commonplace mobile phone technology, using techniques familiar to many young ‘digital natives’ (Prensky, 2001). Another work, *phi* (Figure 4), by the British artist Jessica Mautner, re-uses and re-interprets video documentation of the Greek demonstrations of 2011 captured on mobile phone cameras. In part, this website is being designed as an antidote to the staid nature of much prevalent art teaching in schools. Some leading critical writers in the field of school art education in England argue that ‘practice in art education has reached the point where the subject is in danger of becoming an anachronism’ (Steers, in Addison and Burgess, 2003: 19). Another example to be included in the resource, *black animation* (Figure 7), by the French artist, Laetitia Benat, uses a blend of hand-drawn animation and digital imaging within the genre of portraiture. This particular work caused a strong reaction amongst student participants, departing from a state of attractive normality as a black viscous fluid flows from the subject’s mouth.

Fig. 4: Still. *phi*.



(Jessica Mautner, 2011)

Fig. 5: Still. *the man*.



(smith, 2009)

Students wrote, drew and acted out their responses to camera, and were asked to animate their own name using pen, pencil, paper and a DSLR camera. Both activities constituted additional and visual data-gathering methods, used to measure the impact of the screenings upon developing creative capacities. In part, this activity was planned to reassure the teaching staff of the usefulness of my input as a teacher, as it provided concrete evidence of the development of students’ skills and techniques in imaginative or reproductive drawing, upon which the usual classroom teaching focused upon. To begin with, the students were asked to interview one another, using the video camcorders I had provided for this express purpose. The intention behind these interviews was to instigate an autobiographical state of mind within this group of twenty six students which would allow for a greater sense of ownership. The emphasis upon freedom of expression was intended to release students from the tyranny of examining their opinions within the didactic context of providing correct answers or responses which might please the in situ educator, i.e. myself. Selected experimental animation pieces by Norman

McLaren were shown, including *Free Radicals*. In this film, text jumps around the screen, accompanied by rhythmic drumming. The students were then immediately asked to animate their own first names, using storyboard pads and coloured pens. The subsequent animated work gives an indication of how quickly some of the students understood some of the processes and effects of AMI within the context of their formal learning. This work was screened (Figure 6) in 2012 at the *Disposable Film Festival* and during a public video installation at Loughborough University.

Comparing Pedagogies in England and Australia

In terms of effects of AMI practices upon pedagogies, the research data points to a distinct separation between teachers in English institutions and their Australian counterparts in New South Wales and Victoria. Whereas in England, teachers participating in the data recording were unlikely to introduce students to moving image artworks, those teachers interviewed in the two Australian states felt at liberty to dip into the available pool of digital AMI-related resources, utilising both DVDs and Internet sites. Why this apparent international divide between attitudes within mainstream education towards contemporary practices and their attendant media might exist is perhaps the most jarring question which has emanated from the *AMI and Ed.* research project. In 2013, the Australian politician Simon Crean (ex-Minister for the Arts) described the societal role of artists as ‘central to us as a nation and to securing its [Australia’s] future’ (2013).

Whilst one has become well-used to political eulogies regarding the contributions made by the ‘creative economy’ and hubs of ‘creative endeavour, innovation and excellence’ (Brown, 2008: 1) the stark contrast between Australian and English approaches to art and design teaching (and education per se) must to some extent result from societal difference in attitudes to the changing world economy, social history and meritocratic endeavour. In terms of using communication technologies, the notion of overcoming the ‘tyranny of distance’ (Blainey, 1969) has been an Australian preoccupation for generations. It is no coincidence that the uptake of mobile technologies has outstripped every Western economy in recent years, enabling antipodeans to stay ahead of the latest developments in everything from international news to breaking art market trends. Australians recognise their emergence as a still-developing nation and the tendency to look for progression in most aspects of their national psyche. That is not to say that Australian citizens can be any less prosaic than the rest of us. In 2011, a national survey indicated that, more than any other concern, Australians wanted a successful marriage (The Telegraph). Yet, the over-riding quality that I recorded during a month of interviewing teachers in Australia was one of ‘can do and *will* do better’ (Smith, 2012b). Several of these interviews were recorded as video data and will form part of a documentary to be completed in late 2014 (Figure 8). In comparison, teachers in England are more likely to berate politicians and exit the teaching profession. As a footnote to these brief observations, I should add that teachers in Australian states are much better paid than their counterparts in England and that educational activities outside of the classroom (e.g. art gallery-based sessions) are well supported and

organised by experienced professionals. In this context, art and design education in England is decidedly impoverished in comparison.

Fig. 6: Still. *me, me, me.*



(smith & students, 2011)

Fig. 7: Still. *black animation*



(Laetitia Benat, 2010)

Figure 8: Interview with Teacher, New South Wales



(AMI & Ed., 2012)

Conclusion

To conclude, the preponderance of modernist models of art practice - e.g. DWEAMs (smith, 2012a) - and the attendant paucity of provision regarding models of contemporary art practices, has been a focus of critical writing for a number of years (Potter et al.; Steers). The *AMI and Ed.* research project is focused on the inclusion of artists' moving image studies within the curriculum; the benefits of this in terms of teaching and learning; and the examination of any discernible development in the creative capacities of research participants. This project exists within the fields of education action research and critical pedagogy, with myself taking on the role of artist teacher and visualethnographic witness.

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