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Illumination through illustration: Research methods and authorial practice

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Abstract
This article proposes that the emerging field of illustration research embraces practice-led research, and will argue that it benefits practice outside of formal academic research. The author's practice-led Ph.D. research provides the tools that will be used to investigate illustration methodologies within a research practice. These can be adopted to complement industry-oriented, brief-led ways of working to provide long-term transferable skills, enabling illustrators to be entrepreneurial, and give them a robust set of methods to identify and interrogate their subject matter.

This article will begin with general research concepts to position illustration in relation to existing research methods literature, specifically that concerned with the development of research in art and design that involves a practical element. This will reveal illustration to be 'fundamentally exploratory, involving innovation and risk in ways that are familiar to researchers in the broader community', a key characteristic of practice that lends itself to research (Candy and Edmonds 2010: 126). The article will take in a very brief outline of existing and emerging research paradigms and how illustration research relates to these, and then reflect upon how the emerging field of illustration research may be poised to contribute to the transition between paradigms through its ambitious approach to image–text relationships. Here illustration can contribute to the academic discussion of how to disseminate research findings through writing and images, showing illustration to be a valuable voice within the development of practice-led research.
Having established illustration as commensurate with inductive research the focus will shift from research on to research in illustration, commencing with an investigation of several specific methods used within my practice-led Ph.D. research. Extending the earlier discussion of research paradigms into illustration methods will be seen to raise questions that help us to articulate how practice operates differently within different strands of illustration. This will be accomplished in the form of a commentary on how research methods terminology can facilitate discussion of illustration's link with the world and the viewer, to counter the expectations of the field and limits of existing metaphors that do not encourage us to view the world differently. Such discussion is a practical response to Mason (2000b), Bowman (2008), Poynor (2009) and Zeegen (2012, 2014) who note illustration's limited vocabulary and how this limits its link to the world it purports to speak of and to. The benefit to the study of illustration is that we can gain a clearer understanding of how it operates as a practice, and derive theoretical ideas from concerns raised by and within illustration.
I will then go on to propose that an inductive approach to research and the methods discussed therein (in particular grounded theory) can be adopted within illustration practice, which serves to reinvigorate the forms and language used as practical vehicles for outcomes. I will argue that this is of contemporary relevance to shifts in the commercial workplace, and that an inductive approach (where the outcome of a project is not fixed from the outset) represents long-term skills that equip illustrators with a flexible practice that allows them to be proactive in the development of new employment opportunities.

Illustration research in relation to existing research paradigms
In order to explore what illustration research might be I will explore the practitioner's position as a
researcher within broader research paradigms. The two major traditions are summarized briefly by
Rudestam and Newton (1992) as quantitative and qualitative research, differentiated by their epistemological approaches.
They define quantitative research as objectivist, in that knowledge must
be verified by corresponding to the real world, and research takes the form of hypothesis-testing
using empirical research methods. This is not what this article is concerned with, for the process
described here overlaps with qualitative research as Rudestam and Newton summarize it. Therefore
it is 'constructivist', with knowledge being constructed rather than discovered (Rudestam and
Newton 1992: 47). The research approach discussed here is inductive, which Collins (2010: 43)
explains is usually focused on understanding the context within which the phenomenon of interest
sits, and is open to a variety of explanations for it (whereas a deductive approach starts from such an
assumption and looks to establish a cause-and-effect relationship). In that it responds to the data
continually emerging, the study can be more flexible in its evolution. This approach acknowledges
the role played by practice in directing the course of the research, with methodology being emergent
and responsive accordingly, as described by Barrett (2007a: 6).
Gray and Malins (2004), Haseman (2006, 2007) and Bolt (2008) position practice-led research in
the arts as a separate paradigm, with its own methodological, epistemological and ontological
concerns. Haseman argues for the recognition of an emerging 'performative paradigm' where the
practical work produced enacts change in the world as its contribution to knowledge. The aim here
is to ask questions of illustration to establish how it operates as research, and more broadly to
contribute to the definition of the artistic paradigm in order for that to reflect a variety of practices.
To do so I will draw upon the chart shown in Figure 1 from Gray and Malins (2004):
Illustration research is relatively new and still developing, therefore this is an appropriate time
to be exploring what illustration research might be and equipping ourselves with the tools to do so.
It also means that we do not have a great deal of guidance in the form of appropriate research
methodologies, or discussion of ontology and epistemology with regard to illustration. Questions
arising from this table's relationship with illustration research include consideration of the researcher's
relationship with the world, how they go about investigating it and their audience's relationship
with the research materials produced. How their work negotiates this reveals underlying
assumptions about these issues. Therefore the discussion here focuses on practical methods, in line
with Bolt's emphasis on research-through-practice giving rise to a different mode of thinking and
different theoretical insights to the 'self-conscious theorization' of ideas applied to practice
(Bolt 2006).
Practical methods do not consciously follow paradigmatic lines; they follow Denzin and Lincoln's
description of the methodological 'bricoleur'. The bricoleur crosses the boundaries of research paradigms
with differing world-views unwittingly (and often unproblematically) in the main as part of
the 'poetic making-do' borrowed from Michel de Certeau and applied to methodology (Denzin and
Lincoln 2005: 4, 6). Questions arising that concern the researcher's world-view and assumptions
ought to be resolved within practice as ethical issues concerning the role of the researcher (that are specific to the topic of
enquiry and the illustrator-researcher's situation), rather than be dictated at
paradigmatic level and adhered to as strict methodology.

Practice as research: Research on, in and for illustration
A variety of critical frameworks already exist for analysing finished work (research on illustration)
and its relationship with the viewer, and therefore this article will concentrate instead on the production
of illustration. This is the unique contribution made by practice-led research, which in its flexibility
can take risks with practice that cannot be taken if studying someone else's practice. This
section will examine how illustration practice operates specifically as practice-led research in art and
design. In order to define this we can return to Christopher Frayling's influential 1993 article, which
outlines the three categories of research in art and design, namely, research for, into and through
practice (Frayling 1993: 5). These distinctions form the basis of contemporary discussions of
practice-led research, with useful refinements contributed by Henk Borgdorff who reworks Frayling's
categories into research on, for and in the arts. The latter category is 'when the research unfolds in
and through the acts of creating and performing' and uses the practice as the 'methodological vehicle'
for the study (Borgdorff 2010: 46). These terms will be adopted hereafter. Borgdorff does not
neglect the contribution made by the previous two forms of research, which is particularly relevant
to the current requirements for doctoral research to produce a written thesis, which articulates the
non-linguistic aspect of creative practice that is the focus of research in for Borgdorff. This article
takes into account the production of illustration to reflect Borgdorff's research in art. At no point will
research for be investigated, for as Stephen Scrivener (2010: 261) points out, this aspect of arts-based
research 'is not required to yield new knowledge and understanding [...] [it] does not satisfy the goal
condition of academic and professional research'.
With regard to the most appropriate term available to describe this research in practice, Carole

Gray's definition of practice-led research is succinct:
research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified
and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy
is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods
familiar to us as practitioners in the visual arts.
(Gray 1998: 3)
This definition is declared still fit for purpose within recent discussions of how practice-led research
is developing, such as Brad Haseman's 'performative paradigm' for creative research (Haseman
2007: 147). First, the distinction between practice-based research and practice-led research is of use in examining research
on by way of research in illustration, in order to describe the different roles
taken by practice within one enquiry. Linda Candy draws a distinction between the two, where the
former results in practical outcomes and the latter's contribution is presented in written form (Candy
2006: 18–19).

Illustration and paradigm shifts: Writing and the location of the argument
The question raised above of where the argument lies is particularly pertinent to illustration research,
and may be where it can contribute to the development of research that awards a contributory role
to the practice in carrying some of the burden of making an argument. In recent developments,
Haseman's performative paradigm places the emphasis on the practical outcomes as the appropriate
language to convey the knowledge gained within and through practice, and suggests that the words
and numbers of qualitative and quantitative traditions will therefore lose some of this knowledge in
the translation between modes (Haseman 2007: 148). This sounds like an argument for using images
rather than describing them in written research articles, and corresponds with the view of Rob
Mason and Russell Mills who trace the term back to its Latin root illustrare to argue that the role of
illustration is that of enlightening and therefore operational (Mason 2000a: 4; Eno and Mills
1986: 6).
The relationship between practical knowledge and written language used to express it within the
requirements of a Ph.D. is also discussed by MacLeod (2000), Bolt (2007: 31), Niedderer and
Roworth-Stokes (2007: 2, 12), Smith and Dean (2009: 7), and Newbury (2010: 375, 383–84). It would
be pertinent for illustration (particularly at this point in the development of practice-led Ph.D.s) to
adopt the balanced conclusion from Candy and Edmonds (2010), Newbury (2010) and Bolt (2007)
that the artistic artefact cannot operate alone. However, where it can add to the discussion is by
incorporating visual work within the thesis in a manner that offers both the performative approach
of Haseman as well as the strengths of the traditional written thesis. Therefore, illustration, with its
singular relationship with text (as extension, counterpoint or redirection as discussed by Braund
2011, for example), offers us the possibility of contributing to a transitional stage between the
columns of Figure 1, that is, from qualitative research to performative paradigm.

Figure 1: Gray and Malins (2004).

This is a reasonable position to adopt in relation to the current development of illustration
research, in that the findings must communicate clearly to an audience that includes those who view
the purpose of illustration differently. The written element makes the role of illustration as research
apparent to this segment of the audience and beyond. Therefore, although my written thesis did not
operate in the way that I am arguing illustration should (specifically in terms of the relationship
between illustration and words within the written thesis), it offered an insight into the role of
practice in arriving at that point. However, I would argue for greater responsibility to be given to practice in the
communication of knowledge within a written document. As Candy and Edmonds
(2010: 121) state in relation to practice-based Ph.D. research: 'the text that accompanies the work
may indeed illuminate new apprehensions or a new way of creating apprehensions that we can
claim as the new knowledge produced'. And here the use of the term 'illuminate' is key; to return to
Mason and Mills (Mason 2000a: 4; Eno and Mills 1986: 6) this is the task of illustration.
This suggestion is informed by Katy MacLeod who, in defining three different approaches to
practice-led research, gives the example of a Ph.D. submission that employed practical work and
writing in a complementary relationship. She states that: 'in type C it [the written text] is instrumental
and complementary to the artwork submission but the artwork here is the thesis; it provides the
theoretical proposition' (MacLeod 2000). In this sense the constituent parts of the submission constitute
an argument by contributing their own role, reminiscent of the multimodal texts explored by
Zoe Sadokierski in her Ph.D. research. It is specifically the Ph.D. exegesis in the transitional period
between paradigms that stands to benefit from the more open approach to image–text relationships
as suggested in MacLeod's example.
Examples such as Catrin Morgan's book Phantom Settlements (Figures 2 and 3) demonstrate the
possibilities here, and (as outlined in Morgan 2011) this one does so by using image, text and design
to demonstrate the trajectory of deception. Therefore, illustration can do as well as tell in paperbased

combinations of words and pictures, but it is important to recognize that this is not the same as saying that the practical work produced during the research necessarily embodies the argument. It is instead suggesting that the skills to do so have been identified and could be put to use in creating a new outcome that negotiates a performative relationship between the work produced and the written text. These practical skills need to be embraced courageously as the means to convey an argument, and also as the basis for its structure. The reticence to do so in an academic environment is reflected in Elizabeth Price's honest acknowledgement that the written component of the practice-led Ph.D. submission is troubled by issues of narrative and logical sequences. In turn, insightful and particular practice is constricted by the demands of elegant draughtsmanship. She summarizes this by referring to her writing as 'never as sharp as the boulder [the practical element of Price's Ph.D.], but nonetheless, it is always so much more plausible' (Price 2006: 131). Writing, if privileged over images, therefore dictates the location of the argument and also the nature of the arguments that can be made.

Plausible practice: Research methods in illustration

The preceding paragraphs have outlined the role of practice within illustration research, with the emphasis so far being on research on by way of research in illustration (where the object of enquiry is illustration itself). This is the reflection-on-action and the reflection-in-action of Donald Schön's

Figure 2: Catrin Morgan's Phantom Settlements book, 2011. With text and images from Mireille Fauchon and design by Julia. Pages 14–15, from the chapter 'Creation'.
The choice of line and writing style is precise and clear cut in this chapter.

Figure 3: Catrin Morgan's Phantom Settlements book, 2011. With text and images from Mireille Fauchon and design by Julia. Pages 82–83, from the chapter 'Confabulation'.
This image shows the repetitive structure of the book, in that this chapter is largely similar to the previous example in content but has lost its visual clarity. Here, both image
and text become vague and imprecise to reflect the lack of certainty in recollections.

'reflective practitioner' (Schön 1983, in Gray and Malins 2004: 22). The discussion will now turn to reflection-in-action of practice in an examination of specific research methods, with an additional commentary reflecting upon how these may encourage us to consider where illustration (and practices within it) intersects with the paradigmatic columns and ontological, epistemological and methodological rows of Gray and Malins' table in Figure 1.

By moving the discussion towards the methods employed to investigate a phenomenon of interest within research in illustration I hope to outline the benefits for practice outside of formalized research, as a response to Mason (2000b), Bowman (2008), Poynor (2009) and Zeegen (2012, 2014). These sources, between them, make a convincing case for the continuing prevalence of illustration as a pleasant visual hum divorced from weighty/any content in the world it could operate within and in response to. Whilst there is room for different forms of illustration in circulation, to increase the variety of that we produce and are surrounded with I propose the inductive approach to research could be adopted within illustration practice as research for illustration. This may encourage illustrators to negotiate a more insightful and sympathetic relationship with the world and the phenomenon of interest identified within it, thus linking the concerns of Figure 1 with the various strands of illustration within the contemporary workplace. Methods described in the following sections are derived from the studio practice undertaken as part of my doctoral research, and are therefore singular to that particular endeavour and are not meant to represent the variety of methods available to the practitioner-researcher. The aim is not to create a prescriptive set of methods, but to develop the discussion of transferable illustration methods, beginning with scrutiny of how illustrators investigate the world and communicate their findings.

Fieldwork

The different uses of drawing as a tool to investigate a phenomenon of interest are the focus here, arising from studio practice and drawing trips that produced material such as Figure 4. The latter represents fieldwork undertaken as a naturalistic enquiry according to Rudestam and Newton (1992: 42), but the observer is not at all detached in the way that they describe traditional ethnographic enquiry. This may be a reflection of the shift described by Guba and Lincoln (2005: 204–05) from the positivist notion of an objective reality towards a more postmodern understanding of the socially constructed and fluid nature of reality. More recent research methods texts have responded to and overtaken Rudestam and Newton's summary of ethnographic fieldwork. How these differing approaches are manifest within drawing is particularly interesting from an illustration perspective, for how the practitioner negotiates the concept of representational veracity will reveal their position. This may be different for practitioners of reportage or children's books, for example, and open up debate within these areas. Therefore, we may use such concepts to map the field with greater subtlety.

Figure 4: Stephanie Black's Observational drawing (Oriole), 2012. Whilst it is a straightforward piece of observational drawing, this example shows the discrepancy between
a schematic representation of a bird based on assumptions and memory, and the specificity of this tattered and posed museum exhibit.

Fieldwork undertaken through the course of the Ph.D. largely took place within sketchbooks: a vehicle discussed within research methods texts and with its own influence on practice. The sketchbook is listed by Gray and Malins (2004: 111) as a practical method validated by previously completed Ph.D.s. It is of note here due to the visual nature of the thinking it encourages. It provides a useful tool to encourage stepping into areas of uncertainty or uniqueness, largely because it is semi-private and fosters experimental or unplanned activity that may lead outside the entrenched behaviour noted by Schön. This is the 'ideational drawing' that Terry Rosenberg writes of. He describes it as a 'thinking space – not a space in which thought is re-presented but rather a space where thinking is presenced'. These drawings are the detours in subject matter and method that emerge from flights of fancy within the sketchbook (such as Figure 5), and also the visual exploration of possibilities (for compositions, or three-dimensional works, for example) that occupy a problem-solving role. Rosenberg characterizes this approach to drawing as: 'where one thinks with and through drawing to make discoveries, find new possibilities that give course to ideas and help fashion their eventual form' (Rosenberg 2008: 109). Therefore, this is drawing that is generative of ideas and new tangents for enquiry rather than transcribing existing ideas, and it acts as a record of the thinking and making process. The reflective journal (also on Gray and Malins' list, 2004: 113) offers a similar informal and exploratory space that facilitates reflection-on-action and a record of the project's trajectory. Gray and Malins refer to it as 'a much more structured and deliberate research method' than the sketchbook, and although this overlooks the variety of exercises that go on in my sketchbooks, their description of the journal as a growing archive that will be consulted regularly is appropriate. My use of sketchbooks involves a cycle of reflection and adjustment (through duplicating and reworking its contents into further work and new sketchbooks), and therefore their description of the reflective journal could be stretched to accommodate sketchbooks.

Reflective practice: Thinking through making

Materials amassed during fieldwork require further sorting and reprocessing in the studio. Practical strategies employed within the studio involve using wall space to hang, review and reshuffle the work produced in order to identify themes and clusters of images. These might form a new conceptual anchor for the project or angle on an existing starting point, allowing for the project to diverge from the brief or initial concept and shed new light on the topic. This process can be described using Donald Schön's 'reflective practice'. Gray and Malins (2004: 22–23) and Haseman (2007: 152–53) both explore Schön's ideas in relation to practice-led research, with the former quoting Schön to describe the design process as a 'reflective conversation with the materials of the situation'. This adequately describes the trials, reviews and adjustments seen on the studio walls where images are

Figure 5: Stephanie Black's Ideational sketchbook drawing (Dennis Waterman), 2012. Here a drawing that begins by transcribing a photograph takes a detour during
the making process. Drawings such as these open up new narrative possibilities and tangents to explore.

organized, compared, adjusted and sometimes discarded in the ongoing negotiation of aims, methods and outcomes (seen in Figure 6). Haseman's exploration of Schön's 'reflective practice' within practice-led Ph.D.s shows it to provide the opportunity to make clear underlying assumptions of the practitioner that go largely unquestioned in daily practice (especially if they remain hidden in sketchbooks). For these can become stifling and lead to repetitive work (Schön's term for this is 'overlearning'), which was the problem identified in illustration criticism cited earlier. The key point is the possibility this affords for stepping outside the application of established methods and into unknown territory.

Reflective practice is therefore the bridge between practice and research-through-practice. It encourages the translation of tacit understanding into the explicit and transferable, and in doing so Schön states that reflective practice enables the practitioner to 'make new sense of situations of uncertainty or uniqueness which he may allow himself to experience' (Schön 1983: 61 in Haseman 2007: 153). Uncertainty can be greeted with confidence when equipped with a robust set of recognized methods, which are expanded upon by Haseman. The ongoing review and adjustment of work in progress within such situations is described in terms of the enquiry cycle borrowed from action research that facilitates self-reflection and development in its cyclical stages of planning, action, observing, reflecting, replanning and so on (Haseman 2007:142).

Grounded theory – curating the materials amassed

Materials collected through fieldwork and sketchbook exploration need to be analysed as thoroughly as interview data, and grounded theory from qualitative research can be used to explain this process as described in the previous section. Kathy Charmaz defines grounded theory as both the practice and the product, wherein qualitative data collection and conceptual analysis take place in an iterative cycle and result in theoretical conclusions (2005: 360). In my practice, reinterpreting my own work (through recombining elements or changing the colour, for example) is more in line with a

constructivist research paradigm than with the positivist one that Collins (2010: 41) aligns grounded theory with. However, Charmaz identifies two different strands within grounded theory – a positivist approach (which is going back to the idea that theory can be found within the data) and a newer constructivist approach, which acknowledges that all of our decisions in editing and selecting have an impact when we code, categorize and summarize in relation to our data (Charmaz 2005:360). The main themes of style, gaps and time that formed the structure of my Ph.D. thesis arose from this process, despite the pressures noted by Price (2006). Collins summarizes this strategy as inductive, with theory arising from the data collected and not assumed prior to the study. Gray and Malins (2004: 22) point out that it is helpful to develop theory from within the field in this way, rather than have it as a separate activity that misses some of the specificity of practice. Grounded theory is an

Figure 6: Stephanie Black's Studio photo, 2010. The process of exploring materials and themes can be seen here. Comparisons and links between images are made, and through reshuffling images potential conceptual anchors can be tested.

approach to analysis that enables this and complements other critical endeavours already underway from other perspectives.

The methods and inductive approach discussed previously are not solely of use to the academic researcher, and the discussion will now shift to outlining the wider benefits. I propose that this approach gives us the confidence to argue for and adopt an authorial approach to illustration by removing the known outcome of the traditional brief, or at least the level to which it specifies the outcome from the outset. The inductive approach outlined above can conjure new metaphors, styles and forms with which to communicate, as appropriate to each project. Furthermore, adopting this approach is beneficial to the longevity of an illustrator in a workplace with a high turnover.

Charmaz's constructivist approach is instructive in that it relinks the illustrator and world by encouraging responsibility for image-making and how images are used, and also allows flexibility for their reinterpretation in a new context. For example, the transition from fragmented drawings in the studio in Figure 6 to parallel (albeit loose) narratives within exhibition space in Figure 7 reflects my editing of materials to reflect emerging themes and potential tangents to pursue. Using and reworking existing materials in this way is of note. By having to work within the limits of what has already been pictured, a 'best-fit' approach to editing is adopted, similar to that outlined by Graham Rawle in relation to his use of existing texts to convey his own narrative (2005). The benefit is that new metaphors arise from the necessity of using the most appropriate image for a particular role (as seen in Figures 8 and 9), rather than selecting an off-the-shelf visual analogy in the manner of stock illustration.

The benefit of adopting the inductive approach discussed is that it enables illustrators to generate projects of their own regardless of fluctuations in the market for illustration, by having an ongoing practice to ransack. Self-initiated work can generate further work, and expand an illustrator's professional repertoire; removing the known outcome in this way results in more varied visual languages being developed as directed by the subject matter and methods used to investigate it. Furthermore, by removing the known outcome an inductive approach also leaves room for more varied forms to come from projects, if these are the most appropriate vehicle for the communication. This communicative approach to objects (seen in Figures 10 and 11) complements the entrepreneurial surface decoration that has flourished in recent years, partly due to the increase in (and necessity of) opportunities to generate income such as graphic arts fairs. Equipping illustrators with a sturdy understanding of their methods also enables them to be flexible and responsive within their professional environment, with long-term skills to generate projects and operate professionally irrespective of styles and industry fortunes. Within industry the adoption of an inductive approach to research for illustration could broaden the range of representations in circulation, and make these better informed.

Figure 7: Stephanie Black's Sideshow (Second Round) exhibition photo, 2011. The visual materials shown in Figure 6 have been curated into narrative clusters and threads for a work-in-progress exhibition.

Figure 8: Stephanie Black's Sketchbook drawing from a field trip to Dartmoor, 2010.

Figure 9: Stephanie Black's Final page of DEAR artist's book, 2010.
Figure 8 has here been repurposed and reworked to represent the bleak
and barren end to a Dartmoor story, which has been used as the conceptual
anchor for an artist's book comprising sketchbook materials.

Figure 10: Matthew Richardson's Half Belief exhibition photograph, Howard Gardens
Gallery (UWIC), Cardiff, 2006. Richardson's websites divide his practice between
commissioned and self-directed work, yet his gallery-based practice (shown here) could
provide variety within the venues that host his commissioned work.

Figure 11: Stephanie Black's The Unsung Telephone (detail) 2012. Both figures 10 and 11 represent the use

of three-dimensional objects, materials and environments as communicative practice. In this case the form was dictated by the project as it developed, rather than being defined at the outset.

Circulating practice as research

Research outcomes need to be communicated to a wider audience, and here the discussion of practical outcomes from the process described can contribute to the expansion of discussion in earlier paragraphs concerning the role of practice in research outcomes. This is an opportunity to consider illustration's relationship with the performative paradigm proposed by Haseman (2006) and the frictions raised by using practice in making an argument. These arise from the different expectations of audiences for practice and research practice, which raises questions concerning the suitability of vehicles for circulating academic research practice. Of specific note is the importance placed upon the surface qualities of illustration, which threatens to undo the gains made within critical reflections on the field in the same way that focus on style eclipsed communication within the critical viewpoints cited earlier.

For practical outcomes the precedents exist for producing outcomes comprising fragmented sketchbook materials (such as Figures 7 and 9). Circulating vehicles such as artists books and zines including Henrik Drescher's book works, Sara Fanelli's book Sometimes I Think, Sometimes I Am (2009), and zines such as Nick White's Stuff I found ... (2009) show that there is a pocket within the marketplace for work that looks different to the sheen seen on most stock illustration (and some agents') websites. These vehicles can also address a wider audience outside of academia. However, academic contributions to knowledge may result from practical mistakes and aesthetic failures, which would be edited out from professional contributions such as these. The contribution may relate to how illustration operates, and the visual outcome may be off-putting to an audience of non-academic practitioners equipped with industry-oriented criteria to evaluate visual offerings. In such instances, the aims of the research will need to be presented alongside the visual component to ensure that it is being evaluated for its success in what it is trying to achieve. Otherwise, to use Estelle Barrett's terms, the surface of the work could obscure the ideas it carried in its making and it would not operate as a 'meme' and facilitate the uptake of these ideas (Barrett 2007b: 159–61). She notes that 'the replication mechanisms that have traditionally valorised and validated creative arts practices have focussed on product rather than process', and this is particularly pressing in illustration. But the criteria associated with professional practice (product) do not accommodate productive failure, which is an integral part of research practice.

There is a role for academic journals in providing an appropriate venue for the dissemination of practical research outcomes that do not seek to operate as professional practice and instead operate effectively with a written counterpart or as part of a visual trajectory through a project. It is the appropriate place to cater to the suggestions of Lyons (2006) and Candy and Edmonds (2010). The latter emphasize the importance of informing the viewer of the research context for the artefact(s) on show, stating that 'we need to know what to look at. Then we can see whatever it is that is significant' (Candy and Edmonds 2010: 125). Lyons (2006) makes suggestions regarding how to achieve this in her reflections upon the drawbacks of exhibiting research practice. Lyons suggests that work such as this ought not to be judged as art (these are inappropriate criteria and aims by which to measure the outcomes), and therefore it ought not to be exhibited in a way that presents it as art – such as the gallery. Instead she proposes that journals dedicated to practice-led research would be a sympathetic venue, and the open-minded remit of the two currently available options specifically concerned with illustration allow for broadening this discussion. And if journals embrace a multimodal, performative approach to the research exegesis as argued for earlier, the resulting bulk of citable examples would represent a welcome argument for stretching the boundaries of what is acceptable within the practice-led Ph.D. thesis.

Conclusion

This article has sought to establish that some of the practical methods used within illustration practice to investigate the world and subsequently to communicate findings are commensurate with those of research as described within other research paradigms. This exercise gives us the terminology and the concepts with which to reflect upon illustration methods within non-academic research practice, and to renegotiate its link with the world it proposes to speak to and about. In doing so I have sought to address the concerns of critics within the illustration press by promoting more robust fieldwork that links illustration more soundly with the world.

The strength of this approach is that these methods produce outcomes that can communicate findings to the viewer, and illustration's communicative abilities can be utilized to a greater extent in academic research. Academia stands to benefit as much as commercial practice from trusting the practice to lead projects in an inductive approach involving a responsive and emerging methodology. It enables the illustrator-researcher to be nimble and bring in previously unrelated ideas to a developing field. With regard to the commissioned strand of illustration, my proposal is that it can adopt research in illustration as research for illustration. This would be an interesting challenge to

Scrivener's point that this is research with a small 'r' and does not generate knowledge (Scrivener 2010: 261). There is a benefit to practice of rejecting the deductive approach familiar to commissions, for it does not encourage a deeper understanding of the illustration's subject matter or an alternative view of it. It recycles what we already think we know and puts it into circulation visually.

The relationship between the research process discussed here and broader research paradigms appears to fluctuate according to the needs of the task at hand, and crossing paradigms unproblematically within practice is useful to note. The benefit to illustration of adopting a range of positions throughout the research is that it gives the illustrator-researcher a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of interest, and raises the issue of responsibility in relation to it. Furthermore, in research terms Collins (2010) argues that research paradigms are socially constructed, and therefore the relationships between paradigms and between paradigm and methodology are constantly being negotiated, and the discussion of methods in journals such as this contributes to that. Therefore, for example, where Gray and Malins propose artistic research has its own paradigm, mixed-methods or multi-methods designs drawing on both qualitative and/or quantitative methods from competing paradigms may be the most effective solution whilst the paradigm is under construction. It foregrounds the demands of practice whilst the different strands within illustration research are still being excavated and developed.

Foregrounding the role of practice is to be found in Haseman's 'performative paradigm' for creative arts, where outcomes enact the argument (Haseman 2006, 2007). Where visual communication offers sophisticated tools for balancing complementary text and image within a holistic communication, there are opportunities to use these to address some of the resistance still felt that MacLeod (2000) wrote of in relation to the location of the argument. Within a field where practice can communicate, opportunities are opened up for adopting an appropriate format for providing a range of levels on which to approach the argument. This point is particularly relevant to illustration, where Haseman's suggestions can be read as a call for the alternative use of images within written outcomes concerning illustration. These research outcomes need not jettison words or numbers in favour of symbolic data (such as images). It is precisely because it is a combination of these that could make it performative and accessible. Broadening the range of levels on which the outcomes communicate is of relevance to research (and field) concerned with the viewer/reader, and also to wider concerns with research accessibility and impact. Haseman quotes Gergen and Gergen (2003: 582–83) to outline the benefits clearly: 'in moving towards performance the investigator avoids the mystifying claims of truth and simultaneously expands the range of communities in which the work can stimulate dialogue' (Haseman 2006: 101). Illustration is fluid in its selection of media for communication, and therefore the overlap in practical methods with other disciplines makes this expanded dialogue commendable.

Having raised a number of practical issues and identified a variety of benefits to different parties of positioning illustration practice in relation to inductive practice-led research, I hope that this article points other researchers towards relevant texts in order to broaden the discussion within our field and beyond.

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