Abstract

Illustration practice becomes holistic and acquires gravitas because it develops broadly, with parameters that extend far beyond the remit of commercial instruction. 
Professor Emeritus Alan Male, Eye Magazine no. 92 vol. 23, 2016

Illustration is no longer driven by process, or defined by a single medium. In the advent of technological developments, the proliferation of images and economic factors illustration is increasingly viewed as non-process specific, Illustration as a verb rather than noun?

Whilst there is a fashionable notion or security of authenticity in the traditional skills of illustration, the ‘craftsmen’, the real shift is conceptual and how illustration can communicate to varying audiences and communities, both on a local level and international.

As the digital shifts the emphasis from the written word to the image, illustrators are in a key position to mediate information and narratives. Illustration has accessibility, and increasingly as it moves away from reproduction, has potential through performance and the potential of visual storytelling beyond the image.

This paper will set out to explore the potential for illustration as it moves away from the singularity of the image to movement, interactivity, situated in alternative settings, and as an act a pedagogic tool and for social engagement, using as examples projects with CARIS Haringey Summer Playscheme London UK, Westdene Primary School Brighton UK, and the Illustration Festival in S. João da Madeira Portugal.

Keywords:
Pedagogic Practice
Interactive
Situated Illustration
Illustration as Performance
Collaborative / Collective

1. Introduction

“For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.”

Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

This paper is ongoing research into illustration as it moves away from a traditional concept of the printed page to engage in both the de-material space of the web, and as a pedagogic practice, a tool for understanding the modern world and to tell stories, narratives for varying communities.

With the on set of the digital Illustration is at once all pervasive and at the same time losing it’s traditional forms. Yet it is growing in popularity - in the United Kingdom alone there are over 60 courses at undergraduate level with the word illustration in their title. Where once illustration was only viewed in published annuals, today everyone is expected to self-publish online, and in some cases this becomes what they term as illustration without ever once engaging with the mainstream commercial practice. The paper identifies some of the new spaces in which illustration is situated, and also focuses on illustration as a pedagogic practice with three ongoing case studies involving staff & students from the University of Brighton in the UK.
2. A Pedagogic Practice

‘Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information … Problem-posing education, breaking the vertical patterns characteristic of banking education, can fulfil its function of being the practice of freedom … Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students of the teacher cease to exist … The teacher is no longer merely the one-who-teaches, but one who is him [or her]self taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow …’

*Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

In the past 5 years of my own teaching practice at the University of Brighton a growing number of students have begun focusing on the activity of illustration or the act of *making* rather than the finished illustration outcome. 2015 graduate Florence Reddington likened the experience with that of a nun’s vocation, of being in a communal space, the university studio, and being with others as she produced work.

“The carpenter, lab technician, and conductor are all craftsmen because they are dedicated to good work for its own sake.”

*Richard Sennett, The Craftsman*

It has been increasingly relevant to offer opportunities for students to experience public activities, such as running workshops to cater for the rise in demand. Recently the course was asked to provide live illustration during the British Council ‘Going Global’ International Conference in London 2017, transcribing visually some of the themes of the presentations, and to offer activities for delegates to engage in during recesses, including interactive Skype drawing. So evidently illustration is moving away from merely being the object or image to encompass a performative aspect.

Case studies:

3. CARIS Haringey Summer Playscheme London UK

CARIS is a charity for homeless families based in the diocese of Haringey in London UK. Providing a holistic range of services for families in temporary accommodation since 1990. Their services are open to everyone in temporary accommodation in the London Borough of Haringey, and their service-users include a high proportion of refugees, asylum-seekers, victims of domestic violence etc.

During three weeks each summer a Summer Playscheme is delivered by CARIS for children of families being helped by the charity, whilst parents partake in workshops on healthcare etc. 360 children and young people (ages vary from 0-15) attend the Summer Playscheme which combines art, music, drama and crafts, delivered by trained play workers and specialists in different areas of expertise, supported by adult and youth volunteers. Whilst the children are engaged in the scheme parents and carers have workshops on subjects such as health, wellbeing, budgeting, welfare and housing.

‘The play scheme engages with children and young people by encouraging them to set their own boundaries and consider their aspirations for the future through play and informal learning. It also provides a means to reach children and young people who may be disengaged from formal education, and is also a fun way to build links and community cohesion between families of different culture and faith…’

A series of creative activities are organized for the children based around a general theme for the summer such as the home, exploring both the concept of home and perhaps issues around identity. Allowing the participants to discuss and learn through creative play. It provides an opportunity for students to take part in teaching, gaining experience of running small workshops.
With volunteer artists, illustrators, musicians, animators, and actors coming together to run activities there is a real cross pollination of ideas applied across mediums. The communal spirit is attuned to the growing phenomena of collaboration and illustration as pedagogic activity, as the discipline is unhinged from the printed outcome both in terms of it's physical situation and the de-materialized.
http://www.carisharingey.org.uk

4. Westdene Primary School Brighton UK

Westdene Primary School is situated in the city of Brighton & has 664 pupils (ages 5 - 11 yrs), with the school priding itself on providing a supportive learning community offering opportunities for partnerships. The school approached the University of Brighton’s illustration course to collaborate during their Book Week in October 2016. Liaising with Upper Key Stage 2 Leader Andrew Bradstreet a workshop was devised for year 2 pupils to work on creating a picture book during a morning session. The theme of which was on pictorial journeys to and from school that day. Each pupil was given a blank folded book format in which to create a narrative of that morning, whether real or imagined, with visual stimuli handed out in the form of photocopies to encourage collage as a starting point. Working in groups the student volunteers from the university introduced their own dynamic to the workshop including origami. Having numbers to hand obviously helped to run the workshop, but it also offered opportunity for the volunteers to interact with the children, to help articulate the children’s stories and to create a personal experience of that day via the picture book.

5. Encontre International de Ilustração de S. João da Madeira Portugal

The International Illustration Meeting of S. João da Madeira is an event dedicated to promote and show the importance of illustration to the community, celebrating with those who practise within their professional environment. Firstly organized in 2008 by the Parish Council of S.João da Madeira the meeting has expanded, widening the focus from Children's Illustration to other fields of illustration and dedicating the event to a more diverse audience, not just professionals from the education system, such as the Sanjoanense community, but also to professionals and admirers of illustration and businesses who wish to seek and embrace this business.
http://www.ilustracaosjm.pt/en/about

Situated in the northern city of S. Joao da Madeira in northern Portugal, the Parish Council promotes the illustration meeting centred upon the town’s Oliva Crative Factory, the Oliva Tower, and the Hat-making Museum, former industries of the city.

“The Illustration Meeting held in São João da Madeira is already considered a significant national event, anticipated by all those who dedicate themselves not only to the art of illustration, but also to the art of writing, especially for children and young adults.”
Helena Couto, The President of the S. João da Madeira Parish council

Run through the Mayor office the illustration meeting annually encompassing all levels of the city community, bringing the public together through the activity of illustration. The Illustration meeting brings together all sorts of practitioners to celebrate with workshops across the city, from university students, to pre-schools and secondary schools, to old folks homes (Senior University). Altogether several thousand pupils are involved and at HE level each year various institutions are invited to participate and collaborate with the city to demonstrate different approaches to illustration. Alongside the main focused week of professional illustrators, local teachers are involved to help the public garner memories through graphic journals.

According to the Illustration Meeting website ‘The International Illustration Meeting of S. João da Madeira is a streamlined, rich and dense educational service that takes illustration workshops to local public schools. The Parish Council thus provides the younger Sanjoanense community, and consequently their parents, educators and teachers with an engaging experience of discovery and experimentation of illustration.’
Through the activity of illustration, not simply celebrating the discipline, or professional practice the activity enables stories to be told through the visual, in an act of community. Illustration as a pedagogic activity has much potential, engaging communities such as the elderly with a voice when the digital revolution is rapidly changing how we interact socially, both in terms of communicating with one another, but also how to negotiate the practicalities of life such as shopping.


The British Council approached the University of Brighton to provide live illustration during the Going Global International Conference at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre, London 22-24 May 2017. The conference itself was a meeting of educational leaders from around the world discussing themes around the city and the place of the university, so visual transcriptions of some of the discussions would help capture the conversations. There was a combination of paper based diagrammatic drawings as papers were being delivered/presented, but also low-fi stop frame animations, and colleagues running a workshop entitled (tele) consequences that was a collaborative drawing between teams based at the venue and others at other international institutions using iPhone cameras and Skype calls. Beyond merely recording some of the dialogues taking place at the conference the students and staff were obviously performing themselves – Observed by the delegates as work was generated, so an example of illustration as an act rather than a single outcome or picture. The resulting documentation itself becomes a narrative, an illustration of the event, using drawing as a performance act.

7. Situated Illustration: An Interaction

At the RCA event Ecologies of Publishing Futures in 2015, Lucas Dietrich of Thames & Hudson Publishers revealed that the top selling books of that year were adult colouring books, children’s picture books, and books on mindfulness. The recent publishing phenomenon of adult colouring books, in particular Secret Garden: An Inky Treasure Hunt and Colouring Book by Johanna Basford, published by Laurence King 2013 taps into this desire for communal activity through traditional print. There is an interaction, whether through the parent reading stories to their children, or that of colouring in books with the audience directly interceding with the image. In the de-material landscape of the web interactivity is commonplace, influenced from the gaming industry, and the desire for open source material, challenging the very bedrock of copyright for commercial illustration.

8. Virtual Reality: Lost in an imagined Landscape

In the summer of 2016 I had the first of two experiences of Virtual Reality. The first was an invitation to take part in an event organised by Dan Chrichlow of London based Illustration agency Dutch Uncle to try out Tilt Brush by Google.

The headset that you put on is very immersive, akin to wearing a scuba diving mask, with wires trailing behind you - a guide helps talk you through what you are experiencing & warns you of any ‘real’ obstacles. You find yourself in a gridded room, situated in a landscape - you vaguely see the landscape beyond this room, but the grids themselves define the limits of the actual space that remain in. The guide standing close by but outside of the Virtual World warns you if you approaching the limits of the physical space - you become totally absorbed & accepting of this new virtual space, imagined world.

The tools themselves are very much like being placed in Photoshop - in one hand you have a changeable brush, in the other a virtual palette. Being a figurative drawer, I chose the narrowest brush to replicate how I draw with a pen, and draw a fairly representational character holding a bunch of flowers. Intellectually I thought that I drew in layers, or that Tilt Brush would mimic Photoshop in that way, but you immediately realize that you are not drawing on a flat piece of paper, instead every gesture of your arm effects the drawing in the 3D environment, & throws the line into perspective, it feels very sculptural. The only way to describe the sensation is to say that It felt as if you were in artist Cornelia Parker’s exploded shed installation - You inhabit the drawing itself, with each line suspended before your eyes.
When you shift your position it throws the drawing off - the strangest of experience to walk around your drawing & for it to become unrecognizable. For it to only work as an image from one fixed viewpoint. Very profound when you consider the notion of audience & ownership of viewpoint. Other visitors will not necessarily view your creation how you intended it to be seen - Quite bizarre to step through your own drawing, to see it from another point of view.

I had always believed that my line was fairly regular - but to see the many gestures and marks created infant of me made me realize how diverse the lines are in one sense - only becoming recognizable when viewed from one direction. There is much potential in Virtual Reality for education, in the experiential - to inhabit the visual world's of others, akin to experiencing the Moving Panoramas of the 18th century, or very early film.

A few week's later I visited artists' Shezad Dawood's Kalimpong exhibition at Timothy Taylor Gallery London which had as it's central piece a Virtual Reality world for you to inhabit. Once again a guide helped talk me through this world, entering buildings and exploring the various rooms on a ludic quest. There are also glitch ghosts inhabiting this world with you - it's quite unnerving to sense a shape close to you, especially a flickering presence.

Virtual Reality seems very real and immersive, the audience can control the viewpoint of the illustration beyond that intended by the author of the work. As with open source material of the web the practice offers many questions about the future of commercial practice in illustration. Whilst being a driver for those who can generate such worlds, it can be said to threaten the very livelihood of illustrators, requiring new models of publishing, as in the music industry & how they coped with the download culture.

9. Collaborative Practice

This is the era of collaboration, with Turner Prize winning collective Assemble, the blurring of practice and group activity is evident all around us. From online communities sharing their illustrations to collectives of artisans using 'making' as an antidote to the all-pervasive 'world wide web', we are connected like never before.

At the recent Pick Me Up Graphic Art Festival at Somerset House London, there was an emphasis upon manufacture – print groups helping graphic artists to self-publish. But also collectives such as Clay collective, graphic artists coming together in a shared studio, to make and exhibit, but also developing workshops and public events – more participatory as an activity? This year Graphic Design & Illustration students at Brighton are collaborating on making a quilt as a means of reflecting the community that they identify with.

Other examples of a new sense of collectives can be found in evening-class.org a group of 28 participants sharing an alternative education, not just a space but also an evolving programme of activities, seminars and workshops – a community of creative seeking a different experience from traditional routes of MA's.

As illustration became a specialism within a broader Graphic Design education, traditionally it was taught as a freelance occupation, invariably setting up as sole-trader, the artisan working from home. There were examples of studios, Push Pin Studio in New York, and NTA here in the UK, but mostly illustrators worked individually, represented by a growing number of illustration agencies.

In the 1990's studios such as Big Orange that evolved into Heart Artists' Agents and then a flurry of illustration collectives began to emerge, most predominantly the Peepshow Illustration collective that formed from like-minded graduates out of the University of Brighton, or more recently Day Job out of Camberwell College of the Arts UAL.

As illustration has become broader, to encompass animation and exhibition formats working collectively is more commonplace. Mario Hugo from New York Creative Agency Hugo & Marie has talked about the benefits of drawing together freelance talent on a job-to-job basis.

10. The Network

The importance of having a network, both in terms of professional practice and also for communal support is evident - in an age of file sharing, crowd funding, kick-starters, RSS feeds and constant updates via Instagram… the internet can be seen as a means to share images beyond a purely marketing need, a
way of publishing or perhaps more appropriately circulating work. Existing in this inter-related network the real significance of the web goes much further I would suggest than illustrators simply using another platform to market themselves, or brand. As this territory of art, design, identity, music and performance all become blurred the online community of illustration sharing their illustrations, rather than the traditional trade model of a commercial practice. The growth and popularity of the discipline, or the wider context of visual communication has seen an explosion of those referring to illustration as something that they participate in, almost an illustration lifestyle? In London’s Stoke Newington you’ll invariably come across ‘bob-the-illustrator’ or someone referring to them as an illustration brand. Illustrators are nowadays much closer to their audience – recent graduates can have in excess of 100,000 followers on Instagram, a ready made audience for the illustration that they do, with daily updates it’s already superseded the need for a website or blog?

11. The Craftsman

“The popularity of illustration among commissioners over the last decade has been driven by the digital age. While our contact via the internet with companies and people often feels remote, illustration signals something familiar, emotionally warm, and most of all tangible. For brands, it’s a signifier of provenance, made-by-hand and trustworthy.”


In 2016 the Graphic Design & Illustration students at the University of Brighton are collaborating in making a group quilt reflecting on their time on the degree course. Earlier in the year illustrator Francesca Tiley and graphic designer Will Knight worked together to produce their own quilt. I would see them over the weeks sat on a couple of sofas producing the individual panels to then stitch together. The activity of making and making seems very pertinent, especially relevant with this year’s Pick Me Up Graphic Arts Festival at Somerset House London featuring many print workshop and collectives such as Clay collective, graphic artists coming together in a shared studio to exhibit, but also to run educational events – reflecting a desire for participatory activities?

Other examples of a new sense of collectives can be found in evening-class.org a group of 28 participants sharing an alternative education, not just a space but also an evolving programme of activities, seminars and workshops – a community of creatives seeking a different experience from traditional routes of post graduate studies.

The independent publisher Nobrow was originally formed around the collective love of print and comics of UAL Central Saint Martins graduates Sam Arthur and Alex Spiro. The initial studio shop in Shoreditch London had a very definite handcrafted feel to it, helping to establish a brand name to the publishing company. Similar People of Print was founded by Marcroy Eccleston Smith, also as a means of celebrating illustration print culture.

2016 illustration graduate Francesca Tiley was to sum up her feelings about collaboration - “The making process can be very secular, a self-reflective space, so it was good learning to communicate with another person, in the making of something together.”

Francesca Tiley - Varoom: The Illustration Report Spring 2016 Issue 33

“We wanted to create an object that would commemorate the past three years we’ve collectively spent at the University of Brighton as a course. Whilst the quilt provides a platform that represents us collaboratively, the singular patches are personal and reflective of our individual work. Quilting is often enjoyed because of its quiet and thoughtful nature, allowing time and space to contemplate and think. In this scary, transitional time between education and employment, it seemed appropriate to facilitate an opportunity for each of us to take a grounding moment to acknowledge the present.”

Elizabeth Hardy & Jess Underwood, Varoom: The Illustration Report Spring 2016 Issue 33

“We held a quilting bee in the studio one evening where our classmates could come and sew together. This social event meant that we could discuss our classmates’ individual portfolios and and websites, alongside the patches that they had made.”

Elizabeth Hardy & Jess Underwood, Varoom: The Illustration Report Spring 2016 Issue 33

“A lot of People told us afterwards that they actually found making their patch relaxing. The time taken to
complete patches was considered 'down time' and allowed them to have a well-needed break from their current work and looming deadlines. We found that many people expected quilting to be a 'task' but in practice found it to be quite enjoyable."

Elizabeth Hardy & Jess Underwood, Varoom: The Illustration Report Spring 2016 Issue 33

12. Conclusion

Whilst this is ongoing research it is possible to conclude that illustration is going beyond the single image, seeking other environments and situations to exist. That in the future the challenges for education is to not merely engage with the many new markets and platforms for illustration, but to see the discipline changing shape, and perhaps suggesting new possibilities for telling stories in the future, that may include the process of making itself.

“This driver is accelerating and illustration is becoming divergent – both more digital and more animated. It’s becoming less like the illustration we are familiar with, as art directors and designers explore the boundaries of various editorial and advertising contexts. At the same time it’s becoming more three-dimensional and more about delivering a tangible experience through its physicality…”


There is also something disarming about illustration, its accessibility as an art form allows for communication and learning. Through illustration a greater critical awareness is possible, the action of visual/image reading, a negotiation between audience and illustrator. This area of the illustration act rather than the outcome or object, offers greater scope for displaying the thinking process, referencing Paulo Freire once again. Illustration is at once democratic, as with the communal minded meeting S. João da Madeira, and also empowering to both individuals and communities.

References