Exchanges

The Interdisciplinary Research Journal

Volume 8, Issue 1 (Autumn, 2020)

Issue Highlights:

- Graphic designers: dramaturgy, narrative & revelation
- Improving learning for non-native teachers of English
- Role-play and English language acquisition
- Truthfulness & the autobiographical pact
- Unpicking the ‘how’ creativity works

ISSN 2053-9665

Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal

Volume 8, Issue 1 (October 2020)

ISSN 2053-9665

Published by

The Institute of Advanced Study, Zeeman Building
University of Warwick, Coventry, Warwickshire,
CV4 7AL, UK

Editor-in-Chief

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Exchanges is a scholar-led, peer-reviewed, diamond open access, interdisciplinary, online-only journal dedicated to the publication of high-quality work by researchers in all disciplines for a broad scholarly audience. No author fees or subscription charges are levied, and contributors retain their author rights. Since 2013, the title has attracted innovative research articles, critical essays and interviews from emerging domain experts and early career researchers globally. The title also publishes scholarly work by practitioner authors and independent scholars.

A Managing Editor-in-Chief based at the University of Warwick oversees development, policy and production, while an international Editorial Board comprised of early career researchers provide advice and practically contribute to editorial work. Associate editors are recruited to participate in producing specific special themed issues. Exchanges usually publishes two issues annually, although additional special themed issues are periodically commissioned in collaboration with other scholars.

Exchanges' twin missions are to encourage intellectual exchange and debate across disparate research communities, along with developing academic authorial and editorial expertise. These are achieved through providing a quality assured platform for disseminating research publications for and by explicitly cross-disciplinary audience, alongside ensuring a supportive editorial environment helping authors and editors develop superior academic writing and publishing skills. Achieving enhanced contributor esteem, visibility and recognition within these broader scholarly communities is a further goal.

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Alfresco Dining and Reinvigorated Acquaintance: Editorial, Volume 8, Part 1

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> *Reason is a complex type of instinct that has not yet formed completely. This implies that instinctual behavior is always purposeful and natural. A million years from now our instinct will have matured and we will stop making the mistakes that are probably integral to reason. And then, if something should change in the universe, we will all become extinct - precisely because we will have forgotten how to make mistakes, that is, to try various approaches not stipulated by an inflexible program of permitted alternatives.* (**Strugatsky & Strugatsky, 2012**)

Introduction

Welcome to the sixteenth edition of *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*. As eagle-eyed readers will have spotted, there was less time between our preceding issue and this one, given we are publishing in our traditional late-October slot. This issue, as always, we are delighted to bring once again a selection of new thinking and insights, drawn from emerging scholars from across the disciplinary spectrum.

Ensconced Within the (Covid) Zone

That I am writing this editorial during the seventh calendar month of Covid-19 related restrictions in the UK and with the increasing imposition of stringent lockdown conditions arising, seem tragically, a semi-inevitability to observers of human nature. The theme of lockdown and the concomitant social restrictions have rarely been far from my professional and personal thoughts during this time and I am sure the same is sure for our readership too. I have lost count of how often video or email interactions with colleagues around the globe have diverged from the salient topic to address how participants are currently coping in all aspects of their lives. Nevertheless, despite the varying, if understandable, levels of generalised anxiety frequently encountered in these conversations, I am pleased to report the entire *Exchanges* editorial team has continued to perform their work on the title throughout this period with aplomb, dedication and even enthusiasm. My editorial hat is very much doffed in recognition of their continued efforts as a result.

The Editorial Board has also been taking opportunities to speak with one another face-to-face, albeit online, more frequently too. This is a positive shift for our operational ethos, and one I am hopeful we will continue to employ even as, when, life returns to a greater semblance of normality. I am sure like many other currently distributed colleagues, collaborators and co-investigators we shall emerge from this pandemic having forged stronger interpersonal bonds alongside a potentially reinvigorated distributed work dynamic. There is, as the aphorism goes, nothing like a shared crisis to bring people closer together. Hence, I am pleased, if not exactly able to express delight, that we have gained these minor social benefits from this ongoing global challenge.

Naturally, *Exchanges* has also sought to continue and develop the conversations we enjoy with our readers and contributors, despite currently being at a greater geographic remove from them all. This is as well, given one of the most enjoyable aspect of leading this title is the opportunity it affords the editors to spend time discussing research, publishing and the wide, wide world of the academy with scholars near and far. Thankfully, in recent months I have continued to enjoy numerous and occasionally lengthy conversations with potential authors. While not all of these chats will lead to submissions, more's the pity from an editorial perspective, nevertheless, the intellectual exchange from them each always stimulates. I look forward to hosting a few more of these conversations as we rush headlong through the final months of 2020, so drop me a line if you would like to have a conversation over a coffee or similar beverage. Perhaps even one day soon one enjoyed in person, in comfortable internal surrounds, rather than hosted at a measure of physical distance in the great outdoors.

Conversational Sediments

If you've been fortunate to experience one of my conference talks or presentations about the journal in the past few years, you may have been struck by the curiosity of the title's twin core objectives.[i] Yes, in keeping with our journal format, one of these is to enable an interdisciplinary discourse though encouraging 'intellectual exchange and debate across research communities' (**Exchanges, 2020a**). It is, however, our secondary goal which raises more eyebrows and prompts much discussion with audiences: to provide an 'accessible and supportive environment' through which contributors can 'develop superior academic writing and publishing skills.' (**ibid**) Where part of this goal is achieved through our editorial activities, *Exchanges* also makes contributions to various researcher training and development initiatives at Warwick, and occasionally our partner institutions too. I was fortunate recently to be invited to deliver a session about the journal as part of Warwick's Institute of Advanced

Study's acclaimed Accolade programme (**Johnson, 2020**). Unlike previous sessions, the online environment lent itself to facilitating of an 'Ask Me Anything' session, which I am pleased to report was well received by and engaged audience.

While modesty prevents me expanding on the answers to the questions posed, they were invaluable points of feedback from our potential contributor audience. One of the great, as yet unrealised, goals I have for the journal is to engage in more empirical evaluative work with our contributor and readership communities. Hence, these sort of, sentence case, exchanges are always invaluable in helping us to understand how, where and why the journal should be positioned in the future. It won't surprise you to hear these topics also feed into our planning for future issues and calls for contributions, as well as helping shape our online guidance too. I believe our contributors play a vital part in influencing the kind of journal we become in the future, alongside my own aspirations and that of our publishing hosts. Certainly, I welcome any thoughts along these lines at any time.

In part though, our *The Exchanges Discourse* podcast is also helping to build on our researcher developmental goal, through creating a library of first-hand opinion and insight suitable for new authors from their peers and experienced scholars. Given *Exchanges* mission has always been to enable new voices within interdisciplinary discourse, unsurprisingly my intention has always been to also incorporate a diversity of voices relating to academic publishing in the podcast. Hence, I'm thrilled we have a number of guest speakers lined up to appear in future episodes through to the end of 2020 and beyond: although I'm always keen for more. This is not to say regular listeners won't continue to hear my own melodic tones, but incorporating additional speakers helps the podcast avoid devolving into a monologue on the trials and tribulations of editorial life.

Naturally, that is unless listener feedback fervently demands it: something which I strongly doubt will occur.

I am pleased to note, as of writing, we have just released our seventh episode with more scheduled to follow in November 2020. So, if you have yet to listen, why not give it a try. You will find episodes hosted on various podcasting platforms globally.[ii]

All of which diversionary reflection takes us tangentially to the point at which we should turn our focus to the disparate voices contained within the articles within this latest issue of *Exchanges*.

Articles

In this issue, myself and the Editorial Board are once more gratified to present a selection of peer-reviewed articles on topics across a range of disciplines to our reader community. Interestingly, two clear themes of language acquisition and creativity seem strongly represented in works contained in this issue.

This time our first article comes from Hongming Fan and considers the part role-play can contribute within language teaching to enhance Chinese university students grasp of English. In this case study, entitled *The Implementation and Challenges of using Role-Play to Improve Chinese University Students' English Communicative Competence*, Fan seeks to evaluate if deploying role-play-based teaching offers authentic educational benefits or not. The study concludes that while advantages exist, clearly there are factors which can mitigate or enhance the educational impact of this approach. As such there are lessons to be appreciated by any language teachers seeking to utilise role playing approaches within their instructional wheelhouse (1).

Our next piece, entitled *Fitting In and Fighting Out* is by Urmee Chakma, and continues the theme through considering the challenges faced by non-native English speaking teachers working in English as a second language teaching (ESL). Chakma's study found ESL teachers' personal educational journeys, linguistic traditions and cultural backgrounds contributed to significant impacts on their pedagogical approaches, which often diverged from 'traditional' delivery paradigms. ESL teachers who highlighted and embraced their own linguistic 'outsider' status within their teaching practice, were seen to inspire other 'non-native' students' language learning within a classroom setting. Consequently, embracing and exposing, rather than homogenising and concealing, ESL teachers personal diversity and experiences is suggested as being beneficial in language teaching (19).

We change direction with our next piece from Mark Readman, inspired by our call last year for articles on the themes of *falsehoods, misinterpretations and factual divergence*. In an article entitled *The Comforting Nonsense of Creativity*, Readman's focuses specifically on unpacking and critiquing Jonah Lehrer's 2012 book *How Creativity Works*, through deploying discourse analysis of the literature utilised by Lehrer in establishing his own thesis. Readman's assessment serves to expose the axioms which underlie Lehrer's postulations, consequentially challenging the veracity of its assertions on how creativity functions. Nevertheless, Readman generously concludes there may yet be some crumbs of emotional comfort and insight contained within Lehrer's work, even if this requires a willing suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader (40).

From books on creativity, we turn to graphical literature, in a piece from an author associated with Warwick's Institute of Advanced Study. In *Figures of Thought in Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis and Riad Sattouf's The Arab of the Future*, Doro Wiese adopts 'Deleuze and Guattari's ideas on art's inventive function'. Wiese utilises this lens to scrutinize the two aforementioned titular graphic narratives with particular attention on concepts of truthfulness. The article suggests both of these graphical literature authors have purposefully undermined the anticipated 'autobiographical pact' with the reader as part of their narrative. Wiese also considers efforts in both works to represent a collective, rather than solely singular, narrative experience. Seemingly each authors' goal is to progress to a more complex engagement with their readership, challenging their preconceptions, thinking and perceptions (57).

Finally, we return to the creative fields to conclude the issue with a piece by Yaron Meron, entitled *Re-performing Design*. This article engages with a topic arguably underrepresented in the academy, principally due to difficulties in researching its practitioners: graphic designers. Meron examines the use of dramaturgy as an empirical tool to explore professional graphic designer's perceptions of their stakeholders (clients). Fascinatingly, the scripts from these interview engagements were then employed as performance workshops by actors, serving in turn to permit obfuscated, unexpected elements of their designers' narratives and experience to be exposed anew. The hope is the outcomes from this work can be used to inform similar explorations of other creative practice domains and communities (70).

Surprisingly, this issue we there are no conversations or critical review articles to share with you all. I would suggest this is a pity, as these are frequently very popular with many of our readers, going on our access and download metrics. Hence, I'd like to challenge anyone thinking about taking the plunge to step forward, perhaps in response to our calls below, contributing one of these pieces for next issue!

Corrections

While *Exchanges* strive for accuracy in all our publications, the possibility of the occasional error remains. Following notification and discussion with its author, we have made a very minor typographical correction to a previously published article (**Lu, 2019**). Our thanks to the author for pointing out the error, and their patience as we resolved it. Details of the pre-corrected text are retained in an errata to the manuscript within the journal, for historical record.

Call for Papers: AI – Panic or Panacea?

> *Since emotions are few and reasons many, the behavior or a crowd can be more easily predicted than the behavior of one person can. And that, in turn, means that if laws are to be developed that enable the current of history to be predicted, then one must deal with large populations, the larger the better. That might itself be the First Law of Psychohistory, the key to the study of Humanics.* (**Asimov, 1985**)

The issue of intelligence lies at the heart of the scholarly lifeworld, although for much of history a topic focussed around a singular, human construct. Today though, algorithms, deep learning and artificial intelligence have emerged into the everyday world. From the seemingly trivial, to battling the pandemic or even fighting our future wars (**Bode, 2020; Kane, 2020; Teo & Dobson, 2020**), applications of algorithmic intelligence are increasingly shaping critical decisions and policy helping meet emerging challenges. Should we be celebrating the transition to a more 'automated' workplace, freeing humankind from waged-labour exploitative drudgery or does it represent an existential threat to the livelihood of millions (**Kurzgesagt, 2017**)?

Some would argue humanity has cause to fear the unchecked rise of the machines in our society. For example, the recent examination debacle in the UK undoubtedly lays still sharp in the minds of many British students and their parents (**Hao, 2020; Tolhurst, 2020**) as an example of a misapplied technological aid. Other cautionary tales of unfettered algorithm use abound in fields as diverse as space imaging and earth observation, through to the evaluation of immigration applicants or 'future crime' prediction (**Ferguson, 2017; McDonald, 2020; Marchisio & Smith, 2019**). Is the era of the *Minority Report* a new era of safety to be trumpeted or a greater force for oppression and fear?

Conversely, many assert artificial intelligence, machine learning and algorithms offer humanity a brave new world of opportunity, advancement and potential achievement. Deployed in the service of humanity algorithmic intelligence could help us better plan for future building and habitation needs, predict cataclysmic acts of nature or even more efficiently discover curative treatments (**Decherchi & Cavalli, 2020; Macaulay, 2020; Quach, 2020; Sun et al, 2020**). Thus, the artificially intelligent enabled future may be a far brighter one than some currently anticipate. Where, if anywhere, does 'the truth' lay?

Peer-Reviewed Submissions

Hence, for the issue of *Exchanges* due for publication in Autumn 2021, we invite authors to submit original, exciting and insightful manuscripts for peer-reviewed publication consideration inspired by any aspect of this theme. We welcome papers written for a general academic audience

exploring or reviewing the science, application and implementation of machine learning, artificial intelligence or algorithms within a broader societal setting. We also welcome manuscript submissions from the humanities, arts and social sciences dealing with the ethics, perceptions, interpretations and representations of these issues too. While submissions are invited from all disciplinary perspectives, we would be especially pleased to receive manuscripts from previously under-represented fields or geographic regions within *Exchanges*.[iii]

Critical Reflection & Conversation Submissions

First-time or early career authors may also wish to consider submitting either a critical reflection or conversational piece inspired or informed by these themes. Such pieces would serve to provide much needed background to the topic for a general academic audience. For example, critical considerations of the impacts, and especially those explicitly drawing on interdisciplinary methods, methodologies or insights, would be particularly welcome. Additionally, we would be delighted to consider conversational pieces. These augmented interviews could be with key figures, thinkers and workers within any area of AI, machine learning or algorithmic intelligence, or alternatively focus on those whose lives may have been reshaped through the deployment of these technological solutions. Critical reflections and conversations only undergo editorial review ahead of publication and hence are especially suitable for first-time or early career authors.

Deadlines

Submission deadline for peer-reviewed articles: 1st May 2021

Submission deadline for conversations and critical reflections: 31st August February 2021

All manuscripts should be submitted via our online journal portal, which will guide authors through the submission process.

exchanges.warwick.ac.uk/submission/wizard

The details of this call will also be available on *Exchanges*' site. Authors are encouraged to contact the Editor-in-Chief ahead of submission to discuss their article ideas or outlines: however, this is not a prerequisite for submission. Please see our author guidance for more information on writing for *Exchanges* (**2020b**).

Call for Papers: Open & Ongoing

Additionally, *Exchanges* welcomes submissions throughout the year on any subject, with no deadline, in addition to the above call. Manuscripts accepted as articles will be published in the next available issue of the journal. We therefore invite original, unpublished, manuscript contributions from researchers or practitioners based within any discipline, working anywhere globally, which fulfil our standard article format requirements.

Open Call: No submission deadline

We are happy to consider research focussed or review articles which will undergo peer-review. We also welcome submissions of interviews with key scholars or critical reflections on important scholarly events, conferences or crucial new texts, each of which will undergo internal (editorial review) scrutiny only. More information on all of these article formats requirements are available in our author guidelines. Likewise, the Editor-in-Chief and Editorial Board members are happy to explore article ideas further with potential authors.

Submissions

As *Exchanges* has a core mission to support the development and dissemination of research by early career and post-graduate researchers, we are especially pleased to receive manuscripts from emerging scholars or first-time authors. All manuscripts should be submitted via our online journal portal, will guide authors through the submission process.

exchanges.warwick.ac.uk/submission/wizard

Fees, Access & Author Rights

Exchanges is a diamond open access (**Fuchs & Sandoval, 2013**), scholar-led journal, which means there are no author fees or reader subscription charges. Authors also retain copyright over their work but grant the journal first rights of publication as a submission requirement.

Readership: Advice for Authors

As an interdisciplinary journal with a wide scholarly readership, authors should seek to write their manuscripts to be suitable for a general academic audience. Wherever possible, consideration should be given to unpack, delineate and expand on any potentially 'disciplinary niche' language, terms or acronyms used. Ideally, authors should seek to incorporate some element of interdisciplinary thinking or perspectives, or

outline the broader scholarly relevance of their work, within the manuscript.

Exchanges has an expressly multidisciplinary, global and largely academic readership, and as such, have strong interests in work which encompasses or straddles disciplinary boundaries. Manuscripts providing an introduction, overview or useful entry point to key disciplinary trends, discovery and discourse are often among the most frequently accessed publications in the journal. Therefore, prospective authors are strongly encouraged to consider tailoring their manuscripts, narrative, thought and analysis in a mode which addresses this broad audience. For interviews and critical reflections, authors are especially advised to highlight the importance of disciplinary discourse or interviewees' scholarly contributions to the global academy, society and the public at large.

Forthcoming Issues

The next issue of *Exchanges* is anticipated to be our second special issue volume, containing work celebrating and inspired by the Utopian Studies Society conference on *Utopia, Dystopia and Climate Change* (**USS, 2019**). We hope to bring you this issue early in 2021. This volume will be followed by two further special issues, the first of which continues to be developed in collaboration with SOAS University of London and Oxford University and will focus on the theme of *fictional representations of nerds and loneliness*. Our other special issue will be drawing on the work of students and scholars who have been exploring the history and student experience relating to the arts faculty, in collaboration with the *Then and Now: Arts at Warwick* research project and exhibition (**Warwick, 2020**). These issues are tentatively scheduled for the first half of 2021, and I hope to be able to confirm the anticipated publication dates of each more precisely as we enter the new year.

The next regular issue of *Exchanges* is scheduled for spring 2021. While the deadline for article contributions has all but passed as we go to press, we will still be accepting critical reviews, essays or conversations (interviews) through into late March 2021. Hence, there is still plenty of time for readers to contribute to this issue, which will hopefully contain works inspired by our *Challenge and Opportunity* call for papers.

I hope too that when we meet again in these pages, we will all be in a far more agreeable position personally, socially and physically than we are today. Enjoy the issue.

Acknowledgements

As always, my thanks to our authors and reviewers for their vital intellectual labour contributions towards creating this issue. Without you, the ability to produce a quality-assured, peer-reviewed, scholar-led publication would quite simply not be possible. Thanks also to our reader community, who play a key role in developing the debates and insights raised in each issue. I hope you find this issue as valuable and informative as previous volumes.

Not every manuscript submitted for publication successfully transits our quality assurance processes. Consequently, like an iceberg, much editorial, reviewer and authorial labour hides below the surface of the volume you see before you. Hence, my particular thanks to everyone on the Editorial Board, for their efforts on all the pieces we consider, including the ones that sadly don't quite make the grade. I am also grateful to the Board for their professional input and comments, along with their dedication, focus and commitment they bring to producing this interdisciplinary research organ. I would like to particularly welcome our two newest Editorial Board Members **Dr Giulia Champion** and **Nora Castle**, who have graduated from our associate editor programme still keen to participate further with the title. I would also like to wish **Dr Marie Murphy**, who has stepped down from Board at this point, well in her future endeavours.

Practically, my thanks to Rob Talbot and Julie Robinson at the Warwick University Library, and Fiona O'Brien of the *Reinvention* journal for their continued guidance, technical insights and stimulating conversations. I'd also like to acknowledge the regular lockdown discussions between myself and the IAS' *John Burden* for acting as an invaluable sounding board and continuing ray of positivity during this remote working time.

Finally, my grateful thanks to our publisher, the Institute of Advanced Study at the University of Warwick for their ongoing financial and strategic backing for *Exchanges*.

Continuing the Conversation

Exchanges has a range of routes for keeping abreast of our latest news, developments and calls for papers. In-between issues in particular, you may wish to listen to our growing range of podcasts and blog posts, to continue the interdisciplinary exchange of experience which underlies our operations. Please do join in the conversation whenever and wherever you can, as we always value hearing the thoughts of our author and readership communities.

Editorial Blog:	blogs.warwick.ac.uk/exchangesias/
Linked.In:	www.linkedin.com/groups/12162247/
Podcast:	anchor.fm/exchangesias
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As Editor-in-Chief I am also pleased to discuss potential publications, collaborative opportunities or invites to talk further about *Exchanges* and our activities. Contact me via the email at the start, or via the social media platforms.

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Quynh Vu, Business Law and Taxation, Faculty of Business & Economics, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

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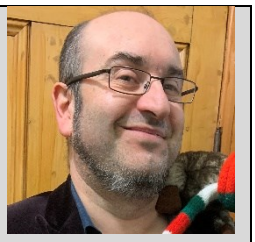

Gareth has been the Editor-in-Chief of *Exchanges* since early 2018. Along with holding a doctorate in cultural academic publishing practices (Nottingham Trent), he also possesses various other degrees in biomedical technology (Sheffield Hallam), information management (Sheffield) and research practice (NTU). His varied career includes extensive experience in academic libraries, project management and applied research roles. Currently, he is also the Chief Operating Officer of the Mercian Collaboration academic library consortium, and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. His professional and research interests focus on power-relationships within and evolution of scholarly academic publication practice, viewed from within social theory and political economic frameworks. He is an outspoken proponent for greater academic agency through scholar-led publishing, and an expert in distributed team management and effective communication practices.

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To cite this article:

Johnson, G., 2020. Alfresco Dining and Reinvigorated Acquaintance: Editorial, Volume 8, Part 1. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 8(1), i-xiv. Available at: https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v8i1.737

Endnotes

[i] I will be speaking at the *Munin Conference on Scholarly Publishing*, hosted remotely by UiT: The Artic University of Norway, in mid-November 2020, should you want to hear me talk about the journal in the near future. Details of the event can be found here: https://site.uit.no/muninconf/.

[ii] You can find every episode of *The Exchanges Discourse* online on Anchor.fm, along with many other podcasting platforms around the world by searching for it by name. Comments, suggested topics or guests are always welcome via email. Listen to the episodes here: https://anchor.fm/exchangesias

[iii] Please see our back issues for an idea of the areas and regions which have, to date, been less well represented within our pages.

The Implementation and Challenges of using Role-Play to Improve Chinese University Students' English Communicative Competence

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Peer review: This article has been subject to a double-blind peer review process

Abstract

English is taught as a compulsory course in Chinese universities and it is necessary to find feasible ways to improve students' English ability to communicate. Role-play is believed as an effective way to enhance second language learners' communicative competence and it is also supposed to be able to be effective in Chinese universities EFL classes. The real effect, however, relies on the actual implementation in classes. If the teachers inappropriately adopt role-play, it is hard to be useful. Due to the lack of research paying attention to this issue, it is not clear how Chinese university English teachers use role-play and whether it is effective. For this reason, a case study was conducted, with a Chinese university EFL teacher taking part in the interviews. The results show that participants attempt to maximise the effectiveness of role-play to improve students' English communicative competence by practising comprehensive language skills, linguistic knowledge, and workplace topics. Nonetheless, some issues, namely script preparation, students' proficiency difference and class size are identified. These may challenge the actual effectiveness of role-play. Possible solutions, including selecting role-play according to students' ability, considering individuals' condition, mixed-ability grouping and small class size, are suggested thereafter.

Keywords: EFL; English as a foreign language, China; university; role-play; communicative competence

Introduction

Since English has become the dominant language of global communication, it is taught compulsorily to students of all majors in Chinese universities (**Ministry of Education (MOE), 2017**). For the sake of fluent communication in students' future career, the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses in universities are expected to enable students to achieve adequate English communicative capacity. Nevertheless, students' capacity is not always as satisfactory as expected (**Gan, 2013; Li, 2018)**. It is necessary for educators and teachers to identify effective ways to enhance students' communication competence.

Chinese national curriculum emphasises students' communicative competence in English. It is required by MOE (**2017**) that university students must be able to understand and conduct a certain length of everyday conversation, such as personal experiences and daily topics. The further requirement is that students '能用英语就一般性话题进行较流利的会话、进行书面表达' (can communicate both orally and in writing about common topics) and the highest one is students should '能用英语在专业领域流利进行对话、能就专业话题撰写报告或论文' (be capable of communicating professionally and fluently in the workplace) (**MOE, 2017, p. 5**). However, the facts are not like what is required by MOE.

Chinese university students encounter four problems when communicating in English. The first one is their inadequate speaking and listening abilities**.** Zhu, Liu, and Zhu (**2017**) point out that students just listen to the teacher quietly and seldom speak English in most university EFL classrooms (**Zhu et al., 2017**). Ironically, although they are listening most of the time, their English listening skill is still deficient (**Zhu et al., 2017**). Students cannot communicate orally in a fluent manner without adequate listening and speaking skills. Second, Li (**2018**) observes that writing is ignored in university EFL classrooms, meaning students can hardly write adequate English, which hampers students' written communication. Third, students are blamed to be deficient in linguistic knowledge. In the studies of Gan (**2013**) and Zhao (**2016**), the majority of Chinese university students report difficulties in grammar, vocabulary, coherence and other linguistic knowledge when speaking English. Zhu et al. (**2017**) further point out that the written test also frightens students due to their lack of linguistic knowledge. Unsatisfactory speaking and writing skills again mean low communicative competence. Finally, the lack of familiar topics worries students. They may not know what to discuss when communicating with people from other countries (**Li, 2018**).

Role-play is defined as an activity involving participants in acting out new roles to learn and practise new knowledge and skills, including linguistic knowledge and social manners (**Harper-Whalen & Morris, 2005**). There are three types of role-play in second language classrooms for learners of different levels. The first one is the full-scripted role-play in which participants are provided with a detailed script telling them what to say exactly (**Harper-Whalen & Morris, 2005**). It is suitable for low-level learners to understand and memorise the linguistic knowledge (**Krebt, 2017**). In the second type, semi-scripted role-play, guidance about the role and what to say is presented to intermediate learners, which offers them support as well as the requirement for further knowledge and skills, and thus they can attempt to move on to the higher level (**Cho, 2015; Harper-Whalen & Morris, 2005**). The third type, non-scripted role-play, only provides information of context to high-level learners so that they have to create original conversation, thereby fully practising the target language (**Harper-Whalen & Morris, 2005; Krebt, 2017**).

Role-play is proposed to have a significant impact on second language acquisition in the following ways. For one thing, students have the opportunities to practise their comprehensive language skills in the role-play if the script preparation stage is added (**Carson, 2012; Edstrom, 2013; Lin, 2009; Tran, 2016**). Students need to read and write the scripts when preparing for the role-play and then listen and speak during the performance, which trains their overall language skills (**Tran, 2016**). Additionally, several studies support the position that role-play familiarises learners with plentiful linguistic knowledge, including vocabulary, grammar (e.g. **Cho, 2015; Lin, 2009**). To perform a role-play, learners have to review and use the linguistic knowledge they have learnt previously (**Lin, 2009**). If there is no complete script, they need to acquire new knowledge in order to compose the script. In the research of Cho (**2015**), both semi-scripted and non-scripted role-play have a positive impact on students' grammar and vocabulary improvement. Other than that, role-play provides learners with various contexts where they would be trained in targeted situations (C**haitanya & Ramana, 2013; Cho, 2015**). A good example is the research of Robinson, Harvey, and Tseng (**2016**) where the authentic contexts enable learners to acquire and practise corresponding knowledge and manners, which is beneficial for their communicative competence.

The Aim of This Study

Considering the above, then, theoretically, role-plays should be effective in improving Chinese university students' English communicative capacity. First, the students need English listening, writing and speaking training, and role-play provides the opportunities for them (**Tran, 2016; Zhu et al.,**

2017). Second, insufficient linguistic knowledge is viewed as a vital problem of Chinese university students' inadequate communicative ability (**Gan, 2013; Zhu et al., 2017**). Role-play can familiarise students with a lot of linguistic knowledge (**Cho, 2015**). Third, familiar topics are demanded for communication, and role-play is able to create contexts with plentiful topics (**Cho, 2015**). Notwithstanding, it is hard to say outright if role-play is effective in real classes in China, because the outcomes, to some extent, rely on the design and implementation of teachers, rather than on the perceived benefits of role plays. Considering the importance of teachers' use of role-play, some researchers explore its actual use in second language classrooms, but the number of such studies is comparatively low (see Table 1). The majority of research gives much attention to the outcome of role-play rather than its actual implementation. Having searched ProQuest and SAGE journals, the author found there were merely three theses investigating how teachers use role-play in primary and secondary EFL classes and almost none concentrated on teachers' use in universities. In addition, there is a limited amount of empirical data in the context of Chinese universities. Although there are abundant conceptual discussions about adopting role-play in Chinese university EFL classes, few empirical studies are collected in CNKI (China Academic Journal Database). Thus, it remains unclear how teachers use role-play in this context, not to mention what impacts the results of role-play. This article, therefore, aims to explore the following questions:

- How is role-play used in the Chinese university EFL classes?
- What challenges the use of role-play in Chinese university EFL classes?
- How can role-play be used effectively in Chinese university EFL classes?

Table 1: Number of studies on Role-Plays

Databases / Keywords	ProQuest	SAGE journals online	CNKI
China, role-play, university, English, teacher	0	0	0
China, role-play, university, English	3	0	30
Role-play, second language, teacher	3	0	2
Role-play, university, second language	30	2	0
China, role-play, English	16	30	689

Method

A qualitative case study was adopted in this research as the case study focuses on an individual unit and enables multiple variables to be considered (**Hancock, 2006; Yin, 2014**). A male EFL teacher from a Chinese university took part in this case study. The documents, including the national curriculum released by MOE (**2017**) and the university's syllabus, were reviewed first for a better understanding of the contextual use of role-play because teaching had to align with the requirements of MOE and the university. Afterwards, an online semi-structured interview with the participant was conducted. During the interview, he was asked to recall and discuss the role-play activities he had conducted before. The reconstruction of events is one of the advantages of the interview (**Bryman, 2016**). The teacher's descriptions and explanations for the use of role-play reflected his perspectives and considerations. In the semi-structured interview, the participant was allowed and welcomed to discuss much more than the questions listed. The researcher had to leave the space for unexpected information.

The question framework involved three aspects (see Appendix). The first aspect was the design of role-play, including the topics and types of role-play as well as the types of lesson in which role-play was used and so forth. Tran (**2016**) and Lin (**2009**) investigated similar themes in different contexts, and their findings reflect the teachers' understandings and concerns of role-play, which is helpful for my research. The second aspect was the implementation of role-play, including procedure, classroom management, and dealing with students' linguistic errors and so on. These were what teachers might encounter when implementing an activity (**Harmer, 2015**). It is inevitable for a teacher to consider and address these issues, so they were included in the question list. The third aspect was other factors which probably affected the adoption of role-play, such as class size and students' English levels.

After data collection, the data set was sorted and analysed carefully. Yin (**2014**) regards the criteria for interpreting findings as an imperative part of a research design. In the interest of the best use of the data generated, several strategies were adopted for data arrangement and analysis.

The first strategy was cross-sectional indexing, using categories to establish a common index (**Mason, 2002**). The data were sorted into several themes. The categories were created according to the interview question list (see Appendix). Microsoft Office Excel was used for the data indexing and analysis. Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) is helpful for the researcher with more than a few texts and documents to index (**Mason, 2002**). In the current case study, there was a great deal of data in the form of texts which were disorderly because the

participants discussed freely in the semi-structured interview. Thus, computer software was used to classify the data.

The second strategy was triangulation. It uses the data collected from multiple sources (**Yin, 2014**). Some evidence collected from diverse sources differed or overlapped, and it was interwoven and then interpreted. Findings based on several sources of evidence are more persuasive than those drawn from a single source (**Hancock, 2006**). When the data from different sources accorded, a conclusion can be confirmed. However, when the data was not compatible, it needed to be examined carefully.

The third strategy was case description combined with rival explanations. The case description strategy is to analyse the data according to a descriptive framework (**Yin, 2014**). The question list in the interview presented a framework, which ranged from the teachers' design of role-play to the implementation, in order to describe the real use of role-play in the Chinese university. The descriptions involved alternative descriptions, namely rival explanations (**Yin, 2014**). During data collection, incompatible information arose, and it needed to be compared and discussed in depth. The alternatives, as well as the possible reasons for them, were identified and analysed in the case study because they were able to provide valuable information for the research. The differences were analysed and the reasons why these happened were taken into consideration. In a sense, this strategy helped in preventing the researcher's bias and stereotyping.

Findings

In this part, the national curriculum and university syllabus are reviewed first in order to provide relevant details of the context in which the participant adopted role-play. After that, the interview outcomes are presented.

Documents Review

The results of documents review are indexed into three categories. The identification of the categories refers to the themes in the interview results. Some of the themes are not mentioned in the documents while some are relevant, and the related information is included in this section. In addition, some themes are hard to split in the documents, and thus they are combined into one category.

The first one is various topics and requirements for students of different levels. MOE (**2017**) indicates three main topics, including general English, professional English and intercultural communication, and three levels of requirements, namely basic, advanced and proficient requirements. The

basic requirement is applied to '英语高考成绩合格的学生' (low-level students who just get a passing grade in English in university examinations) (**ibid, 2**), and daily communication is the main topic for them. Vocational and cultural knowledge is introduced to intermediate and high-level students, to whom advanced and proficient requirements are applied respectively. These students '大学入学时英语已达到较好水平' (get higher scores in university examinations) (**ibid, 2**), and more difficult content is suitable for them to learn. Daily, vocational and cultural knowledge can be the topics of role-play in actual use.

The second category is class size control. MOE (**2017**) states that '各高校应控制口语和写作等课程班级规模，每班原则上不超过 35 人' (the speaking and writing class size should be limited to no more than 35 students) (**ibid, 8**). However, there are no constraints for other classes. The university merely controls the size of Class Ⅱ, in which students have higher English grades, to under 40 students while no restriction is applied to Class Ⅰ. There might be large-number classes in this university, which may affect the adoption of role-play.

The last one is selection and application of materials and technology: In terms of teaching materials and technology, MOE (**2017**) indicates that '各高校应围绕硬件环境、软件环境和课程资源等三大部分开展大学英语教学资源建设' (universities should provide hardware, software and curriculum resources for English teaching and learning) (**ibid, 12**). As per the university syllabus, teachers should make the most of the Internet to select and create excellent and up-to-date teaching materials. Therefore, they need to select the materials carefully and can employ some electronic devices or applications in their classes.

Semi-Structured Interview

In this section, interview findings are presented in line with the nine themes identified during the interviews (Table 2). These themes are identified based on the question framework (Appendix) with the cross-sectional indexing strategy. Related categories in the documents review are also displayed in Table 2 to show the connection between them.

When designing role-play, the participant considered that the type of lesson where he used role-play most is the University English, which is a kind of lesson for the students who do not major in English (Table 2, item 1). Moreover, the teacher selected diverse topics for students at different English levels (Table 2, item 2). Everyday topics were selected for low-level students. For intermediate students, the topics which they were

sometimes confronted with, such as airport and hotel conversations, were suitable. As for high-level students, they were required to involve their occupational knowledge, such as the engineering terminologies, in the role-play. In addition, multiple types of role-play were adopted according to students' levels (Table 2, item 3). Semi-scripted role-play was employed to the students who could only adapt the passages from the textbook or imitate the video of Family Album USA. As for the students who found this easy, the teacher applied non-scripted role-play to them, so they had to use their own words to create original dialogues. He believed: '*You cannot learn by rote. Only when you speak, the language belongs to you. The real confidence comes from speaking, not from scores.*' As such, he encouraged students to speak themselves.

Table 2:Selected Representative Information

Items	Identified themes in the interview	The teacher's words	Related categories in documents review
1	Lesson types	• The class where I use role-play most is the University English.	
2	Topics	• At the beginning, most topics are shopping and travelling, then the airport and hotel. After that, when students are graduating, they will imitate the boss and managers.	• Various topics and requirements for different levels of students
3	Role-play types	• They turn the sentences on the textbook into a dialogue. • For example, in a mock interview, they have to combine the vocational knowledge with English.	
4	Procedure	• They need to prepare the script first. • I usually ask them to record the role-play. Then watch the recording later.	
5	Classroom management	• You just ask them to comment on other's role-play then they'll listen earnestly.	
6	Differentiated instruction within classrooms	• Higher expectation, higher achievement • If they don't want to perform in the class, they can submit the video of role-play.	• Various topics and requirements for different levels of students
7	Dealing with linguistic errors	• Before the role-play, they need to give me the scripts…I'll check the language beforehand.	
8	Class size	• The largest number of students was 60 in one class. • Only 1-2 groups per week. Each group has 2 chances at most in a semester	• Class size control

9	Technology	• I ask them to imitate the *Family Album US*. • They will add background music, special effects to the video.	• Selection and application of materials and technology

During implementation, the participant extended the role-play procedure by adding preliminary and subsequent stages (Table 2, item 4). Before the class, the students needed to compose a script. When preparing, the students communicated and cooperated with each other, which developed their teamwork awareness and ability as required by MOE. During the role-play, the entire process was recorded, and afterwards the students reflected on their performance according to the recording. Second, the teacher managed the classroom by engaging the audience (Table 2, item 5). When some students were doing the role-play, the others were required to comment on the performance later, which means they had to watch carefully. Third, in terms of differentiated instruction within classrooms, the teacher attempted to involve all students and provided help corresponding to their condition (Table 2, item 6). According to the participant, although the students at different levels were divided into Class I and Class II, differences still existed within the same class. He said: '*If you are too strict to low-level students, they may be too upset to do the role-play.*' For those not confident in performing publicly, he encouraged them to make a role-play video which could be as entertaining or informative as they pleased. But high expectations were given to high-level students. Fourth, the teacher emphasised that he would not interrupt students when linguistic errors occur during role-play (Table 2, item 7). He believed role-play was a complete performance, and it should not be interfered with. He chose to check the scripts before the role-play. In this way, the students memorised and practised the correct sentences.

When asked what may affect the effectiveness of role-play, the participant complained that there were too many students in a class (Table 2, item 8). As mentioned before, the students in the University English were not English majors, which means a larger class size. The teacher explained that one English class normally had 50-60 students. English majors would be divided into two classes, no more than 30 students for each. But non-English majors in University English had to crowd into one class. He grouped students and required them to do role-play in turn, but each group had no more than 2 times to perform in one semester.

An unexpected finding was that the participant used multimedia technology to a great extent (Table 2, item 9). The use of technology was also identified in previous themes, including imitating the video of Family Album USA (Table 2, item 3), recording performance (Table 2, item 4) and making a role-play video (Table 2, item 6). The video of Family Album USA

was selected as an additional teaching material by the teacher rather than the university. When making a video, the students were welcomed to use visual and audio effects. The participant said that creativity was emphasised by MOE and role-play was a good chance to inspire students. Video effects were interesting to students so they will take part in the role-play more creatively.

Discussion

Research findings are analysed in this part. The use of role-play is discussed first, followed by the challenges identified in the interview. Subsequently, suggestions are given to deal with these challenges.

The Real Use of Role-Play

This section analyses the teacher's use of role-play and its outcomes. The national curriculum and unidentified syllabus are also involved to support the analysis.

Role-play was used to improve learners' communicative competence by extending the procedure to provide students with opportunities to practise their comprehensive language skills, including speaking, listening, reading and writing (Table 2, item 4). This is consistent with the findings of Tran (**2016**) and Chaitanya and Ramana (**2013**) that role-play is useful in improving multiple language skills. Role-play does contribute to learners' speaking development considerably, but speaking is not the only benefit of role-play (**Krebt, 2017**). Students read and write the scripts, and then listen and speak when performing (**Tran, 2016**). When they can use those skills better, they can communicate better as oral communication involves speaking and listening while written communication consists of reading and writing. MOE and the university highlight the significance of communicative competence as well as comprehensive language skills (**MOE, 2017**). The teachers' extension of role-play met the requirements and would be beneficial for the students' communicative competence.

Students' linguistic knowledge was acquired and corrected by the teacher checking students' script beforehand and asking students to reflect on the video after their performance (Table 2, item 4, 7 and 9). Edstrom (**2013**) highlights the significance of drafts in role-play because neither skill is thoroughly addressed without linguistic accuracy. Hence, the participant spent time on checking students' drafts to ensure they had obtained the linguistic knowledge well. The use of technology also helps students identify the linguistic errors they have made. Cohan and Honigsfeld (**2013**) argue that technology not only advances students' literacy development but also their agency. When making the videos, the students were actually reviewing their own performance. In this way, they would find some linguistic mistakes they did not realise before. Tran (**2016**) claims most

students prefer their mistakes to be corrected at the end of role-play, so the fluency of communication is retained. Edstrom (**2013**) also suggests that follow-up activities can help students retain knowledge and skills. In addition, for the groups which finish their role-play before the others, follow-up activities could engage them, and thus facilitating classroom management (**Ladousse, 1987, as cited in Lin, 2009**). The participant's management of correction was helpful to reinforce his students' knowledge.

The students practised workplace communication in role-play (Table 2, item 1 and 2). Carson (**2012**) suggests that role-play enables students to rehearse for real-life situations. The students likely have to use English to communicate in the workplace in their future life. Proficient English communicative ability around professional topics is expected by employers (**Yu, 2012**). MOE also requires intermediate and high-level students to be capable of communicating professionally and fluently in the workplace (**MOE, 2017**). The participant's students were not English majors so they might have the terminology which was taught in Chinese but needed to be used in English. By simulating working situations, students can learn the terminology and apply them to deal with specific situations in the workplace (**Robinson et al., 2016**). The introduction of professional topics in the class enabled students to integrate their vocational and linguistic knowledge and may help them improve their competitiveness in the labour market.

All students were involved in role-play in the following ways. Firstly, semi-scripted and non-scripted role-play were selected according to students' levels (Table 2, item 3). Different types of role-play require different skills and proficiency, and provide different levels of comfort for learners, therefore it is necessary to find an appropriate role-play type for students (**Harper-Whalen & Morris, 2005**). By this means, it can be avoided that the students cannot fully participate in the role-play because it is too easy or too difficult for them. It is noteworthy that full-scripted role-play was not employed by the participants. A possible reason is that university students had already achieved a certain level of English as they had learnt English mandatorily from Grade 3 in primary schools (**MOE, 2001**). The participant chose these two types of role-play but abandoned the easiest full-scripted role-play, which means he had considered his students' current proficiency. Secondly, the students who were not performing were also engaged in role-play (Table 2, item 5). Similarly, Lin (**2009**) suggests the same solution to increase audience participation by asking students to evaluate their peer's performance after watching. In this way, students' attention is maintained (**Lin, 2009**). Thirdly, differentiated instruction was adopted in the class (Table 2, item 6). According to Tran (**2016**), weak students might need help at the beginning stage of a role-play, or they

cannot go further in their practice. In the current study, the teacher's support for low-level students could help them conduct role-play more smoothly.

Challenges

The students prepared scripts accurately before the class, whereas they lost the opportunity to practise natural and unexpected conversation (Table 2, item 4 and 7). They learnt and used various vocabulary and grammar to compose the script, then recited the scripts corrected by the teacher, similar to the finding of Edstrom (**2013**). She asserts that students obtain nothing due to the lack of focus on linguistic accuracy, and thus their drafts should be reviewed and revised seriously (**Edstrom, 2013**). By this means, the students can acquire accurate linguistic knowledge well. Tran (**2016**), by contrast, defends this use of role-play because he believes that advanced preparation reduces students' exposure to natural communication. Cho (**2015**) contends that if the script is prepared, the language is not produced as in real life. Communication in real life happens naturally and unpredictably, and students should learn how to cope with it during a role-play (**Tran, 2016**). Indeed, the participant's students already knew what would happen next before the performance. They had no opportunity to learn how to face unexpected communication. The authenticity of their role-play was decreased. Carson (**2012**) compares the advantages of improvised and prepared role-play. Improvised role-play introduces the unpredictable language use in the real world to learners while prepared role-play helps students to focus on accuracy (**Carson, 2012**). It is hard to get all the benefits at the same time so the teacher needs to balance the uncertainty of natural communication and linguistic accuracy.

The students in one class had different English proficiency, so it was a challenge for the teacher to give appropriate instruction (Table 2, item 6 and 9). In the study of Lin (**2009**), improper role-play difficulty resulted in some students being unable to finish a role-play even with extra preparation time, but higher-level students found it too easy, so they started to chat once they finished. In the same role-play, it was hard for some students to prepare for more difficult role-play, whereas it was not easy to engage higher-level students (**Lin, 2009**). This suggests that the diverse difficulties of role-play should be given to different levels of students. The participant showed a good way. He had different requirements to students according to their English proficiency. High-level students had to meet his strictest requirement. Those who found it hard to complete the role-play were dealt with less strictly, or even allowed to make a video instead of a live show. At least, they can imitate the video of Family Album USA. By this means, all students were engaged and

confronted with corresponding difficulties of role-play, which is supposed to be a useful solution for the issue pointed out by Lin (**2009**). However, there is one thing in doubt. Family Album USA was published in 1991, nearly 30 years ago (**Family Album USA, n.d.**). It is unclear whether the use of language in this video is still common today. According to the curriculum and syllabus, the teaching materials should be excellent and up to date (**MOE, 2017**). It would be better if the participant uses a newer material so that low-level students can keep pace with the language popular nowadays.

The drawback of large class size was underlined by the participant (Table 2, item 8). He said the students in one group had few opportunities to perform because '*the largest number of students was 60*'. He suggested that students would have more opportunities in a small class than in a large class. Although MOE requires a small size class (no more than 35) for speaking and writing, both the curriculum and syllabus set no limit of student numbers in comprehensive Class I (**MOE, 2017**). However, because the classes where the participant employed role-play were not speaking or writing classes, the student number was far more than 35. As mentioned by the teachers, it is less controllable to do a role-play in such a large class. This finding is congruent with the conclusions of Tran (**2016**) that chaos in a crowded class is viewed as the biggest problem in conducting a role-play. On the other hand, the more students there are in one class, the more differences the teacher needs to cope with. This in turn aggravates the challenge of students' English proficiency difference.

Suggestions

It is suggested that teachers could select improvisational or prepared role-play according to students' ability. Improvisational role-play with error correction after it could be employed to the students who already have some English linguistic knowledge and can communicate to some degree. By doing so, they have access to unexpected real-life communication (**Carson, 2012**). The linguistic accuracy could be addressed after role-play so the fluency of communication is retained (**Tran, 2016**). Nevertheless, for the students who are unable to maintain the flow of speech in English, it would be better if the teachers extend role-play with preparatory activities. Mardiningrum (**2016**) and Weiss (**2007**) observe the challenges brought by improvisational role-play to low-level students. Tran (**2016**) also admits that weak students need extra help at the beginning of a role-play, or they cannot continue. Having prepared before, the learners could understand and practise the linguistic knowledge in the script, then their language would be more accurate during the role-play.

There are two suggestions for students' proficiency difference. Individuals' condition should be taken into consideration by the teachers when they

design and implement role-play. The topics, types, preparation time and difficulty should be suitable for their students. Edstrom (**2013**) proposes that teachers must negotiate with students to identify and establish optimal conditions for teamwork. Several factors, such as personality, language proficiency and prior knowledge, may affect students' motivation and performance (**Edstrom, 2013**). Therefore, teachers should collaborate with students to find the best ways forward. For example, when the participant's students found it difficult to finish a role-play, he allowed them to take less important roles or to submit a video. They cooperated and found a comfortable way to complete the activity so that the students were able to participate and enjoy it. Furthermore, mixed-ability grouping could be employed in role-play. Although the students at different levels are already divided into different classes, the English levels of students in the same classroom are still different. In this case, Cornish (**2009**) suggests mixed-ability grouping as it provides opportunities for peer tutoring and more student choice and negotiation. As discussed above, the students need different levels of difficulty and preparation time, but this is difficult to accomplish in one class. If the teachers group students according to their proficiency, they could select the roles suitable for themselves and help each other finish the role-play.

A small class size is recommended for an effective role-play. As the participants complained, students had fewer opportunities to take part in a role-play in a large class than in a small class, and it was difficult to manage such a large number of students. Moreover, individual students may receive less attention from their teachers in a large class, and differentiated instruction becomes more difficult. Tran (**2016**) argues that a smaller teacher-student ratio is beneficial for English education, thereby calling on reduced class size. His appeal also applies to the context of Chinese universities where a large class size dominates EFL instruction.

Conclusion

This was a small-scale case study concentrating on a teacher's use of role-play in Chinese university EFL classes. The findings show that the participant attempted to maximise the effectiveness of role-play to improve students' English communicative competence from multiple aspects, including comprehensive language skills, linguistic knowledge, and workplace communication. This is consistent with the studies which investigate the concerns of Chinese universities students in English communication and the functions of role-play in second language acquisition (see **Cho, 2015; Edstrom, 2013; Gan, 2013; Li, 2008; Lin, 2009; Tran, 2016; Zhu et al., 2017**). Nonetheless, the issues of script preparation, students' proficiency difference and class size arose in the research. Selecting role-play according to students' ability, considering individuals'

condition, mixed-ability grouping and small class size were suggested to make role-play more effective.

Further research may involve both teachers and students. In this way, students' comments on their teachers' use of role-play would be collected. The opinions of teachers and students can be compared and triangulated. More than that, it is suggested that future researchers include observation in their studies. It would also help triangulation, and then the effectiveness and ways of employing role-play could be investigated profoundly.

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Appendix: Question framework

1. Teacher's design:

    a. What topics do you usually choose for role-play?

    b. What role-play types do you select?

    c. What types of lessons do you choose to conduct role-play in?

2. Implementation:

    a. What procedure does role-play have in your class?

b. How do you manage your students during role-play?

c. How do you deal with the students' linguistic errors? And when?

3. Other factors:

a. Does the class size have any influence on role-play?

b. Do the students' English levels impact role-play?

c. Do you think the university supports your use of role-play?

d. Do you think the government encourages role-play?

To cite this article:

Fan, H., 2020. The Implementation and Challenges of using Role-Play to Improve Chinese University Students' English Communicative Competence. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 8(1), 1-18. Available at: https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v8i1.531.

Fitting In and Fighting Out: Non-native teachers of English engaging in an Australian ESL environment

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Peer review: This article has been subject to a double-blind peer review process

Abstract

This study explores and problematises the various challenges six non-native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) faced in the ESL teaching profession. The purpose of this study was to increase an in-depth understanding of non-native English speaking teachers in terms of their perceived and actual employability, students' perceptions of them, and the discriminatory practices they are often reported to be subjected to in the ESL industry in Australia. The number of international students studying ESL at Australian language centres has increased significantly in recent years and a concurrent increase in trained NNESTs seeking employment in these centres necessitates this study. The findings revealed that the participants still face challenges to some extent in the ESL teaching profession in Melbourne and their teaching approaches are impacted by their linguistic and educational experiences. The study also found that, contrary to popular belief, NNESTs do not use the so-called 'traditional' teaching approaches while teaching, despite their own learning of English through such approaches. As well, far from seeing it as a disadvantage, these teachers often utilise their non-native status as a positive source of inspiration to encourage 'non-native' students in the classroom.

As data in the study indicates, the participants' pedagogical approaches have been influenced by their past linguistic, educational, and cultural experiences, this understanding will help these programs become better attuned to teachers' experiences and backgrounds and encourage NNES future teachers to examine their varied experiences in relation to theories of language acquisition, language teaching and curriculum design.

Keywords: Native speakerism; non-native English speaking teacher; NNEST; English language teaching; ELT; English as a second language; ESL

Introduction

Due to globalisation and attendant forces such as transnational migration, especially to the English-speaking West, the demand for English language learning and English language teaching in both second and foreign language contexts has increased tremendously. English has become the lingua franca of the world, to the extent that even as early as in 1997 Graddol declared that the number of second and foreign language speakers of English far exceeded the number of first language speakers of English (**Graddol, 1997**). This means that the English language is no longer 'the privilege of native speakers' (**Medgyes, 2001: 429**) and that native speakers have long lost the prerogative to control its standardisation.

Historically, native English speaking teachers (NESTs) have been preferred as teachers of the language, as they were perceived as 'ideal' or 'authentic'. It was also widely accepted that 'native-speaker' teachers represented a 'Western culture' from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology (**Holliday, 2006**). This resulted in a worldwide discrimination against English teachers whose first language was not English. As a result, even qualified non-native English speaking teachers were often considered as not 'good enough' by managers and administrators at language centres, and indeed often by their peers and even by the students. In the English language teaching (ELT) industry, it was accepted that NESTs were necessarily - by virtue of their first language status – better, and therefore students desired to be taught by them. Phillipson, (**2012**) described such widespread and unquestioned beliefs as 'myth' or 'fallacy'. Subsequent scholarly literature from the late 90s to the present have to an extent overturned such beliefs, especially as reflected in policies and recruiting and promotional materials. In practice, however, little has changed, as old beliefs about native speakerism persist, and this has serious implications on the employment and general acceptance of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) especially in countries with high number of immigrants, such as Australia.

Many previous studies have problematised the definitions of native speakers and non-native speakers; some have claimed that NESTs and NNESTs are 'two different species', (**Arva and Medgyes, 2000**). However, very few studies have solely explored the issues of NNESTs in the adult ELT teaching profession in an Australian context and the kinds of challenges and experiences they go through that influence their teaching practices in the ESL classroom. This study addresses the following *questions:* What challenges do NNESTs experience in order to fit into the ELT industry in Australia? What are their self-perceptions as NNESTS? What expectations do students have of them? And, finally, are there barriers and obstacles on their way to employment?

Challenges Experienced by NNESTs

In recent years an increasing number of non-native English speaking teachers have taken up teaching positions in English as a second (ESL) or English as a foreign (EFL) contexts (**Clark & Paran, 2007; Zhang and Zhan, 2014**). It has been found that teaching EFL or ESL could be a very challenging task for NNESTs because there are high expectations on their cultural and linguistic knowledge (**Moussu & Llurda, 2008**) of the English speaking country or the host country they are teaching, but also because NNESTs are not generally perceived to be as competent as their counterpart NESTs (**Kahmi-Stain, 1999**) as discussed above. As a result, NNESTs often face difficulty in finding teaching positions – and this problem is obviously exacerbated in English speaking countries (**Zhang & Zhan, 2014**).

It has long been reported in scholarly literature that in the language teaching industry, labelling teachers as 'native' speakers and 'non-native' speakers can have a significant impact on the overall teaching and learning process, the classroom culture as well as in administrative matters in teaching institutions. Many researchers have found that program administrators or managers generally give preference to hiring NESTs over NNESTs because there is a general perception that students do not want to be taught by non-native English teachers (**Mahboob, 2004**). According to Maum (**2002**), some NNESTs have reported that many of their students 'resented' being taught by non-native teachers until the teachers were able to prove that they were not any less effective as native speaker teachers. Indeed, many TESOL professionals believed that being a native speaker is a necessary qualification to teach English (**Thomas, 1999; Braine, 1999**). It is a sad reality therefore that these professional and many language institutions even advertise and 'boast' that they only hire native English speaker teachers (**Braine, 2004**). A study conducted by Selvi (**2010: 174**) investigated the extent to which native speakerism appears in job advertisements documented that in employing teachers, 'native speakerism was more important than any relevant education background and sufficient teaching experience'.

However, the challenges that NNESTs often face are not just limited to such discriminatory hiring practices; they also often face challenges of credibility as professionals because of their racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds (**Amin, 1999; Thomas, 1999**). In her personal narratives, Thomas (**1999**) shared a confused and hurtful experience of feeling 'unsure' of her teaching abilities when her students commented in a teacher evaluation report that 'we need native speaker teacher. It will be better' (**1999: 10**). After reading such remarks she reported that was not only hurtful but also caused her lack of confidence in her credibility, as it

was directly pointed to her non-nativeness, rather than her teaching ability or qualifications. A more recent study conducted by Lasagabster and Sierra (**2005**) on students' perceptions of Native and Non-native teachers' in 76 universities in Europe to explore credibility issues that NNESTs face, showed that there is a stronger preference among students to have NESTs as teachers at all levels in the areas of vocabulary, speaking, listening, pronunciation, assessment and writing with 81.5% and 71% of students preferring a native speaker in pronunciation, speaking and vocabulary courses. In order to get a clearer picture, the next section will discuss the strong presence of native speakerism in the English Language Teaching Industry.

Native Speakerism and the Case of NNESTs in ELT

The history of native-speakerism is not new; Phillipson (**1992**) pointed out that it existed since the period of British colonisation when English functioned as an imperial language in the former British colonies across the globe in the 19th century. According to Mufwene (**1994**), 'it originates from the colonists' ideas and perceptions who considered people in colonised countries as incompetent speakers and illegitimate offspring of English' (**ibid: 29**), believing that there is only one, 'standard' English. In other words, only native speakers possessed standard English. How, then, do we define 'standard' English? Is it British or American? Or the English spoken by 'inner circle' (**Kachru, 1985**), or the 'other' Englishes spoken by the 'outer circle' (**ibid**) through colonisation by England or America, such as India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka (**ibid**). 'Standard English' (**Arva & Medgyes, 2000**) argued, is an 'idealization, an amalgam of beliefs and assumptions about rules and norms to which certain people attempt to adhere with variety degrees of success'.

There is no denying that the reductive binary of NESTs and NNESTs in terms of their relative competencies has been deeply established in the ELT industry. Indeed, in this field, it is still a prevalent belief that NESTs are the ideal English teachers - Phillipson termed this as the 'native speaker fallacy' in 1992. Twenty-five years later this professional discourse of the binary between native and non-native (Braine, 2010) still exists. As discussed, partly what compounds the problem is that many students themselves continue to show the desire to be taught mainly/only by native speaker teachers, with studies conducted in Japan, Korea, Saudi Arabia and in many other countries showing such tendencies. The term 'native speakerism' is political in nature, because it conveys an undertone of authority and assumed standardisation. It essentialises competence in language as a quality one is born with, and therefore closely aligns language competence with the biological category of 'race'. Research has shown that such ideology is 'harmful for the growth of the profession

because it shifts attention from teachers' professional knowledge and expertise to their linguistic status' (**Zhang & Zhan, 2014: 570**), and by extension, to their nationalities, ethnicities and races.

In recent years there has been an increase in scholarly research on issues related to NNESTs in ELT, (**Braine, 2010; Mahboob, 2010**) due to the increasing concern that NNESTs are not always given the credit they deserve. Most English teaching takes place in countries where English is either a second or a foreign language, thereby constituting the majority (nearly 80%) of the world's English. Braine, (**2010**) believes NNESTS began to make their voices heard in the beginning of the 21st century through various ELT organisations, for example the establishment of TESOL's Non-native Caucus in 1999 in the US gave NNESTs a platform to be vocal about their position. In the following sections, how students perceive their non-native English speaking teachers and how the NNESTs, on the other hand, perceive themselves will be discussed.

Student perceptions of NNESTS

Although the number of NNESTs has increased in both ESL and EFL contexts all over the world, scholarly research reports that they are still not always given the credit they deserve (**Mahboob, 2004**). Research on the way they are perceived by their students is a relatively recent phenomenon. This could be due to the sensitive nature of the issue, because NNESTs were generally considered as 'unequal' in knowledge and performance to their NEST counterparts (**Braine, 2004**) or because most NNESTs work in public schools globally while the ELT industry has generally promoted private schools, and expensive textbooks for adult students.

Interests have shifted, and in the last 10-15 years there have been a few studies conducted on how students perceive their non-native English Speaker teachers across the globe, such as in Vietnam and Japan (**Walkinshaw & Hoang Duong, 2012**), in the United States (**Liang, 2002, Mahboob 2003**), in Hong Kong (**Cheung & Braine, 2007**), in United Kingdom (**Pacek, 2005**), in Europe (**Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005**) and so on. In the study by Walkinshaw and Duong, for example, students expressed a number of perceived advantages and disadvantages of both NESTs and NNESTs. Students viewed NESTs as models of correct pronunciation and language use but they also considered NESTs as being poor in explaining grammar and sometimes 'cultural differences' creating 'tensions'. On the other hand, students found classroom interaction with NNESTs was 'easier' because of the shared culture and NNESTs being relatively 'good in grammar' compared to their NEST counterparts.

A study with ESL learners in the United States conducted by Mahboob in 2003-2004 showed that a number of participants viewed that native speakers were better 'language models' when it comes to pronunciation. In line with Chomsky's (**1965**) notion of the 'ideal native speaker', they associated terms such as 'ideal' 'true' and 'correct' pronunciation of English, with NESTs. It is interesting that this study found that adult ESL learners wanted to imitate 'true' or 'correct' native-like pronunciation, whereas psycholinguistic evidence suggests that adult L2 learners will not achieve this (**Mahbub, 2004**). On the other hand, Liang (**2002**) investigated students' attitudes towards NNESTs at California State University where 76% of the participants stated that being 'interested, well prepared and being professional' were the major characteristics of effective teachers.

In yet another study by Benke and Medgyes (**2005**) on students' perceptions of native and non-native teachers, among 422 Hungarian learners of English, the overwhelming majority of the participants felt it was important that teachers are able to translate (84.4%), although this only applies in monolingual classes, and ideally both NEST and NNEST teachers should teach them (82%). In this case, only 5.9% participants voiced that they wished to be taught by NESTs.

From the above findings, it appears that English language learners in many countries in the world would not actually mind being taught by both NESTs and NNESTs. Despite, this it is still very common to see advertisements that promote programs run by 'only native speakers' in countries where English is taught as a second or foreign language, such as in Japan, Korea, China or in the Middle East (**Ruecker & Ives, 2015**).

Now that we have discussed how NNESTs are perceived by their students, it is also very important to know how NNESTs see *themselves* as English teachers. It is important for the NNESTs to have self-confidence in order to feel *equal* if not better to their counterpart, native speaker teachers.

NNESTs' Self-Perceptions

As NNESTs constitute the majority of English teachers in the ELT field (**Mahboob, 2004**), it is important to investigate their self-perceptions. Research shows that teachers' self-image and beliefs directly influence how they teach and interact with students (**Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999**). This becomes more important in environments where both NESTs and NNESTs teach together, as the two groups are constantly being compared, especially in relation to accent, grammar or vocabulary knowledge (**Braine, 2010**).

Numerous non-native English speaker teachers have written about their journeys and experiences as ESL or EFL professionals. Thomas (**1999: 10**) claims that 'NNESTs have to work twice as hard as their NEST colleagues, proving themselves as effective users of the language'. She explains that NNESTs face many situations where they have to establish 'credibility' as English teachers to be taken seriously by the colleagues and students, which sometimes can be unnerving, if not 'debilitating', and that can have significant impact of feeling inferior, lack of confidence and finally the ability to succeed.

Research on NNESTs' self-perceptions, professional characteristics and experiences of teaching English in diverse contexts highlight the strengths and gaps in NNESTS' knowledge and skills that might affect their qualifications and competence as ELT professionals. The question therefore arises - just because NESTs have 'perfect' pronunciation and 'perfect' grammar, does it automatically make them better teachers? Studies have suggested other factors that contribute to becoming a good or an effective English teacher, such as better preparedness (pedagogically), being sympathetic or showing empathy to students and, perhaps most importantly, having a 'professional attitude' towards the job they are doing.

An early study by Samimy and Brutt-Griffler in 1999 determined how 17 NNESTs graduates from countries such as Japan, Korea, China and Turkey, who were either pursuing a MA or PhD in TESOL in a university in the United States, perceived themselves as professionals in the field of English Language teaching. More than two-thirds of the participants admitted that their difficulties with language affected their teaching from 'a little' to 'very much'. They pointed out their counterpart NESTs were informal, fluent, accurate using different techniques, methods and approaches. They used more conversational English with subtle knowledge of the language, having communication skills as the main outcome of their students of their teaching. On the other hand, NNESTs were perceived as relying on textbooks but at the same time also being sensitive to the needs of the students, better empathising with students and keeping exam preparation as an important goal of their teaching. The differences, according to the participants, were mainly due to the sociocultural factors embedded in Western and Asian societies, such as, in Asian societies, classes are often not student-centred and collaborative activities with pair and group works are not always applied to increase students' participation, which are strongly emphasised in Western classrooms. However, the participants did not consider themselves as being inferior to the NESTS when it came to teaching practice.

A more recent study on the self-perceptions of NNESTs in Hong Kong was conducted by Cheung in 2002 with 22 University English teachers at six universities. The NNESTs revealed their strengths were the ability to empathise with students as fellow second language learners, a shared cultural background and the emphasis they placed on grammar. They believed teachers should be knowledgeable about the English language, able to make learning relevant and fun, be sensitive and responsive to students needs and be good at motivating students. Despite the above mentioned positivity and self-confidence that many NNESTs possess, in many countries they still face various challenges in finding employment.

Securing Employment

Due to native speaker fallacy explained above, non-native teachers not only face challenges in seeking employment, professional credibility in workplace but also get challenged because of their accents (**Maum, 2002**). Maum's study describes how 'the issue of accent' has often been a cause of employment discrimination practices in the US and other countries – 'teachers with non-native accents were perceived as less qualified and less effective and were compared unfavourably with their native-English speaking colleagues' (**Maum, 2002, cited in Ulate, 2012**). In other words, non-native teachers who were born in a country such as India or Singapore are not considered as competent and credible, regardless of their competency level in English. This is intriguing, considering that in reality even native speakers have varied accents. For instance Australian accent is significantly different from the American or British, although in this case it is unlikely that they would be discriminated either by their employees or their students on the ground of how they speak - although there are occasional reports of US accents or British RP (Received Pronunciation) accents being favoured over other 'native' accents.

The Study Design

Upon Ethics Approval from my university, an email was sent to the Directors of Studies (DOS) of seven English Language Centres in Melbourne to recruit participants. The seven were selected based on their large student numbers with a high number of teachers. Six DOSs provided the names of the six participants; the seventh centre did not have any Non-native English teachers among the teaching staff. The participants in this study were six NNESTs working in a number of adult ESL programs in Melbourne, Australia, teaching various courses ranging from General English (GE) courses from Pre-Intermediate to Advanced levels and English for Academic Purposes (EAP).These programs mainly serve international students, to assist them in succeeding in their studies and students who come to stay for a short time on either a tourist visa or a student visa. The

NNESTs represented six countries: China, East Timor, Bangladesh, Iran, Sri Lanka and Germany, and their ages ranged from 33 to 55. There were five male and one female participants, two of whom had a PhD degree, one in her second year of PhD and the rest had at least a Bachelor's degree and an English teaching qualification, such as TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language or CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). None of the participants had to take the IELTS test to teach as long as they possessed ESL teaching qualification. Their experiences varied from two years to 30 years of teaching English in Melbourne. It is important to mention that all the participants had prior teaching experiences in their home countries or in other countries before they started teaching in Melbourne. All names in this study are pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities.

Table 1: Participents' Profiles

Name (Pseudonyms)	**Age**	**Country of Origin**	**Education**	**ESL teaching qualification**	**Teaching experience**
Huong	34	China	PhD student	CELTA	6 years in China, 2 years in Melbourne
Evan	32	East Timor, moved to Australia at 11	Bachelor Degree	CELTA	1 year in East Timor, 8 years in Melbourne
Shaheen	35	Bangladesh	PhD in English Literature	Master in TESOL	12 years in Bangladesh, 2 years in Australia
Ahmed	36	Iran	Studying Master in Education	CELTA	12 years in UK , Iran and Australia
Sumeet	55	Sri Lanka	Masters, IELTS Examiner Trainer	Master in TESOL	Taught in the UK, New Zealand and Australia since 1984
Ulrich	46	Germany	PhD in English Literature	Master in TESOL	5 years in Japan, 10 years in Melbourne

Since the goal of this study was to gain a deeper understanding about the NNESTs' experience in the ELT industry in Melbourne, Australia, the research was conducted using a qualitative approach, as it is exploratory and descriptive in nature (**Ary, 2010**). A case study approach was adopted for this study, which explored the kinds of challenges and experiences these non-native English teachers of ESL and EFL in Melbourne faced. The interviews were semi-structured and each participant was interviewed once averaging 60 -75 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in English. All the interviews were transcribed and coded.

Findings and Discussion

Once all data needed had been gathered, the interviews were transcribed and coded by listening to the recorded interviews multiple times. The data was then coded for themes which is a process where a researcher attaches 'labels' to segments of data that represent what each segment is about. This resulted in the three main themes guided by the research questions:

there were significant differences among the participants in terms of age, first language and teaching experience. However, they had one thing in common – they were all non-native teachers of English in an English speaking country.

Three major themes emerged from the data. The first theme is that the participants faced challenges in the three main areas that they related to their NNEST status: in securing employment, receiving negative attitude from students and feeling professionally insecure. The second theme is their understanding of the learners' struggle and seeing themselves a source of inspiration to students; while the final theme is NNESTs' dislike for the practice of the so called 'traditional' teaching methods.

Finding 1: NNESTs still face challenges in terms of credibility, negative attitude from students and securing employment

There is no denying that discrimination seems to be institutionalised in ELT field in Australia (**Pennycook 2004**). The data in this study confirm that NNESTs still face many challenges. The literature documents the challenges non-native English speaker teachers face range from feeling insecure as NNESTs (**Amin, 2001**), finding employment (**Braine, 2005; Zhang & Zhan, 2014**) or negative attitudes from students (**Amin, 2001; Mahboob, 2004**).

Three participants out of six reported experiencing challenges in different ways. Shaheen, a 35 year old man who emigrated to Melbourne three years ago at the time of the interview had 12 years of teaching experience in Bangladesh at a university, teaching ESL and EFL from Intermediate to Advanced level students. He had strong feelings with regard to his experiences of facing challenges and difficulties over the last two years of work experience in Melbourne. He strongly believed that:

> *Because of my 'Indian' appearance I was not given a job, it took me more than six months to get the 'first break'… also, my previous degree and job experience in my native country, Bangladesh were not counted when determining my teaching level and experience in Melbourne.*

Therefore, he had to first get a degree and was placed at the lowest pay scale due to his lack of teaching experience, although he had more than 12 years of prior teaching experience. Shaheen's above experiences echo Amin and Kubota's (2004) claim that NNESTs often face issues of credibility that challenge their teaching ability because of their racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, often overriding their professional qualifications and experiences. It is worth mentioning Shaheen scored 8.5 in IELTS to study Master in TESOL, whereas the requirement was 6.5. Shaheen's struggle of finding an 'ongoing or tenured job' could be attributed to what

Ellis (2016) wrote regarding NNESTs in Australia that they are considered as second-best to NESTs, contributing professional inferiority complex.

Evan's experiences of being challenged were slightly different. Evan was a 32 year old teacher who had been teaching in Melbourne for eight years. He came to Melbourne at the age of 11 with his parents. He held a Bachelor degree in Engineering and a CELTA. He seemed to be very passionate about teaching English and found it rewarding despite having some 'rough' experiences. Evan claimed that he was unaware of native speakerism when he first started teaching in Melbourne. However, three incidents made him 'aware' and 'self-conscious' about it – the realisation that he is perceived as someone who speaks with an accent, that he is *not* a native speaker of English. He gave three specific examples:

> *The first time I encountered 'discrimination' was on the phone. I was told that because I spoke with a 'foreign accent' I would not be considered for the position I applied for or ahh . . . I don't know, maybe I'm not a native speaker?*

The second time was when he was told by a student that many students in class reacted negatively to having an Asian teacher with an accent. Thirdly, a Malaysian-born colleague told him because of her colour or Asian look she wasn't given work at many ELICOS Centres. It was interesting that Evan was told he had a foreign accent because he sounded just like a local Australian to the researcher as Evan completed both high school and a Bachelor degree in Engineering in Melbourne. Until he was told that he spoke with an accent, he considered himself a 'local', therefore unaware of 'native speakerism'. He believed it could be because of his 'Asian appearance' he was perceived as non-native, implying 'only white people' are native speakers.

Huong, a 34 year old Chinese female, had been teaching in Melbourne for two years. She came to Melbourne to study Masters in Education, decided to continue with a PhD and was in her second year of PhD at the time of the interview. Huong too, like Shaheen had to wait for several months to get her second job, although she had already had teaching experience in Melbourne.

> *I suspect that it took me long to get the second job because I spoke with a 'slight Chinese accent' … haha and I really think I got my first job because I was Chinese and because the majority of the students in that school were Chinese too … (laughs) and my boss was also Chinese.*

Amin (**2001**) in her study on immigrant female ESL teachers in Canada found similar results as Huong, Canadian (native speakers) teachers were perceived to have an 'inner-circle' accent, therefore, students preferred them. She argued that 'accents, like race are socially organized' (**ibid: 92),**

which she described as linguistic demonstration of 'nativism' and another form of 'racism'. It can be argued, in the light of the literature presented earlier, that when these institutions disregard NNESTs' teaching experience, and discriminate against teachers who speak with an accent, they are indirectly espousing the belief that native speaker teachers are better qualified to teach the language based on their 'birthright mentality' (**Thomas, 1999: 9**). Within this mentality, a non-native teacher is measured against a native speaker teacher who has, by definition, acquired the target language as a birthright, and the non-native teacher is therefore essentially at a disadvantage.

It is important to note, however, that the other three participants, Sumeet, Ulrich and Ahmed did not have many difficulties finding employment in Melbourne. It could be argued that this was because all three of them spent a subsequent period of time in an English-speaking country: Sumeet completed his Bachelor degree in the UK, Ahmed finished his high school in the UK and Ulrich went to college in the US; and thus, it seemed they had more communicative and pragmatic competence in operating within an ESL context. A similar finding was reported by Reves and Medgyes (1994) in a study conducted on non-native teacher's self-image on 216 participants from 10 countries. The study showed NNESTs who had spent longer periods in English-speaking countries, who had more 'frequent contact' with native speakers of English in their early years were 'less insecure and less self –conscious' (**Medgyes, 1994: 364**). However, all three of them were aware of other NNESTs who had similar experiences like Huong, Evan and Shaheen.

Many researchers argue that being a native speaker does not automatically imply the ability to teach more effectively (**Mahboob, 2005; Braine, 2005**). Conversely, there are many students and ESL professionals who still believe that native speakers enjoy some advantages over non-native speakers. For example, Huong and Evan both indicated that some of their students reacted negatively to having non-native, non-white English speaking teachers and they both felt some kind of resistance from the students. A student of Evan approached him after the lesson and admitted feeling 'very disappointed' to see a non-native teacher who was going to teach him for the next five weeks.

Huong on the other hand, was asked about her IELTS (English Language Testing System) score almost every time she had one-on-one lesson with her students.

> *Students always ask me what I got in the IELTS test … even individual scores, like what I got in writing or reading or speaking … it's so frustrating because these students would never ask a native speaker teacher about their IELTS score because they do not have to prove their language ability.*

Being 'questioned' about her credibility seemed to have an impact on Huong's self-perception of herself. She admitted feeling 'inadequate or startled' by these questions at the beginning but she realised that whenever she revealed she had scored 8 in IELTS, students responses were 'positive with admiration'. However, the students' reactions in both cases show that they believed only native speakers could teach them competently and they would not have asked them for any credibility. Drawing from Chomsky's (**1965**) theory, 'the native speaker is regarded as the authority, model user and that he or she is the most 'ideal informant' who has an 'understandable advantage' in language teaching' (**Canagarajah, 1999: 78**). Therefore, the findings above concur with Fotovatian's (**2015: 232**) claim that 'in the field of TESOL, foreign educated ESL teachers in Australia are reported to experience additional challenges to enter this professional field shadowed by employers' preference to hire native speakers'.

Finding 2: Understanding students' struggles better and NNESTs seeing themselves as sources of inspiration

In second or foreign language teaching, it is often believed that language teachers who teach their first language have more advantages over teachers who are not a native to the language they teach. However, many scholars have argued that NNESTs can be successful and ideal ESL teachers because they have undergone the process of acquiring and learning English as a foreign or additional language themselves and therefore, they are better aware of their students' linguistic needs (**Mahboob, 2004; Ma, 2012).** Many NNESTs experiences of going through the process of learning English give them valuable insights into the ways English is learnt or taught (**Ma, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2010**). In addition, in some EFL situations they also share the students' first language.

All the participants in this study believed that their teaching approaches were heavily influenced by their past learning experiences of the language. Ulrich and Evan can 'empathise' with their students' learning difficulties since they have been through the similar difficulties in acquiring the target language. In this regard, Sumeet explained:

> *We as non-native English teachers probably know and understand many students' native language and culture and we can offer a variety of perspectives and we can use our experiences as a source of knowledge to teach and guide them.*

Huong also believes she can teach her Chinese students 'better than NESTs' because she can teach them how she herself became 'very good' in English and considers herself a 'successful example' to her students. Mahboob's study (**2004**) also provided evidence that 'good language teaching' is not exclusively the native speaker's domain. The students in Mahboob's study argued that NNESTs were more 'understanding' and 'empathetic' towards them and provided effective support that native teachers often fail to do so.

Mahboob (**2004**) further argued that in terms of NNESTs language teaching methodology, especially when it comes to teaching grammar, they do a much better job and fit into students' expectations as they were second language learners themselves. One of his participants explained why she believed NNESTs were more effective in teaching grammar – 'native speakers are not structure teachers and maybe they learn about grammar rules only when they start teaching … they speak the language perfectly but they do not know the pain of learning grammar rules' (**ibid: 134**). Arva and Medgyes (**2000**) also indicated that NNESTs are more effective grammar teachers since they are 'explicitly aware' of grammar rules. In this study, all five participants except Sumeet stated that one of their main strengths was teaching grammar. Ahmed gives an example,

> *When I do a listening exercise, I always do a pre-listening exercise because as soon as I look at some phrases or idioms or the sentence structure I realise that students are going to struggle with them. I tend to think a native speaker would probably go like ok, we are doing a listening, write the answers. So, you see I understand the grammar structure of the sentences and I can predict students would struggle.*

They all explained because of their own learning process and going through 'similar' experiences, it is easier for them to teach grammar and make it easier for the students to learn (**Ellis, 2002**). Ulrich believes he understands his students' struggles better compared to his NEST colleagues,

> *As I had to learn the language myself I can understand what kind of 'mistakes' students make and 'why' they make them and it's easier to 'relate' them with my experience I believe… and sometimes my native-speaker colleagues ask me to explain certain grammar points because they are not sure how to explain them to students especially in advanced classes.*

For Huong because of her linguistic background and her 'grammatical knowledge', she can explain to the students 'what' and 'how' grammar structure works, particularly to Chinese students. She can also show 'examples' on the board about how she learnt and became better in English and by doing so she believes she becomes an 'example' or 'inspiration' to the students. Sometimes Huong deploys code-switching from English to Chinese as she believes students understand faster and better, particularly when she is teaching an advanced, complex grammar rule. Many studies have investigated how NNESTs use code-switching method to help their students during English lessons (**Lee & Chowdhury, 2018**) allowing them to use contrastive analysis with L1 to learn English in better ways. Evan explains 'how hard it is to learn a language, especially for adults', and uses the word 'pressure' to 'know' and 'how' to use the language in different contexts, which many students find 'frustrating'.

Sumeet, on the other hand, prefers teaching advanced level academic courses, such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) due to the fact that he is an IELTS examiner trainer with vast knowledge and experience of course designing and teacher training. He believes, because he has not taught General English (GE) courses for a long time, he feels rather 'uncomfortable' explaining grammar rules, therefore, prefers

All six participants believed they were a source of inspiration to their students. Huong, Ulrich and Ahmed often offered themselves as examples of 'success' when their students were frustrated or got disappointed with learning and with their progress. Huong says, 'if I can do it, so can you'. Ulrich admits students sometimes confided in him that they felt inspired that he, someone with a German accent, was teaching them English. Ellis's (**2002**) study on teaching from experiences of three ESL teachers in Australia revealed similar findings where all three participants felt they were 'role models' for their students and that they could inspire students to become better in English.

Finding 3: NNESTs do not prefer or practice 'traditional' teaching approaches

Many previous studies have shown that native and non-native teachers have distinctive teaching approaches (**see, for example, Medgeys, 1994; Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Maum, 2002**). These studies show native speaker teachers are relatively 'flexible' and 'informal' and they use different techniques and eclectic (although not random) methods whereas non-native teachers mainly 'rely' on 'textbooks', using so-called 'traditional' approaches focusing more on 'structured' lesson plans and 'teacher-centred' learning, for example a study conducted in Hungary by (**Arva & Medgyes, 2000**), where non-native teachers seemed to stick to textbooks, whereas, their counterparts used a wide range of materials and being

more tolerant towards students' mistakes. It also showed the local Hungarian teachers have good training in grammar but use 'traditional' pedagogies, whereas 'foreign' teachers are either not trained at all or have done CELTA or similar and use 'communicative' techniques that make the best of their fluency. The findings of this study did not 'corroborate' many of the previous findings. Evan and Ahmed prefer using authentic materials over textbooks. Ahmed calls himself a 'techno savvy' teacher:

> *I always incorporate textbook materials with everyday available materials on the internet or something I would come across in the street. We need to understand in this technologically advanced day and age to teach effectively teachers must include internet in their lessons.*

In order to 'facilitate' this idea he has organised a few PD (Professional Development) sessions on 'including technology in ESL classes' for the other teachers at his workplace. Like Ahmed, Evan voiced the need of bringing 'interesting and diverse materials' into day-to-day teaching lessons.

> *If we want to motivate our students to learn English, it is extremely important to know how our today's internet savvy, digital natives learn and therefore, we have to be innovative and use other available resources out there.*

On the other hand, Sumeet and Ulrich prefer using a variety of classroom activities and strategies, with the focus being on authentic communication skills. The primary objective is to help students improve their Listening and Speaking skills. They both use authentic materials such as audio visual materials, YouTube or other online videos to make learning more interactive and interesting. Sumeet prefers using newspaper articles, magazines to promote pair or group activities to discuss, ask questions, give opinion and so on. Ulrich believes 'role-plays', 'in-prompt fun activities' and 'games' work much better to engage students in improving conversational skills rather than heavily relying on textbooks or teacher-centred learning. These various strategies, they believe to 'engage' the learners have contributed in making the lessons 'fun, engaging and interesting'.

Despite being mostly taught in the traditional style (teacher centred, relying on textbooks) where teachers were the authority in the classroom, Shaheen and Huong showed that they wanted to make students' learning more meaningful and adapted new ways of teaching. The findings of this study thus refute previous findings where researchers argued that NNESTs' prefer traditional, teacher-centred approaches whereas NESTs were more flexible (**Arva & Medgyes, 2000**); the study conducted on five NESTs and five NNESTs in Hungary, showed compared to their

counterpart, NNESTs. Indeed, all of the participants rarely relied on textbooks and instead used authentic language materials to teach the target language.

Conclusion

This study looked at six non-native English speaker teachers' experiences of teaching English and the challenges they faced in doing so in Melbourne. Specifically, the study investigated whether NNESTs face challenges in finding employment because of their non-native status, how students perceive NNESTs and how the NNESTs perceive themselves.

The participants in the study reflected on various aspects of the challenges they faced in the ESL teaching profession. As we have seen, three participants have clearly shown that despite the difficulties they experienced due to their NNEST status, they have utilised their past learning experiences positively to make them reflective, empowered and hardworking teachers in their teaching approaches.

Echoing Medgyes' (**1994**) previous findings, the participants felt that they were able to often predict and understand the difficulties their students' experiences while learning English to 'predict and anticipate linguistic difficulties of their students' and provide suitable teaching strategies to the students through their own experiences of learning English as a foreign language. Furthermore, the participants voiced that they were more empathetic towards their students' needs and challenges in learning a second language. This study found that these advantages served the participants well in the classroom, manifesting themselves in the implementation of teaching practices that they felt were appropriate and effective for their students.

Throughout previous literature, it has been noted that NNESTs often feel insecure as they are often not considered as competent enough in English language teaching as their native English-speaking counterparts (**Kamhi-Stein, 2004).** However, there needs to be a new message that NNESTs can be *just as good* or even *better* as the findings of this study suggest.

It is important to note that although this study examined six NNESTs who have varied linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds, there remain limitations. Firstly, it is questionable whether the findings could be generalised considering its relatively small sample size. Obviously, there is huge variation among NNESTs in terms of their experiences, challenges, and teaching approaches. As Kamhi-Stein (2004) noted, categorising NESTs and NNESTs with absolute characteristics may distort understanding of NNESTs and create harmful stereotypes. Thus, future research studies need to examine individual differences among NNESTs instead of simply grouping NNESTs into one homogenous group.

Secondly, this study did not investigate either how ESL students viewed these six teachers, or how their employers viewed the NNEST's teaching methods or competencies. A future study incorporating these three aspects might shed a better light on NNESTs' experiences in Australia. Finally, since participants in this study were from six countries only, investigating NNESTs from various other countries might be beneficial to explore whether English teachers from non-native English speaking background are being hired in a greater number. Studies need to also confirm if, as Llurda (**2004**) proposed, the perception of native speakers being the role model or the ideal teacher is decreasing while appreciation of non-native English speaking teachers is increasing worldwide, is true for Australia today. After all, teachers' - whether NEST or NNEST - should be hired based on competency regardless of experience, engagement and pedagogical knowledge rather than on their linguistic background.

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To cite this article:

Chakma, Urmee., 2020. Fitting In and Fighting Out: Non-native teachers of English engaging in an Australian ESL environment. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 8(1), 19-39. Available at: https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v8i1.602.

The Comforting Nonsense of Creativity

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Peer review: This article has been subject to a double-blind peer review process

Abstract

Jonah Lehrer's book Imagine: How Creativity Works was discredited when it was discovered that it included fabricated quotes by Bob Dylan. It was also criticised for cherry picking the science of creativity and adding little of worth to the literature on the subject.

While this may be true, I suggest that much scientific literature about creativity is already epistemologically and methodologically incoherent, and characterised by the treatment of creativity as something with stable ontic status, rather than something which is always, inevitably produced through cultural processes of interpretation and association. An examination, using the tools of discourse analysis, of some of the research papers cited by Lehrer, along with other related examples, reveals some of the assumptions and rhetorical manoeuvres at work.

Despite the overt falsehoods in his book, the stories that Jonah Lehrer tells us are consistent with the stories that the research, science, and policy tell us about creativity – all are equally fanciful. Nevertheless, if we choose to suspend our disbelief in such stories, and their rhetorical prestidigitation, there are some comforts and pleasures to be obtained from the illusion of essential humanity that they create.

Keywords: Creativity; Jonah Lehrer; Discourse; Neuroscience; Stories; Consolations

The Disgrace of Jonah Lehrer (and why he was already wrong about creativity)

In 2012 the journalist Jonah Lehrer resigned from his post at the New Yorker after admitting that he fabricated quotes from Bob Dylan in his book Imagine: How Creativity Works. His deception was exposed by the journalist Michael Moynihan who, keen to track down the sources for seven of the Dylan quotes (**Ulaby, 2012**), ended up getting Lehrer to confess that the quotes 'either did not exist, were unintentional misquotations, or represented improper combinations of previously existing quotes' (**Myers, 2012**). But prior to this Lehrer's book, despite debuting -at the top of the New York Times non-fiction bestseller list (**Holpuch, 2012**) had already been criticised for its uncritical faith in neuroscience to reveal the mysteries of creativity. Steven Poole, for example indicts Lehrer for his 'neuroscientism': '[the] promise that brain-scans (using the limited current technologies of fMRI and EEG) can explain the workings of the mind' (**Poole, 2012**). There are two key points in Poole's scathing review which, I think, are useful charges against Lehrer, but also the general field of 'creativity research'. The first pertains specifically to neuroscience: 'The inconvenient truth is that observing which areas of the brain light up on a screen during experiment tells us little about "how creativity works"'; the second is applicable more widely:

> *The larger problem…is the sheer variety of activities that Lehrer has conflated without argument as representing "creativity" or "imagination". The composition of a song or poem is just assumed to be the same sort of thing as the solving of a hoary riddle or word-puzzle by experimental volunteers in a magnetic-resonance- imaging tube, or the dreaming-up of new moves in surfing, or the copying of a German porn doll to market it as Barbie, or the invention of a new kind of mop* (**Poole, 2012**).

It is this tendency to conflate disparate things - attributes, artefacts, practices - which is characteristic not just of Lehrer's book, but of research into creativity more generally; the things which are drawn into the frame are so diverse and contradictory, so produced by assumptions and prejudices about art, craft, problem solving, agency, and thinking itself, that it is often difficult to identify what is not 'creative'. My argument, then, is not that Lehrer does science a disservice by (as Poole puts it in a later article) 'cherry picking results and distorting their implications' and by telling 'simple stories sprinkled with cutting-edge science' (**Poole, 2016**) but that the field of creativity research is already nothing more than a set of more or less nonsensical stories about the origins of the human capacity for invention. We can explore this by following Foucault's example when he suggests that:

> *The problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under that category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false* (**Foucault, 1984: 60**).

It is important, then, to recognise that science does not take place in a hygienic realm, free from the contaminants of language and culture (see, for example, **Popper, 2002**; **Latour & Woolgar, 1986**; **Doyle, 2017**). In the field of creativity research there are some distinctive discursive traits which produce and reproduce particular notions of creativity, by which I mean not just ways of speaking and writing about creativity, but ways of constructing it through particular procedures and conditions. A focus on language, discourse and rhetoric enables us to describe 'creativity' as a construction rather than a 'thing' with ontic stability anchored in the real world; just as Richard Rorty suggests that philosophy is a kind of writing (**Rorty, 1978: 143**) creativity, too, is built upon metaphorical representations of the relationship between mind and body, and signs and referents. Creativity, in this light, becomes a mythical construction like 'love', 'violence' or 'national identity'. And like love, national identity, and maybe even violence, it offers some reassuring ideas about who we are and our place in the world; like all fairy tales, there is no reality here, but there are potential pleasures, nonetheless. Lehrer's book, then, is a conveniently paradoxical place from which to launch a critique of the science of creativity; Lehrer may have included actual falsehoods but these tend to mask the more widespread misconceptions in the field of creativity research which it faithfully (if excitedly) reports.

In what follows I argue for an approach to creativity which focuses on language and discourse; then for the need to interrogate the assumptions underlying the procedures of creativity research, using some of Lehrer's examples; next, the ways in which research correlates art and creativity; and finally the ways in which a 'science of the creative city' lends itself to myth-making in policy. I conclude by suggesting that Lehrer's work is entirely consistent with the myth-making of creativity research – none of it is 'true', but by suspending our disbelief it enables us to indulge in comforting fantasies about human exceptionalism.

An Anti-ontology of Creativity

A focus on the discourse and rhetoric of creativity is a modest, but radical strategy – radical because it destabilises the notion that creativity is a thing with independent existence. Banaji et al. (**2006**), for example, recognise the discursive dimension of creativity and, with great economy, they identify a range of different, often contradictory, versions of the concept.

The choice of the word rhetoric, with its connotations of philosophy and literary analysis is telling, as is their use of the plural – a simple, but profound indicator that creativity is not a unitary entity or concept. They elaborate:

By rhetorics we mean in this context a subset of discourse, characterised by specific properties:

- They are highly elaborated structures, drawing on distinctive traditions of philosophical, educational, political and psychological thought
- They are organised to persuade as a form of 'communicative action'…seeking to bring about consensus, leading in some cases to intervention in specific contexts of practice
- They produce discursive frameworks such as key terms and taxonomies which can be learnt by practitioners who either need them or are obliged to use them. In this way they feed back into more general 'popular' discourses of creativity (**Banaji et al., 2006: 5**)

The groundwork is created here for an 'anti-ontology' of creativity, and an invitation to engage with a 'poetics' of creativity. The authors, however, hold back on the anti-ontology, often asking 'is…?' questions about creativity which, I have argued before, reveals a dependence upon an essential premise – that 'it' exists and that there is a real phenomenon, quality or attribute which is called 'creativity' (**Readman, 2010: 18**).

We might consider, instead, that creativity is not an object which researchers have 'discovered', but that it is an arbitrary labelling of a range of different behaviours and processes. By refusing to accept the existence of creativity as a starting point, and by analysing the language used to describe and account for it, we can, I think, reveal the nature of the poetics and argue that there is little with tangible status there at all. This more radical stance mobilises a Foucaultian approach to discourse which, according to Kendall and Wickham, begins by 'the recognition of a discourse as a corpus of 'statements' whose organisation is regular and systematic' (**Kendall & Wickham, 1999: 42**) and entails the recognition that 'statements involve 'things' as well as 'words'. They counsel that 'The crucial thing here is to avoid the idea that [discourse] is a purely linguistic term (as in most incarnations of 'discourse analysis')' (**Kendall & Wickham, 1999: 35**). To illustrate how this strategy might be useful we could look, for example, at the way in which experimental science produces creativity discursively, not only through its language and arguments expressed in academic papers, but through the tools which it has devised in order to identify the object of study, such as Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), the electroencephalogram (EEG), and the administration

of these tests in laboratory conditions. These processes are implicated in the language and arguments, and they also inform the language and arguments. Showing how creativity becomes discursively active as a concept entails locating it within particular contexts and identifying how these contexts create the conditions for creativity to be manifested in a particular way. And discourse, as a concept, enables us to see the relationships between rhetorical enunciation and power; power, that is, as a force by which meaning is asserted – through language, institutions and operations.

Scientism and Creativity

An examination of some of the experiments that Jonah Lehrer discusses certainly reveals a degree of 'cherry picking', but also shows how the experiments themselves reify creativity as something tangible. The rationale for experimental approaches to creativity proposed by Mark Runco and Shawn Sakamoto illuminates how this process of reification works:

> *Creativity is among the most complex of human behaviours. It seems to be influenced by a wide array of developmental, social, and educational experiences, and it manifests itself in different ways in a variety of domains. The highest achievements in the arts are characterized by their creativity, as are those in the sciences. Creativity is also quite common in a wide range of everyday activities.*

They infer, therefore, that:

> *The complex nature of creativity suggests that meaningful research must take multiple influences and diverse forms of expression into account. Experimental research on creativity is useful precisely for this reason. Experimental methods utilize various controls to reduce complexity to a manageable level* (**Runco & Sakamoto, 1999: 62**)

The experimental method works on the basis that a complex phenomenon can be broken down into its component parts, each part understood, then reassembled and thereby, the whole understood. This method legitimises the kinds of laboratory experiments described by Lehrer, such as Mark Jung-Beeman's work on insight (**Lehrer, 2012: 8-19**). Jung-Beeman et al., actually mention the noun 'creativity' just once – in the introduction when they say that insight occurs in 'various forms of practical, artistic, and scientific creativity' and the adjective once when they say that 'Performance on insight problems is associated with creative thinking…' (**Jung-Beeman et al., 2004: 0500**).

This 'argument by association' is typical in the creativity literature and is a very common feature in Lehrer's book, in which he cuts back and forth between the experimental work on insight and his narrative about Bob Dylan rediscovering his mojo, arguing that Dylan's 'uncontrollable rush of a creative insight' (**Lehrer, 2012: 19**) exemplifies the 'Aha!' moments sought in Jung-Beeman et al.'s study. It is not just the association implied through contiguity in the book which creates this sense of unity, but also the adjective 'creative' which is used to modify or augment 'insight' in the quote above. In addition, we learn from Jung-Beeman et al. that the anterior superior temporal gyrus in the right hemisphere of the brain is 'the most likely area to contribute to this component of insight problem solving' (**2004: 0501**) and, consequently, Lehrer reports confidently that 'During those first frantic minutes of writing, [Dylan's] right hemisphere found a way to make something new out of this incongruous list of influences' (**Lehrer, 2012: 21**). But this is not to say that Lehrer is alone in creating myths; Jung-Beeman et al. use the story of Archimedes to provide a model for the kind of insight that is sought in their experimental work and, although it is referred to as a 'legend' (**0500**) it is the notion of the 'Eureka!' moment which underpins the work and the article. As the article progresses, the legendary status of the Archimedes story recedes until by the end it is discussed as if it were historical fact:

> *In the two millennia since Archimedes shouted "Eureka!", it has seemed common knowledge that people sometimes solve problems – whether great scientific questions or trivial puzzles – by a seemingly distinct mechanism called insight* (**Jung-Beeman et al., 2004: 0507**).

Curiously no other specific examples of the 'Eureka!' moment are adduced (despite the 'two millennia' of opportunity), so Archimedes is offered as the ideal subject to represent the subjective experience of insight, just as for Jonah Lehrer Bob Dylan is the ideal subject to exemplify his breakthrough when writing 'Like a Rolling Stone' (**Lehrer, 2012: 19-24**). This work on insight, which is connected tangentially to creativity, reveals some of the associative rhetoric at work. We can also see a process of reification at work, that is, an attempt to make the invisible and intangible into something concrete. The experiment is an attempt to identify, in the brain, particular 'events' and to see if they 'are as sudden as the subjective experience (**Jung-Beeman et al., 2004: 0506**) and, because the subjective experience of 'sudden insight' has been rhetorically linked with creativity, it is possible for Lehrer to argue that 'a flicker of electricity inside the head' (**2012: 19**) can be precisely located.

The Seductions of Correlation, or: How science makes sense of art

Scientific experiments into creativity tend to be characterised in following way: a 'phenomenon' (say, musical improvisation) is identified and its essential ('creative') nature is assumed to be evident, which then justifies an investigation into its cause. What often follows is a rhetorical shift from identifying correlation to generating aetiological theory – in other words, an activity which is categorised as 'creative' is correlated with neurological, psychological, sociological events, and causes are inferred.

But the 'creative' activity observed is the result of an act of interpretation - its nature is inferred because there is already a culturally acquired investment in what creativity is supposed to be. In the well-known case of Tommy McHugh, for example, a builder who suffered a subarachnoid haemorrhage and subsequently became obsessed with producing sculptures and paintings the researchers infer that this kind of production represents 'artistic creativity':

> *He drew hundreds of sketches, mainly of faces, all of them asymmetric. This was followed by large-scale drawings on the walls of his house sometimes covering whole rooms. He claims the brain injury has left him obsessed with making art and he now spends most of his day painting and sculpting* (**Lythgoe et al., 2005: 397**)

When these researchers looked at Tommy McHugh, they saw a man making up poems, crafting clay sculptures and painting, all of which were assumed to be markers of creativity. But they could equally have been markers of compulsive behaviour. Here, then, the products of the compulsive production have been judged as more significant than the compulsion itself. And, perhaps unsurprisingly for neuroscientists, the perceived breakthrough here is believed to be the insight into a specific brain mechanism of creativity:

> *The emergence of artistic skills following subarachnoid haemorrhage may represent another platform into the mechanisms of artistic creativity and an unrecognized attribute of this type of brain injury* (**Lythgoe et al., 2005: 398**)

Discursively, this work contributes to a pathological model of creativity which is persuasive because it opens up the possibility of 'prescription' as a result of 'diagnosis', in other words, if the causes can be diagnosed then it might be possible to create the conditions for the non-pathological to 'be creative' (a kind of 'reverse cure'). But there is a tension here, and at its heart is the question of agency; if one is compelled to 'be creative' then what is the status of that process? When Noël Carroll (**1999**), for example,

employs a philosophical approach to defining the work of art, the intention of the artist to create an aesthetic experience is always present in some form. Similarly, Anthony Storr's psychoanalytically grounded exploration of creative drive and motive resists the idea that '…the artist is a man who can only achieve satisfaction for his instinctual drives in phantasy…' (**Storr, 1972: 17**). This seems to be at the root of Lehrer's fetishisation of 'science' as opposed to any particular model of brain, body or context; he flirts with pathology, only to reveal possible ways of 'hacking' oneself in order to be creative. There are obvious, similar attractions to computational paradigms for the brain (see, for example, **Boden, 2014**).

Lehrer discusses a range of cases of frontotemporal dementia – a disease of the prefrontal cortex (and, incidentally, the primary point of comparison for Mark Lythgoe and his colleagues in the case of Tommy McHugh):

> *These patients are suddenly overcome with the desire to paint and draw and sculpt. They lose interest in everything else. Then, after they have a few precious years of ecstatic productivity, the disease that inspired their art destroys their brains* (**Lehrer, 2012: 106**).

Again, the output here is unproblematically categorised as 'art', and by implication 'creative', because it includes painting, drawing and sculpture. And from this pathological context he presents us with a 'hack' – a way of 'silencing temporarily' (as opposed to destroying) the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex via repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation (rTMS). This 'hack' is presented in the work of Allan Snyder whose paper cited here is titled 'Savant-like skills exposed in normal people by suppressing the left fronto-temporal lobe' (**Snyder et al., 2003**). The paper uses the word 'creativity' only once, in the keywords, although Lehrer (presumably quoting an interview rather than the paper) tells us that Snyder refers to TMS (Lehrer omits the 'r') as a "creativity amplifying machine", and refers to the "creativity treatment" that he administers to his subjects (**Lehrer, 2012: 109**). There is a speculative model of the brain underpinning this research – that of the 'modular brain', which comprises distinct areas with discrete functions. The modular brain is a seductive idea because it provides a way of breaking down complex behaviours into more manageable ones, and when activity in a particular area of the brain correlates with particular human activity it excites scientists with the promise of causality.

Snyder et al. begin with the phenomenon of 'the astonishing skills of savants' and speculate that they are 'latent in everyone'. The focus on drawing skills is significant in this experiment, as it elides 'artistic skills' with 'savant-like skills', and the tensions between wholly cultural assessments of artistic products and the scientific method emerge in this statement:

> *In order to ensure objectivity, a committee first inspected all of the drawings (arranged in random order) to judge them for the "best" art. This did not lead to any consensus…however, a subsequent committee was asked to judge whether drawings… within any series showed a demonstrable change of scheme or convention. This led unambiguously to the sets we present here. Ratings by raters who are blind to the order of the drawings is a standard method of psychological evaluation* (**Snyder et al., 2003: 151**).

The rhetoric of assertion is evident here – the need to persuade us of objectivity, of standard methods, of the validity of judgements based on randomised elements and of the expertise of an anonymous 'committee'. For Lehrer, this scientific method is proof positive that by suppressing the left fronto-temporal lobe one can release one's inner artist:

> *Before subjects are treated with TMS, most of their drawings are crude stick figures that don't look very much like anything. However, after people receive their "creativity treatment", their drawings are often transformed; the figures are suddenly filled with artistic flourishes.* (**Lehrer, 2012: 109**).

Through a rhetorical sleight of hand in Snyder et al. 'creativity' emerges from 'artistry', which in turn emerges from 'savantism'. And the 'modular brain' also comes into focus as a legitimate, uncontested paradigm, despite evidence that it is a site of debate; see for example, Patricia Churchland who argues that '…any neuronal business of any significant complexity is underpinned by spatially distributed networks, and not just incidentally, but essentially' (**Churchland, 2015: 286**), and Matthew Cobb who talks about '…the mistaken impression that our brains are composed of anatomically distinct modules' (**Cobb, 2020**). Just as Lehrer fetishises science, there are scientists who fetishise the brain, which is not to say that the brain is insignificant – as Raymond Tallis says: "Chop my head off and my IQ descends" (**Parry, 2011**) – but that the quest for a specific location for 'creativity' is always a narrative freighted with particular assumptions, tools and desires.

Stories from the (Creative) City

The second half of Lehrer's book is sociological rather than neuroscientific. One might assume that the methodological and epistemological contradictions between such diverse studies might be problematic, but 'creativity' is an amorphous concept and incredibly absorbent. Lehrer's strategy is consistent – to assert that he is adducing scientific evidence of 'how creativity works'. When describing research into urban innovation he focuses on the character of Geoffrey West who 'likes to compare himself

to Kepler, Galileo, and Newton, since he's also a theoretical physicist in search of fundamental laws' and '…he wanted his advice to be wholly empirical, rooted in the strictness of facts. West was tired of urban theory – he wanted to invent urban science' (**Lehrer, 2012: 184-185**). It is ironic that West dismisses modern urban theory as 'storytelling' without 'rigour' given the ways in which Lehrer constructs him as the hero of this particular story (West's co-authors don't get a mention, apart from the first author of the cited paper, Luis Bettencourt – 'another physicist who had given up on physics') and the ways in which the scientific process is described. Interestingly, as with some of the other papers discussed here, Bettencourt et al. only mention 'creativity' once:

> *We believe that the further extension and quantification of urban scaling relations will provide a unique window into the spontaneous social organization and dynamics that underlie much of human creativity, prosperity, and resource demands on the environment* (**Bettencourt et al., 2007: 7306**).

Perhaps realising that 'creativity', the noun, is a potential hostage to fortune, the emphasis is on the factors underlying creativity; rhetorically this adjectival hedging is not an uncommon strategy. Another feature is the use of the proxy 'innovation', a word which is less problematic, and often allied with creativity. For Lehrer, the implied revelations are sufficient for him to use the research to provide insights into 'the most creative cities'. The obvious seduction of this work for Lehrer is the scientific method – cities are rendered as data, patterns are discerned and represented graphically, and outputs such as 'wealth and knowledge creation' are measured statistically (knowledge creation in the form of new patents, that is). He is particularly enthusiastic about a physics metaphor, which somehow becomes a literal explanation for how cities generate new ideas:

> *They compare urban residents to particles with velocity bouncing off one another and careening in unexpected directions. The most creative cities are simply the ones with the most collisions* (**Lehrer, 2012: 190**).

It is this evocation of the scientific discourse which creates the illusion of unity between work on urban growth and the earlier chapters on 'creativity centres' in the brain. In addition, the poetry of cities creating 'sparks' and 'collisions' suggests that the brain and the city might be more than metaphorically related, and that in some respects they operate in the same way.

And what this masks, of course, is the accommodation of a neoliberal mobilisation of the idea of 'creativity' – something popularised by Richard Florida (not mentioned by Lehrer, perhaps because the work lacks the

necessary 'scientific heft') along with his concept of a 'creative class'. This is built upon (perhaps paradoxically) a notion of romantic individualism and 'people's intrinsic motivations' (**Florida, 2002: 101**), despite his entreaty in the final chapter for the creative class to:

> *Evolve from an amorphous group of self-directed, albeit high-achieving, individuals into a more cohesive, more responsible group* (**Florida, 2002: 316**).

The promise of wealth and knowledge creation, along with urban regeneration has led to an uncritical embrace of the 'creative class' and Florida's book, as Oli Mould points out '…is used to justify continued inward investment and gentrification, as long as it looks creative' (**Mould, 2018: 24**).

What creativity looks like, in this context, probably conforms to something like the UK Department of Culture Media and Sport's mapping document for the creative industries, which includes: advertising; architecture; art and antiques markets; crafts; design; designer fashion; film and video; interactive leisure software; music; performing arts; publishing; software and computer services; and television and radio (**DCMS, 2001**). As an arbitrary category – a container for a range of economic activities more or less engaged in the production of cultural artefacts – this might work, but as the foreword, written by then Culture Secretary, Chris Smith, makes clear, there is a morality, perhaps even a spirit being mobilised here:

> *Our creative industries […] are a real success story, and a key element in today's knowledge economy. All of this is, of course, founded on original creativity – the lifeblood of these industries… I want all young people to have the opportunity to express and channel their creativity through a wide range of activities, including for some a career in the creative industries… I want all businesses to think creatively, to realise creativity is not an add-on but an essential ingredient for success.* (**DCMS, 2001**).

Creativity, here then, is more than an expedient means of categorising a range of industries – these industries, supposedly, capture some kind of essence of this quality (a pro-social quality which provides opportunity, enrichment and profit). This is why a later report by the British Council revealed how some workers in these industries cavilled at the inclusion of others – they believed that some industries were genuinely creative, whereas others were merely present by association with something more noble:

> *The presence of the antiques trade on the DCMS list has also been challenged, on the grounds that there is no fresh act of creation involved, merely the retail of pre-existing ones* (**British Council, 2010: 18**).

What Jonah Lehrer does in Imagine is not very different from what creativity research, science and policy like this inevitably does: it elides differences between a range of internal and external activities; it seeks an essence; it uses assertion; it creates felicitous associations upon which are built more robust assertions; it attempts to reify the intangible and make visible the invisible; it infers the existence of creativity from associated phenomena; it produces 'creativity' through rhetorical and discursive means, which include the poetic invocations of spirit and self-determination as well as the moves of power constituted by authoritative citation and the construction of subjects.

Let's consider, finally, how all this nonsense might be comforting.

The Consolations of Creativity: Suspending one's disbelief

The creativity literature is a vast sprawling field which encompasses many disciplines and, as in Lehrer's book, the epistemological and methodological contradictions are somehow subordinated to the promise of insight, self-actualisation and economic growth.

Some recent work, however, offers a necessary critical intervention. Angela McRobbie, for example, adopts a Foucaultian stance and argues that creativity has become something '…which has the potential to be turned into a set of capacities. The resulting assemblage of 'talent' can subsequently be unrolled in the labour market or 'talent-led economy''. She develops the notion of the 'creativity dispositif' which 'comprises various instrument, guides, manuals, devices, toolkits, mentoring schemes, reports, TV programmes and other forms of entertainment' and which constitute a form of 'governmentality (**McRobbie, 2016: 22**). McRobbie uses this notion of governmentality to explain how young people might embrace precarity and construct themselves as neoliberal subjects – to become active agents in their own exploitation.

Similarly, Oli Mould argues that 'creativity has become a straitjacket, a character trait that fuels the further imposition of that very same [individualistic] narrative. Sure, everyone is creative, but only those who have 'made it' (those with the privilege) have the luxury of profiting from that creativity' (**Mould, 2018: 159**).

Andreas Reckwitz, like McRobbie, in Foulcaultian mode, carries out detailed genealogical work in order to present the historical cultural 'invention' of creativity. He suggests, though, that 'we should not make a

blanket declaration of war on the aesthetic and the regimes of novelty and audience, because we would then run the risk of moral fundamentalism, anti-modern conservatism, or the idyll of the private self', and advocates, instead, 'strategies for the self-containment of the aesthetic and of the regimes of novelty and the audience' (**Reckwitz, 2017: 235**).

Whereas Mould ends with a battle cry, to reclaim 'creativity' as a radical, revolutionary act, Reckwitz's response is more modest – a withdrawal rather than a charge – but both ask us to reject the cant.

Perhaps a third way is detached indulgence – a suspension of disbelief. In Gareth Tunley's film The Ghoul (**2016**) the psychotherapist Morland played by Geoff McGivern encourages his troubled patient to make his depression tangible:

> *A lot of what I do is trying to distract you, rather like a stage magician. Only the rabbit I'm trying to pull from the hat is the solution to your depression…when a magician raises a demon or an angel it may only be real in his head, but if it's real to him it may as well be real, full stop. If he makes it into something tangible then he can deal with what it represents. It's the process that matters* (**The Ghoul, 2016**).

This is not so much a leap of faith as a willingness to be duped – an awareness that there will be some benefits from allowing the fantasy to exist. And creativity is a pleasurable fantasy, as Mould points out, parodying Richard Florida's thesis: "we are all creative; we just need to 'unleash' that creativity on the world (**Mould, 2018: 25**).

In a recent episode of BBC Radio 4's arts programme Front Row, the presenter John Wilson asks his guest, George the Poet:

> *We're hearing a lot at the moment about this lockdown stimulating creativity and people tapping into skills that possibly they'd forgotten about, or never even tried before. How has it affected you? Have you found yourself writing more at home? What effect has it had on your own personal creativity?*

George the poet replies:

> *A message to anyone out there that feels pressure to be suddenly amazing: a lot of what you are going to deliver is already within you, and sometimes it's the case of you just being still, being in the moment, just accepting the situation and then allowing the creativity to flow* (**Front Row, 2020**).

There is a hydraulic metaphor at work here – the figure of creativity as a liquid force within the body, which needs to be 'tapped' or released in order to flow. It is the metaphor favoured by creativity theorist Mihaly

Csikszentmihalyi (**1996**) which conjures up a semi-conscious state of losing oneself in an activity. It recalls the 'lifeblood' metaphor which, incidentally, is one of the BBC's stated values: "Creativity is the lifeblood of our organisation" (**BBC 2020**). And it is a particularly seductive metaphor at a time when people's freedoms are restricted, and the notion of human exceptionalism is undermined. To believe that self-expression is an index of something which makes us more than merely potential hosts for a virus is appealing, even if we have few illusions about the quality of that self-expression.

This link between human exceptionalism and creativity is made explicit in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel Never Let Me Go (**2005**) in which we meet a group of friends at boarding school. We learn that creativity is valued highly and that the students are urged to paint, draw and sculpt, but we aren't sure what's at stake in this. We hear that 'There'd been no real change in Tommy's work – his reputation for 'creativity' was as low as ever' (22) but that one of the teachers had 'known a lot of students…who'd for a long time found it very difficult to be creative: painting, drawing, poetry, none of it going right for years. Then one day they'd turned a corner and blossomed' (27). It's not until later that we learn that the students are clones, reared for organ donation, and that their creativity is nurtured by the benevolent school as proof of their humanity; as one of the teachers says: 'We took away your art because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we did it to prove you had souls at all (255). There is a germ of something recognisable in this grotesque dystopian fantasy; sensitivity, soulfulness, spirituality, authenticity, humanity, are all terms which circulate around notions of creativity. As George the Poet implies, one's essential, inner self is revealed through the 'flow' of creativity.

Jonah Lehrer's Imagine: How Creativity Works may be tainted by the inclusion of some made-up Bob Dylan quotes, but even if they were genuine the book would be no more or less authoritative; it tells us stories about research which is already founded on and which perpetuates myths about 'creativity', so seeking a distinction between that which is 'true' and that which is 'false' seems like a rather quaint and artificial binary. One reviewer, perhaps with a sense of this, argued for the book's rehabilitation, regardless of the author's sins, because, he said, 'it worked for me' (**Clark, 2012**).

The book does not do a disservice to the 'science of creativity', because the bulk of the creativity literature is already smoke and mirrors. The concept of creativity is constituted through the activation of particular tropes which make sense of, and mobilise, a whole range of disparate, real activities and processes. Some of these activities and processes are

internal and cognitive, some are external and practical, but in a range of very different contexts - scientific, pedagogic, spiritual and artistic for example – they are all nominated as 'creative', and as a result of this nominalisation these processes and activities become meaningful, valuable, connected and useful or applicable.

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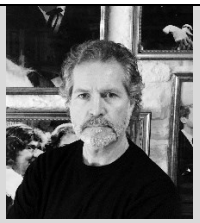

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To cite this article:

Readman, M. 2020. The comforting nonsense of creativity. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 8(1), 40-56. Available at: https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v8i1.651.

Figures of Thought in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* and Riad Sattouf's *The Arab of the Future*

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Peer review: This article has been subject to a double-blind peer review process

Abstract

This article takes Deleuze and Guattari's ideas on art's inventive function as a point of departure to analyse two graphic narratives that undermine ideas about truthfulness: Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis *and Riad Sattouf's* The Arab of the Future*. It is argued that these allegedly autobiographical memoirs undermine genre conventions to create an implied readership who co-witnesses Satrapi's and Sattouf's experiences of oppression, racism, and war during their respective childhoods. It is shown how Satrapi and Sattouf undermine the autobiographical pact through graphic narrative's 'figures of thought', a term introduced to capture the formal, thematic, and narrative possibilities of comics and graphic literature to make readers come into contact with unforeseen visions—and to possibly think anew. Specific attention is paid to the narrative voice, which in Satrapi's and Sattouf's works often goes beyond the personal perspective to account for collective experiences, as well as to the use of colour and line work that add critical layers to the stories told. In line with Deleuze and Guattari's arguments, the poetic, which is the productive function of art, is shown to go beyond questions of truthfulness and falseness, allowing for new ways of thinking and for the creation of new worlds.*

Keywords: truthfulness and falseness; the autobiographical pact; comic philosophy; the possibilities of art to invoke thought; fabulation

In *What is Philosophy?* (**Deleuze et al., 1994**), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari examine the critical possibilities of thought inherent in philosophy, science and art. While philosophy creates concepts and science creates functions, art creates affects and sensations. These affects and sensations are not conventional feelings. Nor does art depict either preconceived perceptions or memories. Human experience is not depicted in art but is instead subjected to complex processes that lead to transformations. For Deleuze and Guattari (**1994**), works of art have productive possibilities since they can entice recipients, through the creation of new worlds, to think otherwise. Works of art can add new, neglected, or forgotten narratives to historical consciousness and future imaginations, and possibly give rise to a vision in which social, political, individual problems are framed differently. This means that works of art, through their creative possibilities, complicate the contested line between truthful and false narratives. Creations, fabulations, fictions, inventions—they all can add something to the remembered past, the experienced present and the envisioned future; they can produce new perceptions and sensations, and forge new relationships to the world. And while artworks can be used to falsify historical events, to spread hurtful ideologies, and to distort memories, these misuses do not delimit the arts' capacity. Especially when works of art are labelled and self-reflexively announce themselves as fictional, when they do not claim to be truthful representations, then they open up possibilities that extend beyond truthfulness and falseness (**Wiese, 2014**).

In this article, I want to demonstrate fiction's productiveness through an analysis of two graphic narratives that share many stylistic and thematic characteristics and yet are fundamentally different: Marianne Satrapi's two-volume comic-book *Persepolis* (**2003, 2004**) and Riad Sattouf's four volumes of *The Arab of the Future* (**2015, 2016, 2018, 2019**). Both graphic narratives are at least ostensibly autobiographical; they depict childhoods and thus create a certain horizon of expectation for readers. As Phillipe Lejeune has pointed out in *Le pacte autobiographique* (**1975**), readers of autobiographies assume that the author has the same identity as the narrative voice and/or the narrated character. Furthermore, autobiographies are imbued with a certain claim to truthfulness. As self-narratives, the autobiography is also closely related to the novel of development and education—the Bildungsroman. As we shall see, *Persepolis* and *The Arab of the Future* complicate the autobiographical pact by deceiving ideas about the self through emphasis, exaggeration and fabulation. As narratives that bear witness to transnational migration and mobility, both comics also challenge national self-constructions as everyday myths. Since this unmasking takes place visually, I will use the term 'figures of thought' to refer to Deleuze and Guattari's ideas about the

visionary power of artistic expressions. Nevertheless, 'figures of thought' is not an adopted term, but rather a conceptual intervention on my part, which relates to several discussions simultaneously. On the one hand, this concerns Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of art, whose 'conceptual personae'—'agents of enunciation' that 'produce movement by thinking' (**1994: 64–5**)—I would like to expand with the 'figures of thought' term. On the other hand, this article is also intended to provide a conceptual contribution to the reading of comics and graphic literature. Since the latter often deals with figures—stylistic figures as well as fictitious figures in graphic texts created from strokes, lines, colour or contrast—the term 'figures of thought' allows me to link formal, stylistic, thematic devices and thought with each other effortlessly. By focussing on the conjunction of visual and narrative elements, I will look at 'a distinct narratological configuration' offered by graphic literature (**Groensteen, 2013: 81**). Comic philosophy—that is what I am getting at. What percepts and affects do those 'figures of thought' evoke that are embedded in graphic fiction? And what possibilities for thinking does the specific mediality of comics open up? To demonstrate which narrative and stylistic choices evoke 'figures of thought', I will first outline how *Persepolis*, as well as *The Arab of the Future*, undermine the autobiographical pact—a reading contract which invites readers to see author, narrator, and protagonist as being identical. In the case of *Persepolis* as well as *The Arab of the Future*, even academic critics have made an autobiographical pact when analysing those graphic novels (**cf. Chute, 2008; Friedman, 2013; Gilmore, 2011; Whitlock, 2007**). Then, I will show how both graphic narratives appeal by way of affect to their audience through formal and narrative choices like line work, colour, and narrative perspective. It should be stressed that these stylistic and narrative devices are medium-specific for graphic literature that is defined as a 'specific conjunction of visual and verbal text' (**Whitlock, 2006: 966**). Oral or written literature can only express the respective equivalents—through style, description, point of view—linguistically. The former has, differently to graphic literature, no access to icon or indexical representation unless it uses visual registers.

Riad Sattouf's four volumes of *The Arab of the Future* tell the story of Riad, born in 1978, a blond, sensitive, irresistibly cute child, who at the age of two leaves France with his parents to go first to Libya and then to the Syrian homeland of his father Abdel-Razak. Riad's father, Abdel-Razak, received his doctorate in history at the Sorbonne when he met Riad's mother, Clémentine. Abdel-Razak is more like a caricature than a character. He is characterised above all by his inability to assess situations realistically and therefore makes one wrong decision after another. These misjudgements, in turn, are what drive the story forward, for it is usually Riad, his mother Clémentine and his brother Yahya who have to deal with

the consequences of these errors and wrong estimations. Abdel-Razak, for example, believes in the absolute cohesion of the family, even though he is cheated of his family inheritance by his own brother and little Riad is often called a Jew and beaten up by his cousins. Last but not least, Abdel-Razak has an unshakeable belief that the Arab of the future would be educated in school to a superior, pan-Arab position towards the West. The entire second volume of *The Arab of the Future* conveys this belief as an illusion: the primary school teacher hits children on the hands with a stick, leaves them standing in the corner, calls them traitors to the people and humiliates them. Girls do not go to school, nor do those children who have to herd goats. Every day, the children have to scream their lungs out to shout the national anthem and learn to read the Koran, even though they do not understand classical Arabic. In short: the Arab of the future goes to school, as Abdel-Razak vociferously announces at the end of the first volume, but the education that the children there receive consists of experiencing violence.

Persepolis tells the experience of living under a violent political regime. In the first volume *The Story of a Childhood*, the main character Marjane grows up in a sheltered, liberal home in Tehran, which supports the 1979 revolt against the Shah. But soon after the Shah's fall, Revolutionary Guards and thus a theocratic regime took over power in Iran. It is shown how friends of the family, who had just come out of prison as political prisoners, had to leave the country covertly. Others are again captured or murdered. With the invasion of Iraq, a war begins in which children are sent to the front. In schools, girls have to wear veils and sewn balaclavas. When the rebellious Marjane starts an argument with a teacher, her parents decide to send her to a French grammar school in Vienna. The transition from childhood to adolescence is initiated by the incision of exile, the significance of which is explored in the second volume of *Persepolis*. Here the experience of homelessness is central. Already the first taxi ride from the airport into Vienna, when Marjane is picked up by exiled friends of the family, is a clash of worlds. While Marjane is happy not to be subjected to any more repression at school, Shirin, who is the same age, raves about flavoured lipsticks and earmuffs. For Marjane, these banalities in times of war mean a betrayal that she too will soon have to commit. Her everyday life is too far removed from the events in Iran. In order to make friends and feel like she belongs, she smokes joints and cuts her hair punk-style. She lies to her parents on the phone. Whenever there are pictures from Iran on television, she changes the program. She gets to know gays and anarchists and her first boyfriend. Faced with recurring racism and her first separation, she puts on a headscarf and shrugs off Europe: '... I needed so badly to go home' (**Satrapi, 2004: 91**).

Riad Sattouf's *The Arab of the Future* has received numerous awards, has been translated into sixteen languages and was highly praised in the press.[i] In *Le Monde*, Frédéric Potet described *The Arab of the Future* as a worthy parent of current developments in autobiographical comics (**2015**), and critics in the *Guardian*, the *New York Times* and *The New Yorker* also sang the praises (**cf. Cooke, 2016, Senior, 2016; Shatz, 2015**). *Persepolis* is now one of the award-winning classics of comic art that has been discussed in essays and monographs by many well-known scholars of visuality and textuality (**cf. Chute, 2008; Friedman, 2013; Gilmore, 2011; Whitlock, 2007**).[ii] Even in these interpretations, Persepolis is consistently referred to as an autobiography. This might be the case because, as narratologists like Cohn (**1990**) and Genette (**1990**) have pointed out, there is no intrinsic distinction between a fictional or an actual autobiography. This means that, when narrator, character, and author of a written work share the same name, readers, including academic scholars, will expect to read an autobiography (**see Löschnigg, 2019: 104**). Is *Persepolis*, however, telling a personal life-story? In a *Spiegel Online* interview with Sonja Ernst, Satrapi stated that what she describes in *Persepolis* is 'merely a situation.' She is primarily 'a person who has witnessed revolution and war' (**Ernst, 2005; my translation**). Strictly speaking, *Persepolis* is much more than just a personal life-story; it is the testimony of a perception in which one's own history can always stand in for others because it demonstrates social conditions. Satrapi is therefore for graphic narratives what Brecht was for theatre when he invented its epic form (**Brecht et al., 1978**): a transformer of formal possibilities, a translator into social space. In fact, she has never claimed biography as a genre for Persepolis but instead described her work in the *Spiegel* interview as 'auto-fiction': a definition that connects well with Deleuze and Guattari's ideas on fiction's potential.

Returning to the inventive possibilities of fictional accounts, and to graphic narratives' 'figures of thought' outlined at the beginning, it is important to deconstruct the 'autobiographical pact' made by the critics, and to expand the—extremely positive—critiques of Satrapi and Sattouf. This concerns above all arguments which, in my opinion, allow the extraordinary explosive power of graphic novels and their artistic expressiveness to flow into the figure of the child narrator, so that the biting criticism of both authors on autocratic and totalitarian regimes is not perceived in its entirety. Satrapi and Sattouf undermine genre-expectations and use the visual repertoire of graphic narratives—their 'figures of thought'—to call forth readers able to oppose the intolerable situation of nationalist exclusions and hostilities.

The 'autobiographical pact' was introduced into narratology by Phillipe Lejeune (**1975**) and refers to the equation of authors with the narrative voice and/or the narrated character. If, for example, author Riad Sattouf

introduces a narrative voice into *The Arab of the Future* that tells the story of character Riad Sattouf, then all three narrative positions are understood to be identical. Likewise, the author Marjane Satrapi is seen as an older version of the child and teenager Marjane. For according to the autobiographical pact, the story runs chronologically from a younger first-person narrator located in the distant past to an adult first-person narrator belonging to a more recent past or possibly, as author, even to the present. However, it is precisely this chronology that complicates the assumption that the narrated story of a biography belongs to the past. Although Riad Sattouf, for example, always emphasises in interviews that he tried to take the limited perspective of a child in *The Arab of the Future* (**cf. Chrisafis, 2016; Dueben, 2016; Mirakhor, 2017**), a commentator makes her/himself felt here and there within the story when s/he corrects the child's statements and thus makes her/himself felt as an extra-diegetic, omniscient narrator. It is this commenting narrator who directs the narrative since s/he makes it accessible to us. *The Arab of the Future* is, therefore, from the narrative perspective taken, the Arab of the present, perhaps even already the Arab of the past. For it makes a difference whether a narrative is told progressively or retrospectively; what was in the future for little Riad, narrated figure, in 1984, can be in the past for the adult Riad, either narrator or author. In *Persepolis*, too, a commenting narrator has the same effect on the graphic novel's temporalization, since s/he is chronologically closer to the present and possibly also reflects it. The fact that both narratives, *Persepolis* and *The Arab of the Future*, also refer to historical dates and events, wherefore they can be integrated into a historical course of time, is a further argument for the difficulty of viewing them as pure biographies: these references point to the interweaving of social events and a life's journey.

Sattouf's reference to the caricature also undermines the autobiographical pact, because he refers back to the non-biographical knowledge of the readers. His characters have cucumber noses, revolver hair, eggheads and handle ears so that his portrayal can immediately be deciphered as caricature-like. He thereby makes use of the medium-specificity of graphic literature that normally 'performs identity visually in the third person' by creating an avatar, an 'I-con' (**Chaney, 2011: 23; quoted in Klepper, 2019: 442**). This creates an 'ironic authentication' (**Hatfield, 2005: 124; quoted in Klepper, 2019: 442**) that can ironize either speaker or situation through excess, cliché or inadequacy. Sattouf's way of showing and telling exaggerates orientalist clichés to the point of intolerability, thereby destroying claims to their veracity, purportedly told from the perspective of a 'native informant' (**Shatz, 2003**). Furthermore, the history of form can also shape the expectations of readers: they have read Hergé's *Adventures of Tintin* (1929–1976), for example, and are familiar with its ligne claire,

the clear and simple lines that largely dispense with embellishments and hatching, which, according to Scott McCloud (**1994**), through its sparing design, offer readers easily accessible identification. *Persepolis* is another example of the ligne claire that Satrapi uses to enable readers to identify smoothly with the characters narrated. For as we will see, Satrapi is particularly concerned with involving readers in a collective that is opposed to the rule of the mullahs. The two graphic narratives challenge national self-constructions as everyday myths. This establishes a readerly collective that is fabulated, as I will show through an analysis of colour and perspective.

Sattouf's colour scheme is insofar striking in that he tells the story of Riad and his family in monochrome, only changing colour when switching to a different national setting. Episodes in France take place against a blue background, episodes in Libya against a yellow one and episodes in Syria against a background of watered-down pink, with colour splashes of red or green. These colours evoke affects that can be associated with the figures of thought conjured up in the title. It must be considered that colours in themselves have no meaning: they only acquire their meaning in interaction with other signifiers (**see Baetens, 2011; Baetens et al., 2015; Wiese, 2016**). As Michel Pastoureau argues, 'colours foremost are conventions, tags, social codes. Their primary function is to distinguish, to classify, to associate, to oppose, to hierarchise' (**Pastoureau, 2010: 69**). This means that colour is entangled in power and politics, and helps to build up symbolic functions (**see Andersen et al., 2015**). In *The Arab of the Future*, colour signals a change of location across national borders. Through the use of colour, national settings are identified as fundamentally different, although their difference is marked by a-significant colours, whose meaning cannot be clearly defined. For who could clearly say what it means that Syria is penetratingly coloured pink and Libya yellow?

Precisely because colour only acquires its meaning in the play with other signifiers, its use in Sattouf's comic books illustrates a misguided logic. For in *The Arab of the Future* it is not the national settings that are different from each other, but the colours that are assigned to them. In this way, Sattouf exposes the secondary meaning that is inherent in many cultural signs. They do not only acquire their meaning in play with other linguistic signs but are, according to Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (**Barthes, 1957**), embedded in a meta-language, which gives the signifiers a mythical meaning beyond their linguistic connotation. This process of signification also applies to nation-states. They differ from one another not only through their linguistic signifiers like 'France' or 'Libya' but also through the everyday myth of national differences, which creates a feeling of solidarity and an 'imagined community' (**Anderson, 2016**) between people

of one nation and a sense of separation from people of other nations. Sattouf takes up this everyday myth and translates it one-to-one into a colour scheme: one nation corresponding to one colour without nuances. Sattouf's colouring demonstrates how absurd and rigid the idea of a clear national distinctiveness is and reveals it as a myth.

It is this visual straitjacket used in Sattouf's comic books that creates an affect which is better apprehended via the concept of 'figures of thought.' As said at the beginning, Deleuze and Guattari believe that artists create affects, precepts, and sensations that cannot be reconciled with familiar feelings, perceptions, or preconceived ideas. For them, it is the task of artists to slit open the umbrella that constitutes the known and protective firmament of our lives and to frame their visions of an underlying reality anew, thus creating new sensations. Sattouf's artistic achievement, however, consists in doing exactly the opposite of what distinguishes artists in Deleuze and Guattari's description: namely that they destroy the known firmament (**1994: 203–04**). Instead of cutting open the protective umbrella, which is inscribed with conventions and opinions and shields from a view of the celestial chaos, Sattouf dips the umbrella in monochrome national colours and then paints it with a host of caricatures. Within the narrative, these caricatures may well prove to be anti-Semitic, intolerant, corrupt, contemptuous of women and narrow-minded. Indeed, Sattouf's depiction of Libya and Syria has been charged for being racist, xenophobic, and Islamophobic, as well as for reinforcing stereotypes about Arab people (**cf. Bonnefoy, 2015**). Yet from my perspective, Sattouf gives these stereotypical depictions of the Arab world a surprising turn by intensifying them to the point of intolerability. If we follow this interpretation, it is precisely the constant repetition of stereotypes that characterises them as untenable and unbearably rigid. Sattouf thus illustrates the intolerability of stereotypes by repeating the self-same ideas repeatedly, thereby further intensifying their effect. And it is precisely this approach that affects us as readers and that enables us to think.

With the latter description, I refer to a distinction between affection and affect made by Baruch Spinoza (**2011: 93–323, 1677**). For Spinoza, affection is the impact one body exerts through an action on another body and refers to the impacted state of the body (**2011: 242**). Affect, however, refers to the lived, experienced passage of one state of the body to another state of it (**2011: 134**). Since it is the transition from one state to another that causes an affect, different states can be differentiated from each other, analysed, and evaluated conclusively. In relation to Sattouf, this would mean that his monochrome choice of colours and the caricaturing manner of representation have a direct effect on the body of the reader, who perceives this repetitive representation as unambiguous

and one-sided. This possibly triggers the affect of resistance and the desire for a way out of the one-sidedness and monotony. I argue that this affect is more than a sensation. It is a reaction to a change of sensations which can be perceived and as a perception analysed. According to the Spinozist analysis of Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd (**2002**), it is precisely this analysis of a changed perception, made possible by affect, that leads to an expansion of our knowledge and to a more appropriate experience of the world, since it does not take a quasi-origin—the effect of one body on another, its affection—as the object of reflection, but can include the effect of an affection in its analysis. With regard to Sattouf, this would mean that the eternal recurrence of the same stereotype provides an opportunity to firstly analyse the evoked feelings, and then to ethically look for alternatives—for the characters, for the representations of nations. It is precisely this enabling force of affects that has prompted me to introduce 'figures of thought'. Namely, that the potential of affects is not determined by their novelty alone, which is highlighted in Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisations in *What is Philosophy* (**1994**), but by the analytical possibilities they open up and make available to thought and thinking through stylistic and narrative figures within the graphic text.

Persepolis, on the other hand, as critical readings have repeatedly emphasised, is concerned precisely with unmasking hardened ideas about 'the Orient' by pointing out visually and narratively the permeability of cultural and national borders (**cf. Naghibi et al., 2005; Madella et al., 2013**). An example of this would be the globally circulating pop culture, which finds its way into Marjane's life with pop music, branded clothes and star cuts, all of which she passionately desires (**Satrapi, 2003: 126–29**). Furthermore, Satrapi integrates readers into global resistance narratives. Marx, Lenin, Che Guevara, as well as Rezai and Ashraf find their way into visual and narrative layers (**Ibid: 12**). Satrapi skilfully transforms these icons of resistance into Marjane's childhood idols and thus anchors them in the narrative. Sometimes Satrapi also revisits stories of resistance and persecution before the eyes of the reader, which detach themselves from a character's perspective and are independent fragments of a superordinate, metafictional story.

One evening, for example, Marjane overhears her parents talking about the burning of the Rex cinema by henchmen of the Shah's regime: a fire that claimed 400 lives (**Satrapi, 2003: 14**). On the following picture page, this fire is depicted full-page as an inferno and is backed up by a journalistic source, the BBC (**Ibid: 15**). This image cannot originate from Marjane's perception, as she was not present at the cinema: it is, therefore, an example of a metafictional, omniscient narrative perspective into which the reader is suddenly integrated. Similarly, prison doors and mass graves open for the reader's perception elsewhere, and demonstrations (**p. 76**),

battle graves (**pp. 102–03**), torture chambers (**p. 51**), executions (**p. 125**) are shown which Marjane never visited. Marjane serves, in other words, as a springboard for telling stories of persecution and resistance, but without a perpetrator's perspective, taking sides for the persecuted, oppressed and damned of this earth.

Deleuze wrote in *Cinema 2. The Time Image* (**2001**) that fabulation is 'not an impersonal myth, but neither is it a personal fiction' (**Ibid: 222**).[iii] Rather, fabulation has the function of expressing within a dominant language 'an impossibility of living under domination' (**p. 223**). For him, this impossibility is expressed when fictional figures cross the border that would 'separate his private business from politics' (**p. 222**). Only then could collective statements be produced that are directly political, even if they cannot revolutionise ruling power relations, but only express their intolerability. If Sattouf, through his use of colour, has made it clear that clear-cut attributions are unbearable due to their rigidity, Satrapi's omniscient and partisan perspective allows her to perceive domination as untenable.

In summary, it can be concluded that neither Satrapi's nor Sattouf's biographical characters serve to tell a life story. Satrapi and Sattouf's narrative perspectives, their historical references and the stylistic devices used undermine the autobiographical pact and relate directly to the present of the implied reader. Sattouf's little Riad and Satrapi's Marjane are fictional, artificial, and artistic figures that, as a caricature or as a point of identification, relate social ideas or want to evoke them in a future-oriented way. The two graphic narratives challenge national self-constructions as everyday myths so as to construct and to appeal to readers. This is achieved by their 'figures of thought' which are colour and perspective, next to their line-work and a deconstruction of genre. Their life-stories bring experiences of migration and mobility closer, emphasise the unbearable and question the course of the world. Satrapi and Sattouf record myths and create figures of thought which, while not cracking the familiar firmament, nevertheless show that 'under the different disks that are sun and moon' (**Brecht, 1981: 1129–130; my translation**) it is up to us creatures to confront the unbearable.

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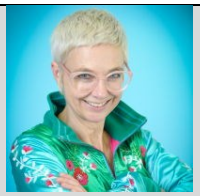

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To cite this article:

Wiese, D., 2020. Figures of Thought in Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis and Riad Sattouf's The Arab of the Future. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 8(1), 57-70. Available at: https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v8i1.642.

Endnotes

[i] Among the prizes that *The Arab of the Future* received are the Grand Prix RTL de la bande dessinée in 2014, the Fauve d'or du Festival d'Angoulême in 2015, and the Los Angeles Book Prize in 2015.

[ii] For instance, *Persepolis 1* was named Comic of the Year at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2004, and Satrapi, like Sattouf, won for *Persepolis 1* and *2* prizes at the Festival d'Angoulême.

[iii] In *Cinema 2. The Time Image*, the English translators Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta have chosen to translate 'fabulation' as 'story-telling'. However, since Deleuze refers to a concept by Bergson (see Bogue 2010), I have chosen to use a terminology more in line with the original version.

Re-performing Design: Using dramaturgy to uncover graphic designers' perceptions of stakeholders

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Funding: See page 83

Peer review: This article has been subject to a double-blind peer review process

Abstract

Graphic design, as a specific research discipline, has been largely underrepresented in academia, with the literature suggesting this is partially due to difficulties in researching its professional practitioners. Acknowledging such hurdles, this article discusses an experimental study that used dramaturgy as a defamiliarising method for uncovering professional graphic designers' perceptions of stakeholders. The study collected graphic designer narratives from online forums as well as dramaturgically informed interviews with professional practitioners. The graphic designers' narratives were converted into a script and used to motivate a troupe of trained actors, who re-performed the narratives during a series of performance workshops. The article argues that this use of trained actors as 'proxy designers' created a refractive form of defamiliarisation, allowing previously obfuscated narratives about graphic designers' perceptions of stakeholders to emerge. Presenting the study as a prototype to inform future research into graphic design and other elusive creative practices, the article also cautions that the amount of defamiliarisation used must be evaluated against the desired outcomes.

Keywords: Graphic Design; Dramaturgy; Performance; Defamiliarisation; Ethnodrama; Design Research

Introduction

In the design studio of a creative agency at which I once worked, the lead designer, Mike (not his real name), was notoriously reticent about discussing his work. Questions about his working process, where his ideas came from or indeed anything relating to his professional practice were generally dismissed with an indecipherable mutter or sneer. The rare exception was when he formally presented designs to stakeholders or clients. During these presentations he became animated and eloquent. Design concepts were flamboyantly presented and responses to questions elaborated upon creatively. It was a performative exposition that would temporarily earn him the nickname 'The Professor'.

Mike's transformation is used here to symbolise a performative aspect of the graphic design profession that this article explores and that, alongside the literature, informs my use of dramaturgy as a research method. Following Goffman (**1973**), Mangham (**2005**) and others that have viewed everyday organisational interaction through a performative lens (**Boje et al., 2003**), my dramaturgical framing of graphic design opens up a productive metaphorical perspective (**Oswick et al., 2001; Cornelissen, 2004**) for researching the resistant professional practitioners of the under-researched discipline of graphic design.

The profession of graphic design has been described as uniquely problematic to research due to its haphazard history (**Frascara, 1988; Julier & Narotzky, 1998**), ill-defined pedagogy (**Laurel, 2003; Poynor, 2011a: b; Heller, 2015; Dorland, 2016; Jacobs, 2017**) and lacking research discourse (**Laurel, 2003; Corazzo et al., 2019**). Moreover, graphic design is an inherently interdisciplinary and evolving discourse (**Davis, 2012; Harland, 2015**) with a complex evolution reflected in its professional (**Dziobczenski & Person, 2017**) and educative (**Littlejohn, 2017**) formats. Expressing the challenges of investigating the profession, some have highlighted graphic designs' reliance on intangible elements such as intuition (**Bennett, 2006; Taffe, 2017**). Indeed, Heller refers to it as 'somewhere between science and superstition (or fact and anecdote)', with its dissemination requiring a 'variety of tools and sources' (**2019: par. 3**). This interdisciplinarity can render the practice fractured (**Ambrose et al., 2020**) and difficult to examine.

Graphic design's interdisciplinarity has caused it to become an increasingly imprecise professional practice. Originally located within printed mediums (**Meggs & Purvis, 2012**), graphic design now inhabits web design, interactive design, social media and emerging virtual and augmented reality paradigms (**Hastreiter, 2017**). This results in 'graphic design' being an imperfect and often misunderstood term (**van der Waarde, 2020**) within professional practice. Within academia, Frascara (**2004**) prefers

'communication design', as do many university departments, with some using both terms (**RMIT, 2020**). The two terms are often used interchangeably (**Barnard, 2005**), while at other times they are amalgamated within multiple aligned categories (**Corazzo et al. 2019**). 'Graphic design' is used in this article because it remains the dominant industry term and enables consistency.

Pedagogically, graphic design is often treated as a supplementary topic or a predominantly aesthetic practice (**Heller, 2015; Jacobs, 2017; Walker, 2017**), subsumed within the wider visual arts (**Poynor, 2011a: b: Triggs, 2011**). As a result, graphic design's professional practice ambiguity (**Kotamraju, 2002; Baer, 2010**) and, critically, the apparent reticence and overt resistance to research of its practitioners (**Banks et al., 2002; Brumberger, 2007; Dorland, 2017**) present methodological challenges for this nascent academic discourse, which is still largely embedded in industry (**Cabianca, 2016; Davis, 2016**). As alluded to in the opening vignette, graphic designers have been described as overtly obstructive (**Banks et al., 2002; Roberts et al., 2015**) and even flippant and sarcastic towards research. As Dorland explains, directly asking graphic designers to describe what they do is unlikely to be productive, with their responses 'accompanied almost always with an eye roll' (**2017: 232**).

Adding to these difficulties, Phillips (**2015**) argues that although experts at communicating on behalf of others, graphic designers are remarkably inept at doing so on their own behalf. This paradoxical lack of self-reflectivity suggests graphic designers are especially resistant to what Erickson describes as 'what is happening?' questions (**1985: 121**), resulting in a lack of engagement with contradictions or obfuscated subtexts inherent in graphic designers' own practice. Graphic designers therefore tend to portray their practice with professionalised 'common answers' (**Dorland, 2017**), rendering research into the underlying motivations of these practitioners difficult.

In an attempt to mitigate these obstacles presented by graphic design practitioners, this study prototyped an experimental methodology, combining dramaturgy with the creative practice of defamiliarisation. Narratives were initially drawn from online graphic design discussion forums, before being contrasted for depth and nuance alongside a series of face-to-face interviews with professional graphic designers. The outcomes were combined to create a 'script', called a Performative Design Brief, which was used to motivate a troupe of trained actors. During a series of performance workshops, the actors re-enacted these narratives as short performances. The workshops were used as investigative theatrical sites in which I observed the re-performance of the graphic designer narratives indirectly, by 'proxy', with the actors functioning as

third party designers. Thus, the workshop format functioned as a defamiliarising prism. Re-performing the designers' narratives within this 'newly strange' (**Sadowska & Laffy, 2018**) context of dramaturgy allowed reflection on themes and outcomes that might not normatively have emerged.

Although informed by similar dramaturgic methods such as those undertaken by Howard et al. (**2002**) and Hope (**2011**), this study contributes two distinct methodological approaches. Firstly, by intentionally removing the subjects/informants of the research (the graphic designers) from the performances, the performance workshops act as a metaphorical prism, rendering the process refractive rather than merely reflective. Secondly, the performance workshops experimented with incrementally extending the amount of defamiliarisation used, allowing a critical evaluation of the methods used and their limits, with reference to Shklovsky's (**1917**) original use of defamiliarisation as a creative practice, as well as contemporary implementations, such as Dunne and Raby's 'slight strangeness' (**2001: 75**). In adopting a novel, even speculative (**Wilkie et al., 2017**) approach, the study is thus positioned as an experimental pedagogical prototype for research into professional practices which, like graphic design, can appear obfuscated or elusive.

This article emerged from a wider, multi-stage study of graphic design practitioners' professional relationships with stakeholders, which uncovered a series of often obfuscated themes embedded within practitioners' perceptions of their professional practice (**Meron, 2019**). This article deals predominantly with the novel dramaturgic methodology used within the study. Taking advantage of the interdisciplinary intersection of dramaturgy, ethnography and design research, this article informs graphic design and also offers a contribution to creative disciplines and professions, whose practices can appear obfuscated or elusive to study.

Defamiliarisation, Dramaturgy and Design

Defamiliarisation, or *making strange*, emerged as a creative practice methodology within Russian formalism at the beginning of the 20th century (**Bell et al., 2005; Forrest, 2007; Lvov, 2015**). It has been loosely adopted by a number of creative practices in the visual arts (**Gooding, 1991; Samberger, 2004**), photography (**Watney 1982**) and within research methods such as ethnography (**Eisner, 2003**) and experimental theatre (**Meisiek and Barry, 2007; Eriksson, 2011; Radosavljević, 2013**). At its most basic level, to defamiliarise something is to simulate the experiencing of it for the first time (Lemon and Reis, 1965). With the rise of research-based design discourse, defamiliarisation has increasingly been used in wider design research and design thinking practices such as human–

computer interaction (**Bell et al., 2005**) and experimental design (**Seago & Dunne, 1999**). This study adopts defamiliarisation as a central practice, and by incrementally increasing the amount of defamiliarisation used in the performance workshops, draws directly from the original creative practice definition of the term by Shklovsky in 1914. Shklovsky described the manifestation of strangeness (literally estrangement) as the result of the use of numerous defamiliarising creative methods or devices (**Lemon & Reis, 1965; Sher, 1990; Berlina, 2015**).

The dramaturgic format takes advantage of the theatrical nature of graphic design practice. As Gillieson and Garneau (**2018**) point out, graphic design is a distinctively communicative design practice, involving visual presentation and communication with an audience. The performative approach also channels metaphorical comparisons of designers with other theatrical roles, such as dramaturges (**Dorst, 2009; Meany & Clark, 2012**). The study is also informed by the established use of dramaturgy in the wider field of design, which uses such techniques as personas and scenarios (**Eriksson et al., 2013**), testing (**Penin & Tonkinwise, 2009**), project communication (**Blomquist & Arvola, 2002**), interactive devices (**Iacucci & Kuutti, 2002**), awareness-raising among designers about the needs of specific user groups (**Newell et al., 2011**) and visualising future societal design needs (**Blythe & Dearden, 2009**).

In addition to drawing on dramaturgy's long tradition within organisational discourse (**Burke, 1945; Goffman, 1973; Oswick et al., 2001; Nissley et al., 2004; Mangham, 2005**), the study is informed by its pedagogical use (**Heathcote, 1984; Edmiston, 2003**). Indeed, the use of dramaturgy outside of formal theatre as both a generative tool and research method has ranged from the interventionist methods of Boal's (**2000**) Forum theatre and the Epic Theatre of Brecht (**1964**), to the educational practices of process drama (**O'Neill, 1995; Schneider & Jackson, 2000**) as experimental research tools (**Edmiston, 2003**), through to performance ethnography (**Mienczakowski, 2001; Saldaña, 2011**).

Luckhurst (**2008**) describes practitioners of documentary theatre as repurposing the original sources of their performances. Similarly, themes from the designer interviews and online sources provided motivation for the performance workshops. As such, this study builds on practices such as Smith's dramatisation of interviews (**2005**) and Hope's performative interviews (**2011**) as tools for critically mirroring original sources (**Denzin 2001; Meisiek & Barry 2007**). Like the reproduction of everyday theatre as metaphoric performances of professional organisations (**Boje et al., 2003**), the study is a research continuum between roles portrayed by actors and those played out in everyday life (**Schechner, 2002; Carlson, 2011**); its value resting not in performative skill, but in the distance created between

the original and the simulacral re-performance (**Carlson, 2004**). As Madison (**2011**) suggests, performance communicates subjects' worlds in their own words, exposing aspects of that world that are not otherwise visible in everyday practice.

The Dramaturgic Interview Method

The online forum and interview narratives often confirmed similar broad outlooks among the graphic designers. However, it was soon apparent that the discussions emerging from the online graphic design forums tended towards stereotypical and binary narratives. Thus, a further stage of data gathering, in the form of interviews, was required.

To intervene in the tendency for graphic designers to provide assumed answers (**Lawson, 2004; Dorland, 2017**), the interview methodology integrated theatrical tropes such as personas and scenarios to function as defamiliarising devices (**Shklovsky, 1965; Sher, 1990**) and metaphorical probes (**Gaver et al., 1999; 2004**). For example, one question asked designers to visualise themselves in the army, which engaged with the designers' notions of hierarchy. Their responses are discussed below in Case Study 2. These methods allowed interviewees to discuss their professional practices outside the familiar frames of reference (**Dunne and Raby, 2001; Celikoglu et al., 2017**) of everyday graphic designer–stakeholder interaction. These dramaturgically informed interviews enabled a degree of nuance to emerge, which allowed stereotypical views of stakeholders and the graphic design process to be unpacked. A lexicon of theatrical tropes, personas and scenarios that emerged from the interviews were then integrated into the Performative Design Brief.

The Performance Workshops

The performance workshops used improvised, theatre director-supervised exercises. These included simple two-person dialogues, physical theatre, word games and fully-fledged scenario-based improvisations. On completion of some exercises, actors were brought together to discuss the performances. What follows is a discussion of two case studies from the performance workshops. They were selected for discussion as they engage with two key narratives that emerged from the online forum discussions and the designer interviews: graphic designers' perceptions of stakeholders as gatekeepers, as well as notions of status and hierarchy, identified as design capital.

Case Study 1: Re-performing metaphor

Negative perceptions of stakeholder communication were common among the graphic designer interviewees and in the online forums. The designers often perceived that stakeholders assumptively adopted a managerial role, something the designers believed to be an unnecessary intermediary or gatekeeping presence that negatively impacted the communication process of graphic design. This concurs with Jacobs' (**2017**) suggestions that stakeholders often default to a managerial position within the design process and can impact the creativity of graphic designers. This is exacerbated when stakeholders lack industry experience of working with designers (**Banks et al., 2002; Holzmann & Golan, 2016**). One performance workshop scenario engaged with these issues using a popular theatrical exercise known as 'Telephone'.

The exercise involved the theatre director privately 'briefing' the first actor, in a row of five, with a key phrase. The actors would pass this phrase down the line by whispering it into their neighbour's ear, with the final actor, in this example named Khyal, revealing their interpretation of the inevitably garbled message. The exercise also re-performed the graphic designers' perceptions of facing unrealistic deadlines. For example, the theatre director introduced simulated timescale pressures, such as requiring the actors to repeat the same exercise within increasingly shorter timescales, resulting in increased miscommunication.

Discussing his performance, Khyal noticed that the exercise had created a hierarchical framework, like a line of command in an email chain, for him and his fellow actors. Khyal elaborated that in a 'real-life' situation (in his theatrical role as 'designer'), faced with such a series of conflicting messages, he would have little choice but to query his immediate stakeholder in the communication chain. When asked to reflect upon the impact of this for his workday, Khyal replied that it would have been a waste of a day and that he would have wanted a better design brief from the beginning. This response is reminiscent of comments from an online forum poster (**HotButton, 2016**), who suggested that graphic designers ought to 'put the burden on them [stakeholders]' to provide a comprehensive design brief. For Khyal, that request would ideally have been aimed at the stakeholder who had initiated the chain of communication, cutting out the 'gatekeeper'.

This opinion was shared by some of the graphic design interviewees. Marcus (**2013**), a self-employed designer, had described several scenarios in which designers had been at the receiving end of a disorganised briefing process: 'You often have this after a concept or research has already been done. Then, at the end, you suddenly get handed the real text and images.' Similarly, Patricia (**2013**), who designs books, brochures and logos and

Bruce (**2013**), a self-employed designer, respectively suggested in their interviews that stakeholders 'don't really understand the process' and 'just try and tell you what you want to hear'. This results in stakeholder frustration at the extended length of the project, a situation that Marcus believed would be avoided by involving designers earlier and ensuring direct access to the client, rather than communicating through a chain of stakeholders. Koslow et al. (**2003**) suggest this frustration reflects graphic designers being reduced to reactive implementers of a brief, or mere technicians of design (**Schön, 1983**), with little capital for questioning or influencing the process.

The final misunderstood and distorted message is a predictable outcome of the Telephone exercise. Its importance lies in demonstrating how the graphic designers' perceptions of stakeholder communication were carried through to the performance workshops, in which they were dramatised by a third party (the actors as proxy designers) and defamiliarised. The use of this exercise as a dramaturgic metaphoric device for the designers' perceptions of their organisational process (**Cornelissen, 2004**) repurposes one frame of reference within an alternate setting, enabling it to be viewed from a newly unfamiliar perspective (**Schön, 1993; Sadowska & Laffy, 2018**). That defamiliarised dramaturgic context enabled researcher identification and engagement with themes around graphic designers' perceptions of stakeholders, such as the gatekeeping trope, that might otherwise not have emerged or been overtly visible.

Case Study 2: Re-performing perceptions of design capital

Graphic designers' professional capital has increasingly been challenged by the interrelated influences of evolving technology (**Helfand, 2002; Drucker & McVarish, 2013**), growing ambiguity of designers' roles (**Girard and Stark, 2002**) and the rise of in-house design departments (**Geraedts et al., 2012; Silk & Stiglin, 2016**). The resultant graphic designer battles for gravitas (**Fishel 2008**) and perceptions around the insecurity of their professional value (**Lunenfeld 2004; Barnes et al. 2009**) are explored in this second case study.

In this scenario, actors were assigned a collective design task of 'rebranding a law enforcement authority'. To minimise the tendency for the actors to draw on external perceptions about graphic design practice, the theatre director briefed each actor using motivations drawn from persona descriptions in the Performative Design Brief, rather than overt job titles. For example, one actor was briefed that 'health and safety' was a part of their role, while another's role included 'time management'. Other persona characteristics included the kinds of clothes that each character might wear, their hobbies and other motivations.

During the scenario, it was noticeable that Katherine, the actor who appeared to have taken on the 'designer' role, increasingly performed a reactive, even subservient role. In contrast, the actors playing stakeholders assumed managerial roles. For example, shortly into the improvisation Katherine sat down and pretended to be quietly working, while the other actors remained standing, discussing high-end strategic issues or dealing with crises. Katherine generally only spoke when spoken to, or when confirming instructions with questions such as 'so, do you just want me to…?'.

During the debriefing session, Katherine confirmed that her role was focused on reactive practical solutions, such as 'listening to the important things … and trying to do the work'. Conversely, the other actors claimed they had focused on conceptual and organisational issues. This was also evident in the other actors' use of marketing jargon, such as 'looking at current perceptions and changing them' and 'cutting through the chatter and getting at the main crux for pulling the idea together'. As with Case Study 1, the designers' perceived managerialism of stakeholders was carried through to the performances. Additionally, Katherine's depiction of deference is reminiscent of interviewee narratives, in which designers appeared to undermine their own design capital.

For example, to interrogate the topic of design capital, an interview question was posed asking the graphic designers to visualise their position within an army. The question intentionally invoked exaggerated and stereotypical hierarchical dramaturgic metaphors; a conceptual method that has been repurposed within usability and interactive design (**Mattelmäki & Keinonen, 2001; Blythe & Wright, 2006**). While the designers positioned themselves as central to the design process, most also qualified their importance by downgrading their authority. For example, Gary (**2013**), a designer who works with artists and curators, described his army role as being 'Not too high up. On the field – slightly in charge'. Similarly, Bruce (**2013**) positioned himself 'Off to the side. Really important, but no authority'. Most interviewees selected similarly supporting roles in this metaphorical army. Patricia (**2013**) chose 'nurse' and Maureen (**2013**), a senior designer and manager, chose 'cook', with only one interviewee selecting an actual 'military' role. These responses indicate a tacit affirmation from these designers of their limited design capital, a recurring theme that appears to have been replicated by proxy during the performance workshops.

The performances support LaRossa's (**2017**) suggestions that professional insecurity among graphic designers results from the practice's lack of historical and educational focus. Moreover, the case studies support Phillips' (**2015**) assertion that graphic designers lack organisational

assertiveness and confidence in negotiation and bring to mind Fishel's (**2002**) descriptions of graphic designers' constant battles for organisational legitimacy. The outcomes of this study also prompt wider questions about whether the lack of direction in formal graphic design pedagogy (**Poynor, 2011b; Heller, 2015; Dorland, 2016; Jacobs, 2017; Corazzo et al., 2019**), alongside the practice's haphazard historical professional development (**Frascara, 1988; Julier & Narotzky, 1998**), contributes to graphic designers' perceptions of a lack of design capital.

Critique: Limitations and opportunities

The use of trained actors as proxy designers in the performance workshops intentionally removed the designer interviewees as direct informants and subjects of the study, enabling insight into obfuscated aspects of professional design practice. This indirect approach renders the method a refractive one, moving beyond the looking glass of organisational drama (**Meisiek & Barry, 2007**) and playful design devices, probes and interventions, which are intended primarily as provocative artefacts of inspiration (**Loi, 2007; Sanders & Stappers, 2014**), to channel the original concept of Shklovsky's (**1917**) estrangement (**Lemon & Reis, 1965; Bell et al., 2005; Forrest, 2007**). In doing so, the study generatively used theatre's default tendency to dramatise the subject at hand (**McKee, 1997**) in order to metaphorically re-perform the graphic designers' perceptions of stakeholders, thus defamiliarising them. Denzin (**2001**) describes this operation as drama transcending itself to become research by enabling a critique of the portrayed topics.

The performance workshops experimented with degrees of defamiliarisation. For example, in the Telephone exercise, the word 'design' was not even mentioned. At other times, such as Case Study 2, the actors were briefed about stakeholder personas and scenarios, but only using generalised themes and tropes from the designer interviews. In later exercises, more overt motivations such as job titles were provided to the actors. These approaches move beyond Dunne and Raby's 'slight strangeness' (**2001: 75**), extending from Howard et al.'s (**2002**) use of real designers for moderation of actors' performances as 'surrogate users' (**2002: 178**) and Sophie-Hope's use of practitioners as performers (**2011**).

The choice to exclude the graphic designer interviewees from the performance workshops appears to be validated by the workshop outcomes. Their intervention in the workshops would have diluted the defamiliarisation, potentially deflecting the actors' motivations from those of the Performative Design Brief. Indeed, Howard et al.'s study suggests that the involvement of designers may have impacted performances, with actors in their study indicating awareness and even empathy with the designers, at one stage commenting: 'It's unusual when you are up there

(on stage), and I'm feeling sorry for you guys (the designers) having to watch this, and you're writing things down!' (**2002: 178**).

However, isolation from the original graphic designer sources of motivation possibly led to confusion for the actors, increasing potential for their digression from the topic. For example, during a debriefing session, Khyal expressed frustration about his seemingly intractable negotiative position when dealing with a specific design issue arising from the Telephone exercise, stating: 'I'm not a designer'. Only acting as a designer, his professional insight was limited by the director's brief. Had there been active involvement of actual graphic designers during the workshops, they could have addressed Kyahl's queries or tutored him to produce a more 'realistic' performance. A similar issue was identified during Howard et al.'s (**2002**) study: because their actors were not asked to accurately portray designers (the normative expectation of an actor), they were also sometimes puzzled about what was expected of them. However, in my study, when overt designer motivations were provided in the brief, the actors noticeably drew more heavily from preconceived notions of graphic design practice, rather than relying on the brief; thus bypassing the intended research method. These observations suggest that the degree of defamiliarisation ought to be monitored when using actors as third-party designers.

Intentionally motivated solely by the perceptions of graphic designers (via the Performative Design Brief), the roles performed by the actors were inevitably subjective. This was seen in Case Study 2, with Katherine's portrayal of the designer as a harassed, yet stoic, and even heroic character. Meanwhile, the stakeholders were portrayed as disorganised, concerned with peripheral issues and out of touch. While this indicates the success of the method in conveying the designers' perceptions of stakeholders into performative narratives and tropes through third-party re-performances, it also affirms the designer-centric approach. Therefore, the study does not claim to validate or judge those perceptions, or the cultural, professional, or organisational environments from which they emerge. Its function is to prototype a new method for observing graphic designers' perceptions of one aspect of those environments.

This article argues for the use of dramaturgically informed defamiliarisation as a critical method for engagement with graphic design professional practice. Dramaturgically informed defamiliarisation can facilitate a critical examination of this practice, many of whose practitioners have been described as appearing to willfully obscure their practice (**Cross, 2011**), avoid engagement with (**Dorland, 2017**) and be resistant to research (**Roberts et al., 2015**) and lack ability to adequately communicate their own professional needs (**Phillips, 2015**).

The outcomes of this study contribute to a fledgling research discourse devoted specifically to graphic design. This study adds weight to the 'growing pains' (**Davis 2016: 130**) of building scholarly bridges between professional graphic design practice and academic discourse, by informing the experimental nature of graphic design (**Ross, 2018**) within an interdisciplinary research framework. Within this experimental and interdisciplinary framework, graphic design is presented as distinct yet versatile enough to respond to the transitory, historical, organisational, professional and academic paradigms within which the practice and its practitioners operate.

Conclusion

Graphic design is at an acute stage in its ongoing evolution, as it faces challenges from automation and the democratisation of design, leading to changing workplace practices. This brings new challenges to graphic designers' relationships with stakeholders and to their levels of design capital within the creative process. Leveraging and adapting methods from other design disciplines, dramaturgy and ethnography this study contributes to a growing understanding of the under-researched professional practice (and informs the nascent academic discipline) of graphic design.

The performative workshops experimented with a refractive method, using dramaturgy to defamiliarise graphic designers' perceptions of stakeholders. Analysing the workshops against graphic designer narratives indicated the method's potential for portraying the design process through the prism of a third-party re-performed environment, thereby intervening in the habitual communication patterns of graphic designers. As discussed within this article, the use of dedicated actors as proxy designers comprised a precarious balance of methodological requirements. Thus, the study demonstrated the need to evaluate the difficult balance of research priorities alongside objectives, when adapting its dramaturgic method for future studies. In summary, the study is presented as a pedagogical prototype to inform research into graphic design and other disciplines with everyday practices that appear obfuscated or elusive to research.

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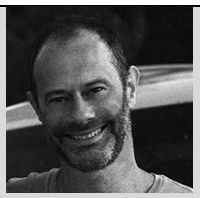

Acknowledgment

I acknowledge the support I have received for this research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

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To cite this article:

Meron, Y. , 2020. Re-performing Design: Using dramaturgy to uncover graphic designers' perceptions of stakeholders. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 8(1), 71-90. Available at: https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v8i1.701