

Semester Report

Year 1, Term 1: Organisation and Disorganisation

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Overview

Most of the work I've done for this PhD project across this 12-week term (28th Sept - 22nd Dec) can be broken down into:

- Practice. This includes linoprint demons, wreath-making, embroidery, university protesting, and planning a course next year with Siobhan Davies Studios.
- Reading. This includes reading books and articles relevant to the PhD, but also participating in reading groups; and attending (digital) talks and lectures.
- Writing. This is split between writing in preparation for presentations, publication, or my open-letters to supervisors; or ongoing note-taking as part of my 'Zettlekasten' method.
- Discursive partners. Some of these are formally recognized and required by the university, like my monthly PhD supervision meetings; but others I organise for myself, like weekly meetings with my therapist, and regular meetings with other practice-as-research PhD students in the Dance department.
- Training. This includes induction days at the university and with the funding-body Techne, and seminars at the university. I am required to undertake a minimum amount of training sessions (around 30) across the PhD process.
- Peers. This includes a broad range of activities through which I engage with, center and aim to support the work of my artistic peers: proof-reading work, informal dramaturgy, visiting studios, documentation, etc. I understand this to be necessary and nourishing for my own practice; but I also think it is important for me to use the resourced position of the PhD scholarship to put energy into a wider arts ecology from which my practice has developed and continues to draw from.

Partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all this activity took place from my home studio in Nottingham, UK.

My title for this term, 'organisation and disorganisation' comes from my ambivalence of participating in, challenging, or co-founding organisational structures, which became a central 'theme' across lots

of the above activities. This was most directly addressed through the student protesting work at the University, and artistic practice around linoprint demons and wreath-making as different models of dis/organisation.

Output

The most significant 'outputs' of this term are:

- Demons. Rohanne and I produced and sold 30 postal pack editions of our linoprint 'demons'. 100% of these sales went to Trussell Trust or other local food banks, for which we estimate raising between £300-450.
- PhD seminar presentation. I gave a 10 minute presentation on the 2nd December to peers and colleagues in the Dance department introducing my research questions in relation to past and current practice.
- Conference presentation. I have a 10 minute presentation at the 'On Transversality' digital conference (9th-11th December). Speaking within the session 'Undoing the Institution', I spoke from my experience of collectivising in protest of the University of Roehampton, and used my wreathing practice as a metaphor to evoke decentered forms of institutionality.
- Letters to supervisors. I wrote two open letters to supervisors which detailed some of my shifts in reading and practice; and my attention toward the institutional frames of artistic research. I might write a third over the break.
- Various other forms of practice, including linoprints, embroidery works, and wreaths. Some of which were sent out by post to friends / colleagues / commissioners; others are still in my studio without any clarity around 'where' they might end up.

Finances

The annual stipend of this PhD is £17,285, which breaks down into £4321.25 per term.

This studentship is formally in my name, but my work is highly

collaborative. I want to ensure these funds are distributed according to who is actually doing the work. Usually when my collaborator Rohanne Udall and I work together we pay each other equal fees, but the amount of work in this situation is pretty uneven; most of the activities are solely undertaken by me, or being undertaken with people who are already remunerated / salaried.

So: I am dividing the stipend based on how much time each of us spent working. I kept close track of how I spent my time this term (see notes below). With each day divided into 3 'sessions' (morning, afternoon, evening), I undertook 161 sessions of work 'relevant' to the PhD. Of those, Rohanne also worked for 8 sessions, and we estimate she worked an extra 6 on her own time; 14 sessions total.

After expenses of £566.61 (covering books, art materials, postage and therapy), the remaining fee of £3,754.74 split by this ratio of sessions worked comes to £3,453.36 for Paul and £300.38 for Rohanne.

This sum corresponds to £21.45 per 'session' of work; £42.91 for a day of work (morning and afternoon, with evening off); and £214.55 per week (5 days of work with 2 days of weekend).

Some Notes:

1) Why evaluate?

Rather than attempt to produce any kind of 'qualitative' evaluation for this term (which I think my two presentations already achieve), I'm interested in how this document both participates in and speaks to notions of bureaucracy and transparency.

I delight in the perverse nature of this evaluation. I tend to complain about what I understand as these pointless and excessive processes of bureaucracy and evaluation I encounter with major institutions like Arts Council England and the University of Roehampton, which I believe often actually get in the way of doing the work itself. But beyond scholarly curiosity into institutional structures, I feel some need to experiment with how these play out in my PhD work itself; and not merely as ironic gesture. My annual scholarship comes from public funds. I feel it urgent to try make my work relevant and accessible to the public; I also wonder what it might mean to account for how my time, and this money, is spent.

How much work does this actually take? It takes a negligible amount of time each day to note what I have worked on. And that's partly because it's pretty broad: each day is split into 3 'sessions' (breakfast to lunch, lunch to dinner, after dinner). Some sessions are pretty uniformly committed to a single activity, or I leave them blank if they are non-work; but in some I might move between a number of different activities. So I simply lump them together under one title ('practice: demons and wreaths'); or average out the day (2 hours of writing in the morning and one hour after lunch might lead me to assign the morning as 'Writing', and lump in the other pre-lunch hour into the afternoon). All of this is done with an undefined but relatively consistent degree of precision (the word 'resolution' comes up for me here – as in, the 'resolution' of an image). This is basically determined by how much energy I am capable or interested in committing towards all this. I'm doing what is pleasurable and feels reasonable in this situation; a different context (say if I was working

as a paralegal) would require something different.

Going through the document with Rohanne probably took a couple of hours, but this was necessary in order to calculate our financial breakdown. Then it took another couple of hours to put together this document, which has been a nice little research / thinking activity in itself. It also feels like a helpful way to down tools this semester, in order to take a proper break before the new year.

It's also worth noting that it's been quite nice to have a record of how I spend my time. Without it, I don't think I'd be able to remember what I was doing a fortnight ago. I'm told often of how disorientating and isolating the PhD experience can be for many students; I think this is a nice structure to help me keep track over the next couple of years of what I've actually doing.

2) What is 'the work'?

Lots has been written about the important yet impossible distinction between 'work' and 'non-work' (rest, play, recreation, domestic labour, etc.). Was it work when I spend a morning walking, and ended up thinking through what I needed to write for a presentation? I'm more interested here in the division between what works counts as 'relevant' (or not) to the PhD.

This is a necessary distinction to make because my collaborator Rohanne and I are both working on lots of different projects all the time. Some of these projects are definitely relevant to the PhD – and so her time should be remunerated as well as mine – some are definitely not relevant to the PhD, and many are in a grey area. So we went through my records, and decided what was the PhD-work and what wasn't.

Of the 258 total sessions (mornings, afternoons, evenings) across this term, I spent:

- 161 doing PhD-relevant work,
- 35 doing non-PhD work,
- 62 not working.

Some things to note:

- Overwork. In comparison with the traditional working week of 10 sessions (5 mornings and afternoons of work; not working on evenings and weekends), I worked on average just shy of 15 sessions a week. Which isn't great. There is a culture of overwork in academia (and elsewhere) that needs to be challenged. I was more tired during and at the end of this semester than I am happy being. But the situation around the cuts at Roehampton – and the necessity to protest them – was urgent and extraordinary. I don't think I will (be able to) work as hard next semester.

- Unlikely work. Some things don't particularly feel like 'work', but I felt it important to argue for them being accounted as such. For example, my sessions with my therapist are engaged in all aspects of my life, and we don't spend much time talking about the PhD work; but it feels a totally necessary discursive and reflective process due to the very intimate, relational and ethical nature of my research. (Counting 'therapy' as 'work' has the interesting effect of my therapist's fee as 'expenses'. Which isn't a big deal for me – ultimately it comes out of my pocket – but it does effect how much the remaining proportion of the budget that Rohanne is drawing her payment from). And likewise, sending end-of-year cards to friends seems much more to do with 'personal life' than work. But most of these people are also practitioners, and I see these cards as (a) another example of my print, letter-writing and embroidery practice that is otherwise very obviously part of the PhD, and (b) essential work in maintaining and nurturing a peer-community, which I otherwise account as work.

- Things shift. I had originally taken up wreath-making in early December as a relaxing non-work activity, and left that time as 'blank'. However, within the space of a week, it became pretty clear to me that the wreaths were very relevant to my research. *I love how what initially seems as a 'distraction' from the work reveals itself to be totally useful to the work.) One solution to this kind of problem would be to simply account for everything. But this would be boring and exhausting, and would also infringe on my sense of privacy. I don't want to have to fully keep track of or report on the details of my 'non-work' time. And so, because of my reluctance to put my full life under scrutiny – and because of the unstable divisions between work, non-work and what is or isn't relevant within this context – there will always be a quality of this ongoing evaluation process that resists straightforward measurement and quantification.

- The work before the work. Some of the work this term were a continuation or culmination of a significant amount of work that had taken place before the semester started. For example; Rohanne and I each spend about 3 to 5 days working on demons; but this emerged from an unfunded 2 week residency we undertook in August. How is

that past labour remunerated? But once we pick at this thread, it all seems to unravel: almost all the activities I undertook could be said to only be possible through significant work in the past. I don't think this is just a problem for this method of remuneration, but pretty much any project-based or freelance labour, for which 'outputs' are priced that ignore the R&D work (and other kinds of labour) on which they rely. Rohanne and I made the decision to embrace the arbitrary division of time of the PhD; the stipend only pays for what happens during the PhD. And we'll do this semester-by-semester, because it seems to most neat and manageable way of dealing with that. We cannot wait for all this time to pass before we can pay ourselves the money; we have to find fair ways of payment, before everything is clear.

- Changes from one semester to the next. The above decision has an interesting knock-on effect. For example: a project that Rohanne and I are working on with Amy Lawrence has significant overlap with the questions of this PhD. It is not currently 'part' of the PhD, but I strongly suspect that next semester it will be. And so even though the work next semester might formally become remunerated through the PhD – and that this work relies on and builds from the work we undertaken this term – this past work will not be remunerated, even though it happened during the PhD. Similarly, if Rohanne and I spend a lot of time over the PhD on side-projects, and that we realise very very late in the process that these projects need to be formally submitted as part of the thesis, only the work spent on it from that point onwards would be remunerated as such.

3) Why work?

How much should I be working? What is 'enough'? There is no one managing me, or checking in on me about how I am spending my time. While I will need to produce a written thesis and body of work at the end of this PhD, there is not obvious sense of how the work I do now relates to that 'output' required at the end by the university. (This might change in later stages when it becomes clear I need to be writing X amount of words-a-day to finish a thesis). I remember something Adrian Heathfield said in a recent seminar: that practice-based PhD students regularly end up overworking and producing a quantity of research – for example, a large-scale body of work, as well as a written thesis of similar scale to 'traditional' scholarly research – that easily equates to two separate PhD projects.

This questions of 'how much' I should work carries interesting consequences about the value of this time. My studentship is a set fee of £17,285 per annum. I do not get paid more if I work more, and I do not get to apply for time off in lieu. As my calculations above suggest, there is the clear sense that the more I work, the less financially valuable my time is. If I were to have only worked mornings and afternoons Monday to Friday this term, I would have had a day-rate of about £60. Instead, my day rate was ~£43.

This seems like an abstract point: of course, this doesn't change how much money I pay myself for this work, simply how it is calculated. But it does have more tangible consequences in how collaborators are remunerated for their time. By asking Rohanne to work with me, both of our hourly rates goes down. The more Rohanne works, the more sessions she is paid for, but the less she is paid per session. In this case, it's not a big problem: Rohanne and I have a long friendship and are used to working together for little or no money. She is well-paid through her salaried job, she was not dependent on earning from her work on this this term.

But it would be a different situation for others, and at other times. Usually if I invite someone to work on a project I would make clear

before we start what they would be paid as a set fee. What does it mean to say to a collaborator that they *might* not only be paid a miserly day-rate of £60, but that it will go down the more they work? And go down further if I end up doing any 'extra' work on evenings and weekends across that semester? And how does this notion of 'fair pay' in relation to this pot of money, square with the fact that my therapist (who is being paid from the same bank account) is getting paid £40 each week for an hour's work?

I find all of this is intimate, serious, complex, unjust, and super interesting, and I can't wait to think about it more next semester.