

RESEARCH artefact

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Research in print

Visuospatial ability

This paper investigates increasing visuospatial ability in three countries. Drawing on the Flynn Effect some researchers (Greenfield, 1998; Neisser, 1997) hypothesized that visuospatial ability may be increasing. I explored rising visuospatial abilities amongst school leavers in the UK, Australia and Nigeria.

In one study Cocodia et al. (2003) found that exposure to new technology may be impacting on ability to carry out tasks that require high levels of visuospatial ability more efficiently. Results suggest that increasing visuospatial ability may be occurring due to a more visual environment and more access to multimedia.

The core component of the present research paper was to investigate whether visuospatial ability is indeed rising as it is a feature of the human intelligence framework (Halpern & LaMay, 2000; Alias, Gray, & Black, 2001). Data analysis of examination results in specific subjects indicated that visuospatial abilities are rising. It was hypothesized that visuospatial ability is rising in industrialized nations due to more access to multimedia, and cognitive manipulation task in general.

Cocodia E.A. (2015) Assessing for Rising Visuospatial Ability of School Leavers. Vol 7, No 2.

Breaking the Fourth Wall

Online reactions to the popular television show Sherlock are passionate, opinionated, and, thanks to the speed of social media, very immediate. It is no surprise then that reaction to a stunt at a recent series launch generated its own newspaper headlines. The stunt in question involved the show's lead actors, at the behest of the event's host, reading explicit fan fiction aloud to the audience. The online response was swift and outraged, mostly aimed at the host for not only failing to elicit permission from the author to use her work, but also for



Screenshot of opening sequence, Sherlock TV Series, Copyright Hartswood Films Ltd

enabling the transgression of the 'fourth wall' – a notion that suggests fan fiction is to remain a 'private' affair. Privacy in this instance does not refer to the arena of distribution or specific location of construction. It is a conceptual privacy wherein fantasy (and the fan fiction in which it is played out) is differentiated from the reality of the fiction that inspired it. Yet the online publication of most fan fiction offers it as an easily accessible source of material for distribution by fans, and it is appropriated by mainstream media as tangible 'evidence' of a celebrity's fame.

Although the public nature of fan fiction is not an unfamiliar concept, there was distinct discomfort when the stunt was deemed too public, when fantasy came close to actualization and the fourth wall was broken. Yet what exactly does the fourth wall demarcate: the line between actor and fanfic actor/character (most fan fiction inspired by visual media will incorporate the physical attributes of the actors into the work), between actor and character, or between 'official' character and fanfic character?



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New Year, New Research

Welcome to this issue of our biannual research magazine, *Artefact*, my first as Associate Dean, Academic Development and Research. Many thanks to Associate Professor John Rees for all of his previous terrific work in this role.

There is an exciting buzz in the air, and it is all related to research. If the first few 2016 School Research Committee meetings are any indication, it will be a most exciting year for research outcomes. We are potentially entering the ARC 'Game of Funding' with a Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) application, and have two colleagues on Study Leave. We have started our enthusiastic new writing group. We are welcoming some exciting new HDR research projects into the fold, and seeing some old favourites come to fruition. We have plans to build a more cohesive and supportive HDR research community in our School.

But as this issue demonstrates, there have also been some fantastic research achievements over the last six months from both staff and students.

Enjoy the issue!

Dr Christine de Matos is a Senior Lecturer in History and the Associate Dean, Academic Development and Research.

“I was with a work party near Changi collecting barbed wire to be used for fencing when the news [of surrender] came over a secret radio ... The barbed wire was then used to fence the Japanese in. They immediately became the POWs and we no longer had to work for them. It was lovely.”

Celia Lam Chapter in *Living in the Lighthouse: Dynamics of the Celebrity Experience* Edited by Kylo-Patrick R. Hart. Inter-Disciplinary.Net

Discourses of creativity

Historians of the creative idea have traditionally taken what might be called a substantialist approach to their object of study, so that creativity has been quite commonly understood as an ideal or essential reality that exists outside and beyond the cultural and historical field.

The result of this approach is that the manifold possibilities of history have been progressively reduced to a narrative about approaches to, or departures from, this fixed constant, so that the task of the historian becomes one not of theorisation, but of identifying and describing pure and unadulterated forms of the idea, or unmasking corrupt and alienated versions.

Camilla Nelson Chapter in: *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Creativity* Edited by: Rodney H Jones. Routledge, Oxford UK.

Labor under military occupation

The above recollection (top right) from a former Australian POW of the Japan's, Bill Wharton, invokes not just an image of the moment of Japan's defeat in the

Asia-Pacific War in 1945; it demonstrates the centrality of labor to the performance of power under conditions of war and military occupation.

While it has been widely acknowledged that 'labour was a central feature of colonialism', it is less recognized in the scholarly literature that labor also has an intimate relationship with military occupation. Occupation, like colonialism, cannot function without access to local labor through various levels of coercion. Labor is not just an economic relationship or structure, but a social act and practice, and it is primarily through sexual relations or work that the occupier and the occupied interact most closely with each other. Perhaps even more important is that labor is a site for the enactment of occupation power, as demonstrated in the epigram, and for its subversion.

Christine de Matos. *Labor under military occupation: allied POWs and the allied occupation of Japan*. Chapter in: *Japan as the occupier and the occupied*. Palgrave Macmillan, London UK.

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Could you tell us briefly about your PhD thesis?

My PhD was completed at the University of Sydney in the area of Film and Digital Art. The focus of my thesis was on spectatorship, specifically audience viewing experience on portable devices. The introduction of portable devices as a means of distribution preceded media content that was tailored for those platform. Media content displayed on the small screens of portable devices tended to be content originally intended for large screen or broadcast formats such as television series or films. My PhD examined consumption of large screen content on small screen devices by comparing audience engagement with the narrative in both small and large screen conditions. Findings revealed that while basic understanding was not lost on a small-screen viewing platform, a significant reduction of overall experience was noted. Significantly, audio design and sound mixing were more important factors than imagery in the navigation of narrative on small-screen devices when compared to large-screen settings.

How would you explain the broader significance of your research to an educated layperson?

Over the past 10-15 years the influence of digital technologies on our everyday lives has increased. From health and education to telecommunications, advertising and consumption, the boundary between online/offline and private/public spaces are increasingly blurred. This has implications for media production and consumption. Distribution patterns have evolved from a broadcast model to multi-platform on-demand delivery, in which audiences are permanently accessible but at the same time constantly 'disloyal' and easily distracted. Shifts in distribution platforms and audience

Celia Lam

Interview with a researcher



behaviour filter back into media production practices, such that the techniques of screen production, narrative construction and integration across mediums are considered anew. I examine the industry/text/audience dynamic in order to reveal the nuanced ways in which media production and consumption takes place in the contemporary digital and social media environment. Outcomes of my research have implications for media production, policy and marketing strategies.

What is your current research focus?

My current research is focused on the role of fans and audiences in the construction of celebrity images, and the success of media content including online, broadcast and transmedia narratives. In collaboration with a colleague from Curtin University, I am also embarking on a study focused on Australian audiences and fans, in particular the impact of digital media on Australian fans' experience of popular culture.

What is the cutting edge in your field and how does your work extend/relate to it?

In a digital media age scholarship is increasingly focused on audiences, and fans in particular. This particular subset of consumers are more likely to be content co-creators who actively engage in the participatory culture made possible by industrial and technological convergence. They support emerging media producers in the 'YouTube economy' of online vloggers, in which followers and hits can translate to financial returns. At the same time, they are the main economic force behind the success of mainstream media franchises.

While audiences and fan studies is by no means new, the degree of visibility afforded by online fan activities is a more recent occurrence. In particular, media producer, celebrity and fan use of social media platforms enables scholars to interrogate, reevaluate and articulate the nuanced and highly complex relationships between these three agents in the media economy. In doing so, the audience/fan is cast as an active, albeit unofficial and unregulated, participant whose role is at once producer and consumer, 'star' and 'follower'.

My research into the experience of fans and audiences extends the understanding of the producer/consumer relationship by offer insights into the contexts of fan activity and consumption. Of particular interest is the motivation behind fan loyalty and the impact of fan-produced works on the success of mainstream media franchises. This research not only extends the understanding of fan and audience behavior, it also rearticulates the concept of 'active audiences' from the perspective of fan and participatory culture.



Arts and Sciences undergraduate students attending academic conferences

The second semester of 2015 was both exciting and daunting for two undergraduate students – Emily Gallagher (4th year) and Sarah Bell (Honours). Emily presented her first conference paper at an undergraduate conference held at the University of Western Australia, and Sarah attended a Japanese studies conference at the University of Sydney. They both share their experiences below.

The Australasian Conference of Undergraduate Research (ACUR)

Emily Gallagher



A hundred students, multiple disciplines, one place, two days, everyone presents. The Australasian Conference of Undergraduate Research (ACUR) is a furious clash between a love for research and a brave commitment to public speaking.

Hosted by the University of Western Australia on the 29th-30th of September

2015, the two-day conference exhibited pioneering undergraduate research from esteemed universities all over Australasia. Alongside presentations in psychology, mathematics, science, law, politics, philosophy, literature, medicine, and a multitude of other disciplines, I presented a multidisciplinary research paper titled 'Mobilising the Grotesque: The Anti-war Publications of Ernst Friedrich and Frederick A. Barber'.

Inspired by the pacifist ambitions of two anti-war publishers in the 1920-30s, I sought to demonstrate the power of grotesque war photography in legitimising a victimhood identity. In addition, my analysis exposed the social and political power that a self-constructed victimhood identity could endow to its user.

With this noble cause at the forefront of my mind I disregarded the pit of nerves that consumes every young public speaker and prepared a presentation that would ask challenging, thought-provoking and confronting questions. Abandoning the traditional format of a conference presentation I embraced a speaking style based on my high school teaching experience. By asking questions, demanding audience participation, and refusing to rely upon a script, I found an engaging and intuitive platform to present my research.

Alongside the opportunity to formally share your research with international and national peers, ACUR was an opportunity to be surrounded with people who share the same passions, ambitions and academic pursuits. For those pursuing undergraduate research, set your eyes on this conference for 2016. It is an opportunity to showcase your hard work and be enriched by the hard work of others.

Sincere gratitude to The University of Notre Dame and Dr Karen McCluskey, without whom this experience would not have been possible.

Find out more about this conference: <http://www.acur.org.au/>

Emily continues to steam ahead. The paper based on her presentation at the above conference has been accepted for publication in the academic peer-reviewed journal, *Interdisciplinary Humanities*. She will also be undertaking Honours in 2016 at the Australian National University, and was awarded an academic scholarship with ANU's Burgmann College.

Wounds, Scars, and Healing: Civil Society and Post-war Pacific Basin Reconciliation

Sarah Bell

Attending your first academic conference is truly an experience, one that is equal parts humbling and encouraging for an Honours student. Over the span of the three day conference 'Wounds, Scars, and Healing: Civil Society and Postwar Pacific Basin Reconciliation' at the University of Sydney, I felt a spectrum of emotions, often at the same time or jumping between two extremes within the space of a minute. As an Honours student sitting in a Sydney University conference room filled with budding and well-established academics from all around Australia and the world, and sitting directly behind the key historian in my field, my terror was palpable. However by the end of

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came into this community and treated as an academic for the first time was a remarkable and inspirational experience, one that I will not soon forget.

To find out more about this conference: http://sydney.edu.au/arts/conference/post-war_pacific_basin_reconciliation/

Sarah is continuing her research by undertaking a Masters by Research in History at UNDA in 2016. We thus hope to hear more about her research and networking experiences!

the first day it was clear that that terror, while understandable, was fleeting and unnecessary.

The aim of the conference, and those who organised and participated in it, was to unite a diverse range of civil and international histories with the common theme of reconciliation, whether on a grassroots or institutional level. As a result, the environment fostered was one of involvement, genuine interest, and encouragement. No experience better exemplifies this than meeting two representatives of the POW Research Network Japan, both of whom freely offered their time and resources to anyone interested in their mission of reconciliation between former World War II POWs and Japan. This was a phenomenal encounter not only because my thesis was centred on the experiences of Australian army nursing POWs, and this network was involved in the reconciliation of one of these nurses, but also because it introduced me to an organisation that I would not otherwise have thought likely to exist.

This experience was very much symbolic of the conference as a whole—passionate academics and members of the community with a genuine interest in reconciliation, presenting their own experiences and topics in the pursuit of education and expansion. To be wel-



Philip Dennett, Editor

Research Artefact is published by the School of Arts & Sciences at the University of Notre Dame Sydney.

We welcome your feedback and contributions which can be sent to philip.dennett@nd.edu.au



Creating a HDR Research Culture

One of the areas that the School would like to develop is encouraging a more collaborative and nurturing research environment for all of our HDR students, from MPhil to PhD. What are some of the things you can do as a supervisor to help?

Make sure you have a copy of the supervisor's guide, which contains all the most important Guidelines and School documents required for supervision, along with some helpful flowcharts for key processes like submitting the Research Proposal;

Check the PowerPoint slides from the recent supervisor workshop, available on the M drive under Arts and Sciences/Research/Information for Supervisors (along with soft copies of many documents in the guide mentioned above);

Encourage your students to both attend and present in the School Research Seminars;

Encourage your students to attend at least one national conference during their candidature (the research funds allocated to HDR students by the RO can be used for this);

Encourage your students to write at least one article for publication;

Look out for new HDR activities in 2016, like writing bootcamp and the 3 minute thesis competition.

