

Using Phenomenology in Contemporary Arts Research and Pedagogy

Jorella Andrews, Jeffrey Say and Clare Veal

This project consisted of two interactive workshops held at Goldsmiths and LASALLE, which introduced groups of students, lecturers and researchers to phenomenologically-based research methods and, in particular, to a qualitative research methodology known as IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis). These workshops demonstrated that visual methodologies such as drawing and description are particularly effective in forging deep connections with one's source materials and their modes of self-showing. The workshops also allowed us to expand the remit of IPA to the study of images and establish the relevance of this methodology within de-colonial scholarship. The project has resulted in a number of outputs including workshops, conference papers and peer-reviewed journal papers, and the methodologies shared and developed have provided students and researchers at LASALLE and elsewhere with tools to develop new research in the context of South East Asia.

Introduction

Having worked closely with Jeffrey Say and more recently Clare Veal in my capacity as Academic Link for LASALLE's MA in Asian Art Histories, we decided to further develop our academic collaboration by adding a new, research dimension to it. We identified a topic we felt would support staff and student research (especially, but not only in the area of art history), be of pedagogical benefit to both of our institutions, and enable staff/student exchange between Goldsmiths and LASALLE.

The main project aims were (1) to develop practical, phenomenologically-based methodological resources that are not readily or comprehensively available within contemporary arts scholarship and (2) to deliver and test these resources in the form of two three-day workshops to staff and students based at LASALLE and Goldsmiths.

Of immediate concern was to examine how usefully these phenomenological resources might assist arts researchers working in the emergent fields of modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art history. At issue here is how best to critically approach Southeast Asian art practices and projects which may not yet have been extensively studied or exhibited, and whose specificities might be obscured if already-formulated and generally Eurocentric art historical models are applied. In other words, the decolonising potential of these research methodologies was highlighted.

We introduced participants to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative methodology predominantly used in the social and health sciences which uses in-depth, open-ended interviewing techniques and respect for idiosyncrasy in order to elicit, and then rigorously analyse and interpret, rich experiential data. As such, it also has a powerful decolonising effect on researchers themselves since the emergent data invariably challenges assumptions and presuppositions. We presented this interviewing technique as a useful addition to other approaches – interviewing being of particular use to arts researchers involved in fieldwork and for whom encounters with makers, curators and viewers of art are crucial.

We also sought to develop the potential of IPA further by asking whether it might also be possible to interview images and objects, and we developed and tested a range of techniques for doing this.

Process and Participants

For both the Singapore-based and the London-based events, we used an interactive workshop format that combined taught components with practical sessions in which participants applied the techniques being taught to their own current research projects. We also incorporated museum and gallery visits. As well as introducing participants to IPA as described above, we also explored the philosophical rationale for a range of phenomenologically-based descriptive techniques including listing, transcription, ekphrasis, paraphrasing, (re)enactment and mapping, and put these into practice.

Participants were interested staff and graduate students from both LASALLE (mainly but not exclusively from the MA in Asian Art Histories) and Goldsmiths (mainly from Visual Cultures and the Art department). Participants from SOAS and UCL also attended the London sessions.

Outputs and Impact

The PIF funding enabled us to develop a series of workshops in which we were able to formulate, present and receive participant feedback on the potential of phenomenologically-based research methods for arts researchers.

Arts/art history researchers and graduate students learned a range of new phenomenologically-based methodologies which they were able to apply to their own research projects. This included LASALLE MA Asian Art Histories student Tanya Michele Amador's thesis that used IPA methods to examine the reception of performance art in Southeast Asia.

We were not only able to argue but also evidence the phenomenological (Merleau-Pontean) claim that rigorous research in both emergent and already-familiar terrain must be (re)grounded in pre-conceptual and pre-critical modes of engagement with primary sources, that is, with strategic sensitivity to the self-presentation of that material on its

own terms, as far as this is possible, and by researchers relinquishing already-established personal and disciplinary presuppositions.

As indicated above, we were able to demonstrate that visual methodologies, such as drawing, and often overlooked descriptive methodologies (including listing, transcription, ekphrasis, paraphrasing, (re)enactment and mapping) are particularly effective in forging deep connections with one's source materials and their modes of self-showing. We were able to demonstrate that these phenomenological techniques serve contemporary projects aimed at decolonising scholarship within and without academia.

With respect to our engagements with IPA, we were able successfully to extend its remit by demonstrating how its techniques can be applied to the study of images (the notion of interviewing images and not just persons). As workshop leaders, we were able to conceptualise and deliver previously unformulated material into a coherent workshop-style format, receive feedback and further test and develop our ideas.

Our next step is to (a) write a jointly authored essay for an academic journal about phenomenology/IPA as a methodology within arts research and (b) to compile a handbook for artists/art-historians based on our workshops. A rough version exists, but recordings will need to be transcribed, formats explored, and so forth.

Workshops, Conference papers

Andrews, Jorella G..2018. With Jeffrey Say and Dr Clare Veal (LASALLE). Using Phenomenology in Contemporary Arts-based Research and Pedagogy. Three-day Workshop (11 Sessions). LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore. 22-24 September 2018. <http://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/25482>

Andrews, Jorella G. 2019. With Jeffrey Say and Dr Clare Veal (LASALLE). Using Phenomenology in Contemporary Arts-based Research and Pedagogy – Part Two. Three-day Workshop. Goldsmiths, 21-23 February 2019.

Andrews, Jorella G. 2018. Starting from below: Phenomenological Interventions in Art History and Visual Culture. LASALLE College of the Art, 24 September 2018. <http://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/25495>

Andrews, Jorella G. 2018. Using Phenomenology in Contemporary Arts-based Research and Pedagogy. Two-day Workshop (10 Sessions). Goldsmiths. 19 and 26 October 2018. <http://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/25496>

Andrews, Jorella G. 2019. 'Interviewing Images': Using IPA in visual arts research. Invited symposium, convened by Jonathan A Smith: Pictures and words: combining verbal accounts and visual images within interpretative phenomenological analysis. Phenomenology of Health and Relationships Conference, Aston University, Birmingham 23 May 2019.

Andrews, Jorella G. 2018. Decolonizing the Self: Phenomenological Strategies. Contribution to: PhD Workshop: Decolonising the Self: Representations of the Self in Art Theory and Practice across Cultures, SOAS, London, 22 November 2018.
<http://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/25494>

Veal, Clare. 2019. "Re-Evaluating Agency: Authorship and the Expanded Field of Production in Southeast Asian Art." Gender in Southeast Asian Art and Visual Cultures: Art, Design and Canon-making, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 20 April 2019.

Related Essays/other publications

Andrews, Jorella G. 2019. Erasure and Epoché: Phenomenological Strategies for Thinking in and with Devastation. ISSUE 8: Erase, July/August 2019.
<http://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/26660>

(Forthcoming) Veal, Clare. 2020. "Possessing the Voice: Ventriloquism and Agency in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Cemetery of Splendour (2015)", Oxford Art Journal, vol 43, no. 2, August 2020.

(In preparation): Jorella G. 2020. How art can upgrade your thought-patterns (Association for Art History, UK) aimed at school-age young people and linked to a school project (with Evelyn Grace Academy, Brixton, London) in which techniques explored in the 'Using Phenomenology' workshop are adapted.

Authors

Jorella Andrews is a Reader in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths with a background in Fine Art practice and a specialist research interest in phenomenology. Recent publications on this topic include *Showing Off! A Philosophy of Image*, (2014) and *The Question of Painting: Rethinking Thought with Merleau-Ponty* (2018), both published by Bloomsbury. She has been the Academic Link for the LASALLE MA in Asian Art Histories since September 2012.

Jeffrey Say is an art historian and has been instrumental in the development of art history studies at LASALLE College of the Arts. In 2009, he designed the world's first Master's programme focusing on Asian modern and contemporary art histories. Jeffrey is a public advocate of the importance of art history to Singapore and is a frequent speaker on art history at art institutions. He is the co-editor of *Histories, Practices, Interventions: A Reader in Singapore Contemporary Art* (2016).

Clare Veal is a lecturer on the MA Asian Art Histories programme at LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore. She undertakes research on South East Asian photography, art and visual culture, with a particular focus on questions of sexual difference, subjectivity and agency. She is currently an editorial collective member for *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, a scholarly journal published by

NUS Press and has contributed papers to publications including, *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, *Afterall* and *Trans-Asia Photography Review*.

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