A study in cognitive ecology for a print-mediated artistic practice

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

Libby Eckersley, December 2020

This thesis is dedicated to my mum, dad and brother.

It is dedicated to my friends, Meg, Mel, Nik and Yas.

I would like to thank my supervisors over the years: Caelli Jo Brooker, Susan Kerrigan, Deidre Brollo and of course Angela Philp, in whose memory I dedicate this PhD inquiry, as well.

To see a film of the exhibition associated with this exegesis, please select the link below:
Plan & Execute, University of Newcastle Gallery, 3 Feb - 6 March 2021

Extended abstract

My practice-led research shows how the rubric of cognitive ecology can be used to develop an experimental 'print-mediated' artistic practice. Referred to as "the study of cognitive phenomena in context" by Edwin Hutchins,[1] cognitive ecology extends how cognition has typically been studied within the cognitive sciences, beyond the controlled confines of laboratory walls. As John Sutton and Evelyn Tribble write, cognitive ecologies are:

> the multidimensional contexts in which we remember, feel, think, sense, communicate, imagine, and act, often collaboratively, on the fly, and in rich ongoing interaction with our environment.[2]

Following Hutchins's statement, that when it comes to the study of cognition, the correct unit of analysis is the 'cognitive eco-system',[3] my practice-led research explores how the idea of *making a cognitive eco-system*, might be used to develop an experimental artistic practice over an extended period of time. This was a response to a need I had to transform my artmaking processes into a robust mode of life-long learning, after a prolonged period of retreat from a 'culture of critique'. I tested the robustness of this idea by using an artmaking context in which my individual artistic cognition had largely not occurred in, to date, namely, a printmaking studio on university grounds. Through a combination of written and practical components, I was able to show that conceptualising my artistic practice as an extended unit of analysis, that went beyond the studio walls, helped to activate and then integrate my artmaking processes with a corresponding web of conceptual elements. By answering the research question, 'what would my cognitive eco-system look like, in artistic practice?' my inquiry allowed me to imagine and then create a conceptual framework that operates as a pathway into the practice of art.

[1] Hutchins. 2010. 705.
[2] Tribble & Sutton. 2011. 94.
[3] Hutchins. 2010. 712

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