

Report from CAiRO Summer School
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Catering for the arts researcher, the CAiRO Summer School focused on methods of documenting the practical element of practice-based research as well as ways of creating documentation that is both suitable for funding bodies and meaningful for the researcher and output under consideration. Despite not being an arts researcher myself, I am particularly interested in the preservation considerations this type of material would present me as an archivist. I approached this summer school with an aim to explore the relationship between practical output and its documentation, the tension that seemed to exist between the two for some types of arts research and to gain insight into how to maintain the context surrounding arts research, its documentation and any text-based accompaniment. I also hoped to look to the practices of live art and theatre for guidance on the relationship between performance and documentation that might inform my work around archiving popular music and its associated performances. My PhD research, due to begin in October 2011, will examine popular music, technology and preservation; accordingly, all of my interests in this summer school would help me think about how to approach similar challenges with popular music.

The resounding consensus about the relationship between performance and documentation was that the latter is neither an accurate representation of nor a replacement for the former. Significant characteristics of performance – fluidity, uniqueness, interactivity – resist documentation. Most methods of documentation can convey some aspects of a performance, but a combination of all methods will never stand in for the event itself. For example, time-fixed methods like photography can describe aesthetic elements like set design or costume but not how either function throughout the event. Time-fluid methods like blogging support ongoing researcher and audience interaction but it cannot convey the heat from stage lighting or the smell of musty theatre upholstery. If performance is primarily a sensuous and live event, then any documentation will only be a trace or remnant. They simply point towards the event and outline the place it once occupied. This conclusion was shared by most of the

participants and seemed to be strong in the wider practicing and academic performance communities. There is a conflicting notion in archival practices; documentation is seen as a replacement for a transaction or event. When documents are created, they are deemed acceptable substitutions for the creating act. After hearing other participants' concerns about the relationship between an event and its documentation, I am now confident this tension will feature heavily in my PhD research and will confront current archival theory and assumptions about the nature of records.

My MSc research attempts to use genre to apply archival descriptive standards, MAD3 and RAD in particular, to popular music recordings. Accordingly, I was drawn to the PADS notation system developed by Stephen Gray. While I understand PADS is a structural standard designed to be broadly applicable to performance arts, this system has made me wonder not whether it can be applied to popular music but if it would be madness to combine structural and descriptive standards. Structural standard ISAD(G) is unsuitable for most creative material, but it does adopt and make explicit four basic principles. These particular principles address structure, but could they be descriptive instead? Could they be combined with a structural system like PADS? This option hadn't even crossed my mind before the summer school, but I would like to explore this idea further in my MSc research.

Trying to apply some of the concerns the other participants had about the relationship between performance and documentation to popular music, I have identified one significant difference. It is not an entirely new observation, but its importance to my PhD research was demonstrated over and over. Popular music has an intimate relationship with recording techniques and technology. Mostly but not always, recordings come first then the music is performed publicly. The difficulty is not whether a recording can capture a performance, but whether a performance can reproduce a recording. I had wondered if live art or theatre could guide my thinking about preservation of popular music performances. Going on the results of this particular discussion topic with these particular researchers, I am not convinced I can make a comparison, but the possibility warrants more investigation.