

Thinking Through Making

Mel Brown & Bridgette Ashton

ORCID Numbers:

Mel Brown:	0000-0002-4440-8492
Bridgette Ashton:	0009-0004-2494-2470

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60 min Workshop [author accepted abstract, workshop handout and presentation slides attached]

Arts Plural, ELIA Biennial Conference 2024, 20 — 23 November, Milan, Italy. Hosted by NABA, Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti [[programme](#)]

Thinking Through Making Workshop

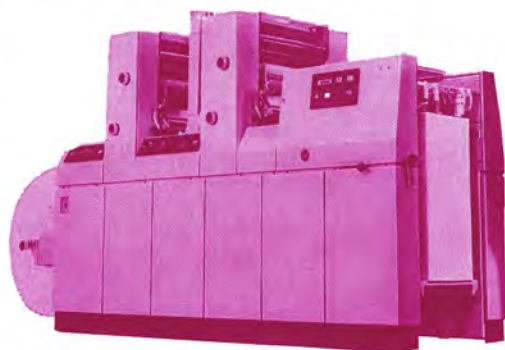
Mel Brown & Bridgette Ashton

In *Being Alive* Tim Ingold considers such themes as ‘the vitality of materials and what it means to make things’ through the lens of anthropology and environmentalism:

“...once we dispense with the prior representation of an end to be achieved as a necessary condition for production, and focus instead on the purposive will or intentionality that inheres in the action itself...then there are no longer any grounds to restrict the ranks of producers to human beings alone. Producers, both human and non-human, do not so much transform the world...as play their part from within the world’s transformation itself.” (Ingold, 2021)

With this in mind, building on the questions posed in our “Curiosity Incubator” workshop staged at ELIA Academy in 2023, we want to continue to overturn recognised cycles of research > ideate > refine > evaluate and stage a new workshop that will seek to harness the power of play & imagination as a means to approach and conceptualise global challenges. We wish to propose a shift from a mindset of 'What?' to 'What-if?' opening up new avenues for creative problem-solving and innovative thinking.

For ELIA Conference 2024, this has been developed into ‘Thinking through Making’ - a workshop that will prioritise experimentation and the unexpected, encouraging participants to engage with materials directly, getting lost in the action, revisiting the fundamental aspects of making and tapping into a universal skillset inherent in all of us. In contrast to the prevailing digital landscape, this workshop will emphasise the unique qualities of analogue making, highlighting the importance of physical, hands-on experiences in a world increasingly dominated by AI influences. Spontaneous impulsive moments combined with practical and observational engagement with materials will present an opportunity to engage with creativity in a meaningful, tangible way, sparking new perspectives that could extend beyond the confines of the session.



Trust the process and believe that
something will appear from nothing



Explore how play, imagination
and getting lost in the action of
making can allow our minds to wander,
thus nurturing less conscious thought processes



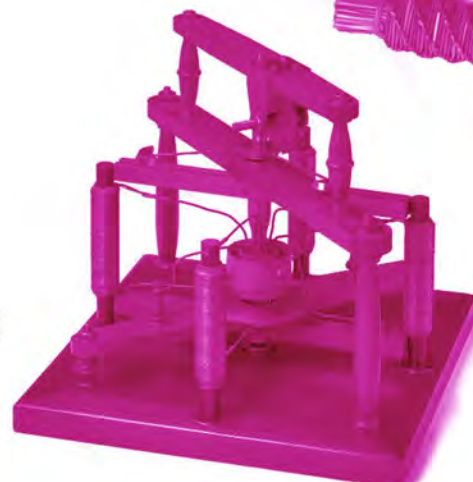
Prioritise experimentation
and engage directly with materials



In a world influenced by AI, promote
hands-on experiences and consider
what are the unique qualities of analogue making



Consider whether
the memorable action
of making and the
experience of imagining can
be as important as



1. Using the materials available render a 3D artefact that you can hold in your hand.

2. Write a narrative to accompany your artefact (50-100 words).

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3. Generate a 2D diagram of your artefact.

4. Build a 3D base that can support or display your artefact.

5. Swap your diagram with someone else (without letting them see your original artefact). Both of you now generate a new 3D artefact based on the diagram you've been given.

6. Swap your diagrams and artefacts back and display your new cuckoo artefact on your base. Use adjectives to note any similarities/differences between the two artefacts.

What does it feel like?

What does it look like?

What does it remind you of?

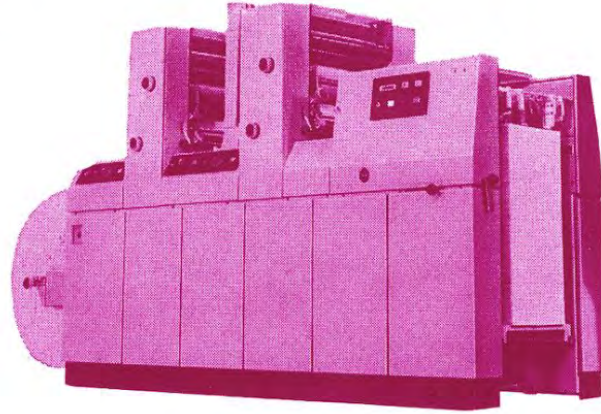
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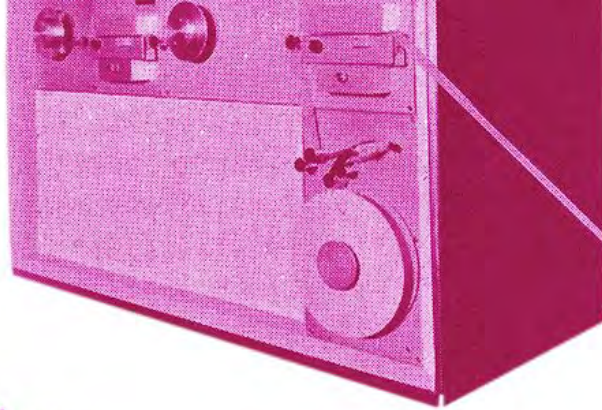




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bashton@aup.ac.uk and melbrown@aup.ac.uk

Prioritise experimentation

and engage directly with materials





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1. Using the materials available render a 3D artefact that you can hold in your hand.

2. Write a narrative to accompany your artefact (50-100 words).

This image shows a full page of primary-ruled paper. It contains ten identical horizontal rows. Each row is defined by three lines: a solid top line, a dashed midline, and a solid bottom line. The rows are evenly spaced across the entire page, providing a template for handwriting practice.

2. Write a narrative to accompany your artefact (50-100 words).

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**If it helps,
add an
adjective**

melancholic
ominous
matter of fact
tense
sentimental
thrilling
fantastical
dramatic
cryptic
magical
rhyming
righteous

confusing
wild
romantic
realistic
autobiographical
nonsensical
thoughtful
rude
poetic
mysterious
fussy
argumentative

3. Generate a 2D diagram of your artefact.

What does it feel like?

What does it look like?

What does it remind you of?

A faint blue arrow points from the left edge towards the bottom-left corner of the card.

What does it feel like?

annotate your diagram by
answering these questions
about your artefact

What does it look like?

What does it remind you of?

4. Build a 3D base that can support or display your artefact.

5. Swap your diagram with someone else (without letting them see your original artefact). Both of you now generate a new 3D artefact based on the diagram you've been given.

6. Swap your diagrams and artefacts back and display your new cuckoo artefact on your base. Use adjectives to note any similarities/differences between the two artefacts.



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In a world influenced by AI, promote
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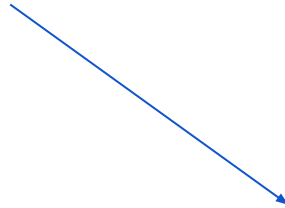
Artificial intelligence workshop



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Probably like many of you, we've been to numerous AI workshops over the last few years, exploring ChatGPT, Midjourney, Adobe Firefly...

Some of the issues raised each time have included:



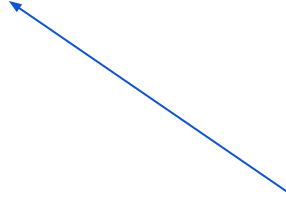
Data entry and use of prompts to get the 'desired' effect

Inbuilt ethics and bias

Originality, authenticity, authorship and copyright

Sustainability and the environmental impact (energy consumption, data storage etc.)

So, instead we wanted to test ourselves to create a workshop that might in some way explore these same ideas through analogue making



Data entry and use of prompts to get the 'desired' effect

Inbuilt ethics and bias

Originality, authenticity, authorship and copyright

Automation / impact on employment

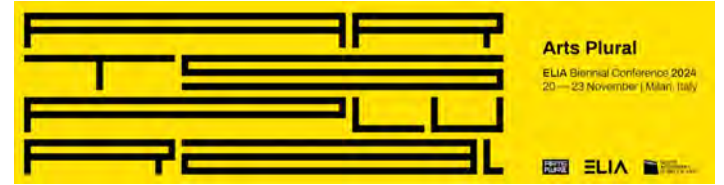
Sustainability and the environmental impact (energy consumption, data storage etc.)

artistic

Artificial intelligence workshop



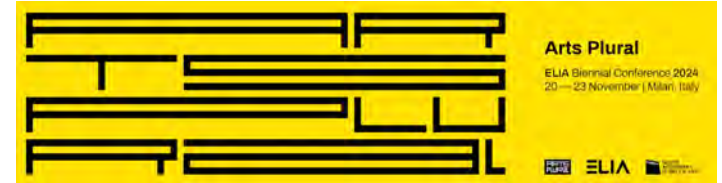
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The things we planned:

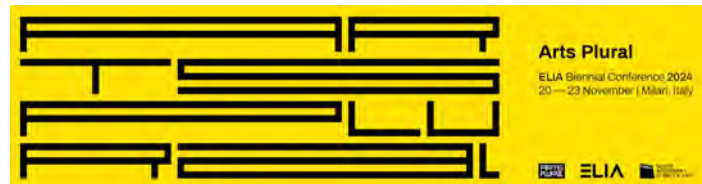
- Controlled access to materials in reference to how AI generates text and image informed by the data it can access.
- Materials were all either existing resources, sustainable or recycled - visible and up front compared to the 'hidden' sustainable issues surrounding use of AI.
- Tight time restraints in the very short tasks to indicate the potential in human creativity compared to the expectations of near instant gratification of AI results.
- Carefully worded directions and introduction of adjectives to mould and direct your responses, reminiscent of AI prompts.
- The creation of the narrative, the diagram and the base - tasks designed to build a connection to the original artifact to consider in contrast to AI generated outcomes.
- Making an artefact based a diagram - another reference to AI creation from the information and data that is provided.
- The base also existed to anticipate the arrival of the 'cuckoo artefact' - to test ideas about the original and the copy.
- Specifically at the ELIA workshop, our planned response to a restrictive environment (a small work surface on seminar chairs) was to exaggerate, scattering the chairs to make it slightly more awkward!!



These were the things we observed/heard in your responses:

- You all fell into silence as you started to make. Were you lost in the process? Did you work instinctively? Had your creative problem solving kicked in? Or had panic descended?
- In all of you, we saw your ability to generate 'something from nothing' - both with the limited materials given and in the process of writing your short narrative.
- You were all able to quickly switch modes, from making to writing, further exploring your artefact as you built a narrative around it - for some deepening your attachment to it, for others explaining it's flaws.
- You were all able to consciously relinquish ownership (willingly? nervously? reluctantly?) of your artefact as you swapped your diagrams with someone else.
- The diagrams themselves were varied: from detail to simplicity, from clarity to chaos.
- We'd planned for you to acknowledge your response to another's creative input (the final writing task) but what we hadn't expected or pictured in our minds was what the exchange would actually look and sound like. It was a pleasure to see you swap and share - all somewhere between joy and disappointment!

Thank you all!



If you'd like to get in touch with us please do (our emails are below)

- Let us know what you thought & felt about the workshop (the good and the bad).
- What have we missed in our observations and understanding of what happened?
- If any of you are contemplating running your own variation of a *Thinking Through Making* workshop, we'd love to hear about it.



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