The Conscious Practitioner

Week 2 - Theory and Methodology

John 2024

What are theories

- Is theories opposite to "practice", "experience" or "the real"?

- From dictionary: Theories are **generalised** ideas and/or principle that are **independent of** the things to be explained.

- Linguistic game: what do you mean by "Theory":

  - My **theory** would be he stepped on the banana peels and slipped, then hit his head on the stairs.

  - In **theory**, the supper computer can predict the weather for the next 10 days and compute the result in 2 seconds.

  - Darwin's **theory** of evolution shows how lives diverse from one simple cell.

  - The Big Bang **theory** describes how our universe and time start.

What are theories

- Theories can be **wrong**.

- Theories are **idealised**.

- Theories are (partially) verified **hypotheses**.

- Theories are **ordinary**

    - An approach/response to problems

    - Related to everyday life

- Theories are **specialised**

    - Informed by key authors whose work had been widely used in the past

    - Impacted by social movements

Common sense

- Can you give me some examples of common sense?

- How is common sense different from theories?

- Do you use common sense in your practice? Why or why not?

- How common do you think common sense is?

Academic Theories

- A body remains at rest, or in motion at a constant speed in a straight line, except insofar as it is acted upon by a force. (Issac Newton)

- The universe at the beginning was very hot and very compact, and since then it has been expanding and cooling. (Big Bang Theory)

- Based on the probability mass function of each source symbol to be communicated, the Shannon entropy H, in units of bits (per symbol), is given by $H = -\sum p_i \log_2(p_i)$ where p_i is the probability of occurrence of the i-th possible value of the source symbol. (Information Theory)

- The cinematic world is ordered by sexual imbalance, in which pleasure in looking is separated into active-male and passive-female. The determining male glaze projects male phantasy on to female figures. (Laura Mulvey)

- Nation is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. (Benedict Anderson)

Discuss

- What is a different between academic theories and the theory in "My theory is there is someone hiding behind the auto vending machine."?

- What is a different between academic theories in different fields?

- Hint: think about:

  - What those theories are describing

  - The terminology used

  - How do they convince people

Terminology

Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff, 1992, *Critical Terms for Art History*
Ramzi Fawaz, Shelley Streeby and Deborah Elizabeth Whaley, 2021, *Keywords for Comic Studies*
Nicholas Taylor and Gerald Voorhees, 2018, *Introduction: masculinity and gaming: mediated masculinities in play*

- Below are some terms commonly used in different critical theory. Talk about you understanding of these terms and discuss if (and how) it can be used in your discipline.

• Appropriation	• Postmodernism	• Signs	• Feminism
• Modernism	• Colonialism	• Narrative	• Fandom
• Avante-Garde	• Imperialism	• Context	• Media
• Gaze	• Post-colonialism	• Interpretation	• Text
• Gender	• Neoliberalism	• Diversity	• Hierarchy
• Value	• Representation	• Queer	• Politics

Why theory

- To build up you brain as muscle.

- To get a deeper understanding of you subjects from various perspectives.

- To provide a vocabulary for you to understand, analyse, and critique other's works as well as to articulate your own ones.

- Theorising is a way of **systematic thinking** that need to be learned.

Why theory

- Theory that has no foundation in practice is likely to appear disconnected or contrived. On the other hand, practice disconnected from theory is aimless and uninteresting to media scholars like us — Dan Laughey, 2007, *Key Themes in Media Theory*

- Reciprocally, film theory has informed film-making, at times in purposeful ways. Developing alongside film production, film theory alerts us to fresh conundrums, posits explanations, and reminds us that the cinema is a complex, sometimes enigmatic medium. Film theory endures for a simple reason: movies make us **think**. — Richard Ruston and Gary Bettinson, 2011, *What is Film Theory: An Introduction to Contemporary Debate*

- Films were better when filmmakers felt themselves obliged to be a part of a conversation about cinema that took into account critical thinking. — Nick James, 2013, *Sight and Sound*

Theory in art

- Alan Parker once said: "Film needs theory like it needs a scratch on the negative." What do you think he means in this sentence?

- Do other form of art need theory as well?

Discussion

- Think about your own practice, focus on how do you made artistic/creative decisions. Talks about those decisions and why did you make them. Try to generalise your decision making process into your theory.

- Think about the theories you know (maybe the ones you learned from EDI), do they influence your practice? If so, talk about how. If not, talk about why.

- Have you seen any theory in popular media (TV, movies, novels, YouTube, social media, etc.). If so, introduce them and talk about them.

Besides critical theory

For computing and creative technology

- Unlike other subjects, e.g. film, painting, and sculpture, there is other kinds of theory which you, as computing and creative technology professionals, will encounter — math theory, scientific theory, and engineering theory.

- Discuss:

  - What math theory, scientific theory, or engineering theory do you know and you have used in your practice?

  - In what way do they influence your practice? Is it different from the influence of critical theory?

  - How important do you think these theories are?