Exploring Community, Identity and Schism with Disability Arts Online

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Introduction

DAO have expert knowledge regarding the formation and history of the Disability Arts movement. DAO were finding, however, that this expertise was not proving to be particularly useful in their ongoing efforts to address a number of issues emerging across the DA community. These included challenges relating to evolving practices and affiliations, the need to measure and demonstrate impact to funders, and the changes taking place in the wake of social media.

What is explored here, is whether ‘reflexivity’ could assist DAO in their efforts to address these challenges. In this context, the term reflexivity involves an effort to ‘make strange’ our own perspectives and, in the process, to offer chances for reassessment. Within the field of Cultural Studies “A reflexive approach is one that questions the theoretical and other assumptions of the project”. It involves a commitment to rethinking assumptions, constructs, perspectives and categories, and thus allows for change, grown and reconfiguration (Gray 2003, pp 21-22).

DAO published a commentary (or ‘provocation’) during 2018 which featured references to the idea of ‘generations’. Would the concept of ‘generations’ be useful for helping to build a framework that would support reflexivity? To find out, I looked at work on schism within creative communities, and at sociological papers on approaches to and definitions of generations, and then shared my findings with DAO.
Background: The D4D project

The D4D project [http://d4d.org.uk/] is made up of 8 ‘work-streams’.

I lead on the Playful Bodies, Technology and Community work-stream. Disability Arts Online lead the Electric Bodies work-stream. The Playful Bodies work-stream connects with the Electric Bodies work-stream for one unit of work.

Scale: 10 days in 2017/2018, building on our discussions during the Alternative Futures project (2014/15).

Aim: To develop a tool, concept or approach that would be useful to DAO in their ongoing efforts to work through issues that have arisen within the DAO community

Timeline and design: This research was circular and reiterative. It didn’t begin with a design, but rather, involved a process of ‘working towards’ and ‘working through’ (meetings, emails, etc.). The aims and research questions developed over time. There were discussions with DAO (late 2017-spring 2018) during DAO’s drafting and publication of their commentary (or provocation) at the DAO website. DC identified a particular line in inquiry (in spring 2018) based on DAO’s drafts: the idea of ‘generations’ which was approved by DAO at that stage. DC researched the idea of ‘generations’ in more depth (summer 2018) and its potential connection with reflexivity. DC returned the ‘write up’ of this research to DAO in November 2018. The over-arching goal: This research is intended to contribute towards DAO’s ongoing work (events, debates) on the history and future of Disability Arts and the Disability Arts community.
Research aims and questions

As noted, my aim was: To develop a tool, concept or approach that would be useful to DAO in their ongoing efforts to work through issues that have arisen within the DAO community (see slide 5). My work focused on the idea of ‘generations’ as suggested by DAO’s drafted commentary. This focus on generations in turn suggested the identification of a relevant ‘tool, concept or approach’ – that of reflexivity. This reiterative process led to the development of a set of questions:

• Can reflexivity (as a practice, as a tool) help DAO to address the issues that they have identified?
• Can the concept of ‘generations’ function as a ‘lens’ that facilitates reflexivity?
• Can the concept of ‘generation’ help raise useful questions about schism, change and affiliation when considered in relation to ideas of ‘community’, ‘disability, ‘artists’, and ‘being online’?
The issues faced by DAO, as explained by DAO

The issues identified by DAO* were various. They included:

- A need to better understand the tensions that have emerged across the evolving DAO community, in order to respond constructively to these tensions.
- The need to demonstrate and measure impact (for funders, etc.)
- The continuing need to fight for the empowerment and social inclusion of disabled people.
- A need to remain relevant to the DA community over time, while acknowledging and responding to change, including:
  - Changes to technology and the rise of social media platforms
  - Changes to funding and economic policy, and
  - Changes to institutional practice (e.g. education, mainstreaming), and
  - Changing definitions of ‘Disability Arts’

* see notes from DC/DAO meeting, November 2017
The reiterative research process

- DC (the author - me) and DAO had meetings, team-based discussions and an exchange of emails during 2017-2018
- During this time DAO were drafting a commentary or ‘provocation’ intended for sharing with the Disability Arts Online community (I will refer to this as ‘the commentary’).
- DC contributed feedback at two stages during DAO’s drafting of the commentary.
- DC’s contribution involved reading the draft, asking questions, requesting clarifications and suggesting references.
- During DAO’s drafting phase, DC suggested a line of enquiry based on a theme that was running through DAO’s draft – that of ‘generations’.
- DC asked DAO questions about the significance of the idea of ‘generations’ in another round of discussion by email. DAO agreed that the idea was relevant.
- DC looked for research literature that would help with exploring the idea of ‘generations’ and its relevance to DAO.
- DC identified two research papers in particular as relevant, and then considered key points from these papers in relation to DAO’s commentary.
- DC draw on concepts outlined in relevant research papers, and used these as ‘lenses’ through which the DAO commentary was read and re-read.
A note about my role

• In discussion with DAO in 2018 it was agreed that my role was to act as a ‘critical friend’ – to ask awkward questions, which I was free to do as I’m not working as an artist, not working within the same networks, or dependent on the same funders.
A note on ethics, partnerships and privacy

The author and DAO are co-investigators on the D4D project. DAO (represented by Colin Hambrook, Trish Wheatley and Allan Sutherland) were consulted about this work throughout its development. The work focuses on the commentary that DAO wrote and published at the DAO website. I quote from that commentary, rather than using or referencing unpublished correspondence or conversations. DAO published their commentary at the DAO website in August 2018 as “Are we in an era, post Disability Art?” by Colin Hambrook and Trish Wheatley.

http://www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/are-we-in-an-era-post-disability-art/

I have not incorporated material posted to the DAO website by members of the DAO community at this stage because that would raise a different set of considerations as regards consent, permission and authorship v. anonymity (see guidelines at the AOIR for more on this issue). To be clear, I have been working with those who facilitate DAO and run the DAO website, especially Colin Hambrook and Trish Wheatley. I have not been working with the sizeable, diverse and dispersed community who use and contribute to the DAO website. Likewise, this document (at this stage) is being written with my DAO partners in mind, rather than the wider DAO community. One option of a ‘next step’ would be to work with DAO in a further round of discussion in order to identity how, if (or what) aspects of this work would be productive to share with the wider DAO community.
Finding relevant research literature

I started work on the DAO commentary by locating relevant research literature on groups, communities and the idea of generations.

I found two research papers that were particularly useful.


The first is from feminist game studies. It’s relevant because the authors (Harvey and Fisher) have researched tensions, activism and identity in a creative community while using the concept of ‘intergenerationality’. Furthermore, the authors are very clear that their insights were developed through reflexive practice.

Harvey and Fisher’s references to ‘intergenerationality’ led me to a second paper. This paper proved helpful because it focused specifically on the idea of ‘generations’ or ‘generationalism’ as a concept within the field of sociology. The author (Purhonen) defined generations in terms of social groups and grouping: the act of grouping people together, the idea of grouping people). The points made in Purhonen’s paper suggested ways to work towards the reflexivity demonstrated in the Harvey and Fisher paper.

I will talk in more detail about each of these papers in turn.
Relevant research literature: tensions within a games-making community


**REFLEXIVITY**

‘Reflexivity’ and ‘reflective practice’ (or even “uncomfortable reflections” – Harvey and Fisher 2016 p. 660) involves ongoing, critical examination of the structures, preconceptions, privilege and subjectivities that shape our work (as researchers, practitioners and/or facilitators). It involves us in an effort to ‘make strange’ our own working practice and perspective.

Harvey and Fisher explore schism, politics, creative practice and tensions within a creative community.

- While using the idea of ‘intergenerationality’
- They identify some of the power structures and perspectives that inform these tensions
- This involves reflecting on their own identities and roles as workshop facilitators.
- They demonstrate the importance of reflexivity in community facilitation
What do Harvey and Fisher mean by ‘intergenerationality’?

- Firstly, they don’t mean ‘different age groups’ as most of the women they work with are of a similar age (late 20s – mid 30s)
- ‘Intergenerational’ – they mean that within a community that is affiliated on the basis of gender, groups members will speak from different positions (because identities are complex and intersectional)
- Which leads to different perspectives on activities, rationale, goals and outcomes.
- Because participants will have different options (different resources, different backgrounds, different affiliations)
- P 651 “themes of generational rupture” – as a way of speaking about diversity within marginalized communities of practice – relating to difference in values, different access to resource, etc.

As when “Implicit standards of professionalism led to tensions amongst participants” (p 655).
Harvey and Fisher (2016) on intergenerationality, inclusion and professionalism

Harvey and Fisher (2016) write about facilitating workshops aimed at empowering a disenfranchised creative community, and they reflect on power, privilege and diversity within creative communities. They write about diversity within the community, and how different identities, possibilities and perspectives might be supported or undermined by practical aspects of workshop facilitation (e.g. venues).

They look at the tensions between professionalism and activism within a creative community, and ask:

- What happens when one of these options is (inadvertently or otherwise) framed as more valid than the other? What happens when this is framed as a choice, without acknowledging that some participants might have more options than others, in relation to this choice?

They emphasize the need to

- reflect on the framing of community activities in relation to roles, identities and options.
- look at how aspects of community facilitation might support (and by implication, validate) particular kinds of participation (and particular identities) compared to others.
- ask what can be done to make these patterns ‘visible’?

Making patterns ‘visible’ - Why does that matter?

Maybe it is inevitable that conventions will emerge in communities, and that some forms of engagement come to be regarded as more legitimate, constructive or popular than others. The problem would be if these patterns become ‘commonsense’ or ‘natural’ and ‘taken-for-granted’.

Because that will make it more difficult for everyone involved to articulate, engage with or disrupt these patterns. It’s this ‘taken for granted-ness’ that could turn peripheral participants into marginalized participants. Reflexivity is one way, potentially, to help make these patterns discernable, or visible. So that they can be critiqued.

Note: these points might be further explored through research literature on communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation – see Lave and Wenger, eg: https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781134512584/chapters/10.4324%2F9780203996287-11)
Looking at the idea of ‘generationalism’ in more depth

To explore the idea of generationalism in more detail, I looked to this paper, ‘Generation’ is an idea with a particular history in the field of sociology, and this paper engages with that history – which is helpful to me, as a non-sociologist.


Key points about ‘generations’ and ‘generationalism’

• It’s not simply about age or age cohorts (i.e. people born the same year.)
• Instead, it’s about the creation of groups and the idea that you can group people. It’s about the act of ‘grouping’
• It’s about the idea that grouping happens through naming (the naming makes the group – identifying it to others, identifying it to itself).
• And somebody does the naming This act of naming by somebody involves the representation of some group, by somebody.
More on generations

This *somebody* who does the naming is - implicitly or otherwise - ‘representing’ that group. The representation (the act of ‘grouping’, the naming) brings the group into being – it means that the group exists in an identifiable way. The various vernacular meanings of ‘generation’ come together here: it is the generation ‘of something’ (a social group) through an act of representation. This representation involves a relationship (between the group that is represented, and the ‘somebody’ doing the representation). So – grouped, grouping, grouper.

Then Purhonen points out that identifying a group on the basis of ‘something’ (i.e. a criteria) involves this somebody selecting and foregrounding *something* at the expense of something else. In other words, ‘playing up’ one aspect of identity (e.g. gender) as a basis for group formation, entails downplaying other aspects of that person’s identity (e.g. race, class or sexuality, etc.) Purhonen argues that this is part of what ‘representation’ means and hence that there’s a political, strategic aspect to it.

Example 1: Advertising often relies on the idea that you can band people by age (e.g. ‘millennials’ or ‘baby boomers’); think how reductive this is, what experiences it treats as universal, the kinds of claims that are made about these groups on this basis (about the use of technology, for example) and how these kinds of claims rely on acting as if one criteria (e.g. age) over-rides other aspects of a group member’s identity, be it class, sexuality or religion, etc.

Example 2: To go back to Harvey and Fisher’s paper, they wrote about community affiliation on the basis of gender, and then talked about the necessity of acknowledging how gender connects with other aspect of identity (e.g. class, race) because these intersections have implications for those taking part (e.g. implications for resources, objectives, and politics – for the perspectives people bring and the different options that they have in relation to things like professionalism and activism.)
Generations and DAO: Emergent themes

Fisher and Harvey, and Purhonen’s papers helped with ‘unpacking’ the idea of generation, and helped with identifying some of the ways that the concept might be applied to notions of community, schism, and identity.

Together, the papers suggest that ‘generations’ is an idea that could support reflexivity - helping develop alternative perspectives on the issues that DAO have been wrestling with, by raising useful or difficult questions, about:

- The generation of a group, through naming (by somebody – ‘grouping’)
- The selective use of criteria to define a group (by somebody – a ‘grouper’)
- The prioritizing of some criteria over others (by somebody) during group formation
- The validation of some practices over others within that group (and the extent to which this pattern might be implicated in the validation of some identities over others)
- The need to reflect on ‘representation’ (the naming and grouping done by a grouper) as a process that potentially contributes towards the validation of some community participants and the marginalizing of others.

Summary of the key concepts:
Generations as its being defined here is about groups, grouping and groupers.
The aim of this work is to explore the offers and potential of reflexivity.
The point of reflexivity is that it allows for the recognition of patterns, some of which might be implicated in the issues that DAO has identified.
The idea of ‘generations’ is being considered, as one way to support reflexivity.
It’s about looking at a familiar issues through an unfamiliar lens, in order to see it in a different way.
Re-reading the commentary, while thinking about ‘generations’ (grouping and representation)

What *patterns* in the commentary become more evident when I read it with ‘groups, grouping and grouper’ in mind?

How can the idea of groups/grouping/grouper be applied?

Here’s a suggestion:

**Groups:** What criteria are used to identify or describe the group? Who is in and who is out? Based on what?

**Grouping:** What criteria are used to make the group? What claims are made or implied on the basis of these groupings? (By who, about who and how?). What structures, narratives and histories are implicated in group formation?

**Groupers:** What is the relationship between the ‘grouper’ and the ‘group’? What kinds of roles, assessment, distance or proximity are implicated in this relationship? What structures, technologies, practices, resources or positions enable groupers, to group? What options are there for the grouped to ‘talk back’ (hooks) to the grouper?
Emerging from the re-reading

If I re-read the commentary using ‘groups, grouping, grouper’ as a lens one thing that shows up is that different kinds of ‘voices’ are involved in grouping. By voice – I mean in the sense of who is speaking, where from and what they know/are telling the reader.

Here are three brief examples of difference kinds of ‘voice’ that I mean – all quotes from the commentary.

(1) The “I know” voice – (“I learnt this”/”sold to me”)
(2) The “we know” voice (eg. “we’ve since”/”handing [out] our medals//We would argue”)
(3) The ‘It is known” voice (“What is termed Disability Art now is being made for a mainstream audience//both these intentions are aimed at// the way that the work is understood, perceived and consumed is very different//before, the Art spoke to disabled people [...] now the Art speaks to an arts audience”)

I think it is interesting that the 3rd of these is the ‘voice’ that is most associated with factual statements and with a history narrative, some bits of which would be uncontroversial (chronological events and changing policy, etc.).

The history-narrative describes structures (institutions, funders) that do ‘grouping work’ (create groups on the basis of some criteria).

So – there are a couple of points to think about here, as this relates back to the lens that is being applied (group, grouping, grouper) but it also points forward to the purpose of the commentary itself: the commentary is intended to support dialogue (to “invite responses”) from the wider DA community (which is also about ‘representation’: the relationship between grouper, and grouped).

I will go though these points in turn...
Grouping, groups, groups in a history-narrative

The history narrative depicts these structures as ‘groupers’ without being particularly explicit about ‘who’ is ‘speaking’ this narrative.

It is a narrative history of grouping by grouper institutions. At the same time, the narrative itself is doing ‘grouper’ work – from behind the curtain (thinking *Wizard of Oz* here).

Why might this matter? There are a couple of reasons.

Firstly, because notions of objectivity (‘It is known’ or the ‘voice from nowhere’) are conventionally associated with authority and credibility (see Haraway). Secondly, because this ‘It is known’ voice moves from quite neutral or uncontroversial grouping statements (e.g. groups formed in institutional spaces) to grouping statements about an alternative set of people, to statements about people’s politics and motivations, and statements about the relative value or integrity of different arts practice.

So what?

Well – the commentary is intended to support dialogue (to “invite responses”) on potentially contentious topics. Engaging with an observation made in an ‘I know’ voice is different than trying to respond to a (more authoritative) ‘It is known’ voice. Could this make it challenging for some community participants to get involved in precisely the kinds of dialogue that DAO want to support?

Summary:
Using ‘groups/grouping/grouper’ shows up a pattern in the commentary that I would not otherwise have noticed. It has implications for how expertise and authority are expressed in the commentary – which might be worth reflecting on when hoping to generate a debate.

In terms of the literature on generationality, this connects up with questions about representation (groupers, and the relationship between grouper, and group).
When the ‘lens’ of generationality (groups, grouping, grouper) is used to re-read the commentary, it highlights:

1. references to experiences and structures (education, institutions, milestones) that build specific versions of disability. Histories are implicated in the forming of two sub-groups, with a distinction drawn between their arts practice and their politics.

2. that representation (the ‘group making’ by a ‘grouper’) incorporates forms of validation. Of the two ‘groupings’ depicted in the commentary’s narrative, one is framed as valid relative to the other in terms of values, politics and arts practice.

3. that it is not always clear ‘who’ is doing this grouping, and attributing value. The ‘voice’ of the history narrative moves from close-up (‘I know that’) to distant and indistinct (‘It is known that’).

The first point raises questions about the version of disability that is being created by the narrative. The second, questions about how difference and choice relate to the versions of disability created by the first. The third raises questions about representation and gate-keeping (the attributing of value in combination with acts of ‘grouping’).

Which...begs some questions.

In the commentary, two kinds of arts-practice are presented, and one is framed as more valid (politically) than the other. But the commentary also links each version of arts-practice, with a particular kind of disability biography (mainstream v institutional). Does this mean that one version of disability identity is being validated relative to another? Who gets ‘disappeared’ by this narrative? What does it mean for ‘representation’ (i.e. for the relationship between ‘group namers’ and ‘named groups’) that DAO is the ‘narrator’ of this account? Is it possible (or desirable) for DAO to take on the role of expert historian without also taking on the role of ‘gate-keeper’ – does this matter?

Next, I want to look more at the ‘grouping’ that’s done in relation to the two kinds of arts practice described.
Mainstream/professional v. alternative/activist

DAO’s commentary makes a distinction between professional/mainstream arts practice, and activist/alternative arts practice. There are references to two distinct kinds of work, ‘coming from’ different places, differently motivated, different content, intended for different audiences. It positions these two modes of arts practice as distinct and antipathetic. This opposition can be connected up with issues of generations and representations (groups, grouping, groupers) if I return to Harvey and Fisher’s paper. One of the distinctions that Harvey and Fisher make in their work is between that of ‘women in games’ (WIG) initiatives, and ‘feminists in games’ (FIG) initiatives. Obviously there’s going to be overlap – but the point is that the two different names signal two different agendas:

• WIG: inclusion; change in terms of diversifying the industry; equality
• FIG: change at the level of societal norms; to offer an alternative to the industry; equity

It’s a distinction that resembles the one that is being made in the DAO commentary
Towards equality or Equity?
A quote from Harvey and Fisher’s paper

“While equality [i.e. increasing the number of women in the games industry] might perhaps be seen as a simple quantitative approach of balancing the numbers, equity in games would entail a more radical shift: one that considered significant intersections of gender and other forms of exclusion including (but not limited to) age, race, class, and education. In other words, equality-based measures are premised on having the same numbers of individuals in the existing context of production and participation, while equity-based action would entail a fundamental change to the underlying structural and systemic norms that inhibit fairness. It is this focus on the broader and deeper cultural and social norms related to identity and how these result in inequitable, oppressive, and violent situations for women and other marginalized groups in games that has inspired an international organization as well as a larger research/activism agenda called Feminists in Games, or FIG (Jennifer Jenson and Suzanne de Castell 2013)”

Harvey and Fisher’s distinction (WIG or FIG) encapsulates a difference in goal (i.e. change the industry by joining it, or reject it and create an alternative). It’s a distinction that has implications for creative practice (e.g. what gets made, by whom, for whom), but there’s another thing to consider.

Harvey and Fisher’s research makes it clear that diversity within the community means that not all participants will have the same access and options as regards these choices. It is framed as a choice. Yet some people won’t get to choose, and some venues (for instance) implicitly validate one orientation over the other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Old school’ DA</th>
<th>Non-mainstream institutions and structures</th>
<th>Social model of disability</th>
<th>Political, anti-oppression, rough, collective</th>
<th>Disability audiences</th>
<th>Change: Equity, transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘New school’ DA</td>
<td>Mainstream institutions and structures</td>
<td>Biographic or impairment based versions of disability</td>
<td>Pedagogical, professional, polished, individualized</td>
<td>Mainstream audiences</td>
<td>Join: Equality, access, inclusion</td>
</tr>
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Questions raised:
Who gets to choose? What kinds of histories come into play, as regards accessing these choices? More fundamentally, what does it mean (our ‘grouper’) to frame these patterns as ‘choices’? Narratives about how groups are made – is another form of ‘grouping’.

One of the issues in the literature on ‘generationality’ is ‘representation’ – the relationship between ‘grouped’ and ‘grouper’. I think that these have particular implications for arts practice, including issues like professionalism, contexts, motive and audience – which are all mentioned in the commentary. This is what I will focus on next.
What next? What are the implications?

This ‘first round’ of work on the commentary and generations has raised questions about two further questions and the issues raised by DAO. These relate to -

(1) communities, generations and **the artist**
(2) communities, generations and **being online**

The artist, groups and representation: Is there something about the idea of ‘the artist’ that is particularly tricky to reconcile with the idea of community? Is there something about *the idea* of ‘the professional artist’ that is difficult to reconcile with particular models of disability?

Being online, structures and representation: What does social media offer in terms of the relationship between a community and its ‘representatives’ (or facilitators, or chairs). How might the Internet and social media shape this relationship, or offer new perspectives on this relationship?
Artists as groupers, artists as grouped?

To think about this, go back to Purhonen’s paper and the idea of representation, and the question of who ‘speaks for a group’ (and creates that group in the process).

It’s an idea that resonates with particular notions of ‘the artist’. Some of which are difficult to reconcile with notions of community-based/community-orientated practice (although, of course, art directed at any form of critical success, will be art that is directed at/in dialogue with a specific community).

The question is:
What happens when problems suggested by the idea of groups/grouper/grouping collide with popular discourses about what art is, what artists do, who artists are?

The idea of the artist
To think more about this, I’m going to reference scholarship on art history and the body. For example, Amelia Jones’ Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts).
Jones has argued that in Western art history the idea of ‘the artist’ is closely tied with individualization; with a single and singular perspective.
the idea of the artist as singular

Jones writes that “In this sense, art and the subject it both produces and is produced by (the artist) are the obverse of the ideal scientist produced through (and producing of) discourses of objectivity”

While the artist is culturally associated with affect/subjectivity and the scientist with objectivity the point is that both are constructed as singular (“produced by a genius”, an “expression of individuality”) (Jones, 2012 p 25)

This is an idea that chimes well with Perhonen’s ideas about generations as involving representation (somebody who is ‘speaking for’ a group, or ‘grouping’ people) but it is also an idea that’s difficult to reconcile with equity and community.

• While DAO is a community, it is also a community that involves arts and artists, some of whom are represented in particular ways in the commentary
• Success = individuation = ‘to make a name for oneself’ = To be singled out.
• Do funding criteria further complicate or exacerbate these tensions?
• So, do we need to have a talk about ambition?

Next, I want to look at this idea in combination with ideas of disability.
The idea of ‘the artist’
The idea of disability

What if we think about the individualism associated with
• ‘the artist’ as singular
• ideas of representation (the ‘grouper’ of the grouped) alongside
• models of disability?

Because popular discourse continues to have problems imagining a collective, political identity based on experience of disability thanks to the reach, pervasiveness and persistence of the medical model – which individualizes disability.

Looking at the commentary while using the idea of ‘generations’ as a ‘lens’ has raised questions about
(1) the idea of the artist, and
(2) the idea of representation (as defined in the work on generations)
(3) the idea of ‘disability’
All of which are culturally associated in the West with individualization.

Is this a useful way to talk through some of the tensions that might emerge in a community of artists who identify as disabled?
Discussion 2 : Being online

Another issue that comes up when considering the idea of generations, and DAO’s commentary relates to Purhonen’s arguments about what ‘generationalism’ means – about the need to think about it in terms of the making of groups, the naming of groups (and then the relationships between such groups and their ‘makers’)

Generations are made by somebody (the grouper) who picks one aspect of an identity and nominates that as definitive – and forms a group around that definitive quality, while ‘representing’ (naming, speaking of, speaking for) that same group.

‘Generationality’ involves this relationship between ‘groups’ and ‘representatives’ (group makers).
How might social media (its uses, its affordances) impact on this relationship? With social media, the relationship between group and ‘grouper’ has changed, or could change, because the contexts of and opportunity for dialogue have changed.

So – some questions :
DAO have already pointed out that changes to digital technology are changing how people use the DAO website. Is asking “How might social media facilitate changes within representation” a useful way to focus and explore this issue?
Social media, part 2

While social media might allow for a reconfiguration of the relationship between group and ‘grouper’ it doesn’t follow that all who could engage in this dialogue would bring the same resources, or speak from ‘the same place’, or have the same degree of ‘reach’, credibility or authority.
But there’s another issue to consider. In the commentary, specific structures and institutions are associated with particular experiences of disability; with the formation of communities, and with the emergence of Disability Arts as a historically situated, historically specific movement. Disability Arts Online is online (obviously) so this raises a final set of questions:

• The DAO commentary connects institutional spaces and practices with specific and formative experiences of disability, but how does the Internet (as an institution, as a space) construct specific and formative experiences of disability?
• What might be the implications for identity-oriented, community-orientated arts practice and activism by artists who experience disability?
• What kinds of ‘re-thinking’ about Disability Arts practice might be called for in the wake of these possibilities?
What, if anything, does this suggest about future versions of DAO’s role?

NOTES: I’m sure that there is relevant literature on this issue (within Internet Research, for example). Finding it, however, is not easy, because of (1) the high number of papers that address digital media and ‘generations’ in terms of age, and (2) the many different ways that the term ‘representation’ is used in media, Internet and cultural studies. There is research on the online construction of disability within online communities – some of which might be relevant. For example:
Findings and conclusions
Findings:
Applying the idea of ‘generations’ to DAO’s commentary

Concepts associated with the idea of ‘generationality’ were identified in relevant research literature. These included concepts of:
- Group creation – The evoking of a shared ‘something’ by ‘somebody’
- Representation – the relationships between the grouper/namer and the group/named
- AKA: Groups, grouping and groupers.

This work suggests that ‘reflexivity’ itself might support DAO’s continuing work on schism, role and identity in the DA community.

It’s been proposed here that ‘generations’ and ‘representation’ (i.e. groups, groupings and groupers) are concepts that could support reflexivity, because:
- The construction of groups as an activity that involves criteria
- these criteria have implications for diversity within these groupings
- Reflecting on ‘grouping’ as a practice raises questions about power, validation, legitimacy and marginalization.
This work has suggested 2 additional issues

The first focuses on the ‘idea of the artist’ within Western culture and its association with singular perspective.

The second relates to ideas of group and grouping and the implications for social media.

(1) The figure of ‘the artist in Western cultures, and how (or if) this figure is in tension with some of the aims of DAO or DA more generally, given that the idea of ‘artists’ is aligned with an individualistic model of subjectivity. How does the idea of success ‘trouble’ the ideas of community and collectivity suggested in the DAO commentary? How does the individualism implied by ‘making your name as an artist’ co-exist with models of disability (especially given the continuing power and reach of medial models?)

(2) the significance of social media practices to ‘generations’ and ‘representations’ as defined and discussed in this analysis. Does social media offer a chance to re-think/re-work the relationship between named group, and namer/facilitator? If so, who would lead on these changes, and what might be the implications for power, diversity, equity and inclusion? The DAO commentary connects structures and institutions to the formation of disability identity and Disability Arts. How might the Internet as institution and structure construct disability, or generate new frameworks for Disability Arts practice, and new roles for DAO?
Conclusion

There is no question that DAO have expert knowledge as regards the formation and history of the Disability Arts movement, but they have identified a number of challenges, relating to changes in disability arts practice and to changes, tensions or schisms within the disability arts community.

What has been explored in this research, is whether ‘reflexivity’ as a tool for ‘making strange’ and developing new insight, could be useful to DAO in addressing these issues.

Literature on the idea of ‘generationality’ was used to explore issues of group making, grouping and group naming.

This process was used to develop a framework (a series of questions) intended to support reflexivity (rethinking perspectives, identifying patterns)

Whether engaging in reflexivity is considered worthwhile to DAO, and how, why or if DAO wish to share aspects of this work with the wider DAO community, is something that I hope we could explore as a next step.
Next steps

This work was shared with DAO in November 2018 in this slide version.

We met in London at the end of January 2019 to discuss the work.

That discussion is currently being transcribed (Feb 2019) and (with DAO’s approval) an edited version will be shared at the D4D project website.

DAO response has been encouraging, receptive and supportive, and they intend to draw on aspects of this research in their work during 2019.