

Teleonomy Newsletter

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John Ruskin, Our Future Voice- A Lesson in Craft and Vision

By Michael Hulme

How does John Ruskin, writing some 150 years ago, bring guidance for our future as researchers? His writings 'The Stones of Venice' and 'The Nature of Gothic' provide commentary, criticism and research that can be seen to be based on the fusion of social context awareness combined with great technical skill - Ruskin's championing of Turner being the perfect example of this. This combination of connectedness, broad disregard for the confines of specialisms and an emphasis on technical excellence, or the finely honed skills of the craftsman, I would suggest, shows research at its best.

At one level, Ruskin represents the archetypal polymath: the founding father of the National Trust, a contributor to the conservation and ecology movement, social and political commentator and influencer of the Labour Movement, artist, art critic and supporter of both Turner and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement, and of course natural researcher and classifier of fossils. But at a higher level he also developed ideas of craft and explored the relationship between the objects created, the artist/craftsman, and society.

Ruskin 'did not see buildings merely as works of art created by individuals for the use of other individuals. They were social artefacts and, as such expressed the moral condition of the society in which and for which they were built'. In other words, such creativity at its best is giving meaning, making sense and becoming part of a complex and multi-level relationship – the researcher's ideal! But to understand this requires an understanding of the interconnections between method or skill, technology and the social and behavioural contexts, whether it be a subject of research or a work of art.

At a time of great industrial and cultural change broadly analogous to our own, Ruskin speaks to us, as then, with a 'refusal in an age of growing specialisation, to separate one discipline from another or to see questions of art and science as distinct from questions of morality', and thus issues challenges to many of our current research practices, methodologies and ways of working.

As Ruskin points out, many of these challenges relate to the nature or manner of the labour involved in the creative processes. Is the craftsman, or the researcher, in danger of being reduced to 'certain fixed conventions' whereby 'the creative freedom of the workman is repressed and controlled'? Or does his 'work give freedom to the workers' imagination'? Importantly, Ruskin never ceases to emphasize the role of skill or technical mastery, but only as one element of the creative process. This commentary can be brought up to date by considering it the context of work by Dreyfus and his notions of hierarchy of learning and expression, wherein the 'expert', artist or practitioner transcends simple rules and guidelines (although these are a key element of the framework for understanding) to reinterpret a situation based on profound understanding and deep connectivity to contextual location and use.

Today, much use is made within research of the word 'insight', a word rapidly becoming debased. Insight without the combination of technical mastery and creativity is just an empty word. Or even worse, an example of misleading marketing. Gaining deep understanding, or insight, involves commitment, a commitment so profound it is akin to higher emotions such as love. Such commitment lies in the skill of the craftsman working to draw forth from his work deeper and more profound meanings, and this drawing-forth is the work of the individual in direct relation to the subject of interest. Ruskin's concern with the emergence of the factory and the dominance of processes over content and craft took the form of championing the individual. He was concerned to discover and demonstrate how craft could flourish even against this background of factory and the onset of mass-production, with its and alienation from context and meaning. Such concerns are of equal relevance to us in the research industry today.

References

John Ruskin, *Unto This Last and Other Writings*, Penguin 1985.

Making Social Science matter, Bent Flyvberg, Cambridge 2201.

The Importance of Conversation

By Paul Hudson

“What is the impact of the Internet on the call centre?” It is a common question that has been around for many years now, but one that is central to the current generation of contact centres. In the heady days of dotcom boom, we were told that the Internet was going to lead to the total demise of the call centre and that call volumes would fall so dramatically that consumers would all use online ‘self service’ methods. I remember watching a presentation based on this three years ago. At the same time, on the other hand, I remember recounting Teleonomy’s then-revolutionary behavioural research into the Internet, which at best said the impact would be far less quick and dramatic.

I can also remember suggesting that instead of volumes falling, they may in fact increase in the short term as inexperienced Internet users called looking for help and guidance in using this new medium. And this was closer to actual experience. Rather than the Internet leading to an immediate revolution and shift in contact, it has led to a more subtle and difficult change. Expectations have changed.

Work with our clients has repeatedly shown that we constantly meet caller expectations for being ‘friendly’, but consistently fail to deliver on the key areas of demonstrating care and keeping promises. In 1998 these were both important, but were easier to deliver against compared to friendliness. After a number of years, we have become masters in closing this gap, and can now deliver friendliness in bundles. But we are less capable than ever before in showing care and understanding. In focus groups callers constantly refer to frustration over being dealt with by a ‘friendly robot’.

The answer to the opening question therefore has to be that the Internet is challenging us to think more deeply about the ‘conversations’ they have with customers. We have experienced a rather subtle shift in customer expectations that means they are now looking for a different interaction when they pick up the phone. They are no longer satisfied with merely being treated in a friendly manner – all our centres are now more than adept at ‘processing’ thousands of friendly calls - but the Internet can complete transactions quicker, in our own time and in just a friendly a manner. The Internet is now where we go to transact and to ask simple queries.

So the response to the question is not about operations, team structures, email handling or even streaming online chat. These are an important part of the future mix, but we must also concentrate on reversing a more challenging trend – the reason for calling has changed and we must respond by understanding the caller and how to deal with them when they do call. A friendly robot will clearly not suffice.

The falling satisfaction with call centres is based on this lack of understanding expectations. Our operations are modelled on an outmoded way of thinking, one that is delivering, more often than not, the wrong conversation.

It is this, the importance of conversation, shifting expectations, challenging demands on email response, continual questions over IVR, the integration of the Internet and a never ending search to minimise costs that has led us to a major new research study sponsored by Cable & Wireless – Emerging Expectations of Multi-Media Contact. Please contact paul.Hudson@teleonomy.com for more information about this study, or for further information about any of the issues raised in this article.

The Pick and Mix Device

By Natalie Turner

I recently purchased a Treo Handspring combined PDA and smartphone. I had wanted one of these years ago, even before they were thought of, so with great excitement I got it out of the box and started to play. I had people “ooing” and “ahhing” around me, probably due more to its novelty value than anything else, but within a few days I realized there were some usability glitches; for example, how can I check my diary while using the speakerphone against my ear? Impossible. Or, why doesn't it have the simple functionality of being able to redial the last number I had called?

“It's a bit big and ugly”, a female friend commented, “not really the sort of thing to take out with you to a party”. I have found that I am more prone to leave it in the cloakroom when going out to a club rather than take it with me, something that I would never have done with my previous tiny Nokia phone, so maybe my female friend is right. It is a bit bulky. But, on the plus side it is great to not have to input multiple numbers into a SIM card, to be able to download and read email easily and write SMS with speed, all with one device.

As both a researcher into how people interact with devices, and a consumer of them as well, I am fascinated with how our behaviour evolves and adapts and how our expectations change over time. Now I have such functionality at my fingertips I want it to be able to do more things; I want the functionality of the device to evolve with me, as I change. Behaviour changes slowly, far slower than the ICT industry would hope for, but it does change. What is important is that products and services are not created as static entities but are able to mutate as people's behaviour and expectations adapt. Products and services therefore take on a longer lifespan.

The challenge for manufacturers and content providers is to offer flexible functionality that can extend a person's reach into new spaces, enabling and encouraging them to move by taking small steps to do new things. This may be a benefit discovered after the purchasing event. The instant gratification of being able to take a photograph and send it to a friend might not have been the initial trigger to buy a particular mobile phone or PDA, but the discovery that one can do this, especially if it is easy to use, can be a prompt for behavioural change. It is taking the time to think of the *needs* or *desires* that might trigger usage of functions or content access, then mapping flexible services onto these mind states that is critical. This is less about the “next big thing” and more about thinking creatively about what currently exists and then presenting it in an innovative way.

It has been a month since I bought my Treo and I'm very happy with it. I can think of a number of things I wish it would do, or at least have the capability to adapt to. At the moment my needs, as a consumer, are limited to what manufacturers think I want from the device. But what I really want is the ability to pick and mix the applications that suit my needs and lifestyle; I want a redial option, I want easy access to a headset when I view something on the Treo during a conversation, I want to try – but maybe not buy – a camera attachment. But while manufacturers still insist on selling from a product perspective, rather than a customer perspective, I guess I'll have to keep an eye out for a model that better anticipates my needs.

When will interactive television deliver against its promise?

By Paul Hudson

It's a killer question, and it has been a central theme to part of our work now for the last few years. There has been much written on the subject but the key question of when, and how, is yet to be answered.

There are many social and behavioural reasons that undermine the current take-up of interactive television, especially from a commercial perspective. Primarily, it will take longer for human behaviour to respond and adapt to such radical changes in technology than most analysts predict, as technological change evolves at a quicker pace than behavioural change. In the case of interactive television this can clearly be seen – the technology is far more advanced than current behaviour and user take-up. Furthermore, the technology is still developing, so the 'turbulence' for this device is very high, making any predictions of usage difficult at best.

Interactive television success stories are well documented. Big Brother saw a huge (and profitable) success in interactive voting, and over two million people took their own prehistoric safari alongside the BBC's Walking with Beasts. However, most companies are still struggling to find successful ways of using interactive television as a source of revenue. ITV Digital certainly found it difficult to deliver any meaningful success in the interactivity stakes. So far, interactivity only works when it is either deepening/extending the viewing experience or providing quick and 'disposable' gratification. Where companies try to mimic their services on the PC-enabled Internet, they are significantly less successful because an interactive television has different characteristics and behavioural patterns associated with it.

However, with the introduction of Freeview, the government, the BBC and Sky aim to bring the age of digital TV to a wider audience, eventually enabling the total switch-off of analogue signals. The BBC has its own digital strategy, offering the opportunity to bring a mass audience to interactive television and therefore the chance for 'normalising' the social behaviour of interacting with a television screen.

Behavioural change follows recognisable key stages, from experimental use to adaptive behavioural mode to normative behaviour. For the successful introduction of a new device, this latter stage needs to be reached, but this will only happen once a critical mass of users has been achieved and behaviour has had the opportunity to adapt.

This learning pattern can be supported through the effective design of services that aid the learning process. At first, services need to be designed to mirror as close as possible current experiences and expectations, and need to be based on simple, easy to follow 'rules'. Next, opportunities need to be provided to educate and extend the experience and allow the user to see the significance, relevance and meaning of the service to their lives. Having a number of high quality, well thought-out, relevant services will provide a better support for consumers as their behaviour is normalised and the market reaches critical mass.

So there are still many challenges for the Freeview platform to overcome. However, as a learning ground and solution to normalising behaviour, it must offer a key opportunity in speeding up the interactive television promise and bringing closer the successful harnessing of this medium for marketing and revenue creation. Only this will dictate the ultimate timescale for interactive television success.

MRA Members' News

New Members

We are delighted to welcome back Norwich Union to the Media Research Alliance. We look forward to seeing them at forthcoming seminars.

MRA under review

Following extensive discussions with members of the MRA, we are looking forward to several exciting new developments in the format of the MRA and the contribution it can make to your organisation. Full details will be released in the New Year, but if you have any further comments about the MRA that you would like us to consider, please email us at this address or telephone Debra Bookbinder on 01524 382000.

Quarterly Review Update

The Quarterly Review on the very latest developments in brand is now being prepared, and the format will be in a more accessible magazine format.

Quarterly Review Format

Feedback to the December QR has been positive. If you have any further comments, please let us know by filling out the form below.

Winter Quantitative on Brand

Closing date for topic suggestions is the 13 December. Please email us here with your suggestions or telephone 01524 382000. Suggestions include:

- Using online communities to develop the brand relationship
- Brand development through entertainment
- Building multi-channel brand values
- Measuring brand effectiveness online
- Segmenting the user by brand building device
- Branding internationally using the Web