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Cover image

Dr Miriam Darlington
photo by Giles Trochard
The academic year 2016-2017 has marked the second full year of operation of The Arts Institute (AI), which was set up as a hub to encourage and facilitate cross-disciplinary research within the Arts and Humanities and to stimulate collaborations across subject, institute and institutional boundaries. Over the course of the year we organised and hosted the International Conference in Digital Research in the Humanities and Arts, which brought to Plymouth a range of delegates from across the world working in this exciting research field. The AI also commissioned a report on Research Leadership, which was produced by Bonnie Latimer and Katherine Williams, and has sought to lead on this important programme, within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, and across the University, holding a day-long symposium on ‘Research Leadership in the Arts and Humanities’.

Over the past twelve months the AI has sought to develop a number of cross-cutting interdisciplinary research initiatives, including the launch of Cornerstone Heritage, (Directed by Professors Daniel Maudlin, History, James Daybell, History, and Kim Stevenson, Law), an interdisciplinary research group which brings together more than 20 staff from across the University of Plymouth working in the field of heritage (or how we live with the past today); and the Displacement Studies Research Network led by Dr Sana Murrani (Architecture) and Dr Haya Al-Dajani (Business), which again is an interdisciplinary network of researchers, policymakers, academics and aid workers whose work straddles diverse fields covering the many facets of displacement. The AI hosts and supports these initiatives and is currently developing a series of other research initiatives.

Across the year, the AI organised a wide ranging programme of training sessions for researchers (catering for people at all stages of their careers from PGR to Professor), which stemmed from REF strategy, impact and Open Access through working with museums to grant writing, publication and presenting research on the TV and radio, and podcasts. Highlights of the last 12 months include several major grant successes, including a three-year Leverhulme Trust award, an AHRC Research Leadership Award and several AHRC follow-on funding grants; and the production of a significant number of books, articles, book chapters and conference papers. Arts Institute researchers collaborate with the very best universities throughout world, and have worked with a broad range of non-HEI external partners, including Tate Modern and the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Vasa Museum, Powderham Castle, UNESCO World Heritage Site, the BBC and Sir David Attenborough, and the Tchaikovsky Moscow state conservatory.

What follows in the upcoming pages is a mere snapshot of some of the research activities conducted by members of the Arts Institute, but hopefully it gives a sense of the richness, vibrancy and diversity of the internationally leading research that goes on in the Arts and Humanities at the University of Plymouth.

Professor James Daybell
Director of the Arts Institute
This research area addresses critical approaches to digital and smart cities, augmented reality, new technologies of communication, social media and their effects in changing urban and social environments and on place making. Over the last year there have been a range of activities; from publications, a workshop and an international conference as well as some impact related activities.

In October 2017 the book entitled *Digital and Smart Cities* was published by Routledge (part of the Critical Introductions to urbanism and the City series), co-authored by Katharine Willis and Alex Aurigi. This book aims to give an informative and definitive overview of the topic of digital and smart cities. It explores the topic from a range of different perspectives, both theoretical and historical, and through a range of case studies of digital cities around the world.

As part of the research critically reflecting on smart cities and their urban context, Alex Aurigi co-organised a workshop at the Communities and Technologies Conference on ‘Digital Cities 10: Towards a Localised Socio-Technical Understanding of the ‘Real’ Smart City’ in France, 26-30 June 2017. This invited academics, practitioners and thinkers to look at smart cities from the point of view of the inhabitable, and inhabited place. It considered how the appropriation of technology is contextual with the physical and digital city experientially connected. The participants included work with stories from the global South that engages the growing work on southern urbanism through a techno-lens. This workshop is now being followed up with work on an edited book publication provisionally titled: *Designing Smart for Improving Place*.

The research area also currently has two externally-funded research projects; ‘Digital Neighbourhoods’ and the ‘Whose Right to the Smart City?’ AHRC-funded research network. The Digital Neighbourhoods research area includes studying the digital, social and spatial inclusion with technology. The EU Marie Curie-funded Digital neighbourhoods project (PI Katharine Willis) has studied how access to high speed internet affects rural communities, and whether it contributes to overcoming digital and social divides. Working with rural villages in Cornwall, South West UK, one of the most deprived regions in Europe, the project investigated the impact of EU Convergence superfast broadband rollout on local communities. One of the key outcomes from the research is the importance of community centres and village halls for creating a place for digital inclusion. This is addressed in the publication of the Digital Venue Toolkit document, which can be used by community centres and village halls as a guide as to how to get online and help to overcome digital divides with the support of the local rural community. This will impact on policy for regional ICT access and neighbourhood renewal in UK. The ‘Digital Venue Toolkit’ is currently being distributed to village halls and community centres in Cornwall by Cornwall Council and nationally through the organization; Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE).

The international aspect of digital inclusion in smart city projects is studied through the AHRC international network ‘Whose Right to the Smart City’ which runs from March 2016 to March 2018. Two key events with partners from UCL, UK, UFMG, Brazil and India took place in from 5th-11th September 2017, in London and Plymouth. First, a workshop in London with participants from academia, local government and community organisations. Invited speakers included NESTA, Future Cities Catapult, Intel Connected Cities, Living Under One Sun, Justmap and Spacehive as well as academics from UCL including Prof Muki Haklay, and Claire Melhuish. This was followed by an international conference in Plymouth with panels, workshop sessions and two keynotes; Ayona Datta of Kings College London and Tim Davies of Open Data Services Collective.
Digital and Smart Cities
by Katharine S. Willis and Alessandro Aurigi
My current research explores how poetry engages the dilemmas of our present moment of ecological emergency. Since I began working at Plymouth, I have become increasingly drawn to thinking about changing cultural imaginaries of the ocean, and how poetries of the sea might help us better understand our shifting relationships with the watery world. I’m currently developing a project called, Oceanic Archives: Shifting Seas in Literature and Culture, 1800 – the Present, an inter-disciplinary research project which will set the framework and debates for the development of marine humanities scholarship. As well as academics from UCL including Prof Muki Haklay, and Claire Melhuish. This was followed by an international conference in Plymouth with panels, workshop sessions and two keynotes; Ayona Datta of Kings College London and Tim Davies of Open Data Services Collective.

Alongside this collaborative project I am currently working on an article on poetry and marine plastics and a monograph provisionally entitled Marine Poetics: In the wakes of Modernism. This book explores how American poets across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have drawn on cultural and experiential encounters with the ocean in the development of their own distinctive aesthetic and philosophical projects. In doing so, this work casts new light on heterogeneous and shifting imaginaries of the ocean at a time of unprecedented and ongoing anthropogenic change.
Otter Country was published as a lead title by Granta in 2012 and is a close reading of the wild otter as an emblem of nature conservation in Britain. This exploration of a creature and its habitat places the wild animal at the heart of the journey a species might undergo, from its early evolutionary history to being perceived as totem or vermin, from its dalliance on the list of endangered species to its arrival as literary icon and the UK’s favourite native predator. The book evaluates our shared human-animal history and ecology and follows my meticulous search for the real wild animal through the many different wetlands, coastlines, rivers and urban areas of Britain. My research generally explores the literature of animals, landscapes and places, and finds itself embedded in the movement known as ‘the new nature writing’. Particularly interested in the tensions, overlaps and relationships between science, poetry, nature writing and the changing ecology of human-animal relations my method of attention is that of a poet-ecologist, nature writer and contemporary environmental commentator. I have a regular nature column in the Saturday Times (the ‘Nature Notebook’, in the paper’s ‘Comment’ section) and frequently use this platform to explore the connections and disconnections I observe day to day. My latest project is Owl Sense (published February 2018) a non-fiction study of the tensions between the accumulation of mythology around Europe’s elusive owl species and their ecological reality, but also underpinning this exploration is a meditation on our connection to nature and its effects on our physical and mental health. I am currently developing an impact project around this research. Owl Sense will be read as Radio 4’s book of the week when it is launched in February 2018.
Over the past two years Professor James Daybell has been working as part of an international network of scholars at the universities of Lund in Sweden, Leiden in The Netherlands, and the University of Western Australia funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to study the themes of gender, power and materiality in early modern Europe. As part of this research, Professor Daybell has been working on historic glove collections with curators at the Victoria and Albert Museum and Museum of London, and experts at the Worshipful Company of Glovers. The research looks at the ways in which gloves as historic objects allow us to examine the gendered nature of power relations in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Stemming from this research he has delivered papers at the universities of Cambridge, Hull and Reading, written a journal article and is currently working on a book entitled *Glove Culture in Early Modern England*.

The book demonstrates the complex potential of material culture, in this instance, gloves in early modern England, to inform and create gendered operations of power in multiple contexts, traced through its varied existences from commission and production, through consumption and exchange, to the ways in which such objects have been displayed and archived, destroyed, lost or forgotten. Moreover, the choice of the early modern glove as object is partly because of its often inherent gender ambiguity, challenging museum curators in determining whether a particular glove is male or female. The book thus offers, through gloves, a way of thinking about the gendered nature of power relationships constructed by and through objects, that might be applicable for analysing other things, such as shoes, rings, porcelain or books. It studies the early modern glove in particular since it can be analysed in different stages and contexts – from its production and consumption, its manifold meanings in different socio-cultural contexts, the emotional, haptic and sensory experiences of glove-wearing, and the ways in which gloves and glove-wearing were represented in early modern culture – as well as temporally and geographically and has distinct meanings throughout society, as items worn by the humblest of people and by social elites and royalty. While the book focuses primarily on early modern England – since this is the location of the majority of the glove collections – there is a strong comparative element, with elements such as perfume, leather and gifts involving a strong continental aspect. The book thus unpacks the ways in which gender and power were shaped by materialities, and offers a new theoretical framework for studying objects within early modern culture.
Professor Daniel Maudlin has spent the past three years travelling throughout Britain and North America in search of early modern inns and taverns. Supported by a Leverhulme Trust Major Research Fellowship, Daniel has identified, visited and surveyed hundreds of historic inns and visited archives across England, Canada, Ireland, Jamaica, Scotland, the United States and Wales: some now museums, some now private houses and many still working pubs or hotels. The project has sought to understand the British Atlantic World as a coherent culture space mapped on to the geography of the North Atlantic rim through the building, occupation and use of inns: vital spatial intersections of early modern travel, or mobility, and sociability. Daniel is currently writing up his travels and a book will follow in 2018; a new, follow-on project is now in development on Global Spaces of Hospitality with Professor Beat Kumin, University of Warwick, to examine early modern inns and travel at diverse sites from Spain, Italy and Germany to Syria, India and China.

Image courtesy of Daniel Maudlin
Ever since the dawn of humanity, voice has always been our primary source for communication. Our ability to evolve sophisticated verbal languages distinguishes us from other species but voice also transmits other kinds of emotional and social information in ways that written words are not able to transmit. And of course, let us not forget the undeniable expressive power of the singing voice.

Paradoxically, voice seems to be losing ground to other means of communication. One might say that new communication technologies are to blame. For instance, back to the invention of silent cinema people realized that pictures could speak a thousand words. Indeed, this trend became entrenched in our society today: notwithstanding the fact that we can record voice with our mobile phones, people generally prefer to take photographs instead. Movies now combine audio and vision, but voice is often regarded as the poor cousin of image. More disturbingly, recent studies on usage of mobile phones have shown that texting has taken over making voice calls in the USA and in most of Western Europe.

What is happening? Is voice becoming obsolete? Is technology really to blame here? Or would it be the case that voice, as we used to know it, is going through an upgrading process to be able to express matters of the present times?

Plymouth University’s Interdisciplinary Centre for Computer Music Research (ICCMR) is looking into how new technologies impact on the role of voice in human communication, especially in music. The first outcomes of the research were showcased at Peninsula Arts Contemporary Music Festival, Voice 2.0, in February 2017.

Voice 2.0 offered a glimpse of how musicians, scientists and linguists are re-inventing voice through an ambitious programme exploring new means, forms and usages of voice in communication and musical creativity.

The festival premiered new compositions by ICCMR composers, including Dr Marcelo Gimenes’ Silicon Voices, demonstrating an unprecedented piece of Artificial Intelligence software that is able to listen to a singer and improvise melodies interactively with her on stage.

Another highlight of the festival was Prof Eduardo Miranda’s Vōv, a piece for choir and live electronics exploring the composer’s research into the origins of language and music. The lyrics for Vōv were written in a fully-fledged invented language, created specially for ICCMR by David J. Peterson, the inventor of the language Dothraki, of the series Game of Thrones.

New Voices, New Messages

Professor Eduardo Miranda

a Dr Simon Ible conducting
b Professor Eduardo Miranda
c Dr Simon Ible conducting during 2017 Contemporary Music Festival
NEW VOICES, NEW MESSAGES
Between 10–13 September 2017, the Arts Institute hosted the 21st International Conference on Digital Research in the Humanities and Arts (DRHA). With the transdisciplinary theme of ‘Data Ache’, it explored the use and misuse of data in the digital arts and humanities: in particular, the material, practical and theoretical challenges imposed by data and the digital turn; and the tensions, difficulties and creative potentials that data provokes.

The conference – which was convened by Prof Roberta Mock, Prof James Daybell, Dr Sana Murrani and Dr Andrew Prior – revolved around five keynote presentations and ten parallel sessions which each featured a range of panels, workshops, performances and screenings. During some of these sessions, participants could attend panels being run by its sister conference, ‘Whose Right to the Smart City?’, organised by Dr Katharine Willis and arising from her AHRC-funded network focusing on information and communication technologies in marginalised communities.

The Data Ache keynotes were presented by the interdisciplinary artist, Oreet Ashery (Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford) on death, gender and digital afterlives; Professor Eduardo Miranda (Interdisciplinary Centre for Computer Music Research, University of Plymouth) on dismantling distinctions between organic and inorganic worlds with musical research; Professor Jussi Parikka (Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton) on cultural institutions, infrastructure and art practices; Tim Davies (Open Data Services Co-operative) on constructing transparent participatory public data infrastructures; and Professor Jane Winters (School of Advanced Study, University of London) on negotiating the archives of UK web space.


Among the participatory workshops offered during the conference were those that focused on creating
“dataless objects” (led by David Strang), gathering social media data for creative practice (led by Dr Gauti Sigthorsson), and managing the data behind creative masterpieces (organized by JISC). Practice-research performances included those by Dr Mark Leahy, Gemma Chatwin, Amble Skuse and Dr Marcelo Gimenes. The conference programme also included a special lunchtime session for postgraduate researchers led by Dr Rachel Hann (University of Surrey), sponsored by the AHRC-funded 3D3 Centre for Doctoral Training (a partnership between the Universities of Plymouth, Falmouth and West of England).

Running across the conference were installations on the University campus, as well as an exhibition of artistic research, curated by Andrew Prior, at the Radiant Gallery. Featuring work by William Card, Becky Gooby, Lucie Hernandez, Sarah Levinsky & Adam Russell, Tim Mills, Tom Milnes, Stuart Moore, Alex Nevill, Steven Paige, Claudia Pilsl, Beth Emily Richards, and Lucietta Williams, the exhibition included beautiful artworks engaging with ideas around our conflicted relationship with a datafied culture. Conference participants could also watch Oreet Ashery’s video series, Revisiting Genesis, which had recently been shortlisted for the prestigious 2017 Jarman Prize, on a loop in the Jill Craigie Cinema. All of these installations, exhibitions and screenings were open to the public as well.
As Dr Joanne ‘Bob’ Whalley and Dr Lee Miller note, this depends on many overlapping circumstances: How do we feel? Why are we here? What are we watching? Do we know the performers? Have we seen the work before? Are we watching this with our friends? Have we been fighting? Are we hungry? Are we tired? Is the seat comfortable? How warm is the theatre? Are we in a theatre? Do we have a seat? Is the man behind us coughing? Does he cover up his mouth?

Whalley and Miller both teach theatre and performance and are members of the Performance.Experience.Presence (PEP) research group at the University of Plymouth. Their book, Between Us: Audiences, Affect and the In-Between (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) is for and about audiences and being an audience member. It is aimed at those who want to think about what is happening in the intersubjective moments between themselves and a performer.

The book includes a number of tasks that may be interpreted in whatever way the reader chooses. These involve activities like mapping, scoring, observing, reflecting on and structuring actions. However, Whalley and Miller are careful to state that they are not offering a ‘how to’ guide to being a spectator.

Organised into three sections – which focus on audience, affect and qualia (those subjective experiences that are resistant to being communicated verbally) – they discuss and analyse a range of contemporary performance practices, including their own experiences watching work by Marina Abramović, Tino Sehgal, Jesper Just and Punchdrunk.

According to Whalley and Miller, ‘We were driven to write this book because the exchange between audience and performer remains an under-explored area, and we hoped that by opening up a playful exchange with the reader, we might provide a text that widens the debate, while still being an accessible entry into the philosophy of spectatorship.’
Cornerstone Heritage

Cornerstone Heritage is an interdisciplinary research group that was set up in 2016 and which brings together staff from across the University of Plymouth working in the field of Heritage (or how we live with the past today). ‘Live Projects’ are at the heart of Cornerstone’s activities. Live Projects engage with community groups and heritage organisations in the co-production of research-led heritage initiatives.

Cornerstone Heritage works with community groups and organisations to develop and implement socially-engaged heritage projects. We aim to help bring about initiatives that will be useful and valued by people and communities. Our ethos is to always work in partnership in the co-production of projects: we work with our partners on projects that matter to them.

Cornerstone is the University of Plymouth’s interdisciplinary heritage research group. Through regular seminars and network events Cornerstone is a hub for researchers in different disciplines to exchange ideas and develop new projects. Members are drawn from Architecture, Design, Digital Media, English Literature, Environmental Building, Geography, History, Law, Music, Tourism, Theatre and Performance and Underwater Archaeology. Our work ranges from knowledge transfer projects with community and schools groups to the in-depth physical investigation of historic buildings, landscape surveys, oral history, criminal and legal history projects, site-related performances, cataloguing archive and library collections, historic building conservation, heritage strategy consultancy and the development of interpretation materials for historic sites including digital platforms.

Cornerstone staff have been involved with regional, national and international heritage projects for over ten years working on sites ranging from the Eden Project to Bodmin Jail and the town of Nantes, France. We are currently working on projects with a number of partners across the South West including English Heritage, South West Police Heritage Trust, National Trust, Tavistock Heritage Partnership and Powderham Castle.

Image courtesy of Daniel Maudlin
Displacement Studies is a research network based at the University of Plymouth with global partners and members. It is an interdisciplinary network of researchers, policy-makers, academics and aid workers whose work straddles diverse fields covering the many facets of displacement. We have a breadth of research expertise in topics including resilient community building, urban mapping, conservation in conflict, creativity and psychology of the displaced, refugee law, identity, literature, poetry, art and architecture. In recent years, conflict, poverty, and natural and human inflicted disasters have caused an unprecedented rise in the numbers of internally and externally displaced persons and forced migration. Plymouth has witnessed a steady increase in the number of charities, development and support programmes for asylum seekers and refugees since acquiring the status of the centre for arrival and distribution in the South West of England. This research network seeks to provide a voice for the displaced and facilitates a platform for inter/trans/cross-disciplinary research projects with our global partners.

The network will see its first initial launch in the form a symposium titled Human and Urban Displacement: from Crises to Creativity, organised by its founder Dr Sana Murrani (Associate Head of School of Art, Design and Architecture for Graduate Affairs and Lecturer in Architecture), with the help of Dr Haya Al-Dajani (Plymouth Graduate School of Management and Plymouth Business School), and Professor Iain Stewart (School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Science; Director of the Sustainable Earth Institute). The event has been supported by the DVC Research Showcase 2018 fund in addition to The Arts Institute, The Responsible Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation Research Group, Institute for Social, Political and Enterprise Research (iSPER), and The Sustainable Earth Institute.

The event will feature prominent academics, researchers and policy-makers such as Dr Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (Principal Investigator leading the Refugee Hosts project; she is Reader in Human Geography and Co-Director of the Migration Research Unit at University College London), Professor Nasser Yassin (Director of Research at Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut, Lebanon), Professor Virginia Murray (Consultant in Global Disaster Risk Reduction, Public Health England), Dr Ahmed Masoud (Writer and Director of Al Zaytouna Dance Theatre, UK), Dr Diana Walters (International Heritage Consultant, UK) and David Feindouno (Devon Area Manager, British Red Cross), among others.
The island of Cyprus has been divided since 1963, when inter-communal violence erupted. United Nations (UN) peacekeeping forces were called in to secure what came to be known as the Green Line, a de facto cease fire line that separated Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in the capital Nicosia. This formed the basis for the demilitarized Buffer Zone that today partitions the island. Following the occupation of the northern third of Cyprus by Turkish forces in 1974, the division was formalized and is still monitored by the UN.

The practice research conducted by Kayla Parker and her colleague Stuart Moore at University of the West of England, Bristol, investigates notions of home and (dis)placement in the divided island of Cyprus. Through intertwining subjectivities with political and social histories, the legacies of colonialism, occupation, and the Cold War, the research outcomes will be shared as an essay film, a poetic form of documentary that blurs traditional genre boundaries, being a form of non-fiction that employs fictional techniques.

On receiving the Plymouth-Nicosia Artist Residency Award for Father-land in 2016, we spent a month as guests of Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre (NiMAC) in the Republic of Cyprus. Our base in the Turkish Quarter of Old Nicosia was close to the Green Line, the demilitarised Buffer Zone patrolled by the United Nations Peacekeeping Force, which separates the Turkish-occupied northern section of the island from the Greek Cypriot south.

During those four weeks of the residency, living and filming near the Buffer Zone became a quiet reflection on the uneasy stasis of the unresolved conflict which tore the island in two over forty years ago. Our families played small parts in the island’s past, and the challenge for us seemed to be situating our essay film’s narrative in its own buffer zone between a contested history and a placeless personal reflection.

In making sense of our collective past, we drew on our formative experiences of both being ‘RAF children’, uprooted from one country to another – patriarchal baggage moved by external forces. As the geopolitical cards fell during the latter half of the twentieth century, so people were shuffled around and lived with the consequences of exile and displacement. Turkish Cypriots to the north, Greek Cypriots to the south, one child sent to Germany facing the Soviet Union, and the other child part of the troubled status quo in Cyprus.

All along the Buffer Zone there are signs forbidding photography. Aiming a camera towards ‘the other side’ is not allowed – despite being able to pass through the border crossing points between south and north and traveling to that viewed space. Once there, we are forbidden again from aiming our camera back to see where we have come from.

The large eucalyptus tree we could see from the rooftop outside our apartment has been growing freely in the Buffer Zone for several decades. Wild life thrives in this no man’s land, a sanctuary largely untouched by human activity where vegetation overflows the broken, sandbagged buildings and fills the dusty alleys, and sounds pass from one side to the other like the birds and feral animals which have made the zone their home.

As film-makers, we use a dialogic methodology developed through a practice that is collaborative and cooperative rather than predatory – feeding on conflict and drama. We are seeking a truth that is rooted in the fractured ambience of this place. Father-land draws on the American film-maker Babette Mangolte’s reflexive explorations of landscape and place and the conversational exchange in Italo Calvino’s Invisible Cities to explore our own histories in this divided island.
We return to Cyprus shortly to film additional sequences and make audio recordings on location to infuse the sound design with appropriate ambience and to inflect the words with the integrity of being and speaking ‘in place’. When completed, Father-land will be exhibited in the gallery at Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre, close to where it was made.

In November 2017 we are invited to join an international group of researchers at University of York to present a paper sharing our insights into the ways in which the screenwriting process comes into play during stages of the essay film’s development, using Father-land as a case study. The Essay Film and Narrative Techniques: Screenwriting Non-Fiction symposium, convened by the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies, seeks to address the paucity of knowledge in the way essay films are scripted and develop an understanding of the work done in this area.

We are grateful to Professor Liz Wells and the Land/Water and the Visual Arts research group for supporting this project through the Plymouth-Nicosia Artist Residency, and to Yiannis Toumazis, director of Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre, and his staff for their generous hospitality and assistance.
In 1943 Jackson Pollock was commissioned to produce a large painting as the centrepiece for his first solo show at Peggy Guggenheim’s Art of This Century gallery. The painting was subsequently installed in the foyer of Guggenheim’s townhouse in New York. Although not painted directly on the wall, the immense oil on canvas measures more than 19 by 8 feet and is entitled Mural. With its all-over composition of interlaced forms and colours, the frieze-like abstraction is widely regarded as a “breakthrough” work whose significance for the history of modern art is regularly acknowledged if not fully understood.

Pollock’s Mural is heralded as a starting point within histories of modern art rather than the wilful continuation of more than a decade of monumental paintings executed in public spaces for mass audiences under the aegis of New Deal art projects. The immediate historical context to which Mural belongs – namely a widespread commitment to the democratisation of culture – is sidestepped. Mural is primarily viewed through the longer lens of canonical 20th-century Western art as advancing the work of modernists such as Monet and Matisse in its assault on traditional easel painting. For many, the relevance of Mural lies in launching a new approach to abstraction culminating in Pollock’s mature Abstract Expressionist style; the painting’s value extends to the international apotheosis of the New York School within the crucible of elite high art. The importance of Pollock’s formal achievement is not at issue; it is his conception of the painting as a mural that sets the agenda for a re-evaluation of modernism at mid-century.

Art historian Dr Jody Patterson focuses on the politics and polemics of public art. Her work engages issues around mural painting that continue to bedevil extant histories of modern art. As Patterson demonstrates, the mural is an unwieldy category of art whose boundaries are difficult to fix. These problems are both physical and interpretive, with murals often exceeding the demands of conventional modes of painting in both respects. In addition to her scholarship, Patterson puts theory into practice. She has worked with local artists’ collective Loci, a group of recent graduates from the Fine Art programme at the University of Plymouth, to establish The Wallflower Project. Launched in the summer of 2017, The Wallflower Project is collaborating with a range of cultural and heritage partners to execute monumental outdoor wall paintings across the city of Plymouth. The murals engage diverse audiences in the design and creation of public murals that animate our shared urban spaces and encourage a renewed sense of community identity and civic pride.

The Wallflower Project
In these penny-pinching times of grey austerity, the cultural sector struggles to articulate its true value, not least because the tools used to measure are flawed and underdeveloped, designed instead to measure economic and social metrics. Inadequate metrics have seriously undermined the credibility of the cultural sector. Bakhshi et al (2013) highlight the numerous inconsistent and methodologically flawed economic impact studies which plague the sector and have led to a general suspension of belief in funding bodies. Skirting across the shiny surface of the arts has also undermined deep analysis and understanding of the long-term benefit of the sector. But even if this wasn’t the case what are the metrics that can effectively measure the longitudinal impact of a creative act? Instead we are preoccupied by measuring ‘instrumental’ value, the social and economic benefit, as opposed to the ‘intrinsic’ value of the experience of art. The empirical cost-benefit analytical tools endorsed by the Treasury Green Book are not so effective for measuring wonder and awe.

In recent years the likes of Nesta, Arts Council England and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (Cultural Value programme) have struggled with this dilemma balancing our cultural scales without measuring it to death. It is an uphill struggle; such interventions reveal limited technical innovation and lack of infrastructure to measure things. Measuring things also challenges the cultural hierarchy, threatening the wisdom of curators, collectors, gallery owners and museums, all of whom, one could argue, have a vested interest in maintaining a mystical sense of value. And who’s to say the democratisation of value would benefit the artist?

i-DAT has stepped bravely into the firing line with a series of digital innovations for harvesting cultural value. This is a short story of the development of the Quorum project. Previous research funded by the Nesta Digital R&D fund allowed us, in collaboration with Cheltenham Festivals and Warwick University, to create Qualia, digital tools to better evaluate audience experiences. Qualia enabled an experimental framework for capturing real-time audience data, such as demographics, flow of movement, sentiment and smiles, and a series of analytical tools providing feedback and participation.

Qualia laid the groundwork for Artory an Open Source incentivised ‘What’s On’ App for cultural events was launched. The prototype was launched in January 2015 as a pilot scheme to enable users to leave feedback and cultural organisations to understand their audiences better. This city-wide collaborative pilot was produced by i-DAT and Plymouth Arts Centre with the Plymouth Culture Guide Group: Theatre Royal Plymouth, Barbican Theatre, Plymouth City Museum and Gallery, The Gallery at Plymouth College of Art, Peninsula Arts Plymouth University, KARST, Ocean Studios, Take a Part, Plymouth Dance and Plymouth Culture. The App was designed and developed by Elixel with i-DAT and branded by Intercity. The evaluation framework and questions in Artory were designed by Dr Eric Jensen from Warwick University, based on the needs of the Artory partners. The initial pilot phase was funded by Plymouth Arts Centre, i-DAT with Plymouth Arts Centre, Elixel, Destination Plymouth, Plymouth City Council and Plymouth Culture.

As a platform it offered digital marketing of events combined with accurate and evidence based audience feedback and real-time data capture and visualisation (user demographics, interactions, reviews etc.) With 6201 downloads across IOS and Android devices Artory has engaged 25 partner organisations, promoted 2041 events, provided 12,015 pieces of feedback. The convergence of this data harvesting and data analytics through innovative interfaces has informed the development of the Quorum project. Quorum is a collection of digital techniques, which enable reciprocal playful encounters with audience behaviour and Artificial Intelligent systems.
These techniques can be seen in the research outputs of the E / M / D / L (European Mobile Dome Labs). ‘Phage’ devices were incorporated in performances at the Satosphere Fulldome in Montreal (2015), and allowed crowd interactions with the projected virtual image.

This Is Where We Are (TIWWA) installation, commissioned for the opening of the new Tate Modern Switch House in June 2015, saw similar interactions between the large immersive and interactive algorithmic sculpture, which was fuelled by the data harvested from the 197,000 people that played with the work.

Quorum is an initiative that builds on this practice based research and our strengths in cultural computation, ludic data and playful experimentation with creative technology. Quorum creates playful synergies between audience behaviours, interactive media environments, physical objects (or things) and modern integrative, sub-symbolic, computational techniques. Essentially Quorum allows us to couple new interactive ways of engaging with large audiences and then to use machine learning techniques to create new experiences and at the same time generate new insights on audience behaviour. This process of an active dialogue with audiences and artificial systems may one day provide metrics that generate a meaningful sense of cultural value.
The extraordinary complexity of the human brain poses what is arguably the greatest scientific challenge of our time, that is, to understand the functioning, development, and neural basis for human cognition. While scientific progress towards this goal is advancing on many fronts, from molecular biology to systems neuroscience, many of the questions now being asked within cognitive neuroscience have their roots in the arts, humanities and philosophy. Thus, we took the view that CogNovo Fellows would benefit from systematic training in Humanities approaches concerning the nature, history and practices associated with creativity and cognition, specifically as they apply to audio-visual media. During the three years of the programme, Fellows were encouraged to examine the underlying assumptions and histories associated with the very idea of human cognition; in particular, what it means to be a social human being, and what human values have been, and might be, important for innovation in technologically augmented applications. The intention was that a critical self-reflective epistemology would permeate the whole project as Fellows were encouraged to explore questions of cognition and creativity that until recently have not formed part of the scientific debate. This became the matter and spirit of CogNovo.
From January 2018 to January 2020 I will be an AHRC ECR Leadership Fellow, working on a project that will explore how the novel has been used since the late nineteenth century to imagine better forms of community, and the problems and opportunities revealed by such attempts. The project will argue that an utopian impulse - however qualified or frustrated - overrides established categories of literary study, demanding that we reconsider the relationship between how we go about trying to change the status quo and how such changes are imagined and represented.

The project’s findings will be presented at international conferences and shared through a major new monograph; the research ideas will also drive a community engagement project undertaken in partnership with Regen SW, ‘Feasts for the Future’, in which people come together to hold a series of utopian feasts. These events will receive further input from across the disciplinary spectrum, drawing on the expertise of researchers housed within SEI. The ‘Feasts’ will harness the power of future-facing narratives to help communities transition to more sustainable behaviour in the present; while multi-media accounts of them will be disseminated more widely on purpose-built webpages, and the fellowship’s key ideas will be discussed further at filmed public lectures connecting arts and sustainability communities in Plymouth, and with practitioners and academics from a variety of disciplines at an international research workshop on ‘Imagining Future Communities’.

Dr David Sergeant,

Imagining Alternatives: Utopia, Community and the Novel, 1880-2015

The Pronoun Utopia by David Sergeant