



University of the Air:
Transmission

Innovative artwork celebrating excellence in research

at **The Open University**

In 2013 the University of the Air (UoA) project opened a new channel of communication for the Open University (OU). As an experiment on a grand-scale, the OU invited artists to respond to its research and develop public artworks for Belfast, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Milton Keynes. What emerged were four multi-disciplinary installations which proved extraordinary and they successfully engaged new audiences with the Open University.

The project was inspired by the speech Harold Wilson made at the Labour Party Conference in Scarborough in October 1963 where he said “I believe a properly planned university of the air could make an immeasurable contribution to the cultural life of our country, to the enrichment of our standard of living”.

The artists translated the University of the Air concept through their work in different ways, and collectively they delivered a powerful interpretation of Harold Wilson’s vision. Like a breath of fresh air, this project has brought us something new – a public art commission with four elements that connected through the air. Whilst we could draw satisfaction from a single commission, our experience was heightened by connecting the physical and virtual elements of all four.

Refreshing and new, exciting and exploratory, I echo the words of Harold Wilson when I describe the University of Air project as immeasurably enriching.

Marie Kirbyshaw
UoA Project Arts Consultant

UNIVERSITY

AIR

In 1963 Prime Minister Harold Wilson proposed a 'University of the Air' to describe his vision of an accessible and open education for all. This was embedded in the Labour party's election manifesto in 1966 and the Open University was founded by Royal Charter in 1969. Fifty years later, in 2013, the Open University commissioned 4 public art works, one for each nation in the United Kingdom, to mark this anniversary and to celebrate the University's research profile in Design and Technology, Arts and Humanities, Science and the Social Sciences.

The project began in April 2013 with the commissioner Professor Tim Blackman establishing a project board including four Nation leads and a project manager, coordinator and promoter. The board decided to commission four temporary works each responding to one of the research themes. The brief outlined the project aims:

- To communicate the OU's distinctive research reputation to a wide audience through engaging art commissions which respond to the 'University of the Air' theme and convey the OU's research in each of the four nations.
- To promote innovation and excellence in the Arts
- To provide a memorable audience experience

A two stage interview and selection process took place over August and September 2013. At stage one, ten artists were invited to develop their ideas further and at stage two, the final four artists were selected. The completed works were then shown in Milton Keynes, Edinburgh, Belfast and Cardiff from early November through to early December.

The project involved celebrating diverse and academic research programmes with innovative public art that would engage a broad audience. This involved artists working with archives and researchers, and translating these themes into visual, audio, digital and performative works that can be described as multidisciplinary, multidimensional and multimodal. These were events that carved out connections between subject areas and their experts, that moved between different forms of representation and communication and which involved the audience using different senses in their reception.

In an interview project manager/ consultant Marie Kirbyshaw stated that, 'it is only brave organisations who work with artists'. She noted that artists provide a mirror back to organisations in experimental and unanticipated ways.^{vi} The University might have commissioned a report, film or documentary that charted its research profile in more standard and literal ways. Instead they created an opportunity for new work to be produced, from unexpected collaborations; as Professor Gill Perry described, 'to celebrate innovation with innovation'.^{vii} Kirbyshaw reflected that the artists enjoyed working with the researchers, that there were similarities in their shared practices. She suggests, 'The University of the Air project has potentially launched a new direction for the OU - one that further explores the benefits of researchers working with artists'.^{viii} The Open University already had a long

standing reputation regarding its relationship with art and visual culture, particularly contemporary forms and practices. This is evident in the curricula, scholarship, publications, research, curation and commissions undertaken by the Arts Faculty and the Art History Dept.^{ix} In addition, in the specific field of Public Art, Milton Keynes and the OU campus has a large collection of works designed for public spaces. Open University researchers contributed to *Personal Views* (2003) which investigated public response to public art in Milton Keynes and the relationships between place, art and identity.^x In audience interviews several members of the public commented that viewing specialist research information in unfamiliar areas, such as the sciences, through the lens of an art installation made the material more accessible and approachable.

The *University of the Air* Arts commissions produced digital public art using new technologies. There is synergy here: in an interview artist Steve Geliot, who was commissioned to exhibit in Cardiff, compared how digital technology has impacted on public art practice and on the nature of teaching and learning at the Open University by opening up the possibility of reaching wider and more diverse audiences.^{xi} The Welsh commission, *Trajectory*, involved an artist, dancer and choreographer collaborating at a distance; on the phone, on line; which Geliot describes as, 'an Open University way of doing things'. All of the works were temporary and in aspects, immaterial. Each was an event that responded to a particular site and involved the participation of the audience, but which didn't adhere to the model of public art as monumental, physical and permanent. The works remain on websites and digital archives, accessible to audiences from a distance.

The University's open mission and the vision for public art share a commitment to inclusiveness and accessibility. In interviews each of the artists discussed reaching broader audiences through working in the public realm. Geliot described his interest in, 'doing stuff in the world' rather than in specialist or separate spaces; of the intertwining of community and architecture within the work.^{viii} For most Open University students study takes place in and around their everyday lives (they don't go away to university) which connects with public art in everyday spaces: on the street, in disused buildings, on sites of free access, and on the internet. Each of the works creates a particularly inclusive relationship with its audience who piece together their sensations and impressions to form their own meanings. Caroline Devine, in her sound installation, *On Air*, creates a trail of discovery of surprises and hidden treasures. Many of these sounds are unfamiliar, unsettling and open to interpretation; the audience feels as though they have gained access to an extra layer of hearing. In Belfast art curator Carrie Neely produced a series of collaborative art installations in the city, the outcome of artists, writers, students and audiences working together from their different perspectives. Wiretrace artists Moyra Campbell and Deborah Norton created an immersive three dimensional and audio environment in Edinburgh as an innovative and unique way for the audience to explore brain, memory and cognitive states.

Each of the art commissions is experimental, innovative and calls on contemporary themes such as participation, immersion and relational aesthetics, which stand in contrast to traditional art forms. Some writers suggest that public art should be more traditional or conformist to appeal to a wider audience, although temporary commissions can have more scope for challenging convention. The processes of public art commissions can also mitigate against innovation, the requirements of different bodies can create compromise. Agnes Deynes, an American public artist, discusses conflict and compromise where 'what is possible gives way to what is at hand' and where the, 'aims and sensibilities' of those involved, 'could not be further apart'.^{ix} In contrast the University of the Air commissions seems to have facilitated innovation through collaborations between creative practitioners, with councilors, academics and administrators and with audiences themselves.

i: for an analysis of the speech and its origin see Guardian report by David McLoughlin:
<http://www.theguardian.com/science/political-science/2013/sep/21/harold-wilson-white-heat-speech>

for further information see: <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/historyofou/story/harold-wilson>

ii: Interview with Marie Kirbyshaw 6.12.13

iii: Interview with Professor Gill Perry ,6.11.13

iv: Marie Kirbyshaw University of the Air Arts Commissioning Report for the Open University, December 2013

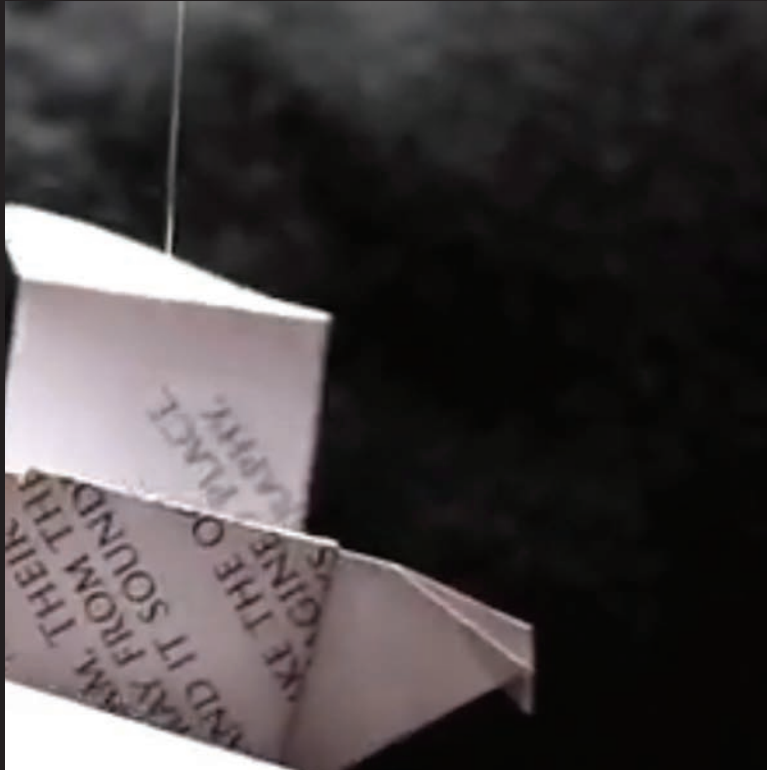
v: In particular note the Open Arts Archive (www.openartsarchive.org/oa) which houses recordings of lectures, study days, interviews held in collaboration with 20 galleries and museums And the Open Arts Journal www.jiscmail.ac.uk/OPENARTSJOURNAL with its commitment to open access to scholarship

vi: Prof. Doreen Massey and Dr Gillian Rose investigated issues of ownership, impact and identity related to Public Art. This academic research ran alongside investigations by artists Simon Grennan and Christopher Sperandio. For more information see www.publicartonline.org.uk/resources/research/personal_views.php

vii: Interview with Steve Geliot 6.12.12

viii: Ibid

ix: Agnes Deynes, 'The Dream' in W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.) *Art in the Public Sphere* p.181





University of the Air: NORTHERN IRELAND

Overview

- Northern Ireland
- Curator: Carrie Neely
- Title: Luminous, Curious, Journey
- Site: The Open University building, Belfast and Belfast City Hall
- Preview: 31st October 2013. Exhibition 5th – 7th November 2013
- Research Theme: Arts and Humanities
- Nation Lead: Dr Frances Morton

Research Theme

Arts and Humanities

By focusing on the rich culture of Northern Ireland's literary heritage Luminous, Curious, Journey draws attention to The Open University's wider excellence in the field of the Arts and Humanities. For example, The Faculty of Arts has created the world's largest single resource dedicated to the experience of reading. And furthermore, disciplines such as History of Art are deemed 100% 'internationally excellent' or better, according to the RAE of 2008.



Carrie Neely, Artists and Writers.

Carrie Neely is an art curator and consultant based in Belfast and has been shortlisted for Belfast Telegraph Woman of the Year Awards in Arts, 2014. On this commission she collaborated with a range of artists working in different media: Conan McIvor, Colin Davidson, Lee Boyd, Deepa Mann-Kler and Christine Trueman. McIvor's moving image projections included poetry extracts from *In Belfast* by Sinead Morrissey, Belfast's first Poet Laureate, and *Amelia* by Maureen Boyle, Creative Writing Associate Lecturer at The Open University. The other artists worked with the words of Michael Longley, Ciaran Carson, Linda Anderson and Open University students.

Site

The site of the exhibition was at two venues in Belfast: The Open University building and Belfast City Hall. By combining the hub of open access learning in Northern Ireland with Belfast's civic centre for citizens to engage with The Open University's research in the arts and humanities, the luminous displays could not fail to attract the attention and raise the curiosity of the many people who visited these sites whilst going about their everyday business.

'It [the art work]

makes me think


of a learning exchange.'

Kiera



In Belfast, art consultant Carrie Neely collaborated with artists and writers to curate a series of art installations entitled Luminous, Curious, Journey available to all to view in the windows of The Open University's building and in the grounds of the iconic Belfast City Hall. Inspired by the OU's University of the Air project, Belfast City Council organized a fringe programme of complementary literary events, lectures and workshops over the corresponding period of the exhibitions. The synergy between art, open access and co-operation with public bodies in Belfast proved a dynamic force in focusing the public's attention on the OU's research excellence in the arts and humanities, and in particular literature and creative writing. Therefore one can argue that the OU's celebration and promotion of research into literature and creative writing in Northern Ireland was as much about the sum of the project's parts as the individual art works that undoubtedly engaged audiences across Belfast.





The title of the public art installations in Belfast *Luminous, Curious, Journey* neatly encapsulates the literal and metaphorical interplay between the commissions and the OU's concern with excellent research in the literary field. The illuminated works, whether it be Conan McIvor's projected screens or Deepa Mann-Kler's neon window piece, suggest too the innovative creativity of a luminous mind. The curiosity engendered in the public on coming across these works in the civic and open spaces of the city touches upon the very desire for further knowledge amongst staff and students alike within the OU. And the idea of journey is borne out not only as visitors make their way across Belfast from the OU's building in Victoria Street to the City Hall and the Ulster Hall to view the commissions and partake in the fringe festival, but is also indicative of the curator's journey in conceiving, developing and bringing a piece of work to fruition, or the student's educational journey through a programme of study to perhaps one day contribute to knowledge themselves through research.

Belfast Poet Laureate Sinéad Morrissey writes in her poem *In Belfast*, extracts of which are used in McIvor's piece *Luminous*, 'This city weaves itself so intimately'. It is Neely's achievement in that she has woven the commissioned art works in a range of genres – drawing, digital, sculptural, etc. – with the literary heritage of Northern Ireland. As well as Morrissey's work, Maureen Boyle (Creative Writing Associate Lecturer at the OU), Michael Longley, Ciaran Carson, Linda Anderson and Open University students all had their literary work reinterpreted in the artists' commissions. In addition to the visual display of writers' works, the fringe festival also brought bookmaking and writing workshops, live readings, poetry performances, children's activities and alike to bear upon the city. As the city bought into the OU's inspired programme, the OU's mission statement declaring to be 'open to people, places, methods and ideas' came off the page and became embodied in the very fabric of Belfast's *University of the Air*.

“I think it's very subtle, and a really interesting concept.”

Michael



'I was inspired

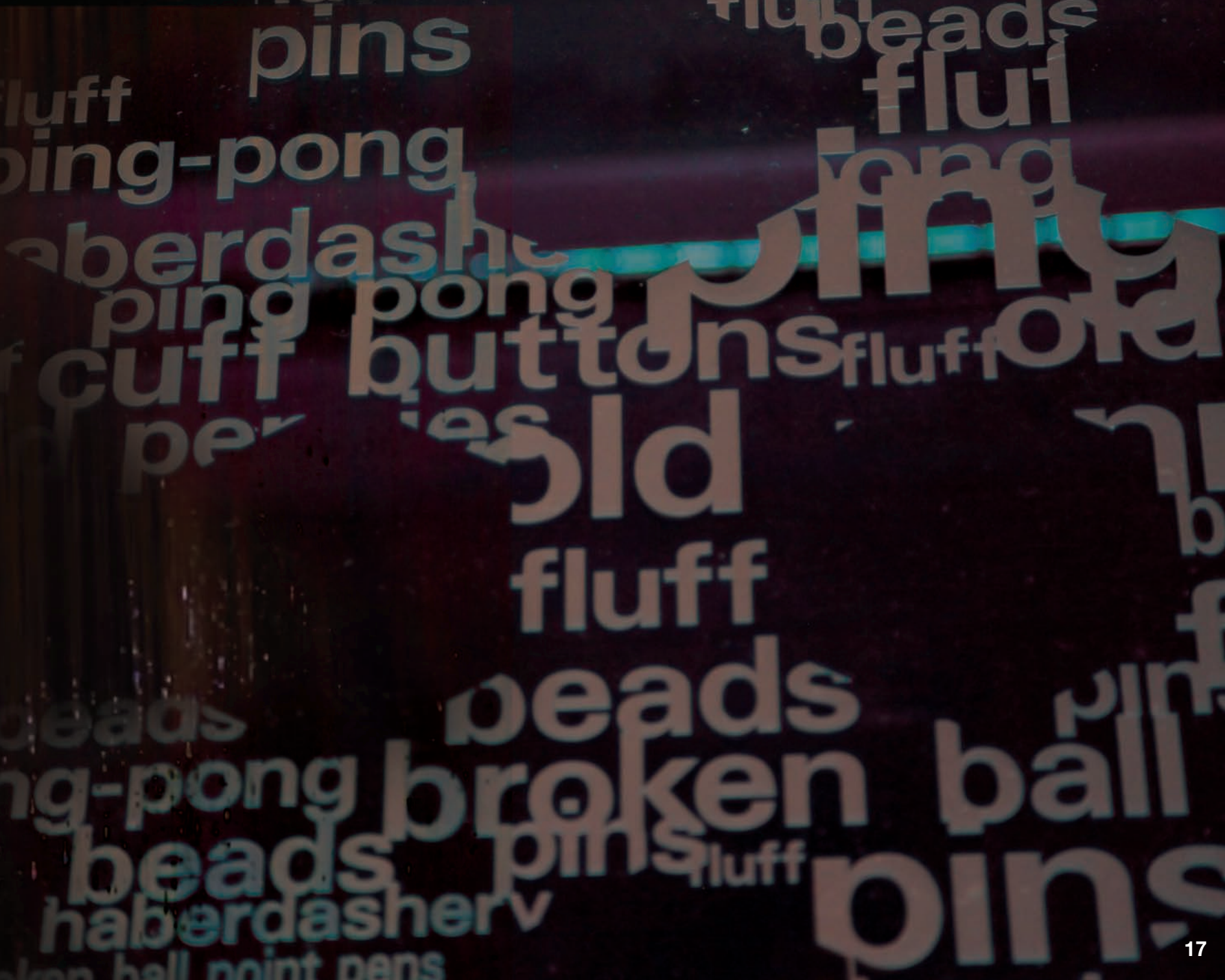
by the openness of the brief

and the theme could be interpreted

in so many

different ways and through so many mediums'.

Carrie Neely





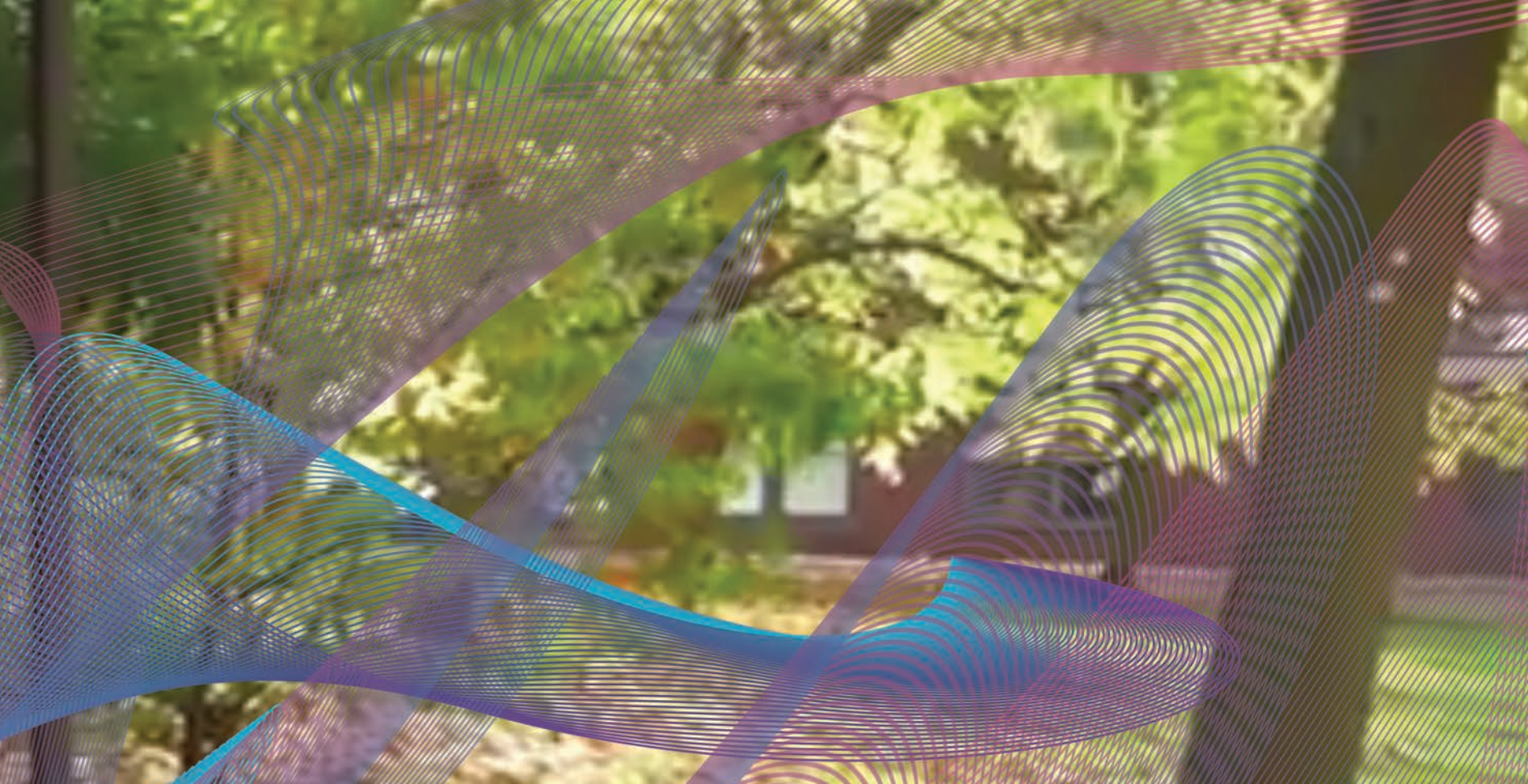
University of the Air: ENGLAND

Overview

- **Country:** England
- **Lead Artist:** Caroline Devine
- **Title:** On Air
- **Site:** The Open University campus at Milton Keynes
- **Dates:** 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th November 2013
- Research Theme: Design + Technology
- Nation Lead: Professor Gill Perry

Research Theme

Design and Technology.
Energy and Environmental research focuses on the role that technology can play in creating a more sustainable future.
The Materials Engineering Research Group is one of the largest research groups in the UK.
New interactive technologies used to improve learning and health
Design Research ranked 3rd out of 72 universities (RAE. 2008).



Curriculum Vitae

Caroline Devine has worked on a number of sound pieces for public spaces, including collaborative projects with scientists, photographers, visual artists and theatrical projects. She graduated with a first class honours degree in Sound Arts and Design from the London School of Communication.

Previous works include:

Earth Loop, MK gallery Lift Project, 2013

Space Ham Between the Ears, BBC Radio 3, 2013

Carrier Waves, *Station X* - Alan Turing Hut 8, Bletchley Park Codebreaking Centre, 2012

5 Minute Oscillations of the Sun, Milton Keynes Theatre District, 2012

Devine was shortlisted for this year's British Composer Award (2013) (Sonic Arts category) for her work, *5 Minute Oscillations of the Sun*.

Site

The Open University transferred to the Walton Hall Campus in September 1969, two years after the 'new city' of Milton Keynes was founded, five years after Jennie Lee, as Minister for the Arts, was given responsibility for the 'University of the Air' and six years after Harold Wilson's speech

Blog

www.linernotes.co.uk

Portfolio

www.linernotes.co.uk/portfolio



***“It has inspired me to think
about how different sounds can be manipulated
to make music”***

Dan Stock, Walton High

As a response to the '*University of the Air*' brief Caroline Devine produced *On Air*, an interventionist, multi-channel sound installation.

Devine's work aims to transform the perception of architectural and acoustic space without visual impact. She treats existing and recorded sounds as musical notes that collide, combine, layer and harmonise. On the Walton Hall campus there is a central covered walkway through the campus, narrow with a low ceiling and open on both sides, that connects the main academic buildings. The speakers are arranged and hidden either side, so that the sounds appear to be disconnected, to have escaped from the buildings where research is undertaken, lectures delivered and knowledge stored. Caroline Devine suggests that this structure of a central column with branches and networks is a metaphor for communication at the Open University.¹ The composition of sound has a spatial and sculptural dimension but the experience is temporal as sounds roam between the architectural forms like ghosts, memories, echoes or traces. There are recognisable, everyday noises alongside extraordinary sounds which, in their unfamiliarity, may appear as voices from the future, not of this world.



Key to Symbols					Key to Walkways	
 Bus Stop	 Bicycle Parking	 Dog Run	 Public Telephones	 Sports Pavilion	 Footpath	
 Car Parking	 Childrens Centre	 Gate	 Refractory	 Stairs	 Central Walkway	
 Car Parking for Disabled	 Church	 Information Points	 Shop & Bank	 Building Entrance		

The sounds, from invisible sources, are difficult to place. Voices and testimonies coincide with high frequencies, there are fragments of conversations and crackles like the switching of radio channels. Some sounds appear solid and static others more fleeting; some in front, some to the side, some left behind, some still to be. Readymade, recorded and transmitted sounds blend with footsteps and conversations so that the collaboration extends and the audience contribute to the orchestration. Devine plays with scale; things not normally heard are amplified and other everyday sounds are barely perceptible. Sounds are fragmented, decontextualised and reconfigured so that they are transformed and find new identities in the listener's imagination. Devine uses electromagnetic sounds, radio, computer and mobile phone signals. Complex technology meets metaphor and poetry, to create an inclusive and participatory audience experience. She has described her work as a 'sound portrait' of the Open University; combining and collaging archival recordings, texts, interviews, lectures as well as sounds captured on the campus."

The idea of the art or sculpture trail is familiar, but with *On Air* the viewer's or listener's journey is propelled by the sounds that infiltrate and transform the physical space. The experience and interpretation of the work is different each time depending on the direction taken, giving a sense of exploration, discovery, chance encounters and hidden treasures. Devine reflected on the time taken to research and install the work as a kind of journey in itself; from September to November and her awareness and recording of seasonal change.

Devine collaborated with researchers and trawled the archives to gather her material; she describes an undercover operation to install an infrastructure of speakers and cables that would be barely visible and the irony of working underground to create a work in the air. Devine also describes the work as a kind of gateway allowing the audience to cross a 'sensory barrier' and gain access to a sonic world that normally exists outside awareness. The audience, on leaving the work, are left with a feeling that one of their senses has been 'turned off'. The legacy of this may be to reflect on, 'voices and sounds that are obscured, silenced or are in some way absent,' or more simply to draw attention to the sonic relationships in our everyday lives."ⁱⁱⁱ

i: **Caroline Devine Interview**

ii: **Caroline Devine, artists statement: project proposal**

iii: **Ibid**



***“It reminded me
of one of
David Attenborough’s programmes”***

Joe Taylor, Walton High





University of the Air: **SCOTLAND**

Overview

- **Country:** Scotland
- **Lead Artist:** Wiretrace
- **Title:** The Brain Trilogy
- **Site:** Inspace, 1 Crichton Street, Edinburgh
- **Dates:** 1st – 3rd November 2013
- Research Theme: Science
- Nation Lead: Louise Davison

Research Theme

Science

The Open University's Biomedical Research Network (BRN) investigates the research themes of cellular and molecular biomedicine; medicinal chemistry and diagnostics; neuroscience and behavior.

The BRN's research focus is on the design of novel therapeutic agents and diagnostic tools, the molecular and cellular processes underlying diseases, and the fundamentals of neurobiology and how they relate to behavior.

70% of research conducted across the sciences at the OU was considered 'internationally excellent' or better according to the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in 2008.



About Wiretrace

Wiretrace is an animation and design company located in Glasgow, directed by Deborah Norton and Moyra Campbell, both graduates from Glasgow Art School MPhil course in 2D/3D motion graphics. Norton comes from a fine arts background, while Campbell was formerly a scientist with PhD and postgraduate experience in molecular biology.

Wiretrace specialises in technical and biomedical projects with clients such as Babcock International plc., Tillotts Pharma AG, and Glasgow and Strathclyde Universities, and arts-based media for a diverse range of clients including BBC Alba, Sorbier Productions, the Open University, UZ Media and Ubiquitous Chip restaurant.

Wiretrace have worked on projects that received awards for both Scottish and UK Event awards (Ing3dients) and been nominated for BAFTA (children's drama *Calum Dingle*).

Site

The site of the exhibition was at the University of Edinburgh's Inspace. This proved an ideal venue in which to exhibit *The Brain Trilogy* as it is a purpose built multimedia laboratory which aims to raise awareness and understanding of computation in modern biology. Inspace provided a synergetic environment with which to stage Wiretrace's dynamic and immersive interaction between the research disciplines of the arts and the sciences.

For more information about Inspace, please click on the following link:
<http://inspace.mediascot.org>


Links

<http://www.wiretrace.net>

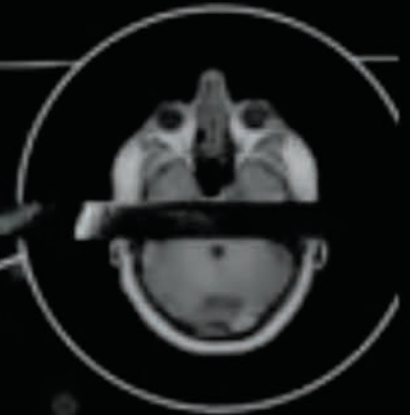
The background of the slide features abstract, glowing blue and green digital patterns that resemble data visualizations or particle tracks, set against a solid black background. These patterns are concentrated on the left side and fade into the black background towards the right.

'The complete sync
of the
visual output and science
was stunning.'

Kirsty-Louise Jones.

The background of the page is a dark, almost black, field filled with numerous thin, elongated, and slightly curved streaks of light blue and white. These streaks are scattered across the entire page, creating a sense of depth and movement, reminiscent of a starry night sky or a microscopic view of certain materials. The streaks vary in length and brightness, with some appearing as sharp, bright lines and others as softer, more diffuse glows.

The artists Moyra Campbell and Deborah Norton, who form Wiretrace, collaborated with composer Guy Veale, film and video artist Jane McNally and live performer and artist Mal Young to produce *The Brain Trilogy*. The piece was designed as a 3D stereo installation with multiple simultaneous projections cast on the media laboratory walls and screens. Standing in the middle of this 300m² purpose built research site the audience experienced an ever changing panoptical experiment in time, space and sound of mapped projections and live audio mixing.



‘Art work could be the way

to explain what goes on inside our brains...

it’s a way to be curious and to become conscious of science.’

Eduardo.

Wiretrace developed their creative investigation into the OU's research themes of cognitive behaviour and memory by combining it with moving images drawn from the Open University video archives. The incorporated imagery of Harold Wilson, Jamie Lee, OU production material and other aspects of OU broadcasting asserted the OU's rich heritage in the dissemination of knowledge and encouragement of learning in the sciences since the 1960s to the present day within the work.

However, the audience was not only treated to a rich palimpsest of imagery but also a live media mix of accompanied sound. In response to the alternating imagery and audience flow throughout the space and period of the exhibition, composer Guy Veale provided a supporting bed of sound textures. From an extensive archive of sound files available to him, Veale introduced sounds which corresponded to memories triggered by the imagery surrounding him. In the same way Wiretrace had made the internal imagery of the brain visible, Veale made audible things that are ordinarily inaudible, for example: the pops and crackles of lightning strikes in the upper atmosphere; and the whistling sounds of electro-magnetic fields.

Wiretrace identified the OU's Biomedical Research Network's significance in scientific research and configured it in an innovative and mesmerizing art installation environment. As a result, the work provided a unique audience experience in order to promote the OU's research area in science.

The work developed after visiting the OU's Biomedical Research Network laboratories in Milton Keynes and investigating the studies of Igor Kraeve, Dongshen Wu and James Philips into learning, forgetting and remembering. Wiretrace settled on the idea of '3 acts' to structure their piece. These three acts, or trilogy, provided the creative framework with which to approach their brief; to provide an imaginative installation that celebrated and promoted an aspect of science where the OU has a significant research presence. As a result of Wiretrace's discussions with Open University research scientists they subtly configured confocal microscopy imagery of cultures of neurons and electron tomographic models of brain tissue, related to the processes of learning, forgetting and remembering, into a rich tapestry of transient images. As far as the artists are aware they are alone in deploying pioneering 3D stereoscopic image technology used in scientific exploration within contemporary art.



***‘Engaging,
immersive’.***

Peter Stavinsky.





University of the Air: WALES

Overview

- **Country:** Wales
- **Lead Artist:** Steve Geliot,
- **Title:** *Trajectory*
- **Site:** Tramshed, Clare Rd, Cardiff
- **Dates:** 6th December 2013
- Research theme: Social Sciences
- Nation Lead: Cerys Furlong

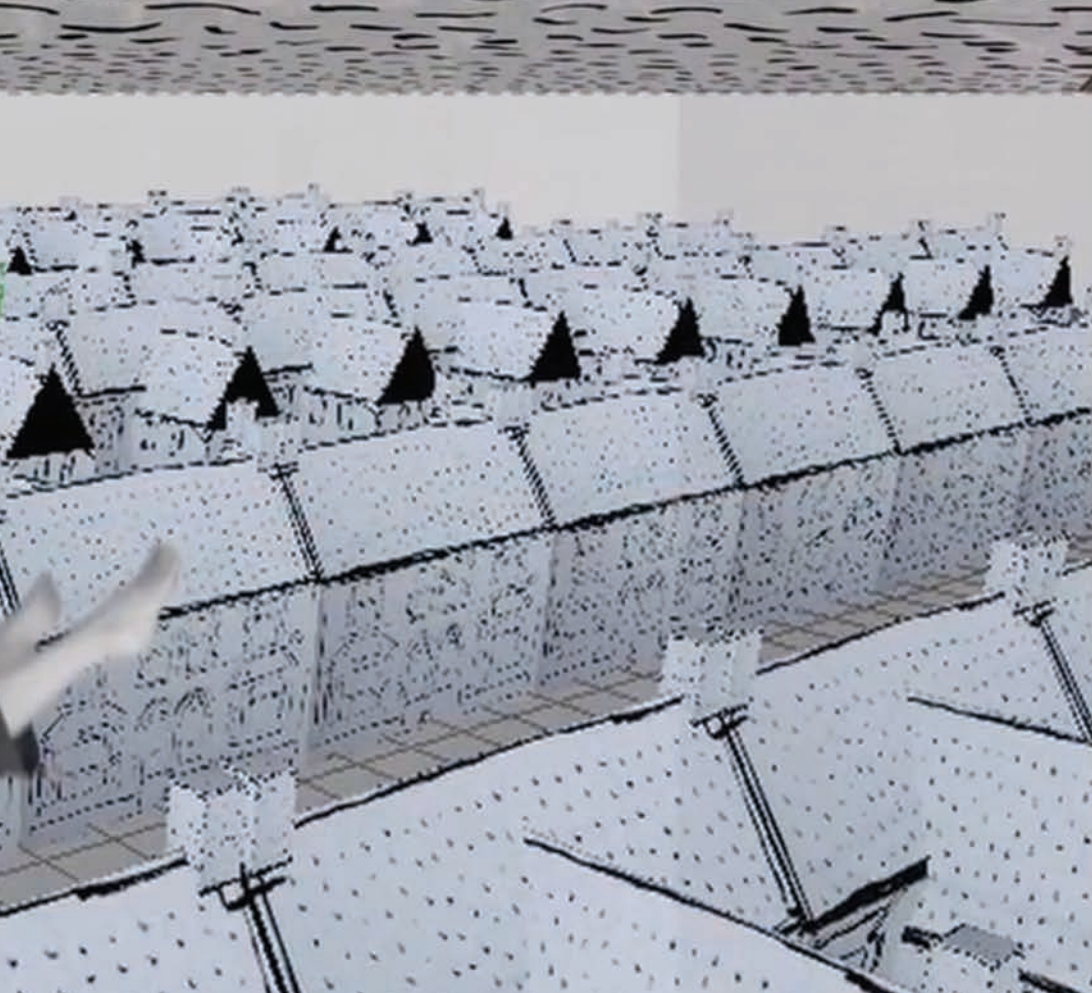
Research Theme

Social Sciences

Interdisciplinary research into the issues that affect contemporary society and promote equality and social justice

Key research themes include:

Citizenship;
Identities and governance;
Criminology; international development; human geography;
Social policy and socio-cultural change



Curriculum Vitae

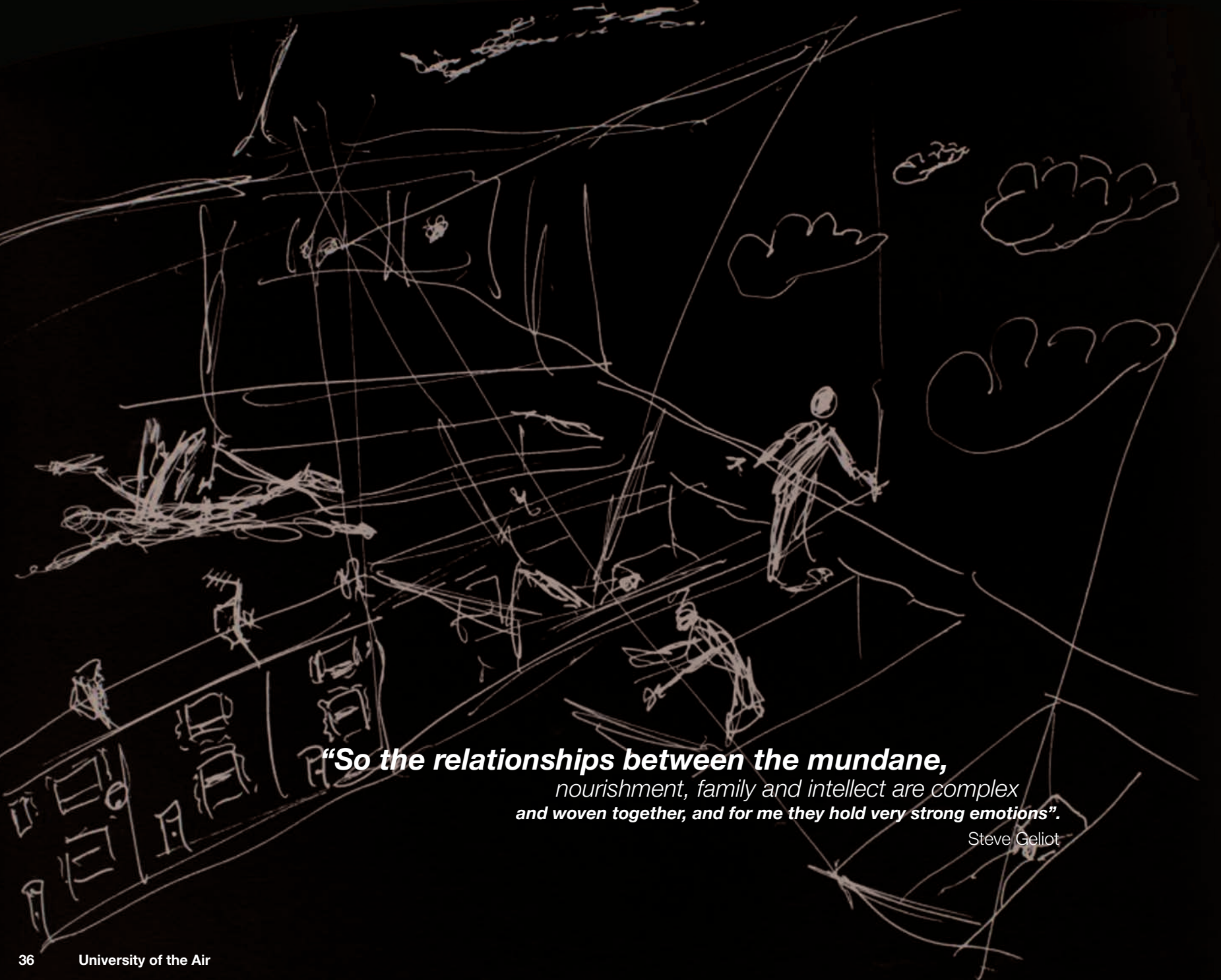
Steve Geliot is a public artist who works on events, temporary installations, large scale projections as well as permanent sculptures. He collaborates with other artists, musicians, dancers and the public to produce multidimensional pieces. He studied three dimensional design at Brighton and gained an MA from Chelsea in the History and Theory of Modern Art. See www.stevegeliot.com

Previous works include

- The Compton Skyline Project 2006 (www.comptonskyline.com)
- Antigravity 2010

Site

The Tramshed in Grangetown Cardiff, is an old industrial bus and tram repair depot whose redbrick sheds date back to the 1880s. This is a Grade II listed building surrounded by terraced housing, shops and community facilities. The future of this building is under consideration



***“So the relationships between the mundane,
nourishment, family and intellect are complex
and woven together, and for me they hold very strong emotions”.***

Steve Geliot

Steve Geliot collaborated with dancer Jo Fong and choreographer Tanja Råman to produce *Trajectory*, an ambitious combination of animation, film, music, projection and performance, in the historic Tramshed in Grangetown, Cardiff. There were three public performances which took place in the old industrial bus and tram repair depot whose redbrick sheds date back to the 1880s. In this vast, dark, oily, metallic space a large sheet of material provided a backdrop for the projection. In front of this were positioned a table, chairs and a settee; the stage where the family eat, study and dream. The performance begins with the mother laying the table for the family meal and as the story unfolds we see her embark on an Open University course, struggle with an assignment and finally receive her results through the post. Intertwined with this student journey is the story of the Open University, from the Harold Wilson speech in 1963 to current milestones in research within the social sciences.



The audience experience different spatial zones: the stage, the screen and the viewing space. The performance area is box like, with screen, ceiling and floor as back, top and bottom faces. Images are projected on to ceiling and screen and float from one region to another; just as actions carried out on stage are repeated in the film projection. At one point in the performance and again at the end, the actors come and join the audience in their space. This travelling across spatial boundaries is echoed in the narrative which features domestic, public, academic and imaginary worlds and the sense that the mother and her children can also travel between zones, that they needn't be trapped in one space. The story is entirely staged within the home, but the audience imagine an 'outside world' as they see the family return from school and work. We also see the 'interior world' of the mother's imagination projected onto the screen. At other points the filmic background represents research themes in the social sciences which hover alongside the family as they go about their everyday lives, so that the audience wonder about the relationship between the two.


Trajectory juxtaposes everyday mundane actions with images of dream, escape and imagination. The repetitive actions of laying the table, of moving between cooker and table, are simultaneously performed and projected. The giant filmed images, more abstract and ritualistic by virtue of their scale, dwarf the actions carried out on stage. The split between reality and fantasy; interior and exterior world, is represented through the coexistence of everyday activity on stage and surreal imagery on screen. Geliot discusses layers which represent the conscious, unconscious and individuation.ⁱ

The working process began with black ink sketches; gestural, spontaneous, direct and expressive. These were then transferred to the computer and transformed into digital animation using the same software that architects use for rendering and modelling designs. This interplay between hand drawn and technologically produced is echoed in the movements of the dancer seen on stage, set against the filmed dance sequences on screen. A simple physical gesture through space, a sweep of black ink across the page become transformed and amplified in the projected animated sequences. This creates strange relationships of scale; the mother is both too big for the kitchen and too small for the settee. There are different ways of thinking about the real and the represented in the relationships between things drawn, filmed, digitalised, performed and 'actual'. Throughout the work, performance (foreground) and screen/film (background) swap in and out of focus so that at times attention is drawn to literal and everyday actions on stage only for these to dissolve and become backdrop to the images of dream and escape on screen.

In *Trajectory* there is fluidity and transformation of mark and gesture and movement across boundaries and technologies. The interior space of the building is transformed by the story of a life changed through education. As the audience enter the space they leave behind the 'deceptive sameness' of the terraced housing that surrounds the Tramshed, a 'monolithic sameness... that has become part of the iconography of the everyday'.ⁱⁱ The film begins with animated sequences of repeated roofs and facades before we focus in on one house and the extraordinary story that takes place within.

i: Steve Geliot, personal correspondence 24.01.14

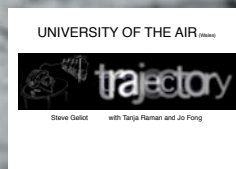
ii: Joe Moran, 'Housing, Memory and Everyday Life in Contemporary Britain', in *Cultural Studies*, 18.4(2004) <<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals> [accessed 13/07/2010] (p.609).



'the brief suggested two strong narratives -
the Open University experience
and ***the story of research***
inspired me because it takes us on
an intellectual, emotional and social journey'.



For further information please see the following links



For The Film of Trajectory

For Images of Trajectory

‘Talking about Trajectory’

Reflections

In November and December 2013 the four art works responding to the *University of the Air* brief were presented in Milton Keynes, Cardiff, Belfast and Edinburgh. These were temporary works that used new media and digital processes; technologies that have transformed public art and education, particularly distance learning. The commissions charted the journey from Harold Wilson's speech and the vision for educational opportunities for all, regardless of background; to the groundbreaking research profile of the University today. There are related narratives here. The University has grown in scale and scope, around 1.8 million students have qualified since the opening in 1969 and currently the OU is ranked in the top third of the UK's higher education institutions (RAE, 2008). There is also the story of the individual student, starting from scratch, who has the opportunity to access these higher tiers of learning.

The art works took place in public spaces and places of open access with the intention of reaching a broad audience. There is synergy here with the University's open policy which includes access to learning materials and research to everyone, not just OU students.¹ One of the significant aspects of the commissions is the success of the collaborations involved: across disciplines, between practitioners,

organisations and institutions and between artists and their audiences. Again there are connections with the University who have longstanding partnerships with organisations like the BBC, the NHS as well as other educational institutions.

Each of the projects forged a particular relationship with its audience; they were immersive and interactive and required the viewer/ listener to bring their own experiences and memories to the interpretation of the work. Each piece is self contained but it is also interesting to connect the works and the places and view them as a kind of collection. In an interview Marie Kirbyshaw reflected on the possibility of, 'stitching them all together'.² This suggests that each response creates a facet of a larger whole; 'the work as a 'collection' created a more holistic response to the brief'.³ It is through work such as this publication and the film 'University of the Air: Transmissions' that this notion of a collection can be examined further.

In her evaluation Marie Kirbyshaw also noted that the commissions have established new and sustainable partnerships. She cites John D'Arcy, Open University Director in Northern Ireland who said that the *University of the Air* has helped 'establish an equality of partnership between Belfast City Council,

the OU and Arts Council Northern Ireland'. Wiretrace were invited to give a talk focusing on 'the brain trilogy' at the Real-time Visuals AHRC Research Network conference in Newcastle on the 24th and 25th January 2014. Caroline Devine has suggested reinstating the installations in the future, 'It could be interesting for the installation to speculate what the *University of the Air* would be like in another 50 years time'.^{iv} Steve Geliot is going to carry out further projects with one of the researchers featured in his piece; Professor Kath Woodward has commissioned him to make a film about her research group "Being In The Zone" - which is an AHRC funded project. The University of the Air commissions may have set a precedent for artists working with researchers.

In lots of ways *University of the Air* wasn't a typical project. It wasn't an obvious way to celebrate academic research. The art works didn't adhere to conventions regarding public art. The sites moved beyond traditional art venues and the audiences beyond a typical art audience. This may result in a re-evaluation of the potential for art in those everyday spaces and for the viewers and listeners of the work, the potential for the ideas, experiences and sensations to permeate their everyday lives.

i: For example the OpenLearn, learning resources website, the material on iTunes U and the University's Open Research Online (ORO).

ii: Marie Kirbyshaw, interview, 6.12.13.

iii: Marie Kirbyshaw, University of the Air Arts Commissioning Report for the Open University, December 2013

iv: Ibid

To view the full project evaluation please follow the link below



EVALUATION PDF

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