

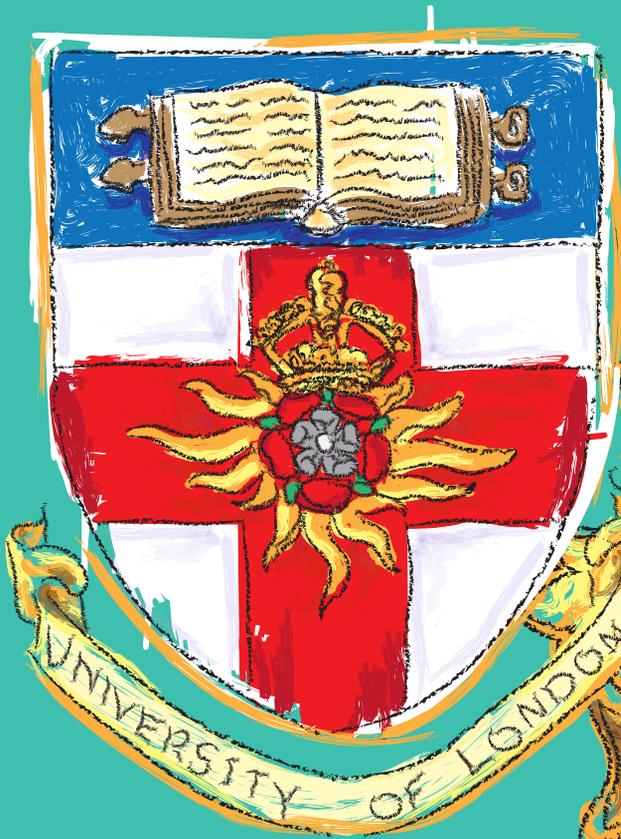


Birkbeck
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

BBK

EXPLORING OUR PAST

*Professor Joanna Bourke
explores the College's history*



**BIRKBECK
CELEBRATES THE
100TH ANNIVERSARY
OF JOINING THE
UNIVERSITY OF
LONDON**



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MASTER'S WELCOME

This year has been another eventful one for the world of higher education, with the role of universities, their funding, and purpose never far from the front pages. In this issue of BBK, we mark the 100th anniversary of Birkbeck joining the University of London with an article by Professor Joanna Bourke who delves into Birkbeck's progressive past. We are proud of our membership of the University of London and the value to our students that holding a UoL degree brings.

In its nearly 200 year history, Birkbeck has always made the case for part-time, flexible higher education, an ethos which is gaining significant traction nationwide. I was pleased that the Augar Review, released in May 2019, contained proposals for a lifelong learning loan allowance to encourage retraining, flexible and "second chance" learning – everything Birkbeck does best.

Earlier this year, I was appointed to the Lifelong Learning Commission, tasked with developing plans for an inclusive adult education system which could transform millions of lives and reskill the economy.

I hold conversations with policymakers to show the power of Birkbeck at every opportunity. This year, I was proud to welcome leading figures of all stripes to the College to demonstrate the value of lifelong learning for our students and for wider society. Universities Minister Chris Skidmore delivered a speech to an audience of Birkbeck students and staff, in which he recognised the important contribution that part-time education makes in enabling people to reskill throughout their working lives; and how, as he put it, "Birkbeck has always been one step ahead when it comes to opening up access to university."

Meanwhile Labour MP for Tottenham, David Lammy, gave the Annual Public Lecture in the Department of Politics, where he discussed Birkbeck's invaluable role in improving access to education by expanding employment opportunities and social mobility; and called for more challenges to political certainty and complacency.

I welcomed the news that international students will once again be able to access a two-year work visa after graduating from a British university. These students offer major cultural, intellectual and economic contributions to the UK, and this change will enable the country to benefit from a skilled, global workforce.

Our researchers have been busy shedding light on subjects as varied as the effect of classroom noise on school children's learning (p. 8), facial disfigurement and art in war (p. 14), addiction to video games (p. 20); or learning about the most distant object ever reached in space (p. 26). Meanwhile our estates team are finalising developments to strengthen our research and teaching spaces, with the new ToddlerLab on Torrington Square, a freshly refurbished library on Malet Street, and Cambridge House, a state-of-the-art teaching facility near Euston Square. (p. 12)

This year we welcomed Sir Andrew Cahn, a highly experienced Chief Executive and senior civil servant, as the new Chair of Governors, as the former Chair, Sir Harvey McGrath, stepped down after serving nine years (the maximum allowed). Thank you Sir Harvey for the immense contribution you have made to Birkbeck. We're now looking ahead to the coming year of inquiry, innovation and insight and to improved support for part-time and mature students.

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We are committed to remaining a globally facing institution

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*Professor David Latchman,
Master, Birkbeck*





EXPLORING OUR PAST

With 2020 marking the 100th anniversary of Birkbeck joining the University of London, Professor of History Joanna Bourke delves into our past.

Walking into the Birkbeck Literary and Scientific Institution (as it was then called) in the 1890s could be dispiriting. Charles Wesley Hume, a student at the time, deemed it “depressing” – one reading room was generally “occupied by very aged proletarians” reading newspapers. Hume observed that Birkbeck at that time was “a cross between a mortuary and a maternity hospital”. The Birkbeck Institution “was dying by inches”, but Birkbeck College had not quite been born.

Part of the problem was that systematic instruction was lacking. In 1858, the University of London had introduced a Charter allowing anyone to sit their examinations for degrees, but fewer than one-third of Birkbeck’s students took advantage of this. Most of the classes offered were technical, including Elocution, Chess and Music.

This was to change with the appointment of George Armitage-Smith as Master. He arrived in 1896, and when he left twenty-two years later the College was unrecognisable. Known as a “shrewd and practical North Countryman”, Armitage-Smith did more than any other administrator (except the original founders) to transform the College’s fortunes.

On the surface, Armitage-Smith was an unlikely revolutionary. He was a political economist whose books on taxation and free trade make for dry reading today. A 1901 lecture suggests a man of solid tastes: he warned students against “the vice of desultory reading”, which he believed was “one of the frailties in an age of cheap paper, when everyone can read and too many write”.

His legacy was shepherding the College into the University of London. Encouraged by students, Armitage-Smith initiated a programme of restructuring. In his first year, he grouped the individual classes into five Faculties: English and Commercial; Languages; Law; Mental and Moral Science; and Science and Technology.

The Royal Commission on University Education in London, which sat between 1909 and 1912, was the perfect opportunity for Armitage-Smith to make his case to join the University of London. Before he was called to give evidence, he endured condescending arguments against Birkbeck made by The Rev. Arthur Cayley Headlam (Principal and Dean of King’s College London). Headlam proposed that Birkbeck be restricted to educating those “who have not had a proper school education”. At King’s, he noted, there was “a very large amount of work not of a university standard, which we are anxious to get rid of”. It would

be advantageous if Birkbeck was “a place to which the University could recommend anyone to go who is not yet fit for university work”.

These comments infuriated Armitage-Smith. The idea that “King’s College should hand over its inferior students to Birkbeck College” was offensive, he argued. He was “indignant” that Headlam suggested turning Birkbeck into “a preparatory school” for King’s. After all, Armitage-Smith reminded the Commissioners, King’s had been established later than Birkbeck and was “chiefly known... as a theological institution, and as an evening coaching establishment for the lower Civil Service examinations”.

Armitage-Smith noted that there were two models for a metropolitan university. The first was a restrictive one: few Colleges would be members and education would be made available to a small proportion of students who could afford high fees or could compete for bursaries. The second model was superior – it was open, welcoming all educational establishments that met university standards.

After all, London was the centre of government, administration, commerce, trade, and banking. The city could not afford to ignore the educational needs of people who were employed during daylight hours. Armitage-Smith further noted that there was now very little “elemental work” taught at Birkbeck. Indeed, the proportion of non-university level courses at Birkbeck was actually smaller than at King’s. He reminded the Commissioners that Birkbeck had been preparing students for the University’s examinations ever since the 1858 Charter. The College was already part of the University of London “in everything but name”.

Armitage-Smith’s chief message was the superiority of Birkbeck students. He bragged that “the evening student has more stamina and greater capability of work than the younger day student”, that they are “earnest, eager, intellectually alert”. Birkbeck students were nothing less than “the elite of the day worker”.

It was impressive rhetoric. And effective. When the *Royal Commission on University Education in London* issued its final report in 1913, it recommended that Birkbeck become a “constituent college in the Faculties of Arts and Science for evening students” in the University of London. The declaration of war postponed Armitage-Smith’s prize, but the College triumphed in 1920.

For more information about events taking place to mark the 100th anniversary of Birkbeck joining the University of London, visit: bbk.ac.uk/about-us/200th-anniversary

MAN KIND

A project spearheaded by the counselling service is getting more men talking.

A successful initiative led by Birkbeck's counselling team has helped more at-risk men to access professional mental health services.

While men make up 44% of students in the UK, research has found that they represent only 31% of those using university counselling services, and that the risk of suicide for male students is twice that of female students. There is evidence of a gender bias in mental health care, with women diagnosed with anxiety or depression far more often than men, despite similar scores on the measures widely used in diagnosing mental health conditions.

Birkbeck recently became the first UK university to assess why this disparity exists.

While the vast majority of men surveyed said that they would consider using the counselling service if they were experiencing difficulties, the reasons that some may not ask for help were troubling. Some men felt their problems were not serious enough, while others said they struggled to ask for the help they needed, or felt that they should be able to deal with their problems alone.

The project was led by Charlotte Williams, Paul Mollitt and Jo Myddleton, who worked to put new structures in place to empower men to access mental health support. They found that men "wanted images of masculinity to be challenged. They wanted male role models – men who could talk about mental health and be visible within the university", adding that "understanding what keeps different individuals from asking for help when they're struggling is key to providing an inclusive service."

They launched a targeted campaign to diffuse myths that men's problems weren't serious enough to merit help or that talking about mental health is at odds with a

masculine identity. More male counsellors were employed and the counselling team built a peer support system, training Birkbeck students in active listening to create a more inclusive, kind and open community.

Since launching the project, Birkbeck has seen a steady rise in men accessing the counselling service, with an increase of about 6%. While this improvement shows evidence of the efficacy of the campaign, there is still work to be done.

The project was generously funded by the UPP Foundation, whose Director, Richard Brabner, said: "The success of the counselling outreach project shows that a positive impact is possible when you combine funding support with an innovative new idea."

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The risk of suicide for male students is twice that of female students

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Over time, Birkbeck's counsellors hope to build a blueprint of strategies which other university providers can follow, so more male students can access the help they need and lead happier, healthier lives.

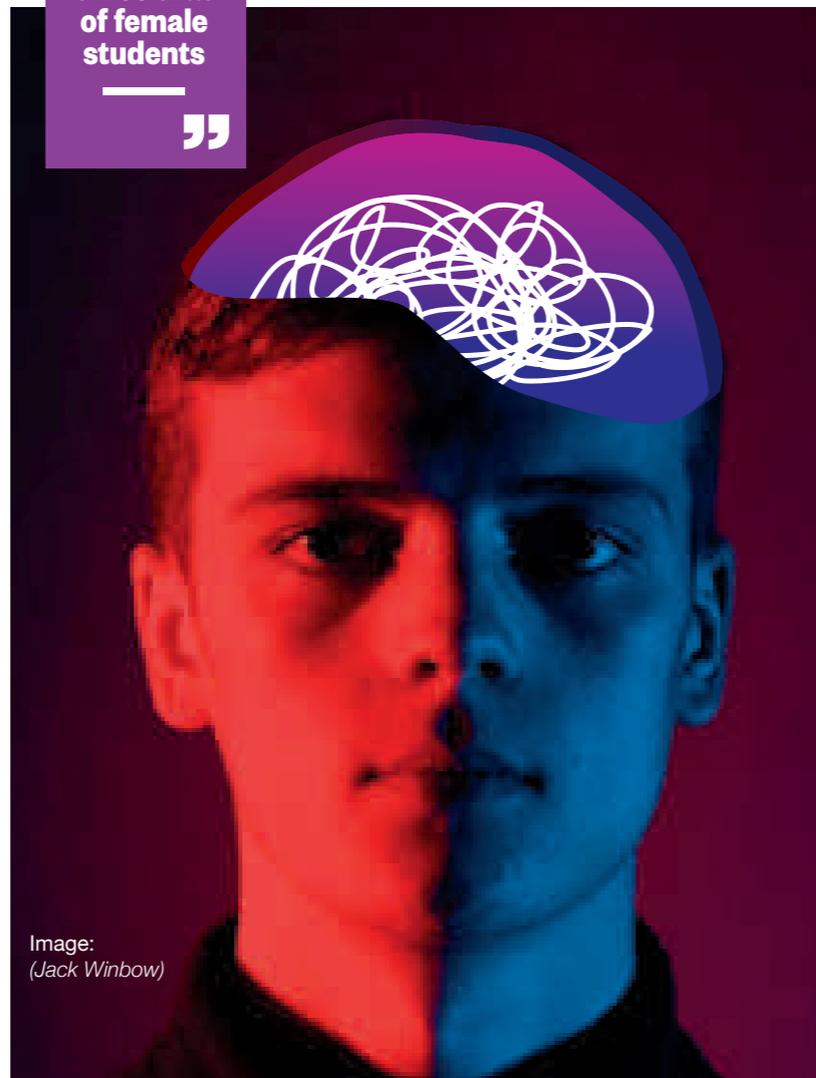


Image:
(Jack Window)

“

The scheme has enabled me to reach a point where I feel positive, excited and energised about my future

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Image:
(Damian Walker)

THE PATHWAY TO SUCCESS

A programme to match students with alumni or corporate partners shows the power of a mentoring relationship.

Mentoring Pathways, the programme that sees final year students paired with a mentor from Birkbeck's alumni community or an employee at one of our corporate partners, is now in its ninth successful year. Since 2012, over 650 students have benefited from the advice and insights that mentors who are established in their careers have been able to offer those wishing to change career or make a step-change in their working lives. The mentors have experience in a wide range of sectors, with corporate partnerships including PwC, Cancer Research UK, Fiserv, Ashurst and Arts Council England.

In the current academic year, the programme has expanded again to see almost 230 mentee-mentor pairings, showing that there is widespread recognition of the power of a successful mentoring relationship. The pairs meet monthly between November and June, with additional support offered via email and telephone.

Paula Pearch, 55, applied to Mentoring Pathways in the second year of her MSc Career Management and Coaching, while on a career break from her role as a FE college careers adviser. At the time she wanted to explore becoming a career coach. Paula's mentor, Anna Wesson, graduated from Birkbeck with a MSc Occupational Psychology in 2012 and now works as an executive coach.

Paula says: "Anna has enabled me to reach a point where I feel positive, excited and energised about my future. Her calm, insightful and positive approach provided space and time for me to explore my career transition. She challenged and focused my thinking, helping me to understand my situation in new ways and to link my past career with my future plans. She generously shared her knowledge and professional experience with me and offered really useful practical advice and guidance. This mentoring relationship has left me with a renewed sense of confidence where I now feel, 'Of course I can do this!'"

Alumna Anna also discovered that mentoring brought her unexpected benefits, saying: "Mentoring forced me to get clear on why I had made the choices I made, what served me, and what I would counsel against, which I really enjoyed."

To find out more about Mentoring Pathways, or to register your interest for next year's programme, visit: bbk.ac.uk/alumni/mentoring

LEARNING IN NOISY SCHOOLS

Jessica Massonnié, a PhD student from the Department of Psychological Sciences, discusses the impact that noise in primary schools can have on children's wellbeing.

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The results show that noise is not always bad for learning. It depends on which children we are talking about, and on what they are doing. It also depends on the type and level of noise

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Image:
(istockphoto)

Do you remember that lad at school who was constantly blowing his nose? And the fidgety one who was clicking his pen every two seconds? You probably still have some of these amongst your friends and colleagues. If this is irritating you, you can describe yourself as relatively “noise sensitive”.

Being noise sensitive is not always adaptive in educational settings, as peace and quiet is not the norm. If I think about my own journey, I shared a classroom with twenty or more enthusiastic children in primary school. Then I went on to high school, where I started speaking back in class, trying to look cool. University scaled things up again, with hundreds of students in the same lecture theatre. Noise made it hard to follow the lessons, as fascinating discussions were happening around me, from my friends' holiday plans to the latest news.

Building on this strong personal experience, I joined the Department of Psychological Sciences at Birkbeck,

to work on the impact of noise on learning and wellbeing, with Professor Denis Mareschal and Dr Natasha Kirkham. I focused on primary school children, since they learn core skills (and are very fun to work with).

In one of my studies, children engaged in several school activities assessing mathematics performance, reading comprehension and text recall. They did it once in silence, and another time while hearing noise through headphones. I used two types of noise: someone telling a story, or an overall incomprehensible babble (what you would hear in a café). I learned a few things from that study.

First, that children's subjective sensitivity (whether they felt distracted by noise) often did not correspond to the actual impact of noise on their performance. Some children felt very distracted but actually performed better in noisy conditions. Others were convinced to filter the noise when it had a deleterious effect on their performance.

Second, when averaging results for all children, noise only had a negative impact on the mathematics and recall tasks, which required children to hold information in mind.

In line with this idea, children who were better at keeping multiple pieces of information in mind (as assessed in a separate working memory task) were less affected by noise when doing mathematics.

It means that the question is not only about whether children “let the noise in”, or “block it out”, but also about what they do with the information when they have it in mind. These results show that noise is not always bad for learning.

It depends on which children we are talking about, and on what they are doing. It also depends on the type and level of noise. In my study, there was no difference between hearing storytelling, and coffee-shop noise, but other types of noise exist! My noise stimuli were

also displayed at the level of a normal conversation, when noise levels in schools can actually reach those of rock concerts. It was therefore important to investigate how my work related to life in “real classrooms”.

My favourite PhD project was actually the last one. Together with Philippe Frasseto (school teacher), Tommy Lawson (artist), and Marie Frasseto (mindfulness/yoga teacher), we developed school interventions, one focused on sound awareness, one on mindfulness. In the sound awareness intervention, children discussed the concepts of sound and noise in class. They were invited to regulate noise levels when they were too high, as indicated by visual panels.

Our results are still preliminary, but the sound awareness intervention was associated with a reduction in noise levels, in children's feelings of distraction and annoyance from noise, in comparison to the mindfulness intervention. However, our control classroom (which followed the usual curriculum) also got quieter over time! It seems promising to directly discuss the issue of noise with children, but it is also important to compare different types of interventions with each other, and with a ‘business as usual’ situation.

Our school project won the Early Career Public Engagement Award at Birkbeck. This meant a lot to us. Gathering collaborators from various backgrounds was risky. We were unsure whether all the pieces of the puzzle would hold together, and if our approach would be valued by the academic community. The award came as recognition for our initiative.

Moreover, when doing educational research, it reminds me to think about who I want to work for, and how I am going to evaluate my impact. It is important for our research to rely on solid scientific protocols and analyses, which might ultimately be published in academic journals. But it is also important to consider feedback from teachers and children: Do they find our projects meaningful? What are the barriers in their involvement? It can be scary at first to expose hours of work to potential criticism. But reaching out and being more transparent with our public can change both their, and our reality.

Jessica's project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, Birkbeck, University of London and the Académie de Corse.



BRINGING YOUR WHOLE SELF TO WORK

Birkbeck Futures combines the Careers Service, Enterprise Pathways and Birkbeck Talent to support students and graduates in their future lives.

Birkbeck Future's Ability Programme is helping students with disabilities find work placements.

“

It made me feel like there are more opportunities out there for me. It's created more connections and made me feel more confident in my abilities. I have a bright future ahead of me

”

Image:
Richard Morley
(Damian Walker)

In 2018-2019, more than 17% of Birkbeck students identified as having one or more disabilities and we regularly see the discrimination that people with disabilities can face when entering the job market. These barriers are not just physical but also structural and ideological; there are a number of stereotypes and misgivings about disabilities that may hinder employers from hiring people with a disability or a neurodiverse condition. As a result, applicants may think that certain industries are not open to them, which could mean they lack confidence when it comes to applying for jobs. To support our disabled students, Birkbeck established the *Ability Programme*, an initiative dedicated to helping students and recent graduates with a disability or a neurodiverse condition to access skills development workshops, online resources and opportunities to network with disability-friendly employers.

Last year, thanks to the generosity of the Ian Karten Charitable Trust, the *Ability Programme* facilitated twelve fully funded four-week work placements with external employers. Students were matched with employers based on their existing skill set and interests. The placements were designed to give students the opportunity to develop their skills and gain relevant work experience as well as boost their self-confidence to ask for adjustments at work if necessary.

Richard's story

Richard Morley, pictured left, an MSc Computer Science student with a hearing disability, applied to the scheme and was given a place at digital insurance company Azur. Richard had been in contact with Birkbeck Futures before joining the scheme and applied to take part in the programme because he had been out of the job market for a while and doubted his ability after a few unsuccessful interviews. He wanted the opportunity to improve his existing skill set and boost his wavering confidence in the job market.

At Azur, Richard was given the role of Software Development Intern and tasked with improving the interface of the company's application called Magic. This entailed improving the colour scheme using the brand guidelines and working on developing animated features for the app. In a previous company, Richard had felt very pressured which he did not find conducive to progression. The positive atmosphere at Azur, by contrast, allowed him to develop his skills and confidence. He developed a good relationship with his team and said: "I found the work challenging because I was doing things that I hadn't done in previous positions, such as programming and creating animation on the app."

One of Richard's biggest challenges at Azur was delivering a presentation about his project. He noted that in previous roles, "I never did presentations. Even if I was given the opportunity, I would be reluctant to do it." But after receiving support from a colleague in the preparation and delivery, he found it contributed to improved confidence around his skill set and employability prospects.

Reflecting on the importance of the work placements for people with disabilities, Richard said: "It's good because lots of employers think that people with disabilities might not be able to get things done because they have certain problems that get in the way of work." Being given placements such as these "demonstrates that people with disabilities are hardworking and for me personally, that I can adapt to any situation despite my hearing disability."

Richard's placement culminated in a job offer which he will take up after he graduates. "It made me feel like there are more opportunities out there for me. It's created more connections and made me feel more confident in my abilities. I have a bright future ahead of me."

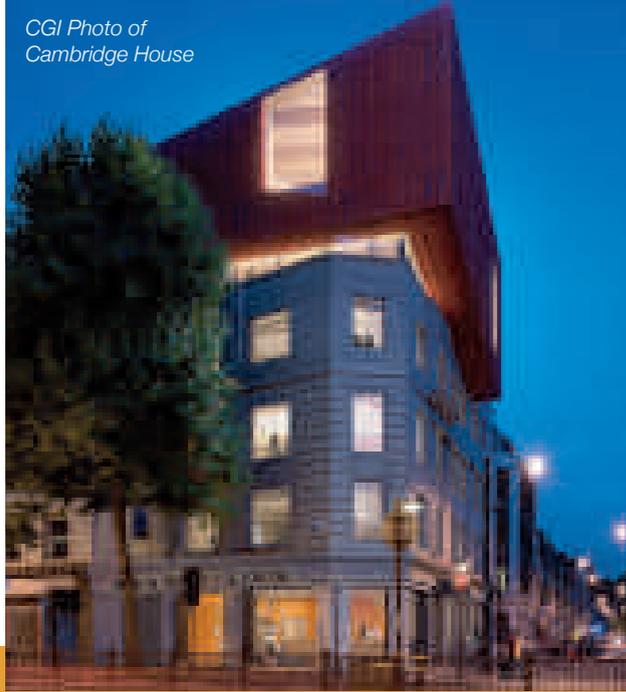
Many of the employers that took part said that the scheme was important in opening their eyes to the way they could attract and accommodate employees with disabilities or neurodiverse conditions, and encourage an open dialogue about the individual needs of the employees. Tom Armitage, Head of Talent and Performance at the *Telegraph* commented; "We were able to craft work experience placements that were really meaningful" and said that it challenged his team's way of thinking.

It is the experience of Richard and students like him that show why schemes like the *Ability Programme* are necessary to break down stigmas attached to people with disabilities and in turn allow people to bring their "whole selves to work."

THE IAN KARTEN CHARITABLE TRUST

Established by the late Ian Karten, refugee student, businessman and generous philanthropist, the Ian Karten Charitable Trust is committed to supporting educational opportunity and improving life outcomes for disabled people through assistive technology and vocational and life skills training. The Trust has established more than 100 centres for disabled people for computer-aided vocational training, education and communication and awarded more than 3,000 scholarships to students across the UK.

CGI Photo of
Cambridge House



BUILDING OUR FUTURE

As we look forward to the College's 200th anniversary in 2023, a number of projects are now under way, to deliver a substantial increase in high-quality teaching, study and research space that will ultimately enhance the Birkbeck experience for all of our students.

Cambridge House

In working towards the goal of teaching every Birkbeck student in a Birkbeck building or teaching facility, work has begun on our new state-of-the-art teaching centre at Cambridge House. Located on Euston Road, it will house the College's largest lecture theatre and new classrooms, as well as a dedicated co-learning space where students can prepare for their lectures and share ideas with one another.

The building was designed following a consultation with our students and is being built with their needs in mind. It will provide them with much needed study and learning space in an environment that fosters interaction and collaboration.

The Library

In response to feedback from Birkbeck and the National Student Surveys the Library underwent significant refurbishment in the summer of 2019.

The work resulted in an increase in the number of study spaces, including areas for collaborative working, the creation of a larger silent study space, improvement to teaching facilities for academic skills workshops, and a hub to enable students to access support facilities all in one place.

The Wohl Wolfson ToddlerLab

Construction is almost complete on the Wohl Wolfson ToddlerLab which will be the UK's first purpose-built centre dedicated to studying brain development in toddlers as they interact with their natural environment.

Located in Torrington Square, the building will be the site of research that will build upon the research already conducted in Birkbeck's BabyLab. Researchers will use the new facilities to understand the development of typical toddlers and those with neurodevelopment conditions like autism, ADHD, Fragile X and Williams Syndrome. Researchers will continue to pioneer and test the efficacy of new early interventions techniques that could be transformational in supporting children with neurodevelopment conditions.

The ToddlerLab will provide spaces that mimic the natural environment, in which children learn, play and develop. The building will include preschool and home simulation spaces; a nap room to monitor sleep development; and a state-of-the-art CAVE, an automatic virtual environment that can digitally simulate different locations and situations.

We are incredibly grateful to the hundreds of alumni and friends of Birkbeck whose kind donations have helped make this project possible.

With special thanks to:

- The Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation
- The Wolfson Foundation
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- Daniel and Elizabeth Peltz
- CareTech Charitable Foundation

REFUGEES, NEWCOMERS, CITIZENS: MIGRATION STORIES FROM PICTURE POST, 1938-1956

An exhibition brought together over sixty original prints by renowned émigré photographers Gerti Deutsch and Kurt Hutton, together with Bert Hardy and Haywood Magee, to reveal Picture Post magazine's stories of refugees and immigrants to Britain from the 1930s to the 1950s. The images focused on the Kindertransport and Windrush-era migrations, as well as on lesser-known histories of wartime African-American women Red Cross volunteers, and post-war child Holocaust survivors who found refuge in the Lake District.

The exhibition ran from 3 June-5 July at the Peltz Gallery in Birkbeck's School of Arts and was curated by Mike Berlin, Lecturer in History at Birkbeck, and Amanda Hopkinson, daughter of photographer Gerti Deutsch and Picture Post editor Tom Hopkinson, and Honorary Research Professor, City University.



Image:
Haywood Magee
(Getty Images)

FACES OF WAR

Suzannah Biernoff, *Reader in Visual Culture*, explores wartime facial injuries and their effect on the sense of self in this extract from her book, *Portraits of Violence: War and the Aesthetics of Disfigurement* (University of Michigan Press).

Disfigurement and mutilation were ubiquitous on the battlefields of World War I; an estimated 60,500 British soldiers suffered head or eye injuries, and 41,000 men had one or more limbs amputated. At the specialist hospital for facial injuries in Kent, over 11,000 operations were performed on some 5,000 British and Dominion troops between 1917 and 1925.

Many soldiers were shot in the face simply because they had no experience of trench warfare: “They seemed to think they could pop their heads up over a trench and move quickly enough to dodge the hail of machine-gun bullets,” wrote the American surgeon Fred Albee. Military medical archives contain extensive visual evidence of these injuries. Until the past few years, however, these x-rays and surgical diagrams, photographs and stereographs, plaster casts and models were rarely on display; amounting to a “hidden history” of World War I.

During the war, visitors to the Queen’s Hospital would have been able to see Henry Tonks’ drawings of patients before and after surgical reconstruction. Aside from these unusual studies, however, the disfigured face is almost entirely absent from British art. They never found their way into anti-war publications, as happened in Weimar Germany, nor in the illustrated histories of the war. As historical documents, they speak volumes about the kinds of injuries sustained in modern combat, and the medical response, but they were not part of British cultural history in any broader sense.

Facial injury provoked an anxiety that was acutely and specifically visual. Patients refused to see their families and fiancés; children reportedly fled at the sight of their fathers; nurses struggled to look their patients in the face. Ward Muir, who worked as an orderly at the

Third London General Hospital in Wandsworth was surprised by his reaction to patients on the facial ward: “I never [before] felt any embarrassment... confronting a patient,” he confesses, “however deplorable his state, however humiliating his dependence on my services, until I came in contact with certain wounds of the face.”

A culture of aversion surrounded facially disfigured veterans of World War I. This collective looking-away took multiple forms: the absence of mirrors on facial wards, the physical and psychological isolation of patients with severe facial injuries, the eventual self-censorship made possible by the development of prosthetic masks, and an unofficial censorship of disfigured veterans in the British press and propaganda. Unlike amputees, men with facial injuries were never officially celebrated as wounded heroes. The wounded face is not equivalent to the wounded body: it presents the trauma of mechanised warfare as a loss of identity and humanity. That radical facial transformation is likely to affect one’s sense of self is self-evident. Less easy to tease out is the relationship between facial appearance and humanity. Why should disfigurement lessen one’s humanity in the eyes of others?

Ward Muir and his contemporaries take the answer for granted. Facial casualties could not have responded expressively to those around them; their faces were not only visibly mutilated, but rendered inanimate. These attributes of the human face – the ability to convey subtleties of emotion or mood; to indicate or elicit understanding; to register another’s presence – are all compromised by severe facial trauma.

Faces do more than signify our individual selves. They are a common ground. In the words of the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty: “I live in the facial expression of the other, as I feel him living in mine.” When the Queen’s Hospital opened in August 1917, the new facility and its patients received considerable attention. The physical and psychological isolation of the men was a recurring theme, as were the wonders of modern surgery. Patients often spent two years or more in treatment, undergoing multiple operations, and often returning for further operations after being discharged.

In many respects, the development of surgical and prosthetic reconstruction in this time represented a new frontier, where the modern war machine met human flesh, and where surgery met the uniquely dehumanising effects of facial injury. Medicine could repair the mutilated body up to a point. It could return it to active service or to some kind of productive labour, but art – both portraits of the kind by Henry Tonks and the ‘strange new art’ of plastic surgery – offered different kind of advantages; it could humanise.



Why should disfigurement lessen one’s humanity in the eyes of others?



Private William Kearsley by Henry Tonks,
© Museums at the Royal College of Surgeons, RCSSC/P
569.36

“

There is a question as to whether urban graffiti is the only kind of art that can now be truly accessible, affordable and popular in some areas

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Image:

Phillip Roberts / Alamy Stock Photo

BANKSY COMES TO PORT TALBOT

Amanda Roderick, MA History of Art student, tells the story of the time a Banksy original turned up on her street and reflects on the implications of cuts to public funding for artists and small art organisations.

One week before Christmas 2018, a striking image of what appeared to be a small boy enjoying the snow was discovered on a garage wall in Port Talbot. The site, a lane behind a row of early nineteenth century terraces in an area called Taibach ('small house' in Welsh), is sandwiched between the M4 and Tata Steelworks. Recognised and then confirmed as Banksy's work within hours on his website and titled 'Seasons Greetings', it had his typical combination of hard-edged social commentary mixed with humour. In this instance, a small boy playfully sticking out his tongue with arms outstretched catching snow is bundled up for winter with coat, hat and scarf, complete with sledge at his feet. Only by turning the corner can the observer have a different reading – the flakes are not snow falling from the sky, but ash blowing over the boy from what is either a burning bin or chimney.

Port Talbot is my home town. The site of the Banksy is on the street I grew up in, its lane is the route my sister and I took as a shortcut to school every day, where we played in the evenings and learnt to ride our bikes. Visiting the Banksy was the Boxing Day walk for many families – mine included – and the security staff in place there (paid for by the actor Michael Sheen who is also from Port Talbot) informed us that in the days leading up to Christmas alone, there had been around 2,000 visitors to this small lane. The number of visitors apparently rose to a grand total of over 10,000.

Life, news and the art world have moved on since then of course; the work has been purchased for an 'undisclosed six figure sum' which has been paid to the owner of the garage, a local man. John Brandler, art dealer, street art expert and collector of Banksy's work, was the buyer; he promised that it would remain in Port Talbot for two to three years but insisted it be relocated somewhere else in the town for protection.

Brandler, through his patronage, perhaps unintentionally foregrounded the crisis that now looms. Without the philanthropy we have witnessed here, it is difficult to envisage how artists and small regional arts organisations will survive and thrive as public funding rapidly declines.

The UK is fast approaching the US model of reliance on private and charitable funding – which is a strong tradition there. Its infrastructures are built up over many generations where money is usually raised by wealthy Board members and Trustees. The encouragement of similar 'business' models in Wales has been a brutal transition into a different kind of dependency and one not easy to achieve, especially in the poorer regions or inner cities of Wales and England. Here there can often be little or no track record, resources or economic success related to individual giving and corporate sponsorship.

An arts venue in Port Talbot off the back of the Banksy would be hugely beneficial but the reality is that any new or 'redeveloped' space for showing or producing art would come with unaffordable rents, overheads and often insufficient budget allocation to pay its artists and staff properly. It would, like increasingly, the NHS and many school classrooms, be reliant on volunteers for many front-of-house staffing and operating responsibilities.

Secondly, there is a question as to whether urban graffiti is the only kind of art that can now be truly accessible, affordable and popular in some areas. It does not require a building, but will it always need to be covered with ugly protective screens and fencing (as was the Port Talbot Banksy)? What of the emerging, local artists, the art students and grassroot collectives? How and where will they make their art, who will pay to see it, buy it – and how will it be collected, maintained and archived for the future?

Banksy has been labelled a Situationist, and part graffiti artist, part wind-up prankster. In Port Talbot he created a timely metaphor to shine a light on the town. Through his art, he re-opened and reignited excitement and creative discussion amongst its inhabitants across class and generation – appealing to all those who identify with notions of self-expression and the spirit of rebellion that he represents. He has also reminded us, in case we needed it, of the dereliction of duty towards arts and culture (and other public services) by the current government ideology of austerity – the repercussions of which are manifested in cost-cutting exercises by regional authorities across Britain. How this impacts the next generation of artists and museum visitors and collections we will see.

SWITCHING OFF FROM 'ALWAYS ON'

Almuth McDowall, Professor of Organisational Psychology, shares her research into work-life balance and calls on employers to take responsibility for their organisation's culture.

There is much being written and said about the 'always on' culture and how we are increasingly glued to our digital devices – whether at work or at home. Some of my own research has also concerned itself with this topic. In 2018, my colleague and friend Gail Kinman and I had the results from a practice survey published, as we wanted to know what organisations were doing about the changing world of work and the use of information and computer technology.

Well, 'precious little' is the answer. Over half of our respondents said that their organisations don't have a relevant policy in place and don't offer any guidance or training. Somewhat worryingly, over 40% thought that it should be up to individuals to manage the issue, rather than their line managers or Human Resources.

Why would people choose to be 'always on' outside formal working hours?

Working unpaid during leisure time does not make logical sense! We gift the UK economy billions in unpaid overtime year on year, as research by the Trade Unions Congress has revealed. People have different motivations, influenced by issues such as what everyone else does (social norms); what the expectations in the job are; how committed people feel to their job; how they value 'switching off' and recovery; and whether this is supported in their environment. One key

issue which came out of this review is the 'empowerment enslavement paradox'. Our digital devices are both an enabler, as they afford flexibility, but also 'digital leash' as it's difficult to say 'enough is enough' and switch off. As we all know, screen-time can be very seductive.

Is there any evidence that being 'always on' is bad for our health?

A recent econometric analysis shows that ICT infrastructure has a positive impact on population health (the authors measured general health outcomes such as infant mortality). Regarding the impact of social media use, there is evidence that high use is linked to poor sleep quality, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. Of course, such studies cannot tell us whether teenagers who are highly anxious to start off with are more likely to be prolific users.

There is far less robust evidence on the exact effects from the world of work – what happens to you if you are on your phone, tablet or laptop almost 24/7? We lack good research to tell us what the exact effects are. What we do know is that we need recovery and respite, our systems are simply not programmed to be on continuous overdrive. We also know that leisure activities which are quite different from our work tasks are better for our recovery than doing more of the same. I take this to heart. For instance, I find that reading at night doesn't help me switch off as academics read rather a lot at work, so I take ballet classes online (and am known to teach the odd one myself!), knit and crochet.

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We need recovery and respite, our systems are simply not programmed to be on continuous overdrive
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Image: (shutterstock)

WHAT CAN ORGANISATIONS DO?

Employers have a duty of care and should ensure that people are not overworked and can switch off. Work-life balance research tells us that those who live 'enriched' lives have better mental and physical health, which is important for them, and important for their employer. We should actively support employees by ensuring that:

- A work-life balance policy is in place as a point of reference; then check processes and structures against this policy.
- Employers review job design and ensure that digital tasks (checking and responding to emails, synchronising devices, remote calls and conferences) are actually captured in people's workload and tasks – these often fall off the radar.
- There is consultation to ask employees what they need – mutually negotiated boundaries and solutions work much better. Think creatively about flexible solutions!

- Everyone, including senior leaders and managers, are role models in good behaviour. People need time to switch off, so don't expect your staff to be available outside normal working hours.
- Staff are offered training and development. Managing in an increasingly digital workspace requires up-to-date management and leadership skills.
- Employees look out for implicit expectations and 'rumours'. "I check my emails on holiday because this is what is expected of me". Really? Question such assumptions as they can often take on a life of their own.

Finally, if in doubt, ask a psychologist. The Department of Organizational Psychology is keen to work with organisations to establish, consolidate and evaluate best practice.



GAMING UNPLUGGED

Dr Bruno Schivinski, Department of Management, is working with a team of researchers to protect player wellbeing in the gaming industry. The group have developed the world's first test to help people understand their gaming habits.

Do you lie to your friends or family members about the amount of time you spend playing video games? Do you feel restless when you're unable to game? Do you isolate yourself from others in order to spend more time gaming? If so, you may be one of the thousands of people worldwide suffering from 'Gaming Disorder,' first recognised as a type of mental illness by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in the eleventh revision of the International Classification of Diseases, published in 2019.

Now, for the first time, those wondering how much gaming is too much will have access to a scientifically-backed answer to this question, as a research team led by Birkbeck alongside Dr Halley M. Pontes, University of Tasmania and Professor Christian Montag, Ulm University have created the world's first psychological

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Problematic patterns of gaming behaviour can cause significant impairment in family life, education or work performance

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test designed to allow gamers to self-assess whether they suffer from Gaming Disorder.

Disordered gaming (also informally known as video game addiction) is associated with extreme cases of uncontrolled gaming behaviour and excessive game playing. In line with the criteria developed by the WHO, the new psychological test informs participants if they meet the threshold for gaming disorder and compares how their gaming-related behaviours differ from the rest of the population. As Dr Pontes explains: “Anyone who can no longer control their gaming behaviour, who prioritises gaming over other life activities and does not change this behaviour despite negative consequences, could be suffering from Gaming Disorder. Having an evidence-based and freely available rigorous assessment tool for an emerging mental health issue such as Gaming Disorder is of utmost importance.”

Problematic patterns of gaming behaviour can cause significant impairment in family life, education or work performance. A 34-year-old male who took the test said: “I had no idea I was playing too much... no one says anything about that, you know? You just keep playing and everything is fine. I was playing every day for six hours or more after getting home from work. I was not sleeping much, not going out with friends, not eating much, and when working from home, I was not doing anything but playing games. That is not good, I am changing it now, but it is not easy without support.”

The Gaming Disorder Test was first trialled on a group of over 550 participants from Great Britain and China, with the results published in the peer-reviewed journal *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* and featured in international

media including *Forbes*, *The Examiner*, *Google News*, and *The Sun*. The researchers found that the prevalence of problematic gaming behaviours did not differ significantly between the British and Chinese groups and that, on average, gamers played for 12 hours a week. Almost half of this gaming time (46%) occurred during weekends alone. A total of 36 participants (6.4%) reported major problems in everyday life due to their gaming behaviour, therefore fulfilling the WHO's diagnostic criteria. Professor Montag explains that “excessive video gaming is already a serious health risk in Asian countries and an emerging problem in Europe”. Having a methodology to monitor this risk is vital.

ESL, the largest e-sports organisation and production company, with close ties to the gaming community, is supporting the researchers' scientific initiative due to its public relevance. Rodrigo Samwell, Chief Marketing Officer at ESL said: “ESL wants to support responsible gaming. We believe in a world where everybody can be somebody and being somebody means you can be dedicated to the game but also to your family and achieve a positive gaming-life balance. As the leader in the e-sports market, we want to contribute to responsible gaming, and that is why we are supporting this study to help individuals understand better their behaviours towards gaming.”

The research team is currently working on the largest study to date on gaming disorder. Nearly 200,000 gamers worldwide have already taken the self-assessment through the researchers' online anonymous platform www.do-i-play-too-much.com.

Dr Schivinski, said: “We want to understand the point at which gaming becomes a health problem, and which factors contribute to the development of gaming disorders, exploring sociodemographic variables, personality and psychological motivations. We have reached thousands of participants in the study and hopefully, our findings will facilitate policy-making and regulations within the gaming industry to promote harm-minimisation and player protection strategies in the industry.”

Image:
(istockphoto)

FROM LOVE TO JUSTICE

Dr Nadine el-Enany, Co-Director of the Centre for Research on Race and Law, discusses the transformative power of love, grief and kinship in struggles for justice and accountability in Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Death in Custody cases. Her research is funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

“Love is just wanting to protect the people that you love...He’s my brother, my brother, my brother, you know... a family’s love for them is that they have to speak for them, and so that’s why I do what I do” (Marcia Rigg, Sister of Sean Rigg, who died in Brixton Police Station in 2008 after being restrained by police).

On Saturday 26 October 2019, the families and friends of Death in Custody victims marched from Trafalgar Square to Downing Street to remember their loved ones and to demand justice and accountability. The United Families and Friends Campaign (UFFC) has been marching on the last Saturday of every October for 21 years. Tragically, each year, new families join the march. Since 1990, 1,720 people have died in custody or following contact with the police in England or Wales. Despite inquest jury verdicts of unlawful killing in 12 cases, no police officer has ever been convicted in relation to a death in custody.

Between 1990 and 2018, 180 BME people died in police custody or following contact with the police in the UK - 97 of these deaths occurred in London. BME deaths make up 14% of the total number of such deaths. Statistically, BME people die disproportionately (over two times more than in other deaths in custody) as a result of the use of force or restraint by the police. This suggests racism is an important factor in their deaths.



Stop Police Brutality @ UFFC Rally London 2018 - Image credit Tippa Naphtali

Following a death in custody, families are at the centre of efforts to seek truth, justice and accountability. However, they find difficulty in obtaining information, delays in processes, unresponsiveness from the authorities, the absence of funding and legal representation in the course of legal processes and lack of resolution to the question of responsibility for the death of their loved one. At the same time, affected families are not provided with vital support structures, such as counselling.

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Statistically, Black and Minority Ethnic people die disproportionately as a result of the use of force or restraint by the police

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Over the past year I have spoken to many people whose loved ones have died in custody. Marcia Rigg’s brother, Sean Rigg, was 40 years old when he died in Brixton police station in South London on 21 August 2008 after being arrested and restrained by police officers. Despite being unresponsive while being carried and handcuffed by two officers into the police station, he was left unexamined for 25 minutes. A CCTV camera captured an arresting officer claiming that [he] was faking it. When Sean Rigg was eventually examined, his heart had stopped and he was not breathing. Marcia Rigg has fought for almost ten years to bring the officers responsible for her brother’s death to account.

Centering love, grief and kinship in our thinking about struggles for justice in BME custodial death cases allows us to identify

moments and modes of anti-racist, anti-colonial resistance and solidarity. Campaigning strategies adopted by families work to resist racial state violence as well as to expose the modalities of its operation and denial. UFFC was first established in 1997 as a network of black families, but over the years the organisation has expanded to include families and friends of all those who have died in custody. Marcia Rigg, who is one of the chairs of UFFC, describes its purpose as providing support to families ‘so that they can meet other families, share their stories, share their pain, and have somebody else to talk to that understands what they’ve been going through’. UFFC is thus one example of broad political mobilisation stemming from individualised experiences of grief following a death in custody. The existence of UFFC draws attention to the prevalence of state violence, which might otherwise be understood as exceptional. As Louis Neville, the brother of Darren Neville, who died in March 2013 after being restrained by police, has said, “I think it’s important for families to come together because I think a lot of families think that their case is the only one that’s like this, but it’s actually through UFFC...[we] know that there [are] too many cases like this.”

UFFC’s annual memorial procession in remembrance of those who have died in custody begins in Trafalgar Square and ends at Downing Street. At the end of the procession route, in front of the towering, locked and guarded gates to Downing Street, symbolic of the state’s refusal to recognise these deaths and to account for the violence of its agents, the families take turns in telling the stories of how their loved ones were killed and the challenges the families continue to confront in their campaigns for justice. Marcia Rigg has described the occasion as one “where families can give an account of their pain and tell their stories.” These defiant public expressions of grief and acts of remembrance are simultaneously demands for truth, justice and accountability. The families’ insistence on justice is articulated as an assertion of collective struggle. As Marcia Rigg says, “we want justice, but at the moment, it’s just us.”

Image:
Behrouz Boochani
(Hoda Afshar)



LAW AND DISORDER

Birkbeck's School of Law has welcomed Behrouz Boochani as a Visiting Professor. Dr Sarah Keenan discusses his impact.

Multiple award-winning author, journalist and filmmaker Behrouz Boochani has been appointed Visiting Professor in Birkbeck's School of Law. An Iranian Kurd, Boochani left Iran in 2013 because he faced arrest and imprisonment for his writing. Travelling first to Indonesia, Boochani boarded a boat bound for Australia where he planned to seek asylum. The boat was intercepted by the Australian military, which forcefully transported him and his fellow passengers first to a processing centre on Christmas Island and from there to a detention centre on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. Conditions for Manus detainees have been found by the UN to constitute torture, and have been the subject of ongoing protest by detainees and activists around the world.

When Boochani's boat was intercepted, it was just days after the passage of Australian legislation which stated that not only would 'unlawful maritime arrivals' be sent to offshore prisons to have their asylum claims processed, but they would also never be permitted to settle in Australia, whatever the outcome of their refugee status determination. This law, which Boochani would later describe as savage and merciless, has led to the indefinite remote island detention of over one thousand people in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. Following a 2016 Papua New Guinean Supreme Court decision that the Australian-funded Manus detention centre was unconstitutional, Boochani and those detained with him were moved first to another prison camp on Manus and then, in August this year, to the capital of Port Moresby. Boochani left Port Moresby in November 2019 after a six-year detention. While ostensibly 'free' in Port Moresby, the former Manus detainees, many of whom have serious medical conditions as a result of their prolonged detention, are living in temporary accommodation in conditions of poverty and insecurity, without travel documents. Despite these conditions, Boochani continued to publish regularly in a range of newspapers. Without regular access to a computer, he wrote using WhatsApp.

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Boochani's work poses rich, material challenges to any assumption that law operates universally in the service of human justice
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Boochani's work addresses state violence and human survival, focussing in particular on immigration detention and Pacific Ocean geopolitics. To these areas of study, Boochani brings an original poetic framing and uniquely cross-disciplinary perspectives. His acclaimed monograph *'No Friend But The Mountains: Writing From Manus Prison'* (Picador 2018) describes everyday life in Manus prison, giving an intimate and deeply insightful account of what it means to be used as a human weapon to protect the Australian border. In the book, Boochani analyses the prison system identity through an application of the feminist theory of 'kyriarchy', which argues that domination, oppression and submission are produced by interconnected social systems. Boochani's manuscript is both a product of his resistance to Australia's border regime, and

a reimagining of what those borders are. It offers compelling critiques of geopolitical norms of bounded space and national belonging, and in doing so contributes to multiple fields of study.

Law is always present in Boochani's work, either implicitly or explicitly. While law is responsible for having created the sites of injustice he has occupied and observed, those sites are also defined by an absence of law. In a statement to academics issued in 2018, Boochani wrote:

“The best way to examine [Manus and Nauru prison camps] is through deep research into how a human, in this case a refugee, is forced to live between the law and a situation without laws. There are laws that can exile them to an existence where they have recourse to no law. In this situation, the human is living as something in between a human and another kind of animal.”

In *'No Friend But The Mountains'*, Boochani observes, in intricate detail, attempts by sick and exhausted refugees to access basic services which would be accessible to humans in any law-abiding space. This access is repeatedly denied, leaving men to die in prison camps that are seemingly both outside of law, and overdetermined by it. Yet while Boochani powerfully portrays law's inconsistencies and cruelties, he continues to use law strategically in his quest for freedom and justice. Working with Papua New Guinean lawyer Ben Lomai, Boochani was the lead applicant in a case against the Papua New Guinean government seeking orders to make real the protection of the detainees' constitutional rights.

Boochani's written, creative and activist work pose rich, material challenges to any assumption that law operates universally in the service of human justice. In so doing, his work also challenges us to question what it means to be human. Reflecting on a portrait of him taken by photographer Hoda Afshar, Boochani reflects on this image of himself:

“He is precisely on the threshold of law and violation of law; he has been positioned on the threshold of civilisation and barbarism... From my viewpoint, this is not Behrouz Boochani. This is the image of a human being who with his own way of knowing and with his flesh and bones – with his protruding ribs – is gazing back at a society of human beings and wants to assert: “This is me, this is a human being.”

Boochani is currently residing in New Zealand and hopes to resettle in the US.

NEW HORIZONS AT THE EDGE OF OUR SOLAR SYSTEM

Dr Mohamed Ramy El-Maarry, Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, explores the new knowledge gained from NASA's New Horizons close flyby of Ultima Thule - the most distant object ever explored - after collaborating on the New Year's Day mission.

Exploring small bodies is one of the ways scientists can learn more about planets and how our solar system formed, because they are essentially the building blocks of planets. Numerous missions have investigated asteroids, allowing us to gain information about the conditions in the early solar system and how the inner rocky planets formed. However, we know relatively little about Kuiper Belt Objects (KBOs), which lie in a belt beyond the orbit of planet Neptune. The recently discovered Kuiper Belt contains billions of small icy bodies that represent the building blocks of the outer gas giant planets. To gain a better understanding of the conditions during the formation of the outer solar system, it is imperative this region is explored.

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The Kuiper Belt was discovered recently and we know it contains billions of small icy bodies that represent the building blocks of the outer gas giant planets

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NASA's New Horizons mission was the first mission to explore the Kuiper Belt in-situ through its flyby of the dwarf planet Pluto (and one of the larger KBOs) in 2015. Following this, the New Horizons team turned their attention to the outer reaches of the Solar System to try to find a small KBO that could be visited. The Hubble telescope and New Horizons' onboard cameras looked for the spacecraft's new target. In 2014, the mission's astronomers discovered what is now known as 2014 MU69 (informally called Ultima Thule).

When Ultima Thule was picked as the next target for the New Horizons mission, little was known about it. Follow-up observations allowed us to further constrain

its shape, size, and colour. Scientists utilised an astronomical technique called stellar occultation that relies on observing a body as it passes in front of a star along our line of sight. We learnt that Ultima Thule was comprised of a single elongated body, two bodies in contact with each other, or two bodies orbiting around each other as a binary system.

On New Year's Day 2019, New Horizons flew by Ultima Thule in its closest approach (three times as close as it flew by Pluto) and beamed back to Earth unprecedented images and measurements of a small KBO. Images from the spacecraft's cameras showed Ultima Thule to have a bi-lobed shape, similar to comets that have been visited by other space missions, such as comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko, visited by the European Rosetta mission. However, the surface of Ultima Thule did not look like any comets visited before; it showed a lumpy surface that was rather smooth. The images showed the surface of the small KBO lacked a large number of impact craters on its surface. Given we expect Ultima Thule's surface to have recorded events of the past ~4.6 billion years (i.e., the age of our solar system), the small number of impact craters further suggests collisions between KBOs and other bodies in the Kuiper Belt were very rare. One of the most remarkable things we learnt about Ultima Thule is its overall shape. In the earlier images, Ultima Thule appeared to be just a typical bi-lobed shaped body. However, follow-up images allowed us to further constrain its 3D shape. We now believe Ultima Thule is composed of two lobes, one that is pancake-shaped, the other shaped like a walnut.

In essence, Ultima Thule is remarkably flat. This peculiar shape is one of the puzzles that scientists are trying to understand because it can provide us with information on the conditions of the early solar system and how planets form from smaller bodies (planetesimals). Further analysis of the data that we have should help us tackle these important questions, and is sure to keep scientists busy for years to come!



NASA/Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory/Southwest Research Institute/Steve Gribben

Image:
(Amir Geshani)



BUILDING BODY REPRESENTATIONS: UNDERSTANDING HOW WE PERCEIVE – AND MISPERCEIVE – OUR BODY

Matthew Longo, Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience, explains how studying illusions and misperception can help us understand the way the brain constructs mental models of the body.

Our body is central to our personal identity and is the core of our sense of self. It is ubiquitous in our everyday experience, and the basis for all our interactions with the environment. Intriguingly, misperceptions of the body are present in numerous psychiatric and neurological disorders, ranging from body image distortions in eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, to the experience of ‘phantom’ limbs in amputees who continue to experience the presence of the amputated limb, and even cases of people

denying that parts of their body are theirs, a condition known as somatoparaphrenia.

While such misperceptions have been the focus of a large body of research, much work has assumed that misperceiving the body is a certain sign of pathology, a striking contrast to the presumably accurate mental models of the body that healthy individuals have. We know our body like the back of our hand – or do we? In contrast to this assumption, a growing body of research has started to show that distortions are a normal part of how all of us perceive our bodies.

The BODYBUILDING (Building Body Representations) project, which finished this July, explored the way in which healthy adults perceive, and misperceive, their bodies. The project had run since 2014 supported by a Starting Grant from the European Research Council (ERC). We used a combination of methods from experimental psychology and cognitive neuroscience to explore the way we experience our bodies and the brain mechanisms underlying these experiences.

For example, in a 2015 paper in the journal *Cognition*, I investigated people’s understanding of the spatial layout of their hand. Take a look at your palm of your left hand and try to judge the location on your palm directly opposite the knuckle of your middle finger, the joint at the very base of your finger. Now turn your hand around and look at where your knuckle actually is? Most people judge their knuckles to be much farther forward in the hand than they really are, showing highly systematic misperception of hand structure. We apparently don’t know the back of our hand like the back of our hand.

That the brain maintains distorted representations of the body is not new. For example, in the 1930s the Canadian neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield showed, by stimulating the brains of patients undergoing surgery for epilepsy, that the area of the cortex specialised for processing touch (the primary somatosensory cortex) maintains an organised map of the body surface. Critically, the size of each body part in this map was proportional to the sensitivity of touch on that part, and not its actual size. For example, the representations of the fingers and lips were disproportionately large, while the representations of the back and legs were disproportionately small.

This distorted map has come to be known as the ‘Penfield homunculus’, and makes obvious computational sense for the nervous system. Allocating a disproportionate share of neural resources to a small subset of the skin allows us to act with extraordinary

dexterity with our fingers and mouths, facilitating behaviours such as tool use and speech. The somatosensory homunculus has become a standard feature of textbook descriptions in psychology and neuroscience, but has traditionally been linked with basic aspects of touch, rather than our experience of space and body image. Our work has begun to challenge this view.

In a paper we published in 2017 in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, my PhD student Olga Golubova and I asked participants to make judgments of the perceived distance between touches applied to different locations on their hands and applied a statistical method called multidimensional scaling to reconstruct perceptual maps of the tactile space of the skin. We found that these maps were systematically distorted, in a highly stereotyped way across people, with distances across the width of the hand overestimated compared to distance along the length of the hand. Intriguingly, the distortions correspond to known characteristics of the somatosensory cortex.

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**We know our body like the
back of our hand – or do we?**

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A follow up study, led by Dr Luigi Tamè and Dr Raffaele Tucciarelli, used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to construct similar maps of tactile space based on the patterns of brain activity evoked by touch applied to different locations on the hand. Neural maps in the primary somatosensory cortex, overlapping the Penfield homunculus, showed distortions highly similar to those we found in perceptual maps, suggesting that the perceived spatial layout of the body itself may inherit characteristics of low-level neural maps.

Both researchers and the wider public have long been fascinated by the intriguing delusions and distortions of the body seen in psychiatric and neurological disorders. Research from the BODYBUILDING project has contributed to a growing body of evidence that far from being limited to disease, bodily misperceptions are a common, even ubiquitous, aspect of normal mental life.

MADNESS AND THE DEMAND FOR RECOGNITION

Dr Mohammed Abouelleil Rashed, Wellcome Trust Institutional Strategic Support Fund (ISSF) Research Fellow in the Department of Philosophy, examines the Mad Pride movement and social recognition for madness as an identity.

The resurgence of philosophical interest in mental health since the mid-1980s has seen a concerted effort to clarify, if not resolve, the 'boundary problem'. The problem, broadly speaking, is whether we can distinguish aspects of human experience and suffering that are legitimate targets for psychiatric concepts and responses, from those that are social, moral, or legal matters, or otherwise a matter of difference, not illness. For example, at what point does normal grief become clinical depression, and can we distinguish religious experiences from related psychiatric phenomena?

Much of the philosophical effort fell on defining a scientific concept of mental disorder. The rationale was, and continues to be, that if we were able to define mental disorder in a way that excludes value-judgments – at least in part – then we would be able to identify the appropriate domain of psychiatry and respond to the accusation that psychiatry inappropriately medicalises aspects of our lives.

Despite much debate, attempts to define a value-free, scientific concept of mental disorder have not been successful. The 'boundary problem' cannot be resolved scientifically, and recourse to ethical, social, cultural, and political factors is necessary. My research over the past ten years has been largely concerned with a philosophical analysis of the role these factors can and should play in defining the boundaries of illness. Among the various projects, I have looked at the distinction between disorder and social deviance, the role of values in the diagnostic process in psychiatry, and the influence of culture on defining what is normal behaviour and experience.

Since 2014, I have been investigating attempts within mental health activism to shift the boundaries of illness by reclaiming experiences, behaviours, and emotional states widely considered to be disorders. The discourse of Mad Pride, which is inspired by the Gay Pride movement, is an example of this activism. What is distinctive about Mad Pride is that it is no longer concerned with the correct application of the concept of mental disorder, but with rejection of the language of mental illness and mental disorder in favour of the view

that madness can be grounds for identity. In this sense, the movement shares affinities with other groups that have campaigned and demanded social and political recognition on the basis of shared experiences and self-understandings.

Mad Pride activism is broad in its scope and ambitious in its goals, for the aim is not only to reform psychiatry, but to initiate social and cultural change in the way

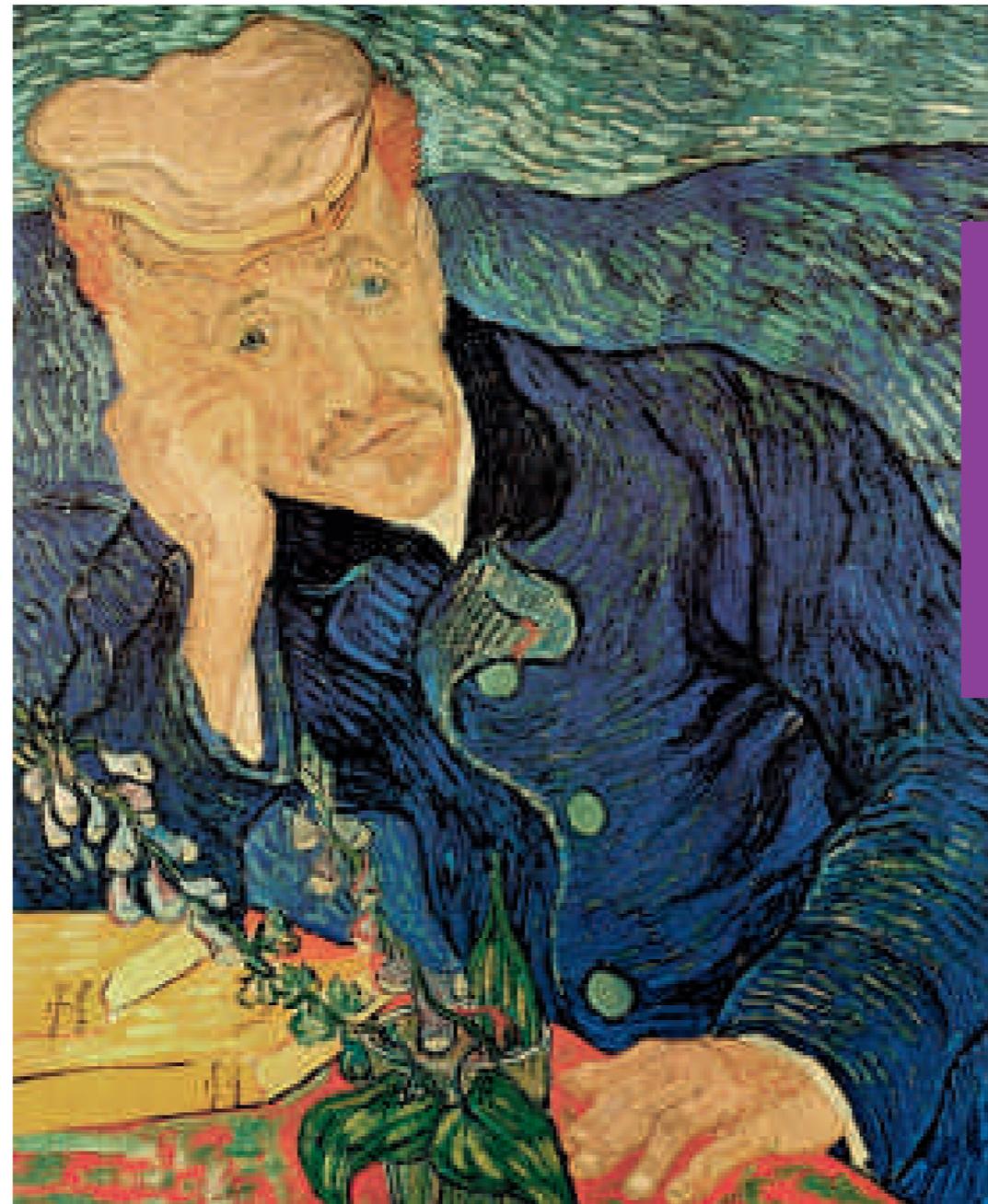
madness and normality are understood. It is this radical and far-reaching activism that is the subject of my book *Madness and the Demand for Recognition: A Philosophical Inquiry into Identity and Mental Health Activism* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

The book addresses key questions derived from the claims and demands of Mad Pride: Can madness be grounds for identity? Why should society attempt to recognise the validity and value of Mad identities? More broadly, why does social recognition matter? And, in light of this, what is the right response to the demands of Mad Pride?

Intuitively, it might seem that madness cannot be grounds for identity: delusions, extremes of mood, paranoia, sensory hallucinations, and loss of control over one's actions and thoughts – that is, the experiential and behavioural content of madness – have long been theorised as deficit states and are often associated with significant distress and disability. These phenomena appear to undermine a person's capacities for identity formation, rather than constitute the sources of this identity.

In order to address the remaining questions, what was required was a theory of recognition that can provide the moral and political resources to justify the demands of Mad Pride and to provide a framework for responding to them. The philosophical literature on identity and recognition expands into several schools of thought and invokes long-standing problems in philosophy such as in the theory of knowledge (epistemology) and in moral philosophy. In working through this literature, my aim was to provide a formulation of identity and recognition that can allow progress with the questions of the book. The resulting theory can also be read as a standalone contribution to the philosophy and politics of recognition.

I have attempted to chart a path for reconciling the central claim of Mad Pride with a number of concepts that appear to undermine it: the concept of identity itself, but also the concepts of truth, agency, rationality, and of unity and continuity of self. At the same time, I was mindful throughout that Mad Pride tends to generate partisan reactions, from unconditional support to equally unconditional scepticism. While a book cannot solve the intractable disagreements between these two camps, I hope that I've managed to provide a framework for clarifying what the disagreements are about in their philosophical and evaluative dimensions.



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Despite much debate, attempts to define a value-free, scientific concept of mental disorder have not been successful

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Portrait of Doctor Gachet, by Vincent van Gogh. Paul Gachet was a French physician with whom van Gogh resided following a spell in an asylum at Saint-Rémy-de-Provence.



ENDURING MAOISM

Julia Lovell, Professor of Modern Chinese History and Literature, discusses Mao's ambiguous legacy.

Image:
Richard Fisher

Since 2012 – and for the first time since the death of Mao in 1976 – China has experienced an official, national revival of Maoist culture and politics. Despite the huge human cost of Mao's rule, the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under Party Secretary Xi Jinping have re-normalised parts of Maoist political culture: self-criticism, the 'mass line', and above all the personality cult.

Mao and his ideas remain key to understanding one of the most surprisingly enduring organisations of the 20th and (so far) 21st centuries – the CCP. Although China seems to have long abandoned the utopian turmoil of Maoism in favour of an authoritarian capitalism that emphasises prosperity and stability, Mao has left a heavy mark on its politics and society – in the politicisation of its judiciary; the supremacy of the one-party state; the intolerance of dissident voices; and the political capital that he retains. There is also a pressing need to evaluate the power and allure of Maoism beyond China, for it

has had a long afterlife in revolutions and insurrections – that have transformed states and left millions dead – in Cambodia, Zimbabwe, South America, India and Nepal. In Vietnam, Maoism helped build a party and army able to face down the French and then US empires. In Western Europe, it stood for playful disobedience (as well as inspiring murderous terrorism).

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Maoism is a set of contradictory ideas that has distinguished itself from earlier, Soviet guises of Marxism

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Maoism is a set of contradictory ideas that has distinguished itself from earlier, Soviet guises of Marxism in several important ways. Giving centre stage to a non-Western, anti-colonial agenda, Mao declared to radicals in developing countries that Russian-style Communism should be adapted to local, national conditions; that the Soviet Union could go wrong. Diverging from Marx, he told revolutionaries to take their struggle out of the cities and to fight guerrilla wars deep in the countryside. Mao preached the doctrine of voluntarism: he declared that if only they believed they could, the Chinese – and any other people with the necessary strength of will – could transform their country; revolutionary zeal, not weaponry or wealth, was the decisive factor. Although, like Lenin and Stalin, Mao was determined to build a militarised one-party state worshipful of its supreme leader, he also championed an anarchic insubordination, telling the Chinese people that 'it is right to rebel'. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), he deployed his own cult to mobilise millions of Chinese people – especially indoctrinated youth – to smash Party rivals whom he deemed counterrevolutionary.

Maoism's global impact took off in the late 1940s in Malaya, Korea and Vietnam: in states on China's borders breaking with European and Japanese empires, and in the first hot conflicts of the Cold War. Here, Mao's anti-colonial rhetoric (he famously pronounced that 'imperialism is a paper tiger'), strategies of asymmetric, guerrilla warfare and above all his blueprint for airtight party-building inspired and supported ambitious anti-colonial, communist rebels.

Radical protest cultures in western Europe and the United States of the late 1960s passionately identified with Mao's Cultural Revolution message of youth

rebellion. Students pinned Mao badges on their lapels, and daubed Little Red Book quotations on the walls of their lecture halls. African-American activists against the US establishment declared solidarity with Mao. After the European protest movement of the late 1960s petered out, Cultural Revolution-inspired radicalism veered into urban terrorism in West Germany – the Red Army Faction (RAF) caused 34 deaths in the 1970s–80s – and in Italy, where the Red Brigades committed some 14,000 acts of violence, resulting in 75 deaths, during the same period.

Following Mao's death in 1976, and the PRC's own denunciation of the Cultural Revolution as 'ten years of chaos', Western enthusiasm for Mao waned. But in the developing world – above all in South Asia – his ideas continued to fuel insurgency. In India and Nepal, Mao's revolution represented a political success story apparently suited to poor, agrarian states that had suffered at the hands of colonialism. Educated elites, convinced by the dream of an egalitarian utopia, led Maoist wars decades after the chairman's death.

In China today, Mao has an ambiguous legacy. The leaders of the CCP invoke him as an August founder of the nation, and as the creator of a disciplined, incorruptible party-state. But Xi Jinping's revival of the Maoist heritage is very selective. For Xi's China is different (almost beyond recognition) from Mao's: it is tied into global finance, its stability is bound to economic performance, and its media is too diversified for a single official, old-style ideological message to convince its increasingly well-travelled, well-read citizens.

And there are swathes of the Maoist heritage that Xi Jinping is determined to suppress: above all Mao's grassroots mobilisations of the Cultural Revolution that almost destroyed the party-state in the late 1960s. Nonetheless, large parts of the Mao cult continue to thrive beyond Party control. After the CCP dismantled urban job security in the late 1990s, laid-off workers marched in protest, brandishing portraits of Mao, whom they acclaimed as the patron saint of labour rights; Mao-nostalgia remains strong in such groups. Neo-Maoists in China angry at the inequalities generated by the market and globalisation quote Mao's Cultural Revolution incitements to revolt against the state. Throughout much of its history, Maoism has been an unstable, shape-shifting ideology: a programme of autocracy that also legitimises furious defiance.

Julia's Lovell's book 'Maoism: A Global History' was published in March 2019 and is available from Bodley Head.



“I COULDN’T DO THIS WORK IF I WASN’T HOPEFUL”

An interview with Marai Larasi, MA Culture, Diaspora and Identity alumna fighting to end violence against women and girls.

For 25 years, Marai Larasi has been working to end Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). From supporting front-line services to taking a leading role at Imkaan, an organisation specifically focused on capacity building and support for women and girls from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds, she passionately believes in the need for spaces where BME women can advocate for themselves.

Born in London to Jamaican parents, she graduated from Birkbeck in 2015 with an MA in Culture, Diaspora and Identity – an experience which she says made her a tougher activist. “It strengthened the theoretical underpinnings of my work, and provided a challenge to particular ways I’d been approaching things” she said. “It pushed me to interrogate ideas in different ways.”

In the interview, Marai reflected on the shortcomings present in the wider feminist movement in understanding or advocating for the different needs of BME women and girls, which necessitated the creation of Imkaan. She explains: “Our voices weren’t being recognised as a critical part of feminist struggle, despite decades of contributions to ending VAWG. The intersecting concerns that are the reality of our lives weren’t being dealt with in the feminist movement more broadly. Imkaan was essentially created to make sure that we are central to the narratives that are being developed around us; that we are authoring our own narratives, and that we are supporting autonomy and self-determination. Rather than being dictated to by white, euro-centric feminist thinking, we’re looking at how we develop and design our own solutions.”

Larasi accompanied actor Emma Watson to the Golden Globes Awards ceremony in 2018, at the height of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, which

highlighted and called for an end to the widespread sexual violence women face around the world. With the credible allegations of sexual violence naming some of the world’s most powerful political figures, along with the institutionally racist treatment of the Windrush generation, it must make it difficult to feel positive about the direction of progress. “I’m hopeful,” she says. “I couldn’t do this work if I wasn’t hopeful.” [Black American political activist] Angela Davis reminds us to acknowledge that we have travelled far, that change has taken place. I think it’s really important to acknowledge that we have done work which has made a difference at policy level and that we have made change across so many of our societies.

“I’m descended from people who were enslaved. Imagine what their worlds looked like when my great-great-great-grandmother was taken off the ship in Jamaica. What she must have thought the world would look like for her children and her grandchildren – and now I’m here having this conversation with you, because we’re the ones that survived even though we weren’t meant to. I mean that’s enough reason to be hopeful. You can’t give up because actually it is possible to make a change.”

If Marai was granted the power to make or change one law tomorrow, what would it be? “That’s a really big question! I would create legislation that would set in place a system of reparations for generations of harm that have been done through enslavement and colonisation.” When slavery was abolished, no reparations were ever paid to the people who were enslaved; they were paid to the people that owned slaves. The equivalent today would be a man who had been done for trafficking women being paid for loss of earnings, but no one doing anything to compensate the women that had been repeatedly violated.”

Now working across various projects for different BME women’s organisations, plus doing consultancy work at the Mayor’s Office on the different country and cultural contexts of VAWG, she is a big believer in education as a force for change. “Education is one of the ways that we either reinforce or challenge social inequality. It should not only be available to those who can access it in this very linear way that’s been constructed. We should have lifelong access to education, we should be able to study for the sake of studying, and there should be spaces of learning that allow us to develop who we are as human beings.

“I remain grateful for the opportunity I had to study at Birkbeck, while I was working full-time, and often going overseas. Birkbeck is wonderful, honestly.”

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Education is one of the ways that we either reinforce or challenge social inequality

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Image:
Marai Larasi
(Michelle Beatty)



Image:
Justin Audibert
(Craig Sugden)

MAKING GREAT ART FOR ALL

Alumnus Justin Audibert MFA Theatre Directing, 2008, on making great theatre and taking children seriously.

Justin Audibert is on a mission to make great art for young people; and as current Director of the Unicorn Theatre in London, he is bringing that goal to fruition every day.

It's been just over a decade since Audibert graduated from Birkbeck's Theatre Directing MFA, which has proven to be a springboard into a job that he loves. Audibert now runs the third highest publicly funded theatre in the UK, just 12 years after starting his course - a feat "that's kind of mad" even to himself.

Audibert's interest in theatre grew from being exposed to the arts from a young age. Family treats included trips to musicals and pantomimes and aged 11, a trip to the Royal Shakespeare Company with his aunt - experiences that started a lifelong appreciation for the craft.

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The course provided a neat mixture of theory and practice

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His start in theatre was not linear. After graduating from Sheffield University with a degree in History and Politics, Justin went on to become a teacher on the Teach First scheme, a job he enjoyed but ultimately believed he did not see himself doing long-term. After some soul searching, he came to the conclusion that "I am really interested in politics and theatre."

Audibert recalls the range of people studying on the course, and the quality of direction and support he received from Professor Rob Swain, Programme Director of the MFA, who he describes as "the most thoughtful and decent human being. I couldn't ask for a better person to work with." His peers came to the course with a number of different skills and challenged him in a way that helped him grow and develop as an artist.

The course provided a neat mixture of theory and practice, and gave Audibert the opportunity to undertake a placement as Assistant Director at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, where he was offered a job after graduating. Audibert reflects that these practical experiences were only possible at Birkbeck: "No other course offered me the opportunity to do that and really see how the whole thing works."

After graduating Audibert grasped at opportunities that came his way at the West Yorkshire Theatre, where he had the chance to travel to the Favelas in Brazil to work with legendary voice coach Cicely Berry, work on shows in New York, and conduct workshops for young people. Later, he was offered an Assistant Director role at the RSC where he worked for three years before deciding that he wanted to take the step into directing his own plays. Audibert's work was recognised by the Leverhulme Awards, through which he took up the role of Resident Director at the National Theatre and then on to direct his own show at The Gate Theatre, *Gruesome Playground Injuries*. Eventually, he got the call from the RSC to direct *The Jew of Malta* by English playwright Christopher Marlow, the largest scale play in his career to date, before taking up the job as Theatre Director at the Unicorn.

Audibert's current role is not without its challenges but speaks to his wider goals to entertain "young people who are not bothered about politely clapping", and to tell stories that challenge their worldview. "We take children seriously," he said.

So far he has programmed two plays, *Anansi the Spider*, a retelling of the classic Ghanaian fable with elements of Jamaica and contemporary London weaved through, and *Maggot Moon*. It is not just the stories he tells that he wants to be inclusive. Audibert hopes that both his audience and his team reflect Britain today. At the RSC he had an all-women creative team and he now aims to build a programme of artist development that targets people from low-income backgrounds. "The more diverse the workforce is, the more interesting the building of views and ideas becomes. None of this is about doing the right thing, this is how you make better art."

Further to his mission of widening access to theatre, Audibert has taken shows to young patients at Great Ormond Street Hospital and set up a youth theatre for refugees and unaccompanied minors. "You can only do these things if you have an institution behind you and thankfully, here I have people that want to do those things."

Audibert advises aspiring artists to stay financially solvent in an increasingly tough climate. He worked to pay off his fees for the first year and when he found he was unable to do the same in his second year, he applied for a hardship fund from Birkbeck and a grant from Lawrence Atwell's charity the Skinner's Trust. His parting advice is to always "be humble, be on time, be nice and listen."

This year, Birkbeck is delighted to be awarding the new Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation Scholarship, kindly supported by the Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation. This will offer a talented student from an underrepresented background the opportunity to undertake training towards a successful career in the arts.

THE LAST WORD

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, MSc Economics 1988



I got three things from my university experience at Birkbeck which I did not get from the universities I attended in Oxford, Warwick and Boston.

First, an appreciation of the commitment of part-time students. I studied for a Master's degree in Economics from 1986-88. Three nights a week, I dashed from Whitehall, where I was fully occupied as a young civil servant, often delayed by responding to the latest request from the Ministerial offices, to Malet Street, generally trotting the final stretch to avoid missing the start of lectures. My fellow students, who included an opera singer and the proprietor of a riding stables, also combined busy lives with a real dedication to study. Shared devotion to the course made for more learning all round.

Second, writing a thesis on the use of food grain prices in early famine warning accelerated me down a path I have travelled for the subsequent 30 years. As an undergraduate, I had gone to lectures by Amartya Sen, who later won the Nobel Prize for economics, on poverty and famine. I began a career in international development and humanitarian response. My first job was working on the response to the Ethiopia famine in 1984-6, in which a million people lost their lives. Famines had been ubiquitous throughout human history. But by then it

was clear they could be prevented, by better early warning – including using information about changing food prices – and more effective responses. Most people who die in famines do so as a result of the measles, an infection or some other medical problem, things a healthy person fights off but a starving one cannot. It's less common for the starvation itself to be the cause of death. So famine response, which used to mostly be about trucking or airdropping wheat flour or rice to hungry communities, now involves immunization, safe water and sanitation, and therapeutic feeding programmes for malnourished children and breastfeeding mothers.

All that means that famines are now rarer. So far this century, there has only been one major case, in Somalia in 2011 when 250,000 people lost their lives. Early warning and action in 2017 meant that threatened famines in Somalia, South Sudan, north east Nigeria and Yemen were all prevented.

The third thing I got from Birkbeck was my only successful experience as a matchmaker. A fellow student married my friend from Oxford. Former Universities Minister David Willetts, in his contribution for this column a year or so ago, listed the benefits of a university education. That's another one!



Shared devotion to the course made for more learning all round



Image:
Sir Mark Lowcock
(© United Nations)

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