

Digital Data and Artistic Expression A Digital Conversations Event

Hosted by the British Library, 10 September 2014, 18.00 BST



A panel discussion with Prof Anthony Lilley, Michael Takeo Magruder, Prof Ernest Edmonds, and Dr Kevin Walker

'Conversations on digital transformation and research by the Digital Research team'.

Reflections by Sara Day, DPC

About the event

The Digital Conversations series hosted a panel presentation and discussion on Wednesday evening the 10th Sept to exhibit some of the creative outpouring emerging from the rise in digital data. The panel, including scholars, artists and practitioners of the digital data industry, provided very filling food for thought around themes of artistic expression and new ways of thinking inspired by the products of artistic data transformation. And it's worth mentioning that the hosts provided a delicious spread and a lovely evening overall, so if you're local, it's certainly worth signing up for one of the BL's Digital Conversations events for both the content and catering.

The panel presented and discussed a number of themes, one of which surfaced in the art of the panellists as well as in the questions from the audience. The theme of public Influence – deliberately different from public *interaction* – appeared in the methods and practice of most panellists. The first speaker, Prof Ernest Edmonds, described an early digital artwork performed in Melbourne. Set up in a public square, a screen showing colours and shapes that change and morph. As the forms on the screen transform, it suddenly becomes apparent the changes are triggered by the sounds of the crowd. A Jazz musician aiming to shape the artwork finds herself influenced in turn by the transformations on the screen. This is just one example of the type of artwork discussed by the panel. Artist Julie Freeman presented an artwork representing data retrieved by sensors attached to a group fish in a lake. Artist Michael Takeo Magruder's work 'Prism' is a screen-based work that represents the transformation of personal data retrieved from the leaked documents into a moving collage superimposed on an interview given by Edward Snowden. These artistic expressions of digital data fuelled a lively conversation between panellists and audience about concepts of public influence on dynamic artworks.

Most panellists, artists and scholars, were inspired to reveal, in Magruder's words: 'small narratives from large collections'. This incentive manifested in both the visual representations of data on screens and also in the material transformation of digital data. Dr. Kevin Walker's students at the Royal Academy of Arts have created artworks that engage with traditional art forms – through physical materials – to illuminate discoveries gleaned from digital data. One student constructed a



bell with dimensions to create a sound mimicking the pattern of commuters on the London Underground. Another group developed a honeycomb that drips into jar to reflect nature of activities around London. In these projects small stories rise to the surface from a sea of data. These artists use their creative eye to reveal what the human eye can't see in the mass of big data: the visual experience of Jazz music, the life and daily existence of fish, the alarming volume of personal data collected about us all, and the perfect pitch of the height of commuter hour in London.

From the big to the small, from the digital to the analogue, this panel presentation and discussion conveyed the potential of digital data to human experience. With a number of references to the influence of modernist art, it was not surprising to hear the echo of Ezra Pound's old adage: Make It New!

These notes are intended to provide an informal briefing for members of the DPC not able to attend in person. They only represent the impressions perceived by SDT. For an authoritative and comprehensive report, readers are encouraged to contact the organisers directly.

About this document

Version 1	Written week of event	12/09/2014	SDT
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