

Creative Intersections

An evaluation report for the RSA and King's Cultural
Institute

November 2012

Contents

1. Introduction.....p.2
2. About the project and participants.....p.3
3. Our findings.....p.5
4. Considerations for project partners to take forward.....p.13

For further details, contact:

Julia Payne

Director

E: julia@thehubuk.com

T: +44 (0)1206 826988

M: +44 (0)7968 696211

W: www.thehubuk.com

1. Introduction

1.1 About the project

the hub was asked by the Royal Society of the Arts (RSA) to evaluate the *Creative Intersections* pilot project, which it developed and delivered in partnership with King's Cultural Institute, as part of the latter's *Creative Futures* programme. The project's genesis was the partners' interest in exploring what arts organisations or individual artists need in order to engage with higher education, and what creates connections across diverse academic disciplines. The RSA's Arts and Society team acted as project managers and facilitators, and specific project objectives were to:

- Develop an effective pilot model for partnerships between the arts and academic communities that yields practical benefits for both groups
- Explore the added value of this collaboration and articulate benefits from multiple perspectives
- Build capacity through the programme for partnership working between artists and academics
- Develop a meaningful community of practice between partners conducting the experiments
- Identify barriers and enablers for such collaborations
- Build a wider interest from both communities and a profile for the programme

1.2 Our evaluation brief and methodology

We were asked by the project partners to focus our evaluation on three specific areas:

- The impact of the partnerships and experiments on both the academics and artists working lives
- How the role of 'difference', be this academic or artist, makes a difference to outcomes
- The effectiveness of this model to generate this impact

In order to evaluate the project we did the following:

- Reviewed project material created by participants and project partners, such as notes from participant interviews and experiment group meetings, content produced as part of experiments and notes from larger group sessions
- Attended a sharing session, where participants shared with each other what they'd done and what they'd learned
- Carried out semi-structured one-to-one phone interviews with all participants
- Attended a wider sharing session at the RSA, where attenders involved in similar work around the country were invited to engage in discussions informed by those that had taken place during the project
- Had - a review meeting with the RSA project team, to reflect on participant feedback and on the Arts & Society team's role in the project

2. About the project and participants

2.1 Project outline

The project was divided into two phases:

Development phase (Feb-April 2012)

- Agreement of participant selection criteria and process
- Distribution of the project outline to potential participants
- Shortlisting and recruitment
- Introductory workshop for all participants: used creative practice to introduce participants to each other and identify areas of commonality personally and professionally
- Formation of 'experiment' groups, based on themes identified in the workshop

Implementation phase: April – November 2012

- Project design by experiment groups
- Group development and delivery of their experiments
- Participant outings, to enable wider exchange of ideas and learning across the whole group
- Sharing and dissemination of ideas, process and learning, within the group and more widely: online via a ning site, and physically through participant sharing session and 2 wider sharing sessions held at Kings College and the RSA

2.2 Project participants

Artists and arts managers

- Sarah Butler – writer <http://www.sarahbutler.org.uk/> <http://www.urbanwords.org.uk/>
- Sheryll Catto – Action Space <http://www.actionspace.org/>
- Inua Ellams – writer/graphic arts/poet/performer <http://www.phaze05.com/>
- Beth Elliott – Bethlem Gallery http://www.bethlemgallery.com/Bethlem_Gallery/Welcome.html
- Simon Grennan – Grennan & Sperandio <http://www.kartoonkings.com/>
- Sue Lawther – Spread the Word <http://www.spreadtheword.org.uk/>
- Rafau Sieraczek – musician <http://www.imagineaspectacle.net/>
- David Slater – Entelechy Arts <http://www.entelechyarts.org/>

Academics

- Rosalind Arden – Institute of Psychiatry
<http://www.iop.kcl.ac.uk/staff/profile/default.aspx?go=10442>
- Ulrike Naumann – Institute of Psychiatry <http://www.iop.kcl.ac.uk/staff/profile/?go=12349>

- Chiara Nosarti – Institute of Psychiatry
<http://www.iop.kcl.ac.uk/staff/profile/default.aspx?go=10411>
- Max Saunders – English department
<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/english/people/staff/academic/saunders/index.aspx>
- <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/ip/maxsaunders/>
- Sukhi Shergill – Institute of Psychiatry
<http://www.iop.kcl.ac.uk/staff/profile/default.aspx?go=10062>
- Simon Tanner – Digital Humanities department
<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/ddh/people/core/tanner/index.aspx>

2.3 Project groups and experiments

Group 1: Transmissions

(Rosalind Arden, Institute of Psychiatry; Beth Elliott, Bethlem Gallery; Simon Grennan, Grennan & Sperandio; Sukhi Shergill, Institute of Psychiatry)

This group formed around an interest in communication, with the outsider and through form. They created a chain of entities (such as objects, ideas, poems, instructions, tunes), passing these between one another, and then later to others outside the group. Each participant/recipient was asked (using guidelines devised by the group) to consider, reflect, critique and respond to the entity they received, and then to pass on a new entity to the next person in the chain.

Group 2: A Textual Map of Emotions

(Sue Lawther, Spread the Word; Ulrike Naumann, Institute of Psychiatry; Chiara Nosarti, Institute of Psychiatry)

This group developed an experiment that used creative writing, statistical analysis and brain-mapping to explore theme of change and transformation. An original text was chosen, with statistics randomly generated from this then being used to create brain ‘coordinates’. The particular areas and functions of the brain to which these coordinates related were then used by a writer to create a new piece of creative writing, that also responded to the group’s original theme.

Group 3: Where Is The Line?

(Sarah Butler, writer; Sheryll Catto, Action Space; Rafau Sieraczek, musician; Max Saunders, Professor of English)

This group came together around an interest in how they approach and articulate place, and might experiment with different ways of doing that, virtually and physically. In Stage 1 of their

experiment, they each selected a location on the Isle of Dogs, exploring it first of all virtually and then visiting it. In Stage 2, they dedicated a longer time to exploring Templar Church, again exploring it virtually and then physically, using a range of games and exercises to do this. Their experiences were captured in sound, image and text.

Group 4: The Midnight Run

(Inua Ellams, writer/graphic arts/poet/performer; David Slater, Entelechy Arts; Simon Tanner, Professor of Digital Humanities)

This group designed an experiment around Inua's project *The Midnight Run*, which takes groups of people on a journey of discovery through London at night over 12 hours, from 6pm to 6am. They curated two journeys – the first for people from Inua's informal group of Midnight Runners, and the second for a smaller group of elders who work creatively with Entelechy Arts. Both runs explored themes raised in Simon's work around modes of cultural value, with data gathered through group exercises, 1-1 discussions and observation.

3. Our findings

3.1 Key areas of impact

Working with people so different from themselves required participants to 'reframe' how they articulate their practice, sharpening their communication and deepening their self awareness

"[It's been]...great professional development... It made me reflect on what I do, what's important to me. I couldn't fall back on the usual old things I say."

Participating arts manager

Without exception, the process of working with people from entirely different artistic and academic disciplines was key to the impact that the project had for participants. Their wildly different areas of expertise meant that everyone had to 'abandon normal devices' and find new ways of communicating what they did and the thinking they were bringing to their experiments. As one artist put it, *"Having a focused discussion with folks whose practice is on the periphery of what I do meant that we leapt over barriers of habit, time and place. Where else could I do this?!"* Another said, *"It sharpened the questions we needed to ask ourselves. It was a provocative nudge to get further into those questions, and to think about the language we use"*.

Having to re-articulate and re-frame their practice and thinking required participants to critically reflect in a way that they don't when working on their own or in groups of people who are

similar to them. Many commented that their levels of self awareness had increased as a consequence, and that they'd discovered things about themselves and their practice they perhaps hadn't recognised before (eg. default modes of communication or learning).

This difference, and the discussions, exploration of ideas and the process of collaboration that the project enabled, meant that participants' pre-conceptions about other disciplines were frequently over turned or challenged. As one participating academic said, *"People coming at their experiments from different approaches meant that we were forced to disabuse our prejudices"*.

The experiments gave artists and academics a rare chance to apply or explore existing practice in a new context, rather than develop explicitly new practice

"It was action research really, a chance to reflect on elements of our practice and the context we work in.... It was fascinating to see how we approached things from different angles."

Participating artist

Most participants reported that the experiments provided an opportunity to apply their practice to a new context or 'experiment', rather than to develop specifically new practice. This opportunity to 're-frame' their practice was a driver for their initial interest in the project.

Typically, the groups' experiments focused on creating an entirely new project or set of activities. Only one experiment – focused around adapting Inua Ellams' *The Midnight Run* – embedded an existing project into a group experiment.

For artists in particular these collaborations appear to have shifted their practice, or opened up possibilities for shifts in the future

A large number of the artists, and one of the academics, reported either that the project has already shifted their practice or opened up their thinking about how they might 'shift' aspects of it in the future.

One artist talked about how the process of having to *"let my idea go and give ownership to others"* has changed the way he's worked with other partners since. He's more relaxed about the concept of co-curating and it means he's more inside the practical considerations of what this means. Meanwhile, another is beginning to apply the collaborative processes employed in his experiment to how he develops projects, involving participants in shaping them from an early stage. The journey for participants now starts with an idea rather than a finished project concept.

Two other participating arts managers are keen to apply learning from the project to how they involve participants more in project evaluation of their work, based on the reflective and evaluation practices used in this project.

Meanwhile, one academic has begun to think about how he might be able to adapt his teaching practice some of the arts practice he's come into contact with via the project.

Some artists feedback that the project has developed their confidence in their practice

Amongst artists new to this kind of collaborative practice and arts managers, the programme appears to have increased confidence in their own practice.

Being exposed to risk appears to be key to this development; trying new things and enjoying some success with these experiments means that the trust they have in their beliefs or practice has increased. In turn this new confidence means two things in relation to risk; firstly, that they feel they are now more open to risk, and secondly that some things feel less risky.

Participants have expanded their networks and horizons, and are better equipped for these kinds of collaborations

All participants are clear that the project has expanded their network by introducing them to people they would otherwise wouldn't have come into contact with, and given them inroads into disciplines that they didn't previously have. This is true both within the experiment groups and the wider project group. This is key for the artists in particular, many of whom talked about how difficult it can be to engage with HE institutions, which often appear 'faceless', inaccessible and overly-beaurocratic.

At the time of interviewing them, the participants were still very much 'inside' their experiments, and some fed back that the evaluation process was useful in terms of aiding their own reflection about the project and the impact it's had – and continues to have – on them. As consequence of still being 'in it', some aren't yet sure if they will work again directly with the people they worked with on their experiment, but all – artists and academics alike – are interested in exploring how they might work in this cross-disciplinary way again. To date, one new working partnership has evolved between project participants, through which Max Saunders has commissioned Rafau Sieraczek to develop a new piece as part of the Kings Festival he curates.

A number are keen to see the network endure beyond the lifetime of the project.

3.2 Difference was key to the excitement the project held - and the challenges it presented - for both artists and academics

Participant feedback suggests that it was the process of proper collaboration – the exploration, negotiation and compromise that this entails – that was what most excited them about the project, and propelled their groups forward. Without exception, every participant said that working with people from different disciplines, finding an experiment that had meaning for them all, and the reflection that this entails, was at once challenging and exciting. One participant reflected, *“As people explored they were being challenged but in a spirit of collaboration and curiosity”*.

This feedback appears to apply not only to the detailed work that participants did in their experiment groups, but also to the discussions and sharing that took place in large group sessions and outings. Again, the opportunity to engage with a wider still group of peers from across different disciplines was an exciting and rare proposition.

A number of participants commented on how important the context or research “framework” that the project provided was; without this, one participant said that *“there would have been potential for this exploration to fall into ideological disputes”*.

3.3 How challenge played a role in the project

Time was a constant challenge, for all participants

On a practical note, making time for the project appears to have been a challenge across the group. Everyone – participants and the RSA team - mentioned how difficult it was to find times (for meetings or for group experiment time) that worked for everyone.

For academics and arts managers this challenge appears partly tied up with the difficulty they had in justifying the time for the project – to themselves and to colleagues. The fact that their projects were so open, and wouldn’t necessarily result in anything ‘concrete’ being made, seems to have made this justification more difficult. One academic summed this up neatly, saying that *“making the time and making the case was a real challenge”*.

Outside of simply finding time for the project, some participants felt that the timeframe was also problematic; some found it difficult to find time in their diaries to get the project underway at what felt like relatively short notice. Others said that the time between the different stages was too compressed, feeding back that a longer length of time would have made an already good opportunity even better. One artist’s comment, that *“doing something over 2 or 3 months is great*

to get outside your normal head and reflect, but doing it over a year or 18 months would be incredible”, typifies this feedback.

Being process rather than product led was a challenge but also liberating

Independently of each other, each group chose to focus primarily on the collaborative process rather than the outcome; only one experiment resulted in the creation of a ‘final’ piece of work. Despite this being each group’s choice, some participants – in the main academics and arts managers – found this approach challenging. One arts manager feedback that, *“Focusing on the process not the outcome was challenging for me, not liberating. I know it could have been, but I got stuck at the challenging bit, even though I love the idea of it.”* In contrast, for artists this felt like an exciting, and too rare, opportunity. One said, *“I realise now that the value was the process itself. I’d never done something that was about just the process before... Not having a clear end point... felt like a massive kind of indulgement. The whole thing felt like a luxury”.* She continued, *“With people coming from different disciplines, if we’d had to make something it would have been a nightmare”.*

Also difficult for academics, and it seems scientists in particular, was the ‘open’ exploratory nature of the experiment process. Starting with a relatively broad theme rather than a problem that needed solving or a proposition that needed testing is at odds with their normal way of working, and appears initially to have been a slightly bewildering prospect for them.

On occasion a small number of participants felt they weren’t able to interact as peers

Two participants fed back that they had initially found it challenging to work as peers with one or more members of their group – something which participants all said they felt was critical to the success of their collaboration (see section 4.1). One participant felt that this was partly to do with his age, as he is the same age as the students who his academic collaborator teaches. The other participant felt more that she simply had lacked the confidence to “speak up” at a crucial point in the early stages of the project, but added that being asked to reflect on her role meant that she was now more self aware.

The issue of dominant personalities within groups came up in discussion a number of times during the evaluation process, but in the majority of cases simply as one of the things which the groups in question had had to negotiate their way through at the beginning of the process.

Giving up ownership of a pre-existing project was “as challenging as it could be”

One group's experiment was based on adapting Inua Ellams' *The Midnight Run* project, which he'd already delivered a number of times, as opposed to developing an entirely new idea based on the different practices contained within the group. Inua fed back that he'd found the process of "giving up ownership" of his idea difficult, and the collaborative process that he'd committed to "as challenging as it could be". Giving permission to others to 'play' with his project required him to negotiate, lobby for and sometimes give up, some of the fundamentals that for him underpinned the project. As with the majority of challenges identified by participants, he reports that meeting this challenge and reflecting on it has had a positive impact on him and his practice. As a result he is more open to "collaborating with people from wider walks of life", and has developed a set of conditions that need to be in place for the collaboration to be successful, which he has subsequently begun to share with other existing and potential *Midnight Run* partners.

Challenge as a positive, and the role of critical reflection in this

It's interesting to reflect that in this particular project, challenge has, on the whole, been a positive experience for participants. Responding to the challenges present in these kinds of collaboration has in the main been exciting, and had a positive impact, for all concerned. In the majority of consults, the very things which challenged people were very often those which had most excited them or had a significant impact on them. As is often the case, 're-framing' a challenge as a positive was often dependent on participants' critical reflection, either 'in the moment' or after the event.

3.4 "It's all the extras that it brings that are great"... How effective the programme model was

The 'intermediary' or 'curatorial' role played by the RSA team was key

In projects such as this, the role of the project team can often go un-noticed and un-articulated if a project is successful; our own experience tells us that skilful facilitation can often be 'invisible', and that its value is sometimes only appreciated when it's missing and things are going less well than hoped.

Feedback that the other participants felt like peers who had the background and qualities needed for rigorous and meaningful collaboration confirms the value of the RSA team's careful curation of the group, in creating the optimum 'conditions' for cross-disciplinary collaboration. It's hard to overstate how important the curation of the participant group that took place during the development phase was. Participants – particularly artists – all commented on how difficult it can

be to navigate large academic institutions and find the right potential collaborator. In this project, the RSA did all this ‘groundwork’.

The RSA’s group facilitation ‘set the tone’ for collaboration and critical reflection

The first meetings that each experiment group had were planned and facilitated by the RSA team, to enable groups to: establish some ‘ground rules’ for their collaboration; further explore the themes that they’d united around as a group, and jointly reflect before putting together a practical plan. This approach was key; it put critical reflection ‘front and centre’, catalysed an approach amongst participants that is imperative for successful and meaningful collaboration, and also ensured that learning could be shared across the whole group. In their feedback, participants talked about how long it typically takes for a collaborative idea to ‘crystallise’. Here, the facilitation framework provided by the RSA – in the first group workshop and the first individual group meetings – helped participants to arrive at this much quicker than they might otherwise have done. That they were able to connect with each other and establish the degree of trust required to do so again testifies to the value of the ‘groundwork’ done by the RSA.

Convening sessions for group sharing allowed exchange to ‘percolate’ across the whole group

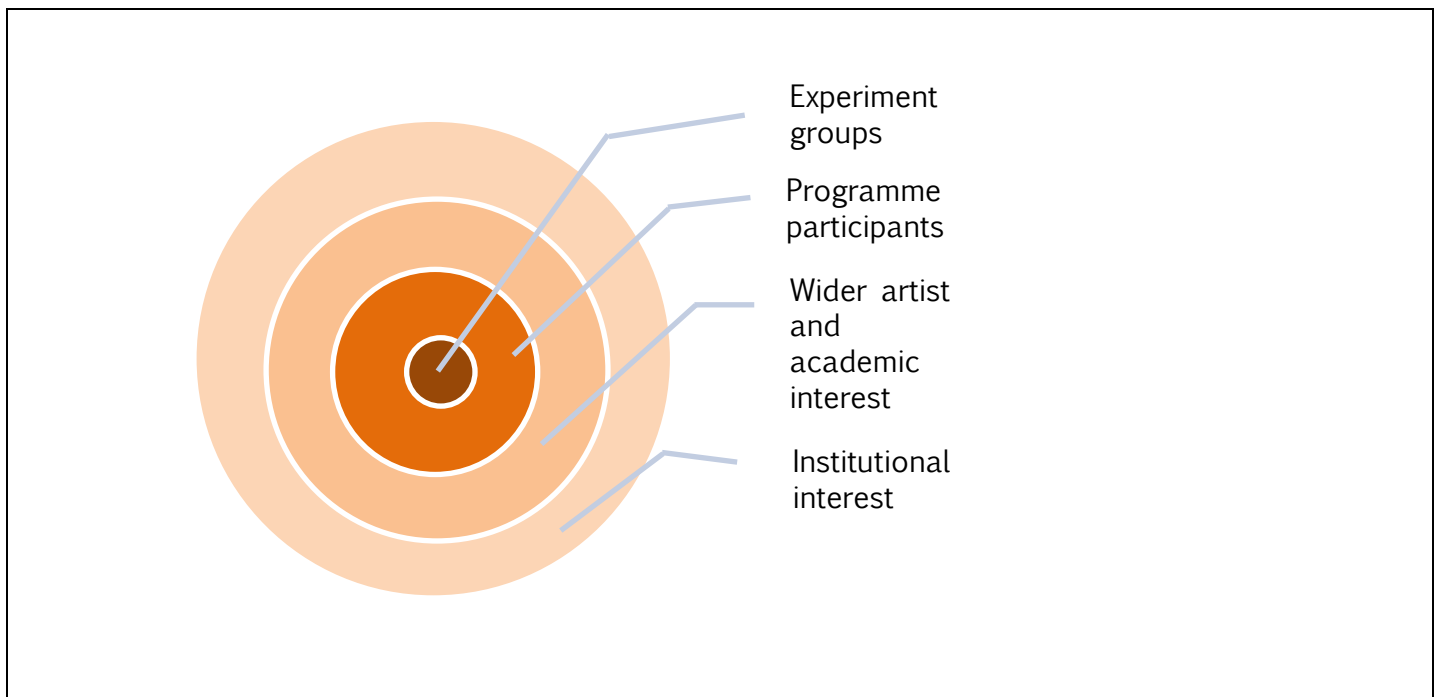
In addition to facilitating these first experiment group sessions, the RSA also facilitated a whole group sharing session at the RSA and a put together a number of informal group sessions, which involved visits to relevant venues and events. These sessions enabled participants who weren’t working together in an experiment group to get to know and share thinking with each other; ideas, questions and discussion ‘percolated’ across the whole participant group. Artists in particular commented not only on the value the RSA’s facilitation had, but also how rare facilitated opportunities to reflect, explore and exchange ideas are for individual artists. One summed up this feedback, saying, *“This was proper professional development, and that kind of reflection is thin on the ground for artists”*.

In a world powered by networks, and especially given the limited infrastructure that exists in the arts – particularly for individual artists – this opportunity was key. With a number of participants indicating that they are keen to work with others from the group in the future, or that they have already begun to do so, being part of a well-networked cohort is likely to have enduring impact for a number of participants.

Wider sharing sessions enabled a wider community to engage with the (idea of) collaboration, but leadership provided by the RSA was key

The RSA team facilitated two wider sharing sessions, one at Kings and the other at the RSA. The one at Kings was aimed primarily at members of the Kings community, and the RSA event at a wider network of individuals interested in this kind of cross-disciplinary work. Originally, the RSA team had expected project participants to be actively involved in shaping and producing these sharing sessions. However, it became clear through a discussion at the sharing session in October that this would not be practical, not least because individuals had (perhaps unsurprisingly) different ideas about what the programme for each event should include. Consequently, the RSA elected to undertake a much more hands on producing role. Our own view is that this was the right decision. It ensured a similar rigour was applied to sharing learning between the participant group and these wider communities, extended the enquiry underpinning the programme to a wider set of individuals, and ensured that the sessions became so much more than a simple 'show and tell'.

The following diagram illustrates the circles of engagement, sharing and learning created by the project:



However, this aspect of the programme was the only one to attract relatively widespread criticism amongst the project participants. Firstly, they felt the idea that the participants would themselves produce or curate these sessions was wrong. Secondly, many seemed to feel that producing something that, as a group, they could share with others was an 'output' they hadn't anticipated and hadn't factored in time-wise. Finally, some feedback that the way in which they ended up

putting something together for these sessions felt at odds with how they'd worked in earlier stages of the project. One participant summed up the negative feedback we received, commenting, *"The processes for exploring were far better than the processes for sharing"*.

RSA involvement validated the project, and made it easier for some participants to justify their involvement

A number of participants commented that the involvement of the RSA in the project, with all that the RSA brand stands for, validated the project. This validation made it easier for them to justify their involvement in the project, to bosses, to funders, and to themselves.

4. Considerations for project partners to take forward

4.1 Conditions or characteristics that are critical to meaningful collaboration

The following are the conditions or characteristics that participants suggested need to be in place for meaningful collaboration to take place between artists and academics:

Qualities and characteristics of good collaborators

- Curiosity and an interest in trying new things
- A willingness to take risks and to place trust in their collaborators
- Commitment to learning from the 'other'
- Being able to actively listen
- Willingness to compromise graciously
- Flexibility and willingness to adapt ideas along the way
- An understanding of why they want to collaborate
- Openness about possible outcomes

Conditions for successful collaboration

- Having time as individuals to 'attune' to other people's beliefs and practice, practically and intellectually, in order to identify if you have the 'kernel' of an idea around which to collaborate
- Having time as a group to explore, develop your thinking, reflect and respond – and crucially to negotiate your way around blocks you encounter
- Generosity of spirit; no one imposing their views on collaborators
- Establishing 'ground rules' for the group, around behaviour and working practices
- Being clear about the amount of time people are able to commit and when
- Forming strong relationships, to develop trust and a readiness to experiment and play
- Group members feeling and contributing as peers
- Identifying and working to collaborators' strengths
- Everyone being clear about the value collaboration has for them individually

4.2 Some reflections for the project partners

Within the context of this project being a pilot model for partnerships between members of the artistic and academic communities, we have listed a number of considerations that the project partners may wish to consider as they move forward:

- Should a decision be made to develop a follow up project, it may be worth using existing participants as project ‘champions’. Having taken part in the pilot programme, they could perhaps nominate participants for a follow up. A small number of participants could also take part in an initial session, to share with new participants their tips for meaningful collaboration and getting the most from the opportunities presented by the project.
- A future project should be clearer about the focus on sharing learning across and beyond the participant group, and the need for each group to consider much sooner how they will share with others the process they’ve explored, not just in terms of detailing the experiment but also critically reflecting on how they’ve worked together and the impact it’s had on them. Given the positivity with which many participants responded to the evaluation process, and the added value created by the sharing event at the RSA, it may be worth factoring into the project plan a more explicitly reflective session for each experiment group. Such a session could have a dual purpose: to contribute to the evaluation process but also be a means of ‘rehearsing the conversations’ they want to have in these wider sharing sessions. The RSA may also want to ‘re-frame’ these wider sessions as ‘reflection’ sessions so as to be clear these aren’t ‘show and tells’.
- The process of curating the participant group was absolutely key to the success of the project. Outside of the framework provided by a project such as this, that process of finding the right collaborator and creating the time one needs to then allow potential ideas for collaboration to ‘brew’ is daunting for some, and feels beyond their reach. Project partners need to be aware that this makes projects such as *Creative Intersections* very resource intensive, but at the same time is a crucial factor in such projects having the significant impact reported here.