

Science in Culture

Exploring the reciprocal relationship between the sciences and the arts and humanities and encouraging cross-disciplinary innovation

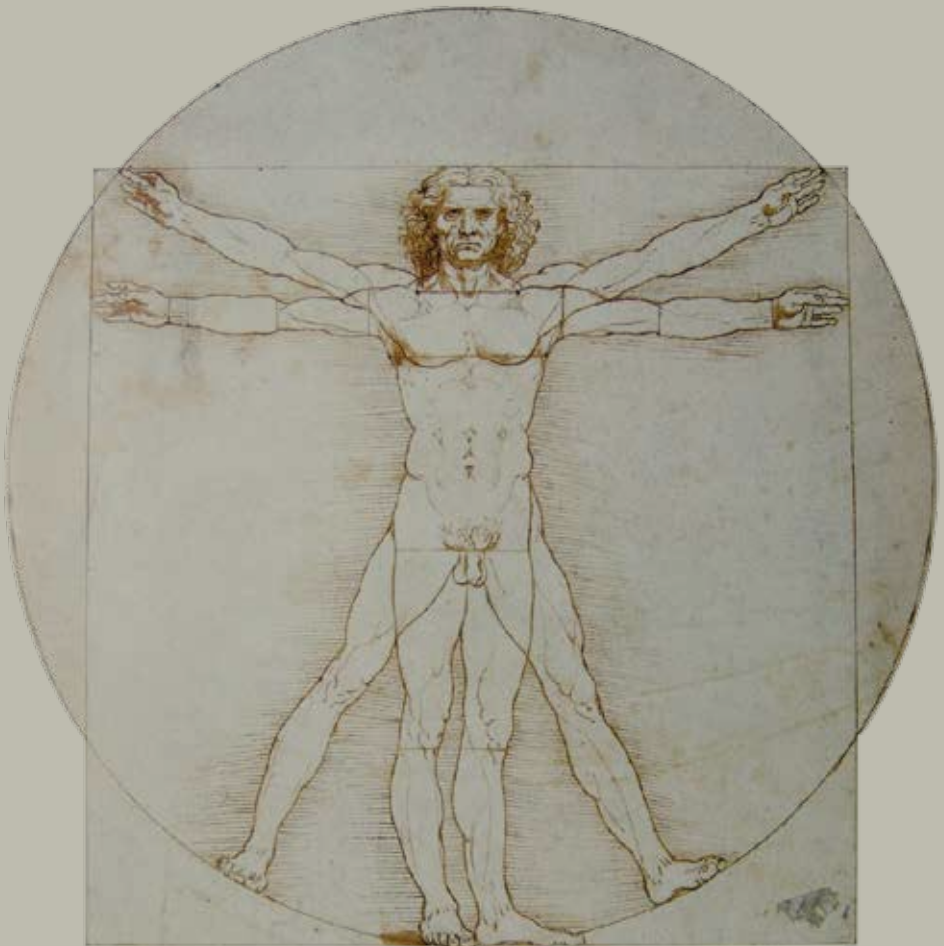


Arts & Humanities
Research Council

Science in Culture

The sciences and the arts and humanities seek answers to very different kinds of questions about human nature, the nature of the world we inhabit, and the relationship between the two.

Sometimes, however, the questions we seek to answer do not neatly fall within the remit of one or the other. The Science in Culture theme aims to address this challenge by exploring and developing the reciprocal relationship between the sciences on the one hand and the arts and humanities on the other.



Introduction

Arts and humanities research in the 21st century has the potential to inform science as much as to chart its cultural impacts. It can provoke new scientific enquiry as much as account for the historical, cultural, legal and ethical contexts for the future development of many areas of science. It can help to anticipate and inform future public engagement and policy debates and controversies.

There is growing recognition of the interconnections and complementarity between the sciences and the arts and humanities, the potential for creativity and innovation that these connections can generate and the limits of using scientific approaches in isolation to tackle societal challenges.

Arts and humanities research can help us answer questions such as:

- What are the nature, value and scope of scientific research?
- What roles do culture, imagination, argument, discourse, creativity, discovery and curiosity play in scientific enquiry?

- How might the art and humanities engage with the sciences as systems of knowledge from the perspective of their cultural context, development and impact?
- How might such interaction enhance public engagement and educational approaches, and inform policy debates?

The Science in Culture theme aims to encourage mutual exchanges between the sciences and the arts and humanities that offer scope for developing new areas of research, methodologies, research frameworks, styles of thinking and/or ways of working across the disciplines.

To date, a range of awards have been made through the Research Networking and Fellowships highlight notice, through the Exploratory Awards call and through the Science in Culture Large Grants call.

Future activities

Please refer to the AHRC website for more information about Science in Culture events, activities and funding calls:

www.ahrc.ac.uk

Leadership Fellow Biography



Barry C Smith is a professor of philosophy and director of the Institute of Philosophy at the University of London's School of Advanced Study.

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He is also the founding director of the Centre for the Study of the Senses, which pioneers collaborative research between philosophers, psychologists and neuroscientists. He publishes in

the philosophy of language and mind, and works increasingly on flavour perception, on which he has published theoretical and experimental papers, including an opinion piece in *Nature*. He is an experienced broadcaster, writing and presenting a four-part series for BBC World Service in 2010 called *The Mysteries of the Brain*.

Please see the Science in Culture Theme Leadership Fellow's website www.sciculture.ac.uk for more information about Barry and his work.

Exploratory awards

Uncovering the connections between the sciences and the arts and humanities

Banking (On) the Brain: The Neurological in Culture, Law and Science

Dr Shawn Harmon, *University of Edinburgh*

This project focused on questions relating to conceptions of the brain embedded within brain bank practice, the impacts of these on law, and the legal and cultural traction of the knowledge produced by brain banking. The investigators found that despite the significance of issues and concerns between brain banks and other types of biobanks,

dialogue about the ethical, legal and cultural aspects and implications of the work in these domains remains limited.

“Our research exposed how the differences between intellectual traditions can be leveraged to animate new interdisciplinary conversations and new initiatives, ultimately leading to innovations, most particularly around how this cultural/scientific practice might be managed.”

DR SHAWN HARMON

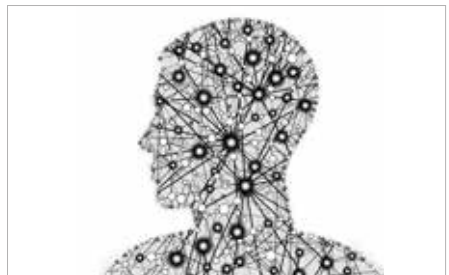
Beyond the Gene: Epigenetic Science in 21st Century Culture

Professor Clare Hanson

University of Southampton

A team of researchers from the humanities and biomedical sciences explored the implications of moving beyond the genetic model of inheritance to focus on the shift that is taking place as we are discovering that fixed genetic inheritance plays a relatively small part in making us ‘who we are’.

“The award enabled us to hold two workshops which provided an exceptional opportunity for leading medical and biological researchers in epigenetics



to exchange ideas with a historian, a philosopher of science and literary scholars. These unique encounters led to an enhanced appreciation of the importance of communications between the science and the arts and humanities.”

PROFESSOR CLARE HANSON

“Questions posed by researchers in the arts and humanities can, on occasion, be addressed by researchers in the sciences, and where both sides put in the effort to learn one another’s terms and methods, there are great gains to be had. It’s also increasingly clear that scientists in many fields are turning to the humanities to provide a wider context for their work and way to shape the research questions that they have the tools and techniques to address.”

PROFESSOR BARRY C. SMITH

Science in Culture Large Grants

The *Science in Culture Large Grants* will act as 'beacons' for the theme, providing foci around which a community of scholars can develop.

Rethinking the Senses: Uniting the Philosophy and Neuroscience of Perception

Professor Colin Blakemore
University of London

Philosophers, psychologists and neuroscientists will be working together in entirely new ways to understand how the brain puts together different sensory information, under the influence of past experience and expectation, to create the seamless flow of conscious experience, to identify objects and events in the world, to give us a sense of our own body, and to enable us to control our actions.

Cultural and Scientific Perceptions of Human-Chicken Interactions

Dr Mark Maltby
Bournemouth University

Over the last 8,000 years, chickens have been transported by humans around the world – no other livestock species is so widely established. Given the social and cultural significance of this species, a detailed analysis of the natural and cultural history of chickens and humans in Europe is long overdue. This trans-disciplinary team, composed of experts from archaeology, anthropology, genetics, and zooarchaeology, will explore the interactions between chickens and human culture in the past, present and future.

Constructing Scientific Communities: Citizen Science in the 19th and 21st Centuries

Professor Sally Shuttleworth
University of Oxford

This project brings together historical and literary research in the nineteenth century with contemporary scientific practice to look at ways in which patterns of popular communication and engagement in nineteenth-century science can offer models for current practice.



“Tricky, important and big questions require collaborative, genuine and reciprocal partnerships across disciplines to create new knowledge and ways of working. Working across disciplines is never easy and the ‘Science in Culture’ theme is a brave initiative aiming to create such partnerships.”

CLARE MATTERSON
DIRECTOR OF MEDICAL HUMANITIES AND ENGAGEMENT, WELLCOME TRUST

AHRC Themes

The AHRC's Themes provide a funding focus for emerging areas of interest to arts and humanities researchers. In recognising that interdisciplinary and collaborative research often requires particular forms of support to develop its full potential, themed funding calls can be particularly supportive of developmental activity, partnership-based activities and innovative approaches.

The Themes were identified through the Future Directions for Arts and Humanities Research consultation in 2009. This indicated support for a number of research areas that were likely to shape or change aspects of multiple research fields over future years. These areas have been grouped under our four themes:

- Care for the Future: Thinking Forward through the Past
- Digital Transformations in the Arts and Humanities
- Science in Culture
- Translating Cultures

In order to keep academic involvement at the forefront of our refinement of the themes, a number of advisory groups were established for each theme and the members of these groups have overseen small scale developmental funding calls. In addition, individual Theme Leadership Fellows will assist with the co-ordination and future development of the themes.

Our commitment to the AHRC's themes was outlined in the Delivery Plan 2011-15, including work towards the large theme grants calls which will be launched in 2012/13.

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