Institute for Creative Arts Practice
Case Studies

Visiting Professor:
Mitchell Whitelaw, University of Canberra

In the summer of 2014 the Institute welcomed its first Visiting Professor. Dr Mitchell Whitelaw is an Associate Professor at the University of Canberra, where he works across new media art and culture and digital cultural collections.

Coming to Newcastle and being based in Culture Lab, Mitchell's aim was to investigate the interdisciplinary domains between the digital humanities, digital design and creative practice, and human-computer interaction. These concerns were focused on two practical research projects which emerged during the visit.

The AHRC-funded Bloodaxe Archive project (see pages 10 & 11) set out to investigate innovative and poetic approaches to a digitised literary archive – papers and manuscripts from Newcastle poetry publisher Bloodaxe Books. Led by Professor Linda Anderson, and with contributors from creative writing, fine art, computer science and archival practice, this project offered a rich case study in interdisciplinary practice. Mitchell worked with Culture Lab researcher Tom Schofield investigating the digital "material" of this archive, and its poetic (and informational) potential. His data timeline interface (**bloodaxe.ncl.ac.uk/ explore/index.html#/data**) reveals patterns of publication for Bloodaxe authors, using data from other sources to triangulate and expand our view of the archive. This practical collaboration also drove theoretical discussions and reflections; a co-authored paper on designing with and for "archival liveness" was published in *Digital Humanities Quarterly* in late 2015 (**digitalhumanities.org/dhq/ vol/9/3/000227/000227.html**).

The lively collaborative environment of the Institute and Culture Lab also fostered a second, independent project during Mitchell's visit. Motivated by the history and heritage of the city of Newcastle upon Tyne, the collections of Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM), and a nexus of broader interests in sustainability, urban change and digital archives, Mitchell developed a project titled Succession (**mtchl.net/ succession**). This project investigates how the creative reuse of digital heritage collections might prompt reflection on the past as well as speculative prospects for the future. Newcastle's heritage – bound up with fossil fuels, trade, industrialisation and globalisation – offered a site-specific focus with global relevance. The resulting work is innovative in taking a generative approach to digital cultural collections. Some 2000 images are drawn from the collections of TWAM, the British Library, The Internet Archive and other sources. These are then recombined, five at a time, to generate new visual "fossils" – compressed juxtapositions that overlay traces and artefacts into new compositions. In a paper presented at the Digital Humanities 2015 conference, Mitchell writes that *Succession* "shows how generative techniques can support the creation of new composite cultural objects, and how these composites can use historical fragments to speak richly to the complexity of our present moment.

IMAGE: Visualisation showing publications by writers in the Bloodaxe Archive. Image by Mitchell Whitelaw and Tom Schofield.