



**School: School of Creative Industries**

**Researcher: Coral Manton and Birgitte Aga**

**Project Title: Conversational AI (Technology that Talks) and Speculative Design Activism**

**UOA 34: Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management**

## Research Timeline

Date	Rationale of research activities and decisions undertaken
September 2017 - November 2017	Initial meetings between Coral Manton and Birgitte Aga to discuss conceptual framework for this collaborative research programme.
November 2017 - February 2018	<p><i>The Infinite Guide</i> - First meetings to discuss the conceptual framework and narrative behind <i>The Infinite Guide</i>. Through prototyping lab sessions, a framework for using AI within a gallery installation was investigated.</p> <p>To give the <i>Infinite Guide</i> the hyperbias position of its imagined makers, a LSTM Recurrent Neural Net system that formed its speech was trained on a corpus of trans-humanist texts that were curated during this period.</p>
February - June 2018	<p><i>The Infinite Guide Exhibition Planning Phase</i></p> <p>This period was devoted to understanding and defining the audience experience, both online and in the physical installation .</p> <p>Arts Council Grants For The Arts funding bid writing for the physical and online installation in partnership with KARST Plymouth, and FACT Liverpool. The bid included the research and development of the installation through participatory design prototyping sessions and a public programme of workshops and artists talks.</p>
April 2018	<p><i>The Infinite Guide</i> - Arts Council funding bid successful. Project with FACT and KARST begins.</p>

March - May 2018	<i>Women Reclaiming AI</i> - Planning and development
	<p>Leading from the initial research in <i>The Infinite Guide</i>, a new strand of research was developed, which centred community building in the creation of a new feminist voice assistant/chatbot. WRAI was developed in response to the pervasive depiction of voice assistants as female, subordinate and serving. Our aim was to harness conversational AI as a tool for activism, creating a community of women with the skills and confidence to advocate for inclusive design practices in technology.</p> <p>WRAI is an expanding piece of design activism, presented as a feminist AI voice assistant, programmed through participatory workshops by a growing community of women. Through creating a platform for collective writing and editing, the project co-creates an AI personality that challenges gender roles.</p> <p>During this period we developed the methodology and the framework for the chatbot in DialogFlow, and the workshop plan. We wrote a community agreement for the participants/collaborators to agree to, and a statement for the ethical collection of data.</p>
13th June 2018	<i>Women Reclaiming AI</i> - Workshop Knowle West Media Centre Bristol
	<p>First test workshop with a group of women from the Bristol area. In this workshop we tested the workshop model, developed our community agreement, and tested the shared platform for writing and editing the chatbot on DialogFlow.</p>
31st July - 2nd August 2018	<i>The Infinite Guide</i>
	<p>FACT prototyping with a group of young people, ages 11 - 15, Liverpool Biennial 2018.</p> <p>Our aim for this prototype camp was to work with a group of young people to develop narratives for <i>The Infinite Guide</i>. Through this intensive, week long prototyping camp we aimed to share knowledge and skills, activating young people to take part in conversation on our current and future relationships with conversational AI.</p> <p>With the group we prototyped conversational AI personalities in Twine then in DialogFlow.</p> <p><a href="https://www.biennial.com/events/prototype-summer-camp-infinite-guide">https://www.biennial.com/events/prototype-summer-camp-infinite-guide</a></p>
1st - 9th September 2018	<i>The Infinite Guide</i> - Exhibition Online and at KARST, Plymouth
3rd & 8th May 2018	<i>Women Reclaiming AI</i> - Workshop KARST, Women of Whitley.

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25th September  
2018

*AI in Art* - FACT, Liverpool.

A series of talks and a panel discussion with artists and curators working with AI; Luba Elliot, Anna Ridler, Birgitte Aga, Coral Manton and Prof. Mike Phillips. Plus a group of young people engaged with the project through FACT Prototyping Camp.

Description:

*With the evolution of AI (Artificial Intelligence) as a ubiquitous cultural force, there is an emergent debate about the role of AI in art, and its validity as art. AI in ART attempts to extend this conversation to examine the role of art practice in engaging the public in a wider debate around the future impact of AI on the individual and the society as a whole.*

*The event brings together artists and curators working with AI for a conversation with a group of teenagers who have been prototyping AI art as part of intensive summer workshops with artist collective i-DAT. The participants will present their work and be interrogated by the group of young people who will ask the kinds of questions we wouldn't think of, or dare to ask. In shaping their future these conversations will explore their artificial cultural inheritance.*

Eventbrite link:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/ai-in-art-a-fact-late-night-tickets-50214768725?aff=efbeventix#>

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Friday 16th  
November 2018

*Disobedient AI* - A series of talks and panel discussion, co-curated by Birgitte Aga and Coral Manton.

We invited artist Nye Thompson (Lumen Prize Finalist), Curator Irini Papadimitriou (V&A, Future Everything), design researcher Elvia Vasconcelos (author of *Alexa you're a Pussy*) and Coral Manton & Birgitte Aga (co-founders of *Women Reclaiming AI*) to discuss disobedient strategies/an activist approach to working with and discussing the societal impact of AI.

Random String Symposium:

<https://randomstring.co/symposium18-2>

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17th November  
2018

*Women Reclaiming AI* - Workshop  
Random String, Coventry.

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25th November  
2018

*Women Reclaiming AI* - Workshop  
Birmingham Open Media (BOM), Birmingham

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December 2018

*Women Reclaiming AI* - Arts Council Grants for the Arts bid development.

The GFA bid was to insure the continued workshops for WRAI and a plan to exhibit the chatbot at Birmingham Open Media (BOM).

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February 2019	<i>Women Reclaiming AI</i> - Arts Council GFA Funding bid successful.
February 2019 - May 2019	<p><i>Women Reclaiming AI</i> - Development of the exhibition of the chatbot.</p> <p>At this point in the project, our research indicated that no other exhibition was using this technology, and community ethos had been attempted, so all research was original and required high levels of innovation. The audience experience had to be planned carefully alongside the technology. The installation of the chatbot was particularly challenging as the chatbot is constantly live and being edited, it runs through The Cloud so a stable network connection is important, the chatbot microphone must be of good quality and cancel ambient noise so people can easily ask it questions.</p>
13th April 2019	<i>Women Reclaiming AI</i> - Workshop Near Now, Nottingham
10th May 2019	<i>Women Reclaiming AI</i> - Workshop Automate Me, Leeds International Festival, Leeds
17th May 2019	<p><i>Women Reclaiming AI</i> - Workshop The Barbican, London. As part of AI: More than Human exhibition programme.</p> <p><a href="https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/ai-more-than-human">https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/ai-more-than-human</a></p>
24th May 2019	<i>Women Reclaiming AI</i> - Workshop Birmingham Open Media (BOM), Birmingham
May 2019 - Oct 2019	<p><i>Women Reclaiming AI</i> - Exhibition of the chatbot.</p> <p>Birmingham Open Media (BOM), Birmingham</p>
29th June 2019	<i>Women Reclaiming AI</i> - Workshop The Cell, London
August 2019	<p><i>Women Reclaiming AI</i></p> <p>In preparation for the exhibition at ARS Electronica we experimented with developing an open source version of the Women Reclaiming AI chatbot that runs locally. The benefit of this is not relying on the Google Cloud or a reliable network in a gallery space.</p>
9th - 13th September 2019	<p>WRAI project was exhibited at ARS Electronica</p> <p><a href="https://ars.electronica.art/outofthebox/en/reclaiming/">https://ars.electronica.art/outofthebox/en/reclaiming/</a></p>

7th September 2019	<p><i>Women Reclaiming AI</i> - Workshop ARS Electronica, Linz, Austria</p>
	<p><a href="https://ars.electronica.art/outofthebox/en/humanism-workshops-women/">https://ars.electronica.art/outofthebox/en/humanism-workshops-women/</a></p>
8th September 2019	<p>Inclusive AI Applied European ARTificial Intelligence Lab ARS Electronica, Linz, Austria</p>
	<p>A presentation on discussion on the impact of WRAI</p>
	<p><a href="https://ars.electronica.art/outofthebox/en/digital-humanism-ai/">https://ars.electronica.art/outofthebox/en/digital-humanism-ai/</a></p>
11th September 2019	<p>ITU Telecoms World, Budapest, panel discussion <i>Diversity by design: mitigating gender bias in AI</i></p>
	<p>ITU is a United Nations Specialised Agency conference on IT and Telecommunications. Coral Manton was invited to speak on a panel titled: <i>Diversity by design: mitigating gender bias in AI</i></p>
	<p>Others on the panel were: Caroline Louveaux, Mastercard Chief Privacy Officer Tim Unwin, Emeritus Professor of Geography Royal Holloway, University of London Dr Martin Koyabe Head of Technical Support &amp; Consultancy at The Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO)</p>
	<p>Panel summary: <a href="https://digital-world.itu.int/diversity-by-design-mitigating-gender-bias-in-ai/">https://digital-world.itu.int/diversity-by-design-mitigating-gender-bias-in-ai/</a></p>
	<p>Video of interview for ITU blog with Coral Manton: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z0cWgHhZgOY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z0cWgHhZgOY</a></p>
14th September	<p><i>Women Reclaiming AI</i> - Workshop and Exhibition of Chatbot The Eden Arts Festival, The Eden Project, Cornwall</p>
October 2019	<p><i>Women Reclaiming AI</i></p>
	<p>Presentation at Anthropology and Technology Conference, Watershed, Bristol.</p>
	<p><a href="https://response-ability.tech/2019-socially-responsible-ai/">https://response-ability.tech/2019-socially-responsible-ai/</a></p>
27th October 2019	<p><i>Women Reclaiming AI</i> - Workshop MozFest (Mozilla Foundation), London</p>
	<p><a href="https://discourse.mozilla.org/t/women-reclaiming-ai/46690">https://discourse.mozilla.org/t/women-reclaiming-ai/46690</a></p>

28th October 2019	Become an AI Activist Knowle West Media Centre
	This workshop was designed to enable community activists to create their own activist chatbot for areas they cared about, exploring the potential for chatbots to create positive change in social and environmental issues.
	<a href="https://kwmc.org.uk/events/aiactivism/">https://kwmc.org.uk/events/aiactivism/</a>
28th October 2019	Contribution to Feminist Internet's FutureLearn online course on making ethical chatbots/conversational AI
	<a href="https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/designing-a-feminist-chatbot">https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/designing-a-feminist-chatbot</a>
October - November 2019	Leading on from our Women Reclaiming AI workshop and exhibition at The Eden Arts Festival, Eden Project, Cornwall, we began discussions on developing a new piece of work engaging the public in discussion on the environmental impact of AI.
	We began a planning and concept development phase focused on developing a project for young people, exploring the technology behind AI and the Internet and raising awareness of the climate impact of these technologies. The project would use participatory design and conversational AI as a means to open discussions, share knowledge and skills with the community.
	The project was named 'Looking For The Cloud'.
	Leading on from the research into creating safe and collaborative spaces for women in creative technology - mainly through Women Reclaiming AI - we decided to use this project to research the potential of working as an all women collective encouraging women into creative technology through skill sharing. This collective was named The RE+Collective.
	Funding bid development for <a href="#">SWCTN</a> Automation Prototyping Grant
11th November 2019	Invented Future Panel Discussion on the future of storytelling and AI
	<a href="https://inventedfutures.co.uk/">https://inventedfutures.co.uk/</a>
January 2020	<i>Looking For The Cloud (LFTC)</i>
	SWCTN Automation Funding Bid Successful. Project Begins.
	Initial prototyping meetings with the RE+Collective LFTC project team and education teams at The Eden Project.
February 2020 - May 2020	<i>Looking For The Cloud</i>
	Through group iterative design and prototyping lab sessions a series of narrative options were developed alongside a framework for a web based chatbot, accessible via an image trigger inside the book.

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Alongside the development of the LFTC project the RE+Collective team developed a new and radical feminist constitution for the RE+Collective.

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June 2020

*Looking For The Cloud*

Prototype narrative written with Dr Joe Elworthy, Eden Project Cornwall. Online chatbot prototypes developed and tested alongside the project website. Illustrations for the prototype book pages commissioned.

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September 2020

*Looking For The Cloud*

Prototype book launched at the SWCTN Automation Prototyping Launch.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hxws0q6YDil&list=PLwa\\_kK-pqTUQouYIXdRsYbIT-UKI3ClyQ&index=29](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hxws0q6YDil&list=PLwa_kK-pqTUQouYIXdRsYbIT-UKI3ClyQ&index=29)

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18th October  
2020

AI Lab Radio, Austria. Interview to discuss current work exploring AI and gender bias.

<https://www.freie-radios.online/sendung/ai-lab-radio-4-birgitte-aga-coral-manton>

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