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Editorial: Contemporary, Engagement, Impact, Public(s)

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radar4 Special Issue public/engagement and contemporary/impact

4. a. Moral or legal obligation; a tie of duty or gratitude.
   b. Attachment, prepossession, bias.
   c. In Literary Criticism.
5. The fact of being entangled; involved or entangled condition.
6. The fact of being *engaged* in any occupation; a piece of business requiring attention.
7. The action of crossing swords.
8. The state of being *engaged* in fight; a battle, conflict, encounter; also formerly, a single combat.
9. In an active sense: That which *engages* or induces to a course of action; an inducement, motive.

Contemporary:
1. Belonging to the same time, age, or period; living, existing, or occurring together in time.
2. Having existed or lived from the same date, equal in age, coeval.
3. Occurring at the same moment of time, or during the same period; occupying the same definite period; *contemporaneous*, simultaneous.
4. a. Modern; of or characteristic of the present period; esp. up-to-date, ultra-modern; spec. designating art of a markedly avant-garde quality, or furniture, building, decoration, etc., having modern characteristics.
   b. Used by a journal or periodical in referring to others published at the same time.
   c. A person of the same age as another.

Impact:
1. a. The act of impinging; the striking of one body against another; collision. Chiefly in Dynamics, in reference to momentum.
   b. Now commonly the effective action of one thing or person upon another; the effect of such action; influence; impression. Esp. in phr. to make an *impact* (on).
2. a. To press closely into or in something; to fix firmly in; to pack in.
   b. To stamp or impress (on something). rare.
   c. To come forcibly into contact with a (larger) body or surface. Const. various preps.
   d. To have a (pronounced) effect on.
   e. To cause to impinge or *impact* on, against, etc.[3]

The above examples might begin to demonstrate the extent of the meanings associated with these terms. While evidently not all applicable to the research areas and disciplines reflected and explored within **radar4**, their breadth and variance underlines the scope of their application, and their tendency to resist finite definition.

radar has undergone an evolution since it was first realised in 2010. **radar1** (edited by Steve Swindells and Joseph McCullagh) introduced the work of a broad selection of researchers within the School of Art, Design and Architecture, as well as highlighting the role of the research centre at the University. **radar1** also performed the crucial task of introducing the journal's intention to illustrate and disseminate the School's research across University departments; to act as an open invitation for further collaborations in the education and creative industry sectors; and to highlight our interdisciplinary practices and the **impact** of our work on society. Through **radar2** (edited by Swindells and Kevin Almond) the journal became a means of addressing

current policy changes, namely those in the economic and education sectors. It aimed to identify how the School's research might be situated within these wider issues/debates. *radar3* (edited by Verina Gfader and Juliet MacDonald) took a more conceptual approach, as a homage to Félix Guattari and new narratives of activism, by posing a series of questions for the invited contributors to reflect upon. Seeking a logical continuation of these developments, *radar4* maintains an experimental and responsive approach. For example some of the contributions appear deliberately more like games, tours or conversations than traditional research papers. By leaving the brief and theme open to interpretation, we encouraged a range of contributions, including written papers, drawn images, photographs, transcribed dialogues and interviews. Incorporating elements of all three previous journals, *radar4* takes a conceptual, playful and self-reflexive approach to the questions it raises, asking for individual interpretations and collaboration to shape both the form and content of the issue. Further, it seeks to address recent trends and issues in the social, political and cultural life of the University, while tracing their relationship to relevant art, design and architecture practices happening beyond its walls. The current issue of *radar* thus situates itself at the interface between the research-orientated arena of the University and the broader art aware/culturally **engaged public** sphere. While maintaining a commitment to showcasing academic and professional research, *radar4* aims to facilitate a process of osmosis between the academic institution and the broader **public**, including individuals and **public** bodies, both within and beyond the creative and cultural industries. Where earlier issues of *radar* have solicited from within Huddersfield's academic community, this issue is positioned at the cusp, often moving outside of traditional research zones. This can be recognised in contributions from municipal Library staff, local arts enthusiasts and independent ethnographers, whose contributions, participation in related *radar4* events, and general interest and feedback has helped to shape cultural events across the University and Huddersfield town centre.

As part of our preparation for *radar4*, and in an attempt to make it as collaborative and inclusive as possible, we sent out postcards inviting different **publics** (from both within and outside of the University) to interpret and respond to the *radar* logo. Acting as invitations, the postcards also encouraged participation in a series of short primer events, held off-campus at local cafes and bars in Huddersfield, involving discussion and invited talks on each of our four key words (highlighted throughout this issue). The events perpetuated an informal, democratic and transparent approach to the subsequent call for papers for *radar4*. Images showing the results of this dialogic postal communication process can be found at the back, and in the centrefold of this issue.

The pilot event, Christmas 2012, was hosted at Coffee Evolution, Church Street, and in Huddersfield town centre. Attended by staff and post-graduate students, ideas were shared and forthcoming seminar plans developed. The second event on 13 March 2013 took the first two themes — **public(s)** and **engagement** —as its focus, and the format of invited talks, held at Zephyr bar, King Street. It featured presentations from Bristow and Lloyd, a collaborative project between community worker Lisa Bristow and educator, artist and designer Christian Lloyd, and from Chris Marsden, who conducts **public** art tours of the town and recently completed a postgraduate study at the University of Huddersfield. Also held at Zephyr, the final event on 20 March 2013 took **impact** and **contemporary** as its key themes, with contributions from artist and University of Huddersfield lecturer Claire Barber, and artist, illustrator and designer Stephen Calcutt. As well as joining discussions, members of the **public** were invited to respond

to the talks on the *radar* postcards, and these were projected onto the walls as a slideshow throughout the events.

To reiterate, *radar4* aims to contribute to the University's wider research project around **public engagement** in art, design and architecture; part of its commitment to cultural leadership and local well-being. It reflects the project's concern to examine the ways in which different groups are able to encounter and interpret practice-based research across these disciplines. It also highlights the project's self-reflexive nature, asking how we might define the terms **contemporary**, **engagement**, **impact** and **public**; in part through the development of the aforementioned series of **public** events which enabled attendees to contribute to discussions on these topics, and, in turn, to shape *radar4*. It considers whether we should, perhaps, be speaking of **publics**, and whether **engagement** might be more easily understood as different levels of 'encounter', 'interpretation' or 'participation' — or as something else? This current *radar* issue stems in part from an exploration of how issues around **public engagement**, **impact**, **contemporary** and **public(s)** might feed into — or stem from — broader issues and questions around, for example, cultural and political agendas. It begins by querying what the future of **contemporary** art, design and architecture in education, research and practice might look like with, or without, effective **public engagement** strategies; how the concept of **impact** might differ in a **contemporary** art, design and architecture context compared with other fields; (why) it might be important that **publics** are able to **engage** with **contemporary** art and design research and practice; what can be achieved through effective **public engagement** strategies; what the challenges and the barriers to **public engagement** might be; and how we can measure and articulate **impact** in these fields. These themes were addressed concurrently by researchers in the School of Art, Design and Architecture and invited speakers in May 2013 at a symposium entitled **Public Engagement** and **Impact**: articulating value in art and design, held at the Institute for **Contemporary** Arts, London.[4] The discussion continues.

Notes

1. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the current research assessment system for higher education institutions. Responsible for determining future research funding within different academic schools, the REF has replaced the previous Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), the last of which took place in 2008.

2. For further information about interpretations of public engagement and impact in the context of the Research Excellence Framework, see Nadine Muller, 'Public Engagement', The New Academic: Guides to Academia (2013): http://www.nadinemuller.org.uk/the-new-academic-guides/public-engagement/ According to Neil Robinson of Bulletin Academic, the current REF is causing 'myriad challenges' for many HEIs. 'How can it be', he asks, 'that the most resolute efforts to ensure that academic research is understood, taken up and used for the widest possible benefit are ultimately encapsulated in a jumble of ambiguity, imprecision, hyperbole and understatement?'. See 'Tell your story clearly, and consider getting a little help if needed', Times Higher Education (10 January 2013): http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=422321&c=1>10/01/13

3. All definitions taken from The Oxford English Dictionary online: http://www.oed.com

4. Further details about this event and feedback from delegates and participants, as well as links to social media responses to the symposium's key questions can be found at: http://contemporaryartengage.wordpress.com/ica-symposium/ and in the related publication by Steve Swindells and Anna Powell, entitled 'What is to be Done?: Cultural Leadership and Public Engagement in Art and Design Education' (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).