

Institution: Nottingham Trent University (NTU)		
Unit of Assessment: D27 – English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Being in Touch: Inspiring Cultural Engagement through Creative-Critical Writing		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name:	Role:	Period employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Sarah Jackson	Associate Professor	2009 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017 – December 31, 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Dr Sarah Jackson's research on the body and communications technologies brings together creative writing, contemporary literature and philosophy to explore the idea of 'being in touch'. Taking her research beyond the academy, she has curated a public engagement programme that has 1) enhanced artistic practice and cultural production; 2) produced new forms of literary expression; and 3) resulted in sustained changes to institutions' cultural programming. Central to these activities are innovative methodologies that blend creative and critical writing. To deliver this programme, Jackson has curated more than 30 creative-critical writing workshops and interactive events involving around 500 participants aged 16-65+ from 15 countries. She has inspired the creation of new literary works on the theme of 'being in touch', including a digital app (428 downloads and 7032 website visits), crowd-sourced online exhibition (7,478 visits), touring exhibition, and short animated film. Jackson has translated her research ideas into creative-critical programming, including radio essays, interviews, podcasts, documentaries and short films. She has also worked closely with regional, national, and international partners including the BBC, the Science Museum Group, UNESCO Creative Cities, and the BT Archives.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>A BBC-AHRC New Generation Thinker [G1], AHRC Leadership Fellow [G2] and award-winning poet, Jackson combines critical and creative practice to examine the relationship between the body, technology and writing. She produces hybrid texts that operate across formal and disciplinary boundaries, exploring how interdisciplinary and collaborative forms of writing can generate new critical insights, inspire artistic production, inform public debate, and promote ways of being in touch that reach across cultural, institutional and national divides. Central to this work is her leadership of NTU's Critical Poetics Research Group (CPRG), whose 25 members draw on her research to develop innovative writing methodologies that engage diverse communities with contemporary socio-political and cultural concerns.</p> <p>Jackson's approach to being in touch addresses two linked themes: tact and technology. Her work on haptic studies is published in multiple scholarly and creative forms. Her poetry collection <i>Pelt</i> (2012) [R1] was inspired by literary and critical work on the concept of the skin as an interface between self and world. She developed her work on touch in an article in <i>New Writing</i> (2012) [R2] and significantly extended this in her creative-critical monograph <i>Tactile Poetics</i> (2015) [R3]. Investigating how literary texts touch readers, this monograph both examines and enacts the relationship between literary texture and theories of feeling. Related outputs include a critical essay 'Touching' (2020) – which considers how extreme environments mediate the perception and expression of contact – and 'A Conversion Disorder' (2015) [R4] – which blends fiction, autobiography, philosophy and criticism in order to offer new insights into the different textures of literary language. Since 2016, Jackson's work on being in touch has focused more intensively on remote contact, interrupted connection, and literary telecommunications. After editing <i>Ten Poems on the Telephone</i> (2017), she investigated telephony in a creative-critical article (2017) [R5]. With Bostock (University of Plymouth), she also published a hybrid essay (2019) [R6] in which the authors exchange voicemails to explore being in touch at a distance. This essay stemmed from an international event on the 'Unidentifiable Literary Object' curated by Jackson and hosted by the CPRG, culminating in a co-edited special issue of <i>parallax</i> (2019).</p>		

In 2018, Jackson won AHRC funding to develop her work on telecommunications in partnership with the BT Archives and Science Museum (SM) (G2).

3. References to the research

The quality of this research is evidenced by peer-reviewed publications and the funding received from the AHRC.

R1 Jackson, S. *Pelt* (Bloodaxe Books, 2012) [poetry collection]. *Pelt* won the Seamus Heaney Prize, was longlisted for *The Guardian* First Book Award, and was described in the *TLS* as 'one of the most assured and exciting full-length debut collections in recent years'.

R2 Jackson, S. 'So Close: Writing That Touches', *New Writing*, 9:3 (2012), pp.408-418 [creative-critical refereed journal article]. DOI: [10.1080/14790726.2012.693096](https://doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2012.693096). 'This is an engaging and lively piece of work; interesting in thought, and interesting in discussion' (referee endorsement).

R3 Jackson, S. *Tactile Poetics: Touch and Contemporary Writing* (Edinburgh UP, 2015) [creative-critical monograph]. Described in *Oxford Literary Review* (2017) as 'a superb and important read'. Listed in REF2.

R4 Jackson, S. 'A Conversion Disorder', *Oxford Literary Review*, 37:2 (2015), pp.217-242 [creative-critical refereed journal article]. DOI: [10.3366/olr.2015.0165](https://doi.org/10.3366/olr.2015.0165). 'Illuminating... [it] exemplif[ies] while performing ways to read and to think of writing and/as reading' (referee endorsement). Listed in REF2.

R5 Jackson, S. 'Derrida on the Line', *Derrida Today*, 10:2 (2017), pp.142-159 [creative-critical refereed journal article]. DOI: [10.3366/drt.2017.0153](https://doi.org/10.3366/drt.2017.0153). 'a stimulating new contribution to the debate on Derrida's writing on the telephone, on the connection between Derrida and Cixous, and on the notion of communication at a distance' (referee endorsement).

R6 Jackson, S. and C. Bostock (eds), *Unidentifiable Literary Objects: A Special Issue, parallax* 25:3 (2019) [creative-critical special issue; includes an introduction (pp.241-7; DOI: [10.1080/13534645.2019.1624321](https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2019.1624321)) and essay *Between Calls: Together in the Garden* (pp.333-350; DOI: [10.1080/13534645.2019.1624327](https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2019.1624327))] both co-authored by Jackson. Listed in REF2.

Key underpinning grants/awards

G1 AHRC/BBC New Generation Thinker, 2016 – 2017.

G2 AHRC Fellowship, *Crossed Wires*, £179,022, Sept 2018 – Jan 2021.

4. Details of the impact

1. Generating new ways of thinking that influence creative practice and increase cultural participation and engagement

As a New Generation Thinker [G1], Jackson has generated new approaches to the idea of being in touch through creative-critical programming for the BBC. Selected broadcasts include: a discussion of lyric touch in a R4 documentary entitled 'Every Little Touch'; an essay on touch in Antarctica for R3, selected for R4's *Pick of the Week*; and an interview on R4's *Today* Programme (approximately 7 million listeners per week in 2019 [S1]) discussing her discovery in the BT Archives of correspondence between Sylvia Pankhurst and the Post Office about phone tapping. The media coverage of this discovery was developed as an AHRC impact study, with Head of Public and Stakeholder Engagement referring to its 'fantastic communications impact' and the ways that Jackson's work has 'help[ed] inspire and encourage' other arts and humanities researchers [S1]. Other BBC outputs include: 'The Mystery of the Missing Telephone', a short film on Sherlock Holmes for BBC Arts Online; 'Daisy Bell: The Voice and the Machine', a 20-minute documentary for R3's *Sunday Feature*; poetry on the body commissioned for R3's *Words and Music*; and several *Free Thinking* interviews for R3, including features exploring the history of Hull's telephone booths and the influence of John Giorno on poetry by the telephone.

Jackson has extended this work on being in touch with a range of community groups and cultural institutions. Designed by Jackson to explore new ways of bringing communities together to consider contemporary issues, *Re:Vision* was a three-year, international creative-critical writing programme for both aspiring and experienced writers. It began in 2017 with a free nine-week workshop series at the Broadway Cinema, Nottingham, in partnership with Writing East Midlands (WEM) and Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature (NUCoL). In 2018, Jackson and

CPRG colleagues were invited to Katowice, Poland, to deliver, as part of the UNESCO Creative Cities public conference, four creative-critical writing workshops (topics included surveillance and telecommunications). As CPRG lead, Jackson helped to design four workshops led by Group members in 2018-2019 (in UNESCO Creative Cities Dublin, Tartu, Ljubljana, and Granada), and a 2019 intensive six-week online creative-critical writing and mentoring programme for 17 emerging European writers; in 2019 she travelled to Pereira (Colombia) to lead the final workshop. This workshop series included sessions on technology, telephony and contemporary culture. A total of 110 writers from 10 countries participated in the workshops and 371 members of the public attended related discussions; participants included teachers, carers, financial advisors, graphic designers and those out of employment. Evaluations repeatedly evidenced two clear outcomes: workshops enhanced participants' creative practice and improved their understanding of the issues addressed; 82% generated new writing ideas, 74% improved expression of ideas and 76% were inspired to write about workshop topics [S2]. Noting that the Nottingham workshops involved '*a broad spectrum of writers with a wide age span, a rich mixture of ethnicity and gender, and in many cases with little or no experience of creative composition*', playwright and NUCoL patron William Ivory highlighted the level of debate they engendered, leading to '*pieces which were profoundly authored and ... argued, and which gave a wonderfully broad and diverse snapshot of the world in which we live*' [S3]. Dublin UCoL Director observed: '*The workshops used an innovative approach, new to Dublin City of Literature, combining reading and discussion of short works of literature and philosophy and critical texts, consideration of art [...] and creative writing exercises*' [S3]. Participants responded positively: '*[This was] a new topic/style and way of approaching writing or possibly merging genres*'; '*[It was an] opening to new source[s] of inspiration and new ways of drawing from it*' [S2]. One participant described the project as '*mind-opening*'; '*[it] taught me about more than writing. [...] It's helped me formulate what I actually think and feel about things*' [S2].

Jackson's research led to her co-organising the 2019 *Writing Skyscapes* collaboration between astronomers, photographers and writers at Creswell Crags Museum and Prehistoric Gorge. Featuring creative-critical workshops in a cave and poetry readings at night, it allowed participants to reflect on and write about how we experience the sky through various astronomical communications technologies. Evaluations showed that 100% of participants generated new ideas for writing. Participant feedback included: '*a fantastic mix of disciplines and of creative and critical approaches [...] the event was genuinely inter-disciplinary, generative and impactful*' [S4]. In 2020, Jackson's research also resulted in 'Five Bodies' (launched November 2020), a collaborative partnership with Nottingham Contemporary, with workshops led by international writers exploring contemporary bodies, environments, and technologies.

Bringing her work on telephony to new and diverse audiences, Jackson created three public events for the 2017 BA-AHRC Being Human Festival. *Switchboard* included a creative-critical writing workshop at Nottingham Industrial Museum (where visitors interacted with telephones from the Museum's collection not normally on display); a BT-supported pop-up event in a phone booth, with anonymous voicemail messages left by members of the public; and a spoken word event. Selected by the organisers as a Festival Highlight, these events involved 70 members of the public aged 16-65+ and were covered on BBC R3's *Free Thinking*. An independent evaluation commissioned by Festival organisers described them as '*very successful*', noting a clear link with '*current academic research*' and '*sustained audience engagement*'. Feedback included: '*I've never read my poetry in public before. [...] I'm going to do it again*'; '*It really made me think about the telephone and how we connect to it*' [S5]. Extending this work as part of G2, Jackson's *Telepoetics* event brought together archivists, curators, writers and the public to explore how the telephone operates across literary, critical, personal and political domains. Originally scheduled to take place at the SM, the symposium was held online (due to COVID-19) over 10 days in 2020. Participants described the event as a '*brilliant variety of voices*', '*a creative-critical feast*', '*a surprising range of different sorts of interventions*' and '*moving too to be part of this active ongoing, intense exchange with people all over the world*'; the project webpages received 7,172 views from 40 countries over two weeks [S6]. Also in 2020, Jackson curated an online crowd-sourced exhibition of literary telephones (7,478 visits); featured in *The Guardian*, it includes 90 nominations of international literary texts spanning over 130 years [S6].

2. Inspiring and producing new forms of artistic and literary expression

Working with writers speaking more than 10 languages, and offering mentoring opportunities and commissions, *Re:Vision* culminated in the 2019 collection *Writing the Contemporary: Poetry & Postcards from UNESCO Cities of Literature*, edited by CPRG members with contributions by Jackson. New poems written during the *Writing Skyscapes* project were shared with the public during a two-week exhibition at Backlit Art Gallery in Nottingham, which moved to Creswell Crags from 15 April – 19 July (30,900 visitors to site from April-July 2019 [S4]), and then to the European Dark Sky Festival and Symposium, Mayo Dark Sky Park in Ireland (1-5 November 2019), where further activities extended the project's legacy.

As part of her AHRC-funded *Crossed Lines* project, Jackson commissioned new work for and edited the *Dial-a-Poem* mobile app, a free resource providing access to 63 contemporary poems by writers from Africa, America, Asia and Europe. Read aloud by the authors and translators, the app invites users to reflect on the relationship between poetry and calling. It has brought to the attention of a wider public the work of international award-winning poets such as L. Yakimchuk (Ukraine) and A. Zia (Kashmir). Poet L. Kelly testified to the value of the project, describing her visit to the BT Archives enabled by *Dial-a-Poem* as 'extremely generative', explaining that she learned about the role of the telephone with d(D)eaaf communities, and that it resulted directly in three new poems [S6]. For R. Dastidar, the project brought to light the possibility of poetry as a 'medium for telling alternative histories of ideas, objects and technologies', and J. McAdams noted that the project enabled her to rethink the relationship between poetry and technology 'not just in terms of process, audience, genre but also the politics of each' [S6]. A BBC R3 feature discussing the project included V. Capildeo's poem read on the telephone from Trinidad; Capildeo commended the project, stating that its 'use of new and older technologies offers the chance of physical contact with poetry as real-time soundwaves' [S6]. The app has been downloaded 428 times, with 7,032 visits to the *Dial-a-Poem* webpages [S6].

In partnership with the SM, Jackson also created an online collection of original art and literary works from a diverse group of practitioners exploring the role of the telephone in cultural production and reception. *The Exchange*, commissioned during COVID-19 and reflecting a shift towards calling during lockdown, features works by writer Will Self, transmedia artist Maya Chowdhry, beatboxer Danny Ladwa, poets Lisa Kelly, Serge Neptune, Nadia Nadarajah and DL Williams, and sound artist Aura Satz. Inspired by Jackson's own research, artworks were created in response to heritage objects in the SM collection – including an undersea cable, a manual switchboard and a rotary dial – and made available to the public via both the SM and project websites; the project webpages and a SM blog published in September 2020 to mark the launch together received over 2000 views and SM's Twitter announcements resulted in 89,647 impressions [S6, S7]. Reflecting on her engagement with Jackson's 'creative-critical essay about transspecies calling' [R6], Chowdhry noted that the project 'introduced my work to new audiences' and also 'benefited me through access to and the development of new ideas and works on the role of telecommunications and its relationship to the "natural" world' [S8].

Jackson also worked with Compass Collective, a non-profit theatre company supporting young people seeking sanctuary, on the *Calling across Borders* project. Through online workshops held during lockdown, Jackson inspired eight young refugees and two young ambassadors to explore their relationship with the telephone, and to leave voicemail messages exploring loss, the idea of being in touch, resilience and hope. Developing writing and performing skills, these voicemail messages have been made into a short animated film (launched 18 February 2021). The Compass Collective Artistic Director noted that the workshops 'benefitted the YP in terms of confidence, creativity and self-expression', explaining that Jackson's 'exceptional facilitation skills' and the resulting film 'ensure[s] the rich culture and artistic contributions of young refugees are seen and recognised by the wider community. [...] The impact is far and wide, altering the perceptions and creating a space of welcome and integration' [S9].

3. Influencing sustained changes to institutions' cultural programming

Jackson's research has led to sustained changes in cultural programming, including wider adoption of creative-critical approaches. Director of NUCoL and Chair of the Global Network of 29 UNESCO CoLs, confirmed the value of critical-creative writing in facilitating 'new conversations with both local and global communities': *'Its impact on our approach and thinking has led to the incorporation of Re:Vision workshops in our future programming'* [S3]. This included showcasing *Re:Vision* at the Granada Book Fair (2019), and funding CPRG activities in Pereira, Colombia. The Director of Dublin UCoL noted that as a result of the project: *'We now have more confidence to "think bigger" and allow our writers to push themselves'* [S3]. Longer-term and international outcomes include Jackson's contribution to NUCoL's support for Pereira's plans to apply for UNESCO CoL status. The impact of Jackson's methodology is corroborated by other cultural partners. The CEO of WEM described ideas engendered by the creative-critical approach as *'a shot in the arm for our work'* [S3]; WEM's annual writers' conference in 2018 incorporated creative-critical workshops for the first time. Creswell Crags' Communications and Programmes Manager said that *Writing Skyscapes* had led to a focus on the site *'as a place of creativity and inspiration'*; changes to programming include *'more space for creative workshops'*, and *'increased engagement with creative networks locally, and online'* [S4]. Artistic Director of Compass Collective described the *'incredibly successful'* format of *Calling across Borders* as *'inform[ing] our future planning'*; as a result, *'we are keen to explore more ways of programming small scale, closed creative writing groups to explore and tackle relevant issues'* [S9].

Describing *Crossed Lines* as *'exemplary of how academic collaborators can bring fresh and unexpected insights to enrich visitors' experience'*, the SM Head of Research and Public History noted that the online dimensions of Jackson's project *'proved to us the value of online communication of the research enterprise. This is a permanent lesson for us [...] and we will be applying it in future collaborations and projects'* [S7]. Confirming the SM's aim to move beyond *'knowledge transfer'* to the *'richer forms of engagement'* exemplified by Jackson's creative-critical approach, he stated: *'We will be able to use this collaboration to suggest the potential of our collections to future research collaborators for creative reinterpretation by artists and scholars'* [S7]. Drawing on the outcomes of Jackson's research, the BT Archives also produced a short film of Jackson's research to showcase *'academic-archivist collaborations in business'* [S7]. The Head of Heritage reported that this partnership introduced their collections *'to wider audiences, often in new and innovative ways'*, explaining that the partnership *'caused us to re-evaluate and re-think how we reach out to new users and researchers'*, and confirming that a new collaboration with Central Saint Martins *'was directly inspired by Jackson's approach'* [S10]. Jackson's online exhibition will also result in a new literary section within the Historical Communications Library at the BT Archives, with records incorporated into their digital catalogue: *'the contextual information generated by Dr Jackson's research strengthens understanding and awareness of the literary heritage of the telephone and its specific connection to the Post Office and BT, opening up our resources in unexplored ways for future researchers, with the prospect of attracting new scholars from a range of disciplines'* [S10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact [* participant in the process of impact delivery]

- S1** Corroborating statement from the Head of Public and Stakeholder Engagement, AHRC
- S2** *Re:Vision* evaluation report, including participant feedback*
- S3** Corroborating statements from *Re:Vision* partners, including Directors/Chairs of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, UNESCO NCoL patron, and CEO of Writing East Midlands*
- S4** *Writing Skyscapes* evaluation report, including participant feedback and corroborating statement from the Communications & Programmes Manager, Creswell Crags*
- S5** *Switchboard* evaluation report by Jenesys Associates
- S6** *Crossed Lines* evaluation report including visitors, participant feedback and interviews*
- S7** Corroborating statement from the Head of Research & Public History at Science Museum*
- S8** Corroborating statement from *The Exchange* artist Maya Chowdhry*
- S9** *Calling across Borders* evaluation report, including participant feedback and corroborating statement from Compass Collective Artistic Director*
- S10** Corroborating statement from the Head of BT Heritage and Archives*