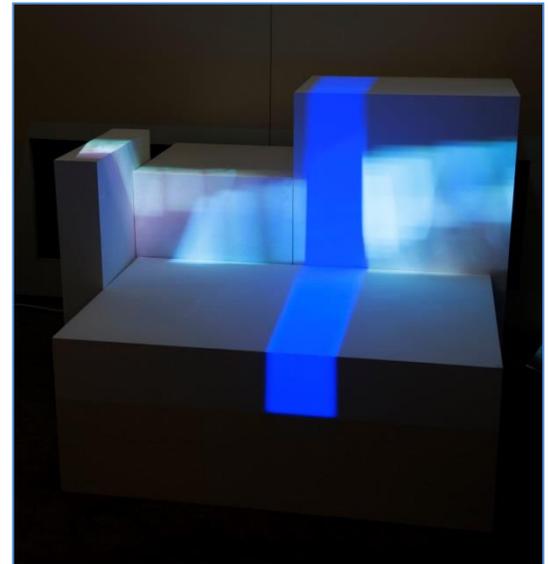


## Research Briefing N° 56

# Methodological Innovation in Digital Arts and Social Sciences

This project addresses a pressing problem for contemporary research: how to synthesise approaches from the arts and social sciences to develop innovative methods of research.

**Key words:** digital arts; digital technologies; multimodality; interdisciplinary research methods; embodiment



**Image Credit:** RCA Information Experience Design: Natasha Trotman; RCA Sculpture: Gabriel Birch; Collaborator: Dr Jenny O'Connor, Digital City Exchange programme, Imperial College London / RCA

## Project aims

The project, which runs from August 2013 to September 2014, will be of benefit to researchers working within and across the arts and social sciences. Researchers who investigate human interaction and communication with digital technologies would benefit from the project's development of new research methods. This includes researchers in information/interaction design, digital performance, Human Computer Interaction, fashion technologies, digital-physical interaction studies, education, and the sociology of technology

The project will make a significant contribution to knowledge in three key areas:

1. Methodological knowledge – developing, applying and evaluating new methods for researching embodiment (a multi-disciplinary concept that looks at the role of the body in different interactions, including human-technological interactions) with particular attention to technology rich environments.
2. Interdisciplinary research – providing empirically grounded insights and guidance on the process of developing research methods across the arts and social sciences.
3. Research understanding and theorising of embodiment – drawing together arts and social science perspectives.

## What we are doing

This UK-based research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) via the National Centre for Research Methods. The project is a collaboration between the Institute Of Education, Royal College of Art, University of the Arts: London College of Fashion, and Brunel University, to investigate methods used to research embodiment in six different disciplinary contexts (three in the arts and three in social sciences). The key objectives are:

- Describe the concepts, practices and processes used to research embodiment in digitally assisted arts (performance, fashion, design), and social sciences (medical simulation, mobiles for education, online games).
- Identify points of methodological connection and synergy across this multidisciplinary terrain.
- Experiment how to integrate and exploit the methodological synergies and approaches to evaluate their applicability to embodiment research across the digital arts and social sciences.
- Design training and capacity-building resources to support methodological

## Further information

See project website: <http://midas.ioe.ac.uk>

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IOE researchers are based at the London Knowledge Lab (LKL) – a collaboration between the Institute of Education and Birkbeck

innovation across the boundaries of the digital arts and social sciences.

## How we are doing it

The project is investigating methods used to research notions of embodiment in different disciplinary contexts, through an exploration of six case studies across the arts and social sciences. Each site is a hub of methodological innovation, engaging in research on the body/physical interaction, and advanced digital technologies (e.g. body scanners).

Routine research practices will be observed in situ to reveal the ways research methods are used and communicated and the principles that shape these methodological practices. Field-notes, photographs, and video recording will be used to document these and data will be analysed to understand the different 'methods world' of each site. The analysis will inform methodological experimentation across the project to combine, extend and develop methods and evaluate their applicability. Experts will attend a series of workshops to explore themes, perspectives, experiences, and contribute to the development of future methods.