ANU Research School of Humanities and the Arts (RSHA)

2024 Mid-Year Snapshot

Australian National University
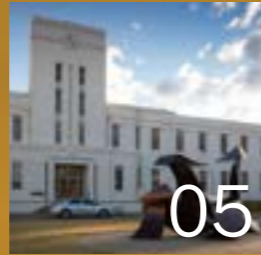
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Director's Note

Professor Kate Mitchell

The ANU Research School of Humanities and the Arts (RSHA) is recognised nationally and internationally for its impactful, world-leading research and innovative creative arts practice.

We draw together a diverse range of disciplines including archaeology, anthropology, biological anthropology, literary and classical studies, languages and linguistics, as well as contemporary art and music practice.

Our research contributes to a deep and sustained understanding of how humans have historically encountered and influenced the world, and uses these insights to address urgent issues in the present.

I am delighted to share this snapshot of the exciting research undertaken by the Research School across 2023/2024.

We have celebrated numerous outstanding achievements over this time, including adding three new Australian Research Council (ARC) Fellows to the current 15 Fellows in the School.

This period has also seen the development and expansion of exciting collaborations within ANU and with external partners including galleries, libraries, museums, hospitals, health providers and a range of community organisations.

Our research continues to provide deep insights into human behaviour, ethics, and cultural practices. It fosters empathy and understanding, and guides responsible technological and environmental strategies.

Our work is influencing health and wellbeing outcomes, particularly focusing on Indigenous health and improving communication between health professionals to increase patient safety.

Our studies on human-environment interactions are contributing to greater environmental sustainability.

Our expertise in technological and computational knowledge is developing important new human-centered design and investigation frameworks for collaboration with STEM disciplines, business, government, and industry stakeholders.

There is so much exciting, innovative research to celebrate in RSHA, and the following is just a snapshot of what we do. It is divided into six thematic chapters, focused on areas of major critical interest: big issues, such as working with AI and the impacts of climate change, that demand transdisciplinary collaborations and approaches.

It serves not only as a celebration of our recent achievements but as a showcase of our collective expertise — and I hope it provides some sense of our academics' wonderful talent and innovation.

RSHA's research will continue to inform national and international debates, practices and policies as we grapple with what it means to be human in an increasingly sophisticated, and complicated, world.

Please get in touch if you would like further information or would like to collaborate with us.

Professor Kate Mitchell
Director, ANU Research School of Humanities and the Arts

director.rsha@anu.edu.au

Our Expertise

Literature, Language & Linguistics

The School of Literature, Language & Linguistics (SLLL) conducts cutting-edge research across a broad range of approaches to the study of language and culture, including linguistics, literary studies, creative writing, digital and health humanities, classical studies, ancient history and language studies. SLLL researchers seek to further knowledge about national literatures, histories, cultures and languages, and examine sites of literary, historical, cultural and linguistic contact or exchange across the globe. Through their work, they are helping society navigate significant communication challenges in Australia and the world, exploring multilingualism, healthcare, at-risk Indigenous languages, and digital transformations. This research builds understanding of the many forms of national cultural heritage and supports a diverse society into the future.

Visit their website.

Archaeology & Anthropology

The School of Archaeology and Anthropology (SoAA) combines four streams of social research: anthropology, archaeology, biological anthropology and the interdisciplinary field of development studies. Sitting at the nexus of humanities and science, SoAA researchers strive to understand the diversity and complexity of past and present human populations through interdisciplinary approaches and cutting-edge methodologies. Through this innovative research and interdisciplinary collaboration, they aim to address global challenges, influence policy and inspire future generations of scholars and practitioners.

Visit their website.

Art & Design

The School of Art & Design (SoAD) is recognised for its practice-based research in art, design and curation, and its scholarship in art theory, art history and material culture. This research seeks to understand the cultural and historical significance of art and design practice, as well as its potentials as a method to respond to contemporary issues and challenges. SoAD researchers often work in interdisciplinary and industry partnerships with the Gallery, Library, Archive and Museum (GLAM) sector and beyond, using these collaborations as a platform for high impact research that engages broad audiences and makes an active contribution to public culture.

Visit their website.

Music

The School of Music (SoM) is a leading centre for research, specialising in diverse areas of performance, contemporary Indigenous music practice, composition, musicology and music technology. Taking a collaborative approach, SoM researchers are engaging in cross-disciplinary research with multiple areas of the University such as medicine, science, and computing. Through associations with leading arts bodies and industries in Australia and beyond, ANU music scholars' research deepens the understanding of the musical future. Through creative approaches, they are leveraging the power of music to drive state-of-the-art practice and promote social inclusion and wellbeing.

Visit their website.

Heritage & Museum Studies

The Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies (CHMS) promotes and develops critical heritage and museum studies as an interdisciplinary area of academic analysis and practice. The Centre aims to integrate research into practice and policy with a critical examination of the social, cultural and political "work" that heritage does in society. Addressing issues such as collection management, public history, memory studies and repatriation, CHMS researchers are using the past to engage with present and future versions of humanity–exploring social justice and identity through expressions of material and intangible heritage present in museums and cultural institutions.

Visit their website.

Our Research in Numbers

50-50 Indigenous art exhibition at the School of Art and Design gallery (2020)
Photo: The Australian National University

31
Active ARC grants*

15
Active ARC Fellows*

3
New ARC Fellows*

80
Active externally-funded research projects (Non-ARC)

19
New externally-funded research projects (Non-ARC)

34
Book chapters

7
Authored books

6
Edited books

139
Journal articles

*The figures included in this chart refer to the period of time spanning from January to December 2023. *As listed in the Australian Research Council Data Portal.*

New Australian Research Council Fellows

ARC Discovery Early Career Research Award (DECRA)

Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture

This project aims to investigate digital technology's impact on book culture through a study of Australian audiobooks. It expects to generate new knowledge about Australian books' relationship to global culture and technology. Expected outcomes include new research infrastructure in the form of a comprehensive database of Australian audio publications and advances in the way publishers and cultural institutions consider the role and value of audiobooks. This should lead to significant benefits, including providing publishers with access to reader survey and industry publication data that will help to increase community access to audiobooks.

> "My project explores how Australian audiobooks are published and read. I will use this as a springboard to investigate the impact of digital technology on book publishing and reading — in Australia and internationally."

Dr Millicent Weber

$ 467,463

ARC Future Fellowship (FF)

The Elephant in the Study: Working Latin Literature for the Enslaved

Roman histories, speeches, and plays are conventionally regarded as the works of individual elite male authors such as Cicero, Vergil, and Livy. This project aims to transform our understanding of Roman literature by showing that it was actually written in collaboration with enslaved workers, generating new insights into the creative processes that shaped the Classical literary canon. Expected outcomes include a new approach for understanding how authors work and the discovery of untold stories about the enslaved population of Rome. This should lead to significant benefits for communities, including improved education outcomes and better-informed public debate.

> "I will examine the kinds of work done by enslaved secretaries — transcribing dictation, copying and annotating texts, reading back passages, but also in some cases co-authoring works of literature. I am hoping to help generate methods that recognise the contributions of enslaved people to history."

Dr Tom Geue

$ 836,622

ARC Future Fellowship (FF)

Singing the News: Ballads as News Media in Europe and Australia, 1550-1920

This project aims to take advantage of new digitisation projects to reveal how songs in premodern Europe and later in Australia were used for disseminating news to the public. By analysing ballads across four centuries and five languages, the project expects to show how news-songs not only informed the public but also helped to forge national identities by exploiting the emotive and communal nature of song. Expected outcomes include an innovative digital platform offering licensed recordings of ballads, a public exhibition of song treasures in Australian collections, and a re-written history of the news media industry. Benefits may include new insights into how the modern notion of Australian national identity emerged through song.

> "I am researching how ballads were used as a primary means of disseminating the news across Europe, from the beginning of print, and how newspapers in the fledgling Australian colony used this ancient tradition to create a sense of Australian identity through ballad competitions."

Dr Una McIlvenna

$ 980,909

New Australian Research Council Projects

ARC Linkage Project (LP)

Dialogue with Difficult Objects: Mediating Controversy in Museums

This project aims to support proactive engagement with controversial objects in Australian museums. With the Eureka Flag as a case study, new tools for community dialogue and engagement will be developed using innovative methods for voicing and mediating difference. Expected outcomes include new strategies for developing museum exhibitions, publications, and educational resources, as platforms for diversity and tolerance. The project aims to provide significant civic benefits by developing a transferable framework equipping museums to counter social fragmentation with respectful debate and inclusive engagement.

> "Our project aims to equip museums to counter social fragmentation with respectful debate and inclusive engagement."
>
> *Emeritus Professor Chris McAuliffe & Dr Raquel Ormella*

$ 404,596

ARC Discovery Project (DP)

Understanding Communication About Advance Care Planning Across the Lifespan

(Externally led by Stuart Ekberg, now at Flinders University, previously at Queensland University of Technology.)

This project aims to understand how people communicate about advance care planning for children, adolescents, and adults. This project expects to generate new knowledge by using leading social scientific and linguistic methods to analyse real-world advance care planning conversations and documents. Expected outcomes include detailed knowledge about challenges people encounter in these conversations and how to manage these challenges. Over 170,000 Australians die each year, most from serious illness. This project should provide significant benefits to future initiatives for enhancing communication about advance care planning, especially in relation to young Australians, older Australians, and Australians with disabilities.

> "We are aiming to understand how people communicate about advance care planning for children, adolescents and adults."
>
> *Professor Diana Slade, Second Chief Investigator*

$ 519,459

ARC Discovery Project (DP)

Images of Power in the Roman Empire: Mass Media and the Cult of Emperors

(Externally led by Macquarie University.)

Contemporary leaders understand the power of an image to influence public opinion, but are they following a path well-trodden by Roman emperors? This project aims to illuminate the role that mass media and images played in securing and sustaining imperial power during the Later Roman empire from the Flavians to the Theodosians (69-450 CE). The comparison of coins, statues and monuments will shed new light on the dynamic ways that popular media were used to mediate between emperors, their officials, provincial elites and the wider populace, and show how leaders used mass media in the Roman world. Social and cultural benefits include a better understanding of the ways that leaders today handle such media to influence public opinion.

> "By examining strategies used by Roman emperors, our project will generate new insights on how today's leaders are handling media to influence public opinion."
>
> *Dr Estelle Strazdins*

$ 230,368

The real life Muses that shaped Roman literature

By Dr Tom Geue

ANU Centre for Classical Studies

> "Don't faint when I tell you the scandalous truth: that the great authors of classical Latin literature – Cicero, Virgil, Horace, Ovid – had some in-house help to write their masterpieces."

Our shelves and drives are bulging with brilliant feminist retellings of women once consigned to the margins of our myths. From the *Odyssey*'s Circe to *1984*'s Julia, contemporary readers are lapping up these acts of narrative reparation.

Sometimes this payback is not just about restoring a character their dues, but about recognising a contribution to the literature itself. Take Anna Funder's provocative new book on Eileen O'Shaughnessy, reductively known as George Orwell's first wife.

O'Shaughnessy's mammoth domestic exertions allowed Orwell the time to write. But she also made material contributions to Orwell's literary process, "typ[ing] his manuscripts in between looking after their chickens, unblocking the toilet and preparing all their meals."

These acts of retribution need to be ratcheted up. For another class of marginalised agents has come a-knocking. Don't faint when I tell you the scandalous truth: that the great authors of classical Latin literature – Cicero, Virgil, Horace, Ovid – had some in-house help to write their masterpieces.

First, some context. The explosion of Roman literature, from its earliest beginnings in the late 3rd century BCE onwards, coincided with a huge shift in Roman economy and society.

The Roman military machine hoovered up a vast number of war captives and dumped them on the Italian peninsula. These people ended up as enslaved workers in all sorts of occupations, from mining, to baking, to farming, to domestic service. Simultaneously and consequently, the myths of Roman elite life were coming unstuck from the realities.

The Roman upper classes still saw themselves as valiant agents performing the hard tasks that legitimised their class rule. They pretended, for example, that they were still themselves ploughing their gigantic Italian estates.

In reality, they had become absentee landowners entirely reliant on enslaved agricultural labour to generate the income on which they parasitically subsisted. So deep-rooted was this dependence on enslaved labour, we even have evidence that slaves were employed to hold their enslaver's penis while he pissed. Tough gig.

Some of these slaves, particularly those from the Greek-speaking east, were highly literate. Parthenius of Nicaea – a Greek teacher and poet, and a transmission vehicle for the Alexandrian poetry that underlay the golden generation of Roman poets such as Virgil and Horace– originally came to Rome as a slave around 72 BCE.

Such learned slaves would have jobbed as literary secretaries in charge of the literate tasks required of every posh Roman household: managing documents, accounts, and correspondence. If the master had artistic ambitions, as many elite Romans did, the tasklist also included extensive creative writing, in poetry and prose.

The Romans knew this secretary figure as the *notarius*. We don't have much information about their individual identities, apart from the exception of Cicero's secretary Tiro. We do know, however, that most Roman authors from at least Cicero's day onwards made extensive use of these secretaries at all stages of the literary process: from composition, when they were made to transcribe the enslaver's dictation; to revision, when they would often read back what was on the page; to distribution, when they were charged with making and disseminating physical copies of a finished work.

Even Virgil is said to have thunk up the next instalment of his *Georgics* (a poem on farming) in the morning, and dictated it to a slave in the afternoon. His contemporary, the equally big cheese poet Horace, lets slip that he's using an enslaved secretary when he directly addresses him at the end of his first book of *Satires*.

The prolific politician and letter-writer Pliny the Elder also fesses up to using a *notarius*, even if he is utterly finicky about quarantining the supposed 'menial' labour of the secretary from his own generative genius. Dictation was a power game of white collar vs blue collar. The Roman elite always swore they were thinking as pure mind, rather than executing as mere body.

Sometimes, however, an anxiety pops through a chink: the enslaved contribution may be more than just following commands. Our aforementioned poet Martial wrote a precious two-line poem about an enslaved secretary whose right hand scribbles away faster than the master's tongue can speak the words.

This is either the Roman equivalent of annoyance at machine learning anticipating our email response with an inane formula; or it is a sign of something deeper. A sign that at times, the tail was wagging the dog, the body leading the mind. The slave was writing the master.

My new Future Fellowship will be about picking through this body of literature to find means of spotlighting the creative contributions of these forgotten co-authors of history. It will be about boring through the ideological filters of the Roman elite to salvage the material realities of how Latin literature was made. And it will be about accounting for some of the distinctive features of this literature in ways that acknowledge the probable shaping force of these agents.

Midway through Virgil's grand epic of Roman collective identity, the *Aeneid*, the poet addresses the Muses, the divine inspiration behind many an ancient poem. He commands them to assist him while he's singing the poem, and to 'unroll' the regions of the war in Latium that will form the subject of the poem's second half.

That word – 'unroll', Latin *euoluite* – is exactly the word he would have used to order his enslaved secretaries to unroll the scrolls he read to research the poem. Once we get to Rome, the Muses – those Greek gods tasked with generating literature – are no longer up there in the mountains. They are right here, elephants in our study. And it is high time we clocked them.
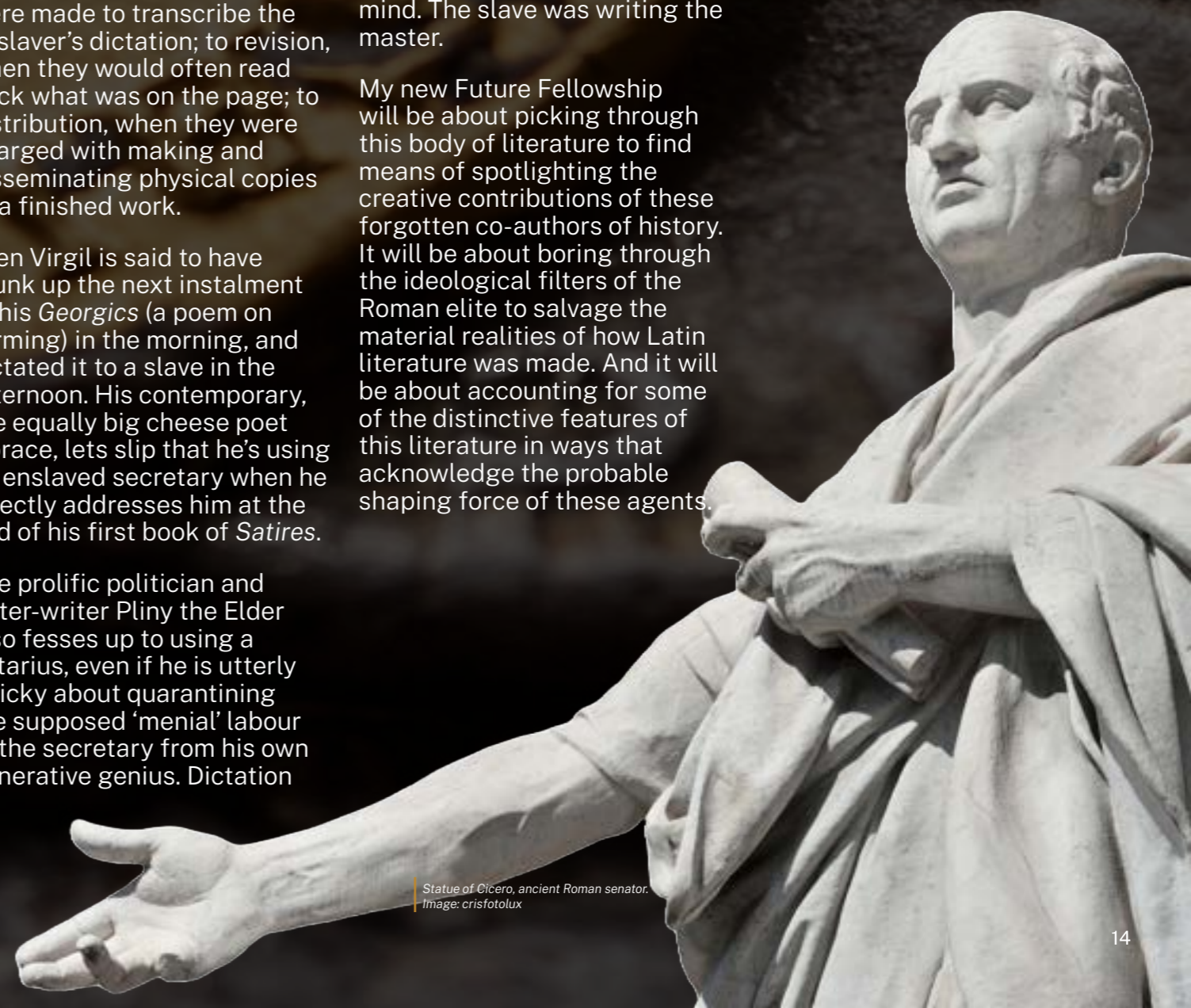
Statue of Cicero, ancient Roman senator. Image: crisfotolux

Chapter 1
Health Humanities

The Health Humanities is a multidisciplinary field that explores how disciplines across the humanities understand and contribute to human health and wellbeing. Its approaches take many forms, from the history of medicine to literary explorations of illness or the role of arts in contemporary wellbeing. RSHA is actively bridging the gap between the sciences and humanities. Through innovative research projects, collaborative initiatives, and interdisciplinary dialogue, the School is fostering a deeper understanding of healthcare experiences, improving patient care, and enriching medical education by incorporating literature, ethics, history, and other disciplines into medical curricula and clinical practice.

L to R: Professor Kate Mitchell, Dr Claire Hansen, Associate Professor Katie Sutton, Professor Alison Behie, Dr Brett Scholz and Dr Keren Hammerschlag. Photo: Rachael Heal

Tooth microstructure

Lactation After Loss Commemorative Quilt. Photo: Dr Rebecca Mayo

Hospital hallway. Photo: Shutterstock #172353922326

Advancing interdisciplinary knowledge of health and wellbeing: from medicine to the arts

The ANU Health Humanities Network (HHN) is a dynamic interdisciplinary initiative dedicated to exploring the intersection of health, wellbeing, and the humanities.

The HHN comprises a diverse range of researchers from fields including the arts, humanities, social sciences, medicine and health.

With members drawn from across ANU, especially the College of Arts and Social Sciences and the College of Health and Medicine, the Network fosters and supports interdisciplinary collaboration that advances the University's knowledge of health and medical humanities scholarship and education.

Since its inception, the HHN has organised exciting events around the health humanities, embodiment, heart health and gender, sexuality and the body, contributing to the broader conversation on health and wellbeing in Australia.

Can teeth be indicators of chronic health problems?

Teeth, like tiny time capsules, start forming before birth, permanently recording any stress occurring during gestation and infancy.

Research has revealed early life adversity can predict future disease risk, acting as an indicator of potential chronic mental and physical health problems across the lifespan.

However, not everyone is affected the same way. While individuals from lower socioeconomic status (SES) typically show poorer health outcomes, it is not a hard-and-fast rule.

Professor Alison Behie, a biological anthropologist at RSHA, is now examining microscopic tooth disturbances to detect signs of early life disruptions.

In doing so, she is providing new mechanisms to identify individuals in vulnerable groups who may be at risk of developing lifelong health conditions. With her pioneer work, Behie is strengthening Australia's health capabilities, paving the way for significant advancements in society's wellbeing.

Bringing health professionals together to improve care for bereaved parents

Funded by: Australian Government, Australian Research Council

The *Lactation After Loss Commemorative Quilt* is an ARC-funded collaborative research output between the School of Sociology and the School of Art & Design.

This two-sided quilt is designed to prompt reflection, dialogue and action among professionals who work with bereaved parents. It was dyed using donated breast milk that could not be used to feed babies, followed by plant dyes sourced from the ANU campus. This intentional design feature reflects the value bereaved parents attribute to breastmilk, as well as the complex and varied experiences of lactation care after loss.

The quilt, made by Dr Rebecca Mayo and Lucy Irvine, is based on research conducted by Associate Professor Katherine Carroll, Professor Catherine Waldby and Dr Debbie Noble-Carr.

Through interviews and focus groups involving bereaved parents and health practitioners, the team identified a substantial information gap on lactation health care for bereaved families and opportunities to find new meaning for them through breast milk.

During workshops, the quilt places the experiences of bereaved parents at the centre of focus for health and bereavement professionals, aiming to create opportunities for change in practice within health service delivery.

Let's talk about death

For people confronting the possibility of death, talking with their clinicians about prognosis, treatment options, and the care they want to receive is critical to a quality end-of-life experience.

However, many Australians are dying in hospital from life-limiting chronic conditions without having talked about their prognosis and wishes for end-of-life care.

The ANU Institute for Communication in Healthcare in RSHA partnered with Professor Imogen Mitchell at the ANU Medical School to conduct a pilot research project at The Canberra Hospital, analysing authentic recorded end-of-life interactions. This project included the development of communication protocols and context-sensitive recommendations for improvements at Canberra Hospital.

This work is being extended in 2024 through a new project at St Vincent's Hospital Sydney, aiming to understand end-of-life communication throughout the patient journey and to develop an intervention to improve communication practices and the experience and care of dying patients.

Music as a catalyst for health and wellbeing

Dr Bonnie McConnell
ANU School of Music

Talinding Kanyeleng group, the Gambia.
Photo: Bonnie McConnell

From working with HIV-affected communities in the Gambia to supporting migrant women in Australia, one constant has guided Dr McConnell's research journey: the power of music to promote social connection and wellbeing.

They say music soothes the savage beast, yet the old adage is only the prelude to music's real potential.

Time and again, research has shown songs can be much more than assuasive sounds, capable of bringing people together, supporting mental health, and even helping patients manage physical pain.

Dr Bonnie McConnell is no stranger to the multifaceted benefits of music-making. As an ethnomusicologist, she studies music at the intersection of culture and social life.

"Music affects us on multiple levels. It can help us create a sense of belonging, regulate our emotions and serve as a means to pass historical knowledge from generation to generation," McConnell says.

"I use ethnographic methods to gain understanding of music through active participation and observation, exploring its potential to act as a tool for the promotion of health."

In her quest for knowledge, McConnell spent six years in Africa, where she learned music could transcend political barriers — uniting marginalised groups and acting as a catalyst for health education.

"In my research in the Gambia I worked with a support group for people living with HIV," she says.

"One of the most memorable experiences from my fieldwork was witnessing the way music was used within this group. Singing together helped people overcome feelings of loneliness and shame. It helped them feel part of a group and hopeful about the future.

"In this context, I found music-making to be a powerful way to engage marginalised groups. For example, music proved to be a culturally appropriate and accessible way to involve rural women without formal education and limited access to health information and care."

Five years later, McConnell is poised to bring her invaluable knowledge to the global stage.

As co-founder of the Musical Care International Network, she is facilitating collaboration between specialists from 24 different countries.

"The network fosters dialogue and exchange of ideas between people with different disciplinary and cultural perspectives, connecting researchers and practitioners to inform both practice and research," says McConnell.

"In Australia, there is growing recognition of the role that music and the arts can play in supporting health and wellbeing, but greater support and funding are needed to benefit from diverse forms of musical care.

"Our network will facilitate the development of a broad and robust evidence base that can inform the understanding of musical care. Sharing this knowledge across national contexts can contribute to improving policy and health outcomes for diverse groups in Australia."

In parallel to her international strides, McConnell is also focused on helping local minority groups through music. In a project called CHIME-In, her research is supporting migrant and refugee women during the perinatal period.

"Poor mental health during and after pregnancy is a serious health issue," she explains. "One in five mothers in Australia experience perinatal depression or anxiety, and mothers from migrant and refugee backgrounds experience these conditions at higher rates due to various factors, including disconnection from their social support networks," she says.

"For women who are separated from their cultures, familiar forms of music-making can help to create a sense of social connection and belonging."

With music demanding more and more attention from researchers, McConnell is already thinking about the next generation of musical care experts. Teaming up with colleagues from RSHA and the College of Health and Medicine, she is in the process of developing health humanities education at ANU.

"This project brings together multiple disciplinary perspectives, resulting in new coursework that will give students an understanding of varied ways they can use their arts practice to support health and wellbeing," McConnell explains.

As evidenced by her career, music can serve as a unique means to support health, educational, spiritual, and social needs throughout the lifetime. However, relying on its mere application does not ensure the effectiveness of musical care interventions.

"If we make assumptions about music without considering cultural context," she warns, "well-intended programs can falter or even cause harm."

"There is a need for further recognition of cultural diversity in musical care practices. By doing so, we can pave the way for equitable outcomes, ultimately improving quality of life for those most in need."


Brikama Nyambai kanyeleng group, the Gambia.
Photo: Bonnie McConnell

Chapter 2

Critical AI, Big Data and the Humanities

Critical AI, Big Data and the Humanities is an innovative, interdisciplinary field at the intersection of information technologies and humanistic inquiries. The domain encompasses projects that use big data and artificial intelligence technologies to foster artistic and linguistic explorations, enhance our understanding of cultural phenomena and expand humanities' methods. It also explores how humanities frameworks enhance understanding of emerging technologies shaping cultures and communities locally and globally. By combining computational and humanistic approaches, RSHA is actively advancing the ethical and effective use of emerging technologies to continue existing critical, cultural, and creative approaches and develop new ones.
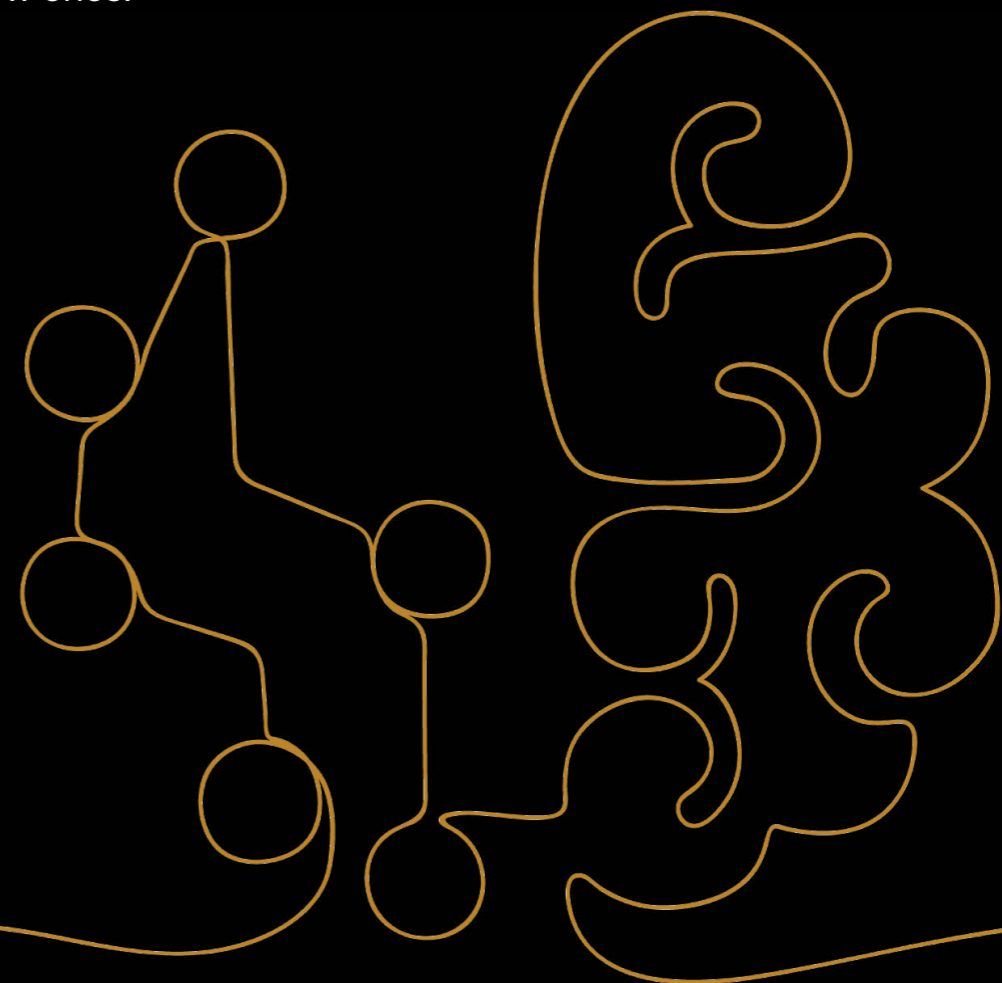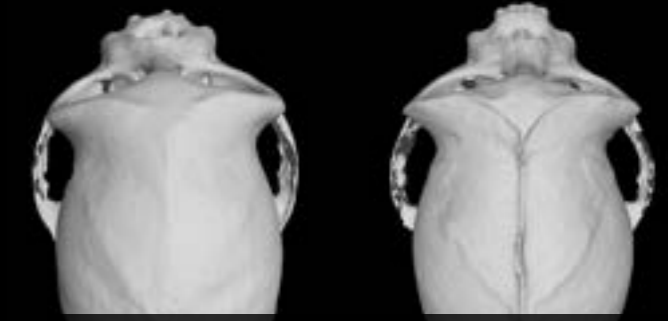
Adam Goodes and Dr Baden Pailthorpe at ANU. Photo: Jamie Kidston

From L to R: Dr Li Nguyen, Professor Catherine Travis, Dr Julia Miller and Senior Data Analyst Wolfgang Barth.

University of Pretoria, South Africa. Photo: University of Pretoria

Examples of bone ridges at the top of the skull, known as sagittal cresting, among species of capuchin monkey. Researchers are using 3D imaging to investigate how variation in this feature among primates may provide clues about the social structures of some extinct human relatives.

Developing Indigenous data sovereignty through creative practice

Adam Goodes and RSHA researcher Dr Baden Pailthorpe have recently signed a five-year agreement to continue working on innovative indigenous data sovereignty projects together.

Supported by $100k in seed funding from RSHA and the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, Goodes and Pailthorpe are developing new creative practice projects that draw from Goodes' culturally sensitive biometric datasets captured during his career as an elite AFL player, as well as Pailthorpe's 3D imaging of significant Adnyamathanha trees and landscapes in the Northern Flinders Ranges (SA).

Working under the guidance of Goodes' elders, these projects will advance creative practice as a powerful vehicle for Indigenous data sovereignty policy and practice through both education and high impact. ▮

Data innovation to preserve Australia's multilingual identity

Stories representing Australia's linguistic and cultural diversity are vital to understanding Australia's history. Such stories are captured in numerous language collections, but those collections have not been fully mapped and many are in danger of being lost.

Seeking to address this, RSHA researchers from the ANU School of Literature, Languages & Linguistics are working on the development of the Language Data Commons of Australia (LDaCA). This is an inter-university project funded by the Australian Research Data Commons (ARDC) that is integrating language collections in an accessible digital infrastructure, facilitating their discovery by researchers, communities, and the general public.

Professor and linguist Catherine Travis, one of the chief investigators of the project, is leading the ANU team, comprising oral historian Dr Anisa Puri, Senior Data Analyst Wolfgang Barth, Data Analyst Gan Qiao, and Senior Data Manager Dr Julia Miller. The cross-disciplinary team is working to build foundations in the humanities and social sciences to accelerate the management and development of language collections and data analysis capability in research and industry. ▮

Fostering inclusive futures with Design Justice AI

The Design Justice AI project, a collaborative venture involving researchers at ANU, Rutgers University, the University of Pretoria and the University of Connecticut, is paving the way for equitable AI development.

Slated for a Global Humanities Institute in July 2024 in South Africa, the project extends to a series of innovative design justice labs across these institutions. The focus is on community-centered, humanistic and interdisciplinary exploration of generative AI's role in language, communication, arts, and culture.

Addressing historical and contemporary power disparities, the project aims to recalibrate generative AI with methods that center and amplify the perspectives of communities frequently sidelined by traditional design practices.

The participation of ANU is being led by RSHA Professor Katherine Bode with colleagues from across the University. By fostering close collaboration with communities, the project seeks to reimagine AI technologies as instruments of inclusivity, transforming marginalisation into empowerment through participatory design. ▮

Revolutionising evolutionary research through 3D imaging

A specialised imaging analysis hub supported by RSHA is now operational and bridging a critical gap in the nation's capacity for 3D imaging research.

The facility is not only unlocking novel workflows for interdisciplinary research using 3D imaging, but also enabling equitable access to cutting-edge technologies in this rapidly developing field.

3D imaging analysis is crucial for many sectors, and research conducted by facility users will generate novel patient-centred solutions to orthopaedic conditions (e.g. joint replacement) and illuminate invisible internal structures of plants, animals and fossils to tackle major unresolved evolutionary questions.

The facility is led by biological anthropologist Associate Professor Laura Wilson, along with team members specialising in orthopaedic research (Dr Joe Lynch, The Canberra Hospital), archaeological science (Prof Tim Denham) and human evolution (Dr Katharine Balolia). The hub has facilitated new research connections with the ANU College of Health and Medicine, and the ANU College of Engineering, Computing & Cybernetics. ▮

Will AI write the next best-seller?

While reading Virginia Woolf as an undergraduate in sunny Townsville, Professor Katherine Bode never imagined that over two decades later she would be chatting to a machine about why literature matters.

A literary multiverse

Long before ChatGPT began to revolutionise the world, Bode came to a fork in the road.

"When I finished my Honours degree, I was offered a job working for a real estate agency and a scholarship to study literature," Bode says. "The former paid about the same as the latter, so I decided I'd much rather spend the next three years reading books than selling houses."

What started as a passion for reading developed into a 16-year career in academia. Now a literary studies expert at The Australian National University (ANU) School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics, Bode spends most of her days interacting with texts to decipher the meaning behind their words.

Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* — which she has read three times — taught Bode how disparate meanings can be found in the same story when reading it throughout the course of a life.

"Literary meaning is a co-production and always a multiple one, which is why literature is so rich and inexhaustible," she explains.

On her academic journey, she has gone from leafing through paper pages to scrolling down a screen as humanities have transitioned to a digital age, a context that has elevated Bode's career to new heights: changing the history of Australian literature forever.

The writing wormhole

Today, Bode's research agenda is all about the symbiosis between computers and literature. Using digital technologies, she explores large text datasets, "time traveling" to recover lost literary gems that lie forgotten in old newspapers.

In these stories, she has observed historical discrepancies, including the prevalence of Aboriginal characters in Australian fictions, which runs contrary to common belief that depictions of First Nations people were simply non-existent.

"In many cases these stories are full of racist stereotypes and slurs. But a number of them specifically describe the prior and continuing rights of First Nations people to their land. This makes it clear that colonial readers and writers were aware of the injustices from the start," she explains.

One of Bode's self-created datasets, *To Be Continued: The Australian Newspaper Fiction Database,* contains over 50,000 novels, novellas and short stories and continues to grow. The project, a crowdsourcing initiative, allows members of the public to find, add and edit lost fiction to the record.

"My research has helped shift practices in the discipline, demonstrating the potential for literary history to be a collaboration between researchers, libraries and members of the public, as opposed to something only literary scholars do," she says.

Bode is currently immersed in finishing her third book, *Computing Reading Writing,* which explores the multifaceted nature of literary meaning in the age of textual technologies such as chatbots.

Cyborg sentences?

In a multimedia-driven world, some people may wonder why anyone should still care about literature. Bode recommends asking ChatGPT.

"It gave me completely valid answers, such as encouraging readers to develop empathy, ethical reflections and imagination," she says.

But she does not view these technologies as neutral or objective.

"To the answers ChatGPT provides, I would add that literary scholars are experts in the relationships between textual technologies and practices throughout history to the present day.

"Part of drawing on that tradition is recognising that ChatGPT, like other AI technologies, is able to give these answers due to unconsented data surveillance and harvesting, and unequal global labour practices."

As AI and machine learning become increasingly central to the way we read and write, Bode is seeking to understand how these innovations may affect literacy, culture and society in years to come.

Despite setting many industries, including higher education and the arts, on edge, Bode doesn't see a scenario where AI endangers her field.

"AI text generation has different affordances. My job is to recognise and respond to the multiple meanings, values and forms that texts can embody," she says.

"We don't engage with a novel in the same way as an email or a poem. The same is true with AI technologies. GPT2 is not the same as GPT3 or ChatGPT. We engage with them in different ways.

"As long as literary studies continues to recognise, value and respond responsibly to differences between textual technologies, I cannot see how AI can disadvantage our discipline."

All in all, Bode hopes for a future where text generation can go beyond standardised text production to develop more surprising or poetic language, noting that these technologies "don't do anything without humans in the loop."

This raises a question, the answer to which Bode prefers to leave open-ended — will we ever see a best-selling novel written by AI?

"Given how much things have changed in the past 12 months in large language models, I wouldn't want to make any predictions about what these technologies will be like in future," she says.

"All I can say, without sounding prophetic, is that it's highly likely that human and AI systems working together could produce the next must-read novel — and I look forward to reading it."

Professor Katherine Bode
Photo: David Fanner

Migration, Memory and Heritage

Migration, Memory and Heritage are three converging fields that explore human experiences across time and space, helping society capture the complexities of history and preserve diverse narratives to inform future generations. RSHA researchers in these three critical areas are exploring the past and the present to enrich contemporary discourses and policy forums, driving societal change, and developing historical consciousness in our ever-evolving world.

Academic CI Professor Fred Cahir (Federation University), Anthony Camm (Director of the Eureka Centre project partner), Dr Raquel Ormella and Emeritus Professor Chris McAuliffe with the Eureka Flag.

Difficult objects as a pathway to social cohesion

A project led by RSHA reserachers is helping museums face the challenges of social fragmentation and cultural controversy.

Difficult objects are art and heritage items invested with troubling histories and ideologies. These entangle museums in the political controversies of the culture wars, legacies of cultural dispossession and social marginalisation. Emeritus Professor Chris McAuliffe and Dr Raquel Ormella are working with the Art Gallery of Ballarat and the Eureka Centre to reaffirm the role of museums as civic educators.

Using community dialogue around difficult objects, museums will develop their capacity for community consultation, civic education and social cohesion. The research team will trial two approaches to community consultation and engagement: cultural mediation and deliberative democracy.

Cultural mediation is the museum in dialogue with its audiences. Deliberative democracy is the museum listening to its audiences in dialogue with each other. These strategies acknowledge diverse knowledge, response and perspectives and promote community involvement in decisions around the status of difficult objects. ▌

Chris and Louise Tegart, Director of the Art Gallery of Ballarat (project partner) viewing material in the gallery collection.

Village in the Austrian Alps where Annika conducted research. Photo: Annika Lems.

Understanding anti-migrant sentiments in Central Europe

How do people living in one and the same country, city, or village and who have long shared basic common grounds become estranged from one another to the point that they can no longer envisage a shared space of belonging? How does this sense of alienation, of losing one's place in the world, emerge?

These are some of the core societal conundrums RSHA senior lecturer in anthropology Annika Lems investigates.

Through ethnographic research in Alpine communities that form the heartland of exclusionary political movements in Europe, she is exploring the social conditions that create a breeding ground for societal division.

By studying how people expressing anti-migrant and authoritarian sentiments experience and make sense of notions such as tradition, belonging, and estrangement–themes far-right parties have successfully turned into their main concerns– Lems is aiming to make sense of the antagonistic ways people try to create a sense of continuity and belonging in an era of accelerated global change. ▌

Exploring ancient migrations from the bottom up

The movement of people, things, practices, and ideas has long been a part of archaeological research. The advent of affordable and fine-grained ancient genetic and biomolecular data has only increased this interest in how, where and when people moved.

While these data (and others) make clear that individuals, larger groups, and even whole communities were on the move at different times in the past, there has been little attention paid to the social and political context of these migrations or their impact on the people migrating and those they encountered on the way.

This monograph, written by RSHA Professor Catherine Frieman, attempts to fill the gap. It develops a framework for understanding past migrations through the lens of small-scale politics, that is the everyday negotiations between individuals and communities. It derives from an international project funded by the Centre of Advanced Studies in Oslo, and (ironically) carried out when the authors were unable to travel to work together in-person due to the pandemic. ▌

Remembering, Forgetting and the Politics of Memory

Associate Professor Yujie Zhu
ANU Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies

As part of an Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Project awarded with $180,000, Associate Professor Yujie Zhu is growing a successful garden of knowledge, insight, and understanding into the cultural politics of memory and heritage.

Associate Professor Yujie Zhu is a researcher at the Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies (RSHA). As an anthropologist, his research focuses on cultural politics of the past through heritage, tourism and museum spaces. He is particularly interested in understanding why the past matters to our present and how that shapes current practices, policies, identity and state-society relationships.

Funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC), his project aims to provide a broader context of memory politics using China as a case study. He is planning to deliver a more nuanced understanding of how culture policies are developed and adopted within its colonial, war and economic development history, hoping his research will provide context for memory politics of other nations dealing with similar issues — such as Australia, Germany and New Zealand.

With this in mind, Zhu is digging deep into various intersections of heritage, memory, and politics to examine the relationship between our remote past — through our ancestor's heritage — and the recent past — through our own memory.

"Recent history often shapes a country such as development, colonialism or war," Zhu explains.

"By delving into recent history, I will investigate its unsettled or 'thorny' side — which often times becomes politically contested."

By 'unsettled', Zhu considers how past events still influence our contemporary life through the lived experiences of people who have suffered as a consequence of colonial history, war or natural disasters.

"For individuals who have been victims, witnesses, or whose families have actively participated in these events, their memories remain vivid and enduring," he says.

All in all, the project is examining how the practice of forgetting or remembering is being used by states and individuals to move on from certain pasts. Particularly, how different memory practices can shape individuals' self-perception and their contribution to truth-telling, healing, and reconciliation processes.

In addition to examining these different aspects of memory, Zhu is looking at how certain memories are represented in different spaces by leveraging the knowledge of traditional memory institutions such as museums, "which often shape official narratives about the past and our relationship with the past," he says.

"My research will examine alternative forms of memory practices, such as oral history, documentaries or exhibitions, which are more temporal and flexible pathways to framing memory."

Zhu draws a thought-provoking analogy between memory politics and the changing seasons: "just as certain seasons demand pruning for growth, humans must also confront and reconcile with the past to evolve," he says.

And as the leaves turn their colour and the days shorten, Zhu is poised to cultivate a garden of knowledge, insight, and understanding into the politics of memory — planting seeds that will blossom for many generations to come.

> **My project is examining how the practice of forgetting or remembering is used by states and individuals to move on from certain pasts.**

Environmental Pasts and Futures

In a moment of environmental crisis, humanities research is offering both deep-time perspectives and contemporary engagements with global issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss and deforestation. Through explorations of food, finance, art and data, RSHA researchers are studying contexts and conditions that shape our connection with the environment. In doing so, they are aiming to remake and rethink our relation to the world, opening possibilities for positive environmental futures. From across the Research School, this broad field shows how diverse approaches of humanities scholarship — empirical, creative, critical and theoretical — address our ever-changing relationship with the environment around us.

Fell, The National Gallery of Victoria. Photo: Sean Fennessy

From discard to discourse: transforming waste into critical design examining extraction and sustainability

Discarded wood furniture, a significant source of waste, has been reimagined by RSHA Senior Lecturer Ms Ashley Eriksmoen in her project *Fell*.

The National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) in Melbourne commissioned the work for its 2023 NGV Triennial—a peak international exhibition presenting globally significant projects intersecting contemporary art, design and architecture attended by 1,063,675 visitors.

Fell consists of a life-sized tree stump and log, constructed from salvaged furniture components collected off Canberra's streets. Through studio practice, Eriksmoen critically examines the relationship between humans and the environment, addressing links between resource extraction, deforestation, consumerism and waste.

By transforming furniture back into tree forms, Eriksmoen encourages viewers to reconsider material consumption habits. *Fell* enriches the dialogue on the impact of colonial legacies on contemporary resource usage. Now in the NGV's permanent collection, it is the focus of an educational workshop co-created by Eriksmoen and the NGV for visiting school groups, further extending its impact beyond the exhibition space. |
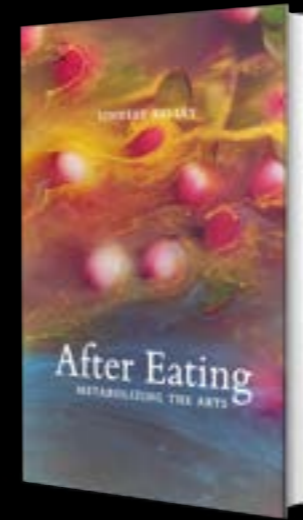
Turning metabolism into art: moving from body image to body process in contemporary practice

Food is widely depicted in the arts through different forms of creative expression. However, despite food's centrality in sociocultural life, artistic interest has traditionally revolved around the act of eating. What if, instead, we shifted the focus from ingestion to digestion?

In *After Eating*, RSHA Associate Professor Lindsay Kelley explores the emerging field of metabolic arts, claiming digestion and metabolism are key cultural, creative, and political processes that demand attention. Taking an artist-centered approach to nutrition, Kelley's book cultivates a neglected middle ground between the everyday and the scientific, using metabolism as a lens through which to read and write about art.

By engaging the notion of "after" as an artistic homage or tribute, metabolism moves beyond the cell to transform into a method for responding to the most difficult cultural, environmental, philosophical, and political challenges of the contemporary moment. Through "metabolic readings", Kelley is rethinking feminist, queer, bioart, installation, and performance projects, providing artists, students, and teachers with new pathways into art theory. |

Click here to access a digital copy through ANU Library.

The Sound of Water (2021), developed by Mitchell Whitelaw with Skye Wassens (CSU Albury), supported by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office.

Redesigning biodiversity data for richer public engagement

Human observations of the living world are increasingly captured as data, from citizen science snapshots to location tracks and audio recordings. As well as supporting scientific understandings, this growing data deluge presents an opportunity for a richer public engagement with the living environment.

RSHA researcher Professor Mitchell Whitelaw aims to redesign our experience of biodiversity data by transforming the interfaces and visualisations where we encounter it.

Working with Professor Adrian Mackenzie (ANU Sociology) and partners including the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office and the Atlas of Living Australia, the outcomes of this project are public-facing sites and interfaces, as well as new understandings of how biodiversity data is shaped, understood and valued. |

Click here to access *The Sound of Water*.

Anthropology through the comic strip: forecasting the future of farming in times of climate disaster

A/Prof Caroline Schuster

ANU School of Archaeology & Anthropology

A sesame farmer in South America and an anthropologist at ANU may seem worlds apart. However, they are bound by more than meets the eye, including a shared concern about the devasting effects of climate change and a comic book inspired by their life experiences.

Long before turning into a cartoon, Associate Professor Caroline Schuster decided to immerse herself in the heart of Paraguayan society, where she witnessed the precarity of contemporary rural life.

Little did she know her field trip would entail a whirlwind of adventures: her car bursting into flames on a desolate highway, a deadly snake encounter, and even an impromptu horse race — just another day at the office when your life becomes one with your research!

Weathering disaster

"Being a participant and observer in my research allows me to open windows onto different worldviews and face the challenge of balancing them," says Schuster.

Intrigued by the dynamics of commercial sesame farming in northern Paraguay, she spent a year in the country conducting fieldwork on agricultural finances.

That's how she met Don Wilfrido, a then 79-year-old farmer whose life story now unfolds as the central narrative in her graphic novel, *Forecasts: A story of Weather and Finance at the Edge of Disaster.*

Like many others in his guild, Wilfrido and his family struggle to make ends meet. But within the challenges of farming lie overlooked issues that Schuster unearths in her book.

"With the planet heating up at unprecedented levels, there are increasingly unknowable environments that rural communities must contend with," she explains.

"The knowledge passed down from one generation to the next is no longer enough to face weather disasters, which means that farmers' lives have become entangled with outsiders, ranging from crop scientists to financing companies."

Nowadays, agrarian communities grapple with the uncertain reality of weather-induced harvest failures.

In response, micro-insurance companies have emerged as the go-to solution for under-resourced farmers. But, paradoxically, these entities base their policies on weather conditions rather than providing indemnity for actual damages.

Using satellite technology to monitor rainfall and temperature, insurance payouts trigger when severe weather alerts are issued — not when farmers suffer actual losses on the ground.

"Making climate-related losses an individual responsibility misses the wider inequity — how is it that the challenge of managing climate risks has been allocated to communities who have contributed so little to global heating, and yet pay the ultimate price?" Schuster queries.

"The true complexity comes when you realise local insurance and finance companies are convinced they are doing the right thing, approaching climate adaptation with the very best intentions."

In this intricately woven tapestry of conflicting interests, Schuster ingeniously navigates the conundrum by breathing life into this clash of opposites — and she does it in the most unexpectedly creative way.

Cartooning research

Forecasts came about as a collaboration with two Paraguayan illustrators, Enrique Bernardou and David Bueno, who skilfully transformed the overlapping worlds of Schuster's research into mesmerising comic vignettes with Caroline and Wilfrido as co-stars.

"Comics do such wonderful job of telling complex, layered, and multi-perspectival narratives," she says.

In a style reminiscent of Latin American magical realism, Guarani mythological creatures join her fictional world, underscoring the significant role Indigenous cultural heritage continues to play in rural communities.

"We don't usually think of Latin America as a settler society, but telling Paraguayan history through the lens of financial speculation reveals the tight links between Indigenous dispossession, foreign speculation on land and environmental risks," she says.

"On top of these challenges, local farmers choose to believe in myths involving tricksters and supernatural beings present in their popular culture.

"I wanted to include this duality in my book — after all, are insurance agents any more reliable or malevolent than *pomberos* (nocturnal monsters) or practitioners of *macumba* (witchcraft)?" she muses.

Taking a sci-fi turn, the story also offers multiple endings, unravelling an intricate web of speculative multiverses.

"Everyday life for Paraguayan sesame farmers is concerned with asking 'what if'. We wanted to bring the idea of speculation beyond economics, taking the visions that local communities have about their futures seriously," Schuster explains.

"These might be hopeful, or they might be warnings of trouble ahead. Either way, we shouldn't grant finance a monopoly on 'technologies of imagination'!"

Global solutions for global issues

Since her book's release in 2023, Schuster has toured classrooms worldwide, giving talks at universities from Melbourne to Princeton.

"*Forecasts* is being used in introductory anthropology courses in the United Sates as well as in advanced seminars in fields such as environmental and Latin American studies," she says.

"On the research front, my book is catalysing a global agenda on anthropology, financialisation and climate change."

Equally importantly, *Forecasts* is inviting reflection on collective climate action.

"My book suggests we are locked in a cycle where risks and rewards are cast in private, individual terms," says Schuster.

"I would like readers to challenge these narrow parameters and think about responsibility, wellbeing, prosperity and security in less restrictive ways that are not limited to financial grammar and a single point of view."

As for Wilfrido and his fellow farmers, she hopes for a future in which they become protagonists in their own stories.

"Too often the stories of farmers are drowned out by the voice of a few select experts hardwired to technical systems based on a limited set of expedient parameters," she says.

"I hope that *Forecasts* can help farmers and climate-impacted communities reclaim the value of their own stories. We need new ways of envisioning life in uncertain, unknowable environments."

Click here to access a digital copy through ANU Library.

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Tangible and Intangible Culture of Australia

Researchers across RSHA are revealing the untold stories and social implications of cultural objects and practices in Australia: be they in the form of First Nations objects in a museum, early modern books in library collections, literary narratives or acts of creative collaboration. This research situates Australian culture in transnational histories and conversations, and uses digital technologies to place Australia's cultural past in new media landscapes so it can be available to new audiences and interpretations. Through these efforts, the School's research is enlivening understandings of the role of creative practice in Australia's past and future.

Anarchia Anglicana: or, The history of independency. Photo: State Library Victoria

Plants Circle (designed by Tabs Fakier) was inspired by a selection of covers of fiction and non-fiction authored by First Nations and other Australian writers. This design emblematises The Centre for Australian Literary Cultures's focus on celebrating and amplifying the voices of First Nations authors alongside those of colonial-settler writers.

Dr Maya Haviland with a prototype of Cobeo Tools. Photo: Jade Riley.

Unlocking a national treasure: the Emmerson Collection at State Library Victoria

In 2015, John Emmerson gave a collection of over 5,000 rare books and manuscripts to State Library Victoria, placing into Australian public ownership a national treasure: the first and only early modern archive of scale to be held by an Australian institution.

Assembled over a lifetime by Australia's foremost private collector of early modern books, the archive's contents were virtually unknown, its significance unexplored and its value untapped, even by the librarians to whom its care was entrusted.

RSHA researchers Professor Rosalind Smith and Professor Mitchell Whitelaw, together with an international team of early modern specialists, rare book librarians and project PhD student Julia Rodwell, partnered with State Library Victoria to transform this physical archive from obscurity to a widely-used, internationally-recognised collection of significance.

Combining digital design and humanities scholarship, the team developed new ways into the archive, including a digital exhibition, *Beyond the Book,* that is currently the library's most visited webpage. The project shows how specialist archives and collections are made, used and shift over time, how digital technologies can advance possibilities for representation, investigation and interaction with the material book, and how digital solutions in collaboration with archival research can make the past speak vividly to the present. ▌

Click here to visit *Beyond the Book*, a digital exhibition of rare books at State Library Victoria.

Click play to watch a video with highlights from *Beyond the Book.*

Championing Australian literature on the global stage

The Centre for Australian Literary Cultures (CALC) at RSHA is dedicated to exploring the evolving role of reading, writing, and publishing in today's dynamic media landscape.

With a focus on Australian literature's foundational significance at the ANU, CALC aims to deepen understanding of Australian writing globally. It honours Indigenous cultural perspectives and acknowledges the enduring importance of local literary cultures in shaping identity.

CALC integrates traditional and emerging literatures to address 21st-century challenges, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. CALC is also the home of two prestigious humanities journals: the *Australian Humanities Review*, an interdisciplinary journal edited by CALC co-director Monique Rooney, and *Australian Literary Studies*, the nation's leading literary journal co-edited by CALC co-director Julieanne Lamond alongside Tanya Dalziell. ▌

Cobeo: navigating diversity and complexity for effective co-creation

Cobeo is a new initiative led by RSHA researcher Dr Maya Haviland offering practical tools and support for effective collaboration and co-creation in diverse cultural and organisational settings.

Responding to the challenges of a globalised world, co-creativity brings diverse views and skills into ideation, design and project implementation to support innovation and generate shared value.

Recognising the growing demand for understanding and implementing effective co-creation among emerging practitioners and organisational leaders, Cobeo offers game-like tools and learning experiences that are adaptable across cultures and disciplines—facilitating the exploration of co-creative dynamics, phases, and stages identified through research.

By making the intangibles of co-creation visible and addressing challenges head-on, Cobeo aims to empower practitioners to navigate their collaborative journeys effectively. From facilitation and education, to planning and troubleshooting, it assists teams and individuals in fostering strong foundations for co-creation in action. Designed to accommodate the unique pathways of each collaborative endeavour, Cobeo serves as a valuable resource for those engaged in co-creative processes across various contexts. ▌

Flames of change: Jilda Andrew's vision for Australian museums

Dr Jilda Andrews is breathing new life into museum artefacts, illuminating inclusive futures for Indigenous cultural heritage worldwide by exploring the troubled past.

Twenty-six years ago, when Dr Jilda Andrews first stepped into a museum collection storage, little did she know the secrets that the objects nestled within would whisper.

As beacons of human legacy, modern museums aspire to become vivid reflections of the real world.

However, in Australia, after decades of efforts to right historical wrongs, museums still struggle to paint a clear picture of the past and the origins of many of the artefacts they contain.

Today, as a passionate advocate for First Nations history and culture on the global stage, Andrews — once the curious observer in the museum storeroom — is leading the charge for change.

Catching fire

Andrews' fascination with the study of museum artefacts was kindled by an unexpected spark.

"I was a trainee working in the Australian Museum's marketing team when I first came into contact with a collection storage facility," she says.

"I had no real idea about the scale and breadth of what museum collections held at the time. But this initial encounter, though naïve, sparked the flames of inquiry that fuel the questions I am tackling today."

Years later, both as a cultural practitioner and a Research Fellow at The Australian National University, Andrews has left her mark in the sector, having contributed to hundreds of museum projects, including the critically acclaimed Great Southern Land exhibition at the National Museum of Australia.

Andrews' work as a practitioner is as captivating as her innovative research, where she looks at museum artefacts not merely as objects — rather, as windows into forgotten pasts.

"Objects are a combination of people, places and rich cultural worlds that span beyond imagination," she says.

It is precisely by harnessing the untapped power of these collections that she can envision a brighter future.

Regenerating the past through fire

Historically, Australia's First People have used fire as a land management tool, employing 'cool-burning' to rejuvenate the landscape and eliminate the underbrush.

Andrews' relationship with fire, rooted in the customs of her Yuwaalarray country, is one of partnership and respect.

"Several years ago, my cousin invited me to participate in cool-burning land on Ngyimpaa country. This was a deliberate action to regenerate Country in hopes that the Malleefowl, an endemic bird, would return to its habitat," she recounts.

Inspired by her own heritage, Andrews is now applying her family's cultural practices to her research, introducing what she describes as a "metaphoric cool burning of museum collections".

"By figuratively 'cool burning' the collections I want to 'clear away' the tangled overgrowth brought by layers and layers of value and different meanings placed around museum objects over the years," she says.

In doing so, Andrews is unveiling untold stories beyond those historically anchored to the objects — many of which bear associations of colonial domination.

She has examined Aboriginal breastplates, called gorgets, which were given to Aboriginal people in the early days of settlement to identify people of authority and influence.

"By cool burning these breastplates I have been able to disrupt the dispossessive memories, discovering who their owners were and remembering the rich cultural worlds they were part of," Andrews explains.

"This offers a way of engaging differently with our complex histories, a dialogue that doesn't overlook the complexity, but explores it."

With her method, Andrews envisages a future where new readings of objects make their way to display and exhibition in museums.

"These I understand as Ancestral Futures, a view that extends equally into the future as it does the past," she says.

An incandescent future

At present, Andrews's gaze is fixed on the distant past as much as it is on the vast horizon, with her work spanning across oceans.

In an admirable international trajectory, she has worked with museum collections around the world, including the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in Washington and the British Museum.

Driven by a conviction to share Australia's gifts with the world, Andrews curatorial work is illustrating the profound connection between First Nations cultures and their Country.

"I understand museum objects as ambassadors. They are active in informing a vision of our countries, speaking across time and space," she says.

She is also part of the team developing the Australian Pavilion at the upcoming Expo 2025 in Japan.

"In Osaka, our theme, 'Chasing the Sun', will place Country at the centre. The invitation for visitors to step into Country will be awe-inspiring," she says.

"Cultural diplomacy is something that Australia can better invest in.

"Doing so could see us having a coordinated approach and a narrative that is inclusive of local, state and national interests with regards to Indigenous cultural heritage overseas.

"In my vision, I see our spirits of the past proud and assured that we are attending to long-imagined continuities."

Indigenous Continuities

This vast interdisciplinary field explores the deeply connected and diverse cultural lives of Indigenous people on the continent — within long trajectories of cultural belonging. RSHA continues its valuable contribution to this dynamic field through several contemporary research programs, in partnership with communities and traditional knowledge holders across Australia. Projects on ritual mobilities over long scales of time and space, language development and wellbeing in children who speak multiple Indigenous languages, and repatriation as contemporary sites of agency, community, practice, and research represent a cross-section of this field. The RSHA has also emerged as highly conducive for Indigenous researchers to explore programs of research that engage innovatively with sites of knowledge, creative-led practice, and Indigenous futures. The development and operation of the Yil Lull Studio is a standout example of the way that cultural voices find expression in the School.

Studio Leader and Torres Strait Islander musician Will Kepa (left) and music legend Uncle Joe Geia in the studio, warming up for the impending launch. Photo: Jamie Kidston, ANU

James Zaro (Dauareb Elder and descendant of Waiat zogo le-ritual practitioners on Waier island) sits next to Waiats place on Waier island.

Brenda L Croft with 'Tristan (Dharawal/Yuin), 2021', Barangaroo Crown Casino in the background. Photo: © Dan Boud.

Helping Indigenous musicians pursue their passion

Yil Lull ('To Sing') Studio, led by Torres Strait Islander musician and ANU School of Music alumnus Will Kepa, is a place for First Nations people to meet, create, share and expand their stories through music. It serves the Indigenous community at no cost and with no strings attached.

"Yil Lull is a place for us, our mob, to come and meet; to create and to share; to expand on our stories; to keep our culture alive and our music alive; and to just keep that fire burning," says Kepa.

"My hope is that we will find the next Joe Geia or Archie Roach – absolutely iconic Indigenous Australian musicians."

The Studio, located at the RSHA School of Music, has been turned into a creative space for First Nations musicians, audio engineers, producers, and other industry professionals from all over Australia.

"I know from my own experience that it's really important to ignite your fire, creatively. If I had found out about something like this residency at the ANU School of Music ten years ago, I would have applied straight away to push me to that next step and help me decide what to do with my life," says Kepa.

"The residency program gives First Nations musicians and industry workers the time, space and resources needed to work on creative and professional development projects." ∎

Understanding the deep history of Indigenous 'Songlines'

Funded by: Australian Government / Australian Research Council

In Australia, Indigenous peoples are connected by important religious and economic networks but little is known about the deep history and memorialisation of 'songlines' – paths taken by reforming ancestors and 'creator beings' across land, sea and occasionally sky.

The *Waiet Archaeology Project* was initiated by communities in western and eastern Torres Strait who wished to re-map Torres Strait "the proper way", following the pathway of a significant, reforming ancestor called Waiet.

Through this project, RSHA Associate Professor Duncan Wright and Professor Geoffrey Clark (ANU College of Asia & the Pacific) are providing a high-resolution archaeological and ethno-historic record of ritual mobility and behaviour by examining core sites, art, stories, songs and ritual installations along the Waiet pathway.

Outcomes include the first detailed record of ritual behaviour through time and space in northern Australia; re-engagement of Meriam people with their ritual and cultural sites; and information that will assist communities engaged within native title sea claims to explore cultural connectivity and co-ownership of heritage. ∎

Naabámi: an intergenerational celebration of First Nations women in honour of Barangaroo

Artist and RSHA Professor Brenda L Croft is shining a spotlight on contemporary First Nations women through her creative-led research project *Naabámi (thou shall/will see): Barangaroo (army of me)*.

This non-traditional research output showcases over 100 photographs of First Nations women and girls with diverse cultural affiliations from regions across the continent of Australia, with a particular focus on the Dharawal community at La Perouse, Sydney. The images were created using the 19th century wet plate collodion process, referencing colonial ethnographic photography.

The series is inspired by Barangaroo (c1750–91), the Cammeraygal woman documented in the earliest colonial records and renowned for her mastery as a fisherwoman and her staunch, non-negotiable attitude towards the early colonisers.

In *Nabaami*, the viewer is invited to reflect on the potency and fortitude of Australian First Nations women and girls. Professor Croft's burgeoning 'army' of female Australian First Nations warriors comprises great-grandmothers, grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, daughters, grand-daughters and great-grand-daughters, drawn from her longstanding community connections spanning almost four decades.

Brenda L Croft in ANU SOAD Photography Studio, June 2019. Photo: Prue Hazelgrove.

The exhibition has been on display in multiple locations across Australia and overseas, including the National Portrait Gallery, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and the Embassy of Australia in Washington DC. Furthermore, some of the images in the series are part of an ANU Grand Challenge project – *Murrudha: Sovereign Walks* – seeking to address racism and strengthen the relationship between culture and wellbeing. ∎

Returning Indigenous remains to their rightful homes

Research led by Professor Cressida Fforde, Senior Research Fellow

Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies

First Nations readers should be aware that this document contains information about the theft and return of ancestral remains that can be confronting and distressing.

Since the late 18th century, First Nations Ancestral Remains were taken from their burial sites and sent to universities, museums and private collections around the world for the purpose of studying human diversity and origins under the false and harmful race paradigm.

They were acquired by special interest societies dedicated to, for example, anthropology, natural history and phrenology — a long-discredited pseudoscience involving the analysis of skull shape as indicators of mental capacity and behaviour. The remains were donated, sold, traded, and exhibited to illustrate presumed racial difference and worth.

Throughout history, Indigenous people resisted the theft of their Ancestral Remains where it was possible to do so. Collectors often knew such actions were opposed by local people and were frightened of reprisals. Nonetheless, hundreds of thousands of Indigenous Ancestral Remains from around the world were stolen from their grave sites, as well as from battlefields and morgues — a history of deep colonial harm.

Since the 1980s, the global repatriation movement has sought to bring Ancestors home. Due to the tireless campaigning of First Nations people, in some parts of the world museums will now accede to repatriation requests. However, many institutions continue to retain Ancestral Remains against Indigenous wishes. In Australia, as in some other countries, successful repatriation is recognised as playing an important role in Indigenous healing and wellbeing, and as a fundamental step towards reconciliation.

Repatriation is a complex task. Locating Ancestral Remains, finding out what happened to them since they were stolen and trying to determine exactly where they were taken from is just the first part of a long process that challenges First Nations in their attempts to find their Ancestors and bring them home.

In 2013, an international team of repatriation researchers and practitioners led by RSHA Professor Cressida Fforde came together to pool their collective expertise. This research group (now a Centre within RSHA) is called Return Reconcile Renew (RRR). Over the past ten years, RRR has undertaken extensive collaborative work to support community-led repatriation, advance understanding of the meaning and value of repatriation, and to build capacity in the sector. Central to this effort are three Australian community Partner Organisations with extensive expertise in international repatriation. RRR investigations have contributed significantly to the development of national and international capability in the field, enabled by its extensive network of collaboration and knowledge-transfer.

As part of a professional worldwide network extending to more than 30 repatriation researchers and practitioners, Professor Fforde spearheaded four Australian Research Council-funded projects between 2013 and 2023, receiving $2.98m in funding from the Australian Government and $5.96m in cash and in-kind support from participating organisations. Multiple other contract research projects have augmented the RRR portfolio.

The first ARC project, *Return, Reconcile, Renew (RRR)*, investigated the history of
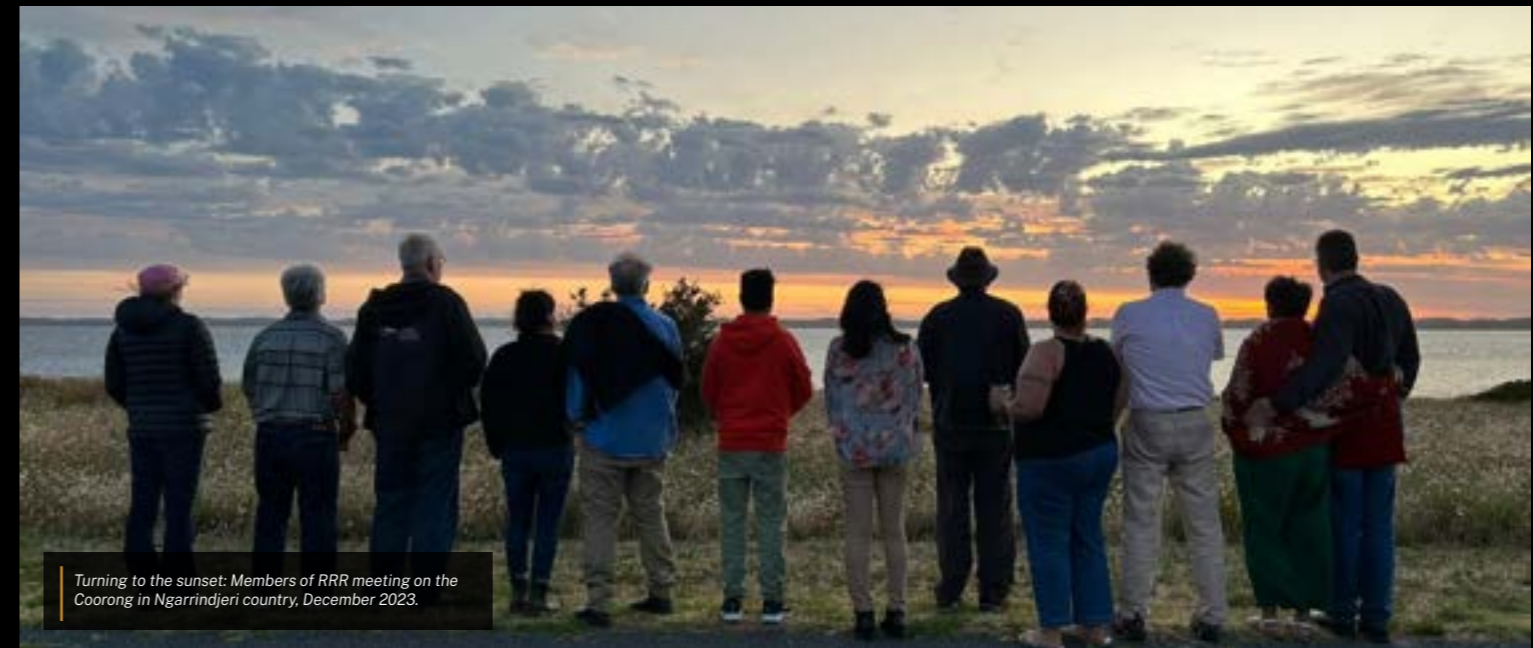
Turning to the sunset: Members of RRR meeting on the Coorong in Ngarrindjeri country, December 2023.

removal and return of Ancestral Remains and assessed the opportunities for community healing and reconciliation upon their return. The project also undertook significant development of a digital archive of repatriation information that would centralise information of use to repatriation practitioners – a significant resource that was then lacking in the sector.

In its second project, *Restoring Dignity*, RRR focussed on developing the Digital Archive: a first-of-its-kind centralised resource of information with tiered levels of access depending upon the cultural sensitivity of its contents. Now governed by an Indigenous Majority board, the archive raises awareness of repatriation's meaning and value, and holds invaluable archival resources, images, reports, publications, contracts and other forms of information that are critical in supporting repatriation practice internationally, with specific areas of high detail private to the RRR founding community partner organisations.

In the third project, *Heritage and Reconciliation*, the researchers are investigating how repatriation contributes to peacebuilding and in *Profit and Loss* they are researching the global commercial trade in Indigenous human remains today and in the past.

Through the work of RRR, communities, agencies and museums engaged in repatriation now have essential resources to support their efforts, including publications, practitioner handbooks, research infrastructure and professional training, all facilitated by this RSHA-led endeavour.

RRR consistently provides assistance to First

Nations seeking to locate, provenance and repatriate their Ancestral Remains.

The RRR Digital Archive produces significant savings on cost and labour for those new to the field, as well as those who are more familiar.

The projects are standard-bearers for community engagement, having involved Indigenous partner organisations throughout the entire process, including Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, and Gur a Baradharaw Kod Torres Strait Sea and Land Council. The RRR collaboration has supported their repatriation initiatives.

The ongoing work of the international team of researchers is also assisting major agencies in the practice of repatriation as they take their work beyond the ARC framework — engaging in day-to-day contract research, supporting communities pro-bono, and building practitioner capacity.

At a university level, semester one of 2024 marked the commencement of a world first Graduate Certificate of the Repatriation of Ancestral Remains and Cultural Objects. Convened by Professor Fforde, this program addresses an acute need for significant capacity building and advanced knowledge in the repatriation field — striving to become an industry standard in the years to come.

Owing to the capabilities created by these projects, researchers, students and the general public are now better equipped with the knowledge and tools to correct wrongs of the past and strengthen bonds in the future. ▍

Improving Indigenous children's wellbeing through language research

Associate Professor Carmel O'Shannessy, Visiting Indigenous Fellow Vanessa Davis and Dr Denise Angelo

ANU School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics

Funded by: **Australian Government** **Australian Research Council**

Children making animal tracks in the sand.
Photo: Carmel O'Shannessy

Many Indigenous children who grow up in Central Australian towns and remote communities speak in a combination of languages to communicate with their families — often using more than one language in a single interaction or sentence.

For years, evaluating Indigenous children's language knowledge has been hindered by a lack of effective assessment tools. However, a pioneering project led by researchers at RSHA is now addressing this gap.

Associate Professor Carmel O'Shannessy, Visiting Indigenous Fellow Vanessa Davis (CAEPR, and Tangentyere Council Research Hub) and Dr Denise Angelo are collaborating with First Nations researchers Jessie Bartlett and Alice Nelson — from Red Dust Role Models — to investigate how young children acquire language skills in Central Australia.

Failing to understand how young children develop language skills may negatively impact their lives. "Language skills are integral to cognitive development and essential for cultural continuity, social cohesion and educational and vocational success, which are important determiners of health," O'Shannessy says.

"When professionals do not recognise the language knowledge children bring, they can critically undervalue their developmental progress. In education settings, they cannot match their teaching goals and methods to the children's learning needs".

> " When only English is in focus in health or education assessment environments, the children's knowledge of the languages they learn at home is not recognised. "

A/Prof Carmel O'Shannessy

As a result, the ANU research team has developed resources — including an internationally authorised app called *The Little Kids' Word List* — , which map out how different languages are spoken with young children in family settings. The set of words enables a novel assessment of language development for kids who speak Eastern and Central Arrernte, Western Arrarnta, Warlpiri, Pitjantjatjara, Luritja and English (or a combination of these).

The project is being funded by the Australian Research Council's (ARC's) Future Fellowships scheme and the ANU Futures Scheme.

Aimed at informing health and education stakeholders, the ANU-led project marks a first-of-its-kind initiative in Australia. "There have been some studies before, but not on the same languages or with the same aims or perspectives," O'Shannessy explains.

The ANU academics and their team are generating new knowledge that is being shared with practitioners, ultimately benefitting the education and wellbeing of the children and their families. Owing to these materials and associated

Young children talk with a caregiver about a picture book. Illustration: Carmel O'Shannessy.

can now understand how to effectively evaluate the languages knowledge the children bring from home.

In addition to its own goals, the project has also the potential to provide a model for work in other areas. *The Little Kids' Word List* could be developed to include other languages, if the foundational empirical work were to be done. This would be a great aim to support," O'Shannessy argues.

By integrating their findings into education and health environments, the researchers are working to improve the future prospects and wellbeing of Indigenous children in Central Australia. In consequence, they are actively seeking opportunities to inform early childhood policy, ensuring these language contexts are not overlooked.

The ANU language assessment tools could be the key to recognising the children's potential, a much-needed resource that will continue to assist health personnel and educators to acknowledge and build on the children's learning strengths — an essential part of their personal development.

The Johnson Vase

Ancient amphora housed at RSHA's Classics Museum for almost 40 years and used for research and teaching of several generations of students. The artefact was repatriated to Italy in 2023 after being identified as criminally trafficked. ANU had bought the object in good faith in 1984.

Image credits

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