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C&C'26

Proceedings of the 2026 Conference on
Creativity and Cognition

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General Chairs' Welcome

Welcome to the proceedings of the 18th ACM Creativity and Cognition Conference (C&C), 2026. This year's conference was held at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London at its award winning campus in central London, UK. In keeping with previous years we also hosted the C&C conference online in 2025 to allow us to benefit from the joys of in-person conviviality and also to reach a wide audience and reduce barriers to engaging with our academic and artistic community. Since 1993, the C&C conference series has brought together artists, scientists, designers, educators, and researchers to more deeply understand how people engage individually and socially in creative processes and how computation and other technology can affect creative outcomes.

The broad theme of this and last year's conference was *Creativity for Change*. This directly responds to the ever-increasing pace of technological, social, and political change in our world and builds on the University of the Arts London's mission "To change the world through our creative endeavour". The theme is very much about using creativity to make positive change in the world. For example, positive societal change, decolonization, responding to climate change, and the values that creative use of technology brings to the Arts and design. Making change requires us to take risks and to push ourselves outside our comfort zones. As David Bowie commented in interview in 1997, "If you feel safe in the area that you're working in, you're not working in the right area. Always go a little further into the water than you feel you're capable of being in. Go a little bit out of your depth, and when you don't feel that your feet are quite touching the bottom, you're just about in the right place to do something exciting". We saw these moments of trepidation, excitement, and innovation weaving their way throughout the conference and making the world a better place through creativity.

This year our keynotes Anna Abraham and Kaffe Matthews bring neuroscience and musicianship to explore creative practice and what it means to be creative. From working with sharks and NASA scientists to investigating mental time travel and the reality-fiction distinction, our keynotes underline the embodied nature of our creativity, existence, and ability to engage with the world. In many ways this challenges dominant techno-centric narratives about the future of creativity, intelligence, and human existence, framing our lived experience as the key to our human creative abilities. We are delighted to have these pioneers of neuroscience and experimental music making keynote our conference and share their substantial experience and critical thinking on creativity.

Our call for submissions this year attracted 245 paper and 79 pictorial submissions, which were peer reviewed, resulting in an acceptance rate of 20% for papers and 31% for pictorials. This year's submissions explored often contradictory themes at the intersection of creativity, technology, and culture. From research on tangible and material interactions on day one to creative communities and speculative design on day three, the presented research offers contrasting lenses through which to view and explore creativity. Counter-narratives on day two challenge prevailing discourses about AI whilst on day one researchers explore the use of AI as a creative probe. Whilst research on the power and politics of creative AI is juxtaposed with more-than-human approaches to design.

In keeping with C&C tradition we curated a publicly accessible Art Exhibition under the conference theme of *Creativity for Change* to sit in conversation with the academic contributions. Fifteen pieces were selected out of the 47 that were peer reviewed, with an acceptance rate of 32%. The collection of artworks cover areas ranging from human-machine co-creation to more-than-human ecologies and wearables, and formats from installation to performance.

Congratulations to all our accepted submission authors. Awards for outstanding submissions are:

Best Paper Awards

"Creating the World with Order!": Designing Tangible Toolkit to Support Creative Expression and Wellbeing for Individuals with ASD

Yibo Meng, Lyumanshan Ye, Yifan Feng, Rong Fu, Bingyi Liu, Linghao Li, Nan Gao

How Playwrights Use Software: Towards Writing Support Tools for Performance

Ace Chen, Isabel Li, Phoebe Huq, Rye Donaldson, Kathryn Ringland

Towards Praxis GenAI: Exploring Generative AI Tools for Huayao Embroidery Craft Practice

Nick Bryan-Kinns, Duoduo Zhang, Hao Li, Mengzhi He, Xiaojing Yuan, Xin Zhao, Ilia Pavlov, Yijing Yang, Sanyi Wang

Best Pictorial Award

Zines as a movement point: Engaging with the margin for alternative dreaming

Mimi Shalf, Celeste Moreno, Ronni Hayden, Ricarose Roque

Emma Candy Award

An award in memory of Emma Candy for the Best Contribution to Creative Communication.

Collective Craft: How Artists Collaborate to Train AI-based Audio Synthesis Model for Music

Théo Jourdan, Jules Françoise, Frédéric Bevilacqua

Honorable Mentions

Collective Craft: How Artists Collaborate to Train AI-based Audio Synthesis Model for Music

Théo Jourdan, Jules Françoise, Frédéric Bevilacqua

Artographer: a Curatorial Interface for Art Space Exploration

Shm Garanganao Almeda, John Joon Young Chung, Sophia Liu, Yuwen Lu, Brett Halperin, Bjoern Hartmann, Max Kreminski

Creativity in the BioFoundry: Supporting scientific creativity in the age of automation

Mingyan Tian, Sarah Sterman

What Makes an AI Writing Companion a Good Fit? A Personality-Informed Co-Design Study

Mengke Wu, Kexin Quan, Weizi Liu, Mike Yao, Jessie Chin

Engaging Older Adults in Online Everyday Creativity with Sound-Based Art

Melika Adabinejad, Celine Latulipe

Resonant Data, Embodied Memory: Reimagining Learning through Counter-Narratives and Affective Data Practices

Tania Villalobos Lujan, Maham Fatima, Pratim Sengupta, Lora Oehlberg

Seed Bank, Co-op, Stoop Swap: Metaphors for Governing Language Model Data for Creative Writing

Alicia Guo, Carly Schnitzler, Katy Gero

Beadle: Exploring, Perceiving, and Redesigning Thermoplastic Materiads using Fuse Beads

Mariah Gardner, Mohammad Abu Nasir Rakib, Cesar Torres

Thank You

The conference series would not be possible without the dedicated support of our conference programme, organising, reviewing, and steering committees. Many thanks to all the volunteers who helped to make this year's conference happen and to bring together our international community of Creativity and Cognition.

Finally, we are especially thankful to our sponsors who have made this year's conference possible: the Creative Computing Institute of the University of the Arts London, ACM SIGCHI, Diamond Sponsor Amazon, and Platinum Sponsor Adobe.

The co-chairs of the conference this year were Nick Bryan-Kinns and Salvatore Andolina who brought together the University of the Arts London with Politecnico Milano to create positive change and support for our international community of researchers, artists, and practitioners at the intersection of the arts, technology, and design.

Nick Bryan-Kinns, *University of the Arts London, United Kingdom*

Salvatore Andolina, *Politecnico Milan, Italy*

General Chairs, C&C 2026

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Keynote

C&C 2026 Proceedings

Offloading Human Creativity to AI: A Dystopian Tale of Erosion, Erasure, & Exile?

Anna Abraham

Torrance Center for Creativity, Mary Frances Early College of Education, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, USA

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Abstract

We, human beings, are a uniquely creative species, capable of undertaking an incomparable breadth of activities across diverse domains of practice. We can apply our powers of imagination and action in endeavors that are as dissimilar from each other as possible. Our experience of the world is embodied and multimodal, yet, at the same time, we are embedded within external environments that we explore purposefully and continually using our minds and bodies. These interactions dynamically redefine the spaces of our realities and our possibilities throughout our lifetimes. We are deeply individual beings with unique and subjective experiences of the world, and also deeply social creatures who are yoked to collectives in the many shared communities to which we belong. In the present day, our species faces a formidable challenge in the age of generative artificial intelligence (Gen-AI), which is well on its way to disrupting multiple facets of human life. While the threats posed by these technological advances to wider concerns of the world (such as the stability of human institutions and the health of the planet) are of immediate public interest, their impact on the creative mind has received far less attention, despite the astonishing pace at which people are offloading their cognitive skills to such tools.

In this keynote lecture, I lay out the case for why we need to be just as concerned about the impact of Gen-AI on the human capacity to be creative: our ability to come up with ideas that are novel and satisfying. In doing so, I emphasize the necessity to distinguish between the creative process and the creative product in order to fully understand how they are related yet separable. This distinction is blurred in most academic scholarship, as the estimation of a creative product is often incorrectly taken as a proxy for the creative process, just as the audience/recipient's estimation of a creative product is appropriated as a proxy for the creative process of the creating individual.

I call into question the notion that Gen-AI instruments merely constitute the latest in innocuous computational contraptions that only work to advance the human condition. By discussing the fundamental differences between skill-extending and skill-eroding tools in terms of their impact on our psychological capacities, I highlight the limitations of the latter in affording the development of novel psychomotor sensibilities. The necessarily scaffolded nature of human skill acquisition across cognitive and motor domains, such that intermediate stages cannot be leapfrogged to reach more advanced stages, will also be examined.

When it comes to humans, there can be no development without deliberate and embodied doing. A potential danger of disembodied engagement in the long-term is the eventual erasure of domain-general skillsets and individual sensibilities that allow us to autonomously engage with the world and have experiences of mastery. Such an eventuality will directly impact the expression of our creative drives and the achievement of each of us in how we realize our unique creative potential.

Bio

Anna Abraham is the E. Paul Torrance Professor and Director of the Torrance Center for Creativity at the University of Georgia (UGA), USA. At UGA, she is also affiliated with the Neuroscience-Integrated Life Sciences Program, the Institute of Artificial Intelligence, and the Humanities Council. Dr. Abraham investigates the psychological and neurophysiological mechanisms underlying creativity and other aspects of the imagination, including the reality-fiction distinction, mental time travel, social and self-referential cognition, aesthetic experience, and mental state reasoning. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts (RSA, UK), the Higher Education Academy (HEA, UK), and the Salzburg Global Seminar (SGS, Austria). She is an Expert Advisory Board Member at the Centre for Arts and Social Transformation (University of Auckland, New Zealand) and serves in the Scientific Advisory Board for the Max Planck Institute

for Empirical Aesthetics (Frankfurt, Germany). She is the Editor of the *Cambridge Elements in Creativity and Imagination* - an academic short book series. She has penned numerous publications including the 2018 book, *The Neuroscience of Creativity* (Cambridge University Press), and the 2020 edited volume, *The Cambridge Handbook of the Imagination*. Her latest book is *The Creative Brain: Myths and Truths* (2024, MIT Press).

Keynote

C&C 2026 Proceedings

The Context Is Space: Thirty Years of Composing with Place.

Kaffe Matthews

The Bicrophonic Research Institute, Berlin, Germany

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Abstract

I am rolling through inner city streets in the gloaming, alone. I have no clear idea how to get home but will not use GPS to help me. Take time and be here. Sense the sounds and changing architectures with spacetime whilst moving. The curves and straights of people-made structures with the caress of winds on my skin and vibrations making sounds through my ears whilst skimming clouds shift light and the lights. Clock time disperses and perceptive boundaries dissolve into one shifting experience. I am loathe to use the immersive word. Immersion tends to imply a loss, a desensitisation. This experience is heightened. Some kind of ultimate human ability. It is from this awareness that I make work.

Through thirty years of practice, I have come to understand space not as a backdrop, but as an active medium through which meaning, understanding and learning emerge and evolve.

Since my early solo concerts I have had a fascination with place. With the variety of our experience of it, dependant on our condition, culture, education, time of day, presence or absence of others and more. An understanding of its power to influence, even determine our lives, our experience, our learning. It is this subtle, sublime force that has led me to an enquiry that is still, after all these years, exploring the same thing. A fascination with its articulation.

Yet what does it mean to articulate place? And what can be made from this awareness? I use this term by taking, transforming sound through it, using space as a fundamental compositional tool. The enquiry then is how to make the outcomes available —not to privileged concert audiences at certain times of day or night in bespoke spaces, but to everyone. These questions have occupied me for thirty years.

I begin with the violin, intimate vibrations under chin, physicality in music appreciation and making as a child. Later, audio worlds explode through electronics, samples, late 80s acid house. Listening. A five year adventure with a MIDI violin, then live sound and space processing with audiences, hitting London freelance solo. Playing in the room not on the stage. Community radio, London early noughties, net art, public art, live streaming, DIY, open source, free workshops. Six solo CDs and a growing desire to widen audiences and inspire listening for everyone. How?

Let's move sounds, make compositions through space —relocating from the concert hall to the street. First with radio. Air as medium. This medium the material. *Radio Cycle*. Five years later, *The Marvelo Project*. Precision of movement in space through GPS. Not an app. But independently and collectively built hard and software. A box for your bike. Free of the internet. The streets as scores.

And so bicrophonics is born. Making mobile compositions outside for anyone to hear. Through a selection of works and the sonic bicycles developed to perform them, this keynote explores that enquiry. Let's go.

Bio

Kaffe Matthews (kaffematthews.net) is a pioneering music maker who works live with space, data, things, and place to make new electroacoustic compositions. Violin, theremin, star maps, NASA scientists, sharks, children, solo walks and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra have all sourced this growing body of works for sites such as concert hall, city streets, basement club, gallery, living room, empty shop and the human body. The physical experience of this music has always been central to her approach and so she has also invented some unique interfaces —the sonic armchair, the sonic bed and a variety of sonic bikes (sonicbikes.net) which enable new paths into composition for makers, and ways in to listening for wide ranging audiences.

Long concerned with community and the environment, Matthews has also established the collectives 'Music for Bodies' (musicforbodies.net) (2006) and 'The Bicrophonic Research Institute' (sonicbikes.net) (2014) where ideas and techniques grow within a pool of coders and artists using shared and open source approaches, publishing all outcomes online.

Since 1995, Matthews has performed and taught worldwide, receiving awards such as the NESTA Dreamtime Fellowship; Honorary Professor of Music, Shanghai Music Conservatory; a Scottish BAFTA with Mandy McIntosh & Zeena Parkins; Distinction Prix Ars Electronica Sonic Bed_London, and Honorary mention for cd *cécile*. She is the first woman to have received the Edgar Varèse Guest Professorship in Computer Music at TU Berlin. Kaffe has also been releasing solo works on Annette Works (annetetworks.com) since 1996. Today, she has returned to the stage live with no laptop. Instead a DIY instrument the Ripley, a noise filter system designed on the alchemical discoveries of 15th British alchemist George Ripley.

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