

## Standard Application form for students applying for a +2 or +3 studentship in the Arts and Humanities

(September 2021 entry)

### 1. Studentship applied for (please tick):

- +2 (PhD - current students)
- +3 (PhD)

### 2. Ring fenced studentship you wish to be considered for (please tick):

- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)
- Known Disability

### 3. Institution in which you have been offered a place/or have applied to:

- Lancaster University
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- Royal Northern College of Music
- University of Liverpool
- Keele University
- University of Manchester
- University of Salford

### 4. Candidate's details:

<b>Name:</b>	
<b>Application / Registration number:</b>	
<b>Address:</b>	
<b>Town:</b>	
<b>Postcode:</b>	
<b>Country:</b>	
<b>Telephone:</b>	

<b>Email address:</b>	
<b>Nationality/Resident Status:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> UK National <input type="checkbox"/> UK Settled status <input type="checkbox"/> EU National not resident in the UK <input type="checkbox"/> EU National resident in the UK for the past three years <input type="checkbox"/> Other

### 5. Project details:

**Mode of Attendance**    a. Full time    b. Part time



### 6. PhD Proposal (to be completed by all students):

6a) Please provide between 6 and 10 keywords that describe your research

Mesoamerica	Futures
Extended Reality	Cities
Transformation	Participatory
Practice-based	Immersive
Decoloniality	Social Justice

6b) Please describe the proposed research using up to 1,500 words, referring to the guidance. Include a word count.

Collaborating with digital arts organisation FutureEverything, this practice-based PhD will establish how extended reality (XR) can operate as a methodology to cultivate human (and more-than-human) transformations in multicultural cities of the future. Working at the intersection of Black Lives Matter, Covid-19 and climate change migration, this transdisciplinary project will draw upon decolonising theories from the ontological turn in Anthropology and Design (Escobar 2020; Fry 2020; Kohn 2014) to respond to the critical need for speculative research into how future cities can shapeshift and adapt to radical transformations in environments, cultures and subjectivities (Dunn 2021; Bell et al. 2020; Paradies 2020; Keane et al. 2017; Haraway 2016; Keating & Merenda 2013). This international Mexican-UK project will bring together indigenous artists and anthropologists from Mexico City to co-produce a series of participatory Extended Reality (XR) experiences. Reframing XR as a shapeshifting methodology to co-imagine Mesoamerican Futurisms in Mexico City, this practice-based PhD will harness multiple perspectives of the past to re-envisage futures more inclusive of its inhabitants. In doing so, it will:

1. Trace a history of shapeshifting rituals across Mesoamerican Futurisms, plotting a pathway towards inclusive XR technology practices.

2. Collaborate with artists from Mexico City to produce a series of site-specific XR interventions that cultivate transformative experiences.
3. Demonstrate and extend the transformative potential of XR as a transgressive and disruptive methodology to co-imagine future cities.

Extended or cross reality (XR) are media technologies that use hardware and software to create virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and mixed reality (MR) environments. Inspired by immersive projects such as *NeuroSpeculative AfroFeminism* (Baccus-Clark et al. 2017), *PrisonX* (Ayala 2020) and *The School of the Jaguar* (Piña et al. 2019), this research will engage with Indigenous Futurisms (Fricke et al. 2020; Guzmán 2015) which extends from Afrofuturism; a powerful speculative methodology rooted in African diaspora and Black culture. The science fiction city of Wakanda from *Black Panther* (Coogler 2018) demonstrates the power of these future imaginaries to decolonise preconceived notions of utopia and transform perceptions of future cities (Henriques & Offeh 2017; Loft 2014).

I will cultivate XR as a research practice, using comics, film and immersive XR installation to develop a multisensory language particular to the signs, symbols and iconographies of Aztec, Mayan and Nahua Futurisms. This will help to speculate and re-imagine Mexico City; incorporating indigenous knowledge(s) as a strategy to understand complex systems in relation to societal, environmental and political justice (Moreman 2011; Barad 2007). I will make specific reference to *nahualismo*, a shapeshifting ritual associated with the Aztec trickster god Tezcatlipoca where a shaman takes on the form of their shadow animal (Baquedano 2014; Olivier 2008; Martínez González 2011; 2006). I will conduct research in different archives exploring codexes and material culture found in the Templo Mayor Museum and the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City as well as the British Museum in London. Existing links with UNAM academics such as [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] will help in accessing these archives in order to investigate transformative and shapeshifting practices in Mesoamerican cultures.

This project will co-produce a series of XR environments that explore future cities as liminal or 'in-between spaces' (Anzaldúa 2015; 1987; Turner 2008; Mignolo 2000). In doing so, this research will contribute towards the growing interest in XR to enhance sensory, cognitive and emotional faculties, cultivating new ways to 'escape from materiality' and mediate urban environments (Parsons et al. 2020; Aston et al. 2018; Rose 2018a; Rose 2011). Moreover, this research will challenge the notion of XR users predominantly being white, male and wealthy whilst considering the ethical risks posed by researchers when using these technologies with indigenous participants (Nakamura 2020; Harley 2019; Rose 2018b). I will use practice-based methods, adapting Escobar's (2018) conception of ontological design to be inclusive of multiple human (and more-than-human) subjectivities in the field, allowing for a multiplicitous and more nuanced approach to traditional empirical research (Little & Rees 2020; Jackson 1989). In doing so, this research will extend and demonstrate the potential of XR as a participatory research method to explore multispecies entanglements in future cities.

The proposed contribution of this practice-based research will be to apply XR as a decolonising research methodology that responds to the ever-increasing rate of radical change in the future(s) of multicultural urban environments. Using XR hardware such as HTC Vive and Magic Leap 1 to experiment with a range of software such as Unity, Tilt Brush by Google and Madefire x Magic Leap, this project will co-produce a series of site-specific participatory XR installations in the UK and Mexico City (travel permitted) that will explore Mesoamerican futurisms. In doing so, I will demonstrate how XR can operate as a conjectural tool to disrupt and co-imagine more inclusive cities of the future.

## Bibliography

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**Word count: 1495**

6c) Please provide information on how the proposed research and postgraduate training will contribute to your career development (max 250 words)

On top of providing me with vital training in immersive methods, this practice-based PhD will be the next step in my career towards becoming an international early-career researcher. Adopting an interdisciplinary and decolonial approach to Media and Cultural Studies, I look forward to sharing my knowledge with the NWCDTP student community. Following the PhD, I will pursue a post-doctorate, continuing to develop, produce and teach innovative practice-based research around XR methodologies and Mesoamerican Futurisms.

Access to resources (equipment, immersive installation spaces) will help develop my skills and access to expertise and knowledge will help build connections and relationships (particularly with Postgraduate Arts and Humanities Centre, PAHC) to help ground my research and ultimately provide me with transferable skills to apply to projects within and beyond academia.

6d) Please provide information on how the proposed research engages with issues relating to Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Sustainability (max 100 words)

At its core, this project is about broadening participation and visibility of those historically not included in academia. When working with participants, I will use inclusive online research methods that broaden in-person and remote participation with those typically outside the purview of academia. With the view to co-imagine more adaptive and inclusive cities, this project will take a decolonialised approach to produce transformative research into future cities, the climate emergency and its associated social, political and ecological ramifications.

6e) Please provide information on how the proposed research might be undertaken should the COVID-19 pandemic continue (max 100 words)

Travel permitted, I intend to go on placement in Mexico City to conduct primary research. That being said, if the pandemic continues, I will be able to conduct my research digitally through existing contacts in Mexico City as this proposed research will work with archives, record interviews and co-produce installations which can be made accessible online. The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of hybrid responses and I am keen to explore innovative ways of producing digital installations and other outputs that are inclusive and accessible to diverse audiences.

## 7. Qualifications:

Year awarded	Qualification type	Qualification Subject	Awarding institution	Level	Class
2019	MA	Visual Anthropology	University of Manchester	7	Distinction
2015	BA	French and Spanish	University of Leeds	6	First



<b>Description:</b>					

### 8. Relevant Experience: (max 350 words)

<b>Description of relevant experience:</b>	<p>I am a British/Mexican artist researcher with a profile in comics, visual anthropology and future practices. My academic output to date includes two forthcoming journal articles; respectively in 'HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory' in a special section on Anthropologists as Artists and a special issue in 'Studies in Comics' on Family and Conflict in Graphic Narratives. With ██████████, I have co-produced the 'Drawing as Anthropology-Making' Interactive Lab for the European Association of Social Anthropologists 2020. In March 2021, we will deliver our new workshop for the Association of Social Anthropologists. Furthermore, in January 2021, I delivered a paper on Indigenous Futurisms during UCL Multimedia Anthropology Lab's panel discussion on 'Multimedia Anthropology in the Anthropocene'.</p> <p>I am the Visual Editor for Otherwise Magazine, an online magazine that explores storytelling and its ethnographic potential. Coordinating the visual segment, I review visual submissions varying from graphic illustration, film to photography to a wide network of international contributors from Anthropology and Media. My work was also presented at the Royal Anthropological Institute's 'Illustrating Anthropology' exhibition (2020).</p> <p>I recently produced an ethnographic documentary with Manchester arts and social care charity The Men's Room during their Arts Council funded project 'What Stops Us From Being Unwell?'. This collaboration focused on the experience of homeless gay men and trans-women service users sharing and recording their experience of mental health when living in the city centre. These experiences demonstrate that I am keen to proactively work both independently and collaboratively to share knowledge both inside and outside academia.</p> <p>Currently I work for Aula, a remote learning experience platform (LXP) where I develop a wide range of scalable digital learning technologies for UK universities during an unprecedented move towards online learning. This role has provided me with a passion for using community platforms in a higher education setting as well as providing me with the skills to design and transform online learning environments.</p>
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### 9. Supervision

Please propose up to 3 prospective supervisors for your PhD:

Institution	Supervisor



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## 10. Research Training previously undertaken (max 250 words)

10a) Please give details of the Masters programme and research training undertaken previously:

Distinction in MA Visual Anthropology in 2019 at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology in the University of Manchester. My masters provided me with a theoretical and practical toolkit in filmmaking, editing, sound recording, visual and sensory methods to analyse primary sources and undertake digital and ethnographic research both in Mexican and British archives, libraries and cultural institutions.

10b) Relevance of Masters and other previous training to your PhD project (up to 100 words):

With over 12 months fieldwork experience in Mexico, I am comfortable conducting interviews in Spanish and English. Providing me with the confidence to collaborate with a range of people through workshops, talks and participatory methods, my MA taught me about the use of comics and illustration to produce practice-based research in a reflexive and sensitive manner with participants. My MA thesis brought together over 28 hours of transcribed interviews, photographs and letters, which has developed into the Story of Mirrors project, a transmedia storytelling database on Mexican family stories and Mesoamerican mythologies.

## 11. Research Training needs (max 250 words)

11a) Please give details of the anticipated research training needed for your PhD project, including difficult language training:

I want to make the most of SODA's newly launched specialist facilities such as the digital innovation and UX lab and editing suites. I will be looking for training in the production of extended reality storytelling and other emergent audiovisual technologies. I am also keen to discover new ways to invigorate archives using adaptive systems thinking and artificial intelligence; something my proposed supervisors are also keen to develop.

11b) Please give details of the kind of resources you will potentially need during your PhD. Please also indicate whether your research project will require you to undertake research abroad.

If possible and safe, I will go to Mexico, working with my connections in UNAM, Mexico City to physically work within the archives in the Templo Mayor Museum and the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. There is also potential for placement in Mexico City or New York (see 12b). If this is not possible, I will still be able to access these archives digitally through my established contacts.

The majority of the resources I need are all located within SODA, MMU and FutureEverything. This will include access to XR headsets such as HTC Vive or Magic Leap 1 as well as access to software such as Unity3D. The dissemination of research output will be promoted through FutureEverything's online platforms such as their Future Focus programme.

### 1. Additional Applications

## 12. Collaboration with External Partners (max 250 words)

12a) Is this or does it have the potential to be a collaborative PhD? If so, give the name of the partner organisation, and describe the planned collaboration. Indicate what discussions you have so far had with the partner organisation. You must also attach a letter from the partner organisation indicating its support in principle.

This 'light touch' CDA (as discussed with ) is supported by FutureEverything, Manchester's future-focused innovation lab. Having spoken extensively with and , respectively the Creative and Executive Directors, they are offering in-kind support for this project. For further details, please see FutureEverything's Letter of Support for this project.



12b) Please give details of any potential collaboration you may plan to develop with external organisations during your PhD programme (industry, cultural organisation, government bodies etc...), including possible placements.

I have already had discussions with FutureEverything about a potential placement at ONX Studio, the Onassis Foundation and New Museum's NEW INC XR accelerator and XR gallery in New York City. Travel permitting, I plan for a 3-month placement in either New York or Mexico City with Arte Alameda Labs or Centro de Cultura Digital where I will exhibit the co-produced outcomes of this research. For this reason, I request consideration for the +3.5 (PhD).

I have also had conversations with anthropologists from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) such as and about access to archives in Mexico City as well as a collaborative public programme linking my PhD research to future immersive installations and workshops.

### 13. Additional Applications

Have you been nominated for or applied for any other studentship this year?

If yes, please provide details:

I plan to apply to the Leverhulme Unit for the Design of Cities of the Future, a Doctoral Scholarships award from the Leverhulme Trust and Manchester Metropolitan University.

Have you previously been enrolled onto a PhD programme?

If yes, please provide details:

### 14. References / Transcripts

Your institution will need to attach two references and your transcript(s) from your programme application to this application form.

### 15. How did you hear about us?

Please let us know how you have heard about the NWCDTP and its studentships:

Online; proposed supervisors.

### 16. Acknowledgement

I confirm that the information I have provided in this form is complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge at this date. I fully understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the relevant forms are submitted to the relevant office in due time and that any missing information may render my application incomplete and ineligible. I authorise the North West Consortium DTP to disclose to the AHRC any information that is relevant to my application.

**Signature:**

**(Type Name if submitted electronically)**





<b>Date:</b>	05/02/2021
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