



The book that has influenced me most in the last 12 months

Ten British Academy-supported early career scholars reveal the books that made the greatest impact on them in 2016

British Academy Rising Star Engagement Awards (BARSEAs) enable distinguished early career academics to enhance their skills and career development through the organisation of interdisciplinary networking activities. Ten of those who received BARSEAs in 2016 tell us about books that helped shape the thinking behind their projects.

Paul Fleet



Whilst this book has not come from a typical university press stable, it has given me the same satiation of knowledge and hunger for further enquiry that one would

expect from any academic book. Sydney Padua's *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage: The (Mostly) True Story of the First Computer* is a wonderful fusion on several levels. It brings together the two characters of Ada Lovelace and Charles Babbage in a graphic novel that tells the story of the Analytical Engine and coding. And like the characters, it fuses the disciplines of science and arts & humanities in its content and presentation. It is rich with footnotes and endnotes that enhance the narrative, thereby providing empirical data alongside an engaging storyline.

The first part of the book is a story of two people who came together in a joint goal by combining their individual discipline strengths. The later section masquerades as fictional crime-solving adventures, but really these

support the first section as engaging vignettes of the ideas and documents of Lovelace and Babbage alongside other pioneers of technology in the early Victorian era. Particularly enjoyable in this later section is the chapter ‘Mr Boole comes to Tea’, which could be read as a useful reminder of what can happen to meaning when metrics are applied without context. It is this bringing together of science and arts & humanities that is one of my key research areas. And it won a BARSEA grant for my project ‘#forgetting2remember’, which has seen the public engage with science and music in co-productions that explore the role of women in science.

Padua states in her introduction to the book that ‘it was in the research that I fatally fell in love’, and it is this love shared by subject disciplines that is worth remembering as we move into a new climate of interdisciplinary research in Higher Education. In the spirit of this book, I’d like to leave you with one of my favourite quotes on collaboration in academia. It is a campaign slogan from the University of Utah and exemplifies why we can be stronger together: ‘Science can tell you how to clone a tyrannosaurus rex. Humanities can tell you why this might be a bad idea.’

Dr Paul Fleet of Newcastle University was discussing *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage: The (Mostly) True Story of the First Computer*, by Sydney Padua (Penguin, 2016).

Catherine Redford



Barbara Johnson’s *A Life with Mary Shelley* collects together Johnson’s work on Shelley from her first essay in 1980 to the last project that Johnson completed before her death in 2009 – a study of Shelley and her circle. Mary Shelley is best known as the author of *Frankenstein*, but she also wrote a number of other novels, short stories, and biographies. My research is currently focused on a novel that she published in 1826 called *The Last Man*, which imagines the Last Man on earth following a global plague. Johnson’s deconstructive reading of this text has been a big influence on my research over the years, so I’ve enjoyed revisiting her essays in this volume. Her work has encouraged me to embrace some of the apparent difficulties that confront the reader of this novel: the Last Man’s suspension between life and death; Shelley’s use of a typically Romantic style to mark the end of Romanticism; and the question not only of where we start to speak of ‘the end’, but where we finish.

My BARSEA project is concerned with how academics can deliver English literature outreach projects in schools, sharing our research with GCSE and A-level students. Johnson’s intelligent yet accessible approach to Mary Shelley has helped to shape the way in which I introduce students of this age to *The Last Man*, and I often

find myself asking questions that Johnson has posed of the novel – for example, why not a Last Woman? – in my outreach sessions. It’s hugely rewarding to see some of the answers that school students come up with, showing that they’re fully capable of engaging with serious academic thought.

Dr Catherine Redford of the University of Oxford was discussing *A Life with Mary Shelley*, by Barbara Johnson (Stanford University Press, 2014).

Teodora Gliga



Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind, by Yuval Noah Harari, is not a history book and everything a history book should be. I knew this would be an intriguing, mind-opening read when, early on, I was asked to ‘Think for a moment about the Agricultural Revolution from the viewpoint of wheat.’ It is exactly these perspective-reversing games that psychologists like myself use as research tools.

I am interested in the perspective of humans faced with the unknown: I want to figure out why we find not knowing so unnerving and learning so rewarding. Many other species seek information to gain better access to food or mates, but humans seem unique in the amount of time we spend on learning for its own sake. Because the seeds of curiosity seem to be present very early in life – in infants’ babbling and endless showing and pointing gestures – I have always thought that human genetic baggage must have gained something extra in that respect recently in our evolutionary history. Harari’s description of the human Cognitive Revolution – when about 70,000 years ago *Homo sapiens* left Africa to spread all over the earth – sounds to me exactly like this turning point. Better planning abilities and collaboration might explain how we were able to cross the open sea to reach Australia, but not why we would have wanted to do so. However, it was his chapter on ‘The Discovery of Ignorance’, i.e. the beginning of the scientific (re-)discovery of the world, that made me wonder whether there might also be a second stage in human development, when children come to realise that they or others are sometimes ignorant. How may that change the way they seek information?

In October 2016, we dwelt on all these questions and others during a three-day workshop on ‘Neurocuriosity’, organised by the Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development at Birkbeck, University of London, and funded by a BARSEA grant.

Dr Teodora Gliga of Birkbeck, University of London, was discussing *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, by Yuval Noah Harari (English language edition: Harper, 2014).

The seeds of curiosity seem to be present very early in life.

Pamela Woolner



Last year I returned to John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* – first published in 1916, and attracting attention through reaching its centenary year. I'd read it when I was doing my teacher training, and enjoyed it, but found that Dewey's ideas about democracy ('democracy is more than a form of government') and schools ('a projection in type of the society we should like to realise') were explained so clearly that they seemed like self-evident good sense rather than novel thinking.

When I now come back to the book 20 years later, having ended up as a researcher in education with an interest in learning environments, I am struck by a quite different theme running through Dewey's proposals. He is very clear that, although every situation is potentially educational, learning is not a transmission process and we therefore need to organise and orchestrate carefully to induce the learning we want to develop. Appearing to have foreseen my slow construction of an understanding of the relationship of school space to student learning, Dewey states pithily that: 'We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment.' He goes on to point out that we therefore need to think carefully about how we 'design environments' to educate our young people.

These ideas make sense of the way I have come to research and work with school communities to enable them to understand and develop their learning spaces. They have been specifically influential in relation to my BARSEA-supported project. 'Art and SOLE' aims to combine the student-led learning of Self Organised Learning Environments (SOLEs) with arts education. We are working with education practitioners (in schools, museums and community space), visual artists and early career researchers to design hands-on, arts-rich environments for student-initiated learning. I think Dewey would understand.

Dr Pamela Woolner of Newcastle University was discussing *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, by John Dewey (1916).

Sophie von Stumm



In *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*, Betty Hart and Todd Risely summarise their seminal research from the 1960s on children's language development. For their main study, trained research assistants paid 27 monthly home visits to 42 families who had recently had a child. During each visit, the research assistants followed the child around the home with a tape recorder and microphone in hand, while simultaneously taking notes, to document the words that the child spoke and heard over the course of

an hour. The data showed that by the age of 3 years some children will have heard 30 million words, while others only heard 10 million words. This dramatic difference in early life language experience affects children's later cognitive, verbal and academic development.

Today, new technologies enable recording children's language at home for longer periods of time – that is, for entire days rather than just one hour – and thus, we can now validate Hart and Risely's estimates for the first time through direct empirical observation. We also have automated algorithms available that analyse several hours of recordings in split seconds, while back in the 1960s Hart and Risely's team took about 30 hours to process a single one-hour recording (which explains why their book was published in 1995, ten years after the data collection was complete).

The vast potential that novel assessment technologies bring for research is not limited to studying children's language, but they have benefits for all empirical science. It is therefore important to train early career researchers in the application of these technologies, which was the focus of my BARSEA-supported event, 'Better Data: Technologies for Measuring Behaviour', held in October 2016.

Dr Sophie von Stumm of Goldsmiths, University of London was discussing *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*, by Betty Hart and Todd R. Risely (Brookes Publishing, 1995).

Katie Donington



Having recently moved into an American Studies department following six years working with the 'Legacies of British Slave-ownership' project, I have been thinking through some of the interconnections and disjunctions between the UK/Caribbean and US experiences of slavery. As an interdisciplinary historian with a background in museums, the book *Slavery and Public History: The tough stuff of American memory* appeals to me because it engages with the ways in which academic and public histories intersect. There are chapters on the representation of slavery in museums, memorials, heritage sites, schools, libraries and tourism. The book explores the relationship between history, memory and identity through the prism of slavery, and in doing so exposes the racialised fault lines of American society.

At a time in which the populist nationalism of Donald Trump has co-existed with the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, it seems that race relations are once again a key ground of political contestation. The unfinished business of slavery and its legacies forms an important part of any national conversation about equality and social justice. As the book reminds us 'The critical question is not simply how people remember their past but how they deal

with and ultimately learn from the “tough stuff” of their history.’

Britain’s history of slavery and empire – the ways it has been both represented and hidden – is a similarly controversial subject. I have been awarded a BARSEA for the project ‘Re-presenting slavery: Making a public usable past.’ This project brings together academics and public historians to think about how we can work together to create a dialogue about slavery within the UK context. The book *Slavery and Public History* concludes with a powerful statement that brings meaning to this project going forwards: ‘Conscientious remembrance is more than a necessary expansion of the nation’s narrative. It is an act of moral engagement, a declaration that there are other... lives too long forgotten that count.’

Dr Katie Donington of the University of Nottingham was discussing *Slavery and Public History: The tough stuff of American memory*, edited by James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

Imaobong Umoren



Toward an Intellectual History of Black Women – a volume of essays edited by a group of eminent scholars all working in the fields of African American, Caribbean and African history and literature – is one of the first pieces of scholarship to put the political and social thought of black women at the centre. While intellectual history on both sides of the Atlantic remains predominantly white and male, this study positions black women as making important contributions.

Chapters in the volume range from the early modern era to contemporary times, and encompass an international focus on women of African descent on the continent and in the diaspora. The collection deepened my knowledge of writers, activists, poets and academics such as Merze Tate, Phillis Wheatley, Frances E.W. Harper, Marie Vieux, Ann Petry, June Jordan, Alice Walker, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Florynce Kennedy, to name a few.

It also inspired me to consider the networks that many of these women were a part of which drove their intellectual development. My BARSEA project has examined how women’s networks contributed to attempts to cultivate gender equality from the 19th century to the present. A graduate and early career workshop was held in May 2016, and was followed by a two-day international conference in September which brought together researchers and students from the UK, US, Mauritius, India, the Philippines, Finland, Germany, and Poland. Women’s networks – both formal and informal – have played an important role

in forging intellectual thought and activism. Exploring the expansiveness and limitations of women’s networks and networking helps researchers understand their complexity and enduring relevance.

Dr Imaobong Umoren of the University of Oxford was discussing *Toward an Intellectual History of Black Women*, edited by Mia E. Bay, Farah J. Griffin, Martha S. Jones, and Barbara D. Savage (University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

Julie Norman



Though not a traditional academic book, *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates has become almost required reading for scholars and students interested in American race relations. Though widely read in the United States, I was surprised by the book’s limited readership in the UK and elsewhere. Despite the US context, the book offers an intellectually nuanced approach to thinking about political struggle and social justice which has challenged my own thinking on activism in Israel-Palestine and other conflict areas where I situate my research.

In the field of peace and conflict studies, and in Israel-Palestine in particular, writings and research often focus on how to cultivate hope. From David Shulman’s *Dark Hope: Working for Peace in Israel and Palestine* (2007), to Richard Falk’s *Palestine: The Legitimacy of Hope* (2014), the ‘politics of hope’ (Sacks 2000) is increasingly part of peace and conflict discourse.

In *Between the World and Me* however, Coates challenges the ‘comforting narrative’ of hope, but he does so without resorting to cynicism. He states: ‘This is not despair. These are the preferences of the universe itself:

verbs over nouns, actions over states, struggle over hope’. This quote in particular stood out to me because, in the conflict areas I research, there is often a lack of hope, but there is still struggle, perseverance, and resilience. Indeed, there is often an assumption that resilience reflects the maintenance of hope, even in the worst of circumstances.

But Coates has challenged me to rethink that notion; perhaps resilience is not based on hope, but rather on choosing to act and struggle even despite the lack of hope.

This idea crystallised for me at my BARSEA-supported event, which brought together youth leaders engaged in cross-community work in Israel-Palestine with others doing similar work in Northern Ireland, along with early-career researchers interested in community-based research. At one point in the conversation, a participant asked the youth leaders how they maintain hope. Sofie, a young Palestinian woman, responded: ‘If I’m honest, I don’t have hope. I try to

Perhaps resilience is based on choosing to act despite the lack of hope.

hope, but it isn't real, it's just something I make up to tell myself. But I still choose to be an activist and I do what I can, even if I don't feel hope.'

As a researcher who has written widely on non-violent movements in the Middle East in particular, I always assumed that hope was almost an essential ingredient for activism. But after the BARSEA event and reading *Between the World and Me*, I've been challenged to re-evaluate how hope functions in political struggle and activism. I still acknowledge the value and, at times, the necessity of hope, but I also recognise that for some, the absence of hope is not necessarily despair, but rather a rejection of complacency and a commitment to action. Dr Julie M. Norman of Queen's University Belfast was discussing *Between the World and Me*, by Ta-Nehisi Coates (Spiegel & Grau, 2015).

Mark Doidge



The heart-rending photos of Alan Kurdi's limp, lifeless body on the Greek shoreline in September 2015 demonstrated the conflict within the 'refugee crisis'. Symbolically, he died at the border between Europe and the rest of the world. Furthermore, on the one hand, these children and adults were human beings who stirred visceral emotions of humanity and suffering. On the other, some sections of society, politicians and the media have seen them as human detritus, and seek to keep them at the margins of (European) society. Zygmunt Bauman has highlighted this response when he suggested that refugees are seen as 'human refuse'.

In *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government*, the anthropologist Michel Agier takes the reader into the marginal world of 'undesirables'. Through extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Africa, alongside humanitarian work with Médecins Sans Frontières, he showcases the work of humanitarian organisations and aid workers and how they have become the de facto state for those without a nation state and whom other nation states refuse to assist.

Agier beautifully demonstrates the relationship between 'the humanitarian world (the hand that cares) and the police and military ordering (the hand that strikes) on the part of the world as a whole'. Agier argues that humanitarian responses are increasingly about management and policing. Even the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which was set up for the protection of refugees in 1951, has shifted from this primary role to one of controlling them for nation states who provide their funding.

This book directly links to my BARSEA-funded project entitled 'Refugees Welcome: Football Fans and Diversity in European Football'. For many, football is a peripheral policy activity. Yet across Europe, fans have established teams, raised money and actively promoted the inclusion of refugees in European society.

The BARSEA project brings together these groups with policy-makers to move both football and refugees away from the borders.

Dr Mark Doidge of the University of Brighton was discussing *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government*, by Michel Agier (English language edition: Polity Press, 2011).

Yseult Marique



Repeated demonstrations demanding a referendum on independence in Catalonia, the Leave side winning the Brexit referendum, the mounting calls for further referenda on EU membership in Italy, France, the Netherlands, Denmark or even Germany ... all these intensifying challenges convey how European citizens long to be more closely involved in transforming radically the living together in Europe. The shaping of such a European project is core to *Questioning Sovereignty*, a book where in 1999 Neil MacCormick set out an intellectual framework for the place of Scotland within the United Kingdom and Europe.

Beyond suggesting a political structure, a 'European Commonwealth', fostering purposes (peace, security and economic well-being) shared by European peoples, MacCormick also explored the respective roles of markets and civil society in contributing to individual freedom and the collective good. He emphasised subsidiarity and pluralism as necessary ingredients to make this a democratic endeavour. Then freedom – freedom from undue state intervention and as the capacity for self-fulfilment within the social groups citizens belong to – would be able to flourish for both individual and collective benefits.

The turbulent times that currently shatter Europe require academics to engage with civil society, legal practitioners and policy-makers to find ways to nurture diversity, pluralism and opportunities for individual self-fulfilment and to contribute to a European Commonwealth. Comparative public law in particular is a discipline that can provide stimulating exchanges, and bring to a wider audience much needed insights into foreign identities, historical choices and political cultures. Thanks to a BARSEA grant, the project 'Comparative Public Law and European Legal Identity – Opportunities and Challenges' (run by the University of Essex School of Law) is extremely pleased to seek inspiration in Neil MacCormick's framework and hopes to contribute in a little way to the ongoing discussions on the future relationships between the United Kingdom and Europe. ■

Dr Yseult Marique of the University of Essex was discussing *Questioning Sovereignty: Law, State, and Nation in the European Commonwealth*, by Neil MacCormick (Oxford University Press, 1999). Neil MacCormick (1941–2009) was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1986.