

Laura Watts, Dr

Speculative futures written from empirical evidence

Award-Winning Author | Consultant | Keynote and Public Speaker
Associate Professor | Senior Lecturer at University of Edinburgh

An 'Ethnographer of Futures' who has developed unique creative methods to collaborate with tech industry. Explores what they imagine for the future, and how they might make it otherwise. Over 25 years experience making futures with tech, from telecoms to energy sectors. Leading innovative writer integrating qualitative research with speculative fiction.

Selected Achievements

Popular science book 'Energy at the End of the World: An Orkney Islands Saga' (MIT Press 2019) **awarded Rachel Carson Prize 2021, Shortlisted for the Saltire Research Book of the Year, Longlisted for the Highland Book Prize.** Reviewed in Nature, Forbes, ACM Interactions. Coverage in The Guardian, World Economic Forum. Instagram promotion by Leonardo DiCaprio reached 1.3 million viewers.

Mozilla Research Award 2018 for 'Orkney Cloud' collaborative project to explore community energy-data futures. Project Director. Results and sci-fi story published as novel sci-art magazine shared with senior management.

Winner of International Cultural Innovation Prize 2017 as part of Reconstrained Design Group (with James Auger, Industrial Designer) for community-built energy storage device made from scrap parts. Award and Exhibition at CCCB contemporary art gallery, Barcelona.

Principle and Co Investigator awarded funding for multiple international social science research projects. **Total awarded over €2 million.**

Role-playing workshop on Heritage Futures for UNESCO International Council on Monuments and Sites conceived and delivered successfully to over thirty members and associates.

Speculative Futures writing workshop for researchers delivered across ten international universities, from Uppsala University, Sweden, to Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Germany. Still in demand.

Energy Walk / Energi Vandring sci-art sound installation in the landscape of Danish Wave Energy Centre, Hanstholm. Creative Director and Writer. Delivered as part of Alien Energy research project at IT University of Copenhagen. Now owned and managed by Green Team Thy tourism.

Experience

Senior Lecturer / Associate Professor in Energy & Society
School of Geosciences, University of Edinburgh

Course Manager of Master programme, Director of fieldtrip to Orkney Living Lab, PhD Examiner, Student Tutor, Research project director, Board member of Energy@Edinburgh interdisciplinary university initiative.
June 2018–present

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Skills

Interdisciplinary scholar with degrees in Physics with Computer Science and Social Studies of Science. Can speak across technology and anthropology.

A futurist inside industry, and a researcher outside industry. Can translate between academic ideas and business needs.

Experienced director of research projects, managing and mentoring staff. Can take interdisciplinary projects through from conception to completion.

Creator of innovative qualitative methods, informed by decades of academic research, able to generate ideas and prototype methods fast.

Education director, teacher, workshop leader, qualified lecturer, able to construct novel programmes of learning at any level from bachelor to professional.

Experienced public and keynote speaker, comfortable holding large audience attention through storytelling. Media trained. Experienced in radio and television.

Consultant Strategist

Energy data governance strategy for flexible energy system 'ReFLEX' proposed and implemented. Island Living Lab proposals developed. 2019-present

Author, Writer & Poet

Published 5 sci-art books and fanzines, 8 poems, graphic novel, 2 sci-fi short stories, 7 essays, over 20 peer-reviewed articles and chapters, edited volume, formerly represented by Susan Mears Literary Agency. 1999-present

Associate Professor***Technologies in Practice, IT University of Copenhagen***

Co-Director of Energy Futures Research Cluster, Chair of the Library Committee, Elected Faculty Representative on Academic Council, PhD Examiner, Masters & Bachelor Course Manager. Teaching Mentor. 2012-2018

Assistant Professor***Technologies in Practice, IT University of Copenhagen***

2010-2012

Senior Research Associate***Centre for Science Studies, Department of Sociology, Lancaster University***

Lead Researcher responsible for project collaboration and ethnography. 2008-2009

Research Associate***Centre for Transport and Society, University of the West of England***

Lead Researcher responsible for policy, industry, and public engagement. 2006-2007

Consultant Futurist

Clients and collaborators include Hewlett Packard, IBM Labs, Intel Labs, WH Smiths, Telcordia, Royal College of Art, Barclays Bank, Professional Public Speaker represented by the London Speaker Bureau. 1999-2004

Business Strategist***Wireless Networks Division, Nortel Networks***

1998-1999

User Interface Designer***Corporate Design Group, Nortel Networks***

1995-1998

Education**PhD Sociology**

Centre for Science Studies, Department of Sociology, Lancaster University
Thesis on the futures and landscapes of the mobile telecoms industry
2007

BSc Physics with Computer Science

Department of Physics, University of Southampton UK
1995

Selected Recognition

Invited presentation to European Commission JRC Workshop on Energy Sustainability in the Transition to Renewables.

Invited Keynote to Vattenfall AB Annual Strategy meeting, Stockholm.

Guest appearance at Edinburgh International Book Festival in New York Times Debate on Climate Solutions.

Advice given to UK Government Westminster POST Note on marine energy strategy.

Scottish Government invited speaker to Arctic Day workshop on Climate Change, with over 100 members of public and industry attending.

Invited Jury Member for Land-Art Generator Initiative LAGI international art-architecture competition for renewable energy, Santa Monica.

World's first poetry book on marine energy 'Ebban an Flowan' edited and published with artist, Alec Finlay. Book launched to over 80 members of public and industry.

United States Patent for Mobile Communications Device, submitted by Nortel Networks, Patent No. 408,400.