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# Future Fest: A New Vision Of Interdisciplinary AI And Blockchain That Uses Collective Intelligence



**Western Bonime** Contributor ⓘ

Style & Design



Geoff Mulgan, CEO of Nesta Speaking At Future Fest in London BETH CROCKATT

If you have been feeling that the future doesn't belong to you, then take heart and check out [Nesta.org.uk](https://www.nesta.org.uk). The National Endowment for Science, Technology and Art (Nesta) is a UK organization that works with 40 countries around the world to develop better methods of research, innovation and strategic planning for everything from government to health, business and the arts. This years 4<sup>th</sup>

annual Future Fest featured luminary speakers like singer and musician Imogen Heap, performance artist and DJ Akala, media theorist and author Douglas Rushkoff and even the First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon who spoke and then toured the various innovation booths. All of the artists, designers, authors and speakers was carefully curated by telepresence visionary [Ghislaine Boddington](#) and writer, musician, consultant and activist Pat Kane.



First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon at Future Fest 2018, London BETH CROCKATT

“We started the Future Fest conference in 2013 in response to the fiscal crisis and as a way to help people envision and build the future they want rather than running away from the future apocalypse they fear,” says Geoff who is also the author of [Big Mind, How Collective Intelligence Can Change Our World](#). “In order to create a positive future using collective intelligence, we need to understand what it is that is happening when thought happens at scale in crowds. In order to create viable technology, we need to recreate situations that utilize the three kinds of intelligence happening all the time in the human brain. The first kind of intelligence is data analysis, memory and prediction. The second combines multiple kinds of intelligence from empathy, observation, intuition and strategy to create new thought patterns and that’s where humans really excel. Take helping people in poverty for example. That’s not a premise AI could come up with yet on its own. Then there’s the third kind where we evaluate the basis for how we think and develop wisdom and judgement. At the moment, we see a lot of money being invested in analysis and prediction, a little in creativity, and almost none in the development of positive and effective thinking patterns. It’s why we’ve consistently seen extremely smart companies do extremely dumb things.”

Future Fest is just one of the over 200 events Nesta produces each year. Their projects range from consulting for cities at the state and local level, to creative crowd projects and investment in start-ups. In each instance, they work to help organizations implement solid strategic plans with comprehensive testing methods that utilize a wide breadth of specialties to build those strategies. “Governments have given up on 20-30 year plans,” Geoff says. “We have developed unit methods that allow governments to solve problems and operate in more entrepreneurial ways which allows them to adapt much more quickly to changes, using many of the same methods that businesses use, informed by the people they serve.”





SuperGuesturs Project in Manchester by Ling Tan LING TAN

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Ling Tan, one of the engineers selected to present at Future Fest, is a perfect example of this type of thinking. Her recent [SuperGuestures](#) project uses intuitive AI on jackets that tracked young people's responses to their environment while touring around Manchester. Through arm and hand gestures, they expressed their perspectives on smart city visions of the future and the impact it would have on everyone's lives. The project culminated in a large-scale outdoor multimedia performance through which people expressed their relationship to the city and their visions for the future with body gestures performed using wearable technology. The data was simultaneously relayed back. In this way, city planners get on the ground, real time feedback they can then incorporate into planning. The implications of this kind of technology, the ways it uses collective intelligence and performance in an inclusive way to solve future challenges and its potential for positive impact is nearly limitless. Imagine whole cities being able to participate in decisions with real time feedback and everyone participating at once on a blockchain. Geoff touches on this when he speaks in the Envision Tent, "We're already seeing this in Taiwan with vTaiwan. Instead of making decisions arbitrarily, ministers come together to discuss what the issues are, then everyday

people can give input via the website, then all aspects of the proposed ideas are discussed from the best ways to implement to what steps would be best and then finally a vote is called.”



Ghislaine Boddington at Future Fest 2018, London BETH CROCKATT

“Companies and governments can’t keep bringing people in once plans are in place, by then it’s too late.” Ghislaine Boddington believes fully that body intelligence is a key part of making collective intelligence work and she’s spent the past 30 years proving it. Beautiful, elegant, funny and dynamic, Ghislaine speaks 70+ times a year around the world including Tedx and serves as a frequent advisor for universities, organizations, major tech companies and start-ups. While everyone was marveling that we could land on the moon, Ghislaine was marveling that we could speak to someone ON the moon. Thus began her interest in Telepresence. A performance artist she has explored the possibilities of virtual enhancement of our senses and ways to bring together body data like touch, movement, gesture, emotion and empathy through convergences of robotics, wearables, telepresence, hepatic and virtual reality since the mid-nineties. Through these projects, she has created moving and transformational links between thousands of people across the world. “ The idea of incorporating the

body with technology isn't as new as people think," she says, "take Rebecca Allen."

**Rebecca Allen**, also a speaker at Future Fest, shares her Catherine Wheel, an animation piece she created in 1982, that paired AI with dancer's movements. A quick visit to her website and you'll see that she's been at the forefront consistently for the past 3 decades. Her Myophone project in 2003 explored the idea of body intelligence using an arm sensor that answered calls based on a person's muscle movements. Like many of her projects, it was influential in the development of other technologies by major companies such as Google.



MiRo the biomimetic robot by Cyberselves Roadshow, Sheffield Robotics, part of the the Bio-Body-Tech installation which was curated by body>data>space for FutureFest WESTERN BONIME

The festival is a mix of great exhibits, opportunities to face-time with many authors and an incredible line-up of amazing speakers. The talks are divided into four key categories: envision, debate, explore and perform with the speakers in each exploring the main topic according to their expertise. "Show me your last



five bank transactions,” says the dealer. It’s the **Black Box Bellagio** by artist Roos Groothuizen, an installation where the only currency is your privacy, and players are forced by the spin of a wheel to give up information, sometimes about their most personal and private aspects of their lives. Judging by the woman’s recoil, the exhibit has achieved its goal of bringing the importance of putting greater value on the information we share with the world every day. Downstairs a giant sculptural installation with glass bottles showcases the fact that people with disabilities live 20 years less in poorer areas as opposed to wealthier ones. In the Garden, one’s feet crunch on a gravel path where a few feeble plants struggle to survive, choked by debris, a path that leads to hope as one transitions gradually into a lush, verdant garden. Packets of future seeds are handed out as you leave.





The Reader by Stanza, Future Fest 2018, London WESTERN BONIME

During Imogen Heaps speaker session, she demonstrates her [Mi.mu](#) gloves with a live performance and at once we are transported beyond music. She sings and with a tap of fingers records her voice to later bring it back in as background

vocals with a sweep of the arm. With two arm gestures, we hear drums. The effect is a great example of technology working effortlessly with the human body in instinctive ways. Imogen's [Myella Creative Passport](#) is a digital container for verified profile information, ID's, acknowledgements, works, business partners and payment for each music maker which aims to develop a universally accessible music platform that will serve a multitude of objectives. It will give users a more pleasurable experience with access to information about all aspects of the recording and all the people who worked behind the scenes. People will be able to access parts of the music to mix, great news for DJ's and ideally, it will enable musicians to reap financial rewards of their work quickly and easily. At first the music industry was skeptical, but after touring and sharing the project and after 100,000 artists joined in less than a year, the industry is starting to be more open.



The Black Box Bellagio by artist Roos Groothuizen Future Fest 2018 London WESTERN BONIME

Gloves and blockchain are not the only projects Imogen is working on. She's also collaborating on VR and curious, I give it a try. The headphones are heavy and awkward but the space I've entered is not. All at once I'm standing in the woods

looking at the stars as the haunting strands of Imogen Heap's voice stream down, around and through me. It reminds me of those moments in time with friends when the night and the music all came together to transport us to what I imagine to be the true meaning of spirit or the ecstasy of the saints. All at once I can see limitless possibilities for technology to help us feel more, not less. The possibility of connecting to our better selves that have created such beauty in art, architecture, and dance so often drowned out by ignorance that leads to violence.

I'd come for a tech conference and instead found a passionate gathering of visionary voices for a future not dominated by AI but where powerful collaboration between human beings and AI create a new form of true democracy. A future where it's possible we might feel even more connected, not less. Here at Future Fest and Nesta and for all these visionaries, the coin isn't faceless company profit, but human potential and a deep desire to answer the question "can we bring the past and the future together? Can we cherish and utilize our humanness in the future technological age rather than be replaced by it? "Evolution is a team sport. Think of evolution as a verb," urges Douglas Rushkoff of Team Human. "For a long time we've been seeing human beings as the problem that technology has to solve, but I say humans are the answer."

If you've felt that you're being forced to join a future that wants to abandon all that you cherish and hold dear about being human, or you're an artist who feels unsure how to bring the world of tech and craft together or a job seeker worried about being replaced by AI, or looking around it seems like history is repeating itself and that those who own the latest technology are the "haves" while everyone else is the "have nots," take heart and add your intelligence to the collective.



**Western Bonime** Contributor

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Western Bonime writes stories about companies in tech, fashion and sustainability that are designing products that positively impact our future. She breaks tech down in ways that make this world accessible to everyone. She is also a design instructor and program developer a... **Read More**

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