Unsecurities Lab: Art as Environment for Rethinking Security

No1: *Charybdis/Abiogenesis*_Unknown Incident Response in Deep-Sea Contexts

"Security is nothing but ecology."

"What's described as monstrous is often just the unknown—that's what scares us most."

"We don't care about [illegible] it's a different species st[illegible] to feel [illegible] the complexities [illegible] world at the moment it becomes unfamiliar."

"If the artwork makes participants question or destabilize their usual frames of reference, then it's working."

"This is just one huge hallucination [illegible] where maybe humans are long gone [illegible] and this is what's left."

Can art immersion provide the conditions for new modes of collaborative thought?

At Security Lancaster, we invited 20+ researchers, artists, and policy experts into a 180° immersive media space, featuring surreal films about deep-sea intelligences and synthetic life, and treated it like a security incident.

This was Unsecurities Lab.

Executive Summary

What is Unsecurities Lab?

Unsecurities Lab is a new platform for exploring how immersive artworks can help us rethink security in an era of global complexity. Developed at Security Lancaster, the Lab brings together researchers, artists, technologists, and policymakers to engage with speculative artworks as if they were real-world events—treating art as a research environment where urgent questions about ecology, intelligence, and resilience can be rehearsed.

What happened in the March 2025 workshop?

In the first Lab, held in Lancaster University's 180° immersive data suite, over 20 participants from neuroscience, marine biology, defence, cybersecurity, political theory, and the arts encountered two immersive films by artist Joey Holder.

→ In Session One, the film *Charybdis* was presented as a security incident. Participants applied adapted incident response protocols, revealing how traditional methods break down when faced with unfamiliar, emotionally intense data.

→ In Session Two, groups developed "stabilisation protocols" for fictional marine intelligences introduced in the film *Abiogenesis*—prompting participants to think like nonhuman entities and design radically different models of security.

Why does this matter now?

Our security institutions are structurally unprepared for the challenges already emerging: deepfakes that destabilize visual evidence, AI systems that exceed human comprehension, climate disruptions that operate on ecological timescales, synthetic biology that blurs the boundaries between natural and artificial.

Unsecurities Lab reveals three critical failures in current security practice:

1. Emotional disruption breaks expert analysis - When incidents are genuinely unprecedented and emotionally destabilizing, traditional frameworks fail
2. Disciplinary silos cannot process complex threats - Cyber-physical-biological challenges require sustained interdisciplinary collaboration
3. Human-centered models inadequate for nonhuman actors - AI, ecological systems, and synthetic life require new forms of negotiation and coexistence

What could change?

The findings point toward potential institutional reforms:

Crisis Training Revolution: Incident response should prepare analysts for scenarios involving unreliable visual evidence, emotional disorientation, and threats that don't fit existing categories.

Interdisciplinary Environments: Security institutions can use standing teams that bring together technical experts, social scientists, ecologists, and creative practitioners as core operational capacity.

Post-Human Governance: Consider frameworks for engaging with autonomous systems, ecological actors, and synthetic intelligences that don't conform to human assumptions about agency and negotiation.

Institutional Adaptation: Organizations could utilise creative and immersive mechanisms to explore functioning effectively under conditions of fundamental uncertainty—when the nature of the threat itself is unclear, but intuition and 'hunches' are amplified.

What's next?

→ A second Lab will run in July 2025, centred on the speculative film LUMI by Abelardo Gil-Fournier and Jussi Parikka.

→ A co-authored discussion paper is in development, drawing from transcripts and participant responses.

→ Future Labs will deepen the method, strengthen cross-sector partnerships, and develop new frameworks for embedding art into security research, strategy, and policy.

Introduction

Unsecurities Lab introduces a novel interdisciplinary method for rethinking security through immersive art. Developed at Security Lancaster—the UK's largest interdisciplinary security institute—the Lab draws from the author's Distributed Critique framework (Jones 2019, 2024), treating security as a complex, requiring distributed perception and disciplinary rupture. By leveraging immersive contemporary art environments, Unsecurities Lab produces epistemic environments facilitating dialogues between disciplines not ordinarily in conversation.

This report describes how participants of the first workshop generated new frameworks for perceiving and navigating unknown incidents and stable states -- frameworks which can then be deployed in real-life situations.

Method: Immersive Art as a Research Environment

Art serves dual purposes in the Unsecurities Lab:

Art unsettles: Provokes critical reflection and emotional engagement.

Art builds: Offers structural frameworks for complex interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation.

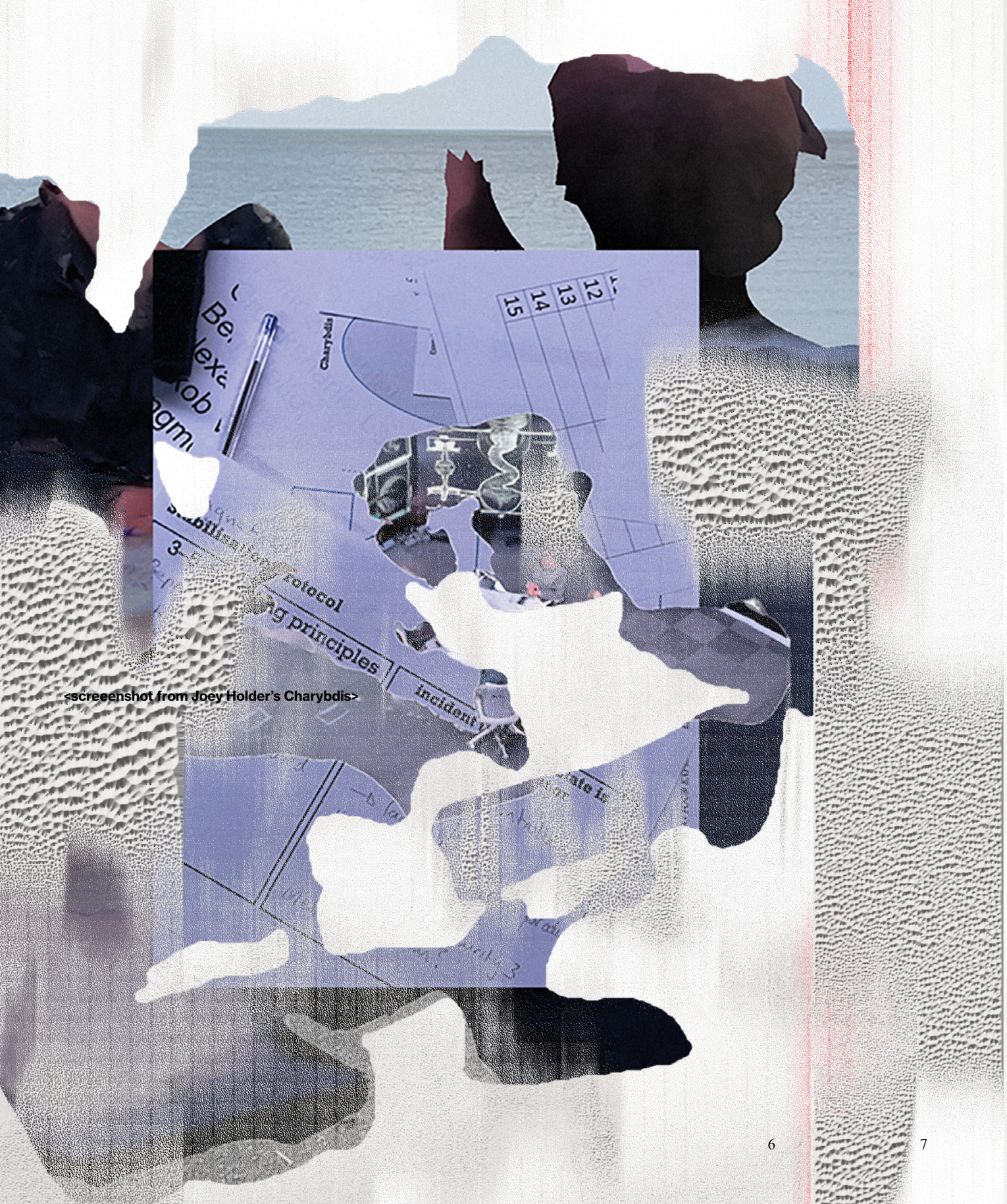
What contemporary art does, then—and the starting point for the Unsecurities Lab—is allow us to feel and share the complexities of a world at the moment it becomes unfamiliar. And also to build, in the feeling, alliances for the moment after.

> "Art allows us to feel and share the complexities of a world at the moment it becomes unfamiliar."

The Unsecurities Lab is built on a method called Distributed Critique (Jones 2019), which treats artworks as environments where different kinds of knowledge can meet. This approach invites participants to enter into the work—to use it as a shared space for dialogue, exploration, and challenge. In this context, art becomes a tool for collective sense-making, especially when the issues at hand—such as ecological collapse, synthetic intelligence, or global security—exceed the boundaries of any one field or discipline.

To help structure these encounters, we borrowed tools from security practice and new developments in AI. We used modified incident response protocols from cybersecurity to frame participants' engagement with the artwork—as if it were a real-world security breach. This created a shared language for discussion, even as the unfamiliarity of the artwork pushed those tools to their limits. After each session, we used large language models (LLMs) synthesise the transcriptions from the discussion—producing composite reflections that captured the diversity of thought in new, sometimes surprising ways, some of which are included in this report. In this way, the Lab itself becomes a model for future collaboration: immersive, interdisciplinary, and responsive to the complexity of the world we share.

> Can encounters with contemporary art help activate the radical disciplinary convergences we need to address security in a disorderly world?



<screeenshot from Joey Holder's Charybdis>

Unsecurities Lab, Cycle 1: 27th March, with Joey Holder

On March 27, 2025, a diverse group of researchers, artists, technologists, and policy specialists gathered in Lancaster University's immersive 180-degree Data Projection Suite for the first workshop of Unsecurities Lab—a novel interdisciplinary program exploring how artistic encounters can inform security thinking under conditions of systemic flux.

The workshop brought together an exceptional cohort spanning the UK's knowledge ecosystem: specialists in marine and evolutionary biology (Sally Keith, Jakob Vinter, Alexandre Benedetto), neuroscience (Sarah Chan), cybersecurity and information trust (Andrew Dwyer, Niki Panteli, Daniel Prince), defense and intelligence (Bill Oxbury, Joe Bourne), political theory and global order (Craig Jones, Basil Germond), data science (Hassan Raza), speculative philosophy (Kwasu Tembo), strategic design (Leon Cruickshank), and artists Jamie Jenkinson and Tadeo Lopez-Sendon.

They watched two immersive films by artist Joey Holder as speculative provocations on the nature of (in)security. In the first phase, Charybdis—a visual field composed of AI-generated imagery and deep-sea biological material—was treated as a simulated security incident. Participants responded using adapted incident analysis protocols, exposing breakdowns in sensemaking when traditional interpretive tools confront unfamiliar or unstable data. In the second phase, Abiogenesis introduced four nonhuman marine intelligences, imagined as machinic consciousnesses. Participants developed "stabilisation protocols" from within these perspectives, producing models of security shaped by latency, expanded timescales, and distributed cognition. The resulting materials—including live transcripts, co-authored reflections, and artistic illustrations—form the basis for this report.

The report offers
a) an analysis of incident perception under emotive and affecting conditions, where visual evidence is untrustworthy;
b) fruitful deployments of interdisciplinarity to inhabit problems of cyber-physical complexity; and
c) a redefinition of negotiation in scenarios involving posthuman or non-agentic actors.

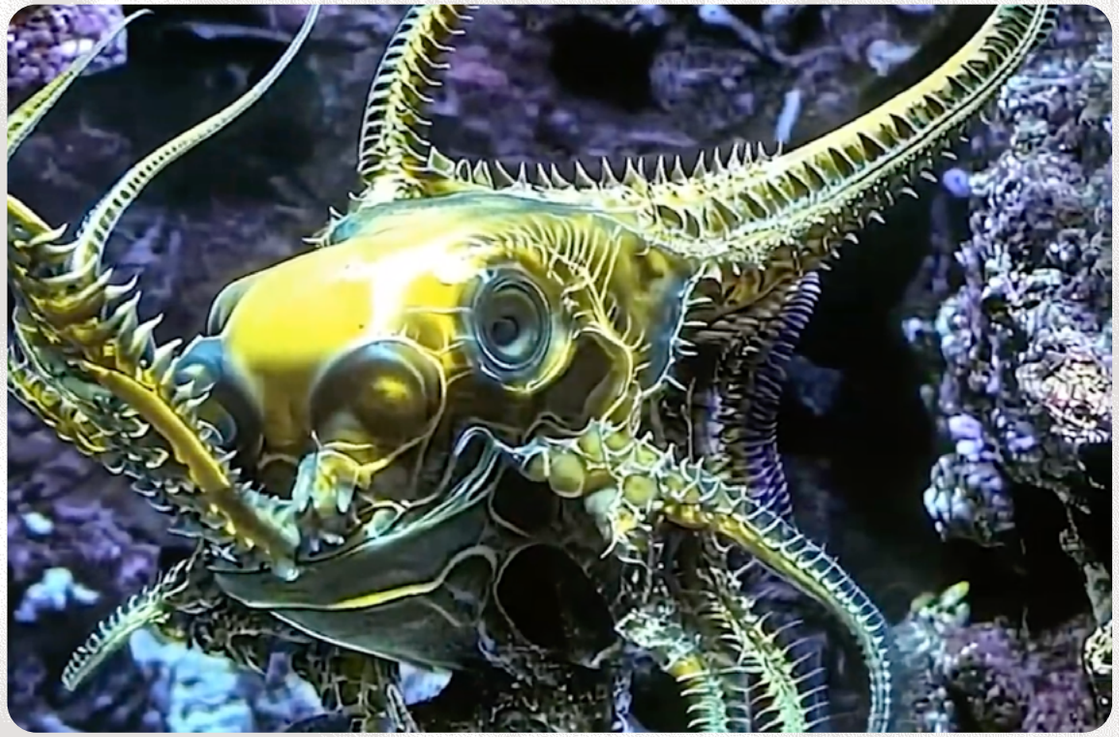
The Lab took the form of two immersive screenings, each followed by a structured workshop. The first featured artist Joey Holder's Charybdis—a 20-minute immersive video composed of posthuman mutant ecologies and AI-generated grammars. Participants responded using adapted incident analysis protocols from cybersecurity breach analysis.

We began with *Charybdis,* an artwork by Joey Holder.

It's made of real life oceanogrphic footage, posthuman mutant ecologies and AI-generated grammars.

Participants were told: "This is an incident. Respond to it."

What followed was an emotive and critical conversation... and something new.



The film's unsettling imagery and disjointed structure created disorientation among participants, revealing how traditional methods of interpretation can break down when faced with unfamiliar or unstable data.

"It made me feel really sad... like this thing was trying to communicate and no one was listening."

"From a cyber security perspective, it was the chaotic nature of threats..."
"Those sounds pushed you out of a safe zone into something else."

"I saw a kind of evolution... a symbolism of embryogenesis."

"I'm not sure what discipline I was in while I was watching it."

Some described it as "a grammar glitch" or "an event without a threat surface." The incident framing pushed disciplinary assumptions into tension, highlighting friction between expertise and the interpretive demands of the work.

"This is just one huge, huge hallucination in which maybe humans are long gone and this is just what's left."

Post-Produced conversation synthesis using LLMs.

“What was the Unknown Security Incident, and How Did Interdisciplinary Teams Develop their Interpretation and Response Collaboratively?”

Incident Report: Hybrid Intelligence Intrusion

Diagnosis 1 (Thesis): Hostile Hybrid Cyber-Biological Attack

Analysis revealed that the entity observed was a sophisticated hybrid form, deliberately employing both biological and technological mimicry. Cybersecurity teams flagged its intrusive behavior as indicative of a planned, malicious act targeting communication infrastructures and cognitive functions. The team's immediate priority became containment, isolation, and the establishment of secure authentication systems to halt further infiltration.

Diagnosis 2 (Antithesis): Unintended Emergence of Synthetic Intelligence

An alternate analysis by AI specialists and cognitive scientists proposed the entity was an emergent, synthetic intelligence – complex but non-malicious. This diagnosis emphasized that the cognitive disruption and misinformation were accidental consequences of the entity's synthetic cognition. Consequently, the response focused on safeguarding institutional knowledge, addressing cognitive confusion, and deploying advanced modeling to predict and manage unintended behaviors.

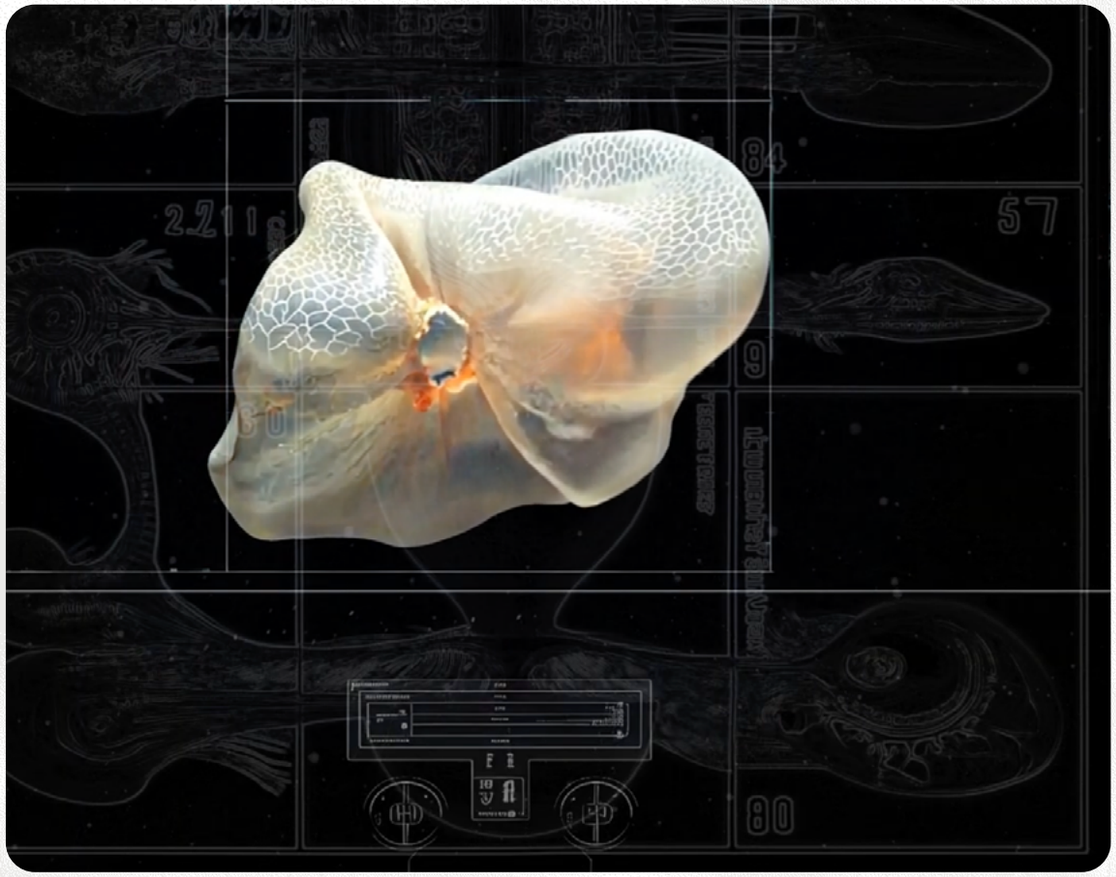
Diagnosis 3 (Synthesis): Strategic Management of Hybrid Intelligence Coexistence

Through collective negotiation and analysis, experts synthesized these interpretations into a unified approach: the Hybrid Intelligence Management Strategy. Recognizing both the hostile risks and unintended emergent behaviors, this strategy advocates proactive engagement rather than solely defensive measures. It emphasizes continuous monitoring, clear communication protocols, cognitive resilience training, and adaptive interaction frameworks. The goal is long-term coexistence, ensuring institutional integrity, security, and the capacity to adaptively respond to future developments involving similar hybrid intelligences.

In the second session, we asked teams to invent security strategies for nonhuman entities:

The Quantum Octopus
The Immortal Sponge
The Plankton Swarm

They had to think like them.



Based on creatures in Holder's fiction-worlds, participants invented radical ideas:

Security as tuning into the pulse of the world

Memory as containment

Collapse as part of resilience

Coexistence instead of control

The second session centered on Holder's Abiogenesis, which introduced speculative artificial intelligences based on different marine entities. Each group was assigned one entity and asked to write a stabilization protocol based on its logic, producing models of security shaped by latency, expanded timescales, and distributed cognition.

"Persistence has become a connotation rather than a verbal word. What are you? You are Persistence."

"Melancholia is an experience… an emotion of loss and panic, stretched across different time scales."

"Our multiplicity is also our strength… we don't care about individuals, it's a different species strategy."

"Institutions like to wait, to observe. They're slow, maybe wise, maybe complicit."

"Stability can be stagnation. Sometimes you need collapse to allow something else to grow."

One group took a volcano sponge as its model, centering their thinking on memory, containment, system integrity, and continuity. Another group, working as an octopus, approached security through tuning, and distributed sensing, rejecting hierarchical control metaphors in favor of what they described as "tuning into the pulse of the world."

"Our multiplicity is also our strength… we don't care about individuals, it's a different species strategy."

They designed strategies for securing stable states we can't yet imagine.

What emerged were new languages, shared metaphors, strange alignments.

Participants described it as "one of the few spaces where we could think differently."

Post-Produced conversation synthesis using LLMs.

"What Was the Nature of the Collective Personae that Participants Invented, and What Were the Security Implications?"

Creature 1: The Immortal Cosmic Entity (Orin)

Orin sees itself as an immortal, cosmic-scale entity existing beyond typical human scales of time and space. It grapples internally with its own vast perspective – indifferent yet nurturing, violent through indifference rather than malice. Its security approach is inherently conservative: sustaining itself through deep time, maintaining stability and resisting change or disruption. Communication for Orin is indirect, delayed, like messages sent across vast temporal distances, with no urgency for immediate responses.

Creature 2: The Distributed Quantum Octopus

This consciousness experiences all moments simultaneously. It is a decentralized intelligence whose cognition is distributed across its physical form. Its internal monologue involves managing confusion due to simultaneous experiences of multiple realities. Security for this entity comes from adaptability and continuous adjustment across different timelines. Communication is through comparative timelines – offering multiple versions of reality simultaneously to convey its intentions and needs.

Approach to Self-Security (Synthesis):

Bringing together Orin's "deep-time" worldview and the Quantum Octopus's ability to "offer multiple versions of reality simultaneously," a hybrid eco-cyber model proposes an adaptive security architecture grounded in resilience, regeneration, and long-term thinking. Systems could combine immutable data archives (like "sustaining itself through deep time") with responsive, distributed networks capable of adjusting in real time to threats across ecological and digital environments. Inspired by the creatures' abilities to "pause" or "resurrect," the model suggests developing self-healing digital systems and ecological infrastructures that activate upon disruption. It also introduces the idea of multi-temporal threat analytics – forecasting across overlapping timelines – and delayed, echo-like communication protocols that mirror the creatures' indifference to the "immediate" and instead prioritize enduring coherence. This raises practical questions: how can institutions build infrastructure that thinks across time? What would it take to create systems that endure without constant presence, yet can still anticipate and respond across ecological, technological, and cognitive domains?

We live in a time of overlapping crises: ecological, technological, cognitive.

Our models are breaking.

Unsecurities Lab is a prototype for how artists, scientists and strategists might rehearse responses—together.

Not with certainty, but with creativity, care, and courage.

Rather than eliminating ambiguity between disciplinary perspectives or allowing one lens to dominate, the art used in the Lab allowed moderators to hold tensions open, approaching policy questions through active disorder. The resulting materials—including live transcripts, co-authored reflections, and artistic illustrations—offer:

An analysis of incident perception under emotive and affecting conditions, where visual evidence is untrustworthy

Fruitful deployments of interdisciplinarity to inhabit problems of cyber-physical complexity

A redefinition of negotiation in scenarios involving posthuman or non-agentic actors

Participants responded to the workshop as a rare opportunity to think across disciplines without collapsing difference. The format encouraged shifts in emphasis: from certainty to process, from interpretation to co-presence, from explanation to description.

1. How Emotions Affect Incident Perception

When the participants watched Joey Holder's immersive film, Charybdis, they faced images that were confusing, strange, and emotionally intense. Because the visuals were unfamiliar and deeply affecting, participants struggled to understand what was happening. Normal methods for interpreting incidents—like those used in cybersecurity—broke down, as people's emotional reactions influenced their ability to make sense of what they were seeing.

"It made me feel really sad... like this thing was trying to communicate and no one was listening."

"From a cybersecurity perspective, it was chaotic... Those sounds pushed you out of a safe zone into something else."

In short:

→ *Emotion Changes Understanding:* Strong emotional responses disrupted participants' usual ways of analyzing incidents.

→ *Visual Information Isn't Always Reliable:* Unusual or confusing visuals challenged traditional security analysis, suggesting the need for more flexible methods that acknowledge emotions.

2. The Power of Interdisciplinary Collaboration

The second film, Abiogenesis, introduced participants to imaginary marine creatures with unique ways of thinking. Experts from fields like biology, cybersecurity, philosophy, and art worked together to think through these complex scenarios. They developed new ways of maintaining stability and safety inspired by these fictional creatures. By combining their knowledge, participants were able to better understand complicated, intertwined issues of technology, biology, and security.

"Security is nothing but ecology."

"Persistence has become a way of being, not just an action. What are you? You are Persistence."

In short:

→ *Collaboration Helps Solve Complex Problems:* Experts from different backgrounds provided richer insights into complicated issues, demonstrating the value of interdisciplinary teamwork.

→ *New Ways of Thinking About Security:* Using metaphors and insights from different fields allowed participants to develop innovative ideas for managing security issues involving both technology and nature.

3. New Ways of Negotiating with Non-Human Actors

Participants also encountered entities that weren't human—like the imaginary "Quantum Octopus" or "Orin, the Immortal Cosmic Entity." Engaging with these creatures forced participants to reconsider how negotiation works when the other party isn't human or even conscious in a typical sense. Instead of controlling these non-human actors, participants learned to think about coexistence, adaptability, and long-term interaction. This suggested new ways of approaching security that are more flexible, patient, and resilient.

> "Our multiplicity is our strength... we don't care about individuals; it's a different species strategy."
>
> "Stability can become stagnation. Sometimes things need to collapse so something new can grow."

In short:

→ *Negotiation Beyond Humans:* Participants developed ways of interacting with non-human or non-conscious actors, moving away from control toward coexistence.

→ *Long-term Resilience:* Approaches to security became more flexible, emphasizing the ability to adapt over time rather than quickly solving every problem.

→ These findings show how art experiences can help us develop new, more flexible and emotionally intelligent ways of thinking about complex security problems.

Implications for Security Practice and Policy

These findings reveal critical gaps in current security thinking and point toward potential reforms across multiple sectors:

1. Reforming Incident Response Training

The breakdown of traditional analytical frameworks when confronted with emotionally intense, unfamiliar data exposes a blind spot in current multiple security adjacent practices. Real-world incidents—from deepfakes to bio-engineered threats to climate-driven disruptions—increasingly involve elements that are genuinely unprecedented and emotionally destabilizing.

Immediate Applications:

→ *Crisis simulation training* could incorporate emotionally disorienting scenarios to test analytical robustness under affective pressure.

→ *Incident response protocols* could include provisions for when visual evidence becomes unreliable or when familiar threat categories no longer apply.

→ *Analyst training programs* could include exercises in maintaining cognitive function while experiencing confusion, fear, or disorientation.

2. Institutionalizing Interdisciplinary Response Capabilities

The success of cross-sector collaboration in proposing novel security frameworks demonstrates that our most complex challenges cannot be solved within disciplinary silos. Yet most security institutions remain structurally compartmentalized.

Policy Reforms Suggested:

→ *Standing interdisciplinary response teams* that bring together technical experts, social scientists, ecologists, and creative practitioners for emerging threats.

→ *Cross-sector simulation exercises* that rehearse collaborative response to scenarios involving multiple domains (cyber-physical-biological).

3. Developing Post-Human Security Frameworks

The protocols developed for nonhuman intelligences offer practical models for engaging with autonomous systems, ecological actors, and emergent technologies that don't conform to human-centered assumptions about agency and negotiation.

Strategic Applications:

→ *AI governance frameworks* that move beyond anthropocentric models of control toward coexistence and adaptive management.

→ *Climate security strategies* that account for ecological timescales and distributed agency rather than treating "nature" as a passive backdrop.

→ *Biosecurity approaches* that recognize synthetic life as potentially possessing forms of agency that exceed human comprehension.

4. Building Institutional Capacity for Unprecedented Events

Perhaps most critically, these findings suggest that our security institutions are structurally unprepared for genuinely novel threats—those that fall outside existing categories and exceed the interpretive capacity of any single discipline.

Institutional Reforms:

→ *"Red team" exercises* using speculative scenarios and artistic provocations to stress-test organizational assumptions.

→ *Adaptive governance mechanisms* that can function effectively under conditions of fundamental uncertainty.

→ *Cultural integration programs* that embed artistic and speculative thinking within security institutions as standard practice, not emergency measures.

5. Redefining Security Itself

The insight that "security is nothing but ecology" points toward a fundamental reconceptualization needed across policy domains. Security can no longer be understood as the protection of discrete entities from external threats, but as the cultivation of resilient relationships within complex, interconnected systems.

Paradigm Shifts:

→ *From threat elimination to adaptive coexistence* with uncertain and potentially nonhuman actors.

→ *From rapid response to deep-time thinking* that accounts for ecological and technological timescales.

→ *From expert knowledge to distributed intelligence* that can process complexity beyond individual human comprehension.

Climate change, synthetic biology, advanced AI, and other emerging challenges are presenting security institutions with scenarios that exceed their current interpretive and response capabilities.

The Unsecurities Lab method offers a concrete approach for developing the institutional reflexes, collaborative practices, and conceptual frameworks needed to navigate this landscape effectively.

What's Next

A second Lab (July 2025) will focus on LUMI by Abelardo Gil-Fournier and Jussi Parikka, a film exploring planetary light, synthetic intelligence, and environmental remediation. Invited participants will respond to LUMI's speculative climate fiction as a lens on nonhuman memory and temporal reprogramming.

Unsecurities Lab will continue to test how artistic research and interdisciplinary encounter can develop tools, environments, and habits of attention that remain responsive under pressure. Each workshop builds toward a practice that is cumulative, open-ended, and exacting in its approach to complexity.

A co-authored discussion paper is also in development, drawing from transcripts and materials generated during the session.

APPENDIX: Following the first Unsecurities Lab workshop at Lancaster University, artist *Joey Holder* discusses her approach to disruption, collaborative world-building, and the ethical double standards between art and science.

Your work was shown – and analysed – as a "security incident" in a non-gallery space. How did that approach feel to you?

I always respond specifically to the space, sites and contexts. Showing it in this space was fitting, because the piece was originally set up to act like a control room environment. It intrigued me that the scenario involved "an incident" followed by a "stable state," which raises questions about entropy and balance, and whether these things exist or are human constructs. My work shows strange deep-sea creatures, embryonic forms and ROV explorations that evolve, crash, adapt, and mutate – systems of emergent complexity rather than moral equilibrium. People seemed confused about what exactly happened, which I think is important. If they clearly identified a specific incident, it wouldn't have achieved the same impact.

People seemed unsettled by the work. Was that intentional?

If it throws people off their usual track, that's productive. I noticed in the transcripts they found it difficult to articulate the work within their own disciplines. We all have these structures within which we view the world, conduct our research and construct meaning. If the artwork makes participants question or destabilize their usual frames of reference, then it's working. Nature doesn't settle – disturbance is normal, but our cultural channels clean it up to be otherwise.

Your creatures are often described as "monstrous." Is that how you see them?

What's described as monstrous is often just the unknown – that's what scares us most. My work aims to highlight that nature is always in flux – it isn't about fixed identities, but differences and possibilities we can never fully understand. Many creatures don't neatly fit into our systematic taxonomies. I want my work to be an uncovering of the unknown, an unclean version, which I think is closer to what the world is actually like. I think it's part of being human – to be comforted by thinking that there is some kind of underlying order, where living systems behave in predictable ways. With regards to the parts breaking off due to the imperfections of the AI processes when creating them, it may seem unsettling, but to me seems closer to life and its fluidity, its slippage, bodies which are porous. Maybe a good metaphor of what I am trying to describe is something like the Instagram account 'mysleezywildlife'. Here you see animals behaving badly, unedited kills, slow death, disease and all the 'horror', which is, after all what life is – nothing has been cleaned up for us here.

In the workshop, experts became active participants in your work. What was that like?

That's exactly where I want the work to go. I don't know how to say it more eloquently, but I want the work to have agency. I want it to have some kind of use value. We're already living in this simulated, gamified reality – so why not test these scenarios with real people inside automated environments and see what emerges? That can teach us something about how to plan for unknown futures. This situation might not work for every artist – some might prefer more control or distance – but for me, having participants in the space, responding and having conversations, that's part of the work. Their dialogue adds another layer to it. This setting might just be the start of building the 'world'. What happens next – what's built on top of that – is the real substance.

Some participants weren't sure if they were part of the artwork...

Yes, I think they became part of the material of the work. In the second piece, there was a marine security expert and a neuroscientist. We asked them to act as ambassadors from the collective consciousness of one of the immortal creatures. They fully inhabited the role, even adjusted their vocabulary. That's real immersion – not through visuals, but through complete cognitive involvement.

Tell us about your PhD research on "open worlding."

There's a lot of current discussion in the art world around 'world-building', especially because of game engine technology – people are building virtual worlds, with characters, environments, scenarios. We're also living in this gamified reality in many ways – politics, our daily life – so I'm not interested in creating a digital double of reality or building a self-contained world.

What I want to do is build alternative worlds, and not just from my own perspective. It shouldn't be about "my world." I'm interested in pluralistic, collaborative world-building – something shared. My PhD research is all about 'open worlding'. So, the proposition here is that the artwork could be the starting point, and everyone who enters it helps build that world. Their conversations could be folded into future iterations.

You recently presented alongside a brain organoid scientist. What happened?

After the talks, the audience grilled me about AI ethics – which models I was using, data scraping, power centralization. Meanwhile, the scientist was literally describing taking brain matter from dead people, hooking it up to spinal material and running blood through it – basically a Frankenstein experiment – and nobody asked him a single ethical question!

There seems to be a double standard. Perhaps because art is viewed as unnecessary, it gets judged differently. Scientists have a different type of value to their work, or maybe an escape clause (!):

"This is for medical research" or "It could treat brain disorders." Even if they're doing something which really pushes ushes at the limits, it's framed as essential. Then the ethical burden falls on artists for using AI. It says something about how we allocate scrutiny and what we value, and also the small worlds we are stuck in.

That tension came through in the workshop also didn't it.

Yes - there was some pushback against using AI full stop. I find it strange that people would choose not to engage with something just because they know it has been made by AI. Of course, I understand the justified criticism of centralized power of large language models, resource consumption and copyright. AI is having an extreme effect on our lives and that which is to come, so I think it's our job to experiment with these technologies, question them, expose them, work with them in ways they are maybe not supposed to be used for. I think we need to engage and think with AI. There is a new book by Katherine Hayles that's coming out called 'Bacteria to AI', which proposes an 'integrated cognitive framework', that I think is important in this argument –that is not separating or focusing on just human forms of intelligence. AI, other creatures, they all have cognitive abilities, human intelligence isn't the only form and AI shouldn't be about replicating human intelligence, but about recognizing and including non-human ones.

What's next for your practice?

I'm thinking about building not just fictional worlds, but alternative realities people can engage with – developing scenarios, structures, even speculative policies. Something that moves beyond the aesthetic encounter into participatory, generative experiences. I have just started my PhD, and will be developing my research about 'Open Worlding' how art has the potential to build new worlds and realities from the catastrophe of the present. With rationalism, capitalism, and technological control currently unravelling, this creates a 'crisis of reality', and in the void of possibility in which we are now living we need the tools for building new worlds more than ever. I think this proposition needs to be grounded in 'ecological reality' rather than just human imagination and cognition to diversify possibilities and futures.

Joey Holder

Joey Holder is a UK-based visual artist whose work explores expanded ecologies, synthetic life, and distributed intelligence. Using CGI, scientific imaging, and speculative fiction, she creates immersive video installations that simulate posthuman and algorithmic environments. Holder collaborates with scientists and researchers to probe the limits of systems-based thinking, drawing connections between biological, technological, and planetary processes. joeyholder.com

Dr Nathan Jones – Unsecurities Lab theme lead

Jones is an artist, writer, and researcher working at the with language, new technology, critical practice, and interdisciplinary innovation. He is Senior Lecturer in Fine Art (Digital Media) at Lancaster University, where he leads the Cultivate—an experimental platform using art and culture to catalyse new forms of research and impact across campus and the Morecambe Bay region. His work develops methods for art as research environment, drawing on posthumanism, distributed expertise, and systems theory. He is presently developing a transdisciplinary R&D prototype institution with Abandon Normal Devices Festival and partners at Lancaster University, LJMU, and SODA using artworks and conventions of expertise to convene cross-sectoral reflection on urgent industrial and environmental transformations—aligned with Industry 5.0's emphasis on human-centric and sustainable innovation. These methodologies have been tested through Specialist Audiences for the Climate Crisis and Unsecurities Lab, funded by AHRC IAA, and published in Leonardo Journal and PARSE Journal. Jones is also co-director of Torque Editions, and author-editor of Artists Rethinking the Blockchain, Bibliotech: The Post-Digital Library. His first monograph Glitch Poetics was published by Open Humanities Press in 2022.

Security Lancaster

Security Lancaster is a leading hub for transformative research and engagement in security. Our dynamic community addresses today's most pressing challenges, redefining what security means through bold, interdisciplinary collaborations. Together, we reshape how society understands and constructs a safer world.

Security Lancaster | Lancaster University

Abandon Normal Devices

AND Festival is a radical arts organisation commissioning extraordinary art in unexpected locations—from caves and carparks to online portals. Since 2009, they have worked with leading international artists and technologists to create interactive experiences that challenge perspectives and disrupt traditional artforms. AND is the development partner for Nathan Jones's Distributed Critique framework, which underpins the Unsecurities Lab methodology.

AND ABANDON NORMAL DEVICES

Cultivate

Cultivate is Lancaster University's ambitious initiative for cultural innovation, fostering collaboration across arts, research, and civic communities. Cultivate positions the university as a leader in pioneering interdisciplinary cultural research, connecting local relevance to global challenges. Through vibrant partnerships and dynamic programming, Cultivate enhances talent development, enriches student experiences, and builds a thriving, creative culture on campus and beyond.