



# CREATIVE MINDS:

## Exploring the Relationship between Theatre-Makers and Research

Wednesday 12 – Thursday 13 February 2020

Organisers:

Darren Walter, Artistic Director of Cornerstone Arts Centre  
Dr Hannah Coleman Manktelow, Theatres Project Officer at  
TORCH, University of Oxford

## **Day 1, Wednesday 12th February 2020 @ Cornerstone, Didcot:**

### **Using Research in Creative Practice**

**09.30 - 10.00 Welcome and Registration**

**10.00 - 11.00 Keynote from Professor Wes Williams** (University of Oxford)

**“Storming Utopia: A tempestuous experiment in practical utopianism”**

Wes Williams is a professor of French Literature and an award-winning playwright and director. His main research interests are in the field of Renaissance literature: the critical study of genre and of subjectivity; investigations into the politics of literature, experience, and the popular and professional cultures of the early modern period. He is a founder-member and Director of Oxford Amnesty Lectures.

Wes has co-written and directed a number of solo shows in collaboration with Emily Woof (*Sex II; Sex III; Going, going...*), Nick Whitfield (*Albert Camus, what's the score?; Roadmovie*), and Ed Gaughan (*Radioplay*). His most recent show is a double act, with Ed Gaughan and Andy Buckley, entitled *Saints and Superheroe*.

**11.00 - 11.15 Coffee Break**

**11.15 - 11.30 Single Shoe – Sharing of new work in progress**

Single Shoe Productions are an international theatre company founded by immigrants whose mission is to create theatrical experiences that challenge boundaries, explore the connections that hold us together and celebrate our common humanity, regardless of where we come from.

They are developing their newest piece *A Wall Between Us*, which looks at what we give up in order to belong to a place. To date they have collaborated with the UNESCO Chair for Refugee Integration Through Language and Arts and are interested in making connections with additional researchers as they develop the piece through 2020.

**11.30 - 12.30 Panel discussion: ‘Theatre-Making Informed by Research’ with Single Shoe and Dr Sophie Duncan** (University of Oxford)

**12.30 - 13.30 Lunch**

13.30 - 14.45 **Panel discussion: 'Using Stories to Engage with Research' with The Last Hurrah (Bath Spa University)**

14.45 - 15.00 **Coffee Break**

15.00 - 16.30 **Practical Session: Developing New Ideas**

16.30 - 17.00 **Exploring Funding Opportunities**

17.00 - 19.30 **Break and Symposium Dinner**

19.30 - 21.00 ***The Last Hurrah* show at Cornerstone** (post-show discussion to follow)

**The Last Hurrah** is a professional theatre company, a practice-based research project investigating how climate change might be communicated to move people to behavioural/political change and a vocational training project which seeks to 'bridge' undergraduate & professional experiences in creating new, socially relevant, touring theatre.

Over the last three years, students and lecturers from Bath Spa University's BA Acting, Geography & Theatre & Digital Production programmes have collaborated on researching true stories of how climate change is currently affecting specific communities around the world.

*The Last Hurrah (and The Long Haul)* is, albeit very loosely, based on the story of Kivalina in Northern Alaska.

## **Day 2, Thursday 13th February 2020 @ St Luke's Chapel, Oxford:**

### **Meaningful Evaluation and Impact**

09.30 - 10.00 **Welcome and Registration**

10.00 - 11.00 **Keynote from Dr Kirsty Sedgman** (University of Bristol)

**"You Don't Win Friends With Metrics": How Can We Evaluate the 'Value' of Art in an Anti-Expert Age?**

Kirsty Sedgman is Lecturer in Theatre at the University of Bristol. She specializes in researching theatre audiences, studying topics including behaviour, engagement, experience, fandom, cultural value, and spectator response. Her work has been published in a variety of journals and edited books, as well as two monographs: *Locating the Audience: How People Found Value in National Theatre Wales* (2016, Intellect) and *The Reasonable Audience: Theatre Etiquette, Behaviour Policing, and the Live Performance Experience* (2018, Palgrave). Kirsty is currently completing a three-year British Academy postdoctoral research fellowship investigating audience engagements with regional theatre through time. [www.kirstysedgman.com](http://www.kirstysedgman.com), @kirstysedgman

11.00 - 12.00 **Interrogating Evaluation** with:

**J. D. Phillipson (Open University/ Border Crossings) "Measuring Reconciliation at ORIGINS Festival of First Nations: Cultural Diplomacy in Action"**

Reconciliation - the reviewing, re-balancing and renewing of relationships – is a central theme in much Native North American spiritual, cultural and artistic practice. Whether it is the reconnection with heritage, spirituality, language, cultural practice, the (re)creation of respectful relationships of mutual benefit with the environment in the face of pressures of the Anthropocene, or the renegotiation of interpersonal/intercultural relationships in the processes of decolonization and globalization, European audiences have much to learn from marginalised voices and much to add to global conversations.

This presentation considers how Border Crossings' ORIGINS Festival invites indigenous artists to communicate with European publics from within a culturally curated programme of multi-national performance arts and media events. The festival fosters dialogue and interaction between artists and audiences who are encouraged not only to enjoy the artistic content as 'art for art's sake' but to consider its wider entanglements.

However, measuring how events are received and how they contribute to changes in audience behaviours, world views and processes of reconciliation is problematic. This presentation proposes a series of innovative, integrated approaches to capture and analyse a range of reconciliatory impacts including increased cultural understanding, public awareness of indigenous issues, an acceptance of inter-generational responsibility, and perhaps most importantly, recognition of indigenous persons as contemporary artists, educators, activists and cultural ambassadors.

*BIOGRAPHY:* J. D. Phillipson has a background in film and the performing arts. Much of this work has been in Canada where her involvement with First Nations communities has enabled intercultural collaborations and her identification as a sympathetic ally to her indigenous neighbours. In the UK, she has been Research Associate and Project Coordinator for Indigeneity in the Contemporary World: Performance, Politics, Belonging, led by Professor Helen Gilbert at Royal Holloway, University of London and its legacy projects. She is currently a PhD researcher with Professor Graham Harvey, Open University and Professor Michael Walling, Border Crossings.

### **Bentley Crudgington (Creative Facilitator) “Evaluation: The Oppenheimer Affect”**

Immersive theatre is a method which allows you to lay out scientific, technical, political, historical and ethical strands for a cautious public to explore. It can transform challenging concepts and concerns into play without trivializing the subject matter or coddling participants. A new world should work to alleviate societal expectations and lower barriers to participation in order to encourage deeper, messier, more nuanced responses.

The point of designing a new world is to access things that are inaccessible in this one, but in which world does evaluation belong? Can it act as a bridge between worlds or does it slam doors shut and limit the emotional lifespan of the encounter? How might it be incorporated into a performance and when might you wish to resist it?

This session will provide a practical overview and critical reflections using Vector; an immersive experience which used elements of performance, game and integrated technology, co-created with immersive performance makers The Lab Collective, as a case study.

*BIOGRAPHY:* Bentley is creative facilitator for the Animal Research Nexus (AnimalResearchNexus.org) and Multispecies Medicine (Multispecies.org) projects. Their research explores the cultural relations and ethical obligations that society creates by collaborating with non-human life in pursuit of human health and wellbeing. They design collaborative interventions around everyday objects and experiences that make participants complicit in the consequences of their interactions so that they may reimagine their relationship to/with the original material’s construction, definition or purpose.

12.00 - 13.00 Lunch

13.00 - 14.00 "Most Significant Change" Methodology Workshop with Jeremy Spafford  
(Director, Arts at the Old Fire Station)

Jeremy Spafford is the Director of the Old Fire Station, Oxford. The Old Fire Station programmes a varied programme of some of the best small scale touring contemporary theatre in the UK. They also support local theatre makers to create and showcase work and host both Theatre Scratch Nights and the Oxfordshire Theatre Makers network. They occasionally produce and commission new work, and co-produce the Offbeat festival with Oxford Playhouse.

14.00 - 14.15 Coffee break

14.15 - 15.30 Papers on Exploring Methodologies with:  
**Hilary Baxter (St Mary's University) "CHANGING IN PUBLIC: Scenography and Menopause"**

A personal experience case study. My presentation will be a reflection on the process of making a complex theatre performance for a practice-based research project in drama and healthcare, involving many collaborators (actors, choreographer, lighting designer, flash mob dancers) and utilising a full range of expected theatre design conventions. The performance was intended for a general audience and shown in January 2020.

My research, which has developed from my practice as a professional theatre designer, is centred in scenography, emphasising active spectatorship and a holistic approach to theatre making. This research employs a cross-disciplinary investigation into the real-life problem of menopause for working women in South London. A key part of the methodology involved using ethnographic methods, working with participants to collect interview data. Initially this was a straightforward collection of opinions and experiences connected with menopause, but a second cycle of data collection used a photo-elicitation method to generate both imagery and interviews about mid-life. This material was collected working within the ethical structures of St Mary's University.

This reflective analysis teases out the tensions between performance practice, 'getting the show on' and the demands of working within the expectations of research norms within an institution.

*BIOGRAPHY:* Hilary Baxter is a Theatre Designer, Visual Artist and Researcher, in the final stages of her theatre arts practice-based Drama and Healthcare PhD studentship at St. Mary's University, Twickenham. As a professional Theatre Designer, her work has been with many different theatre companies both in the UK and internationally, and has considerable

practical experience of costume design. Her previous performance research has explored gendered themes using costume design in public performances, notably 'The Prince and the Showgirl' parade at The National Gallery (2009) and the 'Soane Banquet' at the Banqueting House (2010). Published work includes 'Masquerade, Pride, Drag, Love and Marriage for Masquerade' (ed. Bell: Macmillan 2015) and a chapter on theatre designer Alison Chitty for 'Designer's Shakespeare' (eds Brown & Di Benedetto: Routledge 2016). She has also written entries on British designers for the forthcoming Bloomsbury Encyclopaedia of Film and Television Costume Design (2020).

**Dr Maria Grazia Turri (Queen Mary University of London) "Researching spectators' (unconscious?) emotional responses to early modern comedy"**

In this communication I will describe an innovative methodology that I devised to test spectators' intuitive (unconscious?) reactions to characters. The methodology was employed in the context of a 'Research in Action' event at the Globe Theatre in London. The event consisted in the performance of comic scenes from early modern English comedy and from the coeval Commedia dell'Arte, in which the protagonist is a mad figure. Our broad aim was to test hypotheses about the emotional relationship that comic mad figures on stage establish with spectators in terms of identification, laughter, compassion, and the spectators' ascription of personal qualities to these characters.

Most research on theatre impact has been based on collecting spectators' reflective accounts through questionnaires, interviews or focus groups. However, an important dimension of audience response to theatre is their emotional response and this, as I propose in my previous research, is at least in part unconscious. Research on theatre impact must therefore include the study of spectators' responses which are not mediated by conscious reflection or judgement.

In my presentation I will illustrate the design of the questionnaire that was used to capture spectators' intuitive responses to the comic mad characters, showing how both the mode of administration and the scope of the questions were instrumental to achieve this aim. Analysis of data using quantitative methods produced a rich set of results which increase our understanding of laughter and the nature of the comic. I will present some highlights of the data analysis, in particular the relationship between laughter, identification and compassion, and spectators' quasi-universal perception of comic characters as strong. These results challenge some of the most common assumptions made about laughter, such as that laughter is decoupled from feeling and that laughter is grounded in dis-identification.

*BIOGRAPHY:* Dr Maria Grazia Turri is a Lecturer at Queen Mary University of London and the co-director of the MSc Creative Arts and Mental Health. She is a psychiatrist, psychoanalytic psychotherapist and theatre scholar. She is the author of 'Acting, Spectating and the Unconscious' (Routledge, 2017). Her research focuses on understanding processes of

identification in theatre through psychoanalytic theory. Her theatre practice includes performing and writing for devised theatre projects with Gaia Drama Group and directing children's community theatre projects.

**Kristina Nilles (London South Bank University/ Lyric Hammersmith) "Negotiating Voices: Towards Holistic Impact Evaluation of Lyric Hammersmith Theatre's START Programme"**

There is an ever-present need for participatory arts programmes to strengthen evidence of impact. Traditional evaluative tools such as baseline/summative questionnaires and plenary feedback, provide foundation for understanding impact, but are often unable to uncover the individuality of impact, especially where impact falls outside the expected outcomes. How can evaluation be employed as a component of participants' journeys, promoting self-reflection and ownership of their experiences? How can arts evaluators effectively and ethically address the plurality of voices to qualify impact for participants in arts-based programmes, while also acknowledging their own subjectivity and positionality?

This paper interrogates the development of a holistic evaluation methodology for Lyric Hammersmith's START programme for marginalised young people. START, a six-week programme, aims to re-engage participants through drama-based activities and challenges them to identify underlying causes of their disengagement, culminating in a devised performance. A multi-method approach to evaluation data collection is applied including: pre/post project surveys; in-depth bi-annual interviews; participant and practitioner reflective writing; and researcher observations. This case study positions the process of evaluating drama-based participation as a self-reflective tool for participants, integral to the building of positive pathways post-project, and holding the potentiality for stronger longitudinal understanding of individual change.

*BIOGRAPHY:* Kristina Nilles is a Ph.D. candidate at London South Bank University working in collaboration with Lyric Hammersmith Theatre's Young People's Programme. She is the Research Assistant for the evaluation of Lambeth Council's ELEVATE programme, part of the Mayor of London's Cultural Impact Awards. She has worked as a visiting tutor at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and Mountview Theatre Academy; as a freelance theatre practitioner; Development Director for Create, a London-based creative arts charity; and managed St Bride Youth Theatre, London. Kristina trained in musical theatre at The Boston Conservatory and holds master's degrees in Educational Theatre (New York University) and Museum and Gallery Education (University College London, Institute of Education).

**15.30 – 16.30 Community Building and Match-Making**