**Welcome Note**

Welcome to Martin Harris Centre for Music and Drama at the University of Manchester for this one-day symposium exploring the relationships between theatre, poverty and economic inequality.

The symposium is part of a research project that interrogates the relationships between theatre, poverty and economic inequality in selected historical and geographical sites. During the research we worked with five theatre initiatives in Greater Manchester and we are developing conversations with art and performance companies engaging with economic justice projects across the world. We are delighted that many of our local partners are present today - The Agency (Contact Theatre), Bolton at Home/Octagon Theatre, The Edge Theatre /Booth Centre theatre company, Men’s Room Manchester and Royal Exchange Theatre.

We are also delighted to feature the premiere of *The House* – a solo performance devised and performed by Carran Waterfield (Triangle Theatre). The performance arises from a collaborative research process between a performer and theatre researcher. It traces a series of real and imagined characters, and narratives of destitution, institutionalisation, creativity and care, over a period of almost 200 years.

The presentations throughout the day reflect the diversity of concerns relevant to the symposium theme, including theatre in sites effected by poverty, the impact of austerity on theatre buildings, the precarious economies of theatre-making, the politics of participation and representation, theatre activism and community initiatives. We are especially pleased that speakers come from a variety of contexts – professional theatre, community theatre projects as well as Universities.

Economic policies of austerity create an imperative to consider how poverty and economic inequality is effecting the theatre sector, an imperative reflected in debates about payment for artists and the lack of socio-economic diversity in the theatre industry, and a growing realisation amongst social theatre practitioners that poverty might be an ‘elephant in the room’ that needs to be addressed. In an age of austerity, we are asked to work harder, invest more time and create more from less. On the one hand, we are used to working with limited resources – however, on the other hand, theatre-making is a labour-intensive activity that demands a significant infrastructure of support. Stretched resources can lead to limited access as well as fewer meaningful development and training opportunities for emerging and established artists, high levels of self-exploitation, the suppression of talent, and a narrowing of the kinds of stories that get told on stage and of the range of people that get to tell them.

We are extremely grateful to all the speakers for providing the stimulus for what we are sure is going to be a great day of debate and discussion that responds to these concerns. We hope you enjoy the day – please stay in touch!

**Jenny Hughes & Naomi Paxton**

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