**Abstracts and biographies for the**

**Keynote, Parallel and Lunchtime sessions**

**Naomi Alexander, Brighton People’s Theatre**

*Austerity and the City: from anger to action*

The Warwick Commission’s (2015) report into cultural value noted that the wealthiest, best-educated, least ethnically diverse 8% of the population are the main producers and consumers of publicly subsidized theatre.

I see this as a social justice issue. During a time of austerity with the cuts hitting the poorest, hardest, why is public subsidy of the arts being used in a way to produce work that primarily attracts white, wealthy, well-educated professionals to the theatre?

I want to make great theatre with and for the 92% of people who do not normally participate in theatre. This presentation will capture and explore some of the joys and challenges, the tensions and moments of creative clarity as I develop work with a group of long-term unemployed people in the city of Brighton who are at the sharp end of austerity, benefits cuts and the rising trend in food bank use. The work is part of a research and development process to create a socially engaged people’s theatre company in Brighton. Alongside weekly workshops, the group is seeing performance programmed in the city. By enabling participants to gain access to theatre spaces and reflect critically on what they have seen, we hope their own creative imagination will be fired with new ways of expressing their life experiences through performance. This presentation will explore notions of authorship and the cultural value tensions in the creation of work through a collaborative devising process between a Director (Naomi Alexander), a Dramaturg (Lou Cope), a Movement Director (Gary Clarke) and the developing ensemble, most of whom have not participated in or seen live theatre since they left school.

What does it take to create work in this context?

Who decides what moments of creative expression have value?

Naomi Alexander is a theatre maker and creative producer. She is Director of the newly established Brighton People’s Theatre and is currently leading the research and development of a new show about the impact of austerity in the city.

She also works freelance for Battersea Arts Centre and Old Vic New Voices and in her spare time is setting up a festival of outdoor theatre for children and young people at the BOAT. Previously she has worked in community development at neighbourhood, city, regional and national levels. She’s done detached youth work on the streets, raised over £1 million and distributed it in small grants to community activists and campaigned for reforms to the benefit system. She has worked for Locality and the Community Development Foundation amongst others. She is a member of Arts Emergency and a Fellow of the Birkbeck Institute of Contemporary Theatre.

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Website: www.naomiontheatre.net

**Sarah Bartley, Queen Mary, University of London**

*Hard Labour and Punitive Welfare: Aestheticising the Unemployed Body at Work*

This paper aims to address the performance of labour in participatory arts projects and consider the curious implications for such activity in framing perceptions of the unemployed participant. Engaging with Carrie Noland’s concept of embodied gesturing as a mode of cultural resistance will offer particular focus to the politics of presenting the unemployed body in a state of action or labour, seeking to understand the significance of artistic production borne out of a group explicitly identified as unproductive. A spectacular response to youth unemployment – Tangled Feet’s 2013 production One Million – will anchor my argument, provide concrete examples and allow me to consider the consequences of representing non-labour through community arts projects in which unemployed participants implicitly enact forms of labour.

Juxtaposing this aesthetic presentation of activity with the historical association of worklessness with illness I propose the corporeal body of the unemployed citizen is itself a site of contest. Drawing on the scholarship of Christina Beatty and Stephen Fothergill I will outline the practice of 'doctoring' unemployment figures, which primarily occurred in the UK in the 1980s, through transferring Jobseekers Allowance claimants onto Incapacity Benefit and thus bureaucratically rendering them inactive. This marriage of unemployment and unfitness serves to individualise the issue to the claimant and thus obscures, both statistically and ideologically, broader systematic failings. How might artistic practices therefore offer a mode of representation to this hidden community?

Finally, in the current Conservative context of austerity and welfare cuts, which increasingly demands that claimants 'work for their benefits', I propose the participatory arts project's potential as an aesthetic apparatus to sate public desire to bear witness to the unemployed citizen’s labour. What does this mean for participatory practice, is it complicit in demanding the labour of the unemployed?

Sarah is a PhD researcher at Queen Mary University of London. Her project explores artistic representations of the welfare state, with a particular focus on participatory practices engaging unemployed people. She is an editorial assistant at *Contemporary Theatre Review*and also works as a drama facilitator. She is co-founder of Shifting Point, a drama project working with ex-offenders and prison resettlement services. Previously Sarah has worked for Newcastle City Council, undertaking a research project examining youth unemployment in the city: 'Come Find Us: The Lost Generation' (Newcastle: Newcastle Futures, 2014).

**Bolton at Home**

Bolton at Home Housing Association has collaborated with the Octagon Theatre in Bolton for more than 10 years to provide arts in neighbourhood and community settings across Bolton. The two organisations now have a formal partnership to support this work, which includes the provision of 1800 free tickets to Bolton at Home tenants annually, and a range of theatre clubs in neighbourhoods. The partnership complements Bolton at Home’s renowned *Percent for Art* programme, which recognises the value of incorporating arts and cultural activities into a wide range of housing and regeneration activities. Presenting at the symposium are Dawn Yates-Obe (*Percent for Art* Officer for Bolton at Home), Lisa O’Neill-Rogan, (Community Development officer for Bolton at Home & formerly Associate Director, Octagon Theatre), and representatives from Melodramatics – a women’s theatre initiative based in New Bury (Bolton).

For more information about the partnership go to:

http://octagonbolton.co.uk/community-projects-with-bolton-at-home

For more information about *Percent for Art* go to:

http://www.boltonathome.org.uk/percent-for-art

**Alice Borchi, Warwick University**

*Teatro Valle Occupato: protesting, occupying and making art in contemporary Italy*

This presentation analyses the case of Teatro Valle, an abandoned theatre in Rome, which was occupied by a group of professionals from the theatre industry from 2011 to 2014. Since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008, the Italian cultural sector has been facing a lack of state funding. Many young professionals have been struggling to find a paid job, especially in the theatre sector: the dissatisfaction of the emergent creative class led to a series of demonstrations and campaigns that asked for the recognition of the rights of arts workers. Many abandoned buildings, especially former theatres, were occupied and became spaces dedicated to artistic and political experimentation. Teatro Valle was one of the most famous cases of this wave of occupations, attracting the attention of artists, scholars and legislators in Italy and abroad. The occupation began as a form of protest against the cuts to the funding for the arts implemented by the Italian government, but over the time it brought new life to the former theatre with new programs, activities, workshops, and public assemblies. Teatro Valle eventually became the symbol of a new way of managing cultural organisations and thinking about the role of the arts in society. This paper provides a history of the occupation of the theatre and investigates the concept of theatre as a commons. Moreover, it analyses the role of the militant-practitioner and of art as a form of protest. The experience of Teatro Valle blurs the lines between protesting and working, making art and militating, and puts into question the role of the arts in a society deeply affected by the economic crisis.

Alice Borchi is a PhD candidate in Cultural Policy Studies at Centre for Cultural Policy Studies at the University of Warwick (UK). Her project is titled “Culture and economic crisis: cultural value in Italy from 2008 to the present day”. Her research interests include cultural value and its relationship to economics; Italian culture; informal political activity and the arts.

In 2014, along with Liz Stainforth and Leila Jankovich (University of Leeds, UK), she co-organized the “Co-producing Cultural Policy” workshop series. The project, funded by AHRC, focused on developing cross-disciplinary knowledge exchange among postgraduates and early career researchers, practitioners and policymakers, and exploring approaches to co-producing cultural policy and framing research in response to policy challenges.

In 2015, she and Liz Stainforth co-wrote a commentary for the academic journal “Cultural Trends”; she also cooperates with the website “The Conversation”, analysing contemporary Italian cultural issues.

**Selina Busby, Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London**

*Finding A Concrete Utopia In The Dystopia Of A ‘Sub’ City*

This paper will examine Crossing Bridges, a New York based project that brought together 15 homeless young people and 15 award winning Broadway artists to make theatre together. This collaboration integrated community members, struggling with the impact of austerity and both the culturally, and economically, elite. Together the youth and artists undertook a series of workshops which culminated in a twenty-four hour play-building festival and public performance in a professional theatre.

In the USA each year two million youth experience homelessness, and the annual death rate for young pavement dwellers is approximately 5,000. New York City currently has 1.4 million people relying on emergency food supplies, and an estimated 43,000 homeless children living in one of the wealthiest cities in the world. The Crossing Bridges project targeted youth living in a Covenant House shelter in New York aiming to use theatre to foster confidence, and to enable the young people, to constructively challenge and disrupt the ‘homeless youth’ label and internalised negative identities, by creating something positive that would potentially open up new personal and social identities that allowed for the envisioning of an alternative self. These aims are problematic in that they potentially reinforce the negative identities that the project is attempting to disrupt.

Drawing on Paul Riceour’s concept of the ‘social imagination’ and the idea of a ‘pedagogy of utopia’ this paper will interrogate both how this model of applied or social theatre operated as a medium of social care and support, and the claims made for the impact of this work. It will ask which participants, the youth, the Broadway artists, or the facilitators reaped the greatest reward by engaging with the project.

Selina Busby is Senior Lecturer in Community Performance and Applied Theatre, and course leader for the MA Applied Theatre at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. She is an applied theatre practitioner who works in prison settings and with young people both in the UK and internationally. Her research focuses on theatre that invites the possibility of change, both in contemporary plays and participatory performance. Publications include ‘Creativity or Carnage: An International Theatre for Social Justice Project’ with Catherine McNamara in Bowles & Nadon’s Staging Social Justice: Collaborating to Create Activist Theatre (2013); and ‘The Fluidity of Bodies, Gender, Identity and Structure in the plays of Sarah Kane’ with Stephen Farrier in Godiwala’s Alternatives within the Mainstream II (2007).

**Claire Cochrane, Worcester University**

*Making theatre in the jaws of doom: austerity, artistry and Birmingham rep*

‘The Jaws of Doom’ was the dramatic epithet used by Sir Albert Bore, the Labour leader of Birmingham City Council’s governing party in early 2013 when he was attempting to describe the overall implications of a graph which showed the divergent paths of projected revenue and expenditure for the rest of that year. Two years on the scale of savings required to be made by Europe’s largest local authority is colossal. The ‘Business Plan 2015+’ states that a total of £821 million will have to be found over the seven year period from 2010/11 until 2017/18. The effect on the well-being and stability of Birmingham’s diverse communities, especially the young who represent an usually high proportion of a population of over a million is incalculable. Maintaining a successful producing theatre which for over sixty years has been heavily dependent on grant aid provided by the city is now exceptionally difficult even by the standards of the chronic knife-edge situation of most regional building-based companies. My paper will consider the strategies adopted by Birmingham Rep to make theatre within this bleak context. To what extent is the Rep now a ‘producing’ theatre with the capacity for substantial autonomous creativity? How far has its circumstances necessitated artistic compromises which will impact on its long-term reputation and viability? Or has the task of manoeuvring within the jaws of doom initiated other models of less visible creativity which none the less manage to reach out to touch the lives of the local people?

Claire Cochrane is Professor of Theatre Studies at Worcester University. She has written extensively on regional theatre including two books on the history of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. Her monograph *Twentieth Century British Theatre Industry, Art and Empire* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2011. A collection of essays *Theatre History and Historiography Ethics, Evidence and Truth*, co-edited with Jo Robinson, is due to be published by Palgrave Macmillan in November.

**Susan Croft, Unfinished Histories**

*"Turning reality up to the level of art": Experiments in urban living and alternative theatre in the 1970s - Dispatches from Camden Town and Kentish Town, London*

Drawing on the oral testimony and archival histories collected by Unfinished Histories: Recording the History of the Alternative Theatre Movement and focusing primarily on Camden Town (described in the 1960s as part of ‘the London Nobody Knows’) and Kentish Town, this presentation will explore the experiments in urban living out of which large parts of the alternative theatre movement grew in the 1968-88 period and the infrastructures of squatting and co-operatives that made possible the work and meant that more London-based companies within the movement gave a Camden-based address than any other borough. In Cathy Itzin’s first (1976) Alternative Theatre Guide she states that the book is ‘a descriptive guide to ‘theatre’ companies who perform primarily in non-theatre places for non-theatre audiences’ and companies developed early vocabularies of accessibility, participation, ownership of space, architecture, power, poverty, feminist practice, some of which have continued to animate discussion today. Drawing on the examples of organisations including Action Space, Inter-Action and companies as various as Red Ladder, Belt and Braces, Recreation Ground, Stirabout, Cunning Stunts, Hesitate and Demonstrate, Moving Parts and The Phantom Captain the presentation will address both the various models of theatre they made the strategies they developed to work with communities, develop creativity and make theatre, and how they might – or might not – offer lessons for today.

Dr Susan Croft is a writer, historian, curator and the Clive Barker Research Fellow at Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance. She is also

Director, of Unfinished Histories, a major initiative to record the history of Alternative Theatre in Britain through oral histories and to preserve archives of the alternative theatre movement from the 1960s to the 1980s: see www.unfinishedhistories.com. In 2013-14 she led the project Unfinished Histories Company Links which culminated in the exhibition and publication Re-Staging Revolutions: Alternative Theatre in Lambeth and Camden 1968-88, as well as curating 15 accompanying events. Formerly a dramaturg and academic, from 1997-2005 she was Senior Curator (Contemporary Performance) at the V&A Theatre Museum. She has also written extensively on women playwrights including …She Also Wrote Plays: an International Guide to Women Playwrights from the 10th to the 21st Century (Faber and Faber, 2001) on women’s theatre including suffrage theatre and on Black British theatre.

**Amanda Dalton & Sarah Lovell (Royal Exchange Theatre)**

Amanda Dalton is Director of Engagement at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester. She leads the theatre's strategy for engaging the public through large scale, artist-led projects and work which brings together professional and participative practice. Currently this includes 'You, The Audience' - an eighteen month long creative conversation with audiences in partnership with a range of artists and the University of Manchester. She oversees organisational evaluation, and is currently reviewing the theatre's public-facing training and volunteering programmes. Amanda is also a professional poet (pub. Bloodaxe) and playwright, writing for theatre and BBC radio, and she regularly teaches creative writing.

Sarah Lovell is Head of Participation and Learning at the Royal Exchange. She leads the theatre's extensive programme of work with schools, communities, individual adults and young people. The programme includes a 140-strong Young Company of 14-21 year olds, Company of Elders, World Wide Workshop programme and long-term, bespoke partnership projects working with under-represented communities - currently including 'On Top of the World' partnership with housing trust One Manchester, engaging single living residents of four Manchester tower blocks.

**John Deeney, Manchester Metropolitan University**

*Powerhouses of spectacular precarity: the politics and poetics of poverty in recent Manchester drama and theatre*

Two productions of new large-scale works from the Royal Exchange Theatre and Home – now Manchester’s duo of ‘flagship’ subsidized mainstream building-based venues – together represented noteworthy synchronicity in 2015: both were responses to contemporary debates around poverty and precarity. Rona Munro's *Scuttlers* (Royal Exchange), although 'inspired by the Manchester riots of 2011', is primarily focussed on the Manchester street gangs of the late nineteenth century. Simon Stephens' *The Funfair* (Home) is a new version of Ödön von Horváth's *Kasimir und Karoline* (1932), and excavates the parallels between late 1920s Germany – rising poverty combined with insurgent nationalism – and Britain today. This paper will argue how the turn to existing historical and dramaturgical sources, whilst aiming to locate the current ‘crisis’ in a social, economic and political continuum, shrouds new ideological coordinates that disclose the limitations of dramatic humanism – leftist or otherwise. As part and parcel of this analysis, attention will also be given to how the theatrical mediation of both plays engineered an aesthetic of ‘immersive spectacle’. Whilst the visual, aural and material richness of these productions may be read as a sign of both venues’ commitment to ‘new work’ and ‘contemporary subject matter’, it is argued here that the ‘spectacular-izing’ of poverty and precarity manifests much deeper ideological and cultural phenomena that does little to challenge dominant discourse in the rendering of the poor and disenfranchised as ‘other’. *The Funfair* was also the opening theatre production of Home, Manchester’s new £25 million arts centre, and the city is now part of the 2014 government initiated ‘Northern Powerhouse’ project, part of which promises further capital investment for culture and the arts. Are *Scuttlers* and *The Funfair* perhaps signs of the times to come, of an evolving regional theatre ecology whose increasingly entrenched collusion with the dominant ideology might further limit the possibilities of representation?

John F. Deeney is Principal Lecturer in Contemporary Arts at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. He is the author of many essays and articles on contemporary playwrights and performance, editor of *Writing Live: An Investigation of the Relationship Between Writing and Live Art*, London: New Playwrights Trust/London Arts Board (1998); co-editor, with Maggie B. Gale, of *Fifty Modern and Contemporary Dramatists: Routledge Keyguides*, London: Routledge (2014), and *The Routledge Drama Anthology: From Modernism to Contemporary Performance* (2010, 2016); and the author of *Mark Ravenhill: Routledge Modern and Contemporary Dramatists*, London: Routledge (2016). John has previously taught at the Universities of Birmingham, Florence and Ulster. He directed the European premiere of Susan Sontag’s *The Way We Live Now*at Contact Theatre (Manchester), and other new work at the Citizens’ Theatre (Glasgow) and the Traverse Theatre (Edinburgh).

**Stella Duffy**

*There is No Austerity (of Brilliant People)*

Stella Duffy is the Founder and Co-Director of Fun Palaces. Stella has worked in theatre for over 30 years as an actor, director, playwright, facilitator and workshop leader. She is an award-winning writer with over fifty short stories, ten plays, and thirteen novels published in fifteen languages. She regularly writes about the arts, women’s, LGBT and cancer-related issues. From 2010-2013 she led the Chaosbaby Project, a multi-disciplinary arts project made by 30 artists, ages 17-70, working together in Open Space over three years to create The Chaosbaby show. She is an Associate Artist with Improbable and the Artistic Director of Shaky Isles Theatre.  
Fun Palaces is a campaign to enable greater access for all to arts and sciences, with an annual event every October, locally-led and community-driven. In 2014, 138 locations and venues took part in Fun Palaces across the UK. 3181 people, most of them volunteers, were involved in creating their own Fun Palaces, and 60,000 people attended as participants. Fun Palaces are free, local, innovative, transformative and engaging – anyone and everyone is encouraged to get involved and create their own, and we welcome all interest.

**Matthew Elliott, Collective Encounters**

*Theatre for Change: Collective Encounters and the Multitude of Opposition*

Collective Encounters is a professional arts organization specializing in Theatre for Social Change. The company is based in north Liverpool, an area of extreme disadvantage ranked in the top 10 in England’s Indices of Multiple Deprivation, and works with diverse marginalized communities both here and in the wider North West. Since inception Collective Encounters has maintained three strands to its work.

1) A participatory programme which enables those who would not otherwise have access to the arts to use drama and theatre to explore their ideas and concerns, and articulate them to a wider public. Our recent and current participant groups include veterans and their families; people with dementia and their carers; people with experience of homelessness; marginalised young people; a third age group; and a wide range of vulnerable adults.

2) A professional programme producing new work for new audiences in new spaces tackling pressing political concerns. Our work happens outside of traditional theatre settings: a derelict street, an abandoned mill, empty shops and tumbleweed shopping centres. The content for the professional work grows out of the communities with whom we engage, drawing the issues, stories and desires for change directly from our grassroots participatory work. 3) A research lab exploring new approaches to Theatre for Change and related themes, both through practice and academic research.

Collective Encounters’ work is all framed within the umbrella of poverty and inequality. While the specific focus of each piece is different, depending on the interests of the groups, or on particularly timely topics, the work all stems from the deep­rooted belief that we live in an inherently unequal and unjust society, and that theatre has a significant role to play as a tool for change: to explore problems and solutions, to empower our citizens and their communities, as a battle cry and as a rehearsal for change. This paper will discuss and contextualise Collective Encounters’ work in relation to the topic Theatre in Communities and Sites affected by Poverty. It will discuss how we have in recent years made a shift from a liberal to a radical approach to change, and how we have sought to situate our work, both practically and strategically, within a Leftist change framework, and connect into the global Social Justice Movement and the Multitude of Opposition (Hardt and Negri, 2005; Driver et al., 2012; Bogad, 2010). It will highlight the challenges and obstacles we face with this as a small, publicly funded organisation; and refer to our forthcoming programme of work to illustrate our approach practically.

References:

Bogad, L.M., 2010. “Carnivals against capital: radical clowning and the global justice movement.” *Social Identities*, 16(4), pp.537–557.

Driver, S., Hensby, A. & Sibthorpe, J., 2012. “The shock of the new? Democratic narratives and political agency.” *Policy Studies*, 33(2), pp.159–172.

Hardt, M. & Negri, A., 2005. *Multitude: War And Democracy In The Age Of Empire*, London: Penguin Books.

Matthew has been the youth theatre director at Collective Encounters since 2013. He trained as a facilitator and director at the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts and the workshop theatre, Leeds. Matthew has worked professionally with young people in a wide range of contexts including education settings, the criminal justice system and looked after children’s services. Matthew is also undertaking doctoral research in to the relationship between community theatre practice and civic participation with young people in the UK and Chile.

**Matt Jennings, Ulster University**

*‘Just about coping’:  precarity and resilience among applied theatre and community arts workers in Northern Ireland and Scotland*

In March 2015, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) cut grant funding to some arts organisations by 40-100%, following an 11% reduction from the Northern Ireland Executive (NIE) in its 2015/16 Budget. The ACNI had led a high-profile ‘13p for the arts’ campaign to preserve existing levels of arts funding (estimated at 13p per capita per week), already significantly lower than in other parts of the UK (“far less than the 32 pence per week spent in Wales” Litvack 2014). Simultaneous ‘austerity’ cuts to Social Development, Health and Education, alongside a reduction in EU Peace funding, have severely reduced the financial support available to applied theatre and community arts practitioners in Northern Ireland. In Derry/Londonderry, despite the 2013 UK City of Culture programme, the resources available to locally-based artists are a fraction of those in Belfast, perpetuating a historical disadvantage that has persisted since before the Troubles. In these precarious economic conditions, how can applied theatre artists survive? What hope is there for these artists and the communities they serve?

This paper investigates the personal, political and artistic strategies developed by freelance arts workers across Northern Ireland. Robert Hewison, analysing the social and cultural fallout of neoliberal arts policy in Britain, calls for a ‘reconstruction of the public realm’ and a ‘revival of the local, the diverse and the different’ (2015, p. 231). Isabell Lorey argues for embracing the opportunities of ‘shared precariousness’, declaring that ‘precarity…forms the starting-point for political alliances against a logic of protection’ (2015, p. 91). The creation of ‘a non-state run public sphere’ (Virno 2004, p. 68) through de-territorialized networks of resilience, emancipates us from the ‘subjugating anxiety’ of ‘governmental precarization’ (Lorey 2015, p. 110-111). This paper explores the possibilities of developing such networks of resistance and resilience.

(co-authored by Martin Beirne, University of Glasgow, and Stephanie Knight, University of Glasgow)

Dr Matt Jennings is Lecturer in Drama at Ulster University. Originally from Sydney, Matt has worked as a performer, writer, director and facilitator in Australia, Ireland, UK, Italy, Morocco and France. He has been based in Northern Ireland since 2001, where his experience of working in applied drama and conflict transformation has informed his research, practice and teaching. In 2010, Matt completed a PhD on the impact of community drama in Northern Ireland since 1998. He has also provided professional development for community and health workers and is conducting research in the fields of Arts in Health and Arts Management.

**Alison Jeffers, University of Manchester**

*Authority, authorship and authorisation: participation in community plays in Belfast.*

Community plays originated in what director Ann Jellicoe called the ‘good’ or well-connected communities of Devon and Dorset. So what happens when the community play model is applied to the ‘precarity’ of the ‘bad’ urban communities where, Jellicoe has argued, connections are much harder to make and sustain (Jellicoe, 1987). More specifically, what happens when the community play model is pursued in Northern Ireland which has suffered the double blow of economic precarity and civil, sectarian conflict? Using both published literature and interview material from those who have worked on and been involved in community plays in Northern Ireland I propose a 10 minute provocation which would focus on two plays in particular – *The Wedding Play* (a ‘cross-community’ project) and *Crimea Square* (a ‘single-identity’ project). Using new ideas emerging from research on authority and participation (Noorani et al. 2013) I propose to identify a different way to think about the community play as a form which liberates it from its historical roots and recreates it as a potentially radical intervention in places of economic and social precarity.

References:

Jellicoe, Ann (1987) *Community Plays. How to put them on*, London: Methuen

Noorani, T., C. Blencowe and J. Brigstocke (eds) (2013) *Problems of Participation. Reflections on Authority, Democracy and the struggle for Common Life*, Authority Research Network

Alison is a full-time lecturer and researcher in Drama at the University of Manchester. She began her academic career as a PhD researcher on the In Place of War research project in Manchester (2004-2008) which was set up to investigate relationships between war, conflict, theatre and performance. Alison’s research involved the study of theatre and performance practices made about and by refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.  She has published on this subject as well as on citizenship and education, participation and the arts, verbatim theatre and social archiving. Her professional background is in community arts and applied theatre and she is currently researching the British community arts movement of the 1970s.

**Matthew Knights, playwright**

*Who is poor? Popular and political theatre*

NEWSBOY is a living newspaper examining current political issues and the presentation of them in the media. It uses the character of a 1930’s newsboy to introduce and frame a variety of scripts which explore different political issues. It was performed at the Tron Theatre, Glasgow as a visiting company for three shows between March-July 2014, then at the Festival of Politics, Edinburgh inside the Scottish Parliament in August 2014. Some aims and objectives included; producing my own work via a do-it-yourself ethic, getting playwrights to work together around political goals, making political theatre which opposes austerity and economic inequality as part of a wider struggle, making theatre to continue a political theatre tradition (Ewan MacColl and Joan Littlewood, Federal Theatre Project, 7:84), making theatre within the established or mainstream theatre, trying to bring new audiences into the mainstream theatre, or finding audiences who don’t go to the theatre.

Artists Against Austerity Scotland is currently engaged with collecting stories from the general public in Scotland about how austerity has affected them, with the aim of using this as artistic material to create art which opposes austerity. The presentation will consider some of the questions this project is exploring such as how to make the theatre (and other art forms) more representative of “the people in the street” and how this is related to political questions about democracy.

Matthew Knights lives in Edinburgh and works as a playwright and a Housing Officer in social housing. On completing his MSc in Writing for Theatre and Performance in 2013 he has had readings of his work performed at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh. His specific interest is in popular political theatre. He wrote for and co-produced NEWSBOY, a living newspaper examining political issues which had several performances at the Tron Theatre Glasgow, Festival of Politics Edinburgh and in The Great Yes No Don’t Know Five Minute Theatre Show (National Theatre of Scotland). He is currently writing a play about Ewan MacColl and the Mass Trespass of 1932.

**John McGrath**

*Another Country: Place, Poverty and National Theatre Wales*

John McGrath is the CEO and Artistic Director of the Manchester International Festival, beginning the role in September 2015.

Previous to this John launched the non-building-based National Theatre Wales in November 2009, since when the company has staged productions all over Wales, the UK, internationally and online over four seasons. Highlights have included Michael Sheen’s *The Passion*, staged in Port Talbot, the critically-acclaimed *Coriolan/us* performed in an aircraft hangar for the London 2012 Festival, and McGrath’s own pioneering staging of *The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning*.

The company has garnered an international reputation for making large-scale site-specific work, for digital innovation (including its online community), for weaving tangible community engagement into its productions, collaborating with international companies including Berlin’s Rimini Protokoll and Tokyo’s New National Theatre and reinforcing Welsh artists including Owen Sheers and Ed Thomas’ place on the global stage.

As well as his two senior roles at National Theatre Wales, John has directed many of the company’s productions, including its first, *A Good Night Out in the Valleys*, *Love Steals Us From Loneliness*, *In Water I'm Weightless*, and *The Opportunity of Efficiency* (produced by the New National Theatre, Tokyo),

Most recently, he has directed the company’s current production of *Mother Courage* *and her Children*, performed in a Labour Club in Merthyr Tydfil by an all-female cast. It is the first production in NTW’s fifth season, which will a new version of the *Iliad*, directed by Mike Pearson & Mike Brooks and *The Insatiable, Inflatable Candylion*, a festive show made by Super Furry Animals frontman Gruff Rhys and staged at Christmas 2015.

Before his appointment at National Theatre Wales, John had been a theatre director in New York, London and Manchester. From 1999-2008 he was Artistic Director of Contact Theatre, Manchester. He trained and worked in New York for several years, including a stint as Associate Director of leading experimental company Mabou Mines. As a director, he has worked with a wide range of artists including poet Lemn Sissay (Storm, Something Dark and Why I Don’t Hate White People) and hip-hop theatre artist Benji Reid (b like water). In 2004 he published a book about art in the surveillance age, Loving Big Brother: Performance, Privacy and Surveillance Space, and in 2005 was awarded the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA) Cultural Leadership Award.

**Lourdes Orozco, University of Leeds**

*Theatre in the Outskirts: The Holbeck Underground Ballroom, Poverty and Resilience*

This presentation is an investigation of the role that the Holbeck Underground Ballroom, a small theatre venue in the outskirts of Leeds, has in the theatre landscape of the city. The HUB is run by local theatre company Slung Low who offer the space to companies to perform their work. My presentation wants to explore the venue both as a response to the difficulties that small companies find to perform in the city due to the cuts in the council annual budget affecting the arts; and a response to the poverty of Leeds’ alternative theatre landscape since the closure of the Leeds Met Gallery and Studio Theatre in 2010. Furthermore, the paper aims to look at the HUB as a production model for making theatre in times of austerity in relation to ideas of risk and resilience as highlighted by the ACE recent documents on funding cuts. Finally, accompanied by a video projection of the journey from Leeds City Centre to the HUB, the presentation also wants to think about the mapping of wealth and poverty in the city in relation to theatre activity, as the journey begins from the fancy shopping arcades of Leeds towards the south of the city to end in Leeds’ red district, Holbeck, where the venue is located. The journey will also foreground the HUB’s capacity to highlight both social and artistic inequality within the city.

This presentation is a collaboration between Slung Low producer Porl Cooper and I.

Lourdes Orozco is Lecturer in Theatre Studies in the Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds. Her research interests are on contemporary European (including the UK) theatre and performance practices specially in relation to cultural policy, ethics, and identity. She is particularly interested the theatre policy at the level of cities and how that shapes the theatregoing experience. Her current research interests are on theatre beyond the human and theatre and risk. She is the author of *Theatre and Politics: Theatre in Barcelona 1980-2000; Theatre and Animals* and the co-editor of two special issues of *Contemporary Theatre Review*(Catalan and Flemish Theatre) and also the co-editor of *Performing Animality: Animals in Performance Practices.*

**Sian Rees, Goldsmiths, University of London**

*Don’t Keep Calm. Reclaiming austerity politics through theatre and folklore*

‘Austerity discourse is thoroughly embedded in the cultural imaginary; it is how we are thinking about many of today’s most critical issues.’[[1]](#footnote-1)

Austerity is more than an economic policy. It works as a complex ideological phenomenon; indeed many consider the cultural politics of austerity a site of conflict. Significantly, the weapons of choice, in declaring an ideological war, are cultural. Days after the 2015 election, Britain is expecting a further £12 billion in welfare cuts. The austerity drive has dramatically impacted the political landscape, irrevocably affecting the status, stability and future of the welfare state. Yet, there is untapped currency in subverting the ‘cultural weaponry’ media and political agencies have successfully used to reinforce austerity myths: tradition, cultural events and historical fetishization.

This paper considers the efficacy of theatrical and folkloric modes (Rough Music) employed in my practice, *Austerity Bites*. Rough Music, a pivotal example of early radical protest performance, brought together processional

street theatre, collective action and celebration; modes championed by activists today. As unlicensed direct action, communities self-organised, creating a cacophony of noise which expressed rejection of an individual’s actions. Performatively, it was an historic form of immersive performance, incorporating gaming, storytelling and applied drama. Existing between the fields of performance, folklore and protest, *Austerity Bites* aims to dismantle, subvert, theatricalize and reclaim austerity politics.

Yet, how far can such creative practice actually serve to counter rhetoric by articulating complex arguments? L.M Bogad argues, ‘protest is an art form, and should be treated as such.’[[2]](#footnote-2) Treating protest as an art form, however,

presents aesthetic, ethical and practical challenges. For activists and artists alike, it can diminish the value and purpose of the work. In crossing these fields, Austerity Bites seeks to unpick these arguments, exploring the unique potential of fusing forms.

Sian Rees is an AHRC PhD performance-maker and researcher at Goldsmiths University. Her interests are in examining the efficacy of theatrical protest forms and embodiments of resistance within social movements. Her practice-based research, *Creating Beautiful Trouble in Theatricalizing Politics*, focuses upon the role of play, folklore and performance as a form of resistance against austerity. She examines how austerity has been culturally staged by media and government agencies and presented as a necessity, rather than an ideological choice. As such, her work aims to debunk myths surrounding austerity and examines whether the merging of art, creativity and resistance makes activism more sustainable. She has also participated in artistic direct actions created by the Art Not Oil coalition, the People’s Assembly, and the Lab of Insurrectory Imagination. Notable previous projects include performing in *Revolution Square*(Bush Theatre), Stationhouse Opera (Roundhouse Studios) and a commissioned performance *Make Tea, Not War*(Brighton Fringe).

**Kerrie Schaefer, Exeter University & Graham Jeffery, University of the West of Scotland**

*Theatres of hope? The politics and pragmatics of cultural practice in austerity’s ‘extreme economy’*

This presentation will discuss key findings of a year-long AHRC Connected Communities ‘Pilot Demonstrator’ project (2012-2013), Remaking Society. The project enabled an interdisciplinary team of researchers to engage with four established cultural organisations working in four contrasting contexts of deprivation in the UK. The aims of the project were to:

* Establish ethnographic case studies of participatory arts and media practices in four locations of socio-economic deprivation in the UK.
* Re-map and analyse connections between participatory arts and media practice, assets-based community development (Kretzman and McKnight 1993), ‘cultural vitality’ (Hawkes 2001) and ‘human flourishing’ (White 2011).
* Examine and develop new theory-based methods for evaluating cultural practice in contexts of socio-economic deprivation.
* Provide a set of narrative insights, through cultural production, into the lived experience of poverty and social exclusion; broadening the range of evidence contributing to the UK national Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) Study (www.poverty.ac.uk)

The use of arts/cultural practices in community development contexts has been much debated in recent years with calls for practitioners to empirically prove economic and/or social ‘impact’. The Remaking Society team asserts that the focus on proving impact elides the ethos and praxis of community-based cultural work. For this presentation we will draw on a case study of performance-making in North East Scotland (Theatre Modo) to argue that participatory arts and media are situated, contextualised, lived practices often activated through partnerships across existing community divides, agencies and categories. This fundamental interdependence suggests that the work is rarely methodologically ‘pure’ – it tends to be somewhat fuzzy, messy, blurred and contingent. Developing a more sophisticated account of these practices and processes would acknowledge these ambiguities, and the theoretical and methodological problems that they generate, whilst trying to tease out the value systems and frameworks of meaning-making and un-making that are characteristic of these non- representational practices.

 Dr Kerrie Schaefer is Senior Lecturer in Drama at the University of Exeter. Prior to moving to the UK in 2007 she was Lecturer in Drama at the University of Newcastle, NSW, and a member of the Performance, Community Development and Social Change research group led by Associate Professor David Watt. She is the recipient of an AHRC Fellowship to complete a monograph on community performance (forthcoming with Palgrave Macmillan), and AHRC Follow On funding partnering with acta Community Theatre, Bristol, to host a series of critical dialogues leading into a national festival of community theatre. Kerrie was a co-investigator on Remaking Society.

Graham Jeffery is a practice-based researcher and Reader in Music and Performance at the University of the West of Scotland (UWS). Prior to moving to Scotland with his family in 2005, Graham worked in East London, where he led the NESTA-funded Pathways into Creativity action research project at Newham Sixth Form College and was Programme Leader for Performing Arts at UEL. The project led to the book publication: Jeffery, G. (ed.) (2005) *The creative college: building a successful learning culture in the arts*, Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books. Graham was a co-investigator on Remaking Society.

**Andy Smith, theatre-maker**

*YOU AND ME, HERE AND NOW: De-materialising the theatre to re-materialise the theatre*

This twenty-minute paper will explore the possibilities and limitations of a practice that I refer to as a dematerialised theatre, a practice that I have been involved in making since 2004 both alone and in collaboration with the writer and performer Tim Crouch.  Through reflections that react to as well as explore some of the themes of this symposium, I will explore and challenge some of what this theatre might be able to achieve in order to inspire audiences to consider their position and potential in our present socio-political climate.  The presentation will include illustrations from a number of sources, referencing both my own and other practitioners work as well as theories concerned with our current and precarious circumstances, most clearly Zygmunt Bauman’s extensive writings on the condition of ‘Liquid Modernity’.

Dematerialised theatre is an imperfect and fluid term that outlines a ‘theatre of essence’.  This is a practice that invites and involves the audience into its imaginative processes, and looks to offer them a sense of authority in the creation of work for the theatre.  Influenced by, and taking its name from writings around conceptual art by the critic Lucy Lippard, this work often utilises a ‘poor’ aesthetic that employs and builds upon the idea that more may be able to be achieved with less.  From one perspective, it can be seen as continuing a long theatrical tradition, asking its audience – like the prologue to Henry V – to ‘piece out these imperfections with your thoughts’.  In the present context, the practice is concerned with fiscal and environmental matters as well as artistic questions for contemporary theatre.  It is often cheap to produce, easy to transport, and fluid and flexible in its presentation, making it a useful counter-cultural model for creating work in our economically challenged times.

Andy Smith is a writer and theatre maker who for the last ten years has created a number of solo works for theatre spaces, including*all that is solid melts into air*(2011), *commonwealth* (2012) and most recently *The Preston Bill* (2015). Since 2004 he has also collaborated with Tim Crouch, co-directing (along with Karl James) the award winning plays *An Oak Tree*(2005), *ENGLAND* (2007) and *The Author* (2009). In 2013 Tim and Andy co-wrote and performed *what happens to the hope at the end of the evening* at The Almeida Theatre together. In 2014 Tim, Karl and Andy co-directed Tim’s play *Adler & Gibb*at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs.

**Janine Waters, Edge Theatre**

Janine Waters has worked in mainstream and participatory theatre for 30 years. She originally trained as an actress and moved into making theatre with community groups, facilitation, writing and directing early in her career. She has worked for a number of building based arts organisations, including Shakespeare's Globe and The Royal Exchange, where she set up the Muslim Jewish Youth Theatre & The Refugee Theatre Company. She has led on the partnerships with The Booth Centre (Manchester's Homeless activity centre) both for The Exchange and for The Edge for the past 8 years. She was the John Thaw Fellow at the University of Manchester from 2008-2010 and has made theatre for In Place of War with the Congolese community of Manchester and with a group of young Muslim women. She is co-founder and Artistic Director of The Edge Theatre & Arts Centre in Chorlton and is currently working on a new panto "It's Behind You" with 15 homeless adults and on a new musical starring Julie Hesmondhalgh which will go into production in summer 2016.

**Reece Williams**

*The Relative Cost of Ambition in the Arts*

Reece Williams is a graduate with a 2:1 BA Hons in Music, Theatre and Entertainment Management at the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA). His main areas of artistic interest are literature (live and print) and theatre and he has a broad understanding of law, finance and project administration.

He has extensive experience as a writer, performer and project administrator, having joined Manchester-based poetry collective Young Identity (YI) in 2007, working with and opening for the likes of Saul Williams, Kate Tempest, The Last Poets and the late Amiri Baraka. Reece became the Project Administrator for YI in 2008; a role which he presently occupies.

Reece is passionate about youth engagement, cultural policy and race relations and embeds peer mentoring and the advocacy of active citizenship through the arts into his professional practice. He is a Trustee at Contact (The Manchester Young Peoples’ Theatre Trust), an organisation dedicated to the engagement of young people through the arts, serving on the Artistic Evaluation Group. Reece is the Peer Mentor on The Agency, a project delivered by Contact and The Battersea Arts Centre which empowers young people from economically and socially deprived communities to create projects which foster change.

1. Bramall, R. The Cultural Politics of Austerity, past and present in austere times, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bogad, L.M *Electoral Guerrilla Theatre: Radical Ridicule and Social Movements,* Routledge, 2005, p. 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)