

“The question is not what can the university do for us? The question is what can we do for the university?”

An observation by Pamela Franklin who leads the Caribbean Social Forum. Pamela was speaking to me over coffee and cake as I launched a Widening participation programme at the Bathway Theatre in 2017 called WAU: Empowering Community Voices. An observation which has deeply impacted my thinking about the role of the universities and theatres in their local community and how we might rethink what our work is.

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Hello. My name is David Hockham and I am the Theatre Manager of The Bathway Theatre, The university of Greenwich's dedicated drama facility in Woolwich where we will be live tomorrow. There I lecture in production and technical theatre, digital performance and scenography. If you are unfamiliar with the term, scenography is a way of thinking about how different theatre making methods come together to stage performance. I use scenography in my research as a way of thinking about how component parts, both people and materials, come together to form assemblages and worlds with both formal and informal structures. As I work for a university I am particularly interested in their structures and ways of working. I look to how we might use performance theories to re-think how universities operate with local, national and global communities. Today I begin to think through the ways in which the plural oral histories of our communities might be championed by universities as a way to decolonise our spaces, recognising a need to work with people outside of an institutional bubble.

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This augments Performance scholar Swati Arora's work (2021), who argues that universities should be leaky spaces where knowledge flows into communities. I argue that waters eb and flow arguing and organisations, including universities, need to open up and allow the rivers of knowledge from local communities to flow back into them. An argument which I make with Jean Campbell, Adele Chambers, Pamela Franklin, Professor Tracey Reynolds, Shamica Ruddock and Professor Ingrid Pollard in a paper soon to be published in Research in Drama and Education which examines the ways in which universities work with communities and supports the archiving of oral histories through art and performance practices. The DOI can be seen in the chat (publication hopefully in the next couple of weeks).

Insert Hockham, Campbell, Chambers, Franklin, Pollard Reynolds, Ruddock (Forthcoming) Let Our Legacy Continue: Beginning an archival journey. A Creative Essay of the digital co-creation and hybrid dissemination of Windrush Oral Histories at the University of Greenwich's Stephen Lawrence Gallery.;

10.1080/13569783.2022.2060733

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Arora, S. (2021) 'A manifesto to decentre theatre and performance studies', Studies in Theatre and Performance. Routledge, 41(1), pp. 12–20. doi:

10.1080/14682761.2021.1881730

Before I turn to this a little more about me.

My PhD, which I defend in 2 weeks time, is in pedagogy and learning, specifically about how we teach technical theatre in Higher Education. In it I frame technical theatre as multiple performance making or scenography methods. Which is to say, methods of production and technical theatre come together to stage performance and create worlds. I have been using parts of my PhD's critical framework to expand my thinking in wider contexts.

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I am also a producer of theatre and arts projects. This happens in two contexts. The first is with an internationally touring theatre company, Dead Rabbits Theatre. This company produces highly visual and physical performance to tell true stories, centred around a strong female protagonist. We are currently touring Tiger Lady, the story of Mabel Stark, the first female Tiger Tamer. This is touring digitally nationwide at the moment and heads to Edinburgh this August.

LINK - <https://www.pleasance.co.uk/event/tiger-lady#overview>

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Secondly, since 2017, I produce and support community projects with organisations who work with in the university's Bathway theatre. In this space I have been interested in the ways in which identities intersect, and have been developing, with others, equitable frameworks of co-producing activity with universities. Co-Publishing with Tatiana Ellis, Erica Rolle and Dr Pamela Zigomo in 2020 an equitable framework which we called 'open third space.' It considers, within university partnerships, the three pillars of relationships, resources and results.

Link <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14682761.2020.1807211>

Today, I consider how oral history methods and the performance of oral histories might support change in university (and wider institutional spaces), so that plural voices might be heard at the centre of an organisation, with those who have power.

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Tomorrow I'll be chairing a panel of two community organisations, Avant Gardening and the Caribbean Social Forum, with whom I have worked on Oral History projects over the last couple of years. One of which culminated in the 'Let Our a legacy Continue Exhibition' as seen on the BBC , which was both live at the university of Greenwich's Stephen Lawrence Gallery and is now online. This work was co-produced with Prof Tracey Reynolds, a professor in sociology and expert in participatory arts practices, and arts practioners the Caribbean Social Forum, a group of over 600 Caribbean Elders, the now called wind rush generation. The same team who co-wrote the previously mentioned RIDE article.

Link <https://tinyurl.com/LetOurLegacy>

The second group, Avant Gardening, are currently using arts in their Bijou Stories projects to collect and retell the stories of LGBT+ people. Both Pamela from the Caribbean Social Forum and Paul from Avant Gardening and the Bijou Stories project will talk to these projects in more detail tomorrow.

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It is through my work at Bathway where I met Pam Schweitzer. In 2018 she invited me to work with her on a large EU project. In this project, archived oral histories, from the Reminiscence Theatre Archive, alongside gathered testimonies through filmed interviews were pulled together through papers, films and social media clips as a web resource. The project looking to counter hostile BREXIT immigration narratives. A body of work shared with and co-created with 10 other EU organisations.

Link: https://www.jkpev.de/en/portfolio_page/open-european-societies-2018/

Today, I'm going to be sharing my observations in how this work connects. It will extend the work on open-third space and showcase some of the methods and concepts soon to be published in RIDE. I will offer the performance of oral histories as a way to begin to disseminate and think through the knowledge held within communities, to understand our community expertise. This shifts the paradigm of "what universities can do for communities" to "what can people in communities do for us". A strategy to create a civic institution where the work of engagement becomes essential, rather than an add on. Where we ask the question "who do we need to work with," not "what can we do for you?". By seeing people in communities as experts we need to understand and champion their knowledge and allow that to influence what we do. This does not just apply to universities. This weekend I stumbled across Ned Glasier's twitter feed - Artistic Director of Company Three **SLIDE**. What struck me is that the argument I make today for universities, is very similar to that of Ned who looks to change the ways theatres think about 'participation strategies.' I argue, that the learning from participatory theatre and performance projects could be applied to wider institutions and disciplines. Here I frame oral history performance as it requires the participation of others in its content creation.

To make my case I will bring together the learning from my work over the past five years and begin to share a language, framework and set of thinking which might be used by universities and wider organizations to centre our work in the communities we reside.

I'll use the language of scenography, to discuss and think through the methods of performance practice and oral history projects and use this as an analogy to think about wider institutional practices and activity.

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To begin I reflect on the open third space framework which draws attention to three pillars of participatory practice: Relationships, Resources and Results. In our co-authored article we describe Relationships as a shorthand to frame the complex ways in which people come together across multiple social and situated activities. Here social refers to the ways in which people come together to undertake projects and activity. The term situated recognises the way in which the context of projects affect activity. This is considered in both the broadest sense to include wider social, cultural, historical contexts but also in the highly local sense, speaking to the specific place, time and people involved. It recognises that every time we come together to do something new, we are negotiating the ways in which we work, with others. in situ. This is true for both new encounters and collaborations and also teams who are well acquainted. Each time we undertake activity we need to adjust, align and orientate ways of working, building levels of trust between those involved.

This is potentially, at times, difficult to navigate. If oral histories are at the centre of an arts project there is likely a reason why we have chosen this method, both in terms of content sourcing, documenting and then re-presenting. I am keen to understand who the protagonist in these works are. Who's idea was it to do this work? A specific community or from an organisation like a university. Coupled with this question is why? These questions are important if we are to understand the drivers of the work, but also, ultimately, the legacy or "result." What is to be made? how will it come together? Will it have benefit to all those who engage in the project in a lasting and meaningful way?

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Across the three projects I have mentioned, The Let Our Legacy Continue project with the Caribbean Social Forum, Bijou Stories with Avant Gardening and the EU Open European Societies project with Pam: who the project was for, the reasons why they came about, the relationship's within project teams and final products looked and felt very different. Each forged different types of relationships across different types of stakeholders

Pamela Franklin was the protagonist of the Let Our Legacy Continue project. Looking to capture the memories of her mothers generation and sharing plural Caribbean stories from elders from across the Caribbean who had journeyed from multiple territories to the UK. It looked to recognise the heterogeneous nature of these journeys and ensure these voices were not written out of history in the same way as Teresa Mays government disposed of the multiple legal documents of Caribbean people in the 'Windrush Scandal.' The projects stories able to be shared with children and grandchildren through the online gallery.

The protagonist in Bijou Stories is Paul Green. A queer artist who has created an LGBT+ arts collective. They are seeking people to join the project to capture untold histories, platforming the untold stories of queer communities of London.

Whilst the EU project, which looked to tackle rising xenophobia and racism across Europe, attempted to tell the plural stories of EU migration, engaging with 11 different countries and 12 partner organisations, asking for dissemination at different scales: local and national levels across EU territories.

How a project is orientated be it: local, national or international, changes the relationship between the oral history story tellers, and the final result, redefining what success looks like for those involved.

These three examples have led me to consider oral history story projects as having protagonists. Those who step forward to instigate projects, who identify the need to understand plural perspectives, championing the different ways histories play out and are remembered. These protagonists become advocates in project teams, to hear the multiple stories of communities and champion their expert knowledge. As such, oral history projects have at their heart, storytellers. Those who share their story. Within this we begin to form a language to consider the relationships of those involved, storytellers and project team.

Recognising the different positions of people in oral history projects, the ways in which projects are navigated and the orientating ruptures which arise as different stakeholders share different ways of working thinking and understanding are scenographic markers. They are part of the language of scenography and in turn the language allows us to reflect on the methods we are using and the ways in which power is distributed in equitable or unequitable ways. Here I argue that scenography, as a critical lens, allows us to consider the ways in which projects come together, to scrutinise the component parts and in so doing, change ways of working to ensure that projects benefit all of the partners involved and leave a legacy

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Having discussed relationships and results, the final pillar in the equitable framework, resources, considers all resources such as space, time and personnel etc as finite entities. You could argue that because of this we need to be strategic with how we lend out time, who we offer our time to and what projects we do. The problem with this sense of rationing or steer is that we might only engage with networks we are familiar with and close down conversations which might feel risky or simply uncertain. Instead, I head back to the question what can people do for us? What do I need from others? On a personal level, removing any sense of altruism allows us to think like producers. Is this for Kicks, Quids or Kudos? How does what I am about to do extend, augment and shift my work narrative. What are the opportunities it may open up? From an institutional perspective we can ask the same questions and be transparent about it.

Conversations on funding where, with what and who are obvious questions at the start of any arts project. What is perhaps less considered is a recognition of the expertise of the people telling their story. Clearly we have placed people in front of a microphone for a reason, because we believe their story has value, but what about the individual who's voicing the story? /how might their lived experience change the ways in which the story is told, or how might their skill change the methods in which the work is made. Or, how might the person's story change what we are doing?

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One of the concepts I have become interested in within my PhD has been the concept of trans-situated expertise. The term, which is taken from practice theorist Nicolini, and their co-authored work which observed TAVI heart surgery, speaks to

the ways in which it is not always the most qualified or most senior person who comes forward to operate, but rather the person who has the most direct situated experience. Within my PhD, I use heart surgery as an analogy to think about the making of performance. I recognise the multiple ways of working, the different types of expertise in spaces and the different challenges which arise out of emerging situated contexts. Within the RIDE article, I offer the term trans-situated expertise as a way of recognising the expertise of those involved in the project, both project team and storytellers. Where the different experts skills support projects to be both navigated and produced.

Insert Nicolini, D. *et al.* (2017) 'Expertise as Trans-Situated', in Sandberg, J. *et al.* (eds) *Skilful Performance: Enacting Capabilities, Knowledge, Competence and Expertise in Organizations*. Oxford Sch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 27–49. doi: 10.1093/oso/9780198806639.001.0001.

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The scenographic terms Orientation, ruptures, navigation, scale Protagonists, project teams, and experts speak to the methods of producing Oral History performance. I argue that scenography as a set of concepts and way into analysing methods might support equitable assemblages and ways of working.

If we consider performance making methods, such as those of oral histories as an analogy of wider ways in which activity in institutions are constructed, a way of thinking about how materials and people come together to undertake work activity then perhaps we might begin to shift our thinking. WE might use the questions which arise out of oral history methods and ask them in wider contexts and we might begin to understand how to answer "what can people in communities do for a university?" actively seeking out and becoming surprised by our collaborations, partners and projects.,