

Curated Plenaries and Awards Programme Information

Wednesday 4th September

11:00-11.45 - Conference Opening, Welcome Speeches and TaPRA Awards Announcements

15:30-17:00 - Plenary 1: *What next for UK Theatre and Performance Studies?*
Northumbria Sponsored Panel

Chair: Prof. Donna Chambers, Northumbria University

Speakers: Prof Caron Gentry, Northumbria University, Dr Rachel Hann, Northumbria University, & Prof Simon Shepherd, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

Summary of Panel:

Creative disciplines, and perhaps theatre and performance in particular, have faced challenging times over the last decade and a half. Our disciplines' wider cultural, social and economic values have been elided in preference of political discourses that have accused these programmes of being 'low value', 'soft', or 'Mickey Mouse'. At the same time, creative disciplines have all but been removed from primary and secondary education putting enormous pressure on the pipeline into Higher Education, leading contractions in programme sizes, staff redundancies and course closures across the UK. In such a hostile landscape, it can be challenging to find positives. Yet we know from recent British Academy and HEPI reports that the skills and expertise developed by students studying our disciplines are vital to the future of the UK's workforce in and beyond the creative industries. More recently, the new Culture Secretary, Lisa Nandy, has declared the 'culture wars' to be over, and the new Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson, has made "arts, sport, music, drama" a central pillar of her ambitions for all UK education going forward. Together these perhaps signal a new direction of travel (at least in political discourse) on the value of creative education.

Without ignoring the complexity and difficulty of the current Higher Education landscape, this panel takes its energy from the more positive perspectives outlined and asks: "what next for UK Theatre and Performance Studies?" Panellists will reflect on previous moments of development (growth and contraction) of our disciplines and what can be learned from these; on the importance and value of theatre and performance to wider strategic developments in interdisciplinary programmes in Higher Education; and, on ways that individually we can make strategic decisions about how we define, describe and disseminate our research to best effect professionally. The panel offers a positive and practical approach to the challenges facing theatre and performance studies in the UK right now, offering a range of perspective and approaches to the future of creative disciplines nationally.

17.15-18.45 - Plenary 2: *Palestinian Theatre: Histories, Contemporary Voices, and Solidarities*
TaPRA Exec Sponsored Panel

Chair: Dr Roaa Ali, University of Manchester

Speakers: Dr Dani Abulhawa, University of Leeds, UK, Prof Mojisola Adebayo, Queen Mary's, University of London, UK, Iman Aoun, ASHTAR Theatre, Ramallah, Palestine, & Dr Konrad Suder Chatterjee, ASHTAR Theatre, Ramallah, Palestine

Summary of Panel:

This panel explores the rich tapestry of Palestinian theatre, highlighting its challenges, remarkable contributions to the arts, and its role in generating revolutionary solidarity. Our speakers will delve into its historical roots, contemporary practices, and the role of solidarity in theatre-making. It will spotlight the significance of ASHTAR Theatre, a theatre organisation for social justice founded in 1991 and based in Ramallah, and the experiences of non-Palestinian allies. It will also address the unique challenges faced by Palestinian theatre artists. This panel aims to deepen our understanding of decolonisation in the arts and is a call to action for our community by foregrounding Palestinian voices and theatre arts in education, research and practice.

Thursday 5th September 2024

16.30-18:00 - Plenary 3: *Disability and Performance: Access, Aesthetics, Justice*
David Bradby 2023 Awards Panel

Speakers: Dr Rachel Clive, University of Glasgow, Dr Jessi Parrott, performer, playwright and access consultant, Indiana Lown-Collins, theatre director, Kaite O'Reilly, playwright and dramaturg, & Dr Hannah Simpson, University of Edinburgh

Michelle Terry's decision to cast herself as the disabled king in the Globe's 2024 production of *Richard III* caused uproar in the theatre community this year. Meanwhile, sell-out runs of award-winning disability-centred shows like FlawBored's *It's a Motherfucking Pleasure* (Soho Playhouse; New Diorama; Bristol Old Vic), Zoo Co/Improbable's *Perfect Show for Rachel* (Barbican), Henry Fraser's *The Little Big Things* (Soho Place), and TourettesHero's restaging of Samuel Beckett's *Not I* (Battersea Arts Centre) have demonstrated both the audience hunger for disability-led theatre, and the new heights to which disability and access aesthetics can push coteremporary performance. So: where are we with theatre and disability?

This panel welcomes a mixture of theatre scholars and practitioners to discuss this question. We'll be thinking about issues of disability justice in the field of theatre and performance, including theatre (and academic) accessibility, and debates on disability casting and 'cripping up'. We'll also be thinking more broadly about disability aesthetics in performance, and the creative opportunities opened up by disability- and access-led practice. For a field so focused on the human body, what can theatre and performance learn from disability studies and from disabled theatre practitioners? How can disability aesthetics, or the aesthetic of access, expand how we think about or do 'theatre'?

18:15-19.15 - PGR + ECR Event: *To Build Solidarity and Support As If There is No Future*

Summary of session:

In some ways, it has never been more important, and never more difficult, to imagine the future

of theatre and performance. Perhaps this sentiment has been expressed many times before...and yet we still find ourselves worrying, wondering what we might do as postgraduate and early career researchers who are already deeply invested in forging a career in theatre and performance research in these messy and difficult times fraught with uncertainty.

Following up on conversations from the intergenerational mentorship session in 2023, this hybrid session will take the form of peer-led breakout group discussions that will focus on the following themes:

- Post-academy (post-MA and/or post-PhD) and alternative career routes; covering postdoctoral research, teaching, or moving beyond the academy.
- Navigating migrant routes in and beyond the academy; sharing concerns and collective resources specific to international postgraduate and early career researchers.
- The future of theatre and performance studies as a discipline, in the face of widespread department closures, funding cuts etc.
- Academic freedom and solidarity

Join us for a gentle, supportive session where we can talk openly about these worries. And as we do, let's make a start at building solidarity and creating structures of support. There are no easy or instant solutions, but let's map out some first steps together.

Friday 6th September 2024

10.30-12:00 - Plenary 4: *Breathe, Speak, Act: Black British Theatre and Performance as Activist Interventions*

Outstanding Award 2023 Panel

Speakers: Prof Mojisola Adebayo, Queen Mary's, University of London, Prof Lennox Goddard, Royal Holloway, University of London, & Dr Vanessa Macaulay, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Summary of Panel:

This plenary panel considers the making and researching of Black British theatre and performance as activist interventions. From our perspectives as scholars and theatre makers, we explore some of the ways that Black British theatre and performance practitioners engage with past, current, and ongoing social and political issues pertaining to Black lives. Our papers and discussion focuses on performances that we have made and/or researched that portray racialised experiences, and engage debates about race and racism. Through these we examine the shifting landscapes of Black British theatre making and research, consider what is at stake in the making of activist Black work within British theatrical contexts, and think through questions about what it means to intervene through our performance making and research processes across the generations.

Mojisola Adebayo reflects on her piece *46 Women Attempt a Question*, written for the Arcola Theatre's *Cutting the Tighrope: The Divorce of Politics from Art*, a performance of a series of short plays made in response to the Arts Council's warning to its funded organisations that individuals making "overtly political or activist statements" in a personal capacity ran a

reputational risk that could breach funding agreements. Adebayo reflects on questions about censorship and solidarity in the making of Black British theatre.

Lynette “Lennox” Goddard presents on how Black British playwrights are responding to prominent Black Lives Matter concerns. They consider some recent Black British activist playwriting, including short and solo plays and political theatre responding to and memorialising Black deaths in custody.

Vanessa Damilola Macauley discusses her piece *Between Stolen Breaths*, which was made in response to the police murder of George Floyd within the context of the Covid-19 lockdown.

We reflect together on these and a sample of recent Black activist performance pieces, think about the relationship between Black theatre in the UK and the USA, and consider the future potential of Black British theatre making and research.