

Institution: University of Portsmouth		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 33: Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies		
Title of case study: Transformative Applied Theatre Making with Diverse Communities		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Erika Hughes	Academic Lead in Performance	15/06/2017 - date
Matt Smith	Senior Lecturer in Applied Theatre	21/09/2009 - date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>The research of Erika Hughes and Matt Smith has a shared focus on the transformative effects of applied theatre practices. It has produced new modes and opportunities for engagement, participation and learning for individuals and institutions in the UK and internationally. New audiences, including underserved communities and vulnerable groups, have been attracted and involved through collaborative community engagement projects which have led to changed museum and festival practices and new approaches to community outreach. International initiatives have supported military veterans in the UK and US with mental wellbeing and better public understanding through theatricalized storytelling. Most recently, their work has been instrumental in reaching and educating communities in Kenya on urgent health issues, supporting the understanding of children's experiences of lung problems and air pollution, and helping to prevent the spread and transmission of Covid-19.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>The complementary research methodologies of Hughes and Smith, involving community-based theatre making, have created new modes of engagement for organisations while providing a vital means of expression for individuals and groups. Their research investigates how Applied Theatre can help communities grapple with difficult topics like immigration, asylum, trauma, and military conflict. Smith's work in applied puppetry and Hughes' work in transformative storytelling explore opportunities for engagement in schools, community centres, festivals, and museums. Both scholars share an approach to opening dialogues among communities and groups, and have consolidated the culture of Applied Theatre at the University of Portsmouth.</p> <p>Smith's research is informed by twenty-seven years of using puppetry in applied theatre settings. This practice formed the bedrock for theorising a new field: 'applied puppetry', a term that Smith coined in a 2014 chapter and subsequently developed in further publications of 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2020 (R1). Smith's research conceptualises puppetry as a tool for the (re)conceiving of identities, which is especially evident in practices and performances he has conducted with marginalised groups such as migrants (2016) and disabled people (2020). Smith's research expounds a haptic practice-led methodology for using puppets as an applied form of theatre making. This methodology involves a form of creative dialogue supported by puppetry, in which participants describe narratives about geographies, ecologies and heritage and thereby reconceive the world through practice (2020). He reveals the powerful impact of applied puppetry on individuals and groups, identifying potential for new modes of participation, expression and experience (2015). This approach to practice is evident in the <i>Puppet City</i> project.</p> <p>Hughes' published research has considered how Applied Theatre can serve as a tool through which communities can come to terms with their pasts. It is also informed by extensive experience as a theatre director and deviser of live performance concerning the Holocaust in non-traditional settings. In articles of 2017 and 2018, Hughes considered dramaturgical strategies for children's theatre in Phoenix, Arizona, (R2) and in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC (R3). Her practice-research has since increasingly dealt with legacies of conflict and trauma for military veterans.</p> <p>'Embodied historiography', the practice-research methodology Hughes first described in a 2014 article, is both a concept and a method for applied theatre work. It conceives of community performers as living historical documents and places audience members in the role of historians. This performance dynamic enables standard narratives around the Holocaust, youth and military</p>		

service to be challenged through storytelling performance and it thereby transforms understandings for performers and audiences.

Since joining the University of Portsmouth in 2017, Hughes has further deployed and developed this method in an ongoing series of performance-based practice-research projects (six since joining Portsmouth) with military veterans that have been conducted in the UK and US. In a 2017 article (**R4**), Hughes theorised that the acts of performing and witnessing produced by the projects are central to the process of gathering, generating and exchanging knowledge. In each performance, veterans from the UK or US share their experiences of military service with one another, and their communities, which transform understandings of military life and service for veterans (performers) and civilians (audience).

In 2019, Smith collaborated on the Medical Research Council funded 'Tupumue' project, '*Non-communicable lung disease in Kenya: from burden and early life determinants to participatory interdisciplinary solutions*'. The project explored children's experiences of lung problems and air pollution to demonstrate the high prevalence of non-communicable lung disease. Led by Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, the cross-disciplinary team included Cressida Bowyer (Senior Research Fellow and Principal Investigator) who led on the identification of relevant applied creative methods from the University of Portsmouth. Portsmouth co-investigator, Louis Netter (Senior Lecturer in Illustration) worked with Smith to develop puppetry as an innovative route to engage Kenyan communities with health issues (**S5**). The puppetry was engaged to enhance the project's aims to communicate public health information and familiarise communities with the project, which was further supported by a Wellcome Trust public engagement award in collaboration with the University of Glasgow (**S10**).

In 2020, the success of the 'Tupumue' project led to Smith and Hughes collaborating with UoP colleague Netter as practice-researchers on the *ACT (Action against COVID Transmission)* project to support the Mukuru community in Nairobi in reducing COVID-19 transmission. Led by University of Portsmouth PI, Bowyer, it included a cross-disciplinary team of academics and partner organisations in the UK and Kenya. The project developed creative methods for responding to the COVID-19 crisis and to raise awareness around health and wellbeing issues. It disseminated public health messages using socially and culturally relevant media. Smith's work in applied puppetry and Hughes' research in transformative storytelling were instrumental in developing a practical toolkit to support workshop-leaders of the Mukuru Arts Centre to engage and educate local communities about the risks and dangers of COVID-19. The ACT project deployed a selection of creative methods, including puppetry and transformative storytelling, for a period of 4 months.

3. References to the research

(**R1**) **Smith, M.** (2014-2020). *Towards a Definition of Applied Puppetry: Five articles defining a new field*. Multicomponent output (submitted as REF2 ID: 26322600) consisting of:

- **Smith, M.** (2014). Towards a definition of applied puppetry. In L. Krofin (Ed) *Međunarodni znanstveni skup, Europske odrednice pojma lutke i stručno lutkarsko nazivlje* – Zbornik radova. Academy of Arts, University of Osijek: Osijek, pp.83–94, ISBN 978-953-58055-4-0
- **Smith, M.** (2015). The Practice of Applied Puppetry: Antecedents and Tropes. *Research in Drama Education*, 20(4), 531-536. doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2015.1073581
- **Smith, M.** (2016). Thinking Through the Puppet inside Immigration Detention. *Applied Theatre Research*, 4(2), 147-159. doi.org/10.1386/atr.4.2.147_1
- **Smith, M.** (2018). Hand to Hand: The dynamic situation of applied puppetry. In K. Kopania (Ed.) *Dolls and Puppets: Contemporaneity and Tradition*. The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw: Warsaw, pp. 88–93, ISBN 978-83-88358-02-9.
- Purcell-Gates, L. and **Smith, M.** (2020). Applied Puppetry: Communities, identities, transgression.' *Applied Theatre Research*, 8(1), 3-11. doi.org/10.1386/atr_00022_2

(**R2**) **Hughes, E.** (2017). Dramaturgies of Risky Play: two (risky) case studies. *Youth Theatre Journal*, 31(1), 35-47. doi.org/10.1080/08929092.2016.1278066

(R3) Hughes, E. (2018). Performing Witnessing: dramatic engagement, trauma and museum installations. *Research in Drama Education*, 23(2), 272-281.
doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2018.1441709

(R4) Hughes, E. (2017). The Veterans Project: Historiography In/As Performance. *Theatre Topics*, 27(3), 179-186. (Submitted to REF2 as part of the multicomponent output entitled *Veterans Project and Odyssey Home* ID 26322649) [doi:10.1353/tt.2017.0034](https://doi.org/10.1353/tt.2017.0034)

Statement in support of underpinning research quality

The underpinning outputs by Smith and Hughes represent selection of a substantial body of related work. All employ robust research design and appropriate techniques. The articles (R1-R4) are published in respected international peer-reviewed academic journals that are relevant to the discipline.

4. Details of the impact

The innovative research methodologies of Smith and Hughes have realised change in local, national and international communities as is evidenced in the following examples:

1. Changing museum practices and engaging new audiences in Portsmouth

Since 2019 the work of both Smith and Hughes has impacted on the programming of the National Museum of the Royal Navy within the Portsmouth Historic Dockyard through applied theatre performance events that engage audiences in new interactive ways. The dockyard has an annual footfall of 950,000 visitors but they continually seek ways to engage new, harder to reach audiences, including young people and families. **(S2)**

In April 2019, Smith's work led to the organisation embracing puppetry within the museum setting for the first time for their popular *Horrible Histories Pirates* exhibition. The event's producer, Carmen Flynn, noted, '*Matt's research into modes of Applied Theatre featuring puppetry meant that it proved to be a really interactive and engaging experience for all involved [as] it encouraged children to play and create within the new exhibit. It thereby led people to engage with the Historic Dockyard in a new, interactive way.*' **(S2)**

Hughes brought a neglected yet historically important exhibit in the museum to life for local school children. In May 2019, she staged the UK premiere of Finegan Kruckemeyer's award-winning play *Boats* as a promenade, storytelling experience aboard the 1915 warship HMS M.33, the least visited exhibit in the dockyard. In applying her research in 'embodied historiography', Hughes engaged students from underserved Portsmouth-area schools with the ship and its history. A teacher from Park Community School reflected that Hughes' work '*encourages the kids to look wider than just school*' by extending their learning to such sites and their stories. **(S4)**. Carmen Flynn reflected that '*the significance of [this] work...in engaging young people in new modes of experiencing and understanding our museum exhibits through theatre cannot be overstated because it set a great example for subsequent engagement work within the Dockyard.*' **(S2)**

Hughes' research into Holocaust theatre has achieved impact through *Presence of the Past: Staging Holocaust Testimony*, an annual performance event staged for the Portsmouth community. Despite the pandemic causing the 2020 event to be cancelled, the project has already reached nearly 300 people in Portsmouth since the first event in 2018. It has impacted on a cross-section of Portsmouth society, including adults with little or no connection to the Holocaust, local school children, university students and members of the local Jewish community, to ensure the continuation of collective Holocaust memory beyond the lives of those who survived it. Portsmouth teacher Tim Booker, wrote, '*This project has had a profound impact on our students at Mayville High School, many of whom have never met a Holocaust survivor before. [Furthermore, by] seeing people who look like them, who are just a couple of years older than they are, our students come to understand that this history could happen in the present. In so doing, they come to understand that they bear the responsibility to one another to prevent such an atrocity from ever happening again.*' **(S8)**

2. Attracting audiences and new approaches to community outreach for UK-wide festivals

In 2018, Smith's research into the functionality of puppetry within applied theatre contexts addressing asylum led to the creation of *Puppet City*, which presented a new mode of engagement for children and families. Workshop participants build cityscapes from cardboard and then use

puppetry to explore and reflect on them from the outsider perspective of the immigrant. *Puppet City* has been staged at festivals in Portsmouth (2018 & 2019) and Leicester (2019), as part of the work of Journeys Festival International, and in Bristol (2019), as part of the 'Towards the Child Friendly City' event organised by the community interest company, Playful Planet. Hundreds of people interacted with these performances and the Portsmouth Journeys Festival reached a total of 59,643 people. Claire Woollard, Producer of Portsmouth's festival, reported that: '*Puppet City was especially beneficial in encouraging people to stay and engage with the broader event, increasing the reach of our work to individuals who may not have stopped otherwise*'. (S1) She employed *Puppet City* in a follow-up event in Portsmouth specifically to explore how the festival can develop its reach to new audiences. The project also impacted on the way *The Makers Guild*, a Portsmouth-based Community Interest Company (www.makers-guild.com), developed their work. As the Guild's Director, Gavin Hodson, explained, engaging with Smith's research and preparation for *Puppet City* altered their approach to community outreach and economic development work in the city. They embraced puppets and their making as a key and different mechanism for engaging their more than 200 members in fresh creative projects. (S3)

3. Raising awareness and understanding of military conflict and trauma in the UK and US

Hughes' practice-research with military veterans has had a transformative effect on audience understandings of conflict and military service. For the veterans, it has helped them to come to terms with service and trauma and aided mental wellbeing. Their performances are witnessed by civilian and military audiences and the format of sharing stories — veteran to veteran — in a multi-layered audio-visual staging results in the ex-servicemen working through experiences of service and trauma in a powerful way for all involved. As RAF veteran-turned-performer, Rev (Sqn Ldr) Steve Radley observed, '*This proves to be an affirming and healing experience, as I found telling my story releases emotions which otherwise remain trapped in my mind. The process of listening serves to build relationships between veterans and civilians as the latter learns about the former. Understanding helps remove fear and promotes love and acceptance*'. (S6) There have been 12 performances (six since Hughes arrived at Portsmouth) in different locations and formats which amount to a total audience of around 500 people. *The Veterans Project*, featuring a quartet of UK ex-servicemen, was staged twice in Portsmouth in July and November of 2018 and again in Newcastle in June 2019. *Odyssey Home*, featuring female US veterans, was staged in Canton, NY in September 2017 and Boston, MA in August 2018. A storytelling session was held in Gosport, Hampshire, in May 2018 in association with the FirstLight Trust, a military wellness charity. This, along with the performances in Portsmouth, received media coverage from Solent TV (S7), PureFM, Heart Radio and The Portsmouth News, which extended the reach of this transformative work to tens of thousands across the region.

4. Transforming understanding and communication of urgent health issues in Kenya

In 2019, the MRC-funded 'Tupumue' project involved the puppet show *Billy's Day Out* that was toured and performed to 900 school children in the Mukuru informal settlement and more affluent Buruburu division in Nairobi, Kenya. The Mukuru settlement has a population of around 700,000 people. Smith's research was introduced as an innovative route to inform communities about the research project and lung disease issues. The project leader, Graham Devereux (Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine), described the introduction of puppets informed by the research of Matt Smith as 'transformative' in engaging the local Kenyan community: '*the impact of puppetry is wider than we could have originally envisioned*' and opened up '*new modes of engaging audiences and new ways of ensuring wide-reaching public participation*'. Describing the performances of *Billy's Day Out* and subsequent videos of the puppetry: '*[I] was hugely impressed by the way the children in Nairobi schools responded to the puppets and able to understand the message that is being communicated*' (S5). Professor Cindy Gray (University of Glasgow) concluded that '*our collaboration with Smith and the work they informed was vital to the community, in Nairobi*'. (S10). In 2020, Smith and Hughes both contributed vital knowledge and community-engagement techniques to the ACT (Action against COVID Transmission) project to support the Mukuru community in Nairobi in reducing COVID-19 transmission. Muruku has more than 100,000 households spread over three villages and covering 650 acres, with families living in cramped conditions. Given the transmission pathways of COVID-19, community engagement is essential for reducing the spread of the infection. As one of the community reflected, '*People here live from*

hand to mouth, they don't have time to go and research about COVID. Secondly, if you write a very long post about Covid people won't have time to read, same to long press conferences. But when we use art to explain a whole concept and the people are able to internalise and interrogate it more' (S9). Hughes employed her research into digital storytelling to encourage local ways of expressing concerns about the developing pandemic. Smith drew on his pioneering research into applied puppetry techniques to offer local artists new communication tools. 21 local community practitioner 'champions' in Mukuru were supported and trained to use the techniques of digital storytelling and puppetry to engage local perspectives about the global pandemic. Community school teachers then used the skills training they received in their own teaching practice to enhance understanding and influence changes in behaviour to help reduce the transmission of the virus: *'We had a programme at St. Michael's secondary school that was meant to keep students busy and out of the slums...They made hand puppets. We also did some drawings of masks and the corona virus (sic.); this is all thanks to the knowledge acquired from the ACT project' (S9)*

Hughes' digital storytelling documented the lived experience of Mukuru residents during the pandemic. As one of the community commented, *'starting with the digital storytelling, we were sharing our own experiences of COVID-19 in the community so you will find what we are talking about is what's really happening on the ground' (S9)*

Community artists and youth activist groups continue to use the techniques that were introduced during this project to provide ongoing training for community health champions working in Mukuru on COVID prevention programmes. One champion commented, *'I am a part of many organized groups, CBO's and cooperatives, these methods will help me to mobilize and organize the community and to train others who don't have these skills.'* (S9)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

(S1) Letter corroborating the impact of *Puppet City* at Portsmouth's Journeys Festival (11/07/2019)

(S2) Letter supporting impact and contributions by Smith and Hughes to public engagement and participation at Portsmouth Historic Dockyard (09/07/2019)

(S3) Letter from The Makers Guild, Portsmouth about the impact of Smith's work on their working practices.

(S4) Video documentation of BOATS including teacher and student testimony:
<https://youtu.be/y2ogT5VxISl>

(S5) Letter corroborating the impact of puppetry in the Tupumue lung health project (12/10/2020)

(S6) Email correspondence with military veteran detailing the transformative power of *The Veterans Project* founded on Hughes' research (23/10/2020)

(S7) SOLENT TV video coverage for the veterans project:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIZX3HNXz58>

(S8) Letter from Mayville High School, Portsmouth, about the impact and significance of *Presence of the Past* built on Hughes' research.

(S9) Action against COVID Transmission (ACT) project evaluation report (2020)

(S10) Letter corroborating the impact of puppetry in the Tupumue project (02/11/2020)