

<b>Institution:</b> Aberystwyth University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 33: Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> <i>Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring</i> : Expanding theatrical paradigms of presentation and representation in participatory theatre practice		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2015–2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Professor Simon Banham	Reader in Scenographic Studies; Professor	1 October 2014–present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016–2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p><i>Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring</i> introduced new approaches to participatory stage work that transformed the nature of performer, participant and audience engagement and experience. The work consisted of four inter-linked but distinct productions, realised over a three-year period, which were subsequently performed in their entirety across a 7-hour participatory performance cycle in Manchester in 2016 and Norwich in 2017. It engaged members of the general public in both the creation and performance of a self-reflective theatrical event, and embodied dramaturgical and scenographic investigations of the ethics and politics of presence and representation to create an epic exploration of place and personhood. In so doing, the work had an impact upon:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Cultural life – in enriching public appreciation and knowledge of the theatrical form by generating new forms of artistic expression;</li> <li>2) Professional practice – in informing programming and in generating new ways of thinking that influence contemporary production practices.</li> </ol>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p><i>Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring (SAWS)</i> [3.1] furthers a long-term investigation of the essential co-presence of performers and audience within the basic material realities of theatrical performance. Created with local participants rather than trained performers, the work foregrounds the performance of everyday life and lives, through dramaturgies of interview, inquiry and instruction. It engages the tensions between an apparatus of representation and the structured presentation of participants' daily lives, to interrogate and renegotiate the boundaries between conventions of performer and spectator participation.</p> <p>The research explored how a theatrical apparatus might invite an audience to both join and influence the process of construction being revealed to them. It examined two key concepts: firstly, to what extent could our working methodology stimulate recognition of and engagement with scenographic objects as actants within performance; and second, what effect might the reconfiguration of a work's theatrical frames have upon the audience's experience of that which is presented.</p> <p>Working with non-professional performers has become an established trope of post dramatic performance, yet the particular focus of this research has made an original and distinctive contribution to this field by focusing on how theatre as an apparatus of representation codifies and conditions the appearance of 'the people' whom it presents as simply 'present'.</p> <p><i>Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring</i> enabled audiences to encounter high quality artistic practice in which ordinary people present themselves and aspects of their personal daily realities, rather</p>		

than being represented either by or as actors. In acknowledging the recognition and validation of 'self' as a core mechanism of theatre, here the mechanics of presentation, representation and presence are demystified in an attempt to find and allow perhaps more egalitarian modes of participation [3.2].

This research was rooted within the ongoing collaborative artistic practice that Banham has been engaged in with his company Quarantine for the past 20 years. This practice-based research into a relational aesthetic and practice within the scenographic and dramaturgical composition of contemporary theatre underpins all his work. It is further contextualised and informed by the practice-based scholarly research on located theatre practices and the performance of place undertaken by departmental colleagues and collaborators. Banham, along with Mike Brookes, has played a leading role in the development of practice-based research within the Department of Theatre Film and Television Studies through the *Scenography, Performance and the Everyday* research cluster. Their practical investigations as solo artists and in collaboration are attested in scholarly literature in the field, as well as through conference presentations and guest seminars.

The wider resulting body of public performance work produced by Quarantine has made a significant contribution to debates within contemporary theatre practices internationally. The durational work *Wallflower* (2015–present) is detailed within this REF submission. *Wallflower* [3.3], which was created in tandem with *Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring* echoes the research investigation into the portrayal of 'self' through embodied acts of remembering ('every dance you've ever danced'), and is currently staged as a 90 minute, 5 hour or 12 hour version with each extension in duration interrogating the invitation to the spectator to participate in the creation of a shared experience.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1 Banham, Simon, *Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring* (2015–17) [Submitted to REF2]
- 3.2 Banham, Simon, Michael Brady, Sarah Hunter and Renny O'Shea (eds.), *Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring: Staging Life and Death* (Manchester University Press, 2019) [Portfolio evidence submitted to REF2]
- 3.3 Quarantine, *Wallflower*, (2015–present) [Submitted to REF2]
- 3.4 Banham, Simon, *What is the City but the People?* (2017–present) [Submitted to REF2]

#### **Grant awards (as indicators of quality)**

- 3.5 *Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring*: Total grant income to cover conceptualisation, development, preparation and staging – approximately GBP 254,000. Sources: *Arts Council England (Exceptional Award Fund), The Granada Foundation, Unity Theatre Trust, The Wellcome Trust, Granada Foundation*
- 3.6 *What is the City but the People?*: Total grant income from grant-aid and public sources – approximately GBP 335,000

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

*'Through a series of extraordinary productions, including the extraordinary S.A.W.S. Quartet, Quarantine have affected the way we think about the process of theatre making and changed our expectations of who will appear on stage' –*  
Artistic Director, Manchester International Festival (2019)

Through exploring new perspectives and approaches to audience engagement within theatre, *Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring* has had significant impact both on public imagination and on subsequent practices and possibilities within the industry. Its approaches have been integral to

key consequential commissions, most notably the creation of a major site-specific participatory event for the Manchester International Festival (MIF) in 2017. *What is the City but the People?* [3.5], a one-off public opening event for MIF17, was live streamed by the BBC and structured the presentation of a curated selection of Manchester residents on a purpose-built 66m-long catwalk constructed within the city's centre, engaging local residents as both its subject and cast, and proposing a consciously theatrical and presentational frame that sought to enable an exploration of the presentation of self within a representation of the city.

The arc of this embodied research has raised critical awareness of new areas of dramaturgy and scenography and, in turn, has led to a broadening of the horizons of contemporary theatre and to a rethinking of conventional production and creation practices within two main areas:

***Cultural life – in enriching public appreciation and knowledge of the theatrical form by generating new forms of artistic expression***

*Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring* enabled audiences to engage with scenographic environments and participative dramaturgies in a relational frame, shifting the focus and perspective away from direct artistic appreciations of composition to favour an experience of the aesthetic event from within. It encouraged audiences and communities to imagine and present themselves as participants in artistic practices of representation. Total audience figures reached 7,366. As shown both by the testimony of those who participated and the feedback from the audience, the production provoked new ideas and stimulated considerable debate on these fundamental aspects of contemporary theatre. Participants considered it *'thought-provoking', 'original' and 'different from anything I've experienced before'*, noting how the work had demonstrated that theatre *'doesn't always have to be conventional'*. Others deemed the production *'a uniquely human theatre production', 'out of the box art' and '[t]he art of participation and relational dynamics at it's very best.... real people at the heart/front-centre of this conversation'*. One participant commented on how the production had *'stimulated interesting thoughts and conversation. I found the venue and production design aided the concepts raised by the pieces as you did not seek to hide the studios features – all was laid bare for us as an audience'*. Another noted how it felt *'like you're representing people'*. Audience members noted how the work was *'unique' and 'unexpected'*. One noted how the work had proved *'inspiring... I feel I have been part of ... a theatrical experience I will never forget'* [5.1].

*What is the City but the People?* also attracted large audiences and secured international reach (approximately 6,000 attended the event, 10,000 watched it live online). The work evoked similar reactions to SAWS, with participants commenting on how *'wonderful'* it was to be part of the production and how it made them *'feel more connected with the city'* [5.2]. The production was voted 'Best Event' at the 2018 Manchester Culture Awards.

Initial productions of *Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring* were widely covered in the national press, on television and radio, and were extensively reviewed. A BBC live stream of *What is the City but the People?* is still available on BBC iPlayer and continues to be viewed [5.3]. According to one review in *The Guardian* *'[Summer] exudes warmth, and a valuably impolite yet delicate and searching curiosity about what it is that makes us human.... We all perform our own lives, like actors on a stage playing roles'* [5.4]. Similarly, the BBC described *What is the City but the People?* as *'beautiful' and 'life-affirming'* [5.5] and a review in *The Telegraph* deemed the production *'lump-in-the-throat-moving'* [5.6].

***Professional practice – in informing programming and in generating new ways of thinking that influence contemporary production practices***

The exploratory approaches underpinning *Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring* required new organisational structures and production priorities to be developed in collaboration with each producing context, to conceive and implement production procedures that would allow and support the intended modes of integration and engagement of local participants and audiences within the work's creation and performance.

The specific nature and structure of the quartet of distinct works that formed *Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring* demanded a different working relationship to be agreed and planned with festivals and promoters producing the work, opening up new ways of embedded locational working practices appropriate to the context and local constituents being engaged. This is evidenced in the Arts Council England's Artistic and Quality Assessment Form:

*'The flexibility of the cycle's structure and sophisticated use of simple elements (instructions, questions, answers) sets it up well to adapt over time and respond to each location it's presented in, keeping its commitment to a piece of mass portraiture ... relevant. Additionally, the incorporation of local residents as participants invites people into an art form ... with the potential to broaden their perception of what art and performance is (and can be), as this piece champions a different kind of spectacle and entertainment than offered in more mainstream venues, companies and art forms. The focus on the domestic and everyday and use of familiar tropes ... makes the piece approachable and accessible.... this balance between audiences, the conventions of participatory practice, and artistic vision is a great example of best practice in combined arts' [5.7].*

The Artistic Director of the MIF also noted how *'In [Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring] daily life was transformed ... through the focus that the design and staging brought to a group of ordinary individuals onstage'*. This approach was successfully applied to *What is the City but the People?* – integrating project-specific modes of production and production design within the artistic intentions and realisation of the work, in ways that might both engage and reveal the daily realities of its context. *'[The event] highlighted the extraordinary nature of each 'ordinary' individual presented in the work. Simon's eye for detail and beauty teaches us to see daily life in a new way – revealing a profound aesthetic not only in the work he makes, but, subsequently, in everything we see' [5.8].*

The international visibility and influence of these approaches is further evidenced by the subsequent recommissioning of *What is the City but the People?* – firstly as the opening event of the *Uitfeest* in Utrecht (September 2018), and secondly as the opening event of the *Ruhrfestspiel* in Recklinghausen, Germany (May 2019). The Artistic Director of the *Uitfeest* noted how the production had:

*'showed the richness of the people of our city. It demonstrated its diversity in a most generous way. Several thousand people watched this parade of citizens of the city. In times of populism and nationalism this project made a gentle and strong statement, which was also recognized by city officials and funders' [5.9].*

*Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring* also opened up new vistas in terms of programming choices. Quarantine was invited to create a new stage work for the inaugural season of the National Theatre Wales' then Artistic Director in 2018 – as part of a season of work intended to draw on the production's model of theatrical presentation, production and participation. Intentions made apparent by her statement that *Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring* had influenced her thinking, most specifically in the ways the event had:

*'played with the dynamic between performer and spectator, between professional and non-professional, between what is perceived as 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' ..., exploring and questioning the very nature of what theatre is, who makes it and how it is made' [5.10].*

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 *Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring* participant / audience feedback, March–April 2016

5.2 *What is the City but the People?* participant feedback, July 2017

5.3 See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p056fv0w/manchester-international-festival-mif-2017-what-is-the-city-but-the-people>

- 5.4 *The Guardian*, 12 June 2014 (<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/jun/12/summer-review-quarantine-regent-trading-estate-manchester>)
- 5.5 *BBC Entertainment and Arts*, 30 June 2017 (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-40452973>)
- 5.6 *The Telegraph*, 30 June 2017 (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/what-to-see/jeremy-deller-city-people-piccadilly-gardens-manchester-review/>)
- 5.7 Arts Council England Artistic and Quality Assessment Form, 13 May 2017
- 5.8 Letter from Artistic Director, Manchester International Festival, 24 May 2019
- 5.9 Letter from Artistic Director, SPRING Performing Arts Festival, 25 May 2019
- 5.10 Email from former Artistic Director of National Theatre Wales, 24 May 2019