

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Plymouth		
Unit of Assessment: UoA33		
Title of case study: Re-imagining spaces and changing perspectives through performance practices		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Philip Smith	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Associate Professor (Reader)	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2007-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 01.08.13 – 01.12.20		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Phil Smith's performance research enables individuals and communities to navigate challenging political and historical themes, narratives and landscapes, in order to make personal or communal meaning and view their environments through new lenses. These processes have led to changed beliefs or behaviours toward others; increased senses of well-being, agency and empowerment; and, in some cases, transformative experiences. Smith's research has influenced and supported a generation of artists, practitioners, educators and facilitators in site-specific performance, walking art, and cognate fields. As a playwright and dramaturg, his productions have reached hundreds of thousands of audience members. These international touring productions, especially in China, have introduced new production processes and techniques.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>This case study is underpinned by Smith's research in and through the following three inter-related areas of theatre and performance:</p> <p>(i) Smith is recognised internationally as a leading researcher of site-specific performance and walking arts – in particular, as an exponent of pedestrian performance and participatory practices that are designed to increase agency, subjective consciousness, communal connectivity, and environmental sensitivity. His <i>Making Site-Specific Theatre and Performance: A Handbook</i> (2019) is an outcome of two decades of research across a range of genres, contexts and traditions. This includes his work as a founding core member of the collective Wrights & Sites (established 1997) and, in particular, their long-term 'Mis-guide' project. Smith has published a dozen peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters on walking since 2007. His book, <i>Walking's New Movement</i> (2015) is the most comprehensive analytical survey of walking practices since the millennium.</p> <p>Smith's concept of 'mythogeography' – a process through which one creates complex impressions of the world and re-makes its cultural and personal meanings through walking and journeying – was consolidated in his book, <i>Mythogeography: A Guide to Walking Sideways</i> (2010). His large-scale project, <i>Anywhere: A mythogeography of South Devon and how to walk it</i> (2017) is an innovative hybrid creative research output drawing equally upon approaches to site-specific performance and novel writing; it exemplifies a sustained mythogeographical exploration and account of a distinct locale. <i>Anywhere</i> also built on the findings of Smith's <i>On Walking</i> (2014), a detailed case study of a 17-day walk that recreated a journey recounted by W.G. Sebald, from which a theoretical description of, and tactical handbook for, performative walking emerged. These techniques and tactics include exercises and games to create personal rituals through repetition; to concentrate on bodily sensation and being led by joy, disorientation and curiosity rather than by others while walking; to weave elements of pilgrimage into everyday life; and to identify spaces of disruption in the landscape where individual and collective change might be imagined.</p> <p>Smith's research on re-conceiving and re-imagining spaces of tourism and cultural heritage explores how popular, often conventional, uses of space can be repurposed to create new perspectives and experiences. For instance, a series of practice-research performances created in 2009 for the National Trust property A la Ronde in Devon (UK).</p>		

- (ii) extended recuperative approaches to the site and drew attention to traumatic narratives that remained hidden in the official discourse of the property. Smith's 'Counter-tourism' project (2010-12), which theorised and developed strategies to become an 'agentive tourist', was disseminated in a variety of forms and presented alternatives to heritage practices through playful intervention (an example from the *Counter-tourism Pocketbook* is the suggestion to 'photograph all the stains' while visiting a stately home).

As a researcher working through **playwriting, adaption for the stage and dramaturgy**, Smith interrogates mechanisms for the presentation of progressive ideas through international touring theatre. In 1980, he co-founded TNT Theatre with Paul Stebbings MBE to research the application of Vsevolod Meyerhold's legacy for contemporary popular theatre. Since 2007, he has co-written 6 original scripts, adapted 7 novels or biographical/historical texts for the stage (directing the European tour of one), and dramaturged 6 productions (including 4 plays by Shakespeare) for TNT. Smith has critically reflected on how his approach to site and walking practice emerged from TNT's use of space and touring (*Performance Research*, 12:2). A monograph by Smith and Stebbings, on TNT's research imperative and outcomes to date, was published in 2020.

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

- 3.1 P. Smith, *Making Site-Specific Theatre and Performance: A Handbook* (Red Globe Press, 2019). Available on request.
- 3.2 P. Smith [aka The Crab Man], *Mythogeography: A Guide to Walking Sideways* (Triarchy Press, 2010). Submitted to REF2014 with the following supplements: P. Smith, 'The Crab Walks', 'Crab Walking and Mythogeography', and 'Crab Steps Aside' in R. Mock (ed.), *Walking, Writing and Performance: Autobiographical Texts by Deirdre Heddon, Carl Lavery and Phil Smith* (Intellect Books, 2009).
- 3.3 P. Smith, *On Walking* (Triarchy Press, 2014). Listed in REF2.
- 3.4 P. Smith, 'Gardens Always Mean Something Else (a site-specific performance at A la Ronde in Devon, UK)'. Submitted to REF2014 with the following supplements: P. Smith, "'Gardens always mean something else": turning knotty performance and paranoid research on their head at A la Ronde,' *Cultural Geographies*, 18:4 (2011), 537-546; and, P. Smith, 'A la Ronde: eccentricity, interpretation and the end of the world' in Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd (eds), *Performing heritage: research, practice and innovation* (Manchester University Press, 2010).
- 3.5 P. Smith, *Counter-Tourism: The Handbook* (Triarchy Press, 2012). Submitted to REF2014 with the following supplement: P. Smith, 'Turning Tourists into Performers: Revaluing agency, action and space in sites of heritage tourism,' *Performance Research*, 18:2 (2013), 102-113.
- 3.6 P. Stebbings and P. Smith, *TNT: The New Theatre* (Triarchy Press, 2020). Available on request.

Since 2007, when he was employed on a FTE contract by this HEI, Smith has received funding for his practice-research from Arts Council England, the National Trust, Tracing the Pathway (Milton Keynes), Exeter Arts Council, Torbay Council, Kaleider, Teignbridge Rural Regeneration Partnership, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, The Box/Plymouth City Council, and the Being Human Festival.

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

The social and cultural impact of Smith's practice-led research can be mapped onto two interconnected constituencies: (i) *artists, practitioners, and theatre-makers* whose work he has inspired, enhanced or changed; and (ii) *theatre audiences and participants* in live events, as well as those who are mobilised either by publications and videos sharing their techniques and ideas, or else by encountering his work through its use by other educators and facilitators.

- (i) **On artists, creative practitioners and theatre-makers.** According to Blake Morris, who has traced the development of walking as an artistic practice, Smith 'pioneered the use of walking in site specific performance' as a member of Wrights & Sites. Morris identifies 'mythogeography' as one of Smith's 'key innovations', which 'turns every participant into a

teller of tales... in its desire to engage the world' [5.1]. As a founding member of the Walking Artists Network (2011) and by contributing to and organising collective gatherings that bring together artists, practitioners and academics – including the Walking's New Movements conference at the University of Plymouth (2019) – Smith has played a major role in developing a walking arts movement with thousands of participants worldwide.

Dozens of individuals and collectives, working across a range of disciplines, acknowledge Smith's influence on their site-based practices – from biologist Simon Park (who runs 'microgeographic' walks and mobile workshops), to poet Lucy Furlong (who referenced Smith on BBC Radio4, 2019), to South Korean artist, Jooyoung Lee (who has called Smith's Counter-tourism: A Handbook her 'bible'). The Director of the Still Walking Festival has stated that participating in one of Smith's 'twalks' (a combined walk and talk) 'transformed the way I thought about my own walks and indeed all guided walks' due to 'the revelation' that 'the guide's knowledge and interpretations could be creative and meaningful' 5.[2]. American photographer, Frank A. Mills, has written that the works of both Smith and Wrights & Sites are 'a source of inspiration' that 'have influenced how I look through the camera's "eye" and what I see, as well as how I transform the photo into an image'. He has adapted tactics and concepts from Wrights & Sites' The Architect-Walker: A Mis-guide (2018) for use in his consulting practice and when teaching urban photography courses (Mills, Facebook post, 05/06/2018). Moving image artist-activists MALAXA refer to their practice as 'Cinemythogeography' in homage to Smith's modelling of anti-hierarchical walking, which enables them to transform the 'Eurocentric gaze and stigmatizing representations' by 'reclaiming the geopolitical dynamics of a place' from a black, feminist, migrant perspective [5.3]. John Bowers and Tim Shaw refer to their collaborative data sonification practice as 'mythogeosonics' after Smith, to describe how they 'participate within space' as artists, 'unfixing and reformulating its many meanings'. Bowers, whose performances have 'reached over a million' people, has stated that Smith 'enabled me to define my own work in a manner that I can promote and conduct nationally and internationally in a way I could not have done otherwise' [5.3]. A founding member of Merched Chwarel, a group of women artists who explore the relationship between gender and the quarries of North Wales through walking, has written that Smith 'changed the way that I notice things, how I approach a place ... In particular blending performance with mapping and public engagement'. Smith supported and 'helped to realise' Merched Chwarel's successful Arts Council of Wales grant application in 2017; since then they have reached audiences of approximately 8500 through their website, walks, exhibitions and workshops [5.3].

As dramaturg and theatrical adaptor for TNT, Smith's practice-research has introduced aesthetic techniques that have transformed the production of Shakespeare in China and have provided opportunities for Chinese theatre artists. Between 2013 and 2020, his work had over 500 performances in 35 cities, including extended runs at the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre. Following extensive touring to establish audiences and venues, TNT collaborates with Chinese artists, creating intercultural productions in their own languages, which are then toured independently. According to Nancy Pellegrini, author of The People's Bard: How China Made Shakespeare Its Own (2016): 'TNT is a crucial resource for China' where, because 'Shakespeare was a relatively late import', 'few feel confident with the material.' TNT introduced productions that are 'bold, brassy, bawdy, and at blistering, exhilarating speed... with skeleton casts and minimal props. This opens up myriad opportunities for young Chinese writers, directors, and producers to create tight, flexible shows that can tour the country, from state-of-the-art venues to village stages... In bringing Western classics to China (where they were illegal for years), and in showcasing alternate forms of theatre, TNT's contribution has been invaluable' [5.4].

- (ii) **On participants, readers and diverse international theatre audiences.** Between August 2013 and March 2020 (when touring was disrupted by Covid-19), the 10 productions that Smith has co-written, adapted or dramaturged for TNT have been performed to approximately 200,000 audience members per year (e.g. approximately 800 performances were given in 2019 with an average attendance of between 200-300 each) in over 50 countries, including China, Vietnam, Serbia, almost all Scandinavian and Western and Eastern European countries, Japan, Turkey, Singapore, UAE and in South America. The

majority of TNT's audiences are young adults, many of whom have never attended live theatre before, and at least half of these plays engaged with themes, legacies and cultural attitudes unusual for, if not at odds with, their country's dominant cultures or politics [5.5]. These include the internal dilemmas and aftermath of civil and human rights struggles, the negotiation of liberal ideas in authoritarian societies, and the effects of inequality, labour exploitation, and climate crisis (e.g. *Dracula and the Eco-Warrior*, 2016). *My Sister Syria* (2017), a thriller drawing attention to the refugee crisis provoked by the war in Syria, was a collaboration with Arab artists; it was performed in English and Arabic on a 7 month tour for schools and adult audiences across Europe, focusing on locations where Islamophobia is rife. Performed to thousands of 15-19 year olds, post-show discussions indicated that the show effectively challenged dominant, often gendered, assumptions and narratives; the Arab performers were able to offer personal perspectives on the stories in the play and the realities in the Middle East [5.5]. *Smith's adaptation of The Wave (2014), which explored how Nazi ideologies could take hold, toured across Europe and then Israel during a time of growing tensions in East Jerusalem over the holy site, Temple Mount. It played to thousands of Jewish and Muslim teenagers, both separately and together, and included post-show discussions. According to a news report, a 17-year-old audience member said that the production reinforced their belief that 'No one is better than the other, we are equal. We are the same, with the same God, living in the same land'; another 16-year-old stated that 'despite the difference between our cultures, I got the idea clearly... God gave us a conscience and a brain to think, not just to follow anybody'* (YNetNews, 30/11/2014).

Since August 2013, Smith has personally led dozens of walks and workshops, with and for approximately 300 participants, in collaboration with organisations as diverse as the Pacitti Company, Knepp Castle Estate, National Theatre Wales, the Loiterers Resistance Movement, Artlink, and the Royal National Institute for the Blind. The organiser's experience of a walk led by Smith in Llandudno is typical: many participants told her 'how they have started walking in new ways' [5.3]. One participant in a walk for the AirSpace Gallery in Stoke-on-Trent as part of the touring Walking Encyclopaedia exhibition (2014) wrote that 'What was on offer was a different way of seeing and relating to the everyday... affecting the participant or the audience ... by involving them in an unusual activity or shifting the way they perceive and process the world. This was certainly true of Phil Smith's walk, at least for me' [5.6].

*Smith's ideas and techniques reach far beyond direct encounter with him. Since August 2013, the resources he has created have been used, for example, by lecturers of fine art at Georgia State University (USA) and Sichuan Fine Arts Institute (China); of creative writing and literature at Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology (India) and Lancaster University; in sociology at University of Derby; in addition to numerous theatre and performance departments. Smith has shared his research in the form of 12 accessible handbooks and guidebooks, as well as 'walkable novels' (such as *The MK Myth* for Milton Keynes, 2018), which aim to mobilise and engage both specialist and non-specialist readers. These are primarily published by the small independent company, Triarchy Press, which has sold approximately 9500 copies of his books since August 2013; one of Smith's books is among their all time top ten books by sales [5.7]. A Triarchy publisher notes that their association with Smith attracts other authors and asserts that the recent 'growth in ... individuals undertaking radical/alternative/immersive and other forms of walking around the world' is 'inextricably linked' to Smith's publications [5.7]. A reader of *Counter-Tourism: The Handbook* tested its techniques in Venice, leading her to 'find personal connections with heritage' and experiences 'which are unique and possibly transformative' (*International Times*, 11/02/2020). A reviewer of *On Walking* noted that it 'had a profound influence on me' and enabled 'one of the most unusual and mind-blowing experiences of my walking life. Phil Smith's words seemed to have penetrated my subconscious, profoundly altering both my physical perceptions and emotional responses' [5.8].*

In 2018, Smith began collaborating with University of Plymouth Alumni Research Fellow, Dr Helen Billingham, as 'Crab & Bee', leading walks and workshops, for instance, for Mothership (Dorset), the Celebrating Island Culture Festival (Isles of Scilly), Common Wealth Theatre (Cardiff), and clinical psychologists (NHS Exeter). Their 'Plymouth Labyrinth'

project (2019) included walks, workshops with schools and the general public, and an exhibition over a month-long period, remaking the city as a mythological maze to navigate and decode. In 2019 and 2020, Smith & Billinghamurst worked with Plymouth Community Homes and socially-engaged arts organisation, Take A Part, on a similar project to promote belonging, inclusivity and community engagement in neighbourhoods with a higher than average migrant population and levels of social deprivation. This was extended through their Coxside Smoke Signal project (funded by the Being Human Festival), which explored social art-making within the limitations of Covid-19. The latter included the production of 30 'creative workpacks' by Smith & Billinghamurst, which were distributed by the Plymouth and Devon Race Equality Council, Prince Rock Primary School, and the local art and action group. An elder woman who received a workpack commented, 'It made us think about the future... It made us think and write down things that probably we wouldn't have thought or written down... Old people don't do things like that. I did the activity with my husband but I felt to be part of a bigger community' [5.9].

Smith's research has also directly informed the facilitation by other practitioners of a range of initiatives that address heritage, community and urban environment in radical ways. These include the Commoners Choir's singing and walking project, Magna Carta (Yorkshire, 2015), about the rights of people to access land for leisure and recreation, which was 'transformative in terms of promoting a sense of connection with others and for promoting well-being' [5.10]. Contemporary archaeologist and community artist Rebecca Hearne's 'Alternative Tour of Rotherham' was devised with and for children using Smith's counter-tourism techniques, supported by literacy charity Grimm & Co. In a video of the project, she explains that she wanted 'children to realize that it's up to them to create the place that they live' (email, 16/11/2018). Jane Samuels' 'Dewsbury Myths and Monsters Map' project (2016) engaged with clients of the city's homelessness and drugs service, a mental health service, and women and families from Dewsbury Women's Shelter, in order to create 'connections with place and with each other, and [take] ownership of our environments'; she believes that this 'mythogeographic' project 'made some people who were having a difficult time feel happy, engaged and playful' (email, 05/08/2019).

The impact of Smith's practice-led research is thus cyclical and generative, taking place during the process of research itself for participants and audiences, built into the presentation and sharing of findings and knowledge via both scholarly and non-academic means (as well as in ways that blur this binary), and in its legacy and continuation by others

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

5.1 Blake Morris, *Walking Networks: The Development of an Artistic Medium* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), pp. 84-88.

5.2 'Unravelling Plymouth Labyrinth', 06/07/2019: <http://www.stillwalking.org/unravelling-plymouth-labyrinths/2019/7/6/unravelling-plymouth-labyrinth>

5.3 Artists/members of MALAXA, *Merched Chwarel and Mythogeosonics*.

5.4 Author of *The People's Bard: How China Made Shakespeare its Own* (Penguin, 2016), and Stage Editor for *Time Out Shanghai* (2010-present) and *Time Out Beijing* (2005-2018).

5.5 Artistic Director, TNT Theatre and the American Drama Group (Germany).

5.6 Debbie Kent, 'Transformations at Tesco: a walk round Stoke-on-Trent', 07/03/2014: <https://thedemolitionproject.com/2014/03/07/transformations-at-tesco-a-walk-round-stoke-on-trent/>

5.7 Publisher, Triarchy Press (Devon).

5.8 Ruth Livingstone, 'ON WALKING, BY PHIL SMITH', 22/10/2014:

<https://ruthlessreadings.wordpress.com/2014/10/22/on-walking-by-phil-smith/>.

5.9 Take A Part, *Impact evaluation: 'Crab & Bee at Teats Hill Amphitheatre, March 2019 - December 2020'*.

5.10 L.J. Taylor and B. Whalley, 'Real change comes from below!': walking and singing about places that matter; the formation of Commoners Choir', *Leisure Studies*, 38:1 (2018), pp. 58-73.