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I Am Not a Piece of Meat: Collaborative Practice and the Body

Anna Furse



create national development
agency for collaborative arts

Anna Furse is a theatre maker and professor at Goldsmiths University. In year one of Create's four year Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme (CAPP), Anna delivered The Theatre of Our Bodies workshop as one of a number of Continuing Professional Development workshops (CPDs) Create programmed in 2015. As a CAPP Residency artist, she devised ANNA FURSE PERFORMS AN ANATOMY ACT: SHOW AND TELL, a performance lecture in 2016. I AM NOT A PIECE OF MEAT is one of Create's CAPP commissions launched in 2018; an immersive digital artwork which extends research that shaped AN ANATOMY ACT, and CORPOGRAPHY, an analogue artbook that will be published in spring 2019.

Front Cover:

Anna Furse performs an Anatomy Act: A Show and Tell

Photo: Abigail Denniston

I Am Not a Piece of Meat: Collaborative Practice and the Body

In this interview with CAPP Artist Researcher Susanne Bosch, Anna reflects on her interests in collaborative intersections between research and practice in theatre, performance and medical humanities

SUSANNE

Tell us about your work over the past four years, perhaps beginning with how you came to deliver a live performance lecture?

ANNA

In 2016, I was awarded a research residency in Dublin by Create, lead partners in the CAPP project. I was inspired to work on European anatomy theatres and their cultural meaning by Jonathan Sawday's book on the Renaissance *The Body Emblazoned* and this residency was an opportunity to collaborate with both Irish and UK medics. The Anatomy Department at Trinity College Dublin connected me with Philomena McAtee and Siobhan Ward and their extraordinary Body Donor Scheme, which is about the dignity of death, preparation for this, and how families and the terminally ill deal with body donation to anatomy. I then attended an intensive Anatomy Summer School at Kings College London, in June 2016. That was a turning point. I had to face my anxiety about the cadaver. I started to understand how anatomy is taught in Western medicine. I recorded, interviewed students, watched and took notes.

The Donor Scheme and Anatomy Lab gave me a sense of direction for the piece. I realised that it would not only be about the history of the anatomy theatre, but its contemporary resonances. There was a moral dimension to opening up the body in Renaissance Europe. Going inside the body - where only God should go - was a transgression. When you learn about the history of anatomy in Europe, the provenance of corpses from the scaffold, from executed criminals, you realise that Western medicine, and the knowledge that has been derived from these anatomy theatres, is rooted in a grim and punitive moral code.

I decided to write a performance lecture in collaboration with artists like David Coulter, world leading musical saw player (later, Henry Dagg became my live musical collaborator) and the designer Mela Dell' Erba who has a particular interest in Italian 18th Century anatomical wax collections. Live Collision's Festival Director Lynnette Moran brought graphic designer Dave Darcy and filmmaker Kilian Waters to the team. I wanted to take the audience on a journey of discovery to contemplate our bodies, dead or alive. The performance lecture AN ANATOMY ACT premiered in Project Arts as part of the 2016 Live Collision Festival.

SUSANNE

I like your often personal lead-in to the live performance that allows the audience to engage on multiple levels of head, heart, hands and humour.

ANNA

Yes, AN ANATOMY ACT deals with the morbid, but with humour. I'm taking people on an uncomfortable and disturbing journey. I hope people feel comforted by the fact that these taboos about death, our own imminent passing, and of our bodies being opened are somehow okay

It's ok to have that anxiety. In death we're all the same. The tone of dead skin is very similar after it has been treated for dissection, no matter what skin colour in life. But the cadaver is both about common human denominators and individual nuances. Surgeons say that every heart is unique. Everybody's interior has its own character and I find that utterly fascinating.

SUSANNE

Can you speak to the public's perception of their own inhabited bodies?

ANNA

I'm very interested in public ignorance and understandings. So I ask people questions like: how big is your liver? For the most part they get these answers wrong – they don't have a frame of reference for their own body. Sawday analyses the eruption of poetic allusion to the body alongside the growing field of anatomical medicine in the Renaissance: poets would write blazons, eulogies to a body part. I had the audience write what part of their body they would like someone to write a blazon about, and in workshops I get people to write blazons to their own body parts, which is often very funny. For women who suffer bad body image, it's liberating to write something positive.

My research also delved into the 18th Century use of wax as a medium to represent the human body. The most famous are in Florence, Susini's 'Wax Venuses'. They work like a puzzle, you can take them apart to examine the internal organs. They're both art and anatomical objects. The fact that art and medicine are bound together of course threads through Western culture. The Wax Venuses were one of the must-sees on the Grand Tour of Europe to study classical art.



*I Am Not A Piece Of Meat:
Writing the Body workshop, Practice and Power
Dublin June 2019
Joseph Carr*

SUSANNE

What contribution can your art, your translation into embodied knowledge, make to the extended understanding of death, aging, decay? What could ideally come out of a project like this?

ANNA

I'm looking at things that people don't like to look at: death and dead bodies. Mostly people won't encounter this unless they work with the dead professionally, or until someone close to them dies and they see that corpse. Often this is a huge trauma. Why is a cadaver, that human object, such a taboo, as we're all moving towards that? I'd like to push these boundaries longer term. That would be an ideal outcome: to work more with patients and medics in combination to discuss issues of body awareness in life and death.

SUSANNE

I AM NOT A PIECE OF MEAT presents research and production materials - text, video, medical art, sound scores, still images and 'out-takes' from the performed work. It presents an interactive digital interface, investigating the parameters between dissemination, live performance and remote critical engagement. What were your motivations in setting up this digital platform, www.iamnotapieceofmeat.com?

ANNA

I wanted to create an accessible durable outcome of an ephemeral work. There was so much more research than could be embraced in one piece of theatre. There is an intricate braiding of making the work, stepping back and reflecting on it, and writing about it. There is the research that goes into the work and the research that comes out of the work. There is the research that is the work. The digital interface allowed me to share with the visitor the broader field, the components of thought, action and activity that have gone into the project. I wanted a space where the visitor is invited, in a meditative way, to stay with a thought and a theme. It's a space to contemplate, to look at things that you perhaps didn't look at before.

*There is the research that goes into the work
and the research that comes out of the work.
And then there is the research that **is** the work.*

SUSANNE

When I think of your work from a socially engaged or collaborative aspect, I can see your participatory engagement with experts in the phase of research and production, your collaborative work with professional peers, such as the creative team that were essential to AN ANATOMY ACT. How do you view your relationship with your different “audiences”?

ANNA

The audience for AN ANATOMY ACT has been theatre-goers, however I am very interested in widening access to the project and themes by approaching, for example, schools and communities in the growing arts and health field.



*Anna Furse performs An Anatomy Act:
A Show and Tell*
Photo: Nina Klaff

SUSANNE

Can you tell us about the publication element of the commission, published in spring 2019?

ANNA

I've developed this book entitled CORPOGRAPHY, which is a word I invented as in *writing the body*. I've worked closely with designer Dave Darcy and we've been reversing the Renaissance metaphor "the body is a book" to make a book-that-is-a-body. It's not body-shaped, but it has certain features of the body. It's a tactile object, very graphic. It's structured according to 11 systems in the body according to the Western optic. It's playful and minimalistic. It's an art object in its own right; intimate, visual, and, I hope, special for the person who opens and handles it.

I see my work over the last few years as a trilogy: live performance; digital artwork; and limited edition art-book. Disseminating and sharing the work and the research which informs it, through talks and workshops, continues. I'm excited by how cross disciplinary exchange such as with medicine and medical humanities activates a whole new set of conversations and reflections.



Dr. Susanne Bosch is an artist and independent researcher. She was the Artist Researcher between 2014 and 2018.

In Short...

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO...

The recipient of the Arts Council Artist in the Community Scheme **Bursary Award 2018: Collaborative Arts in Health Contexts**, is Marielle MacLeman. MacLeman is a visual artist who has developed an Arts and Health practice since the early 2000s. Her practice explores the interconnection between place and the human drive to invent, collect, and understand. Using this bursary, MacLeman intends to research and explore notions of place and place-making in the acute hospital setting through research, reflective writing, and by engaging the hospital community in experiential workshops and discussion.

We have added a new feature to our website - **Featured Publications**. Drawn from our extensive and uniquely-populated library, these featured publications showcase the best of collaborative or socially engaged practice, and form the bedrock of academic discussion of the field. Previous featured publications include *Durty Words*, designed and edited by Victoria Brunetta and Kate O'Shea; *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation*, by Tom Finkelpearl, and *Learning In Public: TransEuropean Collaborations In Socially Engaged Art*, edited by Eleanor Turney. This is part of an exciting new library project we're working on, with artist and curator Megs Morley. Visit our website in the coming months for more information!

COMING UP...

Join Softday for an Acousenic Listening Workshop at 2 Curved St on May 18th as part of Bealtaine at Temple Bar. This workshop forms part of Uisce Salach (Dirty Water), a new collaborative sound art project by Softday, the art-science collaboration of artist Sean Taylor and computer scientist Mikael Fernström. Funded through an Arts Participation Project Award with support from Dublin Port's Port Perspectives and Create, the key aim of the project is to enable citizens living and working along the River Liffey to participate in scientific research with creative outcomes. This workshop focuses on the study of listening, creative soundwalking and the meditative practices of Tai Chi and Qigong. Places are free but please reserve a place by contacting info@create-ireland.ie

As part of the Arts Council's Artist in the Community Scheme, Create and **Fire Station Artists' Studios** are looking forward to partnering once more to deliver a **Residency for an artist from an ethnic minority background**, in June. This residency, initiated in 2018 with inaugural recipient Hina Khan, focuses on the visual arts. And for 2019, we are pleased to partner with **Carlow Arts Festival** for a further residency for an artist from an ethnic minority background, which will begin in May, and incorporate the festival (4-9 June). This residency is particularly targeted at artists working in the Performing Arts.

We are busy planning the **2019 Summer School in Cultural Diversity**, to be held in Killary, Co Galway. This is the second Summer School funded by the Arts Council's Artist in the Community Scheme, devised in partnership with Counterpoints Arts. We are also developing a **Publication** stemming from the 2018 Summer School, which will be launched in May.

We are delighted to work with the Irish Architecture Foundation to present the **City Conversation Series**. This public conversation series will explore how collaborative architecture can animate the public sphere and reimagine our cities, towns and neighbourhoods.

Our **Networking Day** is taking place in Cork city on Thursday September 26th. We are delighted to be joined by internationally renowned artist **Tania Bruguera**, as well as Jane Wells and Dr. Cara Courage from Tate Exchange and four representatives of the Tate Neighbours. Delivered in partnership with the Crawford Art Gallery Cork, Counterpoints Arts London and Cork City Arts Office, the **Networking Day** also features Hammad Nasar, Director of the Stuart Hall Foundation and initiator of 'Let Our Statues Speak' project and Sören Meschede, curator and coordinator of the recently established Concomitentes, a Spanish not-for-profit association which encourages the creation of artistic projects that are devised and commissioned by groups of citizens. Further speaker and booking information to come on our website.

Welcome to Create News

This is the twenty-sixth edition of Create News.

Create News is published twice yearly in spring and autumn. It is sent free of charge, features a guest writer and offers the latest information on Create events and services. If you do not wish to receive further editions, please write or email us at info@create-ireland.ie. You will automatically receive copies unless you ask us to remove your details from the list. If you would like to receive a personal copy of Create News please email info@create-ireland.ie and include details of name, address and postcode.

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