

Institution: Aberystwyth University
Unit of Assessment: 35
Title of case study: <i>What's Welsh for Performance? Beth yw 'Performance' yn Gymraeg?: Enhancing the creation, presentation and conservation of performance and live art in Wales</i>
1. Summary of the impact <p><i>What's Welsh for Performance? (WsWfP)</i>'s research into the history of performance art in Wales has achieved its most significant and sustained impact through informing the professional practices of Welsh arts practitioners. These fall into two groups: artists engaged in live art, past and present; and art curators and policy makers who have responsibility for the presentation, conservation and funding of contemporary art in Wales. In uncovering, documenting and making publicly accessible Wales's rich but underappreciated heritage of performance art, <i>WsWfP</i> has given the first generation of performance artists a renewed stake in its history; inspired younger artists in the creation of new work; and helped to raise the public profile of the artform to the extent that performance work is now routinely included in exhibitions, publications and media coverage devoted to Welsh contemporary art. Three partnerships with major organisations allow <i>WsWfP</i> to inform directly how performance art in Wales is funded, administered, exhibited and conserved.</p>
2. Underpinning research <p><i>What's Welsh for Performance? (WsWfP)</i> was initiated in 2005 by Heike Roms with the aim to compile as comprehensive a record as possible of performance art and related avant-garde art activities in Wales during the latter part of the 20th century. Following the award of an AHRC Large Research Grant in 2009 the project has focused in particular on the formative years of the art form between 1965 and 1979 (under the title "<i>It was forty years ago today...: Locating the Early History of Performance Art in Wales</i>").</p> <p>The research has examined two interconnected aspects: firstly, it has revealed an important but overlooked part of Welsh art history and thereby confirmed how actively Wales-based artists were engaged in international artistic developments in the post-war period. And secondly, it has enhanced our understanding of how performance art emerged and developed outside the world's art capitals. By focusing on long-term developments in a defined area, the research has brought to light several neglected features of the early history of performance art in Wales (and Britain generally): the activities of neo-avant-garde networks; the emergence of innovative teaching approaches; the role of university patronage; the formation of a support system of venues, festivals, platforms and funding schemes. <i>WsWfP</i> is thereby making a significant contribution to the recent 'historical turn' in performance studies, which is shifting scholarly attention from a close reading of selected canonical works to the study of the wider scenes and infrastructures that helped to generate a diversity of performance practices. [Reference 3.5]</p> <p>Whilst receiving increasing attention for its findings among performance historians, <i>WsWfP</i> is also generating considerable interest in its methodologies. The project has undertaken in-depth research in over fifty archives and personal collections (including the Tate Archive, the National Arts Education Archive, the V&A, the Henry-Moore-Institute), locating and digitizing nearly 5,000 documents related to performance art in Wales. Outcomes are made freely available in an on-line database, which has won praise for its 'complex but information-rich interface that allows users to explore an expansive range of metadata in a relatively intuitive manner' (MIT HyperStudio 2010). [database hosted on project website; Ref. 3.1] The archival research is complemented by an extensive oral history programme, featuring to date fifty interviews with artists, administrators and past audience members. For these <i>WsWfP</i> has pioneered innovative performative approaches: including group and 'in-situ' oral history conversations, and participatory memory installations and re-enactment formats. A number of these research events has been staged publicly, aiming to enable different communities of interest (artists, art sector professionals, and general audiences of contemporary art in Wales) to witness the research in action and to contribute directly to it. <i>WsWfP</i>'s fourteen public research events to date include: a) publicly staged oral history conversations with protagonists of Welsh performance history (2006-2012, funded by an Arts Council of Wales/National Lottery grant; supported by Chapter and Trace Artspace, Cardiff); b) participatory events around audience's performance memories (eg. <i>Mapping Performance Art in</i></p>

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Cardiff, 2008; *How to Build an Arts Centre? - An audio-guide of Chapter*, 2011; both commissioned by *Experimentica* Festival, Cardiff); and c) re-enactments of historical performances (eg. restaging the Aberystwyth *Fluxconcert* 1968, 2008). [documented on project website **Ref. 3.1**; book **Ref. 3.2**]

WsWfP's methodological approaches (especially its use of publicly staged oral history) have been adopted by performance researchers in locations as diverse as Israel (Dror Harari), Singapore (Ray Langenbach) and Switzerland (Pascale Grau). Roms's accompanying historiographic writings on performance archiving, performing memory and performative evidence [**Ref. 3.3, 3.4**] offer new insights into key debates in performance studies and have been cited by scholars interested in documentation, marginalised performance histories and applied performance, but also by oral historians, art archivists and scholars with an interest in practice-based research methodologies.

Between 2008 and 2013, the research generated a book, ten book chapters and peer-reviewed journal essays (one translated into German and Slovene), a bilingual website and online database (logging the relevant holdings of fifty-six archives and collections), fifty oral-history recordings, and ten exhibitions, performances and workshops. [**Ref. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5**] During the same period Roms gave sixty scholarly keynotes and papers on the research, at conferences and research seminars in the UK, Europe and the US. [**Ref. 3.1**] [for Roms's public lectures see **Section 4**]

In 2011, Roms received the first *David Bradby TaPRA Award for Research in International Theatre and Performance* [**Ref. 3.6**]. The jury praised the research as 'most original and far-reaching', 'exemplary in the level of engagement over time with a specific topic' and 'very significant'.

Researchers: Dr Heike Roms, Principal Investigator (Position: Lecturer - 2010; Senior Lecturer - 2012; Professor from 2013); Dr Rebecca Edwards, AHRC-funded Research Assistant (2009-11).

3. References to the research

3.1. *What's Welsh for Performance? Beth yw 'Performance' yn Gymraeg?* bilingual website: Fully searchable database (of 669 performance events in Wales 1965-1979; log of the relevant holdings of 56 archives); oral history excerpts and transcripts; documentation of public research events; lists Roms's scholarly and public presentations. **URL:** <http://www.performance-wales.org>

3.2. Heike Roms (2008) *What's Welsh for Performance? - An Oral History of Performance Art in Wales* (Volume 1), Cardiff: trace Samizdat Press. (ISBN 978-0-955-3927-2-6) [hardcopy available]

Sample publications on the project's methodologies:

3.3 Heike Roms and Rebecca Edwards (2011) 'Oral History as Site-Specific Practice: Locating the History of Performance Art in Wales' in: S. Trower (ed) *Place, Writing and Voice in Oral History*, Basingstoke/ New York, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 171–191. (ISBN 9780230623699) [see REF2]

3.4 Heike Roms (2008) 'Eventful Evidence: Historicizing Performance Art', *Maska* 117–118 (Issue: *History – Experience – Archive*) (Autumn 2008), pp. 69–77. (English Version) (ISBN 9-771318-050001) [translated into German and Slovene] [peer-reviewed] [see REF2]

3.5. sample publication on some of the project's findings:

Heike Roms and Rebecca Edwards (2012) 'Towards a (Pre-) history of Live Art in the UK', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22-1 (Special Issue: *Live Art in the UK*), issue editor D. Johnson, pp. 17–31. ISSN 1048-6801. [peer reviewed] [see REF2] DOI 10.1080/10486801.2011.645283

3.6. prize: *David Bradby TaPRA Award for Research in International Theatre and Performance 2011*, awarded by the UK's *Theatre and Performance Research Association* for 'outstanding research in any area of Theatre and Performance Studies'. Prize information and judges' comments: **URL:** <http://tapra.org/archive/tapra-conference-2011/tapra-conference-2011/>

Key grants associated with research:

1. **AHRC Large Research Grant:** Heike Roms (PI). "*It was forty years ago today...*": *Locating the Early History of Performance Art in Wales 1965-1979*, 1/4/2009-31/3/2011, £165,779.
2. **AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award:** Heike Roms (PI) [with Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff] '*Historical perspectives on engaging local audiences with innovative performance practice: Cardiff's Chapter Arts Centre in the 1970s*', 01/10/2012 – 30/09/2015, £54,504.
3. **AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award:** Heike Roms (PI). [with Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales]: '*Do Networks Have Margins? Locating the Avant-garde of the 1960s: The performance works of Ivor Davies*', 01/10/2013 – 30/09/2016, £55,128.

4. Details of the impact

The most significant and sustained impact that *What's Welsh for Performance? (WsWfP)* has achieved from its research into the history of performance art in Wales has been on the professional and creative practices of arts practitioners in Wales, and increasingly also in the UK more widely. These practitioners comprise two main groups: artists engaged in live and performance art, past and present; and curators, administrators and policy makers who have responsibility for the presentation, preservation and funding of contemporary art in Wales.

WsWfP has succeeded in generating its impact by endeavouring from the outset to widen its audience beyond the scholarly community with the help of a variety of publicly staged research events, including public oral history conversations, re-enactments and participatory installations [see Section 2 for details], which were attended by around a thousand people. The project has furthermore created a number of resources (database, oral history material) that it has made freely available via the project's bilingual website [see Section 2 for details; Source 5.1]. In addition to addressing general audiences with an interest in live art or contemporary art in Wales, these activities and resources have aimed at two specific communities of interest: the generation of artists who pioneered performance art work in the 1960s and 1970s; and the community of young live and performance artists working in Wales today. The artists whose past work has been the subject of *WsWfP*'s research – the majority of whom are now based in different parts of the UK – have been given a renewed stake in their artistic histories through the increased scholarly and public attention their work has received. In response, a number of the artists (or their families) have been inspired to undertake their own investigations into this history, often leading to new creative works. These have included reunion performance events (eg. Memorial for Ian Hinchliffe at London's Beaconsfield Gallery, 2011); the exhibition of performance documentation (eg. by Ivor Davies at London's Laure Genillard Gallery 2013); and the commissioning of younger artists (John Gingell Award, g39 Gallery Cardiff, 2012-13). [Source 5.7]

In addition, *WsWfP* has made a particular effort to build relationships with young artists engaged in live art in Wales (eg. Rowan O'Neill, the Showroom collective, Kathryn Ashill, Sam Hasler) and to familiarize them with the local history of their practice. The Arts Council of Wales's Arts Director has praised the project for providing 'the encouraging context for a new generation to see this work as possible and realisable in Wales'. [Source 5.4] Several of these artists have created works that have drawn for inspiration on the resources that the project has made available. [Source 5.8]

The momentum created by *WsWfP*'s public events has led to further activities through which the reach of the research has been significantly increased. Several media outlets in Wales have covered the research: including BBC Radio Wales' weekly *Art Show* (which ran two features) [Source 5.2]; *Pitch* art show on Radio Cardiff; the online arts platform *Culture Colony*; Wales's leading literary magazine, *New Welsh Review*; and the British Council-published *Platform* magazine. A number of Welsh bloggers have reviewed the project, including Anthony Brockway [*Babylon Wales*], who advised readers that Roms 'has discovered an avant-garde we never previously knew existed. Be sure to check out her brilliantly researched archive'. [Source 5.3] Roms has been invited to lecture extensively on the research to general (non-academic) audiences – between January 2008 and July 2013, she gave 18 public talks on various aspects of the history of performance art in Wales, hosted by high-profile cultural organisations in Wales, the UK and Europe. These have included the National Library of Wales, the National Museum of Wales, Chapter (Cardiff) and Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Artes Mundi, Axis, National Review of Live Art (Glasgow), The Institute of Contemporary Arts ICA and Live Art Development Agency (both London), the European Performance Art Festival (Warsaw) and Akademie der Künste (Berlin). Their geographical and institutional spread is testimony to the extent to which *WsWfP* has succeeded in building national and international recognition for Welsh performance art among cultural institutions and in promoting an attention to marginalized performance histories.

In consequence, *WsWfP* has managed to enhance significantly the public awareness of and engagement with performance history in Wales, and to encourage an appreciation of the important contribution that the artform has made to cultural life in the country, as well as to grow our understanding of Wales as a place of longstanding, vibrant and internationally relevant artistic activity.

As a result Roms is now regularly invited to consult on aspects of Welsh artistic history, and performance work is routinely considered for exhibitions, publications and media coverage devoted to Welsh contemporary art on a national and international platform. The Arts Council of Wales's Arts Director has stressed how Roms's research has 'stimulated public institutions to engage in important new exhibitions and presentation of material in the public domain'. **[Source 5.4]**

To provide examples: *WsWfP* was consulted by BBC Wales on late 20th century art in Wales for its series *Picturing the Century*, 2010; *WsWfP* informed the exhibition of John Cale by *Wales at the Venice Biennale* 2009 by helping to connect the avant-garde activities of emigrated Welsh artists such as Cale with those based in Wales; *WsWfP* provided the National Eisteddfod's Visual Arts Committee with information on past performance activities in Wrexham (for its Lle Celf exhibition, Eisteddfod 2011) and Barry (Eisteddfod 2012); and *WsWfP* contributed documentary material and expertise to the Vale of Glamorgan Council's exhibition on the history of Barry Summer School (2012). Outside of Wales, *WsWfP* was invited in 2012 by Tate's Collection Care Department to advise on oral history-based methodologies for the preservation of the work of Tino Seghal. And a major European 50th anniversary exhibition of the influential international art movement of Fluxus features Roms's research on Fluxus in Wales (2012, and still touring). **[Source 5.9]**

Out of these activities have arisen three ongoing partnerships with major stakeholders that allow *WsWfP* to inform more directly how performance art in Wales today is funded, administered, exhibited and conserved. The National Museum Wales Amgueddfa Cymru (NMW-AC) first worked with *WsWfP* on the inaugural displays for its new National Museum of Art in 2011, which, as NMW-AC's Curator for Contemporary Art confirms, was informed directly by Roms's research. **[Source 5.5]** It exhibited documentation of two performance pieces which *WsWfP* had made available. Roms was invited to co-curate a public event on Joseph Beuys's work in Wales to accompany a NMW-AC's exhibition (2011); and NMW-AC and *WsWfP* currently collaborate on a major retrospective of Ivor Davies's performance in the context of *Destruction in Art*, supported by an AHRC-funded Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA, 2013-16). NMW-AC's Head of Contemporary Art has called the partnership 'a model for the way academic research can reach wider audiences'.

[Source 5.5] In response to the research the Museum has also begun to consider how it will collect and conserve Wales's performance legacy. *WsWfP* collaborates on a further AHRC-CDA (2012-2015) with Chapter Arts Centre, which is informing the art centre's directions in audience development and innovative programming through a re-evaluation of its early history in the 1970s.

[Source 5.6] And the Arts Council of Wales (ACW), who funded some of the project's early public events with a Lottery grant, hosted an exhibition which drew on *WsWfP*'s research at the National Eisteddfod 2011, thus enhancing the project's profile among Welsh-speakers. The ACW has furthermore taken an active interest in the project through the presence of its Arts Director on *WsWfP*'s steering group. **[Source 5.4]** In 2012 Roms was appointed a National Advisor to ACW to advise on its funding policy and its support for a variety of performance companies and projects.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact:

5.1 Number of page views and unique visits to *What's Welsh for Performance WsWfP* website:

As registered by Statcounter <http://statcounter.com>

5.2 Representative Media coverage of *What's Welsh for Performance WsWfP*: [recording available]

BBC Radio Wales: *Radio Wales Arts Show* (On Performance Art in Wales) (broadcast 24.1.2008)

5.3 Representative Blog coverage of *What's Welsh for Performance WsWfP*:

Anthony Brockway, *Babylon Wales* URL: <http://babylonwales.blogspot.co.uk> - entry 10/2008

5.4 Impact on Wales's performance scene and cultural institutions:

Letter of corroboration from Arts Director, Arts Council of Wales

5.5 Partnership with Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales:

Letter of corroboration from Head of Modern & Contemporary Art, AC-NMW

5.6 Partnership with Chapter Arts Centre:

Contact: Executive Director and Development Manager, Chapter

5.7 Impact on first generation of performance artists in Wales:

Contact: artist, creator of one of the first performance art events in Wales

5.8 Impact on present generation of performance artists in Wales:

Contact: artist, GoodCopBadCop performance group, *Pitch* arts show

5.9 European Fluxus Festivals 1962–1977 (Exhibitions, Conferences, Actions, Publications)

exhibition sites and documentation; URL: <http://thelunaticsareontheloose.tumblr.com/>