

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<b>Institution:</b> Queen Mary University of London (QMUL)
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D35 Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts
<b>Title of case study:</b> Transforming Publics and Participation through Performance
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Professor Lois Weaver joined QMUL Drama in 1997. Her research-led practice as artist, curator and activist has had substantial impact within two areas. First, within the cultural world of live art she has influenced the practice of both emerging and established artists, and the programming and curation of performance. She has facilitated, mentored and directed a range of artists; opened up new spaces for performance’s production and presentation; and actively supported other curators in the expansion of live art programming, especially in London. Second, Weaver’s research into forms of public dialogue – her ‘Public Address Systems’ – has had impact in the wider social field, leading to events and projects around the world in which citizens of diverse perspectives and backgrounds, often excluded from public discourse on grounds of age, class, gender and sexuality, have been able to contribute meaningfully to discussions of urgent social issues, including human rights, sexuality, aging and new technologies.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Weaver’s research and its impact are cumulative: her experiments as a performance artist with new modes of engaging audiences have led, first, to the development of new non-hierarchical curatorial practices, and most recently, to the application of techniques of performance and curating to the creation of new forms of public dialogue and social engagement. Her innovations place her research at the forefront of a turn to greater social engagement in live art practice. Weaver’s research has resonated nationally and internationally through the dissemination of her ideas and practices, and through their adoption by others responding to her invitation to treat the her research outcomes as ‘open-source’ social and performance technologies. The two areas of Weaver’s research – artistic and social – are presented here: the artistic in sections (i) performance and (ii) curation; and the social in section (iii) social design.</p> <p><b>(i) As a researcher working through performance practice.</b> Weaver’s practice is animated by a central research question: how can popular theatrical forms, sometimes deeply conventional, be redeployed to discover new gender possibilities, to challenge the traditions of theatrical practice, and, above all, to engage audiences in active conversation about their own lives? Through close engagement with feminist research and ongoing collaborations with feminist scholars (Jill Dolan, Peggy Phelan) and artists (Holly Hughes, Peggy Shaw), Weaver has developed a feminist performance methodology that favours the fantastical constructions of biographical imagination over the logics of psychological narrative. Her performances also explore the possibilities of non-coercive, accessible participation for audiences. The primary work which emerges from this approach and which constitutes this research has been a series of theatre productions created by Weaver with Split Britches, the theatre company she co-founded in the early 1980s, including, most recently <i>Miss America</i> (2008), <i>Lost Lounge</i> (2009), and <i>Ruff</i> (2012-13).</p> <p><b>(ii) As a researcher working through curation.</b> Weaver’s curation is shaped by feminist research and practice that seeks non-hierarchical alternatives to existing structures for the development and presentation of performance. In collaboration with the Live Art Development Agency (LADA), Weaver created East End Collaborations (EEC, 1999–2009) at a time when there was only one annual event – primarily a showcase – at which emerging live artists could present their work. With EEC she experimented with new formats for such platforms, adapting investigative practices from the university research environment she had recently entered, to incorporate critical conversations and a professional development seminar, transforming the nature of such events through research-driven intervention. The aim is to offer participants the tools to realise their own artistic, social and political aspirations. This work has continued, in collaboration with colleagues at QMUL and LADA, through QMUL-hosted festivals of live art by early-, mid- and later-career artists: <i>AiR Project</i> (2009 -11) and <i>Peopling the Palace</i> (PtP 2013). In addition, Weaver directed <i>PSi#12: Performing Rights</i> at QMUL in 2006, at which a conference and a performance festival were held simultaneously to provide a platform for the development of research at the intersection of political engagement and performance. These projects presented artists whose work falls outside of dominant markets; challenged live artists to address social issues such as human rights and age and wage; and brought new audiences to experimental performance. Weaver’s work in this area has been pioneering in its exploration of what the research university can contribute to the world of</p>

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experimental and socially-engaged performing arts.

**(iii) As a researcher into the design of social and communicative structures.** Drawing on her research-led performance practice, Weaver has developed a series of performance techniques and new structures for organising public engagement, which she terms 'Public Address Systems'.

(a) **Personae.** Weaver's performance work makes extensive use of imaginary personae, created by Weaver or project participants. The use of personae was developed first within the AHRC-funded research project, *Staging Human Rights* (2002), in which Weaver explored the potential of personae as roles through which participants (here, women in a Brazilian prison) could express their desires for change, use fantasy as means of imagining solutions to everyday problems, and perform narratives of alternative futures. This research has continued in a range of contexts since. In **Democratising Technology** (2007-09) Weaver's use of performance techniques, including personae, empowered groups of elders from Tower Hamlets to design ideas for new technologies and invent solutions to problems specifically affecting their demographic. Weaver's own main persona is her über-feminine **Tammy WhyNot**, a country-and-western singer trying to make her way as a lesbian performance artist. Comically naïve but enthusiastically self-proclaimed 'learner' and 'non-expert', Tammy encourages audiences to engage in dialogue on difficult questions on the basis of curiosity and desire rather than conventional understandings of expertise.

(b) **Public Address Systems**, including the **Long Table** and Porch Sitting. The Long Table is a conversational performance format, also developed within *Staging Human Rights*, which experiments with participation and public engagement, foregrounding inclusivity and challenging more institutional and often hierarchical forms of public debate. Participants gather as if at a dinner table; there is no moderator nor any structure for debate beyond rules that anyone at the table can speak and if you are not at the table and wish to speak all you have to do is take a seat.

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

(i) Since 2007, the **Split Britches Video Archive** has been held at the Hemispheric Institute Digital Video Library, New York University. **Split Britches Papers and Archives** were acquired in June 2007 by the Fales Library and Special Collections, Elmer Bobst Library, New York University.

(ii) Public performances featuring **Tammy WhyNot** between 2002 and 2013. **What Tammy Needs to Know** was performed at: Dixon Place, NYC (2004); Drill Hall Arts Centre, London (2005, 2006); Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland (2006); Glasgay!, Glasgow, Scotland (2006); and Warsaw Theatre Institute, Poland (2006). The performance was granted £10,000 by the London Arts Board Research & Development fund in 2002 and a \$5,000 Arts Playwriting Grant by the New York State Council in 2003. **What Tammy Needs to Know about Getting Old and Having Sex** appeared first at Chelsea Theatre, London, in 2008. The performance won a £3,500 Chelsea Theatre Commissioning Award. **Tammy** has also acted as public facilitator for a number of events, including: Closing Plenary PSi#12 Performing Rights Conference, QMUL (2006); Anatomy Lessons, **Performing Medicine's Anatomy Season**, Sadler's Wells, London (2011); East End's Got Talent, EU Researcher's Night, QMUL (2012); and Creative Hosting for American Society for Theatre Research annual conference, Nashville, TN (2012). In 2004, LADA awarded Weaver an £8,000 One-to-One Bursary for development of **Tammy WhyNot** as public engagement facilitator. This research was submitted to RAE 2008 (*What Tammy Needs to Know: Using Persona to Facilitate Public Engagement*).

(iii) **Democratising Technology (DemTech)**. In 2007, a £183,000 AHRC/ EPSRC Designing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century award was granted to Weaver and co-investigators for **DemTech**. Arts Council England awarded £40,000 to SPACE and Weaver for the production of *The Not Quite Yet Exhibition and Symposium*, as documented in Weaver's *Democratising Technology* (2007-09).

(iv) **Public Address Systems**, including **Long Table**. In 2002, a portion of a £164,000 AHRB Large Research Grant was awarded to Paul Heritage for Weaver's contribution to *Staging Human Rights*. In 2004-05, £5,000 of a £59,000 Regional Lottery Programme grant awarded to Weaver for East End Collaborations and £5000 of a £60,000 grant awarded to Weaver by Arts Council England for *Performing Rights* were dedicated to the development of the Long Table. A £7,500 Art Matters grant was awarded to Weaver for the development of the Long Table for the Hemispheric Institute Study of Politics and Performance Encuentros in Buenos Aires (2007) and Bogota (2009). **Porch Sitting** was an experiment developed in 2012 at La Mama in NYC.

(v) A range of published research documents and engages critically with Weaver's creative and critical practices, including, Ann Elizabeth Armstrong, 'Building Coalitional Spaces in Lois Weaver's Performance Pedagogy', *Theatre Topics* 15.2 (2005): 201-19. A fuller list of critical literature on

Weaver's practices is available at <http://www.sed.qmul.ac.uk/drama/staff/research/113391.html>.

#### 4. Details of the impact

Weaver's **artistic research** has social and cultural impact on three main constituencies: artists, audiences, and curators / programmers / venues. Some takes place at the time of a performance, workshop or other event, and feeds back immediately into the development of the research. Some takes the form of an ongoing legacy for those engaged by and through the research. As playwright and Yale School of Drama playwriting lecturer Lisa Kron notes, 'Lois has profoundly influenced generations of theater makers.'

(i) **On artists.** The impact of Weaver's innovative, research-led practice as a performance artist is demonstrated by the number of artists – over twelve between 2008 and '13 – who have been inspired to emulate or build on her work and sought her collaborative leadership as a mentor and/or director. Such collaborators include: Bird la Bird (2010-11); Rosana Cade (2013); Stacy Makishi, *Making of Bull the True Story* (2009-12) and *The Falsettos* (2013); Louise Mothersole and Rebecca Fuller (Sh!t Theatre), *Job Seekers Anonymous* (2010-13); Dan Fishback (NYC) for La Mama series, *Squirts* (2013); Holly Hughes, *Let Them Eat Cake* (2009) and *The Dog and Pony Show (bring your own pony)* (2010); and Serge Nicholson and Laura Bridgeman, *The (Trans) Mangina Monologues* (2009). Artists who received direct support from Weaver's EEC project after 2008 include Oreet Ashery, Richard DeDominici, Sheila Ghelani and Jiva Parthipan. Artists who developed new work with support and/or mentoring organised by Weaver through AiR and PtP include Helena Hunter, Kira O'Reilly, Julia Bardsley, Mehmet Sander (AiR residencies 2009-11) and Lauren Barri Holstein, Hester Chillingworth and Jamie Lewis Hadley (PtP 2013). Here, Weaver's research through her own performance practice combines with her research on structures for supporting artists; her curated events and mentoring deliver the impact of her research to the work of other artists, and to the culture of live art in general.

(ii) **On audiences.** Incorporating audiences is crucial to Weaver's research through performance conversations, Long Tables or Porch Sitting. Techniques for audience incorporation were developed as part of Weaver's ongoing research into forms facilitating access and participation. In these performances, audiences are invited to contribute photographs and writing in the pre-show, enabling them to engage in public conversations during the performance, based on their contributions – members of the public are supported in their participation rather than put on the spot. *Miss America*: 15+ public performances, 2008-9, in NYC, London, Boston, Minneapolis and Zagreb (audience c. 2,000). *Lost Lounge*: 20+ public performances, 2009-12, in NYC, LA, London, Toronto and Brisbane (audience c. 4,000), *Ruff*: public performances in London, NYC and Glasgow (audience c.1,010; £30k Wellcome Trust grant autumn 2013 secures future touring).

(iii) **On curators, programmers, venues.** The impact of Weaver's research and development of curatorial strategies is evident in a range of significant enhancements in the UK's theatre/performance culture, including: expansion of live art programming (at Duckie and Chelsea Theatre, where Weaver is on the Board of Directors); development of new artist-led spaces/initiatives (LADA's DIY was set up as a result of Weaver's EEC experiments; the tenth DIY edition ran in 2013); development of new artist development programmes at venues including the Colchester Arts Centre (2005-the present) and (from 2012), The Junction, Cambridge. Mark Ball, Artistic Director of LIFT since 2009, acknowledges her impact when he writes that: 'Lois Weaver opened my eyes to a new type of performance that was conceptual, experimental, sexy but still deeply political in nature. That introduction to what's now termed "live art" changed my view of what theatre could be and do.'

The impact of Weaver's **social research** also takes place both in the process of the research itself (for participants) and in its legacy and continuation by others. Rachel Anderson, former Artangel Head of Interaction delineates Weaver's expert MC'ing skills as Tammy at the launch of *Stay* (2010): '[Weaver] managed to guide the audience across ... a bumpy terrain with absolute sensitivity, respect and humour... [Weaver] successfully created a beautiful celebration whilst also holding the severity and seriousness of the context in equal position.'

(i) **DemTech** devised methods to engage participants often excluded from digital and new media technology in discussions about digital technology design. Workshops involved 36 participants from local groups: Bow Women's Choir, The Geezers, S-AGE at the Sundial Centre and Association of Greater London Older Women (AGLOW), who worked alongside interactive design students and the project researchers/artists. The research was disseminated for a general public

through *The Not Quite Yet Exhibit* at Space Gallery (2008) featuring works by five artists commissioned to respond to the research conducted in the workshops, a related symposium and a professional development DVD resource for designers, activists and policymakers ([www.spacestudios.org.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/the-not-quite-yet](http://www.spacestudios.org.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/the-not-quite-yet)). The impact of the original research includes work undertaken by the participants following DemTech's formal events, including projects by AGLOW, who won a Community Cohesion Award from the London Health Commission in 2010 for 'performance work challenging ageism across service deliverers and getting people talking about good practice and how it can be achieved.'

(ii) **Participatory events** in which Weaver has drawn on her research to engage non-specialist and often marginalised publics. Most of these involve **Tammy WhyNot**. Five public performances of *What Tammy Needs to Know about Getting Old and Having Sex* (2008–13) (estimated total audience 600); public workshop with 10 lesbian asylum-seekers using personae to support participants in the confident expression of their sexual identity and assertion of rights claims, with audience of c. 120 family, friends, artists and activists, as part of *Stay*, an Artangel project led by Oreet Ashery (2010); *Tourist Information Wanted* (2010) with Stacy Makishi, part of Alternative Village Fête, produced by Home Live Art for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, in which members of the public were invited to remember events in their own lives for which they would like to have a 'Jubilee' (350 participants); *What Tammy Found Out* (2013) performance at Contact Theatre, Manchester (audience c.170); five-day residency in a retirement home in Varazdin, Croatia with c. 35 residents and staff, on issues of health, sexuality and aging (2013), culminating in five films and a live performance (audience of 125); *What Tammy Needs to Know About Being Femme* (2013), City of Women Festival, Ljubljana, audience c.150 (also with a Long Table on Gender and Drag).

(iii) The widespread use of the 'open source' technologies developed under the **Public Address Systems** (PAS) umbrella. Weaver herself has hosted 26 Long Tables since 2008, of which 17 were in theatres, festivals or related non-HEI contexts in Glasgow, London, New York and Boston. Other people have organised them in Sydney, Pittsburgh, London and New York. Events have involved discussion of human rights, technology design, feminism, autobiography, labour, riots in London, Afrofuturism, performance art and sexuality, with c.1,500 participants. Other PAS events include *Porch Sitting for the Future of Queer Performance*, La Mama, NY (2012), with 75 participants, leading directly to enhanced LGBT youth programming at La Mama and the establishment of an annual queer youth festival, *Squirts*; *Getting On: A Back Stage Tour* (2013), three workshops using theatrical language to increase conversation on fear of aging with elder groups in San Francisco and London (25-30 participants and pamphlet for dissemination of workshop methodology); a workshop to present and disseminate PAS with c. 20 artists and activists, CREATE, Dublin, 2013; and launch of Public Address Systems website, 2013.

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

1. Director, Live Art Development Agency, London (DEVELOPMENT OF LIVE ARTISTS, CURATORSHIP AND FORMS OF PUBLIC DIALOGUE)
2. Artistic Director, *La MaMa* Experimental Theatre Club, New York (DEVELOPMENT OF LIVE ARTISTS, CURATORSHIP AND FORMS OF PUBLIC DIALOGUE)
3. Creative Producer, Arts House, Melbourne, and former Artistic Director, LIFT, London (DEVELOPMENT OF LIVE ARTISTS, CURATORSHIP AND FORMS OF PUBLIC DIALOGUE)
4. Project Development Worker, Association of Greater London Older Women, London (DEVELOPMENT OF FORMS OF PUBLIC DIALOGUE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE)
5. Head of Learning and Participation at [ SPACE ] (DEVELOPMENT OF FORMS OF PUBLIC DIALOGUE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE)
6. Public Address Systems: <http://publicaddresssystems.org/> (DEVELOPMENT OF FORMS OF PUBLIC DIALOGUE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE)
7. Split Britches Video Archive, at the Hemispheric Institute Digital Video Library, New York University: <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/hidvl-profiles/itemlist/category/245-britches> DEVELOPMENT OF LIVE ARTISTS, CURATORSHIP AND FORMS OF PUBLIC DIALOGUE
8. The Not Quite Yet, DemTech: [www.spacestudios.org.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/the-not-quite-yet](http://www.spacestudios.org.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/the-not-quite-yet) (DEVELOPMENT OF FORMS OF PUBLIC DIALOGUE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE)
9. Split Britches Papers and Archives, Fales Library and Special Collections, Elmer Bobst Library, New York University: <http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/fales/splitbritches/index.html> DEVELOPMENT OF LIVE ARTISTS, CURATORSHIP AND FORMS OF PUBLIC DIALOGUE