

IETM MAPPING

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THE PERFORMING ARTS IN (NORTH OF) ENGLAND

By Tim Wheeler



Darkest Corners, by Rash Dash (Photo © The Other Richard, Transform Festival)

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The Performing Arts in (North of) England

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by Tim Wheeler

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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 03 |
| 2. SECTION 1: WHAT'S THE STORY? | 07 |
| 3. SECTION 2: TRAVEL GUIDE | 10 |
| 4. SECTION 3 WHAT NOW? | 14 |
| 5. CONCLUSION | 15 |

"IETM Hull 2019 will explore the reality of inclusion in today's societies, in their artistic representations and in the process of creation. We will examine issues around race, ethnicity, faith, disability, age, gender, sexuality, class and economic disadvantage, and any social and institutional barriers that prevent people from participating in and enjoying the arts as an integral part of the societies they live in. We will ask the question: is involving everyone something we want to deliver in theory but something we find hard to deliver in practice?"

IETM Hull 2019 team

01.

INTRODUCTION

IETM Hull 2019 is the fourth Plenary Meeting to be hosted in the UK. The first was an 'open forum' in Cardiff in 1998. In 2003, IETM Birmingham focused on 'Cultural diversity and exchange of values: the challenge of complexity' and in 2010, IETM Glasgow focused on 'Voices' including race, equality, integration, activism and the voice of women, amongst other areas.

Hull 2019 has its focus on inclusion. As outgoing Secretary General of IETM Nan van Houte said, "What does this tell us" about "our times" in general, and the UK and the North of England in particular? Why Hull? Why now? Why inclusion?

Why Hull?

In 2017, Hull hosted City of Culture, a UK government-awarded title that brings similar attention and resources as the European Capital of Culture scheme. As part of the legacy, Arts Council England and the British Council made a commitment to an ongoing celebration of culture in the city.

Hull produced a spectacular year of productions and events that drew attention and changed perceptions. The impact of the year was analysed in [Cultural Transformations](#), published by the University of Hull. There were more than 2,800 events over 365 days, including 465 new commissions that reached more than 5.3m people.



Hull Truck Theatre (Photo © Chris Pepper, Absolutely Cultured)



Four Legs Good by Jack Tan
(Photo © Lizzie Coombes, Compass Live Arts)

Why now?

The answer might be encapsulated in one word: Brexit¹. This offered a compelling reason for holding the Plenary on the very day of our departure. Why did Hull vote 68% leave? Some suggest that a right-wing populist agenda is once again taking root across Europe and globally, as was discussed in the Munich Plenary. Others point to the deep disaffection which saw an opportunity to protest austerity and the North/South inequity evident in the country. According to the [Hull Daily Mail](#), Hull has done well out of European investment, with the city benefitting from £52m of EU funding.

By 29 March, and as we are together in Hull for this IETM Plenary, we should know if the UK is in or out. Will Brexit be hard or soft, delayed or dispatched? No doubt, any decision reached will occupy the conversations amongst the UK members of IETM, either directly, or as the elephant in the room.²

¹ Is the UK about to exclude itself from the European Union? In the UK referendum people in the UK voted 51.9% leave, England voted 51.4% leave, Scotland 38% leave, Wales 52.5%, Northern Ireland 44.2% leave, Yorkshire 58% leave and Hull 68% leave.

² Perhaps the most eloquent summation was made by Northern comedian and folk singer Mike Harding. His [letter to the Prime Minister](#) (2019) is worth a listen.

Why inclusion?

In the outline of this meeting, the organisers say “We will debate the language used and whether terms like ‘inclusion’ are more problematic than helpful. One size does not fit all, so who do you choose to include? How do you deliver this practically in your work?”

The questions that leap immediately to mind are, who is the “we” who is asking and who is the “you” who’s doing the choosing?

And if the answer comes from white, male, middle-class, non-disabled privilege – the so-called “pale, male and stale” – how do “we” change that “you” to be more reflective of the people who live in cities, towns and villages? It is a question of creation and reception, and of leadership and governance. It’s also about those in positions of power making way and actively supporting change. And why would they? What’s in it for them? Obligation? Kindness? Value? In the end, is it about enlightened self-interest?

In May 2015, the incoming Chief Executive Officer of Arts Council England, Darren Henley, made his inaugural address at the [Ferens Art Gallery](#) in Hull. Describing his approach to his new role, he emphasised the importance of building a strong case for culture by engaging with government and politicians, saying “if you’re not at the table, you’re likely to be on the menu”. How are difference and diversity represented at the table?

Inclusion is one of those positive ‘hurrah’ terms that everyone thinks they understand but is easily corruptible. In general, the older we get, the more time we spend in rooms with people who think like us. For some, this is a blessing, for others, a curse. Some seek out diversity and difference. Others seek out similarity and commonalities. And a few seek both.

³ In English schools, if a pupil misbehaves, they can be excluded. Nobody wants this. Schools are fined if they exclude pupils. So, to prevent this, schools have created isolation rooms which some call ‘Inclusion Rooms’. Some of these rooms are well resourced with additional teaching and behavioural support. Some consist of an empty room with booths set around the sides. Young people sit on chairs in a booth – a copy of the school rules pinned on the wall in front of them. A teacher sits at a desk behind them. At best they may have school work to do. At worst they sit facing the wall.



Where We Began, by SBC Theatre (Photo © Ant Robling, SBC Theatre)

There is a difference between the noun ‘inclusion’ and the verb ‘inclusive’. Inclusivity is an active and politically dynamic term. Inclusion is the name of a warehouse where we can store all our problems.³ Inclusivity, like equality, is not a destination but rather an active process which demands constant vigilance. For many years, successive UK governments have supported organisations which have sought to bond communities, geographically or by interest or type. While there has been some success in this strategy, to be genuinely inclusive, investment needs to be made in ‘bridging’ as well as ‘bonding’ – opportunities for people of different backgrounds to come together to celebrate, challenge and explore similarities and differences.

The Equality Act (2010) is the current legislation in the UK that aims to protect people from discrimination. It applies to all who produce goods and services, including theatres, companies, venues and artists. It replaced previous anti-discrimination legislation with a single act, designed to make the law easier to understand and enforce. The Equality Act identifies nine ‘protected characteristics’ – age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity. There are some notable omissions. The Equality Act does not address socio-economic disadvantage (class) or educational attainment, or prisoners, or

looked after children. And there are others who would not feel included or protected by this Act.

Personal note: I have focused on Disability within much of this mapping as it is the field – the bonded group – with which I have been most engaged. Many of the questions raised by the inclusion of disabled people overlap with other concerns, other groups, other communities. There are some important distinctions, and many intersections and overlaps, to explore here at IETM. Key questions for the sector regarding disability are:

- **Power, control and agency – much activity involving disabled people and even disabled artists, is controlled principally by non-disabled people and there is debate as to whether this is still acceptable or exploitative.**
- **Is there a disability aesthetic? Is work by disabled artists a genre? Does it have to be labelled as ‘disability art’?**
- **Is there equality between different impairment groups? Some feel that those with physical and sensory impairments are privileged over learning-disabled people, those experiencing mental distress, those who are neurodivergent and those with pain or fatigue related barriers.**



The Unlimited House of Krip - Liverpool Ball (Photo © Fotocad, Unlimited)

In addition to the Equality Act and in an attempt to move away from an overly prescriptive approach, based on plugging a gap, Arts Council England has developed a strategy it calls the [Creative Case for Diversity](#) (CC). CC aims to site difference and diversity within the excellence agenda. It's about asking how difference can enhance excellence, in writing, devising, choreography and dramaturgy, on-stage, backstage, in the rehearsal room, front-of-house, outreach and wraparound activities. It's also about talent and leadership development, as well as participation and audience development. There is an acknowledgement that diversity in Hull will mean something different to diversity in Leeds, Bradford, Manchester or Liverpool, or Munich or Porto. It needs a different approach to inclusivity borne out of a deep understanding of local need, rather than importing ready-made solutions.

Reflecting on his time as a student in Hull, Darren Henley also talked about Northern culture, and amusingly dubbed the M62 motorway – which runs East to West – “the corridor of culture”. This mapping will follow Henley’s direction and explore these cultural corridors, across the North. The primary arterial routes include the M62 corridor, the M6 which runs up the West coast, and the A1, along the East Coast. The mapping focuses on cities and also examines areas of low arts engagement. As much of the North is rural, hills, dales, moorland and lakeland, many arts organisations have explored the side

roads and sometimes gone off-road to explore [rural touring](#).

As a sovereign state, the UK is unsettled, ill-at-ease, and in conflict within itself and with others. Many artists and artist-activists are driven by dissatisfaction with the way things are. Do we think that the arts are best used to reflect this, or to try to change the situation, or both? Is austerity inciting radical alternatives or muting expression? Are we prepared to take risks? There are no easy answers. These questions require discussion, may provoke disagreement, and require listening and reflection in what anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls a “deep hanging out”. They are questions that IETM, as a community of practice, a community of interest and a community of human beings, needs to address.

My thanks go to Arts Council England, in particular, Hannah Bentley and Jess Farmer, Andrew Jones from the British Council, and IETM’s Nan van Houte and Ása Richardsdóttir, and Chris Wright from [Absolutely Cultured](#). Locally-based members Alison Andrews and Andy Pearson, and cultural consultants Alan Dix, Andrew Dixon and Jo Verrent have been swift and immensely helpful in offering constructive criticism. The opinions stated here are mine or are on short-term loan. Any errors or omissions are mine alone. Where possible, I have indicated sources, cited references and signposted resources by embedding hyperlinks. Owing to the tight timescale, the mapping has been

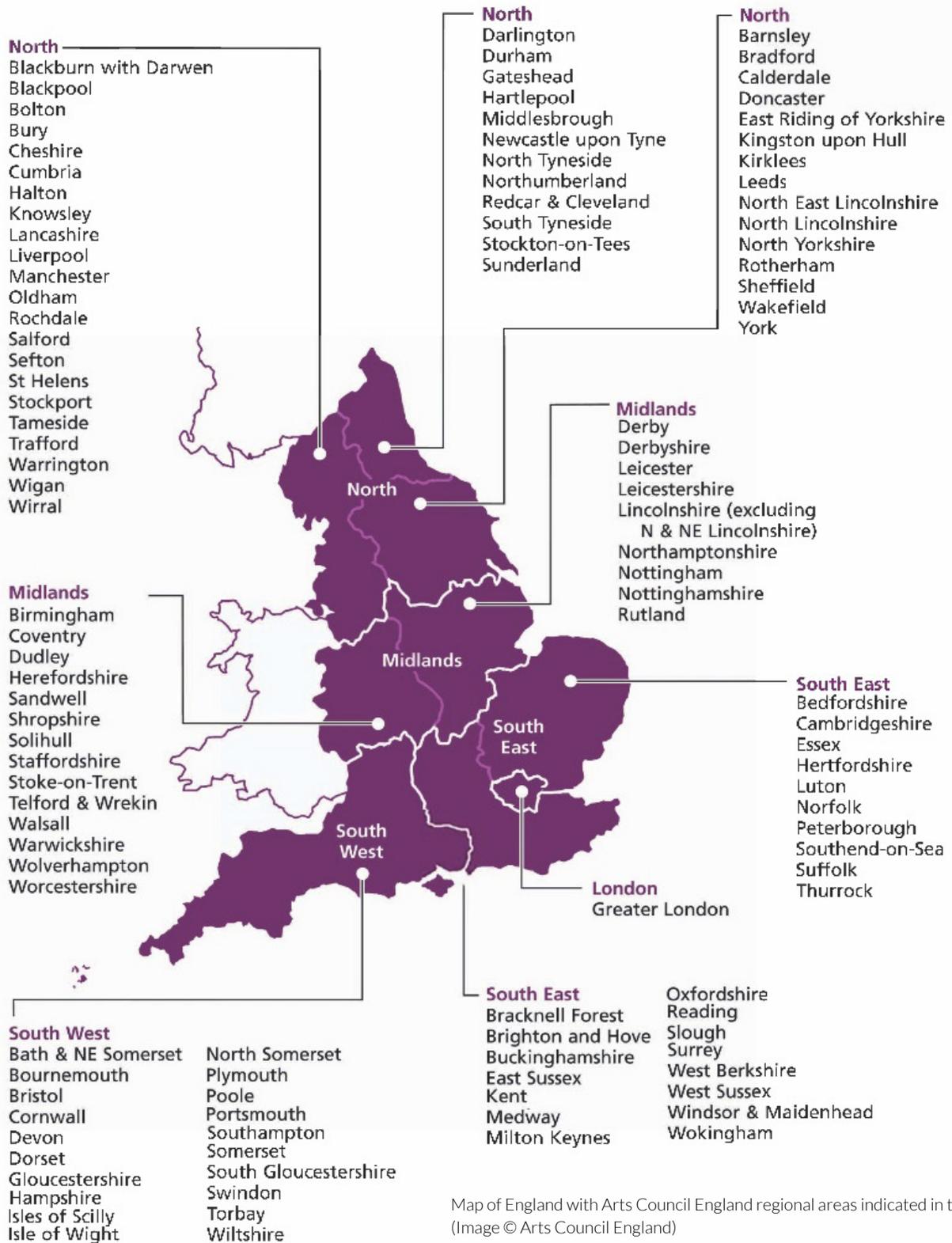
conducted with pre-existing, publicly available material. There was no capacity for consultation. It is divided into three sections.

Section 1: What's the Story? explores Northern culture, examining some of the geographical, historical and economic forces that helped shape Northern England.

Section 2: Travel Guide to Performing Arts in the North of England. A journey to visit the venues, the festivals and the companies that live work and play here, and a look at key organisations, artists and themes. It reflects on information provided by Arts Council England, the British Council and IETM. Where possible, I have given examples of inclusive practice. Most of the organisations mentioned here are National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) regularly funded by Arts Council England, with some individual artists. The map shows the areas that Arts Council England uses to identify the areas of the country. The North Area has three local offices – one in the North West (Manchester), one in the North East (Newcastle) and one in Yorkshire (Leeds).

Section 3: What Now? This section focuses on the future. Where do we go from here – as an area, a country, and a community of colleagues, partners and friends?

Our areas



Map of England with Arts Council England regional areas indicated in text. (Image © Arts Council England)

02.

SECTION 1: WHAT'S THE STORY?

The Bradford-born artist [David Hockney](#) subtitled *Pearblossom Hwy* – a photographic assemblage – “One landscape, many views”. This became the strapline of Bradford’s bid for European Capital of Culture, begun in 2003. The award finally went to Liverpool, which delivered a brilliant year in 2008. The phrase has resonance here. The culture of the Northern landscape is made up of many viewpoints. We are shifting from a traditional, monolithic, grand narrative to one borne out of the geography, the history and everyday creativity of the people who live here. The stereotypical Northerner wears a cloth cap, owns a whippet, drinks warm beer, is plain talking and is full of stoical grit. The people of the North are an imaginary community. This is what they like to think in the South of this island, who are similarly imagined. In truth, all is in flux. Shifting tectonic plates, changes in climate and the erosion of millennia has meant that even the Yorkstone and Millstone grit used to construct houses and drystone walls, began life elsewhere in the world. The North is contentious, riven with fissures and fault lines, disputed borders and boundaries. There are more than 130 languages spoken in Leeds, and countless variations in Northern dialect across towns and villages.



Pearblossom Hwy by David Hockney, 1986 (Photo © Getty Images, Internet search)

Geography

The North of England is difficult to define. From an outside perspective, it looks like it’s in the middle of the country. It’s certainly in the middle of the biggest island of the British Isles. The UK, short for The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, is a sovereign state – like France or the USA – made up of four countries: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The northern border of the North of England is quite simple to spot. It’s the border with Scotland.

The southern boundary is much more complicated. For simplicity, I’m using somewhere mid-way in the Peak District. Sheffield yes, Chesterfield no. For some, though, the line is drawn further down the country, at the Watford Gap service station on the M1 motorway. South of Watford Gap the civilised people have cream with their dessert. North of Watford Gap, us Northern brutes have custard on our pudding.

Running along the centre of England are the Pennines, a range of hills known as the backbone of England. They were formed between 500 and 420 million years ago. The Pennines form an East-West axis dividing Yorkshire and Lancashire. The Wars of the Roses (1455 to 1485) between the white rose emblem of Yorkshire and the red rose emblem of Lancashire has fuelled an enmity

between East and West for centuries. This enmity was exploited recently when the Tourist Board for Lancashire erected a sign on the M62, which read “Welcome to Lancashire, like Yorkshire only better!”. The Tourist board for Yorkshire immediately retaliated with a sign visible from the other direction which read “Welcome to Yorkshire, like Lancashire only better!”

Henley’s Corridor of Culture, the M62 runs from Hull to Liverpool. The vast majority of the population of the North live within 20 minutes of the motorway. It takes 2hrs 24mins to travel from Liverpool to Hull by car, and 2hrs 49mins to go by train. You could also travel by canal barge, cycle, wheelchair or walk. If you wished to travel by air, it would take 7hrs 30mins to fly from Liverpool to Hull, via Schiphol in Amsterdam.

The North-South axis is defined by the A1, which runs from London to Edinburgh. It connects Sheffield and Newcastle with the M62. The final road of note is the M6 which connects Lancaster, Blackpool, Penrith, Carlisle and Glasgow back with the M62.



Browton Abbey (Photo © Victor Frankoski, Unlimited)

History

Established between the late 16th and early 18th centuries, by 1913 the British Empire held sway over 412 million people, 23% of the world's population and over a quarter of the Earth's land area. The country industrialised the slave trade, stole antiquities from around the globe and appropriated cultural practices, causing untold damage to the lives of individuals and Britain's standing in the world. The presence of different cultures has enriched the UK's culture. [The Chapeltown Carnival](#) is one of the longest running West Indian Carnivals in Europe, developed by the [Windrush generation](#).

During the Industrial Revolution (from the 1760s to the 1840s) manufacturing developed in the North, as the proximity of hills for sheep farming, a cheap labour source, rich coal seams for power, and water for manufacturing and transport via the canals, made it a perfect place to build mills, factories and warehouses. The Second World War saw women move into millwork. When the men returned, the women were forced out of work and back into the homes. There weren't enough men to work in the factories that were running 24hrs a day, so the UK government encouraged people from the Commonwealth to come to work in the mills. In the 1960s, UK manufacturing went into decline as factories relocated

closer to sources of cheaper labour in China and India. The North of England has been left with an underemployed workforce and many empty mills, some of which have been repurposed as artists' studios and creation centres. In 2008, Mind the Gap moved into Mind the Gap Studios, a renovated Silk Mill which provides inclusive arts work and performance spaces in Bradford.

Between 1984 and 1985, Margaret Thatcher took on the Miners' Union and won. Driving from down the A1 from Leeds to study theatre at Dartington College of Arts in Devon, I regularly drove past convoys of police-guarded coal convoys, and the occasional van load of flying pickets.⁴ One of Thatcher's legacies was something called the Enterprise Allowance Scheme (EAS). If you could get together £1000, you could begin a company and receive £40 a week from the government (more than the state benefits known as the dole). Some argue that it was the EAS that gave birth to alternative comedy with Alexie Sayle (Liverpool), Peter Kay (Bolton), Ade Edmondson (Bradford) and Ross Noble (Newcastle) and a radicalised countercultural arts scene. From the early 1980s, many theatre and dance companies were set up. Some claim that there were as many as six companies set up on the same £1000 which was just passed amongst

people to qualify for the benefit. In 2001 Artist [Jeremy Deller](#) worked with [Artangel](#) and the [Sealed Knot](#) to commemorate one of the most brutal clashes between the miners and the police, known as [The Battle of Orgreave](#).

In 2012, London hosted the summer Olympic Games. This had a significant effect on the country, in particular on the role of disabled people in sports and the arts. Alongside the Opening Ceremony, a programme called Unlimited was launched, which supported disabled artists to create work to be seen alongside the Paralympic Games. Since 2012, [Unlimited](#) has become a programme of investment in disabled-led arts, funded by Arts Council England, [Arts Council Wales](#), [Creative Scotland](#) and [Spirit of 2012](#), with much international work being supported by the British Council. This was a significant turning point for disability-related arts in the UK. [Europe Beyond Access](#) is a Creative Europe-funded scheme, led by the British Council, involving partners in the UK, Greece, the Netherlands, Germany, Serbia, Sweden and Italy.

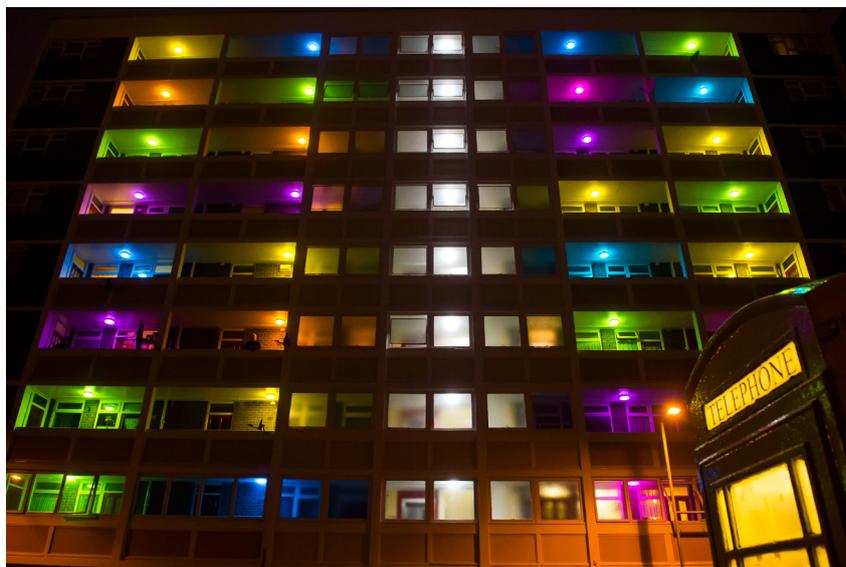
⁴ Flying pickets were miners who travelled between coal pits in support and solidarity with their fellow workers. The wives of the miners were also active in support and campaigning.

Economy

The UK is the fifth largest economy in the world. Currently, most of the wealth is focused on London and the South East. In a [statement on his visit to the UK](#) (2018), Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights identified that “14 million people, a fifth of the population, live in poverty... Four million of these are more than 50% below the poverty line⁵, and 1.5 million are destitute, unable to afford basic essentials.⁶ The widely respected Institute for Fiscal Studies predicts a 7% rise in child poverty between 2015 and 2022, and various sources predict child poverty rates of as high as 40%⁷.”

Focusing on the arts and culture, [Rebalancing Our Cultural Capital](#) (2013) (RoCC) was an evidence-based report examining the distribution of arts funding between London and the rest of England. The report was funded independently by its authors Peter Stark, Christopher Gordon and David Powell, and revealed the extent of bias towards London in public funding of the arts provided by taxpayers and National Lottery players throughout England. The National Lottery has become known by some as a [tax on the poor](#). The report found that while “15% of the population of England lives in London. In 2012/13, Arts Council England distributed £320m of taxpayers’ money to the arts with £20 per head of population (php) allocated in London against £3.60 php in the rest of England. In total in 2012/13 taxpayers from the whole of England provided benefit to London of £69 php against £4.60 php in the rest of the country – a ratio of 15:1.”

According to the to the Warwick Commission (2015) report [Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth](#) “the wealthiest, better educated and least ethnically diverse 8% of the population forms the most culturally active segment of all: between 2012 and 2015 they accounted (in the most conservative estimate possible) for at least 28% of live



I Wish To Communicate With You (Photo © Sean Spencer, Absolutely Cultured)

attendance to theatre, thus benefiting directly from an estimated £85 per head of Arts Council England funding to theatre.”

Undoubtedly the balance of funding in the UK has changed. In 1950, 70% of Arts Council of Great Britain’s Grant in Aid went to London. By 2018 this had dropped to 40%. Arts Council England responded to the RoCC and Warwick reports, saying “We are actively addressing the important challenge of increasing investment outside London. 75% of the Lottery has been spent beyond the capital by 2018, and we are investing an additional £170million outside London in our current National Portfolio from 2018-2022. This includes (£48m) funding for 51 new organisations in the North of England. We want to build capacity outside the capital – enabling more artists and organisations to do exciting work across our cities, towns and villages. We must do this without damaging London’s cultural offer, recognising everything is connected in a cultural ecology that spreads across England and internationally.”

Arts Council England has also developed a programme called [Creative People and Places](#) (CPP) which seeks to create long-term investment in 21 areas in England which have had fewer opportunities

to engage with the arts and cultural activity. It’s an action research programme that focuses on cultural democracy, creating a platform 91% of its audiences ‘come from neighbourhoods with low or medium levels of arts engagement.’ There are nine CPP programmes in the North of England: [Super Slow Way](#) Pennine Lancashire, [LeftCoast](#) Blackpool and [Heart of Glass](#) St Helens in the North West; [Creative Scene](#) North Kirklees, [Right Up Our Street](#) Doncaster and [Back to Ours](#) Hull in Yorkshire; and [East Durham Creates](#), [The Cultural Spring](#) Sunderland and South Tyneside, and [Bait](#) South East Northumberland in the North East. While funding has been allocated in three-year phases, places were asked to develop ten-year visions for the initial applications.

⁵ Social Metrics Commission, *A new measure of poverty for the UK*, September 2018, https://socialmetricscommission.org.uk/MEASURING-POVERTY-FULL_REPORT.pdf, p. 97.

⁶ Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Glen Bramley, et al., *Destitution in the UK 2018*, June 7, 2018, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2018>, pp. 2-3.

⁷ Institute for Fiscal Studies, *Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2017-18 to 2021-22*, November 2, 2017, ifs.org.uk/publications/10028.

03.

SECTION 2: TRAVEL GUIDE

The following gives examples of venues, festivals, companies and programmes across the North of England. It also looks at funding, and sector support organisations such as Creative Case North, Culture Forum North, The Audience Agency and Without Walls. This is not an exhaustive list. It is based on organisations which are regularly funded National Portfolio Organisations of Arts Council England in the North. It also includes independent artists and companies to show a broader arts ecology.

East-West Axis

The M62 begins in Liverpool. Interestingly there is no junction 1 or 2. It starts at junction 3. The original plans for the motorway to extend into the city centre were blocked by the local authority.

Liverpool

Liverpool was the European Capital of Culture in 2008. The city is primarily known for its music scene, with local bands including The Beatles, Frankie Goes to Hollywood and Atomic Kitten. It is home to [Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse](#) and [The Unity Theatre](#). Festivals include [Homotopia](#), [DadaFest](#) (one of the longest-running disabled-led organisations programming the work of the Disability Arts movement), [Liverpool Arab Arts Festival](#) and [Milapfest](#). It is also home to [Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts](#) (LIPA).



The Way You Look (at me) Tonight by Claire Cunningham (Photo © Rachel Cherry, Unlimited)

Manchester

Manchester is well served for venues, festivals and companies. It is home to [The Royal Exchange](#), [Home](#), [Contact Theatre](#) – a venue and producing house that focuses on young people – and the Factory, which will be home to [Manchester International Festival](#) (MIF) which this year is premiering [Thank You Very Much](#) by disabled dancer Claire Cunningham. Companies based here include [Collective Encounters](#), [Quarantine](#) and [Imag?ne](#). Nearby Salford has become home to [Salford Quays](#) including Media City, the northern home of the BBC. ITV, [The Lowry](#) and [Walk the Plank](#) are all based here.

Bradford

At the beginning of the 20th Century, Bradford was one of the wealthiest cities in the country. By the end of the century, it was one of the poorest. It has Local Authority-run venues including the [Alhambra and St Georges Hall](#). One venue that has consistently supported new and innovative work is [Theatre in the Mill](#). As a venue, it has helped and invested in successive waves of new practice. [Mind the Gap](#) is known for its work with learning disabled artists. It developed Staging Change,

a training programme for aspiring learning disabled artists in collaboration with Mountview, Arts Educational, Guildford Conservatoire and Oxford School of Acting which ran for six years. Bradford's newest NPO is [Common Wealth](#), whose show [No Guts, No Heart, No Glory](#) explored the world of female Asian boxing. Jenny Wilson of [Irregular Arts](#) is currently investigating the idea of consent within her work. [Blaize](#), based in Keighley is known primarily for rural touring, currently touring [Joan & Jimmy](#), which explores the life of Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl (a.k.a Jimmy Miller). In nearby in Halifax [Northern Broadsides](#) in collaboration with Hull Tuck cast disabled performer [Mat Fraser](#) as Richard III and Huddersfield is home to the [Creative Scene CPP](#) programme.

Leeds

In 2017 The European Commission confirmed that the post-Brexit UK would no longer be eligible to have a host city in the 2023 round European Capital of Culture. Leeds had already invested in the development of its bid. Thanks to the local authority and local arts organisations, the city decided to be a City of Culture regardless. Leeds is fast becoming a cultural hub. Venues like [Leeds Playhouse](#),

a partner in the [Ramps on the Moon](#) scheme that is seeking to increase representation of disabled artists on-stage and in creative roles, and is pioneering dementia friendly performances. [Yorkshire Dance Centre](#) is home [Balbir Singh Dance Company](#). Two other dance company [Northern Ballet](#) and [Phoenix Dance Theatre](#) share a home in the same area. Phoenix's show *Windrush: Movement of People* explored the arrival of the Caribbean community on the SS Empire Windrush. These companies have turned Quarry Hill - a once dilapidated part of the city - into a significant cultural destination. These dance companies come together as [Leeds Dance Partnership](#). Companies including [Red Ladder](#), celebrating 50 years of radical socialist theatre is touring a show about wrestling called *Glory*. And in the 50th anniversary year of the moon landing, [Unlimited Theatre](#) is touring a show entitled *How I Hacked my Way into Space*. [Slung Low](#) has created a [Cultural Community College](#) and Alison Andrews of *A Quiet Word* - an active member of IETM for many years - has developed a *Walking Talking* pre-meeting in Leeds. Festivals like *Transform* and *Compass Live Art Festival* are giving a much-needed platform for aspiring young artists in the region.



Race Cards by Selina Thomson (Photo © Manuel@DARC.media, Heads Up Festival)



Quizoola! by Forced Ents (Photo © David Schalliol, Forced Ents)

Hull

In 2017, Hull received the designation City of Culture. [Hull Truck](#) (or Truck) is a key venue in the city. [E52's Heads Up](#) festival will be running alongside the IETM plenary, and there's some great work to see including Selina Thomson's *Race Cards*, and Jez Dolan's *Is He On The Line...?* There's also [Freedom Festival](#) which was born out of a festival in 2007 that commemorated the politician who worked to abolish the slave trade. [Middle Child](#) create gig theatre and are the newest NPO in Hull. They are one of the 20 or so companies to have emerged from the University of Hull in recent years.

North-South Axis

On the West Coast along the M6, in **Blackpool**, there are the CPP programmes [Heart of Glass](#) in **St Helens**, [LeftCoast](#) in Blackpool, and the [Super Slow Way](#) based on the Leeds Liverpool canal in Pennine Lancashire. In **Lancaster**, there is [The Dukes Playhouse](#), and further up there is [Theatre by the Lake](#) in **Keswick** and [Rosehill Theatre](#) in Moresby, **Whitehaven**.

Sheffield

Along the A1, Sheffield's fortunes were forged through steel, though like many Northern industrial towns and cities it is much diminished. The three main theatres - the Crucible, the Lyceum and the Crucible Studio - are united under one organisation, [Sheffield Theatres](#), which is

one of the partners for the Ramps on the Moon initiative. Sheffield is home to [Forced Ents Third Angel](#) and [Eclipse Theatre](#), which began as a programme supporting Black and Asian theatre, transforming into a theatre company in 2010. Their 2018 production and first national touring show of their ground-breaking *Revolution Mix* programme, *Black Men Walking*, received wide critical acclaim. Nearby **Doncaster** is home to the North's newest venue, [Cast](#), and the CPP project [Right Up Our Street](#).

Further North you pass **York** and [York Theatre Royal](#), [The ARC](#) in **Stockton Upon Tees** and [Theatre Hullabaloo](#) which creates beautiful theatre with and for very young children in **Durham**, and CPP programme [East Durham Creates](#). **Sunderland and South Tyneside** have a CPP programme entitled [The Cultural Spring](#).

Newcastle

Newcastle-upon-Tyne is the northernmost city in England and is home to [Northern Stage](#), [Live Theatre](#) and [BalletLorent](#). Companies include The Lawnmowers, a company of learning disabled artists who use Theatre of the Oppressed techniques of Augusto Boal in much of their practice, and [Unfolding Theatre](#) whose show *Best in the World* explored the world of professional darts. Travel past Newcastle and you reach the CPP programme [Bait](#), in South East Northumberland. [The Maltings](#) in Berwick-upon-Tweed is the most Northerly theatre

in England.

Rural Touring

In 2009, the National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF) held a conference called the International Villages of Culture. This was an idea dreamt up by the then Director of the NRFT at the IETM Istanbul 2006 Plenary. It was a privilege to sit opposite David Porter as he had the idea. It came out of a dissatisfaction that it was arts in cities that were always being talked about at events like IETM. The idea was to develop a programme that celebrated contemporary performing arts work in smaller places that people inhabit. Since then, rural touring has expanded across the UK and made links with others around the globe – the global village.

I've recently returned from India where I spent time working with *Jana Sanskriti* in villages around Kolkata. My step-Grandad was born in Kolkata, so I have grown up with stories of the city, the Bengal tiger and poet/philosopher Rabindranath Tagore. The depth of artistic, cultural and philosophical engagement in those places was of an order that I've seldom experienced anywhere in the UK. At one point it was decided at 3pm that a performance would be happening that evening, and by 7pm 300 people had assembled to take part. With three days' notice, 2,000 people assembled in a square to take part in an impromptu performing arts festival. There's so much to learn for

festival promoters, programmers and commissioners from practice elsewhere.

Arts Development and Funding

The past 30 years have seen the development of a large number of sector support agencies and alliances in England who provide advice and guidance. Arts Council England supports many of these agencies. The infrastructure is far more developed now than in the 1980s when all that was available was generic business advice. Some of the following are national agencies; some national agencies are based in the North and some are specific to the North of England.

Arts Council England is the arts development agency. It commissions reports like the Analysis of Theatre in England and it distributes funding from public sources across England through its National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) and its Project Grants programme and strategic funds. NPOs have four-year agreements, and Project Grants can support a range of activity from one-off projects to programmes of work. Between 2018 and 2022 Arts Council England will invest £1.45 billion of public money from tax revenue and £860 million from the National Lottery. Arts Council England is currently working to a 10-year Strategic Framework which runs from 2010 to 2020. It has five priorities:

1. Excellence is thriving and celebrated in the arts, museums and libraries
2. Everyone has the opportunity to experience and to be inspired by the arts, museums and libraries
3. The arts, museums and libraries are resilient and environmentally sustainable
4. The leadership and workforce in the arts, museums and libraries are diverse and appropriately skilled
5. Every child and young person has

the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries

With its head office in London, Arts Council England divides England into five areas: South West, South East, London, Midlands and The North. The North area has three local offices – one in the North West (Manchester), one in the North East (Newcastle) and one in Yorkshire (Leeds).

Arts Council England is currently in consultation with the sector, stakeholders and audiences on its next ten-year strategy, which will come on stream in 2020. Recently, Arts Council England took on responsibility for Museums and Libraries.

Arts Council England is the principal distributor of funds from the National Lottery to arts, and cultural organisation.

Other sources of funds include trusts and foundations, usually set up as philanthropic entities designed to donate the residue of wealthy estates. Some arts organisations benefit from commercial sponsorship, where there is a direct business benefit for both parties. This tends to be the larger, building-based organisations which can provide tangible evidence of business impact.

The Audience Agency is a national organisation, based in Manchester and London, which provides information and resources, and shares intelligence, about audience development across the arts. Its mission is “to give the public a voice in shaping a vibrant, relevant culture. Cultural organisations are more savvy and creatively inspired than ever before by the challenges of becoming more relevant and extending their reach while being entrepreneurial and resilient.”

The British Council has a role in promoting the British interest in other countries; it does so through a range of strategies, principally though offering English courses.

It is active in supporting arts and arts practice in other countries as part of the 'soft power' agenda. The role of the arts is used to promote good diplomatic relations, mainly where there is strategic, political and/or business interest.

Creative Case NORTH is a consortium of organisations and individuals which aims to convene conversations within the broader arts, museum and library sector. Its aims are to

1. Champion the Creative Case for Diversity across the cultural sector in the North
2. Devise and deliver events and products as relevant to support cultural organisations in the North on their Creative Case journey
3. Disseminate examples of Creative Case work to demonstrate the amount of activity taking place across the North
4. Act as a critical friend to Arts Council England in their development and articulation of the Creative Case for Diversity

The consortium's steering group is made up of representatives from a wide range of cultural forms who individually and organisationally wish to support the cultural sector to embrace and embed the principles of the CC in their work.

Creative Industries Federation "is the membership body which represents, champions and supports the UK's creative industries. Through our unique network of creative organisations, our influential policy and advocacy work and our extensive, UK-wide events programme we support and celebrate the work of our members."

Culture Forum North is a partnership between the higher education and arts sector in the North. Initially, it grew out of engagement between the N8 Universities

(Durham, Lancaster, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield and York) and larger arts organisations. It now "welcomes partners from across the cultural and academic spectrum in the North, who share an ambition to lead cultural thought, learning and practice through knowledge sharing and co-creation."

Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance is a new national organisation bringing together the arts, culture and museums sectors, representing partners "who believe that cultural engagement and participation can transform our health and wellbeing."

Hull City Council was a principal partner in the development of Hull 2017. Regional government is organised through Local Authorities which, until relatively recently, were a significant investor in the arts. This began to change from 2008 when the Conservatives reduced the amount of funds available to Local Authorities and capped what they could raise through local taxes. The result is that more and more – with a few notable exceptions – have begun to disinvest in the arts. The arts are not part of statutory provision and are an easy target for reductions. That said, the amount of money to be saved from arts funding is relatively meagre, and councils are facing cuts to front line services for children and young people and other vulnerable groups. Some local authorities, principally Hull, Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool, continue to support the development of cultural activities while some of the smaller authorities have reduced or stopped investing in arts and cultural activity altogether, to focus resources on statutory services.

The Independent Theatre Council (ITC) represents, supports and develops the professional performing arts in the UK. It is a community of more than 450 companies and producers, united in the knowledge that we are stronger together.

National Rural Touring Forum supports rural touring schemes, promoters, artists

and communities to bring high quality and professional creative experiences to rural venues and audiences. It does this via national projects, networking, development and showcasing opportunities, grants and information sharing.

One Dance UK "is the sector support organisation leading the way to a stronger, more vibrant and more diverse dance sector. We present one clear voice to support, advocate, enhance and give profile to dance in the UK. Our aim is to provide information, resources and opportunities for a workforce that is well-equipped to secure dance's prominence in the cultural landscape of the future."

Regional Dance Agencies There are six regional agencies in the North: Cheshire Dance in Winsford North West, Dance City (DC) in Newcastle Upon Tyne North East, Dance Initiative Greater Manchester (DiGM) in Manchester North West, Ludus Dance in Lancaster North West, Merseyside Dance Initiative (MDI) in Liverpool North West and Yorkshire Dance in Leeds.

UK Theatre "is the UK's leading theatre and performing arts membership organisation".

Without Walls "is the UK's largest commissioner of outdoor arts shows, taking inspiring new work to audiences all over the country and beyond".

Venues North Consortium is a network of 28 venues in the North, coordinated by ARC Stockton. They aim to work with venues to support new and aspiring artists who are creating new work. By new work they mean "new theatre and performance, usually devised work or new writing, or work that explores the boundaries of theatrical form".

04.

SECTION 3: WHAT NOW?

This is a personal reflection from spending nearly 60 years living and creating work in the North of England. While I have focused on disability, there are huge overlaps with other concerns. Without qualification, my work has been about quality and artistic excellence. I would hope one day that an 'us and them' polarity is no longer necessary and we can talk about the inclusive 'us'. It's clear that we don't live monocultural lives and that issues of identity intersect. This is merely a glance through the rear-view mirror, and a look at the road ahead as the UK might be just about to drive off the European map.

I was born in Leeds and lived most of my life in Bradford. Disability was part of my experience from an early age. As well as making theatre, I enjoy huge amounts of arts both as a participant and as an Arts Council England Arts Quality Assessor (AQA). I'm one of many artists and arts professionals, representing many backgrounds, who form a network of peer reviewers to help add a layer of constructive feedback to NPOs. I know that much is produced that could be better, speak with different voices, move in different ways and appeal to a broader audience. I also know it's for people like me to make way for new voices. Marketing departments often talk about audiences who are 'hard to reach'. I would argue that much artistic work is placed out of reach through pricing and other physical and attitudinal barriers – and I now know that engrained attitudes can take generations to change.

When I moved Mind the Gap into Lister Mills in 2008, I welcomed some funders to the opening party along with those who'd made the project possible. One of the funders was represented by a colleague who'd been particularly resistant to the capital development, which had never



Jess Thom (Photo © Sam Robinson, Unlimited)

been clearly articulated. When he entered the space – a £2.2m renovation of an old silk mill into a performing arts making space for learning disabled artists – his first words were 'you shouldn't be in a place like this!', referring to the company members. I laughed nervously, and then he said 'I'm only joking'. Whether he was joking or not is immaterial. That he could think such a thing meant that others could think so, too. I resolved that the most radical thing to do was to make the place feel like home. This is exactly the issue that Creative People and Places, the Unlimited programme, the [Slate](#) programme and Creative Case are tackling alongside the creation of some of the richest, most daring work there is in the UK – work that speaks about the beauty of human variation. It'll take generations.

Initially, arts with disabled people in the UK focused on therapy – arts were for diagnosis and/or cure. Primarily they were used to keep people occupied. From the 1970s, this began to change and disabled people started to have more opportunities – in workshops, as creators, within a performance, as arts leaders. Much of the early work by disabled artists was linked to campaigns for social change, and pushes to ensure equality for disabled people as artists, participants and audiences, following other civil rights struggles.

National leaders in this field emerged from the '70s – [Shape Arts](#) started in 1977, [Graeae](#) in 1980, [Heart 'n' Soul](#) in 1987, [Candoco](#) in 1991.

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) made it a responsibility for all providers of services (including theatres and galleries) to provide access for disabled people "within reason". This responsibility is maintained within the Equalities Act (2010). This led to an increased focus on access for audiences – signed performances and events increased, then captioning. Audio description and touch tours began, offering access to blind and visually impaired people. Increasingly, now, this provision extends to relaxed performances. At [Battersea Arts Centre](#) David Jubb and [Jess Thom](#) are working on making the whole venue relaxed. These things do not happen in all venues or with all companies, but there is a growing commitment in the UK. The use of the creative inclusion of access on stage appears to have been developed by small scale companies, often looking for innovative ways to increase both access and representation.

Work by disabled artists and companies steadily grew, often (but not always) creating politicised work. Many disabled artists reported that they felt they had to

work in disability companies as so-called 'mainstream' companies would not include them. Notions of quality and aesthetics have been debated continuously.

Theorists such as Mike Oliver developed the Social Model of disability. The Medical Model sees the individual as the problem (no legs, a debilitating condition, a mental illness) and it aims to cure or console. The Social Model focuses on the barriers and obstacles that are put in the way of disabled people by society: steps rather than ramps, lack of signage or sign language interpreters, complex buildings and street layouts. And the hidden obstacles, the attitudinal barriers and unconscious biases of people – “you shouldn't be in a place like this”. In recent years, there has been a shift to appreciate the aesthetics of difference, as Europe Beyond Access is attempting to address. These are much more interesting questions for any artist. As Darren Henley said, if you're not at the table (because the restaurant is up a flight of stairs, or you didn't know the meal was happening) then you're

likely to be on the menu. Whatever your 'protected characteristic' might be.

There are still barriers to progression, and repeating discussions about representation, intersectionality and rights, amongst others. Increased investment, the variety of product, definitions, professionalism and 'quality' (defined in many ways) has seen the UK gain a global reputation in this field while, although access to standard professional training for disabled people is improving, significant barriers remain. The 'mainstream' appears slow to shift.

The recent widespread financial cuts in disability benefits have caused misery and distress. When I look at the situation for disabled people now, I am reminded of the place we left over 30 years ago. We are re-institutionalising rapidly. Inclusion has become a room to house our problems.

Underlying all is the relationship between those who have access to resources and those who don't – *the haves, and the have nots*.

Socio-economic deprivation is the clearest indicator that class divides still permeate English culture. At a recent conference on applied theatre in Derby, one of the speakers said that there was a new way to identify which class you are, by what your parents were doing when you were 14. At 14, my Dad was in a psychiatric hospital, and my Mum was out at work collecting charity tins from pubs, clubs and shops in Leeds for the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB). One thing she noticed was that the collections tins in the more impoverished areas were often the fullest, along with the strip clubs, dodgy pubs and betting shops. The more affluent the area, the less money was donated. It's easy to see how the cynical rich can exploit the compassionate poor, a strategy that played out time and again within the arts, and over the past 30 years in telethons, Children in Need appeals and Red Nose Days – and the National Lottery. In the end, charity is not the answer to reducing poverty. As Dutch journalist and historian Rutger Bergman recently said at Davos, “It's taxes”.

CONCLUSION

As the organisers said, it is no accident that the dates of this plenary occur as the UK decides the outcome of the Brexit negotiations. What is clear is that we will need a different route map to make sense of this new reality we are entering. There is an opportunity here. This new map should be constructed from our changing landscape and our many views.

It may also be significant that the day after Hull IETM 2019 is April Fool's day, the day that we usually play pranks on each other. I've had to rewrite the paragraph on Brexit five times over the past five days as a succession of 'meaningful votes' have been cast by our politicians. Time will tell if the referendum was some [Bullingdon Club](#) prank designed to divide and rule a nation. Perhaps perversely, 1st April is also the

day that UK MPs have decided to award themselves a pay rise. A job well done?

Artists in the UK, like elsewhere, are used to developing work in impoverished circumstances, and creativity out of dissatisfaction and desperation. We are good at turning barriers (walls, hills, seas and frictionless boarders) into sites of creative encounter. We are also used to being considered anomalies and disrupters, in taking risks and provoking change. Institutions are less likely to, as austerity bites further into revenue. I'm really looking forward to listening to the many views of IETM members. In the end, good partnerships are built by people, not organisations, and it is the informality of IETM and its members that will enrich and drive cultural democracy forwards.



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