

To: LUTSF  
From: Catherine Long

Date: 20<sup>th</sup> August 2004

Please find enclosed my report about my experience of attending and participating in the Community/Performance Conference at Bryant College Rhode Island USA from 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> June 2004 describing how the Scholarship from the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund has been of benefit.

I have outlined in my report, the purpose of my project, which I feel was achieved, albeit through challenging circumstances (which provided me with an experience of immense value).

Whilst in the USA I spent time in New York and performed small excerpts from my work-in-progress in Times Square. This was a hugely beneficial experiment and has emphasized an important issue within my work that had been put in the background during the research process prior to my trip. This discovery has steered me towards investigating further ways of incorporating the issues embedded in my work, with using site as a key factor in my research and development (and performance).

There was something of great value in taking an 'unfinished' work-in-progress to an event outside of the UK. It took confidence to do so, but the act of doing so enabled my confidence to grow further, and has given me valuable insight, steering me in a direction I may not have taken had I not taken the performance to the USA.

I would advise potential awardees to the Fund, to be open to the experience of performing in a different country, because I found that everything about it was more different than I had expected it to be (despite the fact that American Culture is not, in many ways, dramatically different to British Culture). Although I found this aspect challenging, I also found it to be very valuable.

My plans to share information about my project with others, at this stage, are open-ended. I am continuing my dialogue with a number of people I met at the Conference, whose work I feel a resonance with. My involvement with Artsadmin is continuing and their support may lead me to giving a presentation about my project, when I have reached a stage when I feel ready to do so. I am also still committed to the idea of running a project in schools about issues of perception of ourselves and others, in relation to the body, movement and difference.

My main aim was to take this performance to the community performance conference as a stage in the research and development process. Doing so has had an overwhelming impact on the whole project, much more than I had anticipated. The nature of the work is such that the material being investigated and worked with is so essential that it will, and it is, continuing. Many thanks for the opportunity.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Long

### **Report of study trip to the Community/Performance Conference at Rhode Island, USA, 4-6<sup>th</sup> June 2004**

The Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund enabled me to attend the 'Community/Performance' Conference in Rhode Island USA, 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> June 2004. I went there to present a performance piece that was still in development, to discuss my work with the audience, and to attend the presentations and other performances taking place. I was accompanied by an assistant, whose travel costs were partly provided by LUTSF. Their role was to provide access support and operate the sound in the performance. The purpose of the conference was:

"to bring together scholars and practitioners of participatory art, community performance, performance theory and related fields."

The issues being covered in the range of debates taking place at the conference were:

- What is the efficacy of arts interventions in building communities?
- What are the present and future roles of the arts in our social projects?
- Are there separate aesthetics of community arts?
- What are the relations between performance theory and practice?
- What communities are being served/serve themselves?
- What factors hinder or further collaboration, dissemination, organisation, and sharing?
- What are the relationships between activism and action, between performance and the performative, between the artistic and art?
- What are the practices of transformation and transgression in our contemporary cultural scene?
- What are the shapes, the smells, the scenes, the people and the places of politics?

The three-day event took place on the campus of Bryant College, Rhode Island, "which lends itself both to the installation for temporary outdoor art works, to the presentation of computer-based/new media works, and to traditional stage-based performances and workshops." Community/Performance brought together

American and International artists, scholars, activists and community workers. My reasons for wanting to participate in and attend the Conference were:

To use the opportunity as a platform for me continue my process and become more established as an independent artist, contributing to the development of my practice.

To attend the debates and other performances taking place. I anticipated the content of these would have relevance to the themes behind my work. This would assist me in further questioning and examining my own practice, increasing my awareness of the issues being addressed that are central to performance and audience.

The performance piece that I took to the conference was the culmination of a 14-month research and development project, based on my body, most specifically an exploration of the themes of restriction and freedom. The research had been carried out with three other people: musician, Chris Brierley; dancer, Frank Bock; and director, Arlette Kim George. I wanted to find a vocabulary to express and communicate my experience of being in my body, this experience beyond language or description. At the time of the Conference I had performed the piece as a work-in-progress at 'Xposures 2003', Disability Arts Festival, to an invited audience as part of the development of the piece, and at the Dance Festival 'NottDance 04'. Attending the Conference was the first time I had performed the piece without the presence of any of the people I had been working on the project with for the past 14 months. This was a significant aspect in the development of the piece, as it had reached a stage where I needed to identify the elements within it that I wanted to take further, towards making the piece more 'complete'. It also allowed me to take a step towards establishing myself as an independent artist, by taking the work into an entirely 'unfamiliar' context, and doing it without the people I had been used to working with. I was presented with many challenges in relation to the performance actually taking place and this was the first time that I was solely responsible for managing and making decisions about the unexpected circumstances that I was faced with (with the support from the person accompanying me, but without the usual support of my director, dancer and musician).

Prior to attending the Conference I had checked that there would be a technician to operate the lights and be present to provide the technical support required. It actually transpired that the 'technician' did not know how to operate the light or sound in the theatre, and showed very little interest in fulfilling the role he was employed to do (he actually fell asleep during the technical rehearsal). We were also given comparatively very little support from the organisers of the conference, compared with what we had been used to receiving in the UK. These were circumstances that I had not expected. Fortunately I was able to draw on the experience of performing the piece three times already, each time in very different circumstances. I was able to utilise what I had learnt from the three people I had been working with, about managing the practical aspects of putting on a performance. This, together with the invaluable support of my assistant, meant that the performance took place successfully!

Until recently I had previously shown most of my work in 'disability arts' contexts. I was excited about having the opportunity to perform as part of a 'mainstream' event. I actively chose not to define myself as a 'disabled artist' because I want to create a space where the audience are free to question their feelings and perceptions about the body and the individual's need to define it. The politics within my work exist in the endeavour to address the everyday issues that affect me as an individual, without adhering to any particular 'model'. A substantial amount of the social model underlies my work, but I do not address it overtly. Instead I aim to highlight the issues on a more human level, in getting to the very heart of the material involved. Consequently I hope for a relationship to be created between the audience and myself. Unfortunately, I received little feedback from the audience due to the fact that the performance took place at 9.00 p.m. and once it was over the audience left the theatre very quickly. Therefore, the dialogue that I was hoping for did not happen. I received some feedback, some of which was in response to the artistic nature of my performance, other feedback was more in relation to my 'disability'. This re-emphasized the knowledge that one can never predict how an audience will respond, and each member of the audience will receive the performance in relation to who they, themselves are. From this I learned that I need to ensure that a time is allocated for post-show discussion, if I want to have dialogue with my audience.

Showing the piece at the conference provided me with the opportunity to identify more clearly elements of the work that I wanted to retain and develop, and the parts that I felt were not working. I was reluctant to show the work in a theatre, but the piece at that stage involved a substantial amount of recorded audio material, therefore a PA system was required. I had made it clear that I was open to showing the work in an alternative space where a temporary PA could be set up. However, the final decision was made by the organisers, who obviously felt that they wanted a more 'formal' setting for the piece. Showing it as a work-in-progress, was an opportunity to find ways of adapting the piece to the facilities that were provided. This encouraged me to find ways of compromising between what I ideally needed for the performance to work in the way that I wanted it to, and find ways of making it work within the environment I had been given. This involved being flexible with the content of the piece, whilst still following the fundamental structure that was in place. It was the third time that I had experience of doing this, which was a very valuable procedure to go through. Doing so has contributed to enabling me to focus in and identify the elements about the performance that I wish to develop. A major part of this is to explore and focus on working with site, outside of a theatre context, and to an audience that is part of the site, whilst staying with the motivational drives behind my work.

The cultural difference of the people involved in the Conference had a significant impact on the way I experienced performing the piece, as well as my experience of participating in the Conference. It has highlighted my need to stay true to what drives my work, and to pursue the question of where I want to locate it. When I returned from the Conference I took a number of steps to take my project further. I did two workshops with voice/movement facilitator Guy Dartnell. This was to explore further the use of voice in relation to my body and the associated feelings, which were issues that had arisen during earlier movement workshops in the research process. I contacted a number of people who gave presentations at the Conference, which were of particular interest to me. This has led to a continued dialogue via email, which has informed the nature of the development I have been doing since the conference. I also met with the people with whom I had carried out the research and development, and began to evaluate the process and the work-in-progress at the stage that it was at. This has led me to deconstruct the performance and examine and reflect upon the research and development process in its entirety. In turn, this has led me to the realisation that I need to immerse myself into the research process again and further investigate the issues that initially motivated the project. This valuable process of deconstruction has also enabled me to identify the nature of all the skills I have learnt, and the beginnings of establishing my own practice as an artist, from the people I have worked with during the research and development process. These skills have equipped me with the ability to continue my

process both independently and collaboratively.