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Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory. UoA 32.



**Northumbria  
University**  
NEWCASTLE

# GET UP AND TIE YOUR FINGERS: STORIES FROM EYEMOUTH



GET UP

 and 

TIE YOUR

FINGERS

EYEMOUTH

Type of output:  
Performance

by

Fiona MacPherson

Cover: Barbara Marten, Samantha  
Foley, *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers*  
National Tour. The Customs House,  
South Shields, 2014.

Left:  
*Get Up and Tie Your Fingers*,  
Eyemouth Tradfest  
Programme, 2017.

# CONTENTS

SUMMARY	4-5
INTRODUCTION	6
RESEARCH CHALLENGE	7
CONTEXT	8-10
METHODS & PROCESSES	11-12
DISSEMINATION	13-17
REFERENCES	18
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	19



# SUMMARY

Since 2014, MacPherson has directed adaptations of Ann Coburn's play *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers* using applied theatre-making techniques as tools for creating interdisciplinary investigative methodologies across performance and sociology.

Working in applied theatre with post-industrial communities, MacPherson created innovative reflective rehearsal activities and strategies for making theatre, informed by Jean-Luc Nancy's work on dialogic listening practices. This involved participants in a practice-based enquiry into choral narrative theatre-making using testimonies, song and movement.

MacPherson's work extends existing applied theatre-making by incorporating Nancy's analysis of listening into explorations of local, participant voice and the ethical creation of community forms of knowledge.



Top right: 'Tie your fingers,  
Tie them tight, wrap them quick.  
Use your teeth to tie the knot  
A deep wound won't mend, a deep cut with  
salt won't mend'. Coburn, A. (2001) *Get Up  
and Tie Your Fingers*, Oberon, Act 1 Sc 2.  
*Photo credit: Fiona MacPherson*

Right:  
Section of the *Widows and Bairns* sculpture  
to mark the Black Friday tragedy, Eyemouth.  
*Photo credit: Jill Watson*



This listening discourse informed methodologies employed in a reflective dialogic relationship between MacPherson, participants, sociologist Carol Stephenson and choreographer Liz Pavey. This dialogue underpinned a wider investigative programme in a publication jointly authored by MacPherson and Stephenson and in performances as follows:

***Get Up and Tie Your Fingers (GUATYF):***

National tour to 12 East Coast locations, 2014. Winner of the Best Regional Revival Award from The British Theatre Guide. Part of Follow the Herring (FTH) theatre and visual art experience engaging 29,280 people.

***Get Up and Tie Your Fingers: Eyemouth (GUATYF:E)***

Eyemouth Parish Church, June 2016.

As part of Dedication Service of the Widows and Bairns sculpture, Eyemouth, October 2016.

Tradfest, The National Storytelling Centre, Edinburgh, April 2017.

Findings have also been disseminated through five conference papers. Funding included Arts Council England (£218,000 in 2014), and Creative Scotland (£9,670 in 2016 and £11,950 in 2019).

Right:  
Eyemouth harbour.  
*Photo credit: Fay Waddell*



# INTRODUCTION

*GUATYF* and *GUATYF:E* are community theatre projects designed to implement polyphonic conversations in an original interdisciplinary methodology developed between the practice of Applied Theatre and the discipline of Sociology.

*‘Polyphony suggests a number of different voices participating in the overall project, frequently following their own routes and independent needs, sometimes harmonious and occasionally not.’*

Mackey,  
2016.

# RESEARCH CHALLENGE

MacPherson investigates the utilization of listening techniques in rehearsal and performance and within interdisciplinary research collaboration, overturning traditional notions of ownership in theatre-making practice and thus giving increased creative agency to participants.

The research asked:

- How might listening theories and practices applied as a primary model for theatre-making facilitate tripartite conversations between community participants, theatre makers and sociologists?
- How, and to what extent, do these practices democratise the theatre making process, promote knowledge equity and provide insight into a post-industrial experience?



Left:  
Storytelling Workshop, June 2019.  
*Photo Credit: Eleanor Logan*



# CONTEXT

MacPherson's research is in the field of applied theatre directorial intervention (Readman 2013). Her work addresses a lacuna within research focusing on the production of knowledge in socially engaged applied theatre contexts (Mackey 2016). Dialogic discourse, characterised as “collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative, and purposeful” (Alexander 2008), is central to MacPherson's directorial approach. This challenges hierarchical perceptions of power and provokes discussions of aesthetic, affect, language and representation by placing community participants as central to the process.

MacPherson's longstanding engagements with marginalised communities have led to collaborations with companies of international standing for participatory work: Northern Stage (1985–96) Live Theatre (1996) Open Clasp (1998–2008) and The Customs House (2012–14).

The research is informed by Jean-Luc Nancy's examination of listening as embodied, shared experience (2007). This explores a distinction between listening as resonance (*écouter*) and listening to hear meaning (*entendre*) and develops a concept of listening and sounding as *renvoi*, a return, send back, repeat. Considerations of resonance and return in post-industrial settings expose unique knowledge embodied through performance. MacPherson's work reflects Nancy's perspective that “communication is not transmission, but a sharing that becomes subject” (Nancy 2007: 41). Here, text is something happening within and between people.

Below:

Barbara Marten, Samantha Foley,  
*Get Up and Tie Your Fingers* National  
Tour. The Customs House,  
South Shields, 2014.





The research emerged from a 2014 multi arts project directed by MacPherson, and co-produced with Customs House which engaged twelve East Coast community choirs and professional cast performing *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers*, underpinned by a contemporary choral song cycle. The evaluation of this project was the starting point for MacPherson and Stephenson's research collaboration. Questions emerged concerning problematic hierarchies in perceptions and practices of theatre, the impact

of story on community pasts and futures; how to understand the potential of dialogic processes for accessing the experience of post-industrial communities, and how to establish knowledge equity.

The research was further developed through working with a community cast in Eyemouth from 2015 onwards. MacPherson developed a new version of the play with and for the current inhabitants of town.

Blyth fishing community.

*Photo credit: Unknown*





*Get Up and Tie Your Fingers*  
National Tour, The Customs House,  
South Shields 2014.  
Photo credit: Fiona MacPherson





# METHODS & PROCESSES

Three dialogic discourses formed the basis for what is both a methodology for research and a community arts practice – interaction between:

- the Applied Theatre practitioner and the Sociologist;
- the Applied Theatre practitioner and community participant (as observed by the sociologist); and
- the Sociologist and the community participant focus group (as observed by the Applied Theatre practitioner).

Following Nancy, the performance-making emphasised distinctions between listening as resonance, for meaning, and for sounding. Explorations of the resonant were prioritised involving:

- Listening for musicality rather than meaning.
- Locating the potential of echo.
- Locating the energy of each verb.
- Defining the colour and shape of each noun.
- Using the punctuation of the text to add/change voices.
- Determining the dynamics speech and adopting choral speaking techniques to realise them.
- Identifying physicality or action for significant words or phrases.
- Identifying vocal qualities to explore polyphonic potential.



Right:  
Listening Workshops  
November 2019.  
*Photo credit: Eleanor Logan*



These explorations of the cognitive and the corporeal informed all processes of improvisation, devising, rehearsal, and performance. The focus on listening shifted the emphasis from self to community and inter-dependency as participants opened themselves up to hearing each other and their collective voice. The process encouraged nuanced conversations concerning language, memory, locality, community identity and representation.

The tripartite conversations have become essential practice research activity. Through the implementation of the approach, other artistic practitioners have worked with the Eyemouth company since 2017 developing skills in storytelling, composition and choreography creating methods of artistic expression unique to this coastal town. As the Eyemouth company prepare their new performance 'Stories of the Sea in 2020' sociological influences are embedded in the creative process prompting reflection on performance practice and supporting discussion in relation to community transformation, Brexit and Covid 19. New knowledge is generated in relation to both community theatre work and the dynamics inherent in changing and challenged social settings.



Above: *Tradfest*,  
The National Storytelling Centre,  
John Knox House, Edinburgh, 2017.

# DISSEMINATION

## Performances:

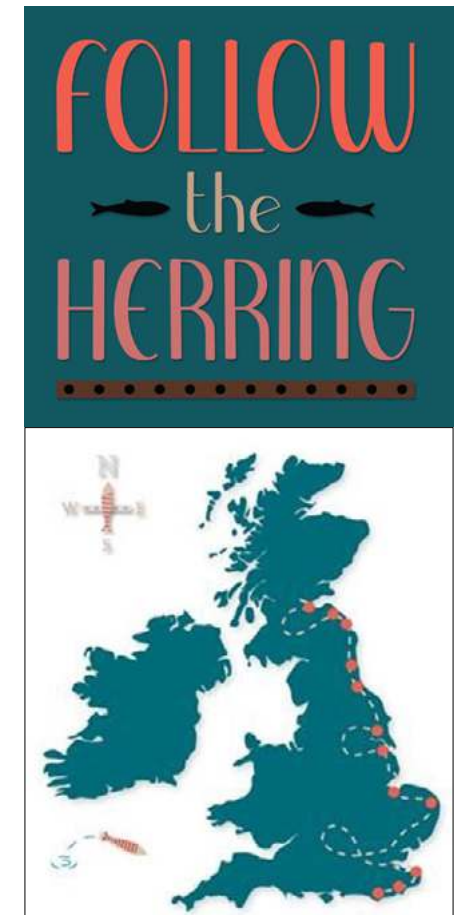
*Get Up and Tie Your Fingers*, national tour, 2014:

1. The Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh, 8-9 May (Sea Sang).
2. Cockburnspath Village Hall, 13 May (Smailholm Singing Group, The Thursday Singers).
3. The Maltings Theatre, Berwick-upon-Tweed, 16 May (Smailholm Singing Group, The Thursday Singers).
4. The Customs House, South Shields, 21-24 May (Customs Voices).
5. Kings Lynn Arts Centre, 30-31 May (The Purfleet Singers).
6. Town Hall Theatre, Hartlepool, 5-7 June (Hartlepool 6th Form College Choir).
7. Hull Truck Theatre, 18-21 June (Hull Freedom Chorus).
8. Grimsby Minster, 26-28 June (The Meridian Singers).
9. St. George's Theatre, Great Yarmouth, 2-5 July (St George's Singers).
10. Theatre Royal, Margate, 17-19 July (The Landmark Show Choir).
11. Quarterhouse, Folkestone, 25-26 July (The Landmark Show Choir).
12. The Stades, Hastings, 31 July-1 August (The Herring Girls).

## Reviews of *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers* (2014 national tour):

[British Theatre Guide Review](#)

[Libby Purves- Theatre Cat Review](#)



Right:  
*Get Up and Tie Your Fingers*,  
national tour route, 2014.





*Get Up and Tie Your Fingers*  
National Tour, The Customs House,  
South Shields 2014



*Get Up and Tie Your Fingers: Eyemouth*

June 2016, 3 performances Eyemouth Parish Church, (attendance 430).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0v-5T0zZME&feature=youtu.be>

October 2016, section of the production performed at Dedication Service of the Widows and Bairns sculpture, The Bantry Eyemouth (attendance over 2,000 people and broadcast on Borders TV).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWTvhn4rWe0&feature=youtu.be>

April 2017, Tradfest (international storytelling festival) Netherbow Theatre, The National Storytelling Centre, John Knox House, Edinburgh (attendance 100).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fptiIK7rUD0&feature=youtu.be>



Top right:  
Tradfest, The National  
Storytelling Centre,  
John Knox House  
Edinburgh 2017.

Right:  
*Get Up and Tie Your Fingers: Eyemouth*  
The Bantry, Eyemouth,  
14<sup>th</sup> October 2016.



### Conference presentations:

'Reflections on community performance of shared maritime heritage' (MacPherson, Pavey and Stephenson). MARE People and the Sea conference, Amsterdam, *July 2017*.

Critical Labour Studies Conference –  
Ella Baker School of Progressive Organisation, London, *July 2018*.

Nature Conservation: That Leaves No One Behind Workshop -  
Hexham Abbey, *Sept 2018*.

Immersive Heritage Performance Symposium – University of London,  
*Sept 2018* 'Touching Past Lives'.

'Get up and Tie Your Fingers Eyemouth: Active Listening as  
Environment' (MacPherson and Pavey) Storytelling and Environment  
Symposium, University of South Wales, Cardiff, *April 2019*.

### Journal Article:

MacPherson, F., & Stephenson., C. (2020) 'After The Storm: Inter-  
disciplinary Dialogic Discourses with a Post-Fishing Community'  
*Frontiers in Sociology* <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2020.00042>



Left: Set build *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers*, National Tour.  
The Brunton Theatre,  
Musselburgh 2014.



Right: *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers*, National Tour  
The Brunton Theatre,  
Musselburgh, 2014.



# REFERENCES

Alexander, R.J. (2008) 'Culture, dialogue and learning: notes on an emerging pedagogy' in Mercer, N. and Hodgkinson, S. (eds.), *Exploring Talk in School*, Los Angeles: Sage, pp 93-114.

Mackey S., (2016) 'Applied theatre and practice as research: polyphonic conversations' *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 21(4), pp 478-491.

Nancy, J-L. (2007) *Listening*. Translated from the French by C. Mandell. New York: Fordham University Press.

Readman, G. (2013) 'What does the Applied Theatre Director do? Directorial intervention in theatre making for social change.' Doctoral thesis. The University of Northampton.  
Accepted version <http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/7848/>

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## **GUTYF: Eyemouth**

### **Creative Team:**

Ann Coburn (Writer), Eleanor Logan (Musical Director), Liz Pavey (Dance Artist), Karen Wimhurst (Composer).

### **Community Performers:**

Charlotte Allan, Maureen Atherton, Alexandra Bremner, Lily Bromley, Evelyn Buchanan, Edward Chester, Kate Cogle, Denise Crerar Todd, Jo Curtis, Shauna Dickson, Ian Dougal, Steve Douglas, Pat Evans, Morag Gibson, Rosemary Greenhill, Carrie Haddow, Christine Henderson, Miah Hindaugh, Saskia Hindaugh, Lorna Hume, Anne Kerr, Margaret Laing, Karen Lerpiniere, Evie Lloyd Jones, Merryn Lloyd Jones, Raquel Lloyd Jones, Keir Logan Tilly Lucas, Melissa MacFarlane, Katy Master, Edith Master, Christine Mutch, Carol Nelson, Vivienne Oliver, Stephanie Patterson, Cath Paxton, John Purvis Mike Redican, Alex Ritchie, Kim Rollo, Rachael Rutherford, Dixie Scott, Ollie Scott, Barbara Stanley, Grahame Sinclair, Helen Thorburn, Ethne Turnbull, Alison Vasey, Margery Vennelle, Fay Waddell, Taryn Walker. Ruby Watt, David Wilson, Jock Wilson, Lynn Wilson.

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