

Michelle Young
TITLE?

Supervisor: Professor Anna McMullan



Research Topic:

After graduating from University I trained at the Gaeity School of Acting and my experience as an actor and director led me to work as a teacher of Drama and Performing Arts in Hertfordshire before returning to Northern Ireland to complete an MA in Drama and Performance in 2007. Graduating with a distinction, I began my doctoral studies in 2008 under the supervision of Professor Anna McMullan and I am due to complete my PhD in 2011.

My area of study is situated within the fields of oral history and site specific performance, investigating the connections between memory and place and engaging with concepts of home, identity, story and self. In an examination of how 'history from below' can challenge and question the hegemony of written history my research considers how previously silenced or hidden narratives can redefine collective identity in post conflict Northern Ireland. Informed by my own practice, my research explores the way that history is passed on within the community, presenting the performance of oral testimony as both a challenge to the accepted narratives of history and to the way that history is passed on.

My research focuses on my hometown of Omagh where the issues surrounding the construction of a memorial monument highlights how in serving a society in post conflict transition, memory has become an object of public procedure where the construction of a historical narrative comes at the expense of the personal. By exploring how through performance it may be possible to unearth the silenced stories that have been written over in favour of a collective politicized and official memory, I will examine how performance itself can be considered as a memorial, a 'counter-monument' (Malkin) or 'living memorial.' My practice aims to encapsulate Pierre Nora's assertion that 'true' memory cannot be based on the artificial 'sites of memory' but on the creation of 'environments of memory' – oral preservations of tradition – that are found in the body's "inherent self knowledge and in habits and gestures." I will explore this concept through the production of a community based performance project that revolves around the archiving and presentation of stories based and performed in the site where they were 'born.' Analysis of the oral history interview will investigate the relationship of individual memory to the cultural and historical process.

Directing members of the community in a performance of their own stories will present the concept of embodied memory and documentation of the project will allow me to trace the transformation of personal narrative into the public arena at every stage of what will be an ethical and creative process.

Funded by DEL, I have just completed my practice and entering my third year of research. In the last two years I have performed a presentation at the 2008 Applied Theatre Conference in Exeter as well as presented papers at the IFTR Conference in Lisbon in 2009 and at TaPRA 2010 in Cardiff. For the last two years I have taught on the Rough Cuts module as part of Drama Studies and this year I will also be a guest director on the Introduction to Practical Theatre 2 module as well as deliver seminars on Community Theatre and on the MA module, Theatre and Conflict.

I am the co-founder of the Belfast/Sarajevo Initiative, a collaborative project which seeks to create and explore the possibility of a creative dialogue between the two cities in conjunction with Queen's and the Academy of Performing Arts, Sarajevo. In October 2009, the Initiative hosted a week-long series of workshops with practitioners and academics from Belfast and Sarajevo at QUB and in April 2010 we facilitated a variety of events that were included in the programme of the Memory Module organised by the MESS Festival in Sarajevo. I am also on the committee of a new student Initiative, 'queensquarterweekends' which aims to facilitate and support student productions, performances and events in and around Queen's throughout the academic year.