

# WORKING GROUP: EMBODIED RESEARCH INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION FOR THEATRE RESEARCH

Revised Founding Document  
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## CONVENER

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## MISSION STATEMENT

The Embodied Research Working Group supports individual and collaborative research projects in which embodied practice is an explicit and essential part of the methodology. While embodiment has been a major interest for theatre and other scholars across several decades at least, the claim that embodied practice can constitute a mode or method of academic research is relatively new and in some contexts is still considered controversial. This WG aims to establish an international platform through which to share innovative and traditionally informed approaches to the methodological, epistemological, and ontological questions provoked by embodied research. These include some of the deepest assumptions that underpin scholarship in theatre and performance studies, such as the distinctions between theory and practice, subject and object, body and mind, *techne* and *episteme*.

The founding members of the proposed WG bring to the collective table a set of articulated research practices based on a conception of theatre as a privileged site for understanding and innovating embodiment and embodied practice. Recent IFTR conferences have involved significant discussion of embodiment, embodied practice, and embodied research as these relate to diverse theoretical and historiographical methods. The new WG will create a context at IFTR in which embodied knowledge and research are foregrounded as legitimate contributors to the field. The WG will support IFTR's institutional goals by developing interdisciplinary and intercultural connections that place performing arts in dynamic contact with physical culture, health and healing, and the embodied practices of everyday life. By modelling new modes of assessment and legitimization for these expanded fields of knowledge, the WG will strive to make embodied research more legible within IFTR and in broader academic and social contexts. Our emphasis on sharing methods for embodied research will be realized through an experimental approach to knowledge exchange that combines written papers, practical workshops and demonstrations, and audiovisual media.

The new WG will organize its activities according to the following thematic strands:

- 1) *Embodied Practice*. The WG will devise new strategies for sharing embodied knowledge at IFTR and for positioning/articulating the practicing (theatre) body as a site of knowledge production and transmission. It will address the disciplinary mapping of embodied practice and the ways in which conceptual and discursive maps are implicitly incorporated within structures of practice. Drawing on theatrical, pedagogical, and empirical models, members will develop new modes of practical encounter that allow for high-level exchange as well as making the depth and diversity of embodied knowledge legible to wider audiences.
- 2) *Multimedia Publication*. The WG will explore traditional and alternative modes of publication for embodied research, including print and online articles and books, multimedia web platforms, and video essays. It will explore and experiment with the media and formats in which embodied research can be shared and archived across time and

space, engaging with current debates around performance documentation and the challenges of archiving of embodied knowledge. Members will incorporate elements of practical skill-sharing into their IFTR presentations, learning together how to make use of emerging publication tools and media to articulate their embodied research.

- 3) *Interdisciplinary Connections*. Moving outwards from its core focus, the WG will examine the role of embodied research in the context of interdisciplinary projects that draw on scholarship in performance philosophy, theatre historiography, anthropology and sociology of the body, cognitive studies, gender and sexuality studies, critical race and (dis)ability studies, studies of religion, war, medicine, and other fields in which the body is foregrounded conceptually. Members will share and examine cases studies as well as developing new models for interdisciplinary collaboration.
- 4) *Institutional Frameworks*. In addition to the epistemo-ontological issues raised by embodied research, there are a host of practical and strategic concerns. Recognizing that vast amounts of embodied expertise and innovation are currently housed within professional organizations — such as those of martial arts, yoga, bodywork, mindfulness, and expressive arts therapies — the WG will consider strategies for development new institutional frameworks that bridge academia and professional practice through engagements with key concerns like rigor, authenticity, lineage, archive, and commerce.

Taken together, these strategies and activities will intervene in current epistemological and ontological debates and contribute to the development of new research methodologies based in embodied practice. Over time, the WG aims to effectively expand and legitimize embodied research within and beyond the context of theatre and performance studies.

#### **NOTE ON THE CONTEXT AND CATEGORIES OF IFTR WORKING GROUPS**

The Embodied Research WG will engage with issues of performance, consciousness, corporeality, dance and actor training, voice and body, heritage, sexuality and gender, national and religious identity, disability, and politics, which are addressed by other WGs. The key difference is that the **Embodied Research WG comes together around the principle that embodied practice plays a central role in the research methodology itself. As this is what distinguishes embodied research, it is essential that the new WG be listed under ‘Methodologies’ within the IFTR WG framework.** While embodiment is evidently a central concern for groups focusing on ‘Performance Practices’ or ‘Theatre and Cultural Studies’, the founding impulse of the Embodied Research WG is to share and improve **research methodologies** that unfold specifically through embodied practice, rather than to write about embodied practices through diverse theoretical lenses. In fact, the Embodied Research WG will engage with practices that go beyond the domain of performance; and while some of the undersigned IFTR members have previously been affiliated with the Performance as Research WG, the majority have not.

In addition to the work of performance scholars like Diana Taylor and Phillip Zarrilli, who have offered pioneering epistemo-ontological and ethical-political accounts of embodied knowledge, and the blossoming of ‘practice as research’ and ‘artistic research’ in Europe and elsewhere, we count among the precedents for embodied research the ‘first-person methodologies’ of Francisco Varela; the ‘carnal sociology’ of Loïc Wacquant; the ‘sensuous scholarship’ of Paul Stoller; the ‘experimental anthropology’ of Tim Ingold; the ‘somaesthetics’ of Richard Shusterman; the ‘simatechnics’ of Nikki Sullivan and Samantha Murray; and the ritual pedagogies surveyed by Catherine Bell (2007). These hybrid practitioner-scholars have proposed new approaches to research that suggest a radical revision of the role of embodied practice in the university, which the new WG aims to advance and which distinguish it from other WGs.

## FOUR-YEAR PLAN

### 2016

The WG held an initial meeting in Stockholm (2016), convened by Ben Spatz with help from Alexander Boyd, Lynette Hunter, and Ian Kenvyn. The formation of the group was supported by forty IFTR members representing sixteen different countries. Following approval of this document, the WG will issue a CFP for IFTR 2017.

Significant effort will be expended each year to invite practitioners outside North America and Europe, especially in the region of the conference location. In 2017, the conveners will work with the WG's Brazilian members to design a pre-conference session designed to highlight and support local and regional communities of embodied practice and research.

### 2017-2020

A co-convenor with expertise in African, Asian, Latin American and/or indigenous embodied practices and methodologies will be sought to co-convene the WG along with Dr Spatz from 2017-2020, after which one or both of the convenors will be replaced. During this period, members of the WG will take on leadership responsibilities within subcommittees linked to each of the four strands of activity mentioned above, with the following goals in mind:

- 1) Embodied Practice: This strand of the WG will develop new formats and structures for sharing embodied research during the IFTR conference and at other times and places. These will draw upon theatrical and other models, such as Lois Weaver's 'Long Table'.
- 2) Multimedia Publication: This strand of the WG will offer intensive peer review and critique for members working towards the publication of embodied research outputs in traditional formats (journal articles, books) as well as new online platforms such as the *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* blog; *Contemporary Theatre Review's* Interventions website; *TDR's* Scalar initiative; and the new *Journal of Embodied Research* (Open Library of the Humanities, launching in 2017). Follow these links for more details:  
<http://theatredanceperformancetraining.org/>  
<http://www.contemporarytheatrereview.org/interventions/>  
<http://scalar.usc.edu/1552/>  
<https://www.openlibhums.org/>
- 3) Interdisciplinary Connections: This strand of the WG will examine recent and ongoing interdisciplinary research projects in which embodied practice plays a methodological role. Within the frame of each annual IFTR session, it will seek to develop collaborative sessions with other WGs such as those dedicated to Performance as Research, Choreography and Corporeality, Queer Futures, Historiography, and African and Caribbean Theatre and Performance. In each case we would look for a two-way exchange in which relationships between research topic and methodology can be enriched.
- 4) Institutional Frameworks: This strand of the WG will examine cross-institutional collaborations between academic and professional institutions, leading to the publication of a 'white paper' on best practices for embodied research in academia. At each annual IFTR session it will work closely with local and regional practitioner-researchers to examine the connections and fault lines between academic and non-academic contexts of embodied practice and research.

**This proposal is undersigned by 45 IFTR members representing 17 countries:**

Ben Spatz, USA/UK (convener)

Balakrishnan Ananthkrishnan, India

Sruti Bala, Netherlands

Bruce Barton, Canada

Elizabeth Belgrano, Sweden

Yvon Bonenfant, UK

Matteo Bonfitto, Brazil

Alex Boyd, UK

Fabiola Camuti, Italy

Thomas F. DeFrantz, USA

Maria Delgado, UK

Diana Delmonte, Italy/USA

Anna Duda, Poland

Joshua Edelman, UK

Natalia Esling, Canada

Joy Brooke Fairfield, USA

Manola K. Gayatri, India/South Africa

Sami Haapala, Finland

Lynette Hunter, USA

Fusako Innami, UK/Japan

Otso Kautto, Finland

Simo Kellokumpu, Finland

Ian Kenvyn, UK

Esa Kirkkopelto, Finland

Anu Koskinen, Finland

Annelis Kuhlmann, Denmark

Jean Lee, UK

Peilin Liang, Singapore/Taiwan

Peter Lichtenfels, USA

Holly Maples, UK

Judith Marcuse, Canada

Fernando Mencarelli, Brazil

Katherine Mezur, USA

Kara Miller, USA

Daniel Mroz, Canada

Sreenath Nair, UK/India

Sandra Parra, Brazil

Daniel Plá, Brazil

Melina Scialom, UK

Elizabeth de Roza, UK/Singapore

Goze Saner, Turkey/UK

Tamur Tohver, Estonia

Hannu Tuisku, Finland

Gustavo Vicente, Portugal

Helen Wilson, UK