



Feel It Festival: Guidance for Artists

Summary

From the 17-20 November the [Elizabeth Blackwell Institute for Health Research](#), the [Life of Breath project](#) and Circomedia will bring together researchers, artists and members of the public to debate and explore University of Bristol research on the experience of being human; with a focus on pain and breathlessness.

The weekend-long Feel It festival will see pain, in all its forms, and breathlessness explored through performing arts, debated in talks and panels and discussed in creative workshops where participants and members of the audience will have the chance to probe, question and feed into research. This diverse programme will be complimented by an interactive exhibition which will be in situ at the venue throughout the festival. The festival will be hosted at Circomedia on Portland Square, St Pauls. More information on the festival is here:

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/blackwell/public-engagement/feel-it/>

As part of the festival Circomedia and the University of Bristol are co-commissioning a new piece of circus or physical theatre from an artist or group of artists who wish to collaborate with researcher Havi Carel and the Life of Breath research project, and create a collaborative exploration of their research.

The piece should explore and examine the research from a new perspective and give the audience the opportunity to engage with, deconstruct and think about the research and its outcomes in a way that will stimulate discussions and debate. Key to the project will be collaboration and partnership with the research team. Please note that there must be at least one Circomedia alumnus (defined as having completed a Foundation or BA) in your group to be eligible for the call.

The Research

'A Changed Person': breathlessness and bodily doubt

Background

Breath is [...] more than simply a reflexive action; it can at times be controlled or manipulated, and can affect or be affected by emotion and experience. There can be 'good' or 'healthy' breaths or breathing styles and those understood to be pathological or dangerous. Breath can be gasped, blown, wheezed or sneezed; it can fuel the drag of a cigarette, the voice, a chant, song or prayer. It is at once subjective, expressive and interactive.

Life of Breath researchers Rebecca Oxley and Andrew Russell, Breathing in context: Historical and cross-cultural perspectives on breath

We all breathe, all day and all night. If we are healthy, we may do so for many years without thought. Thus, breathing passes into the background of other more consciously-controlled activities and may only come to our notice if it becomes difficult. The Life of Breath project (<http://lifeofbreath.org/>) seeks to understand breathing and its pathological counterpart, breathlessness and the meanings, contexts and purposes that surround it; including how

disorders (both medical and emotional) in our breathing patterns might relate to our sense of health, embodiment and self.

Our study

Havi Carel describes in her work her own experience of being diagnosed with a serious and life-limiting lung condition, and also a feeling that she characterises as 'bodily doubt'. Bodily doubt is when an ill person might contemplate executing a particular task but also feel 'serious doubt about whether you could actually perform the task'. As she writes:

What was previously taken for granted, normally for many years [...] that my lungs can support my body's oxygen requirements — is suddenly and sometimes acutely thrown into question [...] one's future plans depend on bodily capacities and thus are limited by ill health. One's temporal sense is radically changed by a poor prognosis. One's values and sense of what is important in life are frequently modified in light of illness; bodily limitations impact on one's existence [...]. One's concepts undergo a radical change; the meaning of terms such as 'near' or 'easy' fundamentally change.

As well as conversations with Havi Carel and access to her work, performers will be able to tap into the expertise of other members of the Life of Breath team to provide breadth and context: Gene Feder, a GP with a particular interest in chronic obstructive pulmonary disorders (COPD); Oriana Walker, a medical historian who will be working on a history of COPD in the next few years; and Alice Malpass, an anthropologist and trained mindfulness practitioner.

Using Performance Art to Communicate Our Findings

[Breathlessness is]...behaviourally subtle, and so often invisible to others. Even we ourselves are not always aware of when we start to become breathless and why. Techniques like meditation and mindfulness training help practitioners become more aware of their breathing, but this is hard to do when a person is immersed in an activity and her attention is turned away from herself. This phenomenon has led Gysels and Higginson (2008) to coin the term 'invisible disability'. - Havi Carel

Not only is breathlessness – the core symptom of respiratory illness – largely invisible, but many people suffering from breathlessness find that their lives become small, narrow places. The moment of diagnosis can be the start of a profound change: they can become trapped in their own homes by the fear of collapse, dependent on their loved ones and medical practitioners, robbed of experiences and interests that they no longer feel able to pursue. This means that people suffering from COPD can simply drop out of society. In other words, this invisible symptom can cause the entire patient to disappear.

The object of this performance is to make breathlessness visible and to cast a light on bodily doubt as a consequence of illness.

The invisibility we describe can lead to the experiences of COPD patients going unheard, unrecorded and unnoticed. Therefore, the piece needs to attempt to rectify this. What is it like to be breathless, or to fear becoming breathless? How might a diagnosis of COPD change a person's ideas of herself, her future, her capabilities? How does breathlessness undermine the relationship a patient might have with her body, and what she can reasonably expect of it? Havi Carel describes her own experiences as follows:

Trapped. That is what breathlessness feels like. Trapped in the web of uncertainty, bodily doubt, practical obstacles and fear. The deepest fear you can think of. The fear of suffocation, of being unable to breathe, the fear of collapsing, blue, desaturated to the point of respiratory failure [...] You are faced with the shrinking of your world, choices, freedom

and eventually, your spirit. Many illness narratives take on a kind of dualist flavour –the body fails, but the spirit flourishes; the body is tethered to its failing organs, but the spirit rises free. Not true.

Further Information

It might be helpful to get a sense of the various interests of the project by reading the Life of Breath blog (<http://lifeofbreath.org/category/blog/>) and visiting the website (<http://lifeofbreath.org>).

Expectations and eligibility

- We are looking for a Circus/physical theatre piece and at least one of the applicants must be a Circomedia alumnus (defined as having completed a Foundation or BA).
- You would be expected to meet with Havi Carel and the other researchers in the Life of Breath project several times during the development of your commission.
- The final piece will be unique, powerful and, whilst by no means a literal interpretation of the research, will have the themes and emotions of the research and research subjects at its heart and tell a story about the research.
- There will be at least one post-show discussion to discuss the collaboration, the performance, and the research.

Duration, space, rehearsals and technical requirements

- The final piece should ideally have a duration of between 30 and 60 minutes.
- The performance will be hosted twice during the festival, likely on the evening of the 17th plus a matinee on the 20th of November.
- A floor plan of the space and the desired set up can be found below. Alternative set ups will be considered though note that the tiered seating cannot be moved.
- There will be a technician on site to assist with set up, run through and support during the performance.
- The space is available for rehearsals on Thursday 10th November if needed as well as a short tech rehearsal slot on the day of the 17th November.
- Circomedia can provide a limited amount of development space subject to availability during the summer holidays and October half term at their Kingswood studios.
- We are happy to accept international applicants but any travel costs will need to be accounted for within the £3000 budget.

Funding and offer

The maximum budget available is £3000 (plus VAT if applicable), including the cost of holding two performances.

Costs requested can include:

- personnel costs directly related to the project, including artist fees, consultancy costs, project management fees etc
- direct activity and production costs
- travel costs
- Basic publicity (poster, flyer, marketing) and venue costs for the performances will be covered by the core festival team but if extra publicity or printed materials are required this should be included in the budget.

What is not covered:

- salary costs of staff who are already funded by their organisation
- core overheads of the applying organisation not related to the project, e.g. heating, rent, etc
- expenses incurred in submitting an application
- costs arising prior to the start date of the project

You may match fund this commission with funds from other sources but please detail in the application whether match funding is secured, who it is from and, your contingency plan in case you cannot secure it.

Application process

The application form can be downloaded from the [artists' page](#) on the [festival website](#).

Please note that there must be at least one Circomedia alumnus in your group (defined as having completed a Foundation or BA) to be eligible for the call.

Please send completed forms, plus a copy of your CV, to ebih-admin@bristol.ac.uk. These must be received by **Midday Tuesday 12th July**.

If you have questions about the call or require extra information in order to complete your application please contact Jay Haigh via email (jayh@circomedia.com). We endeavour to respond to all queries but it may take some time so please leave ample time if the query is essential to your application.

Applications will be reviewed by an expert judging panel and those shortlisted will be invited to discuss their project idea with us. Interviews will take place on the 19th July – please keep this date available. If you cannot make this date please let us know in your application. Skype meetings can be arranged for international applicants.

The successful applicant will be informed of the outcome shortly after these discussions.

If you are not comfortable or able to submit your application in written form we can also accept, with prior discussion, proposals in formats more suited to your requirements, for example video. If submitting an alternative format would help with the process then please get in touch and we can discuss how to capture your idea for consideration by the panel.

Venue Floorplan

