

Collaborate project proposals

Quarantine <https://qtine.com/>

What do you want to explore and why?

Our question is: How can we understand the value of beauty?

It is important to differentiate between that which is beautiful and that which has the potential for beauty. As critic and academic Dave Hickey said: "The beautiful is a social construction... It's what we're supposed to like. Beauty is what we like, whether we should or not, what we respond to involuntarily. So, beauty is not the product of communities. It creates communities. Communities of desire, if you wish."

We're interested in exploring moments of beauty in live performance. It's something difficult to create or describe; you can't guarantee it will happen or that everyone will experience it in the same way. But we believe that it's one of the things that people hope for most and something that remains.

We're interested in what happens when we consider beauty as a human need. We want to know how beauty relates to hope, courage, insight, truth, dignity, imperfection, tension, grace, joy, order, chaos... And to understand beauty's role in the most powerful, life-changing moments we witness – the kind that lodge themselves deep in one's mind or body. We want to investigate how these moments are experienced; what impact they have; and how this can be understood and utilised.

We believe it's worth finding a better language to understand and articulate beauty. Our research would seek to find structured ways to understand these experiences. It could explore whether there are trends in how beauty is interpreted and experienced. Perhaps how they converge and diverge with population characteristics and other elements of human experience such as education, cultural knowledge and context. It would seek to understand the value of beauty in live performance, without being prescriptive about what constitutes beauty, but drawing on philosophical and historic concepts and reflecting contemporary political and aesthetic concerns.

"An opportunity to consider beauty in places not normally associated with that word"-

Exeunt Magazine on Quarantine's 12 Last Songs

For 23 years, Quarantine has been making performance and events that place everyday life side-by-side with rare moments of beauty.

Recent discussion, research and policy development around cultural value focuses on the arts value to the economy, health and wellbeing, societal change and community cohesion, and education, informing funders' agendas and, as a result, the art that is made. The sector lacks a deep understanding of the value of art on the individual. We need a language and framework for understanding the intrinsic value of art, so we can advocate for it. If we were religious, we might use the words 'soul' or 'spirit'.

CENTRE FOR CULTURAL VALUE

Over the next three years, Quarantine's artistic programme will be framed as 'Attempts at beauty'. A consideration of what beauty is, its place in our work and the sector, will be threaded throughout. It is a push-back against the instrumentalisation of the arts and a response to what the Covid pandemic has triggered in us. Through this unprecedented disruption, grief and solitude, we've felt ourselves ever-more drawn to beauty – looking at it, experiencing it, creating it – craving the bodily experience of it. Does a need for beauty go hand-in-hand with grief and struggle? This feels like an urgent question.

While there has been research into the philosophy of beauty, this has not been applied in the context of live performance. A study on public attitudes to beauty in the built environment (IPOS MORI, 2011), declared beauty "worthy of more attention" and found the public wanted it "reinstated as a public value". A better understanding and a legitimising of beauty, and other intrinsic values, has the potential to change the funding landscape, and how we commission and make art.

What are you looking for in an academic research partner?

We're looking for someone with a genuine interest in our question, who will see it as both an exploration of concepts of beauty and of value. We'd be keen to work with a philosopher. Someone who might embrace the complexity of the question and understand that it may not result in a quantifiable measure of value.

Quarantine's approach is slow and conversational. There are always questions underpinning our art, which we explore in both personal and academic ways. We'd like to find someone with a complementary working style and approach; responsive and open to conversation, with the flexibility to follow lines of enquiry as they emerge.

We're interested in working with someone with experience in qualitative research and of taking conceptual ideas and applying their study in real-world contexts. An interest in, or experience with, contemporary performance might be beneficial, but not essential. However, they must value our expertise and be enthusiastic about working closely with us.

Questions of beauty will be central to the work of our entire team over this three year programme and we are all interested in feeding into this research and learning from it. This includes scenographer Professor Simon Banham, a co-founder of Quarantine and Head of Theatre, Film & Television Studies at Aberystwyth University, and long-term collaborator Professor of Philosophy Michael Brady, Head of the School of Humanities at University of Glasgow.

We would expect to work collaboratively to find a research methodology for exploring the value of beauty that is useful and achievable within a six to twelve month project. Our team would dedicate time to this and expect regular contact with the researcher.

It is important that research with audiences/participants is carried out ethically and respectfully, and that people are paid for their time.