**Theatrescience at the Sixth Science and the Public Conference.**

**Kingston University, London, 2 July 2011**

The Theatrescience team gave a plenary presentation at the sixth ‘Science and the Public Conference’ at Kingston University in July.

Subtitled ‘A Quarter Century of PUS’, the conference marked 25 years since the publication of the Bodmer Report, which (arguably) founded the field of Public understanding of science.

It brought together experts from a variety of fields to explore the different ways in which we can approach the idea of public understanding of, or public engagement with, science.

Theatrescience gave an artistic slant to proceedings, and offered an opportunity for delegates to discuss and reflect on ways in which theatre can be complementary to the other approaches being explored, and can tap into an emotional engagement that can’t often be reached by more factual methods.

The session began with a showing of the short video ‘Theatrescience in Eden’ to exemplify Theatrescience’s basic way of working - beginning with a workshop with writers and scientists, then collaborative writing, testing with ‘client groups’, and performances in unusual spaces.

Dr Jessica Mordsley, Theatrescience’s researcher/evaluator, then gave a brief overview of the history of ‘science on stage’, tracing it from Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus,* Jonson’s *The Alchemist* and other early satires, through to 20th century dramas critiquing scientific hubris, and finally to more exploratory and creative recent work.

Theatrescience co-director Rebecca Gould spoke about the history of the company, from its founding in 2002 to the present day, explaining its ethos and aims, its work with the Wellcome Trust, and discussing its international projects.

Director Jeff Teare then introduced three extracts from past Theatrescience productions, performed by Lloyd Wylde and Richard Pepper (with Jeff also appearing in one extract):

* The Tuskegee scene from Paul Sirett’s ‘Bad Blood Blues’.
* The collecting water from the Ganges scene from Gautam Raja’s ‘Invisible River’.
* The third person in the room scene from Simon Turley’s ‘Something Somatic’.

Jeff then led a participatory drama game, ‘Statues’, which was joined in by all with some alacrity and resulted in plenty of laughter and discussion.

Jess then chaired a Q&A session with Professor Tony Pinching (senior Theatrescience science advisor/collaborator), Simon Turley (Theatrescience writer in residence), Rebecca and Jeff.

Tony and Simon began by describing their collaborative relationship, and how it has developed through working on Simon’s three plays for Theatrescience (‘Seeing Without Light’, ‘Something Somatic’ and ‘State of Nature’).

The panel then took questions from the audience. Subjects included:

* The historical, ethical and political issues arising from ‘Bad Blood Blues’: questions around double-blind drug trials for HIV and other illnesses, tensions between ‘first world’ medical professionals and ‘third world’ patients, etc.
* Why, and how, the panel got involved in Theatrescience.
* Why theatre was an efficacious means of involving the public with science (depth not breadth).
* Why the Company’s work was mainly about biomedical science.
* How any play about biomedical science, especially if not set in the UK, necessarily had political and economic aspects.

The Q&A Session was only meant to last 30 minutes but actually ran for twice that, due to great enthusiasm and interest from the audience.

General response to the two hour session was immensely positive and the possibility of Theatrescience returning to Kingston University was broached by University staff.

All members of the audience were given a copy of ‘State of Nature’ by Simon Turley.

Theatrescience look forward to further explorations and discussions with PUS professionals in the future.

For more information:

see <http://www.theatrescience.com>

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