



ART AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

TOM BAILEY DEVISES THEATRE BASED ON SOME OF TODAY'S MOST PRESSING SCIENTIFIC ISSUES. HIS WORK REMINDS US THAT IN EXPLORING QUESTIONS, BOTH SCIENCE AND ART ARE CREATIVE DISCIPLINES AND WE SHOULD BE CULTIVATING LEARNING IN BOTH

Making theatre from scratch, not following a script, is a long but rewarding process for Tom Bailey, a director and theatre maker based in Bristol in the UK. As might be expected, part of his creative process – that focuses on the use of body, rhythm and tempo – is collaborating with other creatives, such as sound designers and movement directors, but that's not where his collaborations end. As well as doing his own research, Tom works with scientific researchers to ensure his performances explore thought-provoking and contemporary scientific issues. His current work on the FAMOS research project – a project that aims to understand the processes that cause metals to be concentrated in magmatic arcs – is evidence of his desire to use his art to connect people with the important scientific questions that affect us all.

WHY DO YOU FEEL THE PUBLIC NEEDS TO ENGAGE WITH THE ISSUES RAISED BY FAMOS?

Copper mining, and resources mining in general, is fundamental to modern civilization. Yet, in general, the public is disconnected from

seeing how all of our computers, phones, cars and daily lives are dependent, in some way, on mining. Technology relies on a global network of organisations transforming rock into metal. The more the public can engage with this, the more sensible the debate can be around the vital role of mining during this time of climatic change. We need to connect with how mining affects us, and how we affect mining by the decisions we make, the values we have as a society, and the things we buy and use.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE YOUR AUDIENCES WILL GAIN FROM YOUR WORK?

I don't make theatre to communicate science. Science communicators communicate science. Theatre for me has a different role. It's about feeling and experiencing, asking more questions, being curious. So, I hope that I can offer an experiential encounter with rocks, mining and copper for audiences, that they won't encounter anywhere else. This experience has to tap into the audience's imagination in a way that no other art form can.

As an artist, I'm excited when working with scientists, exploring the intersection between the known and the unknown, and the limits of present knowledge. I think it's a really interesting place where arts can engage with science. Both ask questions about the unknown, but in different ways. I think one is more about knowing, the other is more about experiencing.

AS A THEATRE MAKER, WHAT HAVE YOU GAINED FROM EXPLORING THE FAMOS PROJECT?

The ability to explore the fascinating world of geology with some amazing researchers. A deep encounter with rocks is transformative, because they can make you more aware of scale – both size and time – and how small human timeframes and human civilization can be against the immensity of geological force and geological time. During our Anthropocene age, this is an important experience for me.



ABOUT TOM BAILEY

Director and Theatre Maker

“ROCKS AND STONES CARRY THEIR OWN MAGIC, LIKE SMALL FRAGMENTS OF TIME. THEY HOLD MILLIONS OF YEARS OF HISTORY IN THEM, WHICH IS WHY I LOVE WORKING WITH THEM.”

ABOUT TOM AND HIS WORK

1. WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST REWARDING ABOUT BEING A THEATRE MAKER?

Being creative for a job, telling stories to gatherings and communities of people, offering people unusual experiences that move, excite and make them laugh.

2. WHO OR WHAT HAS INSPIRED YOU IN YOUR CAREER?

- **James Lovelock** – a brilliant scientist and climate systems thinker, he’s the originator of the Gaia Theory. He inspired me to look at the Earth in a different way.
- **Jerzy Grotowski** – an amazing Polish theatre director and thinker, most active in the 1960s-1980s, who pioneered new ways of creating theatre through physical training and research.
- **The Buddha.**
- My English teacher at school, **Mr. Selwyn.**
- Contemporary landscape artists such as **Andy Goldsworthy** and **Richard Long.**
- **Landscapes** – such as the Western Isles of Scotland, Neolithic sites in the Southwest of England, and tropical areas of Brazil – remind me that nature can be a work of art in itself.

3. WHAT CAN BE DIFFICULT IN YOUR WORK AND HOW DO YOU OVERCOME OBSTACLES?

It generally comes down to two things: people and money. If you can get along with different people and navigate personal differences, and if you can work out how to create art frugally and how to receive arts funding from different sources, then you can overcome the first two obstacles of freelance, devised theatre making.

TOM’S TIPS

- **Do what you can to cultivate learning and appreciation in both arts and sciences for as long as possible. This leads to greater skills and appreciation in both.**
- **There is more money in science because we live in a society that places higher value in technological and scientific work than artistic work. It’s not always been like this, and this needs to change. We need more artists - be part of that change!**

Secondly, a challenge is finding a way in, as an artist, to the science and research. Often, amid a wealth of information, research, resources and possibilities, it’s about searching for that one thing that really excites you, that makes you really passionate about the subject. This can sometimes be hard to find. You have to trust that the show won’t always come easily. Sometimes, you find what the show is early on, and rehearsals are much easier going. Sometimes, it’s a slog to find the core of the show, and you have to accept that you’re going to make many wrong turns before finding what the show really is.

4. WHAT PROJECTS ARE YOU AIMING TO WORK ON IN THE FUTURE?

I’m creating two new shows at the moment - this mining project, and another one called Ghost Sonata, exploring the current transformation of the Arctic. I’ll also be touring existing shows that look at species extinction and bird migration.