



Sally Walmsley

Abstract

This paper emerges from time spent as a Leverhulme sponsored Artist In Residence at Armagh Observatory, Ireland. The paper offers some thoughts as to why an interdisciplinary and creative approach is mandatory if access to complex science research outcomes is to be widened beyond the academy. The paper will use the case study of the artist's time in the Observatory to develop an argument which suggests that the exclusive conceptual framework which underpins the understanding of an astronomer in regards to their research is one in which its complexity excludes the non-specialist from any significant appreciation of their research achievements. In other words a highly sophisticated conceptual framework becomes a barrier to understanding for the outsider. So the challenge emerges as to whether and how this can be circumnavigated in order to disseminate research findings beyond the academy. The paper suggests that if knowledge is the result of experience then one solution is to create new experiences through collaborative creation. The paper uses Bourdieu's (1977) ideas of field and habitus to discuss the ways and means in which an alternative narrative may emerge which belongs neither solely to the artist nor to the astronomer but rather is the outcome of a negotiated position which while encompassing scientific concepts renders them accessible via a creative medium. The paper concludes by suggesting that the astronomers' research world is fascinating to non-astronomers and that therefore there is merit in using collaboration between Art and Science to offer a new route of access. While conceptual frameworks are intrinsic to the thinking necessary for cutting-edge research it seems a shame that much of the excitement of complex ideas and new ideas should be confined to those who create them. Especially with astronomy we are all fascinated and we all are curious and want to know a little more of what is Beyond Limits.

Bio

Sally Walmsley, Leverhulme Artist-in-Residence at Armagh Observatory, Ireland, is a composer and writer. Her work using creative collaboration encompasses research, facilitation and artist practice. Much of her work involves site-specific projects in the public and voluntary sectors. Her artistic practice, shaped by combining the creative possibilities of improvisation through music, creative writing, dance, visual art and drama, desires to encourage social inclusion in the creative process through active participation. Drawing on experiences from practical fieldwork and community music involvement she has developed a methodology of group work that encourages collaboration and communication and that leads to creative outcomes including installations and performance. Participants create artistic motifs in response to specified themes. These motifs, further developed through music, language, digital media and performance, are given context through supporting research thereby revealing an emergent narrative. This narrative, central to the final piece design, relies on building interdisciplinary connections.

