

James Kenworth

Public Spaces, Public Words: Towards a Localist Theatre

James Kenworth delivered his talk – Public Spaces, Public Words: Towards a Localist Theatre – as part of Liverpool John Moores University’s Liverpool Screen School Research Seminar.

James Kenworth (Middlesex University)

Public Spaces, Public Words: Towards a Localist Theatre

I will explore the writing, production and performances of two Newham-based, issue-led and awareness-raising plays: Everybody’s World and Dementia’s Journey, which dealt with elder abuse and dementia respectively in the South Asian community.

Both plays were commissioned by Newham-based charity, EKTA Project, and both featured a volunteer cast, a community participatory feature I was to develop and expand in the ‘Newham Trilogy’ series of plays I wrote between 2012 and 2016. The use of a ‘mixed economy’ or volunteer cast has been consistent feature of my work as a playwright. I will explore this method or approach in the context of working with elderly volunteers, some with dementia, in these two EKTA plays.

Both plays were commissioned expressly to raise awareness of difficult, complex and sensitive issues within a particular ethnic community. The purpose of these plays was in effect to bring about real, practical change in communities and individuals, and I will explore the process whereby I navigated the sometimes delicate balance between satisfying the commissioners’ need for a proselytizing/informational role in the play and an audience’s desire for a good story.

Biography:

James Kenworth is a Playwright and Media Lecturer at Middlesex University. His writing include ‘verse-prose’ plays Johnny Song, Gob; black comedy Polar Bears; issue-led plays Everybody’s World (Elder Abuse), Dementia’s Journey (Dementia); plays for young people/schools, The Last Story in the World; and a Newham-based trilogy of site-specific plays, When Chaplin Met Gandhi, Revolution Farm and A Splotch of Red: Keir Hardie in West Ham.