

WHAT A MOUSE KNOWS:
WALKING THE LINE BETWEEN FACT AND FICTION IN
A STAGE PLAY INSPIRED BY RESEARCH

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THE RESEARCH

- “Critical anthropomorphism” and multi-species ethnography: an investigation of animal behaviour expertise.
- Twenty interviews and two weeks of ethnography at a UK animal research facility, with animal welfare scientists, vets, and technicians
- Exploring Qualitative Behaviour Assessment as a practice of “critical anthropomorphism” during its development and validation for the welfare assessment of laboratory mice
- www.unknownanimals.com



"Measuring Ephemera: finding the "qualitative" in Qualitative Behaviour Assessment as a "whole animal" science of animal welfare" *Journal of History of Science and Technology (HoST)*.



Fri 25th March 2022

2pm

MUSEUM OF
COMEDY

*"We used to worship mice's
transgressions, their
liminality between the worlds
of life and death. But now we
can't bear contradiction. It
makes our charts messy."*

What a Mouse Knows

A play by Maisie Tomlinson

Directed by Ed Madden





“...so I got really really familiar with what rats do (...) But I find mice....just far more unpredictable and difficult to sort of....for want of a better word – interpret. Just because they just seem so random in what they do. And I think that's the problem and why there hasn't been so much progress with mouse welfare assessment. I mean to date there's still no proven effect of dose of any drug to prevent pain, following any procedure, in mice (...) Despite the huge body of literature that's available (...) nobody, has got an answer.”

(Frederick, senior animal welfare professional)



STAGING DATA: THEATRE AS A TOOL FOR ANALYSIS AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER IN HEALTH RESEARCH (ROSSITER ET AL 2018)

- (1) **non-theatrical performances** - a minimum of traditional theatrical convention (..) may simply consist of a dramatized reading of interview transcripts
- (2) **ethnodramas**, interactive or non-interactive - the creation of “real-life” vignettes that emerge directly from data such as interviews, focus groups or ethnographic notes. Ethnodramas are theatrical; but aim to communicate research findings and to remain ardently faithful to primary research subjects and the veracity of the data.
- (3) **theatrical research-based performances** - these performances are informed by the research process, but do not strictly adhere to the data as script. Data is a springboard for dramatic improvisation and creation. Performances in this genre may move away from realism and verisimilitude towards the aesthetic and creative power of theatre as an interpretive, analytic tool.
- (4) **fictional theatrical performances** - not drawing from original research, the process of their creation is unconstrained by data and the rigours of the research process. Thus, validity, realism and empirical fact may take a backseat to emotional truth and dramatic style and flow.

Rossiter, K., Kontos, P., Colantonio, A., Gilbert, J., Gray, J., & Keightley, M. (2008). Staging data: Theatre as a tool for analysis and knowledge transfer in health research. *Social Science & Medicine*, 66(1), 130–146. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.07.021>.

EDWARD: You'll need to report it.

ANNALISE: *(Glowering)* I know.

Silence

EDWARD: This is your first time working with mice since your training isn't it?

ANNALISE: No. Well... live ones.

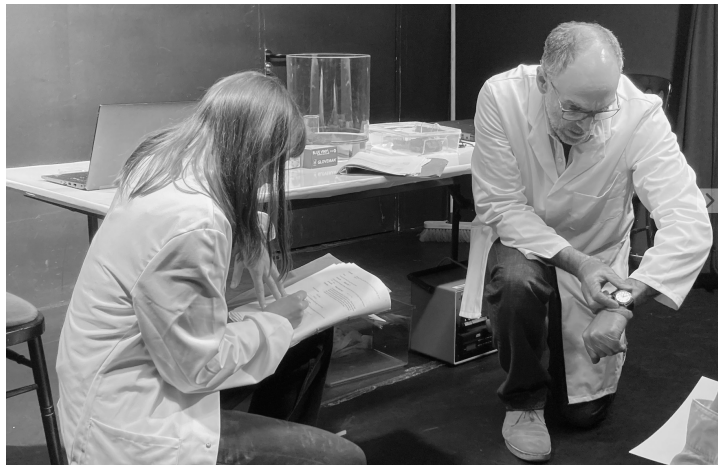
EDWARD: It makes a difference.

ANNALISE: They've been brought to me cold and anaesthetised. How I like them. I'm not a fan of vermin.

EDWARD: Vermin's what she is when she hits the floor. Right now, she's your best friend.

ANNALISE: They make my skin crawl.

"It gives you a way into the science world that is accessible (...) I can enter this world and feel like it's for me....(..) that's what I love about this play, it is exploring this thing that is so Other to me, but I could get in through the relationships, and the story, and the head and the heart interwoven." *Lydia*



"Because the characters were fully-formed, I didn't feel like I was watching a didactic play, obviously I was absorbing all the information, but it just felt really natural dramatic piece of theatre incorporating all the emotional arts as you would find in a normal piece, and it was really gripping and it had comedy and.... I'm not sure what I expected but I think the balance you've found and achieved is actually really exceptional". *Zina*