



**School: Bath School of Music and Performing Arts**

**Researcher: Mary Steadman**

**Project Title: Borderland**

**UOA: 33 - Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies**

## 300-Word Statement

*Borderland*, funded by Arts Council England, was performed at the University Theatre (Bath Spa University) from 28th-30th January 2016, a total of five performances. An exhibition entitled *Borderland* at the 44AD Gallery in Bath ran in tandem to the performances, including artworks by artist Valerie Bowes, designer Cathy Kelly, and women who had suffered from postpartum psychosis. The project forged partnerships with charitable organisations including [Bluebell](#), a Bristol-based charity, and [Creativityworks](#), based in Bath.

*Borderland* incorporated practice-based methodology, developing a dramaturgy that drew upon actual experiences of women who suffered postpartum psychosis, and the semi-autobiographical novella *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Gilman-Perkins. The project foregrounded theoretical studies into historical and cultural attitudes towards mental health, and explored how stigma pervades and adversely affects treatment and cure. The title of the project was drawn from the medical journal *The Borderland* by T.B. Hyslop, who was a senior physician in Bethlem Royal Hospital.

*Borderland* incorporated feminist theory informed by Showalter (1985), Caminero-Santangelo (1998), Gilbert and Gubar (2000), addressing representations and perceptions of 'female insanity [...] as the essential feminine nature unveiling itself before scientific male rationality' (Showalter, 1985). Historical perspectives in the medical establishment, women's actual experiences of mental illness (both historical and current), as well as pervasive underlying stigmas attached to treatment and recovery, all informed the project's methodology. *Borderland* aims to advance dramaturgies into mental health through its specific focus on postpartum psychosis, informed by health professionals, autobiography, and historical perspectives about postpartum psychosis.

The performance of *Borderland* investigates an embodied approach to psychotic experiences through the development of stylised visual and physical theatrical language. Combined with live vocals/music, the performance is an atmospheric experience for the audience, inviting them to consider how stigmas of the past linger and continue to pervade social and cultural attitudes to women's mental health.