

Institution: University of Bristol		
Unit of Assessment: 28) History		
Title of case study: Research into experimental theatre of First World War forges innovative collaborations and growth for creative practitioners		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007 – 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Grace Brockington	Senior Lecturer	09/2007 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 31 December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

The key beneficiaries of Dr Brockington's research on the history of experimental theatre in the First World War are Bristol-based dance company, Impermanence Dance Theatre (IDT), and the London-US open-access journal *British Art Studies* (BAS). Brockington's co-production of a dance film, a new medium for IDT, provided employment for over 60 artists; widened IDT's audience reach; has been incorporated into secondary and Higher Education teaching; and generated over GBP100,000 in income for IDT in 24 months. An online exhibition of the film, published by BAS, changed the journal's approach to online curating and commissioning of creative work, in turn creating a new genre of scholarly publication.

2. Underpinning research

During Dr Brockington's tenure at the University of Bristol (Lecturer in the History of Art, 2007–12; Senior Lecturer, 2012–present), she has conducted extensive research into art and pacifism during the First World War. A key object of the research leading to her 2010 monograph [3.1] was the pacifist publication *The Ballet of the Nations* (1915) by Vernon Lee, illustrated by Maxwell Armfield. Brockington's research into the material history of the book, including the relationship between author and illustrator, the publication process, and the wider context of its dissemination and reception, led to the following :

- 1) It revealed that *The Ballet of the Nations* was recited by the author in a London theatre, but never staged as a dance, although it tells the story of an imagined performance [3.1].
- 2) It presented a new reading of Lee's *Ballet of the Nations* as a work which enacts the destructiveness of war and the breakdown of social order, through the breakdown of literary form. It drew attention to Armfield's illustrations as a commentary on war, and on the artistic and theatrical culture of the moment, which works independently of the associated text [3.1].
- 3) It uncovered evidence of a network of 'little theatres' operating in London during the war which challenges the assumption that experimental theatre was quiescent in Britain in the early twentieth century [3.3].
- 4) Her work on wartime theatre led Brockington to discover a culture of puppet imagery in British war painting, which raises questions about authority and exploitation through the symbolism of puppet and puppet-master [3.2], [3.4].

3. References to the research

- 3.1 **Brockington G** (2010), *Above the Battlefield: Modernism and the Peace Movement in Britain, 1900-1918*, Yale University Press, 264 pp [Available on request]
- 3.2 **Brockington G** (2017). Puppetry and ambivalence in the Art of Paul Nash, in Kamil Kopania K (ed.), *Dolls and Puppets: Contemporaneity and Tradition* (Białystok: The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw), pp. 140–55 [Available on request]
- 3.3 **Brockington G** (lead author and editor) (2019), *Theatres of War: Experimental Performance in London, 1914-1918 and Beyond*, a special edition of *British Art Studies*, 11, 32,000 words, <https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/issues/issue-index/issue-11>
- 3.4 **Brockington G** (2020). The Soldier and the Marionette: Puppet Imagery in British Art of the First World War, in **Brockington G** and Miller CFB (eds.), *Of Modernism: Essays in Honour of Christopher Green* (London: Paul Holberton), pp. 126–53 [Available on request]

4. Details of the impact

Brockington's research [3.1-3.4] has had cultural, educational and economic impact, involving artists, publishers, teachers and students, and diverse audiences both physical and online. The key beneficiaries are: Impermanence Dance Theatre, a contemporary dance company based in Bristol (est. 2010); and *British Art Studies*, the online, open-access journal of the Paul Mellon Centre in London (est. 2015).

1. Impermanence Dance Theatre (IDT): Inspiring new artworks and creative methods, generating funding for the arts, and expanding audiences

In 2014, Brockington approached IDT with the idea of making a dance interpretation of *The Ballet of the Nations*. Together with the editorial team from *British Art Studies*, they discussed making a film and embedding it in an exhibition on experimental theatre in the First World War. A 50-minute feature film was made and released for tour in October 2018 (*The Ballet of the Nations*, directed by Roseanna Anderson and Joshua Ben-Tovim, Impermanence Dance Theatre, 2018), and published online in March 2019 [3.3]. IDT has subsequently made a 30-min edit (supported by GBP2,000 from the Paul Mellon Centre) for touring to film festivals. As their cinematic debut, the film has been transformative for IDT. It has introduced them to new methods of production, forms of collaboration, and techniques of expression; greatly increased their income with wider benefits to the creative economy; expanded their audience through touring and online publication; and opened the way to other, more ambitious ventures. IDT states that: 'The film, and online exhibition are already acting as a "business card" for the company in developing new and existing partnerships' [5.1].

Inspiring creative practice and new methods of production

Brockington worked closely with IDT throughout the making and distribution of this their first film. Her knowledge of the source material and critical insight informed the creative development, including choreography, set and costume design, and soundtrack. IDT's Co-Director states: 'The film is peppered with references that are all based on Grace's research, which really pushed us aesthetically and made us make choices that we otherwise wouldn't' [5.2]. For example:

- her research into disagreements between Lee and her illustrator [3.1] inspired IDT to make bolder decisions about their adaptation of the source material: 'The story Grace told [...] gave us permission to riff off the notion of an incomplete book, a not totally representative portrayal of the text. It gave us some freedom in how we approached the film and a sort of agency to display our own techniques and aesthetics, rather than recreating something historical' [5.3].
- Her work on marionettes inspired IDT to use the motif of a toy puppet theatre, and puppet-like choreography, to explore ideas of power and manipulation in time of war.
- She pointed the composer to source material for the soundtrack: 'another key sample is taken from Debussy's *Poisson d'or* (1907). I chose five piano chords, reordered them, and manipulated them to sound very distant, as if from within an ecclesiastical space. The track jumped out at me because Grace found it had been used in the Chelsea theatres at the turn of the century' [5.3].
- She established an historical basis for costumes in the film. The production designer attests that: 'We had an enormously productive first meeting with Grace. She gave us a lot of context and enshrined certain things before we started: that there should be costumes with patterning all over, in the manner of Maxwell Armfield's illustrations to *The Ballet of the Nations* – he was drawing here on his own practice as a costume designer' [5.3].

As a result of this partnership, historical research and research collaboration have become core to IDT's identity. According to IDT's Co-Director 'the notion of having an art historian embedded in the creative process now feels like something we would seek to do in any major project we undertake' [5.2].

Business growth and sustainability

Brockington took the lead (notably as the film's Executive Producer) in securing new partners and funding streams to which creative artists have traditionally had little access [5.2]. The

project brought in significant new funding for IDT and introduced them to new partners, including university funders, which are an unusual source of support for creative artists. Brockington and IDT secured a package of funding for the film totalling GBP50,000 including Arts Council England (GBP39,665), the University of Bristol (GBP6,000) the Paul Mellon Centre (GBP3,500), and Unity Theatre Trust (GBP800). The making of the film provided employment for 60 artists, totalling 354 employment days and 49 sessions of training and participation [5.1].

Expanding audience reach and engagement

Both versions of the film have been widely distributed, enabling IDT to expand its audiences. The feature film was released in October 2018 at the Cambridge Festival of Ideas and toured internationally to 18 venues in Bristol and the South West, London, Scotland, Germany, and Australia. Alongside traditional cinemas, unconventional venues such as art galleries, a nursing home, a public library and a cathedral, have been used in order to reach more diverse audiences. Live audience numbers have totalled over 1,000 [5.1]. Since the film was published online in March 2019, it has attracted over 5,834 unique viewers (as of 31 December 2020) from the UK, North America, Australia, and across Europe [5.7]. It has also been pirated on YouTube – perhaps the ultimate compliment – where it achieved nearly 3,000 views. This has since been removed and replaced with IDT's own upload which has achieved a further 656 views [5.7]. The short film was released in January 2020 and has toured to two overseas film festivals: Dance Camera West 2020, Los Angeles; and New Renaissance Film Festival, Amsterdam (NL), where it was awarded Best Art Film – a significant break-through which signals its relevance beyond the niche category of dance film. Further touring to film festivals has been curtailed by the Covid-19 pandemic, however, the film was streamed as part of an online film festival organised by Dance Camera West in May 2020. Audience responses have emphasised that the film brought new insight to the history of the First World War and made it seem relevant to the present-day:

- 'This film really changed my perspective on pacifism' [5.8].
- 'This was a thoughtful and innovative re-working of an important work from the period of the 1914-18 war which cast some light on our own time' [5.8].
- 'the film brings the tragedy bang up to date by pointing out, with the help of archive footage and contemporary statistics, that the carnage of 100 years ago still flourishes' (a review in *The Greenwich Visitor*). This review also flags the significance of the film as an artistic achievement and contribution to the genre: 'There have been some great movies about the process of making dance, most notably *The Red Shoes*, *Singin' in The Rain* and *All That Jazz*. *The Ballet of the Nations* deserves to stand alongside any of those' [5.9].

Developing new educational resources

The film has become an international educational resource and has stimulated cross-fertilisation between creative and critical modes of teaching. A Lecturer at the University of Manchester states: 'It demonstrates the capacity of creative arts to raise critical questions or make evident critical questions latent in the text. It has encouraged me in my own move towards setting assignments that use creative as well as critical skills.' [5.10]. It features on curricula at the University of Manchester (for an undergraduate course on the literatures of war and peace protest); at Indiana University Southeast, in the US (for an undergraduate course on 'Shaw and his Contemporaries'), and for Veterans Day commemorations at the same institution; and on the foundation course at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Movement and Dance. It is available on the website of the International Lyceum Club in Florence, which is part of a world-wide network for professional women interested in the pursuit of lifelong learning (the International Association of Lyceum Clubs is linked historically to Vernon Lee and the publication of *The Ballet of the Nations*).

Since the project launched, IDT has won the opportunity to convert a derelict church in Bristol into a new dance centre called The Mount Without (in partnership with a private developer, originally scheduled for opening in May 2020, rescheduled to May 2021 due to Covid-19). The company is keen to use this facility to develop community partnerships, notably with the adjacent school (St Michael's on the Mount Primary School). They used the material of *The Ballet of the Nations* as the basis for their first project with the school, which consisted of a series of weekly workshops with a Year 5 class (suspended by the pandemic). The children extrapolated from the

allegorical characters which feature in the film, using dance, art, and creative writing to explore ways in which the ideas represented might play out in their own lives and communities. The school has welcomed the project as one which is appropriate to their demographic, which is multilingual (28 languages) and includes many families from disadvantaged backgrounds. The collaboration has generated revenue for IDT to the value of GBP10,000, comprising a donation from the International Association of Lyceum Clubs (EUR3,000), outreach funding from the University of Bristol (GBP6,750), and a contribution from the school (GBP700). This revenue has provided further employment for IDT; employment for other creative artists, namely Caleb Parkin (poet/ performer/ teacher, appointed City Poet for Bristol in 2020) and the costume designer Pam Tait; and the scope to develop an education pack which can be offered to other schools once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

New projects, partnerships and long-term growth

The *Ballet* project has opened up new opportunities for IDT, attracting considerable income for future projects and enabling the company to plan for the longer term. IDT's Co-Director says the project has 'really informed and directed the way our artistic practice has developed over the past few years [...] and] given us new options in terms of thinking about how we devise future projects. In how we approach them as well as how we distribute the work [...] we no longer feel like we have to just jump straight into trying to deliver the outcome of the project but we feel like we can invest time properly in researching the history and ideas [...] it's given us a whole new medium to work in and is something that we're now really keen to do more of' [5.2].

The Ballet has led to a second collaboration between IDT and Brockington, which explores the visual culture of cabaret in the early C20th, generating new work and income for the company and their partners. In August 2019, IDT's Co-Director piloted the idea at an Artists' Development Week at Pavilion Dance South West, funded by the Yorke Dance Project, where he created a 15-minute dance performance with an original soundtrack by the composers Benjamin Oliver and Hollie Harding. In October 2019, IDT won a GBP5,000 grant to make a 5-minute film pilot entitled *BLAST*, commissioned by Bristol-based production company Calling the Shots, funded by Arts Council England and BBC Arts, and broadcast on BBC 4 on 28 May 2020. As a direct result of this screening, IDT was approached by Carlos Acosta, the internationally renowned dancer and choreographer and newly-appointed Director of Birmingham Royal Ballet, to collaborate on a short dance film entitled *Empty Stage*, which reflects on the plight of the performing arts in the pandemic. Production took place in November 2020 (supported by Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council) and screening is expected in January 2021. In November 2019, IDT won a GBP40,000 Collaborative Research Grant from the Paul Mellon Centre to work with Brockington on research and development of *BLAST*. This is an unusual source of funding for a dance company, and a new departure for both parties as it crosses the divide between artistic and academic networks. The Paul Mellon Centre has become important to IDT as both sponsor and as creative partner. The IDT Co-Director states: 'the way that we were able to interact with the Paul Mellon Centre, an institution that we wouldn't have felt able to make direct contact without Grace's input has been amazing' [5.2]. The grant is core to their three-year plan, which incorporates performance, new funding sources, and the management of The Mount Without. IDT's vision for how the new dance centre will operate is deeply informed by their collaboration with Brockington, the support they have received from the University of Bristol, and the historical world of clubs and cabarets which their research with Brockington explores: 'We don't want to just run dance classes or performances we want it to be a place, a scene, where lots of people can feel connected to each other and to a set of ideas, so almost embedding Grace into the middle of that! [...] we're thinking about how you'd run a dance centre in which academic research is part of what happens there' [5.2]. IDT has responded creatively to restrictions on the performing arts during the Covid-19 pandemic by redesigning the *BLAST* project to enable long-distance collaboration. They have reallocated a portion of their funding to commission 100 artists to devise short responses to specific items of research material. The aim is to build a broad base of financial support and creative solidarity for the arts at a time when many artists are working in isolation and in straitened circumstances. Invitations were issued in December 2020, with a view to developing a series of collective artworks during 2021.

2. British Art Studies (BAS): Developing a new genre of scholarly publication and building relationships between academic research and the creative arts

In March 2019, BAS published *Theatres of War*, marking the centenary of the release of most Conscientious Objectors from British prisons after the end of the First World War. This special issue of the journal explicated the relationship between dance and archival research, which IDT explored in the filming of *The Ballet of the Nations*, by publishing the film alongside an historical exhibition about the wartime little theatres. It also expanded that relationship by including an archive of interviews and footage documenting the making of the film and making it available for historical research in the same way that Lee's *Ballet* has become a subject of history. From an early stage, the editorial team at BAS was closely involved in planning the project, ensuring that the form and content of the exhibition were properly integrated and made visible the connections between the film and its source material. This is the first time that a journal has published research in the form of a virtual exhibition. It represented an opportunity for BAS to expand its business model, improve its service to other authors, and find new ways of working with creative artists. The project has generated 'lasting and clear impacts for the development of the journal and its contents' [5.4]. Since publication, the issue has generated 11,792 page views (as of 31 December 2020), and has been accessed by 3,410 users in the UK, North America, Australia and across Europe [5.6].

- The project motivated BAS to develop new technical features, notably a template for publishing virtual exhibitions and image-based articles as a new genre of scholarly publication. An Editor at BAS said: 'if we hadn't had that proposal from Grace [...] we wouldn't have had that tool to offer to authors now' [5.5]. It has also enabled the journal to present research in a way that balances text and image rather than making images subsidiary to the text; for example Serena Abdullah's image-based article on Malaysian art at the Commonwealth Institute in issue 13.
- It has enabled BAS to develop a new format for presenting and facilitating collaborations between academics and creative artists. An Editor at BAS states: 'That was something that we'd never done before – we'd never tried to pursue conversations with artists thinking about how art history or music history or fashion and costume influenced the creative work that they did [...] that is a model that we emulated almost straight away for [the next issue ...] we drew really directly on the example of *Theatres of War* to feel good about this as a model for publishing this kind of material in a peer reviewed journal' [5.5].
- It expanded the scope of the journal to include funding and showcasing the creation of original artwork. BAS Editor states: 'Grace's project pushed us into a realm where we were a major funder of new artistic work [...] that's a pretty radical shift in how we are supporting the creation, and then the dissemination of, unique works of art which arise in dialogue with new research that we're publishing in the journal' [5.5]. Issues 12, 13 and 18 contain artists' films presented in this new way, respectively a film about Delia Derbyshire made by Caroline Catz, a cover collaboration by Asia Art Activism, and a set of six cover collaborations by different artists.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

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| 5.1 | Impermanence Dance Theatre, final report for Arts Council England (June 2019) |
| 5.2 | Interview with IDT Co-Director (August 2019) |
| 5.3 | Making the Ballet of the Nations, <i>British Art Studies</i> , Issue 11, March 2019 (also available here: https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/issues/issue-index/issue-11) |
| 5.4 | Testimonial from Editor at <i>British Art Studies</i> (June 2019) |
| 5.5 | Interview with Editor at <i>British Art Studies</i> (August 2019) |
| 5.6 | Google analytics report on issue 11 of <i>British Art Studies</i> [accessed January 2021] |
| 5.7 | Film download figures (January 2021) and Youtube video (January 2021) |
| 5.8 | Audience feedback on <i>The Ballet of the Nations</i> (October 2019) |
| 5.9 | The Greenwich Visitor (March 2019), The Ballet of the Nations at Laban Theatre [accessed 8 July 2019] |
| 5.10 | Testimonials – lecturers who have used <i>The Ballet of the Nations</i> in teaching (2018-2019) |