

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: Panel D - UoA 26: Modern Languages and Linguistics		
Title of case study: Who's Watching Who? Creating New Drama and Film about East German Theatre Censorship		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005 - 2013		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Professor Laura Bradley	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Personal Chair of German and Theatre	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2005 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - 2018		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Dramatist Peter Arnott and film-maker Susan Kemp used Laura Bradley's research on theatre censorship in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to create a play and a documentary film. The project met the strategic aims of the Playwrights' Studio Scotland by connecting playwrights with audiences, involving them in the creative process, and encouraging critical thinking about playwriting today and in the GDR.</p> <p>While working on the play, Arnott reflected on his engagement with Bradley's research in a blog that attracted 3,424 users. In total, 937 spectators booked tickets for events including play readings and film screenings, and the Scottish broadsheet <i>The Herald</i> called the film "a <i>fascinating insight into the artistic process and its struggles</i>".</p> <p>Both the play and the film changed audiences' understanding of the GDR and promoted reflection on censorship, the ethics of theatrical representation, and the responsibilities of artists then and now. The project's success led the Playwrights' Studio to initiate an Advanced Playwright Development Programme that will complement its existing early career development opportunities.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Bradley joined the University of Edinburgh in 2005 as Lecturer in German, progressing to Senior Lecturer (2011) and Personal Chair (2016). She published her research on theatre censorship between 2005 and 2013 in a monograph (3.1) and six articles in peer-reviewed journals. Her research and impact activities on East German theatre were supported by an AHRC Research Leave Award and AHRC Follow-On Funding for Impact and Engagement.</p> <p>Bradley's monograph investigates how GDR theatre censorship developed between the construction and fall of the Berlin Wall, how it was practised in six regions, and how it affected genres ranging from classical tragedy to contemporary drama. The research draws on primary sources from the German Federal Archive, the Stasi Archive, seven regional and city archives, and seven theatres, plus Bradley's interviews with theatre practitioners and censors. The sources include policy documents, internal Party and government correspondence, reports by Stasi informers, prompt books, rehearsal notes, audiovisual recordings, and transcripts of post-show discussions with spectators. No one had previously studied GDR theatre censorship on this scale, and <i>Deutschland Archiv</i> (2012) highlighted Bradley's achievement in making the step change from individual case studies to analysis of the whole system.</p> <p>Most recent publications on GDR performance come from practitioners with a vested interest in presenting theatre as a centre of resistance to the regime. By focusing on high-profile disputes,</p>		

prevailing accounts perpetuate the notion that conflict between censors and theatres was the norm. Bradley challenges these assumptions by examining cases with different outcomes, ranging from production bans, through uneasy compromises, to official approval. She explores how GDR theatre practitioners participated in censorship and shows that conflicts ran along multiple lines, within and between Party and state institutions, and within theatres themselves.

Bradley also breaks new ground by exploring how the authorities' denial of censorship affected the controls on theatre, the decisions made by officials, and the room for manoeuvre open to theatre practitioners. Censorship in the GDR was camouflaged and exercised through a complex web of institutions, and a euphemistic language evolved to describe and justify the system. By denying that censorship was practised, the regime could hold theatre practitioners accountable for productions even though they had been filtered through pre-performance controls. This exposed practitioners to considerable risks, even leading some to campaign for the legal imposition of censorship.

To summarize, the three central research insights that underpinned the impact are: (1) GDR theatre practitioners participated actively in censorship, as well as experiencing its restrictions on their work; (2) whenever GDR censorship was publicly visible, it had failed; and (3) the GDR authorities' denial that they practised censorship exposed theatre practitioners to considerable risks, leaving them with all the controls of censorship and none of the guarantees. This nuanced approach is relevant to contemporary debates about censorship and free speech in other contexts.

3. References to the research

Monograph:

- 3.1 Bradley, L. (2010). *Cooperation and conflict: GDR theatre censorship, 1961-1989*. Oxford: OUP. In the *Modern Language Review* (107.1: 323-4). (Can be supplied by HEI on request.)

Relevant articles in peer-reviewed journals:

- 3.2 Bradley, L. (2013). East German theatre censorship: The role of the audience. *Theatre Journal*, 65:1, pp.39-56. DOI: [10.1353/tj.2013.0032](https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2013.0032)
- 3.3 Bradley, L. (2013). Challenging censorship through creativity: Responses to the ban on *Sputnik* in the GDR. *Modern Language Review*, 108:2, pp.519-38. DOI: [10.5699/modelangrevi.108.2.0519](https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.108.2.0519)
- 3.4 Bradley, L. (2006). GDR theatre censorship: A system in denial. *German Life and Letters*, 59:1, pp.151-62. DOI: [10.1111/j.0016-8777.2006.00340.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0016-8777.2006.00340.x)

Funding:

Laura Bradley. AHRC Follow-On Funding for Impact and Engagement. AH/M005275/1. *The Context of Creativity: Creating new drama and film about East German theatre censorship*. 2014-16. GBP80,017.

Laura Bradley. AHRC Research Leave Award. AH/G004064/1. *Complicity and conflict: GDR theatre censorship 1961-1990*. 2009. GBP22,853. The assessors graded the application A+

4. Details of the impact

To mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 2014, Laura Bradley led an AHRC-funded project that commissioned Peter Arnott to write a play based on her research on GDR theatre and to share this creative process with audiences. Film-maker and academic Susan Kemp, who co-designed this public engagement project, made a documentary film investigating the relationship between Bradley's research and Arnott's play. These activities supported the Playwrights' Studio Scotland, as project partner, in its mission to connect playwrights with audiences and encourage critical discussion about playwriting (5.1). In total, 937 spectators booked tickets for 13 events in Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrews, and Leeds,

including a launch event, rehearsed readings of the play-in-progress, and screenings of the film (5.2). The project blogsite (5.3) attracted 3,424 users taking part in 5,031 recorded sessions with over 11,000 page views (5.4, p.3). It connected Arnott with new audiences, with 3,243 sessions in Europe, 914 in the USA and Canada, and sessions in Australia and New Zealand (153), Latin America (78), Africa (29), India (23), and the Middle East (20; 5.4, pp.7-11).

While developing his play *Ensemble*, Arnott benefited from direct access to Bradley's publications and the underpinning research, including archive sources translated for his use and interviews with leading GDR theatre practitioners (5.5). Bradley advised Arnott on his outline and three drafts, responding to his requests for information and suggesting changes to make the plot align with historical reality (5.5). In his first draft, Arnott created a piece of verbatim theatre, i.e. a play consisting entirely of quotations from Bradley's translated archive sources and interviews (5.6). Spectators at the rehearsed reading of this draft at Orán Mòr (Glasgow, April 2015) repeatedly highlighted its authenticity, and 83% of those surveyed said that it had changed their understanding of the GDR (5.7, p.2). One spectator emailed Arnott to say that the play provided *"a powerful insight into a subject we hitherto knew nothing about"*, adding *"my husband, who is an avid reader, but only of non-fiction ... found this experience of theatre so much more engaging than anything he's been (dragged) to in the past"* (5.7, p.26). The reading provoked a heated debate about Arnott's juxtaposition of material about the Stasi prison with theatre practitioners' testimony (5.7, 5.8). The Creative Director of the Playwrights' Studio commented: *"The involvement of so many audiences, and the level of passionate debate the project provoked, demonstrates just how vital theatre is in bringing together the public with professional theatre practitioners"* (5.1).

Arnott set his later drafts in a fictional theatre in January 1990, reducing and reframing verbatim material (5.6). The theatre practitioners in the play argue over what they should be performing, improvising scenes based on their experiences in the GDR (5.6). In total, 367 spectators booked tickets for rehearsed readings of the finished playscript in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and St Andrews (September 2015), and spectators argued that *"it showed complexity rather than simplicity, avoided cliché", "lead[ing] us away from simple stories about the Stasi"* (5.7, p.67). The play's exploration of GDR theatre prompted spectators to reflect on the value of art and the responsibilities of artists; one spectator wrote that it had reminded them *"why I became an artist and to [go to the theatre] more"* (5.7, p.136). At the end of the project, Arnott – author of around fifty professionally produced plays – wrote: *"I've never quite had a 'development experience' quite like this one. For a start, its authorship is shared in an interesting and provocative way that I'm only beginning to understand ... The result is Ensemble...a fictional play reinforced with serious and proper research of a kind that I could never have undertaken on my own – and with a breadth of humanity, I hope, that I don't think I could have arrived at on my own"* (5.3).

Kemp's documentary film, *Writing Ensemble* (105 mins), was shot in Berlin, Dresden, Edinburgh, and Glasgow in 2014-15 (5.8). Kemp filmed encounters between Bradley and Arnott, and with the wider public, shaping a narrative about engagement with research contextualized through interviews with Bradley and GDR theatre practitioners, archive footage, and contemporary footage of key theatres. When the film premiered at the Glasgow Film Theatre in November 2016, a very positive 800-word review in *The Herald* (print circulation c.26,000) called it *"a fascinating insight into the artistic process and its struggles that works on different levels"* (5.9). Approximately 266 spectators attended public screenings at venues including the Edinburgh Filmhouse, Glasgow Film Theatre, Hyde Park Picture House (Leeds), and Scottish Storytelling Centre (Edinburgh; 5.2). All those surveyed at the premiere thought that they had learned something from the film: about verbatim theatre, what makes plays dramatic, and how political context can affect plays and their reception (5.10). One spectator commented on *"how valuable a document the film is in terms of learning about dramaturgy and play-making"* (5.10, p.1). Another emailed Bradley to say that she was due to visit Berlin to investigate her family history in the GDR, writing: *"I am so grateful for the glimpses into GDR life from [the] documentary, which has prepared the ground for my visit so very well"*. She called the film *"incredibly insightful both for the insights into the theatre scene of the GDR and the creative process of Peter in making a new piece of theatre based on your research"* (5.10, p.8).

The Creative Director of the Playwrights' Studio comments: "*On our own, we would never have been able to deliver a project with these kinds of benefits to one playwright and to ourselves as an organisation*" (5.1). Following the project, the Studio initiated a new Advanced Playwright Development Programme and is fundraising to provide fellowships and residencies for experienced writers. The Creative Director notes that this programme was "*directly based on our learning from [the project]*" (5.1). The Studio collaborated again with Bradley on a symposium that promoted awareness of opportunities for collaboration between theatre practitioners and the HEI sector, using the example of the creation of Arnott's play, as told through Kemp's film. Eighteen playwrights and 13 academics attended (5.2), and 92% of those surveyed said that they had gained useful insights for their professional activity (5.7, p.200). Participants here and at other post-screening Q&As were fascinated by the audience's heated response to Arnott's first draft in the film; one commented that the contrast between artist and audience perceptions of the same work underlined the importance of public engagement (5.7, p.202). Of respondents, 83% said that they had learned new things from the film: about how GDR censorship functioned, the psychology of surveillance, the ethics of playwriting and research, and the complexities and possibilities of verbatim theatre (5.7, p.201). One commented that they had learned "*how powerful work can be made when universities and playwrights work together*" (5.7, p.201).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Testimonial from the Creative Director of the Playwrights' Studio Scotland.
- 5.2 Ticketing records from Eventbrite, theatre and cinema box offices.
- 5.3 Project blogsite <https://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/whos-watching-who/>, including Arnott's reflections on the research and his developing script and further correspondence between Arnott and Bradley.
- 5.4 Google Analytics data for <https://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/whos-watching-who/>.
- 5.5 Sources curated for Arnott; indicative examples of email correspondence between Arnott and Bradley.
- 5.6 Successive outlines and drafts of Arnott's play.
- 5.7 Audience surveys and interviews from the launch event, Spy Week event, five rehearsed readings of the script, roundtable discussion of censorship, and 'Creating Impact: Theatres and Universities' symposium.
- 5.8 *Writing Ensemble*, directed by Susan Kemp: <https://vimeo.com/157314052>.
- 5.9 Marianne Taylor, 'Scottish Film Explores Censorship in the GDR', *The Herald*, 3.11.2016. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/arts-ents/14839573.scottish-film-explores-censorship-in-the-gdr/>
- 5.10 Responses of audiences to screenings of the documentary film.