

<b>Institution:</b> University of Reading		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 33: Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> 'Clamorous Objects: Unmuting the Archive' – changing the way collections are interpreted and presented to engage new and larger audiences		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 1 August 2014 – 2020.		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Teresa Murjas	Professor Associate Professor Senior Lecturer	01/04/02 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 1 August 2014 – 2020.		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Local museums and archives house collections which are often under-utilised or presented in a 'two-dimensional' way that audiences struggle to engage and connect with. Murjas's research has changed how several local museums and archives perceive and use their objects, enabling them to reinterpret their collections using multi-media installations and theatrical performance techniques. The <i>Clamorous Objects</i> projects have elicited emotional responses to objects and collections from migrants, curators, interpreters, medical professionals, creative practitioners and audience members, and helped individuals explore and come to terms with past experiences. Murjas's approach to curating 'histories from below' has influenced how practitioners from a range of sectors conceptualise and share archives and is now being used as a benchmark by sector leaders such as Research Libraries UK (RLUK).</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Murjas's research since 2002 has explored Polish cultures, identities and histories. She edited and critically contextualised three English-language collections of previously untranslated Polish-language plays, that she also directed and produced. Murjas used practice-led research to examine under-represented aspects of Second World War migration from Poland. The narrative focus for <i>Surviving Objects</i> was her mother's deportation in 1940 and eventual arrival in the UK following the Polish Resettlement Act, 1947. Drawing on their audio-recorded conversations and objects from her mother's personal wartime archive, together they developed approaches to ethically mediating these private materials.</p> <p>The work directly informed Murjas's ongoing research into the intergenerational significance of personal archives; their performative creation, curation and (re)mediation; and their tangible and intangible qualities. Themes of conflict and migration link the five strands that make up <i>Clamorous Objects: Unmuting the Archive</i>, which emphasise collaborative, participatory, artistic-curatorial approaches to animating histories 'from below'.</p> <p>Developing from <i>Surviving Objects</i>, Murjas established an artists' collective working with personal archives related to migration, called <i>Peeling Onions with Granny</i> (POWG). Murjas worked with Nicky Werenowska, a POWG member, to develop a play based on Werenowska's memories of migration, <i>Silence</i>. This play received Arts Council England (ACE) funding for a professional regional tour (output 1). A further play was devised addressing migration themes, this time concerning the challenges that interpreters face working within UK public services. <i>Between</i>, was created by a storytelling company led by Murjas called <i>Around the Well</i> (ATW) (output 2). ATW worked in collaboration with mental health practitioners and interpreters to develop the play and an NGO called <i>Mothertongue</i> that until 2018, provided culturally and linguistically sensitive counselling for people from</p>		

black and minority ethnic communities. In the play *Between*, ATW members explore the ethical sharing of personal and professional insights into varied interpreter-mediated encounters.

Murjas's artistic research also extended to local museum and heritage sectors. *The First World War in Biscuits* (FWWIB) (output 3) and *War Child: Meditating on an Archive* (WCMA) (output 4) drew in different ways on the [Huntley & Palmers](#) and Evacuee Archives held in the Special Collections at the University of Reading. In FWWIB, a collaboration between Murjas, the Museum of Rural English Life (MERL) and Reading Museum, Murjas combined new videos and audio recordings with artefacts and archival materials from the Huntley & Palmers' collection, to emphasise the company's wartime role. FWWIB formed the centrepiece of Reading Museum's 'Reading at War' exhibition (2018). It was later installed at Colchester's The Minories and also featured in The National Archives' (TNA) 'Explore Your Archives' week (2018). WCMA is a web-based 'mixed-media book' that illustrates the Evacuee Archive, established by Martin Parsons, an historian of child evacuation and housed at The MERL. *War Child: Meditating on an Archive* brings the archive to life through audio-clips of conversations with Martin Parsons, his daughters and an academic colleague, exploring the impact that the archive of papers and objects has had on their lives (output 4). Murjas went on to analyse the differing approaches taken in the two projects, comparing methods of spatial and digital curation to improve 'discoverability' (output 5).

Murjas's collaborative research with the MERL has continued through participation in the ACE funded 'Museum of the Intangible' project. Responding to the MERL's collections, Murjas worked with poet Jack Thacker and his farming family to develop a filmpoem, [L. Sheep](#) (output 6) which incorporates nonhuman viewpoints of rural life and heritage.

### 3. References to the research

The research meets or exceeds the threshold for 2\* originality, significance and rigour. Written research outputs have been published in peer-reviewed journals. Associated practice outputs have been shared in a wide range of public-facing contexts, with intersecting specialist and non-specialist audience groups.

1. Murjas, T. (2019) Peeling onions with Granny: on being moved to collaborate. *Performing Ethos*. 9(1), pp. 37-53. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1386/peet\\_00004\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/peet_00004_1)
2. Murjas, T. (2018) *Between*. Staged at: 1. Europe House followed by Q & A, London 14 March 2019; 2. UNESCO Spring School, Glasgow 3 May 2019 (as a keynote, also live-streamed and followed by Q & A). 3. Open University, Milton Keynes 17 July 2019 (also live-streamed and followed by Q & A) 4. King's College London as part of AHRC funded Language Acts & Worldmaking 5 September 2019 (followed by Q & A); 6. Nov 2020 as digital event as part of Southampton University ESRC funded festival.
3. Murjas, T. (Devised and Dir.) *First World War in Biscuits* installation at Reading Museum (2014), installation at The Minories, Colchester (2015).
4. *War Child: Meditating on an Archive* <https://www.war-child-archive.com/>
5. Murjas, T. 2020. 'The Biscuit Town': Digital practice, Spatiality and Discoverability in Reading's Heritage Sector. *Body, Space & Technology*, 19 (1), pp. 153-173. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/bst.337>
6. Murjas, T. 2020 (Devised and Dir.) *I, Sheep: A Filmpoem* <https://merl.reading.ac.uk/merl-collections/research-projects/museum-intangible/i-sheep/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yz7AhubH0uM>

### 4. Details of the impact

Murjas's multi-media and digital approaches to under-utilised, intangible collections of cultural heritage and personal archives have allowed local museums and archives to rethink how they present these collections to their audiences and the emotional responses that can

be elicited from such collections. Her work, recognised by national institutions including TNA and RLUK as an example of best practice, has enabled a step-change in curating practices.

### A. Influencing practice within the creative professions

*Clamorous Objects* has provided the opportunity for collaboration across the arts and heritage sectors and between creative practitioners. Murjas, a theatre practitioner, has presented her work to librarians, archivists and curators and influenced their practice. For example, WCMA was presented at two events during the 2018 Being Human Festival and at a joint keynote lecture with Kate Arnold-Forster, Director of the MERL, at the Universeum Conference in Glasgow (2018). In 2020 Murjas was invited to speak about WCMA at an OKRE event which brought together archivists, curators and members of the entertainment industries (E1).

The cross-sector, collaborative approach developed through *Clamorous Objects* has enabled the participating archives and museums to work for the first time with creative practitioners. ATW and POWG have also facilitated interpreters, creative practitioners and medical professionals to collaborate on devised public performances. This has further informed their own practice and led to wider reflections on how family histories and personal archives provide powerful narratives to convey messages around migration and identity. One member of POWG commented that: 'The support given – creative, technical and emotional – through the collaborative nature of the [POWG] collective and its projects has been key in helping me to develop and to produce artworks which link the "micro" of the subject matter to the "macro" of related themes. It has helped me to apply a level of intellectual and academic rigour to the work and has also helped that work develop in ways I had not envisaged [...]' (E2).



The film poem *I, Sheep* was the first of its kind and engaged with audiences in new ways, receiving coverage in *The Countryman* magazine (monthly circulation 10,000) and 2,700 views on YouTube. Jack Thacker, the poet who collaborated with Murjas on *I, Sheep*, commented that: 'This project turned out to mark a key moment in my development as a creative writer. The launch of *I, Sheep* has undoubtedly raised my profile and has provided access to audiences I otherwise would not have reached. More importantly, it has reinforced for me the importance of my rural upbringing for my creative practice' (E3).

### B. New ways for audiences to engage with archival and museum collections

Murjas's research using multi-media approaches to interpreting personal archives has engaged audiences in new ways. The archivist behind WCMA commented that through collaborating with Murjas it 'became apparent that the information contained in the letters, artefacts and ephemera and the insight they provided into the daily life of these people during difficult times, could be better expressed in the performing and visual arts than it could by simply using the same research materials in textbooks and academic papers [...]' It

added a different dimension to [people's] understanding of the archive as well. It was not simply countless bundles of abstract and non-attributable letters; each had a story to tell and there was an actual person responsible for each one' (E4).

Changing how these stories, objects and collections were presented to the public enabled a change in attitudes towards the role of interpreters, as demonstrated by the performances of *Between*. Audience members commented that after watching the play they had a 'new way of understanding interpreting', and that they were able to 'understand and consider the different situations and viewpoints of patients, interpreters and medical practitioners'. Audience members who were interpreters themselves also commented that the experience had made them feel less alone in a challenging sector (E5). A review of *Between* by the Institute of Translating and Interpreting stated that there was 'a clear consensus that this material [...] deserved to be shared with a much broader audience' as 'audience members witnessing [it] found themselves sharing in the challenges and ethical quandaries of interpreting for people in delicate situations' (E5).

### **C. Changing how archives and museums perceive and use their objects:**

The impact of Murjas's work in eliciting emotional responses from audiences using personal archives and overlooked collections has helped several small archives and museums change their approach to the curation and display of these items. Following on from the success of FWWIB, Reading Museum moved the Huntley & Palmers' artefacts which were used as part of the project out of the museum's storage facility and into its permanent exhibition space. The project also led to a 'step-change' in how the museum puts on exhibitions (E6). Murjas's research has also influenced the development of policy and best practice guidance for local museums and archives through the MERL's *Museum of the Intangible*. This project provides guidance on how to preserve and curate intangible cultural heritage and produced a toolkit which features exhibits or installations produced by creative practitioners in response to the MERL's collections (including Murjas's piece *I, Sheep*). This toolkit is freely available and has received 951 views since its publication in 2019; the average dwell time for this webpage is up 111% on the MERL's average, demonstrating clear engagement with the toolkit (E7).

The impact of Murjas's research in the local archive and museum sector has influenced sector leaders, including TNA. As part of 'Explore Your Archives' week, TNA focused their Tuesday theme on #EdibleArchives, a concept which came directly out of Murjas's research project FWWIB. Representatives from TNA and Miranda Gore-Brown (Great British Bake Off finalist – series 1) were invited to see Murjas's research, the Reading Museum collection and the Huntley & Palmers' archive at the University of Reading's Special Collections. As a result of this visit, Gore-Brown wrote an article for the *Who Do You Think You Are Magazine*, which has a print circulation of 17,500, and FWWIB was used as the headline story by TNA to launch the #ExploreArchives week on BBC Breakfast on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2018 (1,400,000 viewers). Murjas's research and work with TNA was highly valued, particularly for how it engaged new audiences with the archive sector using multi-media and performative methods: 'It proved a significant talking point. The history of food and material culture was such an engaging topic for the First World War, and the work undertaken at Reading to promote the Huntley & Palmer collections has been interesting and valuable' (E8).

Murjas's approach to working with archives and special collections has resulted in her involvement in RLUK's Special Collections Programme (SCP), which created a free-to-use survey toolkit for assessing the content, condition and significance of special collections which currently have no finding aids to make them discoverable. The toolkit is part of SCP's consortium-wide initiative to develop an audience-focused strategy for special collections which will increase their use and audience engagement with them. Murjas's approach and the resulting mixed-media practice-led output WCMA was used as an exemplar of how this could be achieved through transforming special collections from 'closed spaces to hubs of creativity and innovation' using mixed media approaches. WCMA's inclusion in this toolkit

shows how Murjas's work, which is centred on increasing the discoverability of special collections through digital means, is having an impact in the wider archive sector (E9, E10).

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

[E1] Emails from OKRE

[E2] Testimonial from POWG member

[E3] Coverage and responses to I, Sheep including a testimonial from the poet

[E4] Testimonial from WCMA Archivist

[E5] Audience feedback and review of Between and Silence

[E6] Reading Museum Huntley and Palmer Gallery and testimonial

[E7] The MERL's Intangible Cultural Heritage Project and Toolkit

[E8] Testimonial from The National Archives

[E9] Two short impact films for RLUK <https://www.rluk.ac.uk/war-child-archive/>

[E10] RLUK Special Collections Toolkit <https://www.rluk.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Evidencing-impact-and-value-of-special-collections.pdf>