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Triangle's Work in Times of War: A Report on the Project's Impact

Carran Waterfield (with Richard Talbot), Triangle Theatre

'Triangle and immersive museum theatre are now by-words for excellence in this area.'
(A museum professional, West Midlands, UK)

Triangle's war projects are regarded as exemplary in the fields of both museum studies and interactive performance. The development of the DVD-ROM, Triangle's Work in Times of War, was supported by PALATINE and the Herbert Museum and Art Gallery in Coventry to enable some of Triangle's work to be made available to students and educators. The DVD-ROM is a compilation of materials from Richard Talbot and Carran Waterfield's award-winning collaborations with museum professionals and unique productions inspired by Coventry's Second World War archives and collections. The materials provide ideas for interactive performance, comical re-enactment and work with young people.

On the following page is a memo received by PALATINE from the office of Mr Whissell and Mrs Williams (two of the wartime characters featured in this immersive theatre project). This is followed by some information showing how the materials have been used and how they have impacted on the teaching, learning and professional practice of students and colleagues.

Please visit Triangle's website for more information about their work: <http://www.triangletheatre.co.uk>



Mrs Williams and Mr Whissell

Memorandum

Following a directive from the PALATINE Office to report on the impact of our Digital Versatile Disc Read-only Memory, *Triangle's Work In Times of War (DVD-ROM/TWITOW)*, we are happy to report that the aforesaid has indeed had Global Impact.

Only recently, via the Amazon conduit, Head Office dispatched one package post-haste to operations in Hong Kong at a formidable seven pounds eleven shillings and three pence (recorded delivery postage).

From the 1000 copies pressed we currently have several supplies in storage awaiting purchase as a result of this directive.

We can also report some Ministries of Information have either lost their copy or didn't acquire one in the first place. Some Ministries have no tracking system whatsoever so it is tricky to determine the particular impact in those particular outposts. However, only one Ministry reported that "it was not in the slightest bit useful".

Please find attached the various messages from around the globe in the worlds of academia, theatrical production and historical interpretation, which relate the response to our investigation:
"What is the impact of *Triangle's Work In Times of War?*" (kindly subsidised by HEA/DDM).

Report received by telegram from the following sections (foreign and domestic):

VIZ:

Foreign:

Daina Harvey (now Shaw) currently in Kuala Lumpur, reporting OBHO Mission Australia.

Patrick Campbell, Our Man in Brazil.

Foreign and Domestic:

Paul Johnson Ph.D. reporting on missions in Scotland and South Africa.

Domestic:

Kathryn Green and her Superior, Kerrie Schaefer Ph.D. (Exeter Mission).

Peter Groves (Melton Mowbray Mission).

Polly Williams (Leeds Mission).

Samantha Overton (Kent Mission).

Professor Tony Jackson (Manchester Mission).

Various Ministry of Information Units:

Anthony Loveland, CSSD.

Season Butler, LADA.

Amy Staniforth, Aberystwyth, Welsh Contingent.

And finally a word from Robin Johnson, formerly Head of Operations, now demobbed somewhere in North Warwickshire.

Memo from the office of Mr Whissell and Mrs Williams

Uses of *Triangle's Work in Times of War* in higher education, research and professional practice

The DVD-ROM has been used as a resource both for teaching and independent learning in a variety of higher education courses and research, including:

- Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes: applied drama/theatre, contemporary theatre practice, third-year practical research projects, induction week activities, museum studies;
- Doctoral research: memory studies, museum studies, cultural studies, performance studies;
- Post-doctoral research: creativity, museum theatre;
- Professional museum training: museum education, citizenship;
- Professional practical projects and actor training.

Some institutions that have used the DVD-ROM for their drama, theatre and performance studies degrees:

- Brooksby Melton College (Performing Arts)
- Central School of Speech and Drama (Applied Theatre)
- University of Exeter (Drama)
- University of Kent (Contemporary Performance Practice)
- University of Leeds (School of Performance and Cultural Industries)
- University of Leicester (Museum Studies)
- University of Manchester (School of Arts, Histories and Cultures)
- University of Salford (School of Media, Music and Performance)
- University of Warwick (Centre for the History of Medicine)
- University of Wolverhampton (School of Sport, Performing Arts and Leisure)

Some examples of research influenced by, or citing, the DVD-ROM:

Green, K. (2011) *What are the limitations of some theatre in education models?* BA (Hons) dissertation, University of Exeter.

Johnson, Paul (2010) 'Art or Honesty? Breaking the rules of the game with immersive museum theatre'. In B. Townley and N. Beech, eds. *The Discipline of Organizing Creativity: Exploring the Paradox*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Overton, S. (2010) *The Relationship between immersive performance and Brecht's Verfremdungseffekt: What is the efficacy of socio-political immersive performance on the audience?* MA thesis, University of Kent.

Williams, Polly (2011) *Living Histories: Performing Work and Working Lives in the Industrial Museum*. PhD thesis, University of Leeds.

Some theatres, museums and libraries that have used the DVD-ROM:

- Aberystwyth University Library
- Belgrade Theatre, Coventry
- British Library
- Central School of Speech and Drama Library
- Coventry City Libraries
- Hyde Park Barracks, Sydney, Australia
- International Museum Theatre Alliance (IMTAL)
- Kindie Theatre
- Live Art Development Agency (LADA)
- Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse
- National Trust
- Odin Teatret
- Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC)
- Sovereign Hill, Ballarat, Victoria, Australia

The DVD-ROM has also been applied to professional practice and research in locations around the world including Australia, Brazil, China, Denmark, Hong Kong and Malaysia.

Examples of feedback on applications of the DVD-ROM in education, practice and research

- Valuable educational tool which sets out a clear model by example;
- Valuable learning experiences that include strong emotional engagement with the subject matter and open and complex play in an immersive and focused space;
- Employing play and the drive for emotional truth;
- Creative and surprising ways of conducting applied drama work; use with final-year undergraduate students who are taking an advanced module in applied drama, specialising in museum theatre;
- Students become imaginatively engaged in the emotional and mental world;
- For some students it was a revelation;
- Education – young persons' performance;
- Participant contribution: young people carved out their own sense of identity and their own creative narratives;
- Numerous comments (by children) underlined the double consciousness this kind of work can generate;
- Enabling children to relive conflict, pain and silent heritage in a uniquely playful way;
- The kids are clearly involved, and to an extraordinary degree;
- To get kids inside the events but also to generate the ability to reflect afterwards: a rare but powerful combination;
- Encouraging cultural entitlement, creative learning and curriculum enhancement with a special needs school;
- Grounds itself clearly in the historical context;
- Pioneering use of immersive performance techniques in museum/heritage/historical settings;
- Elaboration on a history that affects everyone in Coventry; archaeological theatre;
- Wonderful treasure trove of archive material and records of performances and processes – a valuable resource;
- Discussing the interplay between research and practice;
- At the forefront of a strand of applied theatre work;
- Latest techniques in applied theatre and performance;
- Use in interdisciplinary events;
- Memory studies: an example of embodied post-memory;
- Narrative structure underpinning the improvised unfolding of the events;
- Curious, pleasurable and provocative (not at all didactic);
- Quality DVD-ROM documentation;
- Access to commentaries from the involved artists on the DVD-ROM;
- Long-term value will be as a training tool, particularly for museum education professionals and museum theatre practitioners;
- Model for interpreters, curators and theatre practitioners interested in developing high-quality immersive museum theatre.

Extracts from notable feedback received from students, educators, researchers and practitioners who have benefited from *Triangle's Work in Times of War*

Daina Shaw (née Harvey), formerly Senior Programs and Events Coordinator, National Museum of Australia:

Triangle's work in interpreting the impact of war on the home front in Coventry was of great interest to me in my role as an interpreter of the National Museum of Australia's collections. The DVD, Triangle's Work in Times of War, documents Triangle's extremely innovative and creative approach to developing and implementing museum theatre. It is a very powerful method of interpretation based on painstaking historical research and collaboration with historians, educators, museum curators and young people, and provides a model for interpreters, curators and theatre practitioners interested in developing high quality immersive museum theatre pieces. The DVD was purchased by a number of museum professionals and theatre practitioners in Australia, and I believe it is an excellent resource for those working in this area. Museum professionals and theatre practitioners alike have been inspired by Triangle's unique approach and are exceptionally fortunate that Triangle Theatre Company has shared their high quality processes, ideas and outcomes through this DVD.

Dr Paul Johnson, Head of Drama and Principal Lecturer, School of Sport, Performing Arts and Leisure, University of Wolverhampton:

I have used Triangle's Work in Times of War in my academic work in a variety of contexts. I have used it with first year undergraduate students, to show them that creative and surprising ways of conducting applied drama work are possible; I have used it with final year undergraduate students who are taking an advanced module on applied drama, specialising in museum theatre. I have used it at interdisciplinary events at the University of Wolverhampton when discussing the interplay play between research and practice, and at international conferences such as the IFTR conference

in Stellenbosch, South Africa when discussing Triangle's work in terms of training, or at a Seminar for the Institute of Capitalizing on Creativity (St Andrews) discussing the 'rules of the game' for interactive performance work.

What is particularly valuable about this as a resource is the way it brings together practice and research, and also the high quality of the documentation. The commentary from the artists involved, both in and out of role, provides a valuable insight for academics and students in a variety of contexts.

Patrick Campbell, PhD student, Federal University of Bahia, Brazil:

The DVD raised a lot of questions for me. The work was beautiful – I've been reading up about Memory recently, and I feel that the work is an example of embodied postmemory – a posterior re-elaboration of a history that affects everyone in Coventry to this day, although few of us really realize it. I've been thinking of Triangle and Bare Essentials, and I think that the Blitz is something of a running theme – it's as if all our work was a constant Dig, a constant process of archaeological probing into the silent wound that haunts us in the Midlands – all those families who died, the loss of the city's heritage, a hole in the soul. I think that Triangle's work with Whistle [sic] and Williams explored this in a more conscious manner, enabling those children to relive this conflictual, painful, silent heritage in a uniquely playful way. In comparison, I think that Bare Essentials' work dealt with some of the same themes – loss, death, separation of families, violence – on a more archetypal, mythological level. Your own solo performances straddled both worlds to a certain extent, combining archival research with a ritualistic poetics that transformed historic linearity into a eulogy for a lost community. There's something very fertile about the varied ways in which these different groups of artists and young people carved out their own sense of identity and their own creative narratives out of the raw material of Coventry's troubled past and numbed present.

Kathryn Green, drama student, University of Exeter:

Triangle's Work In Times of War has inspired me greatly within my Drama degree at Exeter University. I was enthused by the portrayal of such exciting, immersive and original theatrical events; so much so that I decided to write my final 6000 word essay on it, to conclude my academic education. I think the DVD demonstrates techniques that many (including myself) would not be aware of if it wasn't for its creation.

Dr Kerrie Schaefer, Senior Lecturer in Drama, University of Exeter:

When I watched the DVD by Triangle I thought the work displayed was first rate but more than that it showed a real development in the field of Applied Theatre. The work is educationally oriented AND it is also curious and pleasurable and provocative (not at all didactic). It pioneers immersive performance techniques in museum/heritage/historical settings and is therefore at the forefront of a strand of Applied Theatre work – one of the most exciting ones, I believe. Immersing children in 'history' as Triangle does provokes their sense of wonder and curiosity and offers them moments of pleasure as well as moments of discomfort in which they really have to interrogate the fundamentals of identity, community, belief and belonging.

It is incredibly important to have this material to hand to show to Drama students. They see the latest techniques in Applied Theatre and Performance and begin to understand not only how to do it but where to place it. The DVD did provoke a lot of discussion and for some students it was a revelation, and they have decided to work in or further study that aspect of Applied Theatre work.

Peter Groves, BA Performing Arts Course Leader, Brooksby Melton College:

The DVD offers a clear example of how Triangle Theatre's Immersive approach to Museum Theatre works in practice. It is therefore a valuable educational tool and sets out a clear model (by example) for using drama and performance in a Museum or other historical setting.

Triangle's immersive approach to Museum Theatre grounds itself clearly in the historical context. In the DVD, the students are using real World War II objects, dressing in genuine period clothing, responding to sounds from the era (e.g. swing music and air raid sirens) and have the chance to perform the physical actions carried out at this time (for example working factory machinery).

What makes this approach particularly powerful is the way in which all the students become increasingly, imaginatively engaged in the emotional and mental world that all these objects and experiences work together to generate. Triangle's workshops continue to drive the students towards the experiential, rather than falling back on the more straightforward and safer option of keeping the challenging and disturbing realities of living in a country at war at a comfortable, rational distance. They therefore offer an experience that is both historically grounded but also one that employs play and the drive for emotional truth. This is Museum Theatre where the participants (rather than just the actors) are able to explore in a genuinely open and creative dramatic space.

Carran Waterfield has recently worked with our Year 3 degree students on a performance that engaged with Shakespeare's Macbeth in an experimental and radical way and I was able to witness her approach to theatre making at

first hand. This resulted in a powerful event that presented the audience with a wealth of striking visual images and a complexity of perspectives and imaginative responses to the text.

Watching this DVD of her work with school children I was intrigued to see how a similar approach to drama and performance informs both her theatre making process and her Museum Theatre workshops. In both, the performer/student partakes in a range of valuable learning experiences that include strong emotional engagement with the subject matter and open and complex play in an immersive and focused space.

Polly Williams, PhD student, Department of Performance and Cultural Industries, University of Leeds:

I am sure that your way of working with notions of the past and what is real in performance have made their way into my PhD where I consider things like museums and mimetic realism. I also remember the launch quite vividly particularly when we were coerced into walking around with flags etc. This compulsory element reminds me of the underground tour that I have been writing about at the National Coal Mining Museum. I have found your museum work generally really interesting and a valuable counterpart (or antidote) to much museum performance.

Samantha Overton, MA student in Contemporary Performance Practice, University of Kent:

Triangle's Immersive Museum Theatre frames performed interactions with the help of a thoroughly (and sometimes absurdly) justified character. This enables them to create a means of controlling and moving their audience in a very ambitious scenario without breaking the immersive performance. They use history through modeling and transforming it to work with the present.

Professor Tony Jackson, Emeritus Professor of Educational Theatre, School of Arts, Histories and Cultures, University of Manchester:

It really is a wonderful treasure trove of archive material, records of performances and processes – a valuable resource. And you've managed to capture some brilliant examples of kids genuinely immersed in settings and situations that mirror, if they don't replicate, experiences kids would have been through in and after the Blitz. Two of the films stand out for me – the W&W Home Front Training Camp and Coventry Kids in the Blitz. The first takes you in to the training-for-war activities, not only through the filmed extracts from particular moments in the 2 day immersion, but, invaluable, through the post-event reflections of the kids themselves, reinforced and amplified by the comments of Robin as museum learning officer. It was helpful to get his introductory comments on the interplay of drama/role-play, curriculum benefits and ways in which kids were able to relate directly to objects from the museum's collections; also his evident delight in how well the whole had come together to make the experience 'unforgettable'. It was clear from the kids themselves – in the way they played out the events in situ and in their reflective comments later – how powerful the experience had been. Numerous comments underlined the double consciousness this kind of work can generate: to be able to believe and not believe at the same time (Boal's metaxis), to know it's a game and to find it genuinely scary and challenging. The second film showed us a quite different angle, this time an immersive event that took the kids even further out of their comfort zones, no longer in museum or classroom but on buses, in the ruins of the cathedral, an evacuation centre, etc. Here we get much more of an 'as it happens' insight into the intensity (and fun) of going through a version of what many must have experienced during the bombing, if in concentrated form. The kids are clearly involved, and to an extraordinary degree. There was a narrative structure underpinning the improvised unfolding of the events that enabled the kids still to be themselves and to retain enough emotional distance from the events to be able to reflect once the drama was over. That in my view is the key to the effectiveness of this kind of work: to get kids inside the events but also to generate the ability, the need, to reflect afterwards. It's a rare but powerful combination.

Antony Loveland, Head of Library Services, Central School of Speech and Drama:

My purpose in obtaining a copy was to develop the library's collection of examples of contemporary performance by British theatre companies. They can be pretty hard to come by, so when they do become available we try and obtain them.

Season Butler, Live Art Development Agency:

We acquired the DVD for our Study Room collection, and while we don't track how the materials are used or view (and we are a research-only facility so we do not lend materials), we are sure that it is a valuable part of our collection.

Dr Amy Staniforth, Collections Director, Centre for Performance Studies, Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies, Aberystwyth University:

*I can say that having upped our undergraduate and postgraduate users we are going to try to extend the teaching visits we host next year and I suspect that at the same time we will try to raise the profile of material like Joshua Sofaer's *The Many Headed Monster* and Adrian Heathfield's *Shattered Anatomies*; and Triangle's *Work in Times of War* will prove a resource in the teaching and learning activities we plan to initiate within the department and with organisations locally.*

Robin Johnson, Cultural Curator, Arc School (formerly Head of Learning, Herbert Museum and Art Gallery, Coventry):

This extremely comprehensive resource provides an account and record of four years of innovative, ground breaking and high quality museum theatre work undertaken by Triangle, in collaboration with the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, and other partners.

I think of particular interest were the commentaries by teachers and museum professionals which gave an even more detailed analysis of the methods, techniques and approaches of the work and highlighted the major successes of the work, alongside areas for improvement (of which there were not many!).

The DVD-ROM was distributed to project partners, schools and museum professionals as well as being available from the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum shop. I hope to use the DVD in my new role encouraging cultural entitlement, creative learning and curriculum enhancement with a special needs school.

In my view its long-term value will be as a training tool, particularly for museum education professionals and museum theatre practitioners. Triangle and immersive museum theatre are now by-words for excellence in this area; it was my pleasure and privilege to be involved.