

Institution: University of Reading
Unit of Assessment: 35 Film, Theatre and Television
Title of case study: Promoting understanding of diasporic culture, heritage and identity
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Through providing the first English translations of several Polish plays, which she has published and staged, and through devising performances based on family interviews about Polish deportation during World War II, the University of Reading's Dr Teresa Murjas (Lecturer 2002-) has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) provided educational resources to UK Polish and other schoolchildren b) made aspects of Polish culture and history accessible to Anglophone audiences for the first time, and c) in partnership with the main centre for the UK Polish diaspora, POSK, has enriched the cultural heritage of both specific diasporic and general audiences. <p>In addition, Murjas' methodology has influenced Dr Ashley Thorpe (University of Reading Lecturer 2004-2013) in his practice-as-research production, which engaged the Chinese-British community in a re-evaluation of aspects of their cultural heritage. Thorpe's production continued his ongoing embodied research which disseminates Chinese performance traditions to UK based Chinese and wider communities.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Murjas is the UK-born daughter of post-World War II Polish refugees. Since joining the University of Reading's Department of Film, Theatre and Television (FTT) in 2002, Murjas's research into Polish and UK Polish culture, history and identity has focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) translations into English of Polish plays from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, which provide insights into the historical upheavals of that era, and which are published with accompanying contextual and critical research resources and are accessible to a general as well as an academic readership; and b) public performances of her translations and of original devised work which she directs and produces. These 'practice-as-research' performances are an integral part of Murjas's research project, enabling her to test the translations, and explore critical ideas and theatrical form through practice. <p>Murjas's model of engaging specific diasporic and wider communities through research productions led to further impact through the adaptation of her methodology by Thorpe in his research production of a Chinese-British play, <i>Lady Precious Stream</i> (2011). Since 2005, Thorpe has collaborated with Murjas on her research productions.</p> <p>Seven of Murjas's translations have been published in collections within the REF period (Murjas 2009 and 2013), and an earlier translation of Gabriela Zapolska, <i>The Morality of Mrs Dulka</i>, was published in 2007. Her published translations draw on substantial archival and historical research into Poland at the turn of the twentieth century, when it was partitioned by Russia, Prussia and Austro-Hungary, and they include textual analyses, documentation and analysis of her practice-as-research productions: her collection, <i>Invisible Country: Four Fin-de-Siècle Polish Plays</i> (2013) is particularly pioneering in its interspersing of commentary on and images from her staging of Perzyski's <i>Ashanti</i> with the text of the translation. The introductions to the published texts include reflections on the particular cultural inheritances of different generations of the UK Polish-British community. These are informed by research amongst the community, including their response to the translations and productions, and are geared to enhancing discussion and debate about identities and legacies.</p> <p>Supported by a long-standing tradition of practice-as-research within FTT, including the funding of an annual research production, Murjas's staging of her translations ensure that the texts achieve maximum theatrical and cultural impact amongst her target readers and audiences, and constitute a major vehicle for public engagement.</p> <p>During the REF period, Murjas has expanded her practice-led research into devised performance centred on previously under-researched moments of twentieth century Polish diasporic history. She staged an interdisciplinary devised piece, <i>Surviving Objects</i>, in June 2013 at the Minghella</p>

Building, University of Reading, with a series of post-show discussions. *Surviving Objects* focuses on Soviet deportations from Eastern Poland in 1940/1, and, specifically, on Murjas family history. The British-Polish diasporic community includes a significant number of survivors of this atrocity and their descendants, several of whom attended the production. *Surviving Objects*, told from a survivor's perspective, articulates this little known aspect of World War II history in theatrical form for the first time.

Independently, Thorpe has been studying traditional Chinese theatre through archival, textual and practical modes of research, disseminated through publication and workshops/ conferences for both British Chinese communities, schoolchildren and the general public. Inspired by Murjas's model, he staged a practice-as-research production of *Lady Precious Stream*, a new production of a play written by a Chinese immigrant playwright in English in the 1930's for a Western audience. As with Murjas's productions, *Lady Precious Stream* was staged as the unit's annual research production in 2011, and then transferred to a diaspora community centre, the Islington Chinese Association, London.

3. References to the research

Murjas's selected outputs below, the performance or the published translation or both, were either submitted to RAE 2008 or have been submitted to REF 2014. As such, all have been internally and externally assessed as being of high quality (2* or above).

1. Murjas, T. (Trans. and Dir.), *The Morality of Mrs. Dulaska* by Gabriela Zapolska. Staged Myra McCulloch Theatre, University of Reading (3-6 December, 2003, 4 public performances) and POSK Theatre, London (17-19 January 2004, 4 public performances). Published in Murjas, T. (Trans and Ed.) *The Morality of Mrs. Dulaska* by Gabriela Zapolska, Bristol/Chicago: Intellect, 2007. The published translation was submitted to RAE 2008.
2. Murjas, T. (Trans. and Dir.), *Four of Them* by Gabriela Zapolska. Staged Myra McCulloch Theatre, University of Reading (6-9 December 2006, 4 public performances) and POSK Theatre, London (15-17 January 2006, 4 public performances). This production was invited to the Łódź International Academic Theatre Festival (17 - 18 April), indicating international significance of the research. The performance was submitted to RAE 2008 as a practice-as-research output.
3. Murjas, T. (Trans. and Dir.) *The Mistress / Miss Malicewska* by Gabriela Zapolska. Staged Myra McCulloch Theatre, University of Reading (5-8 December 2008, 4 public performances) and at POSK Theatre, London, on 25-27th January 2009, 4 public performances). Published in Murjas, T. (Trans. and Ed.) *Zapolska's Women: Three Plays by Gabriela Zapolska*, Bristol/Chicago: Intellect, 2009. The performance was submitted to RAE 2008 as supporting material for 2 above, and the published collection of translations has been submitted to REF 2014.
4. Murjas, T. (Trans. and Dir.) *Ashanti* by Włodzimierz Perzyński. Staged at POSK Theatre, London (22-24 January 2010, 4 public performances) and at Reading 27 -31 January 2010 (5 public performances). Published in Murjas, T. (Trans. and Ed.) *Invisible Country: Four Fin-de-Siècle Polish Plays*, Bristol/Chicago: Intellect, 2012. Both submitted to REF 2014.
5. Murjas, T. (Devised and Dir.) *Surviving Objects*. Staged at the Bulmershe Theatre, Minghella Building, University of Reading, 6-8 December 2012 (4 public performances) and 19-22 June 2013 (6 public performances). Submitted to REF 2014 as a practice-as-research output.
6. Thorpe, Ashley (Dir.), *Lady Precious Stream* by S. I. Hsiung, research production, December 2011, Bulmershe Theatre, University of Reading and Islington Chinese Association, London (6 public performances in total). This drew on Thorpe's embodied research into Asian theatre forms since 1999, and published outputs such as the below.
7. Thorpe, Ashley, *The Role of the Chou ('Clown') in Traditional Chinese Drama* (Lewiston N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007). Externally assessed by FTT for RAE 2008 as 2* or above.

4. Details of the impact

Murjas has developed a distinctive practice-led, community-based methodology that has engaged her own diasporic Polish-British community, which is now the second largest immigrant community in the UK, in a sustained dialogue, through her collaboration with the Polish Cultural Centre, London (POSK), the UK national centre for the promotion and dissemination of Polish culture

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(<http://www.posk.org/>). Informing and influencing the teaching of Polish Saturday Schools also falls under POSK's remit. She has also engaged with other networks of the British Polish diaspora such as the Kresy-Siberia Reference Centre (<http://www.kresy-siberia.com>).

One of the main beneficiaries of Murjas's research is the Polish-British community. The Polish community in Reading has been estimated at around 10,000 (<http://www.polish-migrants.co.uk/polish-assimilation-in-the-uk.html>). In the pre-REF period she built up a sustained relationship with the Polish-British community in Reading and in London and, through POSK, with the nation-wide network of Polish Saturday Schools (<http://www.polskamacierz.org>), where schoolchildren learn Polish language and culture and can study for Polish A levels and GCSEs.

In turn, Thorpe has also built up a sustained relationship with the London Jing-Kun Opera Association - the only Chinese theatre troupe to be permanently based in the UK (http://www.londonjingkunopera.co.uk/index_flash.htm). This practice-based research has, through a sustained programme of performances across the UK over a ten-year period, including *Lady Precious Stream*, contributed significantly to non-academic/Chinese diasporic audiences' interaction with Chinese performance.

Evidence of Impact

Education:

i) Murjas's research has continued to provide educational and cultural resources to the Polish-British community in the UK throughout the REF period. Students from Polish Saturday Schools across the UK attended her research productions in Reading and London and her research publications are on their syllabus. These students number around 2,500 each year, at 122 schools. (<http://tinyurl.com/k3wd68z>). Her translation of *The Morality of Mrs Dulska* is used to support A-Level study of this text, as the only English text with sustained contextual analysis of the work. The Report on the 2010 AQA GCE Polish Examination states that "There were very many essays on *Moralność Pani Dulskiej [The Morality of Mrs Dulska]*" and that it "was the most often discussed". Murjas' analysis of the work is studied alongside the original Polish text as a learning and teaching resource to assist A-level learning on this text.

ii) Thorpe's practice-as-research with the London Jing Kun Opera Association has led to performances of traditional Chinese theatre for non-academic audiences, including the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 31 January 2011, Firth Hall, Sheffield, 4 May 2010, Waterfront Theatre, Belfast, 19 June 2009, and Northern Music Centre, Carlisle, 25 January 2008. Several of these programmes included workshops on Chinese theatre with school children.

Cultural enrichment and enhanced access to cultural heritage:

i) Over the REF period, Murjas's productions in Reading and London have attracted audiences of around 1000 (23 public performances in total with approx. 50 attendees per performance). Media and web coverage have extended the reach of these productions.

Documentation and discussion of the performance of *Miss Malicewska* and its impact on UK Polish diasporic community by CTV company TV Polonia (aimed at the global Polish diaspora) stating its significance as the first English translation of the play (April 2008). An extract from the performance is still available on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1h5VJy3rJI> (over 500 views).

The Polish Weekly (which is the weekend paper under the banner of *The Polish Daily*) commented about Murjas's production of *Ashanti*: 'This effort is valued all the more by Polish communities, because it is connected with the translation and production of Polish dramatic texts into English... Praise and acknowledgement should perhaps above all be given to the translator and director, thanks to whom English readers and theatre goers can get to know Polish art and culture, along with the Polish community'. (31st January 2010)

ii) Thorpe's research production of *Lady Precious Stream* was the subject of a seven-minute 'in focus' news report for the Chinese News Channel transmitted across Europe (7th January 2012) and included interviews with the playwright's family. A public talk about the project, held at SOAS, was covered by the UK newspaper *China Daily* (9th November 2012). This media interest indicates substantial renewed interest in the play amongst the Chinese and Chinese-British communities produced by the production.

Testimony from audiences

Feedback from Murjas's research production, *Surviving Objects* (June 2013), includes audience questionnaires and a film of a post-show discussion involving UK-based survivors of the Soviet deportations from Poland and their families. They discuss the personal significance of the performance, and its importance in relation to diasporic cultural memory and therapeutic self-expression. The international Kresy-Siberia Foundation, which supports survivors, disseminates their stories and manages an extensive website that acts as a repository for survivor testimonies, advertised the performance and the director took part in the post-show discussion. Feedback forms from other non-academic audience members, and interviews with them, attest to a previous lack of awareness of this strand of Polish diasporic and British colonial history, and to a renewed interest in memory and history. Comments from members of the general public included the following:

'Didn't know about Polish camps in S. Africa during WWII i.e. that were placed there... may get out old items with relatives'.

'a subject I know very little about... I have often thought of the possibility of incorporating memory into my work; the seemingly insignificant moments that have an impact'.

'It has added to my knowledge of my own family history'.

'It will affect my work at school on the war in history' (school pupil).

Extract from email 26 June 2013 (available upon request): 'Being surrounded by the lived experience of the child – and the adult remembering childhood- has got inside me and deepened my understanding of the subject in a 'felt sense'... It has also inspired me to begin a little project memorialising a relative's memories of World War II.'

The effect on the audience has been in enriching their emotional understanding of a cultural experience, whether their own culture, or that of others.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact *Contact details provided

1. Lecturer in Polish Studies, University of Glasgow: spoke about Murjas' research at the Polish Embassy, to a diverse non-academic audience, and has seen numerous research performances*.
2. Head teacher of Polish Saturday School: has brought Polish school pupils to a number of performances of Zapolska's plays, and also Perzynski's *Ashanti**.
3. Director and Secretary-Treasurer of Kresy-Siberia: Attended performance of *Surviving Objects* and can corroborate significance and impact of the event in relation to the international Polish diaspora*.
4. Administrator at POSK (Polish Social and Cultural Centre): Can corroborate impact of POSK performances in relation to UK Polish Education*.
5. Chairwoman, Islington Chinese Association: can corroborate the impact of the production of *Lady Precious Stream* from the perspective of the Chinese diaspora. She can also comment in more detail on the activities of the London Jing Kun Opera Association and the workshops attended by schoolchildren*.
6. AQA Polish AS and A Level Specification <http://filestore.aqa.org.uk/subjects/AQA-2685-W-SP.PDF> and exam report 2010 <http://filestore.aqa.org.uk/subjects/AQA-PLSH2-W-WRE-JUN10.PDF> p.6 describing the importance of *The Morality of Mrs. Dulaska* as a literary text.
7. Reviews and media coverage are evidence of the interest in Murjas's and Thorpe's productions among each distinct diasporic community and the cultural enrichment they have provided:
 - a) Review of Murjas's *Zapolska's Women* in *Tydzien Polski* (12/2009)
 - b) Review of *Invisible Country* in *The Polish American Journal* (June 2013) (http://www.polamjournal.com/News/Book_Reviews/book_reviews.html).
8. Feedback forms from *Surviving Objects* June 2013 attesting to the significance of the production available upon request.