

Impact case study (REF3b)

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| <p>Institution: University of Worcester</p> |
| <p>Unit of Assessment: 35 - Music, Drama, Dance & Performing Arts</p> |
| <p>Title of case study: Promoting and providing public access to contemporary performance practice and its use of digital technology to explore ‘presence’, ‘non-performance’ and performing intimacy.</p> |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study focuses on impact derived from Ildiko Rippel’s practice-based research in contemporary performance, resulting in the presentation of <i>Blueprint</i> (2012), a performance involving interaction of performers with their mothers, who are present within the work via real-time video links. <i>Blueprint</i> continues to be performed at festivals and in venues in the UK. Impact, to date, has comprised: opportunities for public engagement with contemporary performance practice and furtherance of public understanding of it; the work’s contribution to public performance programming in the UK; its contribution to development of contemporary theatre practices through experience and discussion of it amongst theatre/performance practitioners, promoters and critics; contribution to the vibrancy of publicly available contemporary arts culture in the UK.</p> |
| <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research built on Rippel’s and Rosie Garton’s 2011 collaboration with Nottingham University’s Centre for Genetics to examine genetic heritage through performance. It set out to contribute to contemporary examination of non-performance in theatre by intervening in debates about authentic presence and theatricality in performance, asking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can theatre utilise the performers’ immediate family as “non-performers” to create moments of intimate and authentic presence, and how might those moments be identified and understood? <p>Conducted between February and May 2012 through performance exploration, workshops and work-in-progress events, the research was led by Rippel while a Lecturer at the University of Worcester, in collaboration with Garton (Co-director/founder, with Rippel, of performance company, <i>Zoo Indigo</i>) and performers Suzy Gunn and Olwen Davies. The researchers ran regular performance workshops involving the live video presence of the performers’ mothers to explore the relationship of performed and unperformed presence in theatre. Research tasks included live and unplanned conversations between mothers and daughters via video, the fulfilling of mundane, everyday activities by mothers whilst being filmed, and requests to the mothers to “perform” pre-planned ‘rehearsable elements’ (eg singing a song, narrating an anecdote). The use of improvised material was tested as a means of enhancing a sense of unpredictability and liveness. The responses of performers and non-performers to both unplanned events and to performing the rehearsable elements were compared. (‘Performers’ denote those with formal performance training and ‘non-performers’ those without formal training – ie the mothers and, subsequently, invited audience members/spectators).</p> <p>Work-in-progress events were devised as ‘unplanned encounters’ with live audiences, with the objective of creating impulsive and ‘authentic’ reactions able to disrupt the theatrical framework. A first event at Lakeside Arts Centre in Nottingham was followed by a post-show discussion to understand audience members’ experiences of “non-performance” in their roles as audience and spectators of the mothers, and to explore the notion of ‘real life’ in an arena of pretence (the theatre). Subsequent development involved a second work-in-progress showing at the Brighton Fringe, exploring how the performers might encourage increased audience participation.</p> <p>In July 2012 a performance extract of the resultant work, <i>Blueprint</i>, was presented at the University of Worcester’s interdisciplinary conference <i>a place, a space</i>. The extract was selected specifically to explore the performative possibilities of creating a sense of ‘real’ place in performance via the live video presence of non-performers in their private spaces.</p> <p>Throughout the research, Rippel worked with close family members as a strategy for creating</p> |

intimacy, informed by relevant extant strategies and performance paradigms. This involved intensive study of current practice in which performers have worked with parents: Michael Pinchbeck (*The post show party show*, 2009), Martin Nachbar (*Repeater*, 2007), and German theatre company SheShePop (*TESTAMENT*, 2010). Rippel also paid attention to work exploring the spectator as a non-performer, specifically various works by Gob Squad.

In light of the above, and drawing on theories of virtual presence and posthumanism, especially Hayles' seminal *How we Became Posthuman* (1999), the research considered the potential of the digital, visual presence of unaware 'non-performers' in remote locations to produce an 'authentic', 'unaffected' live presence within the performance. It also drew on theories of non-representational presence in performance, specifically analysing the matrix of Kirby's *From Acting to Non-acting* (1972) and Derrida's theories on the possibilities of non-representation in performance. At the core of the research, from the insights of which *Blueprint* derives, was practice-based negotiation of different states of unperformed presence and of the realities and mythologies surrounding concepts of 'authentic presence'. *Blueprint* and Rippel's discussions of it have thus sought to make a distinctive contribution to the discourse on 'liveness' developed by theorists including Auslander and Phelan, and Feral's investigation of theatrical presences.

3. References to the research

***Blueprint* work-in-progress presentations**

28.4.2012, Lakeside Arts Centre, University of Nottingham

25-26.4.2012, Nightingale Theatre, Brighton

***Blueprint* by Zoo Indigo, performances**

12.10.2012, Derby Theatre. www.derbytheatre.co.uk

2.11.2012, Lantern Theatre, Sheffield. www.lanterntheatre.org.uk

17.11.2012, Flint Festival, Salisbury Arts Centre.
http://www.twodestinationlanguage.com/?page_id=326

27.2.2013, University of Hull, Scarborough. <http://campusinfo.scar.hull.ac.uk/on-the-edge/>

Conference presentations

21.06.2012, 'Blueprint/Fragments', *a place, a space*, University of Worcester

5.06.2013, 'Over to you Mum' *The Body in Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Performance* conference, De Montfort University, Leicester

Awards

In April 2012, Rippel and Garton were awarded an Arts Council England Grant of £9,985 to assist development and touring of *Blueprint*. In-kind support, with an estimated value of £2,000 was provided by De Montfort University and Lakeside Arts, University of Nottingham, in the form of rehearsal space and technical support.

4. Details of the impact

The research resulted in creation of the performance work *Blueprint* which has since been staged at, and contributed to the programmes of, a number of UK theatres and performance venues and to nationally and internationally respected festivals of performance. *Blueprint* has provided public access to theatre that, through its approach to working with non-performers, is recognised to have created an original experience of parental relationships in performance.

In the REF period, there were eight public presentations of the work, in seven different venues, collectively attracting audiences of some 400. The work was publicly marketed by promoters for its exploration of relationships between mothers and daughters and its incorporation of non-

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performers via video. This attracted audiences with little or no previous knowledge of experimental performance and contemporary theatre; in consequence, *Blueprint* has not only introduced new audiences to contemporary performance but also to the contemporary performance programmes of some of the venues in which it has been staged. By and large, these venues cater for regional audiences whose access to, and awareness of, new work is otherwise highly limited.

Additionally, however, *Blueprint*'s incorporation within significant festivals (Brighton Fringe; Flint Festival) engaged audiences with an existing interest in contemporary performance in some of the key debates currently informing theatre and live work. It can also, therefore, be seen to have contributed to the thinking and/or practices of informed, non academic audiences: other theatre makers; performance promoters and programmers; students of drama and performance; critics; Arts Council England officers and so on. Because these festivals have an international audience base, and their programming is international, *Blueprint* also supported the international standing and awareness of emerging practice in the UK. An after-show talk at the Flint Festival for example was attended by other artists performing at the festival as well as regular visitors to the theatre. *Blueprint* was discussed and commented on positively with regard to its originality. Practitioners expressed interest in the exploration of non-performance in relation to, and development of, their own practices.

At the Lakeside Arts Centre, Nottingham an after show talk was attended by a diverse mix of the general public, performance practitioners, an Arts Council England officer, and researchers from the Centre for Genetics at the University of Nottingham with whom Rippel and Garton had previously collaborated (see above).

Performances of *Blueprint* have been promoted by means of arts centre and festival programme brochures, dedicated flyers, posters, face book and other social media sites, You Tube videos and Zoo Indigo's (<http://www.zoindigo.co.uk>), arts centres' and festival websites. Public awareness of the work and engagement with it, by these means, may be seen to have extended to significantly greater numbers than the 400 who came into contact with it first-hand.

Public performances of *Blueprint*

Lakeside Arts Centre, Nottingham (28/4/12)

<http://www.lakesidearts.org.uk/Drama/ViewEvent.html?e=2024&c=4&d=0>

Nightingale Theatre, Brighton, as part of Brighton Fringe during the 2012 Brighton Festival (25-6/4/12) <http://www.nightingaletheatre.co.uk/index.php/whats-on/been-and-gone>

Derby Theatre, Derby (12/10/12) www.derbytheatre.co.uk

The Lantern Theatre, Sheffield (2/11/12) www.lanterntheatre.org.uk

Flint Festival, Salisbury Arts Centre (17/11/12)

http://www.twodestinationlanguage.com/?page_id=326

University of Hull, 'On the Edge' PS2, Scarborough (27/2/13) <http://campusinfo.scar.hull.ac.uk/on-the-edge/>.

Forthcoming (but with invitations received in the period under review):

Nuffield Theatre. LICA, Lancaster University (22/10/13) <https://www.liveatlica.org/home>

Pace Building, De Montfort University, Leicester (7/11/13)

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

http://www.twodestinationlanguage.com/?page_id=326

This Flint Festival documentary video showcases sections of *Blueprint*; it documents the active engagement of its audience as non-performers, as well as the live video presence of the mothers

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as non-performers. It also provides documentary information on the artists whose work the Festival presented, who experienced *Blueprint* first hand.

http://www.uwe.ac.uk/sca/research/place/river_news12.htm

A report on the *a place, a space* conference held at the University of Worcester, written by PhD student Mel Shearsmith for the PLaCE (Place Location Context and Environment) research group, based at UWE. This report mentions *Blueprint* and the role of the audience and the mothers as non-performers.

<http://www.thisisnottingham.co.uk/Review-Lakeside-Arts-Centre-Alan-Geary/story-15950833-detail/story.html>

A review from the Nottingham Evening Post. The review evidences *Blueprint's* accessibility through its use of humour and highlights some aspects of audience interaction.

<http://www.zoindigo.co.uk/zoo-performance-3/blueprint/review-1>

Review by Nottingham based writer Wayne Burrows, published in NVA (Nottingham Visual Arts) Magazine.

Individual users/beneficiaries

Shona Powell, Director, Lake Side Arts Centre, Nottingham (contribution of *Blueprint* to public programming of contemporary performance at Lake Side Arts Centre and to audience engagement with contemporary performance)

Katherina Radeva and Alister Lownie, Programmers, Flint Festival, Salisbury (contribution to public programming of contemporary performance in the UK; role of *Blueprint* in relation to the remit of Flint Festival; public and professional engagement with, and reaction to *Blueprint* and its contribution to professional discourse and developments in contemporary performance).