

<p>Institution:</p> <p>University of Leeds</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment:</p> <p>D34 (Art)</p>
<p>Title of case study:</p> <p>Case Study 3: Performing History, Engendering Democracy: public outreach, educational and socio-economic development through a new international staging of <i>The Terrible but Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia</i></p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This project fused Leeds research, the expertise of France's Théâtre du Soleil and the enthusiasm of Cambodian actors to create a series of international stagings of Hélène Cixous's <i>Terrible But Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk</i>, an epic play about the Khmer Rouge genocide originally staged by Ariane Mnouchkine's Théâtre du Soleil in 1985.</p> <p>Performances between 2010 and 2013 inspired widespread public discussion – notably in Cambodia – on factors leading to genocide, while demonstrating theatre's potential to foster political awareness. Its inclusion in the French school curriculum, and the creation of a vast publicly-accessible archive have been further impacts.</p> <p>For the 32 actors who took part, the experience was life-changing.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The project is jointly founded on the work of two scholars, both world-leaders in their field. Eric Prenowitz is an expert of the work of Hélène Cixous, one of the most important contemporary French writers; Ashley Thompson is renowned for her expertise on Cambodian cultural history. Prenowitz has been a Lecturer in the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds since 2001, Thompson since 2005.</p> <p>The project combines Prenowitz's research on Cixous's theatre, issues of translation of her texts, as well as her hallmark weaving of poetics and politics (3,4,5), with Thompson's work on Cambodian performance and history (6).</p> <p>Research specifically underpinning the production began in 2003 with Prenowitz's publication of <i>The Selected Plays of Hélène Cixous</i> (5). This included an interview with Cixous by Prenowitz touching on local-global metaphors in the play and its relevance to other epic tragedies. In 2006, an article by Thompson explored the implications of a Cambodian-language staging of the play in the context of the imminent International Tribunal for Khmer Rouge Crimes (2). The questions raised in these publications framed the project from the outset for the theatrical professionals, and continue to frame public debate inspired by the production.</p> <p>In 2007 Thompson and Prenowitz obtained World University Network funding for research in conjunction with exploratory theatrical work with French and Cambodian partners. Research was embedded throughout the production process, with further funding from The Asian Cultural Council and The British Academy (7).</p> <p>Their combined research expertise was the key to bringing together the Théâtre du Soleil, Cambodia's Phare Ponleu Selpak Arts and Social Services Centre and Cixous, to work on a groundbreaking Cambodian-language production.</p> <p>The production process was organised around bi-annual theatrical and historical workshops, held from 2007-13 in Cambodia, lasting between two weeks and two months. The first three years of workshops were grounded in literary, linguistic, ethnographic and historical research by Prenowitz and Thompson who led textual analyses of the 416-page play with the actors and directors. Through participant-observation of theatrical workshops, the researchers identified points of miscomprehension and culturally-bound issues of translation (a-1).</p> <p>On this basis, for example, work was developed with the actors on specific literary and historical allusions and metaphorical usage. Thompson undertook archival research into Cambodian language use and dress from the 1940s-1980s, drawing largely on Phnom Penh's Bophana Audio-Visual archive to produce materials for formal history classes she taught to the actors. Thompson also worked with Cixous and the translator on the adaptation of the play for the Cambodian production. Thompson is named 'Historical and Linguistic Director' in the production programme and promotional materials (a-2).</p> <p>Further research undertaken by Prenowitz and Thompson during the rehearsal period led to a joint</p>

publication analyzing the intercultural and intergenerational production process itself in the context of global genocide commemoration campaigns promoting the spread of democracy (1).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- (1) Eric Prenowitz, Ashley Thompson, 'Cambodia's Trials: Theatre, Justice and History Unfinished' in Cohen, M, Noszlopy, L (eds.) *Contemporary Southeast Asian Performance: Transnational Perspectives*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010): 79-106. [entered for REF2013] (A summary of this research in French appears in Thompson and Prenowitz, 'Un théâtre épique non-aligné' in *art absolument*, 2011.)
- (2) Ashley Thompson, 'Terrible but Unfinished: Hélène Cixous' Stories of History,' *New Literary History*, Special Volume 'Hélène Cixous: When the Word is a Stage', Winter 2006: 197-215. [highly regarded peer-reviewed journal; article entered for RAE2008]
- (3) Eric Prenowitz, 'Nearly Reading Hélène Cixous: The 'equivocal vocation' of Translation', in M. Diocaretz and M. Segarra (eds.), *Joyful Babel: Translating Hélène Cixous*, Rodopi, 2004: 47-60. [article entered for RAE2008]
- (4) Eric Prenowitz, Dialectics of Another Litter: Found(er)ing Democracy, *Oxford Literary Review*, Special Volume *Reading Cixous Writing*, 24, 2002: 113-129. [highly regarded peer-reviewed journal; article entered for RAE2008]
- (5) Eric Prenowitz, ed., *Selected Plays of Hélène Cixous*, Routledge, 2003 (226 p). (Includes Introduction, 'Modernepic Theatre' by E. Prenowitz; and Interview by E. Prenowitz with H. Cixous, 'On Theatre').
- (6) Ashley Thompson, (co-author with T. Shapiro-Phim), *Dance in Cambodia*, Oxford University Press (Images of Asia Collection), Kuala Lumpur, 1999 (118 p).
- (7) Grants:
 - Worldwide Universities Network grant of £5000 awarded to Prenowitz and Thompson for project entitled *The Terrible but Unfinished Story: Commemorating Genocide*, 2007-8.
 - Asian Cultural Council (New York) grant of \$10,000 awarded to Prenowitz and Thompson for project entitled *The Terrible but Unfinished Story: Commemorating Genocide*, 2010.
 - British Academy Small Grant of £7,480 awarded to Prenowitz and Thompson for project entitled *The Terrible but Unfinished Story: Commemorating Genocide*, 2008-9.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

At Thompson's instigation, a team from the world-renowned Théâtre du Soleil, led by founder Ariane Mnouchkine, began a series of workshops at Phare Ponleu Selpak Arts and Social Services Centre in northwestern Cambodia.

Phare harnesses arts training to social ends, offering shelter, support and training in arts activities to young people from this deprived region. Though some taking part had circus training, few had completed high school; five were illiterate. The project transformed their education, professional expertise and understanding of Cambodia's history, as their comments reveal:

- 'Before beginning...we knew only what our parents...told us about the Khmer Rouge: hunger, forced labour, disappearances, torture.' (*Le Temps* 25.10.2011 (a-3))
- 'Through our acting...we came to understand that the Khmer Rouge nourished an ideal for the country, that they did not represent a monolithic bloc, but that they spiralled...into murderous madness.' (As above)
- 'I want the whole world to understand, to know the history and the culture of my country.' (*Revue XXI*, 'Le Cambodge sur un plateau,' winter 2012 (a-3))

One critic described the project as establishing a 'popular university...under the care of Ashley Thompson, ever ready to mend memories ripped apart' (*Médiapart* 27.10.2011 (a-3)).

Four performances of work-in-progress in Cambodia in 2010-11 drew approximately 1,000 viewers, primarily Cambodian. The show incited debate among those who had lived through the events, and helped the inter-generational retelling of their stories (*Infosud* 28.3.12 (a-3)).

Audience members included NGO workers and Ministry officials, who were acutely conscious of the play's political significance; permission for a run in the capital Phnom Penh was withdrawn.

On the strength of seeing the production, the Director of Lyon's Festival Sens Interdit offered to fund completion of the work and a French tour (a-4). The three-hour production of the First Epoch of the play opened at the festival in October 2011 starting a seven-venue tour of France, including a two-week run at the Cartoucherie, Paris. In France it was seen by 8,606 spectators (a-5).

A two-month tour of the full six-hour play is scheduled for autumn 2013 (in Lisbon, Limoges, Lyon,

Vénissieux, Valence, Toulouse, and at the prestigious Festival d'Automne in Paris).

The Cambodian actors, musicians and technicians were paid by the day during the workshops, and receive salaries for the tours. One returned home to show her mother 'more money than we had ever seen'; she and another actor from the production have been hired by Phare to lead development of new theatrical work; others have been hired as theatre teachers (a-4).

One critic wrote how the project 'transforms destinies' of people 'with backgrounds of destitute poverty.' The article relates how one actress 'subject to the violence of a furious husband finds her liberation in art' and is now 'taking audiences by storm' (*Médiapart* 27.10.11 (a-3)).

The project brought a profound career transformation to Co-Director Georges Bigot. He tells how Leeds research informed aspects of the production: 'when we began to address the exigencies of the text...it was above all Khmer specialist Ashley Thompson...who shored us up.' (*Les Affiches du Grenoble et du Dauphiné* 21.10.2011 (a-3))

The project's impact on public debate in Cambodia was profound. One journalist likened the play's effect to a bomb exploding, adding: 'The troupe takes on political taboos in re-establishing, through a nuanced interpretation of characters...the complexity of the situation.' She cites an actress: 'We know we take a risk in performing it...we decided to not let ourselves fall prey to fear. Because all we are doing is rehabilitating the history of our country.' (*Le Temps* 25.10.2011 (a-3)).

Thompson and Prenowitz participated in numerous post-performance discussions and roundtables held at events commemorating the Cambodian genocide (a-6), including an exhibition opening at the French Cultural Centre, Battambang, 2010 (approximately 200 attendees), where renowned artist-survivor Vann Nath exchanged with high school students on the production's taboo-breaking in contemporary Cambodia. This key question of initial project research (2), as well as that undertaken during the production period (1), examining the play's breadth of historical interpretation up against political limitations placed on contemporary public discourse, proved a recurring discussion topic among Khmer diaspora audience members and the troupe (a-4).

The production had a significant impact on French education, with Thompson acting as consultant on the development of two pedagogical instruments (a-7):

- A 26-page Théâtre du Soleil booklet for highschool teachers taking classes to see the production.
- A 34-page dossier developed by the French Ministry of Education for the 2013 national curriculum for highschool students specialising in Performing Arts, all of whom will visit the production.

In 2012 Phare won two major prizes: a Prince Claus Fund For Culture and Development Award for 'dedicated and inspirational application of culture's capacity to confront and transform trauma' and an EDF Foundation Trophy for the project's 'service of culture and social integration,' the €10,000 prize being invested in the 2013 tour (a-8).

Supported by a French Government grant, a vast publicly-accessible project archive including rehearsal footage, media cuttings, texts... launched online in 2013 (a). The web archive will be transferred to the Bibliothèque nationale de France in 2015, where it will be further developed.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

(a) Project archive: <http://sihanouk-archives-inachevees.org>. The site is bilingual (French/English), however much of the documentation archived on the site is in French.

(a-1) Workshops: <http://sihanouk-archives-inachevees.org/en/the-path/workshops-in-cambodia/>

(a-2) Artistic Team: <http://sihanouk-archives-inachevees.org/en/distribution/>

(a-3) Press Reviews: http://sihanouk-archives-inachevees.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/REVUE-DE-PRESSE_Sihanouk2011_.pdf

(a-4) Audio-visuals: <http://sihanouk-archives-inachevees.org/en/ressources/images/> (See Presentation of the Play for Festival Sens Interdit; Interview with actresses San Marady, Pin Sreybo, Chea Ravy, by Carole Vann; and Trailer of the Second Epoch)

(a-5) Audience numbers: <http://sihanouk-archives-inachevees.org/en/reception-2/453-2/>

(a-6) Associated events: <http://sihanouk-archives-inachevees.org/en/calendar/about-the-project/>

(a-7) Pedagogical dossiers: <http://sihanouk-archives-inachevees.org/en/ressources/bibliography/>

(a-8) Prizes: <http://sihanouk-archives-inachevees.org/en/reception-2/prizes-and-awards/>

All web links listed above were accessed on 19.10.13. The University of Leeds also holds the above documentation, which can be provided upon request.