

**Institution: The University of Edinburgh**

**Unit of Assessment: 28A Modern Languages**

**Title of case study: Censorship in the German Democratic Republic (GDR): Working with the Scottish cultural sector to promote public understanding of artistic production under dictatorship**

### 1. Summary of the impact

Laura Bradley's research on GDR theatre censorship (2006-) enabled the University of Edinburgh to stage *The Stasi are Among Us* at the Glasgow Film Festival (2011). This two-day event increased public understanding of East German culture, showing how artists participated in censorship and how it affected their working lives: 95% of the audience agreed that they had learned more about GDR culture and/or censorship. The event's success led the Glasgow Film Festival's Artistic Director to choose Germany as the country focus for the 2012 Festival. Bradley has collaborated with Theatre Found on events campaigning against present-day censorship in Belarus and Iran, using the recent East German experience to explore control mechanisms and show how they were abolished.

### 2. Underpinning research

While Bradley (appointed Lecturer in German 2005, Senior Lecturer 2011-) initiated her research on GDR theatre censorship in 2003, the most substantial advances were made during the period 2005-13, during her employment at the University of Edinburgh. She published the monograph *Cooperation and Conflict* (3.1) and six peer-reviewed articles on censorship during this period (e.g. 3.2, 3.3, 3.4). The monograph investigates how theatre censorship developed between the construction and fall of the Berlin Wall, how it was practised in six regions and how it affected genres ranging from classical tragedy to contemporary drama. The research draws on primary sources from the German Federal Archive, Stasi Archive, seven regional and city archives, and seven theatres, plus Bradley's interviews with theatre practitioners and censors. The sources include policy documents, internal Party and government correspondence, reports by Stasi informers, prompt books, rehearsal notes, audiovisual recordings and transcripts of post-show discussions with spectators. No one has previously attempted a study of GDR theatre censorship on this scale.

Since 1990, scholars (e.g. Darnton, 1995) have emphasized the need to replace the value judgements typical of the Cold War with a nuanced understanding of censorship as a process of negotiation. Yet most recent publications on GDR performance come from practitioners with a vested interest in presenting theatre as a centre of resistance to the regime. By focusing on high-profile disputes, even academic studies (e.g. Braun, 1995; Baker, 2007) perpetuate the notion that conflict between censors and theatres was the norm. Bradley challenges these assumptions by examining cases with different outcomes, ranging from production bans, through uneasy compromises, to official approval. She explores how theatre practitioners participated in censorship and shows that conflicts ran along multiple lines, within and between Party and state institutions, and within theatres themselves.

*Cooperation and Conflict* also breaks new ground by exploring how the authorities' denial of censorship affected the controls on theatre, the decisions made by officials and the room for manoeuvre open to theatre practitioners. Censorship in the GDR was camouflaged and exercised through a complex web of institutions, and a euphemistic language evolved to describe and justify the system. By denying that censorship was practised, the regime could hold theatre practitioners accountable for productions even though they had been filtered through pre-performance controls. This exposed practitioners to considerable risks, leading some to campaign for the *legalization* of censorship. These findings have implications for our understanding of censorship of all the arts and media in the GDR, not just theatre.

Bradley has continued her research on GDR censorship in a series of peer-reviewed articles. In an article recently published in the leading North American periodical *Theatre Journal*, she investigates the roles that audiences played in GDR theatre censorship. This is an original approach: historians of theatre censorship tend to gesture to audiences only in passing, and Bradley's research demonstrates the range of sources that can be used to examine how audiences were implicated in, and responded to, censorship. The article explores how the GDR authorities deployed audiences in censorship debates and tried to influence reception processes. It then considers how actors sought to control audience response during live performances, before focusing on the roles that spectators played during discussions with theatre practitioners, as evidenced in transcripts of rehearsal and post-show discussions. Bradley has extended her examination of censorship from theatre into poetry, music and film. Her latest publications include an article on new works of art that were produced in protest against the GDR government's ban on *Sputnik* magazine in 1988. These works of art trained their recipients to dissect and subvert GDR media discourse. They testify to the GDR's emerging culture of creative protest, which advertised dissent and lowered resistance to its expression.

### 3. References to the research

#### Monograph:

3.1 Bradley (2010). *Cooperation and Conflict: GDR Theatre Censorship, 1961-1989*. Oxford: OUP (submitted to REF2).

#### Selected articles in peer-reviewed journals:

3.2 Bradley, Laura (2013). 'East German Theatre Censorship: The Role of the Audience', *Theatre Journal*. 65.1: 39-56. [[DOI 10.1353/tj.2013.0032](https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2013.0032)]

3.3 Bradley, Laura (2013). 'Challenging Censorship through Creativity: Responses to the Ban on *Sputnik* in the GDR', *Modern Language Review*. 108.2: 577-97 (submitted to REF2). [[DOI 10.5699/modelangrevi.108.2.0519](https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.108.2.0519)]

3.4 Bradley, Laura (2006). 'GDR Theatre Censorship: A System in Denial', *German Life and Letters*. 59.1: 151-62. [[DOI 10.1111/j.0016-8777.2006.00340.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0016-8777.2006.00340.x)]

#### Evidence of Quality:

3.5 AHRC Research Leave Award for £22.8k (January-April 2009), awarded to Laura Bradley for 'Complicity and Conflict: GDR Theatre Censorship, 1961-1990'. The assessors graded the application A+.

3.6 DEFA-Stiftung Berlin — €3k (2010-11), awarded to Laura Bradley (PI) and Susan Kemp for 'Der Zensur auf der Spur: Rückblick auf die Filmherstellung in der DDR' (project no. 232-2010). The judging panel included German film scholars, practitioners and curators.

### 4. Details of the impact

Laura Bradley provided the research input on East German censorship for *The Stasi Are Among Us*, a two-day event at the Glasgow Film Festival (21-22 February 2011) that was conceived and curated by the University of Edinburgh. Susan Kemp (UoE Film Studies) initiated the project and secured its place in the Festival programme; she then co-organized the event with Bradley and Fiona Rintoul (freelance journalist and novelist). The event included six screenings of films by the directors Thomas Heise, Claus Löser, Hannes Schönemann and Rainer Simon, and readings by the writers Johannes Jansen and Gabriele Stötzer (5.4). It was sponsored by the DEFA-Stiftung, a German foundation dedicated to the promotion of GDR film (€3k); the University of Edinburgh Knowledge Exchange Fund (£4.3k); *Gutter* magazine (sponsorship in kind); and Glasgow Life (£300).

The findings of Bradley's research were crucial for the way in which the event was conceptualised, presented, and run. These findings demanded that the event should present a nuanced view of censorship: the title *The Stasi Are Among Us* was designed to show the insidious nature of censorship and artists' involvement in censorship processes. Bradley chaired a discussion with Schönemann and Simon called "Working Creatively Under Dictatorship", and her research on GDR censorship and Stasi surveillance enabled her to elicit key information from the directors and set their comments in context for a non-specialist audience. Bradley and Kemp also published a 20-page pamphlet featuring an introduction by Kemp, a 1,300-word essay by Bradley on the GDR authorities' denial of censorship and its impact on control of the performing arts, and information prepared by Bradley on the directors' biographies (see 5.4 below). Bradley collated material from the directors' Stasi files for a wall display, and she produced information sheets on the directors and the censorship of their films (5.4). Allison Gardner, the Artistic Director of the Glasgow Film Festival, comments that this material was "a level above" what the Festival would usually provide: the materials gave the audiences "added ownership" of the event and "engaged them in a way that was really important" (5.1). Without Bradley's research input, the Glasgow Film Festival would not have been able to address such a complex topic, in the presence of directors personally affected by Stasi surveillance and harassment.

The Glasgow Film Festival sold 350 tickets to sessions at the event (5.5), and the University's *Stasi Are Among Us* website received 1,648 hits (5.6). The event attracted new visitors to the Film Festival and the venue: 56.4% of respondents to audience questionnaires stated that it was their first ever visit to the Glasgow Film Festival, and 51.3% said that it was their first ever visit to the Centre for Contemporary Arts (5.3). 94.9% said that they had learned more about GDR culture and/or censorship from the event (5.3). Allison Gardner argues that "giving the audience something different that stretched them was a good thing" (5.1). She explains: "bringing the research, the filmmakers and the films together for the public gave another dimension. It gave them an insight into a life that [...] was completely different from their own. And it brought everybody together in a communal space where they could share those ideas, share their lives, share their stories" (5.1). She comments that the audience "asked really engaging questions. They thought about the films and obviously knew a little bit about the history, perhaps from seeing *The Lives of Others* at the Glasgow Film Theatre. But this was something completely different. This was real life, and that was fantastic" (5.1). Responses to the audience questionnaire indicate that viewers were particularly interested in seeing how censorship worked through human interaction and how innocuous the criticisms in the films seem now, and in hearing the directors' personal accounts of their experiences (5.3). One respondent wrote: "It's brilliant to see an event like this at the Glasgow Film Festival — a real privilege to get to see these films and hear from the directors" (5.3). As a result of the event's success, Gardner chose "Welcome to Germany" as the country focus for the 2012 Festival and invited Kemp to organize a strand entitled "Weimarvellous" (5.1).

Following the event, Bradley was invited to collaborate with the Glasgow-based company Theatre Found on two public events campaigning against censorship of the arts. She gave a talk on theatre censorship at *Our Narrowing World*, hosted at the Tron Theatre, Glasgow, during Scottish Refugee Week (22 June 2011). Bradley's talk set out the challenges that theatre poses to censors, as well as the differences between the censorship of theatre, film and literature. It thus set the context for presentations by the Artistic Director of the Belarus Free Theatre and a human rights activist from Iran. Carrie Newman, the Artistic Director of Theatre Found, explains that Bradley's academic input was essential as the company was only just starting to campaign against censorship: "coming from a theatre background, we had a real learning curve [to find out] about the subject matter" (5.2). It was important for the company "to have support from the academic side to be able to deal with questions which we weren't in a position to answer [...]. It aided us and the audience to feel supported" (5.2).

Bradley created a multimedia GDR strand for Theatre Found's three-day follow-up event on censorship at the Forest Café during the Edinburgh Fringe (9-11 August 2011). She prepared an hour-long radio drama on GDR theatre censorship, entitled "To Ban or Not to Ban" and recorded by Theatre Found. The radio drama presented readings from four plays featured in Bradley's monograph, accompanied by readings of censorship reports on the plays and their productions.

Bradley selected and translated this material, and she wrote a commentary that set the extracts in context. Newman explains that this dramatization made the material accessible to the audience: “it really came to life [...] because it was being said and performed by another human being”; “it was dramatised in a manner whereby an audience could make associations and connect with it, and possibly in a more direct way than if they were sitting in the room reading it” (5.2). Bradley also gave a talk entitled “East German Theatre Censorship: The Role of the Audience” and prepared a wall display of poems and songs in which GDR artists challenged censorship. Newman explains that “the use of the audio [performances] and the displays really brought things together: people were able to contemplate them without feeling rushed, and they really took the time for it and were inspired to hear the talk too, so there were different elements that really added to the experience” (5.2). By showing how censorship was dismantled recently in the GDR, Bradley strengthened the political argument for combating censorship in other contexts. This came out clearly when Bradley joined Dr John Bates (University of Glasgow) in leading a Q&A session on film clips of the work of the Belarus Free Theatre.

On 29 September 2011, Bradley delivered a lecture at the National Library of Scotland (NLS) on “The Secret of East German Censorship”, in connection with the NLS exhibition *Banned Books*. The lecture explored why the GDR authorities refused to admit that they practised censorship, and what implications this denial had for East German writers and theatre practitioners; it thus provided a distinctive perspective on censorship that complemented the exhibition. The lecture sold out, with 100 attendees and a waiting list of 20, and the audience survey gave the lecture the top rating of 5, i.e. excellent (5.7). Bradley wrote a short article on artistic responses to the East German ban of the Soviet news digest *Sputnik*, a publication held by the NLS. The article was published in issue 19 of the NLS magazine *Discover* (with a print run of 9,000 copies) to coincide with the exhibition (5.8).

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

The following sources can be supplied by the HEI on request:

- 5.1 The Artistic Director, Glasgow Film Festival. Corroborates statement on the high quality of the Stasi file materials used in the wall display, also on the effectiveness, for the public, of bringing together filmmakers, their films and personal stories (available on video).
- 5.2 The Artistic Director, Theatre Found, Glasgow. Corroborates statement of importance of Bradley’s expertise on censorship and drama for the theatre’s campaign (available on video).
- 5.3 Questionnaires completed by audiences at the Glasgow Film Festival, 2011. Corroborate audience statistics and positive audience reaction to event.
- 5.4 Dossier of materials prepared for the Glasgow Film Festival. Corroborates programme of events and speakers, also Bradley’s creation of materials on GDR censorship for non-academic audiences.
- 5.5 Spreadsheet detailing ticket sales for ‘The Stasi Are Among Us’, compiled by the Glasgow Film Theatre, 29.3.2011 (Excel file). Corroborates no. of tickets sold.
- 5.6 Screen capture of web-use statistics for *The Stasi Are Among Us* site, WordPress.com, 13.8.2013 (PDF file). Corroborates website traffic statistics.
- 5.7 Emails from the NLS Development Officer, 30.9.2011 and 29.11.2012 (PDF file). Corroborate audience’s high ranking of Bradley’s lecture at the NLS.
- 5.8 Issue 19 (summer 2011) of NLS magazine *Discover*, p. 15, p. 19. Corroborates Bradley’s contribution to the NLS magazine *Discover* and to the programme of NLS talks.