Conclusion: Affective Practice

My final example returns us to the issues of aesthetics, ethics, affect and evaluation, as well as to the principles of applying performance, and draws on my own experience. During 2005 I was involved in an intergenerational project, a collaboration between Canterbury Museum, Year 6 primary school pupils from four local schools, and the Departments of Drama and Theatre Studies and Electronics at the University of Kent. This was a C&T-style Living Newspaper project (the company trained the university students during a residency), focusing on the 1942 Canterbury Blitz.

The project involved a range of elements whereby the final performance (which took the form of an interactive installation) was only one component of what was effectively a huge living archive. Four groups of participants were involved in the performance-making process: final-year students on the Masters Level Applied Performance specialism at Kent, final-year students on the Digital Media programme at Kent, final-year primary school pupils and, most crucially, a group of 79-year-old men and women, many of whom were children during the Second World War, who contributed their memories of the Canterbury Blitz. The university students worked with the primary school pupils to conduct interviews, undertake archive research and assemble a range of materials for an interactive website, the performance event and a DVD. A series of workshops involved all the participants working together to devise material, some of which also featured on the project website.

One story in particular was central to the project. Below is an extract from Jack Waller’s story which was featured in the performance as a soundtrack, spoken by the 80-year old author, interspersed with a narrative commentary.

Monday 1 June

*Narrator:* Jack Waller, a bus driver, returned to wife and young son after his late shift as the sirens began to wail.

*JW:* Anyway we never used to worry until the tugboat started; well, as I was undressing the tugboat went. You see, it was bright
moonlight and I think that’s why I went in the back bedroom to get undressed coz there was more light comin’ in there than the front and it saved switchin’ on the light. Anyway, the sky lit up, you could hear this plane and the sky, you know, cor, it was absolutely brilliant, bright as anything.

**Narrator:** [The family took shelter in the bake-house close by.] Seeing his family safely inside, Jack decided to return home to collect some clothes. He had no idea the danger this would put him in.

**JW:** Went through the front room and as I was going into the kitchen a bomb dropped, or may ’ave have been a gas mains went up, ooh, shook the house, like that.

**Narrator:** The blast brought the kitchen dresser crashing down, noticing an incendiary bomb burning in the back yard, Jack rushed to extinguish it with a sandbag. However, out in the yard he was to look up and receive another shock. His entire roof was ablaze. Realizing his house was lost and he had precious little time, Jack rushed upstairs to save what he could.

**JW:** I dashed upstairs, opened the wardrobe, took ’em off the hangers, altogether, threw ’em out the winder, I thought, I’ll pick them up later on. As I come downstairs, I thought, ooh, I’m not gonna leave our holiday money behind, well that was on the stairs, half-way up the stairs on a little shelf in an Oxo tin. It was almost full! We were saving that for our holiday and, er [laughs], I grabbed that.

**Narrator:** Wondering what to save next, Jack paused, when a blast from an exploding bomb blew down the front door and sent rubble crashing about him.

**JW:** I thought crikey, I’ve gotta save meself, so I [laughs] rushed out the door and I must ’ave caught the tin on the side o the door and all the money, it went out in the lane! [laughs]

**Narrator:** Having gathered his family savings from his doorstep in Canterbury Lane, Jack Waller returned to the bake-house next door where his wife and son and a small group of neighbours were sheltering. However, there was to be no respite.

**JW:** Well anyway, when I went back in the bake-house, Mrs Barwick’s sister, she said, ‘Ooh, I’ve left me false teeth in the kitchen’, she said, ‘could you go and get ’em for me?’

**Narrator:** Once again, braving the falling bomb barrage and flaming buildings, Jack tried his neighbour’s door and found it was locked.

**JW:** I could see everything was going to be finished so I thought I’ll bash the door down [laughs], I took a running leap and, er, I’d still got plenty of momentum and the blessed door went easier than I thought and I went in on all fours. [laughs]