



If the nation is always changing, so too is the relationship between theatre and nation. Taking one of the plays studied on this module, write a proposal for a new production or adaptation to be staged in 2017. How do the different elements of the production, including location, adaptation, dramaturgy etc. contribute to a new relationship between performance and 'national' audience?

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The state of theatre, like the state of the nation, is in constant flux. Whilst Arts Council England's 2016 report revealed that audience attendance outside of London is falling,¹ suggesting a weakening relationship between theatre and the nation, the performative responses to the result of the 2016 EU referendum demonstrate the reactivity of both theatre and the nation to current events. From the theatrical approach of the Royal National Theatre, which has commissioned an 'immediate artistic response'² to the referendum in the form of verbatim piece *Missing Conversations*, comes a more performative (and perhaps more representative) response from the nation's people in the 41% rise in hate-crime since June.³ Therefore, if ideas of nation can be expressed through theatrical and performative acts, and these acts are reactive to current events, each year brings a new 'national' audience and a new relationship between this audience and performance. This evolution demonstrates the necessity of new work and may even suggest the obsolescence of past performances; however, past work can reveal the permanence of many issues which are currently part of a national conversation, and in many cases explore their roots. Therefore new productions and adaptations of existing work are vital contributors to a new relationship between performance and 'national' audience in 2017, as they expose the evolution of ideas of nation which in turn can illuminate current events.

Simon Stephens's *Pornography* is such an existing work. First performed in Hanover in 2007, the play charts the week in July 2005 which saw the Live8 concert held in Hyde Park, London win the 2012 Olympic bid, and the 7/7 suicide bombings which killed fifty-two people. However, as Seda Itler discusses, the play 'goes beyond its direct thematic concerns toward a critique of mediated culture';⁴ indeed, the liminality of the fourth wall within *Pornography*, combining direct address with duologues, demonstrates the play's conscious theatricality and resistance to a mimetic representation of the impact of the bombings, instead presenting the sociological cause of the attacks as a critique of the state of the British nation. As a post-dramatic play, the text itself is 'the basis for a performance without dominating the realisation process',⁵ thereby rendering it apt for adaptation as the text's relativism enables it to respond to the evolution of a 'national' audience and the fluctuations in the nation's relationship with performance.

The nation presented in *Pornography* is dominated by globalisation. Dan Rebellato defines this term through five facets: the first, Rebellato states, is consciousness, 'forced upon us by crises',⁶ demonstrated in Number Seven's awareness of global war zones: 'Iraq... Iran... Afghanistan.'⁷ She comments that 'there's always a car bomb in a market in Baghdad',⁸ preferring to watch *Sex and the City*, and her detachment is symptomatic of the play's media-saturated world: terrorist attacks are simply another news story, war zones simply somewhere flown over 'on your way out on holiday',⁹ representing a wider national desensitisation due to a culture of media overexposure. The second facet, cultural, Rebellato defines as the homogenization and appropriation of national cultural practices. From drinking

¹ Lyn Gardner, 'Arts Council releases report on state of English theatre', *The Guardian* (October 2016)
<<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2016/oct/20/arts-council-england-releases-report-on-british-theatre>>
[accessed 27 December 2016]

² Ian Youngs, 'National Theatre puts spotlight on Brexit Britain', *BBC News* (June 2016)
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-37387574>> [accessed 27 December 2016]

³ Katie Forster, 'Hate crimes soared by 41% after Brexit vote', *The Independent* (June 2016)
<<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/brexit-hate-crimes-racism-eu-referendum-vote-attacks-increase-police-figures-official-a7358866.html>> [accessed 27 December 2016]

⁴ Seda Itler, 'Rethinking Play Texts in the Age of Mediatization', *Modern Drama*, 58:2 (2015), p.256

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.247

⁶ Dan Rebellato, *Theatre and Globalisation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.5

⁷ Simon Stephens, *Pornography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p.7

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.7

Jamaican Blue Mountain coffee to the internationally-broadcast Live8 concert, *Pornography* displays the devaluation of national culture through globalised commodification. Number Seven drinks three cups of 'the most exclusive coffee in the world'¹⁰ in a single sitting, whilst Number Six watches the concert in a pub whilst he's 'waiting',¹¹ symbolising the mindlessness of the consumption of global culture. The third facet, conflict, appears in the play's most overt engagement with globalisation's dangers. Defined by Rebellato as the contradiction of different ways of life which had previously lived separately, *Pornography* suggests that the actions of Number Four are a protest: as mediated imagery recurs, such as 'Walkman'¹² and 'nine hundred television channels',¹³ Number Four describes the suburbs fed by the nation's consumerist addiction, commenting 'If I had the power I would take a bomb to all of this.'¹⁴ This comment suggests that Number Four, and perhaps Stephens himself, does not believe the purpose of the 7/7 attacks was to kill and destruct, but instead a consciously performative objection to a nation derailed by globalised consumerism.

The fourth facet in Rebellato's definition is political, with membership of organisations such as the United Nations 'a decisive step beyond the narrow constraints of national identification'.¹⁵ Stephens explores the political tensions of globalisation through Number Six's xenophobia: his resentment of 'the power that Pakistani people have. And the money they make', in comparison with 'the white people... left with nothing'¹⁶ demonstrates the 'native/imposter' binary created by politicising national identity, which rejects 'human' globalisation, or multiculturalism, but celebrates 'material' globalisation, or consumption, which leads to Rebellato's final facet, economic. Simply 'the development of a global market for goods and services',¹⁷ the economic elements of globalisation link with the cultural, such as Jamaican Blue Mountain coffee, but also appear in Number Two's addiction to online pornography, as via the internet she accesses internationally-produced explicit videos, thus her addiction is indirectly nurtured by the global market. Through Rebellato's five-facet definition of globalisation, therefore, it is clear that *Pornography* is not simply an account of the days leading up to 7/7, but an exploration of the effects of globalisation and consumerism on a nation. Rebellato argues that 'the concept of nation is becoming less; the world is becoming one',¹⁸ and in *Pornography* Stephens demonstrates the dangers of this homogenisation: he presents, as a result of global capitalism, a nation of diluted identity, thus extreme acts such as 7/7 become both acts of resistance and examples of the disconnect to other humans caused by the media's commodification of human experience.

It is *Pornography's* wider thematic engagement which combats what Mark Ravenhill cites as the 'paradox' of theatre-making: the need to make every element 'as specific and concrete' as possible, whilst simultaneously hoping they 'have a resonance, something which is completely outside of the specific and the concrete'.¹⁹ The resonance of *Pornography's* concerns in 2017 renders the play appropriate for adaptation as one can argue that the dissatisfaction with Britain's globalisation, first glimpsed in the 7/7 bombings, has taken root in the past decade to result in a Leave victory in 2016's European referendum: just as *Pornography* presents 7/7 as a protest against a globalised nation, Brexit can be viewed as a similar act of resistance to Rebellato's notion of 'the world becoming one'. Therefore, a new adaptation of *Pornography*, set in 2016 and replacing 7/7 with the outcome of the referendum, engages with both the long-term causes of Brexit and the long-term impact of 7/7, by exploring the impact of globalisation on British national identity.

In order to resituate *Pornography* in 2016, a new adaptation must rework the three events which locate the original text in 2005. The first of these is Live8, which in a 2016 adaptation becomes Glastonbury Festival. Both were music events linked to charities, televised, broadcast on radio, and widely attended by young people, but beyond surface parallels these events both performed a similar function for Britain's national image. Britain's Live8 concert was a celebration and, through its international broadcast, demonstration of British culture to a global audience, whilst Glastonbury Festival is a British event with global links: it 'aims to encourage and stimulate youth culture from around the world', and 'films and recordings... are sold all over the world',²⁰ demonstrating its international

¹⁰ Stephens, *Pornography*, p.51

¹¹ Ibid., p.14

¹² Ibid., p.37

¹³ Ibid., p.40

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Rebellato, *Theatre & Globalisation*, p.6

¹⁶ Stephens, *Pornography*, p.12

¹⁷ Rebellato, *Theatre & Globalisation*, p.7

¹⁸ Rebellato, *Theatre & Globalisation*, p.15

¹⁹ Mark Ravenhill, 'Foreword', *Theatre & Globalisation*, ed. Dan Rebellato (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p.ix

²⁰ Michael Eavis, 'The Festival's Objectives' <<http://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/information/an-introduction-to-glastonbury-festival/the-festivals-objectives/>> [accessed 28 December 2016]

status. The dramatic function of Glastonbury in a 2016-set adaptation also mirrors that of Live8 in the original text. The international success of Live8 and the national pride it generates, demonstrated when Number Seven wonders whether the day of the concert 'is the most important day that there's ever been' when 'everybody should be given a knighthood',²¹ increases the unexpectedness of the 7/7 attacks within the narrative (Number Seven has 'to check and check and recheck again'²²). Similarly, as 73% of those aged 18 to 24 voted Remain,²³ the focus on Glastonbury in the lead-up to the referendum contributes to a parallel sense of unexpectedness in a Brexit-centred adaptation, as its celebration of 'youth culture' purposefully over-represents the support for Remain, just as the celebration of British culture via Live8 purposefully over-represents national unity in the original text.

The second replacement in a new adaptation is London's successful Olympic bid with the murder of Labour MP Jo Cox. Though tonally these events differ vastly, as the Olympic bid was an event of national celebration whilst the murder of Jo Cox was one of national mourning, both incidents united the nation in their respective years as events of international significance. Anthony Giddens comments that due to the 'the intensification of worldwide social relations... local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away',²⁴ demonstrated in the aftermath of Cox's murder with vigils held not only across Britain, but also in New York and Paris through 'More in Common: A Worldwide Celebration of Jo Cox'. Tributes were paid by international leaders such as US President Barack Obama, and thus 'the international enormity of the death of Jo Cox'²⁵ means the event performs a similar function to the Olympic bid in a 2016-set adaptation: through the Olympic bid, Stephens explores global connectivity, such as when a sibling in Scene Five states that the Channel Tunnel extension will 'Join us all up to Europe. You'll be able to go anywhere'.²⁶ This physical connectivity to countries beyond the national boundary following the bid is paralleled in the aftermath of the murder through the emotional connectivity to citizens beyond the national boundary. A new adaptation of *Pornography* thereby contributes to a new relationship between performance and 'national' audience by balancing the original text's argument surrounding globalisation: depicting the international support in the aftermath of the murder demonstrates that globalisation can have benefits extraneous to capitalism, and contributes to the play's exploration of image versus reality by enhancing the disparity between the characters' isolation and the connectivity of their environment.

The final substitution is the 7/7 attacks for the outcome of the EU referendum. In human terms, the loss of fifty-two lives cannot be equated with the result of a democratic vote, but there is a similarity between the events in that both caused the nation to question ideas about itself and its occupants. In conversation about 7/7, Stephens states that 'people were incredulous that British boys could turn on their own country',²⁷ whilst the headline of *Financial Times* the day after the referendum was 'Bitter Brexit campaign reveals a divided and angry nation: Leave voters were fuelled by fear of immigration and fear of experts and elites'.²⁸ Both events demonstrate national disunity; Stephens asserts that the bombers were motivated by 'an alienation from the people they were going to kill and from themselves', which was 'symptomatic of a consumerist culture, which objectifies everyone and everything',²⁹ an analysis which could be equally applied to Brexit. Just as *Pornography's* Number Four is alienated from a consumerist nation, Brexit suggests a similar alienation of Leave voters from other nationals and Britain's European identity. Benedict Anderson defines nation as 'an imagined political community',³⁰ and whilst those who were 'incredulous' that 'British boys' were the culprits of 7/7, alongside those shocked by the outcome of the referendum, may subscribe to the concept of a national 'imagined community', there are those, such as Number Four, who believe themselves to fall outside of this community, and those, such as the Leave voters 'fuelled by fear of immigration', who believe *others* fall

²¹ Stephens, *Pornography*, p.4

²² *Ibid.*, p.9

²³ Jon Kelly, 'Brexit: How much of a generation gap is there?', *BBC News* (June 2016) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-36619342>> [accessed 28 December 2016]

²⁴ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p.64

²⁵ Len Tingle, 'Jo Cox birthday: MP remembered at world events', *BBC News* (June 2016) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-36590032>> [accessed 29 December 2016]

²⁶ Stephens, *Pornography*, p.23

²⁷ Simon Stephens, 'Pornography: the most shocking play of the Edinburgh Festival?', ed. Dominic Cavendish, *The Telegraph* (August 2008) <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/3557508/Pornography-the-most-shocking-play-of-the-Edinburgh-Festival.html>> [accessed 26 December 2016]

²⁸ George Parker, Jim Pickard, Kiran Stacey, 'Bitter Brexit campaign reveals a divided and angry nation', *Financial Times* (June 2016) <<https://www.ft.com/content/c1adcc2-397e-11e6-9a05-82a9b15a8ee7>> [accessed 26 December 2016]

²⁹ Stephens, *The Telegraph*

³⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), p.6

outside and are resisting their inclusion. Where Anderson's theory fails to recognise those excluded (or who exclude others) from the imagined community, these individuals are the focus of *Pornography*; a new adaptation subsequently contributes to a new relationship between performance and 'national' audience by engaging with voices outside of the imagined 'national' audience, by presenting the characters' isolation and desensitisation in light of fractured social relations caused by the referendum, thereby showing a nation divided, rather than united, by conflicting ideas of national identity.

Therefore, a key element to retain in a new adaptation is the transgressive nature of the characters and their actions, Stephens's challenge to the constructed national image of unity presented via Live8 and the Olympic bid, ultimately undermined by 7/7. However, to contribute to a new relationship between performance and 'national' audience in 2017, a further key change is necessary: location. The reduction of regional arts budgets, alongside ACE's disproportionate funding (2015-18's investment balance is 4.1:1 in London's favour³¹), demonstrates the globalisation of British theatre by implying it is cultivated for the capital's tourist market and thus an international audience. Therefore a touring production of *Pornography*'s new adaptation contributes to a new relationship between performance and 'national' audience by increasing access and diversifying audiences, through engaging with national issues at a local level rather than restricting this engagement to the capital. S. E. Wilmer comments that 'the theatre can serve as a microcosm of the national community',³² but this microcosm only exists if the national community is in fact represented within an audience and onstage. Therefore, this adaptation of *Pornography* also sets each of the play's scenes in a different region of Britain, rather than entirely in London, to combat what Rebellato cites as 'the de-territorialised placelessness of globalisation';³³ though the references in the original text render *Pornography* a London story, its wider thematic concerns render it a national one, and the inclusion of six regional voices, both onstage and in the audience, in a new adaptation tackles the national disunity depicted in the play and demonstrated by Brexit, by refusing to conform to mediatised pressure for a globally recognisable national image via a London setting, instead engaging with a variety of national voices.

Whatever the region, however, *Pornography* remains a city story, as much of the characters' isolation is the result of the conflict between 'local and global'³⁴ in modern city life as observed by Tim Etchells, and a new adaptation must not only retain these civic roots, but address the local/global conflict through the location of performance. This new adaptation of *Pornography* would therefore be performed in a disused factory to directly explore this local/global binary; it is a liminal space, which through its regional location signifies the importance of industry to local communities, alongside, through its dereliction, the decline of national industry due to globalisation. Using Fiona Wilkie's model, a new adaptation of *Pornography* thus becomes a 'site-sympathetic performance',³⁵ an existing performance physicalized in a selected site, contributing to a new relationship between performance and 'national' audience by using location, as discussed by Jen Harvie, as a 'mnemonic trigger'³⁶ to evoke 'significant memories for a community'³⁷ about the impact of globalisation at a local, specifically civic, level. Regarding mise-en-scène, in the original Hanover production actors constructed a mosaic version of Brueghel's 'Tower of Babel' at the back of stage; in a new adaptation, actors similarly construct the United Kingdom on a map of the world on the floor of the performance space, using red and blue mosaics to indicate which regions voted Leave and Remain respectively in the referendum. At the end of the performance, the actors stand on the region in which their scene is set, indicating their isolation from the national 'imagined community' through their division by the Leave/Remain binary, demonstrating the reduction of the individual to an image or symbol. Indeed, Zygmunt Bauman asserts that the media's 'objectification of human lives trivialises their complexity', causing us to 'become less attached and increasingly indifferent to other humans',³⁸ and this indifference appears in *Pornography* through the imagery of iPods; therefore, in conjunction with Bauman's observations, the actors will wear earbuds and, as in the Hanover and Edinburgh productions, not interact with each other, indicating the isolation of city life and our growing disassociation with other humans.

³¹ Christopher Gordon, David Powell, Peter Stark, 'Regional arts funding imbalance will 'worsen significantly', warn arts leaders', *The Guardian* (October 2014) <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2014/oct/10/arts-funding-imbalance-hard-facts-report>> [accessed 29 December 2016]

³² S. E. Wilmer, 'Herder and European Theatre', *Staging Nationalism* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2005), p.64

³³ Rebellato, *Theatre & Globalisation*, p.26

³⁴ Tim Etchells, 'Foreword', *Theatre and the City*, ed. Jen Harvie (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.xii

³⁵ Fiona Wilkie, 'Mapping the Terrain: a Survey of Site-Specific Performance in Britain', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 18:2 (2002), p.150

³⁶ Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p.42

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p.75

Stephen's depiction of this isolation and disassociation is evident in the play's structure as well as its content. Rebellato argues that 'globalisation's effects are so profound that they require – and have generated – wholly different forms to represent them',³⁹ and *Pornography*, with its structural disconnect, is an example of what Gerda Poschmann cites as a no-longer-dramatic text, where 'rounded and psychologically motivated characters, dialogue form, and linear dramatic plot dissolve'⁴⁰ in order to accommodate the complex, fractured nature of 'the mediated-globalised world.'⁴¹ *Pornography's* characters are linked thematically rather than through interaction; they share a temporal setting but are not united by it; and they are anonymous to each other and to an audience, alongside the fifty-two unnamed victims of 7/7 in the final scene. Therefore, whilst the play's content addresses global connectedness, its structure emphasises the resulting isolation, and this conflict can be explored in the re-structuring of a new adaptation. Scenes can be performed in any order, thus Scenes Four and One can be used as a framing device: a new adaptation opens with Scene Four, still located in London 2005, followed by Scenes Seven to Two, re-situated in 2016, and closes with Scene One, thereby directly linking the result of the referendum to the events of 7/7. The structure of this adaptation contributes to a new relationship between performance and 'national' audience by explicitly exploring the resonance of past performances and past events to the present; establishing the parallels between 7/7 and Brexit subsequently displays a performance text's ability to transcend its original context, and demonstrates to a 2017 audience that the events of 2016 were not isolated, but rooted in an ongoing national identity crisis due to the advance of globalisation.

Rebellato asserts that 'Whenever we are watching a play, even if we are watching it for the first and only time, we are aware that it *could* be staged differently'.⁴² As the relationship between performance and 'national' audience continues to evolve, in response to national events, the textual relativism of Simon Stephens's *Pornography* and other post-dramatic plays (their ability to be 'staged differently') enables their evolution in conjunction with this relationship. By engaging with new and neglected voices through performance location, a new adaptation of *Pornography* contributes to this relationship by inviting a truly 'national' audience, rather than one based only in London (or Hanover or Edinburgh), to join the conversation about ideas of nation. Through critique of globalisation, *Pornography* displays the social disconnection of the mediated world both in spite and because of its growing connectivity, and this adaptation argues that, far from sharing an 'imagined political community',⁴³ British nationals via Brexit are resisting this connectivity whilst displaying their desensitisation to those excluded from their personal ideas of nation. Therefore, by tracing the roots of Brexit in 7/7, this new adaptation demonstrates to a 'national' audience the importance of performance as a shared history, exploring the evolution of national ideology to illuminate a nation's present through its past.

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³⁹ Rebellato, *Theatre & Globalisation*, p.29

⁴⁰ Itler, 'Rethinking Play Texts in the Age of Mediatiation', p.246

⁴¹ Ibid., p.247

⁴² Rebellato, *Theatre & Globalisation*, p.78

⁴³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.6

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