



Finding The Nation's Place In a Globalised Space: a critical exploration of site-specific performance in *The Passion* and *The Battle of Orgreave*

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Michael Sheen's *The Passion* and Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave* demonstrate the power of site-specific performance to examine the political foundations of society.³⁷⁸ By comparing the historical and contemporary spatial use of real sites in a heterotopic performance that incorporates local residents, the construction of hegemonic social orders can be challenged, which thus enables real political empowerment. Deller's use of re-enactment enables ex-miners to reclaim the history of the miners' strikes in 1984, whilst Sheen's use of local anecdote in a site-specific passion play disrupts the supposedly limited political expectations of a globalised space. To demonstrate how these performances achieve a more politically advanced staging of the nation, I will examine the construction of identity through space and place, how heterotopias can thus be created through performance, and how site-specificity in conjunction with local residents and visitors enables long lasting implications for the places of the spaces in which the performances occurred.

Tim Creswell suggests that '[p]laces are locations with meaning', that the space is the geographical location of objects and the place is the concept of what occurs and has occurred in that space to make it a certain place (although a space is shared, place is dependent on the individual).³⁷⁹ This concept seemingly enables both productions to critique Benedict Anderson's idea of the 'nation' as an 'imagined political community...[where] members...will never know most of their fellow-members...yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion', since the plays seemingly break down the illusions of locals' identities that may be based on stereotypes of the physical space, by performing alternate places in the same spaces.³⁸⁰ Thus, what Doreen Massey terms, the 'sense of place' (which is created by the physical space and anyone who associates meaning with it) can be challenged by listening to the stories of people who actually practise and have practised place in local spaces, rather than relying on hegemonic national conceptions of an imagined identity.³⁸¹

This is especially important since the imagined conceptions of place may arguably be limited by the force of globalisation, where, according to Dan Rebellato, 'Transnational Corporations...produce commodities...and sell them globally...[which] undermin[es]...local economies,...cultures, customs and traditions'.³⁸² Since Henri Lefebvre argues that '[a]ctivity...is restricted by...space' and Kevin Hetherington suggests that 'spaces act as sites for the performance of identity', the physical limits of a space thus act as a limit of identity.³⁸³

³⁷⁸ WILDWORKSbiz, *The Passion of Port Talbot. It Has Begun! BBC WALES Documentary.*, online video documentary, YouTube, 09 August 2013, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99b9C4POEIk>> [accessed 16 March 2018].

Jonny Jones, *The Battle of Orgreave (2001)*, online video documentary, YouTube, 19 August 2013, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ncrWxnxLjg>> [accessed 25 February 2018].

³⁷⁹ Tim Creswell, 'Place: encountering geography as philosophy', *Geography*, 93:3 (2008), 132–141 (p. 134) <http://geospace.edu.au/verve/_resources/3.1.1_4_Creswell.pdf> [accessed 9 April 2018].

³⁸⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn (London: Verso, 2006), p. 6.

³⁸¹ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage), p. 130.

³⁸² Dan Rebellato, 'Playwriting and globalisation: Towards a site-unspecific theatre', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 16:1 (2006), 97-113 (p. 98) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10486800500451047>>.

³⁸³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 143.

Kevin Hetherington, *Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics* (London: Sage, 1998), p. 105.

This potentially limits conceptions of place (and therefore the identities of those who perform it) held within the imagined community (the nation). For example, in Port Talbot, residents were forced to move (and thus stop practising the space as 'home') when the M4 was built and Llewelyn Street was demolished, which may suggest to 'outsiders' that the town is a place worth driving past. Whilst in Orgreave, the tight-knit community of miners was disbanded after the coking plant closed and miners were forced into alternate jobs, where the place is potentially reduced to a disenfranchised working-class community built on a historical site of violent civilian riot.

In light of this, I suggest that, since Fiona Wilkie defines site-specific performance as a 'performance specifically generated from/for one selected site', the staging of location-dependent performances allows the physical spatial limits of Port Talbot and Orgreave to be ideologically re-evaluated.³⁸⁴ Lefebvre's suggestion then, that '[s]pace lays down the law because it implies a certain order – and hence also a certain disorder', entails that these performances constructed heterotopias, since they created 'spaces in which an alternate social ordering...[was] performed'.³⁸⁵ This should therefore resist (but also engage in a conversation with) the impacts of globalisation, whilst shattering limiting conceptions of the 'imagined...community' based on spatial assumptions of 'place' within the nation.³⁸⁶

In *The Passion*, a temporary heterotopia of resistance was arguably created under the M4, since Michel Foucault suggests heterotopias require 'behaviour...[to be] deviant in relation to the required...norm', which enables them to 'have a function in relation to...the space that remains'.³⁸⁷ Here the performance embodied a temporal change or 'heterochrony' in relation to the 'dominated' globalised space: the motorway ('[d]ominated space') still functioned as a place for drivers, whilst locals performed 'ghosts' underneath.³⁸⁸ Since the space has been modernised and marginalised (where the M4 has been 'introduce[d as]...a new form into a pre-existing space'), according to Hetherington, the performance would thus enable 'cultural resistance, transgression and alternative identity formation'.³⁸⁹

I argue that, by enacting possible spatial practices of past residents (as though they had revisited the space as it is now and asked the audience to 'look for' them), the locals undermined the imagined community's expectations of a dominated local identity, which thus undermines the notion that the nation can be 'truthfully' imagined when the space can be practised as different places simultaneously by different members of the community.³⁹⁰ This site-specific performance feasibly epitomises the transformative power of the heterotopia and its resistance of globalisation therefore, since Hetherington argues it should 'unsettl[e]...one's everyday experience of that space', which is seen when an emotional audience member proclaimed she could 'imagine...[her] great grandparents...saying what those people were saying'.³⁹¹ Thus the performance seemingly confirms Rebellato's argument that 'the assertion of the local...[can create] a site of resistance to the global', where locals reclaimed space, place and thus identity.³⁹²

³⁸⁴ Fiona Wilkie, 'Mapping the Terrain: a Survey of Site-Specific Performance in Britain', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 18:2 (2002), 140-160 (p. 150) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/s0266464x02000202>>.

³⁸⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 143.

Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and social ordering* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 40.

³⁸⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6.

³⁸⁷ Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowic, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16:1 (1986), 22-27 (p. 25) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/464648>> [accessed 9 April 2018].

Ibid., p. 27.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 165.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity*, p. 4.

³⁹⁰ WILDWORKSbiz, *The Passion of Port Talbot. It Has Begun!*

³⁹¹ Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity*, p. 47.

WILDWORKSbiz, *The Passion of Port Talbot. It Has Begun!*

³⁹² Rebellato, 'Playwriting and globalisation', p. 98.

Furthermore, by using the actual site beneath the M4, as Joanne Tompkins suggests, the heterotopia is arguably more powerful than those created in theatres, where the creation of alternate worlds is expected.³⁹³ Thus, by using site-specific performance this conclusion to National Theatre Wales' first year demonstrates how theatre (and the staging of 'nation') can create real political change and empowerment within these places due to the fact they are not expected to be practised in a way that deviates from what the physical, globalised domination of space 'determines' or what the fallacy of an 'imagined...community' therefore expects.³⁹⁴

Although Hetherington suggests that the importance of a 'heterotopia is not the space...[itself] but what...[it] perform[s] in relation to other sites', here, the heterotopia is arguably not only created in relation to the site above it (M4), but also in relation to the memories of that space (as both 'under the M4' and 'Llewellyn Street').³⁹⁵ Thus it is both the prior 'sense of place' of that space *and* its relation to other spaces that enable a multi-dimensional heterotopic performance.³⁹⁶ This highlights how the 'unscripted *texts*' of the 'real' space that Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks argue are fundamental to site-specific performance (e.g. the sounds of the motorway) are essential in creating this heterotopia, since these features could be a 'mnemonic trigger', which Jen Harvie suggests connect the current practised place of the space with previous practices of place in the same, recognisable space.³⁹⁷

Pierre Nora's argument however that memory 'takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects' suggests that spatial features or repeated acts would be necessary to evoke memory.³⁹⁸ This seemingly happens to some extent in *The Battle of Orgreave*'s details – the clothing, police formations (including a cavalry charge) – which would increase the heterotopic 'reality'.³⁹⁹ Indeed, many of the ex-miners described how they felt 'emotional' during the re-enactment and that the process brought back a lot of memories.⁴⁰⁰ However, the fact that the space itself has been changed (e.g. by the M4 or the demolition of the coking plant), entails that these spaces have become what Nora describes as '*lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because...[they] are no longer *milieu de mémoire*, environments of memory'.⁴⁰¹

This is arguably why the power of site-specific performance relies not only on the space itself, but also on the local people who perform in it. As Gay McAuley highlights, incorporating local people will mean 'they will continue to frequent the place after the performers have left', where the fact the performance occurred will be part of their individual conception of the place, that it is now practised as a place that has heterotopic abilities.⁴⁰² For example, Port Talbot's residents would remember going to the beach, and thus 'know' the spatial practices expected for 'the beach' as a place. To then watch the performance of the crucifixion during *The Passion* at 'the beach' would not only create a heterotopia, but it would also symbolise the death and rebirth of the town in their communal decision to take control of the spatial changes of where

³⁹³ Joanne Tompkins, *Theatre's Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 40-41.

³⁹⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6.

³⁹⁵ Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity*, p. 49.

³⁹⁶ Massey, *For Space*, p. 130.

³⁹⁷ Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 17; quoted in Tompkins, *Theatre's Heterotopias*, p. 43.

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

³⁹⁸ Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', trans. by Marc Roundebush, in *Representations*, No. 26. Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (1989), 7-12; cited in *Theories Of Memory: A Reader*, ed. by Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 146.

³⁹⁹ Jones, *The Battle of Orgreave (2001)*.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰¹ Nora, 'Between Memory and History', p. 144.

⁴⁰² Gay McAuley, 'Local Acts: Site-Specific Performance Practice, Introduction', *About Performance*, 7 (2007) 7-11 (p. 9); quoted in Mike Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 146.

they live. This potentially enables a resistance to stable spatial stereotyping of a national identity by exploring how identity is locally created by individual decisions and not necessarily (as Lefebvre suggests) by what their physical space determines.⁴⁰³

Performing a lost past that clearly cannot be fully re-created may seem counterproductive, since it may highlight the repressive changing of space that has forced a place and some of the community's identity to be 'lost'. However, creating a heterotopia arguably enables Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering's concept of 'critical nostalgia...[which] derives not from the desire to return but from the knowledge of the impossibility of return, and in the face of that seeks to uncover and assess which aspects of the past may act as the basis for renewal in the future'.⁴⁰⁴ For example, by completing a 'truthful' re-enactment (in creating a self-reflexive performance that acknowledged the limitations of its capabilities), other truths were exposed, as seen when ex-miners explained 'that Mr Scargill, the miners' leader, was not pushed to the ground at the height of the battle, but lost his footing...and slipped'.⁴⁰⁵ This arguably exemplifies the subjectivity of memory and especially history (which, according to Nora, is an 'incomplete...representation of the past').⁴⁰⁶ This therefore provides evidence for how a 'collective memory' – Maurice Halbwachs' conception of the living continuum of perception about a current place, 'manifest[ed]...in individual memories' that together create a sense of identity – is more 'truthful' than a documented history, such as that reported by the BBC.⁴⁰⁷

By creating the re-enactment, the villainization of the miners as the 'enemy within' (and thus the villainization of Orgreave, where Christopher Hart suggests the coverage of the police-miner altercation locations 'were depicted as battlefields') can be addressed and thus counteract the 'shrunken imaginings of recent history' provided by the BBC that Anderson suggests creates imagined communities.⁴⁰⁸ The site-specific re-enactment arguably enabled Nora's idea that a 'moment...of history [can be] torn away from the movement of history, then returned'.⁴⁰⁹ However, it may not have been quite 'returned', since the miners mnemonically re-visited the historical episode and re-documented it by recording their memories of the battle, where the cameras were placed on the miner's side, rather than solely on the police's.⁴¹⁰ Thus although Étienne Balibar argues that 'the projection of individual existence into the weft of a collective narrative...[means that] *only* imaginary communities are real', I argue that some imagined communities (which inform our 'sense of place' and subsequently nation) are more 'real' than others, since some are based on stereotypes or misleading histories, rather than 'truthful' collections of individual memories.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 143.

⁴⁰⁴ Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination: Remembering as Creative Practice* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 137.

⁴⁰⁵ Martin Wainwright, 'Strikers relive battle of Orgreave', *Guardian*, 18 June 2002, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁶ Nora, 'Between Memory and History', p. 146.

⁴⁰⁷ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by Francis J. Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper & Row, 1992), p. 40; quoted in Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. by Sara B. Young (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 16.

Jones, *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001).

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Christopher Hart, 'Metaphor and intertextuality in media framings of the (1984-1985) British Miners' Strike: A multimodal analysis', *Discourse & Communication*, 11:1 (2017), 3-30 (p. 14) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481316683291>>.

Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 7.

⁴⁰⁹ Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity*, p. 50.

Nora, 'Between Memory and History', p. 149.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹¹ Étienne Balibar, 'The Nation Form: History and Ideology', in *Race Critical Theories*, ed. by Philomena Essed and David Theo Goldberg (London: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 220-230, in *Theories Of Memory*, ed. by Rossington and Whitehead, p. 254. Massey, *For Space*, p. 130.

Furthermore, Wilkie suggests '[s]ite-specific performance's act of writing on a space might simultaneously be an act of erasing what has previously been written'.⁴¹² Thus these performances may re-write limited conceptions of places that can be practised in the space (which may erase documented lies of past events, such as those the BBC reported).⁴¹³ However, rather than 'erasing', I suggest that by drawing on the relationship with past places in the same space, site-specific performance merely adds to the space's capabilities and its 'sense of place'.⁴¹⁴ This is arguably essential for enabling the barriers of an 'imagined...community' (and therefore limitations of nationhood) to be shattered through creating a dialogue between spatial expectations based on past place and the spatial reality of the current place of heterotopic communal performance.⁴¹⁵

Furthermore, Wills suggests that 'it is possible to construct a progressive agenda in place through the incorporation of ideas and practices from further afield'.⁴¹⁶ This seemingly occurs in Port Talbot by highlighting Oberammergau's passion play as the inspiration for *The Passion*, as well as having Sheen as the 'leader' – as both local and Hollywood icon – which may combat the complete villainization of globalisation (as just the town vs. the fictional global corporation, 'I.C.U.'), where, by the end of the play, visitors who had learned about the play through national reviews met, joined and spoke with thousands of local people during the final procession.⁴¹⁷ Whilst, in *The Battle of Orgreave*, the incorporation of re-enactors from across the country and the choice to have some ex-miners playing 'miners' and some playing 'policemen' would add to Orgreave's progressive stance toward history by, as Bishop suggests, 'dismantling...any nostalgia for sentimental class unity'.⁴¹⁸ The active political progress can arguably be seen when an ex-miner told Howard Giles, the re-enactment director, about how he was there in 1984 and hid behind a hedge because the police were coming, where Giles could then obtain permission to use local houses in the re-enactment to enable this ex-miner to recreate the moment.⁴¹⁹

However, whilst Bishop suggests 'Deller juxtaposed [the ex-miners]...with the middle class...to write a *universal* history of oppression', it is arguably less about the universality of oppression (Mike Figgis's documentary highlights how ex-miners are still impacted by the events in Orgreave), but how these stories do not need to create boundaries 'between "us" and "them"', of who is allowed to tell a community's story and who isn't.⁴²⁰ Instead it enables a local '*meeting* place' of people to consider a place's history, memory and present together in spite of their differences.⁴²¹ Having said this, it is important to highlight that *The Battle of Orgreave* constituted a masculine-dominated reclamation of space (and place), where women were positioned as audience members. Although they still contributed to the heterotopia, by strengthening the created place of 're-enactment *performance*', this arguably reinforces Massey's observations of these communal spaces during the strikes, where women were not

⁴¹² Fiona Wilkie, 'Kind of Place at Bore Place: Site-Specific Performance and the Rules of Spatial Behaviour', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 18:3 (2002), 243-260 (p. 251) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X02000337>>.

⁴¹³ Jones, *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001).

⁴¹⁴ Wilkie, 'Kind of Place at Bore Place', p. 251.

Massey, *For Space*, p. 130.

⁴¹⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6.

Massey, *For Space*, p. 130.

⁴¹⁶ Jane Wills, 'Place and Politics', in *Spatial Politics: Essays for Doreen Massey*, ed. by David Featherstone and Joe Painter (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p. 141.

⁴¹⁷ WILDWORKSbiz, *The Passion of Port Talbot. It Has Begun!*

⁴¹⁸ Jones, *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001).

Claire Bishop, *ARTIFICIAL HELLS: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 33.

⁴¹⁹ Jones, *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001).

⁴²⁰ Bishop, *ARTIFICIAL HELLS*, p. 36.

Jones, *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001).

Doreen Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', *Marxism Today*, 35:6 (1991), 24-29 (p. 28).

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*

part of the active workforce.⁴²² Whilst this adds to the re-enactment's 'reality', it potentially reduces its progressive abilities by not including women (as it did with middle-class re-enactors) in reclaiming the place of Orgreave.

Furthermore, Kirsty Sedgman and Dave Beech argue that, due to the 'external' artists' inputs, neither community was fully empowered in performance to re-write their places.⁴²³ As seen in *The Battle of Orgreave*, the ex-miners were restricted in what roles they were 'allowed' to play where only trained re-enactors could throw stones.⁴²⁴ Whilst in *The Passion*, it may be suggested that having a writer adapt locals' stories for performance may diminish individual expression, and that Sheen patronisingly collectivises and owns the town's memories as he exclaims on the cross, 'I remember'.⁴²⁵ However, by using Sheen (and the fact therefore that these are clearly not *his* memories), the performance of spatial memory seemingly highlights Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt's argument that the 'truth' of history is acknowledging how it is constructed from other people's representations of events that are retold by others.⁴²⁶ By retelling stories and memories, a collective truth of the place of Port Talbot can inform the present performance and conceptions of identity. Thus, whilst there are individual and localised differences, they can be celebrated in performance, rather than used as a basis for stereotyping and separation. Thus, these performances stage these areas of the nation in a collaborative manner that appeases Massey's concern of 'how to hold on to...geographical difference...without being reactionary'.⁴²⁷

By combining information and talent from within and outside a community, and listening to those who hold the deepest memories of these places, a more 'truthful' imagined community and progressive sense of place (that is at once collective, individual and aware of its subjective limitations) can be created. The use of site-specific performance enabled both Sheen and Deller to empower local people to consciously consider the use of space and how this impacts the place they live in and the identities this enables them to perform. By creating these performances, the space itself can be ideologically transformed, and thus create places of political defiance and reclamation, that empowers local identities in globalised spaces, whilst demonstrating the communal versatility of the nation.

⁴²² Doreen Massey, 'Industrial Restructuring as Class Restructuring: Production Decentralization and Local Uniqueness', *Regional Studies*, 17:2 (1983), 73-89 (p. 77) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09595238300185081>>.

⁴²³ Kirsty Sedgman, 'Ladies and Gentlemen Follow Me, Please Put on Your Beards: Risk, Rules, and Audience Reception in National Theatre Wales', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 27:2 (2017), 158-176 (p. 159) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2017.1300153>>.

Dave Beech, "'The Reign of the Workers and Peasants Will Never End": Politics and Politicisation, Art and Politics of Political Art', *Third Text*, 16:4 (2002), 387-398 (p. 396) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/0952882031000077620>>.

Wilkie, 'Kind of Place at Bore Place', p. 251.

⁴²⁴ Jones, *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001).

⁴²⁵ WILDWORKSbiz, *The Passion of Port Talbot. It Has Begun!*

⁴²⁶ Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 67.

⁴²⁷ Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', p. 26.

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