

10:31, MCR: a practice-as-research project that investigates ethical dramaturgical approaches to politically sensitive theatre-making with and for young people.

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Abstract

What are the dramaturgical approaches for a practitioner-researcher making theatre with and for young people, retaining ethical care, when handling politically sensitive topics? Through the study of three practices chosen to advance the research (theatre and education approaches, dramaturgical processes and rehearsal praxis), the thesis will investigate the main research question by posing the argument that the dialogic, symbolic and ‘liquid’ nature of theatre can (and must) provide a space where controversial discussions can be facilitated. The methodology of this project is practice-as-research, and this thesis goes to the writings of Robin Nelson, using his theories to expand on the released synergies in my practice, and how research informs my practice, and my practice prompts and shapes my research investigation.

The first practice will encompass Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, Brian Way’s theories surrounding social drama, and Cecily O’Neill’s Process Drama, cross-referenced to the initial practical workshop using a curated selection of these methods to work with young in their response to politically and socially troubling topics. The second practice, dramaturgy, looks at the influence of Postdramatic and Post-Holocaust theatre theories (implemented by Hans-Thies Lehmann and Heiner Müller’s writings) which found their place in the scripting workshop with the young people. The third practice is the rehearsal process leading up to the production of *10:31, MCR*, where different techniques of making, taking somatic approaches to shape stage action from the ‘voices of others’.

The study of the three practices is encompassed within a conceptual framework utilising the writing of Amanda Stuart-Fisher around the ethicality of verbatim theatre, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman’s studies on witnessing and testimony, and Jenny

Hughes' discussion on the relationship between terror and trauma. The results of the project, where elements of Grounded Theory are used to arrive at evidence-based conclusions, triangulate three sets of data collected throughout to arrive at a conclusion for the questions posed by this thesis.

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Introduction

The early years of the twenty-first century have witnessed radical events deemed to have provoked “change that was rapidly conceived but which has left a legacy that, to this day, continues to shape and impact on how we think, act and see ourselves”¹ . After the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in September 2001, terror attacks became more frequent in the West and fuelled uninformed feelings of hatred and judgement towards religious and ethnic minorities, where “Islam and Muslims became equated with the actions of a handful of violent terrorists”². Data collected from the Global Terrorism Database demonstrates that the concentration of attacks and, consequently, number of deaths, has shifted from Eastern countries to the West around the early years of the new century, with media sources reporting at least three major terror attacks per year³. This phenomenon has contributed to the creation of societies increasingly focused on exogenous attack and has fuelled political scapegoating of ‘outsiders’.

The response to the attacks has been drastic and swiftly implemented by Western countries, with strict regulations on travel and border crossings and homeland security controls. The United Kingdom actioned “Contest”, a counter-terrorism strategy put in place by the government after the 9/11 attack. “Contest” is a strategy made of four Ps (Prepare for the attacks, Protect the public, Pursue the attackers and Prevent the

¹ Allen, C, ‘Islamophobia’. London: Ashgate, 2010.

² *Ibidem*.

³ Data collected from the Global Terrorism Database, <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.

radicalisation⁴), from which the Prevent strategy came to life in 2003⁵. The programme was expanded in 2005, following the bombings that took place in London, “with almost £80 million on the 1000 schemes in the six years following”⁶. However, the Prevent strategy proved to be inciting increased isolation and unduly targeted certain communities. In 2014, Harun Khan⁷ stated in an interview with BBC that “most young people are seeing [Prevent] as a target on them and the institutions they associate with”⁸. It is against this backdrop of a high frequency of terror events in the UK, and the increasing steps to the far-right of Western powers, that this practice as research⁹ thesis is set, motivated to ask questions about where the collectivity and connectivity of theatre might have the most potency to offer alternative ways to think and act in this troubled time.

The political response to terrorism has split the UK and created an atmosphere of mistrust and division, when columnists who are published on mainstream platforms, such as Melanie Philips, claim that “no other minority attempts to impose its values on the host society like this. Behind it lies the premise that Islamic values trump British ones”¹⁰. This is more than a dog-whistle towards the explicit hatred of groups such as Britain First, and legitimates the upswing in violence towards Muslim British Citizens. The artistic response to the attacks, on the other hand, has tried to interrogate

⁴ Chris Graham, “What is the anti-terror Prevent programme and why is it controversial?”, in *The Telegraph*, May 2017, online edition available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/anti-terror-prevent-programme-controversial/>.

⁵ Although the strategy itself wasn’t made public for some years.

⁶ Chris Graham, “What is the anti-terror Prevent programme and why is it controversial?”, in *The Telegraph*, May 2017, online edition available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/anti-terror-prevent-programme-controversial/>.

⁷ Head of the Muslim Council of Britain.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ An insight on the reasonings behind this choice of methodology is offered in chapter two.

¹⁰ Melanie Philips, *Londonistan: Britain’s Terror State from Within*. Encounter Books: London, 2006.

the situation from different point of views, to bridge the gap between facts and fear-instigated rumours. Playwrights like Carly Wijs, Michel Vinaver, and David Greig have produced plays regarding different terror attacks, each using different methodologies of storytelling to crack open the problem. Nonetheless, the socio-political anxieties regarding the discussion of terrorism have had an impact on artistic freedom.

In 2015, Omar El-Khairy, a playwright involved with the Royal Court, Soho and Bush Theatres was asked to write a play for the National Theatre surrounding the themes of radicalisation of young people in London. The writer partnered up with director Nadia Latif, and rehearsals started with a cast of 100+ young people of different ethnical and religious backgrounds. Halfway through rehearsals, the play was removed from the National Theatre's programme by artistic director Paul Roseby who (despite having commissioned the play) stated that the play "had to be axed to prevent any damage to NYT's reputation and membership"¹¹. El-Khairy stated that:

the cancellation came after local government intervention led to us being thrown out of our original venue, and after police had suggested security measures that included reading drafts, attending rehearsals, planting plainclothes officers in the audience, and carrying out daily sweeps of the venue by a bomb squad. Since then, there has been much media attention, but little dialogue. There is still no clear explanation.¹²

El-Khairy and Latif identify the incident as a case of artistic censorship, and have expressed their concern and their frustration with regards to the role of the arts in the

¹¹ Hannah Ellis-Peterson, "Radicalisation play cancelled by theatre after concerns about extremist agenda", in *The Guardian*, September 2015, online edition available at <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/sep/04/islamism-play-withdrawn-by-national-youth-theatre>.

¹² Omar El-Khairy and Nadia Latif, "Drama in the age of Prevent: why can't we move beyond Good Muslim vs Bad Muslim?", in *The Guardian*, April 2016, online edition available at <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/apr/13/drama-in-the-age-of-prevent-why-cant-we-move-beyond-good-muslim-v-bad-muslim>.

current political and military climate. Strategies like Prevent¹³ have given license to suppress research (e.g. “Muslim university students being referred to the police for reading books on terrorism for their counter-terrorism PhD”¹⁴) but also to shut-down dialogue and representation. This practice as research project therefore aims to join the creative counter offensive in developing a piece of theatre that has an openness to dialogue at its core.

The arts have always created spaces for people to reflect upon and respond to seismic events to interrogate issues that other institutions have failed to understand¹⁵. As Neil LaBute states¹⁶, what the artistic world needs right now is

something that has the potential to be controversial but hopefully [the playwright is] tackling it in a way that makes it of interest for people, thought provoking rather than just trying to provoke. It’s very much about opening a discussion rather than straight censorship of someone’s work.¹⁷

LaBute’s proposition, and the fact that there is a lot of “media attention, but not enough dialogue”¹⁸ around an issue like terrorism and its repercussions on young people, inspired me to use the arts, and specifically theatre, to encourage discussion

¹³ The Prevent strategy is very familiar to me as I was entreated to undertake training as part of gaining ethical authorisation for this project from the University.

¹⁴ Omar El-Khairi and Nadia Latif, “Drama in the age of Prevent: why can’t we move beyond Good Muslim vs Bad Muslim?”, in *The Guardian*, April 2016, online edition available at <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/apr/13/drama-in-the-age-of-prevent-why-cant-we-move-beyond-good-muslim-v-bad-muslim>

¹⁵ We can perhaps think about Nicholas Kent’s cycle of testimonial plays at the Tricycle Theatre in the early part of the Twenty-First Century, (re)creating quasi-legal forums where the initial proceedings or judgements had been purposefully opaque, or unsatisfactory, e.g. *The Colour of Justice*, examining the failure of the police in the Stephen Lawrence enquiry.

¹⁶ Of course, LaBute was no stranger to controversy with his post 9/11 play *The Mercy Seat*.

¹⁷ Neil LaBute, interview with *The Skinny Canada*, in article named “Walking the tightrope: politics at Edinburgh Fringe”, July 2015, online edition available at <http://www.theskinny.co.uk/festivals/edinburgh-fringe/theatre/walking-the-tightrope-controversy-in-theatre>.

¹⁸ Omar El-Khairi and Nadia Latif, “Drama in the age of Prevent: why can’t we move beyond Good Muslim vs Bad Muslim?”, in *The Guardian*, April 2016, online edition available at <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/apr/13/drama-in-the-age-of-prevent-why-cant-we-move-beyond-good-muslim-v-bad-muslim>.

and understanding of sensitive topics, especially when opening the conversation to younger audiences.

As a theatre practitioner-researcher, I believe that LaBute is correct in saying that the arts have a role to provoke discussions, and I also believe that this should not only be carried out within adult groups, but also with young people. Whilst the topic can be controversial to discuss with a younger group of people, perhaps less able to understand and intersect the personal and structural causes and impacts of terrorism, I believe that theatre can (and must) provide a facilitated space where controversial discussions can be held. I was particularly inspired by the practice of Carly Wijs whom, in 2013, was asked to create a theatre piece for BRONX¹⁹, and decided to write about the 2004 Beslan school siege²⁰. Wijs herself said that she had “never discussed it with [her] eight-year-old son”²¹. Her preoccupation with treating such a troubling topic came from recognising the societal impediment to talk about difficult topics of discussions with young people. However, the playwright was surprised to learn that her son had already known about the attack from its media coverage, and was seemingly able to openly talk about it. Wijs reflected that “the way he talked about the attack was very specific: objective, aloof, with the ability to overlook the emotional implications. He handled the news factually, as a sequence of events, and without having to connect it to a judgement”²². This is a critical point of differentiation between most adults and younger people: the capability to simultaneously hold both

¹⁹ BRONX is a Dutch theatre company that produces theatre aimed at young people and their development. <https://www.bronks.be/nl/>

²⁰ On School Number One’s first day of school (Beslan, North Ossetia), 1200 children and parents were held hostages by thirty-four Chechnyan terrorists, who ended up killing a total of at least 385 people (including children, parents and teachers).

²¹ Carly Wijs, “Tackling taboo subjects in theatre for young people”, in *Nick Hern Books Blog*, January 2017, online article available at <https://nickhernbooksblog.com/2017/01/13/tackling-taboo-subjects-in-theatre-for-young-people-carly-wijs-on-her-play-usthem/>.

²² *Ibidem*.

the political machinations and the emotional and personal nature of the tragedy. Wijs continues, “it was as if the horror for him as an eight-year-old child had a completely different meaning because it was not possible to relate it to his own life. A child, unlike an adult, does not think: ‘That could have been me.’”²³ After researching Wijs’ work, and with El-Khairy’s experience of censorship within the artistic world, I wanted to adopt a practice as research based approach to investigate ethical dramaturgical approaches to theatre-making that would help me discuss politically sensitive theatre-making with and for young people, reflecting on a particular tragedy, the Manchester Arena terror attack²⁴, the aftermath of which spread fear and division amongst the nation, and encouraged further Islamophobia.

This central research question led me to adopt three main practices through which I would be able to conduct the enquiry. The first practice is ‘Theatre and Education’, studied in Chapter Two through a practical approach to Boal, Way, O’Neill and Bolton’s theories surrounding legislative theatre, social drama and process drama. The study of these theatre practitioners and their methodologies for working with younger audiences on sensitive topics, aims to answer the following sub-research question: what methodologies and theoretical frameworks are useful to a practitioner-researcher to discuss topics that are politically, religiously and socially sensitive with young people? This sub-research question was supported by the practice-as-

²³ Carly Wijs, “Tackling taboo subjects in theatre for young people”, in *Nick Hern Books Blog*, January 2017, online article available at <https://nickhernbooksblog.com/2017/01/13/tackling-taboo-subjects-in-theatre-for-young-people-carly-wijs-on-her-play-usthem/>.

²⁴ On the 22nd May 2017, a shrapnel-laden homemade bomb exploded in the Manchester Arena foyer, killing twenty-three (number made of young people attending Ariana Grande’s concert, their parents/older relatives and the attacker himself), the youngest victim being an 8-years-old girl.

research²⁵, which involved the testing and application of the researched theories to a set of workshops carried out with a group of young people.

The second practice, dramaturgy, prompted me to investigate playwriting methods to effectively script an event like the Manchester terror attack, as well as examining theatrical devices and aesthetic palettes used to portray the event and to spark discourse around its appropriation and mediatisation²⁶. The sub-research question linked to the second practice (how can a playwright effectively script events that have caused national trauma in a politically ethical way, and spark discourse around these?), helped me reconceive previous artistic experience that involved authoring an original piece of fictional writing, here repurposing this craft as a catalyst for socio-political discussion.

The third practice, which was the rehearsal period to produce *10:31, MCR*, connected to another sub-research question related to my theatre-making practice, which interrogated the ways a theatre-maker can use the space around the play event to challenge and support their audiences (especially younger audiences) emotionally and intellectually, bringing the personal and political into closer alignment, to reflect on the aftermath of these tragedies²⁷.

This process followed throughout the research year and, guided by the interlocking sub-research questions and three practices, shaped the construction of this dissertation. Each chapter will examine different stages of the research, and the

²⁵ Critically analysed in Chapter Two.

²⁶ Critically analysed in Chapter Three.

²⁷ Critically analysed in Chapter Four.

conclusion will weigh how the exploration of these contributed to answering the main research question, drawing the practice-as-research feedback loop to a close, as I conclude on how the process has shaped my own methodologies and approach. The parameters of this dissertation mean that much has been left out the discussion here, in terms of research and process, and sometimes weeks of work are given the most scant mention. This cannot attempt to be an exhaustive account of the history of applied theatre with young people, the psychology of terror and trauma, or a comprehensive review of plays and approaches to representing seismic events, rather I have chosen what I believe to be emblematic methodologies and practices, pertinent case-studies and the highlights of my process, the evidence for which can be found in the appendices.

The first chapter engages with the conceptual framework of this thesis, which revolves around the study of theatre scholarships in verbatim, terror and trauma and how these terms relate to each other in performance. The work of Amanda Stuart-Fisher on the ethicality of verbatim theatre is here examined and linked to the practices carried out, aiming to provide a theoretical basis to begin answering the main research question. Laub and Felman's studies around witnessing, testimony and the concept of "the other" are also inspected and applied to the project's practice-as-research. Additionally, Hughes' writing on the relationship between performance and terror is investigated and serves as a theoretical foundation for the development of the conceptual framework of the thesis. The interlinking of the above studies will provide a theoretical lens through which the analysis of this practice-as-research will advance, aiming to provide an answer to the main research question. The chapter will also relate the conceptual framework to the work of two theatre makers who have treated similar

topics in their creative approaches (Omar El-Khairi²⁸ and Carly Wijs²⁹), and will consider how different dramaturgical and aesthetical factors in politically sensitive plays affect the response to the work. Emphasis will be given to the comparison of these texts and the socio-political circumstances in which they were produced, and the chapter will aim to explore the tension of whether it is possible to weigh the factors that influence audience reception.

The second chapter will outline a clear rationale for why practice-as-research was chosen as a methodological approach, as well as briefly describing the practice's approach to safeguarding and ethics before considering the first of the three practices chosen to advance the research described above, 'Theatre and Education'. This study will focus on the methodologies and theoretical frameworks that are useful to a practitioner-researcher to discuss topics that are politically, religiously and socially sensitive with young people through workshop practice³⁰. The works of Boal³¹, Way³², O'Neill and Bolton³³ will be compared and applied to the construction of effective and ethical workshop planning. The chapter will also highlight how the methodologies studied affected the direction of the writing of *10:31*, *MCR* and the reactions of the participants to the subject matter under discussion.

²⁸ Omar El-Khairi and Nadia Latif, *Homegrown*, 2015.

²⁹ Carly Wijs, *Us/Them*, 2015.

³⁰ The workshop examined in Chapter Two will be the one held at the Mercury Theatre on the 6th March 2018. Please refer to Appendix B for a detailed workshop plan.

³¹ Boal's practice taken in consideration and applied to the young people's workshop is the Theatre of the Oppressed, studied throughout a variety of sources footnoted in Chapter Two.

³² Way's practice taken in consideration and applied to the young people's workshop is the conception of a Social Drama, studied throughout a variety of sources footnoted in Chapter Two.

³³ Bolton's practice taken in consideration and applied to the young people's workshop is the study of Process Drama, hereditary of Dorothy Heathcote and Cecily O'Neill's methodologies, studied throughout a variety of sources footnoted in Chapter Two.

The third chapter will examine the second and third practices chosen to advance the through-line of the research. The second practice, dramaturgy, will study dramatic theories surrounding Postdramatic and Post-Holocaust theatre, and how these can help a playwright creating a script about a tragedy. Emphasis will be given to Lehmann's theory of the parallaxical introduction of the political in the dramatic form³⁴, Müller's revolution of form³⁵, as well as Vinaver's assemblage of documentary materials³⁶. The study of these theories and practices will develop into the second part of the chapter and into the investigation of the third practice, focusing on the rehearsal process for *10:31, MCR* and my search for the theatrical devices and aesthetics³⁷ to portray the Manchester attack, and to spark discourse around its appropriation and remediation. As this chapter will follow the rehearsal process and the performance stages of the project, the reader will note a shift in tone towards the latter part of the thesis, as I reflect upon my own practice, and attempt to present the challenges faced with rigour and candour.

The fourth chapter will aim to examine the primary data collected from the workshops, the performances and the post-performance interviews with the young people interrogating ways of using the space around the play event to challenge

³⁴ Hans-Thies Lehmann's critical writing about the political in Postdramatic theatre will be used as a guide to insert political argumentations in the scripting of *10:31, MCR*. Lehmann's theories will be investigated through Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll and Steve Giles's editing of *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political*, 2013.

³⁵ Heiner Müller's work *Hamletmachine* will be used as a main source for the investigation of fragmented form.

³⁶ Michel Vinaver's *11 Septembre 2001* will be used as a main source for the investigation of the piecing together of verbatim and documentary theatre, and how this reflected in the form of *10:31, MCR*.

³⁷ The reader is informed that the term *aesthetics* will be used to denote the choices of staging and representation to which the audiences respond to.

audiences' emotionally and intellectually to reflect on the aftermath of the attack.³⁸ . This chapter will also briefly touch on Grounded Theory (and its shortcomings when looking at data coding within the pursue of “liquid knowledge” of PaR) and will look at the triangulation of three elements of the research (methodology, research questions and the three practices chosen and studied in previous chapters) to attempt to come to evidence based conclusions that will help answering the main research question.

The concluding chapter of the thesis will include an evaluation of the findings in summary, highlighting strengths and weaknesses of the research and thoughts for further development of the research. The chapter will additionally reflect on how the sub-research questions examined throughout the dissertation have been answered, and the influence upon my practice as a theatre-maker, shifting the focus back to the main research question, which investigates ethical dramaturgical approaches to politically sensitive theatre-making with and for young people.

³⁸ For the development of this chapter, Appendices (including written Appendix I and video Appendices “Post-performance Q and A parts one and two” and “Post-performance young people’s interview parts one and two”) will be used to guide the reader through the findings of the research.

Chapter One

This chapter will provide the theoretical lens through which I will be able to advance the analysis of my practice later in the dissertation. Setting out the critical foundation of the research, I will explore verbatim, trauma, terror and testimony³⁹, specifically how they relate to theatre studies, defining these terms and exploring how they connect and relate with one another. The research carried out throughout this chapter will be accompanied by a brief study of the work of playwrights, looking at terror and its mimesis in theatre through a brief analysis of Omar El-Khairi's *Homegrown* and Carly Wijs' *Us/Them*. To pursue the investigation of how it might be possible to create politically sensitive theatre *with* and *for* young people, and therefore negotiating the terror of the Manchester attack by translation into critical theatrical mimesis, it is necessary to define terms that will be applied later in the research.

When formulating the research question “how can a practitioner-researcher approach politically sensitive theatre making with and for young people?”, the need to find out what “politically sensitive theatre making” encompassed was one point of departure. To do so, I decided to look back onto the event that inspired this practice-as-research project, the Manchester arena terror attack and, more generally, the rise in terror attacks and consequently the ‘War on Terror’ of the first decade of the 21st century. For context, the Arena attack followed a set of historically proximate attacks, the

³⁹ The reader is reminded that, due to the parameters of the dissertation, this study cannot attempt to be an exhaustive scholarship in verbatim, trauma, terror and testimony. The study of these will be centred around the aims of the research, which are to investigate ethical dramaturgical approaches to politically sensitive theatre making with and for young people.

Westminster Bridge attack⁴⁰ and preceded the London Bridge/Borough Market⁴¹ attack and the Finsbury Park⁴² attack.

When thinking about these instances and how to initiate a critical mimesis⁴³ using theatrical performance, we might consider Aristotle's concept of *catharsis*⁴⁴: the release from fear and pity provoked in audiences when presented with the sacrifice of the tragic hero, not absolving audiences as early interpretations of the word contended, but producing a purgation that results in renewed thinking. Terror, according to Jenny Hughes, is "an affect that is stimulated by the disturbance and collapse of worlds of meaning and processes of sense-making as well as material worlds"⁴⁵. The de-realising effects⁴⁶ of terror destroy the norms of the known world and place the individual outside the pre-existing self, vanishing into the Other⁴⁷ - or the unfamiliar. Anthony Kubiak's definition of terror, observed through a Lacanian lens, sets out the pattern to the formation of trauma, a "disordered psychic or behavioural state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury⁴⁸". Testifying to the reality of an unimaginable occurrence⁴⁹ is what often can follow terror and

⁴⁰ On the 22nd March 2017, Khalid Masood drove a rented car over the pavement on Westminster Bridge, ending up crashing into the fence of Westminster Palace and proceeding on foot towards the Parliament. He killed six people and injured over 50. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-39355108>

⁴¹ On the 3rd June 2017, Khuram Butt and Rachid Redouane drove a van into pedestrians on the London Bridge, to then stab and injure passers-by in Borough Market. They killed seven people and injured forty-eight. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/03/london-bridge-everything-know-far/>

⁴² On the 19th June 2017, another vehicle-ramming attack happened, this time in Finsbury Park. Darren Osborne drove his van into pedestrians, killing one and injuring at least nine. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-40323769>

⁴³ Jenny Hughes, *Performance in a time of terror: critical mimesis and the age of uncertainty*, Manchester: Manchester university press, 2011.

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics*, Oxford: University Press, 2013.

⁴⁵ Jenny Hughes, *Performance in a time of terror: critical mimesis and the age of uncertainty*, Manchester: Manchester university press, 2011, page 12.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ Anthony Kubiak, in Jenny Hughes, *Performance in a time of terror: critical mimesis and the age of uncertainty*, Manchester: Manchester university press, 2011, page 12.

⁴⁸ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trauma>

⁴⁹ Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p.60.

trauma in order to ‘witness’, to provide corroboration, authentication and new historicity to the event.⁵⁰ Despite the ‘unspeakability’ of trauma, an attempt to testify to the terror – or the unbelievability⁵¹ of what has happened, can establish a connection between the victim and the listener to the narrative of extreme pain⁵². Dori Laub writes that “while historical evidence to the event that constitutes the trauma may be abundant [...], the trauma – as a known event and not simply as an overwhelming shock – has not been witnessed yet, not been taken cognizance of”⁵³. The listener to the testimony is, therefore, integral part to the process of bearing witness, of creating the political category of witness, and a “party to the creation of knowledge *ob novo*”⁵⁴. The listener, the ‘intimate audience’, is the first receiver of the new historicity of the event, turning into what Laub describes as “participant and co-owner of the traumatic event”⁵⁵. By doing so, they then become witness to the “process of witnessing itself”, and the process of dissemination and reproduction of that original terror is activated.⁵⁶ It could be said that Aristotle’s *catharsis* is represented, in the theatrical space, through the act of witnessing, through audiences listening to the testimonies of others, in contact with the

⁵⁰ Laub’s research into the nature of testimony draws attention to the conflict that arises when historical knowledge is altered by the testimony. Her experience with interviewing Auschwitz survivors brought her to believe that the act of testifying, or bearing witness to the trauma experiences, shapes a new historicity of the event through the unimaginable taking place in the imaginable, existing reality.

⁵¹ Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p.60.

⁵² Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 57.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ Laub talks about the witnessing of the process of witnessing, and describes how this third phase in testimony is a phase that depends entirely on the listener witnessing the traumatized individual. By the third grade of witnessing, the “traumatic experience has normally long been submerged and has become distorted in its submersion. The horror of the historical experience is maintained in the testimony only as an elusive memory that feels as if it no longer resembles any reality. The horror is, indeed, compelling, and not only in its reality, but even more so, in its flagrant distortion and subversion of reality. Realising its dimensions becomes a process that demands retreat”. Dori Laub, “An event without a witness: Truth, Testimonial and Survival”, in *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*, London: Routledge, 1992, page 75-76.

performative historicity of the traumatic event, who are therefore connected to strong ‘purgative’ emotions that ‘results in renewed thinking’.

Hughes states that “performance is the encounter with existential terror, and it provides a means through which it might be negotiated”⁵⁷; therefore, that terror, trauma, testimony and performance can be linked together in successional order, each ‘encountering’ and triggering the next, and resulting in the need for a critical mimesis of the event – the performance -, a “precarious front line to our encounters with an uncertain and unpredictable world”⁵⁸. The term critical mimesis is here intended as a “response to the urgent demand for an interruption of the atrophic, petrified projections of self and other mobilised by the mimetic excess of a system in crisis”⁵⁹ rejecting hegemonic ideals⁶⁰.

Permeating through the succession of terror, trauma, testimonies and performance is the ethicality of the mode of critical mimesis: thinking here about using the testimonial form, realised as verbatim theatre to bear witness and bring traumatised voices to the stage. Verbatim raises questions around legitimacy. The practice of verbatim theatre, “accused of being an unethical and appropriative practice, an ‘act of ventriloquism’ (2008:219), where stories from the marginalized and vulnerable in our community are solicited and then used to authenticate the plays that theatre makers wish to construct”⁶¹, has been explored in depth by Amanda Stuart Fisher. Her work focuses

⁵⁷ Jenny Hughes, *Performance in a time of terror: critical mimesis and the age of uncertainty*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011, p.12.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ Jenny Hughes, *Performance in a time of terror: critical mimesis and the age of uncertainty*, Manchester: Manchester university press, 2011, p.18.

⁶⁰ The notion of hegemonic ideals resonates loudly with the aftermath of the London and Manchester attacks. Following these, the nation has witnessed a rise in hate crimes towards ethnic and religious minorities. Therefore, Hughes’ proposition of a critical mimesis that works to reject these is apt for the aims of this practice-as-research. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/hate-crimes-eu-referendum-spike-brexite-terror-attacks-police-home-office-europeans-xenophobia-a8004716.html>

⁶¹ Amanda Stuart-Fisher, ‘That’s who I’d be, if I could sing’: Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208.

on “understanding the relationship between those who do the speaking (the actors) and those whose stories are told (the verbatim subjects) as one based on reciprocity”⁶². Looking at the aims of my research, interrogating ways of approaching politically sensitive theatre with and for young people, it is necessary to put the succession of terror, trauma, witnessing and performance through a self-reflexive lens, combined with a rich knowledge of ethical practices⁶³. Stuart Fisher outlined the issues surrounding the act of speaking *for* and speaking *on behalf* of others, and their repercussions on the creative process of the theatre-maker. Defending the practice, Stuart Fisher states that “to testify [...] is to promise to speak of that which has been *lived through* and it is this act of attestation itself that contains a truth claim, not the ‘fact’ it corresponds to”⁶⁴. Stuart Fisher understands the implications of claiming and appropriating legitimacy through verbatim theatre, which can lead to an eradication of “otherness”⁶⁵; nonetheless, she also notes that the abdication of the responsibility of speaking on behalf of the victims as a second-grade witness⁶⁶ is as unethical, as it lets the recount of the events from a victim’s perspective be undermined by hegemonic historical descriptions. Whilst Stuart Fisher recognizes that there are many questions

⁶² Amanda Stuart-Fisher, ‘That’s who I’d be, if I could sing’: Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208.

⁶³ The writer recognizes that the reading around ethical practices for verbatim and documentary theatre is wide. For the purposes of the research question, and due to the parameters of the dissertation, Stuart Fisher’s work is studied as a main theoretical source, and the work of other academics (LaCapra, Bottoms, Derrida, Heddon) is only quoted and not critically investigated.

⁶⁴ Amanda Stuart-Fisher, ‘That’s who I’d be, if I could sing’: Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208, p.6.

⁶⁵ The eradication of the otherness is a concept that LaCapra has investigated in depth in his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. His study highlights the ethical issues with identification, which can lead to “the fusion of self and other, in which the otherness or alterity of the other is not recognised and respected”. (LaCapra, 2001:78). This brings the person who is speaking for the victim to become a “surrogate victim who has a right to the victim’s voice or subject position, ultimately taking the other’s place”. (LaCapra, 2001. 78).

⁶⁶ Laub’s second-grade witness is embodied by the listener, who testimonies for the recount of the known event – which re-shapes historical accounts.

surrounding the ethicality of verbatim and documentary theatre⁶⁷, her work with mothers of sexually abused children has allowed her to work on a process of telling the stories of consensual victims and “performing [them], so they can finally be heard”⁶⁸. Recounting the rehearsal process, Stuart Fisher states that

it became clear from [their] participant observation that the act of identification adopted by the mothers towards the actors had a positive and potentially therapeutic value for them... the mothers engaged positively with the actors and in fact actively sought to find points of similarity and cohesion between themselves and their enacted representation.⁶⁹

Her research brings her to pose the question of whether verbatim theatre “points to its artifice and the production of a simulacrum”⁷⁰ or whether it “invites the audience into a process of unchecked identification, where they are no longer sure who is standing before them”⁷¹. Whilst she confirms that both these options can happen throughout the process, she also states that the verbatim subjects, when watching the products of their testimonies, are “fully apprised of who is speaking for whom”⁷². Stuart Fisher focuses her verbatim practice on the shift from “acting out”⁷³ to “working through the past”⁷⁴, as “the person tries to gain a critical distance on a problem and to distinguish between past, present and future” (LaCapra, 2001:143)⁷⁵. Stuart Fisher’s answer to

⁶⁷ Her work quotes Bottom’s thoughts on the ‘fetishization’ of the act of sourcing truths from the mouths of those affected, as well as post-structuralist’s Derrida’s thoughts on logocentrism and the power of the sources of the words that are spoken.

⁶⁸ Amanda Stuart-Fisher, ‘That’s who I’d be, if I could sing’: Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208, p. 8.

⁶⁹ Amanda Stuart-Fisher, ‘That’s who I’d be, if I could sing’: Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁵ It is essential to note that LaCapra states that “working through” does not equate to “a cure or a process of forgetting”. In Amanda Stuart Fisher, ‘That’s who I’d be, if I could sing’: Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208.

the problematic issue of the “eradication of the alterity of others”⁷⁶ resides on a thorough self-reflecting practice throughout the process⁷⁷, where the researcher checks in with their own practice and methodologies regularly. Her conclusions on the questions around the ethicality of verbatim rely on the fact that “it is important not to fall complacently into a false assumption that any methodology – however carefully thought out – can guarantee ethical practice. The stories of our experiences will always implicate others.”⁷⁸ Therefore, “any practice that is constitutively appropriative must engage in an ongoing process of self-reflection and the questioning of assumptions”⁷⁹, and that any practice “should always begin with a process questioning about why we are doing what we are doing and how we think it will benefit the participants.”⁸⁰ Stuart Fisher’s approaches to verbatim theatre making presented above have inspired the practice-as-research undertaken to answer the research question this thesis poses. The practice-as-research will be based on the understanding of Stuart Fisher’s work and it will be analyzed through the theoretical lens provided by the study of Felman, Laub and Hughes’ formulations around terror, trauma, witnessing and performance, with constant self-reflexivity, ‘questioning’ and vigilance to the ‘ethical practice’.

As part of applying the conceptual framework to the research carried out in this thesis, this chapter will consider pre-existing ‘politically sensitive’ plays *Homegrown* (El-Khairy, Nadif) and *Us/Them* (Wijs), as other plays that examine terrorism,

⁷⁶Dominik LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, USA: JHP, 2001.

⁷⁷ Stuart Fisher supports her self-reflecting practice with Fuss’s theory that “it is the very presence of the otherness within the enactment of verbatim that potentially opens up the possibility of a processual move from an acting out to a working through of events of the past” (Fuss 1995: 2-3), in Amanda Stuart Fisher, ‘That’s who I’d be, if I could sing’: Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

fundamentalism and Islamaphobia. These texts are placed in critical comparison, using the scholarships outlined above as theoretical parameters in order to further contextualise the development and delivery of my work. This will result in the exploration of how a play's aesthetics⁸¹ help to shape and give leverage to dramaturgy and how the representational palette works to create realistic proximity or stylised analogy, as well as how the intertextuality of the *mise en scene* can drive the politics behind the "shutting down" of any play.

When Carly Wijs, Dutch actress and playwright, was asked to write a play for BRONX⁸², a terrorist attack had just happened in a shopping mall in Kenya, where 67 civilians were killed by unidentified attackers in a shooting siege. Inspired by her son's factual recount of the events⁸³, Wijs started reflecting about the 2004 Beslan school siege. She especially thought about how "this dark episode in history could combine with the thoughts and impressions of children about such acts, to make a piece of theatre for young people"⁸⁴, and she decided to write a play about the tragedy, focusing entirely on the "individual way children cope with traumatic situations"⁸⁵.

⁸¹ The reader is informed that the term *aesthetics* will be used to denote the choices of staging and representation to which the audiences respond to.

⁸² "BRONKS Theater voor jong publiek" is a Dutch theatre company that creates plays and performances for young audiences, tackling a vast range of topics, all of which are relevant to younger audiences and serve educational purposes as well as artistic freedom.

<https://www.bronks.be/en/all-about-bronks/about-bronks>

⁸³ Carly Wijs, "Tackling taboo subjects in theatre for young people: Carly Wijs on her play *Us/Them*", Nick Hern Books, January 13th, 2017, online article available at <https://nickhernbooksblog.com/2017/01/13/tackling-taboo-subjects-in-theatre-for-young-people-carly-wijs-on-her-play-usthem/>

⁸⁴ Carly Wijs, "Tackling taboo subjects in theatre for young people: Carly Wijs on her play *Us/Them*", Nick Hern Books, January 13th, 2017, online article available at <https://nickhernbooksblog.com/2017/01/13/tackling-taboo-subjects-in-theatre-for-young-people-carly-wijs-on-her-play-usthem/>

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

The play had a sold-out run at the Edinburgh Festival, and a later run at the National Theatre⁸⁶.

In 2015, British playwright Omar El-Khairi and Nadia Latif were “approached by the National Youth Theatre with an idea for a show – a large scale, site-specific, immersive play looking at the radicalization of young British Muslims”⁸⁷. The duo described how after the press release of the production, their planned rehearsal space in Bethnal Green⁸⁸ withdrew, after allegedly being “pressured by Tower Hamlets council”⁸⁹. A spokeswoman of the Tower Hamlets council stated that

“the school was not aware of the subject of the play when they agreed to lease the premises. Once they became aware, they decided that it would not be appropriate to rent their premises to the National Youth Theatre. The news of the missing school girls has had a huge emotional impact on their families and friends, as well as the entire local community. Hosting this play in the heart of this community at Raine’s School would be insensitive.”⁹⁰

Once an alternative rehearsal space was secured, and 70% of the script “signed-off” by the NYT, the artists were informed that the police had expressed interest in

⁸⁶ Rosemary Waugh, “Carly Wijs: ‘It’s very important that we have children that can think for themselves’, in *Exeunt Magazine*, January 2017, online article available at <http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/carly-wijs-scary-lot-people-imagine-no-truth/>
Claire Allfree, “Us/Them is a powerful, child’s eye view of something unspeakable”, in *The Telegraph*, January 2017, online article available at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/usthem-powerful-childs-eye-view-something-unspeakable-review/>
Nick Awde, Us/Them review at Summerhall, Edinburgh, in *The Stage*, August 2016, online article available at <https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/2016/usthem-review-at-summerhall-edinburgh-outstanding/>

⁸⁷ Omar El Khairi and Nadia Latif, foreword to *Homegrown*, page 13. London: Fly Pirates, 2017.

⁸⁸ The rehearsal space was a mile away from the school attended by Amira Abase, Kadiza Sultana and Shamima Begum, three young people who ran away in 2015 to join ISIS, as reported by John Hall in the Independent, “British Schoolgirls who fled Bethnal Green to join Isis in Raqqa feared dead as families lose contact”, online article available at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/british-schoolgirls-who-fled-bethnal-green-to-join-isis-in-raqqa-are-feared-dead-after-families-lose-a6821561.html>

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁰ David Hutchinson, “NYT radicalisation play axed amid cries of censorship”, in *The Stage*, August 2015, online edition available at <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2015/nyt-radicalisation-play-axed-amid-cries-censorship/>

“reading the script, attending the first three shows, plant plain clothes policemen in the audience and sweep daily with the bomb squad”⁹¹. Halfway through rehearsals, El-Khairi and Latif received an email from the same committee informing them that the show was cancelled. According to the two artists, “there was no consultation and no explanation – indeed, they even attempted to prevent [them] from entering the building the next morning when [they] came to collect their things. All [their] attempts at meeting with the NYT have been delayed and then cancelled”⁹². The two artists then decided to pick rehearsals back up in secret, failing however to secure a publishing house or agent - “as they feared being another Charlie Hebdo”⁹³ - and ending up self-publishing under Fly Pirates.

One could say that both Wijs’s and El-Khairi’s plays aimed at shining a light on topics that are often deemed too sensitive and controversial to be discussed with young people, thus investigating different approaches to ‘politically sensitive theatre making’. The differences in the approaches to themes treated and choices of aesthetics used to produce the two shows will be broadly reviewed through the theoretical lens of Stuart Fisher’s research around legitimacy and ethicality in the next paragraphs and will aim to provide examples of pre-existent works and processes for the writer to draw upon when producing *10:31, MCR*.

⁹¹ Omar El Khairy and Nadia Latif, foreword to *Homegrown*, page 13. London: Fly Pirates, 2017.

⁹² *Ibidem*, pages 13-14.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, page 14.

1.1: Approaches to themes treated

Looking at the two plays, the first dissimilarity resides in the fact that Wijs' writing focuses on a singular event, whereas El-Khairy's examines a set of interlinked social issue, a larger scale of episodes⁹⁴ openly dramatized in form of staged discussions in the play. The second clear dissimilarity spawns from the different natures of the commissions and in the aims of the products, which explain some of the variances in the dramaturgical and staging choices made. Whilst Wijs was commissioned by BRONX to write a play for young people that touched on topics relevant for the youth, El-Khairy was commissioned to write a play specifically about the radicalization of young British Muslims. Due to the creative freedom allowed by the artistic director of the Theater voor Jung Publiek, Wijs could select her topic, whereas El-Khairy's play followed a brief and was commissioned by a national organisation with a large community outreach programme. The relevance and freshness of the topics treated could have influenced the different reactions: the Beslan siege happened eleven years before Wijs wrote about it, and she dis-located the drama from the socio-political origin of the story. El-Khairy sparked controversy by locating his drama in the very postcode where young people had been radicalised⁹⁵. Applying Kubiak's thoughts on the de-realising⁹⁶ effects of terror and cross-correlating them with the proximity of the events that are spoken about in *Homegrown* might provide a justification with regards to the National Theatre's decision to pull the production. In considering the reception

⁹⁴ The writer informs the reader that the choice of the term "episodes" will recur in the chapter, and will indicate the issues treated in *Homegrown*, such as radicalisation and islamophobia. The term has been chosen to reflect the recurring nature of these issues in British society.

⁹⁵ East London has one of the highest figures of young people's radicalization to ISIS.

<http://mackenzieinstitute.com/islamic-radicalization-britain-deconstructed/>

⁹⁶ Anthony Kubiak, in Jenny Hughes, *Performance in a time of terror: critical mimesis and the age of uncertainty*, Manchester: Manchester university press, 2011, page 12.

of the work, we begin to unpick the issue of ‘proximity’, a factor here both on personal, geographical and temporal levels. In a 2016 interview Wijs related the topic treated in her play to a more recent terror attack; “Someone asked me, ‘Would you still have made this show after the Paris attacks?’ – and I said, ‘Probably not’”⁹⁷. Wijs’ play was shown in Edinburgh and in London within a year of the Paris and Brussels’ terror attacks⁹⁸ and we can perhaps observe a moment of substitution, a different form of proxy-witnessing⁹⁹, using the events of many years ago in the Beslan siege, to stand in for more recent and proximate tragedies. Furthermore, Wijs’ play treats events that have affected young people, but utilises adult actors to portray the stories, whereas El-Khairy’s play prompted ‘safeguarding’ concerns utilising young actors, who were deemed vulnerable to radicalisation by the very content of the piece. Whilst Stuart Fisher would consider the verbatim techniques used by the young people in El-Khairy’s *Homegrown* a positive, reciprocal moment of working through¹⁰⁰ the issues which affected the school close by¹⁰¹, perhaps the momentum of the de-realising events¹⁰² of radicalization of young people in England shifted the reception of the work around the negative aspects of critical mimesis, in this case believed to encourage radicalisation.

⁹⁷ Carly Wijs, Interview with the National Theatre, 2016, online edition available at <http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/blog/conversation-usthem-director-carly-wijs>

⁹⁸ The Paris terror attack November 2015. Brussels terror attack March 2016.

⁹⁹ Proxy-witnessing is here intended as per Laub’s studies on Auschwitz survivors and their witnesses. A proxy-witness is, in this case, a “participant and co-owner of the dramatic event”. In Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*, New York: Routledge, 1992.

¹⁰⁰ Amanda Stuart Fisher, ‘That’s who I’d be, if I could sing’: Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208.

¹⁰¹ Please refer to footnote 88.

¹⁰² The term de-realising is hereby used according to Kubiak’s description of the effects of terror.

Additionally, Wijs' writing never examines the macro-structural issues around the topic: the history behind the shooting¹⁰³ is never mentioned, sitting instead within the purview of the 'child' protagonists. This could have contributed to creating a space which is free from the arrival of "the other"¹⁰⁴, and allows the audiences to stay within the safe boundaries of the self¹⁰⁵. El-Khairy's play, on the other hand, explores extreme views and portrays them through the eyes of young people aged fifteen to twenty-four years old, threading in the perspectives of a radicalised youth. In his director's note, El-Khairy urges the reader to "not justify these views, or digest them all. Some are purposely aggressive or left-field. The audience, of course, do not have to agree with everything they hear. Investigate the space between what is deemed acceptable and what is intelligible. Make bold decisions. Be brave."¹⁰⁶. Therefore, El-Khairy is purposely using the physical presence of young people to give flesh to the reality of who is likely to encounter ideologues, promising to "speak of that which has been lived through"¹⁰⁷; Wijs is portraying events through young people's eyes, but the allegory and fiction of the moment is sustained through the presence of the adult actor in performance. The latter received five-star plaudits, and the former was subject to a Metropolitan Police Review.

¹⁰³ The conflict between Russia and Chechnya.

¹⁰⁴ Anthony Kubiak, in Jenny Hughes, *Performance in a time of terror: critical mimesis and the age of uncertainty*, Manchester: Manchester university press, 2011, page 12.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁶ Nadia Latif, director's note, *Homegrown*, page 18. London: Fly Pirates, 2017.

¹⁰⁷ Amanda Stuart Fisher, 'That's who I'd be, if I could sing': Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208.

1.2: Structures and characters

The works differ substantially from a structural point of view. Wijs' play is made up of a single scene, where the two main characters, GIRL and BOY, share the stage and act out events that happened in School Number One on the first three days of September 2004. *Homegrown*, instead, presents a much more complex structure¹⁰⁸. The "pre-show" tours take place simultaneously, in different parts of the school, with the first one being led by the characters of AMARA (*black*)¹⁰⁹ and COREY (*white*), who direct the audience through the different spaces and are recurrent characters in between scenes. Interspersed scenes are spoken by different characters, whose ethnicities are not specified and "open to interpretation"¹¹⁰. The other four tours are led by characters such as MOHAMMED (*dark-skinned, middle class, Christian*) and DAISY (*light-skinned, working class*) LISA (*Arab*) and EDDIE-JOE (*white*), where again, their speaking scenes are alternated with others where different characters explore examples of islamophobia, racism, radicalisation and other pre-conceptions that young people encounter. In an interview, Latif and El-Khairi stated that these scenes in *Homegrown* were there "so you'd have to have conversations at the end. There was no way to say everything we wanted to say in an hour and a half so the audience had to converse for us."¹¹¹ This brings the focus back on the above quoted

¹⁰⁸ Appendix A, number 5.

¹⁰⁹ The ethnicities of the tour guides are specified in the characters' list on page 9 of *Homegrown*.

¹¹⁰ The characters' list also specifies that for all other parts, unless specified, gender and ethnicity are open to interpretation.

¹¹¹ Nadia Latif, interview with Emily Jupp, "Homegrown: the ISIS drama that was too hot to handle", iNews, April 2017, online edition available at <https://inews.co.uk/culture/arts/homegrown-the-isis-drama-that-was-too-hot-to-handle/> Emily Jupp, Latif's interviewer, agreed that "the scenes are sometimes shocking but they are there for a reason – to facilitate conversation about things we don't usually have the tools to talk about, or feel uncomfortable talking about".

“open to interpretation” instruction. Whilst the NYT interpreted such moments as potential for exposure to extremist propaganda, in El-Khairi and Latif’s eyes they were a tool to spark conversation¹¹². The characters of the tour guides are all different in ethnicity and gender, however their speaking parts have the same focus: discussing the radicalisation of young British people. The characters who are discussed by the tour guides are AISHA, LAILA and FAROUK – all of which are indicated on the characters’ list to be POC¹¹³. The tour guides all have different opinions on the matter, an artistic choice which mirrors El-Khairi and Latif’s decision of portraying lots of different views that spring from several backgrounds, which might explain the introduction of gender specific and ethnically specific casting. One might say, this is a choice deployed in publication of the text that has also been taken to counteract the censorship of the National Youth Theatre. In our one, AMARA and COREY discuss the following:

COREY: / Look at Aisha.

AMARA: What about Aisha? [...] What you trying to say?

COREY: I’m saying your BFF has got herself caught up in some shit.

AMARA: You’re just being a spiteful /

COREY: / You don’t? (*Beat*). No? (*Beat*). Aisha, Farouk and Laila.

(*Beat*). Nothing? You can’t – you don’t want to entertain –

AMARA [...] ¹¹⁴

The two young people’s conversations heavily revolve around the absent characters, with mentions of Aisha, Farouk and Laila’s names dotted all around the different tours, the sense of ‘missing’ young people underscoring the ways in which the Bethnal Green Academy Girls had disappeared from their ‘ordinary’ lives. Similarly, *Us/Them*

¹¹² Once again sign-posting Stuart Fisher’s shift of verbatim practice from acting out the past to working through it by bearing witness, and promising to testify to the events that survivors have spoken about.

¹¹³ POC stands for “people of colour”.

¹¹⁴ Omar El-Khairi and Nadia Latif, *Homegrown*, page 28, London: Fly πrates, 2017.

mentions characters that are not portrayed throughout the play. In Wijs' play, BOY and GIRL refer to the farmer father with his tractor, and the butcher father with his knives¹¹⁵, who race in the youngsters' heads to see who can get to School Number One first. The difference between El-Khairy and Wijs's way of inserting absent characters resides in the framing by the present characters. BOY and GIRL, in *Us/Them*, represent two six-to-ten-year-old young people who have survived the siege and are recounting the story through their eyes. Wijs' dramaturgical choice is grounded in the belief that the readers and the audience of the play know enough about the events to formulate their own judgement, where the BOY and GIRL offer none. There is no attempt to lobby the audience, or convince them of a viewpoint on the events¹¹⁶, apart from to highlight what is lost by the destruction at the heart of the narrative. It is perhaps the creation of a more neutral seeming environment that does not enforce "schisms of the self"¹¹⁷ that might bring encounters with a perceived destroying "other"¹¹⁸. The *Homegrown* population are secondary school pupils from London who have politicised and, some would say, 'extreme' opinions, confronting the potential audience with the spectre of unapologetic adoption of resistance as a preferable alternative to racist aggression and marginalisation in the 'home' country. The schism is drastically exposed to the audiences, opening onto a world of disbelief and abnormality which causes, as Kubiak would say, existential terror.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Carly Wijs, *Us/Them*, page 14, London: Nick Hern Books, 2017.

¹¹⁶ In Wijs' case, this could be considered a reflection of the victims' attitudes in the documentary "Children of Beslan", that Wijs studied in depth and from which the play takes huge inspiration. The children in the documentary don't express judgements on the terrorists or try to convince the people watching the documentary that people from Chechnya are to be condemned. They tell the story as asked by the producers of the documentary, recalling the events in an analytical way.

¹¹⁷ Anthony Kubiak, in Jenny Hughes, *Performance in a time of terror: critical mimesis and the age of uncertainty*, Manchester: Manchester university press, 2011, page 12.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

1.3: Use of Language

The language used in the plays reflects the demographic of the central characters, mirroring their slangs and ways of expression. The characters in *Us/Them* engage in a more childlike dialogue, describing the layout of School Number One, the number of terrorists and victims, the number of grannies present on the day, and indulging in some light-hearted jokes.

BOY: We are not allowed to lower our hands.
We are not allowed to pee.
GIRL: That is not true.
BOY: We are not allowed to do a poo.
GIRL: We can pee and poo, we are not allowed to use the toilet.
[...]
BOY: We are not allowed to pick our nose.
GIRL: Sit with Mummy. [...]
Drink. Giraffe.
The BOY laughs.
Drink.
BOY and GIRL: Stink.
BOY: Basket Hoop.
GIRL: Stinkempoop.¹²⁰

This reflects Wijs' goal of writing a play for young people, about young people, with words recognisable as belonging to the demographic of young people¹²¹. Similarly, El-Khairy's use of language in the play reflects the socio-geographical world of the play, the ethnically mixed culture of East London. The variety of characters in *Homegrown*, and their ethnic and gender specifications result in a vast ocean of personalities, which sometimes agree, sometimes clash, and sometimes don't try to

¹²⁰ Carly Wijs, *Us/Them*, pages 16-18, Nick Hern Books, 2017.

¹²¹ Wijs based the construction of her play on the BBC documentary "Дети Беслана / Children of Beslan". This is why there are many similarities between the lines of the play and the interviews carried out with the young people who survived the school siege.

understand each other. An example of this is shown in Tour Two, Scene 4, when MUSLIM BOY and WHITE BOY have a rap-off:

MUSLIM BOY TO WHITE BOY:

Watch the pasty little white boy @ me / you never rated me or my ancestry / appropriate it all / why don't you rob my family / more culture in my hair than your whole nation's history / we make the shit – then you abuse it / [...] / Convicted for all that ignorant gang shit / You can't pass a test / but you can pass that spliff / [...] I'm bombing on this white boy / call me Jihadi John

As WHITE BOY continues rapping, it becomes clear that a line has been crossed. The group gets quieter.

WHITE BOY TO MUSLIM BOY:

This Jew's nose is so big cause air is completely free / Hold on to your money / this kid's trying to steal your Ps / [...] Black people, nothing new / I saw one last night / trying to steal my damn television / [...] / Fuck you and your grandma too / there's a banana boat outside / you know what to do / And Arabs / don't get me started / [...] / Fasting when it's Ramadan / for the rest of the year your sister wants to bang a man / sorry if I upset ya / I just hope you know how to get jizz out of your sister's burka¹²²

Due to the collaborative devising process, we might hypothesise that the language in El-Khairy's play was in part a reflection of the speech from the young people involved in making the piece. One might say that Wijs' controlled and measured poetics results in a more tense 'ticking bomb' atmosphere, laden with sub-text and layered with meaning-making in connecting to events outside of the play. As Noel Greig would agree, "there is a pressure on the language, and that pressure is the unspoken feelings. Rage, disdain and fear may all be there, but they are held in by the seemingly mild exchange of dialogue"¹²³. In *Homegrown*, the "pressure" explodes into aggressive dialogues and shocking statements, together with the use of a vocabulary that social 'pressure' would deem unacceptable for fourteen to eighteen years old, and that might

¹²² Omar El-Khairy, Nadia Latif, *Homegrown*, pages 63-64, 2017.

¹²³ Noel Greig, *Playwriting: a practical guide*, page 147, London: Routledge, 2005. E-book available at <http://0-eds.a.ebscohost.com.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzExNjQxMI9fQU41?sid=8481aa29-9dd2-4915-a7d1-b2a6abb0022d@sessionmgr4009&vid=0&hid=http://0-eds.a.ebscohost.com.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/&format=EB>

point towards another of the reasons behind the ‘censorship’ of the play. The use of such explosive dialogue additionally raises questions around empathetic identification¹²⁴ and resemblance and replacement¹²⁵; whilst Stuart Fisher defines this as subsuming the other’s suffering as our own, it could also mean that the audiences are empathetically linked to radical thoughts expressed in performance, consequently suffering a radicalisation by proxy.

1.4: Locations

Whilst Wijs uses defined stage spaces to present their stories, *Homegrown*’s use of locations reflects the uncontrollable and untraceable nature of the radicalization of young people. Splitting the audience in groups allocated randomly and taking them on different journeys, takes away the sense of spatial security and uniformity of perspective, adding to the feeling of ineffability¹²⁶ and triggering the “terrifying disappearance of self and world”¹²⁷. The restlessness of the young people portrayed in *Homegrown* resonates through the *promenade* nature of the piece: the audience is given different coloured bracelets by the “makeshift box office staff in the school foyer [...] in character and in costume – as teachers”¹²⁸, to then be told that the performance has been delayed half an hour. However, the audience is told to “fear not, the [thirty minutes] will be filled by taking [them] on a tour of the school and its

¹²⁴ Amanda Stuart Fisher, ‘That’s who I’d be, if I could sing’: Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208.

¹²⁵ Freud’s theory surrounding the effects of representation are studied by Stuart Fisher in her essay ‘That’s who I’d be, if I could sing’: Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208.

¹²⁶ Jenny Hughes, *Performance in a time of terror. Critical mimesis and the age of uncertainty*, Manchester: Manchester University press, 2011, p. 13.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁸ Omar El-Khairi, *Homegrown*, Pre-show stage directions, page 23. London: Fly πrates, 2017.

facilities”¹²⁹. The unusual nature of the location might have contributed to the scepticism of the National Youth Theatre: an unknown space, with a fragmented and itinerant constituency for each performance. Nothing is predictable about *Homegrown*: “a momentary sense of chaos - anything feels possible right now”¹³⁰, where once again, El-Khairy evokes the air “possibility” a further insistence that this world is “open to interpretation”. On the other hand, *Us/Them* is designed for traditional stage spaces, where there is no merging of the fictional world that is created on stage and the real world of the audience – even when these fictional worlds are based on real events. There is a sense of security in remaining in the position of onlooker, there is no proximity to the stage action, no participation with the actors, no navigation of shifting boundaries. Whilst proxy-witnessing¹³¹ is happening through performance, the audiences are aware that this is mimesis, and have a more distanced relationship through the proxy-ness. This is a feeling that is purposefully complexified and blurred for the audiences who come to watch *Homegrown*. The audience is in the set, walking through the classrooms where drama is happening. When MUSLIM BOY and WHITE BOY start fighting after the rap-off, the audience is circling the action, feet away. The proximity of the scenarios presented and the feeling that “anything could happen” is something which, in a country with a critical terrorist threat level, links to the manifest dangers in the external world.

¹²⁹ Omar El-Khairy, *Homegrown*, Pre-show stage directions, page 24. London: Fly πrates, 2017.

¹³⁰ Omar El-Khairy, *Homegrown*, Pre-show stage directions, page 23, London: Fly πrates, 2017.

¹³¹ Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis and history*, New York: Routledge, 1992.

1.5: Aesthetics: Staging, Movements and Set choices

In *Us/Them*, the aesthetics¹³² of the production is dominated by a web of string criss-crossing the stage, amplifying¹³³ the sense of entrapment, mired decisions, fragmented memories, and perhaps even hinting at the wider political networks surrounding the event. This use of aesthetics has a similar effect in *Homegrown*, where the immersive nature of the setting is intended to provoke situated reflections from the audience. Wijs' aesthetic choices (the positioning of the rope, the wooden box) rely on the influence of the documentary about the Beslan siege¹³⁴ and her personal experience of how young children process and analyse traumatic events. BOY and GIRL describe the events as if asked questions by an invisible person (potentially behind a camera), and battle to make one's version of the events prevail over the other – just as the children in the filmed documentary. The stage is initially bare, apart from a chalkboard at the back, some coat hangers and chalk for the actors to draw on the floor with. As the play goes on, the two actors re-create the look of the gymnasium as per the children's recollection, hanging wires across the stage and linking them all to the brown box, simulating the bomb that was hanging at the centre of the gymnasium¹³⁵. Wijs' stage directions dictate how the stage is set throughout, and are representative of her research and development process, which was strongly influenced by the documentary¹³⁶. Both for the initiated and non-initiated audience members to the

¹³² For the purposes of this sub-paragraph, the reader is reminded that the term *aesthetics* is used to denote the choices of staging and representation to which the audiences respond to.

¹³³ The term “amplify” in relation to aesthetics is hereby used is adapted from Richard Jackson's interpretation of aesthetics, expressed in “Terrorism, Taboo and Discursive Resistance: the agonistic potential of the terrorism novel”, in *International studies review*, 2015, 396-413.

¹³⁴ “Children of Beslan / Дети Беслана”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtefaPk8Yhc&t=940s>

¹³⁵ Appendix A, number 1.

¹³⁶ It could be argued that the reactions of the audiences to these aesthetic choices were milder compared to those had by the commissioners of *Homegrown* due to the derivative nature of the piece, heavily inspired by the BBC documentary “Children of Beslan”.

images of the seige¹³⁷, Wijs' choice of basing the aesthetics of the play on an abstraction of the setting of the originating site, creates a bond back to the 'real', and as well as the metaphorical reading of the stage set, there is also another layer of interpretation where we trace the stage picture back to the fated school in Beslan. However, we might also consider this as detrimental towards the potential of the play, because it shies away from more radical aesthetic choices to explore the topic under a different light, contributing to a more plural exploration of the nature of "the other"¹³⁸.

Us/Them can also be described to have a static itinerary¹³⁹ – the actors roam around the stage but never break the fourth-wall. *Homegrown*, on the other hand, places the audience in the middle of the narration, urging them to listen to dialogues which are not being discussed 'on stage', but as 'private' one-to-one conversations. Perhaps, the intimate and clandestine positioning of El-Khairi's writing to incite the (potential) audience troubled the commissioners. Paul Roseby, in his public statement regarding the pulling of *Homegrown*, stated that:

The NYT has never shied away from tackling controversial subjects... we required the potentially controversial subject matter to be handled sensitively and with editorial balance and justification. [...]
Despite a lengthy and willingly collaborative process, the co-creators were not able to reassure us that the content of *Homegrown* satisfied these understandable and important criteria.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ For photo documentation taken from the BBC documentary "Дети Беслана / Children of Beslan", please refer to Appendix A, number 2, 3 and 4.

¹³⁸ Jenny Hughes, *Performance in a time of terror. Critical mimesis and the age of uncertainty*, Manchester: Manchester University press, 2011, p. 13.

¹³⁹ Writer's note. By itinerary, we mean the trajectory from point A to point Z. In the plays' case, from beginning to end. In *Us/Them*, the itinerary is static due to the fact that the actors start and end in the same set (the gymnasium). In *Homegrown*, due to the amount of scenes, scenarios and tours, the itinerary "zig-zags" to get to the real show.

¹⁴⁰ Paul Roseby, Statement on the cancellation of *Homegrown*, by Index on Censorship, September 2015, online edition available at <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2015/09/statement-from-paul-roseby-artistic-director-of-the-national-youth-theatre/>

Roseby's statement does not explain the reassurance the commissioners were looking for, whether it should have been in the form of a more structured play, different language used, a smaller cast, or more static staging. There is no clarity on what should have been done to keep the NYT satisfied with the production of the original play.

Wijs' play relies on movement and expression of physicality relating to certain words. The characters in *Us/Them* "portray [the victims of Beslan], dismissed from the bondage of the alien character into which they have been temporarily transformed"¹⁴¹. As we shall see later in this thesis, in regard to my own practice, Laban¹⁴² posits a methodology of using physicality, to develop and portray characters, to remove the 'bondage' of representation of a character that will always remain 'alien' to us, but this raises questions on the ethicality of resemblance and replacement, processes that could result in the actors "eradicating the alterity of the other"¹⁴³. On the other hand, and due to the lack of performances of *Homegrown*, there is not any indication to specific choreography in El-Khairy's play. Every concept is articulated out loud, through young people from different backgrounds, every feeling is overtly expressed at the audience, forcing them to confront socio-cultural tensions and disaffection with national identity, and avoiding any risk of "acting out"¹⁴⁴, since the young people are, in fact, playing themselves. In *Homegrown*, in opposition to Laban's approach to

¹⁴¹ Rudolf Laban, NRCD notes, from Karen K. Bradley, *Rudolf Laban*, page 43, London: Routledge, 2009.

¹⁴² Laban Movement Analysis is a "method and language for describing, visualizing, interpreting and documenting all varieties of human movement". In <https://labaninstitute.org/>

¹⁴³ Dominick LaCapra, in Amanda Stuart Fisher, 'That's who I'd be, if I could sing': Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208, p. 10.

¹⁴⁴ Amanda Stuart Fisher, 'That's who I'd be, if I could sing': Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208.

building character on stage, words overshadow bodies and movement– an artistic choice that, after all, serves El-Khairy and Latif’s desire of sparking up conversation on the topic of young people’s radicalisation and islamophobia in today’s Britain.

The different dramatic approaches to the topics of terrorism, extremism and radicalisation show the different receptions the plays received, and track how the transaction of theatrical devices and choices elevated or reduced the sense of ‘political sensitivity’ and ideological potency around the play. My creative practice was interested in the possibility that, to add to the pre-existing database of dramatic approaches to such a sensitive and relevant topic, a playwright might want to explore the worlds created by Wijs and El-Khairy to create a new mix of these elements that tackles the taboo and, at the same time, places the audience in a framework of ethical care. My creative practice has benefitted from the study of the interplay between the different theatrical, dramaturgical and aesthetical factors in the two plays, and these will be reflected upon during the devising and writing stages of my practice as research project.

Chapter Two

This chapter will discuss the methodological approach taken to conduct the research in this project (practice-as-research), as well as looking at the project's engagement with ethical approaches, and safeguarding in practice. The methodological framework will then be applied to the praxis of the project, and rationalisation provided and validated through examples of the practice carried out. By analysing Augusto Boal¹⁴⁵, Brian Way¹⁴⁶ and Cecily O'Neill's¹⁴⁷ theories, this chapter will examine the testing and curation of the first practice (methods of Theatre and Education) outlined in the introduction in a young people's workshop setting, to answer the sub-research question surrounding methodologies of practising that might offer ethical approaches to the discussion of topics that are politically, religiously and socially sensitive with young people.

Before highlighting examples of practice-as-research¹⁴⁸ in this project, it is essential to explain PaR and why it was taken as a methodological approach to research. PaR “involves a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry and where, in respect of the arts, a practice [...] is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry”¹⁴⁹. The research question forming the clew of this thesis (how can a theatre maker investigate ethical dramaturgical approaches to politically sensitive theatre making?) requires a practical approach, where only sustained and reflexive praxis can address and correctly place the question, in an attempt to generate new knowledge. It

¹⁴⁵ Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, London: Pluto Press, 2000.

¹⁴⁶ Brian Way, *Development through Drama*, 1967.

¹⁴⁷ Gavin Bolton, *Towards a theory of drama in education*, 1979.

¹⁴⁸ From here on referred to as PaR.

¹⁴⁹ Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 9.

is important to note that, according to Nelson and Etherington, “knowledge is not fixed and absolute”¹⁵⁰, and it can only be “built upon the culturally defined stocks of knowledge available to us at any given time”¹⁵¹. This thesis, therefore, is assembled upon the theoretical framework examined in Chapter One and aims to build upon the pre-existing pool of theories and scholarship surrounding terror and performance¹⁵². A PaR approach also highlights the subjectivity of the research and the ways it could have been shaped with different participants/had it been carried at a different time/geographic setting: the ‘reality’ studied throughout this PaR is contingent and subjective to the circumstances of the research and of the practitioner-researcher¹⁵³. As such, the ‘reality’ of ‘evidence’ offered as findings towards the lines of enquiry emanating from the research question, must be read as constructed responses to the specificity and subjectivity of the PaR project. As Etherington argues, “Reality is socially and personally constructed; there is no fixed or unchanging ‘Truth’”¹⁵⁴. The aim of the PaR is, rather, to transform the process from “hard facts to liquid knowing”¹⁵⁵, where there is no ‘Truth’ as such, and the project is collated through, and curated by, liquid, ever changing knowledge, influenced and shaped by the findings of practice. It is the knowledge-producing practice¹⁵⁶ nature of this project that adheres to the fundamentals of Nelson’s understanding of PaR, and makes this

¹⁵⁰Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013 p. 39.

¹⁵¹ Etherington, in Robert Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 55.

¹⁵² As investigated in chapter one.

¹⁵³ Likewise, this thesis cannot attempt to constitute a manual of “truth”, but rather a collection of findings using PaR, relating to the specific participants who took part and attempting to give the reader a subjective answer to the main research question.

¹⁵⁴ Etherington, in Robert Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013p. 55.

¹⁵⁵ Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, chapter three.

¹⁵⁶ Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013

project a practice-as-research based enquiry rather than a practice-based-research one. Whilst Nelson agrees that “practice-based-research is used by some to indicate what [he] understands by PaR, [...] [he] reserves this last term for research which draws from, or is about, practice but which is articulated in traditional word-based forms (books or articles)”¹⁵⁷. Applying Nelson’s definition to the outcome of this project, a substantial part of the evidence of the research enquiry is submitted as insightful practice¹⁵⁸, as well as being documented through the different models¹⁵⁹ explained by Nelson. It is this multi-modal process¹⁶⁰ used throughout the project that ensures that praxis is interlinked with theoretical knowledge, allowing the findings to constitute new knowledge and shifting the methodological approach of this thesis towards a practice-as-research.

2.1 Finding a group of young people.

Due to the sensitive nature of the PaR, the task of finding a group of young people to participate in my workshop was extremely hard¹⁶¹. However, this allowed me to study

¹⁵⁷ Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 10.

¹⁵⁸ Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p.9.

¹⁵⁹ A “product” (a performance in this case) with a durable record; documentation of the progress (workshop videos and rehearsal diaries, submitted both as Appendices to this thesis); complimentary writing locating a practice in a line-age of influences (refer to chapter three) and a conceptual framework for the research (refer to chapter one). In Robert Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p.26.

¹⁶⁰ Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 29.

¹⁶¹ I reached out to all the secondary schools and colleges in Colchester with a lesson proposal that included a completed and approved ethical form to authorise the approach, a workshop plan, young people’s participation forms, parent/carer’s consent forms and information sheets about the nature of my research as a University of Essex Master’s student. All the schools contacted either turned my proposal down, or never replied. One might hypothesise this was because I was unknown to them as a practitioner, or perhaps because of restrictions around the curriculum the schools were following, or because of the politically sensitive topic of the workshop. Upon suggestion of the project Supervisory Panel, I approached the Mercury Theatre’s Young People Director, Filiz Ozcan. I asked her if I could approach the parents and guardians of these young people to organise a workshop, to which she agreed.

and apply a safeguarding strategy to ensure the participants' wellbeing. The participants who took part in the workshop stages of this PaR had already worked with me in my capacity as a Youth Theatre practitioner for the Mercury Theatre, Colchester, and I believe this shifted the course of the practice-as-research considerably. They were aware of the aims of my research, working closely with me on a weekly basis developing several dramatic skills, meaning they were familiar with my practising and facilitating methods¹⁶². Having a group of young people that came from different schooling establishments meant a greater diversity in the participants' approaches to exploring and discussing a topic, and being outside of the formal classroom environment, that there may well have been more freedom to share opinions or admit a lack of knowledge. Because of the working relationship I had established with them during the Youth Theatre sessions, I could quickly and efficiently get into workshop mode with practising and feedback strategies I knew they were familiar with, and knew how to pace and set tasks they would not have difficulties carrying out. To ensure ethical practice, I carried out ethical approval through the University¹⁶³ which itemised how I would safeguard the young people (later on in the PaR, this was applied to the cast members and myself too) from being traumatised by proxy through the materials provided for the workshops.

2.2 Individuating theoretical framework.

Researching a theoretical framework for the workshop that looked at how politics and its social repercussions can be discussed through theatre with a group of young people

¹⁶² Working in a school setting, with a GCSE PHSE class, or a GCSE Drama class could have brought my research in a different direction, focusing more on scholastic approaches to politically sensitive topics and investigating how the educational system is addressing those through drama.

¹⁶³ The ethical approval documents can be found in the Appendix J to this thesis.

was essential to create a controlled space for them to discuss different opinions. I wanted there to be “a constant search for dialogical forms, forms of theatre through which it is possible to converse, both about and as part of social activity, pedagogy, politics.”¹⁶⁴ Study of Boal and his Theatre of the Oppressed approach helped me build the workshop’s methodology and shape the overall outlook of the working dynamic; following Boal’s philosophy, I wanted the young people to ‘converse about’ and ‘as part of’ the social activity surrounding the Manchester terror attack. As the attack had been used by several groups in society as emblematic of different political, social and religious agendas, the dialogical construction of Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed system had the potential to hold a space for competing narratives, and to promote active participation and discussion amongst the stakeholders to the problem¹⁶⁵. Using aspects of Theatre of the Oppressed offered the young people the dialogical forms and tools for discussion that they themselves identified as lacking around an event like the 2017 attack.

Whilst most victims of the attack had been young people, the official comments and the speculations made on the attack mainly came from adults who belonged to certain social, political or religious groups¹⁶⁶, who used the tragedy to serve their respective group’s objectives. The main platforms the young people (either affected by the

¹⁶⁴ Augusto Boal, *Legislative Theatre: Using Performance to make Politics*, page 3, 1998.

¹⁶⁵ Augusto Boal, *Legislative Theatre: using performance to make politics*, Psychology Press, 1998.

¹⁶⁶ “How Manchester bomber Salman Abedi took his twisted revenge out of 'love for Islam' after being radicalised by Isil preacher”

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/25/manchester-bomber-salman-abedi-took-twisted-revenge-love-islam/>

KILLER UNMASKED: Who was Salman Abedi? Manchester bombing attacker who left 22 dead at Ariana Grande concert <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/3626664/salman-abedi-manchester-bombing-terror-attacker-latest/>

How the British press reacted to the Manchester bombing <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/may/24/how-the-british-press-reacted-to-the-manchester-bombing>

tragedy or wanting to express an opinion) could use were social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. In the days following the attack, a few concert-goers posted vlogs on YouTube¹⁶⁷ recounting the events of the evening, giving their views on the attack and using this ‘citizen-space’ to express their feelings. I wanted my practice to reflect the reliance on social-media by the young people affected by the attack, to present this polyvocal digital-tapestry to the workshop participants and investigate their feelings towards it. This aimed to ensure that there was always a political inflection to the process of the workshop, and every game or exercise had broader significance and meaning for the young people, encouraging them to develop their critical thinking on politically sensitive topics. I wanted to use Boal’s conception of igniting “political affiliation [to] transform theatre into a public arena, where performers and audience [could] engage with political issues in such a way that theatre [could] actually have an impact on life and make a difference to the world”¹⁶⁸. As Nelson agrees, “inspiration comes through working with, and sparking off, others”¹⁶⁹, and I wanted the Boal approach to prompt inspiration for my second practice, dramaturgy¹⁷⁰. Elizabeth Elleworth, writing on the work of Boal, identifies that his approach to pedagogy and knowledge transmission rejects ‘rationalism’, which fixates on ‘evidential truth’, the right and the wrong, erroneously promoting work in binaries which seek to annul ambiguity and outliers, and teaches people only to act on formulas that have been written for them. Instead, the paradigm of the Theatre of the

¹⁶⁷ Manchester Terrorist Attack at Ariana Grande concert – Wylde Beauty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwyY9LaTpRc&t=43s>

Caught up in a terrorist attack – Lavender Moonlight

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8vyAl0D8eI>

Manchester arena attack, my story – DayDreamer Rachel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiiAW5ItPhI&t=307s>

¹⁶⁸ Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman, *A Boal Companion: Dialogues on theatre and cultural politics*, London: Routledge, page 24, 2006.

¹⁶⁹ Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 29.

¹⁷⁰ Investigated in Chapter Three.

Oppressed encourages its participants – in this case, young people – to develop their personal critical thinking, since “all narratives are partial”¹⁷¹, and how a more thorough analysis is needed to break through the norms and interrogate facts, not opinions. This “pedagogy of the unknowable”¹⁷², as Elleworth titles it, matched perfectly the idea that I had of my first workshop with the young people, and aided the gathering of “liquid knowledge”¹⁷³ throughout the session. I did not want to *teach* them about public opinion on terrorism and on the Manchester attack: I wanted to give them the discussion *tools* to be able to talk about it and then translate it into the three-dimensional, embodied pre-visualisation space of the theatre, “to perform and to take action.”¹⁷⁴ The main exercises that encompassed the “pedagogy of the unknowable”¹⁷⁵ - which were the physical warm up that included ‘Image Theatre’ exercises, by way of Boal¹⁷⁶, ‘Arguments for and Against’¹⁷⁷ (see the discussion of Brian Way’s Social Drama¹⁷⁸ as examined later in this chapter), and the exploration and blocking of the mini-scripts¹⁷⁹ (following O’Neil and Bolton’s study of Process Drama¹⁸⁰). Tracing the descendants of Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, I wanted the young people to explore a plurality of applied theatre dialogical tools, to give them a more comprehensive range of approaches to lead into the second workshop, and aware that workshop participants might need different pathways to access the core topic.

¹⁷¹ Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman, *A Boal Companion: Dialogues on theatre and cultural politics*, London: Routledge, page 40, 2006.

¹⁷² *Ibidem*.

¹⁷³ Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

¹⁷⁴ Augusto Boal, *Legislative Theatre: Using Performance to make Politics*, page i, 1998.

¹⁷⁵ Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman, *A Boal Companion: Dialogues on theatre and cultural politics*, London: Routledge, page 40, 2006.

¹⁷⁶ Video document, “Mercury Theatre Workshop” (Secondary USB submission), minute 1.53.

¹⁷⁷ Video document, “Mercury Theatre Workshop” (Secondary USB submission), minute 5.03.

¹⁷⁸ Term adopted from his Way’s book *Development through Drama*, 1967.

¹⁷⁹ Video document, “Mercury Theatre Workshop” (Secondary USB submission), minute 14.36

¹⁸⁰ Gavin Bolton, *Towards a theory of drama in education*, 1979.

The workshop had 8 participants, aged 14 to 18 years old, with a female to male ratio of 6:2. The young people came from different schools (Philip Morant, Colchester; St. Mary's school for girls, Colchester; the Sixth Form, Colchester), and included a home-schooled young person. During the physical warm up, the young people engaged with the idea of the power of non-verbal pictures, and expressed a new understanding of how much could be portrayed only through the body. The Frantic Assembly-inspired warm up¹⁸¹ saw me giving the young people basic vocal commands and asking them to portray these physically (which, in hindsight, corresponds to Müller's¹⁸² work on fragmentation of word, body and event¹⁸³). I wanted this practice to link the physical experience of fragmentation to its socio-cultural and political meaning in the context of the attack. This provided the young people with another tool to (re) consider the topic of the Manchester terror attack and gave them a new perspective on how an actor can explore physicalisation as simultaneously expressing internal and external landscapes, reuniting the personal and political in performance.

The second exercise, 'Arguments For and Against', focused on finding resources in improvisation to discuss certain arguments by taking a standpoint. The opposing statements I gave to the young people started with abstract scenarios and worked their way to describe scenarios that most young people are not accustomed to discussing openly¹⁸⁴. This is an exercise that derives from the methodology of Brian Way's conception of 'Social Drama', which concerns the development of the child in relation

¹⁸¹ For a complete breakdown of the workshop plan, please refer to Appendix B.

¹⁸² For an analysis of Müller's work on textual and political fragmentation, please refer to chapter 3.1.

¹⁸³ The analysis of Müller's work is carried out in Chapter Three.

¹⁸⁴ Video document, "Mercury Theatre Workshop", (Secondary USB submission), minute 7.17. For a written breakdown of all the scenarios tested, please refer to Appendix B, under the exercise "Arguments for and Against".

to the “outside world”. As Way states, “it is through drama that direct experience and practice can be given to the simple and confident everyday use of one’s resources. Drama in this sense is *social drama*”¹⁸⁵. The exercise, by requiring the young people to adhere to the viewpoint they were asked to argue for, required resourcefulness¹⁸⁶ for their thesis to ‘beat’ the opponent’s argument. In this way, the young people started to individuate methodologies with which they could debate, enumerate and articulate topics that are considered sensitive. This enriched the young people’s perspective on the practice of ‘characterisation’, asking them to think of the idea not only in terms of within a drama, but also characterisation in the broader social sense, manifesting in other public and online fora. This contributed to a more analytical and critical view of the materials and sources we explored in the following exercises. The young people started to adopt the dialogical style used in the exercise to investigate the political in material gathered from online, and from official statements released by the government and the mainstream news media.

After a reprise of the physicality exercise, where the young people took the analytical motivation from the discussion exercise and used it to fuel the energy in their movements, I divided them into groups and assigned each of them a piece of text to work on¹⁸⁷. These pieces of text were both verbatim extracts from the TV series “Educating Greater Manchester”, Episode 1¹⁸⁸, and a piece of original writing that I intended to include in the play. For this part of the workshop, I focused on O’Neill

¹⁸⁵ Brian Way, *Development through Drama*, 1967, page 287.

¹⁸⁶ Brian Way, *Development through Drama*, 1967, page 287.

¹⁸⁷ Video document, “Mercury Theatre Workshop” (Secondary USB submission), minute 14.37.

¹⁸⁸ “Educating Greater Manchester”, episode 1, Channel 4. Online documentary available at <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/educating-greater-manchester>

and Bolton's framework for Process Drama¹⁸⁹, per which the figure of the educator does not provoke or affect the direction or interpretations of the material studied. This meant that, instead of affecting the young people's political interpretation and analysis of the event taken in consideration during the workshop, I used specific exercises that could help them develop a dialogical way of discussing these. Whilst these might have been altered by the participants' drive to provide the 'right' answers to the topics (given the framing of the workshop), they still provided them with the tools to make that decision, if they wanted. Bolton argues that "performance has educational merit. However, [he warns] against an understanding of the source material prompted by the instructor's imposed vision, rather than the student's understanding of the material"¹⁹⁰. Therefore, I gave the young people the scripts to discuss, block and perform to the group, but I did not tell them the origin or contexts of the scripts. Especially with the piece of original writing¹⁹¹ I gave two of the young people, not wanting to disclose the reasons behind the playwriting choices. Instead, I guided the young people to ask questions about the pieces to each other, and try to work out answers in their pairs/trios, prioritising a conversation about the broader issues that affected each scene treated. I wanted the young people to envision and block the scene with the least influence of my personal visualization, relating back to my drive to portray the events of the attack in my play through the eyes of young people, therefore investigating ethical dramaturgical approaches to politically sensitive theatre both *with* and for young people. Bolton contends, "unless participants and teachers

¹⁸⁹ This framework was adapted by Bolton after Dorothy Heathcote's practice. Cecily O'Neill also adapted this practice and wrote about it in her book *Drama Worlds: A Framework for Process Drama*.

¹⁹⁰ Gustave J. Weltseck-Medina, "Process Drama in Education", webpage supplement to *Interactive and Improvisational Drama*, Adam Blatner, 2007, online edition available at

<http://www.interactiveimprov.com/procdrmwb.html>

¹⁹¹ The piece of original writing in question can be found in Appendix G, scene 2.

consciously analyse the politics embedded within a text and in the performance of that text they may simply reproduce the agenda of the playwright, rather than commenting upon it, understanding it or owning the interpretation of it.”¹⁹² This methodological approach to the blocking of each scene brought the group to have ‘ownership’ over the discussions about characters, their demographics, their beliefs and their status in regards to the terror attack; this meant that the dialogical tools developed through the workshop were being brought full circle to reunite with the practice of Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed when investigating the scenes.¹⁹³

All the group members considered the main indicators of the scene – i.e. the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘when’ and ‘how’ of each piece, and placed each character in a setting that, although not necessarily reflecting the actual circumstances of the source material, worked for their interpretation of the piece. Nonetheless, I didn’t feel I adequately transferred O’Neill and Bolton’s message, as I realised when looking back at the footage of the workshop, they were ‘holding back’ and not interrogating the text as fully and expressively as I had seen them do in other sessions.¹⁹⁴ This could have been due to the fact that they were treating sensitive material, or because they were emotionally impacted by it, or because they were trying to please me, knowing that their work would have been part of my PaR project, the latter I believe to be the most plausible explanation. One of the shortfalls of the first workshops could have resided in the inability on my behalf to “dislocate habitual ways of seeing”¹⁹⁵ to achieve a

¹⁹² Gustave J. Weltseck-Medina, “Process Drama in Education”, webpage supplement to *Interactive and Improvisational Drama*, Adam Blatner, 2007, online edition available at <http://www.interactiveimprov.com/procdrmwb.html>

¹⁹³ Video Document, “Mercury Theatre Workshop” (Secondary USB submission), minute 15.32.

¹⁹⁴ Video Document, “Mercury Theatre Workshop”, (Secondary USB submission), minute 19.33.

¹⁹⁵ Robert Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p.45.

“profoundly critical reflection”¹⁹⁶; further explained by the fact that I was familiar with the participants, already working with them on a weekly basis.

Overall, the methodologies and theoretical framework used to engage the young people with the topic in an open and exploratory way helped me start to form an idea about how the event of the Manchester Attack was being perceived by the younger generations, fuelling the “know-how”¹⁹⁷ of the research. I believe this workshop helped me understand how to interweave Boal, Way and O’Neill and Bolton’s theoretical frameworks with the practical realisation of the original play. This was due to the young people’s approach to the exercises they were faced with and their ability to link practice with the small notions of theory I fed them throughout the workshop. The theoretical frameworks helped me understand where the young people placed the tragic event and discussions around it in their daily lives; I now needed to move onto the second practice, dramaturgy, and understand (by working more with the young people) how to translate the political, religious and sociological discussion we had in the workshop into a script that could be performed on a stage.

¹⁹⁶ Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p.45.

¹⁹⁷ The Know-How is defined by Nelson as “procedural knowledge”, and “source-path-goal” scheme of learning through doing. In Robert Nelson, QUOTE BOOK HERE, page 41.

Chapter Three

This chapter will explore the second and third practices chosen to advance the argument of the research. The second practice, dramaturgy, will be investigated by exploring the late practice-as-research carried out as workshops with a group of young people aged 14-18 at the Lakeside Theatre¹⁹⁸, then moving onto the scripting phase (including stylistic and thematic influences found in Postdramatic theatre). The third practice will reflect on the rehearsal process, touching on rehearsal techniques and practitioners' influences (e.g. Augusto Boal, Brian Way, Gavin Bolton) used with the company of young professionals in the rehearsal room¹⁹⁹.

3.1 Scripting *10:31*, *MCR* and planning the Lakeside Theatre workshop

The later research period focused on the curating of material and scripting of *10:31*, *MCR*. The play script had two drafts at this point²⁰⁰ and included a comedic meta-theatre introduction made by three characters (A, B, C), during which they were urged not to mention the word 'terrorism', and was intended to point towards the multiple anxieties around this term²⁰¹. The draft also contained the scene between Girl One and Girl Two that I had workshopped the previous month at the Mercury Theatre with the group of young people²⁰². At this point of the process, I started collecting verbatim

¹⁹⁸ The Lakeside Theatre workshop was held on the 28th April 2018.

¹⁹⁹ The reader will find the style of writing of this chapter to be descriptive-reflective, with anecdotes from the Lakeside Theatre workshop and the rehearsal process. The reader is also encouraged to refer to Appendix D (workshop plan), E (workshop feedback form) and F (maker's notebook and rehearsal diaries).

²⁰⁰ The first two drafts of the play script can be found in Appendix G and H.

²⁰¹ Appendix G, Scene One.

²⁰² The workshop at the Mercury Theatre is described in Chapter 2, with references to TIE methodologies and practices.

testimonies²⁰³ (from survivors of the attack and parents and families of the victims) from established news sources as well as more ‘democratic’ and pluralistic forms of transmission, such as bloggers and user generated content on social media²⁰⁴, and transcribing them to prepare material for the second workshop with the young people. My process at this point was to ‘pour words on the page’ to ensure that I had some material that would stand as the beginnings of a script. I used Noel Greig’s practical guide to playwriting, benefitting from the “Instant Writing”²⁰⁵ exercise marked as number 7 in the guide, which prompted me to start a sentence with “I am writing...” and continue writing anything that came to my mind²⁰⁶. Whilst this exercise helped me start the writing process, I could not separate myself from the pre-existing dynamic of the three recurring characters and could not distance myself from the comedic introduction. This caused a slight schism between the second practice and the conceptual framework being used as a theoretical lens. Nonetheless, even if the product of the exercise did not create any new scenes, it surely helped me understand where I did not want the narration to go, and where I needed to steer the story towards, getting close to the conceptual framework of the research once again, and seeking to

²⁰³ Laub’s studies surrounding testimony, witnessing and proxy-trauma (explored in more depth in chapter one) were useful in this practice, as they allowed me to confidently source material in an ethical and safe way.

²⁰⁴ User generated sources include videos available on public domain on Youtube. The main videos that were transcribed were “Manchester Arena Attack, my story”,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiiAW5ItPhI&t=307s>

“Manchester Terrorist Attack at Ariana Grande concert”,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwyY9LaTpRc&t=43s>

“Manchester concert terror attack survivors describe chaos, helping others”,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dlxjkLNjHQ>

“Manchester victim’s family recall night she died”,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EE0ShTQh2s>

“Manchester attack: father pays tribute to youngest Manchester victim”,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i27iSOEEOjw&t=11s>

²⁰⁵ Noel Greig, *Playwriting: a practical guide*, London: Routledge, 2005, Instant Writing, e-book available at <https://www.dawsonera.com/readonline/9780203334973>

²⁰⁶ Note on the Instant Writing exercise. The sentences did not have to make sense, and if I found myself with a blank mind, I’d just have to keep on writing ‘I am writing, I am writing, I am writing...’, until a new thought could be written on the page.

portray the relationship between terror, trauma and performance. I sought a lot of written material because I wanted to introduce the young people to as much of the script as possible at the Lakeside Theatre workshop, to work on translating the words of the script into movement sections, still images, and scenes. I wanted to follow the methods and workshop structures that Frantic Assembly used in their improvising and devising workshops²⁰⁷, as a whole strand of their work is dedicated to choreographic practice and improvisation with young people, and I wanted to deploy that knowledge and expertise in the service of allowing my group to think about text and situation differently. By having a mental picture of the aesthetics²⁰⁸ needed for certain scenes, I was certain that I wanted the actors to only have chairs as part of the set, and to use them as different parts of furniture. Therefore, I chose to focus on two aspects of the Frantic Method: creating choreography and using and moving furniture in choreography.²⁰⁹

My aim was to devise scenes following the Frantic Method and including Laban's practices that concentrated on the use of the body in space (e.g. Laban Efforts) for as much of the script as possible. This allowed me to go into the rehearsal room with video documentation and aid the transfer of the young people's voices into the acting styles of the company. Whilst I originally wanted the young people to star in the play, there were ethical complexities in obtaining these permissions, and I would have had to apply for a licence for them to perform at the Lakeside, and this was, unfortunately, not a feasible option administratively or economically. Additionally, this was further

²⁰⁷ <https://www.franticassembly.co.uk/learn-train>.

²⁰⁸ Please see footnote 132.

²⁰⁹ The Frantic Method has comprehensive how-to video guides on the company's Youtube channel. Preparing for the Lakeside Theatre workshop, I referred to Choreographing (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7R_V2iCZoY&feature=youtu.be), Moving Furniture (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWAXPEzAqVs>), and Chair Duets (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PB-9LERSyY8>).

problematised by my performance coinciding with their GCSEs and A levels examinations, and therefore could not have committed to the amount of rehearsals I envisioned. I still wanted the young people to have a creative impact on the translation of the scenes from the page to the stage, and I wanted the final play to respect their creative impact and include their creative work in the performance, which is why I had to set myself a very specific aim: I did not want the actors to do impressions of the young people, but wanted them to try and capture the *essence* of the scenes the young people devised and use the inflection of their words, the dynamics of their movements and actions as a driving force behind their acting.

This planning was complemented by research on playmaking methods that I found relevant to the shaping of my play, especially Postdramatic theatre. What resonated the most with the aims of my research was the idea of how political themes (and more broadly, politics) could intersect with the aesthetics of a piece in an almost, as Brandon Woolf would argue, *parallaxical*²¹⁰ way.

The political would have come through in the piece not in a parallel way to the scenes, but rather as an interruption of the narration in the minds of the audiences, who would have considered the broader picture and repercussions of the matter treated in the scene, contributing to a constant sharing of thoughts from the story, to the actors, to the audiences.

I found myself moving further and further away from fable theatre (*sine qua non* of the Brechtian age), which as Wright would state, “does not simply correspond to actual events in the collective life of human beings, but consists of invented

²¹⁰ Brandon Woolf, “Towards a Paradoxically Parallaxical Postdramatic Politics?”, in *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political*, Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll and Steve Giles, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, online edition available at <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/theatre-crafts/postdramatic-theatre-and-the-political-iid-115146/ba-9781408183519-00001>

happenings and that the stage figures are not simple representations of living persons, but invented and shaped in response to ideas”²¹¹. I also felt that this estranged the practice from the conceptual framework posed as a theoretical lens for the research and steered against the concept of witnessing and testimony Laub and Felman outline by inventing characters rather than presenting actors who give the traumatized voices a chance to be heard²¹². I started rejecting the story and its bounds to time and space, and making the Umfunktionierung²¹³, or functional transformation, towards a dramatic apparatus which becomes “more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information”²¹⁴. Hans-Thies Lehmann, who established the notion of Postdramatic theatre, believed that the dichotomic relationship between art, social life and politics presented a problem in the “representation of the real”²¹⁵ in the dramatic, and therefore could only be inserted in the axis of dramatisation in an oblique way - almost parallaxically – to engage with the “political realities of our mediatised and globalised world”²¹⁶ by looking at them from a different angle in the axis.

²¹¹ Wright, Elizabeth. 1989. *Postmodern Brecht: A Re-Presentation*. Critics of the Twentieth Century Ser. London and New York: Routledge. ISBN 0-415-02330-0. p.28.

²¹² Amanda Stuart-Fisher, ‘That's who I'd be, if I could sing’: Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208.

²¹³ Brandon Woolf, “Towards a Paradoxically Parallaxical Postdramatic Politics?”, in *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political*, loc.37, Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll and Steve Giles, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, online edition available at <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/theatre-crafts/postdramatic-theatre-and-the-political-iid-115146/ba-9781408183519-00001>

²¹⁴ Hans-Thies Lehmann, quoted by Brandon Woolf, “Towards a Paradoxically Parallaxical Postdramatic Politics?”, in *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political*, loc. 38, Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll and Steve Giles, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, online edition available at <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/theatre-crafts/postdramatic-theatre-and-the-political-iid-115146/ba-9781408183519-00001>

²¹⁵ Brandon Woolf, “Towards a Paradoxically Parallaxical Postdramatic Politics?”, in *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political*, loc. 40, Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll and Steve Giles, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, online edition available at <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/theatre-crafts/postdramatic-theatre-and-the-political-iid-115146/ba-9781408183519-00001>

²¹⁶ Brandon Woolf, “Towards a Paradoxically Parallaxical Postdramatic Politics?”, in *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political*, loc. 44, Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll and Steve Giles, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, online edition available at <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/theatre-crafts/postdramatic-theatre-and-the-political-iid-115146/ba-9781408183519-00001>

Studying the work of Postdramatic theatre writers and antecedent dramaturgs, like Pirandello (representing the early movements towards Postdramatic theatre), Peter Handke, Heiner Müller and Michel Vinaver (who in later works diverted from his previous naturalistic form to merge Postdramatic form with documentary theatre), I realised that I wanted the form of the play to follow the form of the very event (the Manchester attack), which would have highlighted the fragmentation of the many voices present at the time of the attack, and the schism and evaporation of political, ideological and social certainties as a metaphor for the explosion.

These plays were “offering actors and audiences theatrical experiences that [were] not tied to the vicissitudes of either character or plot, but seek to investigate broader issues, free of drama’s limitations”²¹⁷. This reflected the theatrical experience that I wanted the audience to have: not being tied to character, nor plot, but rather consider the event, investigate political patterns and social concerns that have risen from it, and bear witness²¹⁸ to the traumatized voices.

Whilst I agreed with this, I found that aspects of my work differed from the theorisation of the Postdramaticform. For example, I knew that the issues I wanted the audience to investigate were irremediably tied to vicissitudes of plot (the Manchester Attack) and of character (the story of Girl One). This was because, after researching the media coverage for the attack prior to the Mercury Theatre workshop, I realised that the media had used the face of the youngest victim to instigate, whether purposefully or not, Islamophobia. I wanted to recreate an image of the girl, not being

²¹⁷ Dr. David Barnett, in his online introduction to the Postdramatic Theatre genre, *Drama Online*, available at <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/genres/post-dramatic-theatre-iid-2516>

²¹⁸ Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*, New York: Routledge, 1992.

used for propaganda, but rather telling the story of an evening at the Arena and what happened there.

During my path of discovery of Postdramatic theatre theory, I delved deeper into the work of Heiner Müller, *Theatremachine*. In his introduction “The Less You See the More You Describe”, Müller states that

“When I begin to write or conceive a new piece, the first thing that comes in my head is a feeling for a space, and the configuration of people in this space. From there, gradually, a dialogue emerges. [...] there is a theory that declares the foundation, the fundamental element in ancient tragedy [...] to be silence. Silence is there before the word, and silence is the prerequisite for speaking.”²¹⁹

I was interested in Müller’s point of view because it reflected exactly the reason why I did not feel the writing exercises were working for the aim of my scenes. I had a clear picture of what I wanted (the “configuration of people in the space” that Müller talks about), but I was steering the dialogue away from that picture when putting the exercises in practice, focusing too much on the rules of the exercise and not letting the dialogue “emerge”.

From this, I shifted the focus of the second workshop from writing as much script as I could and asking the young people’s opinion on the blocking and the physicalizing of it, to focusing on a devising-based process. I wanted this to start from the ‘silence’ that Muller indicates above, to then be developed into physical impulses by exploring Laban’s ‘Efforts’²²⁰, to make the young people explore different ways of interacting with the space, by following Müller’s instructions and feeling it in silence first, then configure themselves in the space. Only after this they would be able to individuate

²¹⁹ Heiner Muller, “The Less you See the More you Describe”, in *Theatremachine*, London: Faber and Faber, p.xix, 1995.

²²⁰ Jean Newlove, *Laban for actors and dancers: putting Laban’s movement theory into practice: a step-by-step guide*, London: Routledge, 1993.

the character they are playing in correlation to the pieces of verbatim writing given to them.

The script-based part of the workshop was intended to focus on the verbatim pieces I had transcribed. I wanted to link Müller's silent spatial thinking with Laban's exploration of the space through the body and Woolf's view of politics in theatre as parallaxical, and I decided I would do so by offering the verbatim pieces to the young people, split them in groups, give them time to answer some questions related to the piece, and then asking them to physicalize how they would perform the piece.²²¹ This would have given me a good idea of how the aesthetics could have intersected the political critique I wanted to include in my piece, and it would have consequently helped me shape the original writing around it.

After changing the plan of action for my second workshop, I decided to revisit the script thinking about Lehmann's theorization of Postdramatic theatre. I found that the original Scene One²²² had a forced humour about it which reflected my own fear of tackling the subject of the Manchester Attack directly:

A: I don't know how much you know, or why you are here. Maybe the news did whet your appetite for knowledge? Maybe the publicity managed to pull you in? Or the director has begged you to –

The group shush A all together.

Oh. Right. No. Definitely NOT the director. They definitely have nothing to do with the amount of familiar faces in the audience. Of course if they did, that would be fine because at the end of the day it's their directorial debut –

B: You can't say that!

²²¹ The transcribed pieces that the young people performed were taken from the following sources: "Manchester Arena Attack, my story" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiiAW5ItPhI&t=308>

"Ariana Grande concertgoers describe chaos after attack" – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XL99ing5nAI&t=59s>

"Manchester Attack: Father pays tribute to youngest Manchester victim" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i27iSOEEOjw&t=15s>

²²² Appendix G, Draft One Scene One.

A: I'm just giving a disclaimer, okay?²²³

The three characters then went on to introduce the theme of the play (terrorism), but never managing to say it out loud:

A: A play about?

C: t-

Not this time. Not a sound.

A: Toys?

B: Transatlantic boats?

C: Terr- *Gags*²²⁴.

I was worried about over-theatricalising a tragedy and discarding the conceptual framework (which focused on the importance and weight of bearing witness to new historical evidence²²⁵), but at the same time I wanted the audience to look past the “taboo” that society imposes on it. This is why the theories studied about Postdramatic theatre (Lehmann) and the plays read belonging to Post-Holocaust theatre (Müller) helped me find the right elements to write ethical politically sensitive theatre. Following Lehmann’s theories, I tilted the axis of the performance that saw “the political”²²⁶ interfere with the narration of the story and juxtaposed it parallaxically to the narration, making them co-exist by interruption. This notion compelled me to

²²³ Appendix G, Draft One, Scene One.

²²⁴ Appendix G, Draft One Scene One.

²²⁵ Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*, New York: Routledge, 1992.

²²⁶ Brandon Woolf, “Towards a Paradoxically Parallaxical Postdramatic Politics?”, in *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political*, loc. 44, Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll and Steve Giles, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, online edition available at <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/theatre-crafts/postdramatic-theatre-and-the-political-iid-115146/ba-9781408183519-00001>

erase the comedy sections, taking no divergences nor easier routes. I stopped caring about the play following the structure of the fable as I had originally intended and started imitating Vinaver's style by taking the verbatim pieces, cutting them up and piecing them back together in an anti-naturalistic way, removing the explanation of the links between them or which character the lines belonged to. This led me to produce a series of dream-like soliloquies, where the characters speaking were not announced nor defined, just like in Müller's *Hamletmachine*. After all, "the storytelling in dreams seems to Muller to be one of the purest forms possible – missing links between gestures, the absence of the illusion of meaning, the defiance of chronology, the bringing together of places, people, lifetimes, without obvious reason."²²⁷ A 'storytelling in dreams' was the basis for Scene Eight in the final script used in performance:

D: Multiple confirmed fatalities tonight

A: SHUT UP

E: Our thoughts and prayers go out to the victims' families

A: THIS IS SICK
ROTTEN SICK
STOP IT

F: What was that explosion in city centre then?

G: Has someone just let a bomb off at Ariana's concert?

A: NO NO NO YOU NEED TO STOP

D: A Balloon popped and everyone thought it was an explosion
Talk about paranoia hey

E: Just take your time and keep exiting the building²²⁸.

²²⁷ Marc Von Henning, introduction to *Theatremachine*, London: Faber and Faber, p. xv, 1995.

²²⁸ Fabiana Sforza, *10:31, MCR*, Scene Eight.

3.2 Lakeside Theatre Workshop

The second workshop²²⁹ now had a much more focused structure and aimed at getting the young people closer to the verbatim pieces, interrogating them through questions, to decide what aesthetic choices might fit best. The group of young people who attended were very motivated after the first workshop and expressed their excitement to work with some text. After a warm up, I encouraged them to lead an improvisation exercise called “Park Bench²³⁰”, as suggested by them after the first workshop²³¹. Following the theory studied prior to the workshop, I took on Müller’s notes on practice and I asked them to stand in the space starting with silence, only speaking when they felt it was absolutely needed. I also got them to interact with each other one at a time, so we could focus on the characters the young people created from the verbal stimulus I gave them just before they entered the exercise. I told all of them something had happened (although not specifically what, or if it was a negative or positive event), and I gave them character traits (e.g. you’re a policeman/ a young person/ someone who doesn’t want to talk about what has happened)²³². The young people (despite the purposeful reduction of background information) managed to create a detailed scene, weaving the Manchester Arena attack in and making it relevant to the given activity. After the improvisation exercise we looked at Laban’s efforts and how these can affect the way actors portray characters and the whole

²²⁹ Lakeside Theatre, 28th April 2018.

²³⁰ This improvisation exercise can be found in the video document of the Lakeside Workshop, at minute 1.50 (Main Submission USB).

²³¹ In the Mercury Theatre workshop feedback forms (Appendix C), the young people pointed out that ‘improvisation around the topic could help the shaping of my piece’, and mentioned the improvisation exercise ‘Park Bench’.

²³² The ‘personal traits’ were only given to the young people just before they went on stage, as I thought this would somehow prompt them to be silent for the first part of their scene and only speak when they felt like they absolutely had to.

aesthetic direction of a piece²³³. I explained to the young people how I would like them to consider every single movement as precious, and to be hyper-conscious of their body-weight and movement in the space at a given time. I wanted them to understand the “importance of the human factor [in performance] and the unaccountable behaviour of individuals and groups”²³⁴, and how these would have been useful when blocking the verbatim scripts. I wanted them to achieve this result because I wanted the narration to reflect the events of the night of the attack, but I also wanted to factor in the young people’s behaviours and actions that came from the understanding of these. Taking Dick Mccaw’s Efforts table as an example²³⁵, I explored some of these with the young people. I then eased them into reading the verbatim pieces, giving them freedom to take them and block them in whichever way they felt was more appropriate²³⁶. Working on the verbatim pieces following a Müllerian approach allowed the young people to negate character and understand and portray the tragedy “free of drama’s limitations”²³⁷ and for it to investigate “broader issues”²³⁸. Initially, I did not disclose information about their pieces (who was talking, what their relationship with the Manchester attack was); instead, I gave them some questions that might help them individuate character and ascertain the broader context. After seeing the young people perform in the verbatim pieces, I realised that I wanted my final script to follow a similar construction: prioritising the ideological and political contextual issues, over representing ‘rounded characters’. This is when I

²³³ This exercise can be found in the video document “Lakeside Theatre Workshop”, at minute 7.07. (Main Submission USB).

²³⁴ Dick Mccaw, *The Laban Sourcebook*, “Effort”, page 222, London:Routledge, 2012.

²³⁵ For Maccaw’s Efforts table, please refer to Appendix D.

²³⁶ The verbatim pieces’ performances can be found in the video document “Lakeside Theatre Workshop” at minute 9.26. (Main Submission USB).

²³⁷ Dr. David Barnett, in his online introduction to the Postdramatic Theatre genre, *Drama Online*, available at <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/genres/post-dramatic-theatre-iid-2516>

²³⁸ Dr. David Barnett, in his online introduction to the Postdramatic Theatre genre, *Drama Online*, available at <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/genres/post-dramatic-theatre-iid-2516>

thought of having the actors wear neutral costume and occasionally picking up and dropping props, accessories and/or pieces of clothing to indicate a change in character. By seeing the verbatim pieces one after the other, I also realised that I wanted the play to reflect the ‘collage’ nature of the work we had been carrying out in the workshop. I felt that this represented both the essence of Müller’s style (broken, fractured, missing logic links) and the construction of Michel Vinaver’s *11 Septembre 2001*, as well as avoiding over-dramatisation of character and therefore staying true to the conceptual framework of the PaR. This collage nature matched the fragmented, unmemorable, polluted, unknowable nature of the bombing, and aided the path towards the answer to my main research question, interrogating how a theatre-maker can individuate ethical dramaturgical approaches to creating politically sensitive theatre with and for young people.

I let the young people read this section of *Hamletmachine*:

“In the loneliness of the airports

I exhale

I am Privileged

My revulsion is a privilege

Screened by a wall

Barbed wire prison

Photograph of the author.

I don’t want to eat drink breathe love a woman a man a child an animal anymore. I don’t want to die anymore. I don’t want to kill anymore.

Tearing up of the photograph of the author.

I break open my sealed-off flesh. I want to live in my veins, in the marrow of my bones, in the labyrinth of my skull. I withdraw into my intestines. I take refuge in my shit, my blood. Somewhere bodies are being broken, so that I can live in my shit. Somewhere bodies are being carved open, so that I can be alone with my blood. My thoughts are wounds in my brain. My brain is a wound. I want to be a machine. Arms to grasp legs to walk no pain no thoughts.”²³⁹

²³⁹ Heiner Müller, *Hamletmachine*, in *Theatremachine*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1995.

They thought this had a very similar feeling of fragmentation, disruption and incapability of being understood to the verbatim pieces we had analysed shortly beforehand. This made the link between the Postdramatic theatre and Post-Holocaust writing studied much stronger in my eyes by starting to link my work closer to the answer to my research question.

I also shared with the young people Vinaver's construction of his text *11 Septembre 2001*. They could agree that, in Müller's *Hamletmaschine*, the words were there, but in a new form, which felt shocked, cut up and brought back together in a new order. By "fragmenting the narrative and subverting the usual communicative dialogue and unified character and plot of most adaptations and, in fact, most western drama, Müller's remaking expresses in its structure and language the violent and fragmented contemporary culture in which it was created."²⁴⁰ Campbell's observation in regards to Müller's remaking style applied to the extracts that I had shown to the young people, and expressed exactly the sense of "fragmented contemporary culture" that both *Hamletmaschine* and *11 Septembre 2001* instilled in the reader, and that I wanted to adapt for *10:31, MCR*. The young people also agreed that the "collaged" nature of Vinaver's play matched the brokenness of Müller's remake. Taking the two plays as stimulus for creative practice, the young people took other verbatim pieces that had not been used in the previous exercise and, by cutting them up and piecing them back together in a non-chronological way arranged what was the first scene of the play.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Peter A. Campbell, "Medea as Material: Heiner Müller, Myth and Text", *Modern Drama*, 51:1 (Spring 2008).

²⁴¹ Footage of this can be found in the video document "Lakeside Theatre Workshop", at minute 19.24. (Main Submission USB).

3.3 Scripting post-workshop.

This workshop helped me focus my writing in the right direction. The young people had found a way to join the theory explained to them to the practice engaged with in the workshop, aiming all along to investigate politically sensitive theatre making in an ethical way, through the lens of the conceptual framework, thus reconciling the practice carried out to my main research question. I was committed to the crafting of a dramatic form that created a link between Müller's stylistic atomization to the literal explosion of the bomb on the night of the 22nd May 2017, and to let all the words of the verbatim pieces I had transcribed be remainders of the explosion and of the people who had survived, but had suffered physical and emotional losses. The dramatic form to be used in my play also had to capture and replay the problematics of linear reporting in tragedies, of which the Manchester attack was a notable case. The multitude of voices that rose during the days following the attack made it hard for people who were "spectators" (online, via the national news, or via witnesses of the tragedy) to identify a narrative that was descriptive of the events but did not serve any ideological agendas (islamophobia, pro-Brexit propaganda, racism and xenophobia). The atomization of the dramatic form would have also represented the fragmented news bites, the partiality of and unstableness of reporting emerging and developing catastrophic public events. The explosion, the broken survivors, the missing people, the identified bodies, the attacker, the supporters, the wave of hatred and fear – I wanted these plots to co-exist in the paradox of the play (which Woolf states exists by the dichotomy of different axis interfering parallaxically with each other), that interfered with time, space and character, and that Lehmann would describe as a "theatre of partial perspectives and stuttering answers that remain works in

progress”²⁴². This fragmentation, however, is not only a circumstantial choice, but also a social and political choice: “his fragmented structures and characters and dense intertextuality [...] exacerbate the problem of interpretation, while also positing an apocalyptic vision of the present and of the future.”²⁴³ Amid the fragmented voices, however, I wanted to return to a persistent and understood dramatic device: a recurring character that would bring together the many fragmentations of the performances and would restore the social memory²⁴⁴ of the event, relying on their performances and challenging the audience’s “thoughts of events that they may or may not have witnessed”²⁴⁵. In Peter Campbell’s essay, a section is dedicated to Müller’s writings about the dead characters of history. He explains that “what we need is the future and not the eternity of the moment. [...] One has to accept the presence of the dead as dialogue partners or dialogue-disturbers – the future will emerge only out of dialogue with the dead.”²⁴⁶ After reading Müller’s stance on those characters that had been left voiceless, I realised that Saffie-Rose Roussous, the youngest victim of the attack, could have been represented as a constant figure (Girl One) to guide the audience through the maze of voices that the play contained. Again, Stuart-Fisher’s work on differentiating speaking *for* and speaking *on behalf* of others²⁴⁷ was helpful, as it made

²⁴² Brandon Woolf, “Towards a Paradoxically Parallaxical Postdramatic Politics?”, in *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political*, loc. 44, Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll and Steve Giles, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, online edition available at <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/theatre-crafts/postdramatic-theatre-and-the-political-iiid-115146/ba-9781408183519-00001>

²⁴³ Peter A. Campbell, “Medea as Material: Heiner Müller, Myth and Text”, *Modern Drama*, 51:1 (Spring 2008).

²⁴⁴ Carol Martin, *Theatre of the Real*, “After the fact: memory, experience, technology”, p. 59, 2013.

²⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁴⁶ Peter A. Campbell, “Medea as Material: Heiner Müller, Myth and Text”, *Modern Drama*, 51:1 (Spring 2008).

²⁴⁷ Amanda Stuart-Fisher, ‘That’s who I’d be, if I could sing’: Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208.

my practice aware of what it needed to look out for to remain ethical and avoid “eradicating the alterity of the other”²⁴⁸.

This careful re-work of the play meant a new script²⁴⁹, adapted to the views the young people expressed in the workshop, but also drawn upon Müller’s style, Vinaver’s construction and Lehmann’s theories on Postdramatic theatre. A script that would “threaten reality, [which is] surely [theatre’s] most political function”²⁵⁰. Inspired by Müller’s writing and Postdramatic theatre theory overall, I edited the script to be shaped as a parallaxical universe, where the political existed as an interruption of the narration rather than part of it, with its own circular structure²⁵¹, threatening reality by working in an anti-chronological order and revolving around the story and journey of ‘Girl One’. The pressure to reproduce the event of the attack was eradicated from my mind, and I could distance myself from forms of reproduction that would not make the experience political.

3.4 The rehearsal process

I cast the play and scheduled in rehearsals with the company²⁵². I decided to keep revising the text through the rehearsal process, with the help and suggestion of the company of actors, so that they could be comfortable with the ways in which they were telling the stories.

²⁴⁸ Dominick LaCapra, in Amanda Stuart-Fisher, ‘That’s who I’d be, if I could sing’: Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:2, 193-208.

²⁴⁹ Please refer to the *10:31, MCR* script at the end of the dissertation for the version of the script that was used for the rehearsal process.

²⁵⁰ Heiner Müller, “The Less you See the More you Describe”, in *Theatremachine*, London: Faber and Faber, p. xx, 1995.

²⁵¹ See Appendix F for the diagram titled “Girl One’s Journey”, which describes the structure of the piece.

²⁵² See Appendix F for the rehearsal schedule.

I presented the actors with the work-in-progress script and I let them know that I would have valued their contribution to the rehearsal room. From the perspective of a performer I was familiar with the Stanislavski Method, but I did not feel naturalistic directing would have suited a script like *10:31, MCR*, which drew upon Postdramatic theatre so heavily. Having never directed before, I researched directors who had experience with this type of theatre and that could inspire me to take a different approach. Turning to Katie Mitchell, my priority was the idea of “creating a rehearsal room culture that encourages the gradual construction of strong work”²⁵³. I wanted the rehearsal process to be a journey that involved not only the development of the play, but also the personal development of myself and of the actors, gaining new techniques and skills. As Glenn D’Cruz said when talking about directing a Sarah Kane piece with a company of young students,

Postdramatic texts, by mostly eschewing traditional dramatic elements – such as character, plot, detailed and explicit didascalia – in favour of a provocative ambiguity that encourages experimentation, engages students in ‘material thinking’ – a creative activity that produces new ways of thinking about the world that are unique to artistic practice²⁵⁴.

The encouragement of experimentation and the engagement of audiences, especially younger ones, in ‘material thinking’ was a main part of the aim of my research, and methodologies in which this could be achieved worked towards a possible resolution of my research question. Therefore, I engaged in analytical discussions with the actors, and gradually distanced them from the text to focus on the broader issues I wanted to highlight for the audience’s consideration. This meant that rehearsals did not follow a rigid blocking process, but rather a more continuous and flexible

²⁵³ Katie Mitchell, *The Director’s Craft*, page 116, Oxon: Routledge, 2009.

²⁵⁴ Glenn D’Cruz, “Teaching/Directing 4.48 *Psychosis*”, page 2, online article available at <http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?EbscoContent=dGJyMMvI7ESeprE40dvuOLCmr1CepR5s6a4S7WWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPGvtkmyqLdNuePfgex9Yvf5ucA&T=P&P=AN&S=R&D=lkh&K=73917633>

discussion-based dramatisation of the text. This also meant that, at times, the actors appeared quite still but, agreeing with Laban's theories, this ended up being a discovered virtue in the piece, which allowed them to, as Müller would say, 'feel the space' through silence and stillness before letting the words out. Physicalizing the script was a very interesting process, partly because the company of actors represented a mixture of dancers and non-dancers. By working on the Efforts with them²⁵⁵, I allowed this last group to see themselves in the skill of physical theatre, and that, as Mike Alfreds stated, "all theatre is visual. Not all theatre is verbal"²⁵⁶. There were some concepts not developed into fully written scenes, and the company agreed that movement would be the best way to create a stage picture that we saw getting across to the audience as a broader issue to consider. An example of this was Scene Seven²⁵⁷ which was based upon a vlog that I had transcribed before the Lakeside Theatre workshop but hadn't fully explored with the young people. The vlog portrayed two young people getting ready to go to the concert on the 22nd May 2017, attending the concert and managing to escape the chaos of the explosion²⁵⁸. I knew I wanted to include these voices in the performance somehow, as they represented yet another 'fragment' of the polyphony of voices surrounding the attack – I just did not know how. When transcribing their words, it felt very unnatural to envision the words spoken by actors, on stage, in front of an audience. This was because the vlog had a completely different mood compared to the other verbatim writings I had transcribed. Dramatising a vlog would have been extremely difficult due to the dynamics the

²⁵⁵ Exercises surrounding the Efforts were taken from the plan for the Lakeside Theatre workshop, in order to encourage a dialogical relationship between the actors and the young people.

²⁵⁶ Dymphna Callery, introduction to *The Active Text: unlocking plays through physical theatre*, page xvi, London: Nick Hern Books, 2015.

²⁵⁷ Fabiana Sforza, *10:31, MCR*, scene 7, 2018.

²⁵⁸ Wylde Beauty, "Manchester Terrorist Attack at Ariana Grande Concert"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwyY9LaTpRc&t=43s>

addition of a camera gave to the conversations, and therefore the scripter is dramatising something already performed. During one of the rehearsals, we were investigating the possible ways a theatre-maker could transfer the dynamics of a vlog on stage without merely trying to replay the camera work. This was when I realized I could have simply used the sound of the young people's voices to guide us through understanding the physicality of the piece. Improvising movement when hearing bits of dialogue from each section allowed us to receive a different impulse to the text. The text was transformed into a "score of physical actions inspired by and attached to impulses"²⁵⁹ (John Harrop). Whilst this worked well in theory, the execution of the idea left some members of the audience confused about what was going on and suggesting a different conception of the representation of a vlog, however it provided another somatic and theatrical texture to the *mise en scene*.

3.5 Choreographing the Introduction, or 'Story to be Told'.

A different approach to the physicalizing of the performance was taken to build the introduction to the piece. I wanted it to be a moment for the actors to embody the idea of a story that is about to be told, and to portray the tools used for its narration, to start the process of Müllerian atomization of the known sources for the audience to re-think the issue under a different light. Therefore, I presented the actors with a blank sheet that said, in the middle, 'Story to be Told'. I did not give them any other prompts, or instructions; I wanted them to tell me what the phrase 'Story to be Told' meant to them, because "in an ensemble, actors are part of the interpretative decision-making

²⁵⁹ Dymphna Callery, introduction to *The Active Text: unlocking plays through physical theatre*, page xiii, London: Nick Hern Books, 2015.

and they have to create things as a team”²⁶⁰ (Annabel Arden). The sheet of paper was soon filled with many body parts, (which was interesting to see, as the body parts on the sheet represented a connection to the atomization of a body in a bomb blast and created a visual-verbal link to the Manchester attack) and when discussing their answers, the ensemble told me that the reason behind their choices represented the main way to tell a story: through the body. We didn’t “need portrayal. We need[ed] action”²⁶¹. I asked the actors to pick from the body parts that had been written down a maximum of 5 and to create a short routine with those body parts²⁶². I then asked the company members to relay them to the group, and I took elements from each performance and pieced them together, creating the “Story to be Told” fragment of the play, where the ensemble introduces the piece²⁶³.

3.6 Choreographing Scene Twelve, or “You”.

I also decided to take the same approach with the final scene²⁶⁴. We used the concepts of Laban’s Efforts to communicate a sense of anticipation and of impending doom to the audience through the bodies of the ensemble. To answer the research question, which asked me to investigate a way to translate the idea of “impending doom” into a piece of theatre, I decided to make the movements look exaggerated and out of place.

²⁶⁰ Dymphna Callery, introduction to *The Active Text: unlocking plays through physical theatre*, page xiv, London: Nick Hern Books, 2015.

²⁶¹ David Mamet, in Dymphna Callery, *The Active Text: unlocking plays through physical theatre*, page 74, London: Nick Hern Books, 2015. This represented an interesting moment of reflection in the process, as David Mamet comes from a completely different school to the ones I was following to create the introductory scene.

²⁶² The actors were informed that these did not have to be extremely intricate routines, and that I simply wanted them to utilize the parts of their bodies that they felt were the most appropriate when telling this story.

²⁶³ Please refer to the video document “10:31, MCR part One” (Main Submission USB), minute 0.00-4.00.

²⁶⁴ Fabiana Sforza, *10:31, MCR*, scene 12, 2018.

This aligned with the representation of the moments prior to the Attack, underscored with fragmented words, voices and stories. Due to the ensemble piecing together and parallaxically juxtaposing different views of the event, and the dichotomic chronological presence of ‘Girl One’ to contrast these throughout the piece, the audience would expect the ‘final countdown’ moment that completes the narration. Throughout the performance, ‘Girl One’ is recalling and retelling her story to an audience of people who know what has happened. This is why Scene Twelve is anticipated by the audience, they are aware that this moment is coming and will happen for the duration of the play. Through the last scene I wanted to prove that “the core emotional impact of storytelling lies in anticipation”²⁶⁵ (Steve Waters), and that “[the] audience eye is looking keenly for the story under the surface”²⁶⁶ (Frantic Assembly). These two propositions, taken from theorists and practitioners whose work I had studied to create the piece, emphasised that the approach I had taken to the play was working to answer my research question, as I had been individuating methodologies to achieve the dramatisation of politically sensitive theatre throughout the rehearsal process. This also meant that, fulfilling the expectations of the Postdramatic theatre theory, the audience would have now become “a ‘fourth creator’ after the writer, the director and the actors”²⁶⁷.

Overall, the late practice-as-research helped me individuate methods a playwright can use to script a contemporary tragedy, which answered the sub-research question that this chapter aimed to address. Through the study of Postdramatic theatre theory, I individuated the theoretical basis for this original piece – a research arc that emerged

²⁶⁵Dymphna Callery, *The Active Text: unlocking plays through physical theatre*, 5, London: Nick Hern Books, 2015.

²⁶⁶ Dymphna Callery, *The Active Text: unlocking plays through physical theatre*, 5, London: Nick Hern Books, 2015.

²⁶⁷ Dymphna Callery, *The Active Text: unlocking plays through physical theatre*, page 4, London: Nick Hern Books, 2015.

directly from the workshops with the young people. Through the practice of Laban, I could find a common ground between the theory studied and the dramatisation of verbatim theatre. I found the research carried out prior to the workshop helped me distil the aims and focus of the play. Because of this intersection of practice, I also made progress on finding the emphasis and approach for the research enquiry of this dissertation.

Additionally, the rehearsal process helped me to refine a toolkit of theatrical devices that a theatre-maker can use to portray sensitive events like the Manchester arena attack, and ways in which these representations can bring audiences, actors and research participants to fuel the discourse around such topics. This provided the answer to another sub-research question related to process in theatre making, in examining how a playwright can effectively script events that have caused national trauma in a politically ethical way, in order to spark productive social discourse.

Chapter Four

This chapter will investigate the ways the dramaturgical approaches to the politically sensitive theatre-making process of *10:31, MCR* may have worked in challenging the audiences' pre-existing mind-sets and ideas regarding the Manchester attack. The chapter will, whilst continuing to reference the subjectivity and self-located data set of this PaR project, draw together and attempt to data code and triangulate²⁶⁸ the following areas of analysis of the original play: production, audience reactions and feedback from young people. The observations made in this chapter will be gathered from qualitative data, surveying audiences and participants after the play's preview (which included written surveys, Q&As and interviews)²⁶⁹. Although Grounded Theory was a recommended tool for a stronger data analysis, it felt disruptive for the advancement of the PaR, which had followed a process of switching from "hard facts"²⁷⁰ to "liquid knowledge"²⁷¹. Data coding "is about interacting with data (analysis) using techniques such as asking questions about the data, making comparisons between data, and so on, and in doing so, deriving concepts to stand for those data, then developing those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions"²⁷². The transformation of qualitative data into quantitative, precisely measurable data and/or concepts is not what this study aims to achieve, but rather to let qualitative results of the research (the performance, the audience and the young people's reactions) answer my research question: how can a practitioner-researcher

²⁶⁸ http://www.ie.ufrj.br/intranet/ie/userintranet/hpp/arquivos/texto_7_-_aulas_6_e_7.pdf

²⁶⁹ The audience survey can be found in Appendix I. The Q and A sessions and young people's interviews can be found in the video/audio documented Appendices (Secondary USB submission).

²⁷⁰ Robin Nelson, *Practice as research in the arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

²⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

²⁷² Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing Grounded Theory*, Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008, p.66.

deliver ethical dramaturgical approaches to politically sensitive theatre-making with and for young people? Nonetheless, elements of Grounded Theory have been used to gain a more structural approach to the analysis of the qualitative data, an example being *in-vivo* codes, or “concepts using the actual words of research participants rather than being named by the analyst”²⁷³, and triangulation of three different sources of data (production, audience’s reactions and participants’ feedback²⁷⁴) to “increase the validity of the study”²⁷⁵. The reader will also be redirected to the appendices to this thesis (where all the data collected is presented) and to previous chapters, where the underpinning dramaturgical theories are explored and enumerated as to their deployment in the PaR process.

The first aspect that will be examined of the first set of data (the production of *10:31, MCR*) is my dramatisation of the Manchester terror attack. Starting to write the script, I found it difficult to find ways to dramatise this event. This was due to it being one of the biggest tragedies of the year in the UK; my research question required me to represent somebody else’s pain by individuating dramaturgical methods within an ethical framework, but was this possible at all? This tension resulted in the first draft of the script using a comedic approach as diversion and deferral.²⁷⁶ Whilst this issue was helped by accumulating knowledge of Postdramatic theatre theory together with

²⁷³Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing Grounded Theory*, Los Angeles:Sage Publications, 2008, p.65.

²⁷⁴ In hindsight, the framing of questions during the post-performance interview with the young people who participated in the PaR appeared to have steered the results towards a less natural answer of the research question. This could have been due to the young people’s knowledge of myself and my practice, or it could have been due to their desire to see this project succeed. This is another reason why grounded theory can’t successfully be applied to this study, however elements of it can still be used to come to stronger evidence-based conclusions.

²⁷⁵Lisa A. Guion, David C. Diehl, and Debra McDonald, “Triangulation: Establishing the Validity of Qualitative Studies”, USA: University of Florida, online article available at

http://www.ie.ufrj.br/intranet/ie/userintranet/hpp/arquivos/texto_7_-_aulas_6_e_7.pdf

²⁷⁶ Appendix G, scene One.

Lehmann's ideas on the parallaxical nature of political history in plays, I was also influenced by suggestions from the young people I was working with. When asked the questions "how can a playwright use drama to encourage discussion about politically sensitive topics?" and "what do you think a playwright's duty is when writing about events like Manchester?", the young people were unconstrained with sharing what their expectations would be with regards to a theatre piece about a terror attack. One of the answers stated that showing ordinary characters interacting with extraordinary events can help break down barriers when it comes to discussing sensitive topics.²⁷⁷ This was an answer that helped me focus my approach, bringing me to use 'ordinary characters' and inserting the political implications of the attack parallaxically to their stories to explore their intersections and consequent results. This contributed to creating a space which was constantly evolving and transforming, dependent on the materialised action, in which the actors took on the words of the people who had been affected by the attack. The order of the narration was not following any chronological rules, nor it was regulated by consistent geographical or topographical spatial rules. The only character following chronological rules (although existing in a non-chronological space, and therefore being affected by the non-chronological realities) was Girl One, who 'relived' an edited chronology, observing the different realities of the attack unfold. I believe this worked in favour of the audience's understanding of the piece because they were given a character who, by following chronological rules and being played by the same actress, embodied a guide for them to navigate through the stories that are displayed throughout the piece. However, this also meant that Girl One's journey trumped the other stories in relevance, which was something I had not fully anticipated. Because of the function

²⁷⁷ Appendix E, questions 1 and 2.

of her character, the variegation and plurality of the story was diminished, and political topics might have been harder for the audience to grasp; the personal story outplayed the larger structural issues.

A naturalistic form felt impossible against the fragmentation of the reports, the perspectives, the event itself, the impossibility of piecing those voices together in a way that mimicked the ‘reality’ of the event, when the reality was to be found in the irregular patterns of voices, thoughts and partial and polluted memories, that also intersected with the socio-political.²⁷⁸ The insertion of theatrical parallax in the writing fitted all the scenes apart from Scene 10, where I found myself needing to move the political axis toward the same level as the narration, and insert the character of B²⁷⁹, which quoted the words of a relevant political figure in the UK. This went against the form I had been trying to establish for the piece, and the scene sharply shifted the focus towards the identifiable. Consequently, this moment in the play felt like an interruption to the rest of the narration²⁸⁰, juxtaposing the identifiable with the unidentifiable, creating therefore a clash of storytelling, verbatim and aesthetics²⁸¹. Overall, I believe that the experiment on parallaxing the political could have been explored in greater detail through experimentation of a more exploded form at certain points of the narration, additional viewpoints and perspectives, the study of a more temporal narration, and with a deeper knowledge of social and political trends post-attack.

The research carried out on the Prevent strategy and the western world’s relation to

²⁷⁸ Fabiana Sforza, *10:31, MCR*, scenes 3 and 4, 2018.

²⁷⁹ Fabiana Sforza, *10:31, MCR*, scene 10, 2018.

²⁸⁰ Although differing from the form used throughout the play, this moment still reflects Lehmann’s theory about the political in theatre and its function of ‘interruption’ of the narration.

²⁸¹ Adapting, therefore, the construction Vinaver uses in *11 Septembre 2001*.

terrorism²⁸² felt difficult to translate in writing parallaxically. There were lots of tensions surrounding the idea of being specific about the politics of terrorism in the play, as well as wanting to avoid concentrating and aggrandising the narrative of the bomber at the expense of the victims. This was a tension that followed my practice throughout and was eventually left unresolved, influencing the form and the dramatisation of the piece. Nonetheless, several audience members were directly prompted by the play's content to raise the issue of the political implications of the attack²⁸³. To use the words of renowned Polish theatre-maker, Jan Klata, the piece "presented the past in its multidimensionality, to let many voices speak, so that the listeners can try to re-read the past in the theatre"²⁸⁴. This multidimensionality that Klata refers to, the presence of many voices and their co-existence in the piece was what interested different audience members.²⁸⁵ The participation of the political in *10:31, MCR* could have influenced the dramatisation more heavily, however the tension that came from the impact of the political in the play allowed me to avoid centring the political affiliation of the bomber (or of a certain group of people) as the focus of the play, working to remove the idea that this kind of event can only be caused by a certain group of people - even if by doing this some of the political complexity and social confrontation of 'how we got here' got lost in process.

My playwriting approach, rather than following a particular school or style, focused on reflecting the aim of Postdramatic theatre theory – allowing the audience into the

²⁸² Please refer to the Introduction chapter of this dissertation.

²⁸³ For the discussion on the political repercussions of the attack, please refer to video documented Appendix (Secondary USB submission) "Q and A session, *10:31, MCR* performance Two, from minute 6.26 and from minute 17.

²⁸⁴ Mateusz Malgorzata and Borowski Sugiera, "Political Fictions and Fictionalisations: History as Material for Postdramatic Theatre", in *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political*, p. 84.

²⁸⁵ For the discussion of the multidimensionality of the piece, please refer to video documented Appendix (Secondary USB submission) "Q and A session, *10:31, MCR* performance Two".

narration, making them essential factors in the equation of the piece by exposing stories and narratives that stimulate critical thinking and set up grounds for discussion once the piece is over. I did not want the play to be a stylistic exercise, but rather I wanted to transmit the feel of a story that is being (re)taken into consideration after media attention has faded, a story turned on a different axis and punctured with political reflections on society and trends of thoughts. I therefore decided to have a scene that contained only verbatim material gathered from both formal interviews and online materials²⁸⁶, laced together by Girl One through a game of ‘Touch and Tell’. Once these textures had been cut and sewn next to one another, I added wordless fiction to the equation²⁸⁷, allowing a sentimental scene between father and daughter.

At the beginning of my research, I studied contemporary artist’s Richard Jackson’s essay “Terrorism, Taboo and Discursive Resistance”, where he stated that “aesthetics is neither good nor bad. It works more like an amplifier. Aesthetics adds a different dimension to our understanding of the political and, by consequence, to the ethical discourses that are central to waging political debates.”²⁸⁸ Jackson’s words resonated loudly with the aims of my work, and therefore I decided to adapt his view of aesthetics. This is why the choices made for *10:31, MCR* all contribute to the amplification of the political themes that are intrinsic to the performance. Other reasons behind those choices relied on the prosaic fact that I did not have a budget for this performance, and my aesthetic choice to avoid any naturalistic setting. The *mise*

²⁸⁶ Please refer to the *10:31, MCR* script, scene 5, and cross-reference to the *10:31, MCR* video part 2, minutes 0.00 – 6:51.

²⁸⁷ This is Scene 6 in the *10:31, MCR* script, which contained no spoken word and was later altered in rehearsals to simpler physical movements to reflect a ‘family scene’, where Girl One meets her father amidst the other voices.

²⁸⁸ Freely paraphrased from Richard Jackson, “Terrorism, Taboo and Discursive Resistance: agonistic potential of the terrorism novel”, in *International Studies review*, 2015, 396-413.

en scene was also influenced by Wijs' use of aesthetics in *Us/Them*, with the two characters only using a maximum of five props on stage to portray the Beslan school siege. With such a fragmented piece, containing several voices and presences that lived in opposition with each other, I could not have the actors fully change into different costumes for each scene, nor the set to change entirely during the transitions. Therefore, I decided that the character of Girl One (the only character played by just one actress, and the only character the actress had to play) would be the only one to have a set costume and props to interact with throughout the piece, reflecting in this way Wijs' aesthetics choices when it came to set and props, but still matching the enhanced characterisation of Girl One for the audience to focus on.

In terms of general set and scene-specific props, these were replaced by purposeful gaps, silences and intertextuality of materials to create the ineffable, which was made possible using light, spacing and positioning of bodies to create any place needed, as well as hinting that the world that is happening around Girl One is, perhaps, conjured by her, and not entirely ever supposed to be real. This was my evocation of Postdramatic theatre theory in the piece, requiring the audience to be active members in the making of meaning in the performance. As there was no possible way to 'explain everything' to the audience, through the curation of practices described in this thesis, for them to add their interpretation, so that I wouldn't "impose a limit"²⁸⁹ on their explanation of the play's narrative or message. The use of these dramaturgical and theatrical techniques, within the created aesthetic, in my opinion, opened the piece to a wide range of interpretations and basis for discussion²⁹⁰. I decided to have the

²⁸⁹ "To give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text", Roland Barthes, *Death of the Author*, 1967.

²⁹⁰ Please refer to the video documented Appendix (Secondary USB submission), "Q and A session, 10:31, MCR, performance One and Two.

Manchester Arena's floorplan across the floor and up the walls (parallaxically intersecting), a bunch of blank newspapers²⁹¹, chairs to use as support, and a maximum of five props for the actors to use to help them differentiate between characters played. This also supported the legacy and continuation of the project as, if developed successfully, it would be easy to take into schools or community centres.

Producing the piece saw me embody the role of a practitioner-researcher-director. Directing was the part of the project that I was most worried about, simply because I had never done this before. I studied Katie Mitchell's guide to directing, however I felt like this specific book focused on a naturalistic approach. After trying to apply Mitchell's methods to *10:31, MCR*, I realised that this would have not served my script, the use of aesthetics and the form of the piece. I decided to apply more of my applied theatre practice and facilitation into the rehearsals²⁹², being collaborative and consultative, whilst still maintaining a solid and comprehensive vision for the piece. Because of this, the nature of rehearsals was always collaborative, with the actors actively discussing their choices, their characters and the stories they were telling. I wanted them to know they were telling different stories for each character they played, and because of this they found the discussions and reflections very useful²⁹³. I aided my directing with the use of technical theatre craft, designing lights and sound to aid the aesthetics and the pictures on stage. I wanted to use music to evoke words that simply could not be found in the fragmented voices (taken from formal interviews,

²⁹¹ Encouraging the audience to think about what could have been written on those headlines.

²⁹² Of course I acknowledge that the delineation of these directorial approaches cannot possibly be enforced, but what I describe here is the moment where I found that the same methods I had used in the workshops with young people, also worked in the making with the young company of actors. For a detailed breakdown of rehearsals, please refer to Appendix F, "Maker's Notebook and Rehearsal Diaries".

²⁹³ For the actors' thoughts and report of the rehearsal process, please refer to video documented Appendix (Secondary USB submission), "Q and A session, *10:31, MCR*, performance One and Two.

vlogs and news reports and blurred together to create an overlapping, blended soundbite of stories), and I wanted the lights to aid the storytelling of these. The use of these technical elements, in my opinion, aided the transmission of the play and made sure that the audience were engaged with what was going on, rather than just focusing on the conversations spoken by the actors.

The audience's reactions were collected through three different channels: two Q and A sessions at the end of each performance, a survey for all audiences to fill out to individuate trends and common thoughts, and a post-performance interview aimed specifically at the young people who had participated in the PaR workshops. The performances left the audiences without immediate comment for the first minutes of each Q and A session, however after introductions from the cast the discussions developed richly and informatively. Audiences asked about the process, the work I had carried out with young people, the political repercussions of the attack, the legacy of the project²⁹⁴. The questions the audience posed indicated the play did have an impact on them, and even if it didn't change their mind-sets, it stimulated discussion around the matter. Whilst this parameter (observed secondly in data triangulation) weakened the qualitative effectiveness of the production, it re-enforced the effectiveness of the PaR, as it generated more liquid knowledge rather than solidifying hard facts – both within the minds of the audience, and in this practitioner-researcher. Another way for me to monitor the responses was through the anonymous online survey sent to audience members to individuate responses further and going past the reluctance of face-to-face Q&As. Although most of the audience did not find the

²⁹⁴ For a detailed breakdown of what was discussed in the Q&As, please refer to video documented Appendix (Secondary USB submission), "Q and A session, 10:31, MCR, performance One and Two.

challenging nature of the play altered their thoughts on the attack and the political, religious and social remediation it had undergone²⁹⁵ (possibly due to the demographics of the audiences²⁹⁶) most of them agreed that the play succeeded in sparking discourse around the attack²⁹⁷. The audiences also agreed that they felt emotionally challenged by the performance²⁹⁸ and that the aesthetic choices worked in portraying a different side to the story²⁹⁹. Once again, I believe that these results only strengthened the validity of the methodology chosen to advance the research, and generated qualitative data that, whilst failing to provide enough material to formally code, can provide a basis for future re-works and explorations of the production.

The young people interviewed after the performance were extremely proud of the final product. Inevitably, the results of this post-performance interview will have been steered by the way I framed the questions, or perhaps by the fact that the young people wanted the project to succeed and had found themselves developing a close relationship to the piece. Their comments represented the ‘stamp of approval’ to my project, however in hindsight I would like to have found capacity to conduct further research into the framing of questions to annul bias. I was most pleased to find that the young people felt like their process in the workshops had been carried on by the actors, with them stating that they felt like “the tone of it carried on”³⁰⁰ to the actual performance, and that it had taken the “right progression”³⁰¹. They also appreciated

²⁹⁵ Appendix I, question 2.

²⁹⁶ Which posed the question for me: would this piece have challenged the mentality of a racist/Islamophobic person? This is something that I hope to investigate further when I this work has a wider audience in Summer 2019.

²⁹⁷ Appendix I, question 4.

²⁹⁸ Appendix I, question 5.

²⁹⁹ Appendix I, question 6.

³⁰⁰ Young person’s post-performance interview Part One (Secondary USB Submission), from minute 5.06.

³⁰¹ Young person’s post-performance interview Part One (Secondary USB Submission), from minute 4.51.

the characterisation of Girl One which, whilst being troubling in terms of taking the focus away from other stories, also helped them navigate through the main arc of the narration³⁰². An element of surprise came from the young people citing the hopeful feeling that transpired through the performance³⁰³. Comparing this result to the first parameter used in the triangulation (the production) left me wondering whether the Postdramatic impression of the play, where the audience is offered a story and is then brought to discuss it with the aid of performative methods, or the post-performance discussions helped instil this sense of ‘hope’. One of the participants also stated that the political content was balanced in the final product and that I could have “easily gone too heavy”³⁰⁴. This made me think of the unresolved tension that came from the inclusion of socio-political research in the play, which was something I had not dared to tackle fully; nonetheless, the young people appreciated the level of political content included. The post-performance interview with the young people made me realise that, as a theatre-maker, I had succeeded in creating a dialogue between them and the actors, leading me to ask myself what this meant in regards to the research question that shaped the title of my project: finding ethical dramaturgical approaches to politically sensitive theatre-making *with* (through the workshops) and *for* (through the performance) young people.

³⁰² Young person’s post-performance interview Part One (Secondary USB Submission), from minute 6.00.

³⁰³ Young person’s post-performance interview Part One (Secondary USB Submission), from minute 2.00.

³⁰⁴ Young person’s post-performance interview Part One (Secondary USB Submission), from minute 2.00.

Conclusion

In this conclusion, I will examine my evaluator findings from the previous chapter against the research questions that have guided and shaped the project of *10:31, MCR* and I will aim to arrive at some conclusions as to the ways in which the development of the practice-as-research has contributed to answering, challenging, or re-evaluating those. This chapter will also include brief thoughts for further development of the study.

The first research question focused on the theatrical, dramaturgical and aesthetic factors that underpin the response and reception to plays that discuss sensitive topics. The plays that I took in consideration as models for study were El-Khairy's *Homegrown* and Wijs' *Us/Them*. Whilst the plays all examine a different event, all relate to the issue of terrorism and thus can be categorised as directly addressing politically, socially, ideologically and culturally sensitive issues that affect young people. However, the differing reception of these plays demonstrated the interplay of ethics of representation, aesthetics, and dramaturgical choices³⁰⁵. By applying elements of each of these plays to my own playwriting experience, I wanted to individuate which elements worked better for an audience, which caused unexpected reactions, which made a play unacceptable under an ethical point of view, or which defined whether a play is highlighting an issue to discuss it and not to serve as propaganda. Through my research I concluded that every theatre making event is context specific. However, deploying highly aestheticized stories can help to get an

³⁰⁵ With El-Khairy's play not being allowed to be performed due to contextual political anxieties rather than ideological content, as examined in Chapter One.

experience of what it was like ‘to be there’³⁰⁶. Nonetheless, it might not help to deliver specificity and context and point towards the structural conditions that make an event like terrorism happen if, when you get close to the issue, this might be unsupported. What my play aimed to achieve was treading a fine line of tension by using allegory, elision of reality, and relatable references to create a de-realised³⁰⁷ world and accentuate the “unbelievability”³⁰⁸ of the tragedy whilst still pulling the audience back into the known facts of the event.

Something that has emerged from my research are the methodologies and theoretical frameworks that can be useful to a practitioner-researcher to discuss topics that are politically, religiously and socially sensitive with young people. Exploring the conceptual framework, and the writing of Amanda Stuart-Fisher, Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman and Jenny Hughes has helped me develop a knowledge of the terms used frequently during the PaR (terror, trauma, witnessing), and has given me a robust theoretical lens through which I could advance my research. During the practice-as-research process, I studied the works of Boal, Heathcote, Way and O’Neill and how these can be useful when facilitating sensitive topics to young people, consequently encouraging them to discuss these openly through drama. In the case of my practice, I found that applying the discussions that surround the theory of the Theatre of the Oppressed is an excellent way to encourage young people to discuss openly topics that they would normally avoid talking about – whether because they are not allowed to by their families, or their schools, or because they just are not interested. Through

³⁰⁶ As proved by Wijs’ representation of the Beslan school siege in *Us/Them*.

³⁰⁷ The concepts of the de-realising effects on terror are explored in depth in chapter one, as part of the conceptual framework for this PaR. In Jenny Hughes, *Performance in a time of terror: critical mimesis and the age of uncertainty*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011.

³⁰⁸ *Ibidem*.

my workshops, my feedback evidence demonstrated that the work we had done together made them more engaged about a social issue that affects them at a societal level, which they felt they did not have many public opportunities to discuss because of the purported controversial nature. I would like to conclude that a strong praxis framework is essential and can be applied when working with young people. It is essential that said framework uses the right tool and technique for the job, however (as my research proved to my own practice) it is possible to use dialogical techniques and role play to inhabit other people's shoes and to be able to discuss any topic with the right preparation and timing. It is about developing the toolkit of the practitioner and essential qualities to theatre practice that allow taboo conversations to be opened.

The same statement could be applied to my next research question, which interrogated the ways and methods a playwright can use to write about a tragedy. This process has taught me that, just as there are several factors that could come into play when an audience reacts to a play, there are plenty of ways to script a tragic event. Similarly, to audience reception, the results vary because of different factors, which can be audience background, the nature of the sources used in research, the timeframe in which the play is scripted, the use of practice-as-research, and so on. There are infinite factors that could influence a playwright to write about a tragedy in one way rather than another. This is why I believe it would be really interesting to consider *10:31, MCR* under a completely different circumstance, with a completely different practice. I believe methodology is subjective to the circumstances³⁰⁹, just like practice and audience reception, and therefore I can state that whilst the methodology I followed

³⁰⁹ As explored in depth in chapter two when justifying the methodological approach of PaR for the purposes of this thesis.

and explained thoroughly in Chapter Three worked for this very project, it might not have the same effect under different circumstances.

With young people involved throughout my practice-as-research project, I could investigate which theatrical devices would suit a performance that is created with and for a younger audience. Through the workshops that I delivered, I got to understand what works best for the group I was working with; however, it should be specified that this is all dependent on the context and perspective of the young people a practitioner-researcher is working with. If this project was made instead in Manchester, or with a group of Muslim students, or with much younger people who hadn't engaged with the igniting event, then the likely work would be different again, and may not even result in a performance for public consumption.³¹⁰ With regards to examining *how* a theatre maker can use theatrical devices and aesthetics to portray an event like the Manchester attack, this project developed into becoming a study on form and style in political theatre that respects ethics and challenges thinking. I chose to focus on Postdramatic and post-Holocaust theatre (with emphasis on Müller's work) because I felt like the ineffable nature of the world these schools were portraying fit the overarching mood that I not only wanted my play to have, but also considered it sympathetic to the topics treated. Again, this does not mean that the process for every play that investigates a tragic event should be taken from Postdramatic theatre theory, but it can be stated that, for my practice, this was the foundational methodology to hold the politics and the personal simultaneously in an ethical way.

³¹⁰ It is also worth noting that the results of feedback sessions may have been tampered by the framing of my questions, which sometimes pushed the collection of data towards the answering of the research question outlined earlier on in the thesis.

With the title of this dissertation announcing the investigation of ethical dramaturgical approaches to politically sensitive theatre-making with and for young people, importance must be given to Postdramatic theatre theory, which focuses on the space around the play event and its potentials to aid the challenging of pre-existing mind-sets in the audience. I believe that I have achieved this by encouraging discussions about the topic treated in the play after every performance, and using other interactive methodologies to re-spark the dialogue. By carrying out a post-performance interview with the young people who participated in the workshops, I have made my way back to the original proposition of the title, and have investigated successfully into the effects that the project has had on them too.

The young people, whilst not being able to perform in the previews of *10:31, MCR*, considered the performance a “continuation of [the] work”³¹¹ carried out in the workshops, and expressed their appreciation of the “dialogue”³¹² that has been established and develop between them and the actors. Theatre’s ability to create and dissipate worlds quickly³¹³ enables theatre-makers from different backgrounds (directors, actors, practice-as-research participants) to share these, engaging in a dialogue surrounding the topic of the narration³¹⁴. This outlook allowed me to successfully investigate ethical dramaturgical approaches to politically sensitive theatre-making *with* and *for* young people.

³¹¹ Young person’s post-performance interview Part One and Two (Secondary USB Submission). Please refer to footnote 309.

³¹² Young person’s post-performance interview Part One and Two (Secondary USB Submission).

³¹³ E.g. the worlds created throughout *10:31, MCR*.

³¹⁴ Given the careful application of a methodological framework implemented by the practitioner-researcher.

10:31, MCR

Character List

GIRL ONE, *a young person*

THE ENSEMBLE, *different real-life and fictional characters, herewith named with letters from the alphabet to indicate change of character.*

Introduction

A bare stage. Actor walks in.

GIRL ONE: What you're told
What you know
What they tell you
What you believe

(Beat.)

It's a day like any other day

Pause. Holding the centre. Grounded. Secure.

*Actor picks up backpack and notepad and starts walking to school.
Ensemble walks in.*

Scene One – The Event

*The ensemble is on stage, looking forward.
The track ends.*

A: Breaking news this evening so there's been a major incident, services say they were responding to reports of a severe disturbance during the gig

B: Hello police emergency?

C: Hi there was like ahm something happening at the uhm arena

B: We've got all the 20 people trying to get through the space
But I want you to stay where you are and safe do you hear me

Don't get up

A: All the roads around the arena have been closed off
Police are asking people to avoid the area
Just stay away from the area

B: can you stay with me on the phone?

C: I think so yea

B: Do not move yes?

C:

B: Yes?? Hello??

A: with the number of injured rising by the minute, we are still unsure if there are
any victims

C: I feel like I'm on fire

Help me

B: You need to stay down my love do you hear me

Stay down

C: I'm on fire it burns

Help

A: the prime minister has released an official statement describing the attack as a
sick act of violence

D: come on mum hurry up!!! It's time!!

E: have you put make up on??!?!?

D: it's just a little bit mum come on

C: it burns and it's all ringing now

Will you come to help me

D: oh my god can we just go we'll be late

B: we are trying to break through my dear hold on a little moment

Can you stay with me on the phone for a little moment?

E: Georgina!

D: WHAT MUM

A: what at first was described as a part of the building collapsing, turned out to be an actual attack

E: a kiss goodbye?

A: the injured are rising by the minute

A video plays, intertwining the news of the attack and the young people's thoughts in the workshops to introduce the verbatim work.

Scene 2 – Girls At Home

There is a movement-based transition. The ensemble is building a home with chairs, blankets and torches. Like a nest. Girl one and Girl two are in the nest. Newspapers are put on the nest here and there. They are also placed on Girl one and Girl two. The ensemble are kneeling down around the nest, backs to the audience. They should crumble slowly for the entirety of the scene, as the dialogue goes on. They should start the scene kneeling and end the scene laying completely down on the floor.

GIRL ONE: It's 6 pm. The doors are open. There's excitement in the air. It smells like popcorn.

She writes in her notebook.

GIRL ONE: It's 7pm, and no one thought about recording what is happening here in this very moment in this very place because no one thinks today is going to be the day that -

GIRL TWO: stop it.

GIRL ONE: why

GIRL TWO: just stop it okay

GIRL ONE: did you think about recording what happened at 7pm in the very large entry space -

GIRL TWO (*interrupting, annoyed*): it's called a foyer.

Pause. Girl one notes it down in her notebook.

GIRL ONE: Did you think about recording what happened at 7pm in the very large *foyer* of the very large communal area -

GIRL TWO (*interrupting, more annoyed*): It's called an arena.

A longer pause. Girl one scribbles away. Once she is done, she proudly recites the following line – gestures and accents are welcome.

GIRL ONE: did you think about recording what happened in the very large *foyer* of the very large *arena* where people were buying t-shirts and popcorn -

GIRL TWO (*visibly irritated*): They don't sell popcorn there

GIRL ONE: Oh, yes they do. I smelled it. they sell popcorn and Pepsi and Fanta and t-shirts.

GIRL TWO (*this is probably her last straw*): they sell *coca-cola*, Fanta and t-shirts. They don't sell popcorn.

Pause. Girl one makes a note that they don't sell Pepsi at the arena, they sell Coca cola instead. This is very important to her, as she would like her description of the events to be as accurate as possible.

GIRL ONE: How do you know these things?

GIRL TWO: Because I am older than you.

GIRL ONE: Only of like, two years.

GIRL TWO: Yea, so?

GIRL ONE: Stop showing off.

Pause.

GIRL ONE: I am going to write a book about this.

GIRL TWO: What about

GIRL ONE: The goings on.

GIRL TWO: What goings on?

GIRL ONE: These goings on.

GIRL TWO: Uh?

GIRL ONE: The goings on of tonight. The events.

GIRL TWO: You should just go to sleep.

GIRL ONE: I can't.

GIRL TWO: You have to.

Pause. Girl one scribbles some more, and then closes her notebook. She carefully positions it to her side.

GIRL ONE: No school tomorrow

GIRL TWO: No school tomorrow.

They lay down. Girl one is a little bit restless, and tosses and turns for a few moments. Then, she speaks.

GIRL ONE: Thank you.

GIRL TWO: Uh?

GIRL ONE: I said thank you.

GIRL TWO: What for?

GIRL ONE: For telling me the truth about it.

Scene three – Adults in Overdrive

The ensemble takes the nest apart. Girl one and two are immobile during this transition. Once the nest has been taken down, three people from the ensemble will put blazers and glasses, or anything that resembles "adult workwear", on top of their base clothes. They will step forward to form a pyramid structure. There are now four adults in the room.

A1: Thanks everyone for coming into this meeting regarding the recent events

We had a number of students who were there and

A2: it was my job to make sure they were all safe and

Breath. Holding.

Luckily

Breath is let out.

they all were

A3: what to do
What can we do
What should we do
In case

What to do if someone came to attack our school

Firearm

Weapon attack

A1: it's complicated and dark
Mostly dark / We need a plan

A3: what we need right now is a plan

We need to deliver in the right way

It's the community

Our community

They will be the ones who will be feeling hypersensitive

For it to happen so close to home is

A2: there's no words isn't it

Pause.

A4: Things have changed.

A lot of Muslims have had a lot of hatred towards them

A lot of work needs to be done on how to deal with racial tension

People attacking other people's religion

People are angry

We are a messed-up world

It makes you question

ARE WE DOING ENOUGH AS POSSIBLE

Pause.

And I don't think we are.

A1: I think young people are shocked, worried, but also extremely resilient.

And if you see how our young people respond to this

You see how we should do it in our society

They'll embrace it and they'll find a way through

Scene four – Alright

The “adults” take their workwear off. The ensemble re-builds the “newspaper room”. The actors playing A, B and C are back in the middle. The music stops abruptly.

A, B and C are looking at the newspapers.

A: Okay, so people are uncomfortable talking about it.

C: *Adults* are.

B: I am.

A: I'm okay.

C: Same.

B: I'm not.

A: Fair.

A moment. Shrugging.

B: people died.

It happened to people like us

I struggle to

Comprehend

Talk about it

Pause. C picks up some newspapers with very provocative headlines regarding the Manchester Terror Attack.

See??

B shows the newspaper to A and C.

I hate them

I hate them I hate them I hate them I hate them

Looking through the newspapers on the floor, kicking and discovering more sickening headlines.

All they do is

Ruin things

And kill people

And ruin things

And fly planes into things

And ruin it for everybody

Silence. B sits down in the newspapers.

A: Who's they?

B looks at A. Gestures to the newspapers.

B: You know.

C: Right...

A: What do you mean?

Pause.

B: I mean, if you take all these news, they tell you who the attacker is, where they come from/ what they believed in...

C: / Manchester.

B: What about it?

C: The attacker was from Manchester. Born in Manchester.

Silence.

A: Was he?

C: Yes.

B: *(looking through newspapers, confused)* But it doesn't say here.

Silence.

B: How would you know, anyway?

C: Because I do my research and I don't stop at the surface?

A: Yea but how can you be 100% sure that what you read ANYWHERE is ACTUALLY true?

C: Well –

B: You can't. So, pick a side and stick with it.

A and C think.

Two ensemble members come in talking. They are not aware of A, B and C. They are having a conversation.

D: I feel like my future isn't safe, at all

I feel like I should be living in a different world

On a different planet

Pause.

Does it make you feel different about Muslims?

E: Ehm

I don't know

It's like half

50/50

cause

some are nice

and some are

not very

they're

idiots

D: I know people are thinking

Oh he's a muslim
He's a muslim he's a muslim

We don't need to have him in this school

How about in the future they're not allowed in this country anymore

This is why I'm worried

Scene Four Point Five – A Moment Apart

GIRL ONE enters. She is still holding onto her notebook. She is writing something down. She is picked up by the ensemble and positioned on an actor's shoulders.

GIRL ONE: It's 9pm. I am on Dad's shoulders and I feel like I am on top of the world.

She scribbles.

I can see everything and everyone, and I have never felt this happy in my entire life.

She scribbles.

Apart from when we got given tickets for Christmas.

She scribbles some more.

A beautiful combination of colours, sound, people.

Scene Five – Twin Tales

The ensemble on stage freezes. Girl One walks in the space and re-positions the actors. She then walks around them and touches them lightly. As she touches them, they come to life for a split second, embodying each time a different character and telling each time a different story. Girl One indulges in some of the stories, pressing for longer, or going back to them. Always scribbling on her notebook. She interacts with them.

A: I got a phone call saying that my niece was there

Girl moves on.

B: I'm okay
I'm just in shock

I was just really really scared like
But now I'm uhm
I'm a little bit better

Girl moves on.

C: There was only probably a handful of people that had got through those doors at the top that then turned around and had to run back down and potentially saw the straightaway aftermath of that explosion

Girl moves on. She thinks about it. Then goes back to C.

C: Other than that everyone else in the arena had not seen this and I was not 100% sure what had happened ehm and in all honesty my first thought was the stairs had collapsed ehm and it wasn't until this chaos erupted that I possibly could think that like It was an explosion

Girl stops the flow abruptly and moves on.

D: And she had a big big birthday party

With balloons and ehm

We had cake too

It was good uhm it was a good day

Girl smiles. She indulges in the moment. Maybe she plays it again. She moves on.

E: She's on the ground so I run.. ehm

I ran cos I didn't want people to step all over her

We put jumpers on it.

Girl steps away from the actors, her back to the audience. She is thinking. She takes her notebook out and writes something down. She then positions A, B, C and E with their backs to the audience. She clicks her fingers for a spotlight to fall on D. Music stops abruptly with an in-breath. She sits and listens.

D: She was obsessed

She wanted to be famous

We got the tickets for Christmas and uhm

We just

She was so happy

She would be happy to know that like
Like so many people know her name now
And she had a big big birthday party
With balloons and ehm
We had cake too
It was good uhm it was a good day
Obviously sad but
She would have been happy and that's what matters
I guess

Scene Six – You're all alone

The lights fade back to normal. Girl One stares at D. D is frozen, no longer a character, just an actor. She walks to their side. The ensemble is now behind Girl One. She touches D's shoulder. As soon as she touches their shoulder, D wakes up and steps back into the character whose story they have just told. They turn their head to Girl One. She is lifted by the ensemble and just as D is trying to reach for her hand, she is floating away. She floats around D until she lands on the opposite side. She touches D on the shoulder again. D turns and, this time, Girl One stays. A smile.

Blackout.

Scene Seven – A Vlog

Two girls are getting ready for the concert.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwyY9LaTpRc>

Scene Eight – Manchester machine

The ensemble abruptly drops their arms.

A Member of the Ensemble: I want to be a machine.
Arms to grasp
Legs to walk
No pain

No thoughts

Pause.

THIS IS SO FUCKED UP

The rest of the ensemble is typing on their phones. Light hits them every time they are “thinking”.

B: DO NOT COME OLDHAM HOSPITAL LOCKED INSIDE THERE IS A MAN WITH A GUN OUTSIDE

C: PLEASE COME IT’S BURNING SO BAD I AM STRUGGLING TO BREATHE

A is running around trying to silence the testimonies.

A: STOP IT I SAY STOP IT – SHUT UP
STOP TALKING ABOUT IT
STOP IT

D: Multiple confirmed fatalities tonight

A: SHUT UP

E: Our thoughts and prayers go out to the victims’ families

A: THIS IS SICK
ROTTEN SICK
STOP IT

F: What was that explosion in city centre then?

G: Has someone just let a bomb off at Ariana’s concert?

A: NO NO NO NO YOU NEED TO STOP

D: A Balloon popped and everyone thought it was an explosion
Talk about paranoia hey

E: Just take your time and keep exiting the building

A: SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP

G: Everyone has run out there’s blood and smoke

F: A BANG WENT OFF IN THE ARENA IT’S EITHER A GUN OR A BOMB

B: everyone in the arena run

A: STOP THIS STOP THIS STOP THIS IS ROTTEN SICK I TELL YOU THIS IS SICK STOP IT

C: guys it was just a balloon popping

B: RUN

A: I SAID NO

A is overwhelmed by the ensemble, who is swallowing them with their sentences. Circle coming in closer and closer around A, with A emerging from time to time to “breathe”, circle swallowing him back in.

Scene Nine – One Last Time

At the end of the video and the song, the ensemble falls to the ground. Everything is quiet for a few moments, and then a member of the ensemble stands.
SOUNDSCAPE: “Music Box – One last time by Ariana Grande”

A: Broken
From the bottom of my heart
I’m so sorry
I don’t have words

I’m sorry you lost family
I’m sorry you lost friends
I’m sorry you lost
Parts of you

And I’m sorry you have no faith in humanity anymore because
This is the biggest loss
Losing faith
In people

The biggest loss

Another member of the ensemble rises.

B: Tonight, our hearts are broken.
Words cannot express our sorrow for the victims and families harmed in this senseless attack
We mourn the lives taken by this cowardly attack
We are thankful for the restless service of those who rushed to help saving lives
We ask all of you to keep the victims and their families in your thoughts and prayers.

Scene Nine Point Five – Tomorrow is near

GIRL ONE: It's 930pm.

I'm happy, but I'm also sad because I know the concert will be over soon.

She scribbles the previous lines down on her notebook. She stops suddenly.

Dad says "don't think about it, just enjoy it, NOW!"

And I try to

I just

Can't help but worry

Tomorrow is so near

And I don't want tonight to end

There is a swift change of mood in the room, and the rest of the ensemble springs up.

Scene Ten – The reality, ma'am

Four people step forward. A, B, C and T.

T: I'd like to talk to you about something today
Something that is happening under our eyes
And something that is not being dealt with

Something that could have potentially prevented
The tragedy of Manchester

Pause. A thought.

When she was home secretary
Before any of this happened
she went to address the police federation.
There, she was herself addressed by a police officer called

A: Damien O'Riley, Greater Manchester police

Silence.

T: His connections on the streets of the Manchester suburbs are impeccable
He spoke to the Home Secretary and said

A: Home Secretary, you'll remember in November 2010

You presented me with community police officer of the year award
I'm saying this, forgive me, just to show that I know what I'm talking about
Unfortunately
I worked in inner city Manchester for 15 years
I felt passionate about what I was doing

I had to leave.
I couldn't take it anymore, because the changes that had been imposed had forced
community policing to collapse
That's the reality ma'am

T: That's the reality ma'am

C: No one was there to check on us really... ehm... yea no one checked on us
And we were going to meet her
And it's just like
I could have brought anything in

A: the community policing forces will collapse ma'am unless we stop the cuts

T: That is the reality ma'am.

C: They said no food and I had a sandwich
They didn't take it away

A: Intelligence is dried up
All of our officers
They don't know what's happening
They're all reactive
It's not proactive policing

C: Cheese and onion. I think.

A: That's just the reality ma'am
Neighbour policing is critical with dealing with terrorism

C: I was actually very surprised cos a few years back it was very thorough
It just felt a bit like a joke to be fair
Bit of a let down

A: We run the risk here of letting communities down
Putting officers at risk
And ultimately risking national security

T: That's the reality ma'am

A: I'd ask you to seriously reconsider the budgets and cuts over the next five years

T snaps their fingers. One spotlight on him and one on B, who has been silent up until now.

T: Not long after these words were said to the then home secretary there was an atrocity in Manchester.

Video starts playing in the background with images from Manchester and videos from racist manifestations, etc.

T: I don't understand why we don't get angry about that

B: Crunch the numbers

T: But we get angry about utterly manipulative fraudulent figures being portrayed by the media about refugees

B: Manipulate the figures

T: That's the reality ma'am

B: Focus solely on those who were investigated after suspicions were raised

T: It's just what it is.
If you're thick, and a little bit racist

B: I'll try to sell it to you today.

T: Manchester, London, Birmingham, Gorton, the neighbourhood next door to Gorton, which is the one from where the Manchester Arena bomber hailed.

B: Strong and stable, crunch the numbers

T: So you'd think they'd learn from that do you? / Gonna cut the police, and then we're gonna claim that that's had no impact whatsoever on crimes being committed

B: manipulate the figures, crunch the numbers

T: that's the reality, ma'am.

B: I'm going to sell it to you today.

T: That's everything in a nutshell.

B: If you're thick, or a little bit racist.

T: We're gonna commission a report that finds it is *likely* / that there's been a contribution and then we're gonna pretend that we never saw it

B: Crunch the numbers, manipulate the figures. Crunch the numbers, manipulate the figures.

T: That's the reality, ma'am.

B: Sold.

Blackout.

Scene Eleven – iPhones and brown Labradors

Two ensemble members step forward.

J: I can't find him

Can you help me

Can you please help me

O: Twenty-four hours after the attack and there are still people missing

We have received numerous calls from several families asking us to show the following pictures

J: I uhm.. I started running and I thought he was behind me but then ehm
I guess we must have got separated

O: If you or anyone you know has seen any of these people please call Manchester Greater Police as soon as possible

J: No, I mean I don't know, like, this tall?

O: the emergency services are doing their best trying to locate all the missing –
sister comes into his head (missing word children)
There is helicopters and search squads going on in the city and in the suburbs too

J: A blue jumper, jeans and white converse

O: we urge anyone who has any information to please call the number below and only the number below

J: fourteen

O: We ask everyone spreading information on social media to verify the nature of the material you are sharing, as there has been several claims that have been proved to be untrue

J: Yes, and the lock screen has a picture of our dog

O: The official helpline numbers are still showing below, we urge you to double check all the information you have against the official resources, provided by the Greater Manchester Police

J: Yes, a brown Labrador

O: We are aware of the amount of calls we are receiving from the public and we would like to let you know that we are doing our best to broadcast all the people missing

J: Cracks? You mean on the screen?

O: Please be patient and stay on the line with our operators, they will answer as soon as possible

J: ehm not that I remember of, no

O: We are opening a text line as well, if you can't get through to one of our operators please text the number below and we will get back to you as soon as possible

J: On the left-hand side?

O: Whilst we wait for more news about the attack, we are connecting with our reporter outside the arena to check up on the people who are waiting for the authorities to announce the names of the victims identified throughout the night

J: A blue case, yes

O: Thank you for the update, we will come back to you later

J: Maybe with the ehm... bomb... going off
Maybe it cracked then

O: We are now streaming live the heart-warming moment a father is reunited with his alive son, after having lost track of him for the twenty-four hours following the explosion

J: Are you sure they're white converse?

O: There are no words to describe the look on the father's face, really

J: And it's a brown Labrador?

O: It's a miracle

J: But he never had cracks on his phone
Looked after it well

O: We are incredibly happy for the young boy's family, and... this just in, our reporter live from the hospital interviewing the mother

J: it was a birthday gift

O: Thank you for that beautiful clip. I have been informed that the victims' number has just gone up by one

J: Yes, an iPhone 6

O: The victim was identified thanks to the description provided by a family member of their lock screen picture

J: Liam, yes

O: A brown Labrador

J: You found him?

Scene Twelve – The Explosion

GIRL ONE: It's 10pm.
I'm singing along to the very last song.

It's 10:15.
I'm packing my bag.

It's 10:25.
We are going up the stairs towards the door. I can still smell popcorn.

It's 10:27.
I'm holding onto Dad's hand. It's very crowded and I don't want to get lost.

A smile.

10.31

And I

Lights shine bright.

A breath.

Blackout.

Scene Thirteen – A Tribute

“Mess is mine” – Vance Joy, acoustic

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