

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

A front line analysis of controversy and censorship in contemporary British theatre.

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Abstract

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This thesis offers a snapshot of contemporary British theatre censorship between 2015 and 2017. Drawing on Zygmunt Bauman's theories about liquid modernity, I delineate a range of scholarly discourses on censorship. I propose a more precise term, 'liquid censorship', which acknowledges the various, shape-shifting forms that censorship can take as well as the invisible power that drives decisions to regulate or otherwise inhibit freedom of artistic expression. The research brings together a range of sources from theatre scholarship and qualitative interviews to freedom of information requests, industry reports and press reviews or reports. This is supplemented by insights gleaned from a sample of repertoire data captured between 2016 and 2017 from 34 theatres across the 12 key regions of the UK. I investigate the significance of shifts in society and describe how these influence localised acts of liquid censorship. The spotlight is placed on controversial productions that incorporate the figure of the child in dangerous circumstances, either as performers, narrative focus, or both. My case studies include the National Youth Theatre's *Homegrown* which was censored in 2015, Milo Rau's *Five Easy Pieces* for Campo theatre in Ghent which toured to the Unicorn Theatre in 2018 having been cancelled in Manchester the previous year, and Out of Joint's revival of Andrea Dunbar's *Rita Sue and Bob Too*, which was first cancelled and then reinstated at the Royal Court Theatre in 2017. Exploring the relationship between theatre spaces, society and audiences, my thesis uncovers the less visible pressures that influence programming decisions in Britain, such as social media, politics and funding, artistic leadership, security and the preservation of public order, clarifying how the processes of liquid censorship operate in this context.

Keywords: [Censorship, Controversy, Contemporary Theatre, Liquid Modernity, Social Media]

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Introduction

This thesis explores the limits of controversial representation in contemporary British theatre, with a particular emphasis on repertoire that represents children or young people in dangerous situations. Following the cessation of the Lord Chamberlain's theatre censorship powers in 1968, British artists and institutions have been free to operate beyond the constraints of formal state censorship; however, this is not to suggest that the curtailment of artistic freedoms have ceased to exist. In order to investigate how and why different limits have formed to restrict artistic freedoms, I have deployed case study examples of repertoire that could be perceived as representing instances of theatre censorship in the context of sociology. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman suggests that contemporary Western middle-class society exists in a perpetual state of flux and continually shapes itself around the present. As a consequence, we react 'to the latest trouble, experimenting, groping in the dark' in an environment in which 'change is the only permanence, and uncertainty, the only certainty' (Bauman, 2012:vi). Whilst this description appears to be a bold or perhaps even an alarmist one, it encapsulates the conditions which I will suggest have characterised recent acts of censorship in contemporary British theatre.

Censorship is a complicated word which requires a nuanced definition. Derek Jones defines it as 'a variety of processes ... formal and informal, overt and covert, conscious and unconscious, by which restrictions are imposed on the collection, display, dissemination, and exchange of information, opinions, ideas, and imaginative expression' (Jones, 1990:xi). The variety of modes attributed to censorship is crucial here and an important premise for the approach taken in this thesis. The idea that censorship only exists within a state operated or solid framework does not take into account its shape-shifting or liquid qualities. Catherine O'Leary (2015:7) proffers that censorship does not present itself in one, recognisable form although she suggests it is usually motivated by ideological intentions, such as morality, politics or religion, or a fusion of these. This thesis attempts to define what censorship actually means in a contemporary British theatre context, assessing the validity of claims that threats to artistic liberty are intensifying by exploring examples of repertoire being censored and comparing these with productions that have reached the stage during 2016 - 2017, drawn from a contextual sample of repertoire data and guidance warnings that I have gathered from thirty-four theatre venues across the UK (see Appendix 1). It is my contention that the lack of certainty described by Bauman has created a ripple effect in the theatre industry, influencing how decisions about controversial repertoire are made. It is my hope that this research could be employed to inform industry policy consultations regarding the selection of theatre

repertoire and how decisions are influenced, as well as offering valuable research data that may contribute to contemporary theatre scholarship.

The scope of this thesis has been refined to address a core set of research questions:

- What do controversial representations of the figure of the child in peril reveal about an emerging form of censorship in contemporary British theatre?
- How might we most accurately describe this censorship?
- What does contemporary archival and empirical data research gathered between 2015 - 2017 reveal about contemporary British theatre censorship, particularly in terms of the relationship between geographic and social contexts?
- Where is the balance located in the relationship between administrators and artists in contemporary British theatre and how does this relate to censorship?
- Have social media shifted theatre censorship in Britain?
- What can be done practically to engage the British theatre industry in a meaningful, collaborative and action orientated discussion regarding censorship?

It is important to state at the outset that the focus of my work has been informed by over a decade of experience as a performer, theatre maker, venue programmer and more recently as a trustee. The scope of this research is focussed on identifying a snapshot of how decisions about controversial repertoire are being made and what role, if any, censorship plays in shaping contemporary British theatre repertoire. My research methods have incorporated frontline research interviews with artists, theatre managers and critics working in the theatre industry, as well as an analysis of broader sources such as press reports, critical responses to repertoire or social media commentary. I have gathered and analysed financial reports and freedom of information data in an attempt to develop a comprehensive picture of the processes and pressures that may lead to the regulation of artistic expression. The contemporary repertoire that I have drawn on to scrutinise the ways in which less visible censorship might work in practice has inevitably touched on some important debates regarding how to represent certain subjects such as childhood, minority cultures, class or sexual violence. This thesis does not focus in-depth on these taboo themes. My work instead offers a deliberate emphasis on contemporary theatre practice and the mechanics of artistic regulation, drawing insight from the theatre industry and attempting to make sense of this in terms of trends in society. My work provides an archival approach to recent examples of productions that have been described as censored, gathering together various sources to document a snapshot for analysis. I have reflected on an industry-wide strategic focus on value and relevance in

contemporary theatre. The unique conditions that artistic leaders and makers are working in have been interrogated, referring to the influence of social media as a platform for responses to work. My research makes a contribution to gaps in research that have been identified by Janelle Reinelt (2014) and Helen Freshwater (2009b) regarding the relationship between society, mainstream audiences and artistic representation. My work addresses provocations that have been made by scholars, critics and funders that examples of theatre censorship are likely to increase in contemporary Britain. The repertoire focus on representations of children has also offered a contribution to the gap in research identified by Nicholas Ridout (2006:98-99) and reinforced more recently by Adele Senior as part of the journal *Performance Research* issue *On Children* (2018) and specifically in the 'Editorial' article (Senior, 2018:1). The breadth of my research is deliberate, as it attempts to capture the essence of a period in contemporary theatre history and the decisions that have limited or curtailed artistic liberty in practice, rather than focussing in-depth on a particular strand of work or taboo theme.

I am indebted to the scholarship of Zygmunt Bauman, particularly the concept of a changeable and impermanent society described by Bauman as *Liquid Modernity* (2012). This abridged definition of the properties of 'liquidity' neatly summarises Bauman's theory:

fluids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change...unlike solids, they are not easily stopped - they pass around some obstacles, dissolve some others... heavier than many solids...we are inclined nonetheless to visualize them all as lighter...the lighter we travel the easier and faster we move. These are reasons to consider 'fluidity' or 'liquidity' as fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present...phase in the history of modernity (Bauman, 2012:1-2).

Bauman describes an environment that is being destabilised by new media, globalisation, a consumer driven market economy and precarious employment patterns. A helpful way to view this condition is through Bauman's discussion of technology and the description of a move from 'solid' forms of hardware to 'liquid' software or subscription-based services which are continuously being upgraded and updated, setting the scene for a society in perpetual motion (Bauman, 2012). New technologies have opened up increasing opportunities for a global market economy to expand its possibilities, as well as fostering different types of social relationships and methods for forming them, such as online social networks. Work takes place in an international or global community. Even if individuals still live and work within their own local communities, they are likely to be affected in some way by the impact of a global market economy, perhaps spending more of their time online or lamenting the loss of traditional high-street shops. For Bauman, the pace of change associated with this liquid society has resulted in heightened levels of individualism, uncertainty and anxiety. A global overload of information and an associated precarity creates a kind of fog, or a

context in which the saturation of content makes it hard to focus on one piece of information clearly. Furthermore, this environment is populated by a society of individuals no longer anchored to the certainties provided by a single, localised state power structure which has also been destabilised by the rapidity of globalised change.

Contemporary social conditions are underpinned by new types of liquid power, which supersede traditional or solid structures. We might recognise this power if we think about the volatile control that the financial markets hold over economic stability, or the influence that media and communication technology companies exert by manipulating social narratives and public sentiment. A liquid modern age is no longer governed exclusively by the instruments of a solid state but increasingly by less visible and fluid forces, which are virtually unassailable because they are not necessarily recognisable, or because we underestimate their weight and rapid adaptability. Bauman's reflection on power made particular sense to me when I was surrounded by water in a swimming pool. If you have ever tried to clap under water, you will observe that the sound is muffled by the liquid that surrounds it. So too is the noise generated by 'liquid' power obscured by the fluid social environment that engulfs it. These new forms of power are quiet and insidious. This research has sought to employ a different, customised type of listening that is fit for the liquid age, drawing together multiple pieces of information in an attempt to locate the source of power in decisions to censor or in some way regulate theatre repertoire.

I encountered Bauman's scholarship as a result of a deliberate search for a sociologist who could assist in making sense of a set of unsettled social conditions that I recognised as underpinning decisions to limit or regulate artistic freedom. Furthermore, Bauman's work on the relationship between liquid modernity, art and culture resonated with my impression of how power operates in artistic organisations, specifically in terms of the complex relationship that exists between artists and theatre institutions. According to Bauman, changes in contemporary conditions have provided new opportunities for managerial control:

What are truly novel... are the criteria which present day managers, in their new role as agents of market forces rather than of the powers of the nation-building state, deploy to assess, 'audit', 'monitor', judge, censure, reward and punish their wards (Bauman, 2005:59).

The processes that institutions employ for reacting to shifts in society may result in an overly cautious, risk averse management of artistic creation. Given an artist's financial dependence on an institution or manager, creative outputs are likely to be shaped in some way by this. Conversely, some artists may seek to work against the cautious management of culture, creating extremely

radical or divisive repertoire to provoke those in charge and perhaps precipitating acts of censorship. Bauman has referred to Theodor Adorno's scholarship (1991) on culture and administration to describe the inherently fragile but interdependent relationship which exists between artists and institutions. One cannot exist without the other and therefore each party works within an imperfect but necessary union that requires compromise. The relationship between artists and managers is not a new one; however, my thesis contends that it is under increased strain in the contemporary era, particularly in the context of social media which magnifies the reach of sensitivity to work that might be considered to be offensive. I suggest that we are not necessarily operating in a theatre context that is free from censorship.

Empirical research helps to reveal the extent to which censorship has adapted or found a covert, liquid form since it was abolished at a state level in 1968. In 2002-2003, 454 venues and theatre companies were contacted by David Thomas, David Carlton and Anne Etienne to see if they had suffered anything that might be described as 'censorship' in their practice. Of 164 replies, 68% said they hadn't and 32% said they had with intervention coming from local authorities, sponsors, advertisers, boards and pressure groups (2007:236). Looking at more recent research, in the What Next? report *Meeting Ethical and Reputational Challenges* (2015) over a third of the eighty-nine responding directors of arts organisations suggested they had experienced scenarios where they had deliberately avoided the 'risk of controversy' (Long, 2015:24). Whilst these surveys are distinct, the percentage of venues that referred to a form of censorship was approximately the same over the period.

During the Arts Council England's funded symposium, *No Boundaries* (2015), Natalia Kaliada, director of the Belarus Free Theatre, raised concerns about an emerging conformity and 'self-censorship' in British theatre provoked by a fear of losing funding (*The Stage*, 2015). The use of the words 'self-censorship' by an artist in exile from her native country, where state operated acts of oppression or censorship are exerted over artistic expression, is both powerfully provocative and disquieting. Kaliada was not alone in her commentary, with the idea of arts censorship debated at the House of Commons (2015) by a mixed panel including Shami Chakrabarti (former director, Liberty), Munira Murza (deputy mayor for education and culture, London), Colin Morgan, (head of public order for the Metropolitan Police) and Michael Attenborough (former artistic director, Almeida). The panel suggested that an insidious kind of censorship increasingly happens inside artistic institutions, provoked by an anxiety about the relationship between politics and subsidy (Clark, 2015). Sir Nicholas Serota (2017), chairman of the Arts Council England has referred to 'an

increasing number of high-profile cases raising ethical and censorship issues', cautioning that 'censorship and self-censorship can stand in the way of great art' (Serota, cited in *What Next?*, 2017).

In the Theatre 2016 Conference Report, David Brownlee and Mari O'Neill concluded that 'artistic censorship and self-censorship is a bigger issue than it has been for half a century' (Brownlee and O'Neill, 2016:2). The theatre critic Dominic Cavendish, who writes for *The Telegraph*, a politically conservative newspaper, has questioned whether state censorship has merely been substituted by 'invisible bonds of constraint' (Cavendish, 2018) in contemporary British theatre. A move between visibility and invisibility with regards to the types of control exerted over artistic expression is part of the challenge in establishing the prevalence of theatre censorship in twenty-first century Britain. Empirical surveys cannot offer in-depth insight on self-censorship and the process of establishing the invisible forces at work requires a more complex research approach.

The choice to avoid programming a play that might risk poor ticket sales or even protest may represent for some a form of institutional self-censorship whilst for others this would constitute a legitimate business decision. The decision to cancel a production with an associated risk of controversy during its rehearsal process and prior to its first performance, as was the case with the National Youth Theatre's *Homegrown* (2015) explored in Chapter 4, has been viewed as a form of censorship by the artists involved and industry theatre executives. However, the NYT defended its position on the grounds of quality control and business strategy. Artists may choose to 'self-censor' their work, either consciously in order to secure commissions and funding, or perhaps unconsciously. This type of censorship is hard to pin down. An artist might be reluctant to reflect that their work has been shaped in some way by the imperatives of survival in the theatre industry, because this might imply a lack of courage or commitment that is at odds with the toil involved in creating performance work.

Other examples of censorship, less common in contemporary Britain, involve state or police intervention or perhaps even violence and incarceration. The production *Another World: Losing Our Children to Islamic State* (2016) by Gillian Slovo and Nicholas Kent followed interviews with mothers of ISIS recruits in Brussels and the Metropolitan Police. Kent tried to interview a British returnee from Syria in prison but was blocked by the Home Office (Brooks, 2016) indicating that artistic repertoire is not impervious to some kind of involvement from the state. Local authorities also have a role to play in decisions about artistic representation. Manchester City Council precipitated the

cancellation of Campo Theatre's touring production of *Five Easy Pieces* (2017) at Home Theatre in Manchester on the basis of concerns about the appropriateness of the content for the child actors. There is an absence of information in the public domain about this cancellation and as part of the case study research included in Chapter 5, I have incorporated insights gathered from a freedom of information request (see Appendix 9), which I sent to the licensing department at Manchester City Council.

By contrast, what can be termed 'Grassroots censorship' may be exerted by a civil movement of ordinary people with an objection, typically based on ideology and beliefs. Groups with a particular agenda may lobby against a production without having seen the work. These groups may not attend the theatre regularly, or perhaps at all, but have a complaint against an aspect of the production. The work becomes a site for activism, representing an opportunity to bring public profile to a particular cause. Theatres and arts institutions are vulnerable to this type of response because they provide a geographically focal point for protest, unlike screen art media such as television and film.

I explore new forms of socially transmitted or 'grassroots censorship' propagated by the use of social networks in the liquid modern age. The critic Natasha Tripney describes this as a contemporary form of censorship 'with a small c' in which 'artists and organisations [are] self-censoring due to worries about public protest, sponsorship and its potential loss' and 'media storms' (2018a). According to an email sent by Roseby to his stakeholders (see Appendix 8), in his discussions with the Metropolitan Police during the process that led to the cancellation of *Homegrown*, they raised safety concerns and queried 'the ability for the National Youth Theatre to control all social media responses' (Watling, 2015), which would of course have been impossible for the NYT or indeed any institution to achieve. Managing security is complicated by the unique threats presented by social media.

Controversial repertoire is considered in this thesis according to Aleks Sierz's definition:

Controversy may often be sought, but usually takes off by chance. For a play to be controversial, it needs to touch raw nerves. Often, although the audience's feelings of discomfort and outrage are real enough, the form that controversy takes is itself a performance: walkouts, letters to the press, leader articles denouncing a 'waste of public money', calls for bans or cuts in funding, mocking cartoons, questions in parliament (Sierz, 2001:5).

This type of performative reaction requires a broader definition in contemporary society, to encompass the new types of challenges presented by online activism. It is Sierz's emphasis on 'raw

nerves' in his definition of controversial repertoire that is of particular interest here. This choice of language resonates with Freshwater's description of the 'powerful affective cargo carried by the abstract concept of the child' (2013:174), whether real or imaginary. Sierz and Freshwater point to a connection between audiences and controversial theatrical representation that bypasses an intellectual response, perhaps touching the nervous system and provoking a more visceral response. Freshwater suggests that 'cultural anxieties around the child remain strong enough to prevent intellectual engagement' (2013:181) with certain pieces of theatre repertoire, as part of her reflection on responses to the work of Tim Crouch. Social media is considered in my thesis as a channel for communicating responses to controversial repertoire. I reflect on the impact that social media has had on theatre censorship, and this particular focus is given prominence in Chapter 6, which contains a case study about the (cancelled) cancellation of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* at the Royal Court Theatre in the context of the #MeToo movement.

The case study chapters contain examples of original theatre productions or revivals of repertoire which place children or young people into violent or threatening circumstances. The emphasis on productions that have involved children in some way, either thematically or as child-actors, was partly selected in response to production cancellations that emerged during my research. However, the thematic focus is also in dialogue with a fascination among certain artists with placing the figure of the child into perilous circumstances, which I discuss in my literature review. Childhood is a topic that captivates society and representations of the child in danger has traditionally been a taboo topic in different art forms. As such, this work can be seen as a kind of barometer perhaps for the way that boundaries shift around what is acceptable and unacceptable. Chapter 4 explores the National Youth Theatre's *Homegrown* (2015), an immersive production about radicalisation and terrorism. The production was partly devised with the teenagers who were also due to perform the work prior to its cancellation just two weeks before its opening performance in August 2015. Chapter 5 considers Campo's *Five Easy Pieces* (2017) which is based on testimony from the case of the Belgian paedophile, kidnapper and child murderer Marc Dutroux and was performed by child actors aged eight to fifteen years. The production was cancelled in Manchester at the Home Theatre following a decision from the local authority to refuse performance licenses for the child actors. Chapter 6 scrutinises the touring revival of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017). Written by Andrea Dunbar in 1982, the play depicts two fifteen-year-old girls, played by adults, who are groomed by an older man in his late twenties. The production represents the girls engaging in a sexual relationship with the older man, Bob, and its planned January performance dates were cancelled at the Royal Court Theatre in London in December 2017, prior to being reinstated two days later. Whilst the

importance of the child actor has been reflected on with regards to *Homegrown* in Chapter 4 and *Five Easy Pieces* in Chapter 5, the decision to include these case studies was not based on this criterion, as exemplified by the inclusion of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* in Chapter 6. The rationale behind the choice of my case studies was principally focussed on the close connection between representations of the figure of the child in danger and acts of theatre censorship in Britain, rather than a detailed study of the status of the child as a performer.

In a discussion on the importance of reflexivity, Dev Jootun et al. proffer that 'reflecting on the process of one's research and trying to understand how one's values and views may influence findings adds credibility to the research and should be part of any method of enquiry' (2009:42). It has been important to think about my voice in the thesis and acknowledge my position, placing this in the context of the arguments I have constructed and the evidence I have drawn on. The case studies selected for inclusion in this thesis have been consciously influenced by my identity as a researcher. As a mother of two daughters, I found that the relationship I shared with the contents of repertoire which places children of similar ages into controversial or perilous circumstances, resulted in a surprisingly reflexive response. This provided a heightened opportunity to engage in a deeper level of scrutiny between my preconditioned sentiments and the experiences and evidence being gathered.

My position within this thesis is aligned with the theoretical stance taken by Helen Freshwater (2004, 2009b) and Catherine O'Leary (2015:5) who refer to censorship being on a 'continuum' (Butler, 1998:249-250), acknowledging and respecting the difference between violence or acts of state repression, whilst showing an awareness that less visible or insidious acts of censorship may exist at an institutional level and scrutinising how these might be a catalyst for acts of self-censorship at an individual level. This could manifest as a private decision to remain silent rather than risk controversy or an unconscious decision that has been influenced by an external agency at a formative stage. Both descriptions, continuum and liquid, allude to the fluid properties of censorship.

As part of the process of undertaking this research, I have taken a step out of the theatre industry to observe the less-visible, adaptable or insidious drivers behind a spate of production closures in contemporary British theatre between 2015 and 2017. I have recognised some discernible patterns in the less visible ways that censorious boundaries are imposed over various types of controversial theatre productions and I have drawn on Bauman's terminology to describe

this as 'liquid censorship'. It felt important to establish a new way to describe theatre censorship that was located in the present, because of the plentiful and varied definitions which abound in existing scholarship and discourse as well as the unique conditions that artists and venues are operating in within a contemporary, liquid society.

According to Bauman, 'Descriptions of fluids are all snapshots, and they need a date at the bottom of the picture' (Bauman, 2012:1). Similarly, definitions of theatre censorship relate to the context in which they were written and are shaped by time. This thesis provides a snapshot between 2015 and 2017 and investigates the unique and hard to locate drivers behind liquid censorship in contemporary British theatre programming and artistic creation.

Chapter 1 - Literature Review

Introduction

The first section of this literature review brings together scholarship on censorship, contemporary British society and theatre and describes where my research will sit within this body of work. I refer to key definitions of censorship and clarify the concept of liquid censorship that I refer to throughout my thesis. I also draw on contemporary theatre scholarship, industry press, reports and surveys to foreground the snapshot of contemporary theatre that my research provides. The second section of this literature review contextualises the repertoire case study focus on the figure of child in danger. It is important to qualify that this thesis does not intend to suggest that *Homegrown* (2015), *Five Easy Pieces* (2016) and the revival of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017) deal exclusively with society's attitudes to children and young people and I have not underestimated the complex polarities in society that are explored in these productions, which relate to other subjects such as multiculturalism, postcolonialism and class. The individual complexities involved in representing these themes are referred to briefly in my literature survey. However, the deliberate scope of my thesis has not allowed for a comprehensive examination of pertinent literature on these themes. Instead, the focus has been placed on the social, economic and practical contexts in which theatres are working now in contemporary Britain and how these affect the types of repertoire being programmed or curtailed.

Managing Culture in a Liquid Modern Age

This thesis draws together my experience working in the theatre industry as a theatre maker, venue programmer and a trustee at a touring theatre in the south west, whilst also situating my findings in the context of reflective scholarship and discourse. In order to achieve this, I have placed key industry reports, productions and commentary alongside discursive studies and conceptual scholarly research. For example, in December 2017, *The Stage* newspaper announced a theatre industry training initiative, 'Risks, Rights and Reputations - challenging a risk averse culture' (Snow, 2017b) commencing in January 2018 as a partnership between the Arts Council, Cause Four, What Next? and the Index on Censorship. In a description of the rationale behind the training, the chairman of the Arts Council England, Sir Nicholas Serota referred to his concerns about an increase in examples of censorship in the industry (Snow, 2017b). The course, which was marketed to chief executives and trustees of arts institutions, was designed to provide participants with relevant knowledge about issues such as ethical fundraising, the legal frameworks for staging controversial repertoire, the practicalities of building a relationship with the police and strategies for enabling freedom of expression for BME artists (WhatNext?, 2017). The fact that this course exists indicates that

outwardly there is a commitment to supporting controversial artistic creation. Significantly however, artists were not invited to contribute to the 'Risks, Rights and Reputations' training sessions. This conspicuous absence potentially supports Zygmunt Bauman's suggestion in *Liquid Life* (2005) that the balance in power between administrators and creatives has been upset in a contemporary context, resulting in a cautious and censorious management of culture. The placement of this industry announcement in the context of Bauman's scholarship assists in extracting a more nuanced reading of the training initiative. I believe that the specific value of my contribution has to do with the combination of my working understanding of how decisions are influenced in practice in the theatre sector and the time that I have taken to situate this practice in terms of broader, reflective research and scholarship.

My work relies on Bauman's proposition that we are living in an age of 'liquid modernity' (2000, 2005, 2011, 2012, 2013), a phrase designed and developed by the sociologist throughout his scholarship to capture the fast-moving pace of change in contemporary society. The description is not meant to evoke the smooth or flowing qualities associated with a liquid state; rather Bauman frames this as the antithesis of 'solid', to highlight the moveable, transient and hard to define properties which he associates with a society adapting in an age of advancing digital technology, consumerism, heightened individuation, shifting attitudes to identity and the new types of social relationships being formed in a global market economy. By considering society in this way, it has helped me to contextualise the unprecedented challenges and competing demands that theatre institutions and artistic leaders are facing. The emphasis placed on providing information and training resources within the 'Rights, Risks and Reputations' course, demonstrates an attempt to manage this uncertain and challenging social environment.

In *Liquid Life* (2005) and *Culture in a Liquid Modern Age* (2011b), Bauman refers to Theodor Adorno's scholarship, *Culture and Administration*, drawn from the 1991 translation of his work by Wes Blomster, edited by JM Bernstein in *The Culture Industry: Selected essays on Mass Culture by Theodor W. Adorno*, to explore an interesting and interdependent conflict between creating and administering culture. Adorno initially developed his work on culture with Max Horkheimer in *Dialectics of Enlightenment* (1944) in the context of a different social climate, although his scholarship continues to provide a useful framework for understanding more about the challenges of maintaining arts institutions whilst also attempting to create great art. According to Bauman, within the administrator's role, there is a requirement for order. Part of the creative artist's role is to challenge or subordinate this order. However, the artist needs to maintain a living and work within

the confines of cultural administration. Bauman proffers that maintaining the balance of power between these imperatives is important and that neither party must succeed fully. He draws on Adorno's theories about the cultural industries to explain this:

Culture suffers damage when it is planned and administered; yet when left to itself, everything threatens not only to lose its possibility to have an effect, but its very existence as well (Adorno, 1991:94).

Whilst Adorno suggests that were artists to triumph over administrators, the result would threaten their existence (Bauman, 2005:55, 2011:104), he also forces us to speculate on the consequences of administrators triumphing over artists.

Bauman's scholarship draws together the features of a consumer market economy to suggest that this type of society empowers a culture of cautious managers and potentially threatens artistic liberty or, in the context of this study, the types of repertoire on offer in Britain. Similarly, Sue Curry Jansen (2010) refers to Herbert Marcuse and Michel Foucault to critique liberal and economic forms of censorship in a capitalist economy. Foucault describes 'self-censorship' as an ingrained process, modelling Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon (1798), a prison in which the inmates do not know when they are being watched. Foucault developed this model to suggest that we are unable to recognise clearly when our behaviour is governed by external power (Freshwater, 2009b:9). Jansen proposes that the use of the word 'self-censorship' to describe less visible influences over freedom of expression linguistically undermines the external influences and power structures that control decisions to remain silent (2010:13). This propagates the idea that internalised forms of censorship are simply 'the way things are' (2010:13). The problem with this approach for Jansen is that it perpetuates an acceptance and protection of the status quo, mitigating against questions or change.

Jansen refers instead to 'market censorship', which she suggests is an imperfect term but a useful way to consider 'practices that routinely filter or restrict the production and distribution of selected ideas, perspectives, genres or cultural forms' (2010:13), suggesting a direct relationship between formative choices, censorship, consumerism and the calculation of profit. A consequence of the influence of consumerism over an artist might be self-censorship, however Jansen is concerned that the emphasis on the word 'self' neglects a focus on the source of power that influences this action. The debate that Jansen highlights, about the way in which censorship is described, has captured the interest of other scholars. Judith Butler (1991), Helen Freshwater (2004, 2009b) and Catherine O'Leary (2015) refer to censorship as existing on a continuum (Butler, 1991) to account for the differences between state censorship, civil movements of people lobbying about a

particular issue which leads to grassroots censorship or less visible, private forms of regulation such as self-censorship. Scholarly discussions about the semantics of censorship motivated the formation of the term of 'liquid censorship' in this thesis. I wanted to find a way to describe more precisely the intersection between the shifts in contemporary society described by Bauman and British theatre censorship.

Jansen's scholarship appears to be in dialogue with Bauman's ideas in liquid modernity which refer to the less visible and obscured forms of censorious power that exist in contemporary society. It is this type of invisible censorship that my project has sought to explore, particularly through the interviews I have conducted with artists, theatre practitioners or managers working on the frontline. The idea that 'power' might exert a form of control over decision making provokes questions about the source of this power. In the context of theatre, this would be likely to take the form of a managed or 'institutional self-censorship', a decision taken by an organisation to avoid or cancel a production. However, at an individual level, acts of 'self-censorship' might occur if decisions are made by an artist, consciously or even unconsciously, to amend their approach to controversial repertoire. O'Leary (2015) draws on Pierre Bourdieu to discuss ingrained censorship mechanisms, such as the editorial or translation process prior to publication. Bourdieu proffers that changes made during these processes may be unconscious and therefore one of the less visible but also most rigid acts of censorship (1992:138, cited in O'Leary, 2015:6). Decisions might form part of the process in the rehearsal room with a dramaturg, literary manager or perhaps in requests for amendments to a script made by a director. An example of unconscious 'self-censorship' includes the avoidance of particular thematic territories without conscious recognition by the artist that this narrowing or filtering of artistic repertoire creation is taking place. This suggests that censorship is not necessarily always accompanied by controversy but may occur in more insidious forms. For example, artists might prioritize certain views about society or culture which are then replicated through artistic production. Understanding the relationship between power, its origins and its impact on decision making in terms of theatre repertoire is central to my investigation in this thesis.

My thesis aligns with the conclusion that Freshwater (2009b) makes in *Theatre Censorship in Britain: Silencing, Censure and Suppression*, that in spite of her instinctive position that freedom of expression should be preserved at all costs, in some scenarios, censorship may constitute a socially necessary power balance, not allied to a single institution and requiring continuous re-evaluation (2009:15). Judith Butler was involved in a series of interdisciplinary conference discussions in the US about freedom of speech and issues of censorship which culminated in a publication of the insights

gathered, *Censorship and Silencing* (Post, 1998). As part of her contribution, Butler proposed that forms of 'self-censorship' may be predetermined at a formative stage, conforming to the legitimate boundaries of speech. Contemporary examples from theatre practice are referred to on page 30 of this literature review in a discussion about the recent history of the political correctness debate and its relationship to censorship. Freshwater and O'Leary (2015) refer to Butler's notion of implicit and explicit forms of censorship. 'Implicit power' silences speech before it is uttered, whereas 'explicit' censorship is visible and therefore less powerful' (1997:130, cited in O'Leary, 2015:5-6). Some forms of censorship are difficult to identify. This particular insight is not necessarily available in scholarship on contemporary theatre practice, as these types of decisions take place in private. This is where my research could make a significant contribution. The face to face interviews with theatre practitioners have enabled me to reach tangible evidence that is not typically given a space for open discussion and which support that idea that censorship takes less visible forms in British theatre. Freshwater suggests that regardless of the rhetoric surrounding freedom of expression, boundaries are always drawn, and these may be viewed positively or negatively. Understanding how these boundaries are set and administered in a theatre context requires deeper analysis within the context of interview research with theatre practitioners and dramaturgical or literary staff.

Funding and Theatre Censorship

Bauman and Jansen's scholarship highlights an important relationship between economic forces and censorious practice which is central to the research into theatre institutions that I explore in my case study work. Anne Etienne's research (2013) points to a relationship between funding, geography and programming restrictions in Britain. Etienne reflects on this in terms of the programming of graphic depictions of violence employed by 'In-yer-face' playwrights, a phrase coined by Aleks Sierz (2001) to describe a group of artists working in the 1990's such as Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Philip Ridley, Anthony Neilson and Martin McDonagh whose plays were frequently produced at the Royal Court Theatre. Etienne (2013) suggests that 'In-yer-face' plays are rarely produced regionally because theatre executives deem the content too controversial and a financial risk to stage. The emphasis on a relationship between financial considerations and the avoidance of controversial repertoire is further endorsed in the 2016 report on *Theatre in England* commissioned by the Arts Council England, in which regional touring to mid-scale venues with 500-800 seats was described as 'near unaffordable' (BOP Consulting, Devlin Associates, 2016:4). According to the research, venues at the mid and large scale with 1000 seats or more prioritise work that has a 'commercial hook' such as a celebrity cast member or popular west end musical, which might appeal to a large group of potential audience members where the likely box office yield would be higher. The theatre sector is working

under challenging financial circumstances and according to *Theatre in England* (2016), this is likely to have an impact on the type of repertoire that is programmed.

There are no annualised surveys that collect repertoire data in the UK to explore the idea that economic principles influence the types of work being staged. The BBC repertoire sample examining changes in programming between 2009 and 2014 (Youngs, 2015) and the British Theatre Consortium *British Theatre Repertoire* reports in 2013 (2015) and 2014 (2016) as well as the Arts Council report on *Theatre in England* (BOP Consulting, Devlin Associates, 2016) provide some useful context on general production types; however these samples do not offer insights into thematic content, or indicators of controversial programming such as content warnings about productions or age guidance, which are being explored empirically for the first time in this thesis. The emphasis in these samples is on the balance between broad production types such as ‘revivals’, ‘new writing’ and ‘musical theatre’. For example, in the *British Theatre Repertoire 2013* report (British Theatre Consortium, 2015) it was concluded that new work constituted 59% of all productions but that non-musical theatre work would not survive without subsidy, highlighting the impact of funding and the power it holds in decisions about the diversity of British theatre repertoire. If arts institutions worked exclusively according to market principles and excluded non-musical theatre new-writing projects because of an over-reliance on subsidy, the art form would fail to flourish and the impact on British theatre repertoire, as well as the development of creative writing talent, would be significant. Cultural priorities structure repertoire choice, so even before censorship occurs, artists work under very tight restrictions imposed by market forces and limited access to funding.

Productions cost money to stage and without financial support, they will not reach established professional theatre venues or audiences, confined to smaller studio venues, perhaps with artists needing to self-finance the work. Richard Burt, who was also involved in the *Censorship and Silencing* (Post, 1998) conference, has referred to the notion of “‘soft” and “hard” forms of regulation’ (1998:18, cited in O’Leary, 2015:5) that might play a role in theatre decision making about repertoire. Burt describes this as ‘the graduated differences between forms of punishment and repression (the difference between having a hand removed or a word removed)’, expanding his definition to explain that a ‘soft’ form of censorship may be ‘critical censure’ and a ‘hard’ form, ‘imprisonment’ (Burt, 1998:18). O’Leary refers to Burt to discuss the limits placed on the length of run afforded to a production or the scale or location of the venue performed in, which are examples of regulation that share a relationship with finance.

If we assume that repertoire choice is influenced by consumer demands or the logic of a market economy, there are likely to be consequences for artistic liberty, assuming an artist wishes to have work funded and performed before an audience. At the 2013 London Southbank conference, *Taking the offensive – defending artistic freedom of expression in the UK*, David Lan (2013) raised concerns about a move towards the American funding model in British theatre. Lan suggested that this management approach may risk curtailing freedoms in artistic expression, citing an example of a Board at a UK theatre selecting an artistic director on the basis of ‘safe’ (Lan, 2013) programming.

Understanding the struggle between artistic and business imperatives is enhanced in the context of literature on power and politics. Referring to Stefan Collini’s definition of politics (2004:67), in his analysis of *Theatre & Politics*, Joe Kelleher suggests:

we might understand that power – or powerlessness – is nothing in itself and only ever meaningful in terms of the distribution of power across social relations, among different groups or classes or interests that make up, however momentarily, a social body. It goes without saying that this distribution of power is often unequal (Kelleher, 2009:2).

Working with Kelleher’s reading of Collini’s theory, if the social body considered is the theatre, the struggle for power exists between the interests of the artists and theatre management as well as the external agency of funders and audiences. As this thesis will demonstrate, the balance in power between these groups has a direct impact on the type of repertoire that reaches the stage in Britain.

It is useful to briefly reflect on the increasing reliance on private sources of funding to support subsidised work in the wake of cuts to public funding, referred to by Jen Harvie in *Fair Play – Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (2013) and described in the Arts Council England report on fundraising (Arts Council England, 2019). MP Jake Barry provocatively stated that there is such a phenomenon as ‘subsidy addicted artists’ (Barry, cited in Hope, 2018), in response to artist-led activism which resulted in the withdrawal of BAE Systems from its £500,000 sponsorship deal for the *Great Exhibition of the North* (2018). Protests from artists were made on the basis of a fundamental ideological conflict with BAE Systems’ involvement in the arms trade; however, Barry suggested that this objection was hypocritical given the reliance that artists have on subsidy to make their work. For Barry, the artists’ ethical principles should have been subservient to their financial dependence. Part of the remit of the *Rights, Risks and Reputations* training course was to advise theatre executives and trustees about the issue of ethical fundraising (Snow, 2017b). This is in dialogue with the potential for a conflict in values between artists and private sources of funding.

In December 2017, the Artists Union England called for Elizabeth Murdoch to be removed from her new appointment to the board at the Arts Council England (Bignell, 2017). Criticism was brought in the form of a petition which questioned Murdoch's ability to represent the interests of artists, referring to her family's views on employment rights and unions. According to Christy Romer (2017) in an article for *Arts Professional*, concerns were raised about previous financial donations that had been made from her charity, the Freelands Foundation, during the chair of the Arts Council England, Sir Nicholas Serota's, tenure at the Tate gallery. Donations had also been made to Serota's wife's arts organisation, *CAST*. Implicitly, the donations allowed Murdoch an influence that might compromise her new role as a trustee. If a wealthy trustee has private means to fund a particular type of work, theatre managers may seek to attract this funding, influencing the type of art being created and potentially perpetuating a narrow elitism in the industry. This would work against the principles of the Arts Council England's *Great Art and Culture for Everyone (2013)*, set out in the funding body's ten-year strategic framework for 2010-2020.

Lara Shalson's *Theatre and Protest (2017)* reflects on the complex relationship between elitism and public protests against controversial theatre repertoire. She draws on Christopher Balme's *The Theatrical Public Sphere (2014)* to suggest that there is an inherent class division between typical theatre-going audiences and broader society, which she proposes was exemplified by the protests against *Exhibit B (2014)*. Balme refers to middle-class Western audiences as possessing with few exceptions a 'generally accepted state of tolerance' which allows artists 'unquestioned freedom to transgress against perceived taboos' (2014:17). It is important to qualify that Balme's reflection is not made in relation to *Exhibit B* and his scholarship in *The Theatrical Public Sphere* reflects on a broad range of examples from theatre history as well as a variety of contexts including religion, blasphemy and race. Balme describes a distinction between the public sphere and an 'art-enjoying theatre public', whom he suggests privatise theatre spaces in order to enjoy artistic liberty that might otherwise not be tolerated by certain groups in society. Balme's work provides a useful point of reflection for questions regarding whether theatre is a 'public activity' (Balme, 2014:167 cited in Shalson, 2017:25), complicating the rationale for public funding. This provocation exemplifies a challenge discussed by Janelle Reinelt (2014) between a theatre's need for funding and its ability to demonstrate broader public value.

Janelle Reinelt has discussed how 'value' is measured in contemporary theatre, given that arts funding no longer subscribes to an outmoded 'Death to Hollywood' philosophy of John Maynard Keynes, where the intention of public subsidy was to protect high-art such as theatre from mass

produced forms of 'populist' culture (Reinelt, 2014:341). Reinelt refers to a historical shift in arts funding associated with Thatcherism and a capitalist move towards a 'bums on seats' philosophy (Reinelt, 2014:341), serving a consumerist market demand. Whilst funding has been through several shifts between the 1980s to present, the global recession in 2008 put an emphasis on achieving value for money in the arts, conforming to the 'Treasury's *Green Book* procedures' (Reinelt, 2014:343). In a challenging contemporary funding climate, theatres increasingly rely on audience engagement and spend. Indeed, according to the proposed ten-year cultural strategy announced by the Arts Council England in 2019, the emphasis was placed on 'relevance' and the ability to 'demonstrate that you are also facing all of your stakeholders and communities in ways that they value' (Mellor, cited in Masso, 2019).

Reinelt's investigation into UK theatre spectatorship and cultural 'value attribution' (2014) points to the risk that contemporary theatre faces in 'justifying its existence', suggesting that in terms of measuring value, the 'only currency seems to be monetary' (Reinelt, 2014:344). The *Cultural Value Project* (2013) which Reinelt worked on in her capacity as a member of the British Theatre Consortium, in partnership with the AHRC, sought to look beyond the economic or fiscal value of theatre, in order to explore 'how cultural activity might contribute to public value' (Reinelt, 2014:346). Reinelt concluded that theatre managers are increasingly focussed on how they might excite an emotional response from audiences. Furthermore, for spectators, this type of stimulation and connection is recognised as something of value. For Reinelt, the data assisted in constructing an argument for political theatre which goes beyond the financial profitability of a production. If theatres are financially capable of engaging with audiences in a politically enriching way, this clearly helps to justify their existence and eligibility for funding to grant giving organisations, for example the Arts Council England. The type of repertoire selected and consequently the sort of conversations and engagement with audiences becomes even more significant in the context of Reinelt's conclusions. This important context for the types of complex ways in which artistic leaders are seeking to justify their relevance provides a useful point of reflection for the case studies explored in my thesis. For example, I explore the dual desire to engage with the subject of radicalism whilst avoiding the risk of controversy exemplified by the NYT in its cancellation of *Homegrown*, or the competing and oscillating demands on Vicki Featherstone's leadership at the Royal Court Theatre in the context of the cancellation of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*.

Controversy and the Spectator

In addition to considering managerial threats that restrict the production of repertoire that might be considered too controversial to stage, my thesis draws together literature on society to explore an important and contradictory counter-narrative relating to how theatre institutions might court controversy in an attempt to remain relevant in contemporary society. Given the Arts Council England's emphasis on the requirement for relevance in order to receive funding, this imperative is being considered in my thesis as a less visible pressure on theatre institutions. In order to explore this relationship, I draw on Bauman's discussion of 'contemporary menaces' (Bauman, 2011a:11). Bauman suggests that the liquid age is dominated by a continual flow of information and consequently there has been an increase in anxiety about the threats posed to individual security by general dangers in society such as terrorism, faith schools, gangs, paedophiles or lurking strangers, which he refers to as 'contemporary menaces'. The term draws on Hugues Lagrange's idea of 'derivative fear' (1996, cited in Bauman, 2005:3) to describe an ever-present state of anxiety that exists in society cultivated by an awareness of various dangers that are not immediate or present. Whilst Lagrange's discussion of the relationship between fear and society took place thirty years ago, Bauman's extension of this work is worthy of attention here. With the exception of the actual victims of the crimes, derivative fear in society is based on the idea of a child murderer for example, rather than the actual manifestation of a physical threat. Bauman does not deny the existence of these threats, rather he suggests that they would not necessarily be visible to individuals in their daily lives without being disseminated and transmitted in a particular format that is manipulated by 'cabinet members and trade companies' (Bauman, 2011a:11) to exert power over individuals, and this is where a relationship with relevance is being drawn. The manipulating institution may exert control over individuals or consumers by directing a mass outpouring of social anxiety which manifests itself in the form of 'moral panics' (Bauman, 2011a:11) containing an 'excitement' (Bauman, 2011a:12) or energy that may be harvested for political or financial profit. An example might be the exploitation of social anxiety about the threat of terrorism to secure online news readership or justify a parliamentary-led increase in surveillance powers for the police and counter terror agencies. In a theatre context, it may be a route to securing engagement from audiences.

Thinking about this anxiety in terms of arts and cultural production, in a symposium, *Fear, Irrationality and Risk Perception* (2004), the law professor Henry L. Chambers Jr. observed that 'fear can be bought and sold like a commodity' (2004:1). Chambers refers to a market for television dramas which exploit fear in order to attract audiences. Similarly, 'people will pay to ride roller coasters and other "thrill rides" that are supposed to evoke fear' (2004:1). Bauman (2011a) has discussed an associated seductive marketing that accompanies this type of entertainment

production. The theoretical approach works harmoniously with Adam Alston's (2013, 2016) reflections on the use of marketing and provision of disclaimers for experiential, immersive theatre productions, which are noteworthy for my thesis in the context of *Homegrown*, an immersive piece. In his article *Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value* (2013), Alston draws on Jen Harvie's (2011:114) scholarship to highlight the relationship between neo-liberalism and immersive theatre experiences, underlining Harvie's caution that 'socially engaged and relational art risks being co-opted by an elitist, neoliberal agenda' (Alston, 2013:132). Referring to *66 Minutes in Damascus* (2012), a reenactment of torture in a Syrian prison under the Assad regime, Alston describes the constructed warning about the likely experience as a form of marketing that seeks to 'thrill' its target consumers. He parallels the approach with the type of marketing used for selling a bungee jump (2016:258), where risk is a direct part of the appeal. Alston has reflected that 'immersive theatre resembles adventure companies who remove the component of danger from what may otherwise be considered risky activity in order to render it marketable. The risk becomes accessible through commodification' (Alston, 2013:135). However, responses to this type of repertoire may be divided. For some people, the idea of a bungee jump is attractive whilst for others, it is absolutely not. This is a useful way to think about the strong responses that theatres attempt to anticipate and manage when they decide to programme challenging repertoire, such as productions about child murder or paedophilia.

In 2016, a production of *Cleansed* (1998) directed by Katie Mitchell, the first Sarah Kane play ever to reach the National Theatre, resulted in polarized responses from audience members and theatre critics and achieved mainstream news coverage, with journalists citing individual social media testimony that referred to patrons fainting, feeling nauseous or walking out (Furness, 2016). The production was praised by critics for its artistic excellence (Shuttleworth, 2016, Trueman, 2016). However, the graphic portrayal of rape, torture, tongue-removal and castration on stage provoked the suggestion by the critic Holly Williams that the play did not earn its right to show violence (Williams, 2016). Sarah Kane is a playwright who would be described as having achieved a canonical status in British theatre. Katie Mitchell is also a director whose experience commands respect in the British theatre industry. It is the conflicting responses to the work of these high-profile artists that is of particular interest here.

Kelleher (2009:22) posits that part of theatre's value is the freedom in spectatorship, a unique and live reaction beyond the control of stagecraft, however carefully constructed. Conflict in opinion is a central quality required to make something controversial, the ability to provoke disgust

for some and garner support from others. Lucy Nevitt (2013) describes an individual, physical defence mechanism, an internal repression or a kinaesthetic response that intervenes to protect the gaze for audience members that may be sensitive to explicit content. She posits that artistic representations of violence might be so graphic that they provoke the basic flight-mode instinct or nausea. In his 1929 essay on disgust, Aurel Kolnai talks about physical responses such as nausea which represent a reaction to moral degradation (Smith and Korsmeyer, 2004:22). However, Kolnai's theory implies that reactions are governed by a shared moral compass which does not account for polarised responses to artistic representation. This approach feels incompatible in a contemporary, secular Western society. Whilst this project does not investigate audience kinaesthesia or the relationship between physical aversion, morality and ethics, I interrogate the methods that artists and theatres are employing to anticipate individual aversion to material on stage.

Notably, in 2017, the Royal Court Theatre was featured in a news article in *The Times* for introducing a general 'trigger warning' to alert audiences prior to the start of a production that the content might cause 'extreme offence' (Sanderson, 2017). The theatre selected a warning which managed the risk of complaints or online social criticism, placing the responsibility on individuals to seek guidance. According to the What Next? report *Meeting Ethical and Reputational Challenges* (2015), 49 of one hundred responding directors of arts organisations indicated that they would not have a clear plan if a controversial play escalated to a 'crisis', such as protest, with smaller organisations less likely to have a clear policy in place (Long, 2015:25). This evidence underlines a lack of preparedness on the part of theatres in terms of their audiences, which may explain the origin of institutional anxiety. Reinelt (2014) and Freshwater (2009a) have suggested that there is an absence of theatre scholarship which focuses on spectatorship from the perspective of audiences, as opposed to the critic or scholar. Kirsty Sedgman's work on audiences provides notable exceptions. For example, *Locating the Audience: How People Found Value in National Theatre Wales* (2016) explores how audiences developed a relationship with the new National Theatre in Wales and *The Reasonable Audience* (2018) reflects on a culture of 'behaviour policing' and proposed theatre charters to govern audience etiquette. Literature on the nature of aversion provides a useful context for exploring the division in reactions to particular work and assists in determining the types of repertoire that might be described as controversial. The empirical research explored on pages 62 - 74 of this thesis regarding how theatres across the UK employ content warnings or age-related guidance will add to this small body of research on audiences, reflecting on the intentions behind the use of warnings.

A crucial area in which my case study research provides a contribution to contemporary theatre scholarship relates to the increasing influence that social media plays in contemporary British theatre. Individual audience upsets are capable of securing an unprecedented potential reach in the liquid modern age through the use of social media platforms or reviewing websites. Sierz has described responses to controversial repertoire as 'a type of performance' (2001:5). Shalson proffers that social media represents a space for an external performance of protest (2017:74). This was recognisable in the campaign organised against *Exhibit B* (2014). Protesters objected to the white South African director Brett Bailey's decision to represent an art installation display of colonial violence which was considered an offensive appropriation of cultural pain. A social media campaign was launched against *Exhibit B* with a hashtag that represented a clear call to action, '#boycottthehumanzoo', accompanied by an online petition that was registered on the change.org website, attracting 21,000 responses (Molloy, 2014). Sara Myers initiated the online protest against *Exhibit B* (2014) which mobilised into a physical protest of over one hundred people who employed drumming and other music making in the confined space outside of the Barbican Theatre's Waterloo 'Vaults' venue (Rutherford, 2014). The protesters were critical of the monetisation of 'a bloody history of white supremacy' in the form of box office takings (Myers, 2014 cited by Shalson, 2017:32). The Barbican closed the production during its performance run. Caoimhe Mader McGuinness (2016) suggests that the protesters claimed a space to challenge the marketing of racial otherness and the appropriation of cultural pain. Interestingly, by closing the production, the Barbican also silenced the space for protest.

In a reflection on the social media responses to *Exhibit B*, Rat Western refers to the unique, virtual environment provided by online spaces which allow 'everyone with a keyboard the chance to speak', creating a space for a distinct and 'supplementary theatre experience' (Western, 2017:189). Whilst I am not equating the depth of the responses or type of offence aroused by *Exhibit B* with the queasiness provoked by *Cleansed*, the challenge for both an artist and a theatre institution is that social media as a medium, whilst broad in reach, is ultimately reductive compared to a live theatre experience. This was emphasised by Terri Paddock, in response to the social media controversy regarding the use of a puppet to depict an autistic child in *All in a Row* (2019) by Alex Oates at the Southwark Playhouse. Although the production was not censored, the National Autistic Society refused to endorse the work and the disability researcher, Gill Loames, claimed that the use of a puppet 'literally dehumanised the identity you sought to represent' (2019 cited by Dex, 2019). Defending the decision, a spokesman for the play protested that the company could not secure 'informed consent from a non-verbal autistic actor aged 11 to play the role and additionally due to

the law around employing children we'd need to actually have a minimum of three child actors for the role, as well as specialist, trained and licensed chaperones present at each performance' (Dex, 2019). The complexities associated with securing consent and safeguarding child actors are explored in depth in my case study on *Five Easy Pieces* in Chapter 5 of this thesis and particularly between pages 128 – 137. However, crucially here, the controversy that emerged about *All in a Row* and the pressure to close the production was mobilised online and 'fuelled by social media' (Paddock, 2019).

Paddock hosted a question and answer session after a performance at the venue, in an attempt to 'take the conversation offline' (Paddock, 2019). She suggested that when it comes to 'nuanced and controversial' theatre productions that people have not actually seen, 'social media is not the best way to have that conversation' (Paddock, 2019). The question and answer session was videoed and provided as a written transcript online, but this level of archival diligence is an exception in contemporary British theatre rather than the norm. For example, I have referred to a question and answer discussion that took place after *Five Easy Pieces* at the Unicorn Theatre in April 2018 on pages 148 and 156. This conversation was not documented online and is not available to access as a transcript. Additionally, whilst some live performances or interviews about work are recorded and archived online on *Digital Theatre Plus* for example, this is typically only the case for larger, well-funded productions. So, there is an imbalance between the endurance of the live performance and associated discussions and social media commentary that can be accessed online about repertoire. This is a subject that Bree Hadley explores in *Theatre, Social Media, and Meaning Making*, particularly in her Chapter 'Social Media as Critical Stage: Controversy, Debate and Democracy' (2017). As a result of its ease of use and enduring digital footprint, social media has the upper-hand in terms of longevity, and the potential possibility to influence the way performances are remembered or discussed. A theatre institution must attempt to navigate potential risks to reputation caused by divisive repertoire that has not necessarily been viewed directly, but through a mediated, digital lens.

Theatre Censorship and the Political Correctness Debate

Censorship might emerge when the external set of circumstances surrounding a production shift, and as a result of the new context in which it will be received, the production is considered to pose a threat to an arts institution, rather than an opportunity for engagement with audiences. This type of scenario is explored in the case study on *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017), which was cancelled during the height of the #MeToo campaign following allegations against the production's director, Max Stafford Clark. The complex context in which *Homegrown* (2015) was to be received is also

investigated, referring to the departure of three teenage girls from Bethnal Green to join Islamic State in Syria during the development of the production. *Homegrown* was cancelled ten days prior to its first performance by the National Youth Theatre. The production was a devised and immersive piece with young people which explored Islamic fundamentalism and radicalisation. The NYT's decision to cancel *Homegrown* (2015) has led practitioners to question whether policy has evolved to deal with a society that has witnessed acts of mass violence and extremism (Sharp, 2015). Beck (2013) proposes that a cosmopolitan societal shift in the way individuals relate to one another has led to a disruption in how we view what is acceptable or unacceptable. This subject has captured the attention of other artists, for example DV8's *Can We Talk About This?* (2012). By commissioning and then cancelling *Homegrown*, I suggest that the artistic director of the National Youth Theatre, Paul Roseby, participated in a deliberately sensational form of programming related to a national interest in 'radical Islam', later realising the risks inherent in producing an immersive piece with 112 young people aged fifteen to twenty-five years (Ellis-Peterson, 2015) on a theme that is central to one of the most current sources of anxiety in society. The *Homegrown* script dealt openly with controversial contemporary issues such as the violence of jihad, islamophobia, hate speech, attitudes to Muslims in Britain and presented divergent points of view that society finds it difficult to discuss openly.

Stefan Collini has criticised what he calls the tendency towards 'consensus politics' regarding the need to protect 'minority cultures' (Collini, 2010:40 cited in O'Leary, 2015:4-5) in contemporary society. To put this remark in context, in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the divisive 'War on Terror' agenda, the Labour government introduced two controversial pieces of legislation that encroached on the confines of free speech. Lisa Appignanesi (2015) described the introduction of the *Racial and Religious Hatred Act* (2006) as an 'attempt to criminalise religious hate speech' (O'Leary et al., 2015:xv). The act counterbalanced the amendments made to the *Terrorism Act* (2006) which sought to prevent the 'glorification of terror'. According to the playwright David Edgar (2007, cited in Griffin and Iball, 2007:529) in his contribution to the 2007 symposium *Gagging Forum on Censorship*, this legislation was seen by some Muslim groups to represent an attack on freedom of speech. The bill on religious hatred was viewed by others as an opportunity to resist any form of expression, artistic or otherwise, which might be considered to cause religious offence. Reinelt suggests that imprecise definitions of censorship, freedom of expression and political correctness are unhelpful:

Similar to censorship, with which it is often conflated, the rhetorical juxtaposition of 'political correctness' and 'free expression' sets up a binary which can prejudice a

nuanced analysis of complex cultural negotiations in and around particular theatrical performances (Reinelt, 2011:134).

In practice, this imprecision might result in scenarios where language is either redacted as a precautionary measure or conversely, speech or action is defended and retained in order to uphold the concept of artistic liberty rather than to serve a performance.

As part of their analysis of theatre censorship over a decade ago, Thomas et al. (2007:260) warned that increasing pressure on governments to be 'politically correct' and to modify freedoms of expression posed a significant threat to the creative freedoms of theatre makers in the UK. They concluded that instances of theatre censorship, particularly covert 'institutional' and 'self-censorship', were likely to increase. More recently, Dr Roaa Ali has proffered that Muslim artists are 'often absent or invisible in the creative sector' (2018: 376). Ali explored the censorship of *Homegrown* to suggest that minority artists in Britain who identify as Muslim, experience increased censorship on the basis of a social climate of Islamophobia as well as a general lack of access to the arts industry. There is a substantial body of scholarship which explores issues of diversity in the theatre sector, however these texts will not be explored here because of the scope of my research.

Exploring an artist whose status is in stark contrast to the censored or marginalised Muslim artists in Britain described by Ali, David Edgar (2006) and John Nathan (2010) refer to a scenario at Hull Truck theatre in which Richard Bean cut references to the Prophet Mohammed in the play *Up on Roof* (2006) to appease the theatre management and to avoid causing unnecessary offence to the local community. The amendment was requested 'on the grounds that the board of trustees felt these lines might represent a "non-quantifiable risk to our staff"' (Edgar, 2006:70). In this instance, Bean commented that the wording was not significant to the play. The artist made a choice to observe the codes of sociolinguistic norms, referred to as political correctness, rather than to risk causing offence. My thesis explores the relationship between the Charlie Hebdo attacks in 2015 and the challenges that the creative team behind *Homegrown* experienced when they were trying to publish the text, which underlines an acute anxiety related to representations of the Prophet Mohammed.

By contrast, Bean's later play, *England People Very Nice* (National Theatre, 2009), employed racial stereotyping as a comedic device and in this instance, the playwright stated that he did not cut any of the work (Nathan, 2010). The production was staged at the National Theatre and was widely described by both theatre critics and members of the public as 'politically incorrect' causing a great deal of offence, with some of the criticism coming from people who had not actually seen the work (Haydon, 2009). The National Theatre provided free debate and discussion opportunities in an

attempt to appease protesters. Two protesters took to the stage during a post-show discussion for the production, accusing the theatre of providing a platform for racism. Protesters also threatened to pressurise the National Theatre's principle sponsor, Travelex, to withdraw its support for the production, indicating that they would organise a boycott against the sponsor's currency service if it refused (Dodd, 2009). For Haydon, the play revealed something significant about the nature of value-based judgements; 'Rarely has there been such a convincing demonstration that "meaning" does not reside purely in the work itself, but that it is constructed by audience interpretation as well' (Haydon, 2009). If we attempt to view the artistic work beyond its surface level ridicule of stereotypes, Haydon proffers that Bean was attempting to confront the challenges inherent in political correctness, such as divergent opinions that exist in society on cultural difference. Bean's work did not silence the representation of intolerance. For Haydon, the comedic form presented an opportunity for debate or 'active thinking', which is part of theatre's *raison d'être*. Of course, in practice, a middle-class white playwright staged a comedy about racial stereotypes providing an opportunity for a middle-class, predominantly white audience to laugh at racial groups without necessarily engaging in a more complex examination of the challenges of multiculturalism. The production continued its performance run and the work was not censored. Travelex did not withdraw its sponsorship at the time. However, *England People Very Nice* was the first production in thirty-two years at the National Theatre which provoked protesters to take to the stage (BBC, 2009). Furthermore, the theatre also attracted wider political engagement from the Shadow Children's Minister at the time, Michael Gove, who called the work "'dramatically appalling'" (BBC, 2009) and suggested that the National Theatre had programmed a poor-quality production. The example provokes a number of questions, such as, would the production have garnered the same level of attention and political engagement if it had been staged at a smaller venue, or in a different location in the UK? If a protest had been launched against the work elsewhere, would a less affluent theatre venue have had the financial resources to manage the security for the production?

The external reactions to *England People Very Nice* emphasise a new type of risk being faced by theatres in contemporary society, that of a secondary audience who might not intend to visit the theatre but will lobby against the production based on its content or theme. According to Haydon, 'many of those shouting the loudest hadn't even seen it' (Haydon, 2009). Negative reactions to the 'idea' of the work from an audience that had not intended to watch the production could lead to a form of 'grassroots censorship' whilst also provoking acts of 'institutional self-censorship' to administrate the risk of this type of reaction. Part of the problem for theatres representing challenging subjects is that the work might cause deep offence. The repertoire may treat a character that society would classify as evil, such as a terrorist or a paedophile, in an empathetic way, or might

include language that could cause offence to particular groups in society. In his reflection on political theatre, Pinter describes this as the need for characters to 'breathe their own air' without playwrights 'sermonising' (Pinter, 2005, cited in Shalson, 2017:28-29). The approach taken by an artist when dealing with a theme that resonates with real-world social anxiety is most likely to result in divided responses. This is not a new outcome for the types of reaction to artistic representation. However, the challenging consumer context in which contemporary theatres are working means that institutions feel compelled to ensure that they do not alienate funders or potential audiences. As the literature on the increasing influence of social media has described, theatres are operating in an environment in which negative sentiment can quickly escalate. A theatre might be concerned about the risk of violent responses to controversial repertoire which raise concerns about how to manage security. There are associated risks of alienating funders, incurring unrecoverable costs that put the organisation under financial strain, attracting mainstream press criticism and damage to reputation. These practical concerns are explored in the case study research in my thesis on *Homegrown* in Chapter 4.

The Repertoire Focus - Representing Children and Young People

The next section of this literature review brings into focus the unifying repertoire focus for the case studies of productions that are explored in my thesis, the figure of the child or young person in dangerous contexts. In October 2001, a comedy writer and director said to me, 'I want to put you into tragic and painful situations on stage'. Frustratingly, I didn't have the courage at the time to question this provocative statement. I was an aspiring actress in my late adolescence, not yet fully empowered with the agency or assertiveness of an adult, although I am quite sure that some of the young people I have devised theatre projects with since would have demanded an immediate explanation. With the benefit of training, experience and time, I have come to realise that what this artist, who is now a successful screenwriter, probably meant is that audiences and artists alike are fascinated with repertoire that places vulnerable figures into dangerous or threatening circumstances. For me, this reflection has assisted in offering an explanation for why young women and children are frequently represented in perilous circumstances by artists as they attempt to solicit an empathetic audience response.



Figure 8: Dennis Waterman, Ronald Pickup and Tony Selby in Edward Bond's *Saved*, directed by William Gaskell. Royal Court Theatre (London), 1965. Copyright: Zoe Dominic.

The director I have referred to placed plastic baby dolls into violent scenarios in his piece of comedic theatre, often without an obvious purpose and undoubtedly satirising the revival of Edward Bond's *Saved* (1965) which was being staged at the same theatre. A preoccupation with the innocent and vulnerable figure of the child in danger amongst British artists owes its contemporary origins in part to *Saved*, in which a baby is stoned to death on stage (see Figure 8). This significant and highly controversial piece of repertoire was one of the last plays to be formally censored by the Lord Chamberlain and the production assisted in galvanising a cause against state censorship. According to Joseph Duncan (1976), Bond indicated that the stoning of the baby in *Saved* represented a metaphor for society's aggression and its impact on children. In a post state-censorship era, the in-ner-face (Sierz, 2001) playwrights of the nineties, such as Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill or Philip Ridley, were clearly influenced by Bond and the child continues to be employed as a theatrical metaphor. As the playwright Tim Crouch has commented, 'terrible things have happened to babies in the last forty years of new British writing' (Freshwater, 2013:180).

Bond's assertion that the child represents a metaphor for society is a recurring trope in contemporary artistic representation. For example, Milo Rau commented in one of his various explanations for *Five Easy Pieces* (2016), that the project was in part about the politics of national identity in Belgium. A relationship between child murder and national identity has also been drawn by the British playwright Mark Ravenhill. Freshwater refers to Ravenhill's article, *A Tear in the Fabric* (2004) in which the playwright retrospectively acknowledges a connection between his work and the murder of James Bulger (1993), which Ravenhill states had 'a massive impact upon the national psyche' (Ravenhill, 2004 cited in Freshwater, 2013:167). Bulger, a two-year-old boy, was led away from a shopping centre by two teenage boys, tortured and beaten to death. Ravenhill has

commented that 'the murder resulted in an urge to write, and to find new forms' (Freshwater, 2013:167). The child in the Bulger narrative was represented as a victim and a perpetrator. According to Mark Froud, 'For centuries past there has been 'a dichotomy between the figure of the child as innocent and in danger, and as evil and a threat to the Community' (Froud, 2017:13). In British society, children are perceived as innocent or delinquent and these attitudes to childhood are typically connected to class status and race¹. Rosalind Haslett (2013) has studied the differing theatrical responses from England and Northern Ireland to the murder of James Bulger, pointing to the immediacy of Ravenhill's English response, *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), which focused on consumerism and the act of violence (Ravenhill, 2004). McKee's *Girls and Dolls* (2006) ten years later explored remembered violence and the aftermath of the event as a playwright's response to a post-conflict society in Northern Ireland. The Bulger murder took place in the same year as the Downing Street agreement, marking a move towards an end of 40 years of sectarian violence. Haslett contrasts the shopping centre in Ravenhill's setting with the dilapidated suburban landscape of McKee's, highlighting spatial and community responses to violence and pointing to a political theatre purpose.

The close connection between experiments in new writing or theatre making and the figure of the child or young person in peril is central to this thesis. To clarify, my research is not concerned with the segment of the entertainment industry that is referred to as 'children's theatre' and I will not be adding to the substantial body of scholarship on the fairy-tale genre. Rather, the types of repertoire I am investigating place children or young people into precarious or threatening dramatic spaces in a live performance context and have provoked controversy.

The Figure of the Child

There is some important theatre scholarship to be drawn on here that reflects on the relationship between the child and contemporary theatre repertoire. Freshwater proffers that 'British culture - both popular and theatrical - continues to be haunted by anxieties about children and childhood' (2013:168), a sentiment that is exemplified in my thesis by the examples of cautious decision making in response to productions that have involved children or young people. She suggests that a market

¹ Robin Bernstein suggests that the emergence of the notion of vulnerable innocence in childhood during the nineteenth century 'was raced white' (2011:4) contrasting this with the "pickaninny", depicted as an 'insensate... black juvenile' (2011:20). Looking at contemporary attitudes to childhood and race, Henry A. Giroux contrasts media representations of the innocent white young person with those of 'nonwhites', emphasising a racial bias against the latter (Giroux, 2000:7) More recently, Simon Flacks (2017) has highlighted a relationship between the use of stop and search by the police and race, citing the increased likelihood for young people from minority groups to be targeted.

has been created by a cultural obsession with the child, resulting in extensive media attention and an exhaustive list of publications. A fruitful research partnership between Adele Senior and the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home, has explored the identity of children as performers and collaborators in contemporary performance, culminating in the special issue *On Children* in the journal *Performance Research* in 2018. Senior traces the roots of contemporary society's fascination with childhood, reflecting on the weight assigned to innocence in childhood in the Victorian era,

Contemporary Western discourses of childhood over the last two decades continue to oscillate between the romantic vision of the child as innately innocent, a concept that can be attributed predominantly to the work of Jean- Jacques Rousseau in the eighteenth century, and the notion of the child as 'tabula rasa' (blank slate) as developed by John Locke (Kehily 2004: 5 cited in Senior, 2018:34).

Senior instead asks us to explore a more nuanced approach to childhood and young people as performers, capable of participating in adult roles, which she explores in *Age Transvestism in Contemporary Performance and Live Art With Children* (Senior, 2018). The idea that children are underestimated by adults was championed by the children's rights pioneer, Janusz Korczak, who stated in *The Child's Right to Respect* that 'it is really children who are the real princes of feelings, the poets and thinkers' (Council for Europe, 2009:42). Korczak, established *The Little Review* in the 1920s, a newspaper published in Warsaw that was written and edited by children and presented as any other newspaper might appear at the time. Tangentially, Zygmunt Bauman, whose theories on contemporary society have had such a profound influence on my thesis, was one of the newspaper's key contributors. Importantly, the subjects explored by the contributing children resonated with universal problems in the 'adult' world, challenging a paternalistic and protective approach taken in publications that were typically written for children during the same period (Gliński, 2016).

In her critical response to the interest in the child in dangerous circumstances which is included in *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, edited by Sebastian Groes, Claire Colebrook describes a particular contemporary Western obsession with the figure of the lost, innocent child as a 'collective fantasy' and a form of 'cultural pornography' (Colebrook, 2009:43). Whilst emphasising that the private act of viewing sexualised images associated with 'child pornography' is clearly distinct from the notion of cultural pornography, Colebrook defines the latter as a fascination or obsession with the frozen image of the child prior to the moment of violence or loss. She draws on work by Jennifer Wicke (1991) to critique the 'passive consumption' of images which allow the viewer to 'wallow in the pleasure of moral elevation' (Colebrook, 2009:43) without serving any greater purpose.

As part of his interview with Sebastian Groes, Ian McEwan observes that there is something 'pornographic' about the cultural obsession in Britain with images of 'disappeared or murdered children' (Groes, 2009:124). He suggests that this fascination is stimulated by fear and a natural, evolutionary instinct to protect, because in his opinion, for the majority of people, 'the loss of a child is the worst thing that can happen' (Ibid.). This anxiety potentially offers an explanation for the artistic interest in representations of the child in peril, since the 'literary imagination is bound to go into dark corners to explore this fear' (Ibid.). Geraldine Cousins similarly proposes that fear underpins society's fascination with the child. Cousins proffers that a continual state of anxiety exists in society precipitated by 'an inner core of dread' (2007:i) about dangers such as paedophilia. Theatre is a useful medium to explore this feeling, because the artform possesses the 'ability to embody our fears and desires' (Ibid.). British society's relationship with childhood provides rich and relevant questions for theatre artists to experiment with. This thesis takes the view that an artist's role is to attempt to shift Colebrook's notion of 'cultural pornography' (2009:43) into a more reflective, purposeful space, in which audiences confront their fears, rather than merely 'wallowing' apathetically in the awfulness of terrible things that happen. This elevation of representation beyond a passive voyeurism is the basis on which I have examined and challenged the decisions that have been made by the artists and institutions involved in the case studies of productions included in my thesis.

In his attempt to trace the emergence of widespread cultural pornography historically, McEwan speculates that a significant 'shift in the collective emotional life in Britain' (Groes, 2013:123) was affected by the public outpouring of grief which followed the death of Diana, Princess of Wales in 1997. Like a child, the Princess, who was frequently depicted in the media as a vulnerable or fragile woman, represented an ideal victim. Indeed, Jenny Hockey and Allison James suggest that Princess Diana's image went through 'a process of infantilisation' as part of a media narrative which 'rendered her child-like, dependent and vulnerably innocent' (1999:306). Her sudden loss of life in a 'mundane car accident' (Hockey and James, 1999:305) reminded individuals of the shared, fragile mortality which affects all of us, regardless of our rank, and captured the public imagination. In a similar vein, Sarah Stillman has discussed 'the missing white girl syndrome' or an era of 'damsels in distress' (2007:492) typified by round the clock media coverage of 'worthy' white, middle-class and conventionally beautiful victims. She refers to the close coverage of the Madeleine McCann case as an example of a pretty, white, lost child and questions 'who profits from turning attractive white female victims into national commodities' (Stillman, 2007:494). Stillman avers that theatre can offer a medium in which empathy may be 'cultivated' for society's 'disposable' victims,

but cautions that ‘the goal is *not* to replace one sensational missing female case with another: a white girl with a brown girl, a university student with a sex worker’ (Stillman, 2007:497), resulting in a kind of cultural minstrelsy which is described by Omar El Khairy and Nadia Latif on pages 110 – 111.

The Child in Contemporary Theatre Repertoire

The continued interest in the figure of the child in contemporary British theatre has naturally captured the attention of scholars and artists. In her Chapter on ‘Children and the Limits of Artistic Representation in the work of Tim Crouch’ (2013), Freshwater states that ‘anxieties about children and childhood have been central to some of the boldest experiments in dramatic form on the British stage during the last 15 years’ (Freshwater: 2013:170). Similarly, Senior has observed a ‘growing interest in collaborating with children in contemporary performance and live art across Europe since the late nineties’ (Senior, 2018:29). Challenging the disempowerment of children and young people, Senior (2016) draws on Hannah Arendt’s ideas about natality and innocence and develops these to bestow a greater agency on the presence of children in contemporary performance, which she suggests represents the potential for political rebirth.

Senior’s call for empowerment is particularly complicated when we consider how to accomplish this practically in the context of repertoire that refers to a real event, related to the sexual abuse or murder of a child. Young (1988:1-3 cited in Suárez-Orozco, 2000:7) and Anne Michaels (2017:48-49) emphasise the acute responsibility attached to representing private testimony and memories as well as giving them form. In her analysis of the representation of violence against children, Anna Harpin proffers that it is important to ‘disassemble the recent past and examine the (dis)contents in order to imagine something better’ (Harpin, 2013:181). For Harpin, one of the challenges in representing violence against children is the need to take sides. In her analysis of the ethics of representing real events, Carol Martin reflects that theatre must strive for complexity and ‘an aesthetic and analytical discourse that represents the real in order to call it into question’ (Martin, 2012:174). So, this type of theatre implicitly ought to serve some kind of transformative purpose relating to ethical development.

There is a substantial body of theatre scholarship that explores the subject of ethics. Referring briefly to some pertinent examples for the purposes of the provocations being raised here, Dan Rebellato, ‘theatre perhaps rehearses the nature of our ethical obligations’ (2009:71) serving the notion that the process of spectating theatre assists in the moral development of society. In his

scholarship on *Theatre and Ethics*, Nicholas Ridout (2009:59) refers to ethics as a process that is continually evolving and being reshaped. He suggests that an audience's engagement with ethics through spectatorship heightens a sense of responsibility. The sentiments here serve the notion that theatre, like society, is an active organism requiring continual rehearsal and development in order that its ethics might be reshaped and maintained. The required energy from society, artists and theatres works in parallel with Freshwater's suggestion that forms of censorship must be continually re-examined by theatre scholars within the shifting context of society. If we view society through the lens of Bauman's liquid modernity, the sheer pace of change makes the process of establishing where society places its boundaries more difficult to pinpoint, especially bearing in mind that society is made of pluralities that are contradictory.

Thinking specifically in terms of the child or young person as an actor, which is central to the research on *Five Easy Pieces* and *Homegrown* explored in this thesis, Senior reflects on the challenges of working ethically with 'an essentially vulnerable group' (Senior, 2016:71), referring to an anonymous Guardian reader's comment in response to Lyn Gardner's review of Tim Etchell's *That Night Follows Day* for Campo, that 'we repress, fear and limit teenage expression in this country' (2016:81). Joanne Faulkner, who has written about the nature of childhood and innocence as well as the limits of artistic representation with children, suggests that for Western societies in particular, overly sentimentalised attitudes to childhood result in children representing the 'privileged bearers of cultural value in so far as they are seen to approximate an ideal "innocence" that obscures their actual experiences and capacities' (Faulkner, 2010:203-204). This scholarship resonates with the frustrated reactions of several young people when their devised theatre production on the politics of radicalisation, *Homegrown* (2015), was censored. This scholarship and the *Homegrown* case emphasise the difficult negotiation between the way that adults perceive childhood, and the child's right to consent and participate in performance experiences, explored in Chapter 5 of this thesis. Like Senior and the *On Children* contributors, a significant proportion of my case study analysis responds to the gap in research regarding 'the question of children as performers' raised by Nicholas Ridout (2006:98-99) in *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems*.

Bert O. States (1985), Nicholas Ridout (2006) and Christopher Balme (2014) have observed that phenomenologically, the presence of a child on stage possesses a kind of *en-soi* (States, 1985:29), remaining in itself with an essential resistance to illusion that works in opposition to the norms of theatre convention. When we look at a child on stage, we see a child playing a role which has been constructed for them by an adult. In spite of the child being present, it still feels like an

adult space. Josette Féral's notion of the 'law of reversibility' in theatre is a contract between the artist and the spectator which maintains that by viewing the representation of violence, no harm will be caused to the actor, who returns to a 'point of departure' (Féral and Bermingham, 2002:104, cited in Stowell-Kaplin, 2015:160). The resistant quality presented by a child actor draws artists to study the awakening effect of the presence of the child on stage in their work. In the context of her research into the ways in which children's bodies are represented in performance spaces, Senior proffers that there is a requirement for a:

much longer project to redress the current imbalance between the way we read children's bodies and adult's bodies in performance. This is as much an issue for theatre and performance scholarship as it is for spectatorship (Senior, 2018:35).

Two of the case studies analysed in this thesis have involved child actors directly, *Homegrown* (2015) and *Five Easy Pieces* (2016). The third explores the cancellation and reinstatement of the revival of *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* (2017) which depicts two school age adolescents, played by adults, being groomed by an older man. The research explored in my thesis probes the extent to which contemporary British theatre makers and administrators, partners or audiences are striking a careful balance between the need to impose safeguards and the avoidance of unnecessary or insidious acts of censorship.

The literature review explored here has covered a considerable breadth of scholarship. The purpose of my thesis is to capture a snapshot of contemporary British theatre in order to explore the existence of censorship and clarify how it operates in practice. It has been important to consider a range of research and theory on society, culture, social media, theatre funding and administration, different types of theatre spaces and audiences and contemporary British theatre repertoire studies. I have provided an overview of the key definitions of theatre censorship as well as clarifying my introduction of the term liquid censorship and its meaning. Finally, I have elucidated some of the debates in the literature regarding the subject of representing the figure of the child in peril on stage, both practically and in terms of contemporary theatre scholarship on the ethics and the intentions behind this type of work. The scholarship that has been drawn on here underpins the case study work and will be referred to during the analysis that follows.

Chapter 2 - Methodology

Introduction

In order to develop an evidence-based understanding of how censorship materialises in contemporary British theatre, it was necessary to design a flexible research methodology capable of capturing the less visible, insidious or private acts of regulation that occur within theatres or amongst artists. The selection of the word 'front line' in the title for my thesis was a considered one because it encapsulated the requirement to reach out to theatre leaders and artists working in the industry at the time of the research, in order to gather relevant evidence from the field. My thesis explores contemporary theatre practice and a significant volume of the information that has been analysed was not in the public domain. My research approach has been fluid and responsive in order to capture as accurate a snapshot of censorship between 2015 and 2017 as possible. I commenced the research in October 2016 and some of the examples of productions included in this thesis had not yet been staged at the outset. It was important that the application of my research methods allowed me to remain alert to examples of productions that experienced censorship during and not just prior to the project.

My thesis examines the complex relationships between theatre censorship and artists, institutions, audiences, funding bodies, local authorities, legislators, social media and other social structures. I have collected and interpreted empirical data and a set of interview responses from the British theatre industry to gather together a substantial resource for future discussions, decision-making processes and consultations on theatre censorship. The core research chapters in this thesis are structured as a series of case studies and this approach was designed at the outset in an attempt to provide an anchor for the responsive nature of the research on the contemporary moment.

According to Helena Harrison, Melanie Birks, Richard Franklin and Jane Mills:

The continued use of case study to understand the complexities of institutions, practices, processes, and relations in politics, has demonstrated the utility of case study for researching complex issues (Harrison et al., 2017:1)

The case studies included here explore a variety of structures, institutions and power relations to investigate the drivers behind censorship. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on examples of contemporary productions that place the figure of the child in danger and have experienced a form of censorship. This research is foregrounded in Chapter 3 with contextual insight on how theatres across the UK approached controversial repertoire during the timeframe in which the productions were censored.

A set of core research inquiries have underpinned my methodology and structure. I have investigated the validity of claims that there is an emerging form of censorship in relation to controversial theatrical representations in contemporary British theatre by examining examples of productions that have been censored and placing these in a broader theatre industry repertoire context. I have studied sources that assist in unpacking the power dynamics behind the structures that artists and institutions work with in contemporary British theatre, such as funding mechanisms or legislation, in order to draw conclusions about the likely impact on programming and production. I have explored the relationship between wider cultural currents, geographic and social media and decisions about controversial representations on stage in British theatre. Finally, I have drawn some conclusions about best practice in contemporary stagecraft when creating a representation of the child in peril in British theatre.

The scope of my thesis required a methodology that allowed for breadth as well as depth in order to strive for a reliable interpretation of how censorship operates in practice. According to Maggie B. Gale and Ann Featherstone in a discussion on archival research for *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*, a researcher is only capable of producing 'a version of history' (Gale and Featherstone, 2011:23) and the methods that are selected to establish this view are therefore particularly significant. I designed a mixed methodology, drawing influence from best practice in industry repertoire studies organised by the British Theatre Consortium (2015, 2016) as well as censorship research conducted by Thomas et al. (2007) and case study work by O'Leary et al. (2015) and Freshwater (2009b). The methods employed have included substantial primary data collection to bring together an archive which could be referred to in order to interpret conclusions about contemporary theatre censorship. From the outset of my project, I collected a database of programming repertoire from theatre venues in the UK. Although the programming data was captured live, emerging over the course of the year in which it was gathered, it nevertheless represents a contemporary form of archival research in that it captures a particular historical moment. For example, the database could be drawn on by other researchers in future to extract insights on British theatre programming between 2016 and 2017.

The repertoire data has been analysed in the context of interview testimony which I gathered from theatre practitioners working across various disciplines. The testimony selected for inclusion here has been incorporated because of its relevance for the case study examples of theatre censorship that emerged during the research. The process of gathering testimony and analysing responses has informed the conclusions that have been drawn generally, providing a wider context

for developing my evidence-based understanding of the contemporary British theatre industry. I engaged in primary textual and performance research, responding to live theatre productions as well as published plays. I have also reviewed and analysed legislation on freedom of speech, policing protest, safeguarding, the employment of child actors and UN definitions on the human rights of a child. Freedom of information data has been collected (see Appendix 9) or accessed from existing archives in order to reach less visible or private insights on the invisible drivers behind instances of theatre censorship. I have referred directly to financial data and company reports, sourced online from Companies House, to reflect on the relationship between funding and censorship. The primary research gathered for this thesis has been analysed in the context of wider scholarship. I have also conducted press and social media research to explore the interaction between artists, theatre institutions and different types of audience responses to repertoire in contemporary society.

According to Donna M. Mertens, ‘researchers make choices based on their assumptions about reality and the nature of knowledge’ (Mertens, 2014 xviii). My experience and knowledge in the theatre industry has been established through insights drawn from conversations and collaborative theatre projects with peers, combined with a practical and perhaps more data-driven understanding of how to produce plays and manage a theatre venue. The two key elements, qualitative and quantitative, felt like essential components of my methodology. Robert Burke Johnson and Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie deconstruct mixed methods research as ‘the use of induction (or discovery of patterns), deduction (testing of theories and hypotheses), and abduction (uncovering and relying on the best of a set of explanations for understanding one’s results)’ (2004:17). Each element of the research included in my methodology has helped to shape the conclusions that have been reached, employing induction, deduction and abduction to establish these findings. The different activities described in this brief introduction to my methods are explored in more depth in this chapter, in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of how my research has been undertaken.

Thematic Coding - Recognising Patterns From the Research Data

Thematic coding was an important and practical part of my research process, enabling me to track and evaluate emerging key words in the literature, repertoire sample or interviews such as **‘security’, ‘finance’, ‘radicalisation’** and **‘children’**. These keywords helped to reveal patterns and trends in the types of repertoire that could be identified as controversial in a contemporary setting. They also assisted in identifying the important influences over the decisions that artists or theatre executives make.

It was crucial that the focus of my inquiry in this thesis was drawn from the evidence that was being gathered. The use of coding helped to ensure that my methodology was responsive. It also provided a helpful way of categorising the substantial volume of data that I immersed myself in from the early stages of my research and throughout the project. The process of reviewing lots of different types of information, from marketing descriptions of theatre productions, to press articles about theatre censorship or complex scholarship on censorship, contemporary society, power, politics and ethics had the capacity to be overwhelming. Richard E. Boyatzis describes this element of research as requiring significant ‘cognitive complexity’ which means that the researcher must identify ‘multiple variables’ in order to ‘conceptualise a system of relationships’ (Boyatzis, 1998:8). This description neatly outlines the skills required in the journey towards the outcomes and conclusions that I hoped to produce.

Boyatzis has described thematic coding as a type of ‘pattern recognition’ (Boyatzis, 1998:17), which according to Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990), requires ‘openness and flexibility’ from the researcher (cited in Boyatzis, 1998:8). This approach resonates with the flexibility that I have identified as being necessary for a contemporary piece of research on theatre censorship. In order to map the developing patterns, Boyatzis emphasises that the researcher must establish a system to ‘organise his or her observations’ (Boyatzis, 1998:9). I organised my research data in Google Drive, a programme that allowed me to integrate image files with text and spreadsheet data, in a single, dedicated location, with a filing system that could be tracked by date. It is also possible to run keyword searches in Google Drive, which meant that I could locate sources quickly. I grouped together written material or references to literature in files that were named according to the developing thematic codes (see Figure 1).

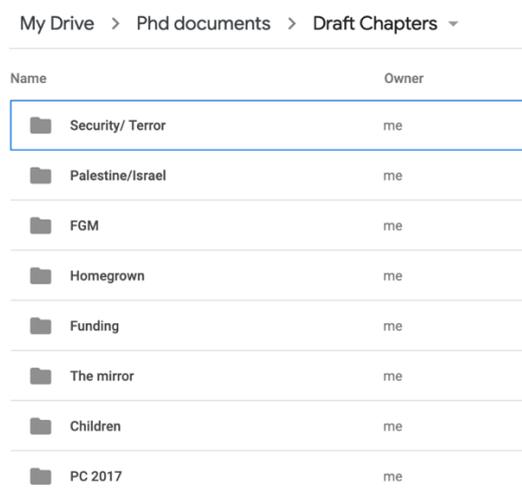


Figure 1 - Examples of the emerging Thematic Codes placed in files on Google Drive

My repertoire data collection sample was also stored in the same location in the form of a set of excel spreadsheets. This allowed me to keep the research and evidence that I had gathered together in one location, and to establish clear categories and files for filtering the information, in order to discern recognisable patterns.

Coding assisted in preventing key citations and ideas from being lost and also provided the tools to develop a theoretical foundation for the analysis of my research. For example, I documented a table of interesting controversial repertoire by theme. The keywords were refined as the research progressed. Figure 2 shows an early phase visual representation of the emerging thematic codes grouped with examples of repertoire and some of the questions that were emerging:

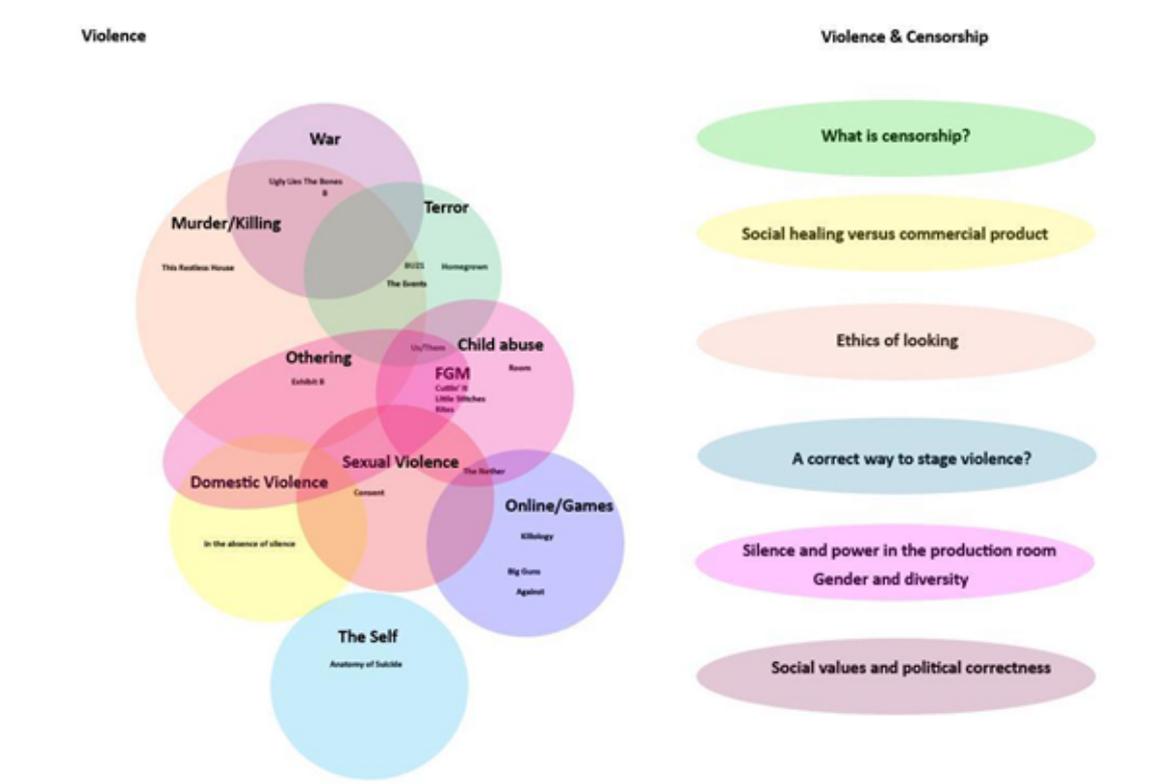


Figure 2: Emerging codes, keywords, repertoire and questions

The development of these keywords was an ongoing and reflective process throughout my research, informed by data from my literature review, interviews and repertoire study. Violence against children and the subject of the figure of the child in danger stood out as a prominent focus for my thesis because it overlapped several of the emerging thematic codes, such as sexual violence, terror, othering, online/games and murder/killing (see Figure 2). I did not approach my research with this

particular focus on controversial productions in mind, rather it emerged as part of the thematic coding.

I set up a Google Alert at the start of my project which meant that relevant wider news relating to the keywords: “Theatre censorship” and “Theatre controversy” would automatically be sent through to me in a single email each day (see Figure 3). A digital subscription to *The Stage* newspaper was purchased. News was also followed through a subscription to *The Times* newspaper, as well as *The Guardian* and theatre news websites *Whatsonstage* and *Exeunt* and on social media forums such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*.

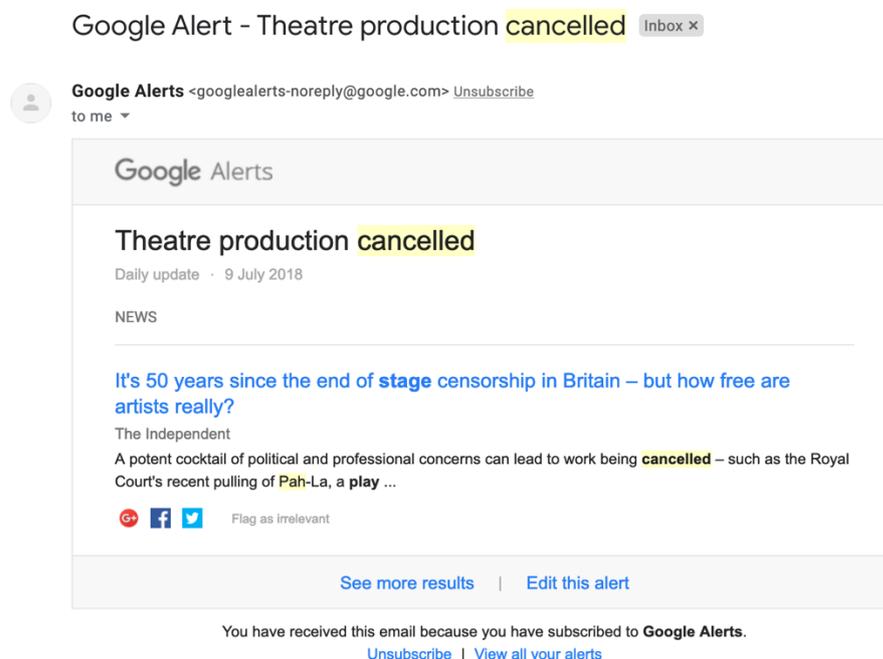


Figure 3 – Example Google alert on production cancellations

Contemporary Repertoire Archive - Developing the Theatre Sample (see Appendix 1).

The decision to establish a database of contemporary theatre repertoire over the course of the year was taken prior to commencing my research, because I felt that I would be unable to make a useful contribution to discussions about contemporary theatre censorship without immersing myself in the types of repertoire being staged across the UK. The approach was influenced by repertoire studies conducted by the British Theatre Consortium, both from the perspective of how to handle programming data and identifying variables that I felt were missing for my own research purposes. The Arts Council England 2016 survey on *Theatre in England* (BOP Consulting and Devlin Associates)

was also referred to for general insights on the challenges that small, mid-scale and large venues face. I wanted to develop a closer understanding of the types of productions being staged across the UK, without which I felt my ability to interpret conclusions about theatre censorship would be superficial, based on a narrow perspective on the UK theatre scene drawn from personal experiences and industry news articles about favoured venues or productions.

My data collection addressed a research gap in empirical data on contemporary programming repertoire after 2014 in Britain and an absence of data that focussed on how theatres approach controversial material through the use of content warnings or age-related guidance. I investigated inconsistencies in the boundaries for controversial repertoire across different venues in the UK, drawing conclusions based on a comparison of the methods that various theatres employed in the provision of warnings about age guidance and content. During the data collection period, there was an announcement in the national press that one of the theatres in my sample, the Royal Court, would be changing its warning system for controversial productions. The theatre decided to offer a general trigger warning to cater for the various types of audience reactions. I was able to use this insight from the data to follow up on the observation in an interview with a member of the management staff at the Royal Court Theatre (see Appendix 2).

Programming data was gathered as part of a broader investigation into the extent to which policy has evolved to deal with the types of challenges being faced by arts institutions. In general terms, a core aim in identifying an appropriate sample was to represent the variety of venues engaged in producing theatre in the UK. My research sought to explore the various types of theatre venues in the UK, scrutinising the differing programming capabilities according to size and location. The repertoire sample considered: regional spread, local area statistics, an emphasis on theatres that identified as 'producing' venues, funding status, longevity and contribution to the sector. Establishing a scale of data collection that was sustainable for an individual researcher to collate over a year was important, including ongoing tracking of critical reception during this period. The desired outcome was to provide a snapshot of the theatre industry between 1 November 2016 and 31 October 2017.



Figure 4: Map image of Theatre sample by region

It was not the objective of this sample to gather data from as many different theatres as possible, but to capture a representative pool of repertoire from theatres that encompassed the different types of venues and locations in the theatre industry. The sample required breadth in terms of community geography and depth from the perspective of demonstrating meaningful data on repertoire and content warnings.

The twelve key regions of the UK were represented in the theatre sample to reflect the theatre industry in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: London (across thirty-two Boroughs), South East, South West, East of England, Wales, West Midlands, East Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber, North West, North East, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It was important to represent all twelve of the regions in order to attempt to extrapolate a relationship, if any, between geography and trends in content warnings or theatre censorship. A map was created, and an Excel

spreadsheet set up with the regions segmented to evaluate the size, scale, funding and comparability of venues for consideration.

A shortlist of potential theatres was researched using the Theatres Trust Archive resource and theatresonline.com, which provided a useful generalised context on theatres by county in the UK. The pertinent spreadsheets on the allocation of funding from the Arts Council England, the Arts Council of Wales, Creative Scotland and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland were also integrated into sourcing a long list of potential venues. Searches were also completed directly on the theatre websites to establish more detail about the configuration, seating capacities and spaces available at the venues.

There was a deliberate bias towards London in the sample. According to the *British Theatre Repertoire* report (2014), 54% of performances in Britain were staged in London. In 2013, it was concluded that despite London having 13.1% of the population in Britain, it also represented 54.3% of audiences. During the course of my data gathering, one of the productions that experienced censorship was *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1982), a revival from 1982 that had toured to venues outside of London without any problems. Specific circumstances in society transformed the context in which the work would be received at the London venue, the Royal Court Theatre, which meant that a play which would not necessarily be considered controversial by contemporary audiences, suddenly became much more problematic proposition at a particular venue. This offered a useful point of reflection on the relationship between the location of the venue and theatre censorship.

I wanted to establish a sample that accounted for diverse communities in the UK. Various datasets were captured and compared in order to refine the theatre sample by demographic trends. Initially, the Office of National Statistics' (ONS) most recent 2011 census population data was recorded in Excel to build a picture of the size of each region and potential audience for the venues. According to the *British Theatre Repertoire* research in 2014 (2016), there is a strong correlation between population size and theatre audiences. The next level of population data analysis looked at ethnicity in order to try to understand more about the diversity picture across the regions in the UK. Ethnicity data in the UK is gathered using self-identification methods. According to a Census comparability report (ONS,2013), data grouped in 2011 reveals that White British remains the majority ethnic group in Britain; however, a closer look at the historical and statistical picture suggests a declining trend, with an incline in the number of people identifying as part of a minority ethnic group in England and Wales. London and the West Midlands were identified as the most

ethnically diverse across England and Wales, with Wales, the South West and the South East the least diverse areas.

Theatre	Region	Location	Seats	Portfolio funding	Population/R (2)	Ethnicity 1	% Ethnicity 2	% Ethnicity 3	People	Notes & Quotes	SDE Codes
1 Leicester Curve	East Midlands	Leicester	902	1,914,029	4.533m	W1	45.1 A1	28.3 W9	4.6	Ciaran Cunningham	Asian or Asian British
2 Leicester Curve	East Midlands	Leicester	282								A1 - Indian
4 Nottingham Playhouse	East Midlands	Nottingham	750	1,354,807	4.533m	W1	65.4 A2	5.5 W9	5.1		A2 - Pakistani
5 Derby Theatre	East Midlands	Derby	535	500,000	4.533m	W1	75.3 A2	5.9 A1	4.4		A3 - Bangladeshi
6 Derby Theatre	East Midlands	Derby	110								A9 - Any other Asian ethnic back
7 The Core at Cort	East Midlands	Corby	445	140,812	4.533m	W1	85 W9	9.1 B2	1.3		Black or Black British
8 Mercury Theatre	East of England	Colchester	499	777,378	5.847m	W1	87.5 W9	3.8 A9	1.4	Dan Shearer	B1 - Caribbean
9 Norwich Arts Centre	East of England	Norwich	120	182,071	5.847m	W1	84.7 W9	5.4 A9, B2, O1	1.3		B2 - African
10 Lyric Hammersmith	London	Hammersmith	550	1,100,000	8.674m	W1	44.9 W9	19.6 B2	5.8	Donald's contact	B9 - Any other Black ethnic back
11 Lyric Hammersmith	London	Hammersmith	110								Mixed
12 Bush Theatre	London		90			W1	44.9 W9	19.6 B2		Matthew Xia	M1 - White and Black Caribbean
13 Bush Theatre	London	Hammersmith	144	8.674m							M2 - White and Black African
14 Finborough Theatre	London	Kensington ar	50	0	8.674m	W1	39.3 W9	28.9 A9	4.8	Niall McPherson	M3 - White and Asian
15 Royal Court	London	Kensington ar	460	2,311,234	8.674m	W1	39.3 W9	28.9 A9		Vicky Featherstone	M9 - Any other Mixed ethnic back
16 Jerwood Theatre	London		90							Matthew Xia	Chinese or other ethnic group
17 Gate Theatre	London	Kensington ar	75	306,330	8.674m	W1	39.3 W9	28.9 A9		Chris Hayden	Q1 - Chinese
18 National Theatre	London	Lambeth	1150	17,217,000	8.674m	W1	39 W9	15.5 B2	11.6	Ben Power	O9 - Any other ethnic group
19 National Theatre	London		890								White
20 National Theatre	London		450								W1 - British
21 Young Vic	London	Lambeth									W2 - Irish
22 Soho Theatre	London	Westminster	150	603,478	8.674m	W1	35.2 W9	24.1 O9 (Arabic)	7.2	Elayoo Ismail	W9 - Any other White ethnic back
23 Upstairs	London		90								Not stated
24 Almeida Theatre	London	Islington	325	675,469	8.674m	W1	47.7 W9	16.4 B2	6.1	Lili Geisondorfer	NS - Not Stated.

Figure 5 - Ethnicity codes by region and potential sample theatres in Excel

Generating a breakdown of ethnicity data in Excel both regionally and within each region helped to refine the UK diversity picture and was a useful tool for segmenting and streamlining the theatre sample. The ethnicity data was manually re-coded in excel (see Figure 5) according to the Self Defined Ethnicity (SDE) codes, which are used by the Police service and Home Office. This simplified the data comparisons between and within regions. It was also important that the ethnicity data coding was analogous with that of existing power infrastructures in the UK. It should be acknowledged that, at the point of the sample selection, Arabic was coded under O9, (any other ethnicity) according to the SDE codes, however the England and Wales Census in 2011 was updated as a result of calls from the Arabic community for a distinct ethnic category. The National Association of British Arabs (2013) report on the Census data from 2011 was referred to for a more detailed breakdown. None of the categories reflect the diversity within the Arabic ethnicity, and descriptions incorporated Moroccan, Somali, North African, African Arab, Middle East with further distinctions such as White Arab.

The three dominant ethnicity categories per region or within regions were captured and analysed against each other, to ensure the sample reflected a snapshot of variations in ethnicity across the UK. Evidence of the impact this had in refining the shortlist of theatres can be seen in the following examples:

- Theatre by the Lake, Keswick was added to reflect the fact that Cumbria has the highest proportion of White British (W1) in the UK.
- The Yard Theatre was added to the sample to represent the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, one of the only regions in the UK where W1 is not the dominant category and is second place to A2, Asian Bangladeshi.

Analysis of ethnicity data is another reason why London was over represented in the Theatre sample. London represents the region with the highest level of diversity in the UK. It was important to reflect this in the sample to see if there was any correlation between programming, warnings about content and dominant ethnic groups.

There is a relationship between new repertoire and subsidy, which needed to be recognised within the sample. According to the British Theatre Consortium, certain types of productions such as contemporary drama is more dependent on funding than other artforms, 'What we have called straight theatre would hardly exist without public funding' (2015:43). The relationship between funding and the creation of this work is therefore important. Data was added for each theatre in the shortlist according to the level of subsidy, if at all, from the appropriate Arts Council annual grant fund. Venue capacity was also mapped to ensure a range of size and scale for comparability. Venues without any funding were included for comparability although it should be noted that these incorporated quite different organisations, from commercial theatres, for example, the Trafalgar Studios, to smaller-scale fringe theatre venues such as the Southwark Playhouse.

There are some interesting new theatres emerging in the UK; however, to ensure that the data was available throughout the period of this study, it was decided that the theatre sample should focus on venues with an established reputation. The approach taken by a new, entrepreneurial venue could potentially be quite different to that of a venue with a track record and an established audience base and it was concluded that this might be a distracting point of comparison within the sample that was not worth prioritising over the insight to be gathered from the abundant supply of existing theatres in the UK.

Data Gathering

A spreadsheet was set up in Excel to capture the repertoire data and content warnings or age guidance provided. Excel was selected because of its suitability for sorting, filtering and analysing data. Excel is commonly used in the theatre sector which meant that the programme would be more appropriate than a specialist statistical software analysis package such as SPSS. The spreadsheet

included a reference cover sheet to ensure that key data could be easily identified for the theatre sample as a single entity, including the theatre name, location, region, number of seats, funding status and amount, artistic director name and gender, executive director name and gender, executive producer name and gender and the literary manager name and gender (see Appendix 1).

Each theatre repertoire sample was captured on a separate worksheet within the spreadsheet to record the repertoire according to the following headings: theatre, region, relevant content warnings, terms & conditions or security policies, space type: *Main Theatre, Studio or Other*. Specific production repertoire data included the start date, end date, year, production, playwright name and gender. If the work was described as a translation or adaptation, the name and gender was captured in a separate column. The director's name and gender were also recorded.

The recording of production types was influenced by the British Theatre Consortium categories, grouped as: New-writing (2016 onwards), New Writing - development, Classical revival Pre-1950, Modern revival 1850-1945, Post-war revival 1945+, Recent Revival (1990 - 2015), Adaptation, Translation, Devised, Pantomime or Christmas show, Musical, Music, Comedy, Children's Theatre and Dance. I recorded the status of the production, which included Produced In-house, Co-production and Visiting Company. The production company name was also recorded. These details assisted in clarifying the financial investment into the repertoire on the part of the venue it was being performed in.

Aside from the general theatre policies captured at the top of each worksheet, age guidance was recorded (for example 5+, 14+, 16+) as well as warnings about content (Language, Violence, Sexual Violence, Nudity, Scenes of a Sexual, Nature, Drug Use, Themes, Loud Noises, Strobe, Smoking/ Smoke, Haze, Animal, Trigger Warnings, Venue Signage, Other). I captured a brief description of each production's content. I also included a category to capture cancellations, the reason for cancellation and notes. Repertoire and relevant developments or announcements were sourced from theatre websites, online theatre brochures, theatre Facebook and Twitter pages, email marketing which I had signed up to and industry press for relevant news relating to controversy. A google alert was also set up to capture any news items that might have been missed about censorship or production closures.

The theatre sample was revalidated at the end of the data collection period to ensure that the data I had captured was reliable. Each theatre production in the sample was checked, principally visiting social media channels (*Facebook* and *Twitter*) and the relevant page on the website to ensure that the production had taken place. There were instances in which productions had been

delayed because members of the company had become unwell or injured or cancelled because the work was not considered ready for an audience. The description 'due to unforeseen circumstances' was frequently employed to describe a cancellation, and I searched news media and social media to check that there were no covert acts of censorship behind these examples. It was important to capture each cancellation, to ensure an accurate sample. Productions added at short notice were typically given a strong profile on social media, presumably to attract ticket sales with a short amount of time available for marketing.

The life cycle of the provision of content warnings in marketing materials meant that when a production is put on sale, it may not have been rehearsed and therefore awareness about the type of content that might need a warning online is based on text or concepts rather than a final theatre product. It was common in the sample to find that warnings relating to content had changed after the initial marketing materials had been listed online, or that an age guidance had been revised or added. This was an important part of the revalidation of the sample data because the use of content warnings in contemporary British theatre is an important part of the analysis incorporated within my thesis.

Analysis of Theatre Sample (see Appendix 4).

My analysis offered context for the case studies on productions that were censored during the sample period. I explored the relationship between finance, geography and decisions relating to controversial repertoire selection. Finally, I clarified the types of guidance warnings provided by theatres and interpret what these revealed about the wider social or political anxieties theatres are catering for.

Excel data was sorted by theatre and aggregated across the full sample on separate worksheets, compared according to distinct variables such as region and funding scale. The VLOOKUP function was an important tool in this process, because it enabled accurate counts according to each category by theatre. The VLOOKUP count was also checked manually to ensure that no data had been missed. The SUM tool was employed to calculate totals and generate percentages. The sample revealed a number of interesting trends in contemporary theatre repertoire and offers the potential to be explored from multiple perspectives. It was important to refine the scope of my investigation to provide sufficient depth on my principle areas of interests.

Scholarship on censorship drawn from my literature review pointed to subtler, more invisible mechanisms, such as confining repertoire to smaller venues or giving them a limited run (Bert, 1998, cited in O’Leary, 2015). It was useful to observe how much work was produced in-house and what reliance there was on collaborative working or visiting production companies. This was particularly important in order to test some of the conclusions made about the particular challenges for theatres operating in regions outside London such as those documented in the Arts Council England report on Theatre in England (BOP Consulting and Devlin Associates, 2016) and gathered at interview. Repertoire data was filtered and compared on a percentage basis by Production type/s, Status and Space by region.

I tested the hypothesis that institutions are anticipating anxiety and have incorporated this emphasis on personal security into their policies. The data captured within the sample assisted in segmenting general safety warnings, such as strobe or smoke and guidance about language or staged content relating to mise-en-scene such as violence. The sample was constructed so that it was possible to make a distinction between specific content warnings or those that were less clear, such as general guidance about themes. The use of content warnings gathered in the sample was compared against policies displayed on theatre websites and gathered through direct contact with the venues, either by email or interview.

Case Study Research Methods

The case studies of productions included in this thesis were selected because they had involved a cancellation that might be described as censorship between 2015 and 2018. *Five Easy Pieces* offered the opportunity to explore the safeguarding policies and legislation required to stage work with child actors in Britain. *Homegrown* allowed space for a reflection on a potential disparity in freedom of expression for minority artists in Britain, as well as the relationship between form and censorship and the influence that funding, security and the government’s Prevent strategy for young people play in decision making processes. The case exposes the localised nature of liquid censorship and the impact that external events have on the context in which a production will be viewed. *Rita Sue and Bob Too* develops this investigation, offering an opportunity to reflect on the relationship between social media and artistic leadership in contemporary British theatre.

Writing case studies relating to contemporary theatre censorship was a generative process (Galletta, 2013:152) requiring revisions as literature research, data analysis or interviews enhanced my insight and research questions. Drawing insights from contemporary theatre scholarship and

example case studies on censorship explored by Freshwater (2009b) and O’Leary et al. (2015) helped to ensure that my analysis and use of sources were in line with academic best practice.

In order to provide new and comprehensive case study research work capable of reaching less visible evidence, I accessed information through Freedom of Information requests where appropriate. In the case of *Five Easy Pieces* (2017), I issued my own Freedom of Information request to the Licensing team at Manchester City Council (see Appendix 9). This was sent by email, with the response also received by email. For the cancelled production of *Homegrown* (2015), the Freedom of Information request was already in the public domain and I accessed documentation through the Theyworkforyou.com website.

In order to examine the relationship between funding conditions and theatre censorship in the UK, it was useful to interpret conclusions from financial information accessed using Companies House which provides annual reports and published accounts for theatres and production companies. It was possible to gather data over multiple years through the online resources available from Companies House in order to build a solid financial picture for an institution. This was a particularly important tool for scrutinising the relationship between financial resilience and artistic creation. Whilst this data was already in the public domain, it is not generally incorporated into theatre scholarship or discussed in the context of particular productions.

The use of financial reporting was particularly interesting for the case study on *Homegrown* explored in Chapter 4. The NYT financial reports for the accounting periods in the three years prior to the censorship of *Homegrown* depicted a company that was in financial distress. The records also pointed to a potential relationship between international training schemes and the decision that was made. This evidence had not emerged in the literature research. Specifically, the NYT had developed a lucrative partnership with Saudi Aramco, an oil company in Saudi Arabia. This data opened up a line of inquiry between the themes of the production that was cancelled, and an important financial relationship between the arts institution and a company in the Middle-East.

The case study research into the employment of child actors required an in-depth analysis of existing safeguarding policies and the legislation which underpins these. I accessed data from the National Network for Children in Employment and Entertainment (NNCEE) which drew together different and relevant pieces of legislation, as well as providing examples of how these operate in practice. In order to understand how this legislation interacted with the rights of a child actor, I

conducted a cross analysis between the existing policies in Britain and the *OHCHR Convention on the Rights of the Child*. I also explored legislation on Freedom of Speech, referring to reports by *Civitas* and the *Index on Censorship*. This was investigated in the context of my literature review and press research.

The interaction between the practical considerations raised by protest and public policy led me to conduct an analysis of the role of the police in decisions about theatre censorship. I encountered references to the police in several examples of the literature that had been gathered and wanted to establish how much power might be attributed to this source. I referred to research produced for the *Index on Censorship* and referred to the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) guidelines directly as well as exploring press reports on funding pressures in the British police force. Each of the examples of legislation discussed here are already in the public domain, however the lens with which they have been viewed in this thesis and the breadth of analysis involved in my research methods has assisted in providing a new type of insight for the purposes of an understanding of contemporary British theatre and censorship.

This thesis draws attention to the important relationship between managers and artists discussed by Adorno (1991) and Bauman (2005, 2011, 2013). My case study research has attempted to explore examples of how relationships are formed as well as when they break down. I have researched individual biographies of artists or theatre executives. This has involved searching internet archives to map previous productions that artists or executives have worked on, as well as organisations that they have been associated with.

Drawing on Bauman's ideas about culture and consumerism, I have investigated the marketing methods that theatres employ designed to attract consumers. This has incorporated the use of production imagery as a research tool to interpret conclusions about intentions on the part of theatre institutions. For example, in the *Homegrown* case study I compared the preparatory marketing imagery for an initial commission by the NYT called *Trojan Horse* with the marketing imagery that was ultimately released to the press. This provided rich material for scrutinising the two distinct phases of the production and probing the relationship that the shift in approach between the two might have had with the cancellation of the production. I also explored the description and imagery employed to market *Five Easy Pieces*, discussing the use of child actors. This was a powerful visual tool for interpreting conclusions on the different aesthetic approaches to representing children.

Theatre is a live artform and as part of my research I attended live performances to reflect on how controversial representations that explore the figure of the child in danger have been staged. This was not possible for all of the productions explored in my case studies; for example, *Homegrown* was cancelled prior to reaching its first performance. However, I was present at the launch of the *Homegrown* text which included a live performance extract with original cast members. It was possible to draw on this as part of my research. I attended the live performance of *Five Easy Pieces* at the Unicorn Theatre in April 2018 and two live performances of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* in January 2018 and March 2019. The interaction between the literature and a reflexive response to each performance has helped to shape the research and conclusions that have been drawn.

Interviews

Interviews are a common technique for securing research insights, and they were a particularly important component within my methodology. In order to gather insights on how theatre artists or institutions approach decisions about controversial material, it was necessary to reach information from private spaces. Jaber Gurbriem and James Holstein (2012) suggest that the role of the interviewer is 'to provide an environment conducive to the production of the range and complexity of meanings that address relevant issues and not confined by predetermined agendas' (Gurbriem et al., 2012:17). Responses were personal and experiential and best suited to a face-to-face, semi-structured approach. I recorded my interviews in order that I did not impose my interpretation onto the output and also, so that note-taking would not distract the conversational flow.

My goal was to gather personal testimonies that were relevant to the case studies being researched and analyse these collectively, contextualised against the data gathered within my repertoire sample and wider research, in order to build a clearer understanding about points of consensus and difference. The interview sample, which includes ten named participants and five anonymous, (see Appendix 2) was developed according to the relevance of the interviewee regarding the repertoire that had been censored.

The transcripts included in Appendix 4, 5 and 6 have been provided because these interviews have been quoted from substantially in my thesis and permission was granted to publish the interview. Some members of the sample did not grant this permission, which is why the transcripts have not been included. I sought to gather testimony from a range of practitioners

working in the industry in order to provide a contextual frame of reference in which to situate my analysis. I participated in additional industry conversations with producers, funders and theatre executives which have not been listed in this sample. Whilst a substantial amount of this testimony has not been included in my thesis due to the constraints of my research scope, the testimony has been considered as part of the research and has informed my analysis of British theatre censorship.

An initial target list of interviewees was gathered by selecting practitioners from within the theatre repertoire sample as well as theatre industry peer referrals. Interviewees also emerged as a result of attending industry panels and discussions such as the Dance Umbrella *Body Politic* (2016) talk on censorship at the Free Word Centre or the *15th Anniversary Celebrations of the Kenneth Tynan award for Dramaturgy* (2016) which was presented by the playwright Mark Ravenhill at the Arcola Theatre and featured a round table discussion on censorship. I tried to ensure a balanced sample in order to gather perspectives from an intergenerational and diverse group of industry practitioners. There was a deliberate bias towards conducting interviews with practitioners involved in productions that had been censored or cancelled, or theatres that had been directly engaged with censorship, to inform on the case studies within the thesis.

There are noteworthy absences from my interview sample, which I will briefly discuss here. Paul Roseby was contacted from the National Youth Theatre for my case study on *Homegrown* in Chapter 4 but did not respond to my requests for an interview. Whilst it would have been interesting to include original interview testimony from Roseby in this thesis, the absence of this interview has not been considered to diminish the balance of perspectives considered in my research. My thesis includes freedom of information data (Paulley, 2015) which was gathered after the cancellation of *Homegrown*, (see Appendix 8), including Roseby's email to his stakeholder's explaining why he planned to cancel the work (Watling, 2015). This insight has been employed to analyse how Roseby framed his decision as the leader of the organisation during the period in which the production was censored. Walter Meierjohann, the artistic director of Home theatre in Manchester was contacted for an interview regarding the cancellation of *Five Easy Pieces*, Chapter 5. Meierjohann did not respond to my requests for an interview. Again, the absence of this testimony has not been considered to be detrimental to the analysis included in my thesis. The decision to close the production is considered to have originated at the point that the licensing department at Manchester City Council refused to grant performance licenses for the child actors. I have included a response from Manchester City Council regarding the reasons why this decision was taken (see Appendix 9). Finally, I also attempted to interview Milo Rau regarding his production of *Five Easy*

Pieces. Whilst Rau was initially keen to participate in the research, the interview did not take place with Rau citing his schedule and commitments as a barrier. The substantial range of secondary source interviews with Rau about his approach to *Five Easy Pieces* that have been analysed for this thesis make up for the absence of original testimony.

Prior to starting the interview process, I devised a list of questions to support my semi-structured approach (see Appendix 3), keeping in mind my research aims. This assisted in clarifying how I might ensure that I did not project my own bias or interpretations on the flow of conversation. The interviews were face-to-face, responsive and conversational and it was important to follow the flow of ideas led by the participant, prompted by thematic provocations. My questions helped to keep the focus on my research aims, however it was important not to impose an agenda. Drawing on Gurbriem's and Holstein (2012) scholarship, I sought to use my 'interpersonal skills to merely encourage the expression of, but not help construct, the attitudes, sentiments, and behaviours under consideration' (Gurbriem et al., 2012:33). One of my participants commented how much she had enjoyed the interview, comparing it to a bad meeting experience the previous week in which the person coming to meet her to gain insight on a different topic had spent over two thirds of their meeting time discussing himself. On occasion I would have liked to have engaged or agreed with my interviewees, but I had to maintain what I considered to be a neutral mask, not distanced but also not partisan, in order that I did not influence the movement of the conversation. This allowed me to 'empower' my interviewees to 'tell their own stories' (Mischler, 1986 cited by Gurbriem et al., 2012:33).

Each interview started with the opportunity for the participant to expand on their experience in the theatre industry, in order to put them at ease. My questions were open and designed to stimulate conversation, for example, 'Do you think there is a responsibility to an audience when creating theatre?' and 'If yes, what do you think this is? Or 'Thinking now about theatre censorship: What does the word censorship mean to you? Have you ever experienced a situation where you have felt censored in a theatre project?' It is important to state that these draft questions were part of a general process of preparation for the interviews and represented a supporting guide rather than a fixed framework. For example, when I started my interviews, I was interested in attitudes to aversion and representing violence, however other important or dominant themes emerged in my research and discussions, such as representations of the child in danger on stage.

By its nature, my research into theatre censorship has probed into private experiences and personal reflections. Having a clear ethics commitment was important. In preparation for my interviews, I put together an explanation of my project aims and a form for my participants to sign to ensure that my interview participants were aware of my research approach, the fact that the interview would be recorded and how their data would be handled. This was approved by the University of Winchester in line with Ethics regulations and prior to any contact with participants.

I provided a one-page document for each participant with some context on my motivations for conducting the research and clarifying the intention of the interview. I sought to provide transparency regarding my focus on theatre censorship and clarify my objective which was to seek insight on personal approaches to decision making regarding controversial repertoire. Furthermore, the explanation also outlined the procedures I had put in place to ensure data protection and to safeguard the recordings and anonymity of my sample. Whilst it was a stated intention that interviewees would be named within the thesis, it was important to protect anonymity prior to receiving sign off for the interview transcripts.

Having had the opportunity to read through the explanation of the project, the form enabled participants to clarify their understanding of the research, whilst actively opting in to participating in the project. The form also reiterated that the transcript would be sent to the interviewee for approval prior to its usage in my analysis. A tick box was provided at the bottom of the form to ensure there was no ambiguity:

Please mark with an "X" as appropriate	YES	NO
Please confirm that you have given permission for me to use your name and when I include and refer to your interview in my research		
Please confirm that you have given your permission for me to record this interview.		

I devised and observed the following data protection commitments, which were included in the explanation for the project:

- Interview data will be securely stored, and every effort will be made to ensure that contact information is not compromised.

- Contact information for interviewees will be stored in a password-protected spreadsheet.
- Each interviewee will be assigned a case study number, and no contact details will be stored alongside the transcription.
- Transcripts will be password protected to ensure the security of the data.
- Any notes will be made in a password protected electronic document.

Anne Galletta's (2013) work on Semi Structured interviewing was a useful theoretical reference point for the analysis of my interviews, as well as my wider data sample. Aside from the vital role of supervisory meetings, theory was my collaborative partner in the process of enhancing my research design. It helped to ensure a robust methodology. Galletta refers to a 'conceptual restlessness' in the research process which starts to emerge with the coding of themes that contribute to the research question. The themes that emerged in my interviews were significant and pointed me towards clear 'categories' with an 'explanatory power' that assisted, with the literature research, to establish a 'conceptual framework' (Galletta, 2013:150). The descriptions of a fluid and changeable context in which theatres are working in contemporary Britain allowed me to develop the scope of my enquiry away from Kolnai's theories on aversion and towards Bauman's scholarship on liquid modernity. This resulted in the discovery of liquid censorship as a way to describe the phenomena I was encountering through my conversations and the evidence being gathered.

Summary

The conceptual framework that has underpinned the analysis of the field data in this thesis draws on the interdependent conflict between artists and theatre institutions. Qualitative interviews have assisted in revealing the motivations behind institutional decisions and artistic creation. Case study examples of productions that have been cancelled or described as censored have been scrutinised and tested against the patterns that have emerged in the research in order to draw conclusions about contemporary theatre censorship in practice. At the outset of my research I had not anticipated the breadth of methods that I would employ in order to reach a refined understanding of the types of theatre censorship I observed. For example, the focus on child actors emerged with my research, and so the exploration of legislation and safeguarding policies developed in response to this urgent and relevant focus. The requirement for a flexible and responsive set of methods was anchored in a clear methodology and project timeframe. I was able to gather repertoire data and interview responses, infusing my findings with wider literature with the end goal of establishing case study research chapters in order to answer a set of clearly defined research questions. Within these

parameters, the methods that I employed to refine my insight could respond to the evidence in a fluid way.

Chapter 3 - Contemporary British Theatre Repertoire

Introduction

This chapter provides a repertoire and policy context for the examples of theatre censorship explored as case studies in my thesis. I have referred to data captured from the sample of programming recorded at thirty-four theatres across the twelve key regions of the UK, between October 2016 and October 2017 (see Appendix 1). There are three principle areas of focus in this chapter. Firstly, I explore differing theatre policies on content guidance and age classifications (see Appendix 4) in order to interpret what they reveal about programming liberty across the range of venue locations and sizes in the UK. Secondly, I investigate productions in the sample that share comparable qualities to the examples of repertoire that are the focus of my case studies, in an attempt to decipher what can be interpreted about liquid censorship. The points of comparison that have been drawn here include the employment of child actors in the context of a production that explores sexual abuse and a production that stages an exploration of radicalisation with young people. Finally, I highlight productions in the sample that have been successfully staged at multiple venues, prior to being censored, in order to draw conclusions about localised acts of liquid censorship in contemporary Britain.

There is an absence of recent empirical data on contemporary programming repertoire, with no data samples that focus on how theatres are approaching controversial material through the use of content warnings or age-related guidance. The Arts Council England 2016 survey on *Theatre in England* compiled by BOP Consulting and Devlin Associates is cited here to provide general insights on the challenges that small, mid-scale and large venues are facing. The *British Theatre Consortium* repertoire studies from 2013 (British Theatre Consortium, 2015) and 2014 (British Theatre Consortium, 2016) are referred to as useful context and a model for best practice in gathering and categorising programming data. For clarity, this chapter does not seek to provide a general examination of the types of productions staged between October 2016 and October 2017 for comparison with these studies. Whilst this type of analysis would be worthy of further attention in future, it is too broad in scope for the research questions being explored in this thesis.

The research undertaken here assists in establishing the extent to which policy has evolved to deal with the types of challenges being faced by arts institutions in contemporary Britain. I

evaluate the various types of theatre venues in the UK, scrutinising the differing programming capabilities according to size and location. I reflect on Balme's assumptions about the thresholds of audience tolerance (2014:17) and the notion that theatres are privatised spaces in which artists typically have the liberty to cross boundaries without close scrutiny, supported by a group of loyal, theatre-going audiences. Balme refers to theatre as 'an almost entirely private matter... between consenting partners' in which the spectator 'is usually prepared to take some punishment'. He suggests that whilst 'Doors will on occasion be slammed and letters to the editor written... these are exceptions to a generally accepted state of tolerance' (Balme, 2014:17). Balme describes these types of privatised theatres as 'black box' spaces and highlights artistic attempts to leave the confines of these established venues in order to reach broader, public audiences. Whilst the research refers to Western European theatre in general, it resonates with Maria DiCenzo's historical description of the conventions of British theatre spaces in *The Politics of Alternative Theatre in Britain, 1968-1990* (1996). Maria Di Cenzo describes venues such as the Royal Court or the National Theatre as 'mainstream theatres', proposing that these types of spaces were inaccessible for 'working class audiences' or other 'culturally dispossessed audiences' (1996:33-37) in the 1970s and 80s. Di Cenzo suggests that the potential for alienating members of the public remained the same regardless of whether the venue was a 'smaller-scale 'artsy'' space or an 'up-market' theatre. Balme's scholarship describes a distinction between theatre audiences and the public and Di Cenzo draws particular attention to a class struggle and 'cultural/ethnic' alienation (Ibid.) in British society over forty years ago. Both examples point to an interesting and recognisable divide between groups of people who could be described as a theatre audience, private or otherwise, and those on the outside. I investigate the relationship that the permissive theatre culture described by Balme shares with liquid censorship, observing the potential for collisions between theatre venues and members of the public and exploring how negative responses to productions that depict controversial or taboo themes become magnified in the context of social media. I also highlight inconsistencies in the boundaries for repertoire at different venues in the UK.

The Use of Content Warnings and Age Guidance at Theatres in the UK

This section of the repertoire study seeks to clarify some of the contemporary, practical approaches that theatres are taking in their guidelines for warnings about potentially sensitive content. The observations refer to the use of signage, age-guidance and the distinction made between thematic content and matters of stagecraft by region (see Appendix 4). This particular focus on the data sample attempts to probe the relationship between theatres and audiences. The word 'audience' is being considered in two ways here; firstly, the group of people that a theatre expects to purchase a

ticket and watch the production and secondly, individuals or groups who do not intend to view the work but will engage with the choice of repertoire in a public forum online. This research provides context for the analysis in the case study chapters which uncover the specific ways in which theatres have approached the new types of challenges presented by audiences in the liquid modern age, in order to probe the relationship between society and liquid censorship.

In an interview that I conducted with the playwright, critic and dramaturg for the National Theatre, Stewart Pringle, during his tenure at the Gate Theatre, he observed that when a venue makes a programming decision, the likely response from an audience is an important consideration:

how will that land?' is a question we ask all the time... we're not only interested in critical response to our work, although it is important commercially and in all sorts of ways. But how will it land with an audience is just as important as how will it land with the critics (Pringle, 2017).

Theatres implicitly attempt to anticipate the impact of a scheduled performance rather than judging the work exclusively on its artistic merits. In 2017, *The Times* reported that the Royal Court Theatre, which is celebrated as a world-leading new writing venue, had started to display trigger warning notices on its website for thematic content that the theatre anticipated would be likely to cause 'extreme offence' (Sanderson, 2017). According to the scholar Catherine James, the 'clinical origins' of trigger warnings can be traced to its usage for victims suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of World War One or following the Vietnam war (James, 2017:297). More recently, the emergence of the trigger warning has been associated with feminist blogs (James, 2017 and Bentley, 2016) representing an attempt to provide a warning for content that may be shared relating to sexual violence. The trigger warning is also now a common feature in higher education, although its use in general has garnered criticism and the suggestion that it is 'unnecessary, infantilising and even farcical' (Breslin, 2010 cited in Bentley, 2016:114). In a theatre context, the trigger warning represents a precautionary policy which addresses a perceived internal threat to audiences in the same way that a wet floor sign or biohazard symbol might refer to an external, environmental risk. According to Rachel Dudley, the theatre manager at the Royal Court who was interviewed for this thesis, the policy was adopted in response to the varied and occasionally complex needs of audience members. The warning seeks to open a dialogue between venue staff and individuals in the audience predisposed to respond more acutely to particular themes prior to the performance, rather than staff attempting to manage responses after an upsetting experience (Dudley, 2017).

The requirement for a trigger warning seems to indicate a shift in the potential audience response that moves beyond the angry letter or door slamming proposed by Balme (2014:17). Instead, Dudley talked about a variety of responses to work, which the theatre must attempt to manage practically. Some patrons require more guidance warnings than others, and the general trigger warning attempts to set up a conversation between those individuals and the theatre prior to the production. As Dudley pointed out at interview, theatre staff are not trained counsellors. Theatre is an artistic space and there are limits to the support that can be offered to individuals who may require expert advice about particular subjects. Whilst it is hard to rationalise Plato's view of theatrical mimesis as a dangerous social phenomenon in the twenty-first century or to argue that theatre has a wide-reaching social impact in society in the UK, we can perhaps view the theatre as holding the potential for some individuals to trigger remembered trauma through the theatrical process of reenactment. In this scenario, theatre guidance is important. So, who is responsible for provoking this trauma and how cautious should theatres be? Keir Elam argues that it is the 'spectator who initiates the theatrical communication by buying a ticket' (Elam, 2002:86 cited by Duggan, 2012:86). However, the theatre venue possesses some responsibility in communicating what the purchase is for through its marketing descriptions and the use of content warnings or age guidance. Of course, this process starts far earlier with the decision to programme potentially sensitive or controversial material such as paedophilia or rape. The question of responsibility is important because theatres are operating in a challenging contemporary consumer context in which customers who are upset or dissatisfied with a purchase can quickly express this online, potentially reaching a global audience.

The approach taken by the Royal Court, a theatre that focuses exclusively on new and untested work and a venue with a long history of controversy, may substantiate the notion that in some instances, theatres are showing greater caution towards individuals who may possess complex triggers or requirements, in part in order to protect themselves against becoming a focal point for criticism online or in the press. The use of a general 'trigger warning' serves a dual purpose, preserving the experience for audience members who may attend a new writing theatre because they do not want to know what happens in the production, whilst also catering for individual audience members who may be shocked or upset by the work.

According to the critic Mark Shenton, there is a 'repeat theatre story' (Shenton, 2019) which appears in the national press in Britain about audience members fainting in response to particularly graphic depictions of controversial content on stage, typically at high-profile or as Di Cenzo

described in her historical account of British theatre, 'mainstream' (1996:33) venues in London such as the National Theatre or The Globe. For example, according to the Telegraph in the article 'Cleansed: Dozens faint and walk out of the National Theatre over gruesome torture':

Members of the public reported seeing people faint in shock at some of the scenes. One blogger said: "One man even collapsed 30 minutes in (Furness, 2016).

Cleansed was not a piece of new writing, having premiered in 1998 during the 'In-yer-face' era. The profile on audience members fainting in response to the work provokes questions regarding the extent to which theatres are depicting increasingly graphic and controversial repertoire or how far the nature of offence and aversion has shifted in a contemporary context. The media appetite for including extreme and individual responses posted on social media websites, such as Aliya Ram's comment on Twitter 'go go go to Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* at the National Theatre, so raw my play-mate passed out' which was embedded in Michelle Terry's *Guardian* review (2016), points to a more complex relationship that exists in contemporary society between the media, theatre institutions and members of the public, than when the play was first staged for example. The external narratives that surround theatre productions have been precipitated by an increased access to digital media communication channels to voice private responses.

Shenton has proffered that theatres may in fact play 'a small part in facilitating the controversy' (Shenton, 2019) which surrounds controversial repertoire. This observation was made in relation to the latest iteration of articles in the national press in January 2019 about a fainting incident during the preview of the National Theatre's *When We Have Sufficiently Tortured Each Other* (2019). The production, which starred the high-profile celebrity actress Cate Blanchett, had been consciously 'shrouded in secrecy' (Shenton, 2019) by the theatre. External performative marketing techniques were employed to enhance the anticipation and excitement amongst potential audience members, with exclusive access to tickets only available through a ballot or limited day seats that members of the public had been queuing from 4am to purchase. The theatre was undoubtedly participating in what Alston refers to as a form of 'thrill' (2016:258) form of marketing, to perpetuate the intrigue that surrounded the repertoire. In his article about the media focus on the production, Shenton proffered that mainstream media is only interested in theatre 'when it acts controversially, or badly' (Shenton, 2019). Furthermore, he suggested that *The Times* article about the fainting incident, '*Lights go down, crowd passes out at Cate Blanchett play's orgy of sex and violence*' (2019), exaggerated the scale of the audience reaction to the point of sensationalism. Susannah Clapp (2019) commented in the *Observer* that it is not actually an unusual occurrence for patrons to 'pass out' in the theatre, and this response may not be related to the

content at all. Having programmed a small studio venue, Clapp's observation certainly rings true. A regular elderly audience member frequently fainted in the venue; however this individual response was related to an existing health condition rather than the content of the work. I am not attempting to suggest that the same elderly patron fainted in response to *When We Have Sufficiently Tortured Each Other*, rather, highlighting that Clapp's recognition that fainting may occur as a result of health as well as sensitivity to content resonates with my experience.

Online platforms enable the elevation of individual audience reactions, which means that the exception to the rule audience response which Balme described as taking the form of a slammed door or an angry letter, may hold the potential to carry greater weight in a contemporary context, influencing the way that a production is discussed or even remembered. The audience member is uniquely empowered through online reviewing spaces, sometimes embedded within theatre production pages or alternatively enabled through online maps and digital promotional spaces for theatre venues such as *Google Places* or *Trip Advisor*. Social media platforms such as Twitter allow individuals to create a dialogue with a global audience whilst connecting both the venue and creative team's identity, provided they have a Twitter profile. Division in opinion becomes heightened in the context of the accessible online spaces available for articulating these reactions to a mass audience. Furthermore, individual reactions do not need to represent the average or typical audience response to become the dominant voice or to be appropriated by groups that have not necessarily attended the theatre production but might be interested in the reactions or the sentiments behind them. As a consequence of this new type of engagement with repertoire, it is harder for theatres to rely on Balme's (2014) assertions about audience tolerance and artistic liberty when they approach controversial work. My research into the types of warnings that theatres put in place to insure themselves against causing offence provides a useful point of reflection on programming liberty in contemporary British theatre.

Findings - Breakdown of Guidance Warnings (see Appendix 4)

The first observation on the use of guidelines relating to potentially sensitive material across the UK is that they are not in use for the majority of productions. Theatre policies vary and there is not one clear or standardised approach. 17.7% of the total UK theatre sample provided age related guidelines for 14+ years and over and only 11.7% of the sample displayed content warnings online. This is not a dominant part of the repertoire. However, it demonstrates that the risk of causing distress to young audiences might be described as the greatest concern for theatres generally.

There are distinct criteria which emerge in the types of categories for warnings that can be found, divided between age guidelines or content warnings and further segmented according to technical effects, physical staging, text or general themes:

1. Age Guidelines
2. Content warnings:
 - a. Technical effects where there may be a health and safety concern: Gunfire, loud noises, smoking, smoke, haze or strobe lighting.
 - b. Warnings about nudity, scenes of a sexual nature, sexual violence, violence or drug use
 - c. Text content: Strong language or swearing, occasionally referred to as sexually explicit or violent language.
 - d. Thematic warnings: Sensitive or potentially offensive subject matter, adult themes or general trigger warnings

The breakdown of content warnings across the UK by type indicates that warnings about language are the most common. It also demonstrates that the patterns for warning about other types of thematic content are more diffuse, with some theatres referring to general themes and others specifying the types of content such as nudity or violence. These categories will be discussed here in the context of the data gathered by region.

Observations by Region (see Appendix 4)

On average, 22% of all productions staged in the London sample displayed warnings about content online (Chart 1), which was comparatively higher than other regions in the UK. 35.2% of productions offered an age guidance with 21.6% of these allocated to productions suitable for 14 years+, indicating that the material would not be appropriate for younger children. Approximately 35% of the warnings provided related to the use of haze, smoking or smoke, strobe and loud noises, where there might be a health and safety concern for audiences. Warnings about content relating to language were 23.1%, followed by violence which was 17.5%. However, if the categories sexual violence, nudity and scenes of a sexual nature were merged, these would represent 17.5% of the content warnings and if sex and violence was grouped as a distinct category, this would make up 35% of the sample guidelines. In practice, according to the policies displayed online the theatres in this sample were equally cautious about showing or saying something.

Content Warnings - London

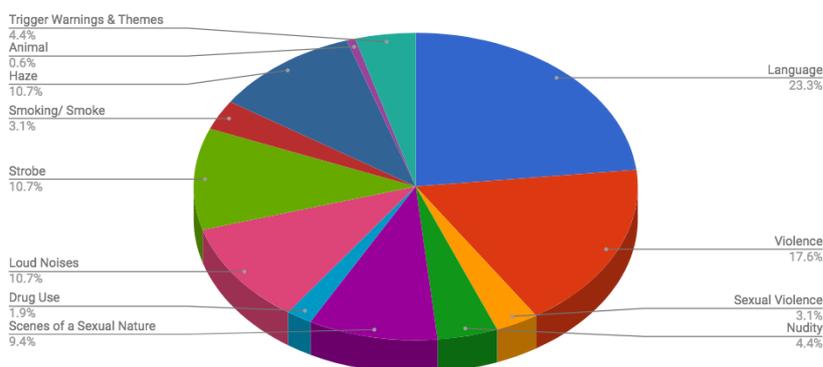


Chart 1: A breakdown of content warnings at 11 London theatre venues.

Three theatres made use of a general themes warning including the Royal Court, the Southwark Playhouse and the Gate Theatre. The Royal Court remains the only venue to directly refer to these online as trigger warnings. All three venues are smaller scale in terms of seating capacity. It is noteworthy that the use of warnings about content was on average approximately 50% of the total productions or higher at the Royal Court, Arcola and the Gate theatres, which reflects the more controversial territories explored within the programmes and the proportion of new writing work staged. The increased use of content warnings at these smaller London venues provokes the question: is access to art or the ability to make certain types of work determined by where artists and audiences are based in the UK?

	Productions	Content Warnings	% Content Warnings	14+ Age Guidance	% Age Guidance
London	332	79	21.8	78	21.6
S.West	165	9	5.5	32	19.4
S.East	115	2	1.7	37	32.2
W.Midlands	168	15	8.9	14	8.3
E.Midlands	196	13	6.6	23	11.7
E.England	63	19	30.2	17	27
N.East	134	10	7.5	48	35.8
N.West	111	10	9	12	10.8

Yorkshire & Humberside	132	8	6.1	20	15.2
N.Ireland	48	6	12.5	4	8.3
Scotland	59	5	8.5	13	22
Wales	143	22	15.4	13	9.1

Table 1: Average % Content Warnings and % Age Guidance above 14+ years for Theatres by region

The data tells us two things in response to this question about the confines of space and geography. The first is that there are projects staged outside London which might be considered to incorporate controversial content and that required warnings. The second observation is that the use of these warnings was typically highest at subsidised, smaller scale venues dedicated to new work, as observed in the London sample. The Sherman Theatre in Wales which seats 460 in its main theatre offered content warnings for 42% of its repertoire. The Theatre invests in interesting co-productions for new work including partnerships with new writing arts organisations such as the Royal Court Theatre and Paines Plough. Live Theatre in the North East, which seats 170 people, is a small-scale venue focussed on developing and promoting new writing. The organisation principally made use of age guidance as a method for warning audience members about potentially sensitive material. Employing a similar policy to the Royal Court Theatre with regards to age guidance, the theatre categorised 58.4% of its productions as suitable for audience members aged 14+ years.

There is an indication in the data sample that the ability to stage new writing productions is in part contingent on the size and scale of the venue. When the regional picture for mid and large-scale venues is observed, there is a clear trend in the data towards an infrequent use of content warnings. Where guidance is provided, it typically focuses on age, either appearing in the form of age guidance or the reference to ‘adult themes’, which caters for a broad range of responses and prioritises protecting children from sensitive content. It is noteworthy that mid-scale touring to venues with a seating capacity of approximately 400 - 800 was highlighted as ‘near unaffordable’ for touring producers by the Arts Council England report on *Theatre in England* (BOP Consulting and Graham Devlin Associates, 2016:4). Citing Tom Wicker (2016), the report indicates that ‘increasingly tight margins are making it “harder to tour work without an immediate commercial hook”’ (Ibid., 33.). A commercial hook might be a celebrity actor or playwright, or an established West End Musical that audiences are already familiar with and will be confident to book. Given the constrained budgets for touring work and the reliance on successful box office receipts to cover the costs, controversial projects that have originated at well-subsidised smaller-scale venues with less

seats to fill and where there is a risk of low box office figures, are unlikely to be programmed at this level. It would be challenging for a mid-scale venue to affordably present this type of repertoire in their programme and even if they wanted to: the stock of touring producers willing to invest in these types of projects would be limited due to the financial precarity involved.

The number of content warnings in the East of Midlands was only 6.6% (see Figure 4). A similar pattern was also observed in Yorkshire and Humberside, with only 6.1% content warnings displayed online overall. In the South East and South West, the number of content warnings was even lower at 1.7% and 5.5% respectively. However, both regions displayed a high number of age recommendations over 14+ years which suggests that the theatres were concerned about maintaining good relationships with their family audiences. The lower number of warnings at the venues combined with the higher number of productions in these regions is likely to be indicative of a broad and family focussed programme. Theatres seek engagement and need to fill seats at the mid and large-scale. The absence of guidance does not necessarily point to a lack of concern about causing offence to audiences, rather an emphasis on repertoire that will appeal widely and may not require a warning. The size of the venue can be related to the ability for regional programmers to stage controversial projects.

There are clear exceptions to the correlation between mid to large scale venue size and content warnings relating to the breadth of repertoire. In the North West, The Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester which seats up to 750 people in its main theatre, displayed very few content warnings at 2% of productions and 8.3% of these displayed an age guideline for 14+ years. It is possible that the lack of caution communicates something about the venue's relationship with its audiences and a tacit contract of understanding about the likely type of production that might be programmed. Interestingly, the theatre has also embedded a comments section into its website, working with the increased appetite for social media and inviting individual responses to the work for heightened engagement. With a higher concentration of plays at the Manchester venue, and less diversity in the programme, it is easier to build a level of expectation between the theatre and its audience.

The higher percentage of content warnings at subsidised, small-scale venues potentially points to a relationship between challenging repertoire and privatised spaces. Prior to the abolition of formal theatre censorship in 1968, controversial plays were staged in private theatre clubs, an initiative that was started by the Stage Society in 1899 (Nicholson, 2003). Whilst private clubs were

no longer necessary after the cessation of state censorship, smaller fringe or studio venue spaces continue to play an active part in contemporary British theatre. Balme's provocation that 'most theatre spectators and advocates of artistic freedom privatise theatrical space in order to enjoy this freedom' (Balme, 2014:167) seems appropriate when considering the private nature of audiences at 'smaller-scale 'artsy'' spaces, to use Di Cenzo's (1996:38) category. The Royal Court Theatre for example could be described as a venue that attracts a loyal, regular audience. However, the fact that the smaller venues in the sample are providing a higher proportion of content warnings complicates the assumption that artistic liberty at these types of venues is unquestioned, since a privatised space populated by audiences that privilege freedom above other concerns would implicitly not require such cautious additional caveats or guidance. The use of general thematic and trigger warnings suggests that theatres are increasingly catering for the reach of negative reactions to work and rather than identifying each potentially offensive piece of content, have selected a warning that will cater for the individual whilst preserving an element of surprise for the rest of their audiences. Conversely, the low use of content warnings in mid to large scale regional theatres is indicative of the precarious relationship between box office takings, the cost of touring productions and a risk averse programming strategy.

Controversy, Spectatorship and Young People

According to the repertoire sample data, seventy-seven productions across twenty theatres advertised productions for children aged twelve-years and upwards, which was the age guidance that Milo Rau suggested was appropriate for *Five Easy Pieces* (2016). The repertoire included in this category which might be described as engaging with more challenging themes included Howard Barker's play, *Judith: A Parting of the Body* in produced by Lighthouse Theatre, Poole and Rend Productions, which was staged in September 2017 at the Arcola Theatre in London. Howard Barker is a playwright associated with exploring violence in his work and the marketing literature included warnings about 'violent' content. The production was a revival of the original play which premiered in 1992, adapted by Barker from the legend of Judith who decapitated her enemy, Holofernes and reinterpreted as a response to the wider zeitgeist around sexual violence and harassment against women. The work is based on a traditional story drawn from early Jewish culture and the Old Testament in the Bible. Rend Productions offered educational workshops for university and sixth form audiences, demonstrating that the company sought to generate additional income streams from engagement with young people as part of the project. *Judith: A Parting of the Body* played at studio venues with limited seating capacities so it is unsurprising that the producers might seek to create additional sources of funding to support production costs such as paying the lead actor,

Catherine Cusack, who has appeared in the popular British television soap opera, *Coronation Street*. According to the theatre manager at the Royal Court in her interview for this thesis, the volume of audience enquiries about age appropriateness for children typically increases when a ‘celebrity’ actor (Dudley, 2017) appears as a member of the cast, as the ability to watch a famous actor in a live theatre context is appealing to parents. *Coronation Street* is a pre-watershed television programme, which means that it appears on screen at a time that is considered appropriate for the content to be viewed by children. It is likely that the producers behind a touring production which included a celebrity cast member most commonly associated with a pre-watershed television programme, would not wish to alienate family audiences by including highly controversial content without appropriate warnings.

The National Theatre’s touring production *Hedda Gabler* (2016) adapted by Patrick Marber and directed by Ivo Van Hove was hosted by Northern Stage and the Theatre Royal Plymouth during the sample period and was also awarded a twelve-years and upwards age recommendation. Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* is a National Curriculum text, taught at key stage five, which is typically the level that 16 – 18-year olds study in the UK. The marketing copy described *Hedda* as a female ‘Hamlet’ and the character is depicted committing suicide at the end of the production. Controversy surrounding the work however did not confront the appropriateness of exploring suicide with younger audiences, rather referred to a theatrical debate regarding the aesthetic choices made by the production’s director, Ivo Van Hove. A user comment on the *Time Out* website review in 2016 proffered ‘It is time for Directors Theatre to be killed off’ (Michael D, 2016). This type of criticism relates to an introspective theatre industry debate about an aesthetic contrast between the British playwright-led theatre culture and a European director-led environment, rather than concerns regarding age-appropriateness. This points to a knowing theatre audience that attends the theatre frequently enough to discern between a difference in theatrical approaches to aesthetics. Both pieces of repertoire described here were adaptations of what would be described as canonical literary texts, the Bible and Henrik Ibsen. Howard Barker is a known playwright who would have an audience following. These observations appear to indicate that the level of scrutiny imposed over the appropriateness of thematic content in revivals of classic texts or established artists work is less rigorous than it may be for new writers and theatre makers.

New repertoire recorded in the data sample which was awarded a twelve-years and upwards age guideline and could be described as dealing with challenging subjects, included *Bin Laden, the one-man show* (2017) which was hosted at the Theatre Royal Plymouth. The production

has been described by the reviewing website, *A Younger Theatre*, as a piece which seeks to ‘avoid causing offence by any means necessary’ (Kelly, 2013). A Belgium production from Bronx and Big Belgium, *Us/Them* (2017) was staged at the National Theatre following a successful run at the Edinburgh Festival. The piece was inspired by the 2004 Beslan School siege which resulted in over 300 fatalities, although the Dutch director, Carly Wijs, has emphasised that her intention was to create a piece of theatre for children in Europe who are attempting to make sense of acts of terrorism, rather than for the victims of the assault. According to Wijs, ‘the challenge with *Us/Them* is whether it is possible to make a children’s theatre piece that talks intelligently, meaningfully and sensitively about terrorism’ (Wijs, cited by Gardner, 2017d). It is interesting that this bold theatre experiment originated in Belgium, like *Five Easy Pieces* (2016). The contrast in cultural approaches to difficult subject matter with children between the UK and Belgium is explored more fully in the case study on *Five Easy Pieces*.

Us/Them was supported by the National Theatre, an institution which is financially robust having received a minimum of £17,462,920 a year from the Arts Council between 2015 - 2018. The play took place in the smallest space at the National Theatre, the Dorfman Theatre, which is a studio venue holding up to 450 seats. Robert Burt (1998) has discussed the practical, soft and hard forms of regulation. In her reading of Burt’s scholarship, O’Leary (2015) proffers that the scale of the space and length of the scheduled run are tools which theatres may employ to navigate controversy and control the scope and impact of the work, as well as its potential audience reach. *Us/Them* was staged in a small-scale studio venue, which meant that had the National Theatre’s audiences not responded well to the repertoire, the financial impact would have been less significant for a theatre institution of this scale. This decision was likely to have been made based on the anticipated interest in the production. According to Wijs, the piece was difficult to sell to venues in Flanders because of sensitivity over terrorism as a subject matter. Programmers were concerned that ‘it wouldn’t look good in the brochure’ (Wijs, cited by Gardner, 2017d). It is however noteworthy that the production was marketed to children aged nine-years and over in Flanders, demonstrating a different attitude in the UK and Belgium to the age appropriateness of the thematic content. None of the repertoire in the sample for the twelve-years and upwards age bracket dealt with themes that explored children and sexual abuse, or featured child performers on stage in the context of controversial themes

The critical response to *Us/Them* was very supportive. Lyn Gardner stated that ‘it might seem an unpromising and possibly even offensive subject for a theatre show made for young audiences. But Wijs’s production sweeps aside all doubts’ (Gardner, 2017d). Claire Allfree also

praised the production for its well-judged tone, 'Us/Them powerfully illustrates the way children construct for themselves a manageable version of something almost unspeakable. But it is also a darker meditation on the way adults distort this childhood impulse in the service of other, more dangerous forms of storytelling' (Allfree, 2017). The contrasting storytelling approach between adults and children described by Allfree is a tension that seems to be at the centre of *Five Easy Pieces*, in which the child actors on stage perform a controversial piece that explores child abuse and murder, created by the adult director, Milo Rau. Significantly, the actors playing the roles of children in *Us/Them* were adults. There is a different level of scrutiny involved when controversial subjects are explored by child actors and this subject is reflected on in more depth in the case study on *Five Easy Pieces*.

Controversial Thematic Territories and the Child Actor

The production *Room* (2017), adapted by the author of the 2010 novel and the 2015 film, Emma Donoghue, was recorded in the sample at the Theatre Royal Stratford East for a four-week performance run in February 2017. The play was co-produced by the Theatre Royal Stratford East and Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in association with National Theatre of Scotland and Covent Garden Productions. Like *Five Easy Pieces*, the production employed a child actor in the context of a piece of repertoire that refers to paedophilia, kidnap and rape. In this representation, the child's mother was kidnapped and has given birth to her son in captivity, having been repeatedly raped by her captor. Donoghue experienced criticism for her novel on the basis that she was exploiting the real-life story of Joseph Fritzl, who was convicted for kidnapping and impregnating his daughter Elisabeth.

According to Donoghue in an interview with Sarah Crown for *The Guardian*:

To say *Room* is based on the Fritzl case is too strong...I'd say it was triggered by it. The newspaper reports of Felix Fritzl [Elisabeth's son], aged five, emerging into a world he didn't know about, put the idea into my head. That notion of the wide-eyed child emerging into the world like a Martian coming to Earth: it seized me' (Crown, 2010).

Unlike *Five Easy Pieces* (2016), which was censored in Manchester on the basis of concerns from the local authority about the child actors, *Room* was staged with a child actor and without controversy. However, in order to achieve this, the production team made assumptions about the limitations of the child actor and these influenced the creative process. The work was performed a month before the production of *Five Easy Pieces* was cancelled at Home theatre in Manchester in March 2017. This case provides a useful point of comparison from a similar point in time for conclusions about the drivers behind the censorship of a production that explores a difficult territory with child actors.

Room is told from the perspective of a five-year old boy and reflects on human survival. The production focuses on the contrast between the confined space of the room that the characters *Ma* and *Jack* are being held in and the bewilderment of a child discovering the wider world for the first time. The subject of the play had already been widely viewed by audiences as an Academy Award nominated film, which was preceded by an award-winning novel. However, the different levels of responsibility placed on the child actors in each production are noteworthy here. According to the *Telegraph* critic Tim Auld, 'Without the services of a preternaturally gifted five-year-old actor able to bear the burden of the narrative for over two hours on stage, more practical solutions needed to be found' (Auld, 2017). The child actor, Harrison Wilder, was seven-years-old, a year younger than Sophie Dedain who was eight when she started performing *Five Easy Pieces*. There were different expectations for the British actor, compared to the Belgian child performers who were required to recount long monologues. The approach that was taken perpetuates the cultural perception of the child as a vehicle of innocence, which Rau attempts to critique in his work. Unlike *Five Easy Pieces* in which the child actors confront the themes of violence and sexual-abuse being explored directly, in *Room*, an adult actor is placed on stage to voice the child actor's internal landscape. According to Donoghue in an interview with *Whatsonstage*:

Our huge technical challenge was Jack. How to represent a five-year-old with a huge and vivid stream of consciousness. But I think the solution we found for that - Little Jack acting his physical and social self, with Big Jack voicing his thoughts - has turned out to be one of the richest elements of the play, and one all the reviewers are loving (Donoghue, 2017).

The creative team attempted to create two realities on stage, a child being playful and comfortable in the space and the more complex emotional oppositions in his mind. Music was employed in order that *Ma* could express her internal monologue and conflict through song. The creative team used stagecraft techniques to construct a protected environment for the child actor. The choice to take this emotional agency away from the child actor assisted in removing potential safeguarding concerns however, the approach raises other ethical concerns. As Adele Senior has observed:

While the discourses of safeguarding, child protection and consent that emerge from these dominant conceptualizations of the child are vital to any creative process of working with children, they could potentially limit our engagement with child performers/ collaborators so that we fail to see children as both material, biological bodies (2018:35).

In this case, it could be suggested that as a result of prioritising safeguarding concerns, the child in the space was dehumanised. Some of the reviews (Taylor, 2017 and Vale, 2017) indicate that the stylized production failed to sustain its impact and intensity, which suggests that by taking the child actors voice away and giving it to an adult performer, the strength of the work also became limited.

What *Room* (2017) demonstrates is that the form and construction of a piece of repertoire is more likely to contribute to controversy or its censorship than the thematic territory alone. Another example of this is apparent in the comparison between the censorship of the National Youth Theatre's *Homegrown* (2015) and the production *Extremism* (2017) by Anders Lustgarten, which was recorded in the repertoire sample as part of the National Theatre Connections programme in 2017. Both productions dealt with the theme of radicalisation with young people employed as amateur teenage actors. However, *Extremism* (2017) was staged without controversy. The marketing describes the production as, 'A play about fear, friendship and the creeping polarisation of our society' (National Theatre, 2017). *Extremism* is based in a classroom and deals with the aftermath of a pupil, Jamal, being removed by the Police under the government's *Prevent* programme. Anders Lustgarten, who describes himself as an 'activist' that 'loves winding people up' (Dickinson, 2018), did not represent a cautious choice by the National Theatre Connections programming team. In an interview with one of the teenage performers involved in the Norwich Theatre Royal performance, she observed that 'it covers a lot of stuff that people don't like to talk about... it does a lot of things that people would be too scared to do' (Norwich Theatre Royal, 2017). This description could have been applied to *Homegrown* (2015), which platforms the various attitudes to radicalisation in Britain. However, unlike the National Youth Theatre's production explored in Chapter 4, the form and scale of *Extremism* (2017) was far more contained.

Homegrown (2015) was to be performed by 112 young people aged fifteen to twenty-five (Ellis-Peterson, 2015) who had assisted in devising parts of the work. The venue was a school in Bethnal Green, in an area that had experienced the impact of young people being radicalised and joining ISIS in Syria. *Extremism* (2017) however, had been written by a playwright and was performed by a cast of ten teenagers. The production was contained to mainstream theatre venues, supported by the financially robust National Theatre. It was recorded in the repertoire sample at the Theatre Royal Stratford East in March 2017 and at the Dorfman Theatre studio venue, at the National Theatre, in June 2017. The financial resilience of the National Theatre Connections Programme and form of *Extremism* which was relatively small in scale by comparison and confined to a theatre space, resulted in an indifference to the type of subjects being explored by young people. The play could neatly be categorised as a piece of issue-based youth drama, which was not worthy of media scrutiny or controversy.

According to Dr Roaa Ali, 'the decision about *Homegrown* demonstrates that 'censorship and the policing of artistic expressions concerning Islam and radicalisation is one of the major

obstacles facing British Muslim artists' access to the creative sector and to visibility' (Ali, 2018: 383). It is noteworthy that Lustgarten is a white British playwright. The creative team behind *Homegrown*, Nadia Latif and Omar El Khairy, have suggested that the censorship of their work was connected to their identity as Muslim artists in Britain (see page 120). This potential lack of parity in freedom of expression for minority artists will be explored in more depth in Chapter 4.

Productions That Experienced Censorship During the Sample Period

So far, the focus of this analysis of the theatre repertoire sample has been on the way venues have approached controversial thematic territories from a policy perspective. I have also explored some examples of repertoire that shares similar properties to the censorship case-studies included in this thesis, drawing conclusions about the differences between the productions that have been staged without controversy and those that resulted in closure. My focus will now shift to two examples of productions that were staged at multiple venues in the UK prior to being censored.

The revival of Andrea Dunbar's 1982 play, *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017) produced by Out of Joint, Bolton Octagon and the Royal Court, toured successfully in the UK before being cancelled in London. The repertoire sample provided evidence of this revival and one other production that had toured elsewhere in the UK during the data collection period prior to being censored in London: an Operatic adaptation by Peter Eötvös of Roland Schimmelpfennig's 2011 play, *The Golden Dragon* (2017), produced by Music Theatre Wales. Whilst the circumstances behind the cancellations varied, both instances occurred as a result of the interaction between the repertoire and an external theatre industry agenda. Both productions were revivals of work that had previously been premiered in the UK without experiencing censorship or protest. Briefly foregrounding some of the details behind the cancellation of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017), which is explored in-depth in Chapter 7 of this thesis, I will compare the circumstances behind the London closure of *The Golden Dragon* (2017), drawing conclusions about the drivers behind liquid censorship in contemporary British theatre.

The revival of Dunbar's *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017) was recorded in the sample in the North West at the Liverpool Playhouse and in the South West at the Oxford Playhouse, touring for four days at each venue. According to a review by Lorna Hughes in the *Liverpool Echo*, posted on 11th October 2017, a loud argument erupted in the audience about the use of a mobile phone in the theatre auditorium at the Liverpool Playhouse which 'mirrored' the characters on stage who were performing a neighbourhood row. This localised disturbance had a performative quality for the

reviewer and created a unique, live audience experience. When the external context in which a play is viewed is destabilised, the relationship between the spectator and the production changes. The circumstance described in Liverpool was however contained to a few individuals for a single performance, unlike the high-profile cancellation of the production in London at the Royal Court Theatre.

The censorship of the work in London responded to revelations in October 2017 about the production's co-director, Max Stafford-Clark (Topping, 2017b), who had been accused of inappropriate and sexualised conduct against a female member of staff, and this testimony resulted in other silenced female voices coming forward with their own stories about the director. This narrative became part of the rapidly developing #MeToo movement on social media against sexual harassment and abuses of power in the entertainment industry. The Royal Court Theatre in London offered a physical space in which these stories could be heard as well as a destination for transformative plans to be shaped which would attempt to end this type of conduct in the industry. The events formed part of a *Day of Action* held on 28th October 2018 at the theatre (Snow, 2017c). Simon Stephens has observed in *A Working Diary* that, in the context of a world 'dislocated and disengaged by technology', the role of a space which actively gathers groups of people together becomes even more important (Stephens, 2016:73). However, non-traditional engagement between a venue and members of the public is complicated by a duty to manage security, the threat of violence and associated anxieties about damage to reputation that might be elevated in the context of online social networks. The *Day of Action* was an example of a theatre space attempting to take control of its unique ability to unite people in the physical world, referred to by Stephens. The performative actions on social media and in the physical space in which the play had been scheduled resulted in a heightened sense of anxiety for the artistic director, Vicky Featherstone, about the new context in which the production would be viewed at the London venue. She decided to cancel the production. This was less about London as a city, and more about the poignancy of the specific associations with the Royal Court, the venue in which Max Stafford Clark had premiered the play in 1982. This relationship will be explored more closely in Chapter 7.

What is significant in terms of a comparison with the censorship of *The Golden Dragon* (2017) by the Hackney Empire is that, like *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017), the production had toured to five venues in the UK prior to its cancellation, receiving critical acclaim. *The Golden Dragon* (2017) was observed in the sample at the Sherman Theatre in Wales where it played in the main house in September 2017 and at the Birmingham Rep, where it was performed in the studio venue in early

October 2017. Like *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017), *The Golden Dragon* (2017) was only cancelled at its London venue, the Hackney Empire and the scheduled performances at Bangor Pontio, Aldeburgh and Snape Maltings were not affected by Hackney Empire's decision. The censorship was localised. However, this does not mean that the production was censored in London because audience members in the city were more likely to be sensitive about the content of the work. Rather, the decision was taken as a direct response to external social media activism about the production, in this case about a lack of diversity in the industry.

The Golden Dragon (2017) depicts Asian characters, including 'Chinese mother', 'Chinese aunt', 'Old Asian' and 'An Asian' and is set in a Chinese restaurant, however it was performed by an all-white cast of performers. The theatre's prominent city location would be attractive to protesters seeking to build profile for their campaign. Whilst this thesis does not seek to explore the complex relationship between the campaign for greater diversity and censorship in British theatre and opera, the mode in which the protest against Music Theatre Wales' production was mounted is pertinent for the conclusions that are being drawn about liquid censorship here and the management of arts venues.

Crucially, like *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*, the production's cancellation was uniquely connected to a particular venue and a specific point in time when an agenda was being lobbied for on social media. Conversations about diversity are not new in British theatre, however the ability to galvanise support and activism on social media is. If we refer back to Lyn Gardner's four-star review of Ramin Gray's production of Schimmelpfennig's *The Golden Dragon* in 2011 for the Actor's Touring Company at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, the theatre critic observed:

The first thing you notice – though it is set in and around a Chinese restaurant – is that there are no Asian actors involved. But then this is a production in which the old play the young, and one species plays another, and gender is entirely fluid, too (Gardner, 2011).

The Actors Touring Company's earlier production successfully toured to thirteen venues, including London, Edinburgh, Manchester, Hull, Oxford, Holt, Folkestone, Bristol, Ireland and venues in India. Gardner, who is a powerful advocate for greater diversity in the arts, appeared to be untroubled about the lack of Asian actors in this review, on the basis of the production's form.

Schimmelpfennig's play explores human trafficking, slave labour and rape, in a surreal way which rejects realism. Set in a Chinese takeaway, the performers present multiple characters, including an evil ant and a cricket. In a review of the premiere of Schimmelpfennig's play in Berlin, Christopher

Schmidt observed that the production's surreal 'fairytale' form was deliberately employed to assist in side-stepping the controversy associated with the challenging themes being explored:

Schimmelpfennig avoids the risks inherent in a theatre of outrage by cooling down his dramaturgy in epic style, adding fairytale ingredients and chopping up the scenes like the little morsels on a sushi tray. (Schmidt, 2010 cited in Goethe Institut, 2019).

From a form perspective, a case for the production can credibly be argued on the basis that it is a post dramatic text that works with 'China' as a parable for a wider network of global exploitation. However, this form resonates for a knowing, theatre going audience and might be dismissed by others, as was the case when the work was adapted by Music Theatre Wales. The objections raised in Hackney about *The Golden Dragon* (2017) did not engage closely with the production's content, rather the absence of Asian performers or what Daniel Yorke and Kumiko Mendl have described as 'yellowface casting' (Yorke, cited in Masso, 2017b). The term 'yellowface' owes its origins to the depiction of East Asian characters by white actors in American films such as *Charlie Chan* (1926). British theatre came under strong criticism earlier in 2017 for its casual 'yellowface' casting, following the Print Room's all-white casting of Howard Barker's *In the Depths of Dead Love*, which is set in Medieval China. Kumiko Mendl, artistic director of the British East-Asian theatre company, Yellow Earth Theatre, was vocal in the criticisms that were made both against the revival of Barker's work and *The Golden Dragon* (2017). In the Print Room instance, the protesters demonstrated outside the theatre venue, securing national press attention. Gardner's response suggests that six years prior to the Music Theatre Wales adaptation, it was not considered a problem for the play to be depicted by an all-white cast. However, I would question how Ramin Gray's production might have been received now that the issue of diversity in the arts, and particularly 'yellowface' casting, is receiving more urgent press attention and far greater scrutiny from a dedicated group of activists on social media.

Hackney Empire was operating under a relatively new leadership structure shortly prior to the announcement on the 12th October 2017 about the cancellation of *The Golden Dragon* (2017). Jo Hemmant, who was named in the Stage as the new executive director, and Yamin Choudury, the new artistic director, were described as individuals who would, 'embody the values of quality, diversity and engagement that Hackney Empire stands for' (Snow, 2018). This statement from the theatre emphasises the importance of diversity for the venue. In an interview with Andrew Barnes at the time of his appointment, Choudury stressed that 'Hackney has a history of embracing new and exciting cultures, stories and ideas and I'm very lucky to be a part of it!' (Choudury, cited in Barnes, 2018). Kumiko Mendl directly criticised the contradiction between the themes of *The Golden Dragon* and the casting decisions:

It doesn't make sense that it's an all-Caucasian cast, particularly when it is about nationalities, ethnicities and the immigrant experience. You can't say that the immigrant experience is purely just a white experience. That doesn't make sense at all (Mendl, cited in Gayle, 2018).

It is likely that the venue would have been anxious about becoming a focal point for criticisms, both online and outside the venue, about a visiting production which was under the spotlight for a lack of diversity in its casting.

According to data from the 2011 Census, 58.4% of people living in Hackney were born in England. The remaining 41.6% described themselves as immigrants, with the highest responses for country of birth being 2.7% in Nigeria, 1.8% in Jamaica, 1.7% in South America, 1.6% in Ireland, 1.5% in Ghana, 1.3% in Scotland, 1.2% in India, 1.1% in the United States and 1.1% Bangladesh (ONS, 2013). The London borough of Hackney is one of the most diverse regions in the UK. Like the Royal Court, which had a localised relationship with the social media activism surrounding the #MeToo campaign, Hackney Empire would have had a strong connection to the online activism against *The Golden Dragon*, which focussed on diversity and representing immigrants in Britain. This is reflected in the company's statement about the work:

The debate aroused by the non-Asian casting in *The Golden Dragon* compromises the Empire's commitment and position as a champion of diversity and accessibility across the theatre industry, and therefore the decision has been taken to withdraw the forthcoming performance on 31 October...Music Theatre Wales were renting the theatre for this production and Hackney Empire has not been involved in any part of the production or casting process (Masso, 2017b).

The statement underlines a transactional relationship between the visiting producer, Music Theatre Wales, and the receiving theatre, Hackney Empire. This is significant, because it makes it clear that the theatre was not creatively committed to the production, which represented a source of revenue. On this basis, it is unsurprising that the theatre was swift to disassociate itself from the production and the controversy.

Where the information about a production's status was available in the theatre sample (see Appendix 1), a total of 990 productions were categorised as 'visiting'. This means that the producers responsible for the work were credited in the marketing copy, and the host venue had a transactional rather than a creative relationship with the production. This number was significantly higher than the 254 in-house productions and the 222 co-productions that were recorded in the sample. What this data reveals, is that a notable part of the role of British theatre executives involves facilitating the contracting of productions that have been conceived and created by other

arts organisations. It is unsurprising that a hosting venue might be less likely to stand up to protests against a project it has not been invested in creatively.

Finance and Censorship

According to the accounts held at Companies House published on 31st March 2018, Hackney Empire had experienced 'very difficult trading conditions during the first part of 2017/18' (Hackney Empire Ltd, 2018:7). This resulted in an operating deficit of £207,861 compared to the previous year's £93,396. The precarious finances had been caused by a cancelled booking, the liquidation of the theatre's catering provider and a reduction in core funding from the London Borough of Hackney, as part of the nation-wide cuts to local authority financial support for arts institutions. Furthermore, as a result of its poor finances, the theatre had been forced to abandon the development of a co-production with Opera Philadelphia, *We Shall Not Be Moved*, which had already incurred £100,000 in costs (Ibid.). According to Nicholas Serota (2017) in his comments about the *Rights, Risks and Reputations* training course, theatres are increasingly less likely to support controversial repertoire on the basis that it may cost them time and financial resources (What Next?, 2017). Moreover, the activists who were mobilising online against *The Golden Dragon* had been drawing a direct relationship between the validity of the work and the legitimacy of public funding. For example, Associate Professor Amanda Rogers posted on twitter:

Today I am writing to the Chief Executive of @Ars_Wales [The Arts Council of Wales] to complain about @MTW_tweets & their yellowface production of The Golden Dragon. They are recipients of public funding, & their casting policy does not align with either INSPIRE or the WELL BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT (Rogers, 2017).

Hackney Empire was operating with a significant deficit and it is highly likely that the decision to cancel *The Golden Dragon* was in part motivated by financial concerns surrounding the possibility of protest or threats to the theatre's funding. The relationship highlighted here between finance and censorship is explored in more depth in Chapter 4 as part of the case study on the National Youth Theatre's cancellation of *Homegrown* in 2015.

Music Theatre Wales was contrite in its response to the online protests against *The Golden Dragon*. The production company suggested that the experience had been a 'transformative' one and that as a result, it would review its casting processes and meet with those who criticised them in order to take the feedback on board (Music Theatre Wales, 2017). The organisation was quick to observe that its talented company of artists were not responsible for the errors in judgement made. Furthermore, Mendl acknowledged in her criticism of the production that the issue of diversity is not unique to Music Theatre Wales but part of a systemic problem, 'Obviously this is the opera

world, which is notoriously un-diverse' (Mendl, cited in Gayle, 2018). It is not uncommon for productions that experience liquid censorship to become a focal point for an industry-wide problem. This act of censorship was not about the content of the play. Unlike *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*, in which the decision to censor the work was reversed, the consequence of the criticisms made against *The Golden Dragon* was that a critically acclaimed production was silenced. It seems unlikely that denying the final scheduled performance of the opera was a proportionate response. Like *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017), the work could have been viewed in the context of the debate, rather than closing this down because of a managerial anxiety about the repercussions and possible protests outside the building. The notoriety of the production continued when it was nominated for the Welsh Theatre Awards. This resulted in further online protests and the permanent closure of the Awards in December 2018.

The fact that the data sample recorded both *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* and *The Golden Dragon* taking place elsewhere in the UK, assists in demonstrating a significant driver behind liquid censorship, which Bauman foresaw in his discussion about a new type of management culture in the liquid modern age. These decisions were provoked by an anxiety about agendas raised in a forum which is disconnected from the content of the theatre repertoire. Instead, a new type of lobbying connected to criticism about what the theatre critic Lyn Gardner has referred to as 'the many different kinds of inequality in the industry' (Gardner, 2018) has an impact on decision making. When this anxiety is considered in terms of the cost of security, potential damage to reputation, a perceived threat to the organisation's stated values and possible funding sources, it is unsurprising that individual productions will be closed in order to satisfy the social mood. It is significant that these decisions and instances of liquid censorship appear to be localised. Whilst society may be adapting to the internet and social media in a globalised era, it is the localised sensitivities of an engaged and specific audience who want responses to their concerns that stand out. These groups appear to have recognised that they are more likely to gain recognition and attention if they select a specific production and space. Localised acts of liquid censorship are a potential route to visibility in the liquid modern age, where the flow of information described by Bauman is continuous and overwhelming.

The theatre sample (see Appendix 1) has acted as cartographer's guide to a recent period in contemporary British theatre history, highlighting some important trends in the types of work that has been cancelled or staged. The conclusions that have been drawn regarding audience sensitivities, the relationship between theatre and social media, the impact of financial resilience

and funding and the challenges in presenting work with child actors are explored in greater depth in the case study chapters that follow.

Chapter 4 - The Censorship of the National Youth Theatre's *Homegrown* (2015)

Introduction

In August 2015, the National Youth Theatre of Great Britain, hereafter referred to as the NYT, cancelled its planned production of *Homegrown*, a piece of theatre that sought to explore the radicalisation of young people in Britain. This case study incorporates insights from the freedom of information requests issued by the information activist Doug Paulley (2015), which have been itemised and analysed closely alongside press articles, primary research from an interview conducted with the production's director Nadia Latif (see Appendix 5) and published statements from the creative team. This research explores the variety of complex factors that led to the cancellation of *Homegrown* including concerns about exploring radicalisation with young performers and the organisational health of the NYT during this period. My case study probes the rationale behind the production closure to establish what might be learnt from this in terms of the wider status of theatre censorship in the UK. The analysis includes excerpts from the self-published text *Homegrown*, which was released in March 2017 (El Khairy and Latif, 2017). A point that should be made at the outset of this investigation is that the production was cancelled prior to its first public performance before an audience. Unlike instances in which theatre productions are cancelled as a reaction to community protest, *Homegrown* did not reach the end of its rehearsal process. It was the censorship of the work that resulted in controversy.

Homegrown was a piece of theatre created by playwright Omar El-Khairy, director Nadia Latif and a group of 112 young people who were members of the NYT. The participants were auditioned and selected by the creative team from a pool of over approximately 400 applicants. The production sought to explore radical Islam, investigating what might attract young Muslim people in Britain to an extremist ideology. The first part of the production is set in a school, designed to be a promenade performance in which the audience witness scenes of dialogue between young people. The audience arrive expecting to see a show that is delayed and are instead led through the immersive scenes. Within this section, characters voice racist, homophobic, anti-liberal, anti-western, anti-Semitic or Islamophobic sentiments. The promenade section is the part of *Homegrown* that the NYT participants assisted in creating through devised rehearsals. The second section of the production, entitled the 'show', is a piece of community verbatim gathered from non-Muslims, which culminates in a piece of fake verbatim from the Muslim community's perspective, written by the playwright. 70% of the production's script was agreed prior to the start of rehearsals, with the remaining 30% of the promenade scenes devised with the young participants (Index on Censorship,

2015). In order to finish the published text, members of the original NYT company of young people participated in the remaining two weeks of rehearsals after the cancellation.

Background to the NYT

The NYT was established in 1956 and presents itself in marketing materials as the first Youth Theatre not only in the UK but globally. The organisation seeks to provide performance and technical theatre opportunities for young people between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five. The CEO of the NYT, Paul Roseby, was a former member of the company in his youth and is an enthusiastic ambassador for its work and importance. The organisation demonstrates and promotes diversity: 'The 2016 membership is 55% female, 72% from outside London and 22% from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups' (Smurthwaite, 2016). Members do not have to pay a fee to be part of the NYT, potentially making some of the barriers to entry less challenging for young people attempting to participate from financially disadvantaged backgrounds. Entrance into the company is through an audition process, with places allocated according to excellence and a deliberate emphasis on encouraging an elite based on ability rather than economic status. The NYT offers paid for training course opportunities with bursaries available for young people who cannot afford to pay to participate; 150 of these bursaries were allocated in 2015/2016. Approximately 500 members of the NYT are admitted annually, spanning acting and technical disciplines.

It is worth reflecting on the public persona that Roseby has presented during his tenure, to explore his management style. Roseby is not the type of leader to shy away from challenging public conversations or strong statements. He has previously courted controversy over his suggestion that the NYT might be a viable replacement for expensive training at one of the established drama schools in the UK (Wyatt, 2013). Roseby has also advocated the removal of GCSE drama from the curriculum, suggesting that theatre craft should be used as a more practical, methodological approach to mainstream subjects and that the perceived 'soft' status of the Drama qualification at this level causes wider cultural damage to theatre as an art-form (Cassidy, 2014). This is not to say that Roseby is suggesting the removal of drama from schools. He states that a certain number of hours in each week should be dedicated to the discipline, as is the case for sports. Roseby has championed the idea of having arts days, in addition to sports days, in order that elite art might be awarded the same status as elite sport (Smurthwaite, 2016).

Finances and Governance

The NYT operates as a charity and is part of the Arts Council England's national portfolio of funded organisations. According to the 2016 Annual Report, this represents 13% of its annual income (National Youth Theatre of Great Britain (The), 2016:14). Paul Roseby led the NYT through its financial crisis in 2012, streamlining both the administration and programming (Smurthwaite, 2016). The NYT was in a situation where its debts were mounting, compounded by the discovery of a human error in its accounting figures which forced the organisation into 'special measures' with the Arts Council (Clark, 2012). A rescue sum of £200,000 was allocated under stringent management conditions, such as the reduction in staffing led by Roseby. By 2014, Roseby commented that the organisation has made 'a rapid return to financial and organisational health after a restructure of its management and an increase in private funding' (BBC, 2014). With debts of £650,000, Roseby has suggested that, had 2012 not been the year in which the youth theatre was participating in the Olympics, it might have closed (Smurthwaite, 2016). It is likely that the criticism of investment into the Olympics that is made in *Homegrown*, 'we have Paralympics every four years to make it look like we give a fuck' (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 2.10:79), may have caused some embarrassment to the Charity. The text alone did not cause the cancellation of *Homegrown* as this case study will explain. However, the lessons from the NYT's near closure and enduring implications for the charity's governance are significant in understanding the conflict in agendas between the management and the creative team, complicating the fragile and interdependent balance in power proffered by Adorno (1991) and discussed by Bauman (2011).

One of the most crucial shifts in the NYT's governance that is worth reflecting on within this case study is the move towards private financial support:

We've learnt to build up our reserves to support the core. It's still the thing that keeps me awake at night because you never know how much is enough and you never know how long private benefactors are going to want to support you. (Roseby, cited in Smurthwaite, 2016).

It is clear that Roseby was anxious to preserve the future of the organisation. According to the Annual report and financial statements for the accounting period 2015/2016, the surplus that the NYT recorded for the period ending 31st March 2016 was £19,113 (National Youth Theatre of Great Britain (The), 2016:14), which was significantly lower than the £454,711 in the period 2014/2015 (National Youth Theatre of Great Britain (The), 2015:12). This significant drop in surplus was attributed to a financially successful international project with Saudi Aramco in 2014/2015, which was not continued in 2015/2016 (National Youth Theatre of Great Britain (The), 2016:14). Additionally, the NYT announced a partnership in March 2015 with Live Nation Middle East to stage projects in the UAE. In an article for *Arts Professional* (2015), Roseby cited the economic benefit of

expanding internationally, given the small portion of its income attributable to the Arts Council England and the need to achieve financial stability:

With our Arts Council England subsidy representing just 10% of our turnover in 2014/15, income from international activity has become an important part of our business model (Roseby, 2015).

This strategic direction is directly challenged in the *Homegrown* text: 'We're not at war with radical Islam because we're standing in line, playing kiss-ass with these Saudi businessmen' (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 4.4:115). The international focus in the NYT's business plan may have heightened the stakes on politically challenging dialogue. A Facebook event in 2015 announced a high-profile celebration of the new partnership with Live Nation Middle East. The guest list included senior industry executives, MPs and celebrities (National Youth Theatre, 2015). It may have been embarrassing for the organisation to stage such strongly worded criticisms about politicians that emerged during the *Homegrown* devising process, such as: 'So what if I described our MPs as having the brain cells of an egotistical, fart crunching, retarded sloth - it's true' (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 4.4:115.). There may have been institutional concerns about a risk of pecuniary consequences of being involved in a controversy about radical Islam, whilst the NYT was expanding into the Middle East and celebrating this new relationship with both leading politicians and industry executives.

It is noteworthy that in 2018, the Royal Court Theatre experienced controversy for the cancellation of *Pah La* by the Indian playwright, Abhishek Majumdar. The production, which explored the 2008 Lhasa uprising in Tibet against Chinese authorities, had been in development for three years. According to Majumdar, the rehearsals were scheduled and the poster was ready (Quinn, 2018). Accusations were made that the British Council had "pressurised" (Majumdar, cited in Quinn, 2018) the theatre to withdraw because of sensitivities relating to a writing programme with sixteen writers in Beijing that the Royal Court had been working on. In a statement reported in *The Guardian* about the incident, the theatre commented, 'The Royal Court always seeks to protect and not to silence any voice. In an international context, this can sometimes be more complex across communities' (Quinn, 2018). The comment demonstrates an example of an artistic institution shifting the terms of its approach to censorship in order to prioritise an important and lucrative international relationship.

An Artistic Director or CEO of an arts organisation must balance financial and creative priorities, as well as risks. Celebrated director Nicolas Kent left the Tricycle Theatre in 2011, a space that has been admired for its bold political theatre productions, on the basis that the loss of

£350,000 in Arts Council funding would increase dependency on private patronage. As Norton-Taylor observes:

philanthropic donations, which the coalition government suggests theatres should rely on in future, tend to follow the theatres and programmes that audiences who make up the donors are comfortable with. It becomes a circle closed to those directors and theatres trying to promote cutting-edge or political work (2011).

In a financial climate of reduced government funding, risk taking for arts organisations becomes more challenging. In this instance, the 41% decrease in box office income for *Homegrown* would have been softened by the significant increase in Theatre Tax Relief (TTR) for the period, a new policy initiative allowing for increased tax-deductible expenditure for productions. This figure increased from £2,500 in the 2014/2015 accounting period to £62,630 in 2016. Paul Roseby commented that he had conducted a 'SWOT analysis' of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the email sent from Beth Watling on Roseby's behalf, 'Urgent Msg from Paul' (Watling, 2015) to key stakeholders including the Arts Council and trustees on the 30th July 2015, in which he highlighted his plans to cancel the work (see Appendix 8). This indicates that financial concerns were part of the decision-making process. The loss of earnings through ticket sales would have been less significant than the potential risk of damage that *Homegrown* might have caused to future lucrative partnerships. In light of the industry TTR policy, the losses could be mitigated somewhat.

In the email sent on 30 July, 'damage or risk to the NYT's reputation and membership' (Watling, 2015) was cited as a key factor (see Appendix 8). According to Roseby, the 'level of attrition was high' (ibid.) during the early rehearsal period for *Homegrown*, with parental complaints reaching the senior management at the NYT. The provision of courses which are paid for by participants provides a significant source of income for the NYT. Fundraising accounted for 28% of the charity's income in 2015/2016 and courses/training represented a 34% contribution (National Youth Theatre of Great Britain (The), 2016:14), which demonstrates the importance of both income sources to the organisation and the influence they would likely have on decision-making. Without a strong brand, the revenue from courses would risk falling and the charity's income would likely decrease. However, the scale of these complaints is questionable. According to the 30 July email, 'We have had conversations with three parents – two have expressed grave concern over the direction of the piece' (Watling, 2015, see Appendix 8). Given the number of participants, this level of criticism seems low and manageable. Of the 112 original cast members, 102 published names were credited in the *Homegrown* text edition that was released in March 2017 (El Khairy and Latif, 2017). This indicates that among a very high proportion of the young participants involved there was a strong sense of loyalty and ownership over the work.

Financial considerations play a role generally in decision-making about programming and may have contributed to the outcome for *Homegrown*. Private benefactors have been known to disassociate themselves from funding organisations involved in controversy and staging a piece about radical Islam may have caused sponsorship anxieties. Evidence points towards institutions being concerned about the risks of causing offence to their funders. For example, the Index on Censorship cite a scenario in 2011 at the London Literature Festival taking place in the Southbank Centre where a duty manager level vetting process attempted to ensure that material was not critical of Shell (Index on Censorship, 2011). It was made clear by the organisation's artistic director Jude Kelly that this was not a Southbank Centre policy and had happened as a result of management confusion:

Nevertheless, we are to blame for not giving staff a clear guide that supports them [sic] understand [sic] the apparent contradictions that can seem to arise in a world were [sic] sponsorship and free speech live side by side (Platform London, 2011).

If an organisation has faced severe financial hardship and is increasingly reliant on private support, it is conceivable that staff might feel the need to be both responsible and careful about situations that could lead to the removal of sponsorship.

One of the most significant donors for the NYT is Jewish businessman David Pearl, through his David Pearlman Charitable Trust. *Homegrown* provides space on stage for anti-Semitic dialogue:

G - Don't call me a Nazi. I'm no fucking Nazi. But it was them who started that war - it was people like him. The Jews were boycotting German goods - crippling Europe. Yeah, crimes were done against them, of course - but they had it coming to them, those crimes don't even compare to what these Yids have done - just look at Palestine (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 4:150).

The scene comes to an end without a counter argument made to 'G' who attempts to continue his game of football and the promenade moves on. Whilst the production is representing a bigoted view and this is made clear within the way the text is framed, presenting anti-Semitism on stage is challenging, emotive and likely to cause offence. In a rap scene during a different promenade tour another anti-Semitic line is included: 'White boy to Muslim boy – This Jew's nose is so big 'cause air is completely free' (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 2.4:63). It must be made clear that there is no evidence to suggest that Mr Pearl had any involvement in the cancellation of *Homegrown*; but this language would have caused anxiety for the Charity. In the same year, 2015, Transport for London censored a poster for the critically acclaimed production *Bad Jews* because it might cause 'widespread and serious offence' (Wyatt, 2015), despite complaints from the Jewish writer and cast members and the rebuttal that the production could 'not be less anti-Semitic' (Moar, cited in Wyatt, 2015). Associations with anti-Semitism would have caused branding and reputation concerns.

Fear of the risk of causing cultural or religious offence might also be attributed to other significant donors. The NYT lists under its supporters on its website the Laing Family Trust, which is 'engaged in promoting Christian faith and values' (Laing Family Trust, 2017). Another sponsor, the Mercers' Company, states that it is 'patron of a number of benefices in the Church of England (i.e. it has the right to appoint the vicar or rector of a parish) and maintains close links with its affiliated units in the United Kingdom's Armed Services' (Mercers Company, 2017). Additionally, the Henry Smith Foundation has a specific fund available for Christian projects: 'Please note we are only able to fund work which promotes faith under the Christian Projects Grants Programme. All our other programmes will not fund any work which includes the promotion of religion' (Henry Smith Foundation, 2017). A controversy surrounding a production depicting issues relating to Islam may not be something that these sponsors would wish to be associated with given their policies on religion and governance. There is no evidence to suggest that any of these charities intervened in the decision to cancel *Homegrown*. Indeed, according to the accounts registered with Companies House for the period 2015/2016, the Henry Smith Foundation is the only private sponsor of these three listed (National Youth Theatre of Great Britain (The), 2016). However, it is important to reflect on the interaction of values between the supporter and the supported.

There are many references to Christianity in *Homegrown*. One scene is dedicated to singing Muslim verse in the style of a Christian hymn, with the stage directions specifying 'Whatever music you write to go with the lyrics, it must feel distinctly Christian, grandiose and stern' (El Khairy and Latif, 2017:56). The content of the hymn however refers to Islam:

Muhammad
Herald of good tidings

Father are you fighting unbelievers?
Mother are you hiding, is sister too?
Brother are you fighting, don't deceive us?
Sister still hiding, where are you? (Ibid.)

The lyrics contain a call to fight 'unbelievers', placing the theme of radical Islam within a Christian and crucially, a homegrown context. However, the aesthetic corruption of a religious ritual might be perceived as something that could risk causing offence to Christian groups who have been known to protest against productions that are deemed to be blasphemous, such as the high-profile lobbying by the organisation Christian Voice against the satirical musical, *Jerry Springer the Opera* (2005) (Toynbee, 2006).

Cautious programming is a potential outcome of financial dependency. The recipient of the funding needs to maintain a strong relationship with financial patrons and might seek to avoid highly controversial or sensitive material. Private or institutional self-censorship can be difficult to track but to deny that this type of strategic decision-making is taking place or that it has an impact on artistic liberty would be inaccurate. However, the NYT could not be accused of engaging in cautious programming in this case because they commissioned *Homegrown*. The organisation consciously decided to engage with a controversial theme, or one of Bauman's 'contemporary menaces' (2011:11). In order to assess a relationship between censorship, funding anxieties and the decision to cancel *Homegrown*, it is important to scrutinise the period between the project's commissioning and its cancellation.

The Commission: *Trojan Horse*

The working title for the commission that came to be known as *Homegrown* in May 2015 was *Trojan Horse*. The earliest publicly available description of the project was in the Minutes of the NYT Council Meeting on 30 October 2014: 'It will be a liberal drama exploring the notion of faith schools and diversity in schools plus it's a great casting opportunity' (National Youth Theatre of Great Britain, 2014). This statement implies that the project was seen as a good opportunity to create roles for a diverse group of young people, which would sit well with the NYT's goal for inclusivity. The original inspiration for the commission was the Operation Trojan Horse controversy, in which Ofsted suggested it had amassed evidence that certain conservative Muslims were pushing a Sunni religious agenda in a group of Birmingham schools, with associated risks of extremism and radicalisation in young people (Wintour, 2014).

Trojan Horse was conceived as an immersive performance, with a cast of approximately one hundred, which was to be led by a 'British Arabic writer' according to the PDF description of the project (National Youth Theatre of Great Britain, 2015e). The actors would create a Greek Chorus, comprised of the stakeholders involved in the Trojan Horse controversy, from pupils to school governors, teachers and the local authority, drawing influence from *The Aeneid* (Ibid.). A coach would arrive at a school open day called 'Trojan Tours' representing the contemporary Trojan Horse that would provoke 'chaos' (Ibid.). To put this project in context, the use of promenade and immersive performance techniques with school groups and young performers is a commonplace technique for exploring issue-based drama. The early marketing plans in the Trojan Horse PDF document (Ibid.) suggests that the audience would be segregated according to their pro or anti-faith school stance, creating a central, binary dramatic tension for the piece to focus on. This early

production plan did not come to fruition but was developed by a hired creative team into *Homegrown*.

Homegrown

Omar El Khairy was commissioned as the designated British Arabic writer, as noted in the NYT *Activity Report* on 29th January 2015 and Nadia Latif was brought in as a Sudanese/British director. Together the creative team made a number of changes to the planned commission, which led to the creation of *Homegrown*. Many features of the original plan for the production remained intact such as the large scale of participants, its immersive promenade form and the concept of a Greek Chorus. However, the emphasis on Operation Trojan Horse and therefore the connection to *The Aeneid* was discarded in favour of a more general exploration of attitudes towards Muslims in Britain. The press release statement made by El Khairy and Latif emphasised the intentional changes put in place to how the production was made:

to give ourselves fully and honestly to this piece we had to try to redefine the terms on which it was to be made... We don't have an agenda or seek to offer a solution but we hope that audiences will leave the piece feeling something within them shift. The opportunity to work alongside so many young people to create this piece and to be able to put the production on inside a working school has been fundamental to it's [sic] development. Consequently the politics [sic] of *Homegrown* can be found in its form as much as any message it may hold in regards to Islamic extremism, radicalisation or Islamophobia (The Cornershop PR, 2015a)

The statement demonstrates a deliberate change between the planned commission *Trojan Horse* and *Homegrown*. Latif suggested in her interview for this thesis that the creative team and participants experimented with form to recreate some of the horror and confusion around radicalisation and terror and to disrupt expectations. The NYT had followed a preconceived narrative on extremism with their original plans for *Trojan Horse* and the artists wished to depart from this in their work. *Homegrown* sought to provoke 'conversations' (Latif, 2017:233) amongst audience members, rather than giving them clear, binary choices to examine such as a pro or anti-faith school stance. Latif and El Khairy defied the Western Canon framework of *The Trojan Horse* and the *Aeneid*. In its place, the artists allowed for a more uncomfortable process of cultural exploration and belonging. This defiance in the relationship between artist and manager led to an act of institutional self-censorship. As I will argue in my case study, this decision and the resulting relationship between Latif, El Khairy and Roseby was a crucial driver behind the choice to cancel the work.

Venue

The NYT had sought to use the City of London School for Girls as a venue, followed by Chelsea College of Art, but neither was available for the project. Raines Foundation School in Bethnal Green was selected by the creative team on the basis that its architecture provided a stimulating background for a promenade performance. Whilst it has not been possible to view Lorna Ritchie's original design for the *Homegrown* set, Latif described some of the details at interview. The design, which was largely inspired by the combination of Victorian and modern elements to the architecture in the Bethnal Green school, would recreate an uncanny sensation, 'that sense of I've been here before, but something is different' (Latif, 2017:234). This might involve furniture on the ceiling, or obscured windows instead of glass, creating an unsettling atmosphere. Latif pointed to the influence of teenage horror movies fused with Victorian body horror and suggested that there would have been 'quite a lot of kids running screaming down corridors and sort of blood smeared on windows' (Latif, 2017:234). This immersive experience sounds thrilling, but it may have been disturbing for some sensitive audience members. Furthermore, the age of the participants complicated the nature of consent in terms of participating in the work. I shall return to this topic in Chapter 5.

The selection of the school led to some of the most significant changes to the production. Latif stated at interview that she and El Khairy felt an obligation to the community in Bethnal Green to ensure that the production explored the nuances of Muslim identity within the community. Latif commented in her interview for this thesis that she felt they 'couldn't do a show in that community and not respect that community in some way' (Latif, 2017:233). It is significant that in February 2015, six-months prior to the planned production of *Homegrown*, three school-girls from Bethnal Green left their homes to travel to Syria and join Islamic State. The girls had been radicalised. As Latif commented, 'suddenly the lens was on the place certainly' (Latif, 2017:233). The venue was not selected because of this incident; however, its influence was inevitably to become part of the external narrative.

As a result of the selection of a venue in Bethnal Green, key artistic changes were made. The premise for Latif and El Khairy's production was that the audience were about to witness a show at the school, which has been delayed. Latif (2017) explained at interview that audience members who arrived together would be split into five different tours, witnessing different scenes in the school, accompanied by tour guides who would react to the drama. When the group was reunited it would stimulate conversations about what they had seen and allow the audience to be aware that each tour had witnessed something different (2017:233). This type of immersive journey creates a live environment, with the sense that spectators have entered a space that is greater than the scenes

they have individually witnessed. In the second part, they would watch a thirty-minute production of Jean Genet's *'The Screens'*, the delayed show, selected according to Latif on the basis that it had an Arab protagonist. To make the piece more relevant for the venue they decided to 'do a piece of verbatim of the people in Bethnal Green' (Latif, 2017:233), and a choice was made to interview only non-Muslim members of the community, elucidating attitudes towards Muslims in Tower Hamlets. El Khairy created a piece of 'fake verbatim' (Ibid.) from the Muslim community's perspective, which would take the form of a Muslim minstrel show, incorporating black-face. At this stage the play would 'grind to a halt' (Ibid.), without presenting any conclusions. This content was clearly significant and will be explored in more depth within the 'Muslim Minstrel Show' section of this case study.

According to the 'History of Homegrown' outlined in the self-published text, the day after the initial press release was issued on the 2 June 2015, Raines Foundation School withdrew as the venue for the production, apparently as a result of pressure from Tower Hamlets Council (El Khairy and Latif, 2017:13). A spokesman for the local authority reportedly stated:

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 NYT. 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 (Ellis-Peterson, 2015)

It is surprising that the school was not made aware of the thematic content of *Homegrown*. The NYT had not made special provisions in the initial production plans for dealing with a project that explores radical Islam. According to Latif, she and El Khairy, they were told to remain silent about the loss of venue and to cite 'logistical reasons' in response to any enquiries until a replacement venue was secured at UCL in the London Borough of Camden (El Khairy and Latif, 2017:13). This demonstrates that the NYT felt silence was both necessary and acceptable and that the loss of the venue had made the organisation nervous about publicity. The NYT underestimated potential responses to its developing commission and had not communicated sufficiently with local authority partners and the school venue. During an interview with Purni Morrell, Artistic Director of the Unicorn Theatre, which was not about the *Homegrown* scenario but explored the process of safeguarding young people involved in artistic projects, she emphasised the importance of working with local authorities and building strong relationships for best practice. The fact that this dialogue appears to have been absent from the work demonstrates a lack of preparedness on the part of the NYT. It is irrefutable that the NYT let down its young members as a result. The production should not have been allowed into the rehearsal room because it is clear that the management had not planned sufficiently for the work. When we reflect on the comments from Tower Hamlets Council that they had not been informed about the contents, it leads to the conclusion that the NYT's production

mechanisms had failed to reach out to partners with sufficient time to ensure that the project was well supported.

Relationships

Bauman's (2005, 2011) reading of Adorno's theories on culture and administration points to an interdependent friction between administering and creating culture:

The managers-managed relationship is intrinsically agonistic; the two sides pursue opposite purposes and are able to cohabit solely in a conflict-ridden, militant and always battle-ready mode (Bauman, 2005:54).

Nadia Latif (2017) suggested at interview (see Appendix 5) that the relationship between herself and Roseby was not a good one but that she had not anticipated that this would impact the work: 'there was never any love lost between me and the artistic director of the NYT, but only in that way that I don't think you all have to be mates, do you know what I mean? I don't have to be your friend. But we can work together fine' (Latif, 2017:232). In his private email to stakeholders on 30 July 2015 Roseby stated that 'the use of language in the room has been disrespectful to NYT' (Watling, 2017, see Appendix 8). Roseby referred to the artists as having an 'extremist' agenda (Ibid.). The strength of this language shows that the relationship between the charity and the commissioned artists had broken down. The failure of this artistic relationship to flourish is significant in understanding why the production was cancelled at such short notice and to the apparent surprise of the creative team.

Latif (2017:232) explained in her interview that the NYT did not wish to have much creative involvement in the project and that once they had hired the representative Muslims, which she infers was for the purpose of 'authenticity', they allowed Latif and El Khairy to take charge of the output. The idea that Muslim artists are oppressed into a prescribed, tokenistic narrative within British theatre is something that Latif discussed, 'if we look at, for example, the status of Muslim artists the Britain today. They are only ever allowed to achieve their perceived culture, right?' (Latif, 2017:226). Roaa Ali frames this in terms of 'an increased cultural demand for authentic ethnic representations, and the Arts Council's case for diversity' (2018:378). Developing this idea within the context of Roseby's preconceptions about the subject-matter, Latif pointed to a lack of expertise within the NYT, citing that the team had not seen *Four Lions* (2010), the satirical comedy by Chris Morris which she suggests is an 'entry level' (Latif, 2017:232) view on representing Islamification and Jihad. During an exploration of the need for authenticity in artistic representation, Latif stated at interview that she does not think it is necessary:

I'm not an essentialist, I don't believe that Muslims should be the only people who make work about Muslims. Nor do I believe they make the best work necessarily. (Latif, 2017:235).

Furthermore, Latif suggested that it can be frustrating for 'artists of colour' to be shoehorned into a particular type of issue-based drama, which she suggests pre-suppose a set of judgements about the identity of the artists which are out of step with reality.

I get a lot of calls about work like that, about gun crime, and I'm like I'm not doing that. I'm not interested in it. I don't think it elevates anything. I'm also really middle-class and half-white (2017:226).

There is evidence of this frustration in El Khairy and Latif's press release about the planned production of *Homegrown*, which emphasised a deliberate shift in their creative approach to the subject matter, indicating that the artists felt they were participating in a projected narrative on radicalisation that had been prescribed for them. Latif made it clear that the artists felt they had been employed exclusively because of their cultural heritage and that this had made them uncomfortable:

We had a number of reservations about making 'a play about British Muslims going to join ISIS'. For so long, we had both resisted playing along with games of identity politics... (The Cornershop PR, 2015a).

Whilst there is more to say about the subject of diversity in British theatre, this thesis does not have the scope to fully engage with this subject matter. For the purposes of my research into the drivers behind theatre censorship, it is the fact that the NYT had planned to commission an unspecified 'Arabic playwright' for the project (National Youth Theatre of Great Britain, 2015e), which demonstrates so clearly the different stance between the NYT management staff and the commissioned artists. This disconnect between the hired artists and the creative team at the NYT *could* have manifested in a conflict about how to progress with the commission. It *could* have led to a situation where the artists were fired from the project prior to rehearsals starting if a joint approach had not been agreed. Alternatively, a connected exploration of the commission *might* have led to a full commitment to the project from both parties. Significantly, however, no such clash of creative ideas occurred, and I contend that the absence of either a mutually respectful artistic conversation, or even a heated creative disagreement, led to a distance between commissioner and the commissioned.

Latif describes *Homegrown* as 'an entirely self-generated project' suggesting that the NYT allowed them '*carte blanche*' and to 'just get on with it' (Latif, 2017:232). The liberty that comes across in this language sets a tone that is completely incongruous with the decision that was made to cancel the production. The NYT were not present during the rehearsals, 'even when we were in rehearsals, you know, they were never there. They were there at the first rehearsal and then they were there the day they fired us' (Latif, 2017:232). The perceived freedom was an illusion however, because the work was cancelled without recourse.

El Khairy (2015) implied in an interview with Hannah Ellis-Petersen that the prevailing attitude outside of the rehearsal space, within the management of the NYT and implicitly, society, was that the issue of how we discuss Islam in the UK is not as problematic as the *Homegrown* creators attempted to suggest. The creative process was in friction with a social discourse about terrorism, and its relationship with the radicalisation of young British Muslims. El Khairy implies that whilst the cancellation was abrupt, it was not wholly unexpected:

What happened with *Homegrown* was a shock but at the same time, it wasn't a complete surprise in terms of the environment we are working in... I don't think it was a watershed moment, instead it just shed light and opened up the conversation for people who presumed these issues around censorship and how we talk about Islam weren't that current or that important (El Khairy, cited in Ellis-Peterson, 2015).

The artistic liberty described by the creative team, which led the production away from its initial *Trojan Horse* framework, played a role in the ultimate cancellation of the project. Had the artists 'self-censored' their creative approach, the production may not have been cancelled. Paul Roseby and the NYT held different views on how to articulate radical Islam in the UK that did not align with the content of the commissioned project, *Homegrown*. The idea that the 'token' Muslim artists, which Latif identified herself and El Khairy as representing for the NYT (Latif, 2017:232), somehow failed to present the correct narrative on radicalisation, makes the act of institutional self-censorship highly problematic.

The aesthetic approach taken by the creative team was clearly quite a radical departure from the initial commission planned by the NYT. El Khairy wished to move away from a binary approach to Islam and extremism. As part of the August 2015 'Walking the Tightrope' project at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, El Khairy discussed the tendency to oversimplify matters into a 'good Muslim, bad Muslim' scenario, emphasising 'the very poor national narrative we have around Islam' (El Khairy, cited in Ainley-Walker, 2015). The event, which featured short plays by El Khairy, Caryl Churchill, Neil LaBute and Mark Ravenhill among others, sought to explore censorship and freedom of expression in the arts, provoked by the cancellation of *Exhibit B* (2014) at the Barbican and the *Jewish Film Festival* (2014) at the Tricycle Theatre. Interestingly, by the time El Khairy's offering reached the stage in Edinburgh, *Homegrown* too had been cancelled. He explained in an interview with *The Skinny* (Ainley-Walker, 2015) that his piece *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* (2015) was a reflection on representations of Islam post 9/11, suggesting that the tendency to homogenise artistic responses is provoked by a:

false sense that liberal theatre makers and art makers assume; that there's an unspoken bond, a kind of shared moral compass. I think they kind of arrogantly occlude

the power dynamics about who gets to speak for whom and the certain privileges for artists generally (El Khairy, cited in Ainley-Walker, 2015).

Exploring this further in the self-published edition of *Homegrown*, El Khairy advocates the opaque approach taken in the philosophy of Edouard Glissant, 'the right not to be understood on other's terms, a right to be misunderstood' (El Khairy and Latif, 2017:15). Both Latif and El Khairy have spoken about the desire to avoid representing the Muslim community through their art and the over simplification of the issues behind radicalisation. It is interesting that Roseby referred to 'editorial bias' and an 'extremist agenda' in his email, which pre-empted the cancellation of *Homegrown* in July 2015 (Watling, 2015, see Appendix 8). Perhaps the deliberately non-partisan approach taken by El Khairy and Latif was too radical and nuanced for the NYT, who had no desire to lead the revolution on how we approach the subject of radicalisation in Britain. This may have led to an impasse between the NYT's attitude to the central liberal dramatic judgements that ought to be made about radicalisation, and Latif and El Khairy's desire to place the emphasis on the variety of opinions that exist in contemporary Britain, rather than providing a conclusion.

For Bauman, part of the liquid modern approach is 'a preference for instant consumption, instant gratification and instant profit' (Bauman, 2005:59). As Latif explains at interview, the play could not provide the answers that the spectators were hoping to find, 'what you want is for us to tell you the magic secret as to why kids leave, and we don't know, of course we don't know. I mean, what do you think, because we're Muslims and I'm supposed to know why kids want to go to terrorist groups?' (Latif, 2017:231). I suggest that this is the type of answer that Roseby was hoping to provide for audiences in his initial commission, satisfying an overly simplistic, consumerist approach to controversy. The artists' failure to participate in this way was a problem for the management at the NYT. Theatre cannot hope to provide answers to questions that society is yet to fully grapple with, but this is precisely why the work that Latif and El Khairy had created was so vital and interesting. Part of theatre's purpose is to stimulate this type of reflection in order to provoke meaningful conversations.

The Language of Internal Communications at the NYT

The language employed in an Activity Report dated 28th May 2015 (National Youth Theatre of Great Britain, 2015c) describing the updated version of *Homegrown* reveals the NYT's anxieties about the project:

Homegrown promises to be a brave commentary and reflection on certain representations and temperaments that have been circulating across the media over the past 10 years regarding Islam, extremism and religion framed within an ominous storyline set in and around a school (2015).

This language betrays a sense of foreboding about *Homegrown*. In the email sent a week into the rehearsal process on 30th July 2015 (see Appendix 8) to a group of key stakeholders for the NYT including the Arts Council representatives, it was made clear that the 'looming' (Watling, 2015) production was to be cancelled. The decision to close the production had been made prior to visiting the rehearsals to see the progress of the work. This was in spite of the detail that 70% of the script had been signed off before the rehearsal process had started, with 30% to be devised by the young actors (Index on Censorship, 2015). The email from Paul Roseby (Watling, 2015) to his stakeholders, released by the FOI request (see Appendix 8), was written before the first visit to rehearsals to view the progress of the devised work, which suggests that the decision to cancel had been made principally on the basis of the signed off script. Roseby claimed that the cancellation was on the basis of creative quality and repeated requests for a completed script. However, Roseby allowed the rehearsals to commence with the young people devising content for the promenade scenes. Having not witnessed the progress, why then did he cancel on the basis of an incomplete devised process, which was scheduled to take place in rehearsal?

The nature of a devised rehearsal process is that the text will emerge from collaborative group work, so by giving *Homegrown* the green-light to go into rehearsals, Roseby would have been aware that the full script would not be available in a completed form until the devised process was more progressed. Either the relationship was so poor that the communication had broken down between the management and creative team, or Roseby's justification attempted to mask other concerns about the production. Nadia Latif (2017) suggested at interview (see Appendix 5) that the NYT had started investigating a cancellation before the rehearsals had started: 'they had put the brakes on nearly immediately, so it had nothing to do with what we were doing in rehearsals at all' (Latif, 2017:232). If this is the case, it was unfair to both the creative team and the young people involved to cite the quality of their work as a justification for the cancellation.

Marketing and Media

There were clearly different risk scenarios between the *Trojan Horse* commission that had been planned prior to the Bethnal Green incident and the evolving *Homegrown* project. *Trojan Horse* sought to explore accusations of systemic radicalisation that were alleged to have taken place in a different city to the performance venue. *Homegrown* was set to take place at a school venue in a community that had recently been under the global media spotlight for the demonstrable impact of radicalisation. Whilst the incident in Birmingham focussed on school infrastructures, the Bethnal

Green news story specifically depicted three vulnerable schoolgirls. The focus of the Birmingham incident was on bureaucracy, process and power structures, however in Bethnal Green the media showed video footage and images of three young female faces engaged in international travel to a war zone to meet an unknown fate. The emotional connection to the London incident would resonate more powerfully for media outlets and created both imagery and a narrative that the public could connect to. The artistic treatment of an emotionally charged subject would be likely to attract attention and criticism. Whilst *Trojan Horse* might be viewed as a distanced, theoretical reflection on the issue of cultural integration, radicalisation and religious boundaries anchored in a classic form of the Aeneid, *Homegrown* could be perceived as the artistic representation of something real. Indeed, the incorporation of verbatim testimony sourced within the community from which the girls departed must have contributed to this. The immediacy of the representation, which was to take place six months after the girls left for Syria would certainly have had an impact on the ultimate closure of *Homegrown*.



Figure 6: *Trojan Horse* draft image (NYT, 2015) Figure 7: *Homegrown* image (NYT, 2015)

The contrast between each production is highlighted in the planned marketing imagery for *Trojan Horse* and *Homegrown* (see Figure 6 and 7). Whilst it must be acknowledged that the early promotional design for *Trojan Horse* was in draft form, if this is considered in the context of the wider changes to the initial commission, we can learn something about the aesthetic intentions for each piece. The draft *Trojan Horse* design (see Figure 6) depicts a formal group of school children, wearing a smart uniform with only a small amount of flesh on show in the centre of the picture. The skirts are long with grey or black tights and flat shoes, suggesting a conservative environment. The image only depicts a third of the girls' bodies from behind, making the spectator an external viewer looking in at the group rather than inviting an emotional connection with an individual. The image

communicates that this is a drama about a school and suggests that conformity and rules may be an important theme. The noticeably different casual stance of one of the girls at the centre of the image implies that the drama might rest within an attempt to resist or confront the status quo within a group. The leg and foot create a diagonal angle in opposition to the vertical lines of the other legs in the picture, emphasising the balance and off-balance at the heart of the drama. By contrast, the *Homegrown* image (see Figure 7) offers vibrant colours, with contemporary, urban graffiti in the background. It depicts three girls, immediately drawing a connection between the production and the three teenagers who departed Bethnal Green to join ISIS in Syria. All three girls are veiled with no flesh on show and the central figure is wearing the most conservative full veil in black. The girl at the centre of the image is striking the most defiant and dominant pose, with her arms folded whilst the girls on either side lean into her. This may have been staged to represent the dramatic tension surrounding radicalisation within the piece. All three girls are facing forward and looking directly at the camera, with a fixed gaze. This pose is confrontational, engaging with the spectator head on whilst also suggesting that this is a personal story about these three individuals.

In both the image created for *Homegrown* and the press release issued on 13 July 2015 by The Cornershop PR (2015a), it is clear that the NYT's marketing material was leveraging the recent incident in Bethnal Green rather than avoiding it. This conscious engagement with controversy potentially betrays a consumerist approach to a contemporary menace. The introductory headline stated that: 'In response to three girls leaving Bethnal Green to join ISIS a cast of 112 take over entire school in brand new immersive production' (The Cornershop PR, 2015b). The sheer scale of this project and its proximity to an event with such a high level of national interest must have caused high-stakes anxiety for the institution, and so it is interesting that they deliberately marketed the work in this way. The combination of the immersive form and emphasis on the intersection between the real example of radicalised girls and the work appears to have participated in the neo-liberal marketing technique described by Alston:

immersive theatre... is commodifiable given its apparently neoliberal value set, rendering the transition from the artistic to the business sphere fairly smooth ...after all, risk, for some, is sexy. Where there is a desire for the sexual, in any of its manifestations, there is usually an industry for it as well, no matter how niche (2013:135-6).

This was not a small-scale piece of youth theatre being conducted in an obscure hall within a community that had no investment into the thematic content. The NYT was offering audiences a 'brand new' controversial tour of radicalisation with an experiential taste of the pathway to terror through a sensory experience incorporating real young people in the real community that the real girls had recently departed to join Islamic State. Just as Colebrook has described a fascination with

the figure of lost children as a form of ‘cultural pornography’ (2009:43), Alston emphasises a desire to participate in something risky that he equates to a sexual impulse. It is noteworthy that the press release issued included an extended direct quotation from the creative team about the work as an explanatory description of *Homegrown*. This may suggest that the NYT was attempting to place some distance between itself and the project through the structure of its marketing content and did not have a clear understanding of the production’s narrative. However, it is perhaps more likely that they sought to emphasise the authenticity of the immersive product on offer.

According to Latif in her interview, the NYT received an early and unprecedented amount of press attention from non-traditional and high-profile media outlets, such as the ‘*New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and *CNN*’ (Latif, 2017:232). Despite its impressive alumni, the NYT would not typically attract this level of international press attention for its productions. This interest might legitimately cause concern for the management team about the international media judgements that could be made and the associated risks for the charity’s reputation. This suggestion is reinforced in Paul Roseby’s email to the Arts Council released by the FOI request (see Appendix 8), which stated that the marketing agency, The Cornerstone PR, had advised the NYT about *Homegrown*’s atypical press attention which was ‘not all from favourable theatre loving media’ (Watling, 2015). The NYT experienced institutional anxiety about the implications of staging a large-scale piece of immersive theatre with young people based on radicalisation under high-profile media scrutiny. The associated costs in resources involved in dealing with extensive media requests may have also been a cause for concern, particularly given that the Charity was working with an external press agent. Given the NYT’s recent recovery from financial instability, it was unsurprising that the organisation would seek to avoid global media controversy, which might have an impact on its international business strategy.

The *Homegrown* Text

This section of the case study refers to the text in detail to draw out elements that might be considered to be controversial, such as identity and stereotyping, violence, terrorism and other potentially sensitive material that might explain the censorship of the work. The original *Trojan Horse* commission was described as a ‘liberal drama’ (NYT, 2014), however a dominant feature of the *Homegrown* text is its critique of the liberal position. A scene that exemplifies this tension neatly is the fast-paced stand-up comedy scene about archetypal ‘Muslims’ and ‘Liberals’ that takes place during one of the promenade tours. Within the liberal jokes section is the prescient gag, ‘What

happened to the end of this joke about white liberals? Censorship'. (2017:124). Like much of the text in *Homegrown*, the scene employs humour to ridicule identity politics.

The idea of stereotyping and objectifying members of society in multicultural Britain is emphasised through the choice and distinction between character names. The only characters given names in *Homegrown* are the 'tour guides' and Aisha, Laila and Farouk in the opening promenade scenes. This is significant because the tour guides represent the audience, responding to the action being played. The characters on stage are given archetypal and descriptive names, such as 'White Boy', 'Black Girl' or 'Muslim Boy'. This technique, which is highly stylised and evocative of Brechtian estrangement, allows the form to share properties with the problems associated with identity politics and cultural stereotyping in Britain. The characters are not meant to be real, fully realised individuals, rather they embody the dramatic representation of the various views that exist in society. This method allows for some challenging representations that would not typically be seen on the British stage. For example, 'Black girl' engages in a racist monologue about Muslims as a reaction to being searched on a bus trip in Paris:

Black girl - Mr. and Mrs. Osama and their brood of baby Boko Harams; and the driver, who constantly had to go to the jihadi John on that crazy Taliban tour bus - they choose me to search (2017, Tour 5.8:159)

Allowing a black, female voice to be racist on stage leads us into an artistic territory that allows for a deliberately opaque moral judgement, which El Khairy has discussed in terms of Glissant's scholarship (El Khairy and Latif, 2017:15). This technique shocks the audience out of an overly simplistic or binary approach to race, faith and multiculturalism, seeking to provoke conversations about society's failure to engage with the more nuanced complexities involved in individual identities and multiculturalism. New prejudices and attitudes are being formed rapidly in a globalised, liquid society and have an unprecedented level of reach in the context of social media. However, the inflammatory language may have made the NYT nervous, particularly given their publicised and celebrated position on inclusivity and diversity.

To Speak the Unspeakable - Censoring Characters

Homegrown offers an explosion of opinions with divergent and colliding voices which create the dramatic form and tone of the piece, like a piece of music. The resulting textual impact can be violent and aggressive. The choice has been made to give stage time to plural and sometimes taboo views, including hate speech, racist, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, anti-liberal sentiments and those that reference real life events or people, such as 'we're just as guilty for Alan Henning' (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 1.4:37). In her director's note, Latif explains this choice:

It is important to recognise that each stand takes both the tour guides and the audience through a range of opinions and stances. Do not normalise these views or digest them all. Some are purposely aggressive or left-field... investigate the space between what is deemed acceptable and what is intelligible (El Khairy and Latif, 2017:17).

Homegrown provided a space for voices that exist in society that may be taboo as well as an opportunity for the young actors involved in the devised process to create a production based on their own ideas. The artists sought to allow visibility for private, individual sentiments in the work, rather than participating in a stereotypical, visible narrative:

We're trying to say these kids are becoming radicalised in a nation that's rife with phobia – whether that's homophobia, sexism or Islamophobia. This doesn't happen in a vacuum. Sexism doesn't not happen to brown people. We're trying to say these are universal problems. The artists involved had a lot of opinions and the show was partly about working through those within the national narrative. (Latif, cited in Sanghani, 2017)

The resulting text challenges the current debate on political correctness, freedom of speech and the right to cause offence.

During the text launch event in March 2017 where an excerpt of the *Homegrown* was given a live performance space, the panel praised the form of the piece on the basis that it allowed characters to speak the myriad opinions that exist in contemporary Britain. It is useful to note that Latif is not an advocate of freedom of speech at all costs and was working against her own sentiments within the production:

It's like people who defend freedom of speech. And they go, oh no we must have absolute freedom of speech... can't we just aspire towards being anti-racist or anti-sexist...you're never on the receiving end of this... You're not going to walk down the street and have somebody call you a name, frankly. I am. And I'm not going to celebrate this freedom of speech (laugh) (Latif, 2017:227-228)

This strong sense that freedom of speech should exist within certain boundaries is revealing, because it demonstrates something about the lack of limitations imposed on the text in *Homegrown*. The form serves as a universe in which freedom of speech is absolute and creates an uncomfortable environment. *Homegrown* exposes the reality of social discord, with an unflinching transparency that would have been almost unwatchable for some audience members. It is possible that the NYT, who had not been present for the development of this creative journey in rehearsals, had concerns about entering the debate on freedom of speech in such a bold way. They might have been worried about being judged by the National or International press as endorsing the offensive sentiments within the play, which could be presented out of context to attract readership.

Roseby cites the fact that some of the young people involved were fifteen years old, suggesting that he had safeguarding concerns about the work (Watling, 2015, see Appendix 8). The text contains adult themes, scenes which incorporate sexual or violent content and strong language. For example, in promenade Tour 3, there is a scene in which 'Muslim Girl' speaks a monologue whilst bound to a chair, covered in paint and feathers with graffiti insults above her head, such as 'Bitch'. The monologue criticises the treatment of Muslim women in what she describes as a 'violent religion'. The language is explicit:

How would you like your little Muslim girl if she was to suck every uncircumcised cock she can find in sixth form? How about she takes as many white cocks - let them fuck her and film her - then make you watch - her honour being torn apart. That'll make her impure. 'Cause in this fucked up religion, victims are treated like sluts (2017, 3.8:101).

This sexualised language is common in *Homegrown* and would have caused offence to some audience members, particularly parents. During the *Homegrown* text launch event *The Inconvenient Muslim* in March 2017, the cast were asked who had come up with the rap that was performed, and the participants took ownership over their words. However, the language used by the young people might not have been appreciated by all of the parents involved.

Young people are likely to communicate differently with their peers and family. In an article for *The Times*, Moore discusses the tendency for young people to project a 'carefully censored account of teenage life to parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles' (Moore, 2017) on *Facebook*, whilst they were more likely to be open on the social media sites snapchat or Instagram where they had more control over who views the content. The anonymity afforded by a group devised process may have allowed the young participants to express their view on growing up in Britain more honestly. The NYT has a complex, dual client base, and has to navigate the relationship between its young participants and their parents. Furthermore, it is the parents who would represent the financial point of contact for other paid-for services offered by the NYT, such as training courses. It would be in the NYT's interests to retain parental consent and keep them invested in the NYT brand to sustain future engagement. Given the ongoing support required from parents, the NYT would wish to avoid upsetting them by prioritising highly controversial repertoire.

Violence

Nadia Latif (2017) stated at interview (see Appendix 5) that '*Homegrown* is full of violence', although suggests that much of this is not shown and deals instead with its aftermath (2017:233). Latif explained that she is more interested in the nature of violence itself: 'the violence in it for us was not even about what Islamophobic violence is, it was more about that people are violent. They have

violent intentions' (Ibid.). This approach suggests that the production avoided a binary interpretation of violence as good or bad and refused to offer a logical explanation for it. Latif's observation 'it's like cancer. It just, it just... exists' offers little possibility for resolution. This is reinforced in Omar El Khairy's 'Author's Note', 'the two groups most caught up in this violent bind of legibility and opacity - Muslims and young people. I hope *Homegrown* serves as a work that torments visibility and uses our assumed clarity on the topics du jour in a productively ambiguous manner' (El Khairy and Latif, 2017:16). These observations demonstrate that neither the director nor the playwright sought to provide a clear rationale for violence or issues behind radicalisation. As Jenny Hughes observes in her analysis of representations of the 'war on terror', 'Performance can be a means of generating grandiose self-deceits that assist in obliterating the other, comforting audiences traumatised by destructive actions in the world' (Hughes, 2007:163). Latif and El Khairy did not seek to provide comfort with *Homegrown*.

Latif (2017), who spent her summers away from Sudan and in London watching the 'in-yer-face' plays of the nineties on her own from the age of nine-years-old, suggested at interview that the British attitude to violence is reserved:

I think that we have a very... Victorian relationship with violence...and I think that's partly to do with not being a hyper-violent country. Whereas I did grow up... you know I grew up in a country that was in a civil war, that's still in a civil war, that had conscription, and although it's not a violent city that I'm from, certainly, I think we were just much more *laissez-faire* about... dying. I think we're really afraid of dying in this country (Latif, 2017:229).

Latif's comment resonates with Bauman's discussion of heightened social anxiety in Western societies and demonstrates a potential cultural conflict in the artistic treatment of this anxiety. The approach taken by the creative team refused to allow a comfortable 'self' and 'other' narrative and may have been too challenging for Roseby, who perhaps was seeking a simpler presentation of good and bad Muslims. This helps to explain comments such as the one made in the email sent on 30 July, just prior to the cancellation (see Appendix 8):

a lot of the feedback internally and externally is 'Why are these decisions being made? Why are we doing this?' and I personally share those questions and have yet to receive any intelligent responses from the creative team (Watling, 2015).

Roseby's email is insulting, emphasising a conflict in views and an 'us' and 'them' rhetoric in discussions on *Homegrown*. This assists in explaining the abrupt nature of the cancellation for the creative team. The creatives became the 'other' to the NYT 'us' in the decision-making process for the production.

The relationship between horror and terror is explored in the scattered scenes of violence throughout the school during the promenade section of the production. For example, the 7th July 2005 London bombings are depicted during the first promenade scene (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 1.2:28-31), framed as a group of school children rehearsing for a production and building through pieces of dialogue spoken privately by the presented commuters travelling on the tube. Some of the speech is about hate crimes or racism, for example: 'C- I had a brick through my window last night. It's the third this month' (Ibid., 29.). Or 'A-Moorgate, 08.42. I see a fellow tick box terrorist get on - our gaze lingers. The watchful eyes notice us both'. This is contrasted with 'F- Buys a 9-volt battery'(Ibid.), the calculated and practical mechanics of terrorism. The violence is depicted through language that creates visceral images such as 'N- My mouth tastes of dirt and blood' (Ibid., 30.) followed immediately by the line 'E- My Adidas trainers are on the ceiling'(Ibid.). The close textual encounters between body and material creates a fragmented and disturbing sense of the aftermath of an explosion. The feeling of suffocation and struggle is evoked through descriptions 'P- Suddenly, there were hundreds of people crushing against the tunnel walls; chocking [sic] and bleeding and crying' (Ibid., 31). The scene recalls a real event, and the images created in the text access an index of images that have been projected about the 7/7 terror attack in London across multiple media channels, making the audience's relationship with the claustrophobia of bodies struggling in the underground more palpable. This would have been an intense and disturbing scene to witness, heightened by the fact that children in a school classroom setting would have delivered the dialogue.

Here, the status of the child actor is exploited in the work to heighten the spectator's empathetic connection to the contemporary menace being depicted. The relationship between the violence reenacted by a group of school children and the 7/7 terror attack connotes the homegrown terrorism that might be employed by young people who have been radicalised. The voices in the scene are relatable to the type of children who may have been targeted and groomed to engage in domestic terror. The poignancy of this relationship creates a disturbing and inescapable confrontation for the spectator, employing dramatic construction to evoke a mimetic relationship with real life. When this is reflected on in terms of the context in which the work was to be viewed, following the recent departure of three young girls to join Islamic state, this particular scene would have been difficult to spectate.

Much of the violence in *Homegrown* focuses on hypocrisy. For example, in one of the promenade scenes, we witness a fast-paced exchange between *Muslim Boy* and *White Boy* which leads to the demonstration of a stress position for the purpose of torture:

Muslim Boy - Your people are torturing our people. (Beat.) Stand in position.
White Boy - Which position?
Muslim Boy - It's a stress position. It's torture
White Boy - No, it's not - it's easy, I can do this. I could top it off with a backflip.
Muslim Boy - Hold it
White Boy - Now/
Muslim Boy - / Don't fucking talk.

(Silence) (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 4.10:135)

In the lead up to this moment, the characters have been engaging in an aggressive exchange about Islam. *Muslim Boy's* emphasis on his religion is contrasted with a disrespectful baiting from *White Boy*. The dialogue is constructed like a fight scene, with quick fire responses. Neither character seeks to engage in a conversation that moves him towards the position of the other, rather the scene seeks to dramatise the conflict between them and achieves this both physically and through the construction of text.

Muslim Minstrel Show

I highlighted the admiration that Latif expressed in her interview for Chris Morris' film satire *Four Lions* at the outset of this case study (Latif, 2017:232), because it provides an important context for the satirical approach that underpins *Homegrown*. Placing a 'Muslim Minstrel show' into the production was clearly a controversial artistic decision. However, I argue that by employing minstrelsy, the artistic team was attempting to incorporate a technique that is not necessarily new in the context of satirical artistic expression in order to explore racism provocatively. It calls to mind Robert Downey Jr's controversial depiction of the white Australian method actor, Kirk Lazarus playing a black drill sergeant in *Tropic Thunder* (2008) or Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* (2000), in which a Harvard educated African American's breakthrough moment on American television is 'Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show'. I discuss the possible complications for this approach, such as the potential for negative responses on social media.

Fears about the likely sensitivity to the work were perhaps heightened because it was young actors who would use 'brown-face' - 'transforming themselves into Muslims' (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 4:178). The young cast would speak as a 'chorus of 'Muslims' named as generic representations from 'Muslim 1' to 'Muslim 6' (ibid.). The 'Muslims' are objectified, given dialogue that probes into their feelings on the three teenage girls leaving the community in Bethnal Green to join ISIS. Whilst the style of dialogue is similar to the verbatim text in the preceding scenes of the show, it is uncomfortable:

Oh definitely – definitely. It's, um, it's - if you're living in England, are a British citizen, then, err, you're provided for by the state. It's wrong. It's not on. And I apologise.

We're not all bad, like I already said, that's not what Islam is (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 5:183).

The character is apologetic to the spectator, heightening the idea that a judgement is being cast upon a community. This dialogue is set against the movement of a young Muslim actor who approaches the stage from the audience after a call to prayer sound is heard. The stage directions state '*This is not a violent interruption - it is simply time to pray*' (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 5:185). The conflict between the rhythm of the Muslim minstrel show, which is dialogue heavy, and this silent act of movement to represent prayer is a powerful use of stagecraft. It demonstrates the juxtaposition between quiet religious practice and accusations against 'Muslims' that have been building throughout the production. The stage direction reinforces this: '*The action onstage starts to grind to a halt as the young man continues to pray*', which follows the line of text from 'Muslim 6' 'Why won't they just let us be?' (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 5:185). The scene is crafted to make the audience feel uncomfortable and to confront them directly on their engagement with *Homegrown*.

The Muslim Minstrel show is carefully built from the beginning of the 'show' section of *Homegrown*, which begins with verbatim text from non-Muslim members of the community in Bethnal Green. This final section of the piece skilfully makes the point that to expect a homogeneous chorus of Muslims in Britain to elucidate the reasons behind radicalisation is flawed. Latif explained at interview that, in her opinion, what makes the violence connected with ISIS more terrifying is the organised 'political rigour', 'It's the guy who sort of generates it that scares me' (Latif, 2017:235). With this in mind, to expect the Muslim community in Britain to explain the actions of a minority group of its most extreme or violent community members is fruitless. A proper investigation of radical Islam ought to explore the origins of political absolutism associated with groups like ISIS, rather than 'some kid who's misinformed' (Ibid.). By closing *Homegrown* with a Muslim Minstrel show, our prior interest in the authentic local standpoints feels somewhat exploitative. We have been listening to the judgements made on the Muslim community and are somehow complicit in crafting the spectacle being created for us in the Minstrel show. The placement of material is a strong dramatisation of 'othering'. Perhaps it is also a comment from the creative team that for the NYT to expect a Muslim playwright or director to explain the complexities behind radicalisation in Britain was futile and potentially discriminatory, a meta-theatrical criticism of what El Khairy described in the *Walking the Tightrope* (2015) press release as the 'exotification of cultural difference' (Chloe Nelkin Consulting, 2015:2).

In a feature for *The Guardian* (2016) newspaper a year after the cancellation, Latif and El Khairy talked directly about the appetite for Muslim Minstrel shows portraying a particular narrative that exists within mainstream artistic representations:

The easiest way Muslim artists can get a foot in the door is by airing their dirty laundry – grooming gangs, FGM, honour killings and the like – and thus turning their anger on each other. At the other end of the spectrum, from Ayub Khan-Din's play *East Is East* to Adil Ray's BBC comedy *Citizen Khan*, artists who are willing to serve up monstrosity or minstrelsy are ultimately praised (El Khairy, 2016).

This reference to 'minstrelsy' connects the scene in *Homegrown* with a protest against mainstream representations of Muslims in Britain. Madani Younis, the artistic director of the Bush Theatre has stated that 'While some think the culture in this country is bohemian and left-leaning, it's not. It's conservative, middle-class and monocultural' (Masso, 2017a). In an interview I conducted with Hanna Slättne, an established dramaturg, she observed that some of the Northern Irish playwrights she has worked with similarly self-censor their work to satisfy an appetite for a prescribed narrative on sectarian violence or 'the Troubles' (Slättne, 2017). Whilst there is not scope to explore the stereotyping that underpins attitudes to Northern Irish drama in Britain, this testimony helps to support the suggestion being made by Latif and El Khairy that rigid social attitudes to different cultures inform the way that artists from those cultures create their work in Britain. A Northern Irish dramatist tells a story in a certain way about the troubles. A Muslim artist must also tell a certain story about radical Islam. I think that Latif and El Khairy wanted to highlight the insidious nature of Islamophobia in Britain and chose the Minstrel show in order to depict a form of racism that British society has recognised is no longer acceptable in order to make the point. By forging a direct relationship between a Minstrel Show and the fascination with understanding radical Islam from within the Muslim community in Britain, the creative team implied that the commission participated in crude stereotyping.

An idea that underpins the Minstrel show choice is that Muslim people are discriminated against now in the way that black people have been previously, 'the black kid's like 'Muslims are the new black people... You're getting the shit that I used to have to put up with' (Latif, 2017:234). I suspect that some black, non-Muslim audience members would emphasise that this violence endures within Britain, and that the burden of discrimination is shared with the Muslim community, rather than a baton of oppression that has been passed on. The NYT may have been concerned that the minstrel device could have been accused of cultural appropriation from other groups with a rich history directly associated with Minstrel shows. The protests that surrounded *Exhibit B* (2014) had recently demonstrated heightened sensitivity and protest against cultural appropriation. In view of the 'kaleidoscopic look at communities, cultures and conversations about Islam in Britain' (Latif,

cited in Sanghani 2015), it is possible that the scene would have made artistic sense. However, as other comparable social media protests against productions have demonstrated, the full context of the work is not necessarily taken into account when a judgement is formed. This was a piece of theatre that tore up the boundaries of political correctness through the use of hate speech or bad language and racist or bigoted views that society finds it uncomfortable to talk about. As protests against Richard Bean's *England People Very Nice* had demonstrated in 2009, responses to this type of work can be angry and time-consuming to manage.

The Cost of Security

In the immediate aftermath of the cancellation of *Homegrown*, there was a great deal of ambiguity about Police involvement. According to Latif:

We were having our weekly production meeting and the producer said to us, 'Oh, we had a meeting with the police yesterday and they were really friendly and helpful. They would like to see the final script, attend the first three shows and circulate plain clothes officers in the audience. (Latif, cited in Hooper, 2015)

The Metropolitan Police Service denied making a request to cancel the production or to see a copy of the script, although confirmed that they had contact with the NYT in a Freedom of Information request:

the MPS were approached by the National Youth Theatre who sought advice on whether we believed it appropriate to organise any specific security for the performances (Met Police, 2015).

In his email sent just prior to cancelling the production (see Appendix 8), Paul Roseby suggests that the Metropolitan Police had warned the charity about responses to the work on social media:

While the police felt it was a valuable and important subject and supported the initiative, they rightly raised concerns over the content with particular reference to any hate crimes and the ability for NYT to control all social media responses (Watling, 2015).

The Police did not cancel the production, but the implied security risks may have made a significant contribution towards the decision to cancel the work.

Controlling social media responses is not something that society has solved yet, so to expect the NYT to be able to tackle this issue was clearly unreasonable. Furthermore, the issue of controlling social order and factoring this into decisions about artistic programming inevitably builds a relationship between managing an arts institution and self-censorship. In the aftermath of the cancellation of *Homegrown*, Pam Vision from the Arts Council England stated by email on 31 July 2015, 'If there is any chance that the decisions could cause a social media storm we need to be on our toes!' (Vision, 2015). Fears about controlling the narrative that emerges on social media are considerable for those responsible for managing artistic projects. How might an artistic leader

guarantee that they can maintain order whilst exploring difficult subjects without the risk of causing conflict or social media outrage? In this instance, the artistic decision-makers were concerned about being accused of participating in presenting material that might be deemed at risk of radicalising young people, perhaps through conversations that started as a result of the provocations within *Homegrown*. As Professor Vron Ware from Kingston University commented in a panel discussion at *The Inconvenient Muslim* event in March 2017, there is 'no clear road-map' (Domenichella, 2017) for how we articulate issues related to radical Islam, making it difficult in these instances for artistic leaders to follow a framework for navigating the risks associated with the territory. This lack of preparedness makes institutions nervous and more likely to self-censor.

The cautious interplay between liberty and security in the public display of theatre works is emerging as a crucial driver in decisions on theatre censorship. As Nadia Latif (2017) explored at interview (see Appendix 5), the cost of policing has previously led to the censorship of theatre productions:

It should be pointed out that actually, *Behzti*, *Exhibit B* and *Homegrown* all have one thing in common, and that's the police. That the thing that they have in common is the financial implication of policing...I don't know what happened with NYT, I wasn't a part of that conversation certainly. But I can totally imagine that the police could put the financial shackles on. (Latif, 2017:236)

Latif cited the cancellation of *Exhibit B*, where the cost of policing protests would exceed the total ticket sales possible at the box office. Other practitioners have made this suggestion about the role of policing costs in the closure of theatre productions. For example, in her discussions about planning for security for Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's *Behud* (2010) at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, director Lisa Goldman (2015) asserts that:

Originally, they wanted to charge the theatre £10,000 per day to police the event; this decreased to £5000, clearly still unaffordable, and eventually the police waived the costs to enable the show to go on (Goldman, 2015:85).

For Goldman, the fact that financial negotiations took place at all sends a worrying signal about the likelihood of institutional self-censorship for fear of not being able to afford the required crisis response. This type of censorship, whilst not overt, is a more insidious approach to silencing productions. Nadia Latif was not 'part of the conversation' between the Police and the NYT regarding *Homegrown*' (Latif, 2017:236), however it is important to note that the burden of police costs generally could cause financial concerns to both venues and production companies and might have an impact on the work being staged. These costs include the additional resources required to deal with a crisis such as private security staff, press, political pressure and the risk of ongoing protest. Theatre institutions operate with limited budgets and financial anxiety is likely to hold a powerful sway in the risk assessment of controversial projects. According to Tamsin Allen, head of

Media and Information law at Bindmans LLP, in her summary advice for the Index on Censorship website, it is unlikely that the police would impose charges on a theatre or arts organisation:

The role of the police naturally shifts with changes in culture and the law, but the current position is that the police, as a public authority, have an obligation to ensure law and order and to preserve, and in some cases to promote, fundamental rights such as the right to protest and the right to freedom of expression (2016)

However, Allen is concerned that there is sufficient ambiguity within legislative guidelines to suggest that organisations may feel uneasy about paying for increased security at events:

There are some instances where the police are entitled to levy an additional charge for their services, but those must be services which are outside the core responsibilities of the police. Section 25 of the Police Act 1996 deals with the “provision of special services” and states that:

The chief officer of police of a police force may provide, at the request of any person, special police services at any premises or in any locality in the police area for which the force is maintained, subject to the payment to the police authority of charges on such scales as may be determined by that authority (ACPO guidance cited in Allen, 2016.)

The definition of ‘special services’ is ambiguous but has typically included events like football matches and music festivals. Both commercial and non-commercial events might be subject to additional charges, and only statutory events are eligible for free policing, described as:

Events where there is no financial gain to the organiser and which reflect constitutional rights, or a cause of royal, national or defined public interest (ACPO guidance cited in Allen, 2016).

According to Allen, the guidance on the differentiation between a statutory event and an event that might be charged for ‘lacks clarity and therefore policy practice in this area may lack consistency’ (2016). Under a particularly austere implementation of the current guidelines, the cancelled production of *Behzti* could have incurred a fee of £10,000 per day for policing had it remained open. Therefore, if the police were to bring up the cost of providing security, it might cause enough concern to provoke a cancellation depending on the internal commitment to the project.

Conversely, Allen suggests that the rights under the constitution for freedom of expression should supersede any income pertaining to a theatre project which automatically means the event is eligible for statutory policing. However, the fluid nature of the legislation causes ambiguity in understanding about the security of events. Both the police and the arts are operating under a period of cuts to their budgets, making this issue of who might pay for the preservation of security a prescient one. Allen’s guidelines were not available at the time that the production of *Homegrown* was being staged.

In my interview with Rachel Dudley, the Royal Court's theatre manager, she discussed the need to plan early to ensure security was maintained at the venue (Dudley, 2017). For example, she cited an example of a David Ireland play based on sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, which was to coincide with an anniversary of the troubles. In this scenario, the theatre would 'have internal discussions' and plan according to particular costs such as 'an extra security guard' or having 'the artistic team present so that if people want some answers, we have some people here that can actually give some' (Dudley, 2017). Dudley's description of the methods employed for anticipating sensitivities demonstrates a thorough and well-planned set of systems that had been put in place, supported by financial resources. Given the strained relationship between the creative team working on *Homegrown* and the NYT, if the cost of policing and security was raised, it is unlikely that the management would have prioritised the production and invested the extra costs into ensuring the work was staged.

Extremism Anxiety

Extremism has been a key feature in debates on *Homegrown*, after Roseby criticised the artistic team for failing to 'justify their extremist agenda' (Watling, 2015, see Appendix 8). In a letter to *The Times* protesting the cancellation, the *Index on Censorship*, *PEN* and other high-profile executives, playwrights, directors, actors and artists suggested that 'government policy in response to extremism may be creating a culture of caution in the arts' (*The Times*, 2015). The intersection between *Homegrown* and the government's Prevent programme must have been very uncomfortable. Prevent is a government policy designed to identify 'non-violent extremism' at an early stage, in order that radicalisation might be avoided. This was likely to have been directed in part at the Prevent programme. During one of the promenade scenes, the ISIS standpoint is given an extensive monologue presenting the extremist point of view on Western democracy:

Our system allows for their voices to be heard. Such transparency is a quality unique to Islamic State... Cameron spoke no words of apology – and no words of apology were forced on him. His accusations were left hanging, but in our society, it would have been him hanging (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 3.4:92).

Given that Prevent's agenda is to identify material that promotes extremism, this monologue, which refers to the hypothetical execution of the current Prime Minister of Britain at the time, could be construed as pro-ISIS propaganda. In its attempts to explain the motivations behind radicalisation, could the production be accused of participating in the process of indoctrination? Might the piece be accused of inciting young people towards acts of violence against the political system in Britain, or suggesting that these are a legitimate and brave form of political protest? When we start to suggest that artistic material can incite people to violence, the freedom on which artistic creation relies is

challenged, potentially bestowing extra power upon those who manage culture, disrupting Bauman (2005, 2011) and Adorno's (1991) described balance between the artist and administrator.

In January 2015, the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks had taken place in France. The satirical cartoonists had depicted an offensive satirical image of the prophet Mohammed and twelve members of staff became victims of a massacre by Islamists (Penketh and Weaver, 2015), captured in graphic news reports, photographs and videos. Fear of violent retaliation against artistic expression therefore became viscerally associated with a genuine threat to artists or institutions and a possible cause for self-censorship. Latif and El Khairy experienced this heightened anxiety during the process of publishing *Homegrown*. The original publishers, who had previously published El Khairy's scripts, pulled their support on instruction from the business's private owners that 'we don't want to be the next Charlie Hebdo' (Latif, 2017:231). A similar response came from other publishers, which led to the self-published text in order that the play could 'get into the world' (El Khairy and Latif, 2017:14). *Homegrown* confronts the topic of the satirical cartoon that was at the heart of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack:

'White Boy - Why do we get so upset about a bloody cartoon? (Beat.) It's because they haven't written or drawn anything of worth in the last seven hundred years. And it's this lack of development - this stagnation, which is creating such insecurity. It's a vicious circle 'cause this insecurity comes from the knowledge that what they practice is backwards. They fear being openly criticised - meaning they will never progress. This is the Muslim problem' (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 3.10:105).

This speech by White Boy ridicules the terrorists' attitudes to the type of cartoons depicted by *Charlie Hebdo* but also attacks the Muslim faith and would have been likely to cause offence. It might have legitimately caused security concerns too, requiring police advice.

Homegrown does not avoid references to the Prophet Mohammad:

Muslim Boy - Muhammad sallallahu alaihi wasallam

White Boy - Muhammad sallallahu sally, pride of our alley (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 4.10:136)

Paul McCartney, a member of the Beatles, used the lyrics 'Sally, pride of our alley', and I believe this is a reference which echoes the earlier sentiment made in *Homegrown* that terrorism has no place in the home of the Beatles: 'It's just, you know, British values, cutting people's heads off. It's against everything the Beatles stood for' (El Khairy and Latif, 2017, 1.4:34). The reference to the Beatles is incorporated in the text to evoke the group of Isis militants, including British members, who enacted violent executions of hostages that were posted as videos online. The apparently flippant reference to Mohammed by 'White Boy' may have caused offence. Whilst a devout Muslim stance is represented in the scene, there is a wider industry anxiety about referring to the Prophet

Mohammed in artistic representations and the risk of violent reprisals. Set against the other criticisms made against the Muslim faith in the piece, it is possible that the NYT may have had concerns that they would become the focus of retaliation from extremist groups, or like the publishers that refused to print *Homegrown*, that they wished to avoid being the next '*Charlie Hebdo*'.

During an interview with the playwright Nina Segal (2017, see Appendix 6), she discussed the close proximity between external events and artistic representation, referring to the Westminster terrorist attack on 22nd March 2017 and the premiere of her play *Big Guns* (2017) which had opened the night before on the 21st March 2017, recorded in the theatre sample at the Yard Theatre (2017). The play depicts two entities 'One' and 'Two', although like the figures in *Homegrown*, they are not fully formed characters, rather representations that voice various expressions of feeding on fear and violence in its various forms, for example clicking on a video of somebody being beheaded or watching a beauty blogger mutilate her skin. In spite of the similarly continuous flow of sometimes graphic content, and the refusal on Segal's part to offer a cathartic explanation for why society is drawn to violence, unlike the young people presented in *Homegrown*, *Big Guns* offers a clearly delineated distance for its spectators through its abstract adult actresses. The play was inspired by the first Isis beheading videos that were posted on social media. Segal explained that she was interested in reflecting on the interaction between society and spectacles of violence and the work invites a reflexive response from its spectators. The Westminster attack 'became a very immediate part of the context that the show was going to be performed in...that kind of knee jerk feeling of the closeness of that specific event and the content of the show... I think no-one's got a real procedure for how to deal that' (2017:237). Segal's description of the uncomfortable interaction between external events and the contents of a production encapsulates the acute management challenges presented by collisions between art and society. This has been heightened in a contemporary context, because of the continuous online access to immediate information about spectacles of violence and extremism.

Critical Reception

In the extract of *Homegrown* that was performed by many of the original participants at Conway Hall as part of the *The Inconvenient Muslim* event, the cast received a standing ovation. According to Lyn Gardner, the accusations made by Paul Roseby that the production was not of sufficient quality were unfounded:

It is also gloriously authentic, snapping and crackling with the sense of young people thinking out loud about who they are, freely voicing their experiences and perceptions

of the world. Nobody, whatever their background, will agree with everything that's said, but that's the point. *Homegrown* opens up a proper grownup debate about attitudes and opinions that often go unspoken and remain hidden (Gardner, 2017b).

Whilst a lot of the most controversial elements of *Homegrown* have been explored in this case study, to suggest that the production lacked quality or indeed subtlety would be inaccurate. The balance of humour, movement, shock and pace suggests that this large-scale promenade production would have been a highly engaging spectacle. The use of rap demonstrated a vibrancy and energy that encapsulated the voices of the young people. Gardner suggests, 'it demands to be staged' and by censoring challenging work like *Homegrown*, theatre risks 'making itself a complete irrelevance' (2015).

According to the academic Arun Kudnani '*Homegrown* is electric. Raw, honest, and compelling, no other play has so richly explored current discussions of radicalization, Islamophobia, and youth disaffection' (Sweetland, 2017). Other reactions can be tracked through blog accounts of the evening. Hanna Mariam Chowdhury suggested that whilst the multiple voices were unsettling in the piece, it was a positive experience:

It showed me that the narratives for actual Muslim people were muted, and that the views and opinions of outsiders, those who aren't even aware of something as simple as the five pillars of Islam, are rampant in the media and throughout society... It helped me to recognise the deep divisions within our own society as they really are (2017).

Dani Tougher described the live extract as 'goosebump inducing' (2017) and deserving of the standing ovation it received from the audience.

The critical responses indicate that the work should not have been cancelled on the basis of quality. Whilst it might be suggested that an audience attending the launch of the self-published text would be predisposed to a position that is sympathetic to the *Homegrown* team, we can be confident that a critic such as Lyn Gardner would maintain her professional editorial impartiality and offer a quality-based judgement. The responses represent the new forum for democratised reactions to artistic work on social media. However, I cannot help but speculate on the potential for negative responses to the full production which would undoubtedly have developed and spread online, as well as the potential impact this might have had on the NYT's reputation. Given the global media interest in the production, it had the ingredients to become a controversial subject *du jour* on social media forums.

Impact on Artists

One of the most damaging aspects of the cancellation of *Homegrown* was the censorship of the material created by the young people involved and the manner in which this took place. Whilst we might refer to the NYT's decision as 'institutional self-censorship', the consequence of this action imposed 'censorship' on the creatives and actors involved. To allow the young participants to devise original work and then tell them that their contribution was not of sufficient quality, despite the decision having been all but made prior to the rehearsal visit, suggests bad practice and obfuscation of the actual situation. None of the evidence suggests that a minimum quality benchmark was communicated to either the participants or the creative team. Furthermore, the rehearsal visit was described as 'delightful' by Latif (2017:231), with helpful notes for moving forward. The email in which the creative team were 'fired' (Latif, 2017:231) and the production cancelled was sent a few hours later. This approach appears dishonest and unfair. In their letter to *The Times*, the industry supporters urged that a 'way can be found to stage it so that the young voices involved can be heard and the production can be judged on its merits' (*The Times*, 2015).

A critic of the Prevent programme, Arun Kudnani suggests:

The great risk is creating an atmosphere of self-censorship – where young people don't feel free to express themselves in schools, or youth clubs or at the mosque. If they feel angry or have a sense of injustice but nowhere to engage in a democratic process and in a peaceful way, then that's the worst climate to create for terrorist recruitment. (cited in Khaleeli, 2015)

Whilst there is no evidence to suggest that any of the young actors involved in *Homegrown* became radicalised as a result of the censorship of their work, it is clear that they were angered and frustrated by the experience. This anger and its presence on social media could offer political capital to those who seek to radicalise young people. After the announcement of the cancellation, some members of the cast posted messages on social media, such as, "Censored. Our voices were silenced today." (Hutchison, 2015a). In her email on 31 July, Pam Vision described that the NYT had employed 'a child protection officer and therapist' to offer 'any sort of support they need'. Participants were to be offered other production opportunities: 'I don't know what those projects are yet, but I am sure they will not include the same subject' (Vision, 2015). Vision's comments demonstrate a relationship between concerns about exploring the subject of radicalisation with the young people and the decision to censor the work. If we examine Roseby's position on the cancellation in his email sent just prior to making the decision (see Appendix 8), 'at the end of the day we are simply 'pulling a show' and at a point that still saves us a lot of emotional, financial and critical fallout' (Watling, 2015), it demonstrates that the NYT underestimated the strength of feeling among the artists involved in the project. The young people felt passion for the project and attributed a wider importance to it, as exemplified by their commitment over a long period of time

until the ultimate performance for many at 'The Inconvenient Muslim' event in March 2017. However, the management at the NYT maintained a business tone in their discussions of the piece. There was clearly a pronounced disconnect between the NYT decision makers and those involved in creating *Homegrown*.

A paid project for a youth theatre evolved into a public cancellation that thrust the professional practitioners into the 'limelight' (Latif, 2017:231). At interview, Latif described entering theatre venues and being conscious that 'people would stop and look at us and we're like... alright calm down we're not actually terrorists' (Latif, 2017:231). That the artistic team were not protected during the process by their commissioners reflects badly on the NYT. It is surprising for example that Roseby has not made a public apology for referring to the artists as having an 'extremist agenda' (Watling, 2015, see Appendix 8). Would such a comment have been made if the commissioned artists had been white British? Latif and El Khairy suggest not:

The fact is, had *Homegrown* been penned by Lee, Morris or another white *enfant terrible*, the police wouldn't have attempted to interfere and the NYT's artistic director wouldn't have been able to get away with justifying cancellation by talking about the show's apparently "one-dimensional tone and opinion" and the creative team's "extremist agenda" (El Khairy and Latif, 2016).

It is worth noting that Omar El Khairy holds a PhD in Sociology from the London School of Economics and Political Science and is a respected playwright, having participated in the Young Writers Programmes at both the Royal Court Theatre and Soho Theatre as well as being a former Leverhulme Associate Playwright at the Bush Theatre. Nadia Latif trained under Bill Gaskill at RADA and has been working professionally as a director for nine years, having studied a BA Hons in English at UCL. The artists' work was criticised by the NYT on the basis of quality concerns and a lack of 'intelligence' (Watling, 2015, see Appendix 8). Madani Younnis has stated that the criticism of the work on the grounds of its artistic quality was hard to justify, suggesting that 'if NYT had questioned the artistic merit of the show it would never have arrived in the rehearsal room in the first instance' (Masso 2017a).

Latif referred to the process of self-publishing *Homegrown* as a means of finishing the project for themselves and the young people involved. She suggested that it had always been 'in the background' (Latif, 2017:231) whilst she worked on other projects. It should bother artists, theatre managers, critics and scholars that two artists endured this type of treatment. It should frustrate observers that Latif and El Khairy were fired without a proper consultation and by group email. I question whether this type of treatment would be allowed in other industries and if it is an appropriate way for a subsidised institution to treat freelance members of staff.

Conclusion

As a piece of theatre, *Homegrown* is exciting. As a project for the NYT, it was clearly deemed too high-risk. It is unlikely that a live version of *Homegrown* will be produced, given that the piece was created without the typical budgetary constraints of mainstream professional theatre projects. To date, no venue has staged a full version of the project. Theatres would not necessarily avoid *Homegrown* on the grounds of censorship, especially after the favourable critique published by Lyn Gardner. To pay one hundred and twelve actors' equity minimum wages for the rehearsal and performance period would not be financially viable. Theatres risk litigation if they attempt to stage large scale pieces with volunteer actors, a practice that the actors' union Equity discourages. Nadia Latif suggests that the piece was planned for the school market, which is typically low budget work and would not require the participating young people to be paid. Although schools are obliged to participate in the Prevent programme, which may discourage drama departments from taking a risk on *Homegrown*.

It is unlikely that *Homegrown* was cancelled on the grounds of artistic quality, rather institutional anxiety surrounding the survival of the NYT, its financial reserves and its future brand and earning potential. There were also some concerns about the defiant relationship between the *Prevent* programme and the form and content of the work. What can be learnt about liquid censorship? *Homegrown* serves to demonstrate that institutional self-censorship exists in artistic institutions in the UK. It is likely that censorship is heightened in an environment where organisations are financially dependent on private sources of income. With the pressures on policing budgets, it is conceivable that services attempt to highlight the costs associated with preserving public order to artistic institutions in the hope that this may encourage the cancellation of high-risk productions rather than adding to their own, overstretched workload. It must be acknowledged that this is not the case across the board. An arts organisation may consider public relations expenses relating to the preservation of its brand when assessing the risk associated with a project. Budget cuts and limited staffing resources might heighten anxiety about the costs to resources and this financial influence constitutes a more insidious source of power that may provoke censorship. Institutions are likely to be nervous about the type of content young people should be exposed to, that might be judged in the media. Whilst there may be safeguarding concerns when devising performances about radicalisation with young people, the fact that none of the documentation released by freedom of information request related to this apprehension indicates that the subject was not considered a key element in the development of the commission. Rather, the absence of safeguarding discussions indicates that Roseby became anxious about the subject later on in the

process as an after-thought and in the context of the growing media interest in the production. Furthermore, the issue of staging work that relates to radical Islam remains a taboo topic in British theatre, which arts organisations are not only attracted to but fearful of, not only in terms of its presentation but its publication. Anxiety about this type of controversial representation is intensified in the context of productions that employ young people, especially those that have the potential to attract social media or international press attention.

Chapter 5 - *Five Easy Pieces* (2016) and the Censorship of Controversial Repertoire Involving Child Actors

Introduction

The opening line in the marketing copy for the Belgium based Campo Theatre's production of *Five Easy Pieces* (2016), directed by Milo Rau, encapsulates a fascination with the figure of the child in danger:

Is it possible – and with which means – to perform the life of child killer Marc Dutroux with children? (Campo, 2016).

Five Easy Pieces premiered at the *Kunstenfestivaldesarts*, Brussels in 2016 with performers aged between eight and thirteen years. In 2017, the production was cancelled at Home Theatre in Manchester where the piece had been scheduled as part of the *Sick!* Festival as a result of the refusal of child performance licenses by Manchester City Council on the basis of the production's content. The licensors had not seen the work, so this judgement was formed in response to the information provided about the production by Campo. The cancellation did not receive press coverage or provoke protest and the work was staged without changes to its content at the Unicorn Theatre in London in 2018. *Five Easy Pieces* provokes practical concerns regarding the types of protections and regulations in place for child performers when it comes to dealing with controversial or potentially emotionally upsetting subjects. It also raises questions regarding the ethical parameters of theatrical representation in Britain.

This case study investigates the censorship of *Five Easy Pieces* from two perspectives. Firstly, I examine the technical complexities involved in local authority licensing and safeguarding policies, an external, legislated provision indirectly capable of closing a theatre production that represents a less visible or liquid censorship. Drawing on existing policies for child performers in Britain, I incorporate research on the *OHCHR Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) in order to reflect on the nature of consent and power relations between adults and children, exploring the extent to which these rights form part of decision-making processes regarding child performance legislation in Britain. A freedom of information request issued to the licensing department at Manchester City Council (see Appendix 9) is analysed here in order to understand more about the local boundaries for staging productions with children in the UK. I reflect on this decision in the context of the approval of the work for the London stage in 2018 at the Unicorn Theatre, incorporating interview research (see Appendix 7) with the serving artistic director at the time, Purni Morell (2017). The logistical considerations that Campo and the receiving theatres that take the decision to stage *Five Easy Pieces* must comply with have been investigated. This insight on policy is used to draw conclusions about the types of spaces or audiences that are permitted to stage or spectate

controversial repertoire which involves child actors in the UK as well as contributing to an understanding of how liquid censorship operates in practice.

In the second section of this case study, I reflect on representation of real events in performances that place the figure of a child into dangerous circumstances, in this instance employing child actors. The dramaturgical choices made by Milo Rau are closely scrutinised in this section of the chapter. The motivations behind the commission are examined, thinking in terms of who Campo and Milo Rau hoped to reach with the work. This research is placed in the context of critical responses to *Five Easy Pieces* and relevant theatre scholarship from Josette Féral (Féral and Bermingham, 2002), Helen Freshwater (2014), Nicholas Ridout (2009, 2014) and Debra Levine (2017). Wider literature on childhood and society has been incorporated in order to draw conclusions about the boundaries of representation with child actors in contemporary British theatre.

Was the Production Controversial?

Firstly, some context for why the production is considered to be a controversial piece of theatre repertoire: *Five Easy Pieces* incorporates testimony from the police, victims and family members associated with the Marc Dutroux case. Dutroux is a paedophile and child killer who has garnered public notoriety in Belgium on a scale that is comparable with the UK child murderer Ian Brady. With a previous conviction for child abduction and rape in 1989, Dutroux was released on parole in 1992 and went on to kidnap six girls aged eight to nineteen between 1995 and 1996, this time murdering four of his victims whom he had imprisoned in confined cells within his properties. In spite of his previous conviction, Dutroux was not arrested until 1996 and his trial did not take place until 2004. The gap between the arrest and trial was attributed in part to a parliamentary investigation into allegations that Dutroux had made that he had accomplices in high profile positions within the police, judicial and political system as part of a large-scale paedophile ring. Public dissatisfaction with the police investigation led to protests against the governing administration in Belgium which culminated in *The White March* on 20th October 1996 (see Figure 9). According to the *New York Times*, 275,000 Belgian's took to the streets 'waving white balloons and white flowers in a popular outpouring of anger and frustration over a widening child sex scandal' (New York Times, 1996). Demonstrators were concerned about protections in place for children and inadequacies in the justice system in Belgium, which had been brought to the surface by the Dutroux case.



Figure 9: 'The White March', Brussels (1996) Copyright: John Vink/Magnum Photos

Rau has stated that his inspiration for *Five Easy Pieces* came from a research phase in Brussels for a different production with adults, *The Civil Wars*, in 2013. He asked the actors to pinpoint a time when they felt most Belgian and they identified the 1996 *White March*. The director has described the Dutroux premise as a point of departure for a broader political piece of theatre about national identity. Rau's interest in this popular uprising certainly aligns with his company's political theatre values. The *International Institute of Political Murder (IIPM)* was founded in 2007 to stage re-enactments, documentary-style artistic representations or social sculpture, what Agata Pyzik, referring to the German artist Joseph Beuys describes as a term coined in the 1960s to explain a form which 'considers art as secondary to the potential change the artwork or artist can foster among the public' (Pyzik, 2015). Rau provides various explanations for *Five Easy Pieces* and whilst a relationship between the child actors and the politics of national identity accounts for an aspect of the production, which is politically relevant and interesting, this does not encompass the director's other significant intentions for the work.

Five Easy Pieces is structured as a series of vignettes rather than a piece of linear storytelling, framed as an acting lesson for the group of seven child actors. In an interview with Bella Todd for *WhatsOnStage* in 2017, Rau offered a useful summary of the structure of his production:

'The first lesson is mimicry, how to play old and sick. The second is about biographical design: you are playing a policeman who is finding the murdered children, how do you construct his character on stage? The third is called 'essay on submission' and is about the relationship between actor and director. The fourth is about emotion: the children have to play parents who have lost their children, they have to cry on stage. Then comes the last lesson, rebellion: how to revolt against everything they have just been asked to do' (2017).

The use of the word '*Easy*' in the production's title is deliberately provocative given the challenging thematic territory being explored by the children. The title is taken from a set of piano exercises

designed by Igor Stravinsky to systematically assist children in learning the instrument. The emphasis on a learning process is a significant part of the production's form. In his interview with Bläske, which was included in the programme notes for the premiere of the production at the Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Rau states that the title *Five Easy Pieces* serves as a metaphor for the lessons which take place in the production, 'How can children grasp the meaning of narrative, empathy, loss, subjection, disappointment, anger against society, and rebellion? And how do we react when we watch them learning on stage?' (Rau, 2016).

For Debra Levine, one of the most important messages in Rau's production is a resistance to a protectionist patriarchal political culture which was perpetuated in Belgian society by the Dutroux affair:

By responding to the public's demand to enact new laws to shore up its control, with the justification of protecting innocent children and children's innocence, the Belgian Federal government extended the logic of colonialism, successfully reaffirming the same terms of patriarchal political power (2017:149).

The children are directed by Rau to make it appear as if they are participating in a direct challenge to the notion that by exploring adult content in a piece of political theatre, they will be distressed. Rau demonstrates that he is empowering the child actors in a professional theatre space. Of course, the adult team who put together *Five Easy Pieces* were in charge of the child actors and their liberty, so there is a different kind of patriarchal control at work here. In the interview with Stefan Bläske, Rau outlined the careful planning and expertise that had been involved in mounting the production, 'Our team includes two advisers and also a child psychologist. The parents were also closely involved in the rehearsals. And we contacted those most closely involved in the real Dutroux affair' (Rau, 2016).

It is a tradition for the Belgium based theatre company, Campo, to invite bold theatre directors who are not typically associated with 'children's theatre' to direct new work. Repertoire has included Josse De Pauw's *üBUNG* in 2001 in which children played the roles of adults who consume too much alcohol at a dinner party so that they are able to talk to each other (Kunstenfestivaldesarts, 2001). Forced Entertainment's Tim Etchells created *That Night Follows Day* with Campo in 2007, a piece that was developed through workshops with children aged between eight and fourteen, containing 'factual observations concerning the ways in which the adult world shapes and defines that of young people' (Etchells, 2007). This was followed in 2011 with Gob Squad's *Before Your Very Eyes*, which portrayed 'lives lived in fast forward—from angst-ridden teens to hunched geriatrics' (Gob Squad, 2011). Each production has reflected on the contrast between childhood and adulthood in some way. Rau highlighted to Bläske his desire to challenge the

traditional boundaries that are set for children in theatre, and to do something 'risky, unprecedented and virtually impossible' (Rau, 2016). This indicates that he wanted to build upon the work that had been created by Campo in the past and take it further. The realisation of Rau's strong vision would require submission on the part of the children involved. Rau's intention was to engage in something 'risky' and controversial and protections were put in place to realise this. The contents of the Dutroux case would not readily be associated with a theatre production that involves seven children. If the repertoire is placed in the context of Sierz's definition of what makes a production controversial, exploring Dutroux with child actors was likely to touch 'raw nerves' (2001:5). Rau was aware of the 'affective' (Freshwater, 2013:174) quality associated with the child and the selection of the theme was consciously controversial.

Five Easy Pieces is a postmodern experiment, described by Rau in his programme notes as 'a meta-study on performance art and its practice of change, subjection, and rebellion' (Rau, 2016). The acting exercises or '*Five Easy Pieces*' are drawn from details of the case but they do not involve any direct re-enactments of interaction between Dutroux and his victims. Rau does not attempt to stage a rape scene for example. Rather than attempting to depict a realistic paedophile or monster, Rau constructs a power relationship between the adult director represented on stage and the child actors, with undertones of the dynamics between a paedophile and a victim. The director is represented by the only adult actor on stage, Peter Seynaeve, who leads the acting lessons and constructs the scenes. In an interview with Bella Todd, Rau explained 'I wanted the play to reflect this: that the strategies of a director are the strategies of a criminal' (Todd, 2017). Reflecting on the ethics and appropriate boundaries in the relationship between a director and child actors became part of Rau's theatrical experiment. This case study explores the extent to which Rau ensured that his experimentation did not risk exposing his child actors to exploitative behaviour, situating the production that originated in Belgium in the context of UK safeguarding policies and legislation.

Exploitation and Consent



Figure 13: *Five Easy Pieces* cast and creative team. Campo (2017)

The motivations for a child actor to consent to perform in a professional theatre production vary. In an audition re-enactment staged as an opening to *Five Easy Pieces*, which according to Seynaeve was based on authentic testimony, the children discussed the various ‘talents’ that they wanted to demonstrate. It is likely that part of the appeal was the opportunity to excel at something or to show off a skill. Perhaps the possibility for a future career as an actor, or a desire for fame, will motivate the child performer. In her feature article, ‘A Quick Curtain Call and then Bed: Child Actors in Adult Theatre’ for *The Guardian*, Maddie Costa interviewed three child actors who were involved in adult theatre productions, namely, *Jerusalem* (2009) by Jez Butterworth, *Enron* (2009) by Lucy Prebble and the revival of Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* (2010). Costa commented that the common appeal for the children was that ‘acting is a thrill’. When asked by Costa whether the thirteen-year-old Finn would rather be at home watching television, he commented ‘but it's what I have to do if I want to keep on acting’ (Costa, 2010). Finn saw his commitment as something that may lead to more acting opportunities. However, as Costa concludes, ‘acting as a child offers no guarantee of work as an adult, when competition for roles is even greater’ (Costa, 2010).

Whatever the personal motivations on the part of the child actors, they will differ from the goals of a production company, theatre venue, artist or audience. The effect of placing a child actor on stage is a powerful one. In her description of the eight-year-old Lennie Harvie in *Jerusalem*, Costa reflects that ‘He is tiny on stage, dwarfed by the trees that reach up to the theatre’s roof – yet in his presence, Rylance’s larger-than-life Byron is momentarily deflated’ (Costa, 2010). This implies that the child actor can be even more exciting in the space than the celebrity actor, or perhaps there is simply something thrilling about seeing the juxtaposition of a real child in the presence of a great stage actor. This might be one reason why an artist or theatre would be attracted to staging work with children. However, there is a risk that the differing aspirations and expectations of child actors could be exploited, particularly in the context of controversial repertoire. Nicholas Ridout observes that when staging work that involves ‘both animals and children, the concern over exploitation focuses on whether or not the animals and children know what they are doing, whether they are capable of giving properly informed consent to their own participation and whether their lives will be any way damaged by their appearance on stage’ (Ridout, 2009:99-100).

The United Nations convention on the rights of a child provides a useful foundation for exploring the established position on a child’s ability to offer his or her consent in decision making processes. According to Article 12:

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the

child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (OHCHR, 1989).

Consent entails forming a view on a subject and this clause privileges a child's right to be heard. However, the 'weight' or agency assigned to the child's view or consent is restricted according to an unspecified age and level of maturity, which caters for the unique nature of each child, according to Emily Logan, Chairperson of the European Network of Ombudsmen for Children (ENOC) in her contribution to the 2008 Council of Europe's lecture series, 'The Child's Right to Respect - Janusz Korczak's legacy - Lectures on today's challenges for children', (Council for Europe, 2019:49-58). The guideline assumes that children's ability to consent will vary and ultimately relies upon an adult judgement. Therefore, consent must first be provided by an adult party. According to Logan, the 'best interests of the child' should be a guiding principle, outlined in Article 3 of the convention (Council for Europe, 2009:49). Whilst there is no precise definition of the best interests of a child, for Logan, the procedural link between Article 3 and Article 12 allows children a more active role in determining their rights, ensuring that 'those involved in decision making must fully consider the issue of the child's own view on the subject' (Council for Europe, 2009:52).

A child's right to freedom of expression is defined under Article 13, including the right to express themselves through art or other media 'of the child's choice' (OHCHR, 1989). Restrictions in the clause relate to protecting the rights or reputations of others, national security, public order, health or morals. This is in line with the restrictions imposed under Article 10 for general human rights to freedom of expression. Article 31 directly refers to a child's right 'to participate freely in cultural life and the arts' (OHCHR, 1989). The second clause within the article includes the phrasing that states parties 'shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity' (OHCHR, 1989). The use of the word 'appropriate' is important here, since it relies upon a judgement made by a political system regarding the types of artistic or cultural activity that a child has the right to be involved in. Under Article 32, governments are given the right to protect children 'from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development' (OHCHR, 1989). States parties are obliged to legislate for and implement 'appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article' (OHCHR, 1989). Therefore, from an arts perspective, as a by-product of the important issue of protecting the rights of children from 'economic exploitation', the UN convention provides a legal instrument of power for governing political institutions to define moral best practice, to punish deviation from its position, to overrule a child or parent's consent for a child to participate in professional performance work on moral grounds and to punish arts producers who do

not conform to the government's position. Gauging the appropriateness of performance work is challenging when it relates to ensuring 'mental, spiritual, moral or social development' (OHCHR, 1989), where interpretations may vary between artistic practitioners, parents and states parties.

There are practical procedures involved in staging theatre productions in the UK with children which effectively constitute a form of institutional consent on the child actor's behalf. The legal position regarding the paid employment of child performers in the UK is that producers must secure a license from a local authority in order to proceed. These licenses are a safeguarding step designed to ensure that appropriate arrangements have been made to protect the children participating in the professional performance work and they are supplemented by enforcement procedures such as unannounced inspections. According to The National Network for Children in Employment and Entertainment (NNCEE) which has produced an advisory document on key legislation from the perspective of practitioners working on the 'front line' (Rothwell, 2016:5), there is no official provision in the regulations regarding licensing for international child actors working in the UK, such as Campo's *Five Easy Pieces*; however it is considered to be best practice to secure licenses from the local authority which governs the area in which the first performance will take place. This license can then be forwarded to the other relevant local authorities for the rest of the tour. Organising venues such as the Unicorn Theatre would have relationships with safeguarding teams with a requirement to have appropriate permissions in place for performances. Licensing will not be granted unless the local authority is 'satisfied that the child is fit, that proper provision has been made to secure his health and kind treatment and his education will not suffer' (Rothwell, 2016). The local authority does not have an automatic right to inspect a full script, which may not give an accurate sense of the child's involvement and has no 'editorial control' (Rothwell, 2016). The local authority can request to see parts of the script and will consider the language in the scene, how the child is going to be involved and what plans have been put in place to protect the child actor. For example, in Maddie Costa's interview with child actors who have performed in adult theatre productions, Lennie recalled that the director Ian Rickson asked him to 'pretend you were walking through a wood, and you're off to see your dad, who's a dragon, and you're quite scared' (Costa, 2010). The director can incorporate exercises which evoke the mood required in the adult space, without the child actor relating this directly to the contents of the script.

In the interview with Rachel Dudley, the theatre manager at the Royal Court, she referred to *The Nether* to highlight some of the challenges in preparing child actors for the adult piece of work:

When they are 14 years old, 12 years old, we have to be honest with them. It's worse for us to leave them with questions and get wrong information elsewhere... But we

have to make sure that we are in line with schools because otherwise these children could go back to school and say 'guess what I learnt at the Royal Court' (Dudley, 2017).

The theatre is in control of the amount of information that a child is exposed to and attempts to manage the level of exposure to difficult subjects so that the performers do not have access to information beyond their maturity and education. Dudley explained that different parental attitudes complicated the practicalities of managing the information that the child actors were exposed to. She gave the example of a child performer coming in with new information from home, which went beyond the artistic explanation offered by the theatre. This indicates that child actors may be expected to perform subjects without fully understanding what they are performing in, challenging the notion that they can fully consent to their involvement.

There is an absence of case history on the volume of applications that are rejected for child performance licenses. Manchester City Council refused the child performance licenses for *Five Easy Pieces*. Details about this refusal only became available as a result of a freedom of information request which was issued as part of this research (see Appendix 9). The NNCEE shares information on breaches in child performance legislation that make it to court. For example, the theatre director Lawrence Robert Love had criminal proceedings brought against him for inappropriate conduct with child actors in his capacity as Artistic Director of the Cleveland Theatre School in Billingham and as a result was given a nine-month suspended sentence as well as being banned from working with children. According to the article in *Gazette Live* in 2013 which was posted on the NNCEE website, Love 'made films of two teenage boys urinating and spitting on a willing "client"' (Evans, 2013), engaging in sadomasochistic activity such as kicking the man's genitals. The child actors were paid between £30-£60 and given vodka in exchange for their roles in the film. The theatre director was found to have been viewing extreme images online, including sadomasochistic pornography, although the materials found (aside from the film that was at the centre of the case) did not involve children. The lawyer defending Love cited that the boys were willing participants and 'were not coerced into taking part in the films' adding that 'her client accepted responsibility but that he didn't realise at the time that what he was doing was criminal' (Ibid.). This defence was not accepted. Love's custodial sentence was suspended on the basis of multiple testimonials which had been submitted in support of his work with children. The case, which is of course an extreme example of exploitation art with children, demonstrates the importance of scrutinising the boundaries of representation and the place for robust legislation on the provision of licenses. Had Love applied to the local authority with his film proposal, including details of the payment terms, the approval would not have been granted. The case endorses the need for some forms of censorship. In this instance,

the film was made and later censored. *Five Easy Pieces*, which is a far less extreme example of controversial art by comparison, experienced censorship in the UK prior to its first performance.

Liquid Censorship of *Five Easy Pieces*

According to an email from the principal licensing officer at Manchester City Council, Fraser Swift, (see Appendix 9) the child performance licenses for *Five Easy Pieces* were refused on the grounds that 'the Council was not satisfied that proper provision had been made to secure each of the children's health and kind treatment' (Swift, 2017). Expanding on this legislated right of restriction, the email stressed the problematic intersection between the age of the child actors and the content and themes, age guidance, impact beyond the production and safeguarding responsibilities. The response provides valuable insight into the types of specific justifications for production closures in the UK which could be described as liquid forms of censorship.

Purni Morell successfully programmed two performances of *Five Easy Pieces* at the Unicorn Theatre in London, which took place in April 2018. In her interview (see Appendix 7), she explained that Manchester City Council's license refusal was more complicated than it might have initially appeared, and that in her opinion, the decision did not represent a form of censorship in Manchester as opposed to London or Brighton, rather a reflection of poor production logistics on Campo's part. On the basis of the information presented to Manchester City Council at short notice, the local authority was not satisfied that the appropriate safeguards were in place, and as a consequence they raised an objection. However, Morell indicates that the local authority was not in possession of all the preparatory documents and psychological reports available in Belgium, of which she states there were a significant volume (Morell, 2017:252).

The production was meant to premiere at the Brighton Fringe on 23rd March 2017 as part of the *Sick! Festival's* south coast edition, where a performance license had already been granted, however due to a scheduling problem the performance had to be cancelled at short notice. Home theatre in Manchester automatically became the first performance venue in the UK and a new license was required from Manchester City Council. According to the NNCEE, 'Regulation (4(2)) states the licensing authority may refuse to grant a licence if the application is not received at least 21 days before the day on which the first performance or activity takes place' (Rothwell, 2016:15). Given the tight time frame available for securing the new license, when Manchester City council attempted to perform its safeguarding checks on a complex production like *Five Easy Pieces*, making legitimate requests for further information on policies and the psychological reports, the logistics of

transporting files from Campo's headquarters in Belgium to the licensing department at Manchester City Council were insurmountable. Consequently, the Council could not issue the licenses in accordance with its own policies and the production was cancelled. The refusal of a license which resulted in the cancellation of the production in Manchester could be described as liquid censorship, a procedural act of control over a piece of art which resulted in its cancellation. Morell cautioned against the assumption that the City Council was 'philistine' and emphasised that they were doing the job that they are tasked to carry out, which is an important one (Morell, 2017:252). For Morell, who was the artistic director at the Unicorn Theatre for children in London for six years, establishing good relationships with the local authority safeguarding team is very important, and in this instance, a relationship between Campo, the IIPM and Manchester City Council was not in place (Ibid.). This example highlights the complexities involved in touring international work to the UK that involves child actors. It also serves as a strong example of the less visible forms that liquid censorship assumes.

In response to a question from the critic Andrew Haydon about whether the decision in Manchester was 'defacto censorship', the IIPM commented on its Facebook page (see Appendix 10):

The reason was that "long term traumatising" for the young actors could occur... and some more moral (and absurd) arguments in this direction. Another reason was that we had all permissions for Brighton & Manchester (where we planned [sic] to play first, you need only the permissions in the city you premiere and can then play in whole GB), than [sic] Brighton was cancelled (for planning reasons, no censure) & Manchester was new premiere place and couldn't hand out a new permission in so short time (IIPM, 2017).

Milo Rau did not seek to claim that the production had been censored. The word censorship carries negative associations, which may have posed a threat to future bookings for the already successful touring production and could have made future license applications in the UK more challenging.

Wider censorship issues for *Five Easy Pieces* in Europe have been relatively limited in scope. According to Lily Climenhaga, 'The play was censored in Munich with minor adjustments made in one scene (the actor Rachel had to wear an undershirt during her monologue instead of removing it)' (Climenhaga, 2017). The French, right-wing politician Jean-Frédéric Poisson 'collected some 12,500 signatures for a petition to keep the production out of Paris (arguing against exposing children to the subject-matter)' (Ibid.). The work was also censored in Frankfurt following the refusal of child performance licenses by the 'Trade Inspectorate of Upper Bavaria' (nachtkritik.de, 2016). Rau commented in an interview with Lyn Gardner (2017a) that they had planned early to seek to mitigate the risk of controversy, inviting journalists in from the start so that it was not possible to discover the play as a news story before the creative team had asserted their principles and vision,

controlling the narrative around the piece. There is something sensational about finding out about a controversial play and breaking this news in the media, but Milo Rau managed to disempower the press by being transparent about his production plans as well as the safeguards in place, such as the psychologists who were working with the children. Rau commented in *The New York Times* that he has 'had scandals before a premiere, but never afterward' (Rau, 2018). This would indicate that the idea of the work generated the controversy, rather than its realisation. This argument is potentially served by the fact that *Five Easy Pieces* has not provoked protest or widespread censorship once it has reached the stage. However, it should be noted that the performance run at the Unicorn Theatre in London took place over two days, which gave only a limited timeframe for protests to be mobilised against the work, had the production sparked controversy.

What is clear from the policy and procedural requirements for working with children is that theatre companies will need to have a sufficient budget in place in order to be able to afford to stage challenging work. This type of production is expensive, which imposes practical limits on the number of projects that make it to the stage, hopefully filtering out examples of work that are not adequately prepared. For example, a further complication for international companies seeking to tour productions that involve child actors in the UK relates to legislative provisions for chaperones. According to Morell, who has programmed work produced by Belgium Children's Theatre companies previously, including Campo, when they arrive in the UK the companies bring a team of Belgian helpers whom the child actors are comfortable with but are also obliged to have UK based local authority approved chaperones in place. Morell commented that the Belgian children find this strange (Morell, 2017:252). It is noteworthy that parents are not permitted to be chaperones in the UK and according to the NNCEE, 'parents can be "star struck" and fail to adequately supervise their child' (Rothwell, 2016:55). The local authority license structure indicates that parental consent alone is not considered to be adequate, and that a further, state level act of regulation is considered necessary in order to protect children in the entertainment industry. This regulation is supported by the UN convention on the rights of a child, under Article 32 (OHCHR, 1989).

UK chaperones participate in local authority approved training in order that they can appropriately identify child protection issues relating to wellbeing and education needs. According to the NNCEE, this encompasses child development issues such as:

attachment, cognitive abilities (ability to consent), conformity (sensitivity to overt pressure), emotional vulnerability (sensitive topics such as body image), effect of anxiety and fatigue and non-verbal communication (Rothwell, 2016:57).

Part of the reason *Five Easy Pieces* is such a complex production relates to the direct theatrical challenges posed to these safeguarding points; for example, an actress is represented in a way that it appears as though she is being pressurised on stage to perform a difficult scene. This interpretation is as a result of the deliberate theatrical framing device employed by Rau and it is difficult to distinguish the real from the constructed in the scene. It is noteworthy here that at the Unicorn Theatre production in April 2018 I observed the same child yawning at earlier moments in the production, indicating fatigue or boredom. Watching this, I questioned whether the child actress was yawning as a result of feeling tired, which is something that chaperones have a duty to monitor, or if these moments had been constructed by Rau.

A recent campaign by the media and entertainment union BECTU highlighted inconsistencies between local authority approaches to vetting chaperones, which in some instances involves 'interviews and mandatory safeguarding training' (Snow, 2017a), whilst in others, references and a DBS check. According to Paul Evans, the assistant national secretary at BECTU, inconsistency in industry regulation is resulting in a 'needless risk' to child safety (Evans, cited by Snow, 2017a). Sebastian Brennan from the Sylvia Young agency commented in *The Stage* that the problem lies with local authorities, where a 'lack of coordination has just led to a fragmented system which is confusing to navigate and doesn't appear to benefit the welfare of children' (Brennan, cited by Snow, 2017a). Budget cuts and the associated pressures on councils were cited by the casting director, Jo Hawes (Snow, 2017a), as having had an impact on the quality of training and the differing levels of services being provided.

A chief concern that Swift raised in the statement from Manchester City Council (see Appendix 9) relates to the controversial themes in the script for production. As part of the NNCEE advisory document, an example of best practice for a difficult theme in a play is provided:

In the play, the children are murdered. One child appears to be stabbed and the other appears to be decapitated. In this case the scene was done in strobe lighting in a sequence lasting a few seconds – it looked quite gory. The sequence was rehearsed in full light and the inspecting local authorities were invited into the theatre to watch the performance. The scene was explained to the parents at the outset (Rothwell, 2016:21).

It is clear that from a legal perspective, children are not prohibited from performing in productions that deal with violent themes or actions, even if the young actors are directly involved in these scenes. The difference between a production being censored or permitted relates to preparation, transparency and effective partnership working between the theatre, production company, chaperones and the local authority. The objections to the production raised in Manchester were overcome by the Unicorn Theatre and the London Borough of Southwark. Crucially, in the case of

Five Easy Pieces, the local authority in London and artistic director would have had more time to evaluate the controversial theme against the treatment of the subject matter by Campo and Milo Rau. At interview Morell commented that based on her experiences, she would be more confident programming a piece by Campo which was directed by Milo Rau, where she could be assured of a diligent and respectful process for the children involved, than a production that explored lighter themes but was less well managed (Morell, 2017:251). In order to achieve this effectively, a production company must have sufficient financial resources, without which it is unlikely that the piece would make it to the stage.

The Dramaturgy of *Five Easy Pieces*

The dramaturgical observations of key moments from the production explored here have been drawn from the live performance of *Five Easy Pieces* at the Unicorn Theatre on Friday, 27th April 2018. Direct quotations from the production are not drawn from a published text because this is not available, but from the notes taken whilst viewing the performance. Rau's approach in *Five Easy Pieces* is underpinned by the idea of emotional abstraction on the part of the child actors. For Rau, theatre's fictional form and the opportunity for role-play within this enables child actors to participate in a different way to the adult actors, without being caused harm. In an interview with Guy Duplat, he commented:

Of course, we've been careful not to traumatize children, and for them, playing on stage is like a Nintendo on the war, they know the difference between fiction and reality (Rau, cited in Duplat, 2016).

To justify this provocative structural assumption, Rau referred to an example from an early rehearsal in which the children mirrored the movements and gestures from Ingmar Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage* (1972). Bergman's film deals with the complexities of a marriage breakdown, describing experiences that children would not have had access to from an adult's perspective. Rau has referred to the Brechtian *Verfremdung* form or estrangement, to suggest that the children were detached from the text and themes that they were playing with whilst they developed their craft as actors. In her online review for *The Theatre Times* of the production at the Unicorn Theatre, Duska Radosavljević endorsed Rau's technique, observing that by 'acknowledging their natural lack of emotional experience, the child actors are prompted to use and practice the basic skills of mimicry as a means of learning how to be adults' (Radosavljević, 2018). From a conceptual perspective, the assumption made here feels convenient for the director, absolving him from the responsibility of a deeper level of questioning regarding the potential that the material might disturb the children. The director assumes that the child actors will forge a fictional relationship with material drawn from real events.

In practice and having viewed a live performance of *Five Easy Pieces* in London, four of the five pieces contained a playful and politically empowered quality which supports the sentiments described here. Aside from one particularly problematic scene which will be explored in depth here, this case study could represent an example of best practice in empowering child actors. The actors performed long monologues, stretching the boundaries of how much text we might expect a child performer to learn without a prompt. In these moments, the children presented themselves at ease in the space and played within the experimental framework established by Rau. For example, Maurice Leerman played the 'old and sick' man described in Rau's description of the first piece, in this case, Marc Dutroux's ailing father (see Figure 10). The monologue, which was filmed live and projected for the spectator, is based on interview testimony. The overstated performance technique exposed the process of its creation, resisting any attempts at realism. The only real quality in terms of the content associated with the narrative in this scene was a selection of photographs of Dutroux's family which the child actor held up for the audience.



Figure 10: Maurice Leerman depicting Papa Dutroux. *Five Easy Pieces*, directed by Milo Rau. *Kunstenfestivaldesarts* (Brussels), 2016. Copyright: Phile Deprez.

The second piece was framed with a reenactment of a visit to a crime scene, in which one of the actresses plays a dead body and asks Seynaeve how to do this convincingly. Again, whilst this moment was uncomfortable to view because of its association with a real child who has been buried in a shallow grave, the actor appeared to be comfortable and playful. Willem Loobuyck portrayed the chief investigator of the crimes, positioned at a desk behind a pin board screen covered with maps and photographs. Seynaeve and Willem improvised an extended opening to the monologue as

the young actor burst into fits of giggles in his attempts to follow the director's instructions for inhabiting his role. The audience echoed the natural laughter and I wondered if the child would be able to regain composure in order to perform the text.

Nicholas Ridout (2006) observes that the presence of uninvited laughter on stage is subversive. It is clear from critical responses to the work at other venues in Europe or in Singapore that this laughter was part of the constructed production and did not happen by chance in London. Rau has directed the scene to make it look as though the child actor is 'corpsing' (2006:129), a term that describes the eruption of unplanned laughter in a live theatre context. The laughter serves to underline the point that in *Five Easy Pieces* children are engaging in an adult discipline and that the typical expectations or formalities associated with a theatre production cannot be assumed here. The director deliberately plays with the unique status of the child actor. Willem's performance challenges the idea that the content is too disturbing, firmly locating the audience in the realm of children playing characters and revelling in the absurdity of the act.

The problematic moment occurs in the third piece, which is described by Rau as 'An Essay on Submission' (Todd, 2017). This moment stands apart from the others and appears to overstep the boundaries of acceptable experimentation with child actors. The scene raises urgent questions regarding the ethics of this type of theatre experiment with child actors. Rachel Dedain plays the role of a child victim, Sabine Dardenne, who was locked in a cell away from her parents and abused by Dutroux. The material is taken from the letters that the victim had written whilst she was in this cell. The relationship Rau has suggested between a fictional scenario created in a video game and this real-world context is hard to defend in this moment. Arguably, it is possible that the child actor would be more likely to connect with the text on an emotional level, because unlike the Bergman example, the words were written by a child. According to Rau's logic, it would be easier for a child to relate to another child's experiences.



Figure 11: Rachel Dedain in 'An Essay on Submission', *Five Easy Pieces*, directed by Milo Rau. *Kunstenfestivaldesarts* (Brussels), 2016. Copyright: Phile Deprez.

The distancing effect established in the preceding scenes, in which the child actors have represented testimony from older characters associated with the Dutroux case, is stripped away in the third piece, and the spectator watches a ten-year-old Rachel Dedain portray a twelve-year-old victim. Dedain, is urged to undress by the director. According to Rau:

You can see him [Seynaeve] leading the children more and more into a dark space of paedophilic play. He says, 'but you did it in the rehearsal, why don't you do it now? You have to do it, that's how Dutroux did it'. This is the reality of theatre, this is what theatre directors do. But when you do it with children, you understand the violence of direction (Todd, 2017).

This critique on the types of behaviours exhibited by theatre directors is part of a reflexive exercise for Rau. *Five Easy Pieces* is his artistic attempt to deconstruct a creative process in what he has described as a 'meta-study on performance art', exploring power and violence in the director's approach (Rau, cited by Todd, 2017). Rau avers that this particular territory is a metaphorical form of 'paedophilic play'. In order to evoke this uncomfortable dynamic, the actress removes her clothes in front of the audience. In the process of reflecting on the nature of theatre and the balance in power that exists between the actor and director however, Rau and the Campo team have given themselves permission to engage in the act of instructing a child actress to undress in front of a paying audience, which did not feel ethically justifiable when I watched the performance. The form recreates the actions of a paedophile coercing a child victim. In an interview with Dominikus Muller, Rau observed that a 'finer sense of responsibility' (Muller, 2016) is required from a director when he is working with child actors. Dedain was eight-years-old when she first performed the role and ten-years by the time the production toured to the Unicorn Theatre in London. I argue here that the director neglected to adhere to the stated need for enhanced responsibility in the third piece.

The scene opens with Peter Seynaeve asking Dedain if she would kiss somebody on stage. Her response is 'Kiss you? No!'. A mattress is set centre stage and Dedain sits on it, whilst her fellow actors gather at the sides around her, watching and holding pieces of film equipment. The tone of this piece is markedly different from the relative playfulness of the preceding scenes. Seynaeve asks Dedain to undress in front of the camera. She performs a reluctant and visibly uncomfortable refusal. In the first piece, we observed a child consumed by his preparations, fussing over the minute details required to play the part of an old man. In the second piece, we laughed along with a child consumed by his reaction to the absurdity of his role-play. Here, we are pushed further, assigned the role of silent accomplices to a director engaged in the act of pressurising a young actress to play a twelve-year-old victim of sexual abuse and to remove her clothes. All of these pieces have been deliberately constructed in this way, as part of the theatre game, however in this moment, the terms of the exercise felt problematic and exploitative. As a spectator watching the scene, I felt that I had a complicit relationship with the coercion of a child actress.

Regardless of the authenticity of the response from Dedain, which has been staged to suggest that she feels uncomfortable with the request and would rather not proceed with the scene, here the point being made about the limits of what theatre can represent seems to push the experimentation with the child actor into a manipulative territory that it should not enter. In his discussion with the playwright Stefan Bläske on his directorial process, Rau describes an imbalance in power within children's theatre:

Children's theatre for adults corresponds – on an aesthetic level and of course in a metaphorical sense – to what paedophilia is in a human relationship. It isn't a mutually responsible love relationship, but a one-sided power relationship, where the weaker partner, namely the child, simply has to put up with it (Rau, 2016).

Five Easy Pieces consciously stages this disempowerment. Dedain responds to the director's request and removes her trousers and top so that she is dressed in knickers and a vest. Seynaeve arranges her hair in front of her chest and sets up the camera, so that the audience has a screen close-up of Dedain's face and body. Dedain has drawn her legs close to her chest, and the placement of her hair gives the appearance on screen that she is naked. She is then told to perform her monologue, which has been drawn from letters written by Dardenne in captivity. Dardenne was twelve when Dutroux kidnapped her on her way to school. She composed the letters to her parents believing that Dutroux was delivering them. The letters remained in Dutroux's possession. Rau has constructed a scene in which a young actress is manipulated into a situation where she repeats the words of a victim who is being manipulated by a paedophile. The relationship made with paedophilia here is direct and a

legitimate response to this part of the work is that theatre should not be allowed to play in this way with child actors.

Five Easy Pieces transgresses a boundary that the creative team behind *The Nether* (2013) by the American playwright, Jennifer Haley, decided to impose upon their production. Haley's play is set in the Hideaway, a futuristic virtual environment within a realm called the Nether, previously known as the Internet, and explores the ethics of paedophilia in this fantasy, virtual realm. The victim, Iris, an idealised pre-pubescent Victorian girl in *The Nether*, is an avatar whom visitors pay to have sex with and then mutilate with an axe. Haley stated in her author's note that it was important that Iris was portrayed by a child actress who would appear as a pre-pubescent girl on stage, asserting that as a consequence the audiences could be confident that no disturbing or graphic sexual violence would be represented. Descriptions of what goes on in the Hideaway are staged in an interview between the adult actors, in a separate part of the stage, which is described as the interrogation room. The child performer only appears in a separate space on stage, which represents the virtual world. However, in scene six, Haley's stage direction states 'Iris lifts her dress over her head and stands in her knickers' (*The Nether*, scene 6:29). Jeremy Herrin and the Headlong creative team decided not to stage this moment with the young child performer in the UK. For Headlong, asking a child to undress overstepped a boundary. Significantly, *The Nether* had a longer performance run in the UK, including a West End transfer. The potential for a controversy to develop in response to the work would have been greater and this may have been factored in to the approach that was taken by the creative team.

When I watched the same boundary being transgressed in *Five Easy Pieces* at the Unicorn theatre, I wondered who else had paid to view the work, what their motivation had been for coming to see the production and whether the act of a child undressing in this context should be something that audience members can purchase tickets to spectate at all. The scene provokes urgent questions regarding the nature of consent and the ethics of spectatorship in this particularly challenging context. In an article about *The Nether*, Isabel Stowell-Kaplin (2015) draws on Josette Féral's philosophy that theatre is governed by a 'law of reversibility', which guarantees that a spectator will only witness the representation of violence rather than actual harm. The law relies on the assumption that the actor will return to her 'point of departure' (Féral and Bermingham, 2002:104, cited in Stowell-Kaplan, 2015:160) after the performance. Developing this assumption, she refers back to Antonin Artaud's *The Theater and Its Double* (1959), which asserts that 'it is precisely this lack of any immediate and literal real-life consequence that...gives theatre its very real power'

(Stowell-Kaplan, 2015:160). It is difficult to rely on the 'law of reversibility' with a child actor, who retains a real quality in a theatrical space. Ridout highlights that concerns about animals and children on stage 'illuminate rather valuably...[that] the reality of theatrical employment itself, irrespective of the status or ability of the employee... [involves] a particular form of exploitation' (Ridout, 2006:100). Whilst this is clearly the point that Rau is reflecting on within his meta-study, can we, as the spectator, guarantee that when Rachel Dedain undresses and performs the content of a child victim's letters, she will return undamaged back to her original state?

On the basis that the third piece was a 'meta-study on performance art' (Rau, 2016), in my opinion, it was not justified. The criticism engaged in the action that it sought to condemn. It has been hard to rationalise this response, in terms of my strong support for the empowerment of child actors in a professional theatre setting, as well as in society. For Rau the meaning of the piece encompassed a broader set of questions regarding the ethics of theatre direction in this space as well as the manipulative power that adults possess over children. As an audience member watching, the scene made me angry, not at the exploitative nature of theatre direction, but at Milo Rau, for knowing that a director can exploit his actors and choosing to do so in this way to make a point that served his 'meta-study'. As Freshwater observes in her study of theatre and audiences, individuals bring their 'personal histories and immediate preoccupations to their interpretation of a production' (Freshwater, 2009a:5). This response is affected by my own sensibilities and fears as a mother, with a daughter not much younger than the actress who played the role.

In his reflection on the use of child actors and the ethics of *The Nether*, the critic Andrew Haydon (2014) draws on Maddie Costa's reading of Nicholas Ridout's *Theatre & Ethics* (2009):

Theatre isn't at its most ethical, Ridout posits, when "what the work says or does matches our own sense of what we would like it to say or do, corresponds with our own sense of how we would like the world to be". For theatre to be ethical, it "would have to confront its spectators or participants with something radically other, something that could not be assimilated by their existing understanding of the ethical". Such work requires "a labour of critical thought for its ethical potential to be realised", requires a critic to approach it "with uncertainty, with a view to the possibility of surprise, challenge or affront" (Costa, 2014 citing Ridout, 2009 in Haydon 2014).

Haydon cites Costa and Ridout to proffer that an artist must present work that confronts its audience, even if this causes discomfort or outrage. If I critique my own response on the basis of this interpretation of Ridout's theory, my concerns were connected to my private ethical sentiments which were being deliberately aroused by Rau in order to engage me in a heightened level of critical thought. However, Haydon's ethical reflection is observed in the context of *The Nether*, a production in which the artists decided it would not be appropriate to ask the child performer to take her

clothes off. My concerns about *Five Easy Pieces* focussed on whether it was acceptable to exploit a child actor in this way to elicit a critical response. Was Rau's desired outcome from an audience worth the potential cost to the young performer?

Clara Chow, whose review of the production was broadly positive, observes that 'the perversity of having children act as the victims of a paedophile does cut too close to home for me: when eight-year-old Rachel is commanded by Seynaeve to take off her clothes' (Chow, 2016). Karin Lai has described this moment as the point in the production which emphasises its fine line between 'performance and pornography, wish-fulfilment and exploitation' (Lai, 2016). Conversely, for the critic Andrew Haydon:

There is absolutely nothing wrong with what happens, or with what we're shown, but at the same time, it brilliantly demonstrates another strand of the piece's concerns – namely that even making this piece is somehow wrong, and by extension the entire director-actor dynamic (in any theatre production) can be seen as suspect (Haydon, 2017).

It seems awkward that something can be not wrong in absolute terms and 'somehow wrong' (Haydon, 2017) simultaneously. Haydon is presumably observing that, in his opinion, the production explores the idea that a director *could* exploit an actor in an artistically sound way. The work is meant to provoke the type of uncomfortable responses that Lai and Chow felt. Lily Climenhaga, who describes herself on her blog as a Canadian PhD student 'trying desperately to break into the German theatre world as a dramaturg', passionately defends the work:

The moment is both difficult to watch, but extremely effective. The scene is not distasteful, but quite the opposite.

So why all of the outrage?

No one who has seen or read the production would ban it or react in this way (Climenhaga, 2017).

Climenhaga response appears to be at odds with the other critical reflections observed by Lai and Chow, suggesting an overly simplistic assumption about a universal audience reaction. I understand where the position it comes from, because I also want to support the liberty of young people to claim a space professional performance. I also recognise that theatre can cause this type of contradiction and it is possible that my response is as a result of effective theatre making. However, I remain unconvinced that the scene empowered a child actor or that it was justified. Rau makes it clear in descriptions of his rehearsal process that he considered the children to be emotionally immature and this formed the basis for the structure of the production. The third piece appears to exploit the identity of the figure of a child as an innocent victim, in order to reflect on the power dynamic between a director and actor. I believe it is possible that, just as my response is defined by

my private sentiments as a mother according to Freshwater's logic, so too may Climenhaga's reaction have been influenced by her stated desire to be accepted into the European theatre scene and a culture in which, according to Balme, 'just as boys will be boys, so too will artists be artists, who largely enjoy constitutionally safeguarded and therefore unquestioned freedom to transgress against perceived taboos' (2014:17).

One of the reasons why it is difficult to directly condemn this moment in *Five Easy Pieces* is because Rau has constructed the scene as a piece of experimentation which is inherently very interesting. The production appears to be in dialogue with contemporary theatre scholarship that questions the ethical complexities of theatre that explores real events. The ethical dilemmas that Rau poses by placing a child actress into this scene, asking her to undress and perform verbatim testimony gathered from a real child victim of sexual abuse, is an experiment which directly confronts the challenges associated with real or verbatim theatre. The spectator is awake to both the presence of a real child on stage and the real child victim associated with the testimony that Dedain performs, drawn from letters written by Sabine Dardenne to her family whilst in captivity. This shocking juxtaposition between the content being explored and the presence of the child actress is constructed to invite an unsettling 'irruption of the real', referred to by Liz Tomlin in her scholarship on theatre based on real and 'private narratives' (Tomlin, 2013:116).

The 'irruption of the real' (Ibid.) status of the child in this scene intensifies the effect created by Rau, which is part of the ethical challenge being deliberately created on stage. For example, in an earlier transition between scenes, the child actress Polly Persyn points a gun at the audience, and the question is posed 'is it Polly, or the actor?'. In the fourth piece in which Pepijn Loobuyck portrays a moving monologue from the perspective of the father of one of the victims, the child actor's presence irrupts into the scene when Seynaeve stops the performance and demands that Pepijn cries to make the moment more convincing. Loobuyck breaks out of his character and his native Flemish to protest, 'I'm trying my best'. We are offered close up images on the screen of Loobuyck's attempts to cry, which are unsuccessful. The director hands the child actor a tear stick, which he applies under his eyes to make them sting in order that they will produce false tears. This shatters the emotional intensity that has been building and reinforces the point to the audience that the child actor is emotionally distanced from the script he is performing. However, it provokes a question regarding whether the line between actual physical discomfort and Féral's 'Law of reversibility' (Féral and Bermingham, 2002:104) have been observed here.

Dedain's representation is evocative of live reality television streaming, or disturbing videos posted on social media websites in order to secure clicks. The actress recounts granular details, through Dardenne's letters, for example that Dutroux has been forcing her to have sex with him, that she doesn't like it when he is 'inside' her and that he has told her to enjoy it. The language is repulsive and particularly haunting because it is based on a lived experience. Furthermore, the text is more shocking and graphic because it is voiced by a child actress. The audience listens and watches in an excruciating collective silence, and the scene is almost unbearable to take in. No audience members walked out of the auditorium at the Unicorn Theatre when I attended the performance in April 2018. That course of action would have felt disrespectful to the real child performer engaged in the process of reenacting the scene, or indeed to the victim.

Listening to Dardenne's letters spoken out loud by a young girl of a similar age, whilst a simultaneous close up of Dedain's face and body is projected on the screen, places the audience in an inescapably voyeuristic and disturbing role. The spectators' senses are bombarded with the dual images constructed on stage. The mixed media perspective offered here and throughout *Five Easy Pieces* potentially serves as a conscious theatrical metaphor for the formulaic and intrusive media coverage that typically accompanies violent events in society, such as photographs of body bags, forensic investigators, crime scenes, recorded interviews with distressed family members or detailed accounts of key pieces of evidence that provide graphic fragments of insight into a crime. Bauman (2005, 2011), Freshwater (2013) and Tomlin (2013) have discussed the deliberate circulation of stories and images in response to this type of crime as a tool employed by media organisations to secure readership and engagement for profit. Rau's use of filming gives physical form to the nature of media obsession which surrounds this type of case and the desire in society to find a rational explanation for the creation of a monster, a symptom of Bauman's liquid society which perpetuates an individual need to seek security in the context of various threats or dangers.

Purni Morell reflected at interview (see Appendix 7) that as a consequence of the circulation of news stories about violence against children, the experience of childhood has irrevocably altered. She suggested that it is important to explore and try to make sense of this outcome with children. Art is a powerful medium to start a conversation:

these children have grown up hearing about this monster so why would we not talk to them about it because ... what we've done as a result of that person's existence is that we've changed the way childhood operates and what children are allowed to do.... If we're going to let them watch the news then why wouldn't we make a piece of art with them... (Morell, 2017:250).

Rau permits the child actors to participate in a typically adult conversation about paedophilia because children are directly affected by the social anxiety which surrounds this type of case. This approach explains why Morell felt that the scene was justified in the production and should be staged rather than censored. In her online review of the work, Radosavljević similarly avers that *Five Easy Pieces* has a transformative capacity, 'on rare occasions when vision, intelligence, and courage align, this kind of programming can change lives' (Radosavljević, 2018).

The emphasis on privileging the real victim's voice in *Five Easy Pieces* is praised by Lily Climenhaga (2017) who proposes that by watching the production, audience members assist in redressing an imbalance in media representation of the crime, which she states were too heavily focussed on the perpetrator rather than those affected as victims. Perhaps the production will provoke a shift in the way that spectators critically view media narratives of violent crimes. Stillman (2007:497) has discussed theatre's transformative potential in her scholarship on media representation of female victims. According to the text included on the outside back cover of *I Choose to Live* (2006) written by the 'real' victim Sabine Dardenne, writing a book about her experiences offered a possibility for change:

I need to write this book for three reasons: so that people stop giving me strange looks and treating me like a curiosity; so that no one ever asks me any more questions ever again; and so that the judicial system never again frees a paedophile for 'good behaviour' (Dardenne, 2006).

It is possible that by privileging the victim's voice, the piece intends to provoke a political conversation about the ways in which society deals with paedophiles. However, the production does not seek to provide any solutions.

According to Rau in an interview with Lyn Gardner, Jean Lambrechts, the father of one of Dutroux's oldest victims has stated that the production 'hurts the truth' (Gardner, 2017a). Rau defended the work, asserting that the piece is not a 'documentary play' and could not attempt to stage every detail relating to the crimes (Ibid.). The philosopher Alexander Kluge has referred to the IIPM's work as 'real theatre' (IIPM, 2018). Crucially, *Five Easy Pieces* is not a documentary, it is an artistic representation based on testimonies and research, explored through a format which involves children playing a game of acting and learning about theatre. This theatrical context and framing is emphasised in Campo's description of the work, 'the IIPM subjects its aesthetic appreciation of realism and brutality to a theatre study' (Campo, 2016). However, the boundary between reality and fiction is deliberately blurred in the third piece, making it the most problematic moment in the production. In a discussion on representing the horror of real events, Anne Michaels suggests that it

would be wrong to assume that we can, and proffers ‘instead, to choose a very different kind of language to write about these events; a kind of language that might bring the reader - and the writer - [and implicitly the audience] to the precise moment before we turn away’ (Michaels, 2017:48-49). The problem in the third piece is that the language and composition of the scene does not feel particularly different, and in my opinion lacks the sensitivity described by Michaels. It appears to attempt to recreate reality in order to shock the audience. Rather than calling for censorship, the scene may perhaps have warranted further dramaturgical scrutiny in order to elevate Rau’s artistic approach.

The delicate relationship between real events and theatrical representations is a subject that is ethically complex and divisive. For Lambrechts, the relationship between Rau’s art and his reality was ‘offensive’ (Gardner, 2017a). Towards the end of the production, the actors engaged in a discussion about the game of acting and Dedain commented that she would have changed some things about the play but that she could not because it was ‘real’. This reflection is crucial in terms of my reading of the child performers participation in the scene. If Dedain’s comment is considered to be a real observation, the implication here is that the constraints imposed by the authentic testimony of Sabine Dardenne carried an associated agency that made the child actor feel that it was important to conform to the real narrative, which may have influenced her decision to consent to the role-play.

During the post-show question and answer session, Seynaeve discussed the specific technical details associated with the creation of the third piece in the rehearsal process. Rau approached Seynaeve to say that he felt the piece needed to go in this direction and to cross this ‘boundary’ (Seynaeve, 2018). Seynaeve explained that he was initially sceptical, commenting that as an actor he could see the validity of attempting this scene, but as the acting coach responsible for the child actors he was uncomfortable asking Dedain to participate in this way. I think Seynaeve’s initial scepticism was legitimate. However, Rau is clearly a powerful and articulate director who knows how to communicate his ideas in order to combat this kind of resistance. Prior to attempting the piece, the creative team consulted with the production’s child psychologists as well as Campo, Dedain’s parents and Dedain. Each party gave ‘consent’ and certain safeguards were put in place, including the use of safe-words which would alert Seynaeve if Dedain was uncomfortable at any point (Ibid.). According to Seynaeve, Dedain was enthusiastic about the scene and was far from uncomfortable about removing her clothes to portray the role, which she performed initially at the age of eight. However, when she reached the age of ten, Dedain approached Seynaeve and stated

that she was no longer comfortable taking her vest top off as well as her t-shirt. Dedain was becoming more aware of her own body and taking ownership over its use on stage. The terms of her consent had shifted. Thereafter, including the performance at the Unicorn Theatre, Dedain left her vest on.

The fact that the child actress was able to change the terms of her involvement in the piece perhaps demonstrates that she was comfortable in the process and felt able to assert her wishes. However, the decision also provokes a question regarding the shifting nature of consent from child actors. Will a choice made at a young age ultimately be regretted with more maturity? Dedain's change of mind over undressing on stage perhaps points to an awakening or an awareness that her body was being exploited in a way that she was no longer comfortable with. Karen Lai raises this concern in her review of the production when it was staged in Singapore, questioning how in the future 'Rachel [Dedain] would choose to reconcile herself with what she has had to do, night after night, to suit an audience's appetite for a show like this' (Lai, 2017). The use of the word appetite calls to mind Alston's (2013) description of the relationship between neo-liberalism and immersive theatre marketing, which frames certain types of theatre as a commodified product for audience consumption. As part of the ongoing safeguarding protection policies in place at Campo, the child actors engage in regular individual sessions with child psychologists, which according to Seynaeve (2018) they find quite pointless. He asserts that the production company is committed to ensuring safeguards are continuously maintained. However, this does not satisfy the question regarding repressed damage that may manifest in the future.

What Motivated Campo and Milo Rau to Make *Five Easy Pieces*?



Figure 12: *Five Easy Pieces* marketing image. *Kunstenfestivaldesarts* (2016)

Five Easy Pieces trades on the fact that the production is playing with the boundaries of acceptability and taking a risk by experimenting with a shocking juxtaposition between the theme and the child actors. The tone is designed to thrill and to shock. In my view, the production imagery employed for the marketing of *Five Easy Pieces* has been constructed to show the seven innocent faces of the participating child actors looking directly at the camera with neutral facial expressions to confront the prospective spectator head on. Their faces are brightly lit against a black background and the absence of a clear emotional expression creates a raw and innocent intensity. The image demonstrates that the focus for the audience will be on this group of children. It immediately hooks the spectator's attention, albeit with an accompanying anxiety. Others may look at the image and interpret it in a different way. Levine's response is similar to my reading of the construction of the production image. She describes it as referencing 'the optical theatrical effects artists have developed over the centuries to construct indelible images of childhood and innocence' (Levine, 2017:151). .

Campo's decision to select Milo Rau to work with children would have been made with an awareness of his identity as a controversial theatre director. Rau's profile has achieved international attention, exemplified by the 2018 article in the *New York Times* entitled, 'Is Milo Rau Really the Most Controversial Director in Theater?' (Marshall, 2018) prompted by the controversy surrounding his call for ISIS fighters to participate *Lam Gods* (2018). In an interview with Dominic Muller for the publication *Frieze* which focuses on a discussion of the director's attitudes to empathy and

responsibility in the context of controversial art, Rau referred to a culture of 'one-upmanship' in German theatre, which he attributes to a legacy of the bold experimentation on the part of the late German director, Christoph Schlingensiefel (Muller, 2016). This acknowledgement of the context in which Rau is working in Europe is important, particularly from the perspective of Campo's previous artistic experiments with child actors. Rau would have wanted to make his mark at Campo, moving beyond the work that had been produced previously. Rau suggests that as a consequence of Schlingensiefel's notoriously controversial projects, artists attempt to emulate a style which privileges taboo themes in their work for the sake of achieving the next great shock:

Now that a goatfucker poem about Erdoğan has been recited on German public television, what are we supposed to do next? Shoot a few Turks on 'Germany's Next Top Model'? The problem is this stultification, this lack of sensitivity to the consequences of one's actions. And for me that was the challenge with *Five Easy Pieces*: to work with the most vulnerable of actors, child actors, on a project about the most taboo issue of our time - paedophilia (Ibid.).

Rau freely selected what he describes as 'the most' challenging subject for child actors, and in doing so participated in the culture of one-upmanship that he critiques in his interview with Muller.

Rau's acknowledgement that the production is a 'challenge' is important, because it reveals something about his motivation behind the selection of the theme which was to try to accomplish a piece of theatre that sounded taboo and impossible, an impetus that can be lost in the various and sometimes conflicting explanations he provides for his work that are so erudite they make the most shocking dramatic experiments sound rational and justified. For example, Rau followed *Five Easy Pieces* with *The 120 Days of Sodom* (2017), a reinterpretation of Pier Paolo Pasolini's controversial film, with disabled actors. This premise immediately sounds distasteful and shocking, yet Rau frames the work as a rigorously purposeful critique of the decision in Switzerland to detect and abort fetuses with Down's Syndrome. Both productions test the limits of controversial experimentation with a vulnerable group of actors, and this connection is something that the IIPM acknowledges on its website:

Rau and the IIPM put the theatre's range of instruments of empathy and portrayal to the test – with child actors in the one case and actors with disabilities in the other (IIPM, 2018).

This indicates that Rau exploits the child actors in *Five Easy Pieces* or actors with Down's Syndrome in *The 120 Days of Sodom* because of who they are and what they represent, in order to test the limits of theatre as part of an intellectual experiment. The identity of the actors is being exploited to serve the intellectual imperatives of the work. How privileged is the position of a well-funded theatre director that he can select a category of actors because of what they represent and push the

limits of what they might legitimately endure on stage to satisfy his curiosity? And what of the privilege of the spectator, who can pay to watch children participating in Rau's theatre experiment?

In an interview with Bryony Cartmell entitled *Inside the mind of the world's most controversial director* (2018), Rau defines the boundaries of his work as having practical rather than thematic limits, 'Artistic freedom has its limits, of course. These are the limits of laws on construction, of physical possibility. You can't kill on stage, you can't have criminals' (Rau, cited in Cartmell, 2018). Rau goes on in the interview to reflect on the hypocrisy of not being able to slaughter a sheep on stage, given that the slaughter of livestock happens in other contexts. Referring once more to Féral's description of the limits of reversibility, her work explains that 'barred from the stage are certain practices of the 1960s in which bodies were mutilated or animals killed for the supposed pleasure of representation' (Féral and Bermingham, 2002:104). The challenge to this boundary discussed by Rau at interview indicates that playing deliberately with the 'law of reversibility' in *Five Easy Pieces* forms part of the artist's broader experimental interests. This logic reveals a lot about the director's clinical approach. The exploitation of the essential vulnerability of children's bodies in the space was part of Rau's exercise in testing or perhaps attempting to reinvent the limits of theatre.

The question is not whether *Five Easy Pieces* exploits child actors, because Rau and the IIPM acknowledge that this exploitation is central to the work, rather is the experiment ethically justifiable? Does this theatrical experiment satisfy the motivations of children who desire to act in professional theatre productions? Or is Rau exploiting these ambitions to serve his own curiosities as an artist or an ever-increasing appetite for thrilling repertoire amongst audiences?

Exploring 'Dark' Themes With British Children as Actors and Spectators

In her online review of *Five Easy Pieces* at the Unicorn Theatre, Radosavljević states that in 'an age of trigger warnings, when the Western society's overriding tendency is to wrap our children in cotton wool, this [*Five Easy Pieces*] is ultimately a truly heroic objective on a number of levels' (Radosavljević, 2018). Radosavljević avers that the process of dealing with violent and traumatic subject matters with children is neglected in contemporary society and art. *Five Easy Pieces* participates in a broader cultural debate regarding the types of art available for children in Britain.

Lyn Gardner has stated that 'theatres are so worried about upsetting parents and the media that they operate within a straitjacket of self-censorship' (Gardner, 2008), which she suggests is a

British theatre issue in particular. Gardner discussed the incongruous standards that exist in the UK regarding the exploration of challenging themes in contemporary work for children as opposed to classic adaptations:

once you wipe away the Disney glitter, many traditional tales are treasure troves of terror featuring murder, mutilation and horror...but if our kids were going to see a contemporary play featuring family breakdown, rape and cannibalism, we'd probably have them off the school coach before you could say "Sarah Kane" (Ibid.).

For Gardner, the liquid censorship of new writing compared to traditional stories offers British children 'a distorted view of reality and theatre' (Ibid.).

In an interview that I conducted with the critic Donald Hutera (2017) for this thesis, he discussed a recent example of censorship and anxiety in Britain regarding staging work that involves nudity with children. H2Dance's intergenerational dance piece, *Staging Ages*, was performed by dancers aged between nine and sixty-five and was cancelled at Ipswich Theatre in 2015. The scene which prompted the act of censorship involved two minutes of adult nudity on the part of the performers aged between thirty and sixty-five, whilst the children on stage aged between nine and sixteen were blindfolded and listening to music with headphones on. There were also concerns raised about a child pulling down an adult performer's trousers and slapping his bottom. The piece premiered in Sweden and toured to Norway before coming to the UK, where more than one venue raised concerns about the appropriateness of the content, emphasising a UK specific concern regarding nudity and the sexualisation of bodies in a theatre space.

In 2017, Rau reflected that his work had yet to reach the UK, in spite of his wider international touring success:

I think we are living now in a new renaissance of European theatre. People are trying new ways of telling things. We have toured in 30 different countries, but not in England. We were never invited! This could be the last play I have in England. But I hope it is the start of something (Rau, cited in Todd, 2017).

It is interesting that Rau observed that *Five Easy Pieces* might simultaneously be his first and last production in England, because it indicates that he surmised that the work may be too controversial for the British stage. At interview (see Appendix 7), in response to the question 'Could *Five Easy Pieces* have been created in the UK?', Purni Morell stated:

Culturally it's not possible to make that work here... Because we don't treat children as people. We don't treat children as artists. We don't treat children as equals. If you walk down the street with a child, the sanest of us including me will worry about how they cross the street... And because we worry about whether our children can cross the street properly we're not able to speak to them properly. Try this as a tourist experiment next time you go to Belgium or Holland and watch adults... They don't say hold mummy's hand, they don't say careful now, look both ways, what are we warning

children about all day. They know how to cross the road. We're a nation of massive neurotics (Morell, 2017:250).

Morell appears to suggest that the liquid censorship of certain themes is more pronounced in Britain than Belgium, or Scandinavian countries. It is possible that this deep-rooted neurosis and need to protect the figure of the child has affected my perception of the third piece in *Five Easy Pieces*.

Looking again at why Manchester City Council (see Appendix 9) refused the child performance licenses, one of the concerns that was raised questioned how children could be expected to participate in a production which is deemed unsuitable for children to watch. Charlotte De Somviele has observed, 'Five Easy Pieces is theatre for adults, not children' (De Somviele, 2016:1). There are inconsistencies in Milo Rau's statements regarding whether the production was considered to be suitable for children. In his interview with Dominic Muller in 2016, Rau indicated that the performance was created 'for adults' (Muller, 2016), not for children. In subsequent interviews, Milo Rau has directly contradicted this by claiming that he wanted children to be in the audience for the production, recommending that it was suitable from twelve years and above (Todd, 2017). In Manchester, the production was marketed for audiences aged sixteen years and over, which clearly delineated the work as adult. The children participating in *Five Easy Pieces* were younger than the age guidance provided, heightening the sense that they were involved in something that was adult and inappropriate. When the production took place at the Unicorn Theatre, the marketing was included in the adult segment of the theatre programme, targeted at patrons aged fourteen years and over. It is noteworthy that the Royal Court and Live Theatre in Newcastle similarly provide a fourteen years and upwards age guideline for productions which are deemed to be unsuitable for children. This is two years younger than the age guidance in Manchester that triggered concerns for the licensing team. Morell stated at interview that the Unicorn Theatre would never refuse entrance to patrons under the age of fourteen years but made the point that parental attitudes vary, and it is necessary for the theatre to cater for this in the production guidelines and marketing material (Morell, 2017:248). In Singapore, *Five Easy Pieces* was awarded a more stringent eighteen years plus rating. Conversely, the Hong Kong repertory theatre recommended that the work as suitable for twelve years and above. The various age guidelines attached to *Five Easy Pieces* reflect the divergence in cultural attitudes outside of the UK across Europe and Asia to the types of themes and media that children should access in early adolescence.

It is possible that, in some scenarios, *Five Easy Pieces* might have a different impact on children based on their specific cultural and family environments or education experiences. For example, children from Holland start sex education classes from the age of four. We can legitimately

assume that it would be less surprising for a child in this context to hear a 10-year-old use the word 'sex' on stage. At the time that *Five Easy Pieces* was developed, sex education in the UK commenced at the age of eleven and upwards in secondary schools. According to the former Education Secretary Justine Greening in her 2017 announcement that sex education would become mandatory in all schools in the UK, with primary school education on relationships and staying safe, it was made clear that parents would still have the right to withdraw their children:

And, of course, all of this, it's important, is age-appropriate and, of course, it's also important to retain, for sex education, a parent's right to withdraw their child (Greening, 2017).

The use of language and pauses employed by Greening in her statement lyrically represents the anxiety regarding discussions about sex with children in the UK. It also demonstrates that the rights of the child in Britain are dependent on an adult's point of view. It is unsurprising that in this environment, theatre institutions would wish to provide warnings for parents about a production that refers to the rape or murder of a child.

According to Dame Esther Rantzen, founder of ChildLine, British children are experiencing new types of threats as a consequence of this poorly charted territory in contemporary society:

Young people are turning to the internet to learn about sex and relationships. We know they are frequently stumbling across porn, often unintentionally, and they are telling us very clearly that this is having a damaging and upsetting effect on them (Rantzen, 2015).

There are scholars challenging this notion, suggesting it is reminiscent of previous moral panics. For example, Clarissa Smith proffers that the position taken against access to pornography for young people under the age of 18 years stems from a 'negative view of sex, the media and young people...' (Smith, 2018:1353). Smith argues that 'it is rare to find any sustained acknowledgement that young people (or, often enough, adults) are sexual beings, with desires, and so young people [particularly girls] are painted as solely receptive, with no ownership of their own desires' (2018:1354). Smith's argument supports the body of scholarship that has been drawn on in my thesis to highlight the tendency in society to romanticise innocence in childhood, in this case at the cost of setting up a healthy environment in which young people can express themselves and develop their sexuality. According to *The Times* there were '30,000 reports of children sexually assaulting other youngsters over a four-year period, including '2,625 alleged attacks on school premises and 225 rapes in 2017' (Griffiths and Wheeler, 2018). It was announced in July 2018 that children will be provided with 'consent classes' from four years old. Education secretary Damian Hinds stated that it is 'vital that every child knows about their rights and that nothing should happen to them without their consent' (Hinds, cited in Griffiths and Wheeler, 2018). This shift in emphasis within education

policy in the UK recognises the potential damage that silence might cause when it comes to the sexual exploitation of children.

In an interview with Bella Todd, Rau commented:

a lot of brothers and sisters of the actors have come to see it. And they liked it a lot, they understood it totally. Here you can see this overprotection, how we treat children in Europe. Every film on YouTube is more traumatising than *Five Easy Pieces*! (Rau, cited in Todd, 2017)

The director's general assumptions regarding childhood and the emotional maturity of all children, or the types of media they may have accessed prior to watching the production, is insufficiently nuanced. It is likely that the brothers and sisters of the participating actors would have had a unique insight into the processes involved in creating the work. *Five Easy Pieces* is a piece of theatre which does not allow for a two-way dialogue or create an immediate space for the questions that children might have when they are watching the play. The production runs for 1 hour and 40 minutes with no interval which is far longer than the short-form video content typically associated with YouTube. Children are not able to turn the production off or swipe onto something different. The child actors did not participate in the post-show question and answer session, which when I saw it at the Unicorn Theatre (Seynaeve, 2018) felt like a markedly adult exchange between an international theatre going audience.

The provision of an age bracket may impose a form of liquid censorship if it is strictly observed however *Five Easy Pieces* demonstrates that when it comes to the complexities of child protection and dealing with society's legacy of an overly cautious approach to violent or difficult topics with children, which Rau is confronting, the general assumption that all forms of censorship are negative is overly simplistic. Morell's flexible approach to age guidance seems to be an example of best practice in this instance, providing a clear signal that the thematic territory is challenging whilst not imposing a strict barrier that excludes young people.

Conclusion

What does *Five Easy Pieces* reveal about liquid censorship in British theatre? Safeguarding policies, which could manifest as forms of liquid censorship, assist in deterring producers from creating work with children without a sufficient level of planning and diligence. Manchester City Council's decision did not provoke a dialogue or lead to a shift in thinking or approach. The different decisions made in Manchester and London highlight a localised difference between the interpretation of safeguarding policies. However, crucially in this instance, *Five Easy Pieces* was successfully staged in the UK when

sufficient time was allowed to secure the required licensing from the local authority. A production of this nature required financial resources and careful planning. There is evidence to suggest that liquid censorship filters out difficult themes for children at the point of creation in Britain, enacted insidiously through funding mechanisms. Furthermore, insecurities in society regarding a loss of innocence in childhood could result in liquid censorship, affecting the types of art that children and young people can access or participate in.

Five Easy Pieces is undoubtedly an ambitious piece of political theatre that challenges the limitations imposed on child actors in a positive way. I find myself unable to rest easy with Rau's decision to ask a ten-year-old actress to undress onstage. In a reflection on artistic responsibility, Anne Michaels observes:

To be silenced by events, by the depth of horror of an historical event. To take a decade to think, to research, to be silenced, to witness, is not inordinate...there is only one chance to honour these characters, their experience. When one is writing about the horror of specific historical events this is not a question of style or technique – it is a moral question. One could write...with brutal and ugly language. But that is more of a lie – because it makes the false assumption that this horror can be represented. Instead...choose a very different kind of language' (Michaels, 2017:46-49).

Bearing in mind 'the growing interest in collaborating with children in contemporary performance and live art across Europe since the late nineties' (Senior, 2018) it is important that, as part of this experimentation, time and space for a debate regarding the limits of representation with children and a reflection on the responsibility of the artist continues.

Chapter 6 - *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017)² - Contemporary Theatre in the #MeToo Era

Introduction

At the outset of this thesis, I could not have anticipated that one of the prominent case studies for inclusion would focus on the censorship in 2017 of a production that premiered in 1982. The critically acclaimed revival of Andrea Dunbar's 1982 play *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* (2017), directed by Kate Wasserberg, started touring in the UK in September 2017. The play was produced by Out of Joint, a theatre company founded by Max Stafford-Clark and Sonia Friedman in 1993 which principally focuses on commissioning new writers. Max Stafford-Clark was artistic director of the Royal Court Theatre for over a decade between 1979 to 1993 and he directed the premiere of *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* at the venue in 1982. Performances of Wasserberg's 2017 revival opened at Bolton Octagon in September and toured to Liverpool Playhouse (2017) and Oxford Playhouse (2017), among other venues, with dates scheduled at Theatre Clwyd and the Royal Court in early 2018. In December 2017 however, a month prior to *Rita, Sue & Bob Too's* planned return to its debut theatre, the scheduled performance run at the Royal Court was cancelled by the venue's artistic director, Vicky Featherstone. Featherstone reversed the decision within two days, following an outpouring of criticism on social media and in the national press.

This case study explores the external events that led to Vicki Featherstone's decision to cancel the production, and the reasons why she changed her mind. The production, which unlike *Homegrown* (2015) and *Five Easy Pieces* (2016) was not a new or untested piece of repertoire in Britain, serves as a significant point of reference for drawing conclusions about the contemporary drivers behind liquid censorship as well as offering a space for a reflection about how British society has shifted since the eighties. The research in this case study includes an analysis of the public statements made by the Royal Court, published interviews with Vicky Featherstone and reactions to the cancellation from theatre critics, academics, artists and audiences on social media or in the national press. *Rita Sue and Bob Too* is a play that deals with class and gender and there are no child performers in the work. However, the production represents a useful opportunity reflect on the depiction of two young adolescent girls being groomed by an older man and to examine what the work reveals about contemporary social attitudes to childhood.

Andrea Dunbar and the History of *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* (1982)

² *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* by Andrea Dunbar premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in 1982. The production referred to in this case study is the 2017 revival of the play which was presented by Out of Joint, Octagon Theatre Bolton and the Royal Court Theatre.



Figure 14: Andrea Dunbar in the eighties. Copyright Don McPhee for *The Guardian*

Andrea Dunbar was from the Buttershow Estate in Bradford. The playwright was described by Jane Kelly in an article for the *Mail on Sunday* as ‘a genius straight from the slums’ (Kelly, 1987 cited in Stripe, 2017b). Her work is infused with a resolute humour and a candid portrayal of the life of young adolescents living on one of the poorest housing estates in Bradford. Dunbar’s debut play, *The Arbor*, was a semi-autobiographical piece about a pregnant adolescent girl and her alcoholic father which she was encouraged to write by a teacher in 1977 when she was fifteen-years-old as part of a school project for her English CSE. The play was submitted to the *Royal Court Young Writers Festival* whilst Dunbar was in a shelter for battered women and *The Arbor* was produced at the venue in 1980, directed by Max Stafford-Clark. Aged eighteen, Dunbar became the youngest playwright ever to be staged at the Royal Court Downstairs. In a *BBC Arena Arts* (1980) documentary, she observed that she wanted to show people ‘my view, not their view’ in her work (Dunbar, 1980 cited in Coatman, 2018). For Stafford-Clark, Dunbar’s work, which was written in green biro on the torn-out pages of a school exercise book, immediately stood out from ‘a flood of gloomy dramas that invariably ended in suicide or unwanted pregnancies’ (Stafford-Clark, 2000:1). Rob Ritchie, the Literary Manager at the Royal Court at the time described the decision to programme Dunbar’s work on the main stage as ‘a declaration of intent’ (Ritchie, cited by Stafford-Clark, 2000:3) for the creative team’s artistic aspirations. More recently, Siân Adiseshiah (2016) has

described the depiction of class in late twentieth century theatre as a recurring trope, which she refers to as 'prole porn' (Adiseshiah and LePage, 2016:8).

Stafford-Clark commissioned a second play from Dunbar, *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* (1982), which was staged two-years later. *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* depicts an uncensored account of two working-class teenage girls from Bradford engaging in a sexual relationship with an older married man from a slightly more affluent part of town. According to Stafford-Clark in an interview for *BBC Inside Out*, Dunbar asked the director 'what can you do in theatre, what can you write? Now she wasn't talking about Brecht, she was talking about sex, what can you show on stage?' (Stafford Clark, 2010). *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* depicts two fifteen-year-old friends and their sexual encounters with Bob, a twenty-seven-year-old married father whom the girls have been babysitting for. Dunbar establishes in scene five of the play that Bob has previously engaged in a sexual relationship with a babysitter, which his wife Michelle discovered when she found a bracelet in their bed.

From the outset of the play, Bob takes advantage of the girls' naivety and boredom to engage in underage sex with both of them, and Rita and Sue willingly take part. Dunbar makes it clear in the play that Bob is conscious that what he is doing is wrong. For example, when he is confronted by Michelle in scene four, Bob rejects her accusation on the basis of the girls' ages:

Bob - Don't be stupid. What's the matter, do you think I'd play about with them?
They're only kids (Dunbar, 2000:4:42).

Michelle confronts Bob again in scene seven, and Bob's response is 'they're only schoolkids' and 'What do you think I am? I don't mess about with young kids like that' and 'I couldn't do a thing like that' (Dunbar, 2000:7:65). Dunbar constructs a voice in the narrative that presents a moral objection to the idea of an older man grooming teenage girls for sex. This is part of the nuance in *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*. The work portrays the exploitation of young girls who demonstrate their attraction to an older man whilst also incorporating the more experienced, embittered resignation from Mum that 'all men are no good. They want shooting for all the trouble they cause' (Dunbar, 2000:10:81).

The sex scenes are direct and unglamorous, and the girls argue over who gets the first turn to 'jump'. Dunbar's play focuses on the friendship between Rita and Sue, and she constructs a subtle rivalry between the girls as part of the work. In the final scenes, we discover that both Rita and Sue have been meeting Bob for separate liaisons. Ultimately, Rita becomes pregnant and ends up moving in with Bob after Michelle has left him briefly. Bob attempts to maintain his liaisons with Sue but she makes it clear that she is 'not going to do the dirty on Rita' (Dunbar, 2000:9:76). Dunbar demonstrates that it is unlikely that Bob will change his behaviour and the cycle will continue,

presumably with the next babysitter. Rita names her child Susan, but the girls no longer see each other, and Sue only discovers that Bob and Rita have married in the closing scene of the play which is set in the local pub. Dunbar depicts an enduring loyalty in the friendship, on Sue's part at least. When her mother and Bob's ex-wife blame the whole affair on Rita for being a 'slut', she defends Rita.

According to Stripe (2017), the premiere of the work at the Royal Court in 1982 divided audiences, with some spectators walking out and others laughing. The work presents some of the harshest living conditions in Britain from the perspective of a young woman who had lived the experience, and it is disturbingly funny. Max Stafford-Clark described Dunbar's surprise at how amused she felt about the characters and scenes she had written when she attended rehearsals, positing that 'somehow the alchemy of theatre often turned her scenes into something that was hilarious as well as brutal. Humour co-existed with anger and desperation' (Stafford-Clark, 2000:2). Laughter is written into Dunbar's text and stage directions and the scenes contain an obvious humour. In scene six for example (Dunbar, 2000:6:49-58), the characters go for a walk in the field to lighten the mood after Bob has bored the girls about unemployment and Thatcher's abandonment of the poor. Rita steps in cows' manure and the others laugh. Shortly after this, Rita argues that it is her turn to 'jump' first (Dunbar, 2000:6:55), but Bob fails to get an erection and the girls laugh. The sex or 'jump' scenes are represented in a grimy and mundane way, as the characters struggle for room in the car in a manner that is both grotesque and humorous. The relationships are not glamorised or idealised, and neither are the characters. David Barnett proffers that Dunbar's comic approach was part of her hardened, 'Northern' working-class roots, a culture in which 'you have to laugh, because what's the alternative?' (Barnett, 2017).

Dunbar was later commissioned to adapt the piece as a screenplay with Jennifer Howarth (Howarth, 2018) and *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* the film was released in 1987, directed by Alan Clarke, with the strapline 'Thatcher with her knickers down'. Dunbar was laying bare the consequences of Thatcher's abandonment of the North of England, where jobs were scarce, and poverty was rife. The ending of the play was changed however in the film, and the girls are depicted in a threesome with Bob, much to Dunbar's disapproval (Ibid.). According to Stafford-Clark, Dunbar ridiculed the upbeat ending, because 'you wouldn't go back with somebody who had rejected you' (Dunbar, cited by Stafford-Clark, 2000:6). The film's ending compromised the integrity which Sue's character demonstrated in the play and was reductive. As a consequence, the representation of her work 'infringed on Andrea's particular moral code' (Ibid.). Stafford-Clark attributed the change to a

middle-class desire to see working-class stories in which the 'protagonist pluckily triumphs over adversity' (Ibid.).

In spite of her writing successes, Dunbar's circumstances in life did not improve. A single mother with three children, she remained in Bradford and drank heavily. She faced a court order for receiving welfare benefit overpayments as a consequence of failing to declare her earnings from her writing projects and lived in poverty. In 1990, three years after the film version of *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* had been released, Dunbar suffered a brain haemorrhage and died.

In an interview about her success as a playwright, Dunbar commented with an unaffected humility that there were people living in similar conditions in Bradford with greater abilities than her who had not been afforded the same opportunities. She predicted that middle-class audiences would 'forget all about us by tomorrow' (Dunbar, cited by Stafford-Clark, 2000:6). The touring revival of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017) demonstrates that Dunbar's artistic footprint has in fact endured. According to David Barnett, 'Dunbar is still held up as an aspirational icon for kids living in one of the most deprived boroughs in the country' (Barnett, 2017). The playwright's life has also inspired other artistic projects, such as *A State Affair* (2000) by Robin Soanes, a verbatim project commissioned by Stafford-Clark about the Butterworth Estate which was staged alongside an earlier revival of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2000). Clio Barnard created a Bafta nominated screen dramatisation of Dunbar's life, *The Arbor* (2001), which depicts conflicting verbatim testimony from members of Dunbar's family about her life, lip-synched by actors. Adelle Stripe's novel *Black Teeth and a Brilliant Smile* (2017a) was also inspired by the playwright's life-story. As James Smart observes in *The Guardian*, Dunbar's working-class roots remain 'impossibly exotic to the London literati' (Smart, 2017). Liz Tomlin and Lyn Gardner have referred to this interest as 'cultural tourism' (Tomlin, 2013:124, Gardner, 2016 cited in Fragkou, 2019:164), in which the act of spectatorship achieves nothing and leaves 'existing power relations intact' (Tomlin, 2013:124).

Dunbar's bleak prediction about an inevitable and enduring middle-class indifference was accurate to an extent. Politically, the plight of working-class girls living in deprived areas in Britain that was highlighted in Dunbar's work has not improved. Theresa May's Britain, like Thatcher's, has failed to offer opportunities for those living on or below the poverty line. Furthermore, artistically, Dunbar's writing did not lead to a plethora of working-class female voices in the British playwriting scene and this demographic remains underrepresented in the UK. In an interview for *Front Row* on

BBC Radio 4, Lyn Gardner (2018) suggested that this is starting to shift in the industry, with new writing programmes beginning to open up access for people from less privileged backgrounds.

Class aside, the balance between male and female playwriting opportunities has yet to reach an equal footing. Of the 1704 productions that were recorded during the repertoire sample in this thesis, only 33% of plays (not including adaptations or translations) were written by women and 67% were written by men. For adaptations, this was split 36% by women, 64% by men and translations 43% women, 57% by men. The total number of theatre productions written by women, across the categories, was 34%. To provide some context for the proportion of writing opportunities afforded to women, the percentage of plays written by women in the British Theatre Consortium (2015) repertoire study, captured in 2013, was 31%. Female voices still only accounted for approximately one third of productions that made it to the stage in the UK. If the data is examined according to each theatre venue, with an exclusive focus on new plays, the opportunities afforded to female voices varied significantly. For example, in London, out of eight productions staged at the Almeida Theatre, seven were written by men and one by a woman. Conversely, at the Royal Court Theatre, out of the thirty-four artists, playwrights or translators credited for writing the work, fifteen were men and twenty were women. In the North East, Live Theatre programmed work by six men and twenty women. Northern Stage offered a broader programme of entertainment, theatre and comedy, however where a writer was credited for an adaptation or a new writing project, eight productions were written by women and nine by men, although three of the women writers were attached to one project. Looking across the sample, 87 revivals of plays programmed in the sample, excluding new adaptations, were written by men, demonstrating that the imbalance in the sample may be attributed in part to a historical legacy. Nonetheless, a sensitivity exists in the industry regarding an in-balance in power between male and female voices in theatre.

The repertoire data demonstrates that these sensitivities reflect an inequality which endures in theatre programming in Britain. This was once again reinforced by the controversy and backlash on social media against the National Theatre's new season press release March 2019, which announced six shows in total, all written by men. The National Theatre has pledged a commitment to achieve a 50:50 gender split for directors and writers by 2021, and the season announcement was perceived as a step backward for the organisation and the representation of female artists in British theatre. Rufus Norris and Lisa Burger defended the announcement, highlighting that productions by women playwrights had recently been announced. They also referred to future programming announcements that would demonstrate a commitment to providing a platform for women (Snow,

2019). However, regardless of the annual programme picture, Norris and his creative team should have shown greater foresight in their planning and messaging. In the case of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*, significantly, for a brief moment, Vicky Featherstone forgot or decided not to privilege Dunbar's voice in her decision-making about the scheduled revival of her play. This act could be interpreted as a moment of liquid censorship of a working-class female playwright, albeit only temporarily. The artistic director instead placed a focus on the narrative surrounding the production's high-profile male director in the eighties, Max Stafford Clark.

***Rita Sue & Bob Too* and the #MeToo Era**



Figure 15: Max Stafford Clark. Copyright: Sarah Lee for *The Guardian* (2017).

Max Stafford-Clark's departure from Out of Joint, the company he had founded with Sonia Friedman in 1993, was announced on 5th September 2017. He received praise in the National newspapers for 'nurturing talents such as Andrea Dunbar and Caryl Churchill' (Norris, 2017). Stafford Clark's dedication to supporting diverse artists and championing female voices was also celebrated. Barney Norris (2017) observed in *The Guardian* that half of the plays produced by his company were by women. The press release issued by Out of Joint stated on 5th September 2017 that Stafford-Clark had left the company because he wished to focus on 'international freelance career' opportunities. However, on the 20th October 2017, Alexandra Topping published an 'exclusive' article in *The Guardian* which stated that Max Stafford-Clark had in fact been forced to exit as a result of a formal allegation made by the company's education manager, Gina Abolins, about inappropriate and sexualised conduct. According to Topping's article, the alleged incident involved Stafford-Clark commenting that 'Back in the day, I'd have been up you like a rat up a drainpipe but now I'm a reformed character. My disability means I'm practically a virgin again' (Topping, 2017b).

The narrative presented in the press about Stafford-Clark's departure was designed to preserve the reputation and rich contemporary theatre heritage of the director. However, behind the scenes at *Out of Joint*, the events leading up to the controversy had started much earlier. Abolins made her accusation against Stafford-Clark in July 2017, the same month that Kate Wasserberg officially joined the company as joint artistic director, as documented in the official company accounts held at Companies House for *Out of Joint* (Out of Joint, 2018). According to Terri Paddock in December 2017 however, Stafford-Clark, who had previously been announced as the director of the revival, 'left *Out of Joint* three days into the five-week rehearsal period' (Paddock, 2017) for *Rita, Sue & Bob Too*, and Kate Wasserberg took over as the production's director. This was printed in the programme note in January 2018 when the production was reinstated at the Royal Court (*Rita, Sue and Bob Too*, 2018). However, according to the theatre critic Natasha Tripney, Stafford-Clark was credited as the production's co-director for the opening at Bolton Octagon (Tripney, 2018b). The statement in the 2018 programme note is also challenged by the evidence in a podcast interview released by the *British Theatre Guide* on 4th October 2017 which contained an interview with the actors involved who referred to Stafford-Clark's rehearsal style. The podcast description also referred to the revival as having been directed by 'Max Stafford Clark', which was undoubtedly seen as a key selling point for marketing purposes. Rehearsals would have taken place in the five weeks prior to the opening of the tour at Bolton Octagon on 6th September, presumably starting in late July. The press announcement about Stafford-Clark's departure from the company was made on 5th September, just one day prior to the production's first performance. Based on this timescale and the inconsistencies in the statements about his involvement in the work, it appears that the company had hoped to control the media narrative, minimising speculation about Stafford-Clark.

The problem for *Out of Joint* was that the PR narrative presented about Stafford-Clark's silenced Abolins, who was 'upset, frustrated, a little angry' about the way that the director's conduct had been whitewashed in the press (Topping, 2017b). It also diminished the role of another woman, the production's director, Kate Wasserberg whose credit for the production had apparently been diluted. The timing of Abolins' complaint is significant. In October 2017, following accusations in Hollywood of historic and ongoing sexual harassment against Harvey Weinstein that had been published in the *New York Times* (Kantor and Twohey, 2017), the actress Alyssa Milano created the hashtag #MeToo, which she encouraged women to post online as a statement of solidarity against sexual abuse. This hashtag quickly spread, going 'viral' on social media sites, with other victims coming forward to share their experiences or acknowledge that they had felt the same way at some

point in their lives. Milano has credited the provenance of the *#MeToo* campaign to an initiative started a decade earlier by the activist Tarana Burke from Harlem (Parker, 2017). In this instance, Abolins told her side of the story to *The Guardian*, including details of other inappropriate comments made by Stafford-Clark, and as a result, in the same month that the *#MeToo* campaign had started, the British theatre scene had its own shameful exposé to rival the Weinstein narrative, which would swiftly be accompanied by allegations that were made against Kevin Spacey, the former artistic director of the Old Vic. The pace with which this movement spread globally demonstrates the power associated with a new type of community activism available in the social media age.

Responses in the media and online to the competing narratives that emerged from the Out of Joint story demonstrate a polarised attitude in society to the subject of sexual harassment. Stafford-Clark's spokesman attributed the inappropriate comments to the director's 'pseudobulbar palsy', a legacy of his severe stroke in 2006 which resulted in 'occasional disinhibition' (Topping, 2017b). The defence being circulated in the press was that an elderly, disabled hero of contemporary British new writing, who had commissioned female playwrights, was having his proud legacy destroyed by the voice of Abolins. The female victim was accused on social media of being a 'snowflake' and a 'puritan' as well as several more aggressive or abusive names. Instead of focussing on the patriarchal abuses of power being described, a backlash emerged against Abolins. For Ella Whelan (2017) of the right-wing libertarian *Spiked* magazine, this was the story of a fragile, disabled old man, who had been liberal enough to allow women to be writers, and who must be protected from a 'hysterical panic about sexual harassment' on the part of weak and pathetic women that had 'gone too far' (Whelan, 2017). The blog *Britain is no country for old men* lamented, that 'Max, is by no means an "evil" man but his reputation will now, no doubt suffer' citing *Julius Caesar* to emphasise the tragic hero's plight:

The evil that men do lives after them;

The good is oft interred with their bones (*Julius Caesar*: 3.2:4, cited by JohnBoy, 2017).

Whelan and the blogger's response demonstrate an emotional attachment to the idea of a great man which has been cultivated through western literature for centuries. For these observers, it would have been preferable if Abolins had been silenced. The act of highlighting normalised abuses of power perpetrated by some men over women in British society, which women appeared to be uniting together against as part of the *#MeToo* campaign, threatened the image of Stafford-Clark, and some observers railed against what they perceived to be an attack on masculinity.

On the other side of the debate, women came forward in support of Abolins with their own *#MeToo* stories about Stafford-Clark. These included accounts from the *EastEnders* actress, Tracy

Ann Obermann, a former artistic director of the Soho theatre, Abigail Morris and the actress and novelist Emily Woolf who all described experiences that predated the director's stroke in 2006 and his resulting disability. These women had maintained their silence until this point. Woolf explained that the *#MeToo* movement had 'empowered' her to express her feelings about the director, stating that Stafford-Clark's 'casual and demeaning sexualisation of me, was an abuse of power. It was damaging to me.' (Woolf, cited in Topping, 2017a). Obermann observed that a man who was an expert in new writing projects should have been more mindful of his use of language and the 'power of words' (Obermann, cited in Topping, 2017a). It became apparent that, like the Weinstein case, Stafford-Clark's inappropriate behaviour towards the women he was supposed to be championing had been a well-kept industry secret or a collective act of self-censorship. Abolins' testimony, which had coincided with the *#MeToo* campaign, opened up this secret for a wider audience and allowed a community of women to speak freely, because they were being supported by a large group of other women. The movement demonstrated strength in numbers in a new, unprecedented digital activism that set the scene for the events which led to the cancellation of *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* (2017) at the Royal Court.

The theatre scholar Dan Rebellato has strongly criticized the counter narrative in defence of Stafford-Clark that emerged in the aftermath of Abolins' revelations (2017). He highlighted that these responses had resulted in another act of silencing, the closure of Twitter accounts by Abolins, and Steffi Holtz, the director's personal assistant, who had also come forward about her experiences of sexual harassment. Rebellato pulled apart the insinuation that so many talented, female writers, such as Churchill, would not have found another pathway to the British stage without a male director:

They would surely have been major figures in our theatre if Max Stafford-Clark had not been born. They are each singularly talented, creative and extraordinary women and it would be every bit as true to say that they made him (Rebellato, 2017).

The playwright Lucy Prebble observed in a personal reflection on the revelations that had surfaced about Weinstein, that the silence which surrounds this type of revelation is imbued in a conscientious empathy on the part of female artists and an anxiety about getting a reputation as a trouble maker:

I don't want you to think me indiscreet, vicious, uppity. I don't want you to think I'm so sure of my attractiveness that I would assume that he was making some sort of play for me. I don't want to brand someone as predatory because of gossip and jokes. I don't want to hurt anyone who loves him. All the feelings that hold women back from mentioning these things (Prebble, 2017).

It is this empathy and insecurity that Whelan and others who defended Stafford-Clark in the media exploited. Clearly, as this thesis has highlighted, British theatre continues to have a problem with

offering a space for female playwrights. However, the idea that women must be silent and tolerate degrading and sexualised comments in order to access this space, as appears to have been the case with Stafford-Clark, is clearly exploitative and not the conduct of a champion for women. Rebellato and Prebble's observations helpfully describe an insidious, underlying bias towards privileging the male protagonist's narrative. In the context of the Out of Joint controversy, this inadvertently resulted in the brief liquid censorship of Dunbar's play. The memory of *his* presence and its impact became more powerful than the memory of *hers*, the late Dunbar, or Wasserberg's, the female director who mounted the revival of the production.

Day of Action

In order to establish how the controversy surrounding Stafford-Clark's departure from Out of Joint resulted in the cancellation of *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* (2017) it is important to explore the Royal Court's response to the #MeToo campaign, which was commended by the theatre industry. Vicky Featherstone announced on 17th October, three days prior to Abolins' expose in *The Guardian*, that the Royal Court would hold a *Day of Action* entitled 'No Grey Area' on 28th October 2017. Two different events took place on the day. The first, which was called *No Grey Area: Your Stories Heard*, was programmed in the Jerwood Theatre Downstairs. Curated by Lucy Morrison, the Associate Director of the Royal Court, the event allowed people who wanted to share their stories to do so. An open call was posted online, and the stories that had been received were read out loud by a team of people organised in advance by the theatre. The event was free to attend, and no booking was required. The phrase *No Grey Area* takes the position that all inappropriate sexualised behaviour, physical or verbal, is wrong.

In the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, four Town Hall meetings were scheduled which focussed on how policy could change in response to the stories that had emerged from the #MeToo movement. At interview, the Royal Court's Theatre manager, Rachel Dudley (2017), referred to Town Hall meetings as being a regular part of the open and collaborative culture for staff that had been instilled at the Royal Court by Vicky Featherstone. Featherstone had previously held a public *Day of Action on Climate Change* in November 2014, so this type of public engagement was not a new one for the theatre. The Town Hall sessions for the 2017 event were free but ticketed and were fully booked within a few days. Participants were encouraged to listen to some of the stories being told in the *No Grey Area* space downstairs prior to attending their allotted session. Featherstone announced her intention to draw up an industry-wide Code of Conduct which was intended to build on the momentum of the movement against sexual harassment and hopefully result in a cultural

change. Featherstone's rapid response to the public mood was celebrated online and in the national press (Aitkenhead, 2017, Clayton, 2017, Douglas, 2017, Thomas, 2017).

The hashtags #NoGreyArea and #speakout were incorporated into social media responses from the theatre industry, and the event assisted in galvanising an active response to the #MeToo movement. In a *Front Row* interview for *BBC Radio 4*, Featherstone commented that 'everyone up to this point has been complicit' (Front Row, 2018), referring to the revelation that people had been aware of Stafford-Clark's behaviour but had remained silent. It is possible that this comment was in part directed at members of the Out of Joint executive team or board who had silenced Abolins' voice in the press release on 5th September 2017, obscuring the real reasons behind Stafford-Clark's departure.

The *Day of Action* was celebrated on Twitter and Facebook by theatres and production companies across the UK and people working in the arts. People who could not attend the event posted messages of support on *Twitter*, including Timberlake Wertenbaker, another playwright who had been discovered and commissioned by Max Stafford Clark whilst he was at the Royal Court. There were at least ninety responses to the event on Twitter with the hashtag #NoGreyArea, and many of these included the words 'solidarity', 'respect' or praise for Featherstone's 'leadership' (Douglas, 2017, Thomas, 2017).

On 3rd November 2017, Vicky Featherstone published a 'Code of Behaviour to prevent sexual harassment and abuses of power' (Royal Court Theatre, 2017c). The code had been developed in response to the Day of Action that had been held on the 28th October. The event was credited in the document. In the 'Note to Editors' section that was included in the Press Release, the hashtags #speakout and #greyareanomore were included, demonstrating that the Royal Court was aware of the importance of social media as a tool for building a community of response as well as profile for the campaign. Bringing together multiple voices united by action and purpose was perceived as a way that the theatre could expand its audience and assist in combating the culture of silence, which Featherstone and other members of the theatre industry were critiquing.

What Featherstone was offering to the industry was hope, at a point in time that it was needed. In amongst the depressing stories that had emerged, she was demonstrating strong leadership and the prospect that this might be a turning point in the socially conditioned patriarchal power structures in Britain. Featherstone was also placing a distance between the theatre she was in

charge of and the memory of the same theatre that Stafford-Clark had dominated for over a decade. She did not want his controversy to be associated with her tenure. In her interview for *Front Row* on *BBC Radio 4* (2018), Featherstone stated that as a consequence of Stafford-Clark's departure from Out of Joint, the company was facing uncertainty over its funding and future. The artistic director emphasised a link between controversy and financial security. With this in mind, it is unsurprising that the Royal Court Theatre would wish to disassociate itself and publicly condemn Stafford-Clark's abuse of power, in spite of the culture of silence that had existed to date.

There was a great deal of energy and emotion in the industry towards the end of 2017 and the Royal Court Theatre became a focal point for the discussions that were taking place. It was in this climate that Featherstone made a decision to cancel the production of *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* which was scheduled in January 2018. I contend that this exemplifies the acute challenge described in the management of culture within a contemporary context that has been described by Bauman (2005, 2011).

Critical Responses to the Cancellation

A JOINT STATEMENT FROM THE ROYAL COURT THEATRE AND OUT OF JOINT

The Royal Court Theatre and Out of Joint have chosen not to present the current touring production of *Rita Sue and Bob Too* at the Royal Court in January 2018. It was due to run for 2 and a half weeks.

The departure of Max Stafford-Clark from Out of Joint and the recent allegations in the media have coincided with the Royal Court's response to the spotlight on our industry and the rigorous interrogation of our own practices. On our stage we recently heard 150 stories of sexual harassment and abuse and therefore the staging of this work, with its themes of grooming and abuses of power on young women, on that same stage now feels highly conflictual.

The show has successfully toured to ten venues this Autumn and we remain incredibly proud that the shared collaboration made the tour possible.

Out of Joint is now a company in transition, facing its future, a future which the Royal Court whole-heartedly supports and looks forward to being part of through the current development of a new co-commission.

Figure 16: Joint Statement on Cancellation of *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* (Royal Court, 2017a).

The cancellation of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* on 13th December 2017 was announced as a joint statement from the Royal Court Theatre and Out of Joint (Royal Court Theatre, 2017a, see Figure 16). The statement referred to the recent *Day of Action* events that had taken place at the theatre, where '150 stories of sexual harassment and abuse' had been told. It indicated that both the association with Max Stafford-Clark and the content of Dunbar's play had contributed to the

conclusion that staging the work in the same theatre space would be ‘highly conflictual’ (Ibid.). Featherstone was concerned about the interaction between the external performance of activism that had emerged with the #MeToo movement and the theatre’s #NoGreyArea, #SpeakOut response. The production was only cancelled at the Royal Court and was still scheduled to go ahead at its other touring venues, so this was a localised act of liquid censorship.

The response to the cancellation of *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* was widespread and critical. Articles have been published about the controversy across the political spectrum of the media in *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, *BBC*, *Daily Mail*, *the New Statesman*, *Spiked*, local press, industry news websites and blogs such as *The Stage*, *WatsonStage* or *Exeunt* as well as internationally in the *New York Times*. Artists came forward with letters and comments (Barnett, 2017, Sherin and Kennedy, 2017), expressing concerns about the censorship of Dunbar’s work and shock that the Royal Court, a venue that was famed for its part in bringing an end to state censorship in 1968 (Walsh, 1999) and as well as its commitment to bold, new writing projects, could have come to this decision.

As a result of her anxiety about the risk of upsetting industry colleagues and audiences who were looking to her and the theatre for leadership on the #NoGreyArea campaign, Featherstone was censoring a play that had been written by a young, working-class woman who had experienced domestic violence and abuse. By referring directly to the ‘themes of grooming and abuses of power on young women’ outlined in the statement, Featherstone was impeding the late Dunbar’s right to express ‘my view, not theirs’ (Dunbar, 2010). This barrier imposed an incongruous level of scrutiny over the repertoire, when compared to other controversial work that has been staged in the history of the Royal Court. The playwright Justin Sherin, who is based in New York, questioned the disparity between this decision and the judgement of other plays. He asked whether the Royal Court would be re-evaluating the validity of Joe Orton’s repertoire for example, citing the playwright’s alleged proclivity for propositioning adolescent boys. He also proffered that the decision was insulting to audiences, who are able to ‘tell the difference between provocation and exploitation’ (Sherin and Kennedy, 2017).

Women, and working-class women in particular in contemporary British theatre are still working against a culture of inequality in the sector, as Melissa Fragkou highlights in *Ecologies of Precarity in Twenty-First Century Theatre* (2019:171) and Katie Beswick reflects on in *Social Housing in Performance - The English Council Estate on and off Stage* (2019:89). In light of the

underrepresentation of female artists, which is also highlighted empirically by the British Theatre Consortium (2015) and the fact that the playwright being censored was unable to stand up to the decision, the cancellation was considered to be deeply problematic. Furthermore, the 'departure of Max Stafford-Clark' which was referred to in the statement was considered to be sufficient to safeguard the touring production of *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* (2017). It had been well documented in the press that Stafford-Clark had left Out of Joint and was no longer the director associated with the production. Therefore, it was highly problematic for critics and observers that Stafford-Clark's name was mentioned in the statement, when the women attached to the production who were being silenced, the playwright Andrea Dunbar and the director Kate Wasserberg, were not referred to at all. Patrick Kennedy highlighted this point in his letter to *The Guardian*, stating 'It is not his production. It has been directed by Kate Wasserberg' (Sherin and Kennedy, 2017). Underpinning this confusion was an attempt on the part of the management team at Out of Joint to control the marketing narrative in order to support the successful run of the play, which of course backfired when the controversy emerged about Stafford-Clark in the national press.

The characters Rita and Sue were played by Gemma Dobson and Taj Atwal in the play which was written for four women and two men. As a consequence of Stafford-Clark's behaviour, these actors were also due to lose their London performances, which represented an important industry showcase. The statement participated in privileging the male protagonist's narrative over that of the female voices in the production's story. Barnett articulated this grievance, stating that 'more than a quarter of a century after her death, her truth has been deemed unpalatable. Not because of anything she has done, but because of the actions of a man' (Barnett, 2017). He observed that Dunbar would probably have laughed at the irony of her voice being silenced by the actions of her older male mentor and on the basis of the content of her play, which exposes abuses of power by men.

Victoria Sadler has suggested that the interaction between the social media campaign #NoGreyArea and the content of a production which demonstrates the sexual agency of teenage girls was particularly uncomfortable, because it did not fit the simplified message about sexual harassment being presented:

there is no grey area around consent, harassment and abuse. Hell, we've even hash-tagged it. Then this revival of Andrea Dunbar's seminal play comes along, holding up a mirror to her own experiences, telling us that, actually, there is a grey area. That underage teenage girls can be willing companions to older men wanting to have sex with them...therein lies this play's big problem to modern eyes. (Sadler, 2018).

Rita, Sue & Bob Too demonstrates an unequivocal abuse of power on the part of Bob. However, Sadler is alluding to the fact that Dunbar does not portray the children engaging in sex with an older man as victims. Stafford-Clark argued that ‘the hardness of the life is mitigated by the sheer priapic vigour of the two girls who certainly didn’t see themselves as victims’ (Stafford Clark, 2000:5). Here, Sadler and Stafford-Clark are talking specifically about young, adolescent girls and their relationship to what society would correctly name paedophilia. There is still no grey area when it comes to paedophilia, whatever the circumstances; however, the willingness of the victims to consent to the sexualised encounter in the play confronts the complexities involved in the ways in which children might be groomed. Dunbar drew on her own experiences as a teenager. This autobiographical depiction makes the work far more challenging. It provokes middle-class conventional notions of what an innocent child or victim should look like, making the spectator feel uncomfortable. Like *Homegrown*, the liquid censorship of this challenging voice has more to do with a likely audience response and the judgement of the artistic leadership at the organisation facilitating the piece of theatre, than the young person who created it.

In a feature article for *The Guardian* written in January 2018, three female writers addressed the question, ‘Could *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* have been written today?’ Atiha Sen Gupta proffered that when the play was first staged it was received as a light-hearted ‘romantic comedy’, whereas now the text is patently ‘a tale of grooming, underage sex and “slut-shaming”’ (Greenhill et al., 2018). Ella Carmen Greenhill similarly stated, ‘There’d be outrage if it was written today: a story about a paedophile told with light-hearted comedy’ (Greenhill et al., 2018). Implicitly, shifts in society’s attitudes are having an effect on the way we write and receive drama. It is worthwhile briefly drawing a comparison with *All the Little Lights* (2017) by Jane Upton, which toured successfully in the UK to critical acclaim and was observed at several venues in the theatre sample (see Appendix 1) including the Nottingham Playhouse, the Mercury Theatre, Theatre Royal Plymouth, Hull Truck and the Arcola Theatre. The production drew influence from the child grooming and sexual abuse case in Rotherham, in which approximately 1,500 working class teenage girls were sexually exploited by a group of older, Asian men over a prolonged period of time and with little assistance from local authorities (Jay, 2014). The production was ‘developed with support from child sexual exploitation awareness charity Safe and Sound’, and this notice was included on press materials for the work. The partnership with and endorsement from a charitable organisation with a proven track record of working with real victims of abuse gave the production team, theatre venues and audiences permission to spectate the work. No such charitable association had been in place for *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*. If we refer once more to the controversy which surrounded *All in a*

Row at the Southwark Theatre in 2019, activists highlighted the lack of endorsement from the National Autistic Society, underlining the importance of this type of association in contemporary British theatre.

Gupta's response to the work encapsulates the complexities of Dunbar's 'warts and all' (Stripe, 2017) play:

I found the opening excruciating: 27-year-old Bob...shows giggly 15-year-olds Rita and Sue how to put on a condom. The scene is realised very literally...Yes, the girls are as keen for "a jump" as Bob is, seduced by an older man with his own car. But are they fully able to consent? Would the audience laugh so loudly if they were 14? (Gupta, 2018).

The response places an emphasis on the girls as victims. Gupta (Greenhill et al., 2018) and Barnett (2018) suggest that the questions raised made the play particularly relevant today, in the wake of the Stafford-Clark and Weinstein revelations, but also the Rotherham sexual abuse cases. A Commons Select Committee concluded in the *Jay Report into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham* in 2014 that failure in management 'allowed this abuse to go unchallenged for years' (Jay, 2014). The report indicated that blame had been placed on the child victims by police and child social care workers. Similarly, in *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*, blame is placed with the girls for their actions and they are accused of being 'sluts'. Contemporary audiences would hopefully be more likely to recognise that blame ought to be directed at the older male protagonist. However, as the Rotherham case, and to an extent the Stafford-Clark scenario demonstrate, some members of society still struggle to find fault with male perpetrators in sexual abuse cases.

The critic Lyn Gardner suggests that the play is represented in a way that 'makes us think about that issue and makes us think about what it is theatre can do' (Gardner, 2018) in terms of opening up debate. Dunbar's writing artfully puts across a conflict between the image that young teenage girls project and the actual feelings that they experience. On the surface, the girls are eager to participate in a sexual relationship with Bob. Although Dunbar also constructs moments in which the characters express their discomfort, albeit stoically. For example, at the end of scene one, Dunbar constructs an intimate moment in which Rita and Sue talk about what the first time they had sex with Bob was really like:

Rita - ... Did you like it?

Sue - Of course I did. Why, didn't you?

Rita - Oh yes, but he hurt me a bit at first. I really like him though....

Sue - I'll tell you what. My legs didn't half hurt after a few minutes of it (Dunbar, 2000:1:25).

Whilst much is made of the girls' willingness to have sex with Bob in descriptions of the work, what Dunbar demonstrates so effectively here is that they are doing so in spite of the fact that it might cause them pain or physical discomfort. She offers a reason for this endurance, which is that the girls want to retain Bob's attention. Later in the play the characters discuss their boredom and Dunbar gives us glimpses of their poverty, such as not having 'rags' for their periods or Sue having to miss school because her parents can't afford to buy her a games kit. The encounters with Bob represent a distraction from these day-to-day realities. Bob gives them money for babysitting or 'fags' and takes them for drives in his car. His wife has beautiful clothes and they envy her. Whilst there are several moments in the play in which the girls ask Bob if they are going to 'jump', Dunbar also depicts a moment in scene four in which Rita pushes to extend a conversation with Bob, rather than go upstairs to the bedroom. Again, this gives the audience the sense that for Dunbar, the reason the girls have sex with Bob is because they want to continue to be in the company of what they perceive to be a 'handsome', more sophisticated older man. This is an aspirational encounter.

It is Bob's character that manipulates Rita to have sex by implying he doesn't mind either way whilst continuing to push the agenda:

Bob - Shall we go upstairs now?

Rita - Oh not just yet. There's no rush is there?

Bob - No.

This moment is followed by a conversation about Bob's work for a page of dialogue until Bob asks again:

Bob - Are we going to do something 'cause I'll have to get home by four.

Rita - Do you want to?

Bob - I'm not bothered.

Rita - Nor am I.

Bob - Come on we might as well. That's what we came for anyway, isn't it?

Rita - Yep (Dunbar, 2000:4:40).

In spite of his feigned disinterest, Bob is spending time with Rita in order to have sex with her. Dunbar reveals for the spectator that Rita's priority is not necessarily the sexual encounter.

Whilst it is easy to criticise Featherstone's censorship of the play, it is not difficult to understand how she came to her decision to cancel the production. There were uncanny echoes between the abuse of power enacted by *Bob* in *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* and the stories that had emerged about Stafford-Clark, with the most obvious example in the opening scene of the play in which Bob drives Rita and Sue to the Moors and persuades them to have sex with him in the back-seat of his car. In the exchange between the characters, Bob questions the girls about their virginity:

Bob - Are you both a virgin?

Rita - You what? (*Looking at Sue and laughing.*)

Sue - What do you want to know for?

Bob - Just curious, that's all. Well are you?'

Rita - You're nosy aren't you?

Bob - Nosy, no. Curious yes. I often wonder what young lasses get up to nowadays
(Dunbar, 2000:1:4)

The playwright Rachel De-Lahey described an uncomfortable experience in which Stafford-Clark had asked her about how she had lost her virginity (Ellis-Peterson, 2018). Stafford-Clark was also alleged to have told Abolins to have casual sex and tell him the details (Topping, 2017b). In the real-life scenario, and in Dunbar's play, which was semi-autobiographical, older men were asserting their power over young women for their gratification.

In my case study on contemporary British theatre repertoire, I referred to the trend in examples of localised acts of liquid censorship to describe the capacity for a prominent theatre venue to represent a route to visibility through protest in the liquid modern age, particularly with the use of social media to galvanise support. This type of response to a theatre production emerges when the external social context in which the piece of work will be received collides with it in some way. The external events surrounding the play would have had a specific resonance for the London performances. The Royal Court Theatre had just asserted its position as a beacon for those affected by sexual harassment. Featherstone must have been concerned that some people may have accused the play, which incorporates humour, of being inappropriate in a contemporary context. Attitudes towards sexual politics have changed significantly between the eighties and now, added to which serious conversations had started to be had about sexual harassment. Furthermore, the work had the potential to trigger a traumatic response on the part of women who had experienced sexual abuse, for whom the venue was purporting to offer a safe-haven. According to Beswick (2019:81), the play also had a close relationship with the Royal Court as a venue, since it represented a home for Andrea Dunbar's short career as a playwright, during Stafford Clark's tenure, when she was alive. This unique set of circumstances that culminated in a localised decision was however difficult to articulate clearly and perplexed observers. In his critique, Kennedy observed that 'If Huddersfield and Mold can tolerate Rita, Sue and Bob Too, London can too' (Kennedy, 2017). The unique set of circumstances that led to Featherstone's decision was too insular and localised for some critics to empathise with or tolerate. The cancellation was perceived as unnecessary and disproportionate. Instead, the theatre was accused of 'losing its nerve' (Glanville, 2017).

Bauman's reflection on acute challenges involved in maintaining the balance between administration and art in the rapidly shifting age of liquid modernity assists in providing a logic for

the decision made by Featherstone which surprised so many critics. Jo Glanville referred to the cancellation as a form of 'moral panic' and a 'dangerous act of self-censorship' (Glanville, 2017). In seeking to find an explanation for what she refers to as a well-intentioned decision, she suggests that theatre had 'confused its role as a space for creative expression with the challenges it faces as an administrator and manager in the post-Weinstein world' (Glanville, 2017). What is interesting about this analysis is that it assists in highlighting the identity crisis that the Royal Court must have been experiencing in the weeks leading up to the decision. The venue had become a focal point for private expression about the potentially traumatic experiences associated with the #MeToo, post-Stafford-Clark era and this responsibility must have been acutely felt by Featherstone. Balancing the administration of a venue and the programme of creative theatre productions with the performance of personal, verbatim testimony would have understandably been 'highly conflictual' (Royal Court Theatre, 2017a). The act of liquid censorship was therefore a reflection of this nervous energy, both in the physical space at the Royal Court and the internal headspace of the artistic director.

Based on the theory that has been explored in this thesis about the relationship between the fast-paced and transient nature of liquid modernity and liquid censorship, it was perhaps unsurprising and inevitable even that a director who had been reacting to the fluid events associated with the #MeToo movement made an error in judgement. Artistic leaders are used to planning schedules a year or two in advance, with committee support and time to think or plan. Featherstone was having to work in a different and reactive way, taking risks in order to harvest the momentum and engagement that was coming from the industry. A programming decision she would have taken the previous year was suddenly thrust into a completely different context. Alice Stripe wrote in an article for the *New Statesman* that 'By trying too hard not to offend, the theatre risks making itself irrelevant in the process' (Stripe, 2017b). In this case, I think part of the problem was that the artistic director was seeking to keep the theatre relevant and purposeful, and in the process took a decision which compromised its artistic integrity.

Change of Mind

On 15th December 2017, Vicky Featherstone released a second statement reinstating the performances of *Rita, Sue & Bob Too*. The use of the first person in this statement makes it clear that Featherstone held the power to decide whether the production would be staged or not, in spite of the 'Joint Statement' that had been made previously:

I have been rocked to the core by accusations of censorship and the banning of a working class female voice. For that reason I have invited the current Out of Joint production of Rita, Sue and Bob Too back to the Royal Court for its run. As a result of

this helpful public debate we are now confident that the context with which Andrea Dunbar's play will be viewed will be an invitation for new conversations (Royal Court Theatre, 2017b).

Featherstone listened to the criticisms made against her decision and swiftly acted to reverse the cancellation, supporting the idea that the artistic director was attempting to respond to the mood in society which was transient and elusive. Indeed, Featherstone is an example of an artistic leader who is attempting to work within the shifting conditions in contemporary society. Her perceived failings demonstrate that the examples of liquid censorship associated with her tenure are not necessarily insidious, but the open and transparent struggles of a committed artistic leader who is responding to a changeable environment.

In an interview with *Front Row* on BBC Radio 4, Featherstone (2018) stated that her decision was never about Dunbar's play, rather the context with which it was to be viewed in following the testimonies of silenced women that had been heard in the same space. Featherstone attributed the second decision, her reversal of the cancellation, to the playwright Caryl Churchill, who said the following during a telephone conversation with the artistic director:

The Royal Court is always at its best when it is at its most dangerous. If you dare to make the decision to put it back on you will have changed the lens with which people now look at the production and so you will have created the context that you felt you couldn't create before. (Front Row, 2018).

Churchill averred that the experience of watching *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017) would have changed because of the public conversations that had been provoked by Featherstone's cancellation. The context had shifted even further, and the intention behind the work had been clearly articulated as part of an external performance of debate about the appropriateness of this production in the space following the *Day of Action*. Churchill was also frustrated at the prospect that a rare working-class female voice would be silenced because of the actions of a man. Securing an endorsement from Churchill, a female playwright who had worked with Stafford-Clark, and who is an iconic feminist voice, would have been a strong boost to the artistic director's confidence in programming the work.

At the start of her interview for *Front Row* (2018), Featherstone stated that she stood by both of the decisions that she had made. This is an interesting observation because it reveals something about the director's attitude to the interaction between the theatre and society. For Featherstone, it was appropriate to cancel the play on 13th December because of its historic association with a director who had perpetrated abuses of power against women. Within the space of two days however, there was a shift in the social context in which the play would take place and be received. This opened the space up for a dialogue about the production, giving the artistic

director the permission that she felt she needed to stage the work. Helen Freshwater's observation about audiences viewing productions through the lens of their 'immediate preoccupations' (Freshwater, 2009a:5) feels appropriate here. It would be unlikely that spectators viewing the production would be aware of the Day of Action, 'No Grey Area' (2017) and not the cancellation, so both contexts would form part of the lens in which the work was viewed.

In a poll organised by *The Stage* newspaper about the decision to reverse the cancellation 75.6% of four hundred and fifty-five voters agreed that Featherstone was right to change her mind. However, 24.4% of voters thought that the cancellation should have been upheld which represents 111 votes. According to Fiona Rutherford in an article for the *Spectator*, it took approximately one hundred protesters to close Exhibit B (2014) at the Barbican (Rutherford, 2014). This number is noteworthy because it demonstrates that whilst Featherstone may not have been concerned about the greatest proportion of her audiences, a smaller group is still capable of having agency if they mobilise to form a protest. *The Stage* poll demonstrates that there were some voices who felt that the production should be censored. The critic Natasha Tripney has commented that in her opinion, Featherstone 'would have faced some form of backlash whichever path she chose' (Tripney, 2018b). Because of the widespread dialogue in defence of the production, Featherstone was aware that the work would be supported by a strong community of voices and could therefore feel confident in her decision to allow the work to go ahead in spite of the 24.4% of voices who were against this.

For two months, Featherstone had been responding to the *#MeToo* movement for action against sexual harassment but now the agenda had changed, and she was reacting to the new focus which was on freedom of expression and support for a working-class female voice. The words 'rocked to the core' indicate that Featherstone was deeply connected to the subjects she was attempting to respond to and felt a sense of responsibility.

Impact and Conclusions

Publicly, Featherstone reversed her censorship of the production. However, behind the scenes there were less visible changes made to the production, which represent a kind of liquid censorship. According to Featherstone, the production's female director, Kate Wasserberg had to 'think very clearly about that lens that she, as a female artistic director, wanted people to see the play' (Front Row, 2018). This response stands out because it appears to suggest that, in Featherstone's opinion, Wasserberg had not previously thought about the production in terms of her own experience of being a woman or it highlights an awareness of Stafford-Clark's involvement as a director. In a

feature for *The Stage*, entitled 'Rita, Sue and Bob Too has changed since I saw it in Bolton, but so has the world' (2018), Natasha Tripney observed that the production of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* had changed between its opening at Bolton Octagon and its performances at the Royal Court. This was presumably a consequence of Featherstone's influence, because the production had already opened and had been touring successfully to 'sold out theatres' (Front Row, 2018).

Reflecting on the production in Bolton, Tripney suggested that the sex scenes 'could have been handled with more delicacy and care' (Tripney, 2018b). The changes made at the Royal Court resulted in the production's running time being ten minutes shorter and included the removal of 'an upbeat introductory music sequence' and a toning down of the 'brash 1980's peppiness' (Ibid.). The external anxieties about paedophilia and sexual abuse in contemporary society exerted an influence over the way the production was staged and forced the director to think carefully about how the work would be perceived. Featherstone comments that the delivery of the dialogue became more 'defiant' at the Royal Court, in order to challenge the spectator.

During her interview for *Front Row*, Featherstone questioned how Dunbar would feel about the play now if she were still alive, asserting with a laugh of frustrated exasperation that 'it's about grooming!' (Front Row, 2018). The tone of this observation inferred that for Featherstone, the content was too problematic for a contemporary audience, and that the play was dated. Similarly, the critic Alice Saville commented 'It feels like a time-capsule, its jokes muddled with new realities' (Saville, 2018). She goes on to express the hope that 'future revivals will have more space to think a bit harder to think about the quality of that laughter, and where it belongs' (Saville, 2018).

For Saville, it was not necessarily the dated sexual politics or different attitudes towards underage sex and paedophilia in the work, rather an immature quality to the young Dunbar's writing that made it problematic. Featherstone highlighted the importance of development during her *Front Row* (2018) interview by emphasising the importance of nurturing working-class voices over time in order that they can continue to develop their writing. Saville critiqued the production for presenting 'this scenario without judgement, without the experience to fully probe its warped power dynamics' (Saville, 2018). For Saville, on this basis it was difficult to place the work in the context of the Rotherham case or 'post-Weinstein' discussions.

Whilst I do not agree with this reading of Dunbar's work, it certainly offers an explanation for why Featherstone felt the production should be cancelled. Had she held the play in a higher

regard, it is perhaps less likely that she would have reached the same decision, regardless of the context in which it was to be received. However, Featherstone's insinuation that Dunbar's writing is immature and underdeveloped was not stated explicitly. I think it would have been difficult for the leader of a new writing venue to criticise a working-class voice, which may explain why she programmed the production in January in the first place. Described as a 'dump month' in the film world, this theatre slot is not generally associated with the highest levels of attendance. According to the Out of Joint Company accounts published 31 March 2018, the production achieved a surplus in ticket sales of £14,016 (Out of Joint, 2018). It was also remounted for a tour in 2019 to seven venues between February and April 2019 indicating that liquid censorship and the resulting engagement can, in certain circumstances, benefit the engagement with repertoire.

A by-product of Featherstone's commitment to the agenda for change in the industry was attention and heightened profile for the venue and her leadership. The 'helpful public debate' (Royal Court Theatre, 2017b) and press attention for the revival of *Rita, Sue & Bob Too* (2017) assisted the box office receipts. Audiences wanted to book tickets to the production to see what the controversy had been about. Featherstone received praise from colleagues in the industry for having the courage to change her mind. Tamara Harvey, artistic director of Theatre Clwyd commented on Twitter:

There's no rule book for being an AD (or if there is, no-one's given it to me yet). But if there was, I hope it would include 'Have the courage to reverse a decision.' Hats off to @vicfeatherstone (Harvey, 2017).

Demonstrating her vulnerability publicly enhanced Featherstone's public image. She was elevated from thirty-nine to first in *The Stage 100*, an annual list of the most influential people in theatre. The decision had been based on her response to the stories that had emerged about 'ongoing abuses of power in the industry' and also the bravery she had shown regarding the reversal of her cancellation of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*, which had demonstrated a 'willingness to rethink that decision publicly' (*The Stage*, 2018). Undoubtedly this public support may encourage others to open up a debate about their repertoire for the public. As Bauman observes, the liquid modern age has destabilised traditional ways of working. What *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* demonstrates so effectively is that liquid censorship is a response to the shifts in society that artistic leaders are trying to navigate.

Conclusion

The case study research included in this thesis has revealed that the drivers behind acts of liquid censorship in contemporary British theatre are complex. Like a liquid, for which 'it is the flow of time that counts' (Bauman, 2012:2), the external circumstances that lead to the closure of a production are crucial in terms of establishing why a decision has been made. The research explored here has placed a spotlight on the influence exerted by audiences, funders, local authority partners, security, legislation, grassroots civil protest and social media to illuminate a relationship between society and an increasingly cautious management of artistic creation and theatre programming. I have reflected on society's attitude to childhood and a protectionist approach to innocence in young people, whilst also challenging the idea that all forms of artistic expression should be staged without scrutiny, by placing a focus on the complex safeguarding and ethical requirements associated with the employment of child actors. The summary included here outlines the key observations and conclusions that have been drawn in my thesis, clarifying some of the trends that are apparent in the snapshot on contemporary theatre censorship that I have captured. These conclusions have been considered from the perspective of the practicalities of the theatre industry to devise suggestions for how they might be incorporated into policy consultations, conversations and practice.

Contemporary British Theatre

Liquid censorship has been considered in terms of 'soft' and less visible examples of regulation such as the type of venue that a production is staged in, described in O'Leary's (2015:5) reading of Burt's (1998) scholarship on censorship. Survey data recorded at two points in recent theatre history, 2002 – 2003 (Thomas, et al., 2007) and 2015 (Long, 2015) indicates that theatre censorship affects a third of arts organisations in Britain. However, this data relies on arts institutions volunteering information about a relationship with censorship and does not assist in revealing the more insidious or perhaps less conscious examples of silencing. My research has made a contribution towards addressing this gap, although there is more work to be done here.

One of the less visible forms of censorship explored within the work was the relationship between censorship and the private decisions made by artists to avoid a particular theme or approach. The evidence has pointed towards an industry-wide bravery on the part of artists, rather than caution. The critic Donald Hutera, who sees an extensive amount of performance work each year, commented in his interview that he could not think of a subject that artists in all fields of performance and theatre making had not attempted to explore in their work. However, a closer

analysis of the evidence that has been gathered in my interviews and through my case study research indicates that there is a more insidious influence over the creation of repertoire, which Kaliada (2015) alluded to in terms of the relationship between funding and self-censorship in British theatre at the *No Boundaries* conference in 2015. This is perhaps best exemplified in the *Homegrown* case study, as part of Latif's discussion on minstrelsy and the prescribed narratives that minority artists must conform to if they want to secure commissions or have their work staged. Hanna Slättne has suggested that some of the artists she has worked with in Northern Ireland are affected by a pressure to conform to a desired representation of sectarian violence or 'the troubles' (Slättne, 2017). Milo Rau's description of the pressure to achieve the 'next great shock' (2016) in his theatre projects potentially indicates that the subjects that artists choose to explore are influenced at a formative stage by the inclination and tastes of commissioners and programmers.

I referred to Etienne (2013) who has discussed a connection between cautious programming of 'In-yer-face' playwrights such as Sarah Kane at a regional theatre level and precarious finances at theatre venues, where box office takings are an important contributor to the organisation's operating budget and the risk of offending audiences may be factored into programming decisions. This research was placed in the context of a more recent report conducted for ACE on *Theatre in England* (BOP Consulting, Devlin Associates, 2016), which suggested that the variety of programming at regional venues is limited by the stock of touring productions available and the financial risks associated with repertoire at this level.

The notion that certain 'controversial' theatre productions possess the potential to 'touch raw nerves' (Sierz 2001:5), a definition conceived by Sierz in response to the 'In-yer face' era of playwrighting and Freshwater's discussions about the 'affective' (2013:174) power associated with the child, both real and imaginary, has underpinned the broad demarcation of challenging or potentially offensive repertoire employed in my thesis. Empirical research into the ways in which arts venues attempt to navigate responses to productions that might cause offence has assisted in revealing a relationship between programming flexibility and the locality or scale of a theatre venue. The use of guidance warnings has been viewed as an example of an arts institution's policy for anticipating this type of reaction. I observed that the use of guidance warnings during the timeframe examined was less common among regional venues than at London venues, with some caveats and exceptions. Theatres generally, including the London venues in the sample, were more likely to provide age-guidance for a production than other advice about content, although the use of age guidelines across the UK for productions suitable aged 14 years+ was only 17.7%, which indicated

that a relatively low proportion of repertoire was deemed to require this type of warning. The use of age guidelines was typically higher than the use of content warnings regionally and this observation was referred to by drawing a comparison between the East Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside, the South East and the South West. I employed this data to suggest that the higher use of age guidelines may be an indicator of audience development plans that privilege the preservation of relationships with family audiences at regional venues. If a theatre maintains good relations with parents by avoiding the risk of offending or upsetting young audiences, this will contribute to the sustainability of the venue.

As discussed in the rationale for the proportion of London venues selected in the sample, according to the *British Theatre Repertoire 2014* report, 54.3% of theatre audiences in Britain are based in London. Of the data explored in this thesis, 21.8% of all productions staged in the London sample displayed warnings about content online. I suggested that programming liberty is potentially greater in London compared to some regions of the UK, whilst also highlighting some important exceptions outside London that contradicted the relationship drawn between controversial themes and a higher proportion of guidance warnings. For example, the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester used guidelines infrequently but was an example of a theatre that had a higher degree of flexibility to programme bold, new and potentially controversial repertoire. The infrequent use of guidance warnings in this instance demonstrated a close contract of understanding between the particular theatre and its audience.

The sample data was explored to scrutinise Balme's description of a theatre-going audience for whom certain spaces have been privatised, containing repertoire that is allowed a permissive and unquestioned liberty. The use of warnings about content was approximately 50% or higher at smaller, new-writing venues such as the Royal Court, the Arcola and the Gate theatres, potentially reflecting the challenging material being explored in productions in the programme. This pattern was also observed at the Sherman Theatre in Wales which offered content warnings for 42% of its programme and Live Theatre in the North East, which seats 170 people, indicating that 58.4% of its productions were unsuitable for audiences under the age of 14+ years. The higher percentage of guidance warnings provided at smaller-scale venues supports a conclusion that programming liberty is greater in smaller spaces on the basis that these warnings are necessary because the work is more controversial and likely to touch raw nerves. However, the provision of warnings at these spaces problematises the notion that this artistic freedom is unquestioned, since the approach indicates an anticipated offence amongst audiences, which represents a type of questioning.

The empirical research explored in my thesis has served to highlight the influence that the financial circumstances of theatre venues or production companies hold in decision making processes. Concerns about a relationship with sponsors and the risk of losing financial support has the potential to influence decisions that are made by artistic leaders. I underlined the potential for a transactional relationship between host theatre venues, visiting producers or artists and examples of production closures, proposing that if a host venue has little or no creative investment into a production, it is easier to close the work. This was reflected on in terms of the volume of productions that were described as 'visiting' in the theatre sample, which illustrated the dominance of a contractual rather than a creative relationship between arts venues in the UK and the productions being performed within them. I discussed this in terms of the cancellation of *The Golden Dragon* (2017), relating the decision that was made to the poor financial position at Hackney Empire at the time of the closure. The conclusions drawn about the close connection between this decision and financial difficulties at the venue helpfully foregrounded the research into the censorship of *Homegrown* (2015) and the context of financial uncertainty at the NYT. I emphasised the distance between the creative team and the remote involvement from Paul Roseby, the artistic director of the NYT who was responsible for the censorship of the production. I suggested that a lack of conflict in the creative process belied an absence of creative investment from Roseby in the work, which made it easier for him to cancel the project. Had Roseby showed an earlier creative interest in the development of the commission, I suggested that it was unlikely that the project would have made it to the rehearsal room at all. Alternatively, if common ground could have been found between Roseby and the artistic team through creative engagement, the production would not have been censored. It is important for the theatre industry to take a step back and question how creativity can influence decisions that are taken, rather than being side-lined on the basis of pressing financial anxieties. Creativity needs to be part of the fabric and values of running a theatre building or production company, rather than being confined to a category of artistic work that fills the space.

The evidence extracted from my research reinforces Bauman's theories about an increasingly censorious management of culture, encapsulated in the concerns raised by David Lan at the London Southbank conference, *Taking the offensive – defending artistic freedom of expression in the UK* (2013), regarding the tendency towards prioritising safer programming or artistic decisions. The enhanced media scrutiny that high-profile, London-based venues may need to account for was discussed, referring to Shenton's description of a 'repeat theatre story' (Shenton, 2019) that appears periodically in the national press about a small number of individuals fainting in response to controversial repertoire. There is a significant relationship between the mainstream news press

interest in established or famous theatre venues and the examples of productions that were censored in London, such as *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017) and *The Golden Dragon* (2017) having toured the UK without controversy. The disparity between the regional theatre venues and the London theatre cancellations highlights the vulnerability that certain theatre venues in metropolitan areas may have in terms of potential for controversy.

I have tested Western's proposition that a 'supplementary theatre experience' (2017:189) is created through the social media treatment of controversial repertoire. There is an acute relationship between examples of live theatre that have been censored and the social mood at the time, which is enhanced by the increasing dominance of social media in society. The agency generated online by responses to *The Golden Dragon* (2017) for example or the #MeToo campaign and the cancellation of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017), highlights an uncomfortable intersection between online activism which focuses on 'the many different kinds of inequality in the industry' (Gardner, 2018) and theatre productions. Liquid censorship requires the alignment of a prominent venue location, an agenda being lobbied on social media at a particular point in time and an anxiety on the part of the artistic leader charged with deciding whether the production should be closed or not. Liquid censorship does not necessarily focus exclusively on the production, but a particular issue that has been raised by the work. I have emphasised the unique, corporeal status of live theatre spaces, which offer an attractive focal point for criticism and localised protest as well as a route to publicity and visibility in an age of media saturation. I have not drawn this conclusion in relationship to examples of patrons fainting, which are types of controversy that theatres may even seek to court in order to gain profile and secure ticket sales for a production. Rather, the newsworthy nature of certain theatre spaces is emphasised in my work to highlight the pressure that artistic leaders may be under when they programme work in these spaces. This intense scrutiny may be resulting in a form of cautious management style anticipated by Bauman (2005:59) leading to examples of liquid censorship, which are also highly newsworthy. However, liquid censorship may take a less visible form during the decision-making process to programme or avoid repertoire. Institutional anxiety relating to the costs associated with managing damage to reputation from a PR perspective, or the requirement for an increased security presence to manage protests, all contributes to liquid censorship in this context.

My description of the use of marketing materials in *Homegrown* encapsulates a complex duality between a desire to attract attention from audiences through the exploration of controversial material, and the need for theatres or arts institutions to avoid potentially expensive

controversial responses in the form of protest or social media campaigns that result in reputational damage. The ambiguous policy and legislative context regarding security in which organisations are working has potentially created a fertile environment for anxieties about the costs associated with policing protest. Roseby's comments about his organisation's inability to manage responses to *Homegrown* online, which he suggested that the Metropolitan Police had raised as a concern, highlights the new type of challenge that social media might pose to arts institutions and managers. Individual or extreme sentiments are capable of reaching a broad audience on social media. It is absurd to suggest that the NYT might be able to manage social media reactions, when society has not yet established a way to regulate social media platforms and content. More industry conversations are needed between audiences, crisis experts, artists and arts organisations who have experienced challenging scenarios on social media, perhaps provoked by an uncomfortable intersection between a piece of repertoire and the social context in which it will be received. Furthermore, young people should be invited to participate in these conversations, because institutions and artists would do well to listen to a generation that is growing up in a digital age and may provide a positive and instructive contribution. It is through a forum for knowledge exchange that the industry will collectively develop the confidence and tools to navigate protest and controversy, rather than adopting a cautious or censorious approach to both the piece of work and those who wish to protest against it.

Whilst my case study data indicates that financial concerns, particularly at regional theatre venues, may lead to cautious programming or acts of liquid censorship, it is important to stress that the notion that regional locations have no appetite for or are unlikely to programme provocative repertoire is erroneous and falls into a narrow view of theatre's potential reach. Indeed, the sample evidence demonstrates examples of productions that toured in the UK prior to being cancelled in London. In a feature article for *The Stage* newspaper, 'Lyn Gardner: Theatre's still an echo chamber – it's time to listen to outside voices', the critic observes:

There is a disconnect between an industry predominantly based in metropolitan areas – which faces its own ongoing issues around diversity – and those who feel unheard, those who never go to the theatre, who think it's not for them, or who have no access. (Gardner, 2019).

Gardner's comment was made in the context of Middle Child's musical response to Brexit in Hull, a 67.6% vote leave city, in which the company reflected on the effects of 'globalisation, austerity and immigration' on the city since 2008 (Ibid.). She questioned why the production was only shown for a limited number of performances in Liverpool and Hull instead of being offered a longer run in other locations, such as at the National Theatre in London. Here is an

exemplification of Burt's 'soft' (1998:18) form of regulation that happens invisibly in theatre programming in Britain. The work was developed at a regional level; however, its reach was limited by the less visible power structures that organise how contemporary theatre is programmed, and these relate to funding and artistic leadership. Gardner proposes that the theatre industry would do well to listen to plural voices in society, in this particular instance in order that it might understand the social conditions that led to Brexit for example, rather than wallowing in what Samuel West has described as a kind of introspective collective industry 'mourning' (Gardner, 2019).

The contrast in liberty between the reach of regional theatres and high-profile metropolitan venues is a prescient problem and a less visible example of liquid censorship that exists in British theatre. It would be worthwhile fostering a closer and connected dialogue and forum for knowledge exchange between artists and institutions from each of the twelve key areas in the UK, in order to examine how the different regions might work more closely to support each other. My conclusions about the impact of media scrutiny on a particular kind of iconic theatre points to a social climate in which Metropolitan venues are experiencing a crisis of visibility, which manifests itself through reactions to work online. Conversely, regional venues may be battling a crisis of invisibility, as a result of poor funding, diminishing local authority support and a disconnect from the more influential metropolitan spaces. My case study evidence demonstrates that both forms of visibility and invisibility may result in acts of liquid censorship and a broader definition of censorship is required to identify and be mindful of and hopefully rectify the complex examples of silencing that exist in contemporary British theatre.

Time, External Events and Liquid Censorship

Once again drawing on Bauman, the sociologist proposes that when we consider the liquid age, 'to leave time out of account would be a grievous mistake' (Bauman, 2012:2). It is the time in which liquid censorship occurs that reveals the origins and power behind the restriction. The brief censorship of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* further emphasises that liquid censorship is influenced by the time in which a piece of work is received. Dunbar's production was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in 1982; however, a shift in the local context in which it would be viewed in 2017 led to the brief resolution to cancel the production's performances at the Royal Court Theatre, a decision that was reversed by Vicky Featherstone within two days. The relationship between *Rita*,

Sue and Bob Too, the #Metoo campaign and the Royal Court Theatre's response to it, represented an example of external events at a specific point in time influencing the way in which an audience might receive the work. It was the timing of these external events that created the environment that resulted in liquid censorship.

The *Homegrown* case study illustrates an uncomfortable interaction and close connection between the external circumstances that surround a theatre production and liquid censorship. Bauman proposes that individuals are working in a complex, globalised society and censorious approaches to management represent an attempt to control this environment. An external circumstance identified in this research that might lead to censorship is the discord between the subject of a play and a strategic focus on international funding opportunities. Research insights drawn from the NYT's company accounts uncovered a lucrative training course initiative in the Middle-East that the organisation had been pursuing, which may have heightened sensitivity to the exploration of radicalisation. This represents a less visible but specific concern that artistic leaders may have regarding the preservation of an important international relationship. Similarly, the cancellation of *Pah La* (2018) at the Royal Court Theatre emphasises the acute challenges presented by financially attractive international relationships where cultural difference in approaches to censorship and freedom of expression leads to a conflict between financial priorities and artistic liberty.

The proximity to the *Charlie Hebdo* (2015) attacks in Paris situated *Homegrown* in a time in which there was a heightened culture of anxiety in the industry, associated with representing violent extremism. Furthermore, the direct relationship between the three girls who left their homes in Bethnal Green to travel to Syria and join Islamic State and the content of *Homegrown* resulted in a new context in which the work would be viewed. The NYT chose to draw attention to the connection between the production and the news story, rather than playing it down in the press releases about the play, supporting the conclusion that arts institutions tread a fine line between engaging with controversy and avoiding it completely. English PEN, an organisation that campaigns for artistic freedom of expression, suggested in a letter to *The Times* that 'government policy in response to extremism may be creating a culture of caution in the arts' (2015). The government's Prevent programme, designed to identify radicalisation at an early stage, had an external influence over the censorship of *Homegrown*. The potential impact of state operated policies is insidious, and in this case generated a heightened sense of anxiety regarding the discussion of extremism with young people.

The time period in which *Homegrown* was to be performed contained a series of newsworthy stories that fractured society's view of the safe parameters for artistic creation or the innocence that can be relied upon among children and young people. A fascination in society with childhood innocence is confronted head on by examples of young people who become radicalised at an early age by a violent or extreme ideology. My thesis contends that an unwillingness to confront this alternative view of childhood touches raw nerves in society and is therefore controversial material for a theatre company to represent artistically with young actors. That does not mean that a theatre company should not explore this work with young people, rather it highlights a less visible boundary that exists in society regarding the ways in which young artists are enabled to explore challenging subjects.

Children and Young People – Challenging Innocence

Comparisons between productions in the repertoire sample and the case study examples of productions that were cancelled have helped me to extract a more nuanced understanding of why some work is censored when other explorations of similar thematic territories are staged without controversy. I referred to *Room* (2017) at Hackney Empire as an example of a piece that, like *Five Easy Pieces* (2016), explored kidnap and paedophilia. There is clearly a choice to be made when an artist thinks about stagecraft in the context of child protection and safeguarding concerns. *Five Easy Pieces* employed a far closer proximity between the child actors and the thematic content, and the children were empowered within the work to perform long monologues and challenging scenes. Conversely, the creative team behind *Room* incorporated infantilising safeguarding techniques into the artistic process, compromising, for some critics, the artistic intensity of the work. There is a complicated dilemma between the need to operate within safeguarding parameters which are open to interpretation and the inclusion of young people as active partners in a professional piece of theatre. If the balance in priorities is not considered to have been met, the result may be a form of liquid censorship by way of the refusal of child performance licenses from the local authority, as was the case for *Five Easy Pieces*.

The form and scale of a piece of work with young people is a crucial factor in terms of the likelihood that a production will result in controversy or censorship. This was reflected on in the context of the different responses to Anders Lustgarten's *Extremism* (2017), part of the *NT Connections* programme, and the NYT's *Homegrown*. Both pieces explored radicalisation with young

people, but the larger scale and form of the NYT's project was a significant factor in its closure. Undoubtedly in this instance, the contrast in finances between the National Theatre and the smaller scale, less resilient NYT contributed to the censorship of *Homegrown*. Once more this example is illustrative of a key trend in my research regarding the impact that financial resources have on the decision to stage or censor productions.

My case study on *Homegrown* identifies a complicated schism between young people and their parents' ideas about appropriate content. Latif and El Khairy empowered the young people involved in the *Homegrown* rehearsal process to articulate various opinions and ideas that abound in society about radical Islam and homegrown terrorists. Conversely, Roseby had a different, more cautious boundary for what it was appropriate for the young people, aged fifteen and over, to discuss. The different approaches to child actors highlight the important influence that safeguarding policies hold regarding approaches to repertoire with young people in Britain. The *Homegrown* case study demonstrates that there is much work still to be done to address this subject in the theatre industry, as Ridout (2009) and Senior have observed (2018).

Five Easy Pieces provided the embodiment of a piece of artistic representation that encapsulates a preoccupation with the figure of the child in peril in British theatre. I described the production as a theatrical experiment that effectively empowers its child performers. I complicated this conclusion by suggesting that the third 'piece' exploited a child performer. Developing Bauman's ideas about contemporary menaces or societal anxiety regarding the various threats to children, I raised a provocation that a fascination with the child in dangerous circumstances may participate in what Rau has described as a culture of 'one-upmanship' (Muller, 2016). for a theatre going audience. I drew a link between an appetite for this type of repertoire and Freshwater's scholarship, in which she states that 'British culture – both popular and theatrical – continues to be haunted by anxieties about children and childhood' (Freshwater, 2013:168).

There is a complicated incompatibility between the status of the child actor in a production for adult audiences and the theatre contract proposed in Féral's 'Law of reversibility' (Féral and Bermingham, 2002:104), which states that the work must allow the actor to return to her or his point of departure. In my view, the child actors in *Five Easy Pieces* were consciously taught lessons about adult emotions by Rau as part of the game of acting. On this basis, it was not possible to return to an original state. The various exercises designed by Milo Rau to probe the limits in power

between a director and child actor, and the decision to ask a young female actor to undress, arguably pushed over a boundary that exploited the child's body in the space.

Legislation on the human rights of a child demonstrates the significant responsibility and agency that adults possess regarding matters of consent for children. The processes and policies in place in the UK to protect child actors have been investigated as part of my case study research, including the technical complexities involved in local authority licensing and safeguarding policies. These policies represent an example of the less visible or liquid forms that censorship takes in British theatre: an external, legislated provision that has the authority to close a theatre production. My research has demonstrated inconsistencies in the interpretation of safeguarding boundaries between Manchester City Council and the local authority in the London Borough of Southwark, which permitted performance licenses for child actors in *Five Easy Pieces* (2018) in spite of the fact that the content had not changed when it was denied licenses in Manchester. I have highlighted the importance of time, resources and preparation for controversial repertoire that involves child actors as well as effective partnerships with local authorities. Furthermore, I have underscored the fact that the act of liquid censorship in Manchester may have been based on a technicality, regarding the timing that was allowed for the licenses to be secured. Whilst safeguarding policies are necessary and child protection legislation should be central to any performance work with young people, the differing interpretation of these policies is worthy of further scrutiny in the future. The potential to control the types of work that young people are permitted to perform in has an invisible quality and ought to be made more visible through a closer connection between local authorities, theatres, artists, audiences and young people, in order to address localised inconsistencies in the decisions that are being made. My research into matters of consent demands that children and young people are afforded an agency in the decisions that are taken about their potential roles in arts and cultural activities.

Less visible and individual instances of liquid censorship do not necessarily lead to positive change or dialogue which is why a closer consultation needs to be had between the various stakeholders, including young people, to share knowledge and best practice. My thesis has emphasised the value and importance attributed to partnership-working in contemporary British theatre, referring to local authorities as well as charitable organisations that possess specialist expertise in the themes being represented. I reflected on this in the context of *All in a Row* (2019) and *All the Little Lights* (2017), drawing a comparison with the content and concerns that were provoked by *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017). As a general conclusion, rather than working on behalf of

young people to establish the types of risks and criteria for best practice, it is through collaborative sessions and knowledge exchange work that child performers will be protected and empowered. There is an absence of substantial research with current or former child performers who have worked within professional and adult theatre productions both in a contemporary setting or in the past, and this evidence should be employed in order that best practice and policy is influenced by experience rather than a sentiment-driven approach to childhood. This gap in research requires an urgent response as its outcomes will represent a vital element in reforming the approach to consent, safeguarding policies and their use in practice.

The research that underpins this snapshot of theatre censorship between 2015 and 2018 has required an open and responsive approach. It is my hope that similar contemporary archival research methods could be replicated and developed to create further snapshots of contemporary British theatre in the future for comparison. Bringing together repertoire data with a range of qualitative research sources such as primary research interviews, freedom of information requests, social media or press commentary and contemporary British theatre scholarship has resulted in a methodology that offers a comprehensive view on a contemporary period in theatre history. I believe that my methodology should be used and developed for further research, perhaps internationally as well as in the UK. On the basis of the broad set of evidence that has been gathered, I have concluded that liquid censorship is not necessarily about conscious, deliberate or relevant decisions. Liquid censorship describes a process which is influenced by a heightened level of anxiety on the part of artistic leaders in charge. The financial situation of a venue or production company has a significant impact on the ability to defend repertoire and the private sentiments of the individual executive in charge will ultimately influence the decision to close a production or not. The importance of these individual executives and the financial circumstances that they are working in is crucial and this responsibility should be reflected on as part of future consultations about theatre programming and its funding in the UK. Some artistic leaders are working in more challenging conditions and the industry should collaborate more closely to defend high quality, challenging and relevant artistic repertoire. To date, discussions about censorship have approached the subject from a historical perspective, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary since its cessation and revisiting familiar examples from contemporary theatre history, exemplified by the V&A museum exhibition, *Censored! Stage, Screen, Society at 50* which was open between 10th July 2018 and 27th January 2019. Discussions about censorship need to move beyond a museum approach and instead look forward, focussing on a recognition of liquid censorship in decision making processes and bringing these less visible examples of regulation into an open forum for discussion. It is through a

positive and open dialogue that the principles of artistic liberty can be maintained in the future, rather than being eroded over time by liquid forms of power and influence. Now that liquid censorship has been named, the next steps will be to facilitate a conversation regarding how artists and arts leaders can work together more closely than the theatre industry has to date.

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Appendix 2 - Interview Sample List

Nadia Latif - Theatre Director, directed *Homegrown* (2015)

Purni Morell - Former Artistic Director at the Unicorn Theatre, programmed *Five Easy Pieces* (2018), also in attendance, **Annelise Davidson** - Executive Director at Unicorn Theatre. Davidson's observations have not been quoted directly in this thesis.

Rachel Dudley - Theatre Manager, Royal Court Theatre

Ciaran Cunningham - Lighting Designer and Technical Manager

Donald Hutera - Arts Critic (*The Times*)

Nina Segal - Playwright (*Big Guns*, Yard Theatre, 2017);

Hanna Slättne - Independent Dramaturg, Northern Ireland (RSC, Lyceum, formerly Tinderbox)

Stewart Pringle - Playwright, Critic and Dramaturg at the National Theatre, previously the Gate Theatre.

Katharine James - Independent Producer and Theatre maker touring in the North West, Clown for the charity *Clowns without Borders*

These interviewees have not been named or quoted directly: A Literary Manager at a large-scale theatre, an Artistic Director at the mid-scale touring venue in the South East, an independent touring theatre Producer, a funder who has worked for the Arts Council England and a Production Administrator at a South West theatre in the sample.

Appendix 3 - Sample Interview Questions

Can you give me a brief overview of who you are and what your background is in theatre?

Did you or the production team engage with the local community at any stage during the rehearsals for the production?

Did you or the production team engage with any other institutions not directly related to staging the work, such as a charity, local authority, community centre or the police.

Thinking now about theatre censorship:

What does the word censorship mean to you?

Have you ever experienced a situation where you have felt censored in a theatre project?

Please provide details.

Have you ever experienced a situation where you have chosen to censor your work?

Please provide details.

Have you heard of any scenarios where colleagues have felt censored in a theatre project. Without naming specific names or details, please give an overview on why they felt censored.

Do you think censorship ever has a place in theatre?

Appendix 4 - Theatre Content Warnings Data Sheets

Region	Theatre	Seats	Total Productions	Content Warnings	% Content	Age Guidance 14+ warnings	% Age Guidance
London	Theatre Royal Stratford East	460	43		0	10	23.25581395
London	Finborough	50	43		0	1	2.325581395
London	Royal Court	375	33	16	48.48484848	15	45.45454545
		85					
London	Arcola	197	63	37	58.73015873	26	41.26984127
		100					
London	Donmar	251	8		0	0	0
London	Almeida	328	11		0	0	0
London	Lyric, Hammersmith	550	42	2	4.761904762	8	19.04761905
		110					
London	Gate	75	10	5	50	2	20
London	Trafalgar Studios	380	15	4	26.66666667	6	40
		100					
London	Southwark Playhouse	240	29	7	24.13793103	2	6.896551724
		120					
London	National Theatre	1150	35	7	20	6	17.14285714
		890					
		450					
London	Yard Theatre	110	29	1	3.448275862	2	6.896551724
Total			361	79	21.88365651	78	21.6066482
South West	Salisbury Playhouse	517	74	6	8.108108108	16	21.62162162

		149					
South West	Plymouth Theatre Royal	1320	91	3	3.296703297	16	17.58241758
		175					
Total			165	9	5.454545455	32	19.39393939
South East	Oxford Playhouse	663	85	2	2.352941176	37	43.52941176
		50					
South East	Chichester Festival Theatre	1206	30	0	0	0	0
		283					
Total			115	2	1.739130435	37	32.17391304
West Midlands	Birmingham Rep	825	68	7	10.29411765	4	5.882352941
		300					
		140					
West Midlands	Belgrade, Coventry	858	100	8	8	10	10
		245					
Total			168	15	8.928571429	14	8.333333333
E.Midlands	Nottingham Playhouse	750	97	6	6.18556701	15	15.46391753
		100					
E.Midlands	Leicester Curve	902	99	7	7.070707071	8	8.080808081
		282					
Total			196	13	6.632653061	23	11.73469388
East of England	Mercury Theatre	486	63	19	30.15873016	17	26.98412698
		98					
Total			63	19	30.15873016	17	26.98412698
North East	Live Theatre	170	55	3	5.454545455	31	56.36363636
		60					
North East	Northern Stage	447	79	7	8.860759494	17	21.51898734
		160					
		120					
Total			134	10	7.462686567	48	35.82089552
Region	Theatre	Seats	Total Productions	Content Warnings	% Content	Age Guidance	% Age Guidance

						14+ warnings	
North West	Theatre by the Lake	400	44	9	20.45454545	2	4.545454545
		90					
North West	Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse	760	43	1	2.325581395	8	18.60465116
		400					
North West	Royal Exchange Theatre	750	24		0	2	8.333333333
		90					
Total			111	10	9.009009009	12	10.81081081
Yorkshire & Humberside	West Yorkshire Playhouse	750	65	7	10.76923077	17	26.15384615
		350					
Yorkshire & Humberside	Hull Truck	437	67	1	1.492537313	3	4.47761194
		135					
Total			132	8	6.060606061	20	15.15151515
						Age Guidance 14+ warnings	% Age Guidance
Region	Theatre	Seats	Total Productions	Content Warnings	% Content		
Northern Ireland	Lyric, Belfast	400	48	6	12.5	4	8.333333333
		170					
Total			48	6	12.5	4	8.333333333
						Age Guidance 14+ warnings	% Age Guidance
Region	Theatre	Seats	Total Productions	Content Warnings	% Content		
Scotland	Royal Lyceum	658	17	1	5.882352941	0	0
Scotland	Citizens Theatre	500	42	4	9.523809524	13	30.95238095
		100					
		50					
Total			59	5	8.474576271	13	22.03389831
						Age Guidance 14+ warnings	% Age Guidance
Region	Theatre	Seats	Total Productions	Content Warnings	% Content		
Wales	Clwyd	550	98	3	3.06122449	7	7.142857143

Appendix 5 - Interview Transcript: Nadia Latif

Case A

Location: Jimmy & The Bee Cafe, London

Date: 1st March 2017

Time: 12.47pm

Duration: 57 minutes

TS: If we could start by talking about how you came into theatre? What you've been working on?

NL: How did I come into theatre? So I am not from this country. I'm from Sudan. But my mother is English. There's no theatre in Sudan at all, it's an Islamic fundamentalist state and there isn't really a word for theatre in Arabic actually. But I used to come to London for Summers and my mum, sort of not knowing what to do with six children in London in Summer used to just send me to the theatre, on my own actually. And she used to just drop me off, you know ask them what time it finished and she'd be there to pick me up and she used to give me a quid for my programme and an ice-cream and I saw everything. I saw all the work of the In Yer Face theatre of the nineties at the Royal Court and I was far too young. I must have been about nine, nine or ten. But also as kids we read a lot, so it made sense. And so I was one of kids who was like this is what I'm going to do. It was never really a question. So I actually weirdly therefore didn't come to it quite late because this was what I was going to do. So I'm going to go and do an English degree, I'm going to work for Unicef and live my life, I didn't do any drama at University and I knew, I knew I was going to come out and I was going to go to RADA because I wanted to train under Bill Gaskill who had run the Royal Court and as far as I was concerned I was going to be a Royal Court Director, and the rest as they say is history really.

I think I was really lucky to be at the tail end of a labour government, where there was still a lot of money in the arts and so when I came out I just started working and didn't really stop and now, I think this year I'll have been working for nine years and I see kids come out now and I'm 'good luck', it's really crap.

TS: So it's changed?

NL: Massively. There's just no money. There's just no money. You could, you could do sort of do anything. There was one stage where I just thought all things are possible. But also I think that there's fewer jobs so you get the same people doing more jobs. And, you know what I mean, they've got to earn more. But I think I came out... I trained as a director at RADA, not an actor and you do a coming out show. And it's a professional production and actually I ended up taking mine on tour because it was very successful. I always knew I wanted to do new writing. I wasn't interested in the classics. I've done them. I've got a classical English education from UCL so I've read them all. And they just didn't interest me. I think I found it slightly odd, the concept of going to the theatre when you knew the ending. And not in that weird way, like I love cinema and now I work in cinema as well and you can watch the same film again and again. I've seen *Pretty in Pink* probably five hundred times but it's different, it's that feeling of familiarity washing over you. And Theatre isn't that. It's too visceral and immediate. So this idea for me of, I once directed *Saved* and hated every minute of it. That idea that people are going 'how's she going to do the chair bit', and also it didn't fulfil for me what I see my role as a director being which is facilitating the text to be its most beautiful self, whereas I think increasingly in classics it's about how far you can move away from the writers intention. You know, here's my version of *Hamlet*. And it just doesn't interest me. I think it's totally valid. It's just not me.

I like an adaptation. I'm working on two adaptations at the moment. I'm working on *Rosmersholm*, which will be set in Saudi Arabia in 1973 and is about the rise of the house of Saud and the birth of Islamic fundamentalism and I'm working on an adaptation of *Heart of Darkness*, which is about the West dependence on African poverty. But really both of those are just an excuse to do a new play. Do you know what I mean? You're just using an older story to give you a way in. When really those two plays could just be written on their own. It's just it gives you a kind of insight. Which is cool. But yes, when I first came out of RADA my first show that I did was a Naomi Wallace play called *In the Heart of America* which is a play about the first Gulf war and a Palestinian American soldier goes to fight on the side of the Americans and his sister who cannot understand how he has no loyalty to the state of Palestine. And I think I chose it because the second Gulf War was happening or just happened and I don't know, it's a really odd thing when you realize you're what other people would use to call a political theatre maker, I just was like I don't know how to not respond to my own feelings. It's not even just totally generous I am just, I am upset. You know, I was at University when that actual Iraq War march started. It started from my University. Do you know what I mean? It was so much part of my life. I'm not from a creative family at all. All of my lot are academics mainly. And to me it felt like theatre is such a bourgeois pursuit, you know it's ultimate bourgeois pursuit, you even get the state to pay for you. To me it feels really, not irresponsible to make art for art sake because I think all art is essentially art for art's sake, but I have too many feelings about the state of the world to not respond to them. And they can be tiny things like I can satisfy those urges in the design of something or in the score of something, you know what I mean? It doesn't have to be like the whole play is about what I feel about the universe.

TS – Would you say you have developed a particular aesthetic for showing that?

NL – Yes, I think my aesthetic is mainly based on, I'm quite a visual person, and partly when I was at RADA they really encouraged you to see things visually. So we had to do life drawing classes every Saturday for six hours. You know and that's about understanding how bodies work in space. And I'm a massive architecture dweeb and I'm really into cinema and so those are all visual media and so I think I often will start - I've worked with the same designer from the beginning we've done like 25 shows together and often she will come from a textual level and I'll come from a visual place so I'll have storyboarded and she'll have scribbled, whatever. And I think increasingly I'm interested in aesthetics that force the play to be its subtextual self, so I just did a show at the RSC which on the surface was a very domestic play, it's set in a living room in classrooms and it's got about seven settings and I was well that's all well and good but I just don't think that's what the play is about. I don't think it's about whether there's a sofa or not. I think it's about people trying to manipulate each other and I think it's about people trying to take power over each other and I think it's about the spaces in between people and how you can be really close to someone physically but a million miles away from them emotionally. And I really wanted to create a set that elevated play so we created this set that was a massive, it was about four meters high, it was a tower of perspex and concrete and metal boxes... partly that's to do with for me... is those are the textures of London as I see them and the boxes were all filled with hot water so you had condensation now, that is that wetness, it's that... for me that is London. That's what London looks like. That is a cubist representation of London. But also you know actually all that was based on the idea that at the end you had a girl stood on top of a mountain. And I wanted to get her physically high up in the air. Maybe I'm odder than I think I am, but then that became the whole aesthetic. And we're not doing naturalism, we're not going to have any costume changes. We're going to have one costume all the way through. Nobody's going to wear any shoes there's going to be no props whatsoever.

TS - And this was at The Other Place was it?

NL - We reopened The Other Place, last summer, which was cool.

TS - And how free were you with those decisions. Because that sounds pretty free?

NL - I did whatever. It was a really great. It was really nice. I also you don't, artists like me don't think they really end up at places at the RSC, so when they called. I'd done a workshop for them earlier in the year on a friend of mine's play. So I was like, yeh, you're a mate, fine. And it was a terrible play. Well in that it was a terrible idea for a commission. So we presented it at the end. So we got in at the beginning of the week and I was like, dude, I think we should just write a whole new play. They'd asked him to write a play that was based on Caliban from the Tempest and I was like, I find that really problematic as an artist of colour. I was like, of course, because that's the only part a black man is asked to play anyway. And this was about a Nigerian theatre company. Anyway, I was like, I think we should write a play about new Nigeria. I think we should write a play about the re-rise of Biafran and about Britain's complicity. So we did and then I remember saying the RSC will to turn up at the end of the week to watch it and I was like 'so we didn't do that play, we did a different play'. And I said to them, I think you have a really problematic relationship with race and I think that you are ghettoising artists of colour into producing a certain type of work.

TS - I was going to ask you about that. Have you experienced that?

NL - I think that, yeh, but I mean you only have to turn on the television to know that that is the case. You know, Mattis [TS note - James Mattis, US Defence Secretary]. You know, if we look at for example the status of Muslim artists the Britain today. They are only ever allowed to achieve their perceived culture, right? And so, and even if you go back to something like, *East is East*. *East is East* is actually a play about an abusive Muslim husband who beats up his white wife, do you know what I mean? It's glorious in many other ways, it's funny and it's very heartfelt. And I'm like it's also about the violent threat of Muslim men. And I don't think we've moved pass that. And that play's twenty years old, no? And so for me, I wasn't interested in making work - I get a lot of calls about work like that, about gun crime, and I'm like I'm not doing that. I'm not interested in it. I don't think it elevates anything. I'm also really middle-class and half-white,so...

TS - So it's not your language? Or it's not necessary?

NL - I don't think it should be anybody's language but I think that's the work we have an appetite for and I don't know how to solve that? I don't know if it necessarily can be solved? Other than creating quality work that isn't that? I think that there is something empowering about telling people's origin stories because I think that, it's all well and good to focus on... it's not like black people turned up in a Windrush, you know what I mean. We've been here for hundreds of years but we are whitewashed out of history. And so actually, you know, for example, looking more towards cinema, a film like Amma Asante's *Belle* or even *A United Kingdom*, I don't think either of them are particularly good films, but I think they do something really important which is to say that actually black people have been here a very long time and you should have known about it except for it is not taught in your history and why is that and... It's the same for Indian people, you know what I mean? I mean you look at a film like *Suffragette*, and you go yeh but one of the main suffragette organisers was an Indian woman and actually who are all these black women? [Laugh]. Do you know what I mean, we were here a the time, erm.

TS - Do you think that that influences some of the choices you make when you think about what to stage? Or does it not necessarily play a part in it?

NL - No it does, completely. But not in a... I'm not one of those people who's interested in over tilting it the other way and so, for example I did a play by Brad Birch a few years ago at the Soho which is called *'Even Stillness Breathes Softly Against A Brick Wall'* [TS note: 2013]. And I've known, me and Brad have worked together for six years now? And, erm, I said to him and he was in a relationship with a black woman at the time, and my mum's white and my dad's black, and you know, I can't remember who I was in a relationship with, and his only, er, description of the characters was healthy. It's a man and a woman and they're both healthy and they're both in their twenties. And we knew we'd cast this white man who, we'd cast him really early on. And I said to Brad, I was like, can I cast a black woman? I wasn't really asking to be fair. I'm going to cast a black woman in the other part, not because it's specific because it isn't specific and I just want to show that really non-specifically people who are different colours can, er, be in love but also this middle-class ennui which is what the play is about affects black people. I once said to Madani Younis [Note TS: AD, Bush Theatre] I was like I would love to see a play where like black people cared about the environment? Do you know what I mean. Kind of like it's cool.. we have... you know...colloquial concerns. And it was great. And actually it wasn't a particularly loaded thing to do because it wasn't about the fact that two people of two different colours were in a relationship together. It was just like, yeh, they're just in a relationship and it could have been the other way round, you know whatever, it just wasn't specific. And, I think it's a great play that allows you to do that.

TS - Do you think it matters, so you've been in Stratford upon Avon, you've done a lot of work in London, do you think it matters where you are in the UK? Have you found that where you are affects any choices?

NL - You ever worked in Plymouth? Oof. [Laugh] No. I spent two weeks in Plymouth for the National and I was like 'I'm never coming back here!'. Really racist, really racist town. Really scary. Um, I, I. No. I don't. I mean I think it massively affects what kind of funding you're getting and all of those things. And quite rightly the Arts Council is now leaning towards outside of London getting more money which it should. And, I don't think it matters particularly in terms of audience because I think that, you know, when 'Fella' came to the National, and I think it's like still the most successful musical that the National has ever done type of thing. And it wasn't just black people watching it, of course it wasn't, do you know what I mean, it's the Olivier, it's like 1200 people a night, do you know what I mean. I think if you make anything good enough people will rock up because they just want to watch it. And I don't think that particularly changes where you go out, it must be said I've never worked anywhere massively rural, besides Stratford. I've worked in like the cities... so Manchester, Leeds, Edinburgh, fine. Er I think if you were to do... I mean when I was at Headlong we did a lot of work that toured and really interestingly it was always the case that you couldn't tour a new play and you could always tour a version of ... So we were like, let's do a snazzy version of *'A Midsummer Night's Dream'* or *'Salome'* or like that you can take anywhere. But new plays you always found it very difficult to do it. So no I don't think there's a massive... difference... I just think it's more outrageous to not do it in a metropolis. Do you know what I mean? So when you see this like all white everything work (laugh) in London, you're like, really? I remember reading a thing which was, The Stage published a list of the ten least diverse Theatres in the country er in terms of their permanent employees and nine of them were in the regions, but it was like really regional so it was like, Bury St Edmunds, and you're like, I kind of get that. These are not massively diverse towns at the end of the day. But then one of the worst offenders was the Almeida. And you're like, you're in of the most diverse Boroughs in London, do you know what I mean? But then you just have to look at actually... I mean I think there's a retaliation to all these things now, which is this whole idea like 'identity politics has gone too far'. And I'm like, it always feels like white straight men are complaining about that. You know what I mean? I'm like, your identity politics aren't at sacrifice here. It's like people who defend freedom of speech. And they go, oh no we must have absolute freedom of speech. And I'm like yeh, can't we just aspire towards being anti-

racist or anti-sexist and they're, 'no we must have absolute freedom of speech'. And I'm like, yeh but you're never on the receiving end of this, do you know what I mean? You're not going to walk down the street and have somebody call you a name, frankly. I am. And I'm not going to celebrate this freedom of speech (laugh) do you know what I mean? And I'm cool with that.

TS - Because language means something.

NL - Yeh, this endless thing that freedom of speech is absolute, I mean like - why? We also know that it isn't true. I mean on a really basic level, the watershed is er like before 9 o'clock you cannot say it. We know we have decency laws as well, do you know what I mean, I'm not allowed to go on the tele and, I don't know, call someone a cunt. Whatever. But em, and so I'm like, this idea that you can't, I know it begins to sound like really authoritarian and scary but someday we're not actually going to move forward if we do not recognise that certain things are unacceptable? And they're like, how do we do that? And I'm well it's only fifty years ago that we decided that like enslaving black people wasn't a good idea. So you've always made some good decisions. Let's keep making good decisions. [Laughter] Let's keep going that way. You know like universal suffrage... Great... we loved that.

TS - Talking about shock and outrage. And obviously, you were watching those In Yer Face shows in the nineties. Are there any things you think shouldn't be staged. NL - No. TS - Nothing.

NL - No. I think you should put it all up there. And I think, you know, me and Brad are working on a play at the moment, it's called '*The Last Days of Pre-Revolutionary Britain*'. And erm, I don't know, it's sort of gone in a drawer now, I think we'll probably re-visit it at some stage. But that was sort of born out of the idea that we were really interested in suffering... and how much suffering is tolerable. And so we decided we're going to construct a play which had a female protagonist wherein we just did increasingly horrible things to her. And it starts off with her sort of being sacked and she loses her flat and it gets worse and worse and worse until there's a complete apocalypse and she commits suicide by gouging out her eyes.

TS - On stage?

NL - On stage. Er, you know but before, she's raped, no she isn't raped but she has sex and then she has a miscarriage on stage. Really nasty. And there's all sorts of things, but like there's other things, like she keeps having loads of nosebleeds. Do you know what I mean? But it's not really... it's a very sort of odd play.

TS - How did you do it? Have you staged it yet?

NL - No, no we haven't. It's on about its fourth draft. But the idea was that it's about suffering. And we were really influenced by Lars Von Trier and that sense of. Well not really Lars Von Trier but more the battle that you see him having which is between... he has these. He always has a female protagonist, but then he does the most disgusting, degrading things to them and you're like, is that really empowering? Or not, and we were interested in what point an audience goes no that's too much. It's not ok to do that to a woman. And actually we found that you could go a lot further... there isn't really a line. I think as long as you declare your intentions that's kind of fine, do you know what I mean? So no I don't think. I mean I think that obviously you have to safeguard the performer. Do you know what I mean? But in terms of aesthetically, erm, no.

TS - And aesthetically, how do you stage it without it entering into the realm of comedy, or?

NL - That doesn't bother me. I mean that's... you figure all of that stuff out. I mean I've done more dead babies and stabbings and all of that business than maybe anybody else. I once made a man bleed to death of stage. That was great. You've got to get like eight pints out of him, er, no it's great. The trick is, it's in the floor. The floor bleeds, not the man. But, em, no and actually I think violence and particularly hyper-violence really interests me, anyway. And I think that, I mean I'm a massive fan of Korean cinema, as well. And I think that we have a very, on the sort of Victorian relationship with violence... and I think that's partly to do with not being a hyper-violent country. Whereas I did grow up... you know I grew up in a country that was in a civil war, that's still in a civil war, that had subscription, em and although it's not a violent city that I'm from, certainly, I think we were just much more laissez-faire about..... dying. I think we're really afraid of dying in this country. And, dying's not great [laugh]. Do you know what I mean? And I just feel like it's really crazy to me.

TS - Do you think that that's coming from the audience? Or programmers?

NL - Yeh, I think people are quite prudish about... particularly sex, it must be said actually, em, but also violence. And I'm just, also, I'm like, this idea that violence is a bad thing. I'm like sometimes violence is, is a great thing. I was in Cairo, in between the two revolutions and you're like, that idea that you can't... It's the whole idea that we're supposed to take the high-ground, right? So but, what if he's wrong. What if he's like, a Nazi? Or you, know, hates women? Do you know what I mean? Isn't it ok to, like, kick the shit out of that guy, sometimes? Do you know what I mean? I'm not advocating the road necessarily. But I'm just like, this idea that all violence is equal, as well, you know? It's like that neo-Nazi that got thwumped in America, and I'm like, I don't feel bad about that [Laugh]. Do you know what I mean? That guy's an arsehole. Boof. Um. And so I don't understand why. You know, I think that sort of cut away technique that you get in cinema where this terrible thing is happening and then three seconds later you sort of fade to black or whatever. I'm more interested in turning the lights all on. Actually. And going, no, let's look at it. Let's not mythologise violence. Let's see it for what it is. And, you know, if you look at how they design the sound for fight sequences in mainstream cinema, and all that sort of thwack, boof. I would much rather just watched something where they just clumped the shit out of each other and it was sort of as it actually is. Do you know what I mean. Let's just do it. Because it is violent. Violence is actually much more brief and painful than they show most of the time. Em, but that's why, you know, there's that great fucking scene in *Old Boy* which is ridiculous. And it's, have you ever seen *Old Boy*? Great film, it's shot, it's a corridor but he's shot it in a cross section so you see the whole thing and it's this guy fighting and unfeasibly high number, you know, it's like him versus thirty dudes, and it goes on for ever. And he keeps on like losing and then he's ha-boosh, and then he eats a live octopus, later in the film. And he did, he ate it. Three times. Do you know what I mean? I'm much more interested. And he asks you to compare the two acts of violence. This sort of ridiculous massive fight scene and then he's actually eating something which is alive. And you're like, weeeeugh.

TS - What does that do to you when you're watching? You say it doesn't mythologise it, but do you think it serves something?

NL - I think that... what's the phrase? Life is short, ugly and brutal. And, I think that if we get too distanced from that it's really problematic. And I think we do. I think we are desensitized to seeing things like seeing 82 people die in a car bomb in Mosul, or whatever. And, I actually think it is really good to be reminded of just how, just how, just what exactly that means actually. Because actually we're sort of... like I always say, do you remember that film *Wall-E*? There's all those fat people in their little boots you know going out and they don't see anything else in the world. And I feel that's sort of where we're going. Where it doesn't distress us that Donald Trump's first military action killed an eight-year old. You

know, I'm like, you try being crushed by a building, and see how you feel. So yeh, no, I think it actually serves an important... I think people do anything they can to avoid the truth. You know, I think I go round all the time ferreting on about inconvenient things. And... and people find me really taxing because of it. And I'm just like, well, I think if we forget or you normalise which is the sort of word du jour isn't it, and I'm just like no, I think you need to be reminded of just how bad it is, actually.

TS - Do you think anyone's doing that particularly well, you've mentioned film, but do you think anyone's doing that particularly well in theatre at the moment in this country?

NL - I really enjoyed the Belarus Free Theatre's last show. And I normally can't bear the stuff they make. And I had to go, I was on a panel afterwards, and I think I'd just got off a flight from Los Angeles and I was the most jet-lagged I'd ever been, so I was feeling like this is going to be unbearable. But actually, it was the unbearableness of it and it was the physicality of it - you know - she's in a bath, she's wet, she's being drowned, great - that really worked. I also thought its relationship with nudity was quite interesting. I normally hate nudity. It's funny, it's the one thing I'm quite, I haven't quite figured out yet is nudity on stage? Because it never does what it should do. Because everyone kind of goes, ooh. Do you know what I mean? And I'm always like, damn it, because if you could use it well, it would be great. But we live in a quite prudish society. People are like 'ooh, wibbly bits' um. I did enjoy that actually. I think it's that not one person's doing it consistently particularly brilliantly. I remember seeing *Cyprus Avenue* at the Court last year which was... David Ireland, that's it. I loved that. I thought that was the best play of last year actually. Hands down, by a long shot. And I just thought it's entire relationship with racism and sexism and violence was fascinating because actually you have this really sympathetic but massively unlikeable man at the centre of it, and it doesn't ask you to like him, and it doesn't really ask you to understand him, it just says this is who he is. And he can't help being who he is, and actually he is, none of it is surprising in a way? It's not surprising that he's a racist. He's a massive homophobe. It sort of makes sense. And then of course it becomes very silly but then it ends with this massive gesture of violence again. And actually I thought it was... I mean I thought what was the best thing about it for me is that the violence in there is about the suppressed violence in Ireland of telling people that something is over. Oh, we're over and done with. Now it's referred to as being in the past and actually, where does that energy go? And it doesn't. And it like sort of drives you insane. And that's what it's all about. I thought I was one thing and suddenly I'm not allowed to be that thing anymore. It's fucking great. I love that play actually. But no I think there are people... I think it's a good thing that we've moved past the idea of you being a branded playwright. So they were the In-yer-face writers and it's like, yeh that's great, but what happens if you don't want to write that play? You want to write something much more pensive, which is totally legitimate. But I think that.. I think there are directors who probably have, you know, Ivo to an extent, I guess [TS note: Ivo Van Hove]. But no, nobody sort of consistently. And I think that's a good thing. Because I don't think it's the answer to everything. And if anything, my criticism of my own work is that I can get really bogged down by my own sentiments. So you have to leave that at the door in some way.

I think what's more problematic is a lack of political rigour. And actually that's what I appreciate more and more. Somebody going actually I've thought this through to it's logical conclusion and like (click, click sound).

TS - So tell me about Homegrown. Where are you at with that?

NL - We launch on Monday. You can buy it on Amazon and several hundred other retailers. Which is nice. Er, yeh, no it's good. It's good. I think that we realised about a year ago, after all the legal wranglings, that the only way that we were going to a) take the

limelight off us which we were really sick of by that stage but also just diffuse the situation, em... you know, it got to the stage where we would walk into a theatre and people would stop and look at us and it we're like, fucking hell, alright calm down we're not actually terrorists, em... was to publish it. And to just say, well anyone can do it. Anyone can do it, pick it up. It was always intended for young people in school groups. So, er, do it. For the love of god, but, you know, don't wait for me to do it. It was partly that but it was also like, we just need to finish this. Not even finish the play, the play was finished. But just finish this process. Not just for us, for our cast as well. Because they knew there was no way they were all going to be involved. You know, there was 120 of them. And so I was like, if I can just produce a script that all of your names are in and you go, I was there. Do you know what I mean?

TS - And these were all members of the NYT.

NL - They were all hand-picked members of the NYT. So we auditioned I think over 400 people and we picked 120. And some of them, you know, I called one of them yesterday, Miles, he's only. Well he's sixteen now, he was fourteen when he started, he was in our very first workshop. So that was March 2015. And I saw him yesterday and I was like dude, we are two years older. He's like, I know, I've done my GCSEs. I was like, fuckin hell, alright Miles, calm down. You know, and he's from Tunbridge Wells and his Dad's a QC and he's bloody delightful. I love Miles. So yeh, I just felt like that for them it was a really important thing of recording this is what we made and we were all there and we took part in it. Which is good. I mean I think, what was more... So we decided that publishing was going to be the focus probably just over a year ago. And then our publishers who had been with us from day one and who had published all of Omar's previous plays... and it must be said our editor still wanted to publish it and then he got a missive from the people who own the publishing house, because all publishing houses are privately owned, saying 'no, pull it, we don't want to be the next Charlie Hebdo'. That is a direct quote. Um, and so after that we discovered that nobody would publish us because they'd all got similar... you know, Charlie Hebdo had happened, in I think, when was that, February 2015 wasnt it or somewhere thereabouts. And this wasn't based on anyone reading it [laugh] they were just 'no, no, those naughty, naughty Muslims have reappeared'. And, em, and so we went out - every publishing house. And that was the weird thing, every publishing house sort of wrote to us, and then sort of wussed out. And we were like, this is very confusing. And then we realised. Skepta won the Mercury prize about six months ago, and he had done it entirely on a self-published album because nobody had wanted to let him make the kind of album that he wanted to make. And you know, he won the award. And it's this amazing thing to see this black man totally empowered and then he was totally right. So he's actually right and what's more I'm going to take all the money. Do you know what I mean? Because why should I pay a record label who want me to make a cop-out album. Why should I therefore pay them to compromise myself. And Omar wrote me an email and I was like 'dude, I think we should just do it on our own'. I think we should just seek that autonomy that we're always asking people for, perversely and just take it.

TS - It's quite empowering?

NL - Yeh, it is quite empowering actually. It's also a massive pain in the arse but it's fine. It's fine that it's a pain in the arse. So, yeh, it's been good. I'm gonna. You know, I sort of don't know who I am outside of this... anymore. It's like that thing, where it's like, when you're doing other jobs, always in the background.

TS - Has it had an impact on your other work?

NL - I think it's had a massive impact. And I think it's made me much more unapologetic? And it's made me much more uncompromising. I don't mean that professionally but I just mean that sense of, I'm just going to say this and I don't really... if you have to catch up that's fine. Or as the kids say, 'there's the need to say some shit'. It's quite profound. But I mean also, has it changed my practice at all? Maybe not. I mean I think, also, I wasn't really somebody who worked with young people anyway, so I was like, I'm just going to treat you all like actors and we'll just get on with it because, you know. I think it's let me know that I could do more than I thought I could. It's got musical numbers in it and dance numbers and stand-up and all sorts of bits, it's got a rap scene in it. And I'd always thought, I'm not somebody who can do musicals and I was like, it turns out I can. So that was nice. But also, that was an entirely self-generated project in a lot of ways, so.. What I think any artist sort of responds well to is being given carte-blanche, somebody is going I trust you, it's fine. And oddly that was what happened with the NYT. They kind of just let us get on with it.

TS - So they allocated you a budget?

NL - No, there wasn't really a budgetary concern. We had the school, the kids were free, so... and we knew we didn't really have a set anyway because it was just going to be done in and around the school. No, not so much that. I think more because they didn't really understand the subject matter they were much more like, you, you do you, do you know, we've employed the two Muslims, we've done the authenticity thing. And so, you know these were people who hadn't even seen Four Lions, do you know what I mean? I'm like, that's the most basic entry level thing. And so, we sort of were like, we're just going to do it. And even when we were in rehearsals, you know, they were never there. They were there at the first rehearsal and then they were there the day they fired us. And so we kind of just got on with it.

TS - Did it come as a shock?

NL - Completely. So we were two weeks away from opening. And... I mean, there was never any love lost between me and the artistic director of the NYT, but only in that way that I don't think you all have to be mates, do you know what I mean? I don't have to be your friend. But we can work together fine. But it was all fine. And what's crazy was, so, we'd done two weeks of rehearsal, we had two weeks of rehearsal left. And the day we got fired, they were like, 'oh, can we come in and watch what you've got so far?' And we were like yeh, yeh, of course. And we did it, and they came and they gave us some really helpful notes. And it was great. And I went home and was like, this is delightful. And then we got fired four hours later (laugh). In a group email. But I think what we found out later on was that actually they had put the brakes on nearly immediately. So it had nothing to do with what we were doing in rehearsals at all. So they had, I think the day after we started rehearsal they had started a conversation with the Arts Council saying 'if we were to pull this, what would happen?'

TS - How long was the rehearsal process?

NL - Four weeks. But you know four weeks to create five and half hours of material is not a lot of time. And also that we had, you know, like, and this was one of the things I think that scared them was that we had so many press requests. But also not your normal ones, not just your arts pages but the New York Times and the Washington Post and CNN.

TS - Was it post the Bethnal Green thing?

NL - It was post Bethnal Green. And what was crazy was that the only reason that the only reason that this whole Bethnal Green thing came up was because we were looking for

venues and the best venue we found was in Bethnal Green [laugh]. And it was, it was beautiful, it was an amazing school.

TS - There are some lovely buildings.

NL - Oh it was, it was very.. it was perfect because half of it was very old half of it was three hundred years old and half of it was really modern. And I was like that's kind of amazing. But it was absolutely perfect and actually me and Omar were really uncomfortable about it being in Bethnal Green but it's kind of this amazing venue. And so we decided to change the show slightly because we felt that we couldn't do a show in that community and not respect that community in some way, because it is, suddenly the lens was on the place certainly. And so Homegrown is structured on this idea that there's a show, and you turn up and the show is delayed and so while they're buying time, the audience are divided into five groups and taken on a tour of the school grounds and then they keep happening across scenes happening. And they're five totally different experiences right, so you and I might go together but we might be split into separate rooms. So the idea is that when we come together at the end we're like 'hey man, did you see like that crazy scene with the balls' and you're like no, and then you have to talk to each other. And that was the whole idea, to start conversations. But, so originally the show that is delayed, which you do see, so at the end everyone comes together and they watch this half an hour of a show at the end... was going to be a Jean Paul Genet play called 'Screen's', which is one of the only plays you can find that had an Arab protagonist, er and I never loved it. It must be said, I was like 'it's a bit too highfalutin for me'. And so Omar had the rather brilliant idea actually of saying, right well instead of doing that let's do a piece of verbatim of the people in Bethnal Green. And I was like, 'yeh, great'. And he was like 'and then, we'll turn it into something else'. And so, we decided that what we were going to do, we were going to go really randomly out to Bethnal Green, so it wasn't that thing of going and specifying, we're just going to walk the streets and interview people, and that we would only interview people who were not Muslim. So we'd go to this person and say 'sorry sir, are you a Muslim? Ok, great'. Because what we were interested in was what non-Muslims thought of Muslims in Tower Hamlets. But then, what it became, the show then... So they'd play various parts... and it is verbatim, so the local priest, the shopkeeper the dude who runs the local housing association, the dude selling flowers at columbia road, the people who live opposite Bethnal Green academy who randomly they were just sitting in their garden and we were like, hey. And then at the end of that show, they all transformed themselves into a Muslim minstrel show. And then Omar wrote a piece of fake verbatim, so he wrote this sort of theoretically what Muslims in that community would say, and, but of course it's performed by a lot of actors in blackface. Which, well for us it was based on this idea that blackface as we understand it is not a thing anymore, right? You would not get Laurence Olivier playing Othello anymore. However, you still get white actors playing Arabs all the time. And actually it's a really acceptable... And Latino characters as well. Do you know what I mean? Ben Affleck in Argo, he is playing a Latino. Andrew Garfield in the social network, that isn't a Latino man. Do you know what I mean? So it's that thing like, how much of that you get away with? There only a bit black, so it's fine, do you know what I mean? So we were like, this doesn't feel like a particularly aggressive gesture. I feel like it just replicates what we see in mainstream art. And then the whole play grinds to a halt, because people sort of realise that once you've admitted that you can't get any further. Do you know what I mean, it's like, yeh, no that's sort of all over now. And then... something else happens... it's fine.

So yes, we had this idea that people would... and that was the thing that people wanted to see right? And like, in our heads I'm like, what you want is for us to tell you the magic secret as to why kids leave, and we don't know, of course we don't know. I mean, what do you think, because we're Muslims and I'm supposed to know why kids want to go to terrorist groups? Of course I don't know, I'm here. But we sort of, so there's this whole idea of

delayed gratification. You wouldn't give people that until the very end. And then you don't give it to them because the whole thing's fake anyway. You're like, 'made it up, soz'.

So yeh, and I think. Homegrown is full of violence. Homegrown is a very violent show but it's also, very little of that violence actually happens in the show. Most of it was, this idea that violence has happened somewhere else. And so, you know this idea that. Like there's this one scene that starts with this kid who runs in and he's obviously just had the shit kicked out of him. But the scene is actually... And he's a young Muslim boy. And he's obviously, he's a young Muslim boy and he runs into this young black boy who cleans him up. And it's actually a scene about solidarity among victims of violence. And I think the black kid's like 'Muslims are the new black people'. Do you know what I mean? You're getting the shit that I used to have to put up with. Or, there's quite a lot of the play is about the aftermath of violence and actually there's also quite a lot of kids running screaming down corridors and sort of blood smeared on windows. The massive influence in it is horror. Particularly your sort of teeny, monster horrors. I love all those really shit movies in the nineties, those are my fave but also sort of body horror and more victorian, uncan horror sort of things like that.

TS - The set must have been great?

NL - Yeh, but it was really. Lorna, who was the designer, who was a genius it must be said, had this thing about doubling back and you know, really victorian senses of the uncanny, so that sense of I've been here before but something is different. And sometimes that would be bonkers. Sometimes you'd come into a room and all the furniture would be stuck on the ceiling. Do you know what I mean? And they would literally... you're like, what? What was that? Or the windows would be postered instead of glass. But it's this idea that you're not in control of the world around you and to think that you are is slightly foolish? So yeh, but it was also about. I mean the violence in it for us was not even about what Islamophobic violence is about, it was more about that people are violent. They have violent intentions. You know, if you're a young Muslim woman, you not only have to be afraid of Islamophobic violence, but also sexual violence, the chances of being raped walking along the street or because you're young, because you're poor like these are all, this is about what it feels to be at the bottom of the pecking order, not at the top. And when you start to unravel that, you realise the world is a fucking scary place on a fundamental level? And also, I was saying this to the kids yesterday actually. I got a death threat the other day. Not anything to do with Homegrown which I was like, 'yay! win!'. [Laugh]. But it's like, this guy I went to school with, out of nowhere, sent these series of emails to me and a load of people I knew talking about how he wanted to rape me to death, and wear my skin as his skin. I was like, this is a mentally ill person.

TS - This is somebody from school?

NL - This was somebody I went to school with. I haven't seen this person in thirteen years. I was like, this is a crazy person. But, it really fascinated me. Because you forget, you forget sometimes that you are just a person and actually, people can want to do really horrible things to you just because you're. You know, and it's arbitrary. It could have been me, it could have been that person, do you know what I mean? I wasn't particularly upset by it. And there are events that happen for example the University of Santa Barbara shooting or Dylann Roof, where you go this isn't about anything. This is just about somebody who is violent. And I'm grateful everyday that I don't live in America. I mean I have, I have lived in America. But I'm really glad, but the stakes are, you know I might go and get stabbed.. but not guns. But that's just about somebody being a violent fuckhead. And that, and you sort of forget that. And that just comes out, it's like cancer. It just, it just exists. It's not about, he was raised a certain way. Do you know what I mean? I played a lot of violent video games as a child, it's got nothing to do with anything. Do you know what I mean? So I'm quite

interested in the sense that... but also like what are you suppressing? Like are we all suppressing a violent instinct. Like I remember, do you remember that story of the lady who put the cat in the bin? That's really basically, really fucked up? And she was just looked like some nice old lady. And I was really interested in that. She just wanted to hurt it. She doesn't have any... there's absolutely no reason for it. And I'm like, let's get from that to the story of the guy who hacked off that woman's head in the corner shop in... was it Magaluf? Somewhere like that. In that part of the world. And I just feel like that impulsive... I think Dylan Roof is a fascinating person. And that total lack of apology. He's like 'No I meant it'. I Absolutely meant it... you know, Anders Breivik is the same. Those people who just go, no I am a violent, nasty... but what's interesting I think is when those people combine that with... and I've spoken about this a lot about... that I don't think that everyone who joins Isis is insane. I think they were all sold a kipper so to speak. But also they can't all be insane because otherwise doctors wouldn't join ISIS and they do, we know they do. We also know that thanks to the Red Cross there is a loophole, if you are a doctor who joins a terrorist group you cannot be prosecuted because you are not going to do harm. So there's... basically, it's because the Red Cross struck a deal whereby they said, we cannot in good conscience not save people because we suspect they might be a terrorist. So if you're in... there's a car bomb in Iraq or whatever, they're like, I have to save everyone, I can't be thinking - were you the bad guy? I absolutely have to do no harm. And so they created a thing where they could go technically stitch up terrorists. Because they're like, yeh that's fine, if someone's lying there bleeding, you as a doctor you cannot ignore them. So there is like this weird loophole where as a doctor you cannot be prosecuted for working for a terrorist. But also you have to look at all the change, all these people who are women, obviously a large part of Isis is a rallying cry for Sadists, but I think it's very interesting when that becomes connected with a real political rigour? Do you know what I mean? And that's the thing, we don't mind a stupid violent terrorist. We're kind of ok with that. But the idea that it's clever violent terrorism, becomes very scary. Do you know what I mean? No that's the thing we're all terrified of, and quite rightly, we should be really, that's really scary. I'm not worried about some kid who's misinformed. Do you know what I mean? That guy doesn't scare me. It's the guy who sort of generates it that scares me. But not very much scares me, [laugh] it's kind of like, myeh, it's all fine.

TS - I read something really interesting that quoted you as saying you get really frustrated when the censorship of Homegrown is compared with Exhibit B, Behtzi. That big censorship word that's bandied around. How do you feel about it?

NL - I saw Exhibit B. I wrote an article for the New Statesman about how much I liked Exhibit B. Because i'm not an essentialist, I don't believe that Muslims should be the only people who make work about Muslims. Nor do I believe they make the best work necessarily. I think the best piece of art about Muslims is still *'Four Lions'*. And that's by white people. I think it's great. I think it's well researched, I think it's interesting, I think it's funny, I think it's heartfelt. I think he's really like done it really well. And so much so that whenever... Like my two best friends are two guys Joylon Rubinstien and Heydon Prowse and they made this sketch for their tv show *'The Real Housewives of ISIS'*? And it all kicked off. I was away, I was in Cairo at the time and Joylon called me up and said 'have you seen it?'. And I said I don't really need to see it breul, like I know what it is, it's lazy, it's cheap. It's just bad. I'm not offended by it I just don't think it's very good. And I was like, I think if you're going to tackle any subject you should always try to be better than the person that you think, that are the best. Do you know what I mean? So you need to be going in and watching *Four Lions* and going, what can I do from this. What can I learn from that and how can I elevate it. And I don't think you have. It's just cheap. And one of the things that really frustrated me about Exhibit B is this idea that... I had an argument with Anthony Anaxagorou who was one of the people protesting it and who's a poet... and he always complains about the fact that he was censored from BBC radio for wanting to talk about Palestine and I was like, what's crazy for me Anthony is that you're obviously advocating the

same thing, and you've not seen it. I was like, if you've seen it, you are entitled to your opinion, that is cool. And he said to me. It's like.. sometimes... I know... I don't want to read a book just by reading the cover?! And I'm like, yeh but you don't then set that book on fire. Do you know what I mean? So that nobody else can read that book.

It should be pointed out that actually, Behtzi, Exhibit B and Homegrown all have one thing in common, and that's the police. That the thing that they have in common is the financial implication of policing. And that's true, it's also true of *Mimsy* at the Moore galleries. It keeps coming up, man. And this idea that what the police do, is that they can't actually shut you down. It's very hard for the police to actually shut you down. So what they do, it's like if you've ever been to a football match, the police have to do policing basically. And so you, you call them and say hey we're doing this event, will you do our security or should we employ private security, you know, that becomes a thing... and so what they will do, they will simply make the price of policing that event unaffordable. So when Behtzi started I think they said it would cost thirty-nine thousand pounds. And the Belgrade were like... was it the Belgrade? No Birmingham Rep, said we don't have that money, so then they said, well it's five thousand pounds, and they were like we don't have that money, and then they're like oh, we'll do it for free. And it's like. And exactly the same thing happened with Exhibit B. So, the Barbican didn't care about two hundred people protesting outside. They couldn't have cared less. Do you know what I mean? It knew it was really in for protest. But when the police said that in order to secure the protest, it was going to cost them... if I've remembered this correctly it was something like four thousand pounds a night, and it was only running for about a week or ten days, that just becomes untenable. Do you know what I mean? Our tickets just don't cover it. And we're not going to take a loss of £40k in this, you know, funding climate. So no, and it's the same, I see more galleries with *Mimsy*, ignoring the fact that those art pictures had already displayed those pictures, again they said it would cost you thirty six thousand pounds in extra policing.

TS - So the cost is going to do it?

NL - Yeh, and so... I don't know what happened with NYT, I wasn't a part of that conversation certainly. But I can totally imagine that the police could put the financial shackles on. And you go, it's not worth it. And also, that shit puts the fear of god into you. It's like, should I be afraid? It was like, I was talking to Index [TS note: Index on Censorship] the other day and they said we're getting a security guy in to do bag checks. And I was like, that's fine, you get a bag check when you go to the Royal Court. A bag check is not in itself a scary thing. And I know that because I'm a sensible human being. But I can totally imagine people think, oh, we have to do bag checks. And I'm like [laugh] we're not doing bag checks to see if there's a lead pipe in there, do you know what I mean? We're doing it to see if there's a recording device. You know what I mean. Things like that if you're a hysterical person would really freak you out.

Appendix 6 - Interview Transcript: Nina Segal

12th June, 2pm, National Theatre
1hr 10 minutes

Pre chat about trigger warnings for Big Guns in continuation of the security checks that took place on the way into the National Theatre where the interview took place.

TS - So Westminster happened and Manchester has happened and London Bridge has just happened and on the way in today security has stepped up and on the National Theatre's website says something along the lines of we're not going to be allowing big bags at the door that they are going to be checking them on the way in. I was wondering on the way up, should I email Nina and prepare her that that is going to be happening. So we're figuring it out along the way. As artists who make live events, creating something that people are going to come to, how does that become part of the creative process? Did it become a part of your experience of putting Big Guns?

NS - It became a part of.... the context in which the show. I mean it became a very immediate part of the context that the show was going to be performed in. Um. Which I think the closeness of those two events and the potential, that kind of knee jerk feeling of the closeness of that specific event and the content of the show, the way that those things rub up against each other, I think no-one's got a real procedure for how to deal that. But then it also feels to me as a writer that if you're making work that's not in conversation with the context that we're in. If you're making work that can not be affected by any news story then it's not fully live to me. So, I mean it was definitely something. It came up first because I workshopped the show out in Chicago. And an audience member asked about, as someone who came to the workshop, asked afterwards about trigger warnings. And back then I was very much like we're not trigger warning this. We don't trigger warning classic plays, um, and then, which is sort of like what Big Guns is about, what kind of violence feels live. And we also don't trigger warning movies. There's a rating system, but there's no list when you go in, of, you will see this, you will see this. And that's less live, but more graphic. Um. And so I felt like I really strongly wanted to make sure that we're not censoring the work that we do but you have to make space after it or around it for conversation and we had a post show discussion just because you want to be aware that what's happening in the theatre is not real are things that happen in the world that is real and one has, the world has to take precedence over your right to kind of explore these things and represent these things in a vaguely safe way Um, but that was as terrible as it was what happened that was like a point where I was like ok, I understand this play now. Like the fact that people are having this, the fact that people on the creative team are having this response of what should we do, do we need to apologise in any way for this content? Made me realise why this play is happening now. I think we live in a very violent world and I think we live in a world where threat is less abstract than threat has been in the past. Um. I mean threat is definitely more present now. That was the origin point for the play. And so to have a threat turned into something actualised during the run of the play was not a reason for me to worry about the content of the play.

But we did always say making the play it will be, if there was a shooting, then that would, we would have to turn that over more in our heads. The form of violence in the real world echoes the form of imagined violence, I think that would be more of a clear through line for those arguments of what can you investigate in a fictional way. I don't know that my feeling would change about we keep doing the show. But I was wondering when that happened what would have to happen contextually in the world for me to kind of re-look at this playing with this idea.

TS - So you felt quite free writing Big Guns?

NS - Free in which sense?

TS - Big Guns can go to the quite graphic and you talk about how that might have shifted if something had happened in the real world and conversations about where that sits. Going back to that process when you started to write the piece, how much of that outside got in? And how free did you feel as an artist?

NS - I started writing it in January of 2015? Maybe January 2016. I started writing it when the first Isis beheading videos came out and there was that very, very short period which seems very strange now where the media did not know how to handle that and it shifted very quickly from um certain publications hosting whole videos on their website and people putting stills on their front pages to going ok we'll use the stills but we're going to take off people's faces to going ok we're going to use the videos but we're going to put a warning ahead of it to actually getting to the point we're at now where we don't, there's a decision that you cannot publicise these things. But just over that two week period or so where people were, where it was so evident that people were thinking on their feet about how to handle this new form of mediated violence was really the thing that started Big Guns for me, was this thing of how we mediate violence and how we understand what is real and not real and whether we should look at things or look away. And whether there's a responsibility to look because it's real or whether there's sort of a responsibility to look away because by looking at it you make it more real in a way or more real for more people. Um, and I guess the other thing to say about that timescale was there were a huge amount more, it felt like, and maybe it was just because I was working on this project but it felt like there were more mass shootings. From the point at which I started the play. And actually weirdly in my previous play *'In the Night time (Before the Sun Rises)'* it has a section in it um that very obliquely lists the places where mass violent events have happened and over the course of taking that to production and even up to the first preview there was this weird, it was always like a distressing thing, to add to that list. Or to redraft that list and make it longer and knowing that if I go back to that play and there's another production there will be an updating of that list. So it did feel like over the time that I was making the play the threat became less abstract or more real and moved closer. But I never felt. I don't actually think there were many points for me in the writing of it where I felt the need to self-censor in any ways. There were definitely points, when certain sections were read out for the first time that I would just go 'god, what have I written'. This is horrendous, this is horrible. But I think in the writing of it. I don't know whether other writers would. Actually, I've asked other writers and they're like, no we don't write like this. I write in a sort of dissociative way where I don't structure in that way where I go this is going to be this section, I write in a very free way.

TS - Your structure is really interesting and the form of the play, it's so fluid. And I think some of the critics brought up that the language was amazingly constructed. What have been your influences?

NS - My influences come mainly from the world of performance making and live art, less from, it's actually interesting because there's a couple of writers in the canon who come up time and time again in reviews with people going like oh it's very like Sarah Kane, it's very Crimp. It comes up a lot and I love those guys and it's amazing to be mentioned in the same sentence as them but I have to, and I've read them, but I try now to not read them because I'm working in what seems a similar area language-wise and then with Crimp like form and content-wise so I have to try not to read them just to be sure I'm not plagiarising them. I had a weird thing when I went to see *The Treatment* which I'd never read and was just watching it saying, 'oh no, this is the same as my HighTide play' this is basically the same idea. So, I

mean those two writers, Crimp and Sarah Kane were very formative to me early on in terms of, I didn't come from a background where I went to the theatre when I was a kid and I didn't feel like I had any access points to Shakespeare or any of the canonical plays and those were playwrights where I went ok, cool, I get how this could be exciting to me. And then there's also people like Forced Entertainment that work in such a different way but a lot of those, the way that they work with text and the ideas that they work with and that constant questioning of what theatre is as a form and what it's supposed to be, I think the awareness and the slight discomfort at theatre as a form, comes from that sort of world, that it doesn't. I don't know that I'll ever write a play that's not aware of how weird theatre is and what is this thing that we do and what is this contract that I have with the audience, because a lot of my early influences were companies that have that direct conversation with an audience and that sense of a contract that is being continually negotiated with the people that are watching it, was really influential to me.

TS - And a lot of violence in *Big Guns* is spoken and very powerful. How would you feel if a director took the play and said, right, I want to show all of this. I want to stream it and I want to have it up there.

NS - I think a lot of. I mean, I would be interested to have that conversation with them, I don't know how it would work to show that violence. I think there's one thing that I was really interested in exploring in *Big Guns* is allowing the sort of graphic nature of it to sit within people's heads so that you're not, it's not blood and guts and you're never showing people this. But whatever there, so much of it, hopefully the power of it comes from the fact that violence is so subjective and our idea of it, or not violence but our idea of threat is so subjective. So you can't prescribe to each individual - you will find this terrifying. So trying to leave enough space within that for people's own interpretations of threat and their own sense violence and I think that, I think it is a truism that you can't really show violence on stage. I don't think you can show violence better than people can imagine violence. You know we watched a lot of, Dan Hutton and I watched a lot of horror movies. And that feeling that it's always scarier before you see the creature. There's so many movies where I've, kind of schlocky terrible movies, like jeepers creepers. Like it's genuinely scary when there's a truck behind you on the road and you don't know where it's chasing you. And as soon as there's a man dressed as a bat, living in a house of whacks eating people's eyes, it's not scary. But that sort of tension where you can't, so like formally it's that feeling of something always being just sort of on your shoulder or just behind you, and you can't just look at it directly. So in terms of the structure of *Big Guns*, I tried to build a certain amount of violence in there structurally so that nothing ever comes to fruition, you don't get this catharsis, really, although actually in production the end of it felt more cathartic, the final scene of it was added during the process of getting to production because it felt we sort of had to give people, I was sort of gung ho about it and I was just no, just send them out there, just send them out into the night. Um. And then we were like no let's give people some kind of feeling of coming together and dealing with this together as a community rather than just staying in our seats. And that was just like us trying to be generous at the end so that we could push it as far as we wanted to go.

TS - That's interesting.

NS - And that was something that I learnt during the process of it, was about what kind of safeguarding you want to do. What actually do you leave people with and how do you make this kind of spiky world but not, we didn't want to be violent towards our audiences in the end so it's kind of that negotiation, that contact of how do you create a space that feels very violent, that has a lot of violence in it but gets to a place where it's not just aimed at the audience the whole time. But yeh.

TS - So that contract with the audience. That process of thinking about the community. That came about during the rehearsal process?

NS - It came about during. We did a workshop and then we had three weeks of rehearsal. And it was actually, it was never, it was just a constant kind of negotiation of what you want people to feel in the end of it. And I never wanted to give people a traditional catharsis because I think if you make people think they've really been through something and then they get that purge at the end, in all my work I feel that that's actually possibly not the most helpful feeling to leave a theatre with to go like we went through something, let's go get a drink. But still without wanting to create any full catharsis, because to have a catharsis you have to solve something or we did something or we achieved something here. Which I don't think we do with *Big Guns*. We don't solve anything, um, but still without giving people that sense of catharsis just giving them a moment of just coming back into the room and being with each other for a second before we go out there. And it's a really hard balance to negotiate. How much you can push an audience and at what point people will switch off because it is just too. I mean there were interesting responses to it where I think for quite a lot of people the, not gratuitousness but the graphic nature of it and the fact that it continues and it gets worse and worse and worse led to the sort of, even within the hour that it was on, leads to desensitisation which I was theoretically very interested in because that is really at the heart of the play, how we can become so desensitised to these things.

TS - We normalise these things.

NS - Yeah. Dramaturgically I was like, I don't know if this is.. (laughter)

TS - Did you have many walk-outs?

NS - We had, I saw two walk-outs. I thought we'd have mass walk-outs, but we never did.

TS - I suppose people knew what they were getting?

NS - I think at the Yard and I think with the marketing, no one was really surprised that it was graphic. So I don't think we really had trouble there. And it wasn't ever, I don't think it was like.. sickening. I didn't see *Cleansed* but I heard it was..I found it incredible that people were like fainting and like throwing up in their seats or whatever. Because I don't feel that I could... and again it's like that thing we were talking about if you spend too much time in this world you do, I am also desensitised to what it is that I'm saying or creating.

TS - Do you think the contrast between, I'm thinking of the Exeunt review where she said she wanted her ears to not hear it anymore. Do you think that the difference with '*Cleansed*' was that the audience was watching something quite grotesque?

NS - I think so. I think because it's also.. was it Tristan and Isolde at the Globe when people were fainting?

TS - That was Lucy Bailey's '*Titus Andronicus*', very bloody again.

NS - Yes that makes more sense. And I wonder if that is a sort of physical, visceral reaction to the sight of blood. Which we never had. What *Big Guns* was doing was more potentially insidious. In that it's there and you have to sort of.. you could either choose to shut off and not listen to it and I could see how as an audience member you could definitely make the decision to go, I'm bored of this. I just don't want to hear it any more. Because there is no catharsis there is no 'and here is how it comes together and this is why we did this'. As a play the hope was to recreate this feeling of there is just so much bad stuff all the time and

there's so much violence, you know I find myself with, I get really, I'll go into the Guardian app and if there's not something really terrible happening I'll search for it. I'm like ok, I'll go to a different tab and see where there's this and you get a sort of adrenaline from it. And I think people have different attitudes. Either you get on that track that it's really hard to look away from it or you just want to shut off from it. And that's at the core of *Big Guns*, what do we do with the fact that there's so much violence in the world and is it, I don't think it's necessarily more helpful to consume it and have such an appetite for it but I also don't think it's the right answer to look away from it. And I guess probably the right answer is to see enough of it to do something about it but I think most of us as humans fall into the first two camps where there's no particular action, just a consumption of it or a looking away from it.

TS - In *In the Night Time (Before the Sun Rises)* you also explore violence. So would you say violence as a theme interests you as a playwright?

NS - I think it does. *Big Guns*... So I wrote the two of them quite close together and in a way, I wrote *In the Night Time* first and then started *Big Guns* and then was still redrafting *In the Night Time*. And *Night Time* feels to me, in terms of how they're positioned next to each other. I worked with a really brilliant dramaturg in America who was working on both of them with me at the same time and he was like ok, so *Night Time* is the internalised version, it's the domestic, it's within, you're within a house, the violence is outside and there's four walls in this negotiation about what you let into that house and *Big Guns* was sort of in reaction to that, just a taking away of those walls. And saying ok what if we're not in the house, what if we're not the nice protective people who would never do anything wrong and we're just out there in the mess of all of it and it's that much more present and we're that much more compromised by it. So everything about *Night Time* that was very much about keeping violence away with *Big Guns* it was just, what if we actually love it and what if we give into that little part of us that feeds on this.

And in terms of my, most of my work has violence in it because I think the world is a very violent place and there's a huge amount. And like even if we live in a relatively safe or protected corner of the world, that's interesting to me as well. What it is to be able to exist for decades and not have any real violence visited upon myself as an individual and what that means to kind of, what violent acts take place in order to make sure that I'm very safe. So I think we are all, regardless of whether you feel it day to day or not, we all have a relationship to violence. There's violence being enacted in our name and in the name of our safety all the time and so it feels natural for me that it's a part of my plays.

TS - It sounds like you were quite involved in the rehearsal process for *Big Guns*?

NS - I was there for a week in workshop and then I came back for the last week and a half of rehearsals.

TS - How did your actors find that journey?

NS - They.. I mean they had quite a hard time of it. I think they loved the play and they'd obviously read it before they went into it but there was an interesting moment at the end of the workshop week when you know we'd been working with them on this material and talking about it and it was on the very last day that we were having a conversation and Dan and I realised that both of them felt, and this is kind of a natural thing for actors to feel, but they very much felt like their characters were good people and were just. And we were kind of, they were, they're actors not theatre makers so they were going through the process of trying to figure out who their characters were and what this space is that they live in. And we were trying to work, even though that's not necessarily how I work as a writer but we were like ok let's figure this out, where are you guys and what is your relationship to this material.

and their instinct for both of them was very much that they have, they'd done nothing wrong. And that process of getting from there to the possibility that maybe they have done something to these characters or even if they haven't they are somehow compromised in the reporting of it and trying to get them away from that point where they are just news readers and trying to find some kind of acceptance of the complicity of these characters in the violence was really, really interesting. Because for me that's just totally natural, I was like we're all involved in this, and we're all complicit in this in some way. But then it's like an actor thing like they have to believe that they're good otherwise they can't do it, they can't play these, like I don't know they were. Dan said something like you can't play a character that you believe is bad, even if your character does terrible things you have to. In the way that we all kind of feel in the way that we do minor terrible things, you have to believe you're justified and that there's reasons for your behaviour.

TS - It sounds like an interesting journey.

NS - And then they got, like and then I went away for a week and a half and by the time I came back Jessye especially was just super like... it's interesting. As part of that process of going you guys might not be angels in this we were going through it kind of line by line and certain lines, there's a line about Layla and one of them suggesting, actually it's Jessye's character suggests that she does a two black eyes tutorials and Jessye was just like laughing and I was like. Ok this was one of the lines that I wrote that I felt kind of bad about but like, great, I'm glad. But that was a really important moment to point out to her to go, you have this in you. Why you find that funny and it's not, I mean, she's not responsible for it I wrote it, but just once we found that little thread of not darkness by that little crack in this idea of we're all good people and we don't like violence and violence is not funny and it's not entertaining once we'd got that little crack we could kind of work into that.

TS - That idea that there isn't necessarily a standardised moral compass has been emerging and in order to get into the heart of violence we need to go into some of those darker spaces. Its interesting that your actors went on that journey. And it's interesting that you talk about stepping back from your writing and saying, did i come out with that?

NS - I mean certain parts of it like the final Layla bit was something that, where she's doing the make up tutorial and she's Brillo padding her face was something that we came up with in rehearsals and I was in a cafe with Dan and I said what if she's like this? And he's like make it worse, make it worse, make it worse. And so we kind of came up with the outline of this idea of a woman doing a makeup tutorial that is just her destroying herself and her looks, we came up with that together but then going home and writing it by myself I did have a moment of being I can't believe I'm going to write this. This is. That was the first bit where I was ok this is actually horrible. Like this feels very horrible and like this is quite on the one hand difficult to write and on the other hand like a challenge to go what is the worst thing I can think of. Especially because I think there was a process in rehearsals of going actually structurally we need to get worse at this point. And having a small moment of just going like 'guys I think I've said the worst thing I could say'. And the. Dan just massaging my shoulders and being like, get back in there, there's got to be something darker that you can come up with.

TS - Did gender feel important?

NS - Gender's a really, really tricky thing in this play because most of the violence in this play is incredible gendered. And I knew that writing it. And I spent a lot of time questioning in myself what that was and where that comes from. And ultimately where I got to is that a lot of violence is gendered and a lot of the violence that I'm most connected to or personally afraid of is gendered violence but it's that moral question of should I as a woman not

represent violence against women? Is that kind of glorifying it in any way or making entertainment out of it? Like where is the line between saying I didn't invent horrific violence against women but still questioning in myself why that comes out in that way. And also why the gunman was, I mean there were questions about whether the gunman was male and the gunman was always male and it's not like definitive but is male in this production is male in the script, again with violence being so subjective, that is what you, I mean for me that is what I imagine when I imagine a threat, it's a male body, it's a male figure. And male bodies are the perpetrators of most of the violence in the world. And it's not that most of the violence in the world happens to female bodies, it's not that cut and dry but the particulars of the violence that *Big Guns* looks at which is violence for entertainment purposes and violence as a glorified, almost eroticised thing, very much, at least from my perspective it feels like it falls on female bodies. You know there's movies where male bodies are torn apart and shot and terrible things happen to them by that particular kind of eroticisation of it and that slightly sickening enjoyment of it feels like it falls slightly disproportionately on female bodies. So yes, the violence in it is very gendered.

TS - This might just be my reading, but there seems to be something maternal coming through as well? The references to children and what we tell our children when we ask about monsters. Did that feel important in the writing or is it something to do with innocence versus the darkest points that we go to.

NS - It's something about innocence. It's probably also something to do with it coming so close after *In the Night time* and that them being similar kind of lenses to look at the world through this question of not just, I mean *In the Night time* it was an actual child and in *Big Guns* I think it was more this sense that living a safe, comfortable, liberal life in the West there's something slightly infantilised about it. That our consumption of violence is often play. It's fun it's the tv it's like action movies. Because we're looked after by this unknown government or global structure or whatever, we are swaddled in a way from the realities of what this is. And also just because, I think it's actually in a lot of my work this question how do we explain this to children because that question of how do we explain that to children sort of feels like an entry point for me into the bigger question of how do we justify the way that we live our lives. Just because that lends a, a child is an accessible way for me to start to take a step back and just go, why? and how come and all those questions that like you know four year olds ask that we just go 'well it's the way things are'. So that childlike lens in all my work is an accessible point to get in.

TS - Like an artistic process?

NS - I think so. And I think there's something about keeping that, some element of innocence in *Big Guns* that maybe we don't know, maybe we're doing these terrible things but we didn't mean to? Or we didn't want to? Or we didn't know that they would, we didn't know what we were doing when we were doing it? It's sort of a way to look at all this violence but sort of take out some of its teeth. To go like we know these terrible things happen and we know that we're somehow complicit in them or we at least know that we didn't stop them but we didn't mean it. Which is both an apology and also grotesque in itself because we're not children and we're not innocent but that's a thing to pull back to I guess when it gets too much is just to go like 'we didn't know it would turn out this way'.

TS - In the stage directions as well there's an element of that playful quality - the imagined Guns that pow, pow and then the imagined sacks, are they there and aren't they.

NS - Well children play at Violence all the time. And there's a way of reading the play that it's just kids playing and it's just exploring the limit - I mean there's a strong through line of one upmanship that runs through the play and sort of gets us really into the mud of it because

they're just trying to initially to one up each other in the what's the worst thing we can think of, what's the worst image, how much can I scare you before you scare me. And then once the gunman appears there's a not one upmanship but there's a feeling of, if I can give you enough, if I can come up with these images that will satiate whatever this desire for violence that you've brought onto the stage is, then maybe it will be ok. And I think that's a very classic child's game of telling scary stories late at night and then suddenly it's 3am and everyone else is asleep and you're staring at the ceiling scared of the very thing that you came up with. So yes that was a, the feeling of children at sleepovers and children at campfires and sort of wanting the desire to look into the dark and scare yourself but then not wanting, where that switching point is where you're actually scared and you can't put it back into the box is sort of what the gunman is. Like they conjure this thing and then they can't control it and it begins to actually scare them which is sort of I guess the point where violence stops being a game or stops being this thing that we can play with and becomes something that feels more real.

TS - Children on stage, *The Nether* or Milo Rau's piece.

NS - Oh yes, '*Five Easy Pieces*'. Have you seen it? I really want to see it.

TS - I haven't yet. How would you feel about putting children in that space?

NS - *Big Guns* would be amazing with kids.

TS - How do you feel about child actors on stage in material that is going to these places.

NS - I think there's a certain amount of safeguarding that's a responsibility of the artist but I think just hearing about Milo's piece, it sounds like that's being done. And so I think as long as those conversations are being had, and as long as the children are being safely looked after. But it's a question isn't it. Because I feel like a lot of when you see kids on stage. Did you see the *Hamilton Complex*? It was at the Unicorn last year.

TS - I know exactly the one.

NS - with thirteen pre-pubescent girls

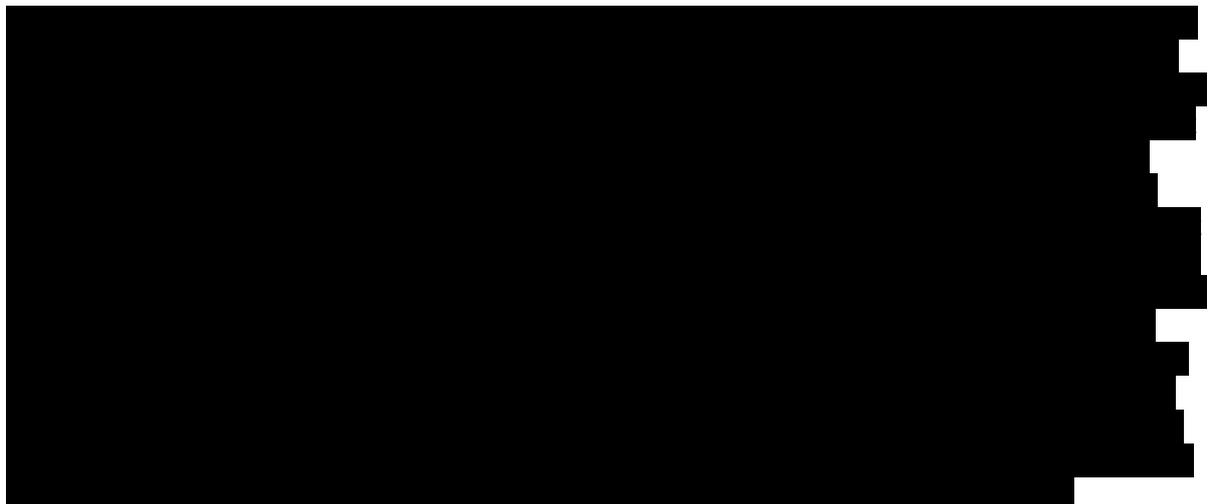
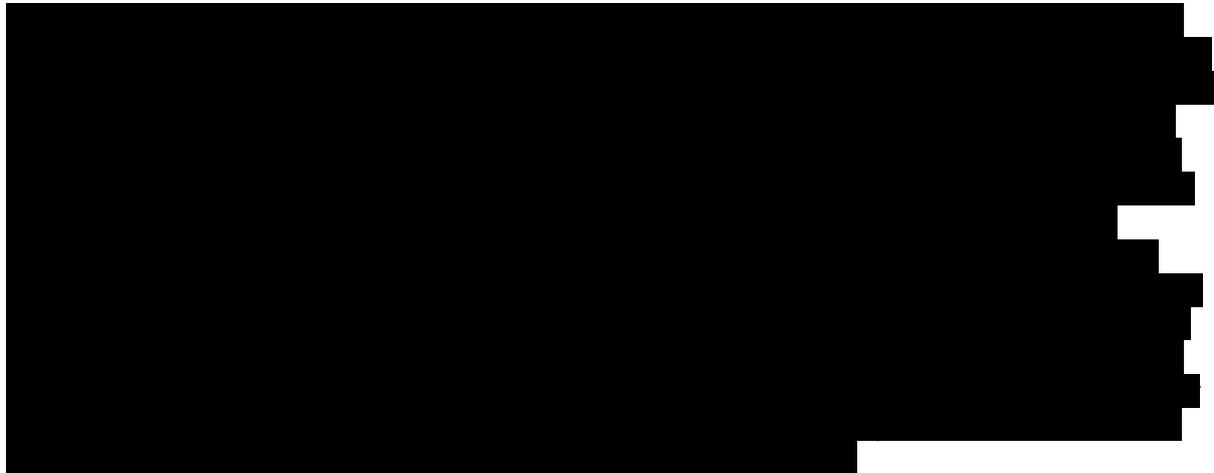
TS - and again that's Flemish isn't it?

NS - Yes. Because I think they may be less uptight than we are about what you tell children in general. It's a massive generalisation but my friends who are Dutch seem to be, or at least those individuals, much less screwed up about sex and relationships because they go like yeah well you're seven years old and sex education is about consent and it's about relationships and we talk about it it's not this bogeyman of split the boys off and split the girls off and you go and watch weird things.

TS - Do you think that's quite an English thing?

NS - I don't think it's just an English thing because to go on like a massive tangent I think like sex education in America is worse. But I think there's a possibility that you can over safeguard and then you don't actually give people the tools to manage. Which I guess sort of comes back to this idea of trigger warnings and of whether it's better to save people from feeling. And I mean it's very much up to the individual and trigger reasons exist for a, there's a real reason why they exist but as a wider context there's a decision I guess as a society about whether you keep everybody away from everything that might make them feel

uncomfortable or whether you try and give people tools and spaces to feel uncomfortable and then to come through the other side of that. Whether we need to be so scared of bad feelings. But that's a hugely um. The real reason trigger warnings exist is not about bad feelings.



So I feel like safeguarding the children is also about making sure that you as an artist are not exploiting the most obvious, you're not just using child as stand in for innocence and you're actually, they are innocent but allowing them to have some kind of power on the stage as well.

TS - in terms of wider reach, the Yard are obviously really supportive of new work. How do you think a space like this one (National) or a bigger space, more commercial space potentially, how do you think they respond to violence on stage?

NS - I think they're open to it. I think that the wider your audience is, the trickier it can be. Even when I was writing *Big Guns* I had it in my mind that the Yard would be the best place for it because they have an audience that is not going to be automatically up in arms. And there's definitely places where *Big Guns* could have gone on where there would just be so many more walkouts than we had because I think it's about a contract with an audience. If you're in a space where your contract with an audience is to give them a good night, I mean it's reductive, but if your contract is to give them a good night out and that's the primary idea then I think it's trickier to put on work where the objective is to challenge people or to create some kind of uncomfortable space or to like look at ourselves. I think theatre is about challenging our idea of ourselves but then there's also spaces where that's not the contract

and it's not fair on an audience to, if they just want to have like a nice night out and a glass of wine, to be like 'look at yourselves', 'what have you done'.

TS - Too direct! Thinking of the in yer face playwrights who got a bit annoyed with the term because some felt it didn't allow them to go to other spaces, write a romcom. Do you ever worry that going to these darker places makes you in that segment or can you not think that way as an artist?

NS - I think there's definitely a sense that having had two plays produced now every playwright has a sort of character that's out there in the world. Which theatres and programmers and literary managers have to be able to do, they have to go ok this person writes this type of plays and so I think no-one is going to be looking at me to write a rom-com musical and I probably don't subvert my own brand that much. Like I don't feel like have this kind of real nice family drama that's very hopeful that I wish somebody would produce. I think it's all sort of at the moment, I don't feel I'm far enough along in my career that the idea that I write dark violent things, that's not yet become and maybe won't become an obstacle. But it's also interesting that idea of darkness kind of coalesces around you. Like when *Night Time* first happened, I don't really think of *Night Time* as a dark play, *Big Guns* is a dark play, *Night Time* I kind of felt like was a hopeful play that had an awareness that there's war in the world and when reviews came out for that at the Gate and there was kind of this initial thing of people saying oh yeah it's like Sarah Kane. And with that play I was like, I mean not all of Sarah Kane's work is dark but Sarah Kane's work is quite dark, I did have a small feeling of like, I don't know if that's actually in the play I think that's a bracketing that happens that is potentially around the idea of being a female playwright who is interested in slightly darker themes. That people go oh what's this like? It's like that other female playwright who was interested in slightly darker themes. So there's a sort of categorisation that happens but I don't feel it as a burden. I've not yet had any situation where people are like. Because also, I don't think anyone is particularly going like, we really want dark plays. So let's approach Nina Segal and ask for a dark play and I'm like, guys I just want to write something light! It's more the other way round, you're having to go to theatres and go like could you take a risk on this one and it won't make anybody feel good but maybe it would be a good production.

TS - Do you think Theatres are open to risk taking at the moment?

NS - it depends who they are? I think that there's still a sort of feeling, there's a question that comes up a lot in my work about where, what the place of hope is in it and that's something I've never really been able to answer because I don't think there's, you know I'm not an unhelpful person but I do sort of at the same time go, well the world's going to end in a really terrible way and there's a huge amount of bad things that are happening and will happen before that point occurs and there's theatres who go like no you need that moment, you need that feeling of hope because that's what we do, we leave people with that feeling of hope. But I think, in terms of risk, I mean I don't see my plays going, I wouldn't see my plays going to like a 500 capacity theatre. I think there's still a relatively small appetite for weird, dark work but I've found there's a lot of theatres that are open to having these conversations and seem to understand that it's a part of the world that we exist in so we should look at it. And I think theatres, there's just different degrees to which they want to look directly at it or through a more indirect way. It's kind of interesting, because I feel like my work got called bleak a lot more before Trump got in. And now there's like, a slightly different. It's so weird that like as soon as it happened the word bleak doesn't come up anymore. It used to be that every meeting I went into people would be like, this is great, it's very bleak. But then it's a recontextualising. These plays aren't so bleak any more. Post Trump the world is really bleak. And it's completely anecdotal, maybe there's still people who still go these plays are really bleak.

But it's interesting how, in terms of the kind of the work that you make, how that bracketing starts to affect you. Like when Lyn Gardner reviewed *Big Guns* and her opening line was 'Nina Segal is anxious'. And then I felt a month after that feeling really anxious. And just being like, ok it must be true then. If Lyn Gardner said it then I am very anxious. Which is just sort of about, everybody has to have like a soundbite about their work that can easily sum them up and then it remains to be seen how much it pushes people in certain directions. Both in their work and also, that was weird because I felt like in my life I was becoming more anxious, or I was looking for signs of anxiety. But then I never really felt that *Big Guns* was an anxious play. It was really weird.

TS - Fascinating, the critic and the writer. You should speak to her about it!

Appendix 7 - Interview Transcript: Purni Morell

Interview
16th August 2017
1 hr 5 minutes

TS - When we thinking about staging work that is related to violent themes: radicalisation, paedophilia, child abuse, it's all going on here. You're putting it on here. But what's so complex about the Unicorn is you've got some many ages to cater for. So how do you get down to that granular detail? So this show is 14+ but we wouldn't let a 13 year old into a 14 year old play. How does that work technically?

PM - Ok, so first of all they are all guidelines. So we don't have a *we wouldn't let*. The only time we've ever had a *we wouldn't let* is for two of our smallest shows. One is 6 months to 18 months and the other is 18 months to 3 years and the reason for those is that physically children are too big and too mobile for the show that the 7 month olds are at. And so the only times we really restrict it are when there's sort of, actually these two people can't do this thing together because they're at a very different stage in their development and necessarily that happens at the young end, not the older end. You don't go, I won't let anyone under 18 into this show or I won't let anyone under 14 into this show, that's nonsense because we can't legislate for who people are. People can do what they like, they can watch what they like in my opinion. The business of deciding what sort of age something's for is really instinctive. I just sort of go, I think it's about 8+ and then we have a meeting on a Wednesday called Artistic Planning where we might debate some of it. Hilariously it turns out we very very frequently have left 6 years out of everything altogether. Because we've ended up with 2-5 and then 7 plus for christmas and then mums ring up and go what about Casper my 6 year old, but that's a coincidence, we're not. But there are some gaps. So I suppose we have a sort of notion of what our bands, so we've got extra small, small, medium, large, extra large, what the preoccupations at any of those periods in your childhood might be, but I don't think I've ever raised an age guideline based on content. So I'm just trying to think about things we've made where we've gone oh, I don't know about this. So when we did *Martyr* for example I mean it's just very obvious with that play that it's just not going to be that interesting for 12 and 13 year olds and it's just going to be more interesting for 14, 15, 16 year olds. Plus which the actor got his knob out so. I mean I don't really see any reason why you can't get your knob out with four year olds, I genuinely don't see what the problem is but one's tending to manage the response that one is expecting to get rather than any real issue. You're tending to manage furore rather than actually a problem.

And one of a things that's been a problem is how we present our brochure when you have shows that are you know, noticeably not for the same set of people. So a baby show, *'The Owl who is afraid of the dark'* is fulfilling a massively different function than *'Five Easy Pieces'* which is about child killing. And one can understand that when you have that up on your fridge and you're remembering to go to Owl you don't necessarily want to be reminded that your children are at risk from child killers. So there's a certain amount. So we have done it, we started off with them in age brackets, so we did all the little, all the extra small, you know we did them like that. Now we do them alphabetically, because we found that problem was the teenage shit, which is usually the really interesting shit's at the end and no-one was buying it and la, la, la. Anyway, there's an assumption that childhood is 8-12 apparently. So, all theatre makers want to make shows for 8-12 year olds. All parents want to buy things for under 7s and nobody gives a shit. I'm really interested in doing stuff for

teenagers but nobody wants to come. Well, that's obviously not completely true but you know what I mean.

TS - If parents are gatekeepers, they're the ones buying the tickets. How do you navigate that balance between wanting to make shows that connect with the young people that are coming to see them, to make really good theatre but also wanting to navigate a way into the parents buying mindset?

PM - Well theoretically when it's good it shouldn't make any difference. So the shows that we've done that are actually good, it doesn't come up. Shows that we've made for younger children, parents do seem to think that it's an opportunity for them to check their email which I find annoying and teachers tend to do that too. There is a slight tendency you know 'well it doesn't really matter but Melissa loved it' you know which I find a bit annoying because I don't think that's what we're trying to achieve. What we're trying to do is get people watching things together and then see what happens but that's just laziness on the whole.

I mean it's true that book titles fly out the door more than Belgium shows about paedophilia. I think you can only just go by if you think what you're doing is honest, then other people will get it too. You can tell when shows are disingenuous. But I think usually, I don't really know how to put this but, there was a thing, I think it was Edward Bond. I think it was Edward Bond or Howard Barker [TS note - it was Edward Bond] said about Slumdog Millionaire which I really liked. He said, 'this is an atrocious film and it's pornographic. You have to understand this is a film in which half way through a child has his eye put out in order to beg more efficiently, and that is not what the film is about and that's a huge problem morally'. And I think people can smell whether things are made for the right reasons or the wrong reasons. You don't need to necessarily be able to articulate it you just can tell. So what we can get away with doing and indeed we sort of encourage doing shows that could be quite emotionally difficult if the thing is true. Whereas something that is a less good show or a more lazily made show might have more trouble with something that is visually less apparently threatening or offensive.

TS - The programming here does seem to be more daring. The Milo Rau piece, Manchester didn't grant the licenses?

PM - Manchester didn't give them licenses because there was an administrative fuck-up. That wasn't a censoring problem. I don't think. I think that was not a scandal of censorship, that was a scandal of not really producing very well.

TS - Yes. Because they missed Brighton but then they were cancelled in Manchester.

PM - Yes. Sorry, you were asking a question.

TS - How much risk analysis goes into a piece where it's obviously, the daily mail love to write about Rau's piece as being children on stage in a massively controversial piece.

PM - I genuinely don't give a fuck about what the daily mail says. I think that managing that kind of nonsense is the opposite of what we should do. I don't think.

TS - Do you worry about protests. Do you worry about that furore.

PM - Do I worry about protests, no. It'd be great.

TS - Do you think that all theatres are programming with that same sense of freedom?

PM - No, I think most people are wasting everyone's time. I mean that makes it sound like I'm saying I'm some sort of genius and I don't mean it like that. I just mean, look. What is it that we're doing. What is it that we're supposed to be doing? What we're supposed to be doing is some way investigating or calling attention to something or. Sitting around in areas of non harmony and murk and not sureness and that can be a baby show, which is a bloke getting dressed to go outside and the weather keeps changing. And babies get it. And that's perfectly straightforward. There's nothing to worry about there but it's true. Or it could be Milo Rau's show in which you take that premise that, ok look, these children have grown up hearing about this monster so why would we not talk to them about it because also what we've done as a result of that person's existence is that we've changed the way childhood operates and what children are allowed to do and the people who dis-benefit from that are children and so why wouldn't we talk about that? And if we're going to talk about it with them. If we're going to let them watch the news then why wouldn't we make a piece of art with them about something. I mean if you allow your child to watch the lunchtime news, you have no business talking to me about appropriate violence. I mean are you kidding me?

TS - How do you think that show navigates it? It's done brilliantly, it's touring Europe, it's doing so, so well. How do you think that show manages to have child actors on stage/

PM - It's just incredibly good. How do I think they've managed to make it?

TS - You've had two Belgium companies in.

PM - Yes, three. We've had quite a few.

TS - Because it's really quite bold, I don't think it's unusual to say it's bold, it's different, it's going right into the guts of the things that are perhaps the most painful. How a child deals with the idea of the monster.

PM - They deal with it in exactly the same way you do. The reason we don't have some of that work in Britain is as soon as a child goes ooh, it's like are you alright? Oh let's stop for a bit. It's nonsense. Nothing is ever achieved like that. It's like those Islands and those cultures where people let their two year olds play with machetes. They haven't got a higher mortality rate for machete injury than anyone else.

TS - Do you think that type of work's being made here?

PM - No. Culturally it's not possible to make that work here.

TS - Why?

PM - Because we don't treat children as people. We don't treat children as artists. We don't treat children as equals. If you walk down the street with a child, the sanest of us including me will worry about how they cross the street. If you walk down the street with me you are not concerned about whether i'm capable of crossing the street or not. And because we worry about whether our children can cross the street properly we're not able to speak to them properly. You don't see. Try this as a tourist experiment next time you go to Belgium or Holland and watch adults or just look at tourists at London Bridge for an hour. Watch Danes approaching an intersection. They don't say hold mummy's hand, they don't say careful now, look both ways, what are we warning children about all day. They know how to cross the road. But yet we're not able to let them just cross the road because we're like [sharp inhale sound]. We're a nation of massive neurotics. And we pass it along. Of course we can't make any good art, I mean it's ridiculous. Certainly not with children.

TS - And so there's no concern about bringing that work onto the stage that you're going to be met with the parents who [sharp inhale shout].

PM - Yes well, they're welcome but it's their problem they need to fix it because nobody is happy. You know, I mean. I don't mind. It's a really interesting question is this business of provocation. So I'm not interested in provoking people, I'm not out to be provocative or cause trouble but I can only tell the truth that I see. And I can tell that and it's not my business whether people agree with me or like it. It's my business to try and tell it and then people can protest or not and then we can have a conversation and then that's fine. But if we're all going to sit around going oh, well I'm not sure if. What's that? That's not how the empire was built. Oh I wonder if the natives will like it.

TS - Do you think there are any boundaries to what you think you can put young actors on stage doing?

PM - Not really, no. I don't think so. But I think it's a real skill and sensibility to be able to make work with children and enable them to be an equal part of it and tell the truth. Most people don't know how to do that. Including most people in Holland don't know how to do that. But it's to do with, there's a very fine line between... Look, this is an art form, it's currency is manipulation, right? That's what it is. You manipulate people into believing things.

TS - In theatre?

PM - Yes. You can call it suspension of disbelief, you can call it whatever but the whole thing is a fat lie. So it's a fat lie in service of telling a greater truth. So there is manipulation in it. You will, you are necessarily asking people to have emotions as a result of the thing that is not happening to them. Or you are manufacturing circumstances and in a certain way you're um, do you know what I mean? There's an artifice to the whole thing. So, everyone is involved in that, you know everyone's inculcated in that and so are the performers so when you're working with children they are also inculcated, they are involved in it. And a director manipulates his actors to a certain extent and that's true of adults and that's true of children. And so, um, it's really hard to. The people who do it well are rewarded with performances like the type you get in the Milo Rau show where you can tell that these children have made it with them and they think that it's theirs. They don't think that they're doing it for him. They know that they're making it look like that for us because they want to, all of them decided that this would be a powerful way to explore what's going on, sorry I'm wanging on now, but do you know what I mean?

[REDACTED]

Whereas asking a girl in the Milo show to take her shirt off I don't find disgusting because I know what they're doing and I know what the girl's doing and I know why the girl is there and I know she understands it and I trust them.

TS - You'll obviously have safeguarding policies here. Do they interact with, so for instance with a show like that they're obviously a visiting company you've brought in because the show's already touring, how does the Unicorn's safeguarding manifesto interact with theirs?

PM - It's very, very interesting they're very, very different. So we are required to have a child performer license for it and we get them from the council and the council provide that and they provide chaperones. The Belgium's provide that and they provide chaperones. There's a lot of nice women around, one of whom's in charge of getting shopping and one of them's in charge of doing washing clothes, one of them's in charge of dressing rooms. They've got about five women who come and just make sure things function. And it's very interesting because we always do meet and greet the first time the Belgium's arrive and the chaperones are there and they're there and everyone's there and we all talk about. We all go around and say who we are and what happens is every time, every single time the children leave the auditorium saying who are those people, why do they have to look after us? And they say well it's because we're in a different country and they have different laws about this, that and the other. But chaperones don't exist in Belgium, you don't need a criminal records check to make a show with a child. So all the assumptions are completely different and we are, along with the States and I think some other countries do it too, more on the side of paperwork and safeguarding. I don't know what safeguarding is myself. But I understand that one has a duty of care to people and I'm not sure always that the processes are really doing really the duty of care. I'm not sure. At the same time, I have learnt to my cost that when you sort of drop them and don't do all of that, you can get into some trouble.

TS - I got an email back from Manchester when I emailed them to find out about the licensing and it was quite open about the fact that they felt the show didn't meet their safeguarding standards.

PM - So there was a bunch of things that happened. On that particular occasion what happened was that the people that were supposed to be getting the license didn't understand that you had to get a separate license for Brighton and for Manchester. So they phoned Manchester up about 6 days before the show to try and get a license. And the people at the council went, look, what is this show? And the thing that they were very confused about was look, if 8 year olds can be in it, why can only 16+ see it? What does that mean? Who's not thought about what there? And they asked to see the psychology reports so the Belgium's who made it, when they were putting it together they had psychological evaluators around to make sure that people weren't traumatising each other. And they've got a stash of this stuff. This is what they do. This is what they've done for the last 30 years. They've got stacks and stacks of this stuff, and they would perfectly be able to produce it for the council if you didn't ask them six days before the show because they were in, I don't know they were in Barcelona or something and they were like I don't know, it's on my desk, I don't know how to get this stuff to Manchester Council. So I think there was a massive fuck up around that and I think you know you, people often go oh ring up the safeguarding people it'll be fine. But these are relationships that you build. And that's actually where the trust has to lie because we have a relationship with the safeguarding people at the Council and we'll ring them up every now and then with whatever it is. Sometimes they'll go 'please get off my line I've got actual children being actually hurt to deal with and I can't be worrying about whether someone was upset by a poem' and other times they're like, 'look yes, we should probably look at this'. It's an ongoing dialogue. And I think that is what you have to do, you can't just fill in a form.

And it's really unhelpful to categorise Manchester City Council as philistine in some way. I'll give you a really good example of something that happened here with our folks. It was the last Belgium's but one, it was the Campo show that came over it was called 'Next Day' and so in it there was a whole load of foam blocks like the size of this and they were all clambering over it. So there was one girl in it who was particularly little and as you will know from your childhood clambering over foam blocks involves falling over, it was great but the thing is people could see her pants. And I found it extremely interesting that the chaperone or the council basically went, and it's very nebulous exactly who is at fault here. I was sitting

up here and I've got all the Belgium's in my office going yeh, er 'the woman from the council is saying she has to put on a pair of trousers and we're not going to do that'. And we had some other people going, 'she can't be showing her pants'. She's not aware of how adults are perceiving that, I mean it's ridiculous, you can't show pants. And then I, we ended up having a long conversation about it and the director of the show went to the council and said, 'yes, it's artistic censorship' and I was like, get him out of the fucking council offices because it's the last thing of relevance here. And then Paul who had been working with the kids said I'm not going to ask her to put on trousers because she's chosen her costume and I'm not going to be the one who tells her what you've chosen is inappropriate, because it isn't.

TS - Because that's more of a safeguarding issue?

PM - It's not fair to put our problem on her. And I think he's right.

TS - I read about an intergenerational dance piece where a blindfolded young actor was on stage with some nudity.

PM - [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

PM - It doesn't get shut off. It doesn't. The issue is to do with something completely different, it's to do with sort of permission societally. You know we don't live in a society which is very very appreciative or sensitive to or sensible of what normal human psychology is. You know it's a protestant-ised, moralised, authoritatised, whatever the word is, and I don't know whose fault it is whether it's Martin Luther King or the Romans or who but there's a problem with - we can't have people going around expressing ourselves because then we can't operate. I mean we actually could operate just fine in my view but clearly it doesn't suit people. Children play at the dark edges and at the sexual edge and so on because they are exploring, there's nothing more interesting than taboo. And if they know something is going to embarrass you or make you not sure about what you're doing they're like right, well let's fuck around in there for a bit longer because that's way more fun than the Gruffalo or whatever. I mean the Gruffalo is that sort of but you know what I mean. And so...

TS - The Hamilton Complex. I've heard a lot of good feedback from adults.

PM - That show was good.

TS - I've read what you've said, that you make shows for adults. But that show wasn't specifically for adults?

PM - The most interesting thing with all the Belgium work, is and Milo Rau's no different. And Hamilton Complex was like this. They sell that as 8+ in Belgium or 6+. I think it's a 6+ show and we're busy selling it at, what did we sell Hamilton Complex as 13+, 14+? And it's hilarious. And we had this whole conversation with Milo Rau, i'm like it's an 8+ show because the youngest girl in it is 8, that's the actual age guidance.

[REDACTED]

TS - Do you think that's about your position?

PM - No, I don't think they give a fuck about my position I think it has to do with them getting a bit more conservative and thinking less.

TS - Do you think that happens as people get older.

PM - It can do, yes.

TS - Do you think that affects artistic leadership?

PM - Yes. Yes, I do.

TS - When people go through the ranks and then into the decision making.

PM - I think there's a basic contradiction in terms of being an artist and being an artistic director of a building. It's nothing to do with splitting your time between brooms and cupboards and rehearsal time and you know, staff appraisals. It's nothing to do with that. The thing about having an institution is you are responsible to it. And you have to take care of, you know. You can't just bring the whole fucking thing down with your programming, you have to balance some things out, you have to take into consideration what might or might not sell or how something might or might not be regarded. Or you shouldn't be going around bringing the organisation into disrepute by, you know, being found naked in trafilgar square at 4am on new years eve etc. Theoretically you shouldn't anyway especially if you're an immigrant or any other kind of you know dodgy person. So, but at the same time actually making stuff, it ought to just not give a fuck about any of that. So you find there's a compromise. And we do a really good job here I think of erring on the right side of it, which is that of course we don't fucking mind if there's a protest. And most things that the daily mail says are wrong, so I think we would consider it to an extent a badge of honour.

TS - If they were outside?

PM - Well the really interesting thing to me is that the business that happened with Brett Bailey's show, *Exhibit B*, which is one of the best things I've ever seen.

TS - So you were one of the few people that got to see it?

PM - I went to see it in Edinburgh. It was astonishing, and that was a real example of stupidity winning out. I think there is a debate, a sensible debate to be had about ownership

of work and ownership of *that* work and racial history, and race politics and the politics of violence in racial discrimination and Empire and all of that, which is precisely what the show was trying to make and I think the idea that you take a position in a newspaper. You've lost me.

TS - Another one that springs to mind is the *Homegrown* scenario which attracted national newspaper attention,

PM - Which one was that?

TS - The National Youth Theatre Homegrown.

PM - Oh yeh.

[REDACTED]

TS - I think the *Homegrown* team got a lot of interest from national newspapers. And that's my point with the daily mail, it's quite unusual for a children's theatre show to get interest from that type of press so it possibly makes shoulders a bit more nervous.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

PM - It was like the Jewish Film Festival, do you remember, and the Tricycle thing? Who got into trouble.

TS - Because of funding.

PM - A bit of their funding comes from the Israeli government.

AD - But they were evidently not aparaotics of that. They were not the mechanism of Zionism.

PM - It is really not difficult to shut a thing down. You know? It is easier to shut something down than it is to say a thing at the moment. And I think that's why ones got to say no I'm sorry, this is what's happening. So our approach is to speak at length and go over many times and explain to the council why and go, look this is why, and they will give us a license and we will put on the show.

TS - And that's about relationships and having good relationships with people in the Council.

PM - Yes.

TS - Do you think some artists are becoming more risk averse in that climate?

PM - Yes I do. I think artists are more risk averse than they were in the olden days.

TS - How about since the 90s?

PM - Well here's the thing. I think what has made art less. What has made art more careful about risk taking is the, I haven't thought this through. I think it's to do with the argument that came through in the 90s which was all about monetising art. And art and money developed a different relationship around then or the early 2000s, or somewhere there, I don't know. But what I know is the conversations I was having in the late 80s even though I was the intern did not sound like the conversations that are happening now. And I think as a result this whole idea is connected to, like, artists have a right to be paid enough. Well no they don't. I mean they just don't. It's ridiculous to predicate an economic system upon people wanting what you do. If people don't want what you do you can't wander around saying I should be paid more. I mean it just doesn't work like that. Anyway, but I think there's a whole thing about. Because we've stopped talking about art for art sake and what it actually can do, which is a stupid phrase, because we've stopped talking about art as sort of human enhancement of actual experience and operating on a different plain where outcomes are not required, where clarity is not required. I mean all of these things, there is the measurable world where we actually go and we build skyscrapers and get on trains and there you have to have a certain amount of health and safety and you have to have some things in operation that are planned and organised and then you need a place where you can not do any of that and be a human being and put everything else that you need and that seems to me to be what art is but since we stopped doing that and we decided to make art measurable, and that we needed to measure its outcomes and particularly we decided that we needed to measure you know its impact on mental health and I don't know blindness and I don't fucking know social justice and since we started using it and instrumentalising it I think that is more to do with why we've become risk averse because we see the whole thing as an industry. And it has been turned into one. And I think that is incredible dangerous. Whether I then think that there is a direct. And so it follows I think that you have a generation or two, and I'm talking about art generations so they're like ten years or whatever, who've stopped thinking properly because what they're busy doing is participating in an industry and doing product and activity and measurables and this that when we get to a moment like now where there's some actual shit to be dealing with like do we let this play be produced or don't we, no-ones got the intellectual basis on, nobody's got the muscle, nobody's used thinking for ages and ages so nobody's able to think their way out of a paper bag. So they go to fucking advice. The last thing i'm going to do if I want to know whether I

should put on a show is get legal advice, I don't give a fuck. So I think yes, but I think possibly it's also connected to something else. I don't know, I've just made all that up though, I haven't thought it through. I think it's plausible on some level.

Look when we all started off doing what we do in the late 80s or early 90s, when we were all doing our gap year or whatever it was that we were doing and we went to work at the Gate unpaid as an intern stage managing for Stephen Daldry or whatever it was that we did, that's gone man, I mean they've got a business plan. At the Gate! It's a room above a pub. Why the fuck have they got a business plan? It's ridiculous. Why have we got a business plan? I mean we're running a theatre we shouldn't have a business plan? I mean, one wants to operate a business responsibly.

TS - Thinking about your time at the NT studio. Do you think there's some amazing work that's coming through that just isn't making it to production.

PM - No. I think most of what's being made is terrible. I think the opposite problem is the case. I think far too much mediocre nonsense is on. I think provided you can more or less spell and paginate your script you can get it on somewhere. That's a little bit untrue and unfair but it's more true than the opposite statement. I hear that you're longing for me. (To AD - do you not agree?)

[REDACTED]

PM - It's incredible. But I can hear you want me to go there's a wealth of incredible work but the conservative gatekeepers are preventing it coming on but sadly no.

TS - So where do you think that grassroots change needs to happen? How do you think it's going to happen?

PM - I don't think it is going to happen. I think this country is moribund artistically and will remain so forever.

[REDACTED]

PM - [Laughter!]

[REDACTED]

PM - It kind of is though.

[REDACTED]

PM - As I continue to bang on about, Napoleon showed up and he called us a nation of shopkeepers and he's right. Art isn't something that's important in English culture in the wider mainstream in society. There are people like her who read a shit load and really love it and it's heartbreaking that people don't get why it's good. And there's people who really love Beethoven and they don't get why it's such a fucking issue that no black person gets to listen to Beethoven except through an outreach programme because for some reason we've organised society in such a way that makes that impossible. You know, all of this stuff. But do I think we make really good art in this country? Rarely. And I don't mean by that that there aren't people who do appreciate it and I don't mean that everyone's a philistine, I don't mean any of that. But that as a country we are more interested in having an arts industry than we are in making art. And, where do I think the change is going to come from? Well, I don't think it is. And the reason I don't think it is is I don't think it ever did. I don't know of a

period in the cultural history of this country and this is not my field so I don't really know but I can't think of a period where I go that we've lost that - when it was better. When I look backwards and I go, ok so, the twenties, the nineteenth century, the eighteenth century, I can't get to a period where I go - that was a golden age of the arts. And of course we have Shakespeare and Elizabethan era as an example, that was a golden age of theatre industry, that happened to have a great conflation of people one in particular of whom turns out to have known a shit load more than most people were paying attention to at the time. But, if you compare that to just the - if you go and sit in Paris with some pissed homeless dude, it won't be long before he tells you that France is the home of Racine. And that's not quite the experience of sitting with pissed homeless people in Trafalgar Square. That's not quite the conversation you're going to get. I don't think there is a way out of this. I think it's going to be a bit like this for ages. I think there'll be some minor changes, the increase in traffic between theatre from Europe and theatre from this Island. Well the one way increase in traffic is interesting. I think the biggest, I don't know, you know. I don't think there's an appetite to make it better. I think the general opinion is that it's the best in the world. I think people think there's not much that needs improving.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

PM - There's Sadler's Wells, the Barbican. But it's interesting, almost everybody I know in Belgium travels for art. They hear something's on in Paris and they say, fuck it, shall we just go. They don't do that so much. I mean, I don't think I've been to the theatre in the UK for quite a long time because I just can't bear it anymore. But that's a fetishism of itself which is also not good. That's asinine also. It's like people go, you should really do some work abroad. You should do a gap year before you go to University. I don't really understand.

[REDACTED]

TS - But I think the sense I've got from you that in terms of violence and the work that's made here for young people, that there shouldn't be boundaries, provided it's made well.

PM - I feel that there shouldn't be boundaries. I think there is a much more important question when there is a boundary to ask why have I put that there than to go why does this person want to contravene this boundary? I think especially as a maker you have to go what assumptions am I making here about what isn't necessary? We've worked with children in shows a few times now and most of the time I employ Belgium's to come and work with them. Because they can just naturally get a conversation out of an English child, it's not, they just know how to talk to a child.

TS - Do you put trigger warnings up here?

PM - Meaning what?

TS - So the Royal Court have started putting trigger warnings to say if you think you might be unhappy about any of the themes we're going to be putting in this play talk to us. That's quite unique to the Royal Court. Do you put warnings up?

PM - I'd rather resign than put up a sign like that. It's so wrong headed I can't even begin to explain it. Oh, it's possible you might not be happy. Join the fucking club.

[REDACTED]

TS - We had complaints for a production of Oliver Twist which didn't include the songs and was quite Dickensian and dark with no Lionel Bart.

PM - We get comparatively few complaints.

[REDACTED]

PM - Funnily enough, when we first started 6 years ago I did all the complaints. I responded to all the complaints. I mean we only had about 11 over the course of 3 years.

[REDACTED]

PM - She said these 13 year olds must be disturbed.

TS - Did she not read anything about it before she arrived?

Read out of Tripadvisor review.

PM - But I used to reply myself, because, I quite liked it. Let's talk about it, don't like it. But I think that's better than a corporate response in a way. And then people would be like the artistic director rang me. I remember one time I called somebody and he said this show's terrible and I said I'm so sorry, you're completely right, I made a mistake.

TS - What did he say?

PM - Well thanks very much. He was a bit perplexed I think.

TS - If you were to move out of what is the children's theatre banner into a more mainstream building how do you think it would shift your practice when you were dealing with controversy?

PM - Not at all. It would just extend a little bit the areas which one could cause controversy. Because with children's theatre there is only really one subject, all your plays are about one subject which is about how children are treated in the world by the rest of us. In an adult theatre you can get involved in Marxist economy if you want to, or whatever, at which point. I think there is a real difference between consensus building before an outcome you know like dialogue and negotiation which I really value and believe in and consensus manufacture which is where you go we've all got to, we can't have you think like that.

End.

Appendix 8 - Urgent Msg from Paul

From: Sent: To:
Cc: Subject:

Importance:

Pamela Vision
30 July 2015 15:08
Neil Darlison; Pete Staves; Claire Saddleton Nick Tapper
FW: Urgent Msg from Paul

High

Thought you should see this from NYT. Hopefully it's contained and going no further, but thought you'd want to know.

Pam

From: Beth Watling [mailto: Beth.Watling@nyt.org.uk] Sent: 30 July 2015 14:48
To:

Cc: Ann-Marie Hodson; Joe Duggan;

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Subject: Urgent Msg from Paul

Importance: High

Dear All,

[REDACTED]

I trust you're well and excuse the mid-summer round robin - but I feel it is imperative to update you in regards to our latest development and thoughts on the looming production that is Homegrown – currently in rehearsal at UCL Academy in Swiss Cottage. Given the nature and sensitivity of the topic and where the show is heading artistically, we have consulted various organisations including the Met Police with regards to safeguarding our young cohort of members aged 15-22 participating in the project. Whilst the police felt it was a valuable and important subject and supported the initiative, they rightly raised some concerns over the content with particular reference to any hate crimes and the ability for the National Youth Theatre to control all social media responses.

We have a cast of 111 coming towards the end of their second week which has been led by Nadia Latif and Omar El-Khairiy as Co-Creators. From a creative point of view - despite many directives from myself and Beth over the past few weeks – the show is clearly very one-dimensional in tone and opinion without, as of yet, any intelligent character arcs justifying the content. In other words, a lot of the feedback internally and externally is “why are these decisions being made? Why are we doing

this?" and I personally share those questions and have yet to receive any intelligent responses from the creative team. To be fair to Nadia and Omar they have a strong vision and voice which is why we commissioned them and that is potentially very exciting, but there is no in-depth analysis, balance or debate around extremism and instead the project seems to be exploring where to place the hatred and blame.

Since the start of rehearsals last Monday the attrition has been unusually high with 5 to date. The use of language in the room has been at times insensitive, inappropriate and disrespectful to NYT. We have had conversations with 3 parents – 2 have expressed grave concern over the direction of the piece. One has been more favourable. One complaint from one of the parents appears to represent the general temperature in the room and whilst we do not have time to fully investigate such a complaint, this and all of the above are leading us to firmly believe we have to make a swift decision to prevent any damage or risk to NYT's reputation and membership.

Our process/approach over the past few days has been a very considered and caring one. We created an internal SWOT analysis to measure the risks and threats, including financial, on whether we should cancel the production or not - and if so what we could offer the members instead.

Taking a risk is one of our mantras but if the creative output mixed with safeguarding issues is a risk too far, then I'm pulling the show today. The creatives have failed to meet repeated requests for a complete chronological script to justify their extremist agenda and so it doesn't look good for the future of Homegrown on National Youth Theatre turf.

We have consulted with Company Management and will immediately look to engage the cast in other projects as my biggest concern is their well being and commitment to the company. We have a plan to offer them a meaningful experience developing new and existing work from our back catalogue – to which a large invited audience will be invited to over a period of 4 or 5 nights.

Over the past week we have also consulted with our external press agent and they have suppressed any further press interest as we work towards a conclusive decision. Cornershop have recognised that this subject is attracting unprecedented interest and not all from favourable theatre loving media. If the product was in a more secure and trusted place we would feel more confident exploring these press and media opportunities, but unfortunately it is not. We are working on a public line/statement which we'll circulate in due course.

At the end of the day we are simply "pulling a show" and at a point that still saves us a lot of emotional, financial and critical fallout.

We're about to go to a small sharing of what's been created to date and can only really confirm this decision that has been assessed.

I felt it was good governance to inform you at this stage given the highly irregular situation we find ourselves in.

Please feedback any questions or further concerns Yours
Paul

PS – on another note I hope you managed to see Generation Sext on Sky Arts last night – we've had great feedback some good press and media coverage.

Appendix 9 - Freedom of Information Response From Manchester City Council Licensing Department

Fw: FOI Request for information

 **Fraser Swift** <fraser.swift@mancc.gov.uk>
Tue 23/05/2017 15:25
T.Sallis:16

Dear Tamzin

The licences were refused as the Council was not satisfied that proper provision had been made to secure each of the children's health and kind treatment, for the following reasons:

- ⓘ The themes of the play are adult (murder, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse) and at times graphic. The script contains clearly powerful language and children are active in some disturbing scenes. In addition, the suggested audience is 16+, which seems to indicate the content not suitable for a young audience. Exposure to such raises fundamental concerns with respect to the health and kind treatment of the actors in this production who are aged 9 - 14 years of age.
- ⓘ As indicated by the safeguards presented by the production company there are risks in the children's psychological impact, which could impact on a child's health.
- ⓘ The safeguards in place only deal with the here and now. However, we know from research that the impact of these themes can be life long and develop later.
- ⓘ The psychological profiling appears not to consider the child's background, experiences and in essence their vulnerability. Furthermore, the last assessments were undertaken in 2013, 2016 and are not due to until later this year.
- ⓘ It has not been possible to review the theatre company's training and policies and how they fit with UK law/guidance or MCC child licence policy/guidance.

Regards
Fraser Swift
Principal Licensing Officer
Planning, Building Control and Licensing
Growth and Neighbourhoods

Appendix 10 – Facebook Comment from IIPM about cancellation of *Five Easy Pieces* in Manchester (2017)

The screenshot shows a Facebook post from the page 'International Institute of Political Murder' (IIPM). The post features a video thumbnail and text: 'Kau is coming to the UK for the first time in 15 years, here he talks about his new work with...'. Below the post, there are 16 likes and 6 comments. A comment from Andrew Haydon asks why the show was cancelled. A reply from IIPM explains that the cancellation was due to 'long term traumatising' for young actors and moral arguments, as well as logistical issues with permissions in Manchester compared to Brighton. Another comment from Andrew Haydon notes that the show was also cancelled in Manchester.

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Team Members: Eva Maria Bertschy

Pages liked by this Page: Andcompany&Co., Pretty Ugly, MOTHERBOARD

Language: English (UK) · English (US) · Polski · Español · Português (Brasil)

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