CRIC Construcció i Representació d'Identitats Culturals

Understanding Precarious Lives

Empathy for the Criminal in *Pornography* and *The Events*

Carolina González Terrés

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Universitat de Barcelona
Edicions

CRIC Construcció i Representació d'Identitats Culturals
Estudis de Teatre Contemporani

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Introduction

> While nothing is easier than to denounce the evildoer, nothing is more difficult than to understand him.
>
> Fyodor Dostoevsky

In a world that claims to be increasingly globalised, borders and limitations are supposed to progressively vanish, giving place to a global humanity and identity. However, the liberalisation of the capitalist market has brought with it, at the social, economic, and political levels, a feeling of unrest that seems to be looking for the reinforcement of borders and the construction of walls to stop dangers coming 'in' from 'out there'. Since the War on Terror started, and particularly after 9/11, the Western world has been on guard against potential attacks, not daring to accept the Other. The threat of mass terrorism has become a constant and a reason for many to voice objections to immigration. The introduction of an unknown Other coming from an unfamiliar elsewhere seems to be an unequivocal source of evil. In these recent decades, external policies and international conflicts have certainly been the cause of many tragedies and, therefore, responsible for the deaths of thousands of people/s. But what happens when the one who makes an attempt on people's lives is a local, one of 'us' and not the Other?

The process of othering has been used in diverse discourses throughout history. It implies the dehumanisation of the Other, the one who is ontologically different. It is based on the dichotomy of 'us' vs. 'them' and, as a result, 'our' humanity is contrasted with 'their'

bestiality. Depriving the Other of this humanity makes discrimination legitimate and, with it, disregard for their life. In this way, when the perpetrators of atrocities like mass murders are defined as such, it is easy to judge them in the light of the irrelevance of their lives. Someone who dares commit such an act against humanity cannot be part of it and thus deserves no compassion.

Simon Stephens's *Pornography* (2008) and David Greig's *The Events* (2013) confront this discourse by presenting episodes of mass killing carried out by members of the community involved. Denying their humanity would pose questions about the community itself and the causes of such an action. In order to avoid this confusion, criminals are generally thought – or expected – to lack empathy, this being a way of justifying their behaviour which at the same time disputes their individual humanity. In their respective plays, Stephens and Greig present criminals whose main source of violence is not their lack of empathy but their utter vulnerability in a world that is in constant change and danger. By doing so, they both centre their attention on the role of society in the construction of unstable identities like those of their protagonists. Through theatre and defamiliarisation, they ask audiences to focus on this and pose questions about their own reality too, seeing that the figure of the Other stretches further – and closer – than expected and that distance should not be a determining factor in understanding them.

1 Empathy

Defining empathy

Some say being human means being *intrinsically social,* and therefore interconnection among people is definitely core to the human condition. That interconnection goes beyond the mere physical sharing of space and time: one has to appreciate and accept the existence of those other beings cohabitating in that space and time, and a commitment must be made between them all. The basis for cohabitation thus implies the acknowledgement of the Other, recognising them and what conditions their lives, and, in some way, making that part of one's own reality. Broadly speaking, and among the many other elements key to that interconnection, empathy and the understanding of the Other are thought to be indispensable. As a matter of fact, as Pedwell mentions in the following quote, empathy is thought to be the best medicine for atrocities in today's society:

> Where there is oppression or violence empathy can heal. Indeed, within the contemporary 'Western' socio-political sphere, empathy is framed as 'solution' to a very wide range of social ills and as a central component of building cross-cultural and transnational social justice (Pedwell, 2014: x).

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed focuses on the emotional nature of human and social relations, or rather, the relational nature of emotions: 'Emotions are relational: they involve (re)actions or relations of "towardness" or "awayness" in relation to

[...] objects' (Ahmed, 2004: 8). In psychology, emotions are considered to originate in the individual and, consequently, they are seen as 'a possession' that comes from 'within', following an 'inside out' process (Ahmed, 2004: 9). Emotions, however, require an object to be affected by, and that makes the 'without' essential for their foundation. As such, we should be talking about a process of 'outside in' rather than 'inside out' (Ahmed, 2004: 9), which is, however, still problematic in itself. This alternative portrayal of emotions continues to conceive them as possessions that can be passed on and, for that precise reason, they are considered superficial or artificial, not 'true feelings' coming from the subject but the result of social pressure. To avoid these incomplete conceptions, Ahmed's model of sociality focuses on emotions as in fact the way to delimit inside and outside: 'emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place' (Ahmed, 2004: 10). At the same time as being demarcated, inside and outside are also connected through emotions themselves, which are created within the individual, yet inevitably shaped by objects and events on the outside. Object and subject are thus simultaneously linked and differentiated, and as such are not a consequence of cohabitation and socialisation, but the cause of it.

This conception of emotions could quickly be misunderstood and considered a universal human condition that is the basis of a perfect society in which conflict does not exist, yet one must also take into account that emotions are not always about love and care. The perception and interiorisation of the outside and the Other do not necessarily imply acceptance, and this is a misconception that can be easily spotted in preconceived ideas about empathy and cohabitation. Hatred, anger, revenge, and fear are also emotions where connections are founded, and this must also be critically analysed. Being able to be affected by the outside, living, and acknowledging its historical, economic, geopolitical, and social conditions, does not directly involve understanding or approval. On the contrary, it is the

source of insecurities and a sense of vulnerability, which can also lead to fear and refusal of the Other.

According to Butler, '[n]o one escapes the precarious dimension of social life' (2012: 148) in terms of one's own vulnerability, the Other's vulnerability, and what each implies. For her, precariousness is ontological in the human being: '[T]he body is exposed to socially and politically articulated forces as well as to claims of sociality – including language, work, and desire – that make possible the body's persisting and flourishing' (2009: 3). This exposure to the outside makes life dependent on it and, therefore, subject to its changes and their consequences, whether they be beneficial or not. Whereas a person might not realise their own precariousness and vulnerability when they are in a privileged position, according to Levinas, we are all precarious and vulnerable. This makes us bound to the Other, one who we do not know, we do not choose, and would probably have never chosen (see Levinas in Butler, 2012). By seeing and recognising 'the face' of the Other, one comes to realise the exposed nature and helplessness of human life and has, inevitably also according to Levinas, an inclination and obligation to preserve their life. It is only through this ethical command that the 'I' makes sense, never prior to this urge to act for the Other (Butler, 2012: 142). Recognising the Other's vulnerability provides a moment of introspection and self-recognition, while also having an impact on the way one responds to others. Butler, however, disagrees with Levinas, arguing that the way the 'I' responds to the face of the Other is not necessarily through caring and helping: '[T]he apprehension of precariousness leads to a heightening of violence, an insight into the physical vulnerability of some set of others that incites the desire to destroy them' (Butler, 2009: 2). Thus, this acknowledgment of the face has several outcomes: a) it makes us realise our own vulnerability and the evanescent nature of our own existence; b) it creates an ethical demand on us that requires an action to lessen that precariousness of the Other (see Butler, 2012), and c) it can contrarily be

a source of violence that takes advantage of the Other's unsafe position (see Butler, 2009).

This perception and recognition of oneself in the Other is core to what is commonly and broadly called 'empathy'. According to Moore and Hallenbeck, 'by positively investing in interpersonal relationships, by becoming aware of our own and other's emotions, desires and intentions, and by sharing experiences and meaning, mutual empathy and understanding are enhanced' (2010: 472). However, empathy is an ambiguous term that has been defined differently throughout history and by different scholars and studies. Besides being a widely studied concept in numerous contexts nowadays – mainly in the fields of philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience – it is indeed a basic requirement for cohabitation. In general terms, empathy is considered a core emotional intelligence competency that enables one to understand the Other and care about them. Nonetheless, it is also a concept that is difficult to define precisely due to the countless definitions that have been given of it. In "These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena" (2011), Batson mentions eight different 'phenomena', as he calls them, that have fallen within the definition of empathy, despite them not involving exactly the same processes, causes and consequences. In spite of the significant challenge that defining empathy poses, he comes to the conclusion that '[t]he processes whereby one person can come to know the internal state of another and can be motivated to respond with sensitive care are of enormous importance for our life together' (Batson, 2011: 13).

According to Keen, empathy can be defined as 'a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect [that] can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading' (2006: 208). The term itself entered the English lexicon in the early twentieth century, coming from Lipps' concept of *Einfühlung*, a German term used to refer to the process of '[i]maginatively projecting oneself into another's situation' (Batson,

2011: 8). While the term empathy is somewhat arduous to define, it is also easily confused with sympathy because '[a]s the term [empathy] has become so widely employed in media, politics, art, medicine, education and business during the last few decades, its meaning has become diluted and sometimes even contradictory' (Lindhé, 2016: 22). Empathy is both a cognitive and affective process that goes beyond the concept of theory of mind – a term coined by Premack and Woodruff in 1978 that refers to how an individual may infer other people's feelings or thoughts and anticipate how they might act as a consequence – by also going through a process of emotional contagion and feeling the Other's emotions. Sympathy, on the other hand, recognises those emotions, and other sentiments of compassion arise in response to them (see Keen, 2007: 4-5). The affective component of empathy has been connected to the concept of 'mirroring', which refers to how individuals copy the emotions of another and live them as theirs. For Posick et al., '[m]irroring can be both unconscious and conscious' (2015: 575). Babies crying without thinking when hearing other babies cry is an example of the 'primitive' and unconscious stage of empathy that requires no cognitive recognition of emotions. Later in life, humans develop the capacity to acknowledge the emotions of other human beings as they are happening, also considering the conditions surrounding them, and this is a conscious process (Posick et al., 2015: 575).

Accordingly, empathy creates bonds between people by making them equal and letting them see themselves in each other. As has been previously mentioned when talking about Butler and the recognition of the Other's vulnerability, this acknowledgement of the Other, their 'face' and their situation, has ethical consequences. As Stein stated, '[t]he world in which we live is not only a world of physical bodies but also of experiencing subjects external to us, of whose experiences we know' (1989: 5), and it is this awareness of these experiences that creates an urge for the self to act and protect the Other. For Butler, particularly when analysing and quoting Levinas on this

aspect, this 'ethical demand' is an imposition from the outside that 'implies a dispossession of the egological' (Butler, 2012: 136). This ethical obligation, therefore, leads to social bonding and cohabitation. Butler's concepts of precariousness and ethical obligation can thus be linked to empathy, and it can be said that empathy allows cohabitation to take place. For Harrison, the ethical consequences of empathy are 'altruism and prosocial behavior, moral development, interpersonal bonding and improved intergroup relations' (2011: 256).

The access to the emotional situation/condition of the Other provided by empathy allows understanding and, subsequently, a better social, emotional, and cognitive connection. Nonetheless, this connection can be manipulated in the same way that it is in advertising or in clearly biased pieces of news and information:

> These are times when, in spite of ourselves and quite apart from any intentional act, we are nevertheless solicited by images of distant suffering in ways that compel our concern and move us to act, that is, to voice our objection and register our resistance to such violence through concrete political means. In this way, we might say that we do not merely or only receive information from the media on the basis of which we, as individuals, then decide to do or not to do anything. We do not only consume, and we are not only paralyzed by the surfeit of images. Sometimes, not always, the images that are imposed upon us operate as an ethical solicitation (Butler, 2012: 135).

Through the careful selection of images, the media takes over the realm of emotions, deliberately creating a 'face' for the Other and consciously expected – and constructed– affect from spectators. Being witness to these media-curated events, images and, predominantly, suffering, spectators are forced to feel a sense of responsibility that may – or may not – trigger their need to act against injustice. The outcome of this solicitation will be that the subject affected by such images will not only have the urge to act to preserve the life of

that suffering Other, but emotions of hatred and fear will also arise towards the originators of that unethical reality. Therefore, in the same way that empathy and emotions can 'open up lines of communication' (Ahmed, 2004: 182), they also '[re-establish] distance between bodies' (Ahmed, 2004: 63).

As has been previously mentioned, the acknowledgement of one's own vulnerability can produce feelings of both care and protection towards the Other, who is also seen as vulnerable and therefore in need of my protection, as Levinas claims, and feelings of fear of the threat that the Other, who is different to 'me', poses. If such feelings of caring and their ethical demand can be linked to empathy and rules of cohabitation, are we still bound to protect and preserve the life of an Other that we feel afraid of? According to Levinas, that is indeed the case, but how is it, then, that violence among human beings exists if such caring is supposed to be a universal aspect of the human condition?

This Manichean aftermath is clearly and more visibly seen in fiction, where emotions are deliberately created towards specific characters, producing fondness or aversion towards them. Literature – among other arts – is a means to question, discover and show the human experience. As such, literature, being to a certain extent a mirror of human nature, has to be included in the reality of empathy as a way to dig deeper into it.

Empathy and theatre

Besides being a process of social interaction and connection among humans in real life, empathy can also be – and is – applied to art. For James Harold, empathy is 'a phenomenon common to our experiences both in friendship and in fiction' (qtd. in Harrison, 2008: 256). Not surprisingly, the dichotomy of empathy having both a caring and fearing face can clearly be seen, and has widely been argued,

within literature. Keen introduces the topic of 'narrative empathy', which is a process of perspective-taking triggered by the characters and events in a fiction (see Keen, 2006). For some, this narrative empathy inevitably comes with a behavioural and civilizing effect, as a teaching moment to facilitate society becoming more empathetic and, thus, unavoidably good. This, however, seems a rather naive thought and has indeed been challenged, despite the fact that empathy has an irrevocably essential role in literature as a means to make the reader relate to the characters and events in the story and to then feel as they do and question these feelings.

As regards theatre, which is what this work specifically deals with, Nicholas Ridout talks about the potential theatre has to talk about ethics – ethics meaning being 'good and staying good by acting well' (Ridout, 2009: 11). He mentions the 'encounter with the face' (Ridout, 2009: 53), a term that has a Levinasian resonance, and which refers to the elevated potentiality of theatre to be a space within which to connect with the Other. The fact that theatre is performed by real bodies in front of spectators makes it easier and inevitable for that Levinasian face to be acknowledged, together with its ontological vulnerability and precariousness. In theatre, empathy is required first by the actors, who have to acquire someone else's precarious condition, as well as by the spectator, who is going to be addressed by that acquired vulnerability. It is this embodiment of theatre that allows the spectator to go beyond mere fiction and into the reality behind it. Consequently, spectators, who are now witnesses to that other reality, are asked to go beyond and act. This is what Lehmann calls 'aesthetics of responsibility/response-ability' (2006: 185). In theatre, spectators are not affected by their reading of a performance and their individualistic imagination only. The 'face' they encounter is a physical one, which directly addresses them and asks them to see the need for an ethical command. Being affected by sound, image, true faces, and the emotions that emanate from the rest of the audience, this command is more consistent than ever. The members of

the audience now have an obligation, so there is something for them to do.

Opposing a certain resistance to these conceptions, and in this way connecting with the ambiguity and dichotomies of empathy, Keen questions whether 'responsibility/response-ability' – although she does not use these precise terms – does truly exist and whether that moral improvement is effectively evoked in the reader/audience by simply encountering the face and feeling the Other (see Keen, 2007). Educational philosophers believe in 'social imagination', as a way to '[allow] the reader the possibility of identifying with "the other" and thereby developing modes of moral understanding thought to build democracy' (Megan Boler qtd. in Pedwell, 2014: 94). As Lindhé presents, Keen is highly critical of the altruism-empathy hypothesis because of the lack of evidence there is in relation to the effect fiction actually has on the receivers of images and how much their behaviour in real life changes (2016: 20). After all, '[i]nvestigating the impact of literary reading on behaviour in the real world through empirical studies is a project in its infancy' (Keen, 2014: 29).

Another element to be considered when examining the altruistic effects of fiction on social behaviour is the fact that 'self' and 'Other' are clearly and deliberately demarcated by authors in the way that emotions are intentionally fostered by them in order to make the reader or spectator feel a certain way towards a specific character. This character, however, is not always fundamentally good. How many times has a chauvinistic character been seen as the hero of the story? Or the actions of a psychopath been justified? Are these supposed examples of heroes to be followed just because understanding is there for them? Are these behavioural patterns to be copied? One has to think that emotions are easy to manipulate, the media being a clear example of this, and empathy is, as we have seen, a double-edged sword. Readers are compelled to receive certain types of images and feel a certain way in response. Besides, when readers/audiences are asked to feel themselves in the situation of a particular

character, others are left aside, being effectively marked as the Other, to be feared or hated, as Booth states:

> Even among characters of equal moral, intellectual, or aesthetic worth, all authors inevitably take sides. A given work will be 'about' a character or set of characters. It cannot possibly give equal emphasis to all, regardless of what its author believes about the desirability of fairness (Booth qtd. in Lindhé, 2016: 25).

In this way, narrative empathy is shown to be a Manichean process through which some characters will be left out of the picture, towards whom humanity and understanding will not be demanded, and who will be unquestionably judged as the villains in the story. These villains will not be shown to the reader/spectator as a face to be encountered and be responsible for. On the contrary, there will be an aversion towards them for being the perpetrators of such atrocities, for forgetting their human, precarious and vulnerable nature. These characters will consciously be portrayed as lacking humanity themselves in order to justify their distaste for and resistance to an emotional and affective connection. Is empathy therefore reduced to a process that is undergone only after a selection procedure? Is it not a response prior even to the existence of the 'I' that does not distinguish distance, race, gender, or any other determinant conditions? If this is not the case in theatre, how can it be expected to be so in real life, where '[a]ll the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players' (Shakespeare, 2009: 2.7: 139-40).

Throughout the years, and especially in the last two decades, contemporary theatre and theatre studies have focused on ethics and the ethical potential plays have for impacting societies (Lehmann, 2006; Ridout, 2009). The objective of much contemporary theatre is to make the spectator question and challenge established standards, trying not to take for granted the world they live in and crossing boundaries. Empathy is thought to be an effective tool – espe-

cially in theatre – to make the spectator become involved in the story, be affected by it, and leave the theatre space with a feeling of responsibility and an ethical command to fulfil. This is, however, not an innocent or unintentional outcome, but rather a well-thought-out strategy to get something from spectators. The intended effect is to oblige them to be judgemental about the actions of the characters and what happens to them, leading to admiration and care towards some characters, and disdain towards others/the Other. If one steps out of fiction and back into reality, one may realise that villains and enemies like those in plays also exist in the real world, and the judgements made of people in the fiction will also be addressed to 'characters' in real life. As a matter of fact, empathy is one of the core elements of the study of criminality and its causes: how is it that there exist people capable of committing crimes against humanity like an indiscriminate shooting or the bombing of innocent people in a public space? Some say it is because they lack empathy, this being indispensable for a human and humanitarian mind. Empathy is seen as a sign of human development and it is praised in children from a young age so that children come to understand and respect the Other, thus not falling into lacking humanity and, as a consequence, criminality. As Pedwell puts it, 'within childhood education, empathy has been conceptualised as an affective skill crucial to the development of "caring, peaceful and civil societies"' (2014: ix).

Empathy and the criminal

Empathy within the criminal

Empathy has been seen as an outcome of evolution and human development and as absolutely necessary for the survival of our species (Moore and Hallenbeck, 2010: 471), and therefore it is given a great deal of consideration when dealing with criminals whose actions go against it. It is therefore at the core of ethical judgement and

behaviour and, as Posick et al. state in "Empathy, Crime, and Justice", '[e]mpathy is a focus in research efforts as an integral component of making laws, responding to lawbreakers and preventing crime' (2015: 571). As such, the same authors consider it to be 'an integral tool in the pursuit of justice' (2015: 574), which is assumed to define the world of lawfulness, impede evildoers from committing crimes and, if they do, act against them in the most appropriate way.

By claiming that the perpetrator of violence lacks this evolved faculty, one is saying that they have been left aside in the evolution of human beings and, therefore, might not even deserve to be treated as such. On that account, they are treated on the Manichean basis of narrative empathy like villains in texts: not deserving of protection or understanding beyond punishment. However, as Posick et al. also explain, 'Dutton (2012) argues that for those scoring high on psychopathy measures, it is not that empathy is entirely lacking – rather, it is the lack of affective empathy that allows psychopaths to feel no remorse for their actions. The ability to understand others' intentions (cognitive empathy), though, equips psychopaths to be able to take advantage of others' (2015: 576). They thus make a clear distinction between the cognitive dimension and the affective dimension (2015: 473), as they are not irrevocably linked. The first refers to the acknowledgment of the Other's emotions, but it is the latter that responds to them with the same – or similar – personal feelings through mimicry. As a matter of fact, it is precisely because of this detachment that antisocial and delinquent behaviour can be explained and accepted as being 'reasonable'. Even if one comes to identify the Other's emotions and vulnerability, these can be either ignored or taken advantage of in order to fulfil self-seeking goals. Psychopathy has been broadly studied in connection with criminology, and several studies have come to the conclusion that only certain aspects (emotional/ethical response) of empathy are missing when the psychopath's connection to the world is analysed. They are capable of recognising reality but fail to receive the ethical command

Butler and Levinas talk about. Self-control is thought to be a key aspect in order for a person to become a criminal: '[Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990)] believe that individuals with low self-control are relatively insensitive to the needs of others. They also suggest that people with low self-control tend to be self-centred – acting not on behalf of others' feelings but rather on self-interest' (Posick et al., 2015: 576). Low self-control implies low empathy, and that is why a lack of empathy is thought to be the root of crime. This somewhat impaired human being cannot be considered equal and thus cannot receive the same treatment as a victim who is fully human, easy to connect with and care for.

Going back to the specific context that concerns this study, which is theatre, the embodiment of the victim on stage, having an actual face that shows their vulnerability and demands protection, makes it inevitable for the spectator not to look down on the perpetrator that has brought about this situation. This response to the suffering Other leads to judgement, based on a dualistic imagining of the world where victims are to be loved and criminals to be directly marked as such for their acts. It is important to point out that the aim of this study is not to disregard victims, as they do raise a necessary ethical command that needs to be answered; and crime also has to be responded to. However, the mistake would be placing the responsibility for a crime uniquely on its perpetrator. In the same way that victims are bound to the precariousness of their environment, criminals are too. As Butler explained:

> [W]e need to situate individual responsibility in light of its collective conditions. Those who commit acts of violence are surely responsible for them; they are not dupes or mechanisms of an impersonal social force, but agents with responsibility. On the other hand, these individuals are formed, and we would be making a mistake if we reduced their actions to purely self-generated acts of will or symptoms of individual pathology or 'evil' (2004: 15).

When the criminal is seen as a distant and inhuman Other, it is easy to blame and judge them. However, it would be naive and reductive to blame individuals when they have in fact been conditioned by all elements that surround them. Moreover, empathy is a complex process of understanding the Other and the world around them and is sometimes taken as a universal truth through which judgement can be made. Sara Ahmed questions and opposes this idea by saying that '[e]motions [...] are effects rather than origins: they hence cannot be taken as "the ground" of judgement (to be a "form" is not a "ground")' (2004: 196). Especially when emotions are intentionally enhanced towards specific characters, like they are in fiction, one has to question the nature of these emotions and go beyond them. The creator of images of suffering has the power to decide to whom emotions of connection are going to be directed. And at the moment when increased empathy towards the criminal is asked for, is there a place for objective justice?

Empathy towards the criminal

Dualities rule the current Western world: good/bad, here/there, I/Other, and – most relevant to this study – victim/criminal, innocent/guilty. When offering judgement in relation to a crime, one generally forgets that the human experience is within both the victim and the perpetrator. In the world of theatre, playwrights and directors decide to whom empathy is going to be addressed. Even if spectators are capable of creating an ethical judgement that proves the criminal to be acting against humanity and human rights, if emotional contagion is directed towards them, empathy will arise and an ethical response towards the criminal will be awakened. According to Moran, empathy 'is not a matter of judgement, reasoning or ideation in general. It is a founded experience' (2000: 176). Hence, if spectators can connect with the criminal, mirror their emotions and sensations, and understand their internal mental state, are they compelled to protect those who perpetrate violence against innocent peo-

ple? For some, when a punishment for a crime is enacted, empathy should be raised towards both the victim and the offender. This moment of awareness and defamiliarisation that spectators experience when they feel themselves to be in the criminal's shoes brings with it a question about their own ontology and reality. Are spectators potential criminals, this being the reason for them to feel so easily connected with the perpetrator of the crime? Are they forgetting and disregarding victims in order to sympathise and empathise with their offenders? Is there something inherently bad within them that makes such a connection possible?

This ethical call from the criminal and inevitable answer from the spectator provides proof of Levinas's idea of an unconscious feeling of responsibility towards an Other I do not choose. As Butler puts it, 'you may frighten me and threaten me, but my obligation to you must remain firm' (2009: 142). However, one must not forget the arbitrariness of the types of characters towards whom empathy is addressed in theatre productions. The face that is shown to the spectator is completely deliberate and planned. But why would anyone want to show empathy for a lawbreaker? Pedwell talks about shame being 'the only affect through which "the self" views itself from the perspective of the other' (2014: 112). Spectators feel shame for that other/Other human being a transgressor of human rights, but also because of their own nature as perpetrators of chaos in their own world. No one has clean hands, and being made conscious of the parallels between themselves and a being that is so clearly and explicitly full of guilt, makes them wonder about their own role, not only in terms of protecting those innocent lives but also in the fact that such crimes exist.

As has previously been stated, if empathy is only looked at superficially, it seems that only good can come of it, yet going deeper shows that it also has to be problematised. Carolyn Pedwell effectively does so, and makes a strong point for the need to actually feel and respond to the call of the Other: '[W]hile "we" might theorise

social inequalities and commit ourselves to political responsibilities and obligations in the abstract, a transformation at the affective level is required to make "us" actually feel, realise and act on them' (2014: 87). As will be seen in relation to the plays *Pornography* (2008) by Simon Stephens and *The Events* (2013) by David Greig, criminals also have a mind that needs to be understood, felt, and acted upon. Their actions have their own consequences but, most importantly, also causes that have to be taken into account in order to prevent them from happening again.

2 Equating vulnerability in *Pornography*

July 7th, 2005. Four bombs are detonated in different parts of the transport system in London, leaving 52 people dead and around 700 other injured victims. The people responsible for this terrorist attack were four male suicide bombers, which brings many issues to the fore. Whereas it is easy to blame the distant Other for all sorts of violence perpetrated on 'us', it is rather controversial to see that this terrorist attack was 'something located within, and produced by, Western culture' (Bolton, 2014: xxxv).

This terrible event happens in a week of worldwide relevance for the country and optimism in London: the Live 8 concerts, the G8 summit, and the election of London as the city to host the 2012 Olympic Games. This disturbance of the peace is a clear example of 'a world increasingly atomised and fractured by the effect of terrorism, the War on Terror, neoliberalism and globalisation' (Monforte, 2017: 31), and it might be thought to be the cause and origin of chaos within society. Yet others claim it is quite the opposite: the consequence of an already broken and fragmented social, economic, and political system. When something bad happens, one wants to know why, and that is what Simon Stephens addresses in his play, *Pornography* (2008). Shockingly, for an audience that might initially only be able to see the bombers' culpability, Stephens goes beyond the 'how could they do that?' and poses questions about humanity, the faults of society and of individuals themselves and how this crisis across the whole community resulted in such an outcome. *Pornography* shows the London bombings to be a symptom of a society based on individualism, fragmentation, isolation and conflict, rather than care and community.

Pornography is set in this week of tumultuous events and contrasted intense feelings. It presents seven scenes ordered inversely that tell the lives of several Londoners. Four duologues, two monologues, and the reading of a list of the victims of the attacks show the reality in London during this fateful week. The play offers a mosaic of eight main characters who are not connected to each other in any sense, except for the specific time and place they live in and 'the themes of individualization, alienation, and the objectification of humans [that] link their narratives' (Ilter, 2015: 248). The complete disconnection of these eight characters and apparent arbitrariness of their selection is a reflection of a 'cosmopolitan', twenty-first century Western society: a society based on globalisation and liberal capitalism governed by the descendants of Margaret Thatcher's and John Major's conservative policies, who believe in individuals rather than societies. Globalisation is a term that has been widely used in the last few decades and that is clearly now part of Western society. While it has been considered positively due to its identification of the capacity to cross borders and connect cultures, societies, individuals and Others, this recognition of the Other does not only have beneficial outcomes, as has been seen through Butler's thinking on the matter. According to Aragay, globalisation represents 'a present dominated by a worldwide neoliberal system that inevitably brings with it social and political relations characterised by (often traumatic) conflicts between neighbours on both a local and a global scale' (2017: 19). As such, conflict and struggle are inescapable consequences of the flexibility of borders and, paradoxically, it is precisely this flexibility that has brought the 'need' to build walls against the threat of the Other. In a time when everything is possible, almost all information is accessible and all needs can be met at a click, the Levinasian patterns of caring are questioned and even abandoned.

Simon Stephens is an English playwright who is engaged with contemporary society and believes in the power of theatre to make people aware of and involved in it too. For this purpose, he bases his

plays on 'the recognizable realm of the everyday' (Bolton, 2013: 101). The structure of his plays and his use of character and language give this apparent naturalism a twist that makes the audience feel defamiliarised and forces them to problematise their own judgements. In relation to this, Stephens has stated the following: 'I'm drawn to naturalism because I want to make sense of the world. I have a deep interest in humanity. I have faith in the power of story and I think a simple story told with honesty and with rigour is the essence of theatre' (qtd. in Bolton, 2013: 103). He examines questions of identity, belonging, community, communication, and interconnections through his manipulation of structure and language. Naturalism is, according to Bolton, '[an attempt] to reveal how heredity and environment govern lives' (2013: 103), not necessarily making these stories 'realistic'. Using naturalism, therefore, Stephens invites spectators to empathise with the characters, become involved in the story, and aware of what conditions their lives.

It is through form that this realistic illusion is broken when spectators realise the fictionality of the play, ask themselves the reason behind it and take on the ethical command. Stephens states, '[t]his play can be performed by any number of actors', and '[i]t can be performed in any order' (2008: 2). Characters have no name, nor is the dialogue divided on the script by anything but spaces. Directors are therefore empowered to make their own reading of the story and offer a much richer play to the audience, as Stephens himself says:

> For you to write theatre is very different from writing poetry or writing novels because it's built on the optimistic possibility that when you give your play to a director, not only will they not fuck it up, but they'll make it better. And when they give it to actors not only will they not forget your lines but they'll make your lines sing. And then when you put that in front of an audience not only will they not close off to it but they might open up and let it in. And that's a fucking optimistic process. And it's built on faith. On the faith that people can be better together than they can be apart (qtd. in Bolton, 2013: 124).

This optimism Stephens talks about exposes the way he thinks of individuals, their relations to each other, and how that affects theatre. According to Bolton, Stephens favours the collaborative side of art. A clear example is how much he trusts directors and actors in performing his play, providing them with almost complete freedom by giving only the strictly necessary number of stage directions.

This collaborative side of Stephens is reflected in the way he wants theatre to impact on society. In the same way that he trusts directors and actors, he also trusts audiences and believes in the collaborative power of society to make the world better. It is as if he expects empathy to arise among spectators and make them act in order to preserve the life of the Other. Certainly, he clearly considers that it is the spectators' responsibility to decide what to do with that command and to decide whether they will accept that call of collaboration or not. In this sense, Stephens seems to be hopeful and makes use of the cooperative nature of theatre to go beyond individualism. While trying to 'make sense of the darkness' (Stephens qtd. in Kellaway, 2009) and claiming not to fully understand it, he uses theatre to do so and have spectators join him in his discovery of the human experience.

The 'age of mediatization' in *Pornography*

In an interview with Elisabeth Massana, Stephens claims to have been influenced not by theatre as much as by the media (television, cinema, and music) (Massana, 2012: 149), and this influence can be seen in the way that *Pornography* is written. These seven apparently disconnected scenes discretely mirror a television that throws all sorts of input at spectators in such a way that they cannot process all the information they are 'offered', or, rather, have imposed upon them: pieces of news that are forgotten the moment they have been told, stories of different people whose lives are only superficially paid attention to, or TV shows offering an insanely wide range

of options and possibilities, among many other formats. All of them are deliberately shaped aiming to achieve a specific impact on spectators' minds. This initial comparison of television with *Pornography* might look a bit daring at first, but it will be more thoroughly developed later. The seven scenes of this play also present this fragmentation of information by having different characters and stories in each scene. Before spectators have the chance to fully engage with the story of one scene, feel it and process it, they are immersed in a brand-new story, forced to either forget the previous one or be constantly vigilant to see how to connect them. Nonetheless, the effect this has on audiences is completely different to that of television. When spectators go to the theatre, they expect to see 'one play', with a single thread to follow, characters whose development they see and follow as the play progresses and an introduction-conflict-resolution structure. Breaking with those expectations by having all these images and different 'unfinished' stories, Stephens achieves defamiliarisation and, with it, his goal of posing questions so that nobody leaves the theatre without needing to think further. What happened in each story? How are they connected to each other? What is going to happen next? And what happened before?

Something hard to interpret and also address are the '[i]mages of hell' that appear at the beginning of the play (Stephens, 2008: 3) and between some scenes. This transition does not ease the way for spectators, as it does not let them prepare for the next scene. They are haunted by their lack of understanding and connections throughout the whole play, and that will be something to think about too at the end of it. Unquestionably, spectators are more than used to watching images of atrocities on the news, and in TV shows and films, and, ironically, due to that congestion of images of violence they are bound to suffer less when receiving them in the play. The vulnerability of the victims is directly presented in those images, and, according to Levinasian thought, the receivers are compelled to feel an obligation to preserve their lives.

This overflow of such images, then, softens their effect and makes spectators ignore that ethical command that they were supposed to feel. As Butler explains when problematising Levinasian thought, 'it does not follow that if one apprehends a life as precarious one will resolve to protect that life or secure the conditions for its persistence and flourishing' (Butler, 2009: 2). These '[i]mages of hell' are some of the few stage directions the play has and they are specifically demanding, regardless of the freedom they provide to directors. Not in a single moment are they described or is a hint given of how they should be put on stage, but the term itself is so vague that it poses a challenge for directors to include them in the performance. However they are staged, though, the existence of these images resonates with the presence of the media in a world full of nonsense and atrocities. They indirectly show the responsibility of the media in such a world and at the same time the 'pornography' in those images. In the play, spectators only see and are directly addressed by these images of suffering as a transition between scenes. Therefore, the images of hell that are shown during that short time are eventually disregarded when the focus is placed again on the characters. In this way, they create the same effect as news about a war or a terrorist attack in a far-away country. We see the Other, acknowledge them, but ignore their existence and just sympathise – not empathise – with them. Bodies in these images are therefore objectified; seen as mere elements to be watched through a screen and forgotten about a minute later.

In "Rethinking Play Texts in the Age of Mediatization: Stephens's *Pornography*" (2015), Ilter applies the term 'mediatized dramaturgy', and places the representation of *Pornography* under this umbrella. This term 'refers to how a play is affected by the media and the culture it generates rather than to what theatrical dramaturgies are deployed and how they incorporate technology into performance' (Ilter, 2015: 240). *Pornography* is, without any doubt, a reflection of what she calls 'the Age of Mediatization': a world filled with tech-

nology that gets in the way of interpersonal relations, paradoxically being both a means of communication and the wrecker of it. Individualisation is thus reinforced by this media-saturated environment (2015: 241) and when talking about theatre, as Ilter also mentions, stage productions are extremely important, particularly so in *Pornography*. As an example, in the German premiere of the play in Hannover, by Sebastian Nübling (2007), the stage represented a city in ruins with a fragmented and magnified replica of Bruegel's *The Tower of Babel* that could be seen in the background. This image mirrored the state of the times 'making visible the disintegration of contemporary society and the destructive effect of the 7/7 bombings and other terrorist attacks' (Ilter, 2015: 253).

Another example can be found in the first performance of *Pornography* in Scotland (2008), directed by Sean Holmes, where the influence of the media was not only textual and contextual but physically present, with TV screens, speakers, cables, and lights all over the stage. The manifestation of the media and its effect on society was explicitly stated in this production, where the structure was made even more challenging by juxtaposing all the scenes and thus accentuating the fragmentation of the play and society (Ilter, 2015: 254).

Besides stage productions of the play, the importance of the media is present in the title itself, reinforcing the way in which the 'mediatic era' has affected society. For Stephens, '[w]e live in pornographic times' (qtd. in Gardner, 2008). According to Bolton, in 'a culture of dislocation and disaffection' where subjects are seen as mere objects of consumption, empathy is completely absent and that deprives the Other of all possible humanity (2013: 119). Just like in actual pornography, the real life of the subjects behind the image is completely disregarded, and they are therefore seen as mere commodities to be carelessly observed and made use of. In such societies, there is no attempt at relating to them, and that 'enables individuals to commit acts of sexual, physical, emotional or economic

violence' (Bolton, 2013: 119). Along the same lines, Stephens blames the mediatisation and objectification of life as the direct cause of the disruption and fragmentation of society. There cannot be care if there is no human connection.

The irony here lies in the fact that, even though *Pornography* intends to be a depiction of a reality governed by the media, the embodiment of theatre and the physicality of it bring forward a much more obvious and tangible command in the play. The audience's awareness of the characters' vulnerability is not filtered through and made distant by a screen but by their physical presence on stage, so that the connection between the subject and object of this observation is undeviating and unavoidable:

> The theatre, however, consisting of a shared time-space of mortality, articulates as a performative act the necessity of engaging with death, i.e. with the (a)liveness of life. [...] It is basically this aspect of shared time-space of mortality with all its ethical and communication theoretical implications that ultimately marks a categorical difference between theatre and technological media (Lehmann, 2006: 159).

An ethical and empathetic invitation

The play starts with the suicide speech of one of the bombers, as was later broadcast on the news, vindicating his actions and his methods, threatening, and blaming those who would be his victims:

> I am going to keep this short and to the point, because it's all been said before by far more eloquent people than me.
>
> But our words have no impact upon you, therefore I'm going to talk to you in a language that you understand. Our words are dead until we give them life with our blood (Stephens, 2008: 3).

This, followed by the '[i]mages of hell', creates an atmosphere of fear, tension, and vigilance. This way, spectators know what the play will be about and will be expecting that terrible episode and its painful memories to be revived. It also gives a hint of the language and the structure that is going to be used throughout the play, which speak of pain and secrets told in a way that they will be given life 'with our blood', our bodies, our feelings, our emotions and, afterwards, our actions in response.

Right after the preface, someone says, '[w]hat you need to do is stand well clear of the yellow line' (Stephens, 2008: 3), which forefronts the issue of safety. This safety and yellow line could be interpreted in several ways: one in the literal physical sense, as in not daring to cross the line because of the deadly danger it implies; but it could also refer to a yellow line of thought that will bring forward painful sensations and feelings but will mean, at the same time, going beyond established thought and stepping out of the margins in order to understand. If spectators want to be at a safe remove from discomfort and ethical obligations, that is where they have to stand: behind that line that resonates with the idea of the ubiquitous screens through which images of suffering are exposed but also filtered and softened.

Stephens has already crossed that line and stepped into the realm of the unknown, of darkness. A darkness that has to be endorsed but also fought against, trying to make sense of it. His aim with his plays, and especially with *Pornography*, is making audiences see themselves in that darkness in order to be able to go beyond and take on the ethical command that is being thrown directly at them. For this purpose, Stephens emphasises the lack of empathy among characters so that spectators are aware it is lacking and feel the urge to provide it themselves. By displaying, criticising and exaggerating the flaws of society, emotions are almost explicitly summoned in the theatre. His main strategy to enable empathy is creating a variety of characters that make *Pornography* an all-embracing kind of play, tackling a wide range of different segments of the community.

A MOSAIC OF PRECARIOUSNESS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

In Lehmann's words, '[t]heatre is the site not only of "heavy" bodies but also of a *real gathering*, a place where a unique intersection of aesthetically organized and everyday real life takes place' (2006: 17; emphasis in original). Thus, theatre is the concrete and physical expression of reality and, for that reason, characters are especially important for Stephens too. They are the clear and literal embodiment of individuals and, consequently, society, and it is through their faces that empathy – which Stephens himself claims to seek in his plays, as previously mentioned – is produced. In theatre, this 'encounter with the face' (Ridout, 2009: 53) directly addresses spectators. Taking advantage of this, Stephens makes his characters flawed and imperfect, and therefore human, so that spectators see themselves in them too: 'For me, character is so important. We understand ideas through the behaviour and actions of individuals. I hope people can recognise themselves in the characters they're watching' (Stephens qtd. in Bolton, 2013: 117). He does not see characters as simply one more element that carries the message in a play. They are the message itself, the core of the play, and the reflection of society as a means to get spectators involved more readily. As was mentioned earlier, Stephens has a strong faith in human beings, both as active subjects in the performance (actors and directors) and as – though only initially – passive subjects (spectators). Due to the lack of stage directions in the play, the emphasis is placed on dialogues, which is where and how characters will be constructed, this being the basis for empathy to arise in this theatrical-ethical process.

In line with the form and the backdrop of the play, the language is fragmented and ambiguous. When reading the text, it is sometimes hard to know whose voice it is and, as background about characters is not provided, spectators – and readers too – have to construct their identities out of these misleading dialogues. Many of the scenes – in fact, all except the duologues in scenes five and three,

and the list of victims in scene one – follow the stream of consciousness of the main characters, who throw their thoughts at the audience without much transition between one and the next. When there is dialogue as, for instance, in scenes five and three, there are also silences which allow spectators to fill them and give them meaning. Without the spectators' will to complete these dialogues (and monologues), neither the story nor the characters themselves are fully fleshed out. For this to happen the characters have to be relatable and, to this end, they portray the dilemmas of their own society with everything it implies: 'Characters [...] demonstrate an ongoing improvisation of moral, societal and familial values, an improvisation engendered by the twentieth century's erosion of such ideological certainties as organized religion, elected government and the nuclear family' (Bolton, 2013: 103-104).

Pornography offers a juxtaposition of eight characters who tackle a wide range of aspects of life including work, family, love, sex, and cohabitation. There is a mother being mistreated and disregarded at work, a teenage boy who is being bullied, two siblings presumably in their twenties, a father with a backpack on a mission, a teacher and his ex-student, and an old woman seeking help after the attacks. In addition, the characters cover the Shakespearean 'Seven Ages of Man', starting in scene seven with infancy and finishing in scene two with dementia (Monforte, 2017: 34). The last scene, according to the original text, is scene one, which represents death through the list of the nameless victims of the attacks. Even though each scene is completely disconnected from the previous one and the characters have nothing that unites them, some similarities can be identified, and as Monforte says: '[p]recariousness is indeed a central characteristic in the characters' lives as different elements emphasise in each case a distinct vulnerability' (2017: 35).

Stephens makes his characters human by assigning them fears, unspeakable desires and weaknesses of all types. The human being is ontologically vulnerable, full of contradictions and in need of

care, and characters have to be so too in order to allow spectators to fully relate to them. In scene seven, a mother is afraid of losing both her son and husband. Right at the beginning of the scene and, if performed the way it was written, after the preface and the '[i]mages of hell', she explains how she goes to her son's room with bated breath fearing he might be drowning. Once she sees that he is safe, she continues with her day and shows her other fear of being cheated on by her husband. She misses physical contact – 'I want Jonathan to touch me' (Stephens, 2008: 6) – but is consistently left aside by her husband. In scene six, a schoolboy who lives in an environment of domestic violence is also bullied at school and ends up with his face covered in blood, but he makes sure to wash it off before getting home so that he can avoid having to tell anyone – 'I have my tea like nothing happened' (Stephens, 2008: 12). Among all these hazardous situations, the boy tries to find the love he is missing through his unaccepted and unrequited love – or, rather, obsession – for his teacher. In this same light of condemned love, two siblings try to find love in each other in scene five through a physical and sexual bonding, the latter going completely against standards and laws. Scene three presents a man who talks about his son's injurability, clearly fearing his own due to ageing: 'That makes me feel like I'll probably die soon' (Stephens, 2008: 46). Lacking a family to hold on to, he takes advantage of an ex-student – unmistakably against her will – who, being precarious too, tries to get a job as a teacher through her connections. Being what some say is the epitome of vulnerability, the main character in scene two clearly states that she has 'no interest in speaking to anybody' (Stephens, 2008: 56), but then she invites the postman 'to come in for a cup of tea' (Stephens, 2008: 57). She is an eighty-three-year-old woman with dementia and does not realise the cataclysmic event that has struck London. Deprived of any other type of human connection, she walks to a house in the neighbourhood to ask for food from their barbecue.

In light of this, all the characters in the play are openly precarious and vulnerable, and they all have the need for human touch, to be cared about, to be saved from the darkness of a world they cannot follow. Each of these characters shows their darkness within through different acts of 'transgression' (Stephens, 2009: xviii) that will also define them and will be part of their identity and, subsequently, their precariousness: workplace betrayal, stalking, incest, terrorism, abuse, and the violation of the social norms of cohabitation and respect. It is particularly relevant that terrorism is in the middle of so many clearly judgmental transgressions, because this position gives it a normalising effect that will make everyone a villain at the same time as a victim. The presence of all these different characters, and the portrayal of events and sensations that are so relatable, put spectators in the same situation. It is not about good and bad, heroes and villains; on the contrary, it is about the countless multitudes that inhabit human beings, and also society itself, and how it affects all those multitudes. One of the many faces inhabiting people is that of a transgressor that, one way or another, breaks social laws and looks for a way out of their injurability. This precariousness is the reason behind people acting in what could be seen as a deviant manner, and this has to be considered when judging. In scene seven, the young mother leaks a report to the press due to her mistreatment and the pressure that is put on her by her boss. In scene six, a racist schoolboy who stalks his teacher and has terrible thoughts towards her once he is rejected, is arguably excused because of the violence that surrounds him at home and at school. Scene five could be one of the hardest to exculpate due to the fact that the characters in it violate the nuclear family that has been lauded throughout centuries. However, in the end they realise that their incest was wrong, and that transgression comes to an end. Scene three presents a university lecturer who has lost almost everything in life and tries to get a second grasp at youth by taking advantage of a much younger ex-student. He also apologises for what

he has done and recognises that everything happened because his world was falling apart: 'I'm fucking cracking up is the thing. I'm completely losing my fucking mind' (Stephens, 2008: 56). To finish with, in scene two, a senile old woman knocks on a door, an uninvited guest asking for some of the delicious chicken she could smell from the street. The owner of the house is shocked and does not even try to hide his thoughts – 'You're completely fucking retarded, sweetheart, aren't you?' (Stephens, 2008: 62) – but he ends up pitying her and giving her what she asks for.

All characters in the play are given a reason for their acts of transgression. They are not unconditionally forgiven, yet they are understood. The distance between the 'I' and the 'Other' is shortened, and one comes to comprehend that there is a transgressive face in all of us. According to Aragay, the characters in the play are 'tokens of overwhelming desire for a utopian elsewhere where the precarious threshold dividing host from neighbour might dissolve and unconditional hospitality might come to pass' (2017: 22). Hopefully, the desirable disappearance of this division will be what makes spectators see beyond and act for that Other in need. One must not forget, of course, that this Other has done things 'wrong', and that has to be critically looked at. Yet, this critical look has to blame both the individual perpetrating that act and the reasons for them to do so.

Who is to blame?

It may seem that scene four has apparently been forgotten in presenting the injurability and culpability of characters, but this has been a deliberate decision. The protagonist of scene four is one of the four suicide bombers responsible for the terrorist attacks in London on July 7th, 2005. He was one of the originators of the breach of the excitement in London at that moment in time that made all illusions fade, one of the direct creators of the loss of victims in scene one.

It is easy to blame the bombers of the attacks if one sees them as individuals who, out of the blue, completely disregarded the lives of all those victims – explicitly shown in scene one, even if nameless – as well as their own lives, and unceremoniously blew them apart. As a matter of fact, the astonishment is magnified by the fact that they were British citizens and not people from elsewhere. Presumably belonging to the same nation, it is inconceivable that they could hurt the 'us' like that. For Stephens, however, it is not:

> What was striking about the London bombings [...] was that it was British boys who had done it. People who had been born and bred here. There was a sense of incredulity that British boys had attacked London. I didn't share that incredulity. I'd been brought up in Stockport, not far away from where they came from, during a period when Mrs Thatcher was telling us that there was no such thing as society. When people become dislocated, they start to objectify each other (Stephens qtd. in Gardner, 2008).

Stephens blames the culture and society of dislocation for these atrocious events. In order to make people aware of it and break with the dichotomy of good/bad, victim/criminal, he creates a fully fleshed out character as one of the bombers. He goes beyond by constructing this character in the same way as the rest of the characters in the play. He provides a context for his story and makes him human, not only a criminal.

The scene begins in his house when he kisses his children and wife goodbye. To start with, then, the criminal is imagined within a loving family, which proves that he does have a face of love and care, regardless of the inhuman acts that he will later commit. On his way to the starting point of his deed, he gets on a bus, picks up a magazine, checks his horoscope, and also appears to be an apparently good citizen by thanking the bus driver, who 'doesn't say anything. He stares out of his windscreen. His eyes don't move at all' (Ste-

PHENS, 2008: 38), and smiling at the man who holds open the gate to the platform at the train station, who 'doesn't smile back' (2008: 43) either. He is the character that focuses the most on other people in the street and on public transport. He sees their faces and can even recognise their emotions, like a woman he sees on the train: 'I think for a second that she's been crying. She hasn't. It's my imagination' (2008: 40). He has the capacity to see the Other and even modify his own thoughts and first impressions. This criminal does not lack empathy, but rather takes an ethical command too seriously. Being able to spot the corruption in a world ruled by capitalism and the media, he is aware of the fragmentation of society that makes individuals not care for the Other, and especially for a distant Other that is being harmed by the powers-that-be. It is this awareness that triggers an act against humanity like mass terrorism.

Among the descriptions of daily life elements and observations that make the character relatable, the fragmented language present throughout the whole play has its place in this scene too. He is explicit about his feelings towards this kind of society: 'If I had the power I would take a bomb to all of this' (2008: 41). He is convinced about his deed and mission and is certain and confident that '[t]oday is the day when the law stops working' (2008: 38). It is on this day, when rules are demolished, that happiness and excitement will be too. People will be asked to think why that happened and how to restore peace. In this way, he shows the violence that inhabits him, which makes one see that the aim of the play is not to forgive and forget the criminals, but to show a 'fuller' story of the events. Bolton talks about how the '*humanizing* energy' of the play allows spectators 'to recognize one's "self" in an "other"' as a way 'to encounter, joyfully or reluctantly, an unexpected commonality' (BOLTON, 2013: 118; emphasis in original).

What is discomforting and defamiliarising about this scene is that spectators are asked to empathise with the criminal by seeing that he was more than just the bringer of death. He was human and had

emotions, which are inevitably contagious and passed on to the audience. In the wider society, the criminals were an Other that had been dehumanised in order to not be acknowledged, in order to not be understood. Not knowing what there was behind their decision to act, it is not surprising that the bombers' British citizenship was unexpected. Knowing the story though, spectators are forced to ask: is there a criminal within me, a spectator who understands and emotionally connects with one of the bombers? Is this empathetic reaction and understanding a sign of the evil within me? Bringing to the fore both the human and the transgressive face of the bomber, spectators are asked to go beyond the initial fear-and-anger triggered judgement towards the bombers as beasts and the only subjects responsible for the atrocity.

In an interview with Gardner, Stephens claimed the following: 'I'm interested in the possibility of redemption, however tiny that possibility is, and I know that forgiveness is very difficult' (2008). Is Stephens trying to redeem a terrorist then? Is he dismissing the enormous transgression of mass terrorism and considering it one more sin in life? Saying so would be blaming Stephens of naivety and carelessness. Rather, he tries to find the reason for those events in what surrounded the bomber, also trying to find and show who was truly responsible for those attacks. By seeing all the faces of different sectors of society and equating the bombers to the rest of it, Stephens shows that responsibility lies in everyone. A society that is not inclined to offer a smile on a bus and whose individuals cannot see beyond their own needs, leads to terrible outcomes, not only bombers but also stalkers and rapists. As will also be seen when dealing with *The Events*, the aim of the author is not forgiving the criminal and forgetting their acts; on the contrary, his idea is to acknowledge the violation of the social rules of cohabitation and to reveal what is behind their actions.

3 Understanding the criminal in *The Events*

In the North of Europe too, in a highly developed and multicultural country like Norway, the fragmentation of society and fear of the Other also sometimes strikes with violence. In July 2011, a gunman called Anders Breivik caused chaos by committing a non-indiscriminate shooting which left 77 young people dead and, as Ramin Gray puts it in the Director's Note, '[set] out to destroy one community while simultaneously and unintentionally galvanising other communities around the world' (Greig, 2013: 9). As has been said of *Pornography* and the terrorist attacks in London, when a desolating event like this happens, there must be an attempt to understand the motive behind it, '[b]ut could it just be, as David Greig suggests, that some things remain beyond the realm of the comprehensible?' (Ramin Gray in Greig, 2013: 9).

In an attempt to understand for himself and make other people understand, the Scottish playwright David Greig wrote *The Events* in 2013 as a play that would completely dislocate audiences and make an explicit call for empathy and an ethics of cohabitation by portraying 'the consequences of a violent interruption into communal life' (Riedelsheimer, 2017: 203). Reactions to the announcement of the play were initially doubtful, fearing that it would carelessly make a joyful musical out of atrocities. Its premiere was received with an air of defensive scepticism that quickly vanished once it was seen on stage. David Greig went beyond and offered a play full of nuances. As Gardner explains, '[t]his is a mighty play about not just one lost soul, but many. It is about grief, anger and revenge, but also about the things that bind us together as a com-

munity, the things that drive us apart, and what it is that makes us human' (2013).

Matching Stephens's theatrical and ethical objectives, David Greig exhibits a strong engagement with society and a special interest in identity, not so much as an individual condition, but centred more in the communal side through 'his engagement with questions of the nation and national identity' (Holdsworth, 2013: 169). To do this, he delves into the effects that globalisation and liberal capitalism have had on society and the life of the community. Even though he has generally been labelled as one of the key figures in new Scottish writing and several of his plays are located within the Scottish setting, his work extends beyond those borders. He plays with the local and the global in such a way that one becomes a reflection of the Other and they cannot be disconnected. Greig is all about creating bonding and bridges for communication, and he believes in the power of theatre as a way to do it: 'He is deeply invested in the possibilities of collective imagination, pursuing ideas across different media as well as linguistic and stylistic boundaries' (Holdsworth, 2013: 169). The aesthetic power of his plays is his main tool to construct identities and understand a world in which change is the only constant. Likewise, identity – individual as well as national – is fluid and mutable, which poses a significant challenge to understanding concurrent times, opening up a wide variety of possibilities. Due to this ambiguity and contradiction that rules human life, 'his work is often simultaneously tinged with a sense of optimism and pessimism' (Holdsworth, 2013: 170).

David Greig is aware of the uncertainty that governs human life, and that opens all manner of doors, implying both volatility and versatility. The volatility of the human condition and, subsequently, identity is both a cause and a consequence of social, economic and political failure. Ultimately, the human being is vulnerable and precarious, and it is this precariousness that leads to acts of violence and inhumanity – contrary to the Levinasian notion of unconditional

love and care for the Other. This injurability is the direct cause of fear, which points the way to failure. As a consequence of this failure, human vulnerability is accentuated and established in a cycle of collapse and breakdown. The uncertainty of this human experience, however, also brings with it versatility, which offers the possibility of inverting failure and 'making sense of the darkness', as Stephens did. Greig acknowledges the corruption of society and the dangers of communal life, yet does not give up his 'desire for communication whether it is between individuals or across cultural barriers' (Holdsworth, 2013: 188).

In light of this, Greig is aware of both sides of the coin, seizes and uses them to send a message. Matching the contradictory nature of humans, Greig focuses on formal experimentation, defamiliarising classic elements of theatre, and creating blanks for spectators to fill in to make this a collaborative construction of the collective identity: '[He believes] in the power of the imagination to intervene, to interrupt the narratives posed by the forces of global, capital, media conglomerates and dominant political institutions – that the imagination, if invited to, can conjure with the impossible and, in so doing, suggest alternative narratives of power and emancipation' (Holdsworth, 2013: 171).

Formal experimentation to raise awareness

Like *Pornography*, *The Events* shows the fragmentation of a capitalist world through the manipulation of structure, character and language. Defamiliarisation is essential in this play as a means to place spectators in discomfort so that the ethical command arises. According to Middeke, this is 'a play that centers around the deconstruction of community' (2017: 221) and, as such, its aesthetic elements encompass this deconstruction which, therefore, becomes a cause as well as a consequence of the form of the text. In a world that lacks

unity and bonding, even though it claims to break down boundaries through globalisation, the instability of human life is manifested in theatre through the elements that can best embody it, which will be further developed later.

The play script is preceded by a Shakespearean quote from *The Tempest*: 'This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine' (Shakespeare, 1994: 5.1: 275-276). When reading the text, this sentence anticipates the gloominess that is going to dominate the play, yet it is accepted and embraced even before any of the characters or events are presented. This darkness and opacity are evidently characteristic of the events that inspired the play and will also be in the background of the episode that is going to be brought to life on stage: the mass killing of a multicultural choir at the hands of a fearful gunman trying to overcome his precariousness through violence. Moreover, this darkness will also control the aesthetics of the play, including dramatic shape, character, sound, and language. These will be the main tools for Greig 'to address the issue of vulnerability' (Riedelsheimer, 2017: 206).

As regards the characters, there are two actors and a choir on stage throughout the play. Even though there are only two actors and, presumably, only two characters according to the text, more than two people will be represented. While one of the actors embodies the character of Claire, the director of the choir, unchanging from the beginning until the end, The Boy plays a different number of roles: the killer, the killer's father, Claire's partner Catriona, a priest, a psychologist, a right-wing politician, a schoolmate, and a journalist. All these roles are not easy to identify at the beginning of each change, as there is no explicit transition between scenes – except for some in which the choir sings to make the shift evident – nor from one character to the other. What is more, even the sentences uttered by these different personalities seem to be sometimes coming from the assassin's thought. By way of illustration, Claire's partner Catriona talks about needing to leave a mark on this world before it is too late (Greig, 2013: 48), which is something The Boy also says,

using exactly the same words: 'If I'm to leave a mark on the world I have to do it now' (2013: 18). Riedelsheimer considers, 'it might perhaps be more fitting to call The Boy "the Other"' due to the 'indeterminacy of this "Other" character' (Riedelsheimer, 2017: 207). The Boy is, then, a reflection of the instability of individual and communal identity and of a fragmented society that is ambiguous in itself and difficult to face and deal with:

THE BOY

[...] I am an expression of failure in eroded working-class communities
I am unique
I am typical
I am the way things are going
I am the past
I am the product of the welfare state
I am the end point of capitalism
I am an orphan
. . . . . .
I am a blankness out of which emerges only darkness and a question.
The only question it is possible to ask.
What is to be done with me? (Greig, 2013: 53).

This is precisely the question that drives the play. What is to be done with this boy? And with all the other/Other characters he embodies? They all personify so many multitudes and contradictions – which, to be fair, is core to all human beings – that coming to terms with them is no easy task. The journey Claire is going to set out on will be in the name of understanding but, paradoxically, will also make her face her own contradictions and opposing multitudes. The play starts by establishing an unavoidable feeling of conflict and tension that settles over the stage and takes over the entire theatre when The Boy speaks for the first time. He makes the audience '[i]magine an aboriginal boy' (Greig, 2013: 11) that witnesses the

arrival of invaders from elsewhere – which immediately brings into focus the issue of national identity. He wonders and asks what he must have thought, and what one could and would have told him, knowing what that invasion was to entail: 'Carried on these ships are class and religion and disease and a multitude of other instruments of objectification and violence all of which are about to be unleashed upon his people' (2013: 11). For him, this Other that is coming to 'our' place is a threat that one must confront: one that implies death and a menace to what makes 'us'. This being the case, he is certain of what you would say: 'You would say stand on the rocks and you would point at the ships and you would say – "Kill them. Kill them all"' (2013: 11-12). This first scene, like the quote from Shakespeare's play, gives a hint of the issues that will be dealt with. Issues that will be hard to confront, in the same way that it is hard to face the threatening Other. With this scene, 'a feeling of instability or uncertainty is created' (Riedelsheimer, 2017: 207). Nonetheless, it will be strongly contrasted against Claire's warm welcoming into the choir. From the first moment, she will be convinced of the indiscrimination that has to define her character and her choir, their 'tribe' – 'We're all a big crazy tribe here' (Greig, 2013: 12) – which is 'a reassertion of community, of empathy, of peace, to stand against the violence she and the choir have endured' (Pattie, 2016: 49). The difference between these two characters is thus already established from the first minutes of the play, when they first encounter. Later on, Claire will go through moments of doubt and questioning, but she will utter this same welcome speech at the end of the play, giving it a round structure and bringing back hope.

Greig takes risks and makes *The Events* an experimental work in order to mirror the failure of society. This formal experimentation seems to be inescapable for Greig when portraying such an episode in communal life, for theatre is the place to create the common ground for – collective – imagination. He knows his play poses a challenge, yet there does not seem to be any other way to go: 'It must be terri-

bly annoying for an audience when I seem to veer wildly off it, but I never see it as veering. I just see the road as being incredibly wide, and I'm simply moving forward as best I can' (Greig qtd. in Holdsworth, 2013: 171). Despite the fact that this play does follow the journey of – at least – one character throughout the play (unlike *Pornography*), the experimentation is shown through the absence of transitions between scenes and characters and the juxtapositions of different conversations and thoughts from Claire and The Boy, which get in the way of the fixed introduction-conflict-resolution structure. There are scenes where Claire talks to The Boy, others in which either one or the other gives voice to their thoughts, and others in which Claire directly addresses the choir. The presence of this choir, and the way it affects spectators, will be analysed later, but it is definitely one more defamiliarising element that will make audiences realise the fictional nature of the play and, thus, feel approached by that ethical command that the theatre holds.

Language is also used in a defamiliarising way, which will not ease the way for spectators either. Short sentences, unanswered questions and incomplete answers, ambiguous language and distressingly violent expressions fill the text with a sense of uneasiness and unrest that do not let spectators disconnect from the play and what it might require from them. It is a demanding play that asks spectators to fill in the blanks and roam the text/dialogues looking for what they mask. Sharing the realm of sound, music is another disconcerting element in the play that contributes to defamiliarisation. Restricting, for the moment, the analysis only to the music itself, the way it is used is not the same as in any other naturalistic play. The choir provides a transition between some scenes, as previously mentioned, but counter to expectation, it does not do so with all the scenes. In fact, it does not even remain a background element but gains relevance as the play progresses and music becomes part of the dialogue, filling out Claire's speech in a moment of improvisation (Greig, 2013: 41) or directly talking to her towards the end of the play

(Greig, 2013: 58). Music in this play is not only a complementary element but an essential one. According to Greig himself:

> Music is such a powerful force on the stage. I think it demands that you're not naturalistic, really. I mean you can have scenes with music within a naturalistic play but the way that I do it, it tends to force you to talk directly to the audience. It's as if you said to me "I've noticed you use lighting in your plays" and I'd say: "well, how could I not?" It's a bit like that. Of course I use music. It's one of the most powerful tools in theatre (qtd. in Śledzińska, 2018).

All these elements of defamiliarisation are strictly necessary to reflect the dislocation and injurability of the community and the Western world, but they are also fundamental to taking spectators out of their comfort zone. It is from a place of utter fictionality and the awareness of it that spectators can recognise the presence of an 'ontological or existential threat' (Middeke, 2017: 221) which suggests their own vulnerability as well as the Other's, accept that ethical command to care for the Other and respond to it. Claire herself feels overwhelmed by the discovery of this threat and the face-to-face encounter with the precarious and menacing Other. She also feels out of her comfort zone and goes through a process of deconstruction and defamiliarisation when she is shown the real darkness and failure of her society. Spectators will be asked to undertake the same journey in order to question the world they live in and look for answers: 'Greig invites his audiences, as well as his characters, to see the world from different perspectives in order to promote heightened understanding rather than answers' (Holdsworth, 2013: 188).

A local and global call

David Greig is well-known for examining national identity and, particularly, British identity, due to his Scottish origins. However, he is

as concerned with the local as he is with the global. As Holdsworth puts it, his 'refusal to restrict his imaginative terrain to his immediate locale' leads him to create 'critical reflections on contemporary global politics' as well as on 'the workings and implications of globalization' (2013: 170). Even though *The Events* is explicitly based on a real mass shooting at a summer camp on the Norwegian island of Utøya, the play is deliberately detached from its original location as the means to make of it a universal play. The director's note by Ramin Gray specifies how this event was the impetus for David Greig to write the play. Nonetheless, he refused to keep it within national borders and chose to expand it globally. After all, tragedies like this can potentially happen anywhere where society is broken, and care is absent.

The play is set 'in a room, the sort of place in which a choir might rehearse' (Greig, 2013: 7). It therefore establishes the action as able to unfold in practically any place and paves the way for different audiences to feel related to the story. Not setting a geographical distance between the characters and events of the play and the audience prevents them from seeing it as a distant matter. It would be naive to say that Greig is making a call for 'universal empathy', as human beings and their empathic capacities are inexorably dependent on and defined by social, economic and geopolitical conditions that also demarcate who the Other is and whether they will be relatable or not. Rather, he is exposing the actual 'universal vulnerability' of the human being. Whereas one might not be able to relate to a person without any filter or discrimination, seeing the precarious face of the Other – especially if national boundaries are disregarded – allows human connections to happen: '[He is interested in] opening up conversations about what it means to engage across cultural boundaries and how questions of ethical accountability, human rights and global citizenship make demands on us all – these conversations may falter and provoke intense debate but the significant thing is that they take place at all' (Holdsworth, 2013: 189).

This dislocation of the events – or, rather, 'a-location' – also poses questions on the nature and origin of the criminal. The fact that the play can be set anywhere evidences the fact that the killer can also be living anywhere. This sense of utter vulnerability is stressed when there is awareness that the criminal can be bred 'here' too, so that there is not only 'ontological vulnerability' but also an 'ontological – and constant – threat'. The incident in the play has been linked to other atrocities in other cities like London, New York, and Boston, among many others (Riedelsheimer, 2017: 208). If the event is replaceable and interchangeable, the criminal must be too: 'The concrete massacre depicted in Greig's play is thus as exchangeable as the concrete Boy who commits violence. What is inescapable is the underlying ontological vulnerability' (Riedelsheimer, 2017: 208).

For this purpose, the choir is a crucial element in creating these lines of conversation between the episode in the play and the audience. As Pattie explains, '[e]ach time the play was performed, it used a different choir, drawn from the local area' (2016: 54), which makes audiences completely forget about the original location of the tragedy (or its inspiration) and undeviatingly places it in the local area where it is performed. Seeing familiar faces on stage – that are not even actors but part of a choir that will be a spectator too – is an almost unequivocal method to raise fellow feelings. The choir should not know anything about the play except their role in it, having rehearsed their songs and their interventions, but being unaware of what they are going to actually see on stage. Accordingly, they will be active elements of the play as well as witnesses compelled by the events happening on stage like the rest of the audience. This common ignorance complements the already common and connecting geographical roots of both choir and audience. Spectators will thus effortlessly see themselves in the story, allowing empathy to arise efficiently and, as a cause or consequence, showing them their injurability in this world. Ultimately, 'the victims might [also] come from any group of people' (Riedelsheimer, 2017: 209).

The role of the choir in the play is also ambiguous due to the wide range of functions it fulfils. In Riedelsheimer's words, it serves as a 'guiding voice of common sense for Claire', it has 'neo-Brechtian alienation effects' and offers an 'alternative community of the precarious' (2017: 209). This alternative community is the fundamental element for audiences to relate to the story and the characters in it. According to Shepperd:

> The audience members as witnesses are physically engaged by that which is present to them, to the extent that they might be physically possessed by it. One of the outcomes of possession is that the audience members attempt, during a performance, to assert out loud, to announce publicly, the truths they believe exist – 'Don't believe him!', 'Look out behind you', 'Oh yes it is!' (qtd in Pattie, 2016: 3).

And what if the voice in spectators' minds is embodied on stage uttering the questions they have? What if the witnesses are not only looking at the stage from the distance, but also are part of it? The choir has this capacity of 'in-betweenness' that will help connect the fictional and the real world. It serves as the character who audiences will not be able to help but relate to. Their faces will be the same and their reactions too, making the audience feel part of the performance.

As a matter of fact, the audience and the choir do not only share origin, emotions, and thoughts, but also precariousness. Even though the choir is not expected to be part of the events and, therefore, seems to be 'a hospitable, if not quite safe, haven' (Riedelsheimer, 2017: 212), it is inevitably the personification of vulnerability. The gunshot is executed against the choir, which directly relates the injurability of the victims of the events to this group of locals on stage. If that community choir was affected by unjustified violence, any other choir could be too. It thus recalls the vulnerability of both the choir itself and the spectators, who are seeing themselves in it. In connection to this, the identity of the choir itself is seen as an under-

lying element in the play in order to make this empathetic connection possible. In the stage directions it is made clear that '[t]he choir's own song should be bright and bold, and it should offer a strong sense of the choir's identity' (Greig, 2013: 6). The choir is the epitome of vulnerability and, sharing a time, space and identity, the atrocity 'quite literally strikes home' (Riedelsheimer, 2017: 212). Nonetheless, the fact that this choir is on stage with the criminal regardless of the threat that he poses, gives a sense of resistance to violence that should help go beyond fear and reach care.

On the lookout for answers

In this sense, Claire is also an icon of resistance to violence. She is a priest and the leader of '[a] choir that brought together vulnerable people, old people, asylum-seekers, immigrant men, young mums and so on' (Greig, 2013: 14), therefore confronting discourses of fear and racist threats. She can be seen as the embodiment of the quest for the meaning of human existence: 'In particular Greig is interested in human motivation, action and agency – how characters respond to the world in all its complexity and contradiction' (Holdsworth, 2013: 170).

Her first appearance is welcoming and understanding. She is keen on communal activities, but she also understands people's discontent – at least at first – with it:

CLAIRE

Hi.
Come in.
Don't be shy.
Everyone's welcome here.
What's your name?
. . . . . .

> We're all a big crazy tribe here.
> . . . . . .
> Why don't you sit with us and if you feel like singing – sing.
> And if you don't feel like singing.
> Well that's OK too.
> Nobody feels like singing all the time (Greig, 2013: 12).

Her character is seen as one that cares for the Other and that believes in humanity and its potential. At first, she might be said to embody the Levinasian idea of loving the Other regardless of distance and embracing difference. She leads a multicultural choir that accepts people from all countries and communities, and which can be seen as the 'positive side' of globalisation; one that ignores boundaries and borders and believes in the inherent force of human connections. As Abram states:

> Claire is shaped by Christian values which she has accepted deeply in order to become a priest. 'Neighbourly love' and the 'love of enemies' are part of her moral outlook. She has learned not to view people in terms of their single (tribal) identity and go beyond what is conventional. Being a gay female priest is just one example of her openness and less conventional way of being in the world (2016: 85).

The play revolves around her journey to find and comprehend The Boy's motivations to commit such a crime. She cannot come to terms with the fact that it happened and does not seem capable of putting it aside. As Claire tells her partner, '[i]t's important to turn dark things into light, Catriona' (Greig, 2013: 45), but that is not an easy task. This is a challenging and dangerous process that will take her to places she has never been before, so she has to dare to take the leap. She encounters many Others in order to understand why the horror happened, and every encounter is charged with feelings of unsettlement and discomfort that do not let her or the audience

trust anyone. A feeling of danger and menace rules the stage and makes attachment to these Others complex. The fact that all these Others have exactly the same face, which is also the criminal's, leaves Claire stranded in a loop of confusion and chaos that will lead her close to madness (Riedelsheimer, 2017: 207). Not being able to escape The Boy's face, she remains a traumatised subject trapped in a feeling of constant injurability, and who cannot escape the fear of being hurt. As is also portrayed by the end of the play, when a person feels constantly threatened, violence seems to be the way out, which is why the awareness of one's own vulnerability is risky. Unable to make sense of the darkness that surrounds the event, in one of the final scenes Claire eventually goes to see The Boy face-to-face in prison and brings him a poisoned teabag that aims to achieve revenge (Greig, 2013: 59). This moment of doubt and confusion poses 'challenges to solidarity' (Abram, 2016: 86), that also make the audience feel confused. Is the play telling us to punish the criminal for what he did, regardless of all the work that has been done to try and understand him? Are we therefore not supposed to sympathise/empathise with him? Is revenge legitimate?

This contradiction that Claire has within herself and that she passes on to the audience can be assumed to make them feel out of place and defamiliarised once again so that they are critical of the situation themselves. Whereas Claire is a caring character who is in fact carrying out a humanitarian and humanising investigation, she cannot escape the trauma of the events and cannot see further than what concerns The Boy. In Pattie's words, '[f]or her, for most of the play, humanness is an open quality, but it is only open to one other human – a human being linked to trauma, infinitely present, but (at least for Claire) ethically and affectively empty' (Pattie, 2016: 56). This quest that claims to seek human understanding is, then, not really looking at all the Others and their faces. When encountering the other personalities that The Boy embodies, the face Claire is dealing with and embracing is only The Boy's, which reduces the

focus and the scope of the issue. The Boy was the criminal in this case, but anyone could be. As a matter of fact, all the Others she comes across prove to be capable of inhuman acts of violence. Her partner Catriona, for instance, talks about fleeing to a place where she 'could manufacture a bomb with nails and bolts and stones bursting out the back of a rucksack tearing a hole through everything and everyone' (Greig, 2013: 48). She talks to a racist right-wing politician and to the killer's father, who introduces the concept of 'the conjuring flame' to The Boy 'with reference to [his] desire it should come down and consume the people who make reality shows' (Greig, 2013: 30). According to Riedelsheimer, 'the encounter with the Other is always potentially violent' (2017: 208). Everyone is a potential threat to society, but Claire can only see the harm that The Boy has produced and seems to only be interested in finding out about that. To this end, she completely disregards the faces of the Others, which goes against her principle of loving everyone.

After seeing all these faces that are never the real ones, she has to come to terms with the chaos that is invading her and is making her encounter her own darkness:

> CLAIRE
> Look at me,
> Drinking, smoking, eating meat,
> Naked at my table
> Unaware of my carbon footprint.
> What light is there left in me, nothing.
> A spark of bad
> Flesh and flash across the kitchen floor.
> I am the devil (Greig, 2013: 56).

Nothing is left inside her but darkness, and she will come to terms with it by finally encountering the real face of The Boy, that Other that is making her realise her own nature. After all the disor-

der that has ruled her life since the events, she has to connect with the world again – something she is presumably trying to do by going to therapy – because she has a duty to fulfil. The psychologist explicitly tells her: 'You're still a priest, Claire. You have a community. Eventually you will have to rejoin the world' (Greig, 2013: 16). To do so, and despite her psychologist's advice not to do so, she will keep looking for an answer in The Boy.

The multiple faces of the Other

The Boy is the image of utter otherness, as he represents a dehumanised criminal as well as several other personalities that will complement his story and Claire's. Unlike Claire, The Boy does not have a name and is merely assigned a general term that does not even match his age:

> By the time he was my age Jesus had founded a world religion.
> By the time he was my age Bob Geldof had saved Africa.
> By the time he was my age Gavrilo Princip had fired the shot that started World War One (Greig, 2013: 17).

If one recognises that these sentences are uttered by the killer, he certainly cannot be a child. If that is the case, why is he labelled as 'The Boy'? For Riedelsheimer, '[t]he absence of even a name thus reinforces the otherness of The Boy' (2017: 208), and I will complement this declaration by saying that the inadequacy of the term deliberately points at the human injurability of the criminal.

As has been previously seen, criminals are generally said to lack the capacity to conceive empathy, which dehumanises them and justifies their disapprobation and rejection. In fact, Claire's psychologist – played by The Boy – explicitly states that the killer must have been 'empathy impaired':

THE BOY

> When someone shows lack of empathy we can clearly say that they have deviated from the human norm. If you tell me that a person has deliberately planned to cause pain to a large number of people. I can say, with confidence, that person's behaviour is empathy impaired (Greig, 2013: 25).

Nonetheless, Claire is positive that The Boy was not 'empathy impaired'. Her argument to support this assertion is the last scene of the terrible event, which she repeatedly recalls throughout the play, when The Boy found her and Mrs Singh and said: 'I have one bullet. There are two of you – which one of you do you want me to shoot?' (Greig, 2013: 26), and they both offered themselves. At this moment, Claire is certain that he could feel what they felt, that he knew it was not right and that they were afraid of death and of him. However, there must have been something in him that empowered him to commit the crime, and that is what she wants to understand.

Whereas everyone hates him and judges him, despising his human and precarious nature, she acknowledges it and wants to go beyond. In order to do so, she thoroughly examines his environment and his past, looking for whose fault it was. Hence, she tries to find fault and responsibility in his family, the political party that inspired him and society itself, through talking to Catriona, the priest, the journalist, and her psychologist. She considers he must have had a fear inside that led him to do what he did, and she is aware of the loop of killing and fear that human life entails. Consequently, she has an 'attempt to break this self-destructive cycle of immunisation' (Middeke, 2017: 223) that disregarding the threatening Other implies.

Before she makes any judgement on what happened, she wants to understand and not take anything for granted: 'How can I hate him if I don't understand him?' (Greig, 2013: 22). When asked if he hates foreigners, The Boy answers, 'I don't hate foreigners. I hate foreigners being here. There is a difference' (Greig, 2013: 19). He

is thus afraid of people coming from elsewhere, for he knows what happened to the aboriginal boy and does not want that story to be repeated. His solution against that is removing the threat, '[k]illing the other for self-preservation' (Middeke, 2017: 222). He is trying to protect his tribe from '[a] softness born of cheap togetherness – which is an illusion fostered by failed elites who cling on to power and wealth through immigrant labour and globalisation' (Greig, 2013: 20).

This violence and fear of the Other are contagious because they shed light on the precariousness of life and the need to preserve it. Whereas acknowledging the vulnerability of the Other implies the urge to preserve their life; acknowledging one's own vulnerability implies preserving one's existence. For this reason, when she cannot find a way to see the humanity in The Boy by talking to others/Others, she ends up only seeing his criminal and inhuman face and realises she needs to see his real face. When she goes to visit The Boy in prison, she sees he is also vulnerable. Relevant and humanising information about him is given for the first time and she – and the audience – can see the caring side of The Boy: he offered shelter to a girl that had been abused and that triggered him to get a gun and preserve her life. Claire had been tempted to seek revenge but becoming aware of this and remembering the moment of unconditional humanity she experienced with Mrs Singh she recovers the ethical command from and for the Other. If she had killed him with that poisoned teabag, she wouldn't be any better. It 'would implicate Claire in a spiral of violence and ultimately make her lose her own humanity' (Riedelsheimer, 2017: 211).

Placing Claire in a space of confusion and doubt makes audiences question the ethical turn of this play. Far from being unconditionally forgiven, the killer is understood and blame is placed on the way governments handle globalisation. Acceptance of the different and distant Other is not an easy task, and one has to go through several processes of deconstruction in order to be able to do this. The play

invites the audience to take part in the way differences are negotiated in the world and, not being strictly obliged to do so, they are also offered a place to sing from along with the rest of humanity.

All in all, both *Pornography* and *The Events* portray the need for contact in a fragmented world that is falling apart due to a lack of human care. Both plays present the urgency of those connections and introduce stories that link characters within the play with each other and also with the audience through 'communication against all the odds, when love, desire and a core sense of humanity enable humans to interact with other human beings' (Holdsworth, 2013: 188). In order to achieve this communication, the playwrights address emotions by offering relatable stories and portraying the vulnerability of all the characters.

By putting on stage the aftermath of atrocities, both plays focus not only on the victims of such events, but on the people responsible for them. It has been previously mentioned how the dehumanisation of the criminal that is generally carried out by the media is what prevents empathy and understanding towards these subjects from happening. However, the aim of these plays is to bring those dehumanised criminals 'back to life' by creating fully fleshed-out characters. They are given a story, a motive, and a background that is usually omitted and deliberately ignored by the media and the masses. Providing them with humanity once again and not isolating them from their community, they are also given the ontological vulnerability that is inescapable for human beings. As a matter of fact, this is precisely what prompts them to commit crimes and, paradoxically, what also leads spectators to feel related to the stories and the characters in these plays, opening the doors to understanding.

Whereas empathy is an ambiguous term and is easy to misuse, the aim of this study has been to show: *a*) that being 'empathy impaired' (Greig, 2013: 25) is not essential to becoming a criminal;

b) that empathy is not pre-emptive of killing, and, *c*) that it is through emotional contagion that understanding appears. The way to create empathy is not creating a realistic illusion for audiences to see their world on stage; on the contrary, what Stephens and Greig do in their plays is turn to the deconstruction of this illusion and the absorption of the audience's attention and care through defamiliarisation. Being aware of the fictional nature of theatre also allows awareness about reality to happen. Both playwrights show the importance of theatre in the humanities and how the pure nature of theatre is human. The corporeality of the theatre favours 'the encounter with the face' that Ridout claims to be fundamental to the arousal of empathy. Theatre offers a physical and real face that explicitly asks for acknowledgement and understanding. Therefore, it is indeed the place to see the Other face-to-face and come to terms with them, embracing difference and facing all the contradictions that govern both the individual and society. Theatre is the weapon to fight fragmentation, paradoxically mirroring and using that fragmentation to do so.

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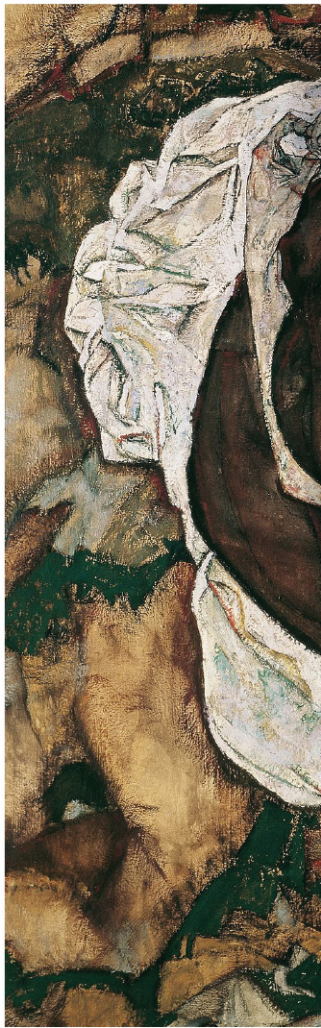
CRIC Construcció i Representació d'Identitats Culturals

Many claim the contemporary world lacks empathy, this being the reason for all the atrocities in it. When thinking about the perpetrators of such brutalities, it is easy to assume they cannot acknowledge others as their equals. But is a lack of empathy a prerequisite for becoming a criminal? Would empathy then be preemptive of murder? When something terrible happens, we may be tempted to look for the source of violence exclusively in the criminals. However, when talking about human beings and the motives for their actions, one has to delve deeper. In Simon Stephens's *Pornography* and David Greig's *The Events*, two different crimes against humanity are portrayed. The aim of this book is to analyse the way in which the perpetrators are depicted in each play and whether the audience is asked to challenge the initial impulse to dehumanise them. Will the multifaceted nature of empathy be explored to the extent of debunking the myth of its simplicity?



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