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Mimesis in Crisis:  
Narration and Diegesis in  
Contemporary Anglophone  
Theatre and Drama

## ABSTRACT

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The main objective of my article is to investigate the ways in which contemporary Anglophone drama and theatre actively employ diegetic and narrative forms, setting them in conflict with the mimetic action. The mode of telling seems to be at odds with the conviction not only about the mimetic nature of performance and theatre but also about the growing visuality of contemporary theatre. Many contemporary performances and dramatic texts expose the tensions between the reduction of visual representations and the expansion of the narrative space. This space offers various possibilities of exploring the distance between the performers and spectators, tensions between narrative time and place and the present time of performance, the real and the imagined/inauthentic/fake, traumatic memory and imagination. The active foregrounding of the diegetic elements of performance will be exemplified with reference to several contemporary plays and performances: my focus will be on the uses of epic forms in what can be called post-epic theatre, illustrated by Kieran Hurley's *Rantin* (2013); the foregrounding of the diegetic and the undecidability of the fictional and the real, instantiated by Forced Entertainment's performances (*Showtime*, 1996) and Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* (2003); and the narrative density and traumatic aporia of *Pornography* (2007) by Simon Stephens.

**Keywords:** diegesis, mimesis, narration, theatre.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since traditionally drama is associated with the concept of mimetic action and mimetic speech expressed by individual characters, a tendency to use narrative forms in it often fulfills significant conceptual, imaginative and experimental functions. In contemporary drama and theatre such tendencies have been often associated with the concept of epic theatre or—more recently—with one of the techniques of postdramatic theatre, along with other possibilities. In both cases diegetic forms actively challenge the audience's mimetic expectations either to increase the effect of the critical distance theorized in the concept of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* or to explore a number of effects aiming at increasing the proximity of the performer, in what Lehmann calls “the foregrounding of the personal” (110).

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My objective is to look at the ways in which contemporary Anglo-phone drama and theatre actively employ diegetic and narrative forms, setting them in conflict with the mimetic action. The mode of telling seems to be at odds with the conviction not only about the mimetic nature of performance and theatre but also about the growing visuality of contemporary theatre and the significance of the *opsis* therein. Many contemporary performances expose the tensions between the scarcity or reduction of visual representations and the expansion of the narrative space, often signalled in the deliberate minimalism of stage directions. This space offers various possibilities of exploring the distance between the performers and spectators, tensions between the narrative time and place and the present time of performance, between the real and the imagined/inauthentic/fake, and between memory and imagination.

## MIMESIS AND DIEGESIS IN DRAMA AND THEATRE

Mimesis has a number of different definitions and meanings deriving from Plato's and Aristotle's texts. According to Paul Woodruff, the meaning of mimesis cannot be contained in the notions that are commonly associated with the concept, such as imitation, fiction or make-believe: “[m]imesis is the art of arranging one thing to have an effect that properly belongs to another” (qtd. in Shepherd and Wallis 212). This very general definition emphasizes the active part of the viewer in discovering correspondences and analogies. The authors of the *New Critical Idiom* volume devoted to drama, theatre and performance mention two conflicting approaches to mimesis arising from different interpretations of the Aristotelian concept. They put these two perspectives in the following slightly simplified categories: “Both positions are engaged with the effort truly to know what reality is, but the difference between them, put crudely, goes like this: one is concerned to

separate copy from reality, so as to avoid being taken in by illusion; the other wants to use copies as a way of understanding reality better” (Shepherd and Wallis 213). Therefore, the concept of mimesis raises questions concerning the dangers and possibilities of imaginary/false identities and the confusion between illusion and reality. Such considerations were present in the discussion of, for example, sumptuary laws in Elizabethan and later periods, and the dangerous role of gender and class cross-dressing on the stage in the destabilization of social hierarchy and gender identities. The theatrical illusion and imitation was seen as threatening the stability of social relations (Garber 176–77). Above all, mimetic art is said to undermine or steal the authority of the ultimate creator, which Diamond discusses in her introduction to *Unmaking Mimesis*, referring to Plato’s example: “. . . if you were prepared to carry a mirror with you wherever you go. Quickly you will produce the sun and the things of heaven; quickly the earth; quickly yourself; quickly all the animals, plants, contrivances, and every other object we just mentioned” (Plato qtd. in Diamond i). Through mimesis one can create a semblance, a copy which usurps the status of its original by the surface similarity to it. Mimesis would be thus connected to usurpation and creative reproduction. Other considerations related to mimesis, also mentioned by Diamond and primarily employed to discuss the problematic nature of representation of women, include the notions of “good” and “bad” mimesis (the choice of what is worth being represented) and the difference between mimesis seen as imitation, which is selective and creative, and portrayal or copying, which involve all aspects of faithfulness to the original (Diamond iv-v). These are only some of potential areas of discussion inspired by the aspects of mimesis.

In one of many possible approaches, mimesis is contrasted with diegesis, which in theatre involves at least two aspects. They are primarily conditioned by the different ways of understanding the concept of diegesis. Its primary meaning is contained in the act of telling, narrating a story, which is contrasted with the act of showing related to mimesis. In film and also in theatre, diegesis is exposed when the very process of narrating a story is emphasized. This process involves exposing the diegetic techniques used for narrating a story (Pavis 102), in which the very act of narrating is no longer transparent. In postmodern fiction, David Lodge identifies a tendency called “a stream of narration,” associated with the revival of diegesis, which is “foregrounded against mimesis” (195). Referring to Samuel Beckett’s characters, Lodge emphasizes the postmodern narrative compulsion, in which characters have to go on narrating despite sometimes having nothing to say or not being listened to (195). Such aspects of metanarrative stream of narration are also employed in theatre to explore

a number of postmodernist concerns and questions about the limits of imagination, deconstruction of conventions, and the nature of theatrical presence, among other themes.

In some postdramatic performances, according to Lehmann, the stage “becomes the site of a narrative act” (109). This notion of the narrative act emphasizes the significance of the very activity of narrating a story—of being present in front of the audience as a story-teller—outside the story. The narrative presence creates the impression and simulation of authenticity and directness. This would be associated with the presentational theatre as contrasted with representational theatre in many cases (Lehmann 109). Lehmann juxtaposes narration with the fascination with the body and the media (109). Narration seems to stop or suspend the imaginary visual and corporeal presentational aspects of theatre. This effect can be seen as equivalent to some aspects of alienation effect but without aiming at the formation of the critical distance to the theatrical situation. The distance is contained in the very act of imaginary concretization of the story in which a story-teller disappears in or beneath the narrated story. To foreground narration is also to foreground the speaker as a story teller and a human being.

Both forms, the epic and the post-dramatic, are still active in contemporary theatre and drama. The difference in the role of narration in epic and “post-epic” theatres has been described, among others by Lehmann, as the difference between “the closeness within distance” and “the distancing of that which is close” (110). “The closeness within distance” primarily refers to the relation between the listener and the story-teller, which is often intimate and personal in contemporary theatre. “The distancing of the elements” which are close is a way of summarizing the way the alienation effect operates through “turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one’s attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected” (Brecht 107). The result of such a technique is to reduce empathy and emotional involvement which might make critical assessment more difficult to achieve. Some of the techniques of creating the critical distance to the character are using the third person form instead of the first; using the past tense to talk about present actions; reading stage directions aloud; and direct address to the audience (Brecht 101–02). In a sense these measures are employed to reduce the mimetic theatricality of performance and to liken the dramatic form to the diegetic epic structure. The mimetic aspect of speaking in individual voices of the characters, to follow Plato’s distinctions (Lodge 183), is replaced with the attempt to frame the individual voices in the diegetic unifying but critical voice of the narrator.

The active foregrounding of the diegesis can be exemplified by many contemporary theatre performances and dramatic texts. Out of various instances my focus will be on, firstly, the contemporary uses of epic forms in what can be called post-epic theatre, illustrated by Kieran Hurley's *Rantin* (2013); secondly, the foregrounding of the diegetic and the undecidability of the fictional and the real, instantiated by Forced Entertainment's performances (*Showtime*, 1996) and Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* (2003); thirdly, the narrative density and traumatic aporia of *Pornography* (2007) by Simon Stephens. Throughout the part that follows I will be referring mostly to dramatic texts and their performative potential, theatre performances (Forced Entertainment) supported by performance scripts, and occasionally to stage productions of the dramatic texts discussed in this article.

#### POST-EPIC NARRATIVES IN *RANTIN* BY KIERAN HURLEY

In the contemporary Scottish play *Rantin* by Kieran Hurley, the narrative is foregrounded against the interactive aspects of the ceildh convention, drawing upon the tradition popularized in theatre by 7:84 company and their *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil* (1973). In fact, the performance text at times relies heavily on McGrath's script, such as in one of introductory passages:

Drew: This is a story that has multiple beginnings, an abundance of middles, and no clear end. It starts, for our purposes, right here under this old railway arch in Glasgow, with each of you here. (Hurley 313)

While being modelled upon the beginning of McGrath's play, which reads "It's a story that has a beginning, a middle, and, as yet, no end" (2), Hurley's introduction exposes the multiplicity and fragmentation of stories as contrasted with an attempt to find a common denominator to the Scottish past, the present and the future in McGrath's play. While stories in Hurley's play are only a part of the stage performance, which includes other forms of entertainment involving the audience, such as songs, music, and jokes, they provide the primary means of both communicating a social and political message and involving the audience in the act of imagination. What the introductory text emphasizes is the dispersal and fragmentation of the contemporary story of Scotland:

Drew explains that what we're offering is a collection of fragments really. We're not trying to show the whole story, that would be impossible.

There's no central character here, just some imagined ideas of different people, with different stories, perspectives, next to each other trying to co-exist. (Hurley 312)

Leaving the stories at the level of narration without visual concretization in stage events and images creates space for further individualization and personalization of stories in the viewers' imagination. The performance text seems to abstain from taking control over the material it presents, leaving it open to individual negotiation and definition.

The first narrative in *Rantin*, describing the rediscovery of Scotland by an American citizen and his trip there: "The fire of the clearances that packed his ancestors off to Canada, their subsequent journey south. Howard thinks about this journey often. He feels it in his bones" (Hurley 314), may represent a classic example of the distancing technique. While the stage directions read "Julia [the actress] *becomes* Howard" (Hurley 313), the actress speaks in the third person "This man is called Howard. He is sixty-seven years old. He clutches his crumpled boarding pass in his hand" (Hurley 313). Despite speaking in the third person and thus creating the narrative distance to the character, the story does not attempt to generate the historical perspective. Quite the contrary, it tries to suggest that each of the stories is happening at this very moment and they are parallel to and simultaneous with one another. The narrative acts make it possible for the stories to build several adjacent dimensions of the present.

Another character, Shona, a fifteen-year-old girl working as a "part-time supermarket check-out worker" (Hurley 334) is introduced as speaking in the first person and enacted by the same actress as Howard. The performer is attributed with a different role and clearly would speak the part of a different person, using a specific register, vocabulary, grammar and melody: "Twenty oors a week ah used tay dae but noo they've goat me doon fur nine" (Hurley 334). This would seem equivalent to the character speaking in its own voice in mimetic rather than diegetic representation in narrative theory. However, while Shona struggles to present her experience and observations, her narrative is interrupted by the third person commentary of another performer, who observes, for example, "She is addressing the people of the town below" or "The people of the Port can't hear her, of course. They're not listening. But she doesn't care. She's used to that" (Hurley 335). Splitting it in between different performers, the play presents a traditional narrative consisting of mimetic representations of the character's words either filtered through the distancing techniques of the third person representation or the narrator's voice that performs the role equivalent to stage directions read aloud.

The play's conclusion transposes all the elements into a metafictional narrative that deconstructs the performance's mimetic and also—in a filmic sense—diegetic functions. The major part of the performance, split into different and fragmentary voices, given only some mimetic autonomy, is followed by a narrative act that tries to gather the loose ends into a framework. The character of Howard, who is still in a plane above the land, provides a distance and perspective from which a pattern could be discerned, but it seems unreadable to him:

Drew: And he doesn't know, that he's part of it already. A story with no single through-line, and no fixed centre. [ . . . ] And that each of those people in the room are part of the story too. A story that has multiple beginnings, an abundance of middles, and no clear end. (Hurley 353)

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The final part of the performance text suggests translating the narrative act into the performative one, when the narrative describes the character in a story take off his cap and perform “a song which is both an expression of anger, and a song of joy and hope, all at once” (Hurley 354), the meanings contained in the play's title. The diegetic construction of the fictional world and the mimetic imitation of reality by the fictional characters are brought into crisis by transposing the narrative into the real: “And the people will leave and go out into the world. And the story will continue” (Hurley 354). Thus *Rantin* explores the distancing and engaging strategies, which generate a sense of critical awareness of, and participation in, the process of forming the present version of Scottish identity. The diegetic strategies reminiscent of epic theatre are employed paradoxically to increase the sense of the present, simultaneity and provisionality, which tries to bridge history, myth and the present moment.

#### EXTRA-DIEGETIC NARRATION AND UNDECIDABILITY (*SHOWTIME* AND *THE PILLOWMAN*)

While some writers, such as Lehmann, suggest that “the occasional disruption of the theatrical frame has traditionally been treated as an artistically and conceptually negligible aspect of theatre” before the onset of postdramatic performance (100), there has been quite a long tradition of direct address to the audience realized by a character occupying the extra-diegetic position (in a filmic sense). Lehmann links this extra-diegetic presence to what he calls “the irruption of the real” (100–02). Most aspects of this tendency develop around uncertainty and undecidability about whether the events on the stage are real or not; tensions arise in the risk that is involved

in real situations taking place. The classical example is the scene in Jan Fabre's *The Power of Theatrical Madness*, in which the frogs let loose on the stage are at risk of being trodden upon by the dancing and blindfolded actors (Lehmann 103). In such cases the imitative potential of mimesis is reduced to the moment in which a theatrical situation is confined to its specific self-referential time and space. The real in theatre can be associated with the presentational aspects of performance and contrasted with the representational ones. The presentational elements of performance refer to "a class of transactional (performer-spectator) conventions concerned with *explicit* definition of what is going on," and including the forms of direct address and the play-within-the-play (Elam 81).

Forced Entertainment has been fascinated with various aspects of story-telling on the stage and the breaking of the primary diegetic level. Several productions by the company feature lengthy monologues and confessions directed at the audience as listeners. Some performances, such as *Speak Bitterness* or *A Decade of Forced Entertainment*, are based on the limitation of the mimetic and visual aspect of the performances and the direct reading of texts in front of an audience with no dialogic exchanges between the characters. Narration is also foregrounded in *Tomorrow's Parties*, but many other productions contain several scenes that are based on a confessional narrative exploring the tensions between intimate and public space in theatre. *Showtime* is exceptional in conflating the narrative intimacies on diegetic and extra-diegetic levels. Its major concern is to explore the condition of voyeurism and witnessing in critical fictional events, such as suicide and death, and transposing them onto the level of the real, probing into the audience's reactions to being present in such situations.

Two scenes in particular problematize the relation between diegetic and extra-diegetic audience. The first one presents a man wearing a home-made dynamite bomb tied around his chest, who tries to address the audience and keep them occupied waiting for the performance to start, while the second features a naked man who describes the nightmare experienced often by actors of standing naked in front of an audience with no script yet ready and forced to improvise their part, while somebody else is writing the script. The man with the bomb focuses on the audience's voyeurism and consumerism: "There's a word for people like you, and that word is audience [. . .] An audience likes to sit in the dark and watch other people do it. Well, if you've paid your money—good luck to you" (Forced Entertainment, script 4). The naked man addresses the issues of the private made public in the theatrical situation. The naked body becomes the site of humiliation and extra-diegetic presence. In both cases the performers are placed in very intimate situations and exposed to public view. The au-



audience is put in the position of intradiegetic audience, directly addressed by the characters; however, because of the metatheatrical nature of the narration uttered by the performers, the spectators are engaged in reflecting upon their role in a performance as witnesses. It is in this equivalence between the fictional and the real audience that the diegetic frame of the performance is exposed and the uncertainty about the audience's status is introduced.

While it is almost impossible to feel this uncertainty in terms of real danger and risk of the bomb exploding or to see theatrical nudity as a source of shame, *Showtime* creates a situation that is far from comfortable. The tension arises in the position of the audience in relation to the performer, of a fully dressed group of people gathered for the purposes of passive entertainment and a performer "risking himself" in an act of performance. Whatever the circumstances, the audience's voyeurism is an undeniable fact that exists both within and outside the fictional framework. Therefore, the real—the undecidability of the real—arises in the conflation between the fictional audience, addressed by a performer playing an actor standing in front of an audience and having no proper script apart from metatheatrical commentary, and the real audience, watching a play in which no conventional diegesis (in a filmic sense) is developed. The uncertainty that is a source of discomfort to the audience arises from the inability to assess whether the audience is placed within or outside the diegetic space and thus how they should react to the situation. It seems that the diegetic frame of the performance is strong enough to keep the audience in their seats while being aware of the ethically dubious nature of their position. The presentational conventions are exposed to re-negotiate the type of transaction that spectators enter when they decide to watch and witness a theatrical performance.

A different undecidability is explored through tensions between mimetic and diegetic representation, as, for example, in Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman*. Driven by the urgency to know the truth about the murder cases, the characters and spectators are manipulated by the ambiguous status of the stories written and told by the suspect character of Katurian. The impossibility of determining whether the stories are purely fictional and accidentally similar to the represented reality or whether they are part of the art of murder incites a number of questions about the ethics and aesthetics of crime and art. The blurred borders between the fictional reality and the stories-within-the-story are reflected in the theatrical tensions between the purely diegetic narrative and its mimetic on-stage representation. Because of their drastic content, the enactment of the narrated scenes seems to illustrate to the audience how easy it is to follow the mimetic

fallacy and believe in the correspondence between life and art. Despite Katurian's metafictional commentaries on technicalities of writing fiction, the audience can never fully reject either of the possibilities, being caught in a situation described in one of the stories about a child-writer and his tortured and murdered brother. The *mise-en-abyme* structure of the story reveals under one layer another one that hides a corpse symbolically buried together with the story which is too beautiful to be read and preserved:

the corpse of a fourteen-year-old child that had been left to rot in there, barely a bone of which wasn't broken or burned, in whose hand there lay a story, scrawled in blood. And the boy read that story, a story that could only have been written under the most sickening of circumstances, and it was the sweetest, gentlest thing he'd ever come across . . . (McDonagh 34)

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The story explaining the origins of art in pain and mystery leads the audience astray by revealing another fictional level that shatters the previous one. The extra-diegetic and metafictional story directs the listeners' attention away from the final turn in the plot: the murder of the parents by the surviving son. Enacting the scenes narrated in the stories exposes the diegetic function of stage actions, its provisional concretizations and premature conclusions.

#### NARRATIVE OVERABUNDANCE/MIMETIC APORIA IN *PORNOGRAPHY* BY SIMON STEPHENS

The mimetic minimalism of Simon Stephens's *Pornography* and its diegetic density can be linked to a number of significant strategies employed to express the effect of the 7/7 terrorist attacks in London in 2005. Out of these strategies I will focus on the ones that deal with the nature of traumatic experience and the pornographic objectification of the tragic events. What might seem surprising is the minimalism of *opsis* and *mimesis* in *Pornography*, noticeable also in the performance script and expressed in the scarcity of stage directions. Even the places where playwrights usually put "silence" or "pause" are left blank or with a dash followed by empty space. The only repeated phrase in stage directions, with which the play practically begins and each narrative ends, reads: "*Images of hell./ They are silent*" (Stephens 375). The visual presentation of images of hell provides another blank space, which can be filled with, for example, documentary images of London bombings, as some productions do. However, it seems that the play demands another level of representation, which is more effectively realized in absence or in non-mimetic visual effects, such as, for example, stroboscopic

lights, used in some productions. This conspicuous and symbolically active minimalism raises questions of representation of trauma and the ethics of looking. The primary level on which the play is developed is a series of six narratives delivered by fictional characters living or staying in London in the critical period, followed by a list of real victims who died in the 7/7 bombings, including short and fragmentary biographical information on each of them, except one blank space. While the stage directions suggest that the performance text can be played in a different order from the one given in the script, there is a rationale behind both the order of characters and their reverse numbering. The descending order clearly resembles a countdown, which holds a number of connotations connected with the bomb explosions and with winning the bid to host the Olympic games a day earlier. The seven parts of the performance, according to Aleks Sierz, correspond to the seven ages of man from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, which culminate in the death of the bombings' victims (xvi). While the reference to Shakespeare might seem almost a cliché, its effectiveness derives from the juxtaposition of the natural aging process and the unnatural and unnecessary death.

The first function of the diegetic mode of representation in Stephens's play is concerned with an attempt to address the nature of cultural and social trauma caused by the 7/7 terrorist attacks in London. In "Remembering, Repeating and Working-through," Freud discusses the processes of acting out and working-through as the two stages of the therapy employed in the treatment of the effects of trauma; in acting-out the patient re-enacts events from the past. This stage is always connected with resistance and some form of deterioration in the patient's state resulting from the confrontation with the traumatic memory (Freud 151–52). The second part of the treatment is based on the working-through of resistances in order to disclose their causes (Freud 155). Working-through is seen as a talking cure in trauma therapy and a way of coming to terms with the traumatic past. It is often associated with the concept of diegesis—of telling about the traumatic events and thus mastering the trauma. Acting out is linked to mimesis and is primarily concerned with the repetition of pain. Theatre is an art form particularly suitable to express the traumatic modes of acting out and working through (Wald 99). If we apply these psychoanalytic aspects of mimesis and diegesis, we notice how—through the mimetic reduction and diegetic expansion—the performance deliberately deals with and tries to understand the reasons and effects of the traumatic effects. What is even more important, the aspects of the traumatic events, the feeling of loss, melancholia, anxiety, fear and horror, are retroactively placed in the narratives describing the events happening prior to the accident. This can be partly associated with the belatedness of trauma, but more importantly,

it is a strategy to master the traumatic events by inserting the memory of them in what seems to be an ordinary narrative. The first character numbered Seven, a mother of a young child, locates her imagined holiday trip on the map of countries at war, flying above them in her new sandals:

I'd like to take Lenny [her baby son] on a long-haul flight. I like the screens, the in-flight maps on the backs of the seats in front of you. They allow you to trace the arc of the flight. They allow you to see the size of the world. They allow you to imagine the various war zones that you're flying over. You're flying over war zones. You're flying over Iraq. You're flying over Iran. You're flying over Afghanistan. And Turkmenistan. And Kazakhstan. And Chechnya. On your long-haul flight. On your way out on holiday. With the sandals that you bought with the gold strap and the plastic pink flower. (Stephens 379)

Although this juxtaposition of the triviality of holiday sandals with the gravity of war can be read as criticism of European indifference to violence and suffering outside Europe, in the context of traumatic anachrony, it can reflect the change of perception brought about by the catastrophic event: it is no longer possible to exist without an awareness of the tragic events happening elsewhere. One's holiday trip involves passing over countries afflicted by war within an ironically safe distance but without the ability to forget them.

Similarly, in the narrative Number Six the passage in which the ghost city of London is described reverberates with meanings when viewed from the posttraumatic perspective:

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The whole city's haunted. Every street there's something disused. There are forty tube stations, closed for fifty years. There are hundreds of pubs. There are hundreds of public toilets. The railway tracks. The canal system. The street map is a web of contradiction and complication and between each one there's a ghost.

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People disappear here in ways they don't in other cities. People get buried in rooms. They get walled up in cellars. They're dug under the gardens. All of these things happen. (Stephens 396)

The haunted city, inhabited by ghosts and plagued with buried corpses, is an effective metaphorical description of the post-catastrophic city. The feelings of loss and mourning are discussed in another seemingly detached comment: "But the thought of their lost one, of their child or their lover or

their colleague, hits them like a train. And their voices catch in their throats and they can't carry on" (Stephens 393). While referring to an incident from before the tragic events, the excerpt expresses the inexpressible quality of the traumatic experience. The same ghostly London is seen by the character of the terrorist, while one character in part three comments on the bruises and scars, which metaphorically might refer to trauma's association with the wound: "These things, they're not bruises. They don't fade. They're scars" (Stephens 428). The character in the sixth narrative (Iwo) gathers the fragmentary expressions of trauma in a passage describing her inexplicable crying: "I walk home. The chicken tastes good. I let myself in. I can't feel my feet any more. I can't understand why there are tears pouring down the sides of my face. This makes absolutely no sense to me at all" (Stephens 436). The diegetic description of the characters' lives contains gaps and aporias, as well as indirect references in which the traumatic event is contained. The characters seem to be struggling to find a proper language to express their experience, coming to terms with what they cannot name, stopping at the critical moment that is not articulated. The trauma is contained in what is silenced and inexplicable in the diegetic description.

The second aspect of diegesis concerning the deliberate decision to abstain from the graphic depiction of the traumatic experience of the attacks is related to the play's title and expresses a critical commentary on the mediatization of terrorism and human drama. By containing the experience in fragmentary narratives and occasional disrupted conversations with the blank lines and empty spaces, the play attempts to find a language that would be free from the sensationalism and trivialization of the mass media reports, their fascination with images (journalistic photography, mobile phone pictures, security camera footage) and their objectifying properties. In this respect the title subverts not only the possible expectations of the play's theme but uses the strategies that are contrary to pornographic exposure. The narratives create the intimate space and closeness in which the elements of the traumatic experience are smuggled in between other aspects of everyday life or contained in blank spaces. The play uses the strategies that prevent a possibility of seeing others as objects, avoiding the voyeurism and scopophilia characteristic not only of pornography but of other visual representations, employed, among others, in the mass media (cf. Mulvey 449–50).

## CONCLUSION

The variety of uses and abuses of diegesis in contemporary theatre and drama rely for their effect on the active reduction or downplaying of mimesis. Diegesis is foregrounded against the deliberate decision to minimalize the

optical and mimetic aspects of performance. In metatheatrical plays and performances exploring the nature of theatre, diegesis is exposed within extradiegetic frames, in which one narrative is built upon another only to reveal that there is still another diegetic level in the story. Such dramatic plays and performances usually investigate the aspects of theatrical presence, presentational theatre, the tensions between private and public space, as well as the ethics of watching. Diegetic forms are also significant strategies in generating the alienation effect and the critical distance to events and characters in what could be called post-epic performance. Diegetic presentation in theatre also replaces mimesis where provisional, fragmentary and incomplete identities need to be expressed. Narrated realities are easily modifiable, adjustable and dynamic, but generate a sense of instability and uncertainty. One of the crucial functions of diegesis is to replace mimesis in the moments of crisis, when the available means of straightforward representation fail. Narratives built around the aporetic centre of an accident offer ways of dealing with traumatic memories, simultaneously showing the impossibility of adequately responding to reality.

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