

Simon Stephens Beyond Europe: *Pornography* on the Turkish Stage

Seda Ilter

Simon Stephens's popularity has been increasing in Britain and continental Europe since the early 2000s. His work has also travelled to other countries at the margins of Europe, such as Turkey, contributing to a palpable impact¹ on its theatre aesthetics and culture. During and following the coup d'état in 1980, Turkish theatre had a period of suspension due to the oppressive politics.² Since the mid-1980s, successive Turkish governments have slowly eased their *direct* censorship of art institutions, and this has, in part, increased the interest in inventive and politically and aesthetically challenging practices in theatre. In the 1990s, along with the international theatre festivals, where Turkish artists and audiences became more familiar with new trends in theatre, the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts instigated a platform for artists to engage with new theatre forms and playtexts in Turkey and from abroad.³ A consequence of this process has been a move, albeit gradual, towards forms of theatre that undermine paradigms of mimetic representation, linear narration and psychological characterisation, while questioning the role of the text, director and audience in performance.

Stephens's *Pornography* (2007) - a play ostensibly about the 7/7 London bombings - is one such play, which was produced a year after its UK debut by the independent theatre company Dot in Istanbul (19 November 2009). In order to take Stephens's conversation beyond Europe's cultural and theatrical landscape, I draw on Patrice Pavis's vision of the 'intercultural hourglass'⁴ of theatrical practices to open up a dialogue with Turkish theatre:

In the upper bowl is the foreign culture, the source culture [...].

In order to reach us, this culture must pass through a narrow neck. If the grains of culture or their conglomerate are

¹ The productions of Stephens's plays (e.g. *Pornography*, 2009; *Punk Rock*, 2010 by Dot) have contributed to the growing interest of emergent independent theatre companies (e.g. Kumbaraci50, İkinci kat, Domus Sanat Ciftliği) in new models of writing for theatre and theatre-making that question and undermine the established tradition of naturalist theatre and the dominance of the playwright as untouchable 'artist'.

² Hasibe Kalkan Kocabay, 'Tiyatroda Yeni Arayışlar', p.3. All the translations from Turkish documents here and throughout this article are mine.

<<http://www.journals.istanbul.edu.tr/iutiyatro/article/viewFile/1023016201/1023015372>> [accessed 4 July 2015].

³ Ibid. Some theatre companies established in this period are: Kumpanya, Stüdyo Oyuncuları, Bilsak, Oyunevi whose works engage with postmodern and postdramatic forms.

⁴ Patrice Pavis, 'Introduction: Towards a Theory of Interculturalism in Theatre?', in *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, ed. by Patrice Pavis (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 1-27 (p.16).

sufficiently fine, they will flow through without any trouble, however slowly, into the lower bowl, that of the target culture, from which point we observe the slow flow.⁵

We must not, however, forget that the ‘hourglass is designed to be turned upside-down’⁶ in order to understand the workings and consequences of the transformation from one culture to another and the impact of this flow on the source text. Pavis seems to suggest a two-way interaction, which would potentially ‘relativize the power relations’⁷ between the source and receiving cultures. However, his model is fundamentally a unidirectional one because it prioritises ‘how a target culture analyses and appropriates a foreign culture’.⁸ As Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert argue, Pavis’s approach may fail to ‘account for alternative and more collaborative forms of intercultural exchange.’⁹ Nevertheless, his model applies to transfers from one culture to another such as *Pornography*’s journey to the Turkish stage and how this may influence the source culture. With Pavis’s description in mind, I shall explore Dot’s *Pornography* and reflect on what this model tells us about Stephens’s work and the respective nation’s theatre culture. I will also touch on *Pornography*’s debut in Germany (2007)¹⁰ and its first British production (2008)¹¹ as points of reference in order to offer a comparative view on the Turkish interpretation.

A View on the Turkish Theatre System and Culture

To understand the appeal and interpretation of Stephens’s work in Turkish theatre, it is important to situate Dot’s production in Turkey’s theatrical culture. The development of modern Turkish theatre accelerated following the foundation of the republic in 1923. Socio-political reforms led to a state that put Westernisation at the centre of modernisation. This, in turn, affected Turkey’s cultural landscape and theatre scene. There was a considerable increase in translations from Western literature that led to the

⁵ Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, trans. by Loren Kruger (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷ Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert, ‘Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis’, *The Drama Review*, 46.3 (2002), 31-53 (pp. 42).

⁸ Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, p. 5.

⁹ Lo and Gilbert, ‘Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis’, pp. 41.

¹⁰ This was a co-production between the Deutsches Schauspielhaus (Hamburg) and the Festival Theaterformen at the Schauspielhannover, 2007. Director: Sebastian Nübling.

¹¹ The British premiere was a co-production between The Traverse and Birmingham Repertory Theatre (Edinburgh Festival, 2008). Director: Sean Holmes.

foundation of the Translation Bureau to regulate translations from other cultures.¹² The major foreign influence on the repertoire and aesthetics of Turkish theatre was the various strains of the modern Western tradition.¹³ Shakespeare, Moliere, Chekhov, Ibsen, Brecht and Miller have been some of the most frequently produced playwrights. For instance, state theatres produced *The Cherry Orchard* in various seasons ranging from 1962 to 1995, 1998 and 2013, and *Death of a Salesman* from 1978, 1988, 1998 to 2011.¹⁴ Turkish theatre has also produced its own works. In the 1950s-60s there was an increase in the number of plays and productions by Turkish authors, which came to a halt in the post-coup years of 1980s, and then picked up again, albeit slowly, since the 1990s. Some of these productions challenge the well-made, naturalistic tradition, whilst others seek new theatrical languages by re-interpreting deep-seated traditions to engage with social issues.

The majority of Turkish theatres have been partially or fully state-funded, be they state-run or independent. However, the Turkish subsidy system has differed from its European counterparts increasingly since the conservative AKP came to power in 2002. For instance, while state subsidy of German theatre liberates theatres to develop new forms with fewer financial or political limitations, state funding in Turkey has increasingly become a tool for censorship, particularly in state theatres.¹⁵ Nevertheless, there is no systematic censorship in Turkey. The boundaries are somewhat arbitrary and undefined, yet a common reason for censorship has been alleged threats to the state's territorial integrity and sovereignty.¹⁶ These political-economic conditions have led most theatres to produce 'safe' works that are well-made and commercial, that do not challenge conventional forms of theatre or dominant political discourse. Even when some productions openly stage socio-political issues, they often fail to engender an innovative theatrical language that would challenge well-made aesthetics and superficial didacticism to challenge awareness.

On the other hand, independent companies with limited or no state subsidy - particularly in Istanbul and Ankara - have been more open to innovative forms. Although gradual and geographically limited, this trend began in the early 1990s,

¹² Suat Karantay, 'Türkiye'de Oyun Çevirisi Tarihine Kısa bir Bakış', *Metis Çeviri*, 9 (1989), 87-91, (pp. 87-88).

¹³ See Pürnür Uçar Özbirinci, 'Intercultural Theatre? *A Streetcar Named Desire* on the Turkish Stage', *Theatre Research International*, 33.1 (2008), 70-83. In 1988 the Turkish state theatre decided to stage 60% Turkish and 40% foreign plays each season to provide Turkish audiences with new perspectives on other cultures, predominantly Western cultures.

¹⁴ See Karantay, pp. 88. Also, see the online archive of the Turkish State Theatre which provides some information on the previous productions.

¹⁵ President Erdogan has been censoring free speech by ceasing state-funding for theatres and threatening to privatize theatres to control what gets staged. See: 'Turkish Prime Minister's Bid to Privatize Theatres Stirs Uproar', *Hürriyet Daily News* (30 April 2012). <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-prime-ministers-bid-to-privatize-theaters-stirs-uproar.aspx?pageID=238&nID=19577&NewsCatID=384>> [accessed 4 July 2015].

¹⁶ See Banu Karaca, 'Images circulated, delegitimized and discouraged: Explicitly Political Art and the Arbitrariness of the Unspeakable' <http://research.sabanciuniv.edu/18831/1/NPT-45_Karaca.pdf> [accessed 4 July 2015].

following a period of stagnation caused by the coup. Although independent theatres are bound by ticket sales, this has not stopped them from challenging ingrained ideas about theatre production. For instance, companies such as Dot, Şahika Tekand/The Studio Players and Seyyar Sahne undermine representational naturalism and the well-made-play structure by experimenting with non-naturalistic acting, minimalistic scenography and nonlinear approaches to narrative. Most of these groups are still located in Istanbul, while state-financed theatres, whose repertoires are increasingly dependent on government policies and hence resistant to new approaches, dominate the rest of Turkey's theatre scene. Therefore, while Dot is a significant part of Turkish theatre, it is not representative of the majority of companies.

Dot has been one of the pioneers of Istanbul's thriving theatre scene. The group initially drew on Britain's 'In-Yer-Face' theatre of the 1990s. According to Dot's artistic director Murat Daltaban, this new writing has provided them with 'apposite languages and tools to address social issues in Turkey.'¹⁷ Dot's interest in British plays extends beyond this moment and to collaborations with British theatre initiatives such as the Theatre Uncut project.¹⁸ Such work with British exports sits alongside Dot's other work with Turkish and other European writers, such as Hakan Günday (Turkish), Alexander Devriendt (Belgian) and Roland Schimmelpfenning (German). Mainly drawing on in-yer-face aesthetics, the company's productions aim to drag its audience to emotional and psychological extremes through provocative language and themes. Dot is interested in creating a close relationship between actors and spectators to allow the latter to experience the stage action more directly. Thus, unlike proscenium stages - the common form in Turkish theatre - Dot prefers a black box space. It is in this context, as we shall see, that *Pornography* becomes aesthetically and thematically relevant.

Exporting *Pornography*: From British Text to Turkish Stage

Pornography constructs a landscape of terror and social disaffection through fragmented snapshots of the lives of eight isolated people, such as a female solicitor disclosing trade secrets to a rival firm and a lonely widow craving human company. The figures are linked

¹⁷ I conducted two interviews with Murat Daltaban, the Artistic Director of Dot and director of *Pornography*. The first interview (6 January 2011) will be referred to as 'Interview I', and the second one (30 March 2014) as 'Interview II'. The quotation here is from the 'Interview II'.

¹⁸ Theatre Uncut's first international collaboration was realized with Dot theatre. Theatre Uncut Turkey was premiered at the Istanbul International Festival May 2014 and at the Edinburgh Festival August 2014.

through the play's spatial-temporal setting: the first week of June 2005 in London that included the Live 8 concert, the G8 summit, the 2012 Olympics announcement and the 7/7 bombings.

Stephens's play is particularly pertinent for Dot for several reasons. Daltaban states that *Pornography*, beyond its British context, is a historically and culturally pertinent play for Turkey, as Istanbul, like London, was hit by terrorist attacks on 15 and 20 November 2003 and on 27 July 2008.¹⁹ Additionally, the 'pornographic times' that Stephens introduces in the play's title is a metaphor relating 'the process of objectification that goes on in the production and consumption of pornography'²⁰ to the nature of contemporary human relations. In today's media-saturated culture, people often perceive and relate to others beyond their physical experience through media technologies. The everyday experience of such 'virtual proximity'²¹ along with the prevalent consumerist culture has led to a tendency for people to see and value others as transient images, distant beings and objects of satisfaction. For Daltaban, this sense of social fragmentation is a globalised experience and is shared by urban culture in Turkey. These parallels aroused Dot's interest in *Pornography*, particularly in Istanbul, the epitome of urban culture and metropolitan living in Turkey. Furthermore, the play's concern with terrorism, incest and social disaffection sit well with the In-Yer-Face sensibility that Dot has cultivated as a theatrical and political language with which to communicate with their audience.

Besides its critical content, the structure of *Pornography* destabilises a dramatic representation of the world as a unified cosmos by undermining traditional categories of linear storyline and three-dimensional characterisation. Such experimentation corresponds to Dot's aim to challenge established dramatic forms. *Pornography* is formed of discontinuous fragments of scenes with no linear narrative through-line to connect them, although each fragment itself is predominantly linear. Furthermore, the play refuses to attribute individual names to the speakers of the duologues and monologues. Thus, the form of *Pornography* renders it difficult to grasp who the speakers are and how the different scenes relate to each other. Whilst challenging elements of dramatic representation, the play nonetheless adheres to the recognisable arena of the everyday

¹⁹ Daltaban, 'Interview P.'

²⁰ Simon Stephens qtd. in Lyn Gardner, 'The Finger-pointer', *Guardian* (4 August 2008) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2008/aug/04/edinburghfestival.festivals>> [accessed 4 July 2014].

²¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003), p. 62.

with realistic human behaviours, setting and language. This creates a tension between the recognizability of the familiar, the intangibility of the speakers' identity and the links between their stories. Stephens's play 'subscribe[s] to a naturalistic rationality',²² but does not allow for the formation of a traditional naturalistic drama, namely, a 'diegesis of a separated and "framed" reality [...] which is marked off against its environment as a separated "made up" reality.'²³

Pornography's structure challenges dramatic representation of a closed-off fictional cosmos through the mimetic treatment of a fable.²⁴ The knowable territory of the 'real' is interrupted through 'a derealisation that reveals reality to be inherently split – uncannily similar to itself but without referent', as Marcus Wessendorf puts it in relation to Richard Maxwell.²⁵ The presentation of socially realistic and recognisable themes through an experimental, not easily intelligible dramaturgy of plot and character subverts the interpretive limitations of potential closure in conventional dramatic plays. The tension between the familiarity of the text and uncertainty about the narrative and figures unsettles the authority of the text, and actively opens it to intervention from the director and leaves it less easy to consume by the audience. Thus, *Pornography* is particularly attractive to Dot as it seeks new dramaturgical and theatrical ways to engage with social reality.

²² Jacqueline Bolton, 'Playwrights and Plays: Simon Stephens', in *Modern British Playwriting: 2000-2009: Voices, Documents, New Interpretations*, ed. by Dan Rebellato (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2013), pp. 101-124, (p. 103).

²³ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. by Karen-Jürs Munby (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 100. [Originally published in German in 1999]

²⁴ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 3.

²⁵ Markus Wessendorf, 'The Postdramatic Theatre of Richard Maxwell' (2003), <www2.hawaii.edu/~wessendo/Maxwell.htm> [accessed 12 May 2014].



[Dot's production. Photo credit: Ebru Ahunbay]

Dot's *Pornography* used a minimalistic stage design: a sofa and a chair with a coffee table in the centre of the stage, evoking a generic living room. Unlike the ambiguous locations of Stephens's text that are framed by London, Dot's distinct setting anchored the play to a single, yet open location. This strategy to bridge the gap between spatial signifier and signified arguably overlooked the play's non-representational aesthetics, which refuse to provide an interpretive pointer. However, Dot's design offered a remarkably blank canvas upon which associative material was painted in its non-specific setting. Its generic nature, as opposed to a definitive naturalistic stage design that would locate specific characters and narratives in detailed and distinctive settings, was suggestive and provocative. In the production, it was evident that each scene took place in different locations, yet Dot's permanent set asked the audience to create each new space afresh in ways that the stage itself refused. Dot's scenographic decision picked up on the non-representational aesthetics of *Pornography* and challenged the Turkish theatre's naturalistic conventions, in which audience expect to find realistic representation.



[The German production directed by S. Nübling. Photo credit: A. T. Schaefer]

Sebastian Nübling's setting of the play, in comparison, was bare and non-specific, with half a dozen chairs and desks placed before a vast mosaic image of Bruegel's 'Tower of Babel'. This biblical image was 'like a huge unfinished jigsaw puzzle with half the pieces lying around the floor',²⁶ evoking an anonymous place in ruins and making metaphorical reference to the atomisation of society. Nübling's associative set used a crumbling décor that offered no spatial framework or fixed pointers, but opened the space to multiple readings, much like Stephens's text. Dot's design differed from that of Nübling's in its use of an everyday space rather than an entirely anonymous and metaphorical one. However, similar to Nübling's uncanny set, Dot's particular setting created a non-specific, open location that led to a potentially unsettling experience on the audience's part. Dot's use of the recognisable setting was being constantly transformed by different discourses and thus became less definitive. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the cosy living room setting with the dark content of the scenes engendered a sense of uneasiness that refused to comfort the audience with a recognisable meaning, and left them epistemologically adrift.

²⁶ Maik Hamburger, 'Theatertreffen in Berlin, May 2008', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 18.4 (2008), 531-544, (pp. 541).

Dot's inventive approach became more evident through the use of visuals. Behind the living room setting were fragmented images of a London map, some of which were situated lower and some higher, creating a disjointed pattern. At times, television images of the attacks and their aftermath were projected onto a screen. The use of such specific imagery indicated a concrete realisation of the images at which Stephens only ever sporadically hints. That said, Dot's visualisation of these motifs in a fragmented manner, like the scattered puzzle pieces in Nübling's design, corresponded to the discontinuous dramaturgy of Stephens's text. However, unlike the magnified crumbling Brueghel painting that had no specific reference to the play's British context, the visuals in Dot's production embodied clear historical and spatial references. Dot's design functioned as a tool to give the Turkish audience a sense of the real stakes of a fictional play. Daltaban explains the set as an attempt to create a suggestive metaphor for late-capitalist urbanism to draw audience's attention to a parallel social reality.²⁷

The specific references here might have run the risk of localising the play to Britain and restricting readings of its critique of a disaffected globalised culture. For instance, some reviewers argued that the production was not related to Turkish society,²⁸ whilst others considered its content 'alien' by suggesting that an audience should become familiar with contemporary British culture in order to grasp the kernel of *Pornography*.²⁹ However, such perspectives may be based on a reception based in the aesthetics of the naturalistic tradition, typical of mainstream Turkish theatre. What Dot offered with this apparent specificity was an invitation to audiences both to make connections with and spot differences between the cultures.

Dot's treatment of *Pornography*'s plot and its figures furthered the company's dramaturgical and theatrical experiments, as it adopted Stephens's destabilised linear temporality and elaborated characterisation. The stage functioned as a port of call for the speakers whose age and sex matched those of the figures implied in Stephens's text: they came onto the stage one by one only to perform their parts and left after their lines were over, preventing any connection with the other speakers or their narratives. The speakers

²⁷ Daltaban, 'Interview II'.

²⁸ Robert Schild, 'Quo vadis, "In-Yer-Face"? "Suratina Tiyatro" nereye kosuyor...?', *Tiyatro...Tiyatro Dergisi* (March 2010). The article in Turkish can be accessed at: <www.tiyatroelestirmenleribirligi.org/elestiri-yazilari/150-suratina-tiyatro> [accessed 4 July 2015]. All translations from the Turkish are mine.

²⁹ See Mehveş Evin, 'Pornografi'den Kürtçe oyuna', (15 February 2010): <<http://cadde.milliyet.com.tr/2010/02/16/YazarDetay/1199469/-pornografi-den-kurtce-oyuna>> [accessed 4 July 2015].

were like passing silhouettes, withholding detailed information about their personalities and deconstructing the more traditional psychological-naturalist mode of dramatic theatre. The consecutive and separate positioning of the figures complemented the fracture between their narratives, and emphasised the sense of isolation predominating the scenes. Dot's organisation of the scenes and their delivery by the speakers refused a dramatic representation of unified surface reality. It undermined the progressions of dramatic action that would culminate in a definitive ending and create a sense of entirety. Instead, each scene stood as a piece in itself, inviting the audience to make its own connections. In doing so, Dot did not simply borrow from the source culture; this is 'neither a pure and simple citation nor an absolute duplication'³⁰ of the original text. Rather, it is a re-elaboration and adaptation of the source culture to adjust the play to the target stage whilst challenging the traditional aesthetics of Turkish theatre. This it did without privileging the source material or assimilating its specificities within the recipient culture. Dot's responses emphasise the hermeneutic acts underlying the intercultural practice that are endeavours to intertwine without having to form a unified text.

The company's take on *Pornography*'s last scene illustrates this process of appropriation, which, according to Pavis, prevents one 'from believing naively in the melting pot'³¹ that merges cultural specificities into a homogenous unity. Here Stephens presents precise references to the bombings through short, fragmented and anonymous descriptions of the victims, taken from the BBC's website.³² This scene's cultural specificity meant that Dot elected to remove it entirely from its production on the basis that its explicit British context would reduce the potential for *Pornography*'s critical engagement with Turkish society.³³ As Daltaban explains, cutting the scene was 'an attempt to avoid a potential memorial of the bombings that would have overshadowed the bigger concerns of the play about the human predicament under late capitalism and social disaffection shared across cultures'.³⁴

German and British productions, in comparison, chose to include the scene, but to use it to different ends. Nübling presented it as a sound recording with no visual

³⁰Pavis, 'Introduction: Towards a Theory of Interculturalism in Theatre?', in *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, ed. by Patrice Pavis (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 12.

³¹ Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, p. 6.

³² See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/uk/05/london_blasts/victims/default.stm> [accessed 17 April 2015].

³³ Daltaban, 'Interview I'.

³⁴ Ibid.

representation of the bombings whilst the figures expressionlessly remained on the stage. One way of interpreting the mode of performance, based on the actors' indifferent and impassive faces, could be understood as a critique of social apathy in modern societies beyond Britain. Yet, on the other hand, their expressionlessness could also be an indication of numbness brought about by shock in the face of the catastrophe or fear that this could happen to them. This reaction on stage re-echoed in the auditorium, and fostered a sense of unity in the face of social disasters, a sense of togetherness as opposed to apathy. Holmes's version presented the scene as a text scrolling up the wall after the curtain call. As the audience were leaving the auditorium, they reportedly failed to notice the text. Holmes's decision to stage the scene at a point when the audience exits the auditorium seems to aim for this scene – a memorial to the victims - to be missed by most of the audience members. This directorial decision can be interpreted as an aesthetic and critical strategy to emphasise social disaffection by transferring this social phenomenon on to the audience. The question here is not necessarily about what the audience, who left the house, had missed. It is more about how Holmes's staging technique enhanced *Pornography's* treatment of social division and apathy. The German and British interpretations reinforced Stephens's critique of the objectification of people, whilst also creating a sense of community through a shared sense of grief and fear. This scene is not simply a denouement, but an open-ended finale that has the potential to address a range of social and emotional issues.

Dot's omission demonstrates two sides of the intercultural theatre debate. On the one hand, the exclusion seems to be a part of the intercultural process through which the 'sufficiently fine'³⁵ grains 'flow through [the hourglass neck] without any trouble'³⁶ to fit into the recipient culture. However, on the other hand, this distillation process, which Lo and Gilbert consider as 'a process of boiling down, a reduction to essences',³⁷ poses a risk of overlooking important elements. It fails to 'account for blockage, collisions, and retroaction as sites of either intervention or resistance'³⁸ which would potentially enrich the intercultural flow and understanding. Therefore, Dot might have missed the real stakes of the scene, yet its final scene, as we shall see, still managed to follow *Pornography's* central ideas.

³⁵ Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, p. 4.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Lo and Gilbert, 'Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis', pp. 43.

³⁸ Ibid.

Dot closed *Pornography* with the scene in which a lonely old woman asks strangers for a piece of barbecued chicken. The request is met, albeit with a degree of ambivalence from the mocking donor, leaving her moved, yet still isolated. In Dot's version, the performer brokenly sang Coldplay's song *Yellow*, a musical motif established earlier in the text. Her ultimate failure to sing the song 'properly' evoked a sense of a greater failure to communicate, to express the self and bond with others. Yet the fact that she picked up on the song signalled a connection, all the same. Hence, Dot's interpretation managed to retain a fundamental ambivalence regarding human interaction in the early twenty-first century, and so remained closer to the play's themes than its specific historical reference points. The meaning of the transformed text arises not so much out of how much of the original text is used or 'what one can take from it',³⁹ but 'what one does to it'⁴⁰ on stage and in the auditorium. On a meta-level, Dot's finale demonstrated how *Pornography*'s open form invites directorial intervention and enables dramaturgical negotiations that are sensitive to processes of intercultural adaptation.

Conclusion: Looking at the Hourglass

In conclusion, I return to the wider issues raised by this production and the ways in which the play's import affects both ends of Pavis's intercultural hourglass.

Despite its overtly specific historical, cultural and geographical context, *Pornography* managed to travel beyond Europe owing to its capacity to communicate shared concerns about social atomisation and apathy through an inventive dramaturgy. Besides demonstrating its ability to communicate with different theatre systems and cultures, *Pornography*'s journey is also an indicator of the ever-growing interest in new British writing beyond Britain. This can be seen in the transit of playwrights – whose works tend to challenge traditional forms and themes – such as Mark Ravenhill, David Greig, Tim Crouch and Chris Thorpe to other cultures across Europe. The cultural flow from Britain to other cultures, particularly ones beyond Europe – has increasingly been the case since colonisation began, and is currently reinforced by a neoliberal environment and an English-as-lingua-franca cultural imperialism. Critics of interculturalism such as

³⁹ Loren Kruger qtd. in Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads*, p. 133.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Daryl Chin⁴¹ and Una Chaudhuri emphasise the power relations underlying interculturalism and the exploitation of one culture by another under globalisation. Chaudhuri refers to these aspects by calling interculturalism ‘cultural rape’.⁴² Pavis’s model does not necessarily consider power relations. It ‘assumes that there is a “level-playing field” between the partners in the exchange and does not account for the fact that the benefits of globalisation and the permeability of cultures and political systems are accessed differentially for different communities and nations’.⁴³

With these considerations in mind, one might question whether British theatre, in turn, is interested in the theatres of other cultures, and discover that the compliment is rarely returned. Britain, to quote Stephens, is ‘an island nation that looks largely inward’,⁴⁴ that has limited interaction with other theatre cultures, although Stephens’s own example among others may help to change that over time. Even when it imports plays, British theatre tends to ‘squeeze [them] into the assumed British model of dirty realism’.⁴⁵ Thus, British theatre would arguably benefit from a more interactive conversation with other theatre cultures. Stephens is a promising example of a two-way dialogue as his collaborations with Europe have not only enhanced his work, but also triggered a slow but stimulating process of self-questioning in British theatre.⁴⁶ Moreover, the exportation of innovative plays might encourage playwrights to approach and experiment with new forms and go beyond theatrical and geographical borders.

With regard to the other end of the cultural transfer, the analysis has shown that one of the fundamental reasons Stephens’s work is transferable to the Turkish stage, at least to the emerging experimental theatre scene, is the inventive slipperiness between realistic language and experimental dramaturgy that locates the play in ‘a hinterland

⁴¹ See Daryl Chin, ‘Interculturalism, Postmodernism, Pluralism’ in *Interculturalism and Performance: Writings From PAJ*, ed. by Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta (New York: PAJ Publications, 1991), pp. 83-98, (p. 94).

⁴² Una Chaudhuri, ‘The Future of the Hyphen: Interculturalism, Textuality and the Difference Within’, in *Interculturalism and Performance: Writings From PAJ*, ed. by Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta (New York: PAJ Publications, 1991), pp. 192-207, (p.193).

⁴³ Lo and Gilbert, ‘Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis’, pp. 42.

⁴⁴ Simon Stephens, ‘Skydiving Blindfolded Or Five Things I Learned From Sebastian Nübling’ given at the opening of Stückmarkt 2011 at Haus der Berliner Festspiele. The article can be accessed at:

<http://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5616:skydiving-blindfolded-impulsreferat-des-britischen-dramatikers-simon-stephens-zur-eroeffnung-des-stueckmarkts-beim-theatertreffen-2011&catid=101&Itemid=84> [accessed 4 July 2015].

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Andrew Haydon’s blog: <<http://postcardsgods.blogspot.co.uk>> [accessed 27 April 2015]. Particularly: <<http://postcardsgods.blogspot.co.uk/2011/05/mid-north-sea-sensibility.html>> and his post on *Guardian* Theatre blog: <<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2014/may/14/uk-theatre-european-plays-in-translation>> [both accessed 4 July 2015], and Simon Stephens’s *Guardian* Theatre blog post: <<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2012/may/09/german-theatre-dares-three-kingdoms>> [accessed 4 July 2015].

between social realism and grotesque abstraction.⁴⁷ Stephens's mode of writing has provided the Turkish company with an innovative aesthetics, without entirely breaking away from its roots in social realism. Relatively young, compared to its British and German counterparts, experimental theatre in Turkey is still attached to its dramatic, representational roots – and yet, as Dot's treatment of plot and characterisation exemplifies, it is also determined to call this model into question.

Stephens's works continue to feature in Dot's repertoire: the company staged *Punk Rock* (2010) a year after *Pornography*, and Daltaban plans to produce more of the playwright's work.⁴⁸ The interest in Stephens's plays underlines not only his ability to address socio-cultural realities, but also the slowly changing face of Turkish theatre in Istanbul, eagerly experimenting with inventive models of theatre beyond the traditional dramatic framework. Furthermore, Dot's focus on Stephens's plays is an indicator of an increasing attention to British new writing, which, besides providing for new experimental groups, has also inspired new interest in playwriting in Turkey. The staging of contemporary British playwrights such as Stephens, David Greig and Anthony Neilson along with the audience's growing curiosity about these works has opened new vistas for Turkish playwrights and encouraged them to produce new works (albeit still limited in number). Additionally, there have recently been liaisons between the playwrights in the two cultures that have started to promote and shape the playwriting scene in Turkey. For example, the British Council in Turkey in collaboration with the Royal Court Theatre has organised playwriting workshops since 2013 for both amateur and professional Turkish playwrights that have enabled them to work with British playwrights and theatre professionals.⁴⁹ Such collaborations not only help Turkish playwrights develop their skills and engage with new writing techniques, but also encourage new interest in writing for the stage. Nevertheless, this cultural flow is still a unidirectional one. According to Lo and Gilbert, intercultural practice 'should ideally activate both centrifugal and centripetal forces in the process of mutual contamination and interaction'.⁵⁰ It would be interesting to see how a unilinear model, based on the West-to-East and Europe-to-beyond flow, would be overcome and a dynamic two-way intercultural exchange achieved.

⁴⁷ Chris Wilkinson, 'Noises Off: April Fools article'. This piece was printed in the 1st April edition of *Noises Off*, and posted on Andrew Haydon's blog: <<http://postcardsgods.blogspot.co.uk/2009/04/noises-off-april-fools-article.html>> [accessed 4 July 2015].

⁴⁸ Daltaban, 'Interview II'.

⁴⁹ See <http://www.britishcouncil.org.tr/en/programmes/arts/royal-court> [accessed 5 July 2015].

⁵⁰ Lo and Gilbert, 'Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis', pp. 44.

In a burgeoning theatre environment that is mainly focused on the translation of foreign plays, it is hard to predict whether Turkish theatre will expand its own new writing, with its fundamentally text-based approach, or edge towards the European tradition of director's theatre, devised theatre or postdramatic practices. It is also too early to talk about an established experimental theatre and a 'new wave' of writing, given the political and economic restrictions, the limited number of productions and the fact most experimental theatres are based in Istanbul. One can only hope that such efforts will spread their influence throughout the country and give rise to a more innovative and dynamic national theatre, with a theatrical language of its own that moves beyond *a theatre of translations* without losing its productive dialogues with other theatre systems.