

**The Logic of Consumerist Culture:
Mark Ravenhill's *Some Explicit Polaroids***

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Abstract: *Within the scope of postmodernist tenets this study aims to scrutinize Mark Ravenhill's *Some Explicit Polaroids* which is considered as one of the most significant plays of In-yer-face theatre that began to gain influence in Britain at the beginning of the Nineties. *Some Explicit Polaroids* is a political criticism on the confrontation of the two generations and reflects postmodernist tenets, which inhold nihilistic values. In this study, it is aimed to bring forward that *Some Explicit Polaroids* reproduces the current social milieu in a postmodernist view. In addition to this, the evaluations written on postmodern drama and the criticism on postmodernism are dealt with according to their resonances in the play. The conclusion reveals the evaluations of this study.*

Keywords: *In-Yer-Face Theatre, Mark Ravenhill, *Some Explicit Polaroids*, Postmodernism.*

**Tüketim Toplumunun Mantığı: Mark Ravenhill' in
Some Explicit Polaroids Adlı Oyunu**

Öz: *Bu çalışma bin dokuz yüz doksanların başında etkisini göstermeye başlayan suratına tiyatronun en önemli temsilcilerinden olan Mark Ravenhill'in *Some Explicit Polaroids* adlı oyununu postmodernist ölçütlere göre incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. *Some Explicit Polaroids*, iki farklı neslin çatışmasının postmodernist ölçütlerle yansıtıldığı, nihilist özellikleri de içerisinde barındıran politik bir eleştiridir. Bu çalışmada, *Some Explicit Polaroids* oyununun mevcut sosyal çevreyi postmodern bir görüşle yansıttığının üzerinde durulmuştur. Ayrıca, postmodern tiyatro üzerine yazılmış olan değerlendirmeler ve postmodernizmin üzerine yapılmış olan eleştiriler oyunda buldukları yankılara göre ele alınmışlardır. Sonuç kısmında bu çalışma sonucunda erişilenler ortaya konulmuştur.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Suratına Tiyatro, Mark Ravenhill, *Some Explicit Polaroids*, Postmodernism.*

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Introduction

Some Explicit Polaroids's debut was performed in September 1999. It is seen as a follow-up to *Shopping and F***ing* because of its treatment of current post-consumerist society and the amoral circumstances of the twentysomething age set. *Some Explicit Polaroids* is based on Ernst Toller's 1927 play *Hoppla, Wirleben!* (Hurrah, We Live). "Toller's play dealt with precisely the same kind of political compromise and betrayal explored in *Some Explicit Polaroids*" (Bilingham, 2007:139). Ravenhill puts forth the same topic by using a younger generation and political issues. Ravenhill fictionalizes two plots which reverberate in two generations. De Buck makes it clear that:

The first plot line focuses on Nick, who is released from prison after being incarcerated since 1984 for attempted murder on Jonathan. Helen is Nick's former partner in anarchic rebellion has now established a firm reputation as a local councillor and wants to sever all possible links to her past. The second plot line displays the lives of Tim, Victor and Nadia. Tim bought a sex slave, Victor, who is only concerned with his beautiful body and obsessively flees all negative feelings; Nadia has sexual intercourse with men to avoid loneliness. In the end, the younger generation is dispersed, whereas the older generation reconciles after a peaceful confrontation between Nick and Jonathan." (2009, pp.24-25).

Some Explicit Polaroids obviously reflects the contemporary London. The play begins with Nick's discharging from jail and he tries to adapt to this postmodern society. As a socialist activist, Nick was jailed for the reason of kidnapping and persecution of Jonathan who represents a capitalist figure in the play. He is released from prison only to find that the friend who encouraged him to carry out the attack is now a New Labour city councillor and is hoping to become an MP. It is easily seen that Helen's political ambitions have been decreased to struggling for public transport between housing estates and shopping malls. Though Nick's first encounters with the minutiae of everyday life leave him disoriented, Helen refuses to let him stay with her, and she suggests that: "You start with the little stuff [...] bit by bit you do what you can don't look the bigger picture, you don't generalize" (Ravenhill, 2001:236). In the play it is divulged that a conflict has formed between the older generations versus the young. Pavis delineates that: "The two opposing groups fail to meet. Nick alone, set adrift on his release from prison, can move easily between the two and hesitates to commit himself to either, feeling divided between neoliberal reformism and alienated nihilism but feeling quite happy with his drug-filled, marginal status" (2003:11). In the younger generation, Nadia is a lap dancer who is afraid of being alone, and therefore, she has sexual intercourse with men. Tim is a gay man who is HIV- positive and purchased a Russian sex slave over the internet, Victor, who represents the trash culture and consumerist society. In this sense, Jonathan, who is

a capitalist drug-dealer, is Nick's political nemesis. Although Jonathan is a respectable businessman in this capitalist world, he blackmails Helen who desires to pursue her career by entering as a New Labour MP. The two generations face each other, and they present their inner conflicts openly in the play. In *In-Yer-Face Theatre British Drama Today* Alek Sierz remarks that:

The militant leftist certainties, the bigger picture that Nick once believed in, seem simplistic when juxtaposed with Helen's concern with trying to make life more bearable for the poor; the hectic fantasy of Tim, Nadia and Victor's happy world seems fatuous when confronted with the realities of HIV infection, domestic violence and loveless sex. By bringing Nick into conflict with Helen, Tim, Nadia, and Victor, Ravenhill forces all of his characters to look again at what they feel, believe and want to do. Conflict is what enables each of them to break out, however briefly, of the prison of loneliness. (2001:147)

It can be understood that in *Some Explicit Polaroids*, Ravenhill presents the conflicts which revolve in a gap between the young generation and the old. When he is released from prison, Nick feels alienated in this society, and he has difficulty comprehending what is going on.

As in *Shopping and F***ing*, in *Some Explicit Polaroids* the shadows of postmodernism can be seen explicitly; Wallace states that "Nadia and her friends Tim and Victor introduce him to the new world of postmodern trash culture of consumption at its most self-indulgence. Their celebration of the inauthentic, the kitsch and the frivolous clashes with his apparently hopelessly outdated values and politics" (2005:273). In Ravenhill's work, it is presented by Victor and Tim's dialogue: **Victor:** And you're trash? **Tim:** We're both trash. Come on, eat something, eat some rubbish. (He gets his pills out.) And Nadia's trash too really. She's alright; you'll get to like her after a bit. She's been good to me. We have fun together (Ravenhill, 2001:244). In *Theatre Today - the new realism* Vera Goetlieb underscores this tenet explicitly:

Another aspect of the postmodernist ideology is that by reducing everything to commodity, nothing has any value. On its own, this too has reinforced the sense of direction, feeling of chaos and, again, offered an alibi for those wishing to turn away from previous valuations of culture and entertainment to leave market forces and box office returns to provide the critique. As playwright Joe Penhall put it: Much as I love it, the theatre is an inherently conservative business, increasingly run by marketing and finance departments, occasionally trying to reinvent itself as the new rock 'n roll, when it's as rock 'n roll as Ben Elton's underpants (2003:11).

Ravenhill casts capitalist characters in *Some Explicit Polaroids* similar to those *Shopping and F***ing*. Jonathan is a product of post-consumerist society, and he refers to her politics explicitly. He reproduces the figure of Brian in *Shopping and F***ing* who has a post-capitalist world view. He gives priority to money more than anything else, which is the symbol of consumerism. Jonathan voices his own capitalist ideology when he demands money for drugs:

Jonathan: Do you have any money?

Helen: I'm sorry.

Jonathan: Money. I'm rather hoping that you're carrying cash.

Helen: No.

Jonathan: I really could do with an injection of capital.

Helen: No chance.

Jonathan: Thing is they send you out of rehab and what they don't take into account is you need a good lump sum if your dealer's even going to offer you some second-rate gear.

Helen: I don't give money to people with a drug problem.

Jonathan: I have a cash problem. My problem is I think you've got some money and I don't want to use force to get it from you. (Ravenhill, 2001: 262)

In addition to this, Jonathan reproduces the individualism and exhausted social atomization. One of the most important features of postmodernism is spelling out disasters such as talking about chaos. It finds its resonances in Jonathan's lines in the play: "You're dead and then you come through that and you embrace the chaos ...you see the beauty of ...the way money flows, the way it moves around the world faster and faster. Every second a new opportunity, every second a new disaster" (Ravenhill, 2001:293). In *Top Girls: Postmodern Imperfect*, Prapassaree Thaiwutipong Kramer asserts that:

We seem to be in the realm of the postmodern eclectic, a playful mix of perspectives and costumes which challenge our grasp on reality and render all debates ultimately undecidable. What may appear a chaotic bricolage, however, comes to resolve itself into a decisive conclusion about the protagonist's failures of comprehension on both a political and human level (and implicitly, therefore, a decisive conclusion about the correct perspective on these human and political issues). (2008: 235)

Ravenhill creates a social chaos milieu to reinforce the postmodern manner in *Some Explicit Polaroids*. In the play, the immense chaotic structure is supported by various lines. In this sense, in *Commerce and Morality in the Theatre of Mark Ravenhill* Caridad Svich asserts that:

Some Explicit Polaroids is a swift, ten –scene portrait of societal chaos. Sharing to some degree *Shopping and F***ing*'s mordant fascination with random violence, and a desensitized London that is spinning egregiously out of control, it is a ninety minute whirlwind of a play that sets its playfully ironic heart in the mourning for socialism's values. Focusing on Nick, who has spent fifteen years in jail for a politically executed vicious attack on a capitalist rival, the play finds this old-time revolutionary adrift in a modern world of Play Stations, lap dancing, new-age psycho-babble, and disaffected political careerists looking to keep their jobs or simply move up the ladder. This is the fallout of post-Thatcher Britain, and the play centers on the dislocation and confusion of a man ill at ease with the cynical hedonistic mentality that has swept British society at the edge of a new millennium. (2003:90)

In parallel with this, the end of the world is highlighted in the play by Jonathan who is the mouthpiece of postmodernism. It is also echoed in Baudrillard's *The Illusion of the End*: "It is unable to escape it humanity will pretend to be the author of its destiny. Because it cannot escape being confronted with an end which is uncertain or governed by fate, it will prefer to stage its own death as a species" (Baudrillard, 1994:71). With the changing world, and all that it brings, everything has been complicated in the postmodern process as a result of certain alterations: nuclear wars; various threats; Gulf War, which was the first war to be watched on TV with the help of simulation; internet, viruses such as Ebola, and AIDS; and cyber space technologies. It is put forward that human-beings are preparing the end of man in postmodern society. In the play this finds its resonances in Jonathan's lines:

Jonathan: Can't have a wobby in the last few hours, can we? Can't have everyone going off-message and throwing us all into confusion as we reach the end.

Helen: I really don't think I need to hear...

Jonathan: Because this has got to be the People's Armageddon, you see? We want to make sure that everybody has been listened to, that every social and racial grouping is represented in the events of the last few days. Exclusion must be avoided. (Ravenhill, 2001, pp.261-262)

It is obvious that the discourse of end is one of the most dominant postmodern concepts in Ravenhill's plays. In *Faust is Dead*, there is a character who writes the book *The End of Man* which refers to Francis Fukuyama's book. In *Some Explicit Polaroids*, he touches upon the destructive end mostly. Ravenhill uses end discourse to highlight how pointless it is. In the play, Tim's speech proves this: "Because it's not out there anymore, alright? You can't look out there and blame, blame, blame. And I can imagine what it was like for you. Everything blocked, everything weighing you down. Communists, apartheid, finger on the nuclear button. It was frightening and you were frightened" (Ravenhill, 2001:269). Ravenhill divulges that the meaning of the end is burdened by the depleted doctrine of communism; actually it represents the end of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and their fearful tendencies. Jonathan's lines also display the sense of end: "... not to reciprocate. You see, the thing is, the world is going to end" (Ravenhill, 2001:261). Frederic Jameson also touches on this twentieth century erosion of the individual in his book *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* where he prefers the term subject instead of man and maintains that the issue is highly significant in contemporary theory: "Such terms inevitably recall one of the most fashionable themes in contemporary theory, that of the death of the subject itself- the end of the autonomous bourgeois monad or ego or individual-and the accompanying stress, whether as some new moral ideal or as empirical description, on the decentering of that formerly centered subject or psyche" (1991, pp.14-15).

On the other hand, Baudrillard puts forward a different sense of end, in respect thereof, he asserts that: "We had come close to this philosophy with the atomic age. Alas, the balance of terror suspended the ultimate event, then postponed it forever and, now deterrence has succeeded, we have to get used to the idea that there is no end any longer, there will no longer be any end, that history itself has become interminable...there will be no end to anything" (Baudrillard, 1994:116). The theory finds its mirror in the play in Jonathan's lines: "Every second a new opportunity, every second a new disaster. The endless beginnings, the infinite endings. And each of us swept along by the great tides and winds of the markets. Is there anything more thrilling, more exhilarating than that?" (Ravenhill, 2001:293). Ravenhill splashes the sense of infiniteness in Jonathan's lines to strengthen his postmodernist view in the play. Hooti and Shooshtarian claim that "... in postmodern plays endings are both open and closed because they are either multiple or circular" (Hooti and Shooshtarian, 2010: 22).

Ravenhill reflects the problematic sides of community, which are scrutinized in a postmodern sense in the play. His characters represent the current social plight by showing postmodern onstage violence to reinforce his aim. He refers to shock tactics to stimulate the audience who is not passive in In-yer-face theatre. Ravenhill's work appeals to lots of moral issues, and Ravenhill criticizes the corruption of the moral values of contemporary society. Ravenhill's characters in *Some Explicit Polaroids* exhibit the ideologies of politics explicitly in what can be called a postmodern- post-ideological world. In respect thereof, Leslie Wade states that Ravenhill's plays:

Go beyond shock value and attempt serious philosophical (and political) inquiry. Giving potent voice to a generation disillusioned by national civic life, facing the complexities of an emerging global marketplace, Ravenhill questions the possibility of moral action. With volatile emotion and dark humor, his plays seek the ethical in a postmodern, post-ideological world (2008: 284).

Ravenhill's works present some basic features of postmodernism. In *Some Explicit Polaroids*, he uncovers the ambiguity which is substantially seen in the uncertain links between the actions. This is an element of postmodernism. Hooti and Shooshtarian states that: "Since every text that is written by a postmodern writer, or the work produced by a postmodern artist, as a means of verbalizing the chaotic nature of modern life, is not governed by Pre-established rules, it is filled with ambiguities and thus, it is usually possible to apply familiar categories to these works" (2011:48). Ravenhill does not refer to clear certainties, but he propounds upon suspicious terms. In Scene Two, Nadia and Victor are in the airport, but it is uncertain why they are there. The beginning of Scene Three is also blurred, Nadia and Nick, who are from separate layers -Nick has just been released from the prison, Nadia is beaten by her boy-friend- come together in Nadia's home, which is not described clearly in the play. On this point, Ravenhill cannot pose in a certain way or he is ambivalent to consumerism and global commodification. Since he merely exhibits aspects, he permanently exhibits a suspicious perspective; it is vague like a still developing Polaroid. In this sense, Ravenhill's uneasy mix of characters and ideas evokes the postmodern ambiguity which is seen in the play with the conflicts of two groups' ideological differences toward life politics. In this sense, Wade states this:

Ravenhill's play exhibits a profound yearning for interpersonal connection and altruistic possibility; however, the work reveals a deep ambiguity. Ravenhill remains suspicious of ideology, of any foundational authority, and thus cannot embrace the assurances of socialism (there is no going back); yet his depiction of postmodernism offers no positive alternative. The play ably captures the frustration and anxiety of a 1990s generation, bereft of moral grounding though still desirous of political efficacy (2008: 285).

Another significant feature in *Some Explicit Polaroids* is postmodern ethics; Wade describes postmodern ethics that "sets ethical relations against the Western tradition's pursuit of knowledge. This outlook renounces the erasures and impositions of modernist, rationalist thinking -which translates difference into categories of likeness and the same" (Wade, 2008:287). The ethics of otherness is also stated. Ravenhill focuses on the otherness issue in *Some Explicit Polaroids*. Ravenhill forms the play by selecting people

from alternating marginal groups such as gays versus straights, the young generation versus old, and leftist versus capitalists. In this point, Wade indicates “[P]ostmodern ethics rather underscores the call for responsibility, the primacy of the self’s obligation to the others” (Wade, 2008:287). In the play, it is connotated in Nadia and Victor’s:

Victor: How does this feel?

Nadia: Good.

Victor: You could fuck this body?

Nadia: Maybe.

Tim: Go on-fuck each other.

Victor: Yes. Fuck these gays, yes?

Scared of the woman’s bodies.

Nadia: Yes. Scared.

Tim: If that’ll stop you being lonely, fuck each other

Victor: Gays are...

Nadia: Ill.

Victor: Ill and ...

Nadia: Frightened. Frightened people.

(Ravenhill, 2001:287)

In addition, *Some Explicit Polaroids* focuses on the dilemma of moral and political commitment in a post-ideological age. Generational difference plays a significant role in this work; the older characters share a past of socialist allegiance, while the younger characters espouse postmodern positions. Jonathan and Nick represent two nemeses who reflect two opponent concepts: capitalism and socialism. Through these binaries, Ravenhill focuses on the amorality of contemporary society. Moreover Aleks Sierz notes, “Behind the violence of these plays, lies anger and confusion”; the plays are responses “to the difficulties of living in a post-Christian, post-feminist and postmodern society” (Sierz, 2001:240). Ravenhill lays bare the postmodern condition in which an old grand narrative of Christianity and morality is no longer available. The play also reveals that the moral values disappear in the contemporary society; this is seen in Victor’s lines:

Victor: Boyfriend, yes. Many boyfriends. They go crazy for my body.
But also my father, yes? My father and my brother go crazy for my
body.

...

Nadia: A very loving family.

Victor: Yes I think so. Yes. My brother he likes to photograph me, you know? Polaroid? Since I was fourteen. Polaroid of my body. See? Fucking fantastic body.

Nadia: And that's your ...? Right. Right.

Victor: And I say to my brother when I am fourteen: I could be in porno.

Nadia: Well that's great.

Victor: Yes?

Nadia: Yes, I think it's great to have an ambition. Something you want and really go for it.

Victor: One day I was so fucking crazy I took Polaroids and I ...please word is ...I...scan Polaroids on home page and I say: 'Look at this great body. Great body, crazy guy. Any other crazy guys out there want to do stuff with this fucking crazy body?' (Ravenhill, 2001, pp.239-240)

Ravenhill's work gives a postmodernist mood to the audience in terms of its subject matter, characters' promiscuous relationships with each other, and contradictions in times. It is also related to the claims of Hooti, "everything in the stratum of postmodernism is indeterminate. As a movement which rejects the idea of the autonomy of the text, postmodernism believes in indeterminacy and relativity rather than exactness and absolutism. Therefore, there are many issues in postmodernism which can be permanently or radically indeterminate between two or more status" (Hooti, Shooshtarian, 2011, pp.51-52). In the play this idea is mirrored in Nadia's lines: "Because we all have our own journeys that we're travelling. Each of us has our own path and, of course, we can't always see the path, sometimes it seems like there's no sense in anything, you know? But of course there is. Everything makes sense" (Ravenhill, 2001:238). She underscores the ambiguity of life itself in the play. Ravenhill also refers to some indefinite subjects in the play, and leaves questions unanswered in the minds of the audience. In *Beckett and The Stage Image: Toward a Poetics of Postmodern Performance*, Neil Murphy, while discoursing on postmodern drama makes it clear:

With respect to postmodern drama the implications are as follow: postmodern drama is different to postmodern fiction quite simply because the words we hear on stage frequently offer views that challenge the idea of the validity of meaning, life, action but, in an implicit sense, this may be compromised by the actuality of the stage, even if the characters appear to be living futile lives; they are still there, they speak, they act,

they exist. So a gap between word and deed in postmodern drama at very least delays the full impact of the arrival at unmeaning (2008:352).

In *Me, My iBook, and Writing in America*, Ravenhill admits that his plays “report upon, maybe even critique, a world of globalised capitalism” (2006 (b), 132). It is noticed in Jonathan’s lines: “There’s the multinationals, the World Bank, NATO, Europe and there’s the grass roots, there’s roadshows where you listen, but still when all’s said and done...” (Ravenhill, 2001:259) Wade also states that: “the matter of community and coherence, however, extends beyond national boundaries and points to a global reorientation of politics and knowledge. The fall of the Berlin Wall stands as something of a political and epistemological watershed, ushering forward a realignment of global power, the rearticulation of identity positions, and the dismantling of ideological assumptions” (2008:286). In *Some Explicit Polaroids*, the idea finds its resonances in Victor’s line: “The world is not so big, you know? There’s the same music, the same burgers, the same people. Everywhere in the world. You can keep moving all the time and still be in the same place” (Ravenhill, 2001:303). He uncovers the globalised market power in the world; you can purchase any item anywhere because the same item is marketed all over the world. It is actually a criticism of capitalism and postmodern consumerist society. Leslie A. Wade highlights Ravenhill’s aim:

Ravenhill remains desirous of some force or appeal that might assuage the troubling aspects of unchecked global capitalism. What one finds in Ravenhill’s work is a sort of prevailing question and a recurrent confusion-how to retain the moral imperative of socialism given the fragmented and dispersed condition of the global order (and the status of knowledge). The ethics of otherness seek a similar aim-to relate responsibility to the other without the mediation of law, nation, identity, or ideology (2008:287).

The general doctrine of postmodernism is illnesses of contemporary society which consists of marginalized groups, and the treatment of the arts is generally beyond ordinary. It is easily seen in every postmodernist work that there are concepts of the troubled sides of being human. It is noticed that most of the subtendencies of postmodernism are combined with the prefix of dis/de. Ihab Hassan narrows in on the compounding of tendencies that the following words evoke: “heterodoxy, pluralism, eclecticism, revolt, deformation. The latter alone subsumes a dozen current terms of unmaking: decreation, disintegration, deconstruction, decenterment, difference, discontinuity, disjunction, disappearance, decomposition, de-definition, demystification, detotalization, delegitimation” (1983:9). In this sense, the illnesses of society are reproduced in contemporary art. In *Some Explicit Polaroids*, it is connotated in Nadia’s lines regarding her desires around sexuality:

Nadia: Do you want to go to bed with me? I've got a great body. And I bet you've got a great body too.

Jonathan: I'm not really interested in bodies.

Nadia: Everyone's interested in bodies.

Jonathan: May be there's something unnatural about me.

Nadia: Everyone's interested in my body. Men pay just for a few minutes near my body. Even when they're not allowed to touch. (She takes off her top) What do you feel?

Jonathan: Nothing.

Nadia: Begins to dance.

Nadia: You must be feeling something now?

Jonathan: It doesn't mean anything to me. You're a very powerless person, aren't you?

Nadia: Am I?

Jonathan: Oh yes. You are a very powerless, lonely, unfocused person, aren't you?

(Ravenhill, 2001, pp.291-292)

Throughout the play Nadia's tendencies are interpreted as a mirror of postmodern society. Since she is the representative of the younger generation which espouses postmodernism in the play, her manners and lines are generally full of illness and reflect the problematic sides of current life. In *The Illusions of Postmodernism* Terry Eagleton proves that:

I must end, regretfully, on a minatory note. Postmodern end-of-history thinking does not envisage a future for us much different from the present, a prospect it oddly views as a cause for celebration. But there is indeed one such possible future among several, and its name is fascism. The greatest test of postmodernism, or for that matter of any other political doctrine, is how it would shape up to that. Its rich body of work on racism and ethnicity, on the paranoia of identity-thinking, on the perils of totality and the fear of otherness: all this, along with its deepened insights into the cunning of power, would no doubt be of considerable value. But its cultural relativism and moral conventionalism, its scepticism, pragmatism and localism, its distaste for ideas of solidarity and disciplined organization, its lack of any adequate theory of political agency: all these would tell heavily against it. In confronting its political

antagonists, the left, now more than ever, has need of strong ethical and even anthropological foundations; nothing short of this is likely to furnish us with the political resources we require. And on this score, postmodernism is in the end part of the problem rather than of the solution. (Eagleton, 1996: 134-135)

Ravenhill's characters mirror a traumatic nihilist society by reflecting the absence of hopeful thoughts of the future. Wolf suggests that "a lot of attitude goes in search of a play in *Some Explicit Polaroids*, the latest nihilistic report from Ravenhill, the author of *Shopping and F***ing*" (1999: 52). Tim, one of the most powerful young characters, is HIV-positive and loses his belief in happiness. In his lines it is predominantly noticed that he has some epistemological problems in his mind. He does not know the importance of his presence which he finds meaningless. It connotes Gary's desire to be killed with a knife in *Shopping and F***ing*. Urban highlights that these experiences on the stage "make an impact that is tragic in Nietzschean sense. The tragic, for Nietzsche, is that which turns suffering into an affirmation of life" (Urban, 2004:369). In *Some Explicit Polaroids*, Nadia and Tim's lines shelter an intense sense of nihilist views which includes criticism of basic ideologies: She says that "everything is terrible. Nothing means anything. There's nobody out there. I'm alone in the universe" (Ravenhill, 2001:288). Moreover, in his hospital bed Tim refuses to take his pills and says:

Tim: I want to know where I am. Since I was nineteen, I've known that, you know? I knew where everything was heading. And sure, it was a fucking tragedy. My life was a tragedy and that was frightening and sad and it used to do my head in. But I knew where everything was going. Bit by bit my immune system would break down until...no fixed figure. Five years, ten years, some amazing freaks even took fifteen years. (Ravenhill, 2001:288)

...

Oh yes, that's happened to me. Now, I've started feeling completely knackered. I've reached the first step. Now I'm on the same path as the others. Better start resting. Wait until stage two. Skin problems. Dry skin, warts. Short of breath. Waiting until...lesions. Here they are. This thing is taking its course. We're moving forward. And now you can see everything all the way down the line (Ravenhill, 2001: 288).

Ravenhill's works invoke postmodernist views on contemporary playwrighting which focuses on unoriginal subjects. First, *Faust's Dead* is a reinterpretation of Goethe's classical masterpiece *Faust*, and *Some Explicit Polaroids* is similar to Ernst Toller's *Hoppla, wirleben* – "which tells the story of a revolutionary who returns home after

eight years in an asylum to find that his old comrades have become corrupt conformists—Ravenhill's version combines a seventies state-of-the-nation play with an acerbic critique of both nineties youth culture and traditional leftist militancy" (Sierz, 2001:144). In the postmodern sense of drama it loses its originality and uniqueness. In *Postmodern Elements in Shaw's Misalliance*, Tony Stafford highlights:

Another feature of postmodernism is a changed view of the artistic producer, the author, artist, architect, or musician. Previously, the artist was regarded as someone of great creativity and originality, as a genius, different from everyone else and occupying a special place. In postmodernism, the elevated view of the artist has been debased with a view that art can only be repetitious (2009: 184).

In *Some Explicit Polaroids*, Ravenhill emphasizes political nihilism and criticism of political systems. "Ravenhill's play is reduced to a vulgar comedy on sex and nihilism" (Pavis, 2004:15). His characters represent declining political systems; nevertheless, some of them are consistent enough to maintain their rigid political belief. In this sense Sierz underscores that: "[...] the twentysomethings are free of ideology, which, he says, allow you to be open to new ideas, they are also lost and confused. By contrast, Nick and Helen are firmly grounded in ideological beliefs, but Helen is seen as dull and Nick cannot join in with youth's frantic partying" (Sierz, 2001:147). It is not proved that the eminent political systems of capitalism and socialism are to be contented. In the play the meaninglessness of these political systems are predominantly dealt with as reflected in Victor's line:

Victor: You are socialist?

Nick: Yeah.

Victor: I hate socialist.

Nick: Right.

Victor: Everything falling to pieces. The buildings ugly and falling down. The shops ugly, empty. The ugly people following the rules and then mocking and complaining when they think that no-one is listening. All the time you know it is rotting, but all the time Everything is getting better. Everything is for the best. The people are marching forward to the beat of history.' This lie. This deception. This progress. Big fucking lie (Ravenhill, 2001, pp.270-271).

Apart from this, Ravenhill reveals the meaninglessness of current political tendencies in Helen's lines explicitly: "And now finally there's a chance to do something. Too late for anything big. Too much lost for any grand gestures. But trying to pick up the

pieces. Trying to create a few possibilities for the bits of humanity that are left. I've seen those bastards fuck up the country all these years. Now I want to do something about it" (Ravenhill, 2001:281). Contrary to this, Jonathan, who is the most consistent character in the play, does not change his posture. He is a capitalist at the beginning of the play, and he is a capitalist at the end. He is the mouthpiece of the postmodern, post-consumerist side of *Some Explicit Polaroids*. Jonathan's lines make it obvious:

Jonathan: I think we both miss the struggle. It's all been rather easy for me these last few years. And I start to feel guilty if things come too easily. But really money, capitalism if you like, is the closest we've come to the way that people actually live. And, sure, we can work out all sorts of other schemes, try and plan to make everything better. But ultimately the market is the only thing sensitive enough, flexible enough to actually respond to the way we tick (Ravenhill, 2001:311).

In postmodern works, the sense of space and time are generally lost and complex. Radunovic asserts that: "Postmodern Theater approaches the revision of the concept of history through the questioning of teleological stories and linear patterns. Much in evidence in contemporary theatre, the ruptures in dramatic linearity have made the multiple temporalities of theatre performance conspicuous, but they also elicited an awareness of the simultaneous existence of heterogeneous histories" (2008:447). Ravenhill does not refer to a sustainable use of time perception in his work. It is divulged that the linearity of the play is not perceived, and he focuses on destinations while ignoring time coherence. The first scene opens with Nick's appearance in Helen's home; the second scene takes place in the airport; the third scene occurs in Nadia's flat. There is no concrete unity of time and space in Ravenhill's *Some Explicit Polaroids*. Nadia and Nick's encounter is not clear, and it also unclear why Jonathan and Nadia come together. Pavis lends credence to this claim:

No chronotope emerges having any general symbolic force suggesting exclusion, or the human condition, since the audience is invited to move from one space to another according to the needs of the plot. The meaning of the individual and political story gradually emerges in the passage from one group to the other or from one world, endures this procession of different places in a state hovering between anger and repentance, while Nadia and Victor, as slaves to sex, organize an alternative place, a crazy world in which drugs, junk food and medicines replace the life and the values of earlier days. (2004:7)

Conclusion

In brief, Ravenhill's aim is questioning the possibility of morality which is scrutinized in his plays by focusing on dark humor, and the postmodern, post-ideological, and post-consumerist world in terms of ethical values. Ravenhill emphasizes the elements of the postmodern ethic which is referred to as a political and moral programme in the play. Ravenhill's goal to serve as a mouthpiece of the minorities can be seen in the determination of his characters: Gays, HIV-positives, ex-criminals, shortly the others. He criticizes eminent social and political structures by spiking characters' lines with nihilistic views. He presents two rival generations in the play, which can be separated into the older generation who are focused on the political and the younger generation formed by members of postmodern society as proved by their lines and actions. In passing from scene to scene, there is no concrete bond between characters when they come together, but it is not clear why. It is revealed in the play that the sense of dehumanizing effects become dominant because of reckless global capitalism. It is proved that Ravenhill tries to lay bare the logic of consumerism and post-consumerism in terms of postmodernism. Ravenhill appears to puzzle the audience by raising postmodern social and political issues in *Some Explicit Polaroids*. At the end of the play, it is uncovered that Tim dies and Victor masturbates with the corpse, Alek Sierz asserts that: "Masturbating a corpse is a powerful image of futility, and Tim's realization, too late, that he does love Victor makes the scene a gut-wrenching one" (2001:147). It is sentimental, but at the same time postmodern in its focus on the other. In this sense, it is revealed that Mark Ravenhill's *Some Explicit Polaroids* has a postmodernist perspective summed up by Jonathan explicitly: The endless beginnings and the infinite endings.

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