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The Empty Center: Acting Out Theatrical Alliance in Three Texts by Sarah Kane

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
Requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Drama and Theatre

by

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2008

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to myself
because that is who I discovered while writing it.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Empty Center: Acting Out Theatric Alliance in Three Texts by Sarah Kane

by

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Professor Marianne McDonald, Chair

This dissertation situates Sarah Kane's dramatic work beyond its In-Yer-Face debut productions (U.K.; circa 1995-2000) and within the larger spectrum of western drama in an effort to introduce a new dramatic vocabulary with which to critically engage with non-traditional dramatic texts. I argue for the establishment of a *theatric alliance*, which I define as the joining of a text (Kane's in this case) with a contributing narrative for production in an effort to achieve a specific social, political, or theatrical goal. I posit that Kane's carefully constructed dramaturgy includes a conscious invitation, via textual and narrative "gaps," to the theatre artist(s), to participate in this alliance. This collaboration results in a critical alliance with Kane's texts that ultimately re-inspires them as relevant, current, and active pieces of theatre,

thereby gaining admission into a myriad of vastly different social and political climates. I discuss the implications of previous contributing narratives that have forged an alliance with Kane's texts including: disabled-led theatre, state-controlled art, mental-illness, and suicide.

I extend Wolfgang Iser's literary theory of the *implied reader* to include an *implied reader/performer* as well as an *implied audience*. By engaging with the critical theories of Iser, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and Victor Turner, I argue that the malleability and ingenuity of Kane's texts allows her work to transcend the limits of the media criticism endured during the mid- to late 1990s and be included among the most poignant and astutely engaging theatre in modern drama.

Introduction: Critical Inspiration: (Re)membering Sarah Kane's Body of Work

(Dionysus and Demeter) were both suffering gods.

The other immortals were untouched by lasting grief.¹

From the first reviews of her work by the British press in 1995 to her suicide in 1999, Sarah Kane maintained her reputation as "Britain's bad girl" via explosive, heart-wrenching texts that screamed from notoriously visceral performances. Scholars and critics relish the opportunity to load journals, conferences, and press with opinions regarding the bleakness and violence embedded within her plays. In many instances these reviewers and scholars criticized and accused Kane's work of being "the prurient psycho-fantasies of a profoundly disturbed mind [rather] than a genuine exploration of a serious theme."² Even those scholars and critics who recognize merit in Kane's work have difficulties contextualizing the violence within her work beyond its shock value and brutal theatricality.

British writer and theatre critic Aleks Sierz coined the phrase "In-Yer-Face Theatre" to describe the period in the late 1990s when an onslaught of violent plays by young writers stormed British stages.³ Sierz considers Kane's presentation and organization of onstage violence to best exemplify the tenets of this new genre. By grouping Kane and her texts within In-Yer-Face Theatre, Sierz credits Kane's texts with a variety of groundbreaking accomplishments and incidentally ropes her work into popular theatre discourse. However, in an effort to unpack the longevity and continuing international acclaim of Kane's texts, I suggest a critical examination of

¹ Edith Hamilton, *Mythology* (New York: Warner, 1999) 50.

² Roger Foss, rev. of *Blasted*, by Sarah Kane, dir. James Macdonald, Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London, *What's On* 25 January 1995: *Theatre Record* XV.1-2 (1995) 38.

³ Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001).

Kane's work and its potency beyond, though not in place of, these In-Yer-Face terms and accolades. This dissertation does not rely on what Kane's texts *did* in performance, rather, I am interested in asking what the unique construction and thematic meditations within Kane's texts might allow these plays to *do* in *alliance* with various artists in performance. Rather than examining a finite performative moment, I examine the lineage and heredity that led to, and emerges from, that moment theatrically, politically, and socially.

The power of Kane's texts comes from their elusiveness; we never quite know where they take place or what they aim to confront. This slipperiness allows the people who perform her work the opportunity to forge a specific and unique theatrical bond with her dramas. This project fleshes out the theory of "theatric alliance" in further detail, but the basis of the alliance is a commitment to progressive and productive theatre that looks to expand its assumed area of influence. What essentially is at stake each and every time one of Kane's texts is performed is the anxious search for a *center*. Obviously, "center" can literally refer to that which is in the middle. However, it can retain a more enigmatic quality as well. Consider these varying uses: we stand "front and center" when being held accountable; in dance we use our "center" to successfully complete various balances, leaps, and turns; in yoga we turn into our "center" in the hopes of liberating inner peace; in theatre we give the utmost importance to acting "center stage;" and Christians try to make Christ the "center" of their lives. These examples reflect quite a bit of dependence on this thing we cannot pinpoint. Metaphorically, the idea of "center" I am alluding to references that which always eludes us and remains just outside our grasp, but for which we always yearn

and strive to define...if only momentarily. On a personal, spiritual, or psychological level we as individuals or as a group push to “find” our center in the hope that it may hold the key to our identity: to our truth.

The search for center gives action to the Greek maxim, “Know thyself” which graces the temple at Delphi (along with the phrase, “Nothing in excess”) and assumedly advised many individuals searching for answers from the Delphic oracle. The process of aligning a contributing narrative with one of Kane’s texts, literally working *with* the text towards a specific goal, affords us the fleeting satisfaction of momentarily recognizing our center [or our collective center(s)]: of knowing by doing. This opportunity to play unendingly with Kane’s texts, to use and reuse them for a myriad of alliances and journeys towards self-knowledge, pushes her texts beyond the context of their 1990s British inception and allows them access to the world’s stage.

May I Cut In? Aligning with the Catastrophe and Inspiring Iser-esque Gaps

I’ve always tried to avoid any reference to an actual situation.—Sarah Kane⁴

Situating Kane and her texts outside In-Yer-Face theatre begins by removing her texts from the confines of their debut moments and analyzing their respective dramaturgies in an effort to unpack new theatrical possibilities. A careful excavation of Kane’s texts reveals an insistent invitation to theatre artists to strategically align their points of view with Kane’s texts in performance. This invitation takes the form of expertly woven dramaturgical *gaps* within the structure of her texts. The gaps in Kane’s texts reverberate with the remnants of the contributing narratives that previously filled them, including those narratives which originally inspired Kane’s

⁴ Sarah Kane, interview with Nils Tabert, 8 February 1998.

construction. For example, Kane described her process during the creation of *Blasted*: “Having brought it [the characters and their circumstances in *Blasted*] all to the surface, the job of the later drafts was to bury it again, make it felt rather than spoken.”⁵ However, Kane’s gutting of her private political and social inspirations from her texts left a messy (w)hole. Whether or not Kane employed this exact method in the creation of her other texts, her sentiment to create a narrative that is “felt rather than spoken” weaves through them all.⁶ This narrative technique allows her texts to align with contributing context from a variety of new sources. Furthermore, this strategy encourages the reader/performer to use the texts in active negotiations grounded in the present that consciously point towards the future, rather than lamenting past transgressions.

Kane’s contextual and dramaturgical gaps take many forms including, but not limited to: seemingly unstageable violence [i.e. the transgender operation of Grace “into” Graham and the systematic dismemberment of Carl in *Cleansed* (1998)];⁷ unseen action between scenes [Cate’s rape in *Blasted* (1995)⁸ and Phaedra’s suicide in *Phaedra’s Love* (1996)];⁹ the exclusion of character description, setting, and time [arguably all of the texts lack this, but most poignantly *Crave* (1998)¹⁰ and *4.48 Psychosis*(2000)];¹¹ and magical realism (the sunflower that bursts out of the floor, the daffodils that suddenly grow through the floorboards, and the rats that carry off Carl’s

⁵ Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 101.

⁶ The arguable exception to this argument is *Phaedra’s Love*, which lacks this narrative technique in favor of a more specific agenda resulting in a less “inviting” text. Chapter Two focuses on this deviation.

⁷ Sarah Kane, *Cleansed, Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2001) 105-51.

⁸ Sarah Kane, *Blasted, Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2001) 24.

⁹ Sarah Kane, *Phaedra’s Love, Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2001) 90.

¹⁰ Sarah Kane, *Crave, Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2001) 153-201.

¹¹ Sarah Kane, *4.48 Psychosis, Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2001) 203-45.

body parts in *Cleansed*).¹² In most instances these gaps seem slightly disjointed on the page. In particular, Kane guts the impetus or “reason” for the violent action in her plays, resulting in zealous texts in need of a purpose and aim. Kane trusted the theatre artists to provide contexts for these acts and insisted that she was not adding violence to the world. Rather, she claimed she was reflecting back violence already present in the world. Intentionally expressionistic and surreal, these texts allow for deeply personal and poignant expressions of love, hate, fear, and acceptance.

In the introduction to *The Implied Reader*, Wolfgang Iser describes a similar strategy in what he terms the “esthetic blanks” within a given novel, wherein the filling of said blanks by the reader provides a fundamental element of the experience of reading the novel. I use the term “gaps” in reference to Kane’s texts in order to differentiate them from Iser’s “blanks,” which he uses in reference to the novel specifically, and not dramatic texts.¹³ Additionally, the term “blank” denotes emptiness or void, wherein a “gap” suggests a moment that is part of a continuum and thus a charged, liminal, space influenced and pressured from all sides. In *From Ritual to Theatre: the Human Seriousness of Play*, Victor Turner points out that “liminality is both more creative and more destructive than the structural norm,” and thus these gaps create a volatile but exciting repository for contributing narratives.¹⁴ Chapter One looks specifically at the powerful potential of “gap-filling” in Kane’s *Blasted* when

¹² Kane, *Cleansed* 120,133, 136.

¹³ Not to suggest that “gap” is any less vague, and in that sense frustrating, than “blank” but, for discussion purposes it helps to use a different term.

¹⁴ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982) Turner 47.

aligned with a specific activist effort as well as the spectrum of dramaturgical gaps within the larger theatre canon.

A “gap” suggests a loss; a missing puzzle piece that eludes us, and thus consciously points towards potential “fillers” that once inserted completes the picture and bridges the two points. The contributing narrative bridges the gaps within Kane’s texts for production. Therefore, the contributing narrators, or the “implied reader/performer” as it were, who will potentially align with Kane’s texts, become implicit in the meaning of the text itself. Their insertion of self into the text emulates the action of Iser’s implied readers: “These, the readers of the novel, are then forced to take an active part in the composition of the novel’s meaning, which revolves round a basic divergence from the familiar.”¹⁵ Iser concludes that the involvement of the reader in composing meaning in the novel not only provides pleasure for the reader but also gives a sense of immediacy to the text. Thus, the implied reader/performer invests himself/herself in the text in order to experience a fully realized and decidedly personal narrative.

The degree to which the author overtly reveals his or her invitation to the reader for self-inclusion within the structure of the story varies throughout the history of the novel as a genre. Iser describes the evolution of this feature of the novel’s construction in the twentieth century by situating a large majority of the action of the text within the body of the reader. The reader’s metaphysical connection to the text intensifies while he/she fills in the esthetic blanks of a text based on the reader’s

¹⁵ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974) xii.

personal history or sense of the world. The reader's understanding of his/her world becomes inextricable from his/her understanding of the world of the text. According to Iser, as the reader discovers the world of the text, the reader discovers him/herself in it.¹⁶ This theory complements Antonin Artaud's emphasis on theatre that pushes past material constraints and concerns itself primarily with the metaphysics felt within the performer and audience during performance of a text.¹⁷ Kane's work merges Artaud's and Iser's theories via the invitation for a contributing narrative, thus effectively raising the stakes of Iser's self-discovery as well as the implications of Artaud's magical moment on stage.

The definition of a contributing narrative I am using here can be understood as the contribution of the theatre artist beyond the usual demands of his/her respective craft (i.e. director, costumer, actor, dramaturg, choreographer, designer, etc.) as required by Kane's texts to create a viable staged experience. This contribution suggests what a particular performance aims to address in addition to the narrative of the text itself. Arguably, all theatre can, and should, be re-visioned with each new production. However, I argue that Kane's texts expertly weave this invitation into the dramaturgy of the texts, thus making the contributing narrative no longer optional rather required by the text.

Furthermore, Kane's plays readily allow the performer the opportunity to align specific social and political agendas with the uncompromising force of her texts. Kane's work functions as a skeleton which the theatre artist fleshes out with his/her

¹⁶ Iser, *Implied Reader* xiv.

¹⁷ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

contributing narrative, while recognizing certain givens (bone structure) with which one must reckon. However, Kane's texts are not a skeleton of static bones, dusty in the graveyard. Rather they are *Día de los Muertos calaveras* (skeletons), actively in motion. The individual theatre artist must capture these skeletons, harness their energy, and channel it into his/her own narrative. The contributing narrative does not stifle the skeleton, limit its abilities, or try to change its composition by cloaking it in an unrecognizable disguise. Rather, it works from the inside out, so to speak. The contributing narrative effectively lends the skeleton (the text) a heart and pulse, thus allowing it greater acceptance with the living audience. The skeleton as a structure defines and limits prospective "costumers." Regardless of what cloaks or fleshes out the skeleton, its innate structure always informs the final composition. Kane's texts likewise contribute key points of consideration and negotiation to their productions; they are always pushing for visibility just beneath the skin of the performance. In this way, the text and contributing narrative work to balance each other and implicate each other in their respective constructions.

Iser uses the term "implied reader" to refer to both the site of potential blank-filling and the author's acknowledgement that his/her text will depend upon the said reader to achieve its goals. Kane's texts push this acknowledgement one step further. Her texts invite the contributing narrative as part and parcel of the work of the *implied reader/performer*. The implied reader/performer's blank-filling process will require the performer to not only "exercise his faculties—generally the emotional and the

cognitive,”¹⁸ but to lend their physical selves and lived experiences on the stage to a third party, the *implied audience*. The implied audience relies on the performers’ inspiration to facilitate their own esthetic blank-filling and catharsis. In this way, we see how the “discovery” for which Kane’s texts call requires the reader/performer’s total immersion into the text in an effort to re-inspire and re-activate the cycle of tragedy from which Kane’s texts draw their energy.

The bodies of the actors onstage that perform one of Kane’s texts stimulate the rebirth of tragedy within the texts for themselves and for the audience. The performers act both inside and outside the community of the audience. Performers and audience alike experience the revived tragedy and its concurrent self-discovery. However, the audience’s experience of these phenomena piggybacks on the performers’ blank-filling processes. Unlike the novel, wherein the reader inserts his/her personal understanding of the world for his/her own private benefit, the reader/performer of Kane’s texts must expose his/her understanding of the world in such a way that the audience can include the reader/performer’s self-discovery into their esthetic understanding of the performance text. The level to which these performers publicly display their discoveries for the audience requires a near-heroic bearing of the soul. The added element of the audience inherent within dramatic text requires the reader/performer to sacrifice the privacy granted to the reader by the novel in order to benefit the audience community.

Kane’s texts intensify the reader/performer’s dramatic task by requiring the sacrifice of the private self in exchange for the public self-discovery onstage. Because

¹⁸ Iser, *Implied Reader* xiii.

Kane's texts regularly explore the deepest, darkest, and most disturbing expressions of the human experience, the reader/performer must negotiate for her or himself the public display of their private understanding of these expressions. The audience judges not just what Kane understands about the world, but the performers' understanding of Kane's world. The reader/performer exposes his/her ability to make sense of Kane's horrific images in their transition from page to stage and thus become inextricable from the audience's picture of these horrors. Because of the extreme violence and taboo topics within Kane's texts, the performer's admission to a working knowledge of these topics pushes past the customary demand of the actor by the dramatic text. The public blank-filling required of Kane's texts in performance minimizes the separation between character and actor, thus heightening the risk associated with performing one of these texts.

The Dance Card: Slotting a Place for Kane Scholarship

My analysis of Kane's work moves past the sensationalized debuts of her plays in the United Kingdom and offers a critical examination of Kane's use of strategic dramaturgical gaps and the residual opportunities for future reincarnations of her work afforded by these gaps. In an effort to increase the appreciation and acceptance of Kane's work beyond its In-Yer-Face context, my analysis suggests that Kane's plays can and should be paired with a plethora of contributing narratives. These potential pairings point towards a larger goal of increasing the production of theatre that recycles and refuels its mythical heritage while always forcefully working to remain current and conscious. Furthermore, this dissertation utilizes classic Greek myths and

dramas (particularly those of Euripides) as conduits through which to siphon out Kane's transcendent themes and conventions.

Prior to my work academic scholarship on Kane's work began, in large part, to unpack the litany of violence within her texts and its phenomenological shock value.¹⁹ Sierz's *In-Yer-Face Theatre* (2000) credits Kane with defining a revolutionary moment in British theatre history and emphasizes the aggressive violence within her plays. Through this text, Sierz defines In-Yer-Face theatre as "any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message."²⁰ In 2004, he published "'To Recommend a Cure': Beyond Social Realism and In-Yer-Face Theatre"²¹ as clarification to his previous discussion of In-Yer-Face theatre, redefining In-Yer-Face not as a movement or a school but as a sensibility. Sierz concludes that In-Yer-Face refers to a specific rupture during a theatre performance that involves the audience and their experience at the theatre, which extends—if not breaks open—the code of Social Realism. Sierz relies most frequently on Kane's work as the example of In-Yer-Face theatre.

¹⁹ This excludes the numerous reviews of Kane's work in their theatrical debuts. These reviews in and of themselves constitute quite a bit of the original Kane "furor" and in that sense deserve to be noted within a larger literature review of Kane scholarship. For a compilation of these reviews see Rev. of *Blasted*, by Sarah Kane, *Theatre Record* XV (1995): 38-43.; Rev. of *Blasted*, by Sarah Kane, *Theatre Record* XXI (2001): 418-23.; Rev. of *Cleansed*, by Sarah Kane, *Theatre Record* XVIII (1998): 563-68.; Rev. of *Crave*, by Sarah Kane, *Theatre Record* XVIII (1998): 1152-54.; Rev. of *4.48 Psychosis*, by Sarah Kane, *Theatre Record* XX (2000): 826-30.; and Rev. of *Phaedra's Love*, by Sarah Kane, *Theatre Record* XVI (1996): 651-54.

²⁰ Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 4.

²¹ Aleks Sierz, "'To Recommend a Cure': Beyond Social Realism and In-Yer-Face Theatre," *Extending the Code: New Forms of Dramatic Theatrical Expression. Contemporary Drama in English 11*, eds. Hans-Ulrich Mohr and Kerstin Machler (Trier: WVT, 2004) 45-62.

In “In-Yer-Face Theatre? Reflections on Provocation and Provoked Audiences in Contemporary Theatre,”²² Piet Defraeye identifies shock as one of the main tactics of subversion, which materializes as the radicalization of artistic expression. Defraeye includes Kane as one of these radically expressive artists. In this article Defraeye divides cultural practice in the postmodern era into two oppositional camps: “That of homogenization and appropriation...and the strategic need to subvert this homogenization.”²³ This dissertation positions itself alongside both Sierz and Defraeye’s mode of inquiry by aligning Kane’s arguably “shocking” tactics with activist efforts and contextualizing the impetus for her work within a very specific political moment. Ultimately, this dissertation works to peel away the negativity and naiveté associated with “shock value” (and by extension, Kane) to reveal the critical and emotional forces that drive Kane’s body of work.

Fellow playwright David Greig’s introduction to Kane’s *Complete Plays* provides one of the most engaging and poignant pieces of writing on Kane and her work.²⁴ Greig details the history of Kane’s texts in modern British theatre, discussing both Kane the author and the varied reception of her work. Greig also offers valuable information about Kane’s methods of writing including her literary influences.

Unlike Greig’s discussion, which scrupulously blended elements from Kane’s body of work as well as her professional biography, authors such as Annabelle Singer

²² Defraeye, Piet, “In-Yer-Face Theatre? Reflections on Provocation and Provoked Audiences in Contemporary Theatre,” *Extending the Code: New Forms of Dramatic Theatrical Expression. Contemporary Drama in English 11*, eds. Hans-Ulrich Mohr and Kerstin Machler (Trier: WVT, 2004) 79-97.

This is the same anthology in which Sierz’s aforementioned article regarding In-Yer-Face theatre appeared.

²³ Defraeye 80.

²⁴ David Greig, introduction, *Complete Plays*, by Sarah Kane (London: Methuen, 2001) ix-xviii.

tend to overplay their self-appointed forensic roles as seen in Singer's 2004, "Don't Want to Be This: The Elusive Sarah Kane."²⁵ In this article, Singer attempts to "tease out the institutions that created the explosive performances of Sarah Kane's career."²⁶ Though initially this appears to entail identifying the political and social climates which have contributed to Kane's texts, Singer goes on to focus heavily on Kane's private biography. Consequently, she blurs the line between the performance of Kane doing "Sarah Kane" (either in the press, in a mental institution, or in the writing of her plays) and the performance of Kane's work on stage (sometimes by Kane but usually by others). Though Singer makes interesting observations about audience reaction to specific Kane performances, the significant attention paid to Kane's biography at the expense of her work skews Singer's conclusions. My analysis pays less attention to "Kane the playwright." Within this dissertation, biographical details exist primarily as incidental to larger arguments regarding Kane's craft and are generally confined to documented quotes and anecdotes from Kane herself. I distance critical discussion of Kane's work from that of her personal biography in an effort to free her work from the constraints of the In-Yer-Face moment and lobby for Kane's inclusion in the global theatre repertoire. Chapter Three in particular works to extricate *4.48 Psychosis* from its fusion with the media coverage following Kane's 1999 suicide.

In addition to these academic articles Graham Saunders offers the only complete book dedicated solely to the topic of Kane and her work.²⁷ In this book,

²⁵ Annabelle Singer, "Don't Want to Be This: The Elusive Sarah Kane," *The Drama Review* T182 (2004): 139-71.

²⁶ Singer, "The Elusive Sarah Kane" 140.

²⁷ As of early 2008.

entitled, *“Love Me or Kill Me”: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes* (2000),²⁸ Saunders sifts through Kane’s plays and their debut moments, focusing on their “extreme” content and form. Saunders defines extreme as a deviation from the “niceties of plotting and the trappings of realism” within British theatre in favor of dramatic style that investigates “the extremes and complexities of modern experience.”²⁹ Although this dissertation concurs with Saunders’s attention to Kane’s bold exploration of dramatic content and form, I argue that the media chaos sparked by her plays had more to do with the disturbing familiarity of the violence portrayed in her text rather than any extreme or distant quality.³⁰

The focus of this dissertation differs from that of Saunders’s writings primarily in that it does not aim to act as a review of all of Kane’s dramatic texts. Rather than taking on all five of Kane’s dramatic texts (or her 1997 ten-minute screenplay, *Skin*),³¹ I interrogate three of her texts in three separate chapters (Chapters One, Two, and Three discuss *Blasted*, *Phaedra’s Love*, and *4.48 Psychosis*, respectively) in an effort to provide an in-depth analysis of Kane’s dramaturgical technique and its correlating performance history. This does not suggest that an in-depth dramaturgical and performance-based analysis of *Cleansed* and *Crave* would in any way be futile. In fact, the dramaturgical techniques extrapolated from my analysis of *Blasted*, *Phaedra’s Love*, and *4.48 Psychosis* appear as forcefully within *Cleansed* and *Crave*. However, many of the textual manifestations of these techniques identified within

²⁸ Graham Saunders, *‘Love Me or Kill Me’: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002).

²⁹ Saunders 11, 19.

³⁰ Saunders’s second book devoted to Kane and her plays, entitled *About Kane: the Playwright & the Work*, is expected to be available in April 2008.

³¹ Sarah Kane, *Skin, Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2001) 247-68.

Blasted and *4.48 Psychosis* resonate very similarly within *Cleansed* and *Crave*, respectively, as do Kane's experimentations with magical realism and dramatic form. Therefore, I engage with these three texts in part to resist redundancy within the given topic. However, fears of redundancy aside, I assert that choosing to engage with Kane's debut text (*Blasted*), her only commissioned text (*Phaedra's Love*), and her final text (*4.48 Psychosis*) provides the opportunity to evaluate the multiplicity of Kane's use of dramaturgical gaps, and additional mythic conventions, within their most poignant examples.

These three texts provide ample material for deciphering and analyzing Kane's dramatic method within different textual bodies. *Blasted's* dramaturgical and contextual gaps echo with the personal frustration Kane expressed regarding British middle-class complacency during the time of the Bosnian/Serbian genocide. By stripping *Blasted* of the overt references to the Bosnian/Serbian crisis of the mid-1990s, Kane allows her work to act as an effigy, which begs for alignment with future activism.

The gaps within *Phaedra's Love* behave totally unlike those in *Blasted* (or any of Kane's other texts), in that they all but do not exist. I argue that this uncharacteristic exclusion of an invitation to future artists on Kane's part accounts for the general lack of performances of *Phaedra's Love*. (There are notable exceptions, which Chapter Two discusses.) Without the opportunity for reappropriation, *Phaedra's Love* lacks the mythical quality of and subsequent popularity of Kane's other works. As the only commissioned text in Kane's body of work, and one which she based on an extant

myth (Seneca's *Phaedra*),³² *Phaedra's Love* centers on renegotiating existing questions rather than positing new opportunities for inquiry.

Finally, *4.48 Psychosis* includes opportunities for interpretation carefully crafted by Kane, yet vigorously clogged by the large scale association of this text with her 1999 suicide. I argue that these gaps provide moments to be excavated and freed from the assumption that Kane's suicide in anyway satisfies the questions brought about within this enigmatic text. Furthermore, this chapter interrogates the misconceptions between mental illness, suicide, and artistic achievement. By working to de-stigmatize both mental illness and suicide, I further extend the reach of *4.48* within activist theatre.

The evaluation of the many manifestations of Kane's dramaturgical gaps, and their translation into performance within these three very different texts, establishes an argument substantiated by Kane's entire body of plays. The concluding portion of this introduction includes a more in-depth articulation of the goals and methods of each of the chapters.

The topic of Kane and her work continues to maintain its clenched fist hold on current theatre scholarship. A recent conference, "Sarah Kane—A Reassessment," held at University of Cambridge on 16 February 2008, devoted the entire day-long meeting to presentations and panels that "reflect anew on Sarah Kane's work and [...] challenge and revivify her established critical reception."³³ This dissertation works to

³² Seneca, *Phaedra*, trans. E.F. Watling, *Four Tragedies and Octavia*, trans. Watling (London: Penguin, 1966) 97-150.

³³ Anna Harpin, "Call for Papers: [Theatre] Sarah Kane - A Reassessment," online posting, 6 Sep 2007 <<http://cfp.english.upenn.edu/archive/Theatre/0460.html>>.

engage with the existing discussion of Kane's work while contributing significantly to its development.

Marching to Her Own Drum: the History of Kane's Texts

Kane used her theatre work to heatedly critique the crimes of humanity and misguided absurdity she felt infiltrated the world around her. Specifically, she penned *Blasted* in direct response to the concurrent Bosnian/Serbian genocide. Kane used *Blasted* to draw parallels between the domestic violence within one couple's relationship and full-scale civil war in order to recast the seemingly distant war as something more familiar to the British audiences' psyche.

Written in 1996, the year after *Blasted*'s debut, *Phaedra's Love* (commissioned by The Gate Theatre in Notting Hill)³⁴ reflects the zealous paparazzi-fueled obsession and sycophantism of the general public towards the Royal family in particular and celebrities in general. Sadly, Princess Diana's death the next year in 1997 (following a high-speed paparazzi chase) epitomizes the subject of Kane's critique: an all-consuming and consuming bourgeois that does not realize the potential violence within its obsession.

Kane's next text, *Cleansed*, debuted in April of 1998³⁵ and continues her critique of media sensationalism. The character of "Tinker" in *Cleansed* likely draws his name from Jack Tinker, the *Daily Mail* journalist who penned the infamous "disgusting feast of filth" critique of *Blasted*'s debut. Virtually all of the theatrical

³⁴ *Phaedra's Love*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Kane, perf. Cas Harkins, Philippa Williams, Catherine Cusak, and Anderw Maud, Gate Theatre, London, 15 May 1996.

³⁵ *Cleansed*, by Sarah Kane, dir. James Macdonald, perf. Martin Marquez, Stuart McQuarrie, James Cunningham, Danny Cerqueira, Suzan Sylvester, Daniel Evans, and Victoria Harwood, Royal Court Theatre Downstairs, London, 30 Apr 1998.

reviews of *Blasted*'s debut at the Royal Court reference Kane's gender and age (23 at that time) in the first paragraph of the review.³⁶ In this way, *Cleansed* takes on both the scandal of *Blasted* and Kane, herself, who received much criticism for being both young and female and writing such graphic texts. *Cleansed* picks up where *Blasted* left off, continuing Kane's ongoing inquisition of the inextricability of love and violence and the respective binding effects between those who share either's perpetration.

In August of 1998, *Crave* addressed the private concerns of the individual within the dominant discourse of a larger group.³⁷ Here Kane confronts the vacancy within the everyday interactions of life and the reflection of inner strife onto the outer world. In this text, Kane turns inward and reflects on the multiplicity of perspectives within our inner monologues and dialogues. She also begins to experiment with form in *Crave*; Kane fragments the text and loads it with *non sequiturs* in such a way as to dramaturgically reflect the incongruence of our everyday passing thoughts which both inspire and inhibit us.

Finally, *4.48 Psychosis* takes on a very personal battle for Kane: her own disenchantment with the mental health community and profession. Case in point, in one scene she reels off a list of drugs and their absurd side effects in order to ironically juxtapose madness with the treatment for madness. *4.48* further deviates from traditional form and dramatic dramaturgy to reflect a more poetic sensibility. *4.48* defines no character, place, or time period for the text. However, compared to *Crave*,

³⁶ For a collection of these reviews see *Theatre Record* XV.1-2 (1995) 38.

³⁷ *Crave*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Vicky Featherstone, perf. Sharon Duncan-Brewster, Ingrid Craigie, Paul Thomas Hickey, and Alan Williams, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, 13 Aug 1998.

4.48 includes a more focused “dialogue,” creating a stronger sense of a pointed narrative. Five years after *Blasted*’s debut Kane’s biography again overshadowed her work, this time after her 1999 suicide while in a mental health facility. Reviews of the posthumous debut of *4.48 Psychosis* in 2000 by and large commented upon Kane’s suicide prior to any discussion of the text or performance.³⁸ This commentary fused with continued judgment from the media regarding her youth and gender to create London theatre’s own *enfant terrible*.³⁹

These impetuses for Kane’s works exist only as starting blocks and markers for their respective debut performances. Their carefully crafted dramaturgies point towards future examinations of new questions and conditions of humanity beyond these debuts and even the fantasies of the playwright. In this way, Kane’s texts become simultaneously accountable for the world she found herself in and the one she knew she could only imagine. By creating works laden with an invitation to infiltrate the texts themselves with new agendas and points of view, Kane solicits a commitment from future theatre practitioners to continue to question and probe the societies in which they live; thus, pushing Kane’s work to the forefront of revolutionary theatre.

Line Dancing: Negotiating the Binaries in Kane’s texts

As Kane progressed as a playwright she preferred the term “text for performance” rather than “play” to describe her work and began, “encouraging my

³⁸ *4.48 Psychosis* by Sarah Kane, dir. James Macdonald, perf. Daniel Evans, Jo McInnes, and Madeleine Potter, Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, London, 23 Jun 2000.

³⁹ Gary Finn, “Kane, Theatre’s *Enfant Terrible*, Found Dead,” *Independent* 23 Feb. 1999.

friends to see my play...before reading it.”⁴⁰ The etymology of this phrase, “text for performance,” reveals a forceful push, whether conscious or unconscious, in all of Kane’s work to fundamentally *act* and *perform* not just as theatre, but as pedestrians on the world’s stage. Kane’s recasting of her work as “texts for performance” rekindles the ancient origins of Western theatre. The word “drama” comes from the Greek *dran* meaning, “to do.” Thus, Kane aligns her work with that of the ancients, perhaps not in form but certainly in purpose.

She always envisions an “afterlife” so to speak for her texts. They are about themselves and the given moments in which they were mentally and emotionally conceived; in addition, the texts maintain the loaded potential to be reapplied and reconstructed in order to redress humanity’s simultaneous evolution and monotony. Kane herself reflected on a fear of mortality and the finite end to this life. In an interview printed in Graham Saunders’s *Love Me or Kill Me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, she states:

I seriously believed that Jesus was going to come again in my lifetime and that I wouldn’t have to die. [...] [I]t suddenly hit me that the thing I should have been dealing with from the age of six—my own mortality—I hadn’t dealt with at all. So, there is this constant debate in my head of really not wanting to die—being terrified of it—and also having this constant thing [...] that there is a God, and somehow I’m going to be saved.⁴¹

Her texts reflect this dual relationship with salvation. Like the aforementioned *Día de los Muertos calaveras* which simultaneously inhabit death and life as well as grief and celebration, Kane’s texts play with uncomfortable binaries by reconfiguring their relationships. Though the *calaveras* embrace these dualities, the characters in Kane’s

⁴⁰ Sarah Kane, “Drama with Balls,” *The Guardian* 20 Aug. 1998: 12.

⁴¹ Saunders 22.

text have a harder time adapting to the conflicting ideas within their respective circumstances. For example, in *Crave*, the character C repeatedly wishes for incongruities and laments upon life between extremes:

If I could be free of you without having to lose you.⁴²

[...]

I hate these words that keep me alive. I hate these words that won't let me die.⁴³

[...]

That's me. Exist in the swing. Never still, never one thing or the other, always moving from one extreme to the furthest reaches of the other.⁴⁴

Embedded within the thoughts and impressions of the other “characters” (A, B, and M), C’s comments personify the loss of innocence concomitant with personal evolution that proves both emancipating and devastating; a gain and a loss. In contrast to C, Kane crafted A as a cynical counterpoint. comments A about C:

Though she cannot remember, she cannot forget.⁴⁵

[...]

You've fallen in love with someone that doesn't exist.⁴⁶

Although these lines can be viewed as a pseudo-dialogue, as can a pairing of M and B’s lines, the characters lack direct recognition of one another within these lines. All of the characters focus on an unnamed point between them, which they somehow know exists despite “its” material absence. The characters in *Crave* register “its” emotional resonance while acknowledging the distance “it” maintains between them. What is “it?” Most likely, Kane answered this question then withheld the answer. This

⁴² Kane, *Crave* 155.

⁴³ Kane, *Crave* 184.

⁴⁴ Kane, *Crave* 194.

⁴⁵ Kane, *Crave* 158.

⁴⁶ Kane, *Crave* 190.

“it” defines the enigmatic quality of Kane’s dramaturgical gaps. They slip and slide and misbehave without a contributing narrative to momentarily discipline them.

The gap looms over the text like a bad weather forecast that must be acknowledged and incorporated into the lived experience (either in the theatre or otherwise). Through her dramaturgy Kane artistically negotiates between various points of extreme in the human experience for herself and her respective audience. She then presents her text as a heavy tool for future artists to chip away at their own challenges. Kane’s texts lament their own limits and finite nature, yet also embrace the possibility of future reincarnations, thus projecting them further into the western theatre canon where they can inspire new experimentations with dramatic content and form.

Inviting Dionysus to Dance Again: Re-birthing Western Tragedy

By situating Kane’s work beyond its In-Yer-Face debut productions and within the larger context of western drama, we can examine the ties that bind Kane’s texts (intentionally or not) to her dramatic predecessors. In particular, the negotiation between the plethoras of opposing ideas within Kane’s texts, with which her characters struggle often to violent ends, reflects a revival of one of the basic tenets of western tragedy: the myth of the Ancient Greek god Dionysus. Dionysus embodies the complex hybridity that Kane’s texts dismantle and challenge.

According to myth, Dionysus (also called Bacchus) sprung forth from the union between his heavenly father Zeus and his mortal mother, the Theban princess, Semele. Incidentally, Dionysus remains the only Greek deity with one divine and one mortal parent. Yet, despite having a mortal female mother, Dionysus was birthed not

from Semele's womb, but from Zeus's side. Zeus snatched Dionysus from Semele's womb moments after one of Hera's jealous schemes resulted in Semele's death. Zeus then placed Dionysus into his own side for safekeeping. Hera, Zeus's divine wife and sister regularly enacted her vengeance upon any woman she perceived to be romantically involved with Zeus. Upon his birth, Zeus turned the infant Dionysus over to his messenger, Hermes, who took Dionysus to be raised by the enigmatic nymphs of Nysa:

whom Zeus afterwards placed in the sky as stars, the stars which bring rain when near the horizon. [Thus] the God of the Vine was born of fire and nursed by rain, the hard burning heat that ripens the grapes and the water that keeps the plant alive.⁴⁷

Dionysus's hybrid genealogy of half divine and half mortal blood marks the first of the many ambiguities and dualities that define Dionysus's character and his life.

As the characters in Kane's texts often sense, engaging with these charged dualities (within the circumstance, themselves, or other characters) can be both creative and destructive. Case in point, legends of Dionysus's journeys describe him aiding mortals one moment and torturing them the next. Dionysus sacrificed and revived the Ancient Greeks with equal brutality and reverence. Euripides's *The Bacchae* colors in gruesome detail the ill-fated story of Pentheus, who dared to deny Dionysus sanctity.⁴⁸ This denial of Dionysus resulted in Pentheus's violent death at the hands of his mother, Agave, who ripped him to shreds while in a Dionysian frenzy. Ironically, Agave was Semele's sister and thus, Dionysus's aunt. Contrary to this

⁴⁷ Hamilton 56.

⁴⁸ Euripides, *The Bacchae*, trans. J. Michael Walton, *Six Greek Tragedies*, by Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles, eds. Marianne McDonald and Walton (London: Methuen, 2002) 223-73.

morbid depiction of the god of wine, additional myths describe the compassion and peace Dionysus provided to mortals on their deathbeds. Dionysus exemplified to the Ancient Greeks the idea that death did not end all. Like the vine, for which he was the patron saint, that died each year with the frost, Dionysus was reborn with the spring and thus could inspire life after death: “In his resurrection he was the embodiment of the life that is stronger than death.”⁴⁹ His rebirth after his destruction encouraged the belief in life beyond mortal death. Consequently, the annual festival celebrating Dionysus took place in the spring. However, this festival commenced not in a temple or in the wilderness, the traditional settings for such festivals, but in the theatre.

The Great Festival of Dionysus presented both comedies and tragedies on the stage. Likewise, Kane also peppers her texts with humor and satire.⁵⁰ However, as was the case with the Festival of Dionysus, Kane’s penchant for tragedy often overshadows her gift for comedy. This choice parallels the stories of Dionysus, who despite his divinity repeatedly suffered a tragic end. Dionysus’s own cyclical death becomes of particular interest when discussing the violence of the tragic theatre for which he is also the patron saint (and for which, Kane became infamous). Like his character, the details of Dionysus’s mythic death are equally ambiguous and seemingly contradictory. Classicist Edith Hamilton provides the following description of Dionysus’s death:

[H]e was torn to pieces, in some stories by the Titans, in others by Hera’s orders. He was always brought back to life; he died and rose again. It was his joyful resurrection they celebrated in this theater, but the idea of terrible deeds done to him and done

⁴⁹ Hamilton 64.

⁵⁰ Chapter Three includes some of the bleakly hilarious moments from *4.48 Psychosis*.

by men under his influence was too closely associated with him ever to be forgotten. He was more than the suffering god. He was the tragic god. There was none other.⁵¹

Today, Dionysus remains as much a “bundle of contradictions” to modern audiences as he was to those of antiquity.⁵² In his introduction to *Masks of Dionysus*, Christopher A. Faraone explains this conundrum:

[Dionysus appears] alternately as the urbane inventor of wine and the symposium, the master of uncontrollable madness and intoxication, the civic patron of Athenian music and drama, the wild hunter who rends his victims with his bare hands and eats them raw, a fertility god represented by the erect phallus, and the mysterious god who comforts the dying and frees them from the fear of death.⁵³

Dionysus personifies the wine that may liven up a party and its revelers, but simultaneously inhibit their minds and potentially lead to turmoil and catastrophe. Dionysus unsettles his worshippers as Kane’s theatre unsettles its audiences. Yet, the worshippers and the audiences equally crave that which upsets their good humor.

The process of extrapolating the visceral destruction and (re)membering of Dionysus from the myth of his death, in order to view it alongside the cycle of violence within Kane’s work, reveals a deep questioning of the human life experience within Kane’s body of work. Kane’s dramatic texts, like the mythic Dionysus, battle the contradictory and simultaneous forces of life, both the extreme and the mundane. In Kane’s world, evil borders good, life neighbors death, and love rubs noses with hate. The mortal-god/god-mortal Dionysus embodies this symbiotic relationship between opposing life forces. This connection between Kane’s texts and the Dionysian

⁵¹ Hamilton 63.

⁵² Christopher A. Faraone, introduction, *Masks of Dionysus*, ed. Thomas H. Carpenter and Faraone (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993) 1.

⁵³ Faraone 1.

myths works not only to draw an interesting parallel between themes but also to support and reinforce Kane's decision to situate the negotiation between these dueling life forces within the theatre space in order to be continually relived and re-inspired. Kane's theatre does not resolve the tension between these two poles. Rather, it drags the audience through a negotiation between them and like all Dionysian journeys, the conclusion may shock as quickly as it may comfort.

Kane acknowledges the perils of enduring this type of cyclical journey and its inevitable toll on the well-being of Dionysian travelers. Three of her five plays (*Blasted*, *Cleansed*, and *Phaedra's Love*) involve at least one character being ripped to shreds during the course of the dramatic action.⁵⁴ However, she also suggests that through this journey, the traveler realizes a new clarity of purpose and perspective, a momentary Sisyphean view atop the mountain, so to speak. During rehearsals for the 1996 debut production of *Phaedra's Love*,⁵⁵ Kane commented,

Through being very, very low comes an ability to live in the moment because there isn't anything else. What do you do if you feel the truth is behind you? Many people feel that depression is about emptiness, but actually it's about being so full that everything cancels itself out. You can't have faith without doubt, and what are you left with when you can't have love without hate?⁵⁶

This sensation of being "so full" that Kane describes permeates all of her texts, as does an accompanying urgency to expel this fullness, and perhaps all of life's poisons, from

⁵⁴ The remaining two plays, *4.48 Psychosis* and *Crave*, are more poetic in form and do not include traditionally delineated characters. However, it has been suggested by other scholars that the character elements presented in these two plays constitute fractured parts of a former whole within each respective text. This "dismemberment" of the psyche seems less literal than the physical dismemberments presented in *Blasted*, *Cleansed*, and *Phaedra's Love*, which is why I do not include them in this particular discussion.

⁵⁵ Kane directed this production.

⁵⁶ "The Late Sarah Kane: In Her Own Words," *The Independent* 24 Feb. 1999.

the immediate moment. This gesture towards bulimia and the cycle of bingeing and purging reinforces the brutal, self-inflicted violence within Kane's work and introduces an accompanying obsession with ravenously seeking fulfillment from unsatisfying sources. Kane's texts offer a nauseating catharsis. Here again, Kane borrows from the ancient Greeks and then morphs that convention.

Your Moves are Sick, Man: the Convention of Catharsis in Kane's Texts

Prior to the 1995 premiere of *Blasted*, Kane wrote *Sick*, a series of three monologues performed at the Edinburgh Festival in the early nineties. Kane titled the individual monologues *Comic Monologue*, *Starved*, and *What She Said*.⁵⁷ These pieces dealt with rape, eating disorders, and sexual identity, and her first-person delivery was said to be "raw" and "unsettling."⁵⁸ The scripts for these monologues are unpublished and unavailable to the public as per Kane's request. However, Simon Kane (Sarah's brother and chief executor of her estate, including her dramatic works) states on an online weblog that the "bits of monologue she [Sarah Kane] really liked resurfaced in the published work... particularly *Crave* and *4.48*."⁵⁹ The brief critical commentary regarding these monologues suggests a history of Kane's exploration of internalized personal anguish manifesting itself into palpable violence and vice versa.

In many moments of crisis a person will express their personal anguish by directing violence towards his/her own body. The cycle of bingeing and purging embodies this method of attempted control over one's circumstance and emerges as an

⁵⁷ "Sarah Kane Overview," *Sarah Kane: A Sarah Kane Site by Iain Fisher*, ed. Iain Fisher. 8 September 2006. <<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kaneov.html>>.

⁵⁸ Paula Bardell, "The Paradox of Sarah Kane," *Streetdirectory.com* 9 Sept. 2006. <http://www.streetdirectory.com/travel_guide/10625/writing/the_paradox_of_sarah_kane.html>.

⁵⁹ Simon Kane, "Re: sick Simon Kane 15-11-2001," *Sarah Kane: A Sarah Kane Site by Iain Fisher*, ed. Iain Fisher, 15 Nov. 2001, 8 September 2006 <http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/disc_frm.htm>.

enigmatic dramaturgical device working within Kane's texts. The revolving nature of binging and purging (both literal and metaphoric) relocates the Dionysian death cycle of destruction and resurrection within the living body. While binging, an individual attempts to fill the physical, emotional, and psychological holes and voids within themselves. However, despite the mass amount of consumption (of food, commerce, drugs, sex, violence, media, etc), the individual may eventually experience numbness and total disconnection from their physical bodies. In order to re-stimulate the body, the individual purges themselves of all they consume, thus resurrecting an awareness of the body—holes and all.

Kane repeatedly creates characters who attempt to exert control over themselves, others, and their circumstances by participating in mass consumption only to find themselves victims of intensified misery. *Phaedra's Love*, for example, begins with list of stage directions which exemplify Hippolytus's decadent cycle of consumption and physical expulsion.⁶⁰ In this opening scene, Hippolytus binges on "expensive electronic toys," Hollywood films, violent images, and junk food. He then blows his nose and masturbates, yet these physical purges provide little evident relief and subsequently the numbed Hippolytus "*begins another hamburger.*" Kane continues her meditation on the residual physical and mental lethargy resulting from blind consumerism in the final scene of *Phaedra's Love*, where an angry mob rips Hippolytus's body apart after devouring the (false) report that Hippolytus raped the Queen.⁶¹ During his dismemberment, Hippolytus quips, "If there could have been

⁶⁰ Kane, *Phaedra's Love* 65.

⁶¹ *Cleansed* and *Blasted* also commence with this trope of the physical dismemberment of principal characters.

more moments like this.”⁶² In this comment, Hippolytus seems to relish the violent awakening of his physical senses while sarcastically mocking the mob mentality that resulted in his death.

Kane presents this mob as unknowingly relishing in its own subservience to a larger system of violence maintained by its binging and purging. The mob believes that by killing Hippolytus it has exacted agency over (or purged) a perceived threat to the communal well-being. However, the mob neglects to acknowledge that participation in the communal sickness of binging and purging ensures reliance upon both the system and the royals it privileges in the process. Thus, the mob maintains an unequal class-structure that distances the people from royal power.

Furthermore, by brutally dismembering Hippolytus, the mob has intensified the cycle of violence. After the deaths of Theseus, Hippolytus, and Strophe, the mob disperses and leaves the stage. The only things left onstage are vultures that descend and “begin to eat [Hippolytus’s] body.”⁶³ These vultures greedily feed on the carcass that, moments before, symbolized the virility of the monarch. The audience is left to confront Kane’s view of the systematized community that participates in communal binging and purging. We do not know if the cycle of binging and purging ends with Hippolytus’s death and the end of this play. The vultures suggest otherwise. However, the physical toll this cycle takes on both the implied bodies of the characters in *Phaedra’s Love* and the actual bodies of the actors that portray them, simultaneously stimulates and numbs the audience via an unorthodox catharsis.

⁶² Kane, *Phaedra’s Love* 103.

⁶³ Kane, *Phaedra’s Love* 103.

Kane's texts push both performers and audiences to systematically unload or relieve themselves of the litany of images, thoughts, and provocations that the performance texts thrust upon them. In effect, they are asked to participate in their own cycle of binging and purging with each performance. This process of Aristotelian catharsis *par excellence* does not offer an individual relief or comfort; rather, it contributes to exhaustion, purgation, and emptiness. In the introduction to *Stages of Terror*, Anthony Kubiak takes to task the Aristotelian prescription of catharsis as instigated by pity and fear and theorizes about the medical understanding of catharsis that preceded its prominent usage as a theatrical term:

Katharsis indicated not the final circumstance of purification, but the process of disgorgement itself.... The presumed 'healing' effect of *katharsis* comes about because these expurgations and dislocations eventually seem to engender terror's Imaginary opposite in the returning sense of a sublime following the expulsion of non-being.⁶⁴

These "expurgations and dislocations" invigorate the dramatization of the Dionysian dualities through which Kane's characters traverse.

Kane's violent catharsis extends beyond the supposed experiences of the characters in her texts to include those who perform her texts as well as those who watch these performances. The ferocity of images within Kane's texts sucks both the performers and audience into a catastrophic cycle of life and death. Kane invites their participation not to shock them with the rawness of violence for violence's sake, but rather to break open a deep exploration of the lack of compassion in the human experience. Kane suggested that contrary to her critics' beliefs, she actually worked to

⁶⁴ Anthony Kubiak, "Introduction: A Panegyric of Aristotle's *Poetics*," *Stages of Terror* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1991) 18-19.

de-sensationalize and de-glamorize violence on the stage. In one such interview Kane stated:

Acts of violence simply happen in life, they don't have a dramatic build up, and they are horrible. That's how it is in the play [*Blasted*]. Critics would prefer it if there was something artificial or glamorous about violence.⁶⁵

The same can be said for acts of companionship and love, which Kane's texts also rigorously examine outside of conventional R/romantic nuances. By pairing moments of extreme horror and deep love and providing little "dramatic build up" in favor of a sense of spontaneity, Kane hinders the psychological tendency towards trying to understand why these poignancies are "just happening." Instead, the task of both the performers and audience becomes one of accepting these "happenings" as points of departure from which the journey of self-discovery begins.

Additionally, Kane's quote suggests a belief in violence as a natural expression of humanity. If violence is accepted as a natural state, equal to compassion and healing, then violence and compassion cancel each other (as do binging and purging), and life becomes an inconstant, unknowable, and undefined gray area between these two extremes. Kane's texts reflect this immediacy and fragility of life. The tragedy within Kane's texts stems from her resistance to (re)present a world that chooses between violence and compassion, while presenting characters who try in vain to lobby for one or the other. In these characters' journeys, not in their theatrical resolutions, Kane revives the Dionysian legacy of tragedy.

⁶⁵ Clare Bayley, "A Very Angry Young Woman," *Times* 23 Jan. 1995.

As the characters in Kane's texts agonize through one existential crisis after another, they cathartically brutalize each other and themselves not as a display of malevolent violence, but to reassure themselves of their existence. In this way, "healing" is not the goal of purgation within Kane's texts. Her characters use this process to push towards a continuation of their pain, because, as Kane put it, "there isn't anything else." Her emphasis on the basic human need for connection, recognition, and reassurance links Kane's texts to a variety of activist movements that focus their efforts on equal access for and visibility of all people. This dissertation posits a *necessity of alignment* with a social, political, or theatrical cause for any and all productions of Kane's texts, if said productions hope to successfully fulfill the high stakes set forth in Kane's texts for performance.

5, 6, 7, 8: Guiding Artaud

The infiltration of self, as either audience or performer, coincides with all live productions. However, the gap-filling and theatric alliance processes instigated by Kane's texts intensify this immersion of self into the performance text. This process ironically points towards an Artaudian Theatre of Cruelty that concerns itself primarily with the metaphysical experience of the theatre.⁶⁶ This gesture towards Artaud feels ironic because of Artaud's general rejection of a pre-existing written text that dictates the *mise en scène* in favor of a living "text" that realizes itself in the hands of the director, not the text-bound author, who "shall make attempts at direct staging, around

⁶⁶Artaud 92-93.

themes, facts, or known works.”⁶⁷ Kane’s work creates a wedge between text-bound theatre production and an experiential Artaudian production.

If we accept Artaud’s denouncement of the written word as an inherently limited, finite mode of communication, and thus a dead and inadequate language for theatrical expression, then the possibility of an alliance between Kane’s texts and experiential performance seemingly does not exist. However, Kane’s texts, in their concrete textual form, do allow for an alliance with the metaphysical experience of both the performer and audience. Her texts guide the performer and the audience towards an experience ultimately “free” from the text itself, yet the text becomes the condition from which the necessity of the metaphysical expression springs forth. The texts contain the gaps wherein the reader/performer inserts his/her personal understanding of the world and from which self-discovery emerges. The self-discovery of the reader/performer creates a second gap-laden text that the audience discovers itself in—a sort of “meta-text.” These self-discoveries exist apart from Kane’s written text, yet always point back towards it. In this way, Kane’s texts arguably reach beyond their concrete and finite limitations as a repository of written language and remain unsettled without their performative counterpart. Perhaps this is because Kane’s texts always remind readers of the performative expression required for their total elucidation. As noted, Kane referred to her texts as “texts for performance” rather than “plays.” Using written language as the point of departure for live experience, Kane crafts her written language so precisely that it cannot be disposed of once metaphysical experience takes over.

⁶⁷Artaud 98.

In producing Kane's texts for performance, a delicate symbiosis must be maintained between her texts and the contributing narratives (outlined in the following section) of the performers. One cannot drown the other, and both must be equally accessible to the audience. The audience experiences Kane's words and her constructed theatrical conditions in and of themselves while they simultaneously experience the metaphysics inspired by the performance. This double site of experience and resonance resurrects Dionysus once again: "So people felt about Dionysus as about no other god. He was not only outside of them, he was within them, too."⁶⁸ This Dionysian notion of duality becomes particularly complex when fused with Artaud's manifesto for a theatre at once itself but also always pointing towards both the personal and the universal. This fusion of Dionysus and Artaud allows Kane's texts in performance to create and leave open a window through which to look beyond what is currently being unpacked and experienced in any given production towards a continuum of theatrical experiences that collectively reinforce each other and Kane's written text. The proposed benefits of a lineage of Kane's texts in performance rely on the capability of those texts to accommodate a variety of contributing narratives. Kane consciously constructed her dramaturgy to allow for such manipulations, thus ensuring a litany of metamorphoses that bend but do not break her primary theatrical text.

The intentional malleability of Kane's dramaturgy links her texts to myth. Just as a myth must continually be updated and re-birthed in order to address current politics, audiences, and social concerns so must Kane's texts be re-imagined.

Recently, a large number of performance groups restaged Aristophanes's mythic

⁶⁸ Hamilton 62.

comedy, *Lysistrata*, as part of The Lysistrata Project's effort to publically display dissatisfaction with the U.S.'s war with Iraq.⁶⁹ Similarly, Rude Guerilla Theatre Company's 2004 production of Kane's *Blasted* began with the audience sitting in complete darkness while the United States' National Anthem played over the sound system.⁷⁰ *Blasted*'s written text begins with the stage direction: "A very expensive hotel room in Leeds—the kind that is so expensive it could be anywhere in the world."⁷¹ Rude Guerilla director Dave Barton capitalized on Kane's dramatic opportunity "anywhere in the world" and filled in his own narrative regarding (blind) patriotism in the United States. This sentiment of staged patriotism framed the images in *Blasted* of the brutality of war and shrunk the distance between Kane's imagined world and the audience's actual world. (Presumably, the audience consisted of primarily U. S. residents as the production ensued in a small theatre in Burbank, CA.) Thus, the audience reads Kane and Barton's textual alliance as the new text of *Blasted*. Rude Guerilla's production contributed one of the many versions of the *Blasted* myth, thus expanding Kane's texts with new opportunities for alignment created in performance while reinforcing her original written text. Chapter One of this dissertation continues this discussion of the *Blasted* myth and investigates the benefits of situating one of Kane's most notorious dramatic texts within the context of myth and its performance history.

In 2, 3 and Out 2, 3: Kane's Texts in Performance

⁶⁹ For more on The Lysistrata Project see: "The Lysistrata Project," 1 July 2007, <<http://www.lysistrataproject.org>>.

⁷⁰ *Blasted*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Dave Barton, perf. Hillary Calvert, Ryan Harris, and Bryan Jennings, Little Theater, Burbank, 17 July 2004.

⁷¹ Kane, *Blasted* 3.

Beyond the theoretical and thematic contributing narratives required by Kane's texts for performance, the implied reader/performers are literally called upon to inspire, breathe life into, the body of the text for performance. Arguably all staged theatre plays require the investment of creative energy into the play production and benefit from a new point of view and purpose. Although Kane's texts fall under this rubric of performance, the gap-filling required by her texts calls for a deeper investment of the personal self. She invites the performers of her texts to lend their own corporeality to the gaping cavities left open within her texts—Method acting *en extremis*. Again, the interaction between Dionysus's ancient tragedies and Artaud's theory of tragic performance becomes helpful. Kane's texts provide the framework to “get you there” (cathartic tragedy) so to speak, but once “there,” the performer must evaluate her/himself at that specific moment, take inventory, and work through a unique live moment of theatrical experience (Artaudian performance).

Like the performative acts of ancient Western religious rites, Kane's work retains an enigmatic and nuanced framework, but there is an element missing—that little bit of Artaudian magic. Kane's work requires the inclusion of the individual participants' understanding and belief system regarding the physical and metaphysical world around them. If the Ancients did not believe that their dances and rituals would influence the gods in their favor, then the rituals become empty, archaic, and void of unifying potency. Ultimately, these performance rituals demand the individuals to factor in their own narrative into a given ritualized framework. However, the narrative must remain new and fresh. One cannot re-sacrifice the same cow. In this same context the contributing narrative which Kane's texts demand from the theatre artists

that attempt them must also denote a new perspective, point of view, or purpose. Kane's texts fall flat without the introduction of a new individual element or point of view. Imagine the aforementioned "gutted text" as a flaccid body lying upon the stage. This dramaturgical detail (the residual gap) allows Kane's texts to resist "revival" in favor of multiple debuts or rebirths.

To simply restage Kane's texts sacrifices the same cow, so to speak. Kane's texts demand a new narrative. She provides a strategic and specific dramaturgy within her texts to allow for individual narratives to seep in. Not every narrative will fit; however, more than a few will. Although it is not possible to evaluate the entire myriad of contributing narratives conducive to this text, it *is* possible to evaluate the framework Kane provides. This framework, like the rituals of antiquity, establishes the call for high stakes and commitment to the enactment of specific events. These specific events become subsumed into the contributing narrative. They create a symbiosis wherein Kane's texts provide the "leg up" and an outlet for the contributing narrative, offering the purpose for the texts, thus avoiding the Dead Theatre against which Peter Brook cautions.⁷²

Kane's work does not call for an erasure of the fundamental elements or "bones" of her texts (i.e. Ian must rape Cate and then be raped by the soldier in *Blasted* and Grace must "become" her brother Graham via a transgender operation in *Cleansed*). These fundamental actions must happen, thus from this perspective Kane's texts guide their productions like any other dramatic text. However, the strategic gaps in Kane's texts allow for an unknowable experience and create a magical potential.

⁷² Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Atheneum, 1984).

Kane includes these dramaturgical devices not because she could or even wanted to imagine all of the possibilities, rather her work reflects a delight in the unknowable limits of potential gap-fillers. These theatric invitations act unlike a Pinter pause or a Beckettian ambiguity. In both of these instances, the authors reject contributing narratives by suggesting that the answers brought about by these questions (the pauses and the open spaces) are laden within the texts themselves. The goal of the theatre artist in these productions is to interpret an existing narrative with new eyes, but not necessarily contribute a new narrative to an existing framework.

Although there are multiple contributing narratives that could potentially be poured into Kane's dramaturgy, not all contributing narratives will translate into successful productions. The structure of the text, like the framework of ancient rituals, limits participatory contributions that can effectively fill the gaps. If an ancient ritual required the sacrifice of livestock, multiple options (i.e. a chicken, goat, sheep, bull, etc.) present themselves each correlating to a different and unique ritual experience depending upon the size and perceived value of the livestock. However, in this example, the ritualistic structure demands determine that flowers or wine cannot effectively fill the "livestock" gap and suggests that insertion of such items lessens the potency of the ritual experience. Similarly, deciphering with what and how to fill the gaps becomes the ultimate challenge when producing Kane's texts for performance. The contributors of narratives must recognize the high stakes set forth by Kane's texts in order to best align themselves with her texts and exponentially increase the vitality of their production.

Kane's makes one of her greatest contributions to contemporary theatre in this invitation to theatre artists to make new and provocative theatre by aligning their contributing narratives with her texts. Her plays are not places wherein artists can go and lament a prescribed or publicized story. In fact, they are where the theatre artist goes to interrogate their own experiences via a shared text. The text is "shared" because it is the one constant in the various performances. The text becomes the communal rallying point for separate groups who use the texts to tell their seemingly disparate stories. This process of alliance (of working with the text towards a common goal) with the same pre-existing text establishes a history and community among theatre artists who choose to align with the same texts. In this way a dialogue can exist between different groups who can recognize their shared experiences via their respective alignments with the same textual tools.

The Remaining Choreography in a Nutshell

Chapter One encourages the alignment of Kane's texts with specific activist agendas by unpacking the theatric and activist choices of Graeae Theatre Company's 2006 disabled-led touring production of *Blasted*. Graeae's production exemplifies the potential for excellence when a specific activist effort successfully negotiates Kane's dramaturgical gaps. Furthermore, this chapter likens this "gap-filling" quality to the elasticity of myth in an effort to further include Kane's work within a larger history of western drama.

Chapter Two's discussion of *Phaedra's Love*, and its decidedly "uninviting" dramaturgy, works to reiterate the assertion that the moments of invitation, or "gaps," within Kane's texts are not accidental, or incidental, but scrupulously and intentionally

crafted. Chapter Two asserts that *Phaedra's Love* is the least-performed text of Kane's work and suggests that this is because it behaves the most unlike Kane's other texts, particularly in its limited inclusion of these artistically opportunistic gaps. *Phaedra's Love* lacks Kane's usual ambiguities and rather overtly criticizes the British royalty of the 1990s thus limiting the potential of the text to transcend its debut production. By examining the dramaturgical shortcomings of this play, in terms of their opportunity for contributing narratives and alliance with theatre artists, the intentional opportunities for alliance beyond the debuts of her other texts becomes more apparent.

Finally, in Chapter Three I critically examine Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* and the blanket her death cast over this text. This chapter works to excavate the residue of Kane's suicide from the gaps within *4.48 Psychosis* in an effort to shift the focus from Kane's biography to the textual masterpiece itself. By taking to task various production choices within different staging of *4.48 Psychosis* as well as public discrimination towards mental illness and suicide, this chapter works to unveil the limitation of assuming that Kane's "young, mad, femaleness" somehow work to adequately answer the questions within this text. By examining this text next to, rather than fused with, Kane's choice to end her life, Chapter Three aims to de-stigmatize mental illness and reveal the plethora of opportunities for this text to comment on issues of interest *other* than Kane's death. I argue that this play investigates rebellion and revival rather than destruction and demise.

The careful analysis of these three texts on the page and in performance looks to establish a new tool box with which to negotiate Kane's body of work in performance in an effort to inspire a continuation of critically engaged and socially

conscious theatre. Through theatric alliance with Kane's texts, we retain the opportunity to not only activate a critical and astute questioning of our current social, personal, and political climates, but also to propel us further along in our personal and collective quests for self discovery and recognition.

**Chapter One: Chopping Away at the Façade:
Corporal Engagement with the Myth of *Blasted***

*I more or less abandoned the audience to craft their own response to the imagery by denying them the safety of familiar form.—Sarah Kane on *Blasted**⁷³

The debut production of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* at London's Royal Court⁷⁴ resurrected a long standing western theatrical tradition of visceral violence first encountered in the *theatrons* of the Ancient Greeks (albeit, generally via a messenger's speech) and subsequently upheld by Seneca, John Webster, Frank Wedekind and others including Kane's contemporary, Mark Ravenhill. John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and Edward Bond's *Saved* (1965) both ricocheted of the Royal Court walls and into the mainstream media because of their naked confrontations with taboo themes.⁷⁵ In this vein, Kane's dramatizations of infanticide, eye-sucking, and civil war are not the stuff of a "disgusting feast of filth."⁷⁶ Rather, they point towards a specific theatrical heritage and exemplify, in Harold Pinter's words Kane, "facing something actual and true and ugly and painful."⁷⁷ Her work stems from a desire to reject the issue-based dramas of the 1980s British theatre in favor of dramas that demand raw accountability and questioning of the spirit.⁷⁸ For Kane, this questioning often manifests as quite a violent process.

⁷³ Sarah Kane qtd. in Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 102.

⁷⁴ *Blasted*, by Sarah Kane, dir. James Macdonald, perf. Kate Ashfield, Pip Donaghy, and Dermot Kerrigan, Royal Court's Theatre Upstairs, 17 January-4 February 1995.

⁷⁵ Dan Rebellato, *1956 and All That* (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁷⁶ This is the aforementioned/cited quote from Jack Tinker's *Daily Mail* review of *Blasted*. Additional reviews of *Blasted* are discussed by Aleks Sierz at the "In-Yer-Face" web page at <<http://www.inyerface-theatre.com/archive7.html>>.

⁷⁷ Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 97.

⁷⁸ Dan Rebellato, personal interview, London, England, 26 July 2005.

Violence is not inevitable, but in *Blasted* Kane reflects a world wherein it is seemingly inescapable. It is into this world that Kane's text ironically becomes a lifeline. A lifeline in that the performers can forge an alliance with Kane's text that pushes past the violence within the text and discover a universal humanity underneath. This "alliance" ideologically mirrors some of the tenets of the "cyborg" that Donna Haraway identifies in her essay, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s" (1985).⁷⁹ Haraway argues, "The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality."⁸⁰ The partnership of the imagination and material reality (in both the cyborg and the alliance) pushes past a need to argue for an isolated identity (as, by definition, the cyborg and alliance are both made up of incomplete wholes) and instead, works to encourage affinity. Haraway defines affinity as "related not by blood but by choice, the appeal of one chemical nuclear group for another, avidity."⁸¹ This hunger for connection and alignment socially, politically, and, in the case of Kane's texts, theatrically creates a forum for a myriad of ideas and views to coexist, not necessarily agree, but coexist as a collective. In terms of theatrics, the concept of affinity allows a single production to explore multiple interpretations of specific signs or elements within a dramatic text and present the fruits of these explorations alongside each other harmoniously rather than competitively. *Blasted* readily embraces this philosophy of affinity, and in doing so, traverses a wide landscape of differing social, political, and theatrical climates.

⁷⁹ Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* gen.ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001) 2269-99.

⁸⁰ Haraway 2270.

⁸¹ Haraway 2275.

On the surface *Blasted* correlates a rape in “a very expensive hotel room in Leeds” with the violence of war.⁸² Not intended for shock value, necessarily, Kane offered the following insight into her use of violence in *Blasted*:

My intention was to be absolutely truthful about abuse and violence. All of the violence in the play has been carefully plotted and dramatically structured to say what I want about war. The logical conclusion of the attitude that produces an isolated rape in England is the rape camps in Bosnia. And the logical conclusion to the way society expects men to behave is war.⁸³

Throughout the course of the play the repressed and oppressive anger and desperation that urges Ian to rape Cate in the hotel room ripples out to become violent, savage war, which literally blasts into the *mise en scene* and transforms the hotel room into a civil war ground. The destruction and dismantling of the room mirror the dissolution of the characters’ physical, emotional, and mental selves. Inevitably, the voyeuristic questions loom over any production of *Blasted*: *How are they going to handle the violence? How are they going to deal with the baby eating scene? Cate’s rape? The sodomy? The eye-sucking?* However, ten, eleven, twelve years after *Blasted* first ripped across the stage these sorts of inquisitions seem fruitless and juvenile. Simply “handling the violence” in *Blasted* without any insertion of a contributing narrative that works to anchor the text and heighten awareness towards some social or political activist effort or point of view reduces Kane’s texts to gruesome debauchery and halts the collective opportunity for community within the audience.⁸⁴ Obviously, “handling

⁸² Kane, *Blasted* 3.

⁸³ Bayley.

⁸⁴ As previously outlined in the introduction to this work, a “contributing narrative” denotes: the contribution of a theatre artist beyond their respective craft (i.e. director, costumer, actor, dramaturg, choreographer, designer, etc.) as required by Kane’s texts to create a viable staged experience.

the violence” is part and parcel of any performance-based re-inspiration of *Blasted*, for certainly the violence cannot be sidestepped nor should it be. However, *Blasted* requires an alliance of this violence with a more specific, forward-reaching agenda.

In the spring of 2006, Graeae Theatre Company of Disabled People toured their disabled-led production of *Blasted* throughout the UK.⁸⁵ Graeae (pronounced “gray-eye”) derives its name from the three old “gray” sisters of Greek myth (whose brothers were the Gorgons) who shared one eye and one tooth between them.⁸⁶ Graeae echoes this sentiment as they work collectively to create a fully realized production. In production, the Graeae actors perform their disabilities twice simultaneously: once as disabled actors literally maneuvering through the *mise en scene* and second as the characters that may or may not perform a disability. Graeae’s Artistic Director, and director of *Blasted*, Jenny Sealey, commented, “An early conversation with Simon Kane, Sarah Kane’s brother, focused upon the fact that all three characters in *Blasted* are or can be perceived as being disabled. Therefore placing disabled actors within the narrative allows a different interpretation of the play.”⁸⁷ In this way, Graeae contributes to the ever-evolving perception of *Blasted*’s significance.

Blasted in and of itself introduced nothing new to the British theatre scene. This text notoriously debuted in London’s Royal Court Theatre Upstairs from 17 January-4 February 1995, where its “disgusting feast of filth”⁸⁸ launched arguably the largest theatre scandal London had seen since the infamous baby stoning scene in

⁸⁵ *Blasted*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Jenny Sealey, perf. Gerard McDermott, David Toole, and Jennifer-Jay Ellison, Graeae Theatre Company of Disabled People, 28 March 2006 - 3 February 2007.

⁸⁶ Hamilton 44. Listed as “The Graiae.”

⁸⁷ Sealey, “Director’s Comments.”

⁸⁸ Jack Tinker, “This Disgusting Feast of Filth,” *The Daily Mail*, 19 Jan 1995.

Edward Bond's *Saved* thirty years earlier.⁸⁹ Graeae's production pushes past this debut moment by forging an alliance between their mission statement, which "profiles the skills of actors, writers and directors with physical and sensory impairments,"⁹⁰ and Kane's text. Via this alliance, Graeae's activist agenda contributes to and filters into the dramaturgical gaps within Kane's *Blasted*, and in doing so, re-visions and re-negotiates the politics and social conscience of the text.

Borrowing from Wolfgang Iser's theories regarding esthetic blanks in novels and their subsequent "filling" by the reader, I define dramaturgical gaps as those opportunities for artists to invest themselves (physically & mentally) into the dramaturgical structure of the narrative and thus, fundamentally, alter the text via their experience of it. This theory differs from Iser's in the addition of an audience which: 1) by virtue of its presence, transforms the *implied reader* into the *implied reader/performer*;⁹¹ 2) consumes the reader/performers' personal investments into the textual narrative made public via performance and; 3) subsequently invests itself into the narrative structure of the performance text.⁹² Graeae's particular production of *Blasted* explicitly explores temporary corporeality and the malleability of the human body as a reflection and manifestation of social and political unease, thus creating a completely new, yet fundamentally connected, *Blasted*. By examining Graeae's treatment of two of the most poignant dramaturgical gaps—or opportunities for alignment—within *Blasted*, Cate's rape and the play's locale, this chapter identifies

⁸⁹ Edward Bond, *Saved, Plays: One* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977) 19-133.

⁹⁰ "Welcome the Graeae Theatre Company," *Graeae Theatre Company*, 19 Apr 2008 <<http://www.graeae.org/page/home>>.

⁹¹ A more detailed discussion of the "implied reader/performer" ensues in the following section.

⁹² For a more detailed description of my adaptation of Iser's theory see the introduction to this project.

Kane's dramaturgy as meticulously critical and strategically open to interpretation and investigation by future artists who aim to forge an alliance between their own agendas and Kane's aggressive texts.

The Implied Reader/Performer and Implied Audience

Although the text written by Kane and translated by others retains a significant tenet of the *Blasted* mystique, the evolution of *Blasted* in performance exemplifies the true power, potency, and potential of this text. This is primarily because the act of performance implicates and calls upon both the implied reader/performer and *implied audience* to interact with the text. In his chapter, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach"⁹³, Iser describes the liminal "meta-ground" upon which the reader and text meet.

The literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the esthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader. [...]The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader.⁹⁴

The "work" resulting from the convergence Iser refers to, roughly describes the realized story in the psyche of an implied reader of a written work. However, in the instance of dramatic writing in general, and Kane's writing in particular, the "work" is twofold: first, the realized story of Kane's text in the psyche of the reader/performer and second, the translation of that story onto the stage for the consumption of the

⁹³ Wolfgang Iser "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974). 274-94.

⁹⁴ Iser, "The Reading Process" 275.

implied audience. The transposition of Iser's "reader" into a "reader/performer" acknowledges the aforementioned fundamental difference between the dramatic and non-dramatic text: specifically that for the reader/performer of a dramatic text the "virtual convergence" of reader and text takes place in two forums: the private metaphysical psyche and the public live performance. In this way, the playwright must acknowledge the very loose hold they can maintain on their text once it is read and re-read for performance by virtue of its inevitably influenced journey onto the stage.

Kane capitalized on the intrinsic value of this implied reading/performing process and structured *Blasted* in such a way as to encourage the convergence of the reader/performer's private psyche with her text for performance. Fundamentally, *Blasted* allows the reader/performer to question their surroundings with Kane's brutal force. Iser suggests the following explanation regarding self-realization during the reading process:

The reader discovers the meaning of the text, taking negation as his starting-point; he discovers a new reality through a fiction which, at least in part, is different from the world he himself is used to; and he discovers the deficiencies inherent in prevalent norms and in his own restricted behavior.⁹⁵

Thus, Kane's texts become a lens through which the reader/performer realizes the truth, not about Kane's world per se, but about their own. In a Derridian sense, the reader understands their identity by negation. Specifically, the reader is not the text and this demarcation suggests meaning. However, in true *différance* fashion,⁹⁶ this identity by negation proves quite slippery. Thus this process of convergence pushes

⁹⁵ Iser, *The Implied Reader* xiii.

⁹⁶ Jacques Derrida (1967), *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

not for absolute meaning or self-identification, but for further self-inquiry.

Cathartically speaking, this is theatre for those who cannot see the forest for the trees and decide to grab an ax. Kane's text is that ax.

Alliance

In Jacques Derrida's continued rejection of logocentrism, which, in his opinion, lurks throughout most of western literature, he insists that there is no "original" or "one point of origin" for the meaning of a sign (written words in this instance); this meaning is always elusive.⁹⁷ Kane plays with this elusiveness and rather than being frustrated by it, ironically uses it as a cornerstone of her work.⁹⁸ If the "true" meaning of any sign is always eluding us, than why not look through these words onto the stage as one might look through a kaleidoscope onto a non-descript backdrop? Each time a new viewer/point of view twists the kaleidoscope—words—the image changes. Kane privileges and delights in the power of words as complex signifiers on the page and on the stage in her work, particularly, *Blasted*. However, she strategically edits the written text as to not alienate or overshadow the non-literary elements of performance that privilege the body, sound, and silence as equally profound and complex signifiers. Thus, the idea, or rather the insistence on alliance via reading/performing that *Blasted* delivers becomes exceedingly exciting and artistic as it moves farther away from the text-bound page and into the bodies of the reader/performers on the stage. Via her quest for alliance, Kane creates an opportunity for affinity among the non-literal elements of performance.

⁹⁷ Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978) 278-93.

⁹⁸ The one exception to this rule is Kane's *Phaedra's Love* and this deviation is the focus of Chapter Two.

Haraway's aforementioned essay, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs,"⁹⁹ centers on the necessity of affinity within alliance among activists and activist efforts. Historically, according to Haraway:

Taxonomies tend to remake feminist history to appear to be an ideological struggle among coherent types persisting over time, especially those typical units called radical, liberal, and socialist feminism. Literally, all other feminisms are either incorporated or marginalized, usually by building an explicit ontology and epistemology....The common achievement of (Katie) King and (Chela) Sandoval is learning how to craft a poetic/political unity without relying on a logic of appropriation, incorporation, and taxonomic identification.¹⁰⁰

This discussion of feminism parallels a discussion of all marginalized groups, including the disabled who must eventually work through and dismantle limiting binaries in order to coexist within society, not as "like everyone else," but as mutually respected members of a diverse society. Haraway posits, "A cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints."¹⁰¹ Accepting perceived partiality as a comfortable reality coincides with both Graeae's agenda as well as *Blasted*'s dramaturgy. Furthermore, perpetuating affinity for these "partials," decreases the crisis of comparison. Specifically, a diffusion of the discomfort associated with a fixed identity that does not behave according to preconceived ideas of completeness. This includes Graeae's identity as "disabled-led" (i.e. not "able-bodied-led") and *Blasted*'s identity as "dramaturgically incomplete" because of its dramaturgical gaps. By aligning with each

⁹⁹ Haraway 2269-99.

¹⁰⁰ Haraway 2277.

¹⁰¹ Haraway 2275.

other, these two identities do not “complete” each other, per se, (as Haraway argues, “They are wary of holism, but needy for connection.”¹⁰²) rather they propel each other forward towards exciting new conclusions. *Blasted* and Graeae do not blur into each other, instead they each demand serious contributions from the other while carefully refraining from overshadowing one another. This is at the heart of both Graeae’s mission and *Blasted*. Rather than try and “melt” away our differences (which, inevitably leaves someone out of, or at least stuck to the side of, the pot), why not “quilt” ourselves together and develop an attachment and interconnectivity among ourselves? Kane inserts dramaturgical gaps into *Blasted* as our cue or condition for alliance.

Those *Blasted* Gaps

The main point of entry into the *Blasted* myth and the condition that accommodates the “handshake” of alliance between *Blasted* and a specific point of view in performance is the dramaturgical gap. The dramaturgical gaps laden within *Blasted*’s dramatic structure exist in a variety of forms including ambiguous stage directions, magical realism, extreme violence, and omitted details regarding plot, character, setting, and action. As mentioned in the introduction to this work, the question for me is not whether these gaps are present within Kane’s work (according to both Iser and his predecessor, Roman Ingarden, all works of art contain these gaps on some level)¹⁰³ but the specific gap-filling response Kane’s carefully constructed gaps inspire and what politics or sentiments they unearth during the

¹⁰² Haraway 2271.

¹⁰³ Wolfgang Iser, “Asymmetry between Text and Reader: Ingarden’s Concept of Indeterminacy,” *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978) 170-179.

reading/performing process. Iser used the term “combination” to describe the interaction of text and reader during the process of concretization, but in order to understand the complex interactions between Kane’s work and its reader/performers the term “alliance” proves more fruitful. “Combination” suggests a dialogue between parties and a joining of forces resulting in a new understanding of each other and a better ability to handle the problem of indeterminacy at hand, however, an “alliance” suggests the uniting and propelling forth of two (or more) parties towards future action or engagement with future, perhaps unknowable, parties. Similarly, Iser suggests:

[The blanks] indicate that the different segments of the text are to be connected, even though the text itself does not say so. They are the unseen joints of the text, and as they mark off schemata and textual perspectives from one another, they simultaneously trigger acts of ideation on the reader’s part. Consequently, when the schemata and perspectives have been linked together, the blanks “disappear.”¹⁰⁴

I would like to offer an alternative understanding of Iser’s blanks, which I refer to in Kane’s work as dramaturgical gaps in order to differentiate between their ultimately separate purposes in both form and function. Rather than disappearing, as Iser suggests, Kane’s gaps align with contributing narratives in order to present new and more complex opportunities for alignment to the implied audience.

Arguably, these gaps come as part and parcel of the postmodern aesthetic, which seeks to dismantle and disjoint assumed grand narratives. Thus, it is useful to discuss the appearance and strategic use of these gaps in terms of a spectrum. Works that depend on the “well-made play,” such as Eugene Scribe’s *A Glass of Water*, or some of Henrik Ibsen’s plays, utilize dramaturgical gaps less frequently and work to

¹⁰⁴ Iser, “Asymmetry” 170.

present as “complete” a text as possible. This type of dramaturgy assumes less of a contributing narrative from the implied reader/performer. The other end of the spectrum would include work such as Suzan-Lori Parks’s *America Play* and Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame* or *Waiting for Godot*. These works more readily include dramaturgical gaps in an effort to illustrate, or at least point towards, political and/or artistic goals beyond those within the written text. The reader/performer must work a bit harder to connect the dots when translating these texts from the page to the stage and must negotiate the delicate balance between playing within the boundaries of the given text and dismantling it totally. Kane’s work and *Blasted* in particular utilize dramaturgical gaps in a way more akin to these latter examples. However, unlike Beckett or even Parks to some degree, the negotiation of the gaps within *Blasted* depends wholeheartedly on a forged *alliance* between Kane’s text and the contributing narrative of the reader/performer.

Blasted strategically lacks totality within its own narrative. It is “always already” incomplete. Kane provides a core narrative to which the reader/performer brings a sense of progression and relevant cultural emersion. This alliance between Kane’s text and the reader/performer relies on a common objective. For example, Graeae and *Blasted* aligned to create a forum for elucidating the able/disabled body binary as well as to de-stigmatize the disabled actor onstage. Similarly, Kane aligned *Blasted* with her desire to bring focus to the Bosnia-Serbian crisis of the mid-1990s. Theoretically, when the fulfillment/participation within alliance is no longer in the best interest of both parties then the alliance ends. In the case of *Blasted*, generally, the

alliance lasts as long as a performance runs. Once it ends, the text is “free” to align with a new reader/performer and further expand the *Blasted* myth.

This repeated alignment emulates the *palimpsest* Gerard Genette uses in his theories of intertextuality. Palimpsest describes a paper or parchment on which the original text has partly erased or effaced to allow a new text to be written, leaving fragments of the original still visible.¹⁰⁵ Genette (1966) uses this term in his analysis of Proust’s works and points out that, “the figure (palimpsest) may be common, but it cannot be simple, since it bears presence and absence simultaneously.”¹⁰⁶ In the same way, each new alignment with *Blasted* that the audience reads has been written over the faint, but forcefully made, imprint left from the previous alliance(s). The contributing narrative of the reader/performer(s) and Kane’s text contribute equally to the alliance, for neither adequately express nor achieve the specific aims of the alliance on their own. Similarly, the history of alignments as demarked on the performance palimpsest reinforces a mythic quality within *Blasted*. The varied and nuanced versions of *Blasted* including Kane’s written text, James Macdonald’s debut production,¹⁰⁷ and Graeae’s *Blasted* together make up a *Blasted* palimpsest and how these performances relate/d to each other and to the respective community from which they came, make up the *Blasted* myth.

The *Blasted* Myth

¹⁰⁵ Gérard Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1966; New York: Columbia UP, 1982) 50.

¹⁰⁶ Genette 50.

¹⁰⁷ *Blasted*, dir. James Macdonald, 1995.

In *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*, Sierz concluded, “*Blasted* is a typically nineties play: it doesn’t state a case but imposes its point of view.”¹⁰⁸ This imposition lingers in *Blasted*’s dramaturgy as the pulse and force behind future incarnations of *Blasted* in performance. Kane’s nuanced framework provides a favorable partner with which a variety of reader/performers can forge an alliance with Kane’s text. These alliances vary in form and function, thus underlining the vast opportunities within *Blasted* for new, unrealized versions of this text in performance. In a quote from *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, Kane described the multiplicity of narratives realized within different productions of *Blasted* that surprised even her. She recalled her experience at a Belgian performance of *Blasted*, which went up just after a child-abuse ring in Brussels had been exposed: “[A]nd the whole play became about the baby and there were people crying in the audience when the baby was buried. It bore very little relation to my play, but I accepted it as a genuine reinterpretation.”¹⁰⁹ In this example, *Blasted*’s scrupulously plotted dramaturgy embraced the Brussels news story as a viable and integral element of the *Blasted* narrative during that particular performance. In a sense, the news story and the text of *Blasted* forged an alliance (though, perhaps, unintentionally) that worked together to establish a human connection and immediacy to the news story.

Fellow playwright Andrew Neilson offered this insight, “I think *Blasted* spoke for a generation who have a dulled, numb feeling—not apathy, but a feeling that nothing you do will make any difference.”¹¹⁰ Kane’s work attempts to fill this

¹⁰⁸ Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 103.

¹⁰⁹ Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 105.

¹¹⁰ Sarah Hemming, “Obituary: Sarah Kane,” *The Financial Times* 24 Feb. 1999.

hopeless void by introducing a visceral witnessing of violence into the *Blasted* narrative. In an interview regarding the creation of *Blasted*, Kane points out that, “[t]he play isn’t autobiographical in any sense—though it is based on my experience of the way people behave.”¹¹¹ The behavior Kane references in this quote identifies what she represented in *Blasted* as the inability to avoid violence in times of desperation, as well as her condemnation of British suburbanites who do not draw a connection between their lives and the sufferings of those beyond British borders. Using *Blasted* to sort through her own feelings and personal politics in 1995 regarding the ongoing Bosnian-Serbian crisis, Kane stated the following of her hometown of Essex:

It has a mentality that is very blind to our relationships with Europe and with the rest of Britain. There is an attitude that certain things could not happen here. Yet there’s the same amount of abuse and corruption in Essex as anywhere else, and that’s what I want to blow open. Just because there hasn’t been a civil war in England for a very long time doesn’t mean that what is happening in Bosnia doesn’t affect us.¹¹²

The events in *Blasted* reflect this understanding of violence as a very real and near possibility within any community, and therefore propose a basis of interconnectivity between seemingly disparate communities and their respective expressions of violence. Kane transfers her urgent need to expose the underlying violence that, in her view, pulses just as profoundly beneath the veneer of a British facade as it does on the civil war grounds of Bosnia, into the text of *Blasted*. Then, as mentioned in the Introduction to this work, “[h]aving brought it [the characters and their circumstances in *Blasted*] all to the surface, the job of the later drafts was to bury it again, make it felt

¹¹¹ Bayley.

¹¹² Bayley.

rather than spoken.”¹¹³ Having “buried” parts of the *Blasted* story, Kane left an invitation to future artists to unearth the latent potential and power within these burial sites (which take the form of dramaturgical gaps). However, to reproduce Kane’s initial alignment of *Blasted* with the 1995 politics of the Bosnian-Serbian crisis in subsequent performances of *Blasted* would seem both empty and archaic. That alliance ended, it is no longer equally beneficial to both parties involved. Thus, it remains the challenge for any artist attempting to perform *Blasted*, to reexamine those gaps, negotiate the residue—or “burial dust”—from previous alliances that continue to inform those gaps and layer in their respective agendas in order to re-inspire the *Blasted* myth.

Kane’s focus on the transcendence of raw, human emotion (rather than more confining plot details) allows reader/performers to renegotiate the basic tenets of *Blasted* in order to forge an alliance that directly addresses their respective goals and circumstances. In this way, *Blasted* acts like myth, in that the malleability of its core narrative (via the dramaturgical gaps) takes new shape and purpose as it traverses various times and locales (via new alliances). By situating *Blasted* within the canon of myth, in addition to theatre, this chapter renegotiates the narrative boundaries and contextual limits of the text of *Blasted*.

In his meditation on the cultural collateral of myths, French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss borrowed from literature in order to transpose “phonemes” into “mythemes” to designate the broken down components of myth that should be, according to Lévi-Strauss, identified by their function not with the characters of

¹¹³ Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 101.

mythical tales.¹¹⁴ In terms of *Blasted*, this idea suggests that the basic mythemes or “plot beads,” to use a more dramaturgical term, of the text should be evaluated not in and of themselves, but rather, in terms of how they interact and relate with each other. For, example, the rape of Cate and the later rape of the Ian by the Soldier can infer a variety of social, gender, and class dynamics when evaluated in relation to each other. Lévi-Strauss points out that the relationship between these elements are more important than the elements themselves. “The knots in the web of the social fabric take logical priority over the lines.”¹¹⁵ Furthermore, how each reader/performer negotiates the different elements, or mythemes, of a given myth or narrative (*Blasted*, in this case) reveals the deeper truths and identity of the respective group the reader/performer represents. Thus, Kane’s text in alliance with the contributing narrative of a reader/performer has the potential to actively interrogate an issue of importance to the community, which the reader/performer aims to address in a new and enigmatic way.

The mythemes of *Blasted* including the unsettling of hegemonic values, violent rapes, curt language, and focused interaction between a small number of characters combined with its malleable dramaturgy and opportunities for alliance, inspire a litany of *Blasted* productions that attempt to grapple with its content and themes. These performances span different languages, countries, and politics. After its 1995 world premiere in London, additional productions of *Blasted* include: Germany (1996); Italy (1997); France (2000); Denmark (2001); Portugal (2001); Australia (2001); Ireland

¹¹⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss (1958), “The Structural Study of Myth,” *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson (New York: Basic Books, 1963) 206-231.

¹¹⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* 229.

(2001); Mexico (2001); Canada (French) (2002); Spain (2002); Scotland (2002); New Zealand (2003); United States (2004); Brazil (2004); Korea (2005); Greece (2005); and Norway (2005).¹¹⁶ Similarly, *Blasted* has been translated from English into: German, French, Greek, Italian, Brazilian Portuguese, Swedish, Spanish, Norwegian, Japanese, and Korean, among others. *Blasted*'s multifaceted textual and performance heritage connotes a mythical lineage of complex pedigree. Each and every time one of these translators, on the stage and/or on the page, (re)present *Blasted*, they re-birth and re-inspire the *Blasted* myth. Thus, *Blasted*, ceases to connote only Kane's written text, rather, it now encompasses that text as well as all subsequent translations and performances. If we accept Lévi-Strauss's assertion that "a myth consists of all of its versions,"¹¹⁷ then *Blasted* must be (re)viewed in each new translation as both an independent venture and as part of the larger *Blasted* continuum. By situating *Blasted* in this light, the question of what politic or agenda inspired the "new" version of the myth comes to the forefront. In this way, the agendas aligned with *Blasted* in each translation cannot be extrapolated from the performance text and thus become an integral and essential component of the text itself.

Two of the gaps within *Blasted*, Cate's rape and the play's locale, offer a cornucopia of opportunities for alliances with particular contributing narratives. The following discussion examines the sensitivity and potency of these two gaps when temporarily fused with the notions of sacrifice, corporeality, and ability. I will offer an analysis of Graeae's critical attention to these gaps in performance as an example of

¹¹⁶ "Sarah Kane: Chronology," *Iain Fisher*, 9 August 2007 <<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kane-live-chronology.html>>.

¹¹⁷ Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* 223.

the artistic and activist potential within *Blasted* and to demonstrate its power in alliance with a particular goal.

***Blasted* Ground—Bridging the Locale**



Fig. 1.1: Bridge: Mianus River Bridge in Greenwich, Conn. | **Disaster:** Structural failure caused the bridge to collapse, and vehicles plunged into gap | **Fatalities:** 3 |

Date: June 28, 1983¹¹⁸

Immediately, the aforementioned stage direction, “*A very expensive hotel room in Leeds—the kind that is so expensive it could be anywhere in the world*” establishes the transiency of the locale in *Blasted*. From the beginning Kane insists that the reader/performer negotiate the importance or relevance of this locale to the overall dramatic arch of the text. Will the artists allow the outside world to remain a vague everywhere/nowhere, or will they establish a more specific residence? Similarly, how far will they deconstruct this inside/outside binary and to what end? This choice

¹¹⁸ Bob Child, Associated Press Photo, 28 June 1983.

becomes extremely important at the end of Scene Two and beginning Scene Three when the outside world rips a huge hole in the hotel wall causing these two formerly segregated worlds to collide:

*There is a blinding light, then a huge explosion.
Blackout.
The sound of summer rain.
Scene Three
The hotel has been blasted by a mortar bomb.
There is a large hold in one of the walls, and everything is
covered in dust which is still falling.¹¹⁹*

The 1995 debut production of *Blasted* invoked the Bosnia-Serbian crisis into this gap and thus resituated war-torn Bosnia within the dead center of British bourgeois in an effort to bridge the two locales and their people on a common, if grisly, ground.

Graeae chose to leave the locale intentionally vague, thus focusing the attention on the bodies in the space. Graeae's *Blasted* trades the 1995 debut production's attention to the temporary stability of the hotel for temporary corporeality: the instability of the "able body."

Becoming Active

Both Kane and Graeae's disabled-led performance strategies reject the hegemonic values of "control, efficiency, balance, and symmetry"¹²⁰ as natural. Both seek to reveal the constructed-ness of most facets of the human experience. As Philip Auslander and Carrie Sandahl point out in *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, disabled artists have been key activists in this critique of hegemonic

¹¹⁹ Kane, *Blasted* 39.

¹²⁰ Carrie Sandahl, "The Tyranny of Neutral: Disability and Actor Training," *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, eds. Philip Auslander and Sandahl (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2005) 262.

values and to embodying alternative values through performance.¹²¹ The introduction of specific aesthetics, performance techniques, and physicality reinforces the strength and flexibility of the *Blasted* myth, which resides primarily in the performance, particularly in the corporeality of the actors through whom the implied audience is acknowledged. It is through performance that the reader/performer completes his or her journey and it is in their (re)presentation of the text through their bodies and its faculties that the audience is invited to join in the alliance between reader/performer and the text. The Graeae’s 2006 disabled-led production introduced an intriguing new element into the performative myth of *Blasted* and quite literally questioned “normal” interaction between a person and his or her surroundings.



Fig. 1.2: Graeae’s e-Flyer for their 2006 tour of *Blasted*.¹²²

The advertisements for the Graeae’s *Blasted* tour featured an image of a single arm emerging from the darkness clutching a handful of red rose petals, a few of which

¹²¹ Philip Auslander and Carrie Sandahl, eds., *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2005) 13.

¹²² “Blasted: e-Flyers,” *Graeae Theatre Company*, 19 Apr 2008
<<http://www.graeae.org/production/blasted/eflyer>>.

have trickled out and appear to be falling down. The online trailer for the tour (and many print advertisements for the tour) provides the following description:

Graeae will be your guide through Kane’s dark landscapes of human longing and cruelty—from a gleaming hotel room, where two ex-lovers meet, through threats and spite to personal brutality and further, as violence seems to spread like a virus until our world seems engulfed and all is damaged.¹²³

The strategic use of the word “guide”, in the above description, points towards the production’s alliance with the disabled community and its subsequent promotion of equal accessibility for all potential audiences and artists. Similarly, the description of “Kane’s dark landscapes of human longing and cruelty” complicates preconceived understandings of a locale that can be traversed or “guided” through. The setting of the advertised production slips into the metaphysical realm and unsettles the notion of a “damaged” world or, in this case, body. Rather than remain “a passive specimen on display,”¹²⁴ the actors in Graeae’s *Blasted* use their bodies as semiotic weapons to co-perform their disabilities/abilities and their respective dramatic roles in an effort to recast the audience’s gaze onto some of the larger implications within Kane’s text: specifically, the physical manifestation of isolation, fear, and desperation on both the body and the material world.

Theatre and disabled bodies both illicit the often considered rude act of staring. In her essay, “Dares to Stares: Disabled Women Performance Artists and the Dynamics of Staring,” Rosemarie Garland Thomson points out that, “staring starkly

¹²³ “Play the Trailer,” “Blasted: e-Flyers,” *Graeae Theatre Company*, 13 Jun 2006 <<http://www.dekretser.com/efliers/graeae/trailer.htm>>.

¹²⁴ Auslander 3.

registers the perception of strangeness and endows it with meaning.”¹²⁵ Certainly, meaning-making coincides with art, and thus, arguably in this instance the stare seems less rude. Call to mind patrons at a museum of art who stand for long periods of time taking in works of art. In this case, the stare denotes appreciation or interest rather than rude voyeurism. In an effort to differentiate “the stare” from “the gaze”, Thomson suggests the following associated narratives: “Gazing says, ‘You are mine.’ Staring says, “What is wrong with you.”¹²⁶ In other words, the gaze incorporates the subject into the “gazer,” whereas the stare categorically distances the subject from the “starer.” Certainly, in the case of theatre, the question of “What is wrong with you” is not out of place, and in fact, this very question often forms the spine of the story being told (just ask Hamlet). I recognize the material, social, and ethical politics associated with the gaze and its relevance in the theatre, however, in an effort to blur the demarcation line between topics of study (theatre and disabled studies), I utilize the term “stare” in my following discussion of audience activity within the theatre. Thomson continues, “Starers gawk with ambivalence or abandon at the prosthetic hook, the empty sleeve, the scarred flesh, the unfocused eye, the twitching limb, seeking a narrative that puts their disrupted world back in order.”¹²⁷ The “starer,” or implied audience, of Kane’s text in performance also seeks a “narrative that puts their [or Kane’s] disrupted world back in order.” However, perhaps the difference lies in that “implied” characteristic of the audience in Kane’s texts. Kane assumes they will

¹²⁵ Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “Dares to Stares: Disabled Women Performance Artists and the Dynamics of Staring,” *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, eds. Philip Auslander and Carrie Sandahl (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2005) 30.

¹²⁶ Thomson 32.

¹²⁷ Thomson 31.

stare, in fact like most playwrights she wants them to, and toys with that activity. Disabled people also may assume that they will be stared at. However, they likely do not want an audience to appraise their every action in daily life. Graeae capitalizes on this staring dichotomy by presenting that which we are supposed to and not supposed to stare at within the same frame. The audience recognizes the “non-normal” because of its difference against the “normal.” Yet, like with all deconstructed binaries the signs or identifying terms lose their former stability as satisfying meaning makers and slip into the ambiguous realm of metaphor.¹²⁸ In this way, Graeae renegotiates that which can and cannot be effectively evaluated as “ok” and “not ok” or “inside” and “outside” “normal” society. Thomson concurs in her discussion regarding disabled performers who invite stares, “Staring unfolds in their work as a charged social exchange between active agents, not simply a form of exploitation or surveillance perpetrated by starers on victimized starees.”¹²⁹ This power-shift, as employed by Graeae, transposes the revolutionary aspects of *Blasted*, and its literal blasting of the hotel wall that divides inside from outside, into vital activism.

“Accessible Aesthetic”¹³⁰: Graeae’s Method

Arguably, *Blasted* on the page already overloads the senses. Thus, in their transposition of *Blasted* from the page to the stage, Graeae capitalizes on these sensory extremes by layering them with specific performance choices that reinforce sensory sensitivity while questioning the construction (dramaturgy) of the textual and anatomical (w)hole. Director Jenny Sealey stated, “We found the play lend itself

¹²⁸ Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play” 279

¹²⁹ Thomson 32.

¹³⁰ “New Writing and Writers,” *Graeae Theatre Company*, 19 Apr 2008 <<http://www.graeae.org/page/writing>>.

perfectly to the ‘Graeae aesthetic,’ and provided fascinating opportunities for us to take a creative approach to interpreting otherwise non-verbal communication within the script.”¹³¹ Through its production of Kane’s *Blasted*, Graeae confronted any lingering audience discomfort at seeing disabled people onstage with brutal force.

From its inception in 1980, Graeae founders Nabil Shaban and Richard Tomlinson, vehemently pushed its political agenda, which emphasizes equality for disabled people, to the forefront of its productions. Shaban, a wheelchair user anxious to become a professional actor, describes the frustration he felt in this pursuit:

I wanted to be an actor and there were absolutely no opportunities for disabled people such as myself, who were wheelchair-users, with mobility issues, speech or sight impairments to either receive training as actors or obtain professional work, in the 1960s and 70s....I wrote to every drama school in Britain, asking how a person in a wheelchair could become an actor? Of course, I was hoping that at least, one, would reply suggesting that I apply to join their drama course and be invited for an interview and audition. Needless to say, without exception, I was told to get lost, forget it, you haven't hope in hell.¹³²

Graeae formed as a company in direct retaliation against this response whose rejection of the disabled community consequently prevented disabled theatre artists, like Shaban, from obtaining the qualifications (i.e. certified completion of recognized theatre training programs) necessary in order to work in the professional English theatre. The Graeae’s first production, *Sideshow* (1980), received large public and critical acclaim. *Sideshow* toured the US and UK, performed at an international conference on disability and rehabilitation in Winnipeg, Canada, and culminated in a

¹³¹ Jenny Sealey, “*Blasted*—Spring Tour 2006: Director’s Comments,” *Graeae Theatre Company* 13 Jun 2006 <www.graeae.org>.

¹³² Nabil Shaban, “Early History of Graeae,” 6 Jul 2006, 13 Mar 2008 <http://uk.geocities.com/jinghiz53/The_Beginning_of_Graeae.htm>.

special Arena documentary for the BBC, which was transmitted in January of 1981 to coincide with the opening of the U.N.'s International Year of Disabled People. After this success and making its debut as the first English professional disabled-led theatre company, Graeae proved itself to the Arts Council of Great Britain and became eligible to receive full funding.¹³³

Graeae offers the opportunity to engage with members of their company in various theatre workshops as one of many ways to enhance awareness about the disabled community's lack of access to the able-bodied mainstream, particularly within the theatre world. During its 2006 UK tour of *Blasted*, Graeae offered the opportunity to engage in a performance workshop run by aforementioned artistic director Jenny Sealey. I interviewed theatre practitioner and scholar Mary Luckhurst about her experience as a participant in one of these workshops, which she described as the most engaging theatre workshop of which she had ever been part.¹³⁴ Luckhurst, an educator at York University in England, arranged for a group of her theatre students combined with a group of social-work students, also from York, to attend a performance of Graeae's *Blasted*. Following the performance, the group participated in one of the Graeae's accompanying workshops.

During this workshop, an interpreter accompanied hearing-impaired Sealey in order to help translate between Sealey and the hearing workshop participants. She emphasized that her goal within this workshop was to communicate her "experience of the world" to the group. The workshop began with an exercise that asked the

¹³³ Shaban.

¹³⁴ Mary Luckhurst, personal interview, San Diego, California, 10 Oct 2006.

participants to create a gesture or sign for his or her name. It was at this point that Sealey demonstrated the sign for her own name, which included a gesture that drew attention to her rather large bosom. Sealey explained that she believed the deaf world to be far more “colorful and obscene” than the hearing world probably imagined it to be (which makes me wonder why they do not take on all of Kane’s texts!). The group was then divided into smaller groups of 5-6 participants and asked to create a narrative only using the gestures they had created. The gestures needed to remain the same, but they no longer had to indicate the person’s name. The groups performed their series of gestures narrative for each other after which Sealey asked, “What did you get?” When the participants reported that much of what they saw was unclear, or they could only derive a vague understanding of the narrative, Sealey replied, “That’s what it’s like for me when someone doesn’t sign.” Sealey points out that, in the hearing world, the hearing-impaired person is left to make sense out of what an interaction or verbal statement looks like without the benefit of the verbal context.

For example, when observing two people shake hands, the hearing-impaired person can derive that these people are greeting each other. However, as one group of participants demonstrated, if the handshake was accompanied by the words, “Hello. I’m from Italy. Where are you from?” the hearing-impaired person would not be able to deduce this exchange from the simple gesture of the handshake. This meaning-deducing process points towards a compatibility with the “gap-filling” required by Kane’s texts. Luckhurst pointed out that for her, this exercise reinforced the necessity for performers to “get out of their heads” and to consciously consider what he/she

looks like and what messages his/her bodies and gestures are communicating to the audience without the accompanying verbalized cues.

Sealey's experiences, as a hearing-impaired person within a hearing-biased world, leads her to be "obsessive" about including signing as an integral part of her theatrical productions rather than a tossed-in afterthought.¹³⁵ Luckhurst, who also directs theatre, described her common experience of signers as part of performances: "They (the signers) are over on the margins, away from the action." In an attempt to relay the experience of this as a hearing-impaired person to the participants, Sealey had the participants craft a scene wherein a couple of students silently acted out a basic scene while being accompanied by a participant who signed the dialogue for the scene. Sealey had previously taught the participants a few basic sentences in sign language, which became the dialogue options for these scenes. Luckhurst described her frustration with having to constantly shift her focus between the staged action and the needed translation of content being provided by the signers. Sealey continually added signers to the performance eventually ending up with significantly more signers on either side of the scene than actors actually in the scene. Luckhurst expressed her fascination in the resulting "ballet" of signs that to her became much more interesting to watch than the scene itself. Through this exercise, Sealey reveals the lack of access to information within a given performance, when a production limits the inclusion of signers to the literal margins of a production, away from the "real" action. In Graeae's production of *Blasted*, Sealey directed the immersion of signs and captions into the production via an exquisitely crafted film, which played on a large screen situated as

¹³⁵ Luckhurst.

the central backdrop for the production. Likewise, the actors read aloud their actions, using Kane's script to enhance the quality and drama of the description. The result was "electrifying, as all the elements combined to create an engaging spectacle for disabled and non-disabled audiences alike."¹³⁶ Graeae works to expand not only the definition of implied reader/performer (Does s/he have to be able bodied, seeing, and/or hearing in order to successfully align with the text?), but also to expand the definition of implied audience. Graeae productions do not imply hearing, seeing, or physical abilities as givens for their audience members. They posit that these type of implications work to systematically subvert and distance members of the disabled community from participating in theatre production on either side of the stage.

Sealey peppered the workshop with various "intelligence" quizzes involving such questions as, "Name 10 disabled actors?" After participants failed to come up with answers to such questions, an experience Luckhurst described as more than a little humbling, Sealey questioned the number of able-bodied actors who had been awarded Oscars for their "convincing" portrayals of disabled people. Sealey posits the question to the theatre/performance world at large: Why do we not immediately consider disabled performers for these or any roles and; why do we assume the disabled performer would be ill-equipped to adequately communicate the condition, experience, or challenges of a particular character? By ladling in these types of critical engagements into the dramaturgy of Kane's text, Graeae pushes *Blasted* into a new

¹³⁶ "About Our Shows," *Graeae Theatre Company*, 10 Mar 2008
 <<http://www.graeae.org/page/aboutourshows>>.

realm of questioning and evaluation of the human condition and what this idea of the “human condition” implies.

Filling in the Gaps, Corporeally

The Graeae’s 2006 *Blasted* featured a visually impaired male actor, Gerard McDermott, in the role of Ian. Thus the actor’s literal negotiation of the stage as a visually impaired person aligned with Ian’s struggle to negotiate his own identity within the world of the play. Although admittedly Graeae obviously employs at least some irony when a visually-impaired actor portrays the character who lacks awareness of his impending doom, the Graeae twists the tables to focus on the abilities of their artists rather than their disabilities. In this way, the visually-impaired actor’s performance of ability in a visually biased world makes Ian’s journey towards self-realization infinitely more complex. As an alliance, the actor and text mutually benefit. McDermott works with the text to perform beyond the preconceived limits of a visually-impaired person, while the textually conceived Ian, benefits from the destabilization of the general terms used to describe his character (i.e. “blind,” “crippled,” “oppressive,” “marginalized,” etc.).

Regarding this casting choice for *Blasted*, Sealey concurs, “(Using a visually impaired actor) takes the metaphorical on a different journey. There is a new-found poignancy when the experience of not having sight is real.”¹³⁷ The Graeae’s *Blasted* consciously presented both of these narratives (the visually impaired actor’s and Ian’s) in the body of one man in an effort to broaden the implications of *Blasted* for the audience, who arguably understand blindness differently. The stakes, thus, for the

¹³⁷ Mark Fisher, “Shock and Awe in Blast from the Past,” *Scotland on Sunday* Sun 16 Apr 2006.

individual performer become extremely high. For example, when the Soldier sucks out Ian's eyes in the latter portion of the text,¹³⁸ does the action invoke more or less sympathy from the audience when a visually impaired actor plays the role of Ian? Similarly, does this same act become more or less grotesque?¹³⁹ By inserting themselves into the literal body of the text in performance, the performer lays bare his or her unique understanding of the violence he or she enacts and/or endures onstage. In turn the audience glimpses the world from the given performers point of view and gains perspective on his or her experience of the world.

Ian's story as a sexist, racist, insensitive journalist unfolds even more enigmatically when aligned with the Graeae's desire to heighten public sensitivity towards the everyday prejudices and general callousness experienced by members of the disabled community. To this end, this production situates each action as a doubly coded sign. Are we to interpret Ian's disgust with Cate's femaleness as an indicator of his misogyny or of a common association (particularly in the able-bodied community) of a pleasing female aesthetic with certain physical inclusions (i.e. two legs) and exclusions (i.e. no leg-braces)? Sealey recognized camaraderie between Kane's and Graeae's commitment to voicing the unvoiced injustices of the world. Sealey states:

Sarah Kane forced the world to listen to atrocities happening in the world. People do not like being told. Kane tried to challenge and change apathy. At Graeae my role is to place disabled

¹³⁸ Kane, *Blasted* 50.

¹³⁹ It is worth noting that the visual impairment of the actor who played Ian in this production was not necessarily recognizable by the audience. As scholar Mary Luckhurst humbly mentioned in my interview with her, "When I found out he was blind after the performance, I was so embarrassed by my crude idea of what a visually impaired person looks like. What did I expect? A seeing eye dog onstage?"

actors on stage and claim our right to be there. Again, people do not like being told.”¹⁴⁰

Graeae takes Kane’s text and disturbs previous understandings or assumptions about its connotations and implications regarding an individual’s place in the world.

In another discussion concerning “place,” Iser finds Ingarden’s theory of “places of indeterminacy” as those places that can be “filled in” by the energy originating in an individual’s “original emotion” during the process of “concretization” limited and incomplete for a number of reasons.¹⁴¹ Primarily, Iser critiques Ingarden’s reluctance to “disturb the harmony of the layered structure (of a work) and so alter the aesthetic value of the work” thus always resulting in a tension between the resolution of “places of indeterminacy” and the works in which they are found. Iser works for a more cohesive and complementary relationship between the work and its inherent “places of indeterminacy” or “blanks” wherein the filling of these blanks work more to enhance rather than detract from the integrity or “harmony” of the work and where there is less concern for preserving the “all-pervading norms of polyphonic harmony and classical aesthetics to which Ingarden’s theory is so heavily committed.”¹⁴² *Polyphonic*, a term borrowed from music by Mikhail Bakhtin in his *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Creation* (1929),¹⁴³ metaphorically describes literary work (those by Fyodor M. Dostoevsky in particular) that utilizes multilayered strands of

¹⁴⁰ Fisher.

¹⁴¹ Iser, “Asymmetry” 174.

¹⁴² Iser, “Asymmetry” 178.

¹⁴³ Mikhail Bakhtin (1929), *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, *Theory and History of Literature* 8 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 6-7.

different, but equal, voices in their narratives.¹⁴⁴ Bakhtin argued that these distinct and complex voices worked to alleviate the author and his/her voice from the text. Later critics argued against Bakhtin's claim, suggesting that although Bakhtin rightly argues for the elegance of the polyphonic form in literature as an enigmatic narrative device, he mistakenly understands this craftsmanship as objectivity by the author.¹⁴⁵ Likewise, I understand this polyphonic harmony as it appears in *Blasted* (in addition to other postmodern work), as a "chorus in continuum," in that it always searches to add more voices. *Blasted* includes a polyphonic harmony of three voices, Cate, Ian, and the Soldier. However, it also encourages the joining of additional equal voices introduced through alliance with the text in performance, while certainly Kane's own voice echoes in the text as well. In this moment, the palimpsest becomes the ever evolving chorus.

Graeae capitalizes on broadening the polyphonic harmony of *Blasted* by aligning its production with their activist goals. Sealey points out, "The structure Sarah Kane gave to the play has given me the freedom to continue to further the aesthetic of access."¹⁴⁶ Thus, Sealey and Kane's text mutually benefit from this new inspiration of *Blasted*: Sealey gains an imposing dramatic voice with which to strengthen her artistic and activist efforts and *Blasted* gains longevity in the theatre canon.

Graeae Assembles: the Body as Locale

¹⁴⁴ In music, *polyphony* is a texture consisting of two or more independent melodic voices, as opposed to music with just one voice (monophony) or music with one dominant melodic voice accompanied by chords (homophony).

¹⁴⁵ René Wellek, "Bakhtin's View of Dostoevsky: 'Polyphony' and 'Carnavalesque,'" *Dostoevsky Studies*, Vol 1, 1980, 20 Apr 2008 <<http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/DS/01/031.shtml>>.

¹⁴⁶ Sealey, "Director's Comments."

Graeae's investment into *Blasted*'s form yields not only a new realization of the textual script of *Blasted*, but reveals the clauses in the social script of a "normal" or "able" body as well as the conflation of these two ideas. Graeae's artistic deconstruction of the "able" versus "disabled" binary works to unveil the limits of these labels and their discriminatory origins. Graeae listed the following on their company's website as part of their mission statement:

The company produces work that is representative of disabled people as members of the community as a whole, contributing to the debate on representation and equality of access, both in the theatre world and among the public at large.¹⁴⁷

This idea of "membership" to a given community is central to *Blasted*, as is the questionable "access" to that community. Specifically, both Cate and Ian seem ill-equipped to interact in the public at large. Cate suffers from stuttering and catatonic fits at moments of high-stress and Ian wields a gun at any and every provocation. Kane equips neither Cate nor Ian to adequately confront the larger societal forces that have propelled them into this room. They therefore resort to a misplaced and frustrated battle for power with each other in an effort to establish some semblance of agency in this temporary dwelling space.

While Cate and Ian jockey for control over each other and themselves within the confines of the hotel room, a civil war looms outside of the hotel walls, urgently pushing in on the room and intensifying the stress within it. In the following scene, Cate and Ian struggle with their abilities to please each other or themselves:

IAN. Don't know nothing. That's why I love you, want to make love to you.

¹⁴⁷ "Graeae Theatre Company," *The British Council*, United Kingdom, 1 Aug 2008 <<http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-acd-directory-graeae-theatre-company.htm>>.

CATE. But you can't.
 IAN. Why not?
 CATE. I don't want to.
 IAN. Why did you come here?
 CATE. You sounded unhappy.
 IAN. Make me happy.
 CATE. I can't.
 IAN. Please.
 CATE. No.
 IAN. Why not?
 CATE. Can't.
 IAN. Can.
 CATE. How?
 IAN. You know.
 CATE. Don't.
 IAN. Please.
 CATE. No.
 IAN. I love you.
 CATE. I don't love you.
 IAN. (*Turns away. He sees the bouquet of flowers and picks it up.*) These are for you.¹⁴⁸

This scene ends Scene One of *Blasted* and dramatizes the continual battle for agency despite questionable ability within this text. At some moments Kane positions Cate and Ian as enemies and at other times, lovers. However, Kane also places both Cate and Ian on the same side of the hotel wall. This shared location of either “inside” or “outside” (depending on the group or locale in question) creates a stronger union than their relationship as enemies or lovers ever did because in this arrangement, on the same side of the wall, Cate and Ian are not looking at each other, rather they are both being looked at or are both looking out at the same thing. Throughout their production, Graeae continues to play with positioning and how it contributes to amicable and antagonistic relationships amongst the characters based on who is “inside” and who is “outside” various groups.

¹⁴⁸ Kane, *Blasted* 23-24.

As formerly mentioned, Graeae staged a large screen onto which three Sign Language Interpreters (SLI) were projected behind the actors.¹⁴⁹ This pseudo-wall complicates the hotel “wall” that is later destroyed in Scene Three. This production choice establishes the borders being negotiated in this *Blasted* to be those other than geographic. Furthermore, the Soldier enters from the “other side of the wall,” and thus renegotiates the power dynamic between the three characters. In Graeae’s *Blasted*, the actor who played the Soldier, David Toole, has no legs and performed without the use of prosthetics, moving about the stage on his hands. The audience members watch both Toole’s physical negotiation of the stage, which is “outside” the norms of typical theatre blocking, and Toole’s negotiation of the Soldier struggling to overcome his own, primarily psychological, limitations. The insertion of the Soldier complicates this image of Toole/Soldier struggling for access, when he argues aggressively and violently with Ian regarding who has more power over their respective life roles. The Soldier interrogates Ian’s participation in “the war” and suggests that Ian retains more agency than the Soldier:

SOLDIER. Ever seen anything like that?

IAN. Stop.

SOLDIER. Not in photos?

IAN. Never.

SOLDIER. Some journalist, that’s your job.

IAN. What?

SOLDIER. Proving it happened. I’m here, got no choice. But you. You should be telling people.

IAN. No one’s interested.

SOLDIER. You can do something, for me—

IAN. No.

¹⁴⁹“About Our Shows,” *Graeae Theatre Company*, 10 Mar 2008
<<http://www.graeae.org/page/aboutourshows>>.

SOLDIER. Course you can.

IAN. I can't do anything.

SOLDIER. Try.

IAN. I write...stories. That's all. Stories. This isn't a story
anyone wants to hear.¹⁵⁰

Here, Kane's discussion of privilege, access, and ability merges with Graeae's activist agenda to strategically question that which is included and excluded from popular discourse and why. If Ian and the Soldier are both products of their respective "sides" of the hotel wall, what common ground unites them, if any? Graeae uses the destruction of the hotel wall in Scene Three to disturb the idea of "equal access" between the able-bodied and disabled world as well as to complicate the notion of "ability," which blankets the entire text.

Audiences have been trained to read the physical body for indications of a character's mental or emotional state. Think of the terms "poker face" or "game face," which points towards "no emotion" or "focused determination" respectively. However, when viewing the disabled body onstage, this practice, "does not apply neatly... and can even be quite offensive and humiliating."¹⁵¹ Thus, for the actors in Graeae's *Blasted*, their bodies disturb the typical viewing process and maintain the prospect of making the audience uncomfortable. The audience squirms when asked to evaluate a deviant physical affect as a "natural" or "neutral" state rather than a clue towards character construction. Certainly David Toole moved through his life without legs before playing the role of the Soldier, thus is it fair to include this aspect of Toole's physicality when evaluating his characterization of the Soldier? On the other hand, rather than point towards a more generally accepted idea of a "normal" body by

¹⁵⁰ Kane, *Blasted* 47-48.

¹⁵¹ Sandahl, "The Tyranny of Neutral" 262.

having Toole perform with prosthetics or in a style that de-emphasized his disability, the production chose to weave Toole's physicality into the performance. Graeae's choice to celebrate the disability, or more accurately, the ability of their actors hallmarks them as provocative and evolutionary. Kane, likewise, resisted tying things up in an obligatory pretty little bow and often unsettled her audiences with enigmatic and complex conclusions. Thus, if the audience of this production did experience discomfort, they are left to decipher whether it was Kane's text or the disabled body onstage that caused their discomfort. In both instances, the audience must reconcile a discrepancy in pre-conceived notions of cause and effect in the theatre world and the world it aims to represent.

Sacrificing the Body and/or Taking one for the Team

I frequently walk out of the theatre early without fear of missing anything. But however bad I've felt, I've never left a football match early, because you never know when a miracle might occur.

Increasingly, I'm finding performance much more interesting than acting; theatre more compelling than plays.—Sarah Kane¹⁵²

The artists who perform the *Blasted* myth offer up their own bodies to re-inspire, literally "breathe life into," the many soul-wrenching moments of the *Blasted* myth. Like a football player whose corporeality the spectators visually feast upon and whose ability to physically and mentally overcome the immediate challenges of the match determines the emotional state of those spectators, the performers of the *Blasted* myth negotiate a delicate hybrid awareness of their own personal navigation through a performance and the audience's emotional dependence upon their sharing of the performers' experiences. In this way, both the football player and the artist offer up

¹⁵² Kane, "Drama with Balls," 12.

their visceral journeys to be consumed by the spectators/audience. This sacrifice of self ties the players to the audience and ingrains the players into the spectators' understanding of themselves both individually and as a community. If the player (theatric or athletic) succeeds then the audience states, "We won." If the player fails then they cry, "It was awful. I can't believe I stayed and watched the second half." The larger a player's role is in the specific success or failure then the greater is their sacrifice for the potential benefit of the community.

In *Blasted*, Kane intensifies the typical call to arms of a text to its performers. Arguably, all performances (of any text) demand some sort of sacrifice, per se, of the performers so that the audience may have something to consume; thus is the nature of performance. However, the gaps and circumstances within *Blasted* push the performers to such an extreme that they must negotiate for themselves their own limits as a person, beyond the realm of performer. Therefore, the *Blasted* performers make not only their craft available for audience consumption, but expose the confrontation of their own mortality. Thus, something extremely private becomes essentially public. For the disabled performers of Graeae, this exploration of private reality in public creates even more modes of inquiry for the audience.

Traditionally, sacrifice takes place in the public realm. Recall, Polyxena or Iphigenia from ancient Greek dramas. The public awareness of the private struggle of these women transforms their deaths into heroic, albeit tragic, sacrifices. Once it has been decreed that Iphigenia will be put to death, she is stripped of her rightful position as worshipper of the gods and transformed into an offering for the gods. As Marianne McDonald points out in the introduction to her translation of *Iphigenia at Aulis*, "She

has no choice as to whether she is to die, but she can choose to die heroically.”¹⁵³ This seems doubly tragic to place the burden of decorum onto the victim. Iphigenia sets the tone for Greek death in the Trojan War. Because of her “heroic” death, presumably additional heroic deaths will follow in the upcoming battles.

Blasted, too, positions sacrifice of a young female’s body as a catalyst for war. Kane drew the following connection between Cate’s rape and the violence in Bosnia in the 1990s:

And then...I thought: ‘Of course, it’s obvious. One is the seed and the other is the tree.’ And I do think the seeds of full-scale war can always be found in peacetime civilization and I think the wall between so-called civilization and what happened in central Europe is very, very thin and it can get torn down at any time.¹⁵⁴

Thus, exploring the rape of Cate becomes as important, if not more so, as understanding the debaucheries and destruction in the second half of *Blasted*. As a journalist, Ian’s livelihood depends upon his ability to spin a story about the details of other people’s lives. He produces media that will aid the agendas of those with economic and political power in the misguided belief that it will increase his own power-share. The resulting tension causes Ian to alleviate the pressure caused by his unfulfilled desire for agency within his own life in more deviant outlets. Kane presents a direct link between Ian’s parasitic lack of agency in the world beyond the hotel room with his radical attempts to exercise power within the hotel room. Because he cannot adequately confront those with economic and political power over him and his life, he

¹⁵³ Marianne McDonald, introduction, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, by Euripides, trans. McDonald (Unpublished translation, 2003) 5.

¹⁵⁴ Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 101.

lashes out at what he can control. In this case, Ian decides that what he can exert control over is Cate.

Early in the play, Ian dictates a particularly gruesome story over the phone about the brutal murder of a teenage girl. He has factored himself out of these types of occurrences so as to suggest that they have nothing to do with him. Because he cannot directly confront the violence he reports, Ian must consider himself in an alternate universe separate from his impotence towards this violence. Ian submerges his horror towards the victim of the news story and manifests it instead within his overt preoccupation with Cate. He obsessively judges and evaluates Cate on everything from her appearance to her age to her sexual inexperience. In Ian's desperate negotiation for power he commodifies Cate's body as collateral. He appraises her as if she were his possession. His struggle for power culminates in his rape of Cate.

The Rape of Cate

Within the rape of Cate between Scene One and Scene Two, Kane composes one of her most enigmatic gaps. Fused with a feminist agenda, this gap allows for the exploration of the feminine articulation of crisis and destruction, mapped corporally on the female body in a heightened moment of theatricality. Furthermore, Graeae's re-narrative of disability, when aligned with the *Blasted* narrative, additionally complicates the assumed politics of Cate's rape. As with Ian and the Soldier, the physicality of Cate in the Graeae production points towards a double understanding of ability, agency, and access. In Graeae's production, the actress playing Cate, Jennifer-Jay Ellison, wore visible leg braces, not as an aesthetic choice for Cate, per se, but to aide Ellison as she moved about the stage. When intentionally staging the disabled

body, “‘Don’t stare; don’t ask; don’t tell’ breaks down, creating a transgressive space where conventional rules and relations are upset and subject to realignment.”¹⁵⁵ Thus, in this transgressive space, Cate’s rape also becomes subject to realignment: and requires a new evaluation of its respective politics and consequences. “Indeed, the cultural narrative that imagines disability as unexpected, the hidden, the uncanny, is part of the oppression of the ability system.”¹⁵⁶ Graeae takes the opportunity to expand upon the dramaturgical gap of “Cate’s rape” and use it to further question oppression of women and the disabled within *Blasted* and the public at large.

In Kane’s text Cate’s body becomes emblematic of a larger scale communal catastrophe (the civil war outside the hotel, the hegemonic oppression and exclusion of Cate, Ian, and the Soldier by the community they try to associate with, etc.); her individual body bares the wounds of this communal catastrophe. This discussion understands catastrophe to include not only one-time events, but ongoing, and repeated catastrophic conditions as well. The wounds and vandalizing upon Cate’s body (re)present microcosms of the larger societal ills that surround her (including Ian’s physical illness) and conversely, these larger societal ills (re)present macrocosms of violations and/or transgression on her individual female body. Similarly, Graeae’s alignment with this text allows us to critically engage with this cycle of catastrophe reflected within/upon the physical body. Both the feminist and activist inquiries work to insert a wedge into the narrative. This wedge aims to halt the all-encompassing

¹⁵⁵ Thomson 39.

¹⁵⁶ Thomson 40.

cyclone of deconstruction of the female body and injustice towards those with disabilities.

Kane identifies Scene Two as “*Very early the following morning.*”¹⁵⁷ While Cate sleeps, Ian has a complete physical break down in which:

(I)t looks very much as if he is dying. His heart, lung, liver and kidneys are all under attack and he is making involuntary crying sounds.

[...]

Ian is a crumpled heap on the floor.

He looks up and sees Cate is watching him.

CATE. Cunt.

IAN. *(Gets up slowly, picks up the glass and drinks. He lights his first cigarette of the day.)*

I’m having a shower.

CATE. It’s only six o’clock.

IAN. Want one?

CATE. Not with you.

IAN. Suit yourself. Cigarette?

CATE. *(makes a noise of disgust.)*

They are silent.

[...]

IAN. Don’t worry, I’ll be dead soon.

(He tosses the gun on to the bed.)

Have a pop.

CATE. *doesn’t move.*¹⁵⁸

The focus on Cate’s body as both female and as a point on the ability continuum works as a bountiful contributing narrative. The transgression upon Cate’s body in *Blasted* plummets towards catastrophic proportions primarily because it transpires without an additional cognizant observer. Irreverence and selective awareness transform a tragedy into a catastrophe. Complicit in this change is the reduction of a specific, named victim to “every and any” victim. “Every and any” transposes into “all

¹⁵⁷ Kane, *Blasted* 24.

¹⁵⁸ Kane, *Blasted* 24-25.

or none”, which equals a cancellation and erasure, or worse yet, a void. Erasures denote action and attention towards the action of erasing something, yet a void, by definition, eludes concrete definition. Cate’s rape takes place within unknowable voids. Literally, Kane leaves these elements out of the text, situating this violence between scenes. The audience gets the before and after, but misses the liminal “during”. In *From Ritual to Theatre* Turner recognizes the separateness of the liminal from constructed norm.¹⁵⁹ Thus, the only way to evaluate Cate’s rape is to evaluate its destructive aftermath marked on her body and her environment. The sacrifice of Cate’s youthful sexuality, via rape, is the catalyst for the onstage violence that ultimately destroys the characters and their environment. The text leaves the rape of Cate unarticulated, yet its residue pervades every violent act throughout the rest of the play. At the end of the play, Cate returns physically and emotionally transformed as a physical marker of the transition that has occurred both to her and because of her (specifically the rape of her body).

In her discussion of radical feminism and theatre, Sue-Ellen Case illuminates the concept of rape as a “patriarchal weapon that directly wounded or violated women and indirectly... alienated them from the expression of their own sexual desires.”¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, she points out that this understanding led to a new consciousness of rape as not only the perverse action of an individual deviant man but a patriarchal weapon implicated in a larger system. She suggests an interconnectedness of all instances of rape by men as a desperate demonstration of masculinity. In this way, the social

¹⁵⁹ Turner 47.

¹⁶⁰ Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Methuen, 1988) 66.

structure that relates masculinity to these physical displays of power (manifested in rape among other forms of violence) oppresses men via its suggestion that these men oppress women in order to maintain their respective position. They are in crisis of losing their masculinity if they cannot demonstrate their power over a given situation.

In Graeae's *Blasted*, Gerard McDermott's visual-impairedness (and Graeae's politics in general) questions disabled men's access to the hegemonic center of "normal" masculine power and agency as measured primarily on the body. Ian sacrifices Cate's body, not because of its value (this value being further complicated by Jennifer-Jay Ellison's leg-braces, which pose a question as to her body's worth as collateral), but because it is the thing of value to which he has access. This accessibility provides the path to his perceived agency. He offers her up in exchange for power. However, because Ian does not accurately identify with whom he aims to negotiate via this sacrifice, this attempted ritualized act becomes a pathetic act of excessive, wasteful violence. In *Gender and Power*, R.W. Connell provides the following insight into the act of rape:

Rape, for instance, routinely presented in the media as individual deviance, is a form of person-to-person violence deeply embedded in power inequalities and ideologies of male supremacy. Far from being a deviation from the social order, it is in a significant sense an enforcement of it.¹⁶¹

In this way, we can understand Ian's rape of Cate as the manifestation of both his and her oppression within their social order. Because Ian aspires to sit higher up in the social order of male supremacy, he utilizes the tools of violence, rape in this case, that the system of male supremacy encourages. The social order of male supremacy

¹⁶¹ R.W. Connell, *Gender & Power* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1987).

depends on the institutionalization of violence, which aims to eliminate any threat to its domination. Via this institutionalization, the social order also predicts the actions of those like Ian who aim to reach a more privileged position within that order. Cate's body becomes the battlefield on which Ian fights to prove his manhood. The literal battlefield of the civil war, which later explodes into the *mise en scene*, echoes Cate's body as battlefield.

The sacrifice of Cate's body during this rape takes place between scenes. Ironically, it is one of the only acts of violence Kane chooses not to stage, yet what Kane does stage is the rape of Ian by the Soldier (whom the civil war spews into the scene when it slams through the hotel room wall) in a following scene. Cate's rape becomes the elusive original violence in this play and the soldier's rape of Ian oddly echoes its destabilization of power and attempts to deconstruct this gesture of gender. In her book, *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth asserts that it is only through the repetition of a trauma by the survivor (of their own traumatic experience) onto a new victim, that the survivor can address the pain of their original trauma. The unknowable qualities of the survivor's original trauma become tangible through the cries of the new victim.¹⁶² If Cate is the "original victim," then theoretically, she should be raping Ian in order to experience her own trauma. But, she does not. Cate somehow escapes (through the bathroom?) when the Soldier enters. In the rape of Ian, thus, does the Soldier act on her behalf? Perhaps it is the audience that has been traumatized by the rape of Cate and it is through the re-experiencing of rape,

¹⁶² Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996).

via the onstage rape of Ian, that they can recognize what traumatized them the first time. By placing Cate's rape as the instigator for Ian's rape by the Soldier, Kane upsets the notion of the male body as original and primary within the social structure.

Kane locates Ian's rape in the residue of Cate's rape not vice versa. Kane establishes the terms of rape with Cate's female body however it is validated on Ian's male body, as that is the one the audience sees being raped. When Ian's male body is raped by another male he cannot reconcile his body in terms of the female and thus begins to fragment and fall apart. In her *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, Judith Butler breaks open the assumed irreducibility of the body as a material constant.¹⁶³ Butler maintains, "Materiality is constructed through a problematic gendered matrix, then the discursive practice by which matter is rendered irreducible simultaneously ontologizes and fixes that gendered matrix in its place."¹⁶⁴ Butler points out that the habit of neglecting to question the elements that supposedly make up the material woman prevents any sort of understanding or recognition of what it could possibly mean to be a woman outside of the male-dominated matrix. Kane confronts us with Ian's male body that fails to effectively register the transgression upon Cate's female body.

Graeae further complicates this image by incorporating the aesthetics of disability. Cate's body is not only presented as female, but as disabled. Furthermore, the Soldier who rapes Ian literally has no legs. Thus the "fragmenting" of Ian becomes even more complex after the Soldier rapes him. As Kane destabilizes the male body as

¹⁶³ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 27-36.

¹⁶⁴ Butler 29.

primary, so does Graeae destabilize the able body as primary. Ian physically breaks down as the binaries of gender and ability deconstruct. After his rape, Ian's body becomes the Soldier's sustenance (he eats Ian's eyes) and ceases to retain any autonomous merits, (the Soldier proceeds to shoot himself in the head) yet Cate's body returns in the final scene:

Cate enters carrying some bread, a large sausage and a bottle of gin. There is blood seeping from between her legs.

It is unclear if this blood is a result of a wound acquired during the rape, the war outside, or if it is menstrual blood. Either way, the vaginal blood secreting down Cate's leg reaffirms the female body as a volatile central force screaming to be recognized within the social structure that oppresses it.

Graeae's contributing discussion on disability grounds *Blasted's* ominous final image of Ian's head sticking out of the floorboards. The stage direction reads:

*He puts the remains back in the baby's blanket and puts the bundle back in the hole.
A beat, then he climbs in after it and lies down, head poking out of the floor.
He dies with relief.
It starts to rain on him, coming through the roof.
Eventually.*

IAN. Shit.¹⁶⁵

In the debut production, Ian's body was literally entombed in the stage floor with only his bloody, eye-gouged head sticking out. In Graeae's production, Ian's head stuck through the bed frame, presumably the same bed upon which he previously raped Cate, and his body remained visible. In this way, Graeae questions not only Ian and the Soldier's crises of masculinity, but the value system society subjects their male

¹⁶⁵ Kane, *Blasted* 60.

bodies to as well. Rather than burying it, Graeae confronts the audience with an immobile body. Graeae questions the awful things that happened to Ian's body and because of it, thus assigning it a premiere place of resonance.

“People like her never win.”¹⁶⁶

The characters of *Blasted* never escape their crisis within the social structure of power and violence. They become implicit in its perpetuation. The last scene of the play shows the completely reduced Ian blinded, buried up to his neck in the floorboards of the hotel room. He is literally consumed by the environment he tried to exert agency and power over (or in the Graeae's production: the bed frame). Cate similarly resorts to the ways of this world. Kane's aforementioned (re)presentation of Cate at the end of the play binging on whiskey, bread, and sausage while her body is purging itself via the “blood seeping from between her legs” sharply contrasts to the vegetarian, squeamish Cate at the beginning of the play who stated, “Dead meat. Blood. Can't eat an animal.”¹⁶⁷ In this way, the rape of Cate inaugurated both she and Ian into the Soldier's savage and barbaric existence on the fringes of “civilized” society.

Blasted gives a palpable immediacy to civil war: somehow the violence is more familiar as a rape in a hotel room than a documentary on Bosnia. Graeae similarly repositions disability as familiar and “normal” rather than deviant or “freakish” within mainstream society. These two narratives work together to momentarily articulate the lack of compassion and justice within dominant systems of

¹⁶⁶ Kane qtd. in Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 103.

¹⁶⁷ Kane, *Blasted* 7.

power. Via the violent destruction of bodies in *Blasted*, Kane criticizes many forms of social and political systems of control, which Graeae then identifies as indicative of a general disregard for the disabled body. Kane and Graeae position the brutality against these bodies in performance as symptomatic of larger social ills rather than individual anomalies. Hegemonic notions of power depend upon systemized subservience and the perpetuation of inequality and as such, fear the aggressive alliances that proactively work to halt and deconstruct these systems by exposing their artifice and shortcomings.

Chapter Two: “It’s Not Me, It’s You.”

The Lack of Dramatic Opportunity within *Phaedra’s Love*

Phaedra’s Love includes fundamental dramaturgical and narrative choices that separate it from the rest of Sarah Kane’s work. *Blasted*¹⁶⁸ and *4.48 Psychosis*¹⁶⁹ both include opportunities for alliance with a variety of contributing narratives via the dramaturgical gaps within the texts, which allow these works to transcend the politics and theatrical conventions of their respective debut productions. *Phaedra’s Love* lacks this dramaturgical strategy, resulting in a much more stagnant dramatic text that rather heavy-handedly pushes a specific late 1990s liberal British agenda (i.e. a distrust and disgust with the public adoration of the British Royal Family and their seemingly blasé public attitude towards Britain’s political climate and its citizens). Although *Phaedra’s Love* does present an interesting and provocative twist on the Phaedra/Hippolytus myth, it lacks the fervent soul-searching and pervasive critique of humanity evident in Kane’s other dramatic works. The enigmatic and often elusive conclusions within the rest of Kane’s texts, *Blasted* and *4.48 Psychosis*, specifically, work to encourage affinity and coalition between different group identities.¹⁷⁰ The multiple alliances forged between these texts and various contributing narratives throughout different times and locales strengthen this affinity that allows different points of view to coexist. However, *Phaedra’s Love* actively “points fingers” and identifies a clear “bad guy” and “good guy” both within the play and metaphorically within the world it aims to (re)present. This blatant agenda lessens the opportunities

¹⁶⁸“Chapter One” devotes its critique to this text.

¹⁶⁹ “Chapter Three” devotes its critique to this text.

¹⁷⁰ For discussion of affinity see Chapter One of this project and Haraway 2275.

for different groups/artists to align the complexities of their specific efforts (activist, theatrical, or otherwise) with Kane's text. The subsequent short-sightedness of this text limits its potential to remain relevant theatre beyond its debut and therefore does a disservice to the rest of Kane's body of work.

In my discussion of *Blasted* and *4.48 Psychosis*, outside of this chapter, I extract and analyze the mythical qualities of these texts in terms of their malleability and multi-dimensional treatment of specific themes. In some of these analyses, I liken Kane's work to specific myths (often those of the ancient Greeks) in both form and politics. This chapter deviates from this tactic and argues that *Phaedra's Love* behaves the least like myth despite the irony of being Kane's only text that actually reworks an extant myth. I suggest that *Phaedra's Love* is the least productive of Kane's work for three reasons: 1. *Phaedra's Love* is Kane's only commissioned text, and this "commissioning" stifled Kane's critical edge; 2. Via *Phaedra's Love* Kane contributed to an extant myth and dialogue rather than introducing a new dialogue or mode of inquiry, resulting in; 3. the reduction of her "Kane-isms" (theatric and textual conventions) to immature and shallow versions of themselves. By examining the dramaturgical shortcomings of this play, in terms of its ability to incorporate a myriad of contributing narratives and align with new theatre artists, the nuanced and strategic dramaturgy within Kane's other texts becomes more apparent.

Sorry, this Work is Out-of-Commission

The only thing I ever wondered about was whether the connection made with the outer world was becoming less and less, and therefore she was having to dig deeper and

deeper to create. There were times when I wanted her to embrace doing an adaptation or something, just so that she'd relieve herself of the need to go further inside.

—Mel Kenyon, *Sarah Kane's Agent*¹⁷¹

The Gate theatre in Notting Hill commissioned Kane to write a play for their 1996 Season: *New Plays, Ancient Sources*.¹⁷² In an excerpt from her interview with Nils Tabert, Kane describes this process and how she “ended up” writing *Phaedra's Love*:

(The Gate) asked me to rewrite a classic and my original choice was (Georg Buchner's)¹⁷³ *Woyzeck*.¹⁷⁴ But they were actually already planning to do a season of all Buchner's plays, so *Woyzeck* was out. Then I said I'll do Brecht's *Baal*. Because it's loosely based on *Woyzeck*. But the Gate thought of all the possible problems with the Brecht estate and we did not really want to get into that.¹⁷⁵ So in the end it was the Gate which suggested something Greek or Roman, and I thought, oh I've always hated those plays. Everything happens off stage, and what's the point. But I decided to read one of them to see what I'd get. I chose Seneca because Caryl Churchill had done a version of one of his plays which I had liked very much. I read *Phaedra* and surprisingly enough it interested me. It depicts a sexually corrupt royal family so it's completely contemporary. This was long before (Princess) Diana died. But there is all this stuff in the last scene of *Phaedra's Love* about the most popular person in the royal family dying and so on. Now it would be a really good time for a production here.¹⁷⁶

Kane's resistance to writing a play based on “something Greek or Roman” shows through in the flagrant violence and aggressive manipulation of the text in an effort to establish a point. Unlike in *Blasted* or *Cleansed*, both extremely violent texts by Kane,

¹⁷¹ Qtd. in Simon Hattenstone, *The Guardian* (London) 1 Jul 2000.

¹⁷² Kate Basset, rev. of *Phaedra's Love*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Kane, The Gate Theatre, Notting Hill, 20 May-15 Jun. 1996, *The Times* [London] 22 May 1996.

¹⁷³ Georg Buchner, *Woyzeck, Danton's Death, Leonce and Lena, Woyzeck*, trans. Victor Price (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971) 105-36.

¹⁷⁴ Kane directed *Woyzeck* in 1998, the same year her *Cleansed* and *Crave* debuted.

¹⁷⁵ Kane had actually worked quite a bit on the *Baal* adaptation before the Gate denied it. In this same interview she states that the scenes with the priest that appear in *Phaedra's Love* had originally been for the *Baal* project.

¹⁷⁶ Kane, interview with Tabert.

the violence in *Phaedra's Love* comes across as forced, gratuitous, and juvenile. In *Phaedra's Love* the violence lacks focus and a point of view. In her article, "Fatal Commission," Marianne McDonald concurs, "Violence with no poetry or vision goes only so far. It creates titillation for the moment, not a lasting masterpiece."¹⁷⁷ By preempting *Phaedra's Love* with a commission to "remake a classic," the Gate set the stakes and expectations for this play quite high. These texts that have been categorically deemed "classics" prove quite intimidating to those charged with remaking them, especially when it is assumed that the remakes will inevitably be compared to "the original." Of course, the question remains whether or not the remakes will be able to endure the transgressions of time with the same resonance and esteem as the classic. In her article, "Violent Words: Brian Friel's *Living Quarters: after Hippolytus*,"¹⁷⁸ McDonald suggests:

There are many reasons for restaging and using Greek tragedy in modern performances. There is an intrinsic aesthetic, moral, and intellectual quality to these works and they also can act as a filter which renders sanity. [...] The result is often another great work of art. In the same way that the classics can be used to filter personal terror, such as fear of death, so as to allow the audience to confront this fear, likewise the classics can filter social and political atrocity so that the audience can finally see what in many cases it would prefer to ignore.¹⁷⁹

Admittedly, Kane reworked a Roman tragedy (Seneca's *Phaedra*¹⁸⁰) not a Greek tragedy (such as Euripides's *Hippolytus*¹⁸¹), however, McDonald's point stands. The

¹⁷⁷ Marianne McDonald, "Fatal Commission," *Arion* 3rd ser. 10.3 (2003): 128.

¹⁷⁸ Marianne McDonald, "Violent Words: Brian Friel's *Living Quarters: after Hippolytus*," *Arion* Spring/Summer (1998): 33-47.

¹⁷⁹ McDonald, "Violent Words" 37-38.

¹⁸⁰ Seneca, *Phaedra* 97-150.

¹⁸¹ Euripides, *Hippolytus*, trans. David Greene, *Euripides I*, eds. Greene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1955) 161-221.

high aims for reworking a classic McDonald outlines seem conducive to commissioning a dramatic text that adheres to the complex themes and critical rigor of Kane's other work. However, *Phaedra's Love* falls short of being "another great work of art." Whereas, McDonald rightly asserts that the possibility of a reworking of a classic can create a reflexive mirror aimed at heightening social awareness within a given community, Kane fails at this task. By her own accord, Kane had a general distaste for the classics. Perhaps this is why *Phaedra's Love* sits uncertainly among Kane's other work. The commission by the Gate acted as reigns on Kane's creative spirit. Rather than engaging with the world and its nuances with her own dramatic toolbox, the commission asked her to fight with someone else's sword. And for a playwright warrior like Kane, this proves quite destructive.

In her article, "Greek to Us? Appropriations of Myths in Contemporary British and Irish Drama,"¹⁸² Annette Pankratz discusses the "cultural capital" gained by modern artists when they appropriate classical mythic texts. Pankratz argues that modern British and Irish appropriations "manifest themselves in four textual strategies—anachronism, fusion, structural analogy, and meta-textuality."¹⁸³ She includes a discussion of Kane's use of "fusion" in *Phaedra's Love*. She suggests that fusion "simultaneously rewrites the classical myth, shows its connection with the present and re-mythifies and sometimes ritualizes present characters and practices."¹⁸⁴

In theory, what Pankratz describes in this "fusion" emulates what I argue about the

¹⁸² Annette Pankratz, "Greek to Us? Appropriations of Myths in Contemporary British and Irish Drama," *Crossing Borders: Intercultural Drama and Theatre at the Turn of the Millennium. Contemporary Drama in English 8*, eds. Bernhard Reitz and Alyce von Rothkirch (Trier: WVT, 2001) 151-63.

¹⁸³ Pankratz 151.

¹⁸⁴ Pankratz 153.

process of alliance with one critical exception. In the process of fusion the reader/performer looks to rewrite a myth and, through the “ritualizing of modern characters and practices,” immortalize a “present character and practice.” This immortalization marks an endpoint for the myth rather than a point on a continuum. With alliance the reader/performer does not “fuse” with the myth, rather s/he stands shoulder to shoulder with it and momentarily joins forces with it to conquer a shared goal before turning the myth and artist(s) loose for the next alliance. The alliance always maintains its hybridity. In fact, it celebrates it. However, after a strategic fusion transpires, the next fusion must take the “original” myth as its starting point unlike alliance which capitalizes on the history of previous alliances, including the “original.” In this way, alliance ultimately encourages a harmonious multiplicity of point of view working along the same line of inquiry and thrives as a complex palimpsest; whilst a collection of fusions resembles a multi-limbed spider with each leg representing a new fusion and point of departure from the “original” myth body. Essentially, Kane abandoned the call for alliance in *Phaedra’s Love* in favor of a dead-end fusion with an existing myth. In *Phaedra’s Love* Kane engages with an existing mode of inquiry rather than establishing a new invitation with which future artists may align. *Phaedra’s Love* points back but forgets to point forward. Kane is at her best when she answers her own queries and pays off her own agenda rather than negotiating with someone else’s guidelines.

Phaedra’s Love reflects Kane writing out of obligation to another party rather than to her own conscience, which ruthlessly guided her other creative work. In “Fatal

Commission,¹⁸⁵ McDonald critically examines the process of adapting the classics, this time pointing towards the potential pitfalls of a commissioned work, particularly one based on a Greek or Roman classic, and concludes that, “a commission can be as fatal to a good drama as any poison.”¹⁸⁶ Namely in her critique of Marina Carr’s *Ariel* (2002)¹⁸⁷, McDonald identifies a lack of truth or organic connection between Carr, Ireland, and *Ariel*. Likewise, in *Phaedra’s Love* Kane plays what seems like an obligatory chess game with icons of classic drama rather than exploring with sincere conviction a serious theme. In her larger discussion of new work in the theatre (particularly that of the Irish), McDonald also offers the following insight into why she feels “young writers in the Irish theatre” seem to be faltering on the global stage when they draw from “past masterpieces” to create their “serious dramas:”

Perhaps they want to show the rest of the world that Irish playwrights are also aware of their cultural debts. Nevertheless, I would be happier if they added to the world’s cultural heritage through their own honest storytelling about themselves.¹⁸⁸

Kane debt to past masterpieces in *Phaedra’s Love* seems equally disingenuous. It feels as though others are telling her, “You should really pay homage to these ‘classics’. You have a lot to glean from them.” But, in her heart, she does not connect to these texts and would rather speak directly from her own gut. Whereas some playwrights can move quite beautifully between modern versions of classics and their own original works, Kane does not benefit from this collaboration. Whether or not this reflects a shortcoming on her part as a writer is beside the point.

¹⁸⁵ McDonald, “Fatal Commission” 125-41.

¹⁸⁶ McDonald, “Fatal Commission” 141.

¹⁸⁷ *Ariel* by Marina Carr, dir. Conall Morrison, Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 2 Oct.-9 Nov. 2002.

¹⁸⁸ McDonald, “Fatal Commission” 128.

Kane directed the debut production of *Phaedra's Love* at the Gate allowing her to rework the text as needed up until the point of production.¹⁸⁹ Kane provided the following insight about choosing to direct *Phaedra's Love*:

(I)n the...productions of *Blasted* sometimes I was looking at the stage and I wasn't seeing exactly the images I had written. I thought if I direct *Phaedra's Love* myself there's no one to blame. If the image doesn't happen its completely my own fault and I find out how difficult it is....But actually audiences are really willing to believe something is happening if you give them the slightest suggestion that it is."¹⁹⁰

This nod towards using the "slightest suggestion" comes across as quite ironic considering the overt sexuality and circus-like violence that Kane directed into her debut performance of this text.

Kane staged this production in "an open-plan auditorium, the actors are scattered around the audience which gives the whole evening a feeling of immediacy."

¹⁹¹ This close proximity echoes the cramped quarters of the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, where *Blasted* premiered, however the staging for *Phaedra's Love* provoked responses more akin to those that might accompany a vampy, campy Vegas show rather than a formidable retake on a canonical text. Multiple critics who attended this debut run of *Phaedra's Love* offer somewhat bemused testimonies regarding Kane's over-the-top staging of the violence in such intimate quarters:

"Kane's version of the story is liberally splashed with the F-word but, for her, relatively constrained with only two oral sex scenes in an hour."¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ *Phaedra's Love* by Sarah Kane, dir. Kane, Gate Theatre, Notting Hill, May 1996.

¹⁹⁰ Kane, interview with Tabert.

¹⁹¹ Sarah Hemming, rev. of *Phaedra's Love*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Kane, The Gate Theatre, Notting Hill, 20 May-15 Jun. 1996, *Financial Times* [London] 23 May 1996.

¹⁹² Kate Bassett, rev. of *Phaedra's Love*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Kane, The Gate Theatre, Notting Hill, 20 May-15 Jun. 1996, *The Times* [London] 22 May 1996.

“Hippolytus’s severed penis is chucked across the tiny Gate Theatre....”¹⁹³

“...the last 10 minutes or so move into an area where the atrocity-count begins to reach respectable *Blasted*-like levels as the mob set upon Hippolytus and rape, castration, disembowelment and an orgy of neck-splitting ensues. Kane’s highly visceral production seats the audience in the thick of this, so it might be advisable not to wear your best frock.”¹⁹⁴

“It is impossible to deny that Kane’s production of her own play, in which the audience is seated among the rampaging actors, achieves a visceral impact. But then it’s hard not to shudder when a penis is being severed under your very nose and you are in grave danger of being covered with gore.”¹⁹⁵

Perhaps these tongue-in-cheek reviews mirror Kane’s own mockery of the whole notion of “classics” within *Phaedra’s Love*. In both her text and her production, Kane pushes for grotesque decadence and a total dismantling of all things revered as “iconic.” This includes both classic drama and the British monarchy. Her production reflects a hyper-self-aware commentary that dismisses the standards by which Kane found herself and her texts being judged as absurd.

Caution! Slippery Myth Ahead

Kane reworks the Phaedra/Hippolytus myth in order to directly confront her own distrust of the façade of the British Royal family as well as the overwhelming trend of celebrity consumerism among her fellow Brits during the mid 1990s. Kane couches *Phaedra’s Love* in this point of view and offers a new look at the characteristics and traits of iconic mythic figures. As mentioned, Kane reworked

¹⁹³ Robert Butler, rev. of *Phaedra’s Love*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Kane, The Gate Theatre, Notting Hill, 20 May-15 Jun. 1996, *Independent on Sunday* [London] 26 May 1996.

¹⁹⁴ Paul Taylor, rev. of *Phaedra’s Love*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Kane, The Gate Theatre, Notting Hill, 20 May-15 Jun. 1996, *Independent* [London] 23 May 1996.

¹⁹⁵ Charles Spencer, rev. of *Phaedra’s Love*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Kane, The Gate Theatre, Notting Hill, 20 May-15 Jun. 1996, *Daily Telegraph* [London] 21 May 1996.

Seneca's (4BC-65AD) *Phaedra*: a gory Roman tragedy. In Seneca's version two goddesses Diana (goddess of the hunt) and Venus (goddess of love) govern the actions of the mortals and by extension retain the majority of the agency. Seneca's Hippolytus hates women (as did Euripides's before this) however, he also hates the city and covets the purity of the countryside. This complicates Phaedra's love for Hippolytus, as he not only does not love her, but he despises all that her queen-ness implicates. Kane likely keyed into this disgust with "civilized" society and decided to further interrogate notions of civilized propriety. Unlike Euripides' version, Seneca's Phaedra confesses her love for Hippolytus herself. In short, Seneca's plot ensues as follows: Hippolytus denies Phaedra; in an effort to save face the Nurse tells everyone that Hippolytus raped Phaedra; Theseus, returning from abroad, demands to know why Phaedra is upset; she "confesses" that Hippolytus raped her; Theseus vows to find Hippolytus and kill him for dishonoring him and Phaedra; he curses him with one of the curses his father Poseidon gave him; a Messenger tells of Hippolytus's death (ripped apart as a result of being dragged by the reins of his horses after they were scared by Poseidon, throwing Hippolytus from his chariot) in even more gory detail than Euripides; Phaedra sees remains of Hippolytus and confesses to everything and kills herself onstage with Hippolytus's sword; finally, Theseus curses himself and pleads for his own death.¹⁹⁶ Kane twists this myth to shed a dark shadow on the state of affairs in mid-1990s Britain. By examining some of her specific choices in detail, a clearer picture of the goals of this text as well as its deviation from the rest of Kane's body of work come into view.

¹⁹⁶ Seneca 150.

Despite its shortcomings as a text that can transcend its debut moment, *Phaedra's Love* does demonstrate Kane's ability to key into the subconscious pulse of her fellow Brits. Myth is ethereal and dwells in our minds and hearts, thus by nature myths tell us more about ourselves and our community than they do a distant time or place. Our myths tie us to each other and our land. They reflect our shared history as we believe it to be and in that sense, they unify and define a people. Nostalgia is essential to myth and therefore diminishes its reliance on truth or actuality. Faith keeps myth alive, like modern religion: it only exists as much as people believe in it. In *Phaedra's Love*, Kane does not rework the myth to reinforce a commonly held belief. Instead, she makes the myth itself the issue. She does not recast the royal figure-heads into a new myth to be revered, rather she questions reverence for the royals and their mythic past at all. Kane's treatment of the Phaedra/Hippolytus myth does not serve to promote pride in routinely believed myths: namely the royal family. In fact, she reveals the fraudulent nature of these myths and thus embarrasses those to whom these myths are dear. David Tushingham's review of *Phaedra's Love* reflects this sentiment: "There are a few moments of extreme violence, but the prevailing impression is of a wicked sense of humour allied to an intimate and unflattering knowledge of the British psyche."¹⁹⁷ Kane did not intend to momentarily align with the myth, or construct it in such a way as to encourage others to align with it, with the intention that others may then continue reappropriating the myth. She fused with it in an attempt to halt it totally, make a mockery of it, and limit its ability to influence communities at large.

¹⁹⁷ David Tushingham, rev. of *Phaedra's Love*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Kane, The Gate Theatre, Notting Hill, 20 May-15 Jun. 1996, *Time Out* [London] 22 May 1996.

In her review of *Phaedra's Love*, Kate Stratton suggests, “At its best the play achieves a rapt, raw power and breathes life into a myth that is all too often remote and chilly.”¹⁹⁸ I somewhat disagree with this assessment and suggest that Kane’s dark sense of humor and penchant for irony masquerade as “raw power” in *Phaedra's Love*. Kane often referred to *Phaedra's Love* as her comedy, though arguably the more appropriate term is satire. She mocks a myriad of institutions throughout the course of the text as well as her production of it. In Seneca’s *Phaedra* Hippolytus loathes the polis and its citizen who:

HIPPOLYTUS. [...] hides his shame—the countryman
 Seeks light and open air, and lives his life
 Under the eye of heaven.¹⁹⁹

Seneca’s Hippolytus reflects the extreme in holistic piety and in his death becomes the consummate martyr whose purity will sustain his legacy. Kane clearly rejects this idol-worship of the royal figures and the myths that propagate it. So as an act of vengeance, she shows us just how despicable Hippolytus is and by extension makes the people who revere him even more pitiful.

As the object of focus, Hippolytus (who is “Phaedra’s love”) behaves as an unorthodox hero who fails to move the audience beyond their own limits. He does not change, and for this we love and hate him: Maybe love is a stretch, but we must respect his consistency. Hippolytus’s character lacks a dramatic arch and, though that may be Kane’s point, his apathy muddles the search for purpose in this text.

¹⁹⁸ Kate Stratton, rev. of *Phaedra's Love*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Kane, The Gate Theatre, Notting Hill, 20 May-15 Jun. 1996, *Evening Standard* [London] 21 May 1996.

¹⁹⁹ Seneca 119.

McDonald offers the following commentary regarding modern versions of classics that come up short:

Where is the journey of the major characters? The broken Creon at the end of *Antigone*? Oedipus, who because of his insights puts out his eyes?

The greatest difference between the...tragedies which seem to have inspired this play and the play itself is that even in Euripides' darkest vision, he creates some audience identification with, or sympathy for, the characters. There is also some underlying sense of ethics involved and usually a sense of hope at the end: one admires these strong characters who survive the worst that the Gods send them.²⁰⁰

Though Kane does make a strong claim about the inefficacy of the Royal figure heads via her characterization of Hippolytus, she offers little to inspire the audience. All interactions with Hippolytus leave the other characters and the audience frustrated. Despite this Phaedra cannot escape her obsession with her stepson. In the following scene with her blood-daughter Strophe (Kane's recast of the Nurse character from Seneca's version), Phaedra articulates "everyone's," including her own, infatuation with Hippolytus. Strophe (who we later find out Hippolytus has raped) presents a less than enthralled point of view. Interestingly, "strophe" refers to the part of the chorus in ancient Greek dramas that questions the main action and supposedly reflects the sentiment of the citizens. Thus, Kane's crafting of Strophe as Phaedra's foil, and to some degree Hippolytus's, makes Kane's critique of the general populous more overt. In the following scene, Queen Phaedra cannot register Strophe's lack of interest in Hippolytus.

PHAEDRA. You don't like Hippolytus?
STROPHE. No, not really.

²⁰⁰ McDonald, "Fatal Commission" 137.

PHAEDRA. Everyone like Hippolytus.
 STROPE. I live with him.
 PHAEDRA. It's a big house.
 STROPHE. He's a big man.
 PHAEDRA. You used to spend time together.
 STROPHE. He wore me out.
 PHAEDRA. You tired of Hippolytus?
 STROPHE. He bores me.
 PHAEDRA. Bores you?
 STROPHE. Shitless.
 PHAEDRA. Why? Everyone likes him.
 STROPHE. I know.
 PHAEDRA. I know what room he's in.
 STROPHE. He never moves.²⁰¹

Here we see that Hippolytus behaves as the empty center around which the people of the kingdom whirl. They assign him importance, yet he retains and sustains little of it by his own efforts.

For Kane, Hippolytus's rejection and degradation of nearly everything and everyone he comes in contact with reflects a commitment to honesty on her part as the playwright. She explains:

But the pursuit of honesty was something that kept coming back at me when I was writing *Phaedra's Love*. I was very depressed at that time.... Yes, it is a comedy. But I was deeply depressed when I wrote it. And someone said something to me this thing which ended up in the play.... 'You take honesty as an absolute. And it isn't. Life is an absolute. And within that there is dishonesty'....If I can accept that...not being completely honest doesn't matter then I'd feel much better. But somehow I couldn't and so Hippolytus can't. And that's what kills him in the end.²⁰²

Thus, if we take Kane's commentary to heart, Hippolytus exhibits so little respect because he cannot find something he believes to retain absolute honesty. He perceives all of the gifts, love, and attention that he receives to be steeped in dishonesty: an

²⁰¹ Kane, *Phaedra's Love* 70.

²⁰² Kane, interview with Tabert.

adoration of the “myth” of him, rather than the actual him. He reflects upon the absurdity of this while watching the news on television:

HIPPOLYTUS. News. Another rape. Child murdered. War somewhere. Few thousand jobs gone. But none of this matters ‘cause it’s a royal birthday.²⁰³

If Kane was mirroring her own sentiments in this character, it becomes clear why she would want to disenable the myth itself. Perhaps this is why in his death by dismemberment Hippolytus seems to experience one moment of sincerity when he decrees, “If there could have been more moments like this.”²⁰⁴ Kane elaborates:

And the thing with Hippolytus is that in his moment of death everything suddenly connects. He has one moment of complete sanity and humanity. But in order to get there he has to die. Actually, that’s a bit like the Soldier in *Blasted*. There the only way he can ever learn what his girlfriend had to go through is when he’s pulling the trigger. But of course the next moment is the moment of his death.²⁰⁵

This moment of clarity for Hippolytus before his death includes the suicide of his father, Theseus. Theseus, however, does not kill himself because his son has died, but rather because he raped and killed his stepdaughter, Strophe, without realizing it was she. In the final scene of Seneca’s *Phaedra* Theseus curses himself (for being tricked by Phaedra’s lie) and pleads for his own death, tragically “rebuilds” the dismembered Hippolytus, and commands everyone to prepare the burial rites for Hippolytus. As for Phaedra, “let a deep pit of earth conceal, / And soil lie heavy on her cursed head.”²⁰⁶

This contrasts significantly to Kane’s final depiction of Theseus and Hippolytus:

²⁰³ Kane, *Phaedra’s Love* 74.

²⁰⁴ Kane, *Phaedra’s Love* 103.

²⁰⁵ Kane, interview with Tabert.

²⁰⁶ Seneca 150.

Hippolytus is motionless.
Theseus is sitting by Strophe's body.
 THESEUS. Hippolytus.
 Son.
 I never liked you.
 (To Strophe.)
 I'm sorry.
 Didn't know it was you.
 God forgive me I didn't know.
 If I'd known it was you I'd never have—
 (To Hippolytus.)
 You hear me, I didn't know.
*Theseus cuts his own throat and bleeds to death.*²⁰⁷

Kane's final scene does not mention Phaedra. Perhaps Kane leaves her out because her lie (that Hippolytus raped her) is never publicly refuted. Strophe knows Phaedra lied, and therefore via dramatic irony the audience also knows, however, Kane excludes the public revelation of this information, which traditionally cleared Hippolytus's name. Hippolytus knows he has been accused and despite Strophe's pleas, he refuses to defend himself preferring to be "strung up" as a rapist. In response to Strophe's telling Hippolytus that Phaedra accused him of rape he replies, "How exciting."²⁰⁸ Later in the same scene he muses, "A rapist. Better than a fat boy who fucks."²⁰⁹ Kane infused Hippolytus's rather detestable character with her infamous dark humor. She explains this dichotomy:

Hippolytus is for me an ideal. If I was like him I'd be quite pleased with myself. You are right, he's complete shit but he's also very funny, and for me that's always redeeming. I think there are people who can treat you really really badly but if they do it with a sense of humour then actually you can forgive them. And whether or not you should is somehow beside the point.... I think when you are depressed oddly your sense of humour is the last thing to go, when that goes then you completely lose it.

²⁰⁷ Kane, *Phaedra's Love* 102.

²⁰⁸ Kane, *Phaedra's Love* 86.

²⁰⁹ Kane, *Phaedra's Love* 88.

And actually Hippolytus never ever loses it. I don't think he's taking the piss in the last line but I don't think he's unaware of the fact that it's funny. He's aware of the paradox.²¹⁰

It seems odd to consider Hippolytus an "ideal," no matter how funny we may find him. Perhaps Kane admired Hippolytus's self-awareness, but not the self, per se, of which he was aware. One can argue that at least Hippolytus knew he was a horrible person, unlike Phaedra who had absolutely no true sense of self.

Kane crafts Hippolytus as slovenly, lazy, crude, cruel, insensitive, and sexually corrupt. In spite of this he does exhibit a raw ability to accurately appraise the true intentions of those around him. His manipulation of Phaedra (and according to him, all of his sexual partners) thrives on his recognition that they all are infatuated with the idea of sex with the crown prince. Phaedra believes this infatuation to be true love, despite Hippolytus's insistence that she does not really love him. Compared to Phaedra, in this sense, Hippolytus comes across as more enlightened. In "Re-writing Seneca: Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love*,"²¹¹ Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier connects and disconnects the various versions of the Phaedra myth including those by Euripides, Sophocles, Seneca, and Sarah Kane.²¹² She suggests that Kane's version of Phaedra is viable and effective because, despite its modernization, Phaedra remains the central and ultimately the most sympathetic—even heroic—character. She argues "the character who really exercises her free will through action still is Phaedra, even in

²¹⁰ Kane, interview with Tabert.

²¹¹ Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier, "Re-writing Seneca: Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love*," *Crossing Borders: Intercultural Drama and Theatre at the Turn of the Millennium. Contemporary Drama in English 8*, eds. Bernhard Reitz and Alyce von Rothkirch (Trier: WVT, 2001) 165-72.

²¹² See also: Marianne McDonald, "La violenza drammatica: Fedra da Euripide a Sarah Kane," *Proceedings of "Violenza nel teatro greco e latino,"* Siracusa, Sicily September 11-13, 1997 (Padua: Istituto Nazionale del drama antico, 2002) 287-294.

Kane's play." I disagree with this interpretation because I think Kane gives the agency in this play to Hippolytus and Theseus, not Phaedra. As mentioned, the goddesses are absent in Kane's version of this myth and their agency has trickled out to the royal male bloodline. Remember, Phaedra has married into the Royal family and Strophe is will.her daughter from another union. Any dignity, though not agency, previously assigned to Phaedra has been relocated in Strophe. Hippolytus ridicules Strophe's allegiance to a myth she struggles to remain included in:

HIPPOLYTUS. Why?

STROPHE. Sake of the family.

HIPPOLYTUS. Ah.

STROPHE. You're my brother.

HIPPOLYTUS. No I'm not.

STROPHE. To me.

HIPPOLYTUS. Strange. The one person in this family who has no claim to its history is the most sickeningly loyal. Poor relation who wants to be what she never

The violent sacrifice of Strophe's youth and loyalty is the catalyst for the spread beyond the castle walls of the disease of decadent apathy that has overcome the monarchy. Phaedra, like Strophe, fused her worth and identity with the royal myth. She truly believes she will be nothing without it. Regarding Phaedra, Kane states:

She's not actually very in touch with herself about what she wants but she does pursue it completely honestly. To the point where she's prepared to die for it. Probably all of my characters in some way are completely romantic. I mean I think nihilism is the most extreme form of romanticism. And that I think is where the plays get misunderstood. I think I'm a complete and utterly romantic, in the tradition of Keats and Wilfred Owen.²¹³

And Van Gogh, perhaps? Kane's obsession with honesty coupled with her obsession with exploring human limits (physical, emotional, or psychological) creates a rather

²¹³ Kane, interview with Tabert.

damnable setting wherein seemingly no one can measure up. Why must the cynic be confused for the enlightened one? Kane allows no room for hope in this play: the belief that one can overcome his/her limits in this lifetime, no matter what their lot in life, eludes this text. Thus, the prospect of re-visioning this text for some purpose beyond its debut lamentation and condemnation is weakened. This play offers no forgiveness or opportunity for rebuttal. *Phaedra's Love* actually has very little to do with myth in form or content, whereas Kane's other works expertly engage with the enigmatic and malleable qualities of myth. Though Kane does successfully navigate through the Phaedra myth and infuses it with a grim 1990s perspective on obsessive pop culture, her text fails to include the mythic strength or dramaturgical ingenuity of her other texts.

Danger! Kane-isms Falling Ahead

This tension between hating the classics and the fear of somehow honoring them via a remake hurts Kane's craft. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, *Phaedra's Love* lacks the sophisticated poetry, nuanced dramaturgy, and enigmatic plots of her other texts. In his theatrical review of *Phaedra's Love*, Sierz reflects on Kane's lack of focused editing:

her great weakness is her complete lack of discrimination between what works on stage and what's maddeningly banal....Running for just over an hour, the dialogue veers from exchanges that are genuinely disturbing to such bonehead declarations as, 'Fuck God; fuck the monarchy.'²¹⁴

In her zealous assault on the myth of the British Royals, Kane's writing becomes reckless and suffers for it. In his review of *Phaedra's Love* debut critic Michael

²¹⁴ Aleks Sierz, rev. of *Phaedra's Love*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Kane, The Gate Theatre, Notting Hill, 20 May-15 Jun. 1996, *Tribune* [London] 31 May 1996.

Billington states, “Viscerally, her play has undeniable power: intellectually, it’s hard to see what point it is making.” However, a few paragraphs later, Billington takes a stab at deciphering Kane’s point by suggesting, “Sarah Kane’s point appears to be that modern royalty is a debased myth: that it poses as a national emblem while being prey to all kinds of tortured passion.” Billington concludes his review with the following, “Kane is obviously a force to reckon with; but I still long to see a play where she persuades the audience of her vision rather than shocks it into submission.”²¹⁵ This comment points out one of the fundamental problems with *Phaedra’s Love*. It is the one text where we feel that Kane is very self-consciously “doing Kane.” Specifically, in writing this text she seems to be performing “Sarah Kane” and all that might entail after the *Blasted* uproar (i.e. blood, gore, various sex-acts, violence, aggressive staging of social taboos, etc.). In fact, she presented her fourth play,²¹⁶ *Crave*, under a pseudonym (complete with biography) in an effort to, “escape briefly from the shadow of being ‘Sarah Kane, the controversial author of *Blasted*’.”²¹⁷ Unfortunately, Kane’s identity confusion manifested itself into *Phaedra’s Love* resulting in her most superficial text.

In *Phaedra’s Love* Kane abandons her gift for ambiguity and dramaturgical ingenuity in favor of overt, almost contrived, depictions of her favorite theme: love. As Sierz posits in his review, “It tells you little that’s new about the illogical power of love or the confusion of untamed feeling, but it does offer a glimpse of how an ancient

²¹⁵ Michael Billington, rev. of *Phaedra’s Love*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Kane, The Gate Theatre, Notting Hill, 20 May-15 Jun. 1996, *Guardian* [London] 21 May 1996.

²¹⁶ *Cleansed* was her third text produced and it closely resembles *Blasted* in its aesthetics, content, and politics.

²¹⁷ Greig xiii.

tragedy can be rewritten with the benefit of modern psychology.’²¹⁸ Indeed Kane uses her theory of mind to render inert this classic myth. Consider the following excerpts from *Cleansed*²¹⁹ (Kane’s third produced play) and *Phaedra’s Love*, respectively, and their different treatments of extreme tolls of love. From *Cleansed*:

ROD. What are you thinking?
 CARL. That I’ll always love you.
 ROD. (*Laughs.*)
 CARL. That I’ll never betray you.
 ROD. (*Laughs more.*)
 CARL. That I’ll never lie to you.
 ROD. You just have.
 [...]
 CARL. I’ll never turn away from you.
 ROD. Carl. Anyone you can think of, someone somewhere got bored with fucking them.
 CARL. Why are you so cynical.
 ROD. I’m old.
 CARL. You’re thirty-four.
 ROD. Thirty-nine. I lied.
 CARL. Still.
 ROD. Don’t trust me.
Pause.
 CARL. I do.
They kiss.
Tinker is watching.
 [...]
 ROD. If you’d said ‘Me,’ I wonder what would have happened. If he’d said ‘You or Rod’ and you’d said ‘Me,’ I wonder if he would have killed you. He ever asks me I’ll say ‘Me. Do it to me. Not to Carl, not my lover, not my friend, do it to me.’ I’d be gone, first boat out of here. Death isn’t the worst thing they can do to you. Tinker made a man bite off another man’s testicles. Can take away your life but not give you death instead.
On the other side of the fence a child sings—Lennon and McCartney’s ‘Things We Said Today.’
Carl and Rod listen, rapt.
The child stops singing.

²¹⁸ Sierz, rev. of *Phaedra’s Love*.

²¹⁹ Kane, *Cleansed* 105-51.

Then begins again.
Carl stands, wobbly.
He begins to dance—a dance of love for Rod.
The dance becomes frenzied, frantic, and Carl makes grunting noises, mingling with the child's singing.
The dance loses rhythm—Carl jerks and lurches out of time, his feet sticking in the mud, a spasmodic dance regret.
Tinker is watching.
He forces Carl to the ground and cuts off his feet.
His is gone.
Rod laughs.
The rats carry Carl's feet away.
The child sings.²²⁰

From *Phaedra's Love*:

PHAEDRA. Can't switch this off, Can't crush it. Can't. Wake up with it, burning me. Think I'll crack open I want him so much. I talk to him. He talks to me, you know, we, we know each other very well, he tells me things, we're very close. About sex and how much it depresses him, and I know—
 STROPHE. Don't imagine you can cure him.
 PHAEDRA. Know if it was someone who loved you, really love you—
 STROPHE. He's poison.
 PHAEDRA. Loved you till it burnt them.
 [...]

STROPHE. Stay away from him, go and join Theseus, fuck someone else, whatever it takes.
 PHAEDRA. I can't.
 STROPHE. You can have any many you want.
 PHAEDRA. I want him.
 STROPHE. Except him.
 PHAEDRA. Any man I want except the man I want.
 [...]

PHAEDRA. I love you.
 HIPPOLYTUS. Why?
 PHAEDRA. You're difficult. Moody, cynical, bitter, fat, decadent, spoilt. You stay in bed all day then watch TV all night, you crash around this house with sleep in your eyes and not a thought for anyone. You're in pain. I adore you.
 HIPPOLYTUS. Not very logical.
 PHAEDRA. Love isn't.

²²⁰ Kane, *Cleansed* 110-12, 136.

[...]

PHAEDRA. I love you.

HIPPOLYTUS. No.

PHAEDRA. So much.

HIPPOLYTUS. Don't even know me.

PHAEDRA. I want you to make me come.

HIPPOLYTUS. Can't stand post-coital chats. There's never anything to say.

PHAEDRA. I want you—

HIPPOLYTUS. This isn't about me.

PHAEDRA. I do.

HIPPOLYTUS. Fuck someone else imagine it's me. Shouldn't be difficult, everyone looks the same when they come.²²¹

In many ways Carl and Phaedra profess the same commitment to an idealistic, absolute love. They both suggest that they would do anything for the one they love and that this love is an organic extension of them. Likewise, both Rod and Hippolytus (Carl and Phaedra's beloveds, respectively) counter with cynical realism that this infatuated devotion is untruthful and no one can love as completely as Carl and Phaedra suggest. The dismantling of love and its extremes is one of Kane's most utilized tenets. However, her deconstruction of the institution of love in *Phaedra's Love*, particularly in the aforementioned scenes, seems juvenile and glib specifically when compared to her work in *Cleansed*. Kane depicts Phaedra as a one-dimensional hysterical woman, who kills herself because she cannot accept a life without her ideal love. Likewise, Hippolytus does little to redeem himself, making Phaedra even more the fool in love. However, via the character of Tinker in *Cleansed*, Kane systematically deconstructs Carl as his vision of ideal love simultaneously shatters. The multi-dimensional perspectives Kane provides surrounding the forces at work in Carl and Rod's relationship creates opportunity for dialogue between the text and

²²¹ Kane, *Phaedra's Love* 71-72, 79, 82.

future artists who may wish to align with this text. Unfortunately, *Phaedra's Love* lacks this complex treatment of love, or any other theme, thus denying entry into the text of a different point of view or contributing narrative.

With *Phaedra's Love*, Kane wholeheartedly commits to the task of dismantling without any attention to a life for this text beyond its debut. Furthermore, it is the most overt of Kane's texts in terms of its plot, agenda, circumstance, and purpose, i.e. discontentment with the British Royals and upper class consumer decadence in the mid to late 1990s. McDonald notes, "Good theatre has always been specific: it has never thrived on the general."²²² Note that McDonald encourages specific "theatre" not a necessarily a specific "text." In terms of a text that can continue to inform future audiences, the "specific" must transcend itself. In other words, the text that is less specific allows for the performance to be absolutely specific. If the text is absolute then the performance must allude to its purpose. However, if the text alludes to a variety of purposes, then the performance can conquer its specific goals with absolute conviction. Thus, given the choice, specific purpose in performance trumps specific purpose in the text. After all, the audience imbibes the performance (the alliance of text with the contributing narrative) not the text, alone. In *Phaedra's Love* Kane land-locked the "specifics" of this text and thus prevented it from developing further in production with future artists. These specifics trouble the text's ability to transcend its debut moment. Ironically, Kane alluded to this catch-22 in her interview with Tabert: "Also, I think there's the problem that when you get so specific something actually

²²² McDonald, "Fatal Commission" 129.

stops having resonance beyond that specific.”²²³ This quote solidifies Kane’s apparent disengagement and abandonment of her creative voice in *Phaedra’s Love*. She used the text off-handedly to discuss a current problem, without allowing the text the forethought to eventually lend itself to a new discussion.

Artists who perform Kane’s work relish the chance to align their ideas with Kane’s texts, rather than solely stage Kane’s idea. Ian Fisher’s popular “fansite” *Sarah Kane: A Sarah Kane Site by Iain Fisher* includes a forum for people to discuss “their” version of ambiguous Kane moments.²²⁴ The weblog includes strand after strand of individuals offering up their ideas of what a particular text, line, or character signifies. Overwhelmingly, those who favor Kane’s work bask in the opportunity it provides to explore a multitude of paths in the labyrinth of her texts. There is no one way to work through them. This is what artists who do Kane’s work count on from her, an elusive prescription for humanity. Thus, by tipping its hand too far, *Phaedra’s Love* factors itself out of contention. As the audience we are coerced against the royal family and not given the room, dramaturgically (or in Kane’s production, quite literally “room,” as in physical space), to choose otherwise. Although we may pity this royal family we do not cheer for them. It seems near impossible for an artist to align with this text in such a way as to lobby in favor of the governing bodies that be (with the possible exception of Hippolytus’s cynicism).

Mind the Gap

²²³ Kane, interview with Tabert.

²²⁴ *Sarah Kane: A Sarah Kane Site by Iain Fisher*, ed. Iain Fisher. 8 September 2006. <<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kaneov.html>>.

Kane generally lets the artists performing her texts “work it out” via strategic gaps within the dramaturgy, but in *Phaedra’s Love* she virtually does all the work. The “act of convergence”²²⁵ is limited, and therefore the sacrificial display of the reader/performers work is diminished. In *Phaedra’s Love* Kane acknowledges an implied audience (one she essentially browbeats), but oversteps the implied performer, thus the “realizing” is left out. Without this crucial step in alliance *Phaedra’s Love* reads more like propaganda rather than a profound dramatic text. Kane crafts a multitude of oppositions in *Phaedra’s Love* with little attempt to deconstruct any of them: Hippolytus vs. Strophe; Hippolytus vs. Phaedra; Hippolytus vs. Theseus; and Hippolytus vs. the people. Though Hippolytus links these oppositions, his detestability distances the audience from identifying with his character. The only thing that deconstructs is Hippolytus as he literally fragments when the people rip him apart. It is as if Kane inserted herself in the mob and cried out, “Damn it! Rip this whole stupid thing apart.” She dutifully paid her debt, i.e. gave us Hippolytus. However, she exposed him as a disgusting pig, staged him partaking in taboo activities, (namely incest and oral sex with a priest)²²⁶ and then ripped him up. Kane all but hated the classics, and via *Phaedra’s Love*, did her best to completely disarm one. All future attempts to use this text to shake a finger at authority have to struggle against appearing contrived.

²²⁵ Iser, “The Reading Process” 275.

²²⁶ Again, the priest scenes remained from her previous work remaking Brecht’s *Baal*. The use of these scenes within *Phaedra’s Love* exemplifies Kane’s use of *bricolage* (i.e. making do with what she had) and in this case suggests how little relevance or logic had to do with the play’s final composition. Chapter Three further discusses Kane’s more provocative uses of *theatric bricolage*.

Chapter One of this project investigates the strategic dramaturgical gaps in *Blasted*, specifically Cate's rape and the locale of the play's action, and how these gaps act as invitations for alliance with the text in performance. In *Phaedra's Love* the only thing akin to these strategic gaps is either Phaedra's offstage hanging of herself or, arguably, Hippolytus's sexual encounter with Strophe. Yet, both of these things lack the force or more specifically the measurable consequences that Cate's rape does. They both seem futile and incidental rather than ultimately significant to either the politics or the narrative of the text. Thus, aligning with them to perform some larger purpose also seems futile. Certainly, Phaedra's suicide did prompt Hippolytus's death however even this seems ultimately instigated by Hippolytus, thus stripping Phaedra of agency even in her suicide. Strophe acknowledges her sexual encounter, alluding to rape, when she states, "There aren't words for what you did to me."²²⁷ Kane does not supply the words or any other signifier for the audience to read Strophe's rape with. Thus, little attention is paid to her tragedy beyond this one statement. Strophe fails to effect change or consequence when she tries to stop Hippolytus's death. Theseus rapes and kills Strophe before he realizes it is her, and arguably due to his guilt he kills himself. However, like in the case of Phaedra's death instigating Hippolytus's, Strophe's death folds into Theseus's dramatic death scene rather than retaining any autonomous merit. In both instances the women are accessories to their male counterparts, an opening act to the male characters' climax, and unlike Cate's rape in *Blasted* or Grace's re-birth in *Cleansed*, the transgressions on Phaedra's and Strophe's bodies are not re-visited or given due consequence.

²²⁷ Kane, *Phaedra's Love* 87.

Phaedra's Love in Performance



Fig. 2.1: *Phaedra's Love* as presented in the Tm-una theatre in Tel Aviv, Israel. Directing and dramaturgy are by Lilach Dekel-Avneri. Here, the vertical blinds are opened to reveal the misdoings behind the Royal façade.²²⁸

The aforementioned Kane fansite, *Sarah Kane: A Sarah Kane Site* by Iain Fisher, includes a place for site visitors to vote on their favorite and least favorite Kane play.²²⁹ The site regularly updates its “feedback” page and currently reports the “results so far” to indicate *4.48 Psychosis*, *Crave*, *Cleansed*, and *Blasted* as “The favourite Sarah Kane plays,” (basically all of the plays except *Phaedra's Love*) and *Phaedra's Love*, *Cleansed*, and *Crave* as “The least liked Sarah Kane plays.”²³⁰ Although the site surmises that, “*Crave* and *Phaedra's Love* are regularly voted best play by some people and worst play by others,” this seems more accurate for *Crave* than *Phaedra's Love* as *Phaedra's Love* is the only text that appears on the “least liked” list but does not also appear on the “favourite (sic)” list. The site (maintained by Fisher but regularly contributed to by scholars, including Graham Saunders, critics

²²⁸ *Phaedra's Love* by Sarah Kane, dir. Lilach Dekel-Avneri, Tm-una Theatre, Tel Aviv, Israel, 2008.

²²⁹ “Sarah Kane Feedback,” “Iain Fisher: Sarah Kane,” 19 May 2008
<<http://www.iainfisher.com/vote/kane-voting-page.html>>.

²³⁰ “Sarah Kane Feedback,” “Iain Fisher: Sarah Kane,” 16 May 2008
<<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/sarah-kane-feedback-results.html>>.

who provide reviews of Kane's work in production, and artists, including Graeae) also includes an ongoing, regularly updated "hot news"²³¹ link that profiles reviews, commentary, and advertisements of current productions of Kane's work.²³² This information is volunteered by critics and scholars, as well as the artists and producers of the productions. Consequently, this site does not claim to post a complete list of *all* productions of Kane's work. However, it does provide quite a diverse and comprehensive cross-section of her work in production including links to reviews, production details, and artist/performance company websites. In addition to the "hot news" link, the site includes a performance chronology log of Kane's texts throughout the world from their respective debuts through 2005.²³³ This performance log documents (from least to most productions): twenty-eight productions of *Cleansed* (1998 debut); thirty-two productions of *Phaedra's Love* (1996 debut); thirty-five productions of *Blasted* (1995 debut); sixty-one productions of *4.48 Psychosis* (2000 debut); and sixty-five productions of *Crave* (1998 debut).²³⁴ This information seems to counter-balance the claim that *Crave* is a least favorite play (on this log, at least, it has the most productions), but does support the idea that *Phaedra's Love* is less popular among the texts. The discrepancy may lie in the fact that the voting for "most" or "least" favorite Kane play does not specify, most or least favorite "for production."

²³¹ As of May 19, 2008, the most recent documented update was April 10, 2008.

²³² "Sarah Kane Hot News," "Iain Fisher: Sarah Kane," 10 April 2008, 18 May 2008
<<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/sarah-kane-news.html>>.

²³³ "Sarah Kane more: performances chronology," "Iain Fisher: Sarah Kane," 18 May 2008
<<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kane-live-chronology.html>>.

As to why the log has not been updated since 2005, I cannot say. The "hot news" archives include production information dating back to 2001. Perhaps the site master, Iain Fisher, simply began to prefer archiving Kane production information on the "hot news" link only rather than cross referencing it on the "performance chronology" log as well.

²³⁴ "Sarah Kane more: performances chronology," "Sarah Kane," *Iain Fisher* 16 May 2008
<<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kane-live-chronology.html>>.

Thus, the magical realism and extremely difficult stage-directions of *Cleansed* and *Blasted* become less of a practical issue for the reader than for the would-be reader/performer. Similarly, the free-form, poetic style of both *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* does lend itself to a variety of interpretations (and thus, arguably, a variety of production budgets). These discrepancies aside, certainly Fisher does not claim to be a statistician or social scientist, one thing these two samplings of popular opinion both suggest is a lack of interest in *Phaedra's Love*.

The majority of production reviews that I read for *Phaedra's Love*, review it in terms of its relationship to the Phaedra/Hippolytus myth lineage. A 2007 production advertisements states, "This is a Greek tragedy. And it is terribly, horribly funny."²³⁵ Likewise, One Year Lease's 2005 New York production presented three Phaedra's-Racine *Phédre* translated by Ted Hughes, Matthew Maguire's *Phaedra*, and Kane's *Phaedra's Love*.²³⁶ Aaron Riccio's review of this production billed Racine's version as "the classic," Maguire's as "the modern," and Kane's as the "neo-expressionist."²³⁷ In this instance, Kane appears the "third wheel" or "freak" version among the staged history of the myth. A 2005 Italian production of *Phaedra's Love* ensued after the Accademia degli Artefatti had already developed a body of work dedicated to Kane's writing (as part of the Dark Age Project—a series of studies on the mythical figure of Ariadne) and wanted to work directly with Kane's text. According to the press release, "The immediate and only possible choice for the Accademia is to work on the figure

²³⁵ "Phaedra's Love," *Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts*. PICA 2008 16 May 2008
<<http://www.pica.org.au/view/Phaedra's+Love/122/>

²³⁶ "Sarah Kane more: performances 2005," "Iain Fisher," 16 May 2008
<<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kane-live-2005.html>>.

²³⁷ Aaron Riccio, "Phaedra x3," "Theater Talk's New Theater Corps," 10 Dec. 2005, 16 May 2008
<<http://newtheatercorps.blogspot.com/2005/12/phaedra-x3-by-aaron-riccio.html>>.

of Phaedra.”²³⁸ Thus, the interest in *Phaedra’s Love* here occurs as a result of it being the only text that overtly meditates on a classic figure. This seems a matter of convenience and makes the text itself almost incidental. Again, here the choice to produce *Phaedra’s Love* is more about theatrically tracing a mythical heredity, rather than looking to address modern issues with a new and enigmatic voice. Though this excavation can be interesting and compelling onstage, it deviates from the raw accountability and bald inspection of humanity that Kane’s other texts set as their task. Kane’s text, not necessarily the artists in particular, limits *Phaedra’s Love* from transcending beyond the reins of its mythical legacy.

Probably the most telling in terms of the debacle that *Phaedra’s Love* can become when pushed to become something it just is not (i.e. a “great work of art” that can align with a myriad of contributing narratives) is Felicity Poulter’s review of a 2001 Pembroke Players production of *Phaedra’s Love* in Cambridge, UK, which states:

this production has emphasised (sic) its Greek roots... creating a troupe of all-singing, all-dancing angels that control the action, even having a brainstorm (complete with flipchart) to decide how Phaedra will meet her terrible fate. I’m not sure I was entirely convinced by their intervention in the action all the time, as it often slowed the pace a little too much between the scenes, but they were a fantastic addition when it came to presenting the moments of brutality. In particular, when Phaedra performs oral sex on Hippolytus, the stage image is juxtaposed with the angels dancing and singing to Britney Spears. Yes, this was very funny, but it was still strangely disconcerting. Whilst we laughed at the angels we were also

²³⁸ “Phaedra’s Love in Italy,” “Sarah Kane more: performances 2005,” Iain Fisher 16 May 2008 <<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kane-live-2005.html>>.

laughing at the main stage action, which was really an expression of Phaedra's true desire.²³⁹

Though the comment on the obsession with pop-culture and concurrent ignorance of government activities amongst the bourgeois rings true, the ultimate goal of this production seems to be, "How radically can we retard this myth in production?" Again, I posit that Kane leaves little choice for those who would like to align their own agendas with this text, but to pervert it totally and layer it with silly gimmicks. For example, despite Poulter's claim in her review, a chorus of angels reflects an odd commentary on Christian not Greek roots (as angels and goddesses are not the same thing) that fails to do much more than provide childish kitsch for the audience. Perhaps these images could have worked to some larger purpose or point (a commentary on overly mediated sexuality versus authentic love, for example), but without a place to comfortably reside within the performance text these production choices remain superfluous fluff. Kane left no place for the artist-seeking-alignment to go once she did all the work with this text by filling all the gaps. Had *Phaedra's Love* been crafted more similarly to her other work, these types of theatric additions may have succeeded rather than having made a mockery of themselves. Dressing up *Phaedra's Love*, (i.e. trying to forge an alliance in the same way one might with *Blasted* or *4.48 Psychosis*) resembles throwing some guy's underwear on Michelangelo's statue of David: it is cute and funny, and maybe somewhere, somehow makes a point, but really we just think, "Hey, get those off of him!"

²³⁹ Felicity Poulter, rev. of *Phaedra's Love*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Dan Sherer, Cambridge, 21-24 Nov. 2001, *Varsity*, 22 Nov 2001.

In addition to contextualizing *Phaedra's Love* within its mythical lineage, another common technique used with this text is the staging of *Phaedra's Love* in conjunction with one or more of Kane's other texts. Some of these pairings include: a student production of *Crave* and *Phaedra's Love* in Northampton, UK (2003);²⁴⁰ a different set of student productions of *Crave* and *Phaedra's Love* in Singapore (2001);²⁴¹ a production of *Crave* and *Phaedra's Love*, yet again, premiered at the Volkstheater in Vienna (2001) and traveled to perform in Ontario, Canada (2003);²⁴² a production in Slovenia combined *Phaedra's Love* and *4.48 Psychosis* into one play titled *4.48* (2001);²⁴³ and *Phaedra's Love* again followed by *4.48 Psychosis* in Birmingham, UK (2002).²⁴⁴ *Phaedra's Love* also gets performed as part of Kane festivals, including the production of all five Kane plays in Berlin, Germany (2005).²⁴⁵ Again, the goal here seems to be to create a dialogue among Kane's texts or at least compare different forms in her work. This compartmentalization of *Phaedra's Love* reinforces its rigidity and inability to be re-birthing and re-informed on its own in the same way that Kane's other texts might. One notable exception is an Italian company that staged a Sarah Kane festival in Milan, Italy (2002), but only staged *4.48*

²⁴⁰ Theatre Laboratory Module, *Crave* by Sarah Kane, University Northampton, St Georges Avenue, Northampton, 9-10 Jun 2003, *Phaedra's Love*, by Sarah Kane, University Northampton, St Georges Avenue, Northampton, 11-12 Jun 2003.

²⁴¹ *Phaedra's Love*, by Sarah Kane, perf. Colin Cheong, Charlene Cai, and Zachary Ho, *Crave*, by Kane, perf. Zachary Ho, Colin Cheong, Joyce Yao, and Koh Wan Ching, Singapore, Nov 2001.

²⁴² *Crave* and *Phaedra's Love*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Michael Lenic, Mad Jack McMad, The Baby Grand Theatre, Kingston, Ontario, Canada 11-15 Feb 2003.

²⁴³ *4.48*: a combination of *Phaedra's Love* (*Fedrina ljubezen*) and *4.48 Psychosis* (*4.48 psihoza*), by Sarah Kane, dir. Eduard Miler, Mladinsko Theatre, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 10 Nov 2001 (premiere).

²⁴⁴ *Phaedra's Love* and *4.48 Psychosis*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Richard Hurst, prod. Birmingham School of Speech and Drama, Patrick Centre (at the Hippodrome), Thorp Street, Birmingham, UK, 13-16 Mar 2002.

²⁴⁵ "All Five Plays in Berlin, Germany," "Sarah Kane more: performances 2005," Iain Fisher 16 May 2008 <<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kane-live-2005.html>>.

Psychosis, *Crave*, and *Blasted*. This same Italian company did produce a production of *Phaedra's Love* the year prior.²⁴⁶ Both 4.48 *Psychosis* and *Blasted* were billed as “revivals” in the advertisements of the Kane festival, now under the direction of Barbara Nativi.²⁴⁷ Thus, the decision to exclude *Phaedra's Love* was not because of a desire to present work not previously produced by the company. Perhaps, this company used *Phaedra's Love* as an introduction to Kane's politics. Then, in the interest of developing a dialogue with Kane's texts in performance, they chose to align their festival with the more malleable texts, notably leaving out *Phaedra's Love* and *Cleansed*.

In light of these conjoined performances, *Phaedra's Love* proves useful in terms of studies of intertextuality but provides little opportunity for overt activism, beyond regurgitating Kane's 1996 political concerns. *Phaedra's Love* provides a ready-made script for those wishing to attack the government (making it a good choice for the Israeli company among others mentioned). In this vein, Fail Better Productions, having performed Kane's *Crave* to critical acclaim in 2002, brought a new production of what they billed as “Kane's least performed play” to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2004.²⁴⁸ Their press release suggests: “Performed in the atmospheric vaults of the Underbelly, *Phaedra's Love* is a powerful play, given a new lease of life in this timely

²⁴⁶ “Kane Festival,” 4.48 *Psychosis*, *Crave*, and *Blasted*, by Sarah Kane, trans. Gian Maria Cervio, dir. Barbara Nativi, Milan, Italy, 3-19 May 2002.

²⁴⁷ “Performances in Italy,” “Sarah Kane Cold News 2002,” *Iain Fisher*, 16 May 2008 <<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kane-news-2002.html>>.

²⁴⁸ *Phaedra's Love*, by Sarah Kane, dir. Jonathan Heron, Fail Better Productions, The Big Belly, The Smirnoff Underbelly, Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2004, 5th-29th Aug 2004.

revival.”²⁴⁹ I am unsure if this (re)presentation of *Phaedra’s Love* truly gets a “new lease of life.” More likely, the (re)presentation of Kane’s 1996 politics come across as “timely déjà-vu” in the 2004 political climate of the UK (and Scottish distaste for the British Royals, specifically). This process of borrowing from repeated history differs dramatically from the conscious alliance between one of Kane’s texts and a new contributing narrative. Specifically, this Brechtian convention *looks back* to remind us of past transgressions that may be on the brink of happening again. In contrast to this, an alliance, by definition actively joins two or more parties in the process of *looking forward* towards a common goal. Not to suggest that that a revival of past myths cannot be provocative, certainly *Trojan Women*, Euripides’s great anti-war play, continues to resonate with modern audiences during war-times.²⁵⁰ However, without the process of alliance and accompanying convergence of the reader/performer from page to stage, the re-presentation of *Phaedra’s Love* banks too heavily on the similarities between two circumstances without paying due respect to the differences of these two communities (in this case, 1996 London and 2004 Edinburgh): thus, it lacks the specificity that inspires activism. While great accomplishments can be made in a given production of *Phaedra’s Love* in terms of stage craft (acting, directing, costuming, technical arts, etc.), ultimately *Phaedra’s Love* lacks the invitation to alliance that Kane so generously imbeds in the careful craftsmanship of her other texts. In this way, *Phaedra’s Love* cannot progress beyond changing her outfit.

²⁴⁹“Fail Better Productions: Press Pack,” Press officer Claire Hilton, 2004
<http://www.failbetter.co.uk/press/phaedraslove/phaedra_press-pack.pdf>.

²⁵⁰ Euripides, *Trojan Women*, trans. Marianne McDonald, *Six Greek Tragedies*, by Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles, eds. McDonald and J. Michael Walton (London: Methuen, 2002) 179-221.

Chapter Three: Letting Out the Blood: Relieving 4.48 *Psychosis*

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet

*Are of imagination all compact.*²⁵¹

On 20 February 1999 sometime between 2 and 3:30am (a little more than two weeks after her 28th birthday on 3 February)²⁵² *Blasted* playwright Sarah Kane hung herself from a hook on the back of lavatory door with her shoelaces while on “high-risk” suicide watch at King’s College Hospital. (She had been admitted to the hospital after an earlier “determined” attempt to kill herself with an overdose of anti-depressants.)²⁵³ There, now that we got that out of the way, let us get on with it. But wait! (*Insert the sound of tires screeching followed by a domino of cars crashing into each other.*) She wrote one last play...and it seems to be about suicide...what does this mean?! And thus the subsequent suffocation of *4.48 Psychosis* transpired.²⁵⁴

4.48 Psychosis (4.48) suffers greatly from its circumstantial alliance with Kane’s suicide. This alliance, unlike that between Graeae Theatre Company and *Blasted*,²⁵⁵ for example, lacks the fundamental clarification of intention behind joining two points of view or strategies for the purpose of achieving a common goal. Primarily, the media, audiences, and general public aligned the narratives of her suicide with *4.48* and in doing so, effectively clogged the passageways (dramaturgical gaps) through which new contributing narratives might eventually pass. The narrative

²⁵¹ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream, The Portable Shakespeare* (New York: Penguin, 1977) 5.1.7-8.

²⁵² Lyn Gardner, “Of Love and Outrage,” *Guardian* [London] 23 Feb. 1999, obituaries: 16.

²⁵³ Patrick McGowan, “Nurses failed to check on suicidal playwright,” *Evening Standard* [London] 22 Sep. 1999: 4.

²⁵⁴ Kane, *4.48 Psychosis* 203-45.

²⁵⁵ Chapter One discusses this alliance at length.

joining of *4.48* with Kane's suicide fails to look outwards toward a common goal rather it implodes on itself by hoping to find answers within the alliance rather than *through* or *via* the alliance. Specifically, this pairing hopes to find answers to Kane's text by dissecting Kane's suicide and vice versa. From both ends of this dramatic pairing these futile inquiries stagnantly probe each other, thus condensing themselves and ensuring no forward progress is made. Consequently, this futility buries the text and stifles its ability to re-align with future artists and/or narratives. Arguably, in some sense Kane did author the conflation of these two narratives in as much as she could have presupposed the publicity of her suicide and its subsequent effect on a posthumous debut of *4.48*. (A following section of this chapter examines the cultural collateral of suicide in more depth.) However, Kane personally did not carry the alliance through to fruition via production nor did her suicide guarantee the style, time, or circumstance of a *4.48* debut after her death. Thus no articulation of the "goal" of a Kane-authored alliance surfaced beyond speculation and inference, resulting in a conflation or circumstantial merging of these two narratives—the suicide and *4.48*—rather than a productive dramatic choice that pushes to achieve a specific goal.

This "original" alliance, consciously or unconsciously thrust upon James Macdonald's debut production of the *4.48*,²⁵⁶ acts as a parasitic leach sucking the opportunities of rebirth out of the text. Though the passage of time and multiple productions of the text throughout the world have begun to erode the *4.48*/Kane-suicide alliance, it still continues to inform much of the scholarship and production choices involving both Kane and *4.48*. It is my hope to continue to free *4.48* from this

²⁵⁶ *4.48 Psychosis*, dir. James Macdonald, 2000.

ultimately discriminatory choice and redirect the focus of the text away from suicide (Kane's in particular), which seems to me incidental in this text, and towards Kane's aggressive questioning of mental health including its treatments, its misunderstandings, and its stigmas.

My goal is not to completely distance any autobiographical authority of Kane from *4.48*, for certainly her first person experience within the mental health community affords her an acute voice regarding this subject. However, I do not want to grant her any more authority in this world than we do in any of the other worlds she dramatizes. She intentionally does not frame *4.48* as any more of a docudrama or autobiography than her other texts: why should we? Furthermore, the conflation of these two narratives (her suicide and *4.48*) limits the potential to regard her suicide as a purposeful act unto itself. In following sections of this chapter I engage in an in-depth discussion regarding the multiplicity of suicide as well as the misunderstandings of mental-illness in order to posit that the necessary reevaluation of these two topics in relation to the publicity of Kane's suicide can work to further free *4.48* for future alignments. If we recast her suicide as subversive and revolutionary against hegemonic ideals, an authored act not unlike the texts themselves, we allow Kane's body of work greater transiency in the theatre canon. Furthermore, we alleviate some of the residual forensic obsession and lamentation gratuitously (and I feel erroneously) ladled onto *4.48*. Hence, we allow the text to critically and astutely challenge the notion of sanity and insanity within our respective communities without having to painfully and messily renegotiate Kane's suicide with each production.

4.48 in Debut

Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* debuted posthumously at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre from 27 June-15 July 2000 under the direction of Macdonald, the same man who directed the premiere of *Blasted* (1995)²⁵⁷ and *Cleansed* (1998).²⁵⁸ Of the eighteen reviews I read for this production, fifteen of them address Kane's suicide in the first paragraph if not the first line of the review. Michael Coveney begins his review by stating: "Not really a play, more an extended suicide note, this is the disturbing last work of the late Sarah Kane, who killed herself in February last year."²⁵⁹ Likewise, Rachel Halliburton begins her review with: "Sarah Kane was found hanging from a hook on a lavatory door in February last year. Her last play, *4.48 Psychosis*, will more than satisfy the death-imitating-art hounds sniffing around for macabre psychological details."²⁶⁰ Sarah Hemming laments the predicament of the inevitable alliance between *4.48* and Kane's suicide: "*4.48 Psychosis* is a difficult play to review, because the writer, Sarah Kane, killed herself not long after it was written....So you find yourself reacting to the piece...a 75 minute suicide note...a disturbing experience in many ways."²⁶¹ The remaining three reviews that do not open with commentary on Kane's suicide weave the notion of either suicide or "death of an artist" musings, not un-sensitively, throughout their reviews. Michael Billington's *Guardian* review offers a compelling, although problematic in parts, review of the

²⁵⁷ *Blasted*, dir. James Macdonald, 1995.

²⁵⁸ *Cleansed* by Sarah Kane, dir. James Macdonald, Royal Court Theatre Downstairs, London, 30 Apr 1998.

²⁵⁹ Michael Coveney, rev. of *4.48 Psychosis*, dir. James Macdonald, Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, London, *Daily Mail* [London] 30 June 2000.

²⁶⁰ Rachel Halliburton, rev. of *4.48 Psychosis*, dir. James Macdonald, Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, London, *Evening Standard* [London] 30 June 2000.

²⁶¹ Sarah Hemming, rev. of *4.48 Psychosis*, dir. James Macdonald, Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, London, *Financial Times* [London] 30 June 2000.

production event.²⁶² He states, “In just over five short years Sarah Kane moved from disrupter of the peace to dramatic icon.”²⁶³ He also concludes that *4.48* enacts a 75-minute suicide note, but has the gumption to ask, “But does the play, which takes us inside Kane’s head, have any general application?” He ventures the following: “I cannot speak for others, but what it taught me was the frustration of the potential suicide at the way the rest of the world marches to a different, rational rhythm, and assumes there are cures and answers for a state of raging alienation.”²⁶⁴ Had Kane not committed suicide, perhaps Billington (and others) might have ventured further down this provocative road of inquiry rather than concluding, “what this play proves is that her death was every bit as uncompromising as her creative life.” Quite literally in this example Kane’s death quelled artistic debates, which *4.48* very well could have instigated, in favor of forensic ones.

Despite this, Billington makes a particularly insightful correlation in his review between Kane’s staging of her creative life (in her texts) and the staging of her death. His provocative use of the word “uncompromising” connotes both a sense of ruthlessness in her death act (hanging oneself is arguably more aggressive than overdosing or gassing oneself) as well as a voiced intent. Furthermore in order to be uncompromising, her death would need to be *standing for* or *arguing for* something in an uncompromising way. This word choice recasts Kane from patient in a mental ward to staunch vigilante. How can this transition of focus re-inform the circumstantial alliance between Kane’s suicide and *4.48*? Is it possible to retroactively reassign the

²⁶² Michael Billington, rev. of *4.48 Psychosis*, dir. James Macdonald, Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, London, *Guardian* [London] 30 June 2000.

²⁶³ Billington.

²⁶⁴ Billington.

alliance a more activist starting point that can more easily be renegotiated for future alignments? By deconstructing the process of alliance particularly that between Kane's suicide and *4.48*, I lay bare the dramatic tools Kane weaves throughout this enigmatic text in the hope that new artists will understand how to use these tools to embrace and propel their own contributing narratives.

A Convenient Alliance: Denying the *Bricoleur*²⁶⁵

Critic Neil Cooper reviewed Graeae Theatre Company's disabled-led 2006 production of *Blasted* at The Tron theatre in Glasgow and offered this observation:

The mythology that prevails around Sarah Kane these days has more to do with her untimely death than the furore [sic] which followed her still startling debut. Such iconoclasm has made her a sacred cow, a solid enough argument for putting her work to bed until it can be judged with fresh eyes, unhindered by the shock and awe that still surrounds it.²⁶⁶

In this case Kane's suicide fused with her entire collected works, not only *4.48*, in the vein of similarly compartmentalized female artists who committed suicide such as Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf. However, with *4.48* in particular the fusion or circumstantial alliance of *4.48* and Kane's suicide is cemented so tightly together that it mistakenly gets misconstrued as two parts of the same whole. This emphasis on completion (filling in of gaps with too much resolution and finality) resists the goal of affinity that forms the basis of alliance. Neither alliance nor affinity try to "meld together" but accept the "always already" incompleteness of their parts. The alliance is always temporary: intentional, but temporary. The two aligning parties act like the two rows of teeth which make up a zipper on a jacket: the momentum of the zipper pull (or

²⁶⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1966) 16.

²⁶⁶ Neil Cooper, rev. of *Blasted*, dir. Jenny Sealey, Graeae Theatre Company, Tron Theatre, Glasgow, *The Herald* [Scotland] 21 April 2006.

“the production” metaphorically speaking) aligns these two rows (metaphorically the “contributing narrative” and the text) momentarily to close the jacket, however, when the jacket no longer needs closure the “production” comes down and the rows release each other: yet they retain/regain/remain their grooved separateness. However, Kane’s work pushes this potential for alliance further. The text not only presupposes a variety of “zipper pullers,” but also contributes to a new understanding of “zipping.” In terms of production this malleability and momentary status of “the zip” becomes particularly important.

In order to best analyze the dramatic nuances and strategies employed by Kane throughout her text I engage in the following theoretical discussion regarding unconventional creative processes. In his book *The Savage Mind* (1962, English translation 1966), French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss uses the word *bricolage* to describe a process of the *bricoleur* who uses “whatever is at hand” to create a masterpiece:

that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relations to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions.²⁶⁷

In terms of Kane’s work, 4.48 specifically, the dramatic “tools” Kane scattered on the work floor of her text require a similar sort of bricolage-esque assembly. This theatrical-bricolage gets to the heart of a production-alliance in that the productive use of the tools depends as much, if not more so on the ingenuity and organic problem-solving of

²⁶⁷ Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind* 17.

the bricoleur (the reader/performer or producer in our case)²⁶⁸ as the tools-for-production themselves. Furthermore, the pre-supposed or assumed purposes of the tools become null and void in the hands of the bricoleur, who above all else, works to create an extension of him or her with little regard for the “proper” use of the tools. In this sense, Kane herself acts as a bricoleur in her untraditional use of theatrical conventions, and the text an extension of her unique understanding of the world: not to be confused with autobiography. Lévi-Strauss explains:

The ‘bricoleur’ also, and indeed principally, derives his poetry from the fact that he does not confine himself to accomplishment and execution: he ‘speaks’ not only with things, as we have already seen, but also through the medium of things: giving an account of his personality and life by the choices he makes between the limited possibilities.²⁶⁹

The tools become instrumental to the discovery of self via their use. But, of course, this discovery is momentary and intended specifically for the bricoleur. The gift left for additional bricoleurs is not this discovery, but the deconstructed tools themselves: ever ready for a new “account.” The question of “What are they” eclipses “What could they be?” Kane’s text acts like and is made up of these tools and thus the reader/performer becomes the reader/performer/bricoleur. The attitude and creative process of the reader/performer/bricoleur rejects the suicide/4.48 fusion or circumstantial alliance if only because it has been done before. S/he deconstructs the work to, “Begin again. Begin again”²⁷⁰: the consummate producer.

In the reader/performer/bricoleur’s process of discovery and negotiation of the tools in 4.48, his/her contributing narrative finds meaning. This process resembles

²⁶⁸ See Chapter One of this project for more detailed discussion of the reader/performer.

²⁶⁹ Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind* 21.

²⁷⁰ Kane, *Crave* 176.

what Lévi-Strauss goes on to suggest about “mythical thought,” which incorporates “a kind of intellectual bricolage,” wherein “mythical reflection can reach brilliant unforeseen results on the intellectual plane.”²⁷¹ In terms of theatric production and “mythical imaging” for the stage, these types of “unforeseen results” titillate the would-be reader/performer and producer. Unfortunately, as outlined by Lévi-Strauss, these results may indeed be multiple and “new” (although only to the bricoleur) but they are not infinite. He explains:

But the possibilities always remain limited by the particular history of each piece and by those of its features which are already determined by the use for which it was originally intended or the modifications it has undergone for other purposes. The elements which the ‘bricoleur’ collects and uses are ‘pre-constrained’ like the constitutive units of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre.²⁷²

Regardless, the bricoleur relishes in this business of multiplicity. Just as one never loses interest in self-discovery, “Mythical thought for its part is imprisoned in the events and experience which it never tires of ordering and re-ordering in its search to find them a meaning.”²⁷³ In this way, we can see the necessity of a contributing narrative to the theatric alliance with Kane’s work, it is the thing searching for “meaning” and the text provides the search tools.

Kane in Continuum

²⁷¹ Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind* 17.

²⁷² Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind* 19.

²⁷³ Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind* 22.

But what of these tools and their unorthodox ordering in 4.48? We can draw parallels between the dramatic tools themselves and their use in 4.48 and the definition and use of “the images of myth” that Lévi-Strauss outlines:

The significant images of myth [the dramatic tools in our discussion], the materials of the bricoleur, are elements which can be defined by two criteria: they have *had a use*, as words in a piece of discourse which mythical thought ‘detaches’ in the same way as a bricoleur, in the course of repairing them, detaches the cogwheels of an old alarm clock; and *they can be used again* either for the same purpose or for a different one if they are at all diverted from their previous function.²⁷⁴

Thus, the tools are always in continuum: pointing back towards a previous use and anticipating a future use. In their book *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari push Lévi-Strauss’s definitions of bricolage to identify it in terms of a “product/producer identity.”²⁷⁵ The tools or “objects” to use Deleuze and Guattari’s term, maintain a dual identity as both product and producer. Likewise, they retain an always already incompleteness. Deleuze and Guattari explain:

Every “object” presupposes the continuity of a flow; every flow, the fragmentation of the object.... Hence the coupling that takes place within the partial object-flow connective synthesis also has another form: product/producing. Producing is always something “grafted onto” the product.... The rule of continually producing production, of grafting producing onto the product, is a characteristic of desiring-machines or of primary production: the production of production.²⁷⁶

Kane’s text both behaves like these objects and is comprised of these objects: each production/bricolage (the culmination of the tools in use) pulling from and pointing

²⁷⁴ Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind* 35

²⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking Penguin, 1977) 7-8.

²⁷⁶ Deleuze and Guattari 5-7.

towards another production (theoretically and theatrically speaking).²⁷⁷ All the while, the production continues to deconstruct and renegotiate the tools presented in the text. Again, to use Lévi-Strauss's words: "In the continual reconstruction from the same materials, it is always earlier ends which are called upon to play the part of means: the signified changes into the signifying and vice versa."²⁷⁸ In his "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," (lecture 1966;²⁷⁹ published English translation 1978) Jacques Derrida extends this notion to any discourse.²⁸⁰ He states: "If one calls bricolage the necessity of borrowing one's concept from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is bricoleur."²⁸¹ In this argument, Derrida further distances the agency of a bricoleur (human or otherwise) as a unique originator of meaning and posits that s/he is not unlike the science oriented engineer: in effect, Derrida lessons the difference between bricolage and a learned or regulated craft or science. He argues that both the engineer and the scientist are also bricoleurs and their work, bricolage. Whereas Lévi-Strauss considers this difference (between bricoleur and scientist/engineer) paramount to the nature of the bricoleur, Derrida argues:

As soon as we cease to believe in such an engineer and in a discourse which breaks with the received historical discourse, and as soon as we admit that every finite discourse is bound by a certain *bricolage* and that the engineer and the scientist are also species of *bricoleurs*, then the very idea of *bricolage* is

²⁷⁷ I am capitalizing on the common use of the word "production" to denote the endeavor of theatrical work and find that that use slides relatively easily into this theoretical discussion of "production."

²⁷⁸ Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind* 21.

²⁷⁹ Jacques Derrida, "La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines," lecture, International Colloquium on Critical Languages and the Science of Man, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, 21 Oct 1966.

²⁸⁰ Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" 285.

²⁸¹ Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" 285.

menaced and the difference in which it took on its meaning
breaks down.²⁸²

This displacement of meaning in art as well as scientific life becomes particularly poignant when discussing the translation of Kane's text to the stage, which aims to reflect some truth to the audience about their lived experience. However, this truth remains sporadic and elusive, even to the reader/performer/bricoleur. As already stated, a goal can be identified as a sort of guiding North Star for a theatric alliance, however what is actually realized defers to the endeavor and process of bricolage and the perspectives of the bricoleur(s).

If we accept Derrida's theory and if in fact "the goal" of a given theatric alliance ultimately becomes a moot point, what then of the alliance at all: considering the fact that I already argued in favor of an established goal that two or more parties work collaboratively towards as essential to the definition of alliance? The focus or achievement, thus, transitions from the *goal* of the alliance to the *work* of the alliance: the means justifying the ends so to speak. To this end Derrida suggests:

There is no unity of absolute source of the myth. The focus or the source of the myth are always shadows and virtualities which are elusive, unactualizable, and nonexistent in the first place. Everything begins with structure, configuration, or relationship... Therefore it is necessary to forego scientific or philosophical discourse... which is the absolute requirement that we go back to the source, to the center, to the founding basis to the principle, and so on.²⁸³

The shift in focus to the "structure, configuration, or relationship" of the elements works to celebrate the careful crafting and placement of dramatic tools in Kane's texts, particularly evident in *4.48*, and encourages the practical use of these tools rather than

²⁸² Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" 285. His emphasis.

²⁸³ Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" 286.

an aggressive dissection of their origin. Furthermore, this shift privileges the theatric alliance process that aims to establish a relationship between the tools left by Kane, both amongst themselves and in relation to the contributing narrative. Quite literally here, “the play is the thing.”²⁸⁴

We imbibe the reader/performer/bricoleur’s creative engagement with the tools Kane used but did not put away. As Derrida goes on to argue, this slippery “play”²⁸⁵ resists any commitment to totalization: to “sewing up every hole” or “filling up every gap.” Derrida argues:

Totalization, therefore, is sometimes defined as *useless*, and sometimes as *impossible*.... If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field—that is, language and a finite language—excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions.²⁸⁶

Therefore, alliance becomes not a mode of gap-filling, but *playing* with gap-filling.

The question ceases to be (if it ever was), “What answer *correctly* fills this (and every other) gap?” Instead the alliance asks, “How can this potential gap-filler mutually benefit both the text and the contributing narrative?” Derrida defines this process of gap-filling as *supplementarity* (intentional double-meaning by Derrida in his use of “supplement” to suggest both the act of supplying something that is missing and the

²⁸⁴ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Four Tragedies*, ed. David Bevington et al. (New York: Bantam, 1980) 2.2.605.

²⁸⁵ Again, I relish in the double meaning of these terms and their theatric and theoretical references.

²⁸⁶ Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play” 289. His emphasis.

act of supplying something additional).²⁸⁷ However, this supplementation lacks certainty and permanency. It hypothesizes at best. Derrida explains:

One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in its absence—this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*. The movement of the signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement the lack on the part of the signified.²⁸⁸

In this way, Kane's texts, *4.48* in particular, gain their strength from the empty center they reveal. Because, unlike some of the more Realistic work of Ibsen or Chekhov for example, Kane's work does not force a conclusion, nor can it presume an answer. Kane's text provides a starting (though not original) set of tools and a designated work space, i.e. the bounds of the text, for fragmented as they may be, they still do bind and define the textual work space. The reader/performer begins their workshop play with these tools and within this space.

Derrida lauds Lévi-Strauss for his abandonment of center or “decentering” in the discussion of bricolage. Derrida elaborates:

In effect, what appears most fascinating in this critical search (by Lévi-Strauss) for a new status of discourse is the stated abandonment of all reference to a *center*, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an origin, or to an absolute *archia*.... The absence of a center is here the absence of a subject and the absence of an author: ‘Thus the myth and the musical work are like conductors of an orchestra, whose audience becomes the silent performers.... Myths are anonymous.’²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play” 289.

²⁸⁸ Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play” 289. His emphasis.

²⁸⁹ Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play” 287. His emphasis.

We can easily extend this synopsis to include theatre. In the instance of Kane and 4.48, if we accept Derrida's terms, Kane only acts as the conduit through which these tools have arrived for theatric use, she acts as the momentary bricoleur who borrowed from her past (as certainly her dramatic tools are "used" and not "new"), used the tools to realize her own truth, and then left the tools (albeit, now "more used" and slightly rearranged) for future bricoleurs. By understanding Kane's texts in this light (and according to Derrida all dramatic texts are likewise the stuff of bricolage, though I would argue their "bricolage-ness" varies on a spectrum of more or less), we can transition the focus back to the reader/performer: for it is his/her work as bricoleur that the audience watches.

Even still, the tools remain the tools and the bricoleur remains the bricoleur before and after the realization of the bricolage. In other words, 4.48, the contributing narrative, and Kane retain their individuality throughout the process of theatric alliance. The mutual separateness of the bricoleur and the tools correlates with Donna Haraway's discussion in her previously cited article, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs* (1985),²⁹⁰ on the hybridity of the cyborg and the mutual benefits of the alliance for both the machine and the human (in the case of the cyborg or the bricoleur and the tools in the case of theatric bricolage). Haraway argues: "Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert."²⁹¹ In this case, theoretically, the human maintains some sort of lid on the "lively" machine, while the machine pushes the "frightened" human into action. In terms of a theatric alliance between

²⁹⁰ This article is introduced in Chapter One.

²⁹¹ Haraway 2272.

artist in performance and dramatic text, the text acts “lively” and the would-be performer, “frightened.” In Kane’s texts in particular, the text awakens our primal instincts and interpretations of events (realized in the act of reading/performing in front of others), and the performance momentarily anchors the always elusive texts: the momentary anchor being akin, of course, to bricolage and a supplemented center. Together, the text and performer work towards a moment of clarity and equilibrium for the audience.

However, the alliance of *4.48* with Kane’s suicide never reaches such a moment of clarity or equilibrium. Instead, these two elements engage in a narrative tug-of-war, each one tiring out the other: each one resisting the fluidity of the supplement and the essential emptiness of the textual center. Deleuze and Guattari contend that this “moment” is part and parcel of “a producing/product identity.”²⁹² They explain this phenomenon: “It is this identity that constitutes a third term in the linear series: an enormous undifferentiated object. Everything stops dead for a moment, everything freezes in place—and then the whole process will begin all over again.”²⁹³ Once this is achieved the alliance dissolves and the performer and text separate again. In this way, Kane’s text evolves from retaining an “empty” center to an “ever-shifting center,” which pauses momentarily to engage with a new contributing narrative, only to resume its shifting center, which is to say, no center at all. However, the unresolved tension within the *4.48* and Kane-suicide alliance locks the text onto a fixed point and denies it the fluidity it thrives on. Rather than declare a winner in an

²⁹² Deleuze and Guattari 7.

²⁹³ Deleuze and Guattari 7.

effort to relieve the text of this tension, (i.e. “The text is a suicide note.” Or “The text has nothing to do with Kane’s suicide.”) I offer up a new point of view that in effect allows both sides of the tug-of-war to “set the rope down.” To begin, I will unpack the weighty and often taboo topic of suicide. I argue that modern western cultural discomfort with this act in general contributes to the inability and/or resistance to appraise Kane’s text beyond her suicide: to erroneously force it into the center of 4.48.

She Killed Herself, You Know: Kane and the Stigma of Suicide

For those left in the wake of another’s suicide, closure remains one of the most elusive tenets of recovery. The generally heart-wrenching and frustrating struggle to understand why someone would kill themselves haunts an entire community as it somehow implicates us all. Case in point, Kane’s literary agent Mel Kenyon relayed her frustration with Kane’s suicide:

I had liked Sarah’s work so much: the humour, the potent imagery, her incredible use of language and her emotional rawness. It made it much easier to accept what had happened even though I’m still angry that she felt she had to dig so deep to write the last play that she couldn’t find another way out.²⁹⁴

Anger and resentment towards the self-murderer couched in a sense of great loss often characterize the long journey towards reconciliation after a suicide; a journey plagued by as many conflicting questions as emotions. To help quell the inevitable search for answers (and/or perhaps aid in establishing reasons to comfortably relieve oneself of blame) Southwark Coroner Selina Lynch recorded a verdict that Kane’s death was

²⁹⁴ Mel Kenyon, “Conversation with Mel Kenyon: 13 November 2000,” *Love me or kill me’: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, by Graham Saunders (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002) 153.

caused by “suicide while the balance of her mind was disturbed.”²⁹⁵ As a civil servant Coroner Lynch must provide some reason, some conclusion to this act. The idea that “Miss Kane killed herself while the balance of her mind was totally intact” opens up an almost unthinkable can of worms. No, in order to retain our hold on “civilized” society, we must reject this possibility. She was “mentally ill.” She would not have done this otherwise...right? The phrase “*while* the balance of her mind was disturbed” implies Kane’s death was conditional, for example, “Miss Kane killed herself *while* driving on the wrong side of the road” or “Miss Kane killed herself *while* trying to fix her TV antennae in the rain.” Ergo had the circumstance been different, had her mind not been disturbed, she would not have killed herself. Unfortunately, this presents a logical fallacy as correlation does not equal causation. The phrase “committed suicide while the balance of her mind was disturbed” suggests something quite different than “suicide because her mind was disturbed” or “suicide due to the disturbance of her mind.” It should be noted that the phrase “while the balance of her (or his) mind was disturbed” is commonly used in official death documentations. In the case of suicide, the phrase supposedly describes the person who committed suicide prior to their death. In fact, Virginia Woolf’s suicide was also officially documented as “suicide while the balance of her mind was disturbed.”²⁹⁶ However, the phrase is also used to describe the state of mind of a person prior to their killing others. Of particular interest is the common use of this phrase in court cases regarding mothers who have killed their children “while the balance of their mind was disturbed.” In the latter example, the

²⁹⁵ Patrick McGowan, “Nurses failed to check on suicidal playwright,” *Evening Standard* [London] 22 Sep. 1999: 4.

²⁹⁶“Suicide Note,” *Time*, Monday, 5 May 1941.

correlation seems slightly more beneficial in terms of establishing a motive for inflicting death as it does seem quite likely that without mental illness (or post-partum depression as this phrase seems to point towards in such cases) these women would not have killed their children.²⁹⁷ However, in the case of suicide I am not so sure that this phrase achieves its intended goal of closure. Instead, it seems to dismissively wave suicide (Kane's in particular) away with a flick of its institutional hand.

Certainly mental illness (depression in particular) contributes significantly to many instances of suicide and without it, arguably, a large percentage of suicides would not transpire. However, are we robbing "suicides" or self-murderers, Kane in particular, of agency if we automatically attribute her suicide to an affliction or an unknowable something that has worked on and "disturbed the balance" of her mind rather than suggesting that suicide was a logical thought that pushed from her inner psyche out through her mental "disturbance" and reconnected her to the material world? For someone as engaged and enraged with the world around her, I prefer the implicative, "Miss Kane killed herself by herself while herself." The double implications of "by herself" is intentional to suggest that she was alone and also the weapon or means to kill herself (instead of she killed herself *by* knife, or *by* hanging, or *by* overdose, etc.). Though often selfish and extreme, should suicide be so sweepingly dismissed as the end of the story: "She was a playwright, but then she killed herself" vs. "As a playwright she killed herself?" Determining the exact circumstances (mental and otherwise) in which Kane killed herself would require a forensic study that could quickly become intrusive and offensive and one which this

²⁹⁷ I admit the obvious wrench Medea throws into this assumption!

project has no interest in taking on. This project looks to liberate the text (and only by extension, Kane) from the stigmatized reception of the suicide of a young artist in the hopes that this disentanglement will increase the complexity and multiplicity of 4.48's future performance lineage. Hence, in an effort to release mental illness and suicide from each other and from the margins of society, we must entertain this other side of the coin which posits suicide as not only sane, but a civilized choice.

The marginalization and stigmatization of mental illness relegates suicide to the hush-hush corners of polite society. We shudder to think why someone would want to kill themselves. As a supposedly altruistic society we cannot accept the notion that a "sane" person would really want to kill themselves. Suicide cuts so deep, ripples out so far, and stirs up our deepest fears so that we resent the person who selfishly began this wave of destruction. Suicide kills one person but makes a victim of someone else and in this way muddles up all "civilized" rules of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Generally in terms of killing someone, the one killed and the victim are one in the same and the perpetrator is a different party, however, suicide is less direct in its application of these terms. With intentional suicide, the perpetrator and "killed" are one in the same, yet the victim(s) (i.e. those who were blind-sided by death) survive.²⁹⁸ The conflation of perpetrator and one who is killed and the split of killed/victim is agonizing. We feel this discomfort in the fickle cultural pendulum swing between the criminalization of suicide on the one hand and the heroism of suicide on the other throughout history.

²⁹⁸Accidental suicide further disturbs this allocation of terms but is tangential to this conversation, which concerns itself primarily with intentional acts.

In *Leaving You: The Cultural Meaning of Suicide* (2003),²⁹⁹ Lisa Lieberman traces the history of suicide's cultural collateral. In the following passage Lieberman defines historical "suicides of honor" (specifically those within Christian histories, i.e. martyrs) and goes on to discuss the subsequent need for criminalization of such "self-murders" in order to maintain public deference to divine authority, particularly when the ruling government claimed service to and endorsement from said divinity:

To die for some higher ideal, for the sake of virtue, patriotism, or faith was to turn death into an occasion for homage. (...) So great was the appeal for heroic mode of self-destruction that the church was eventually forced to formulate a policy against it. Beginning with the fourth-century Donatists, Christians who actively sought death for any reason were denied burial in sacred ground.

The Christian case against suicide was formally stated by Saint Augustine, who prohibited the act on the grounds that it violated the sixth commandment: Thou shalt not murder. (Saint Augustine refined his statement,) 'To kill oneself at God's command is not suicide,' he asserted. This refinement was necessary in order to allow for the voluntary sacrifice of Jesus, who freely chose to die on the cross for the sins of humanity, while at the same time excluding Judas, who hanged himself in despair, violating divine will.³⁰⁰

Lieberman clarifies, "What made suicide a sin (for Christians) was its voluntary nature. Self-destruction was prohibited because it represented an individual's choice to do wrong, a deliberate challenge to divine authority."³⁰¹ Similarly, the selfish quality of suicide also influenced its legislation:

During the High Middle Ages, civil legislations against self-murder was enacted in the majority of Western European states. (...) Under no circumstances were men or women permitted to sacrifice themselves without divine sanction or *to place their own needs above the needs of the community to which they*

²⁹⁹ Lisa Lieberman, *Leaving You: The Cultural Meaning of Suicide* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003).

³⁰⁰ Lieberman 10.

³⁰¹ Lieberman 12.

*belonged...the crime of self-murder would remain a punishable offense until 1823.*³⁰²

The last line reads almost like a punch-line: punishable? How do we bring this social deviant to trial in front of our judges and juries, posthumously? How do we collect their dues to society?

In order to criminalize the self-murderer, public attitude first regarded the act in relation to its effect on the community and divine order, identifying self-murderers as heretics and social deviants. Punishments included denial of a proper Christian burial and the dragging of the self-murderer's body throughout the public streets.³⁰³ However, as Christian-based governments gave way to more secular governing bodies, suicide started to be evaluated in relation to the pathology of the self-murderer her/himself. Lieberman clarifies, "By the end of the seventeenth century, England had become an increasingly secular, politically stable society, and with these developments came a renewed willingness to attribute suicide to mental impairment."³⁰⁴ Self-murderers became wild, unsafe, barbaric disturbers of the peace. Yet unlike other "outsiders" whom monolithic powers characteristically group together based on their perceived lack of civility, a key characteristic of the self-murderer stigma is isolation and suffering from an individual condition: this exclusion often part and parcel of the "mentally ill" identity. This characterization allows "us" to differentiate ourselves from "them" or more specifically, "him" or "her." The criminalization and isolation of mental-illness foregrounds our modern prejudices of

³⁰² Lieberman 12-13. My emphasis.

³⁰³ Lieberman 12-16.

³⁰⁴ Lieberman 14.

both mental illness and suicide, and directly influences the reception of work by artists associated with mental illness and/or suicide.

Suffering from a Pathology of Artistic Suicide

*Nothing will interfere with your work like suicide.*³⁰⁵

The public identity associated with artists as “exceptional” (i.e. exception to the norm) in terms of their artistic proficiencies compounds the isolating stigma of mental illness and directly influenced the reception of Kane’s work, particularly 4.48. The obligatory list of “likely disturbed” artists includes: Antonin Artaud, William Blake, Emily Dickinson, Victor Hugo, Edgar Allan Poe, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams, Edvard Munch, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Jackson Pollock.³⁰⁶ This type of list has become party trivia, a thing which “explains” great achievements and excuses the rest of us from not having achieved such greatness. In this sense we use mental illness and its manifestations to “bring them down a notch” and level the playing field, so to speak. For example, we find it oddly comforting to know that Vincent van Gogh cut off his ear and mailed it to his beloved; that Emily Dickinson wore all white clothing in her later years; and that Bill Gates violently rocks back and forth in autistic “stimming” fits during Microsoft board meetings.³⁰⁷ Most of us likewise delight in the idea that Albert Einstein often wore no socks; not an indictment of mental-illness, certainly, but comfortingly quirky nonetheless. (However,

³⁰⁵ Kane, 4.48 221.

³⁰⁶ Kay Redfield Jamison, “Appendix B: Writers, Artists, and Composers with Probable Cyclothymia, Major Depression, or Manic-Depressive Illness,” *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993) 267-70.

³⁰⁷ Temple Grandin, “Genius May Be an Abnormality: Educating Students with Asperger’s Syndrome, or High Functioning Autism,” *Autism Today*, 1 Aug 2008
<http://www.autismtoday.com/articles/Genius_May_Be_Abnormality.html>.

it should be noted that a 2003 study from professors out of Cambridge and Oxford Universities argues strongly that Einstein, along with Sir Isaac Newton, did have Asperger syndrome, a form of autism.)³⁰⁸ The further we can distance these exceptional people from “normal” the more comfortable we find the “us/them” binary. We accept these individuals’ “eccentricities” (a term often used to politely excuse mental illness, though, of course in actuality denies it) because we value their other, generally regarded as significant, contributions to society.

Furthermore, it is often erroneously assumed that an individual’s mental illness has somehow contributed to or “caused” the greatness of a given achievement. In his book, *Creativity and Madness* (1990), Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and Director of Research at the Austen Riggs Center, Albert Rothenberg takes to task this supposed link.³⁰⁹ He states: “Many have tried to do this and failed; that is, they have failed to show any invariant connection between genius and psychosis—but we have been interested in how it is that two such seemingly opposite conditions ever could exist in a particular individual.”³¹⁰ Rothenberg deduces that, “Only one characteristic of personality and orientation to life and work is absolutely, *across the board*, present in *all* creative people: motivation.”³¹¹ He concludes: “Contrary to popular belief that great ideas often pop into certain people’s minds spontaneously and without effort, the creative process always results from

³⁰⁸ Hazel Muir, “Einstein and Newton showed signs of Autism,” *New Scientist* 30 April 2003, 20 July 2008 < <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn3676-einstein-and-newton-showed-signs-of-autism.html> >.

³⁰⁹ Albert Rothenberg, MD, *Creativity and Madness: New Findings and Old Stereotypes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990).

³¹⁰ Rothenberg 6.

³¹¹ Rothenberg 8. His emphasis.

direct, intense, and intentional effort on the creator's part."³¹² Here again, circumstantial alliance between two identities (artist and psychotic) has prevented recognition of the autonomous condition and credits of either.

The element of suicide further complicates this relationship between mental illness and artistic achievement. We experience a dichotomy of values when considering "mentally disturbed" artists who also killed themselves including (in addition to Plath and Woolf): Socrates, Seneca, Anne Sexton, Ernest Hemingway, and van Gogh among many others.³¹³ Our modern western society values creativity,³¹⁴ especially from supposedly "unlikely" sources (young, female, cloistered nun, disabled, etc.), but as a general rule we do not value suicide because of the aforementioned burden of closure it puts upon the victimized family, friends, and community.³¹⁵ Whereas mental-illness can be politely "excused," suicide is not granted such niceties. Unlike art, where a certain amount of "misunderstanding" is assumed and accepted, suicide throws down the gauntlet for would be sleuths often resulting in sloppy mental-illness diagnoses. Lieberman suggests:

Melancholic or angry, cowardly or heroic: suicide is a statement that cries out to be deciphered, yet the cultural history of self-destruction consists of a series of attempts to evade this truth by depriving suicide of its broader implications. [...] Therapeutic strategies that treat suicide as an illness, medicating the depression while ignoring the underlying motivations that drive

³¹² Rothenberg 9.

³¹³ For an illustrative list see: Jamison 267-70.

³¹⁴ Rothenberg 4.

³¹⁵ Exceptions include community reverence for self-murders such as Japanese WWII Kamikaze pilots or similar "heroic suicides," in which the community accepts the suicide as beneficial for the whole. This, however, enters into the realm of sacrifice and implicates an entirely new set of rules and rituals momentarily tangential to this discussion.

people to end their lives, effectively diminish individual responsibility for the decision to die.”³¹⁶

These artists’ achievements need to be extrapolated from the problematic association with mental illness. Rothenberg elucidates the delineation of mental-illness and the creative process:

In those cases in which a creative person is suffering from a psychosis, it is still correct to say that while he is using these specific processes and engaged in the creative process, he is at those moments or periods of time thinking healthily. You see, there are some superficial similarities and connections between these creative cognitions and psychotic modes of thinking. Both types of thinking are quite unusual in superficially similar ways. There is thus a thin but definite borderline between the most advanced and healthy type of thinking—creative thinking—and the most impoverished and pathological types of thinking—psychotic processes. The great creative person who is also psychotic can, and does, shift back and forth between these pathological and creative processes.³¹⁷

Rothenberg makes his case for distancing creative acts from psychosis, thus, is it possible to likewise distance at least some suicide acts from psychosis as well; to align it more closely with the creative process than the psychotic one? And in doing so, can we differentiate between these suicide acts and the other works in a given artist’s collection, thereby preserving their respective integrities and separateness? In an effort to reevaluate a self-murderer’s work it helps to consider suicide as a liberating act: a way to escape the constant labeling and enforced values of a given society. Though certainly not applicable in all instances of self-murder, this discussion becomes particularly enlightening in the forthcoming evaluation of the aggressive quest for personal liberation Kane weaves through 4.48.

³¹⁶ Lieberman 10.

³¹⁷ Rothenberg 12.

Suicide for Me: the Liberating Work of Suicide

In the opening chapter to *Leaving You* entitled “Defiant Death,”³¹⁸ Lieberman wrestles with Austrian writer and Holocaust survivor Jean Améry’s violent resentment towards the physicians who “rescued” him after his first suicide attempt: an act which he claimed was not unlike the torture he suffered during his two years at a Nazi death camp. In a 1976 German radio address Améry relayed his feelings regarding this “injustice” done to him and additionally lamented the impossibility of “true liberation” in life. Améry succeeded in his second suicide attempt via overdose of prescription drugs two years later on October, 17 1978.³¹⁹ Guided by the content and tone of Améry’s aggressively philosophical radio addresses, Lieberman argues: “Améry’s suicide was meant as a statement, a personal declaration of independence. . . . He knew there was no such thing as absolute freedom.”³²⁰ Lieberman continues:

We are all constrained by birth and upbringing, customs, laws, and the day-to-day compromises we make in the course of a lifetime. (...) He (Améry) refused to live with the constraints composed by society, refused to compromise his integrity for the sake of others. . . . Only by voluntarily choosing to die could he resolve the impossible contradictions of his life. Suicide was not an act of self-annihilation, in his view, a passive succumbing to grief or despair; it was an active assertion of identity. ‘I die, therefore I am,’ he announced without a trace of irony.³²¹

Lieberman haunts us with Améry’s concluding remarks in his final radio address, “So farewell. I belong finally to myself.”³²² Is suicide the ultimate stamp of self-identification? Rather than engage with the systems that be, self-murders abandon the

³¹⁸ Lieberman 3-37.

³¹⁹ Lieberman 6.

³²⁰ Lieberman 4-5.

³²¹ Lieberman 5.

³²² Lieberman 6.

system (and all other material systems) totally. Suicide thrives on an omnipresent obsession with self-evaluation.

Suicide relieves the relentless struggle for identity and accompanying compulsive-consumption of oneself. Specifically, suicide halts the constant debate regarding how one will choose to engage with the onslaught of signs that forcibly try to define an individual throughout the course of daily life. Like, Améry, Kane also rejected subscribing to public definitions of who she should be. In response to a request to do publicity for *Crave* Kane reportedly “snarled, ‘I’m not a brand. I’m a person.’”³²³ If, like Kane, one has chosen to ferociously take on these “life forces that define,” the possibility of over-consuming and being consumed by these battles is likely. Life becomes the constant negotiation of competing signs as well as significance assigning. Most of us accept some sort of complacency in at least one or two areas of the constant identity negotiation we all experience. In our mental shorthand, we may accept the popular significance of “mother” and “educated,” but combat the generally assumed significance of “woman” or “American.” However, if a person chooses to combat all possibly assigned signs and their significance at all times, to in effect become obsessed or consumed by the signification of these labels, or more accurately the forcing of these labels upon her, she will suffocate. Recall Kane’s quote wherein she states, “(depression is) about being so full that everything cancels itself out.”³²⁴ In this light, suicide becomes one of a variety of options used to combat the perceived oppression. In 4.48 Kane guides us through the moments *before*

³²³Mark Ravenhill, “Sarah Kane,” obituary, *Independent* [London] 23 Feb.1999, Tuesday Review ed.: 6.

³²⁴“The Late Sarah Kane”.

the making this choice. She takes us through the experience of being “so full” with over-diagnoses both within and without the mental-health world. *4.48* actively challenges sloppy diagnoses and lends insight into the experience of mental-illness in an effort to reclaim rightful recognition within “sane” society, while questioning assumed definitions of sanity and its prescriptions in the first place. Ideally, an alignment with *4.48* would work through these oppressions and towards relief for the bricoleur(s) other than suicide. Suicide relieved Kane of her life however it does not relieve *4.48* from its need for alliance and a re-inspiration in production: the center remains empty and its tool-bag ready for a rebuilding project.

Working through the Words in *4.48*

In a 1998 article for *The Guardian*, Kane states, “Theatre has no memory, which makes it the most existential of the arts.”³²⁵ In this quote Kane supports the idea of theatre as a clean slate that is wiped clean with each production. But is it just wishful thinking? Does theatre really have, “no memory?” Certainly the previous discussion of theatrical-bricolage assumes some sort of residual fingerprints from the series of bricoleurs that preceded the current bricolage. Furthermore, anyone who has had to strike a stage set post-production can relate to the exhaustive process of trying to return a theatre space to “neutral”: like textual palimpsests, residue is inevitable. It is also kind of exciting: Archeologists make their living excavating what was “missed” or “left behind” at various sites. This residue provides more points to plot when trying to chart a largely unknown narrative: little gems in a business of uncertain prospecting. As a theatre artist, it is fun to return to a theatre space and see reminders

³²⁵ Sarah Kane, “The Only Thing I Remember is...,” *Guardian* 13 Aug 1998: 12.

of the impression that you made during a previous production: it's why we carve our names into trees or on the back of stage walls, as it were.³²⁶ It declares to others as well as to ourselves: "We were here." To use words from *4.48*:

the only thing that's permanent is destruction
we're all going to disappear
trying to leave a mark more permanent than myself³²⁷

These acts provide a sense of permanency in the otherwise transitory space of theatre. This transiency masquerades as a lack of memory. However, memory does not have to be so explicit: it ebbs and flows as needed. Furthermore, even if theatre has no memory, per se, theatre-goers do. Herein lay the opportunity to bank on that memory, to expand on an already established common ground: i.e. a previously produced text. Often, we as theatre-goers see "new" productions of texts we have already seen in production, or at least productions of texts whose authors with whom we are familiar. It is into this practice of re-production and re-staging that Kane's texts thrive. *4.48* in particular benefits immensely from not only re-negotiating the social and cultural climate that surrounds the production history of the text, but by returning to the text itself. The following analysis looks to redirect the astutely painful, often humorous, and consistently unnerving narrative of *4.48* towards future modes of inquiry and alignment that work to deconstruct the sane/insane binary in any one of life's circumstances.

4.48 embraces an untraditional theatric form and more closely resembles poetry on the page in form, rhythm, and cadence. Beyond the omission of traditional dramatic conventions such as characters, stage directions, and act/scene numbering,

³²⁶ Not necessarily based on personal experience.

³²⁷ Kane, *4.48* 241.

the lines and words themselves seem to perform on the page via their enigmatic spacing, inconsistent use of punctuation, and visual picture they create. Borrowing from Artaud, Kane works to create word images that can (re)present the images of her mind. Of this particular interest with Artaud, debut director of *4.48*, Macdonald states, “There’s one particular letter where he (Artaud) says he needed his writing to take a form on the page which reflected directly what was happening inside his head. That’s exactly what Sarah was doing with *4.48 Psychosis*.”³²⁸ To clarify in Lévi-Strauss’s terms, Kane acted as the bricoleur who worked with what she had to make it do what it had not previously done. However, her method or her personal realizations afforded by the use of these tools (her private bricolage) are unknowable to us via the text: in fact the problematic assumption that knowledge of the suicide equates to “knowing” *4.48* forms the crux of the discriminatory fusion that stifles and limits *4.48* in production. Macdonald elaborates:

As for the suicide note question, Sarah wrote the play over quite a long period of time, and I think it wasn’t necessarily going to be a play that described a path that led to suicide, although in the end that was how she chose to structure it. I think she set out simply to describe her ‘illness’ experientially—and to find a theatrical form which would mirror this experience. As to whether the play is affirmative—I do think it is, curiously, maybe because there’s such life and passion in that voice, even though she’s telling you how she arrived a point where she couldn’t find a reason to live.³²⁹

Here again we see the true purpose of the bricoleur’s work: to understand him or herself. Kane intentionally did not leave us with a detailed description of the

³²⁸ James Macdonald, “Conversation with James Macdonald: 8 August 2000,” *‘Love me or kill me’: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, by Graham Saunders (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002) 123.

³²⁹ Macdonald, “Conversation” 125.

understanding she did or did not gain through her work as bricoleur. What she has left us is this precarious arrangement of tools in her text. We are left to decipher our own user's manual.

Though unorthodox in terms of form for a dramatic text, Kane does infuse a rhyme and reason into 4.48 that points towards translation to the stage. However, this translation depends on an alliance with an outside contributing narrative through which these nuances can be performed. The contributing narrative provides the reader/performer with a filter, per se, through which s/he can decipher the textual images and translate them to the audience. It goes without saying that these translations will (and should) vary with each production and emphases on "getting it right" (as per the text) will come up short. The slippery multiplicity of this text demands that commitment to the alliance must foreground commitment to the text. The alliance considers the text, but pushes towards a goal achieved only in performance.

Please fill out this form then have a seat. The Doctor will be with you shortly.

There seems to be three "forms" oscillating throughout this text: brief, unpunctuated, and fragmented lines, reminiscent of an interior monologue; dialogue between two people (emulating doctor/patient relationship) demarked by singular hyphens at the beginning of each line that seem to indicate a change in speaker; and punctuated lines of varying lengths similar in content and form to a letter or written correspondence of some sort. The "scenes" are divided by five hyphens (_ _ _ _ _) centered on the page. In light of this, one must ask, "For whom is this word art on the page intended?" obviously a reader, but a reader/performer as well? If so, how far does

this intention extend out to the audience? These are in fact the “tools” left by Kane to future bricoleurs. Some productions choose to project certain pages from the text onto a screen or the stage itself for the audience to view directly (passing the “reader/performer” buck so to speak), while others attempt a more artistic interpretation that works to capture what the reader/performer(s) feel the text is performing. Regardless, it becomes clear that this text demands a contributing narrative with which to align and concretely sort through these textual images. It is beyond the scope of this project to decipher all possible contributing narratives for this text: in fact, I would like to believe that the options are numerous and exceed my best brainstorming efforts. However, what can be undertaken is a careful analysis of the opportunities or tools Kane leaves in this text: those things with which a potential contributing narrative can align to perform. Likewise, I offer an analysis of *4.48* in production, both as a one-woman show starring French siren Isabelle Huppert (Paris, 2002; U.S., 2005) and by the Free Theater of Belarus (2005) evaluating their respective successes as well as areas in which I feel an alliance with a more provocative contributing narrative could have allowed the text further development.

“Words, Words, Words, I’m So Sick of Words.”³³⁰

In *4.48* Kane presents unwavering criticism of the mental health profession coupled with a devastating confession of heart-break and loneliness and takes us right to the edge of ourselves. The simplicity of the convictions in this text cut to the core as Kane leaves us a set of tools aimed at (though not definitively) a deeply complex and

³³⁰ Alan Jay Lerner, “Show Me,” perf. Audrey Hepburn and Jeremy Brett, *My Fair Lady*, dir. George Cukor, Warner Brothers, 1964.

upsetting search for self: self-love, self-acceptance, and self-acknowledgment. For example, a brief two page section of *4.48* includes 29 short lines that begin with the word, “I” and belie some self-perceived deficiency (e.g. “I am sad” “I would like to kill myself” “I am fat” “I cannot be alone” “I can’t be with others”).³³¹ This scene ends with the following.³³²

Some will call this self-indulgence
 (they are lucky no to know its truth)
 Some will know the simple fact of pain

This is becoming my normality³³³

These lines recast seeming self-obsession as endurance. Throughout the entire text, the “this” that these lines reference (i.e. “Some will call *this* self-indulgence”) remains elusive. The circumstantial alliance with Kane’s suicide assumes that the “this” is the text of *4.48* and that the speaker is Kane posthumously talking to her critics. However, by splitting apart the pairing of Kane’s suicide and *4.48*, “this” once again becomes elusive and thus primed to be aligned with new meaning and purpose. Specifically, when conceived in a slightly broader sense, these words on the page provide palpable insight into the isolating experience of mental-illness, its treatment (both clinically and socially), and its conclusions.

In one of the most poignant (and unfortunately hilarious) scenes of the entire text, Kane doubles up on the artifice when she uses her dark humor and scrupulous attention to detail to unpack the seemingly random and ultimately “artificial”

³³¹ Kane, *4.48* 206-08.

³³² Rather than adhere totally to MLA guidelines regarding quoting from plays, in this chapter I have tried to reproduce the unpunctuated, fragmented, and stylized formatting of *4.48* to the best of my ability.

³³³ Kane, *4.48* 208.

administration of medication for mental illness. Not only are the drugs artificially triggering responses in the patient's body, but the arbitrary nature of the treatment itself seems steeped in artifice. The medication history Kane recreates in this scene points towards a crude mass-treatment for "mental illness" at large rather than a respectful appraisal and treatment for the individual conditions of each person. More than any other scene, this one unabashedly challenges the question of "who or what" is insane: the patient or the treatment. As usual for this text this "scene" deviates from traditional dramatic form. The scene reads as follows:

Symptoms: Not eating, not sleeping, not speaking, no sex drive, in despair, wants to die.

Diagnosis: Pathological grief.

Sertraline, 50mg. Insomnia worsened, severe anxiety, anorexia, (weight loss 17 kgs,) increase in suicidal thoughts, plans and intention. Discontinued following hospitalization.

Zopiclone, 7.5 mg. Slept. Discontinued following rash. Patient attempted to leave hospital against medical advice. Restrained by three male nurses twice her size. Patient threatening and uncooperative. Paranoid thoughts—believes the hospital staff are attempting to poison her.

Melleril, 50 mg. Co-operative.

Lofepamine, 70mg, increased to 140mg, then 210 mg. Weight gain 12 kgs. Short term memory loss. No other reaction.

Argument with junior doctor whom she accused of treachery after which she shaved her head and cut her arms with a razor blade.

Patient discharged into the care of the community on arrival of acutely psychotic patient in emergency clinic in greater need of hospital bed.

Citalopram, 20mg. Morning tremors. No other reaction.

Lofepamine and Citalopram discontinued after patient got pissed off with side affects and lack of obvious improvement. Discontinuation symptoms: Dizziness and confusion. Patient kept falling over, fainting and walking out in front of cars. Delusional ideas—believes consultant is the antichrist.

Fluoxetine hydrochloride, trade name Prozac, 20 mg, increased to 40 mg. Insomnia, erratic appetite, (weight loss 14 kgs,) severe anxiety, unable to reach orgasm, homicidal thoughts towards several doctors and drug manufacturers. Discontinued.

Mood: Fucking angry.
Affect: Very angry.

Thorazine, 100mg. Slept. Calmer.

Venlafaxine, 75mg, increased to 150mg, then 225mg. Dizziness, low blood pressure, headaches. No other reaction. Discontinued.

Patient declined Seroxat. Hypochondria—cites spasmodic blinking and severe memory loss as evidence of tardive dyskinesia and tardive dementia.

Refused all further treatment.

100 aspirin and one bottle of Bulgarian Cabernet Sauvignon, 1986. Patient woke in a pool of vomit and said ‘Sleep with a dog and rise full of fleas.’ Severe stomach pain. No other reaction.³³⁴

The form of this scene, literally a list of medical treatment, posits the question of “performing” sanity as well as treatment. As theatrical tools, they allow the reader/performer to work through them and with them to establish a greater understanding of what it means to act “normally” and the absolute lunacy of a this history of medical treatment.

³³⁴ Kane, 4.49, 223-25.

In a similar vein, throughout 4.48 Kane takes on the “performance” of depression and the resulting “performance” of treatment by the mental health provider that seems steeped in mutual misunderstanding. In the following scene the “depressed” patient, appearing focused and aware not mentally lethargic or stereotypically morose, challenges the notion of depression as constant and omnipotent:

- Do you despise all unhappy people or is it me specifically?
- I don't despise you. It's not your fault. You're ill.
- I don't think so.
- No?
- No. I'm depressed. Depression is anger. It's what you did, who was there and who you're blaming.
- And who are you blaming?
- Myself.³³⁵

While the patient in the above scene professes self-awareness, even so far as to more accurately describe his/her mental state than the “doctor,” the “doctor” still assumes the superior position. The phrase “It's not your fault” cycles throughout the text and in doing so maddeningly robs the person diagnosed with mental illness not only of agency, but of consequences and retribution as well. The following lines humorously dramatize this point:

It's not your fault, that's all I ever hear, it's not your fault, it's an illness, it's not your fault, I know it's not my fault. You've told me that so often I'm beginning to think it *is* my fault.³³⁶

This denial of intentionality by the mental health profession and community at large plagues the person diagnosed as mentally ill. The diagnosis reassigns agency to “the

³³⁵ Kane, 4.48 212.

³³⁶ Kane, 4.48 220.

illness” rather than the person. In the following scene, the “patient” screams for acknowledgement while the “doctor” remains stuck in diagnosis-paralysis:

- Oh dear, what’s happened to your arm?
- I cut it.
- That’s a very immature, attention seeking thing to do. Did it give you relief?
- No.
- Did it relieve the tension?
- No.
- Did it give you relief?
- (*Silence.*)
- Did it give you relief?
- No.
- I don’t understand why you did this.
- Then ask.
- Did it relieve the tension?
- (*A long silence.*)
- Can I look?
- No.
- I’d like to look, to see if it’s infected.
- No.
- (*Silence.*)
- I thought you might do this. Lots of people do. It relieves the tension.
- Have you ever done it?
- ...
- No. Far too fucking sane and sensible. I don’t know where you read that, but it does not relieve the tension.
- (*Silence.*)
- Why don’t you ask me *why*?
- Why did I cut my arm?
- Would you like to tell me?
- Yes.
- Then tell me.
- ASK.
- ME.
- WHY.
- (*A long silence.*)
- Why did you cut your arm?
- Because it feels fucking great. Because it feels fucking amazing.
- Can I look?
- You can look. But don’t touch.

- (*Looks*) And you don't think you're ill?
- No.
- I do. It's not your fault. But you have to take responsibility for your own actions. Please don't do it again.³³⁷

Here again, the line "It's not your fault" robs the person diagnosed as mentally ill of the capacity for conscious intentionality. In a similar scene that precedes the previous one, "the patient" again argues for recognition of calculated intentionality rather than sporadic emotionality in the "mentally ill" person:

- Have you made any plans?
 - Take an overdose, slash my wrists then hang myself.
 - All those things together?
 - It couldn't possibly be misconstrued as a cry for help.
- (*Silence.*)
- It wouldn't work.
 - Of course it would.
 - It wouldn't work. You'd start to feel sleepy from the overdose and wouldn't have the energy to cut your wrists.
- (*Silence.*)
- I'd be standing on a chair with a noose around my neck.³³⁸

In addition to positing suicide as a completely premeditated and determined act, this scene also demonstrates Kane's sharply bleak humor which in this text momentarily distances the audience, in the Brechtian sense, from the narrative on stage. Kane uses irony to reveal the artifice of the storytelling taking place and reminds the audience members to reposition themselves as active listeners aligned with, but not fused with, the performance.

Throughout 4.48 Kane repeatedly returns to the double-edged sword of mental health medication and enacts the agonizing question of whether the supposed benefits of these drugs outweigh the possible side-effects. Ultimately, this task seems to be

³³⁷ Kane, 4.48 216-18.

³³⁸ Kane, 4.48 210.

choosing between the lesser of two evils. Consider the ironic truth in these two appeals: “Please. Don’t switch off my mind by attempting to straighten me out. Listen and understand, and when you feel contempt don’t express it, at least not verbally, at least not to me.”³³⁹ And, “There’s not a drug on earth can make life meaningful.”³⁴⁰ Both lines indicate a yearning for connection and consequential human interaction, however, in both instances drugs presumably would work as a substitute human relationship. This flagrant diagnosis and treatment has the potential to help some people, however, it also threatens to numb out some inconvenient truths. In the following scene, the “patient” struggles with the decision to intentionally submit to medication that can potentially desensitize him/her. Here again Kane utilizes ironic humor to draw attention to her larger point:

- I won’t be able to think. I won’t be able to work.
- Nothing will interfere with your work like suicide.

(Silence.)

- I dreamt I went to the doctor’s and she gave me eight minutes to live. I’d been sitting in the fucking waiting room half an hour.

(A long silence.)

Okay, let’s do it, let’s do the drugs, let’s do the chemical lobotomy, let’s shut down the higher functions of my brain and perhaps I’ll be a bit more fucking capable of living.

Let’s do it.³⁴¹

Ultimately the “patient” agrees to medication on the presupposition that it will make him/her less receptive to the less desirable conditions of life; be sure, these

³³⁹ Kane, 4.48 220.

³⁴⁰ Kane, 4.48 220.

³⁴¹ Kane, 4.48 221.

medications will not eliminate these social ills, just lesson their effects on us. Is ignorance really bliss? As one line succinctly ponders: “I never understood/what is it I’m not supposed to feel.”³⁴² Essentially, this text questions the benefits of medication as emotional balm.

In her book, *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (1993), Kay Redfield Jamison speaks directly to the uneasy relationship between artists and mental health medication:

Some artists resist entirely the idea of taking medication to control their mood swings and behaviors; interestingly, however, there is some evidence that, as a group, artists and writers disproportionately seek out psychiatric care. . . . Other writers and artist stop taking their medications because they miss the highs or the emotional intensity associated with their illness, or because they feel that drug side effects interfere with the clarity and rapidity of their thought or diminish their levels of enthusiasm, emotion, and energy.³⁴³

In a 1998 interview with Kane, Nils Tabert concurred, “I think schizophrenia is something really healthy sometimes.” Kane agreed:

That’s what I think, too. Sounds very odd, though. And also I think depression is quite a healthy state of being because all it reflects is a completely realistic perception of what’s going on. (laughs) I think to a certain degree you have to deaden your ability to feel and perceive. In order to function you have to cut out at least one part of your mind. Otherwise you’d be chronically sane in a society which is chronically insane. I mean look at Artaud. That’s your choice: Go mad and die or function but be insane. What is actually insane?³⁴⁴

Kane leaves us the tools in 4.48 to work out the “benefits” of medicated versus un-medicated suffering, so we can evaluate this “choice” for ourselves. In doing so, can

³⁴² Kane, 4.48 239.

³⁴³ Kay Redfield Jamison, *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993) 7-8.

³⁴⁴ Kane, interview with Tabert.

we help but ask, “What would I want if it were me?” Here again, we see evidence that the bricoleur sets out to discover more about him/herself than the text.

In the previous scene mental health treatment begins to resemble a dance between to unlikely partners, a give and take of unrehearsed steps wherein one partner simply responds to the other and the articulation of a goal is lost. In *4.48*, Kane often likens the experience of mental illness, its diagnoses, its manifestations, and its treatment to a hesitant dance that sways back and forth but does not progress. Often in this text, both partners “dance” within the same person resulting in anguishing limbo:

I do not want to die

I have become so depressed by the fact of my mortality that I
have decided to commit suicide

I do not want to live³⁴⁵

In this scene the two convictions, “I do not want to die” and “I do not want to live,” strain in opposite directions. A later line laments, “And this is the rhythm of madness.”³⁴⁶ The idea of rhythm and an ebb and flow to mental illness works to alleviate the finality associated with a diagnosis of mental illness. For example, at one point the line, “After *4.48* I shall not speak again”³⁴⁷ haunts the reader and reader/performer with frightening images of a final silence. However, a later scene returns to this same point and seem to offer a less finite resolution:

I thought I should never speak again
But now I know there is something blacker than desire
perhaps it will save me

³⁴⁵ Kane, *4.48* 207.

³⁴⁶ Kane, *4.48* 227.

³⁴⁷ Kane, *4.48* 213.

perhaps it will kill me³⁴⁸

Though seemingly benign, the word choice of “perhaps” signifies a huge amount in terms of mental illness, particularly depression. “Perhaps” signifies options and can work to lessen stigmatization by recognizing all mental health diagnoses as moveable points on the spectrum of mental illness. This “perhaps” illuminates the alternative to isolation imposed on the mentally ill person both by hegemonic ideals and the person “hermsself.”³⁴⁹

The obsession with the unique predicament of oneself unifies the narrative in 4.48 and peppered throughout this lamentation is the frank discussion of suicide. This text contemplates the complexity of suicide and re-situates it as a scarily logical conclusion. In the following lines, the speaker laments a personal void:

I can fill my space
Fill my time
But nothing can fill this void in my heart

The vital need for which I would die
Breakdown³⁵⁰

Despair propels me to suicide
Anguish for which doctors can find no cure
Nor care to understand
I hope you never understand
Because I like you³⁵¹

In addition to these lines, Kane includes a definitive refusal of forensic inquiry that works to claim for the self-murderer the identity of victor rather than victim:

Please don't cut me up to find out how I died
I'll tell you how I died

³⁴⁸ Kane, 4.48 226-27.

³⁴⁹ Kane, 4.48 205. Kane neologism.

³⁵⁰ Kane, 4.48 219.

³⁵¹ Kane, 4.48 239.

One hundred Lofepamine, forty five Zopiclone, twenty five
Temazepam, and twenty Melleril

Everything I had
Swallowed
Slit
Hung³⁵²

In this instance the intentionality of death plays with the irony of method: the self-murder aims to commit suicide utilizing the very medications meant to alleviate his/her desire to do so. However, perhaps that is the point: once all the medication is consumed, then the patient is “free” or “cured” of their perceived suffering in life. In this vein, Kane seems to be imagining a rather romantic death in the following phrases:

the capture
the rapture
the rupture
of a soul³⁵³

For Kane, the self-discoveries via her private bricolage that resulted in this text cannot be reclaimed. However, as they are in the text, these tools elude specific direction but allude to a framework of sentiment. Subjective supplementing into this framework will allow for new discoveries of meaning and purpose: and this we can claim.

The contribution Kane makes via *4.48* in terms of humanizing and “sanitizing” (i.e. making sane) suicidal thoughts cannot be overlooked. Despite this I do not believe that a performance alliance with this text which culminates in suicide or an advocacy for suicide ultimately satisfies this point. As the previous discussion of the bricoleur and his/her tools suggests, the business of production of one of Kane’s texts

³⁵² Kane, *4.48* 241.

³⁵³ Kane, *4.48* 242.

in particular is not realization of an “end goal,” but the realization of self while pursuing that goal. The “goal” in this sense being no more or less incidental to this process than the tools of the text. Lévi-Strauss clarifies this point, “Once it materializes the project will therefore inevitably be a remove from the initial aim (which was moreover a mere sketch), a phenomenon which the surrealists have felicitously called ‘objective hazard.’”³⁵⁴ The suicidal meditations within this text progress throughout and thus, detail more a story of endurance and desire for understanding rather than suicide itself. I maintain that *4.48* is a text to work *through* and thus, cathartically speaking, an alliance that pushes towards something other than suicide can likewise work to further de-stigmatize suicidal thoughts and by extension mental-illness.

In an ironic nod to “process,” Kane offered the following take on suicide:

I just met someone who has taken God knows how many overdoses and has attempted suicide in almost every imaginable way. She has a huge scar round here (points to her throat) and scars round here (points to wrists). But actually she’s more connected with herself than most people I know. I think in that moment when she slashes herself, when she takes an overdose, suddenly she’s connected and then wants to live. And so she takes herself to the hospital. Her life is an ongoing stream of suicide attempts which she then revokes. And yes, there’s something really awful about that but I can understand it very well. It makes sense to me.³⁵⁵

For Kane, this person discovered an urgency to live through the urgency to die. She engaged in a sort of “catharsis in extremis” in which she discovered herself: quite the zealous bricoleur as it were. Kane echoes this commitment to process, to the repeated evaluation and re-evaluation of the tools as well as to the deconstruction of the

³⁵⁴ Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind* 21. His parenthetical.

³⁵⁵ Kane, interview with Tabert.

assumed conclusions these tools best work towards. In is in the work that the bricoleur can discover him/herself. The following section examines the theatric work of Isabelle Huppert in her one-woman production of *4.48* as well as The Free Theater of Belarus's production of the same text.

Psychosis into *Psychose*³⁵⁶: *4.48* in Production

"I became an actress because there was something missing in me. Something is always missing otherwise I'd stop."—Isabelle Huppert, 2005³⁵⁷

For all the public and private questions *4.48* insights on the page, its translation onto the stage in production best exemplifies its potential for poignant and provocative drama. If we accept that during the process of a bricolage-esque theatric production the reader/performer/bricoleur discovers him/herself while in pursuit of *another* goal (i.e. *not* the explicit discovery of self), what happens when a production sets gratuitous self appraisal *as* the goal rather than a product of the process? Can one discover themselves while in pursuit of discovering themselves? This seems logical if not redundant however, when analyzed a bit more in depth, this goal of self-discovery (in other words, the contributing narrative: "what does it mean to be me?") ironically impedes the process of self-discovery and defaults to narcissism, which does little to expand the dramatic text in a new direction. Case in point is Claude Régy's direction of Isabelle Huppert in a one-woman international touring performance of *4.48*.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ *4.48 Psychose*, by Sarah Kane, trans. Evelyne Piessler, dir. Claude Régy, perf. Isabelle Huppert, Les Ateliers Contemporains, Theatre des Bouffes du Nord, Paris: 1 Oct- 9 Nov 2002.

³⁵⁷ Isabelle Huppert qtd in "The Ice Queen Shatters: Isabelle Huppert Breaks Down (in French, No Less)," by Ginia Bellafante, *New York Times*, Sunday ed., 16 Oct 2005: 7+.

³⁵⁸ It is worth noting here that James Macdonald's direction of *4.48*'s 2000 world premiere included three actors (two female and one male), as did his 2004 restaging of *4.48* in Los Angeles. The casting is

Régy first directed Huppert in this role (he considered no other actress for the role)³⁵⁹ in 2002 for his theatre company, Les Ateliers Contemporains, at Paris's Theatre des Bouffes du Nord.³⁶⁰ The production used Kane's text as translated into French by Evelyne Peiller (*4.48 Psychose*). After having seen this production in Paris, executive director of Brooklyn Academy of Music, Joseph V. Melillo, invited Régy's production starring Huppert to perform at the Brooklyn Academy and requested they retain the French text, despite the English-dominant audience likely to attend.³⁶¹ Régy and Huppert accepted. Before opening in New York, *4.48 Psychose* made its U.S. debut as part of the UCLA Live series at the Freud Playhouse in Los Angeles, running for five shows from 5-9 October, 2005.³⁶² The UCLA Live audience retained some familiarity with this text, as one year earlier (2004) it hosted Macdonald's restaging of his production of *4.48*, wherein he used the same actor configuration (two female actors and one male actor) and staging (including a large, inverted mirror hanging over the stage) as he had in his 2000 world premiere of the text at the Royal Court in London.³⁶³ In her *New York Times* article on Régy's UCLA Live production, Ginia Bellafante (having interviewed Huppert from New York by phone while Huppert was still in LA) stated that Huppert had felt the LA premiere

open-ended for this text and I have come across everything from one-woman shows to casts of 4-5 actors of varying genders. However, I have yet to come across a one-*man* version of this show.

³⁵⁹ Ginia Bellafante, "The Ice Queen Shatters: Isabelle Huppert Breaks Down (in French, No Less)," *New York Times*, Sunday ed., 16 Oct 2005: 7+.

³⁶⁰ *4.48 Psychose*, Paris.

³⁶¹ Bellafante.

³⁶² *4.48 Psychose*, by Sarah Kane, trans. Evelyne Peiller, dir. Claude Régy, perf. Isabelle Huppert, UCLA Live, Freud Playhouse, Los Angeles: 5-9 Oct 2005.

³⁶³ *4.48 Psychosis*, by Sarah Kane, dir. James Macdonald, perf. Jason Hughes, Marin Ireland, and Jo McInnes, Royal Court, Freud Playhouse, Los Angeles: 7 Nov 2004.

went well, “the audience having retreated into a deep and extended silence.”³⁶⁴ After the LA run, *4.48 Psychose* moved on to make its New York debut at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, running from 19-30 October at the Harvey Theater.³⁶⁵

In 2005, both the *Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times* ran articles featuring interviews with Huppert on her role in *4.48*. The first was by Kristin Hohenadel, who interviewed Huppert in Paris for the *Los Angeles Times* approximately two weeks prior to the L.A. debut.³⁶⁶ Then Bellafante’s aforementioned article, featuring her phone interview with Huppert, ran in *The New York Times* three days prior to Huppert’s New York debut.³⁶⁷ In both interviews, Huppert stoicism and detachment regarding this role come across as unnerving. Hohenadel quotes Huppert as saying: “It’s never hard to play a role that is difficult to watch. I’m obliged to maintain a certain distance. It’s the spectator who is totally thrown off balance, more than me, in the end. Happily.”³⁶⁸ Here, Huppert seemingly admits that she routinely limits the investment of herself in performance, rather she invests us.³⁶⁹ She invites us to do the bricolage work. In fact, executive director Melillo sent a letter to ticketholders alerting them to the starkness of Kane’s text as well as the intended sparse use of English subtitles set to accompany the French production.³⁷⁰ Certainly, as audience members we are always called upon to do a certain amount of bricolage.

³⁶⁴ Bellafante.

³⁶⁵ *4.48 Psychose*, by Sarah Kane, trans. Evelyne Pieiller, dir. Claude Régy, perf. Isabelle Huppert, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Harvey Theater, New York: 19-30 Oct 2005.

³⁶⁶ Kristin Hohenadel, “The Pleasure, the Pain: A Daring Play on Suicide Holds a Strenuous Challenge for Isabelle Huppert. She Loves That.” *Los Angeles Times*, 25 Sep 2005, Sunday ed.: E32.

³⁶⁷ Bellafante.

³⁶⁸ Huppert qtd. in Hohenadel.

³⁶⁹ Huppert is certainly not the first actor to subscribe to this method. Laurence Olivier famously stated, “Acting is illusion, as much illusion as magic is, and not so much a matter of being real.”

³⁷⁰ Charles Isherwood, “Existentialist Musings, Clinically Pondered in French,” *New York Times on the Web*: 21 Oct 2005 <<http://theater2.nytimes.com/2005/10/21/theater/reviews/21psyc.html>>.

However, can we not be offended if we are asked to work with tools the actor (the assumed bricoleur) deemed not necessary to dirty her hands with? In this instance it seems that Huppert daintily handed the tools left by Kane in her text over to the audience, having only slightly used them herself: Sort of like your prissy aunt at Thanksgiving who will smile stiffly as she passes you the mashed potatoes at dinner, but who would not dare to put any on her plate. Likewise, Huppert does not reveal any more than her revered façade.



Fig. 3.1: Isabelle Huppert in 2005 production of *4.48 Psychose*, directed by Claude Régy, “a meditation on suicide” in Brooklyn, New York.³⁷¹

Despite this, I am not suggesting that investing a contributing narrative into the production of *4.48* and the exhaustive process of method acting³⁷² are one in the same, although they can be. Huppert has been quite lauded for her refined acting technique

³⁷¹ Pascal Victor, photograph, “The Ice Queen Shatters: Isabelle Huppert Breaks Down (in French, No Less),” by Ginia Bellafante, *New York Times*, Sunday ed., 16 Oct 2005: 7+.

³⁷² S. Loraine Hull, *Strasberg's Method As Taught by Lorrie Hull: A Practical Guide for Actors, Teachers, Directors* (Santa Barbara: Hull-Smithers, 2004).

and I do not mean to question her craft in general for certainly, Huppert's style works well with a variety of other dramatic texts. However, I do feel that the lack of contributing narrative from either Huppert or Régy in their production of *4.48* (personal or otherwise) leaves the performance a bit unresolved and without a strong point of view. Without a contributing narrative with which to align and work, the performance of this text tends to over-lament Kane's suicide, which I feel is a step backwards, and of course, offensive to Kane as it allows her suicide to overshadow her work.

Regarding Kane, Huppert stated, "I wanted to see what she looked like."³⁷³ In fact, Huppert's costume for *4.48* consisted of, "black leather pants, a T-shirt and sneakers—and plain hair and make-up... meant to reflect Kane's rocker sensibility and sexual ambiguity, themes that run through her work."³⁷⁴ Similarly, Huppert committed to an extremely reduced movement vocabulary: "She stands virtually still and often alone on a bright stage for two uninterrupted hours, exploring a poetic landscape of mental illness, sexual ambiguity, suicide and death."³⁷⁵ Supposedly intended to reflect, "The inner strength of a lucid and implacable confrontation with death and the strength to make that confrontation a public one,"³⁷⁶ this production aims to (re)present Régy and Huppert's understanding of Kane's inner psyche and ultimately attempts to stage Kane's bricolage (private discovery of self) rather than participate in a renegotiation or bricolage with the dramatic tools of their own. Ultimately, as the director Régy does not seem to be interested in doing anything other than celebrating

³⁷³ Huppert qtd. in Hohenadel.

³⁷⁴ Hohenadel.

³⁷⁵ Hohenadel.

³⁷⁶ Régy qtd. in Bellafante.

Huppert. Therefore, if our interest lay in the text, can we help but feel cheated?

Regardless, this detachment seems to be part and parcel of Huppert's approach to her craft.

Regarding acting Huppert states:

Do I learn from it? No, I think what I expect from acting is more disappointing. I see it as a form of narcissism, a source of self-expression, a source of pleasure. Lots of actors will have you believe that there is something altruistic about acting, but there's nothing altruistic for me. And I never learn anything about myself. I'm too detached from my work.³⁷⁷

Considering this, theatre critic Charles Isherwood's (otherwise erroneous) lament that, "This is the second production of the play I've seen, and the second to fail to persuade me of its viability as a dramatic text"³⁷⁸ finds legitimate ground.³⁷⁹ Ironically, Isherwood includes a quote from Régy's program note, in which Régy quotes Kane's observation that, "what is much more important of than the content of the play is its form."³⁸⁰ Why, then, did Régy not play with this form or invest in it in any way? To just (re)present it, to just acknowledge the form and regard it from a distance misses the point of theatric alliance totally, thereby ensuring that the death of the text on stage. Huppert (and Régy) seem content to only contribute the gift of "Isabelle Huppert," the public shell of a real person, to their production of *4.48* rather than an honest, viable contributing narrative. Why just ladle artifice upon artifice?

³⁷⁷ Bellafante.

³⁷⁸ Isherwood.

³⁷⁹ Perhaps Isherwood would have a different opinion had he seen the Free Theatre of Belarus's liberating use of *4.48* in their quest for artistic freedom and whose production I discuss in the following paragraphs.

³⁸⁰ Isherwood

Compounding the admitted narcissism of the project, Huppert's run in *4.48* coincided with:

a citywide tribute...the Museum of Modern Art is offering a retrospective of her work that will open with her latest film, "Gabrielle,"...and that will include a number of her films....A new book, "Isabelle Huppert: Woman of Many Faces," is devoted to pictures (of Huppert).... Most of these pictures will be on view at an accompanying exhibition.³⁸¹

Even of this tribute, Huppert remains stoic. She states, "I'm very happy. But when this sort of thing happens it's best to have a certain detachment."³⁸² Detachment apparently best describes Huppert's *modus operandi*.

In response to Kane's request (upheld by her estate overseen by her brother, Simon Kane) that none of her texts be performed for any other medium than the stage to include video-taping staged productions, Huppert laments, "It's a real shame. I wanted to have a trace of myself in this show. But philosophically, I can understand it—the idea that the theater is destined to stay only in the memory, to exist in a more interior form."³⁸³ Having personally performed in a number of productions, I can speak to being able to retain "a trace of myself" in a given show, despite not having a video recording of it. Does Huppert distance herself so much that she relies on outside documentation to remind her of her experience within a production? For what purpose does she desire the video documentation? Aside from materials meant to support a resume (which seems to be of little concern for someone as heralded and established in her field as Huppert), what need does this outside verification serve? For Huppert, perhaps, this arms-length-vanity is her cache. Yet, had she invested in *4.48*, or in any

³⁸¹ Bellafante.

³⁸² Huppert qtd. in Bellafante.

³⁸³ Huppert qtd. in Hohenadel.

artistic bricolage for that matter, perhaps Huppert could offer her audience more than her face.

Regardless of Huppert's professional philosophies (which, again, have afforded her great respect and fame in the film industry), detachment cannot revive *4.48* in production: alliance directly contrasts with this attitude. Isherwood concludes his review stating, "'Just a word on the page and there is the drama,' she (Kane) wrote. But put those words on a stage, and there may be no drama at all." As the word "drama" comes from the Greek word *dran* meaning "to do," Isherwood has a point, for apparently Huppert did not "do" anything. However, contrary to Isherwood's previous lamentation, this points to a flaw in production rather than a shortcoming of Kane's text.

In contrast to the Régy/Huppert production, the Free Theater of Belarus's underground production of *4.48* (2005)³⁸⁴ embodies the power that can manifest when transposing *4.48* for the stage via theatric alliance. This production, which also served as the troupe's debut production, aligned Kane's text with the Free Theater of Belarus's contributing narrative dedicated to challenging state oppression by explicitly exploring Belarusian taboos (which include suicide, sex, and anti-establishment material) as a form of civil protest on the stage.

³⁸⁴ *4.48 Psychosis*, by Sarah Kane, Free Theater of Belarus, Graffiti bar, Minsk: circa 2005.



Fig. 3.2: Actors from the Free Theater of Belarus onstage in *4.48 Psychosis*.³⁸⁵

Steven Lee Myers's article for *The New York Times* on this renegade theatre troupe (which unofficially began 30 March 2005) includes the following history: "More than 14 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its rigid system of imposing ideological conformity across Central and Eastern Europe, the Free Theatre has emerged as a new artistic underground."³⁸⁶ Myers suggests that the plays that the Free Theatre produces, "are not overtly political.... The subtexts, though, are unmistakable in Belarus, a place where public debate—in newspapers, on television—is practically nonexistent." The Free Theater began as a drama competition organized by Nikolai Khalezin and his wife Nataliya Koliada in an effort to cultivate Belarusian writers, which then evolved into a workshop, and then a production company which directly challenges state-controlled art.³⁸⁷ In an interview in Minsk, Khalezin lamented, "Belarus today (in February 2006) is a boiler, with the lid screwed tightly

³⁸⁵ James Hill, photograph, "A Troupe is a Potent Force in Belarus's Underground," by Steven Lee Myers, *New York Times* 9 Feb 2006: B1+.

³⁸⁶ Steven Lee Myers, "A Troupe is a Potent Force in Belarus's Underground," *New York Times* 9 Feb 2006: B1+.

³⁸⁷ Myers.

shut.”³⁸⁸ The Free Theater, especially in its early productions, performed their art in private apartments and pubs, often relying on word-of-mouth advertisement in an effort to avoid prosecution by the state. It is into this climate that 4.48 releases and creates drama on the stage.

Aligned with such a zealous desire for freedom, 4.48 finds a truth and a purpose. Rebellion against the hegemonic ideals of sanity and insanity (in form of mental illness or state-controlled art) unites the alliance between 4.48 and the Free Theater. Via the process of performing, of negotiating the dramatic tools within 4.48 (theatric bricolage), the Free Theater discovers their own strength and resilience for themselves and for their audience. The troupe needs the text and the text needs the troupe to achieve their goal of elucidating the silent fight bubbling within the suppressed person. 4.48 lends the collective voice of the Free Theater a microphone into which they supplement 4.48 with a scream.

The Final Punctuation. 4.48 Psychosis and Intentionality

*There is a particular kind of pain, elation, loneliness and terror involved in this kind of madness.... It will never end, for madness carves its own reality.*³⁸⁹

Ultimately, 4.48 remains restless and in need of constant, urgent action. Kane ends 4.48 with these final lines:

I have no desire for death
no suicide ever had

watch me vanish
watch me
vanish

³⁸⁸ Myers.

³⁸⁹ Kay Redfield Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness* (New York: Vintage, 1997) 67.

watch me
 watch me
 watch

[on facing page]
 It is myself I have never met, whose face is pasted on the
 underside of my mind

[bottom of page]
 Please open the curtains
³⁹⁰
 _ _ _ _ _

To who is “Please open the curtains” intended? Theatrically speaking, this line reads as a stage direction. In the setting of the mental institution, the speaker could be addressing the attending ward. Either way, there exists an appeal to let the outside in: to remove the line of demarcation between inside and outside. Interestingly, Kane does not include “the final period/the final full stop”³⁹¹ after this line, instead she includes her indicator of a scene change: _ _ _ _ _ . The scene ended, but the sentence has not. I take this as an invitation to continue her work’s life. Let Kane rest in peace, but let the work continue to fight for alliance.

³⁹⁰ Kane, *4.48* 244-45.

³⁹¹ Kane, *4.48* 243.

Conclusion: (R)Evolving Kane

Risk! Risk anything! Care no more for the opinion of others, for those voices. Do the hardest thing on earth for you. Act for yourself. Face the truth.—Katherine Mansfield, 1927³⁹²

Sarah Kane took risks. She did what she was not supposed to do: she cooked up a “disgusting feast of filth.” Even more disconcerting to “stiff upper lips” was the fact that she not only refused to clean this mess up, but she never apologized for it. True, her methods of misbehavior changed over the course of her playwriting career (in terms of tone, style, and form), yet we the audience always glimpse her impish grin peeping through her textual façade. Rather than casting herself as the distant, troubled outcast (certainly the media did enough of this) Kane unabashedly invited all theatre practitioners to join in her rebel rousing.

By knowingly constructing dramaturgies that assume their own vulnerability, Kane creates theatre that transcends a particular moment or politic and thus, can continue to momentarily inform audiences. Kane’s texts represent a “textual Constitution” that acknowledge the inability to know everything or speak for future artists. Yet, via their dramaturgical gaps, her texts allow those artists to join a community and a history of experiences thus strengthening, preserving, and fueling their respective voices. In this way, Kane’s texts expect to evolve: to encourage the risks that precede change. As the saying goes, “Nothing changes if nothing changes.” In evolutionary terms, Kane’s texts adapt: but not at the expense of conviction or a

³⁹² Katherine Mansfield, entry for 14 Oct. 1922, *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. J. Middleton Murry (1927; Whitefish: Kessinger, 2003).

point of view. As these texts evolve through various theatric alliances, these texts gain two of life's greatest teachers: time and experience. These two elements transform the knowledge in these texts into wisdom: they transform the ideas into practice.

Kane's texts explore the individual not only as a reservoir or repository of a larger system's point of view but also as an active agent from which change and action can emanate. If we understand Kane's work as fundamentally about the individual agent and his/her quest for progress, then the violence within the work becomes incidental. Kane's texts break open and reveal the various systems of power that influence the daily life of the individual, and uses this as her starting point. She dares to explore another option: the individual who propels active change back at the larger systems. She understands that the system is just that, a system. It does not have a heartbeat. Its center is empty. However, the individual can draw strength from *their* "center" and it is from this reservoir of potential power that Kane tempts the audience. Kane's texts reflect the belief that this inner strength inhabits all people but often needs a reliable outlet. In their unique and scrupulous structures, Kane's texts offer that outlet.

In Michel Foucault's discussion of Jeremy Bentham's *panopticon*, he describes a structure that exudes influence despite its hollow core. In his discussion on "Panopticism," Foucault argues:

The panoptic mechanism...reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions - to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide - it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two.... So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action;...that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the

person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.³⁹³

Like the panopticon the careful arrangement of dramatic structure in Kane's texts ensure their potency and influence. Furthermore, these structures cease to reflect any autonomous merit. Rather they reflect back to us what we believe to be true. The theatre Kane's texts envision behaves like the panopticon, yet it does not accept the privileged position of the surveyor. Kane's theatre presents the position of the "one (who) sees everything without ever being seen," as the most tragic. There is despair in Kane's texts, not because of the violence, but because no one realizes their own power to stop it. Her texts acknowledge that the world can be violent and apathetic. However, they also posit that the world is only that way because we allow it to be so: because *we* are so. Her texts make clear that in which we are complicit and therefore identify that against which we can fight.

Power is a Many-Splendored Thing

In almost every instance of violence within her texts, Kane uses dramatic irony to show us the puppeteer's strings. Sometimes she labels these strings overtly, as in the case of Tinker in *Cleansed*, and sometimes less so as in the case of the omnipotent pressure lurking throughout *Crave*. Kane's texts seek to reveal the hidden systems of power by exploring and often exploding open how they manifest into our everyday lives. Thus, her texts elicit theatre pieces that also question and interrogate "hidden" systems. In Kane's texts, systems of power are revealed to be constructions, not absolutes, which can be deconstructed and re-organized to account for a larger, more

³⁹³Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1975; New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 195-228.

egalitarian, experience. Yet, she does not place the burden of revolution on the person(s) sinking into their respective quicksand. Rather she attacks the viewer (the literal or metaphoric audience) for not extending a stick, or worse yet, for having seen the inevitable doom and choosing not to issue a warning to their fellow human being. I have always viewed the “doors opening” at the end of *4.48 Psychosis* as the ultimate provocation. Kane opens these doors for the audience and in doing so asks, “What are you going to do? What path are you going to take?” These choices demand we recognize our place as privileged “viewers” and argue that if we can recognize our privilege, we must also recognize our responsibility to choose altruistically.

The Eye of the Storm

In Kane’s texts power resembles a chaotic tornado where energy and emotion are swirled up and around an empty center. That empty center is invisible or unseeable to those fighting in, or consumed by, the whirling dervish that is the outside or body of the tornado. Regardless, we believe in the promise that this center exists. In many ways, this is not unlike Foucault’s aforementioned evaluation of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon. However, the tornado assumes a less human-centric origination and, therefore, allows us as human “viewers” to overcome our guilty-conscience paralysis. Thinking of power acting in this way does not inherently suggest a way to stop the tornado, so to speak (an act of God is just that), but it does suggest that those closer to the “eye” (pun intended) can see the tornado for what it is. They do not control it from this position per se, but they do have the most information. The eye contains the requisite components needed to analyze of the rest of the tornado. Armed with this information, those in the privileged seat within the eye can use that

knowledge and information to their advantage. Kane's texts attempt to place the audience in this metaphoric eye of the storm in an effort to encourage a similar analysis. The solace provided by the eye of the tornado is fleeting and equally so in Kane's texts. However, Kane's plays suggest that careful evaluation of the storm can allow the audience to seize their moment of opportunity or intervention on which to capitalize.

Kane takes us through that scary place where one can either acquiesce or resist the momentum of the world around them. To use the tornado analogy once again, we can only escape the storm by entering the all-seeing eye, or by taking shelter, concealing ourselves until the storm has passed. Kane does not deny the danger, risk, and death potential accompanying any journey to the eye, but she offers it as a viable option just the same and thus, an alternative to the status quo. In this way, Kane does not answer, for her audience, what she thinks they should do. She simply points out that they can do something other than hide from that which they most fear.

It is not the violence of human beings that shocked Kane, but rather the lack of accountability for this violence. She does not blame the player or the game, rather the spectator who sits in the point of privilege, if only because they are in the viewing seat outside of the violence/game. She repeatedly reveals characters that could have thrown a wrench into the system of violence around them. However, because of their own limitations, for which ironically Kane does not blame them, they do not intervene. She offers them provocative glimpses into untraditional courses of action but the characters choose what they know, what they find comfort in, and unfortunately this sucks them back up into the storm.

Towards a Prescription for Progress

As audience members, Kane also presents us with uncomfortable choices and she begs us to trust in the risk, to evolve past the current circumstance, if not for ourselves then for our neighbor. In *Leaving You*, Lieberman comments upon Améry's suicide by saying, "He is intent on leaving us, his audience, and I cannot help but feel implicated in his decision."³⁹⁴ This idea of community, of our inextricability from the actions of others, simmers just beneath the surface of Kane's texts. Regardless of the perceived detriment of another's choice (suicide, for example), we are called upon to respond to the best of our ability. In this way, the dialogue provoked by Kane's texts must continue between players and audience members as well as from production to production. Director James Macdonald stated, "But I think in the end, the more different productions the better; it would be awful for there to be an authorised way of doing anyone's plays."³⁹⁵ Macdonald's comment points towards an opportunity to align with Kane's texts and to do so in a completely new and unique way.

The revolving, evolving cycles and palimpsests that carry Kane's texts beyond their debuts characterize the process of progress. These productions resemble less a series of concentric circles and more a stretched out spring loaded with potential. Although the "spring/production" usually snaps back into place once the tension is released, it reverberates: and this small, echoing action is just enough temptation for us to stretch it as far as we can and let it fly one more time.

³⁹⁴ Lieberman 4.

³⁹⁵ Macdonald, "Conversation" 123.

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