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# Violence and Formal Challenge in the Plays of Sarah Kane and Martin Crimp

Diplomová práce

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I declare that the following diploma thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned.

V Praze, dne 28.dubna 2008

Ráda bych poděkovala vedoucí práce, Clare Wallace, PhD., za její neocenitelnou pomoc a čas, který mi věnovala.

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Nemám námitek, aby byla tato má práce využívána ke studijním účelům.  
I have no objections to the diploma thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

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## ***1. Introduction***

This thesis will look at the plays of two contemporary British playwrights, whose names are not often associated: Martin Crimp and Sarah Kane. Both write formally innovative dramas, but their approaches differ: Crimp's ironic detachment seems very far from Kane's passionate involvement. Kane is well-known in the UK and usually perceived as an exponent of the "in-yer-face" dramatic group, whereas Crimp seems to be a solitaire in the British theatrical world – and, indeed, seems to be better known in other European countries than in the UK. The two writers differ sharply both in method and tone, yet nevertheless, it can be argued that their preoccupations, major statements and motivations are the same: they are interested in the contemporary sensibility and in the way it reflects the notions of inequality, violence, abuse and oppression. Without pronouncing any explicit moral statement, they succeed in uniting form and content, presenting a credible stage representation of abuse and trauma and at the same time point to the problems in this representation. In the same dramatic environment, each has different precursors and influences, which is the reason why their aesthetic solutions to the problem of "true" representation differ. In this thesis, I will compare the dramatic works of Kane and Crimp with the classical notion of tragedy. I will concentrate on formal challenges the two writers use, and connect those with the principal sources and influences of both. Later, the common topics (violence, abuse, oppression) will be discussed together with different images and techniques Crimp and Kane chose for their representation. I hope that in this comparison the two playwrights will cast some light at each other that will help modify the labels they are usually assigned.

Sarah Kane (1971 – 1999) is one of the new British dramatists whose plays and life are well-known both in the UK and abroad. A student of drama in Bristol and Birmingham, Kane developed quickly as a dramatist, going from traditional structures to experiential plays with

blurred notion of plot and character. She was an actress as well as a director and playwright. Kane suffered from depression which made her take her own life at the age of twenty-eight. She left just a small body of plays: *Blasted* (1995), which begins as a traditional conversational play but evolves into a nightmare of violence and abuse; *Phaedra's Love* (1996), a rewriting of Seneca's *Phaedra*, in which she changed the moral message interestingly; *Cleansed* (1998), a colourful dream/nightmare taking place in a clinic; *Crave* (1998), a theatrical poem on love in which she abandoned the traditional notion of character; and *4.48 Psychosis* (1999), a monologue/dialogue on depression and insanity perceived by many as her suicide note. The count is completed by a screenplay for BBC entitled *Skin* (1997), a short morality on racism.

Kane was not taken seriously by many until *Cleansed. Blasted*, which premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in 1995, provoked a critical outburst of disgust. Most critics decided that this was a play by an attention-seeking adolescent (Kane was twenty-three), whose plot does not justify the amount and degree of brutality the spectator is forced to endure. *Phaedra's Love* was similarly strongly criticised, with some of the critics recommending psychiatric treatment to Kane.<sup>1</sup> It was only *Cleansed* that forced part of the critical audience to change their minds. Some critics still could not get over the initial scandal of *Blasted* and would perpetually criticize the amount and extent of cruelty in Kane's plays. On the other hand, *Cleansed*, with its striking symbolic images, lead some reviewers to admit that the play has a poetic force and "clings to you like a shroud."<sup>2</sup> Such harsh critical responses made Kane release her next play, *Crave*, under a pseudonym. *Crave* was almost unanimously praised for its poetic qualities and use of language as music. Not dazzled by violence this time, reviewers were able to find and appreciate allusions to the Bible, Shakespeare or T. S. Eliot. Kane's last play, *4.48 Psychosis*, was staged shortly after Kane's death, and consequently presented a

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<sup>1</sup> See Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre. British Drama Today* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001) 108.

<sup>2</sup> David Benedict in *The Independent*. Qtd. in Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 113.

sensitive case for the critics. Most of the reviewers inevitably connected the play to Kane's suicide, and limited themselves to reverent summaries of her short life and work.

Under the influence of Aleks Sierz's *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* it is fashionable to treat Kane as a part of this theatrical "movement" of the 1990s. In the book, Sierz tried to summarize the endeavours of young playwrights to shock their audience until the spectators get genuinely emotionally involved. Sierz describes a "new sensibility [that] has become the norm in British theatre."<sup>3</sup> According to Sierz, new British drama is characterized by transgression, by breaching the spectator's expectations and refusing their conventional response – in-yer-face dramatists will not let their audiences get away with detachment. Sierz provides a helpful list of properties of in-yer-face theatre: "The language is usually filthy, characters talk about unmentionable subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each another, experience powerful emotions, become suddenly violent."<sup>4</sup> All this is true about Kane's plays; however, she differs from most in-yer-face dramatists in what she wants to say. If a dramatist chooses to shock his/her audience in the way in-yer-face writers do, it is liberating (everything is allowed on stage) but also limiting (a play with high degree of sex and/or violence will typically deal with a limited number of issues). Mark Ravenhill, an emblematic in-yer-face writer, is a good example of this. His plays tackle the 1990s generation, the Internet, dance drugs and AIDS. The sensibility expressed in his plays is a decidedly contemporary one: his characters strongly refuse to commit themselves, to have relationships. They perceive themselves and the world as commodities; they frame every experience with psychobabble; when they want to live for real, they cut themselves and put the picture on their website. Compare these decidedly amoral characters to Kane's larger-than-life heroes and one can immediately see the difference: Kane's characters are not afraid to commit themselves. In fact, they always commit themselves too much. Like their author,

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<sup>3</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 5.

they live and die for the ultimate experience, for truth, for love. They are everything but futile. If it were not for the contemporary props, Kane's characters could belong in a Greek tragedy or a Jacobean play.<sup>5</sup> This is different from other in-er-face dramatists, who use modern phenomena (drugs, gangs, serial killers) as their vital settings and usually do not go beyond these immediate issues.

Another difference between in-er-face dramatists and Kane is that dramatists like Ravenhill or Jez Butterworth use the influence of film and TV (Quentin Tarantino is an often-quoted inspirational source) and sometimes seem to compete with them. Kane, on the other hand, stays profoundly theatrical. It is not the most violent or "mediatized" actions that are the most powerful theatrical moments of her plays. The greatest moments are actually those most innocent in terms of violence: Ian saying "Thank you" to Cate in *Blasted*, Grace dancing a dance of love for Graham in *Cleansed*.

Sierz describes the intention of in-er-face dramatists as follows: "In-er-face theatre always forces us to look at ideas and feelings we would normally avoid because they are too painful, too frightening, too unpleasant or too acute."<sup>6</sup> Kane definitely shares this intention. Nevertheless, Sierz's statement could be applied to all good theatre from the times of Aristotle. The difference, for him, lies in the fact that although "theatre is similar to other cultural forms in that it provides a comparatively safe place in which to explore such emotions," the new drama is "potent precisely when it threatens to violate that sense of safety."<sup>7</sup> In other words, in-er-face dramatists (Kane included in this case) strive to provide us with an experience that would shake our world.

Martin Crimp is even harder to place within a theatrical generation or group than Kane. Born in 1956, he should belong to the same generation of playwrights as Caryl Churchill or

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<sup>5</sup> Graham Saunders finds many parallels between Kane's work and that of Jacobean dramatists. Graham Saunders, *Love Me or Kill Me. Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002) 18-22.

<sup>6</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 6.

Edward Bond. However, his topics and experimenting with form in some of his plays drive him more towards the younger generations of dramatists, who (including Kane) often claim him as their influence. Crimp himself is unsure about his generational labelling:

I was part of that moment and it was very strange for me, because I found myself being published [...] with playwrights like Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill [...] I'm much older than them. I am what the Royal Court politely called the lost generation. [...] I appear to be the survivor.<sup>8</sup>

Crimp began as a writer of fiction but started writing plays in the early 1980s. After a long period of collaboration with the Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond he began to be associated with the Royal Court Theatre, where *No One Sees the Video* was first staged in 1990. Crimp's reputation as a playwright has been growing steadily since his alliance with the Royal Court, where he was Writer-in-Residence in 1997. Crimp is also known as a translator: he specialises in French drama from Molière to Ionesco. It is difficult to describe his pieces in terms of form: while *The Treatment* (1993) or *The Country* (2000) have traditional structures, *Attempts on Her Life* (1997) and the triptych *Fewer Emergencies* (2005) are exponents of the playful postmodern theatre.

The issues Crimp likes to focus on are those associated with language and commerce – advertising, market research, the media. His plays highlight the manipulation of spectators, customers and consumers in general. What led Crimp to this preoccupation with consumer culture? Aleks Sierz in his study of Crimp's theatre associates it with the fact that Crimp started to write in the era of Margaret Thatcher, which tried to change even theatre into commodity and theatregoers into customers.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, during his beginnings as a playwright

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<sup>8</sup> The interviewers, Mireia Aragay and Pilar Zozaya, ask Crimp: "Do you see yourself as a part of that mid-1990s moment which is often considered as signalling a renaissance in new writing for the stage with the Royal Court as one of its main dynamos?" See Mireia Aragay et al. eds, *British Theatre of the 1990s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 64-5.

<sup>9</sup> Aleks Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp* (London: Methuen, 2006) 7-8.

in London, Crimp worked as a “transcriber of market-research interviews.”<sup>10</sup> For a person with such sensitivity to language, the work must have been a traumatizing experience but at the same time must have provided him with excellent background on the language of persuasion and manipulation. Experiments with language and the desire to unmask the mechanisms of mainstream art make Crimp close to the theatre of the absurd, which delights in discovering the ways in which we are oppressed and limited by language.

Apart from this dimension, all of Crimp’s plays share an interest in abnormal, usually abusive relationships. He is fascinated by the balance of power and respect, in breaches of faith and in physical and psychic torture. Far from glamorising power or cruelty, he explores their connection with politics, fashion and morality.

In this work, I would like to compare the use of violence in Kane’s and Crimp’s plays, and show that it works as a strong element of their dramatic structure. Critics have often seen the violence in Kane’s plays as merely a shocking device. I would like to challenge this assumption and show that through violence, she incorporates in her plays the unfashionably grand topics that are otherwise almost impossible to tackle in today’s world: death, unconditional love, absolute honesty. Crimp, on the other hand, prefers formal or implied violence to the explicit one used by Kane; he finds oppression and cruelty mostly in the gesture and language, rather than performed on the body. The prominence of the physical body in Kane’s plays will be compared to the abstracted, iconic body of Crimp’s plays. Different approaches to violence as a structural element, a metaphor and a concept will be discussed. I will argue that both Kane and Crimp are, in their special ways, very moral playwrights and a deep concern for the unhappiness of the individual appears repeatedly in their plays.

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<sup>10</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 3.

Together with the discussion of violence, theatrical implications of the formal challenges Crimp and Kane present to the audience will be examined. The dramatic tradition that has connection with or influence on the two playwrights will be observed. A more detailed comparison of the two dramatists, based on close-reading of their plays, will serve to illustrate similarities between their work. In addition to the theatrical traditions the two authors employ as their sources, the notion of character and characteristics in their plays will be discussed. The authors will be perceived as the dramatists of the contemporary era, aware of other media but choosing theatre as their own.

### **1.1 *Synopses of the Plays***

At this point, it is useful to present the reader with short synopses of Kane's and Crimp's plays. Their texts are not easily available in the Czech Republic and there have not been many stagings.<sup>11</sup> In summarizing the plots, this chapter will serve as a universal starting to the thesis so that later, when I talk about a motif or a character in a play, the whole plot does not have to be repeated.

I will start with Sarah Kane and her first and most notorious play, *Blasted*. It is set in a luxurious hotel room, entered by an uneven pair: Ian, a tabloid journalist, is very sick, drinks heavily, and carries a gun. His partner Cate is a young and submissive girl with some kind of mental retardation. The two were a couple but separated some time before. Ian has planned this meeting to seduce Cate again. During the first two scenes he manipulates her to have sex with him, alternately coaxing and insulting her. We find out that Cate tends to suck her thumb, stutter and have fainting fits when under pressure. The next morning, it is obvious that Ian has raped Cate. The couple keep arguing and fighting. Cate damages Ian's leather jacket while he is in the shower; when Cate has a fit, Ian lies between her legs and simulates sex,

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<sup>11</sup> A list of the Czech translations of Kane's and Crimp's plays is listed in the Appendix.

pointing the gun at her. He then tells her he is a hit man, which is why he broke up with her. During his monologue, Cate fellates him, then bites his penis. She goes to the bathroom to have a bath, remarking casually: “Looks like there’s a war on.”<sup>12</sup> After a knock on the door, Ian opens it to find an armed soldier outside. The Soldier keeps Ian at gunpoint, announcing: “Our town now.” (39). In Scene Three, a mortar bomb has blasted the room. After describing to Ian what atrocities he has committed during the war and demanding that Ian writes about them, the Soldier rapes Ian, sucks his eyes out and shoots himself. In Scene Four, Cate returns to the room, reporting that soldiers have taken over the city. She brings in a baby, given to her by an unknown woman. She is trying to keep the baby alive, while discussing the possibility of suicide with Ian, who wants her to pass him the gun. She eventually does, but removes the bullets first, so nothing happens when Ian pushes the trigger. The baby dies and Cate buries it under the floor, praying. Then she leaves to get some food from the soldiers. Ian, blind and left alone, plunges the depths of despair. Eventually he is so starved that he eats the baby. “He dies with relief” (60), only to wake up again when it starts raining on him through the ceiling. Cate returns with food and gin, “blood seeping from between her legs” (60). After she has eaten, she feeds Ian and gives him some gin. The play closes with Ian’s “Thank you.” (61).

*Phaedra’s Love*, the rewriting of Seneca’s *Phaedra*, starts with Hippolytus watching TV and masturbating. His stepmother Phaedra is talking to the family doctor, who asserts Hippolytus is “depressed” but “has to help himself” (66). During the conversation it becomes obvious that Phaedra is obsessed with Hippolytus. Phaedra then brings Hippolytus some birthday presents from his people. She tries to get close to him by discussing sex. Hippolytus reveals that he is miserable and bored, “[w]aiting [...] [f]or something to happen” (79). Phaedra gives him her “present”, which turns out to be a fellatio. Hippolytus humiliates her horribly, telling her he did not enjoy her performance, he has had sex with her daughter, and

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<sup>12</sup> All quotations, unless stated otherwise, are taken from Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2001) 33.

he has gonorrhoea. He finishes Phaedra off by asking: “Do I get my present now?” (84). Phaedra leaves, hurt beyond words. Stepsister Strophe comes to Hippolytus to inform him that her mother has committed suicide and accused him of rape. Hippolytus’ main reaction is excitement that something is happening at least: “Me. A rapist. Things are looking up” (87). He leaves to turn himself in. A priest visits Hippolytus in a prison cell, trying to make him confess and ask God for forgiveness. Hippolytus refuses and the Priest performs oral sex on him. Theseus (Hippolytus’ father and Phaedra’s husband) returns, swearing revenge. Hippolytus is taken out for lynching, which is performed by an angry mob. Strophe, concealed in the mob, tries to defend him. She is raped and killed by Theseus, who does not recognize her. The mob then cuts off Hippolytus’ genitals and disembowels him. Theseus recognises Strophe and commits suicide. The play ends with vultures descending upon Hippolytus, who dies with a smile, saying: “If there could have been more moments like this” (103).

*Cleansed* takes place in a mysterious institution, which is something between a university, a clinic, a prison and a rehabilitation centre. A man called Tinker, a doctor/warden figure, runs the institution and submits the inmates to torture. There is a woman called Grace, whose brother Graham dies in the institution by Tinker’s hand. Grace comes to Tinker, wanting to become her brother. In the course of the play, we witness Grace’s metamorphosis into Graham: first, she is wearing his clothes, then persuades Tinker to perform a sex-change operation on her. Throughout the play, the imaginary Graham appears by Grace’s side. They dance and make love; flowers growing from the stage accompany their actions. Simultaneously, Tinker has Grace pursued by imaginary torturers who beat and rape her. The other inmates include Robin, a retarded boy who falls in love with Grace and is tormented for it by Tinker. Grace teaches Robin how to count. When he is able to count his remaining days in the institution on his abacus, he hangs himself. There is also a homosexual couple, Carl and

Rod. Carl, who swears eternal love to Rod, betrays him when Tinker makes him choose between his and Rod's life. Carl then regrets and tries to express his love for Rod but Tinker always cuts off the body part with which love can be declared (first Carl's tongue, then his hands, then his feet). Rod, who refused to swear the eternal love Carl wanted, volunteers to be tortured to death instead of Carl. The last story is that of Tinker himself. Throughout the play, he visits a peep-show booth, calling the woman in it "Grace" and abusing her verbally. In the end, the woman comes out of the booth, tells Tinker her name really is Grace and makes love to him. The play ends with mutilated Carl and Grace sitting in the mud, in bright light and loud squeaking of rats.

*Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* do not have a plot as such, and include more lyrical elements. *Crave* is a play for four voices, entitled A, B, C and M. The characters are usually perceived as two couples: an older woman with her younger lover and an older man with a young girl – probably lovers but possibly an abuser and his victim. Their dialogue shows many forms of love, including the hideous ones – possessiveness, jealousy, abuse, and indifference. The utterances have a pronounced rhythmical structure, which make *Crave* something between a play and a poem.

*4.48 Psychosis* is a very personal play, evolving around Kane's period of depression and the treatment she received. This time, Kane abandons the very notion of character, introducing the utterances only by hyphens. The protagonist addresses her doctor and her lover, who sometimes merge into one person, and the monologue/dialogue turns from confessions of love to the account of medication the depressive patient has been given. *4.48 Psychosis* is an insight into a mind of a mentally ill person, implying questions about the border between sanity and insanity, imagination and reality.

The early plays of Martin Crimp, like *No One Sees the Video* or *Play With Repeats*, contain some of his emblematic topics and motifs (the language of marketing, approach to

people and ideas as “products”). From his many plays, however, it will be sufficient to summarize four that show Crimp at his best and most typical. Those are also the plays that will be discussed throughout the work as they are close to the subject of formal challenge and/or violence.

The play that will be considered most often is *Attempts on Her Life*, an experimental string of scenarios. The fragmented scripts all attempt to describe or represent a female figure called Anne. Anne is characterised mainly by the lack of her own activity, she never speaks or appears directly on stage. The description of Anne is taken on by multiple voices that offer interpretations and descriptions of “all the things that Anne can be.”<sup>13</sup> The descriptions take place as a screenplay of a thriller, as an intellectual discussion in a gallery, as a police interview, or a musical song. The play does not have any traditional plot, beginning or end. The characters do not have names, neither is their number or gender specified.

The triptych *Fewer Emergencies* is, together with *Attempts on Her Life*, Crimp’s most innovative play in terms of form. It consists of three playlets: *Whole Blue Sky*, *Face to the Wall*, and *Fewer Emergencies*. Crimp mentions that he started the play as a sequel or male counterpart to *Attempts on Her Life*: “I naively thought there was a formula, so I could try it with men. *Face to the Wall* is as far as I got.”<sup>14</sup> The characters in *Fewer Emergencies* are only labelled by numbers, sometimes their gender is specified. Time and place is stated as blank. *Whole Blue Sky* is a discussion of three people who are constructing a narrative of a young woman’s life (a method already used in the *Attempts*). They construct a fairly banal story, overlapping and contradicting each other. The woman lives in an unhappy marriage. She has a baby called Bobby, who has a pet called Bobby. One evening when his parents have guests, Bobby comes to the dinner table and announces he hears voices in his head. The play ends

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Crimp, *Attempts on Her Life* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997) 20. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

<sup>14</sup> Aragay et al. 65.

with Bobby's request to his mother to sing "the little song", which infuriates her, as it is "Mummy and Daddy's private song."<sup>15</sup>

*Face to the Wall* describes a serial killer in the same way, i.e. three unnamed characters discussing his life. The killer is at school, shooting children. The characters wonder at the reasons he might have for the behaviour, refusing all the obvious ones:

3	He's never suffered.
1	No.
3	Experienced war.
1	No.
3	Experienced poverty.
1	No. (32)

In the end, they decide the only discomfort in the man's life lies in the fact that the postman is sometimes late. They begin to discuss the postman, who is lying depressed in his bed, his face to the wall. The story ends with the postman's "Twelve Bar Delivery Blues" song in which he throws hot tea into his son's face.

In *Fewer Emergencies* the characters' conversation circles around the fact that "things are improving" (41) and there are "fewer emergencies than there used to be" (46). Bobby, the baby from *Whole Blue Sky*, returns. He is locked inside the house, which is equipped with all he might need. His parents are away and there is a key hanging from a shelf for Bobby to get out of the house in case of an emergency. The emergency is going on in the form of an unspecified conflict and a shot fired through the window hits Bobby in the hip. He is crawling to get to the key while his parents call him on a satellite telephone from their cruise around the world. The characters then sing the refrain of the postman's blues from *Face to the Wall*, while Bobby is still watching the key swinging.

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<sup>15</sup> Martin Crimp, *Fewer Emergencies* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005) 20. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

Two plays more traditional in form but similarly unsettling in context are *The Treatment* and *The Country*. *The Country* was written immediately after *Attempts on Her Life*. One can see that Crimp is not “developing” in any way from the traditional structure to the experimental or vice versa; the form of his plays varies according to his focus. In *The Country*, a doctor called Richard has moved from the city in to the country with his wife Corinne and their children. There is some tension and suspicion in the couple’s relationship. It is revealed that Richard is a former drug addict. Richard brings home an unconscious girl called Rebecca, whom he claims to have found on the road. While Richard is away to visit a patient, Corinne questions Rebecca and it transpires she is Richard’s lover. He brought her home because she has overdosed on drugs he had given her. Moreover, it becomes clear that Richard has moved in the country because Rebecca went there first to get rid of him. Corinne leaves with the children. There is a passionate dialogue between Rebecca and Richard, showing their obsessive, love-hate relationship. The last scene takes place two months later. It is Corinne’s birthday and Richard buys her an expensive pair of shoes. She tells him she went to the place where he “found” Rebecca and discovered Rebecca’s watch there. The play ends ambiguously: what the discovery of Rebecca’s watch means, or if the couple will stay together is not indicated.

*The Treatment* is a play set in the environment of New York showbusiness. Two executives, Andrew and his wife Jennifer, question a woman called (typically) Anne. She was a victim of domestic violence and they want to make her story into a film. They are trying to manipulate Anne into representing her story conventionally, whereas Anne stands by her own version of the abuse. Reaching a dead end in the discussion, the couple decide to take Anne for a sushi lunch. On the way they meet Simon, Anne’s violent husband, who is talking to a homeless man, Clifford. Anne pretends she does not recognize Simon. In the restaurant, Andrew tells Anne he is in love with her while Jennifer is in the toilet. Anne is overwhelmed

and goes out to think. She hails a taxi to go to Central Park; the driver is blind. Back in the office, Jennifer fellates Andrew, then they discuss Anne and Andrew's feelings for her: it seems that his love declaration was merely utilitarian, to make Anne unwind. Nicky, the assistant, brings in a visitor: it is Clifford, the homeless man, who was once a famous writer. Nicky reads some of his materials to Andrew and Jennifer; they are impressed and decide he will make a screenplay out of Anne's story for them. Later, Andrew and Anne have sex in Andrew's apartment, observed by Clifford. When Anne finds out about Clifford, she is so angry she contacts Simon. Together they pierce Clifford's eyes with a fork Simon has bought from Clifford. A year later, the film about Anne's life is launched, with Nicky playing Anne. Andrew leaves the party and goes to Anne's and Simon's flat, where he finds Anne tied up and gagged. He frees her but Simon arrives, together with Jennifer. Anne tries to run away but Jennifer shoots her in panic.

With the plots set out here, it is now possible to proceed to the comparison of Crimp and Kane. The discussion will start with their relation to the classical notion of theatre; I will try to establish to what extent their pieces are theatrical, to what extent they take from other art forms and how much of the Aristotelian dramatic form they have retained. The theatrical influences of both authors will be discussed. In the next section, the formal innovations will be dealt with specifically, referring back to Aristotle occasionally, together with the discussion of the notion of character in their plays. In the last section, I will analyse the use of violence in Crimp's and Kane's plays, examining the body as a theatrical presence.

## 2. *Theatrical Tradition and Influence*

### 2.1 *Aristotle: Mimesis and Katharsis*

The analysis of Crimp's and Kane's work shall begin by their comparison with Aristotle's *Poetics*, the canonical text of drama theory. The Aristotelian structure requirements will be discussed further in Chapter 3.1; what I shall concentrate on in this chapter is the way drama should interact with its audience according to Aristotle, comparing it to the relationship of Kane's and Crimp's plays and their audience. What is of interest here is the overall arrangement of a play and above all the impact and influence theatrical pieces have on their audience. Two crucial Aristotelian terms are put forward for examination: *mimesis* and *katharsis*.

The first term, *mimesis*, can be translated as representation. Aristotle claims that man has a "natural propensity [...] to engage in dramatic activity."<sup>1</sup> People enjoy *mimesis*, both actively (imitating things or objects) and passively, as "great pleasure is derived from exercising the understanding."<sup>2</sup> In other words, what brings us pleasure is to identify the represented object or action. When he refers to tragedy, Aristotle further specifies the nature of this representation:

Tragedy, then, is a representation [*mimesis*] of an action which is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude – in language which is garnished in various forms in its different parts – in the mode of dramatic enactment, not narrative – and through the arousal of pity and fear effecting the *katharsis* of such emotions.<sup>3</sup>

It is obvious that Aristotle did not perceive *mimesis* on its basic level, i.e. as mere imitation of somebody or something. It was enactment of an action, which did not necessarily

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<sup>1</sup> Unless stated otherwise, quotations from Aristotle in this chapter are from Stephen Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle. Translation and Commentary* (London: Duckworth, 1987) 34.

<sup>2</sup> Halliwell 34.

<sup>3</sup> Halliwell 37.

have to be true, hence Aristotle's notorious distinction between history and tragedy as between things that "have occurred" and that "*could* occur."<sup>4</sup>

It will become apparent in the course of this work that Kane's drama is more rooted in the classical theatrical tradition than Crimp's. It is not surprising, then, that she seems to be much more concerned with the question of *mimesis* than Crimp. Looking at the critical reception of her first plays, one realizes that most of the critics refused to accept her plots on a mimetic basis. In spite of using a rather traditional structure, her plots were nevertheless illogical, the motivation of actions unclear. To use Aristotelian terms, the plots of Kane's plays did not prove "possible by the standards of probability or necessity."<sup>5</sup> Crimp, who in some plays gives up the whole notion of plot, does so absolutely, i.e. he refuses *mimesis* to prove the impossibility (or, at least, problematic nature) of artistic representation. His other plays are perfectly traditional structurally. Kane, in contrast, had not given up on true portrayal. However, she felt the need for partial subversion because the traditional, realistic representation seemed false to her. The preoccupation with truth, which shows in the contents of her plays, can equally be seen in this search for a form that would portray the world as it really was. For her, the experimental and traditional plays are not two independent, alternative modes; she develops clearly from the traditional form to the experimental in the process of searching for "true" depiction.

With respect to the illogical narratives of her plays, it is notable that the topics Kane chooses to represent are those in which logic and coherence usually cease to apply. These include the war in *Blasted*, the clinic/concentration camp in *Cleansed*, and of course the landscapes of the mind. In *Crave*, Kane portrayed the mental realm of love, moving to the realm of mental illness in *4.48 Psychosis*. A remarkable number of critics have compared her plays to nightmares, effectively admitting they have some kind of logic, be it the logic of

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<sup>4</sup> Halliwell 40.

<sup>5</sup> Halliwell 40.

dreams. With her under-motivated plots, Kane tried to develop new *mimesis*, which would serve to represent the existential extremities.

With Crimp, the conventional portrayal of reality in most of his plays is replaced by its more complicated notion in the experimental pieces. Crimp is obsessed by the act of making a narrative out of somebody's life, which for him usually equals violating and overpowering them. This issue forms the topic of *The Treatment*, and is incorporated into the structure of *Attempts on Her Life* and *Fewer Emergencies*. Double *mimesis* takes place here: both plays represent people who are trying to represent a character or a plot. In this way, Crimp is able to embody a set of philosophical questions in his plays, namely: is reality really just a market of narratives? Why do we always need to make our lives into stories? What large proportion of reality are we missing out by pushing our experience into pre-prepared categories?

Crimp's plays connect strongly with the pleasure of recognition Aristotle talks about together with *mimesis*. Crimp works with our knowledge of genres (not only theatrical ones, but also those of commercial culture). He uses the genre's typical features to make the audience recognize the code, and then surprises them by breaching it. The typical example would be the scenarios in *Attempts on Her Life*, which are more mimetic in terms of text than in terms of reality. Put differently, the spectator is able to identify the genre each scenario is representing after just a couple of lines. The irony of the scenario is then exposed, usually by inserting contents that are incongruous with the genre. In Scenario 7, "New Anny," which advertises the character as a car, the regular advert jargon turns into something much more disturbing as the commercial proceeds:

- No one ever packs the Anny with explosives to achieve a political objective.[...]
- No man ever rapes and kills a woman in the Anny before tipping her body out at a red light along with the contents of the ashtray.[...]
- No one is ever dragged from the Anny by an enraged mob. (34)

By employing ironic meta-narrative, Crimp differs strongly from Kane, who emphasises that her plays are not “ABOUT other plays; they are not about methods of representation.”<sup>6</sup>

The second Aristotelian term crucial for our understanding of drama is *katharsis*. The word describes the psychological impact of the tragedy on its spectator, which consists of arousing “pity and fear” and results in emotional purgation of the spectator.<sup>7</sup> Many of Aristotle’s interpreters have seen *katharsis* as the crucial term for his theory of drama as a whole, and undoubtedly the ability to rouse powerful emotions is still the touchstone of the authenticity of tragedy.

As far as stirring the spectators’ emotions is concerned, it is certain that Sarah Kane fulfils this Aristotelian requirement, though by means very different to those prescribed by him. It is not really the logical and inevitable sequence of action, neither “the change from prosperity to affliction,”<sup>8</sup> that stimulate emotions in her plays. Kane engages her spectator’s emotions in the best tradition of in-ye-face-drama, i.e. involving their emotions in what equals a theatrical punch in the face. Not letting the audience reflect on what is happening, she makes them undergo violent and traumatizing experiences together with the protagonists. She tries to achieve the same emotional involvement in her experimental plays, although e.g. *Crave* has no consistent narrative and avoids the depiction of violence. In its first production, Kane wished the lines to be spoken very quickly, so that the audience had to pay attention to the rhythm of what was said, rather than to the contents.<sup>9</sup> Refusing or short-cutting the intellectual level, Kane always tries to get the audience’s emotions involved.

This is in sharp contrast to Crimp, about whose *Attempts on Her Life* Roger Foss in *What’s On* critically remarked that it “never engages you at the human level of feelings or

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<sup>6</sup> Qtd. in Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Halliwell 37, 191.

<sup>8</sup> Halliwell 45.

<sup>9</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 119.

emotions.”<sup>10</sup> It is necessary to realize that this is not what Crimp wants to do. His experimental pieces are not trying to engage the spectators’ emotions but their thinking. What Crimp points at in the *Attempts* is our inability to be engaged by the works of art or other representations of life. He shows the automatized approaches of language that fail to bring more than clichés to mind, proving that even the brutal and violent issues can and do leave us indifferent. As theatrical pieces, *Attempts on Her Life* and *Fewer Emergencies* offer the audience an approach to the complex philosophical issue of representation and meta-representation.

Crimp’s more “traditional” pieces with stable plot and characters often have an emotional message that is both disturbing and ethically challenging. This topic will re-emerge throughout the following sections; to make the point clearer here I will discuss the ending of *The Country*. The story of a love triangle finishes ambiguously. It is Corinne’s birthday; Richard has written her an affectionate birthday card and given her a pair of very expensive shoes. However, soon we find out that Corinne had gone to the secret meeting place of Rebecca and Richard the day before and found Rebecca’s watch there. This might mean that Richard and Rebecca keep meeting; it might also mean that Richard has killed Rebecca. During the scene, Corinne asks Richard to kiss her, which he refuses, saying: “I have kissed you.”<sup>11</sup> The same exchange has been taking place throughout the play, giving it a cyclical structure and implying that none of the old problems have disappeared. *Katharsis*, understood as an emotional purgation, does not take place in the spectator, as there is no change or emotional development of the protagonists to trigger it. Moreover, the identification of the spectator and Crimp’s protagonists is problematic, as Crimp keeps us in the dark about their

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<sup>10</sup> Roger Foss qtd. in Mary Luckhurst, “Political Point-Scoring: Martin Crimp’s *Attempts on Her Life*,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 13.1 (2003): 48.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Crimp, *Plays: Two* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005) 367. All subsequent quotations from *The Country* and *No One Sees the Video* are from this edition.

thoughts and motivation. He prefers to create an atmosphere of furtive menace rather than tell us precisely what is happening.

In opposition to Crimp, Kane is not a detached author and her dramas are by no means cyclical. Her characters (and ideally also spectators) always undergo an experience that changes them forever. In this sense, all her plays contain a *katharsis* of sorts. The public and the critics have often failed to see the development of the characters and only remembered the damage done to their bodies. However, there is a redeeming moment in each and every play, even though it has to be admitted the notion of *katharsis* is sometimes muted.

In the end of *Blasted*, Cate brings food to Ian in an act of mercy. Ian, who has acted as Cate's tormentor throughout the play, finishes the scene (and the entire play) with a meek "Thank you." (61). In *Phaedra's Love*, after the death of the entire royal family and after Hippolytus has been horribly mutilated by the mob, he ends the play with "If there could have been more moments / like this" (102), fulfilling the wish he has uttered earlier in the play: "I've lived by honesty let me die by it" (95). Paradoxically, his anguish and lethal wounds make him more alive than ever before.

*Katharsis* in *Cleansed* is certainly more problematic and ambiguous, although, paradoxically, the very title seems to imply purgation. However, the tormentor – Tinker – only purges his victims of their freedom and identity, occasionally taking their life away in the process. In the last scene, Grace and Carl are sitting together in a patch of mud after the losses of their beloved. Grace delivers a monologue about pointlessness of her life without Graham. An ambivalent scene follows, closing the play:

**Grace/Graham** Help me.

*Carl reaches out his arm.*

**Grace/Graham** holds his stump.

*They stare at the sky, Carl crying.*

*It stops raining.*

*The sun comes out.*

**Grace/Graham** smiles.

*The sun gets brighter and brighter, the squeaking of the rats louder and louder,  
until the light is blinding and the sound deafening.*

*Blackout.* (151)

The smile and the helping gesture can be interpreted as an optimistic ending and the ultimate love and sacrifice could be understood as a cathartic option for Carl and Grace. However, the bright white light and deafening sound suggests death, which is not synonymous to the emotional purgation implied by *katharsis*.

Death is also suggested in the endings of Kane's two last plays. *Katharsis* in *Crave* is extremely complicated: although the play surprised the critics by the absence of violence, which was considered something of a landmark of Kane's by 1998, it is concerned with the lack of meaning and hope. Kane says: "the characters have all given up."<sup>12</sup> Love, which was perceived as redemptive in *Cleansed*, now is or can be seen as "a source of obsession, corruption, ownership and breakdown."<sup>13</sup> The allusions to T.S Eliot's *The Waste Land* add to the impression of emptiness of the characters' lives. Kane considered *Crave* to be her most desperate play, the only comfort that offers itself to the characters being death.<sup>14</sup> Death is again represented as the embracing light, which will become the central image in *4.48 Psychosis*. On the other hand, at the end of the play the arguing and overlapping voices are finally united in a vision of liberation:

**A** Free-falling  
**B** Into the light  
**C** Bright white light  
**A** World without end  
**C** You're dead to me  
**M** Glorious. Glorious.  
**B** And ever shall be  
**A** Happy  
**B** So happy  
**C** Happy and free. (200)

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<sup>12</sup> Kane in interview with Nils Tabert, February 1998. Qtd. in Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 108.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Billington on Nightwaves, qtd. in Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 107.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 108.

Even a play like *4.48 Psychosis*, in which Kane expresses the anguish of the person who wants to commit suicide, has a (partly) optimistic outcome. 4.48 in the morning, the hour when “clarity visits” (242), is paradoxical in the elucidation it brings the protagonist. On one hand, she can be herself and knows that her understanding of the world is pure at that hour, unharmed by her illness or by medication. On the other hand, it is at this hour she can see most clearly that there is no option for her but suicide. At the end, with the death of the character, the final line “please open the curtains” (245) implies liberation and escape, but also letting the life in. It might also mean that the protagonist is now able to communicate with the outer world – something she has not been able to do before.

This preoccupation with death is hard to interpret because of the obvious connections with the playwright’s suicide. Nevertheless, it could be linked to the struggle for unconditional experience that is the landmark of Kane’s protagonists. In *4.48 Psychosis*, suicide and death is the only experience that can be absolute, all-encompassing and therefore satisfying to the heroine. Whether the taking of one’s own life can be read as a success and not as giving up is a difficult question. It certainly seems to work in this way for Sarah Kane.

Although Crimp and Kane cannot be said to work with *mimesis* and *katharsis* in a strictly Aristotelian way because of the experimental character of their plays, they operate with both terms. *Mimesis* as representation of reality is disrupted and innovated in Kane; in Crimp, it transgresses into the meta-representation of language and genre. *Katharsis* as an emotional response is not valid in Crimp’s experimental plays, as they engage the spectators more on an intellectual/philosophical level. Moreover, *katharsis* as emotional purgation is not applicable even to Crimp’s traditional plays, as the author is usually too detached or too sceptical about the development of his characters. This is in contrast to Kane’s protagonists, whose journey from their initial state through traumatic experience towards emotional change is the

backbone of most of her plays. In this distinction between intellectual and emotional involvement probably lies the very main difference between the drama of Sarah Kane and Martin Crimp.

## ***2.2 Inspiration and Influence in the Work of Sarah Kane: Antonin Artaud, Samuel Beckett***

At this point, I will explore the sources underlying the works of Sarah Kane, who chose the inspiration for her plays in a truly eclectic manner. The width of her influences is discussed in full in Graham Saunders' *Love Me or Kill Me. Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*. Chronologically, these include Shakespeare, Büchner, Ibsen, Strindberg, Kafka, Eliot, Brecht, Orwell, Camus, Fassbinder, Beckett, and Crimp. Apart from these admitted or obvious sources, there is a myriad of theatrical clichés and influences one can claim to find in Kane's work. Saunders, for instance, finds several points of proximity between Kane's work and that of the Jacobean dramatists: great passions and great themes (love, death) dealt with in a radical way and delivered as "stark memorable theatrical images"; tragic characters, who nevertheless gain insight through suffering; the saviour/tormentor figures (Cate in *Blasted*, Tinker in *Cleansed*); and the attempts to induce "revelation or change in her audiences" through "extreme or brutal actions."<sup>15</sup> Undoubtedly, Saunders is talking as an expert on Jacobean theatre, and some of these characteristics could also be ascribed to the influence of Greek drama. Broadly speaking, Kane is aware of and working with the canonical theatrical texts. This rather banal fact is important as one of the features in which she differs from in-ner-face dramatists: while Ravenhill or Butterworth can be said to create a new theatrical language, specific for the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kane is much more rooted in the tradition.

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<sup>15</sup> Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 20, 22.

Linked to this is the discussion of Kane as a postmodernist. Although she has often been compared to postmodernist writers because of her light-handed eclecticism and excessive use of violence which some interpreted as its glamorisation, she is seen by others rather as drawing from the modernist tradition because of her proximity to “continental avant-garde ideas and techniques.”<sup>16</sup> There are valid arguments for both approaches but those can be two-faced: for example, the system of theatrical allusions to iconic authors that is typical of her plays can be perceived both as a modernist and postmodernist feature. It is modernist in the exemplary use of allusions that utilize the quotations to enlarge the context of the play but at the same time change the quotation’s meaning by placing it in a different context. A perfect example of this would be allusions to *The Waste Land* in *Crave*:

**C**        If I was  
               If I  
               If I was  
**M**        HURRY UP PLEASE IT’S TIME  
**B**        And don’t you think that a child conceived by rape would suffer? (162)

On the other hand, the palimpsestuous and irreverential way in which she works with Seneca’s *Phaedra* would point to postmodern approach. Moreover, the polyphony and pronounced subjectivity especially of the later plays remind one of the postmodern experimental drama.

The main difference between Kane and a hypothetical exemplary postmodern writer lies in the absence of detachment and irony. This is obvious even in comparison to Crimp (whom I consider a postmodern playwright for reasons stated in the next chapter). Kane is not able to, and more importantly, she does not *want* to stay detached. Her remarkably dry humour, which will be discussed in connection with Samuel Beckett, is not light and playful postmodern irony. Her work is full of suffering and loneliness, which she tries to put through to the spectator. She would then not perceive the anguish as “an abstraction, a literary topos or

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<sup>16</sup> Clare Wallace, “Sarah Kane, Experiential Theatre and the Revenant Avant-Garde.” *Sarah Kane in Context*, eds. Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders (Manchester: Manchester UP, forthcoming).

describable ‘content’ [...] but as an unavoidable effect of the [...] text [or performance] which the reader is made to experience at first hand.”<sup>17</sup>

Kane announced that she wanted her art to be subversive: “All good art is subversive in form or content. And the best of art is subversive in form *and* content.”<sup>18</sup> This very statement implies that there is a notion of some ideal to be subverted, which points to the modernist, avant-garde seeing of dramatic form, rather than the postmodern attitude. It is clear that Kane both draws from and subverts traditional dramatic structures. Her serious, pessimistic tone and experiments with structure make her more akin to the modernists than the postmodernists. Accordingly, Kane’s vanguard inspiration will be vital in this chapter.

The avant-garde influence most often mentioned in connection with Kane is Antonin Artaud. Born in 1896 in Marseille, he became involved in the Surrealist movement and his essays and manifestos on theatre have been extremely influential ever since the 1930s. Kane herself, however, claimed that it was only after she had completed most of her plays that she read Artaud: “It’s pretty weird – because a lot of people said to me for a long time ‘You must really like Artaud’, and I haven’t read any of that.[...] So I only started reading him very recently.[...] And I was amazed on how it connects completely with my work.”<sup>19</sup>

The ideas of Artaud most fruitful in comparison with Sarah Kane’s plays are contained in the texts concerned with the Theatre of Cruelty (*Théâtre de la cruauté*). These contain two manifestos, a short essay entitled “Theatre and Cruelty” and two letters with further remarks on the concept.<sup>20</sup> The essay “Theatre and Cruelty” was written in 1931, after Artaud saw Cambodian and Balinese dance groups perform in Paris and Marseille. Their dance-cum-

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 17-18.

<sup>18</sup> Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting* (London: Methuen, 2007) 130.

<sup>19</sup> Kane in interview with Nils Tabert, February 1998. Qtd. in Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 135.

<sup>20</sup> All quotations, unless stated otherwise, are taken from Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, trans. Victor Corti (London: John Calder, 1977) (3rd ed.)

theatre, with its concentrated gesticulation, inspired Artaud to refuse the Western theatrical tradition as a whole and create a new, total form of theatrical experience, using both language and gesture but not centring around text. The essay, which contained the first draft of the concept, was followed by two manifestos, published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in order to raise funds for productions; the tiny corpus is completed by two letters to Jean Paulhan (the director of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* and Artaud's patron), wherein Artaud explains in more detail what he means by the term "cruelty". I will now discuss the concept at some extent, comparing it to Kane's work and taking examples from the plays.

First of all, both Artaud and Kane refused the concept of theatre-as-entertainment as degrading for theatre. Artaud says in "Theatre and Cruelty": "Our longstanding habit of seeking diversions has made us forget the slightest idea of serious theatre."<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere, he expresses his disdain of the "after-dinner theatre,"<sup>22</sup> which reverberates in Kane's: "I hate the idea of theatre just being an evening pastime."<sup>23</sup> Both Kane and Artaud are looking for the way out; both invent, in some form, the concept of cruelty. "Theatre and Cruelty" starts with the following claim: "Our sensibility has reached the point where we surely need theatre that wakes us up heart and nerves."<sup>24</sup> Artaud looks for extreme effects of the spectacle on the body because he refuses to separate body and mind: "What is visceral, what makes us react physically, will make us react emotionally as well. In our present degenerative state, metaphysics must be made to enter the mind through the body."<sup>25</sup>

One is immediately reminded of Kane's excessive use of violence. The violent action of *Blasted*, for instance, is not required by the conventions of the plot and the strong physical effect is not justifiably necessary. What starts as a psychological conversational drama suddenly turns into a nightmare without any logical restrictions, which made critics issue their

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<sup>21</sup> Artaud 64.

<sup>22</sup> Artaud 84.

<sup>23</sup> See Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Artaud 64.

<sup>25</sup> Artaud 77.

now notorious venomous remarks. In an Artaudian reading, however, *Blasted* is perfectly logical. In the Theatre of Cruelty, “reality of the imagination and dreams [...] appear on a par with life.”<sup>26</sup> What happens in *Blasted* is not rational in terms of reality but “provides the audience with truthful distillations of dreams where its taste for crime, its erotic obsessions, its savageness, its fantasies, its utopian sense of life and objects, even its cannibalism, do not gush out on an illusory, make-believe, but on an inner level.”<sup>27</sup>

*Blasted* could almost said to be invented just to illustrate those theoretical lines; note that Kane even uses the cannibal motif Artaud mentions. In Kane’s view, people walking out of the theatre during the production of *Blasted* were a positive manifestation, as it showed they “connected emotionally.”<sup>28</sup> Any strong reaction, be it positive or negative one, was always better than indifference for Kane.

On the other hand, this “cruel” treatment that Kane subdues her audience to does not precisely correspond to the Artaudian meaning of “cruelty”. It is true that Artaud was in favour of crime and violence on stage, as this was for him the most direct way to touch the spectators’ emotions. What “cruelty” really meant for Artaud, however, was “that much more terrible and necessary cruelty things can exercise upon ourselves. We are not free. The heavens can still fall upon our heads. And the theatre exists, in the first place, to teach us that.”<sup>29</sup> Viscerality is just a way to communicate this cruel truth to the spectators. What does this mean for the playwright and/or director – the person who is supposed to understand and mediate the metaphysical angst? “[P]racticising cruelty involves a higher determination to which the executioner-tormentor is also subject and which he must be *resolved* to endure when the time comes. Above all, cruelty is very lucid, a kind of strict control and submission

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<sup>26</sup> Artaud 82.

<sup>27</sup> Artaud 71.

<sup>28</sup> Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Artaud qtd. in Martin Esslin, *Artaud* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1976) 82.

to necessity.[...] It is understood that being alive always means the death of someone else.”<sup>30</sup> This is a good topic for a tragedy, but more importantly a message to the playwrights themselves and their responsibility. One tends to join the words immediately with the person of Sarah Kane, her life and death. The viscerality to which she subdued her audience was expressive of her own anxieties. Being in control of these meant understanding them and thus accepting the ultimate cruelty of human existence, which notion finally led her to take her own life – in a lucid and “rational” state of mind.

The question is, however, how this metaphysical statement connects with not only Kane’s life, but her texts. Is this metaphysical concept of cruelty applicable to the writing or staging of drama? Artaud says: “I use the world cruelty in the sense of hungering after life, cosmic strictness, relentless necessity, in the Gnostic sense of a living vortex engulfing darkness, in the sense of the inescapably necessary pain without which life could not continue.”<sup>31</sup> The cruelty of the playwright therefore lies in making us aware of our own limitations. What are the practical implications of this statement for a director or a playwright? It is again to make the performance visceral and confrontational, to use violence, “to heighten response by magnification.”<sup>32</sup>

Kane, who in *Blasted* (and, to a certain extent, *Phaedra’s Love*) used violence and viscerality to heighten her audience’s social responsibility, uses it to a more Artaudian end in *Cleansed*. This play portrays inner life exclusively, making it inadequate to discuss its logic in terms of outer reality. Whether Grace becomes her brother Graham really or in her imagination does not matter. It is the idea and its spiritual and emotional value that the play is “about” and it is the metaphysical notion of surviving at the expense of someone else and losing one’s own identity that is expressed through violence.

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<sup>30</sup> Artaud 80.

<sup>31</sup> Artaud 80.

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre: 1892-1992* (London: Routledge, 1993) 65.

This metaphysical quality should no doubt be mirrored in the staging of the play, as most of the directors so far have acknowledged. *Cleansed* is famous for containing stage directions which are physically impossible to transfer onstage – unless it is in a highly symbolic form. Instructions like “The rats carry Carl’s feet away” (136) will always cause directors a headache. The only way in which *Cleansed* can be meaningfully staged is not literal but highly stylised and symbolic way, corresponding to the spirituality of the thoughts expressed in the play.

This connects with the need for symbols expressed by Artaud, for whose new mode of expression they were crucial. He emphasises that symbolism should not work on the language level but rather in the sphere of objects. He endeavours to show inadequacies of language but at the same time the power of non-verbal expression. Kane also employs non-verbal expression (e.g. the dance of love in *Cleansed*), but otherwise is a very text-centred playwright. This does not prevent her, however, from approaching unspeakable issues and showing language which crumbles when confronted with trauma.

In *Phaedra’s Love*, the issue of unspeakability is fascinatingly twisted when juxtaposed to the original play by Seneca: in Seneca’s *Phaedra*, Hippolytus, pure and chaste, is accused by Phaedra of the rape he did not commit. In Kane’s version, Hippolytus, although vile and debauched, also does not exactly rape Phaedra. He allows his enamoured stepmother to fellate him, giving her some hope about their future relationship, then insults her, revealing to her that he has slept with her daughter. The fellatio she intended as his birthday present is annulled by Hippolytus’ “Do I get my present now?” (84) just after he comes. Mad with shame and grief, Phaedra accuses Hippolytus of raping her and commits suicide. The emotional damage and humiliation he caused her are too horrible to be expressed by words. Phaedra therefore chooses a conventional accusation of rape.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 77.

For both Artaud and Kane, the inadequacy of language is crucial as they are dedicated to representing “truth”; however, they differ in their approach to text. Artaud wants to strip language of its intellectual function, placing its mythical (i.e. magical, rhythmical) function into focus: “a new, deeper intellectualism hidden under these gestures and signs and raised to the dignity of special exorcisms.”<sup>34</sup> The connection with Kane’s work is apparent when looking at her later works such as *Crave* or *4.48 Psychosis*. In these plays, the elusiveness of characters allows us to concentrate at the “real” meaning of what is said rather than its psychological or narrative aspects. This was, according to Kane, reflected also in the making of the plays: “With *Crave* I knew what the rhythm was, but I did not know what I was going to say.”<sup>35</sup> The discourse of *4.48 Psychosis* is used to express a boundary between dream and waking life, sane and insane mind, reality and fantasy; the meta-discourse functioning as a roof to all this is the theatrical imagery. It looks just as what Artaud had in mind, when he wrote: “Anyhow, there is no question of putting metaphysical ideas directly on stage [...] Humour and its anarchy, poetry and its symbolism and imagery, give us a kind of primary idea of how to channel the temptation in these ideas.”<sup>36</sup> Despite or perhaps because they are set in “mindscape,” Kane’s two last plays are not renditions of philosophical concepts. They deal with existential questions so common they could be termed mythical – with the help of artistic distance, humour and poetry. The theatrical existence of *4.48 Psychosis* provides it with a meta-discourse, making it a sophisticated and highly stylised but at the same time truly universal text. What can be more general than these questions: “What am I like?” (239) or “Why am I stricken?” (219).

For Artaud, theatre was uniquely disposed to stage inner life because of its combination of spatial and verbal expression, with the verbal element by no means “above” the spatial one. Thereupon springs his demand for new language, highly symbolic, oscillating between

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<sup>34</sup> Artaud 70.

<sup>35</sup> Qtd. in Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 101.

<sup>36</sup> Artaud 69.

gesture and word. He talks of complex “hieroglyphs”, made out of the combination of gesture, language, characters and objects.<sup>37</sup> For Kane, the stage dimensions of her plays are extremely important. Exemplary is the final act of *Blasted*, where Ian appears in a sequence of (almost) mute *tableaux*:<sup>38</sup>

*Ian masturbating.*

*Ian* cunt cunt

*Darkness.*

*Light.*

*Ian strangling himself with his bare hands.*

*Darkness.*

*Light.*

*Ian shitting.*

*And then trying to clean it up with newspaper.*

*Darkness.*

*Light.*

*Ian laughing hysterically.*

*Darkness.*

*Light. Ian having a nightmare.*

*Darkness.*

*Light.*

*Ian crying, huge bloody tears.*

*He is hugging the Soldier's body for comfort.*

*Darkness.*

*Light.*

*Ian lying very still, weak with hunger.*

*Darkness.*

*Light.*

*Ian tears the cross out of the ground, rips up the floor and lifts the baby's body out.*

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<sup>37</sup> Artaud 68.

<sup>38</sup> See Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 17.

*He eats the baby.*

*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. (59 – 60)*

The motifs of *Blasted* that were discussed or introduced verbally in the play are now re-introduced in a sequence of symbolic images: Ian, who has spent the whole play refusing comfort, is now forced by his loneliness to seek reassurance by the dead body of the Soldier – his tormentor. The newspaper he wrote for is reduced to mere paper for the blind Ian and therefore used for cleaning his faeces. Ian, who tells the Soldier he could never do the taboo things the Soldier prides in doing (torture, child-rape), now transgresses one of the oldest and most universal taboos by practicing cannibalism. The transgression is intensified by the sacrilege of the cross and Ian's unsuccessful attempts to take his own life.

Concerning the theatrical and textual dimension, Artaud's attitude to stage and staging should be mentioned. Artaud calls for staging "not simply viewed as one degree of refraction of the script on stage, but as the starting point for theatrical creation"<sup>39</sup> and calls for the deletion of the gap between the author and the director. Kane, herself a director and an occasional actress, naturally united the two aspects in her person. Her texts, although sometimes challenging in terms of staging, always maintain a very strong theatrical dimension. Her approach to her work as a performance is linked to what was mentioned above: the need for direct physical contact of the play and the audience. She liked the idea of an active spectator who can change the play by interaction with it.<sup>40</sup> This refers back to Artaud, whose ideal audience could accept what Kane's audience was at first unwilling to: "the audience will believe in the illusion of theatre on condition they really take it for a dream, not for a servile imitation of reality." Artaud goes on to assert that the "picture of a

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<sup>39</sup> Artaud 72.

<sup>40</sup> Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 15.

crime presented in the right stage conditions is something infinitely more dangerous to the mind than if the same crime were committed in life.”<sup>41</sup> This seems to bring back the Aristotelian notion of *mimesis* and *katharsis*. In Artaud’s ideal world, “[t]he illusion will no longer be dependent on the probability or improbability of the action, but on the power to communicate and the reality of that action.”<sup>42</sup> The slightly improbable plot, Artaud argues together with Aristotle, is forgivable if it means that the characters or the happening on the scene addresses itself to the spectators’ whole existence, not just entertains them.

The double in “Theatre and its Double” refers exactly to this: theatre should be a double of life but not in the mimetic way. Rather, it should express the cosmic forces that are at work in our lives and that also form the part of the “cruelty.” The theatre can therefore re-establish contact with the layers of our existence we do not normally use or think of; it expands our consciousness towards the rationally impossible by showing it on stage.

An important author whose influence shows in both Kane’s and Crimp’s plays is Samuel Beckett. First, some points of correspondence will be pointed out between Kane and Beckett; Beckettian features will serve as a transition to the chapter on Crimp’s influences.

Kane claims she was “steeped in Beckett” when she wrote *Blasted*.<sup>43</sup> The play shows strong Beckettian influence in the last scene, where Cate and Ian inhabit the stage together, eating sausage and drinking gin, Cate feeding the blind Ian. The situation where the mutilated and de-humanized characters are entrapped in a space together and somehow dependent on each other is a typical Beckettian moment. There is certain dissimilarity, of course: in Beckett, the motivation leading to a similar situation is usually so under-developed that he seems to address the human condition as a whole, whereas Kane is interested specifically in the relationship transformed by violence, and in the impact of externally caused trauma on the

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<sup>41</sup> Artaud 65.

<sup>42</sup> Esslin, *Artaud*, 78.

<sup>43</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 102.

characters. The chief similarity lies in the fact that at the end of the play, both characters live on, not moving away from their unbearable situation, entangled in an inescapable relationship. When Kane shifts to more experimental dramatic form, the mutual dependence of characters takes a new structure in *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*. Here the voices can be taken as parts of one mind, reminiscent for example of Krapp's two selves in *Krapp's Last Tape*.

Martin Esslin says of Beckett that his works "are more than mere illustrations of the point-of-view of existentialist philosophers [...] they constitute the culmination of existential thought, itself, *precisely because they are free of any abstract concepts or general ideas*".<sup>44</sup> Kane is akin to Beckett in this refusal of generalization in the name of an ideology.

Kane and Beckett share a taste for the absolute but they differ in its application and implications. When the ultimate (experience, truth) cannot be achieved, Beckett's characters cease to act and create an inner universe, which is why they are sometimes little more than a voice or a consciousness. In contrast, Kane's characters choose action and go to extremes in their pursuit of the unattainable ideal. They always wish to undergo a definitive experience, which changes them in an unexpected way. Correspondingly, the characters themselves are not any set psychological archetypes; they are autonomous, almost classical heroes with specific fate and anguish. Kane seems to relate to Beckett's concept of character-as-consciousness in her last two plays, where the character is transformed into a voice. In her earlier plays, however, Kane's *personae* are emphatically physically present on stage, of which fact the spectator is always reminded by their bodily actions and afflictions. This is not to say that Beckett's characters do not have bodies: in fact, they often refer to their own physiognomy, usually to report some infirmity or mutilation. However, these mutilations and infirmities are not results of violent interaction with another character. The fact that Molloy cannot walk, for example, is above all grotesque, reminding the reader of some kind of

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<sup>44</sup> Martin Esslin, ed., "Introduction," *Samuel Beckett. A Collection of Critical Essays*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1987) 5. Italics are Esslin's.

Kafkaesque “divine malediction”.<sup>45</sup> In Kane, mutilation of one character is always the result of the manifestation of power of another (e.g. Carl and Tinker in *Cleansed*). What is more, Beckettian characters’ bodily malfunctions serve to increase a sense of detachment, to make them seem less human and more like machines or objects. In Kane, the characters’ anguish invites our involvement and by suffering with them we are supposed to extend our humanity.

One aspect Beckett and Kane share is a very black sense of humour. Verbal humour is completed by the grotesque, usually associated with the afflicted body: this is for example the scene at the end of *Cleansed* when Carl (whose arms, legs and tongue have been cut off by Tinker) holds out his stump to Grace in the only friendly gesture he is able to perform. His affliction is so overwhelming that laughter is perhaps the most appropriate response. Similarly tragicomical and blackly humorous is the moment in the last scene of *Blasted*, where Ian dies only to be revived by inclement weather:

*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. (60)

The isolated body part protruding from the floor, the effortlessness of death (compared with previous unsuccessful attempts at suicide), and the laconic (and, in its implications, blasphemous) comment on afterlife all relate Kane to Beckett.

The last similarity between Beckett and Kane is the feeling for the musical and rhythmical side of language. From Kane’s plays, *Crave* especially shows the rhythmical and

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<sup>45</sup> Maurice Nadeau, “Samuel Beckett: Humor and the Void,” *Samuel Beckett. A Collection of Critical Essays* 34.

verbal precision that creates an impression independent of the meaning of the words, the feature we find in all Beckett's theatrical works.

**M** I close my eyes and I see her close her eyes and she sees you.  
**A** The scream of a daffodil,  
**M** The stain of a scream.  
**C** I watched my father beat my mother with a walking stick.  
**A** A stain,  
**C** An echo,  
**A** A stain. (179)

The language seems to free itself and function as a separate element when it is not burdened by the psychological notion of character and the consistency and probability of the plot. Even so, the spectator tends to make the fragments into a narrative, so the language of the drama in fact functions on two levels: as a playtext, working with the expectations of the spectators, and separately, as a universal, usually poetic text. The rhythmical use of language does not mean negation of its theatrical possibilities; putting the stylised language on stage in fact doubles its significance.

### ***2.3 Inspiration and Influence in the Work of Martin Crimp: Samuel Beckett, the Absurd, Media***

Martin Crimp has always stood apart from theatrical trends and fashions. As a young playwright, he refused to write the highly political “social-realist council estate” plays that loomed large in the Thatcherite era.<sup>46</sup> Instead, he “turned his back on the contemporary in order to explore a symbolic, or absurdist, landscape of cruel personal relationships”.<sup>47</sup> In 1988, for instance, Crimp wrote two plays that correspond with the mood of the day at first sight: *Getting Attention* (dealing with child abuse in an indifferent neighbourhood) and

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<sup>46</sup> See Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 35.

<sup>47</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 15.

*Dealing With Clair* (reworking an actual case of a young estate agent murdered by her customer). However, even in these plays Crimp demonstrates what interests him as an author: largely ignoring the potential of a social appeal, he prefers to create an atmosphere of unidentifiable menace to delivering a clear political statement. Already in these early plays Crimp creates characters that are obsessed, manipulative and at the same time strangely empty. Their interaction consists of manoeuvring, secretiveness and long meaningful silences. Liz and Mike, the greedy couple from *Dealing With Clair*, serve as a good example. They could be portrayed as materialistic and therefore immoral; what is so unappealing about them, however, is not really their greed, but their vaguely abnormal relationship as a couple. Mike likes to talk about their young Italian au-pair, Anna, sometimes with sexual innuendo. After they find out that Clair, the agent, has been abducted and probably killed by a man who wanted to buy their house, Liz is aroused by the idea:

*Liz comes up behind Mike and puts her arms around his waist. He puts his hands on hers.*

**Mike** What is it?

**Liz** Aren't you curious?

,

It's just they've been here, haven't they. They were in this house. They were in this room, that's all.

,

I mean aren't you curious?

**Mike** Mmm?

**Liz** Because in some ways I can't imagine it at all, I can't imagine where they'd begin.

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But then I suppose they're rather similar people.

**Mike** D'you think?

**Liz** No, don't let go. Don't let go off me.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Martin Crimp, *Plays: One* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000) 83-4. All subsequent quotations from *Dealing With Clair*, *Play With Repeats*, *Getting Attention* and *The Treatment* are from this edition.

This, together with the way the couple are regarding the murder of Clair as a wasted business opportunity, gives one a nauseous insight into their feelings and makes their lust for money and sexual desire connected in an uncanny way.

The characteristic atmosphere of menace, power games, language and manipulation are landmarks of Crimp's style. Where does the style spring from and whom does Crimp acknowledge as his predecessors? Crimp says that at the beginning of his writing career Samuel Beckett was probably the strongest inspiration, although he considers him "a really dangerous influence."<sup>49</sup> It is apparent what the two have in common: the notion that language is the central phenomenon of human existence, and the desire to explore the limits of expression by language. Equally, it is clear from what has been said that Crimp and Beckett differ in the way they perceive the inadequacy of language. Beckett's protagonists are usually alone, or more precisely, it does not matter whether they are with someone; the concern is always the interaction of an individual with reality. Beckett's characters struggle to describe reality and their language falls back upon itself when it encounters difficulties of representation. Crimp is much more interested in interaction between two or more characters, wherein language serves as a weapon, as a commodity or as a curtain behind which something is concealed. As a result, Crimp never stays in the speculative realm that is Beckett's domain. The narrative of the play always stays primary, no matter how experimental the structure. *Attempts on Her Life* is experimental, but at the same time it is a string of clear-cut micro-narratives. This affection for narrative is also reflected in the way Crimp reads Beckett: *Waiting for Godot*, he says, is essentially "underpinned by a story; it just happens not to be told."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Crimp qtd. in Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 87.

<sup>50</sup> Crimp qtd. in Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 103.

Beckett and Crimp are both sceptical about the power of language to find and express the truth. Beckett expresses this through decomposing the language (e.g. in *Play*), and also by actually letting his characters discuss their own difficulties of expression (*That Time, Not I*); Crimp, being more of a satirist, parodies and exaggerates the register of his chosen genre or ideology to point out its weaknesses. However, he also uses devices such as rhetorical questions or repetition when he wants to emphasise the discrepancies in communication. In *The Country* the lovers Rebecca and Richard have a conversation which points at the limit of what can be said in words. Rebecca reveals she has told Richard's wife Corinne about the relationship and Corinne has left with the children. The scene ends with Rebecca repeating "Don't look at me", to which Richard responds "I'm not looking at you", while the stage directions state that he keeps looking at her (345).

Discrepancies between words and action, repetition up to the point of nonsensicality and dialogue that is so realistic that it is irrational are all landmarks of the Theatre of the Absurd. Crimp's eclectic, polyphonic and parodying style draws him close to the heritage of continental absurdism. Judging by Crimp's taste in translation, which has led him to choose authors like Ionesco, Genet and Koltès, he himself is aware of the connection.<sup>51</sup> Crimp's dialogues, which make excellent use of the banal, everyday clichés of the conversational form, seem to reverberate in the words of Eugène Ionesco: "[N]othing seems more surprising to me than that which is banal; the surreal is here, within grasp of our hands, in our everyday conversation."<sup>52</sup> The futility and emptied conversation in Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* remind one of the dialogue about frozen salmon in *Attempts on Her Life*. Absurdism and its central

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<sup>51</sup> Crimp points out specific influences of the works he translates on his own work. He gives an example from the time he was working on *The Country* and simultaneously translating *The Maids* by Jean Genet: "I knew there was something wrong with the last act of *The Country*; it hadn't quite gone far enough. Consciously or not, I stole the shoes from *The Maids* and I made a present with the shoes." Interview with Mireia Aragay and Pilar Zozaya, Aragay et al., 63.

<sup>52</sup> Ionesco qtd. by Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961) 93.

significance of language is echoed in Crimp's: "The characters in the play invent themselves while they are speaking and through their speech."<sup>53</sup>

Together with Ionesco, Crimp is fascinated by the association of language with violence and with authority. In Ionesco's *The Lesson*, a girl pupil is bullied into submission by a professor, who has the advantage of knowledge and authority. When the pupil gets toothache, the professor rapes and kills her rather than letting her get away from his power. The notion of the authorities as owners of language and therefore truth is obvious and strong in Crimp, even if not expressed in such straightforward manner. In *The Treatment*, John, who provides finance for the project of filming Anne's story, feels justified to change the story according to market demand. In *Whole Blue Sky*, the voices that create the narrative keep arguing; the voice that is most powerful has the right to shape the story:

3     She can't love it.  
1     Can't what?  
3     Love it – can't love the baby – gets depressed.  
1     Gets what?  
3     Depressed – gets depressed – depressed by all that screaming – all that sucking – all that biting the breast.  
1     Oh no. She loves it. She loves the child. She loves the way it sucks – even the way it bites. Loves its hair, loves its eyes.  
(*Fewer Emergencies*, 9)

Crimp shares with Ionesco or Genet the use of objects on stage as separate expressive devices. In *The Country*, Genet's influence and the significance of the shoes has been mentioned; besides, the individual scenes are separated by the children's game of scissors, paper and stone. The scissors, which are used by Corinne in the first scene and with which she hurts herself, signify the sharp probing to which she submits her husband but which turns against her. Throughout the play, there are references to a chair-shaped stone in the open country in which Rebecca likes to sit and where her watch is found at the end of the play. The

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<sup>53</sup> Crimp in interview with Nils Tabert, qtd. in Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 126.

stone could be argued to signify the country itself, the space where all the characters have come to escape from their troubles but found they have followed them. Paper is the frailest of the three “elements” and represents the weak and superficial happiness of the family: the pictures Corinne cuts out for the children in the first scene and the birthday cards she gets in the last scene.

The identification with the theatre of the absurd is not absolute in Crimp’s case; however, the association is obvious enough to help him evade accusations of illogicality. With absurdism, everybody understands the plot does not have to be realistic as the purpose of the play is to criticise the times.<sup>54</sup> Crimp’s experimental plays are sufficiently satirical and critical to drive the point home. The plays can be enjoyed as hilarious and mercilessly witty, and their logic is underlain by open critique – which makes them easier to follow (e.g. in comparison with Kane’s plays). Crimp prefers the role of a satirist over the role of an innovator: “I would describe my position as universally critical.”<sup>55</sup>

The satirical edge, nevertheless, does not make Crimp a truly political author in the manner of Ionesco or Havel. While they write about authorities that are imposed upon us, Crimp concentrates on authorities we ourselves choose to rule us. Among these are the narratives we like to construct from our lives, the constructions of ideal lives as presented to us by commercials or popular culture.

Thereupon springs the last source often mentioned in connection with Crimp: the mass media (TV, video) together with the elements of popular, commercial culture (advertising, popular movies), whose register he uses on stage. The fascination with high-tech culture can be explained by the discrepancy between the time Crimp started writing and our

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<sup>54</sup> Paraphrasing Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 10-11.

<sup>55</sup> Crimp qtd. by Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 166.

contemporary world. The development has been enormous. Aleks Sierz starts his elaborate description of the Thatcherite era in this way:

Imagine life without mobile phones, cordless phones, email, texting, videos, CDs, DVDs, minidiscs, and digital cameras or camcorders. Or PlayStations. Or personal computers. Or the Internet. No laptops; no iPods.<sup>56</sup>

Apparently, everyone was fascinated by the quick development of technical devices in the 1980s; in a way, this shows for example in *No One Sees the Video* (1990). When Colin rewinds the market research interview with Liz and watches it again and again on a videotape, it is an interesting stage device: Liz is present on stage, but simultaneously absent – yet again present, because Colin is talking to her on the phone while watching the interview. The fact that Colin is watching her video contradicts the title and thus points at the immorality of market researchers; at the same time, it shows that Colin is not capable of having a normal relationship and feels safer with Liz on tape than with the real Liz.

Crimp's approach to media, however, has never consisted of mere fascination and has moved during the 1990s towards more serious connotations. While the media ceased to be "new" and began to represent an indisposable element of contemporary life, Crimp's preoccupations have stayed the same: the quantity of media possibilities does not imply higher quality (or, rather, heightened reality) of representation. On the contrary, while we are being bombarded by images, we lose the ability to be impressed, to get involved.

This phenomenon has of course been largely discussed in its not only dramatic but also philosophical implications, and sometimes described as the posthuman condition, with media running our world instead of us. It can be argued that the dramatic texts drawing on media want to a) make us aware of the impact of media on our existence and b) reach a more striking

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<sup>56</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 7.

effect with a society already saturated by media and their possibilities. As Karen Jürs-Munby notices in her introduction to *Postdramatic Theatre* by Hans-Thies Lehmann:

The impact of media on performance manifests itself not only in the use of high-tech 'multimedia' onstage,[...] but sometimes also in its very opposite: theatre on a bare stage with minimalist, pared down aesthetics, which nevertheless can only be understood by being related to life in a 'mediatized' society.<sup>57</sup>

Correspondingly Aleks Sierz notes that for Crimp's plays that use media (*Attempts on Her Life*, *The Treatment*), "the worst productions are those in which the media element of the play is excessively highlighted, drowning its satire with noisy video images or the like."<sup>58</sup> The comparative silence and limited possibilities of the theatre can make the audience more aware of their everyday interaction with the media, which is in fact abnormal. Crimp's preoccupation with media and appearance of TV, video, microphones etc. on stage is also a meaningful addition to the debate on theatre as a (dying?) genre. *The Treatment*, a satire on film producers and showbusiness, takes place on stage, which gives it metatheatrical irony. Theatre is "a medium that can't compete with cinema's trendiness nor with its audience size,"<sup>59</sup> but as such, it can still mock the cinema. Crimp is aware of the limits of the stage but succeeds in turning them into merits.

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<sup>57</sup> Karen Jürs-Munby, "Introduction". *Postdramatic Theatre*. By Hans-Thies Lehmann. London: Routledge 2006. 1-15. 10.

<sup>58</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 55.

<sup>59</sup> Sierz: *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 43.

### ***3. Theatrical Innovations***

#### ***3.1 Formal Innovations: Tradition and Experiment***

Innovations of the dramatic form provoke questions about what defines drama and wherein lies the dramatic quality of the text. It is always problematic to establish what is actually taken as a norm in theatre. Aristotle's *Poetics* provides a good starting point for establishing the notion of the "norm". In contemporary theatre there are very few plays that would abide absolutely by Aristotle's requirements for tragedy: however, the breaches from the notion of plot, character, structure or time and space as identified by Aristotle are even nowadays interpreted as innovative or experimental, no matter how common they have become. What, then, does Aristotle think essential for the structure of tragedy?

Necessarily then every tragedy has six constituent parts, and on these its quality depends. These are plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song. Two of these are the means of representation: one is the manner: three are the objects represented. This list is exhaustive, and practically all the poets employ these elements, for every drama includes alike spectacle and character and plot and diction and song and thought.<sup>1</sup>

Aristotle goes on to describe the plot, which he claims to be the most important element of a play:

After these definitions we must next discuss the proper arrangement of the incidents, since this is the first and most important thing in tragedy. We have laid it down that tragedy is a representation of an action that is whole and complete and of a certain magnitude, since a thing may be a whole and yet have no magnitude.[...] Well-constructed plots must not therefore begin and end at random, but must embody the formulae we have stated.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle. *The Poetics*. Trans. W. Hamilton Fyfe (London: William Heinemann, 1965) 25.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle 30-31.

The less important parts of tragedy, such as song, have long been abandoned, but what stays valid is the requirement of an understandable and well-arranged plot, believable characters, and setting that is probable in terms of time and place. The dramas of Kane and Crimp do not seem to follow the Aristotelian requirements. The identification with characters is disrupted; while Crimp does not let us get involved with his enigmatic characters, Kane's *personae* give us no option but to get involved. However, there are few clues as to their motivation or psychological background. The situations in Kane's and Crimp's dramas are unconventional and the audience has no set response to much of what is happening on stage. The plots are illogical and lack explanations and neatly arranged climaxes.

Kane's plays correspond to at least some of the Aristotelian criteria more than those of Crimp. She definitely portrays events "of a certain magnitude", not being afraid of larger-than-life characters, bloody revenges and eternal love vows, while Crimp cherishes the banal and the everyday. What the two authors have in common is the notion of the difficulty of "true" perception of reality, which they remake into complications in representation. For Aristotle, the form is beautiful when it is "perceivable to the intuition without a time delay, in one beat, at one glance": hence the three unities and the requirements of logic and consistency.<sup>3</sup> Crimp and Kane observe that the relationship of reality and perception is not clear-cut; both believe that the maintenance of the unities facilitates understanding of drama but in fact marks a boundary between drama and life; both dislike this notion and try to disrupt the boundary.

In her first play, *Blasted*, Kane took the extremely conventional "fourth wall" structure and blew it apart together with the hotel room in Scene Two. Already in this play she began the undertaking to unite form and content, which was to continue throughout her writing career. In *Blasted* the brutality of war seems to influence and in fact damage the plot.

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<sup>3</sup> See Lehmann 159.

*Phaedra's Love* is a variation on classical tragedy and as such has the most affinities to Aristotelian tragedy: the unities are maintained, the characters and dialogues are clearly defined, and we perceive the change of a character that ends in purgation. *Cleansed*, on the other hand, has the form of a fantasy, a drug vision, or a dream: the scenes are independent and only loosely fall into a narrative, so the sense of time is challenged. The impossibility of action (sunflowers growing from the stage, invisible torturers) corresponds to the freedom of the structure. *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* are written under the influence of Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* and as such very experimental in form; by abandoning time, place, action and character, they mutate into other genres, especially poetry.

Crimp, as a champion of experimental theatre, felt touched by Kane's work from the beginning of her career. When he defended *Blasted* in *The Guardian* on 23 January 1995, he did so precisely because he was "angry at the banal definition of theatre as naturalistic realism based on personal experience."<sup>4</sup> It was discontent with this model of theatre that led him to writing *Attempts on Her Life* in 1997. He recalls his motivation for writing the play:

*Attempts on Her Life* comes from a sense of extreme dissatisfaction and boredom with everything that was happening in the theatre.[...] It was also a provocation to the Royal Court, which saw itself as the home of avant-gardism. But where was that kind of work? It didn't seem to be happening.[...] *Attempts on Her Life* tries to describe a whole range of events that are happening in the world, but from one particular viewpoint which is that of the privileged Western European viewer.[...] I was fed up with people coming and saying hello to each other.<sup>5</sup>

The *Attempts*, presenting seventeen independent scenarios and no characters, is Crimp's most famous experiment with form, but by no means the only one. Arguably every Crimp's play presents a different formal innovation. His early plays draw strongly from the theatre of the absurd by challenging the usual shape of dialogue or monologue – most significantly

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<sup>4</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 44.

<sup>5</sup> Aragay et al. 57-8.

probably in *Living Remains*, which is essentially a monologue of a woman who visits her husband in hospital. The husband is paralysed and can communicate only by means of a buzzer, with which he is able to say “Yes” (press once) or “No” (press twice). The woman wants a permission to leave with another man; the husband, even if paralysed, holds her hostage by refusing to answer.

In *Play with Repeats*, an insignificant factory worker gets a chance to relive the decisive moments of his life and make the right decision the second time. He narrates his life to a young couple in the pub in the first scene. The crucial moments of his life (promotion at work, attracting a woman) are therefore present in the play twice: once narrated in the protagonist’s monologue, and the second time enacted on stage – this time with a different outcome.

Even a very conventional play like *The Country* is very elaborate formally. The three characters of the love triangle never appear onstage together. The play has five scenes with two characters in each of them – wife and husband, wife and husband’s lover, or husband and lover. Crimp says: “There are dialogues and at the end of each dialogue there is always a winner and a loser.”<sup>6</sup> Characters important for the story (the children, the neighbours) never appear, but are only discussed or present through a telephone call: they function as pawns in the verbal *agon* performed by the two protagonists onstage. The element of game is strengthened by the words “stone”, “paper” and “scissors”, uttered after each dialogue.

Crimp loves symmetry and places corresponding scenes in almost all of his plays: there are two scenes with the blind cab driver in *The Treatment*; in *No One Sees the Video*, there are parallel scenes of interviews and two scenes of people watching each other on video.<sup>7</sup> Even the form of *Attempts on Her Life*, which suggests randomness, is nevertheless thoughtful and

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<sup>6</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 165.

<sup>7</sup> See the interview with Crimp in Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 96-99.

symmetrical: there are two “musical numbers”, two foreign language scenarios, and two scenes (“Faith in Ourselves” and “Strangely!”) that can be interpreted as parts of one story.<sup>8</sup>

It is clear that even the more apparently traditional of Crimp’s plays are always more or less experimenting with form. On the other hand, his two pronouncedly innovative plays, i.e. *Attempts on Her Life* and *Fewer Emergencies*, have often been termed “postmodern” and thus disposed of as mere pranks. They have been perceived as parts of the realm of postmodern game, which Elinor Fuchs describes as an “aesthetic of breaks and gaps, surfaces and masks, objectless in its irony, without closure, speaking a strange synthetic language packed with sly quotations and a myriad of references to pop culture.”<sup>9</sup> However, this is not entirely valid about Crimp. The language he employs is by no means synthetic but fully realistic – a feature that works excellently precisely in juxtaposition with pop culture. His plays are not only enjoyable but also thoughtful and challenging – and, for that reason, hard work for the spectators. His irony is usually very pointed; he always writes as a satirist, with an opinion and a target, whereas as a postmodern author he would ideally employ no moral position at all. Satire implies involvement, and involvement presupposes a moral/political viewpoint. For that reason, Crimp, after all, seems to be a political writer – not in the manner of the “state-of-the-nation” plays but in a more abstract sense of the political as ethical. In this context, even a philosophical issue of living in a mediatized society becomes political – precisely because Crimp chooses to satirize it and show its ethical risks.

### **3.1.1 *The Postdramatic & Recycling***

What is the point of using the dramatic form but devoiding it of almost everything that we have learnt to associate with theatre? Hans-Thies Lehmann offers some approaches to this

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 50.

<sup>9</sup> Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater After Modernism* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1996) 6-7.

problem in his *Postdramatic Theatre*. The book has been translated from the German by Karen Jürs-Munby, whose introduction concentrates on the Anglo-American theatrical scene, mentioning Kane and Crimp as examples of postdramatic playwrights.

The average spectator comes to the theatre looking for a cohesive narrative and consistent characters; his/her expectations will not be fulfilled by Kane's or Crimp's work but there is still the possibility of a valid theatrical experience. The postdramatic writers, according to Jürs-Munby,

require the spectators to become active co-writers of the (performance) text. The spectators are no longer just filling in the predictable gaps in a dramatic narrative but are asked to become active witnesses who reflect on their own meaning-making and who are also willing to tolerate gaps and suspend the assignment of meaning.<sup>10</sup>

To achieve this, it is important that the spectators have not only the willingness to be "active" but most of all the experience of theatre. The dramatic text in Crimp's or Kane's experimental version might seem non-theatrical or even anti-theatrical because of its lack of what a play is expected to have; however, it is meant to be seen in the space of the theatre by the people who came to see a play. For this reason, it is meaningful to relate this new theatre to the old or traditional one. The performances "often allude to these expectations of familiar dramatic structures and theatrical conventions and deliberately confound them."<sup>11</sup> The typical features of the postdramatic theatre are therefore blank place and time, blurred (or no) characters, and utterances that are lyrical and fragmented rather than concise and plot-building. Kane's *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* and Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* and *Fewer Emergencies* correspond to this description precisely.

The constant interruption of the narrative voices in *Attempts on Her Life* and *Fewer Emergencies* tells the narrative "in an indirect way, in a way that calls attention to [its]

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<sup>10</sup> Jürs-Munby, in Lehmann, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Jürs-Munby, in Lehmann, 11.

telling.”<sup>12</sup> The text that relates to itself is a favourite device of Crimp’s. This is the reason why he often uses a person reading out a text or interpreting from a foreign language on stage. The “physical, motoric act of speaking or reading the text itself” helps us understand “the speech act as action”.<sup>13</sup> In “The Threat of International Terrorism” from *Attempts on Her Life*, the *Verfremdungseffekt* is brought to perfection by the quote/unquote signs: “Who listens quote expressionlessly unquote to the description of quote outrage unquote after quote outrage unquote after quote outrage unquote she has perpetrated”(40). The text is thematized and replaces action. The use of different languages in the performance can of course have a political meaning: the director can bring to focus a certain political issue by choosing the appropriate language. As Mary Luckhurst says in her interpretation, “[t]he multi-lingualism of *Attempts on Her Life* also affects the politics of its performance” and Crimp “deliberately allows scope for the insertion of topical local and global politics.”<sup>14</sup> However, Crimp himself seems to perceive foreign language more as an aesthetic element: “[...] when I hear [the conversation] in a foreign language [...] it’s like music. It’s tremendous. [...] The event onstage is brought about by language. But the language itself doesn’t need to be understood. The truth of the scene is elsewhere.”<sup>15</sup>

For Kane, the use of fragments of songs, clichés, and canonical texts displays the “palimpsestuous intertextuality and intratextuality that are a significant quality of much postdramatic theatre.”<sup>16</sup> This copies the influx of overlapping and often contradictory phenomena that constitute our existence in this day and age; in the words of one of the actors of the experimental theatre group *Forced Entertainment*, it is “searching for a theatre that can really talk about what it’s like to live through these times.”<sup>17</sup> It is essential to remember that

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<sup>12</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 162.

<sup>13</sup> Lehmann 147.

<sup>14</sup> Luckhurst 52.

<sup>15</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 99.

<sup>16</sup> Jürs-Munby, in Lehmann, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Qtd. in Lehmann 11.

postdramatic theatre has thus not given up on relating to the world but crucially no longer represents the world as a surveyable whole: 'Here, "world" does not mean the walled-off (by a fourth wall) fictional totality, but a world open to its audience, an essentially possible world, pregnant with potentiality.'<sup>18</sup>

In *The Haunted Stage*, Marvin Carlson comments on the recycling and returning phenomena of theatrical performance and dramatic texts, talking about individual productions and their allusions to each other but also about the body of the actor or the space of the theatre, including staging. This idea is, in a broader sense, applicable to Kane and Crimp's techniques of *Attempts on Her Life*, *4.48 Psychosis* or *Crave*. Apart from being purged from any character conventions, the ignoring of usual properties of the dramatic text, such as the number of actors or stage directions may mark the authorial desire to start anew, to avoid all the recycling, "ghosting" reappearances of dramatic phenomena one seems to undergo when writing a dramatic text. In this respect, Crimp ironically undermines his own endeavours with the topic of his experimental works: the rendition of a life in which the life is lost in a whirlwind of recycled props of commercial genres. Indeed, there is probably no dramatic text that could be devoid of meaning from the beginning of its existence. Roland Barthes points out "the virtual impossibility of discovering or creating a nonsignifying object in any society, since there is no reality except what is intelligible, and as social beings we structure our intelligible universe according to the semiotic systems of our culture."<sup>19</sup>

Carlson also notes the use of "recycling" for ironic purposes, when "the audience's previous knowledge of or experience with some element of the dramatic production reveals to them an incongruity between the apparent situation onstage and what they know or assume to be the real situation."<sup>20</sup> In Crimp, the recycling is often used to show us (and make us laugh

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<sup>18</sup>Lehmann qtd. in Jürs-Munby's introduction to Lehmann, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Barthes paraphrased by Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage. The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003) 133.

<sup>20</sup> Carlson 166.

at) our expectations of the genre. In *Attempts on Her Life*, the scenarios are just fragments – and still each of them succeeds in delivering the whole genre convention behind it. The irony of recycling a variety of concepts is the most “postmodern” feature of Crimp’s texts. In Carlson’s words:

Recycling today often serves to call the attention of the audience to the constructedness of the theatrical performance, to its status as a product not spontaneously appearing but consciously assembled out of preexisting elements, many of them already known to the observers from other, somewhat different contexts.[...] Such a recognition of constructedness is actively pursued both in the engaged theatre descended from Brecht, which has found recycling a useful tool in its project of disrupting the dreamworld of naturalism, and by the playful postmodern theatre, taking joy in the artifice of art.<sup>21</sup>

In the two uses Carlson describes, the difference between Crimp and Kane can be observed. Kane does not use the ironic recycling much: she prefers to start anew and questions the validity of traditional theatrical features by removing them. She disrupts space, time and action to bring us directly into an inside world of ideas and images, without any crutches of tradition. Kane always proclaimed herself dedicated to the truth and her experiments are aimed at the best way of grasping the truth and delivering meaning to the audience.<sup>22</sup> Her aim here can be compared to that of the continental avant-garde of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who “challenge[d] the narrative structures and conventional rational constructions through which reality is interpreted, in order [to] make the inherited realist models of the world less self-evident or ‘natural’.”<sup>23</sup>

Crimp, on the other hand, engages in recycling to be able to play with the audience, to wake them from their lethargy by disrupting their horizon of expectations. The brevity of his

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<sup>21</sup> Carlson 175.

<sup>22</sup> Stephenson and Langridge 134.

<sup>23</sup> Murphy qtd. in Wallace, “Sarah Kane, Experiential Theatre and the Revenant Avant-Garde”, 2.

fragmented scenarios shows that most of the spectators only need very little information before they identify the genre, sit back and relax.

Of course, in the exact imitation (be it of a person or a genre) there is always a strong possibility of parody. Carlson cites in this context an example of an actress who

studied a single television program on how to prepare a chocolate cake by the well-known television personality Julia Child and then precisely recreated this program onstage, scrupulously imitating every gesture and intonation of the original.<sup>24</sup>

The outcome, according to Carlson, was very funny. The audience's experience of their own present is used on them: they are supposed to use it as a clue to what is happening onstage. One is immediately reminded of the realism of Crimp's dialogue, which is so hilarious when transferred on stage – but at the same time terrifying, as the audience recognises themselves in what they are laughing at. By means of ghosting and parody, Crimp seems to be offering a kind of *katharsis* after all.

### **3.1.2 Outside Inspiration: Non-Theatrical Forms**

Both Kane and Crimp seem keen to use elements from other, non-dramatic art forms. Together with referring to the traditional theatrical elements (even if only by their absence), they are willing to reach out from the theatrical space to a different field, genre or problem.

In Kane, the use of violence as a trigger of life-changing experience has been noted by many and often misunderstood as an unhealthy fascination by violence. Others have rightly pointed out the moral juxtaposition of “a common rape in a Leeds hotel room” and war crimes in Bosnia as “the seed” and “the tree”.<sup>25</sup> Most importantly, *Blasted* has been successfully

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<sup>24</sup> Carlson 71.

<sup>25</sup> Kane qtd. in Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 101.

compared to the genre of war testimony by Peter Buse.<sup>26</sup> The shock value of the scenes in *Blasted* is obvious; more importantly, it raises questions about the manifestability of horrific, traumatizing events. Buse points out that “[t]rauma is not just the crisis in the memory of the traumatized subject but a crisis in representation and narration.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, how does one express a unique personal experience? The common words, used and reused, seem inadequate for the expression of trauma. Therefore, if the traumatized subject wants to avoid expressing his/her experience in clichés, s/he has to remain silent.

Kane has always been interested in trauma, its expression and manifestation. Her very first dramatic achievement, “Comic Monologue”, is a monologue of a woman who tells the story of her abuse. She has a boyfriend but does not want to have sex with him. One day he takes her to his flat and, after a long struggle, rapes her orally and comes in her mouth. After the rape, he puts her in a bath, nurses her bruises and takes her home in his car. For the woman, this is “a trauma from which there is no recovery.”<sup>28</sup> The experience is traumatizing not only because she is unable to have sex and has constant flashbacks of the rape, but most of all because she has not told anyone. The reason she cannot confide in anybody or go to the police is that her experience does not fall in any known category. She imagines the policemen asking questions for which she does not have an answer: why did she let the man bathe her? Why did she let him take her home? Is oral rape “real” rape? The impossibility of confession isolates her socially and the trauma, untold, swells inside her. A similar problem arises in *Phaedra’s Love*, where Phaedra accuses Hippolytus of rape, when in fact what he has done is much more complex and much more humiliating than mere “rape”.

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<sup>26</sup> “Trauma and Testimony in *Blasted* – Kane with Felman”, in Peter Buse, *Drama + Theory. Critical Approaches to Modern British Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) 172-190. Buse interprets *Blasted* using Shoshana Felman’s book *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992).

<sup>27</sup> Buse 182.

<sup>28</sup> “Comic Monologue” exists only as a manuscript and has no page numbers. University of Bristol Theatre Collection, Ref. No. WTC/PS/000245.

*Blasted* and *Cleansed* seem to find an adequate expression of trauma by means of showing and not telling. They are attempts to go around the barrier of words and connect straight with the spectator – which they have succeeded at and were harshly criticised for. The difference between visual images (which have the power to traumatise) and words (which have lost it) is emphasised by the stories Ian dictates to his tabloid newspaper in *Blasted*:

A serial killer slaughtered British tourist, Samantha Scrace, S – C – R – A – C – E, in a sick murder ritual comma, police revealed yesterday point new par. The bubbly nineteen year old from Leeds was among seven victims found buried in identical triangular tombs in an isolated New Zealand forest point new par. Each had been stabbed more than twenty times and placed face down comma, hands bound behind their backs point new par. [...] (12)

On another level, *Blasted* is a play about overcoming trauma. Cate, who is the submissive type, has had fainting fits “since Dad came back” (10). Her dealing with the trauma is to escape, if only in the form of fainting (later in the play, she escapes from the hotel room for real). The soldier, on the other hand, is trying to get rid of his own trauma – the rape and killing of his girlfriend: “Col, they buggered her. Cut her throat. Hacked her ears and nose off, nailed them to the front door” (47). Being a soldier, he wants to annihilate the trauma by re-enacting it, i.e. by mutilating, raping and torturing.<sup>29</sup> For Ian, trauma only takes place in the course of the play and it is paradoxically a purgatory experience, which enables him to evolve into a different human being. Different ways of overcoming a traumatising experience and attention given to the assumed roles of witness, perpetrator or victim of violence provide valid interpretational context for Kane’s work.

An obvious connection of Kane’s work is intertextuality and the association with poetry. Kane has used – especially in *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* – a language poetic and full of allusions to the Bible, to the poetry of Eliot and other texts. The rhythm of language, the

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<sup>29</sup> See Buse 178.

sensual perception of words is as important as the meaning for her. However, it has not perhaps been noted sufficiently that the overwhelming language in the later plays is balanced by powerful moments of silence in *Blasted* or *Cleansed*, where Kane seems to fill the stage exclusively with movement or an emblematic image. This is for example the moment in *Blasted* where Cate comes in, “blood seeping from between her legs” (60). This single line is so powerful in the text itself that one can only imagine its impact when seen on stage. In the early version of the play, Kane had Cate actually recount how she sold her body to a soldier, in rather clichéd terms (he smelt of cigarettes, he told Cate she reminded him of his wife). By cutting the explanation away, Kane intensifies the meaning of Cate’s return on stage.

Perhaps the most beautiful moment of all Kane’s plays is the scene in *Cleansed* where Graham and Grace dance:

***Graham** dances – a dance of love for **Grace**.*

***Grace** dances opposite him, copying his movements.*

*Gradually, she takes on the masculinity of his movement, his facial expression. Finally, she no longer has to watch him – she mirrors him perfectly as they dance exactly in time. (119)*

The pantomime succeeds to express the complex psychological state of mind Grace is in. In its simplicity, it is loaded with meanings. Since the beginning of the play, Grace has been told that Graham was dead; hence it is not clear whether the Graham on stage is alive or dead and only existing in Grace’s imagination. Neither is the “dance of love” simple and straightforward: Grace is Graham’s sister, so the scene certainly has some incestuous implications. On the other hand, “love” here signifies also a desire to become the other, which is in its turn strengthened by the fact that the two are siblings. *Twelfth Night* resonates strongly in the scene. Grace takes on the identity of her brother; when they make love later in the same scene, it can be interpreted not as mere sexual act but also as a reconciliation of two

parts of Grace's psyche in a brief moment of harmony. Dialogue would certainly be too awkward to express all this in words.

For Crimp, the inter-genre play consists of bringing onstage the conventions of commercial entertainment, advertising and marketing, working with "unexpected and innovative juxtapositions of material, creating new relationships, effects, and tensions."<sup>30</sup> Crimp uses a technique opposite to Kane: in a form of *ekphrasis*, he describes visual (usually film) scenes textually. An example of this is the third scenario from *Attempts on Her Life*, "Faith in Ourselves". It is a description of war, which, together with the "slavonized" name of the heroine, Anya, immediately evokes the war in Bosnia. The pictures of violence are very powerful and touching – until one realises that it is meta-representation of violence one is offered. Two excited screenwriters keenly emphasise the violence and cruelty of the scene in their dialogue. A film scene is being described on stage, contrasting the power of the stage with the power of the camera:

- All there. All there in her face.
  - In Anya's face. We don't need words. She's beyond words. Her mouth, in fact her mouth trembles but no words come.  
[...]
  - Panorama of the whole valley.
  - The whole deep valley in spring.
  - The trees. The grass.
  - A bee crawls into the cup of a flower.
  - And now she speaks.  
[...]
- I think she advances towards the camera and begins to curse. (14-15)

The Anya in the film is beyond words; however, the words of the two creatives never stop. The picture of war violence is real enough but there is a distance caused by the emphasis laid on the effect the violence should have on the audience of the movie. Lehmann argues that people in general always prefer the imaginary to the real as there is "something liberating

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<sup>30</sup> Carlson 168.

about the appearance of the image” as the “schematised and intertextual meta-world” has no “moral and physical gravity” of the real one.<sup>31</sup> What Crimp wants to show is of course the insufficiencies and dangers of transporting oneself entirely into the meta-world. The gap is created by the enthusiastic “exactly” and “yes” the film-creators use to praise each other’s ideas. The overlapping of the executives also helps to widen the breach between what is represented and how it is represented.

The tension between the text and visual presentation is obvious: the circle from traditional theatre to avant-garde techniques has been completed as it comes back to textuality: Crimp does not prescribe any visual presentation, thus emphasising the “text as a quality that resists the scenic image.”<sup>32</sup> Crimp’s experimental plays basically consist of voices. There are not any directions concerning props or even the number of actors; the director has relatively great freedom as s/he is invited to combine the text with almost any (or none) stage action. In the words of Tim Albery, the first director of *Attempts on Her Life*: “If you are going to tear theatrical form apart, you might as well give the director and cast total freedom.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the fact that e.g. *Attempts on Her Life* is a representation of a representation offers a lot to the staging. It can be done with pompous theatricality, ironizing the showiness of the texts; then again, some of the directors who have staged *Attempts* so far preferred to have the stage bare, with the shabby and ridiculous people on it fantasising the technicolor world of clichéd images.<sup>34</sup> The emptiness of the stage here can mean that there is in fact nothing to show and point again at the difficulties (or sheer impossibility) of artistic representation. It also stresses the prominence of the text.

In this respect, both Crimp and Kane, although using “postdramatic” techniques, differ from Lehmann’s idea of theatre, in which the voice “is arranged and made rhythmic according

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<sup>31</sup> Lehmann 170.

<sup>32</sup> Lehmann 146.

<sup>33</sup> Qtd. in Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 193.

<sup>34</sup> See the interviews in Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 173-220.

to formal musical or architectonic patterns; through repetition, electronic distortion, superimposition to the point of incomprehensibility.”<sup>35</sup> In both Kane and Crimp, the meaning of text stays central. Language refers to itself and its limitations as means of representation but is not conceived so much as a physical act.

By replacing the traditional theatrical elements, both Crimp and Kane increase their audience’s awareness of what they understand under “theatre”. In order to represent truthfully, they complicate the individual parts of representation. Remarkably, both use the mental space for their experiments. Crimp provides a comment on both his and Kane’s innovations when he says:

I do think part of modern “identity” is to live inside our heads (a bit like being shut in a car, endlessly driving). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the theatre abandoned the street and moved into the tortured drawing-rooms of Ibsen and Feydeau; and in the 20<sup>th</sup>, Pinter and Beckett transformed it into a mental space, which some writers (the Kane of *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*) continued to explore.<sup>36</sup>

Kane’s plays “seem to be at war with the substance of theatre itself, provoking theatre to raise questions about its own nature.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, even if some of the stage directions are un-stageable, Kane manifests, by writing them, her belief in the power of theatre. She is thinking of an ideal stage where such performance elements are possible. This notion of the ideal shows also in the ambition of truth and totality: in each of her plays, Kane produces a totally new universe that corresponds to her imagined reality and shows it in its absolute form.

Crimp, on the other hand, points at the fragmentation of theatrical (and, accordingly, real) experience, and the topic of *Attempts on Her Life* and *Fewer Emergencies* could be at one level summarized as failure to produce a whole, a totality. At the same time, in these plays, most notably in *Fewer Emergencies*, we are invited not only to see the “product”, i.e.

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<sup>35</sup> Lehmann 149.

<sup>36</sup> Crimp qtd. in Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 140.

<sup>37</sup> Sean Carney, “The Tragedy of History in Sarah Kane’s *Blasted*.” *Theatre Survey* 46.2 (November 2005): 275-296. 288.

the narrative, but also the process in which the narrative forms itself in mind. Showing how ideas “morph out of each other” is hard to stage but compelling to read or watch.<sup>38</sup> The voices can belong to different people or conflicting sides of one person: what is important is the creative process. In this way, Crimp’s plays can be seen as not only a critique of language, but as a tribute to its creative powers.

### ***3.2 The Notion of Character***

Character and plot are the most important elements of tragedy, says Aristotle; character, however, only comes second as the plot can be drawn even without psychological analysis:

[t]he most important of these [elements] is the arrangement of the incidents, for tragedy is not a representation of men but a piece of action, of life, of happiness and unhappiness, which come under the head of action, and the end aimed at is the representation not of qualities of character but of some action; and while character makes men what they are, it is their actions and experiences that make them happy or the opposite. They do not therefore act to represent character, but character-study is included for the sake of the action. It follows that the incidents and the plot are the end at which tragedy aims, and in everything the end aimed at is of prime importance. Moreover, you could not have a tragedy without action, but you can have one without character-study.<sup>39</sup>

Elinor Fuchs sees the notion of character evolving in romanticism and replacing, in some sense, the plot in Aristotelian theory of drama. She remarks:

In G.W.F. Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics and the fine arts of the 1820s came the apogee of a trend that had grown steadily in romantic critical thought: romantic inwardness raised to the power of religious revelation. Hegel based his distinction of the classical form the European post-medieval (or romantic, in the generic sense) form of art almost entirely on the hypothesis of a shift from a self-enclosed objectivity to absolute subjectivity, or the “absolute inner”.

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<sup>38</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 69.

<sup>39</sup> Aristotle 26-7.

Fuchs emphasises: “For Hegel, character was the only artistic vehicle that could give material form to absolute spiritual subjectivity.”<sup>40</sup> This is definitely reminiscent of Sarah Kane, whose characters do not live plots written for them by an author or intended for them by gods, but who live their inner dramas, crises of identity and decisions *as* plots.

In Kane’s plays, a transition takes place in which the actual plot is replaced by the change in character. Her first two plays have a summarizable plot; in *Cleansed*, *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*, however, she merges the categories of plot and character into one, replacing the plot with the evolvment/conflict of character. Saunders claims there is no psychology involved in Kane’s characters;<sup>41</sup> still, it can certainly be argued that they have very rich inner life, which might be indeed considered the only “real” life they have (e.g. in *Cleansed*). It is true that Kane rejects the psychology of realistic drama, much the same as she rejects to anchor her characters in geographical space and historical time. However, this is not the rejection of psychology as such; it is more the rejection of the realistic way as the “true” way of depicting the characters; it is the seeking of a new, *more truthful* delivery of psychology.

Kane clearly evolved from the plays with clear-cut characters to the complete cancellation of the traditional category in *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*. From *Blasted* on, she resigns more and more on verisimilitude and psychological sketch. She is also less interested in social settings and her characters do not generally represent social issues in the way Ian, Cate and Soldier of *Blasted* can be argued to do. While the characters in *Blasted* express the political/moral issues of violence, trauma, and indifference, the motivation of the protagonists of *Phaedra’s Love* is much less anchored in reality. They correspond to Artaud’s “gods, heroes or monsters of legendary size”,<sup>42</sup> as all of them are in fact characterised only by their willingness to go into extremities because of their aim or conviction: Phaedra is a slave of passion, Hippolytus pursues absolute honesty, Strophe falls victim to her exaggerated loyalty

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<sup>40</sup> Fuchs 26-7.

<sup>41</sup> See Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 8.

<sup>42</sup> Artaud 82.

to the royal family, and Theseus, after Phaedra's death, is so dedicated to revenge he does not hesitate to kill his son.

In *Cleansed*, Kane seems to follow Artaud even further: "Repudiating the psychological man with his clear-cut personality and feelings, [theatre] will appear to the whole man, not social man submissive to the law, warped by religions and precepts."<sup>43</sup> Imagination and dreams in *Cleansed* are employed as equal to reality. The theme of the play is exclusively inner change, and taking on another's identity in the quest for love. Grace changes into her brother Graham; the unknown dancer in the booth merges with Grace. Rod and Carl, the couple who are not trying to identify with one another, are unsuccessful in communicating their love and the only option for Rod, who refuses to let go of his identity, is death. Losing one's own personality is portrayed as the only way to really interact with the beloved. "To make up for the loss of her brother, [Grace] gives up her own identity. Then she takes up her dead brother's identity as a way of loving him, as a way of finding herself and as a way of changing."<sup>44</sup>

*Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* will be dealt with later in association with Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life*. It is vital to remember, though, that even in these plays with disrupted notion of character, the self, its idea of itself and its presentation of itself to another stays central. The interaction, communication and identification with other is presented as problematic but desired. "[O]ur own emotions emerge only through the acts of interpretation and identification by means of which we feel for others. [...] We are not ourselves without representations that mediate us, and it is through those representations that emotions get felt."<sup>45</sup> In the words of *4.48 Psychosis*: "I think that you think of me the way I'd have you think of me" (243).

Martin Crimp has in his experimental plays totally deconstructed the notion of character, disrupting the category and making it his topic at the same time. In his early, conventional

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<sup>43</sup> Artaud 82.

<sup>44</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 115.

<sup>45</sup> Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the "Death of the Subject"*, qtd. in Carney 282.

plays, however, the characters almost resemble the “State-of-Britain” characters that contain a certain amount of social critique and illustrate a social issue. What is it Crimp is criticising? Aleks Sierz notes the impact of Thatcherite government on art in the 1980s, the beginning of the approach to art as a commodity and the materialist culture of contentment. Crimp definitely notices and criticises these issues in his plays from the 1980s and consumer culture stays in his focus even now. Dan Rebellato remembers the ’80s as an epoch of

consumer identity that affects everything – contracts, working conditions, the way people think about themselves, the rise of popular psychology, therapy culture, and self-help books, the hugely popular idea that everything that’s wrong in your life is your own fault. All that creates a massively individualistic culture where the possibility of collective action is out of fashion [...].<sup>46</sup>

In *Play With Repeats*, the phenomena Rebellato is talking about are strongly thematized. The fact that the main character, Tony is neither successful at work or in his relationship is perceived by Tony not as a mere failure, but as a sign he is not sufficiently “in control” (244) of his life. Also the fact that he goes for help to Mouhamed Lamine, an obscure holy man whose business card he finds in a pub, is typical. Ironically, Lamine grants him his wish by letting him relive the significant moments of his life again. Tony, assertive and “in control” now, asks for the promotion he does not want, tries to rape his chosen woman at a bus stop and gets killed in a pub quarrel.

Crimp’s characters from this epoch are contemporary and utterly believable people, whose materialism and wish to control others make them repulsive – exemplary in this respect are Mike and Liz from *Dealing With Clair*. Even in the 1990s he presents small and rather traditional groups of people in his plays: the starting point of his plots is usually a tension within a couple or a small family (*Getting Attention*) or sometimes a meeting between complete strangers. He differs from in-yer-face drama in that he does not really reflect the

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<sup>46</sup> Aragay et al. 160.

newly emerging social units; in his work there are “no gay couples, no flat-sharing lads, no girl gangs”.<sup>47</sup>

However, the traditional family in Crimp’s world is by no means a cosy haven. A family is often seen as a disturbing and suffocating environment, with absent or dysfunctional elements. Typically, the children in Crimp’s plays are perceived as victims (Sharon in *Getting Attention*, Annie who wets her bed in *Attempts on Her Life*) or at least as instruments of power games of their parents (Corinne and Richard’s children in *The Country*). The tourist Annie from the “Mum and Dad” scenario of *Attempts on Her Life* leaves the home of her parents at sixteen to travel around the world with a bag full of stones, sending them her pictures from all over the world; there is definitely a menacing shadow over her past:

- Because no one’s *forcing* her, no one’s forcing her to smile, are they?
- No one’s forcing her to do *anything*. The idea of Annie, little Annie being forced to do things is quite frankly ludicrous. (21)

The vulnerability of children is emphasised in Crimp’s treatment of violent issues: in one of his recent plays, *Advice to Iraqi Women* (2003), Crimp juxtaposes the meticulous advice provided for Western mothers with the impossibility of protecting one’s child in a country at war. The same fear transpires in a scenario from *Attempts on Her Life*, “Strangely!”, where a distraught mother comes to a closed airport (probably in Bosnia), demanding to be allowed to leave the country. She claims her little girl is going with her; however, when the soldiers look at the back seat of the car, all they discover is two black rubbish sacks:

- And yes – strangely – no one asks what she means by Annushka ‘being in the bags’.
  - STRANGELY!
- Silence.*

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<sup>47</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 127.

- And yes – strangely – no one asks to examine the bags.
- STRANGELY!

*Silence.*

- And yes – most strangely perhaps of all – no one questions why a child should be in two bags as opposed to one.

*Silence.*

- STRANGELY! (56-7)

Another recurring topic is the oppression of women, which ranges from the real, physical one (e.g. in *The Treatment*) to the pressurizing models of femininity acknowledged by our culture (*Attempts on Her Life*). The oppression and menace that lurks in most of Crimp’s plays but is never really explained or justified links his “traditional” and experimental plays. Sierz remarks that Crimp’s “constant theme is the unknowability of the other”: a feature that can be illustrated both by hyperrealistic dialogue, with its silences and meaningless repetitions, and by an experiment with a character that is absent and constructed by anonymous voices.<sup>48</sup> This loss of self induced by society has always fascinated Crimp. In *No One Sees the Video*, people make sense to the market researchers only as consumers; when they do not fit into pre-prescribed categories, it is as if they did not exist. In the first scene, Liz, whose husband has just left her, is questioned by a market researcher in the street. Ruthlessly probing, she forces Liz to define herself as married, divorced, single, or widow. This is very traumatizing for Liz, who, in her emotional tumult, does not know where she is standing. Her confession that her husband left her that very morning leaves the researcher completely indifferent. “Market research is shown to categorise individuals as objects of consumer society”,<sup>49</sup> removing their individuality.

Crimp pursues simultaneously the critique of materialism (*Dealing With Clair*) and critique of consumerism (*Attempts on Her Life*). To say he has evolved from one to the other would be misleading, even if his plays no doubt reflect the changing concerns of the contemporary world. *The Treatment*, for example, unites both issues. Jennifer and Andrew in

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<sup>48</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 162.

<sup>49</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 33.

their utilitarian, money-making approach to Anne's person and story collaborate with John and Nicky, who fear Anne's story will not correspond to the clichés of abuse and therefore refuse to acknowledge her experience as true. These doubts about the genuineness of Anne's story grow into devaluation of her experience (Nicky: "I say she struggles. I say she resists. I say how can she *tolerate* this treatment from a man?"(347)) and to an outright accusation of lie (Jennifer: "It's not believable. There is no man. There is just Anne and her imagination." (362)). Both are of course proved fatally wrong at the end of the play, when it becomes obvious that reality is even worse than Anne has intimated to them. The loss of one's identity as a result of its transformation into cliché is presented as a moral problem in *The Treatment*. The question is not only the obvious one, i.e. what right do Andrew and Jennifer have to steal and transform someone's life. The behaviour of Anne herself is also morally questionable: it was she in the first place who approached the producers and sold them her story, i.e. her life. As Sierz remarks: "She is a victim, certainly, but also a complicit one."<sup>50</sup>

While Kane's characters lose their identity in order to pursue an absolute value, such as honesty and love, with Crimp the loss of one's individuality is always a matter of compromising oneself, of moral relativism and materialism.

### **3.2.1 *Experimental Characters***

The defamiliarization of character that takes place in Kane's *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* and Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* and *Fewer Emergencies* is clearly visible as soon as one looks at the text: both authors frequently name their characters by letters (Kane, *Crave*) or numbers (Crimp, *Face to the Wall*, *Fewer Emergencies*); in *Attempts on Her Life* Crimp uses a common girls' name, Annie. In Kane, due to the blurring of voices monologue merges with dialogue, creating double meanings and at the same time generating a universal and intimate

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<sup>50</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 42.

space between “me” and “you”. Crimp, in contrast, uses the technique of multiple voices, which talk about a character in his/her absence. As narrators, the voices are quite unreliable; the spectator can choose from dissenting versions, all of which are equally possible:

2            So she packs the books and leaves.  
1            I'm sorry?  
2            Packs the books.  
3            Packs the books and leaves.  
1            Ha.  
3            What's funny?  
1            Packs the books and leaves? No.  
2            She gets pregnant.  
(*Fewer Emergencies*, 8-9)

In Crimp's plays, therefore, the self is always absent, always “constructed by others”, while “the speaking self in Kane's work, however traumatised and fragmented, remains on stage at the centre of attention.”<sup>51</sup> What stays common is the destruction of a unified self. Fuchs links this experience to the notion of the loss of community:

The representation of the community that is theater's special province has not been lost, but the community now floats behind the play through multiple absences – of the speakers, of the full sense of their speech, of the locations where such speech might take place. The community has dissolved into the electronic ether.<sup>52</sup>

The fragmentation of self leads directly to misunderstanding, impossibility of communication and therefore loss of real contact and community. However, the link can also be traced in the opposite direction: “because community has collapsed, the sense of self is under threat.”<sup>53</sup>

Crimp's plays are formally interesting in their pointing towards the philosophical questions of identity or subjectivity. *Attempts on Her Life*, seventeen scenarios about a woman

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<sup>51</sup> Wallace, “Sarah Kane, Experiential Theatre and the Revenant Avant-Garde”, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Fuchs 4-5.

<sup>53</sup> Tim Albery qtd. in Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 197.

who does not exist, give the spectator seventeen stories about Annie, turning her into somebody or something different each time: a child, a terrorist, a film star, a car... Her name is used in several national mutations, stressing the volatility of the person/product described. On the other hand, the multiplicity of the name and other characteristics makes the heroine universal. Ann, Anya, Annushka, Annie is an Everywoman.

From the title onwards the spectator is presented with ambiguity. The portrayal of Annie is only one interpretation of the word “attempts”. The other meaning is obvious: attempts on Anne’s life are attempts to destroy her. That is the principal source of irony in the *Attempts*. Stories are told: they are supposed to be moving, genuine stories of “her” life. Her life, however, is not told *by* her, Annie, but *for* her and *about* her. Her story is twisted and violated, as the protagonists work with it in their dialogues: we are reminded of Jennifer and Andrew in *The Treatment*. There is no space for Annie’s own monologue: the dialogue has arrogantly taken over.

Everything one could possibly get to know of Annie and her life is destroyed, as the emptied language of the enthusiastic creators drives it from reality to meta-reality. Everything the spectator gets is pre-prepared, pushed into a clichéd form and labelled. The story becomes a product; Annie herself becomes a product, governed by the laws of market and showbusiness. In an exquisitely banal dialogue, which closes the whole play, we find out that even salmon supposedly fresh could in fact be “previously frozen”(80). It is the same with the stories handed to us by the executives, supposedly genuine but in fact formulaic.

In connection with cliché, the play can be successfully interpreted as a critique of “how women are viewed within our culture.”<sup>54</sup> Heiner Zimmermann sees the portrayal of Anne in her absence as a metaphor of “male gaze” on women in our society. He thinks that the *Attempts* functions as an accusation of “the absence of a woman in a culture in which male

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<sup>54</sup> Crimp qtd. in Aragay et al., 65.

projections of her conceal her reality.”<sup>55</sup> Aleks Sierz is also in favour of this interpretation in his book on Crimp,<sup>56</sup> whereas Michael Billington in his review of *Attempts on Her Life* interpreted the play more broadly as “writer’s moral rejection of a selfish, materialist civilisation based on consumer fetishism”,<sup>57</sup> which is an outcome similar to his earlier plays.

On other, nonmaterial level, the banal things and details one gets to know of Anne, combined with the obsession about Anne everyone in the play seems to be sharing, remind us of the “contemporary preoccupation with identity and celebrity.”<sup>58</sup> For Elisabeth Klett, an American reviewer of the *Attempts*, the play’s message was that we live in a “godless, celebrity-obsessed materialist society.”<sup>59</sup>

In every case, Anne is a non-character, “a woman who allows men and other women to define her character, and her significance.”<sup>60</sup> Our own life, as well as Annie’s, has as many versions as it has interpretators – and Annie’s version of her own life is by no means truer or more valid. In “Untitled (100 words)” we witness Anne the artist’s “Attempts on Her Life”: she tries to communicate herself and her experience to others by presenting her own suicidal attempts in a gallery. The art critics’ opinions on her life as a work of art inevitably differ, once again emphasising the impossibility of a “true” portrayal. While one critic raves about the “viscerality” of her work, another suggests that the artist “should’ve been admitted not to art school but to a psychiatric unit” (47), which is an allusion to the now notorious remark made by Charles Spencer about Sarah Kane.<sup>61</sup> More significantly than criticising consumerism, materialism or the “male gaze”, Crimp shows us that the narrative we construct for ourselves about ourselves is extremely vulnerable.

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<sup>55</sup> Zimmermann qtd. in Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 54.

<sup>56</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 154.

<sup>57</sup> Qtd. by Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 52.

<sup>58</sup> Lynn Gardner, “Attempts on Her Life.” Rev. of *Attempts on Her Life* by Martin Crimp. 5.9.2006  
<[http://www.bac.org.uk/event\\_reviews.php?runid=2038](http://www.bac.org.uk/event_reviews.php?runid=2038)>

<sup>59</sup> Elisabeth Klett, “Phaedra’s Love.” Rev. of *Phaedra’s Love* by Sarah Kane. *Theatre Journal* 55.2 (May 2003): 337-339. 337.

<sup>60</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 42.

<sup>61</sup> “It’s not a theatre critic that’s required here, it’s a psychiatrist.” Qtd. in Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 108.

Clare Wallace says that Kane's last two plays are "making and unmaking multiple and contradictory selves through language,"<sup>62</sup> which at first sight would make them very similar to Crimp's; in fact, they are starkly different. While Crimp's plays consist of a creative dialogue with a void in the middle where the "real" character should be, Kane's plays take place in a psychological space, inside a mind, with the subject always present even if fragmented. Crimp's plays are attempts to *create* outer reality: Kane is trying to *describe* inner reality as precisely as possible. The subject, especially in *4.48 Psychosis*, suffers mental disintegration, which it is hard not to associate with the person of the author. While Crimp keeps reaching out to external reality, be it the reality of the world or the "electronic ether" Fuchs talks about, Kane abandons all links to the outer world creating an elliptical, deictic existence.

Does character really erode in Kane's plays? Even in a play like *Crave*, there are four distinct voices, to whom Kane gave "names" according to the hints about their age and role in the play: A as Author, Abuser, Aleister Crowley and Antichrist, B as Boy, C as Child, M as Mother.<sup>63</sup> However, the lines of individual speakers have numerous meanings, depending on whether one approaches them as united and reacting to each other or not. Through a plethora of literary allusions, Kane opens the context of *Crave* even more, offering additional resonances. All four characters crave something; all admit to identical (or similar) traumas, suggesting either the universality of these traumas (self-hatred, longing for mother) or four conflicting personalities within one mind, each of whom approaches the seminal trauma differently. In any case, Kane does not attempt to suggest any kind of social critique here (if one does not interpret the references to child abuse as a vague statement in this direction), which is in marked contrast to Crimp.

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<sup>62</sup> Clare Wallace, *Suspect Cultures. Narrative, Identity and Citation in 1990s New Drama*. Praha: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006. 224.

<sup>63</sup> Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 104.

4.48 *Psychosis* deals with the topic of a mental illness; it resembles a diary in its form of intimate monologue completed by real or fictional dialogues (with the lover, with the doctor/therapist). Sadly, this is a documentary work, a confessional play in which the audience can witness the decomposition of a single character. Kane said the play described the state of mind in which the boundary between reality and imagination disappears.<sup>64</sup> In other words, the play is a portrayal of a merging of the character and the world. Even if the play ends by the subject's death, it seems to be following a strange, cathartic logic, in which death is the ultimate good precisely because it enables one to connect with the world, to experience and feel for real. Kane's preoccupation with the truth is certainly mirrored in this idea of death as positive communication with the absolute. Despite/because the play is full of despair and self-hatred, 4.48, the time of death, is the "happy hour" (242).

The experimental features of Kane's and Crimp's plays do not lie only in the dispersion of the self in the text of the play but also in the presence of the people – actors on stage. Lehmann notes that in postdramatic theatre, where the actors do not really play "roles" in the traditional sense, the presence of the speakers onstage is "meaningless (*sinnfrei*)", that it is in fact "a question addressed to [the audience], to their gaze as corporeal creatures."<sup>65</sup>

While Kane provides no stage directions in her experimental plays, giving the director absolute freedom, Crimp certainly seems to be aware of the possibilities the person of the actor gives him; the double identity of his actors transpires clearly when he uses the device of translating or interpreting from a foreign language. For example, the girl interpreter in the scenario "Pornó" is both absent and present as a character. She is physically present onstage but effectively silent as the words she translates from a foreign language are not her own. She has no properties of a character. When she stops translating, one cannot be sure whether she does not want to go on with the repulsive text, or she suffers from stage fright. The words she

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<sup>64</sup> See Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 111.

<sup>65</sup> Lehmann 148.

is allowed to say in the play do not express her in any way, so the only way she can assert herself is to refuse to speak. One can think of the girl as of an interpreter, bound by the limits of the text she is translating, but also about the actor, bound by the text of the play. Crimp reaches an extraordinary *Verfremdungseffekt* in this scenario, using the person on stage on all levels of her existence.

Kane and Crimp both experiment to express a dispersed idea of self; for Kane, this lies in introspection and obsessive subjectivity. With Crimp, the subject is more construction of a fictitious self or the violation of an existing self by others.

## 4. Violence

### 4.1 The Meaning of Violence

Sean Carney remarks that “theatrical violence works at odds with theatre itself, asserting a kind of false concreteness for itself, a sense of ‘reality’ with which the whole of the representation cannot compete”. He sees the reason for this in the act of violence being in some ways more real than the rest of the theatrical performance. Explicit violence, according to Carney, works as an “aesthetic disruption” which “deliberately frustrates coherence and continuity,”<sup>1</sup> as something is being done to the *real* body of an actor. Aleks Sierz makes a similar point when he says that “stage violence is [...] almost always marking a point of no return”, as it takes place in “real time and real space” as opposed to the violence mediated through a camera, as in film or even in a news broadcast.<sup>2</sup>

Violence is a powerful theatrical tool, and as such a favoured one of both Kane and Crimp. For both of them, however, the cynical, ironic Tarantinesque use of violence is not aesthetically satisfactory – and, what is more, morally sustainable. For Crimp, violence is a powerful metaphor for oppression by language, media, or social stances. For Kane, self-assertion, communication with others (and sometimes with oneself) is so painful at times that it can only be expressed theatrically through violence.

It is necessary to emphasise once more that neither Crimp nor Kane use violence to glamorise it; there is no unhealthy fascination in its representation. Crimp is considered a postmodern writer; yet, a play such as Jez Butterworth’s *Mojo* contains much more postmodern irony, as it invites the spectator to enjoy the gruesome violence it portrays. Crimp, for all his playfulness, is a moral author. Kane, although often labelled an in-yer-face playwright, wanted to innovate rather than to shock, and certainly never intended her audience

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<sup>1</sup>Carney 276.

<sup>2</sup>Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 209.

to *enjoy* the nightmares her characters have to endure. For her, violence has strong cathartic potential: “we have to descend to hell imaginatively to avoid going there in reality.”<sup>3</sup>

The way violence is represented in plays of Crimp and Kane is very different: in Kane, it is explicit and concrete. In contrast, no one would probably dream of counting Crimp into the group of in-*yer-face* playwrights. Jean-Marc Lanteri in his preface to *Dramaturgies britanniques 1980-2000* compares the use of violence of both playwrights. He argues that in Kane’s plays the violence is concrete and radical, turning the people on the stage into pieces of meat.<sup>4</sup> Crimp, however, uses more subtle, manipulative forms of violence. The real, brutal violence is often talked about instead of shown, its representation contenting itself with a commentary.<sup>5</sup>

I would like to argue that the violence in Crimp’s plays is omnipresent, though usually only implicit. He uses violence as his main theme, showing that the hidden and manipulative violence of our civilisation, culture and language is as dangerous as the open and brutal violence of wars and terrorist attacks.

Concrete violence and cruelty is the central concern of only two early plays: *Dealing With Clair*, where a real-estate agent is abducted and murdered by a psychopathic client, and *Getting Attention*, which deals with child abuse. Even in these plays, however, nothing violent is ever shown to the audience. The effect is not gut-wrenching, as with Kane, but rather chillingly threatening. In *Getting Attention*, the four-year-old victim never appears on stage. Crimp tries to make his audience reflect on their own fears, so the torture is always only insinuated, never explicitly described. Milly, a middle-aged neighbour of the torturing couple, keeps referring to the unknown atrocities in her monologue at the end of the play:

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<sup>3</sup> Stephenson and Langridge 133.

<sup>4</sup> “[...] cette déshumanisation systématique de l’homme contemporain (qui devient viande à nourrir, à torture ou à sexe) [ouvre à] une dramaturgie radicale dans sa concrétude.” Jean-Marc Lanteri, ed., “L’âge d’or et la dame de fer.” *Dramaturgies britanniques 1980-2000* (Paris: Lettres Modernes Minard, 2002) 3-19. 12.

<sup>5</sup> “C’est moins la violence sanglante et explicite qui sollicite Crimp que celle, subtile et rouée, perverse et insinuante – mais pas moins ravageuse – des manipulateurs d’existences et des trafiquants d’âmes. [...] La cruauté de la scène n’est pas moins éprouvante pour le spectateur et sommation à méditer.[...] L’action tend à se sublimer en commentaire.” Lanteri 12-13.

[...] I'm talking about what we know now. (I mean, how could anyone do these things to a child...)

Well I'm sorry but I don't see how you can say the facts have to be established, because, well, surely we've all read the papers. (And well it would make an angel weep, wouldn't it, the things he did). (151)

In *Dealing With Clair*, one never makes out what actually happened to Clair. In the last scene, we witness James, her murderer, in Clair's flat. He is talking on the phone to Clair's mother and pretends he is Clair's new boyfriend. The joviality and reassuring tone in combination with his ruthless presence in Clair's private space is more menacing than a detailed account of the murder. In contrast to Kane, who is trying to overcome the audience's high level of indifference by heightened level of onstage violence, Crimp delivers the ugliness of violence to his audience precisely by giving them the freedom to imagine their own nightmares instead of forcing them to live his fears.

Crimp successfully links the threat of "real", corporeal violence to the manipulative one, to the psychological pressure people put on each other. In some cases, the violence in Crimp's plays is synonymous to lack of respect, to disregard for people's needs or feelings. He is interested in emotional violence and shows the way in which language prompts it. In *The Treatment*, the two executives own and rework Annie's story in order to suit their audience – but their treatment of her also serves as an assertion of their power and functions as a catalyst for their relationship. In *No One Sees the Video*, executives of a market research company ask strangers personal questions in exchange for a "cash gift", not allowing them to lead the conversation their way nor listening to the customers' real opinions.

If there is anything that makes e.g. *Attempts on Her Life* a consistent work, it is precisely the re-emerging topic of language and/or violence. Why does Crimp describe real and brutal violence in a language that keeps recycling itself? Why do murders, terrorists and war

resonate throughout the *Attempts*? The violence in *Attempts on Her Life* lies not only in what is narrated, but in the narration itself. The fact that Annie is portrayed in so many ways makes it obvious that some (or all) of them are false. This, together with the pronounced absence and silence of Anne, makes the very act of portrayal violent. She is observed from every angle and with every intention, used and misused by people but also flattened by language and its set norms. The violence that can appear on stage, prompted by the text, is contrasted to the violation by language. The fifth scenario, “The Camera Loves You”, is sung by the show business executives, who are the creators of Anne and at the same time her destroyers. What they do with her (or to her) is claimed to be “much more exciting / than writing” and they admit to be “OVERWHELMED by the sheer quantity / [...] of all the things that Anne can be” (20) with no interest as to who Anne is or wants to be. They twist her and turn her. She is made a machine, a porn star, a terrorist, a suicidal artist.

This is complicated by the fact that in some scenarios, Anne becomes the abuser: as a tourist, she “rubs shoulders” with the poor, has herself photographed “in slums with the smiling slum-dwellers” and “on hillsides with the smiling hill-dwellers”(23). In Crimp’s observation, even tourism becomes a form of violence, this time committed by Annie, who, with her eternal smile, “rubs shoulders” with the defenceless poor. The excursion of the creative officers into her own life can be seen as a parallel inconsiderate tourism – they only take what they need from her, not giving anything in exchange and not caring about the truth.

The representation of violence without really showing any of it, ideally a verbal description of physical violence, is Crimp’s landmark. The concrete, bodily violence is in the text, without giving any stage directions as to what is to be shown. It is an ironic reminder that representation can never reach reality – which, of course, is especially true about representation of violence. Plays like *Attempts on Her Life* or *Fewer Emergencies* are telling us of our own inability to understand violence unless we are its victims, as no depiction is

sufficient to deliver it. In his demonstration of the typical characteristics of language, which he proves to be eloquent but easily automatized and impotent, Crimp cannot find a better example.

What is so alarming about the comfortable, clichéd way in which violence is usually represented? When gas chambers are casually introduced into a conversation of two strangers at a bus stop in *Play With Repeats*, it is a chilling reminder that the atrocities of World War II belong in the common code of nowadays' humanity. Heather says: "You see – personally – I don't believe that number of people died. In the gas chambers. I don't believe it's humanly possible for that number of people to die" (239). What is more, she is affronted to be reminded that such things happened. She says: "[...]I think we all as human beings have a duty to direct people's attention away from all that ugliness" because "if you stare at ugly things for long enough, you get ugly yourself, inside" (238-9). It is precisely this attitude Crimp is fighting against. He awakes his audience to the primary, intensive meaning of words like "child abuse" or "oppression of women". To portray "ugly things", he feels, is to fight against them. However, this moral strain is pleasantly balanced (and sometimes outweighed) by Crimp's sharp, sarcastic humour and playfulness. In the words of Jude Kelly, the first director of *Getting Attention*: "Martin [...] deserves better than a voyeuristic audience. He doesn't judge his characters, and he doesn't judge society either. [...] What Martin does is to bear witness. He asks us to look and trusts us to make up our own minds."<sup>6</sup>

One thing Kane and Crimp have in common is that violence in their plays is often accompanied by irony and clever verbal humour (admittedly very black). This has been widely acknowledged in the case of Crimp, but not often with Kane. Her tendency towards exaggerated theatrical gesture, huge, romantic characters and statements ("Love me or kill me"), and especially the never-ending torrent of violence has prevented the critics and

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<sup>6</sup> Qtd. by Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 187.

audience from recognizing the shrewd, cynical wit underlying the plays. The wry humour of her characters has often helped to lighten what would otherwise be a very suffocating environment of Kane's dramatic realm:

<b>Phaedra</b>	A spear in my side, burning.
<b>Strophe</b>	Hippolytus.
<b>Phaedra</b>	<i>(Screams.)</i>
<b>Strophe</b>	You're in love with him.
<b>Phaedra</b>	<i>(Laughs hysterically.)</i> What are you talking about?
<b>Strophe</b>	Obsessed.
<b>Phaedra</b>	No.
<b>Strophe</b>	<i>(Looks at her.)</i>
<b>Phaedra</b>	Is it that obvious? (69)

The humour has redeemed Kane's plays from being too obviously profound and intense. However, this does not imply that she is not deadly serious about her issues. Similarly as with Crimp, the portrayal of violence serves to point out the evil side of human relationships: oppression, humiliation, and obsession. The high level of graphic onstage violence has, however, blinded some of the critics to the fact that oppression is being criticised and not praised or exploited for its shock-value: there have been many critical attempts to establish a new streak of theatre-writing, decidedly immoral one, in the 1990s. Labels like "New Brutalists" or "The Theatre of Urban Ennui" strove to imply that writers like Mark Ravenhill or Sarah Kane were much younger, more bored and cool than was actually the case. There have been a lot of epigones of the new writers, and admittedly a lot of the plays contained an unjustified amount of brutality and not much more. The violence in Kane's plays is shocking but by no means purposeless. Sierz emphasises that the aim of Kane has been to "make violence as horrible, and as inescapable, as possible", not "in order to titillate, or to make

powerless audiences feel powerful and fascistic, in the way Hollywood films do, but in order to shock them out of their complacency.”<sup>7</sup>

It is useful at this point to keep in mind the fact that the shock-value especially of the sexual scenes in Kane’s plays was by no means unheard of. When reading Elinor Fuchs’s evaluation of the 1980s theatrical scene in New York, it is surprising to note the degree of obscenity and/or open eroticism found in the performances of the time. Fuchs remembers a performance of porn star Annie Sprinkle in Richard Schechner’s *Prometheus Project* in 1985, during which Sprinkle stripped and invited the audience to touch her nipples or put their heads between her breasts. Next, she “asked any interested spectator to shine a flashlight at her genitals, examine them with a magnifying glass, and describe their texture and color.”<sup>8</sup> In 1990, the same actress brought herself “to orgasm on a kind of altar, a ritual climax dedicated to those she loved who have died of AIDS”. Fuchs describes her feelings during this performance as “[h]ushed reverence” and “something akin to love.”<sup>9</sup> More obscene and on the “excremental” side were the shows of Karen Finley, whose performance *I’m an Assman* consisted of the performer pouring “dog food, cream, and other condiments down the open neck of her ruffled 1950s party dress.”<sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly, there are some differences between the theatrical landscape of the UK and the United States; the impact of performance aesthetics has, however, been strong in both environments. Why has the public used to postmodern experiments shied away from the plays of Kane?

The answer seems to be the association of sex, violence and traditional dramatic form. In the 1980s, the new performances were created on a wave of “happy” postmodernism, in a relatively optimistic endeavour to explore the limits of what can be done on stage. It is also remarkable that although most of the shows mentioned by Fuchs show open and often

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<sup>7</sup> Aragay et al. 144-5.

<sup>8</sup> Fuchs 116-7.

<sup>9</sup> Fuchs 127.

<sup>10</sup> Fuchs 119.

extreme sexuality, they are usually not focused on abuse or violence. The whole experiment, it seems, was conducted within the sphere of the political statement which entitled all sexual groups, obviously females and homosexuals but also other sexual minorities, to have a say, to be seen and thus emerge from the realm of “unspeakables”.

In the 1990s, on the other hand, there was a lot of plays that contained extensive brutality; these, however, were usually clear-cut thrillers and/or plays with a social concern and a message. An example that contains a bit of both would be Tracy Letts’ *Killer Joe*: the *Daily Mail* critic Jack Tinker, who wrote the most damaging review of *Blasted* after it was first staged, defended himself in the ensuing polemics by a favourable review of this play.

It would seem, therefore, that Kane’s violence is especially shocking because her plays do not follow – in form or content – any outside, realistic logic but rather the Artaudian logic of dream and the subconscious. Sex, for instance, is deeply linked to ritual, as it equals power. The one who rapes is the more powerful one than the one who is raped. On the other hand, the “voluntary”, non-violent sex has the significance of reception, recognition and harmony. Far from the act of “liberating eroticism”, sex has become “a desperate attempt to communicate”.<sup>11</sup> The scene with Tinker and the Woman in *Cleansed* is noteworthy in this respect. Tinker, who has acted as a bully and a tormentor to the inmates, has been visiting an anonymous prostitute dancing for him in a booth. At the end of the play, the dancer comes out of the booth and makes love to Tinker.

*They hold each other, him inside her, not moving.*

**Woman** Are you here?

**Tinker** Yes.

**Woman** Now.

**Tinker** Yes.

**Woman** With me.

**Tinker** Yes. (149)

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<sup>11</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 179.

Sex here is the ultimate recognition, a supreme form of communication, almost sacred. Rape has the same force in Kane's world, but, as it were, in the opposite direction: it blasts the victim apart; it is an ultimate humiliation, almost mythical in its absoluteness and irreversibility. Similarly, other, non-sexual violence is deeply symbolic for Kane: Ian's "visual castration" in *Blasted*, mutilation as loss of the communicative powers for Carl, or the torture which tests the strength of love of Rod and Carl and Graham and Grace in *Cleansed*. Violence as ritual is dreadful and purgatory at the same time, and ideally works the same for the spectator.

Interestingly, while Crimp prefers to portray women as victims, but Kane claims not to be gender-biased at all.<sup>12</sup> She seems to be giving equal space (and portion of cruelty) to men and women, hetero- and homosexual. The only possible gender-bias can be traced in *Blasted*, where Ian and the Soldier can be perceived as men and perpetrators of violence and Cate as the victim. Aleks Sierz, who associates Kane with in-yer-face theatre, insists that *Blasted* "doesn't have a message"; he admits, however, that Kane "makes connections between the male urge to self-destruct and tabloid rhetoric, sexual fantasy, nationalist aspirations, football tribalism, homophobic feelings, racist hatred and open warfare,"<sup>13</sup> which in itself is a rather strong gender statement.

Moreover, the fact that there is no explicit moral statement does not make the implicit general message of the play less clear. Kane recalls that the idea of a link between private and public (i.e. war) violence occurred to her while she was watching a news report from war-stricken Srebrenica:

I asked myself: "What could possibly be the connection between a common rape in a Leeds hotel room and what's happening in Bosnia?" And then suddenly this penny dropped and I thought: "Of course, it's obvious. One is the seed and the other is the tree."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 121.

<sup>13</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 103-4.

<sup>14</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 101.

The fact that Ken Urban recalls coming home from the production of *Blasted* and bursting into tears while watching the TV news means that Kane succeeded in proving the connection.<sup>15</sup>

Many have made the mistake of confusing Kane's preoccupation with violence for over-active imagination. However, Kane did not invent any of the particularly violent scenes: indeed, all the atrocities committed in her plays are accounts of real events taken from books on war violence (and, in the case of eye-gouging, from a book on football fans). She complained: "I tend to think that anything that has been imagined, there's someone somewhere who's done it."<sup>16</sup>

Another point that might cause misunderstanding is that she is equally (or more) fascinated by the story of the perpetrator than the victim (Ian and Soldier in *Blasted*, Tinker in *Cleansed*, Hippolytus in *Phaedra's Love*).<sup>17</sup> It is a fresh way to look at the narrative of abuse as it helps to avoid the cliché: the version of the victim almost always brings with it a black-and-white version of the story, whereas Kane succeeds in making the aggressor likeable (Hippolytus) or at least pitiable (Tinker). Aesthetically, the representation of violence is not weakened by representation, as it would be in Crimp, but rather strengthened when related by the aggressor. The things the Soldier describes in *Blasted* are actually much worse than what he does to Ian, precisely because the way he behaves to Ian proves that his story is true.

If the Soldier tortures Ian in *Blasted* to make him "bear witness" or to get rid of a trauma, the motivation of the torture in *Cleansed* is even less clear. The overtones of ethnic cleansing loom large here: the play is mainly inspired by Roland Barthes' comparison of "the

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<sup>15</sup> See Ken Urban, "An Ethics of Catastrophe: The Theatre of Sarah Kane." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 23.3 (September 2001): 36-46, 46.

<sup>16</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 117.

<sup>17</sup> As Buse comments, Kane's point of view "privileges [the violence of the perpetrator] because so fascinated by it". 180.

situation of a rejected lover with that of a prisoner in Dachau.”<sup>18</sup> Kane was initially shocked by the comparison but later understood that loss of self was involved in the case of both extreme “infatuation and incarceration.”<sup>19</sup> The ambiguous title of the play together with the *persona* of the sadistic doctor brings forth further echoes of holocaust.

Tinker is cruel to the inmates for a very unclear reason. The relationship of the perpetrator and victim of violence is strong but oblique, as Tinker, the sadistic torturer, is at the same time a doctor/teacher figure: somebody with absolute power over others but also a person to whom the other characters come for help and treatment. He fulfils Graham’s death wish by giving him a fatal overdose of drugs; he performs a crude sex-change operation on Grace, enabling her to “become” her dead brother; he proves to Carl that his lover Rod would die for him by killing Rod. Everyone in the play gets what they wanted in the end, but they are so disfigured that they are hardly the characters they were at the beginning of the play. Tinker’s bizarre tests and punishments, together with the absurd campus/hospital/prison space, are as nightmarish and illogical as the concentration camp.

*Crave* has been accepted with relief as a poetic contrast to the previous plays. Wallace, with regards to Eckart Voigts-Virchow and Jeanette Malkin, describes *Crave* as “a modernist retreat from the employment of violence, to an involvement with a poetic methodology of semi-Beckettian ‘verbal despair’.”<sup>20</sup> However, the retreat from physicality on stage and from concrete characters does not mean that Kane has moved her focus from violence. *Crave* enables Kane to fragment the significance instead of pushing it into a narrative, but her attention stays with the same elements: mutilation, oppression between close people, trauma.

A In a lay-by on a motorway going out of the city, or maybe in, depending on which way you look, a small dark girl sits in the passenger seat of a parked car.

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<sup>18</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 116.

<sup>19</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 116.

<sup>20</sup> Wallace, “Sarah Kane, Experiential Theatre and the Revenant Avant-Garde”, 7.

Her elderly grandfather undoes his trousers and it pops out of his pants, big and purple.

C I feel nothing, nothing.  
I feel nothing.

A And when she cries, her father in the back seat says I'm sorry, she's not normally like this. (157-8)

The fact that Kane has retreated into mindscape does not mean violence does not follow her there. Indeed, due to the blurred identity of the speakers and the overlapping of their narratives the spectator is smothered by the omnipresent fog of pain and cruelty. Dysfunctional, confused relationships continue to play a big role.

With the further retreat into subjectivity, Kane seems to underline the connection of trauma and self-hatred. In the early "Comic Monologue", a story of a woman whose boyfriend rapes her, the woman reminisces:

I read a story about a nine year old boy who withdrew into silence after being forced by guerrillas to murder his parents. I understand that self-hatred. When I resisted him, I was inviting the punches, when I couldn't resist any more, I consented to my violation.

The prevailingly monological *4.48 Psychosis* also expresses self-hatred; however, this time it is the neurotic, almost adolescent uncertainty about oneself, which reaches from the banal to the serious in an irrational parade of inadequacy: "I am a complete failure as a person/ I am guilty, I am being punished/ I would like to kill myself" (206) turns into "My hips are too big/ I dislike my genitals" (207) and connects with "I gassed the Jews, I killed the Kurds"(227).

Self-hatred inevitably leads to violence – this time inflicted by the subject on him/herself. In *4.48 Psychosis* the punishment is taken *in extremis* and climaxes in suicide. A similar experience appears already in "Starved", another early monologue, where a girl's sense of insufficient parental love brings her to bulimia:

My father comes to see me, he says My beautiful daughter, my source of delight. But he delights more in his firstborn, his son. And I only want to die. They won't be burying the real me now anyway.

He leaves me a make-up kit, blushers and lipstick and eyeshadow. And I paint my face in bruises and cuts and blood and swelling. And on the mirror in deep red, UGLY. Be a woman, be a woman, FUCK YOU.<sup>21</sup>

In Kane's juvenilia, the conflicts with parents or partner, feelings of inadequacy and guilt seem to be mere crises of growing up; however, the difficulties in communication, the notion of inadequacy and the problem of abuse re-emerge in all her plays in fact, magnified into large-scale violence. Ultimately, as Kane's focus turns inwards, violence is once again represented as a subjective, private, often self-inflicted trauma.

## **4.2 *The Body***

It should be apparent by now that the corporeality of the characters is much more pronounced in Kane than in Crimp. Again, some Artaudian echoes can be sensed with Kane, especially as concerns the identification of the spectator and the actor. For Artaud, theatre and theatre experience is connected to the body, the gestures and motions it makes, but also the sounds and rhythm it can produce that have nothing to do with language. His staging was meant to emerge on the spot, using language but also bodily expression; he believed that theatre, as the only truly spatial medium with live actors, should take advantage of its possibilities. The Word was to be used in cooperation with action – but not text, as text suggests repetition. The body of the spectator, says Artaud, copies rhythm and breath of the performing body, which helps identification with the actor but also has a magical quality.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "Starved" exists only as a manuscript and has no page numbers. University of Bristol Theatre Collection, Ref. No. WTC/PS/000246.

<sup>22</sup> Paraphrasing Artaud 140.

There is a definite connection between Artaud and the in-her-face sensibility, in which the spectator is wanted to connect with the characters through representation of extreme suffering. The raw physicality, emphasised by torture and the actual presence of the actors cause the audience's almost involuntary identification with them, makes them "connect emotionally",<sup>23</sup> which was what Kane wanted. On the other hand, the significance of the atrocities in her plays is always symbolic and this feature anchors them in the theatrical tradition. This is apparent when we compare Kane's plays and the importance of the text to the Artaudian tendency towards the performative aspect of the isolated body, which found its modern expression in the postdramatic performance. Kane has in common with contemporary performers the aggressive presence of the body on stage. In this respect, Lehmann perceives the contrast in the approach to the body in "dramatic" and "postdramatic" theatre in that "[t]he dramatic process occur[s] *between* the bodies", whereas the "postdramatic process occurs *with/on/to* the body,"<sup>24</sup> which is exactly what differs Kane from the postdramatic performers. In Kane, the violent process is not a gesture or a significance of a body in its isolation, but rather a result of interaction with other, and as such a profoundly dramatic action.

There is yet another difference: Kane negates the political implication that is typical for some of the currents of contemporary performance. For her, e.g. the female body on stage is not the contribution to the discussion of female sexuality, pornography, feminism etc. She does not privilege according to gender aspects: it is the *human* body that is in focus and its mutilation serves as a sign of what is happening in the play in terms of emotions. Rather than have the characters reveal their inner state in an extensive monologue, the characters lose body parts, are beaten by invisible men or eaten by vultures.

Indeed, it is usually through violence that Kane lets the body speak to us. There is always mutilation or some other form of violence performed on the body. Ian is raped and

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<sup>23</sup> Kane qtd. in Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Lehmann 163. Italics are Lehmann's.

blinded, Cate is raped and forced to sell her body; Hippolytus is mutilated, castrated, disembowelled; Grace undergoes a bizarre and unnecessary operation, etc. The change in body typically symbolises some inner change of the characters. Kane works with elements with long theatrical tradition: exemplary in this respect is the blinding of Ian. Reminiscent of Oedipus and Gloucester, it brings about the notion of cathartic, purifying punishment. Ian is changed from the violent and aggressive character to a powerless wretch, left to the mercy of his former victim. This causes his change of character, symbolised by his final “Thank you.”(61).

For the Soldier what he does symbolizes the change from his normal status (student, lover) to a soldier. He is positive he can revert to his old role again as soon as the war is over: “At home I’m clean. Like it never happened.” (48).

Hippolytus, in *Phaedra’s Love*, can be said to mirror the contemporary spectator; he is not excited by entertainment or power, sex is just a bodily function for him, and everything seems boring in the extreme:

**Phaedra**      What are you watching?  
[...]  
**Hippolytus**    News. Another rape. Child murdered. War somewhere. Few thousand jobs gone. But none of this matters ’cause it’s a royal birthday. (74)

In the end, the extreme pain is the only thing that can make him break from the boredom of his existence again mirroring the position of the spectator and his/her involvement.

In *Cleansed*, “[c]utting your hand off is not about what physically happens to you – in this case, it’s about no longer being able to express your love with your hands.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the torture of Carl and Rod does not have any realistic consequences – it merely signals the

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<sup>25</sup> Jeremy Herbert, the first designer of *Cleansed*, qtd. in Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 116.

changes in their relationship, as it brings to the surface the shift of faith and involvement of both.

The juxtaposition of the undeniable, aggressive corporeality of most of the acts and their symbolic significance is overwhelming. Sean Carney in his article on *Blasted* tries to provide a theoretical context for this double significance, by establishing

the stable binocular vision once described by Bert O. States: 'If we think of semiotics and phenomenology as modes of seeing, we might say that they constitute a kind of binocular vision: one eye enables us to see the world phenomenally; the other eye enables us to see it significatively.' States's approach to phenomenology is poststructuralist, foreclosing upon phenomenology's claims to a unity of thought and experience, yet still retaining that potential and placing it in tension with semiotic analysis. These are the two extremes of interpretive activity: one eye phenomenal, where everything is itself, existing in its raw corporeality, and one eye semiotic, where everything is a sign, a code, a convention, and means something else.<sup>26</sup>

The blinding of Ian in *Blasted*, in this mode of seeing, has two equal levels:

It seems that since Ian will not open his tabloid journalist's eyes to the atrocities of war, he loses his eyes altogether. The loss of the eyes is, again, an element of corporeal suffering on the stage that both asserts the raw physicality, the phenomenal immediacy of the stage and also insists on the semiotic coding of the body, if only due to the long dramatic heritage of blindness as a visual discourse of the stage.<sup>27</sup>

In connection with the significant presence of the mutilated body on stage, there is the inevitable resonance with Samuel Beckett. The acts of violence should provoke identification and compassion; the mutilated bodies themselves, however, can create the uncanny effect we are familiar with from Beckett's plays. In the end of *Cleansed*, the only two survivors – Carl and Grace – are Beckettishly uncanny bodies: Grace has amputated breasts, a stitched on penis and a lobotomy; Carl has no feet, hands or tongue. The uncanny body seems hardly

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<sup>26</sup> Carney 276.

<sup>27</sup> Carney 287.

human in its mutilation: Hippolytus is opened up, castrated, his bowels spread on the stage and his genitals on the barbecue, vultures are descending upon his body, while on his face there is a smile of a Christian martyr. There is of course also the famous image of Ian's head poking out of the floor in *Blasted*. The script says explicitly that Ian dies (60): for the rest of the play, his head talks, eats and drinks. Is his body still alive, is it still under the floor? The effect is extraordinary. Returning to States's "binocular vision", this is an image that has to be interpreted as a sign *only*, since it is physically and logically impossible. In Carney's words:

It is here that the play manages simultaneously to maintain Kane's sense of hyperreality as it enters the realm of symbolism and abandons the generic baggage of realism: We have no choice but to interpret the image of Ian's head, because no "literal" meaning is available.<sup>28</sup>

Martin Crimp, with his detachment and pronouncedly contemporary sensibility, makes his characters distant, with their bodily existence referred to but not shown. This resonates in *Attempts on Her Life* and *Fewer Emergencies*, where the main characters (Annie, Bobby) are talked about but absent. It is an aesthetically pleasing and philosophically attractive way to tackle the problem of representation of character: the bodies of the actors have no significance as they are not the protagonists but mere narrators. The identification with character is therefore practically made impossible. If, as Lehmann says, the postdramatic 'text' is not a play script, with characters, dialogue, and stage directions, but rather the totality of the signs onstage,<sup>29</sup> Crimp as the author leaves the stage bare. Who are the people on stage? What right do they have to the narrative they are performing? With the absence of stage directions and through the numbering of the characters, Crimp seems to "dismiss [...] the idea of a

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<sup>28</sup> Carney 289.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Lehmann 85. Also Aleks Sierz, "'Form Follows Function': Meaning and Politics in Martin Crimp's *Fewer Emergencies*." *Modern Drama* 50.3 (Fall 2007): 375-393. 379.

‘composition’ of a dramatic person through the actor, opposing it with the formula that it is rather the *decomposition of a human being* that is happening on stage.”<sup>30</sup>

What is more, most of the information we get about the protagonist is ballast, banal details, which compose a cubist, highly selective portrait:

- And wears a hat.
- Yes. She wears a hat.
- Which, you state, she has knitted herself.
- I believe so.

*Silence.*

- She grows tomato plants in...
- Margerine tubs.
- Margerine tubs.
- That’s right. (62)

Sometimes banal clichés are contrasted with pompous ones, creating an ironic, incompatible mixture:

- I’ll tell you what: she has a kind of ashtray. The tall kind on a stalk. Like something you’d find in the lobby of a cheap hotel, the kind of hotel you visit for a few hours on a weekday afternoon in a strange city with a man you’ve / only just met. [...]
- She also speaks five languages and with the aid of the CERN accelerator in Geneva has discovered a new elementary particle which will bear her name and completely change the way we look at the universe. (36)

Although Crimp’s “traditional” plays typically employ contemporary characters with contemporary sensibility, whose bodily existence is not specifically referred to, there is usually a string of sensual images underlying the abstract qualities of the conversational exchanges. *The Country*, especially, is concerned with sensual perception. The passion of the body, suggested by the central story of a love triangle, is in contrast with the purity, even sterility of the elements of the country: the cold stone chair in the middle of bare landscape;

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<sup>30</sup> Lehmann 163. Italics are Lehmann’s.

pure, tasteless water; sharp scissors. It is emphasised that it is the space of the country that brings about the sharpened perception. Katie Mitchell, the director of many Crimp's pieces including *The Country*, remarks that "[o]n one level, *The Country* is about what people do with their bodies: sticking syringes full of heroin into them or fucking each other, with all the mental effects of betrayal and confusion that that involves.[...] Bodies: whether you put water into your body or have an alcoholic drink."<sup>31</sup> The fact that Rebecca and Richard are drug users contrasts harshly with the supposed Vergilian purity of the countryside.

Similarly, *The Treatment* is full of the theme of "sight, insight and seeing,"<sup>32</sup> both in literal and metaphorical sense. The literal voyeurism of Clifford, who watches Andrew and Anne having sex, is reminiscent of the metaphorical voyeurism of other characters, who prey on Anne's story; the eyes that are taken out have behind them the strong theatrical tradition of blinding as a punishment that has been mentioned in connection with Kane; the rich (Andrew, Jennifer, John) are blind to the poverty of the streets and to Anne's suffering; the cab driver is blind, symbolising the blind, rapid pace of both the play and the city.

Crimp prefers to construct his narratives about women, and more often than not those women are victimized: "The woman is the victim and I don't really escape from that."<sup>33</sup> The preoccupation with violence and abuse shows in all plays also because of another obsession that has been already mentioned: he presents us with "a catalogue of images of injured, victimized, and unhappy children."<sup>34</sup> In a seemingly innocent car advertisement in the *Attempts*, one is shocked to hear that "[n]o child's pelvis is ever shattered by a chance collision with the new Anny" (238). Even in the most playful song from *Fewer Emergencies*, the postman behaves abusively to his son:

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<sup>31</sup> Qtd. in Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 203.

<sup>32</sup> Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 41.

<sup>33</sup> Crimp qtd. in Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 150.

<sup>34</sup> Sierz, "Form Follows Function", 387.

My son poured tea  
From the brown china pot  
Said, drink up your tea, dad,  
Drink up while it's hot.  
Daddy daddy, you're not sick at all  
Daddy daddy, turn a-WAY FROM THE WALL.

Hey daddy,  
You're a liar – and a fake  
Take off those pyjamas  
There's deliveries to make.  
I lifted my head from my white pillow case  
Threw my hot tea RIGHT IN HIS FACE. (35)

Both Crimp and Kane use the images of the body that are both real and unreal. In Kane, it is the extreme brutality performed on the bodies of the characters that reduces them to “uncanny bodies” but at the same time forces the spectators to get involved. With Crimp, the actors on stage do not “play” a character but “narrate” it, with the character’s body significantly absent. In his non-experimental plays, the suppressed corporeality connects with abuse and the sensual perception is used as complementary with the surface quality of what is said. Both authors use the body in a profoundly theatrical but unconventional way; both point “to the reality that exists only in theatre”, which Lehmann aptly terms “das TheatReale”.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Lehmann 163.

## 5. Conclusion

Both Crimp and Kane are genuine innovators of the dramatic form. The issues dealt with in their works are related; they share similar concerns about the dangers of nowadays' society – and, with it, theatre. This might not be apparent at first sight because of the divergence of styles. Crimp's style is language-centred, hyper-realistic at times, drawing a lot from the theatre of the absurd. He provides a characteristic mixture of satirical edge, ironic detachment and hidden threat. While Crimp works exclusively with the contemporary sensibility, Kane's proximity to the tradition of tragedy can be seen in what she employs in her plays – the big passions, “love, hate, death, revenge, suicide.”<sup>1</sup> Kane differs from both modernists and postmodernists by her refusal of detachment and by her requirement of emotional involvement. Both the playwright and her characters are absolutist, truth-seeking and provocative. Crimp prevents emotional identification even in the plays that at first sight seem realistic; in the experimental dramas, the distancing device of having stories narrated rather than just shown “allows Crimp to mix acerbic satire with rapid shifts of tone and focus,”<sup>2</sup> asking intellectual questions in a convincingly dramatic form. The intense emotional content, which in Kane is delivered by the explicit, larger-than-life gestures, is evaded in Crimp by the stories' rapid formal mutation.

Both authors challenge individual categories of theatre. Kane disrupts realistic space and time, and negates the logical coherence of the action. In her incessant experiment, she strives to find a new, “truthful” portrayal of reality. Crimp, in some of his dramas, pursues the realistic portrayal but makes it multilayered through the language level. In his experimental plays, alternatively, almost no notion of the classical drama is preserved. Both authors can at their most experimental be seen as relating to the large realm of “postdramatic theatre”. There

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<sup>1</sup> Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 109.

<sup>2</sup> Sierz, ““Form Follows Function””, 379.

is, however, one crucial difference: if the one essential quality of postdramatic theatre is that it no longer focuses on the dramatic text,<sup>3</sup> Crimp's and Kane's work is always very text-centred, even if all other theatrical categories have been negated. The text is an ideal means for the promotion of "the author's individual vision", expressed through his/her "own idiosyncratic and written voice."<sup>4</sup>

This allows the author to function as a critical presence, both in the case of form and content. The form itself functions as a protest against the falsehood of traditional, naturalistic depiction; together with this critique of traditional representation, the content and subject matter of the plays mirror the topical concerns their authors have. Kane and Crimp share the preoccupation with violence, trauma and abuse. This is by no means an unhealthy fascination but an artistic delivery of a powerful topic together with an obvious moral statement implied.

Both Kane and Crimp are aware of and alarmed by a society "in which spectators are habitually exposed and largely desensitised to violent or sexual spectacles in other media."<sup>5</sup> The formal devices they use are meant to help the audience "come round" from the limbo induced by everyday portion of aggression make them responsive again. The purpose of showing uncomfortable, traumatic subjects is not to prove that "anything goes" but rather to wake the spectator up by provoking strong emotion.

In the age of rationalization, of the ideal of calculation and of the generalised rationality of the market, it falls to the theatre to deal with extremes of affect by means of an aesthetics of risk, extremes which always also contain the possibility of offending by breaking taboos. [...]

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<sup>3</sup> See Lehmann i.

<sup>4</sup> Sierz, "Form Follows Function", 380.

<sup>5</sup> Wallace, "Sarah Kane, Experiential Theatre and the Revenant Avant-Garde", 3.

Such theatre might include events “which point the spectators to their own presence precisely through ‘amoral,’ ‘asocial’ and seemingly ‘cynical’ events.”<sup>6</sup> For both authors, there is a strong element of confrontation. Both avoid simple statements; for both, the complicity of the victim and the relationship between the abuser and the victim is packed with theatrical opportunities.

The methods they use to achieve this are different: whereas Kane uses visceral effects and disturbing violence, often linked to sexual exploitation, in the context of the traditional theatre, Crimp turns from the bodily violence to the mental, psychical one, making it equal (or worse) than the actual, physical violence. Kane turns the representation of violence as such into the issue of admitting the truth and overcoming trauma, while with Crimp, it connects with the broader issue of representation as such – which is why there is a lot of mediatized representation going on in his plays.

While Kane uses a strong climax, provoking at least some kind of emotional *katharsis* in the spectators, Crimp usually resists narrative closure and prefers a cyclical structure. This is enforced further in his experimental plays, where the stories are told in fragmented conversations, do not have a beginning, a middle or an end. The genre expectations are fulfilled and then disrupted, preventing the audience from comfortably “enjoying” the performance and making them aware of their own expectations. The stories point to their own telling: they are told by uncomfortable, unidentified, disagreeing characters, pointing to the impossibility of portrayal of character.

The anonymity or at least blurred identity of characters is a common technique of both Kane and Crimp. While in Crimp it has the function of distancing and defamiliarization, with Kane it is a signal of retreating into mindscape and the shift from drama to poetry. In connection with violence, the physicality of the characters is not “auto-sufficient”, as in

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<sup>6</sup> Sierz, ““Form Follows Function””, 186-7.

postdramatic theatre, but expressive of the inner state. In Kane, the expressive brutality sometimes replaces conversation, expressing difficulties in communication and relationships. The idea of a body on stage is particularly interesting in Crimp's experimental plays where the actors do not play the protagonists but rather the narrators/creators of a story.

The world we live in is "less 'surveyable' and manageable than ever", making the traditional theatrical form insufficient to represent it.<sup>7</sup> Both Crimp and Kane have two concerns: to find a new form, which would portray the contemporary existence truthfully, and to point at some of the most problematic, taboo issues of nowadays' world, including abuse, victimization of "weaker" groups, war and terrorism. These themes are not merely exploited for their shock-value; both playwrights share a very strong moral concern. Crimp says: "There is definitely a feeling that [my style] is wrong and that we need something uplifting. But, for me, confronting the dark is positive and uplifting."<sup>8</sup> Kane asserts that her plays are "about love and about survival and about hope."<sup>9</sup> This can be perceived ironically by biographical criticism: however, it must be taken seriously when applied to theatre. What both Kane and Crimp achieve to convey is love, survival and hope for the theatrical form.

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<sup>7</sup> Lehmann 11.

<sup>8</sup> John Mahony: "Writers' Crimp", qtd. in Sierz, *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*, 38.

<sup>9</sup> Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 25.

## *Summary*

### **Formální inovace a fenomén násilí v dramatech Sarah Kane a Martina Crimpa (resumé)**

Diplomová práce se zabývá divadelní tvorbou dvou předních britských dramatiků současnosti: Sarah Kane a Martina Crimpa. Zatímco krátký život Sarah Kane byl dramatický a téměř všechny její hry vzbudily kontroverze, Crimp, který je o generaci starší, zůstává v panoramatu britského divadla poněkud opomíjen. Kane považovala Crimpův vliv, zejména na své pozdější hry, za zásadní.

V diplomové práci se zabýváme srovnáním těchto dvou autorů z různých důvodů. Oba zaníceně inovují tvar dramatického díla. Jejich hry se postupně oprostují od všeho, co jsme zvyklí si s divadelní hrou spojovat: není určen čas ani místo, ale ani postavy či příběh nejsou jasně dány. Zatímco Crimp střídá hry přísně tradiční, konverzační dramata ze současnosti (*The Country*), s experimenty bez postav a bez příběhu (*Attempts on Her Life*), Kane se jasně vyvíjela od jen mírně narušené tradiční formy (*Phaedra's Love*) přes avantgardní experiment (*Cleansed*) až po postmoderní, fragmentovaný text, který divadelní hru připomíná jen vnějším tvarem (*Crave, 4.48 Psychosis*).

Práce poskytuje shrnutím obsahů her možnost proniknout do jejich dramatického světa i čtenáři s dílem neobeznámenému. Následuje analýza děl Crimpa a Kane vzhledem k aristotelským kritériím, zvláště mimesi a katarzi. Zatímco Kane klasický mimetický tvar narušuje a ukazuje tím na jeho nedostatečnost v dnešní době, Crimp se mimesi úplně vzdává, resp. mimesis u něj probíhá nikoli na úrovni nápodoby skutečnosti, ale na úrovni nápodoby textu či žánru. Z toho pramení typická charakteristika všech jeho experimentálních her: na jevišti jsou lidé, kteří vyprávějí život jiné, nepřítomné postavy, a to z mnoha perspektiv a v různých stylových odstínech. Tento přístup je páteří Crimpovy nejdůležitější experimentální hry, *Attempts on Her Life*: jedná se o sedmnáct kratičkových rozprav o hlavní hrdince Annie,

příčemž v každé z nich ztělesňuje něco či někoho jiného: je filmovou hvězdou, teroristkou, obětí války v Bosně či automobilem.

Co se týče vlivů, které na Crimpa a Kane působily, je u Crimpa patrná inspirace absurdním divadlem. Stejně jako např. Ionesco vnímá Crimp vládce jazyka či ty, kdo ovládají diskurs, jako faktické „nositele pravdy“ a tím pádem vládce celé společnosti. U Crimpa, podobně jako v absurdním divadle, se jazyk vztahuje sám k sobě a odhaluje své mechanismy a zažité fráze pomocí hyperrealistického dialogu. Důležitost jazyka a jeho omezení vzhledem k vyjadřované skutečnosti spojuje Crimpa s dalším velikánem moderního divadla: vliv Samuela Becketta je nesporný. Crimpovy postavy, podobně jako Beckettovy, tematizují a vyjadřují svou nedostatečnost ve vyprávění příběhu, který je kvůli tomu necelistvý a přerušovaný. U Crimpa je ovšem nesporně větší prostor věnován satirě konkrétních žánrů a vyjadřovacích manýr.

I u Kane se dá hovořit o Beckettově vlivu, i když z docela jiné perspektivy: jejich příbuznost spočívá hlavně v užití černého, groteskního humoru a v situaci postav, která je neřešitelná a zároveň jí nelze uniknout. Vliv Becketta lze vystopovat i v tělesném zpodobnění postav – první tři hry Kane končí tím, že na jevišti bez hnutí setrvává postava/postavy zmrzačené k nepoznání. Dalším prvkem, patrným zvláště v pozdějších hrách Kane, je minimalismus jazyka, kde se každé slovo stává nesmírně důležitým jak v obsahové, tak v rytmické složce textu.

Podstatný vliv na tvorbu Kane měl také guru avantgardního divadla Antonin Artaud. S tím jí pojí důležitost gest a jevištních symbolů, a expresivní, leckdy nesplnitelné scénické poznámky, ve kterých z jeviště rostou květiny, krysy odnášejí uťaté končetiny protagonistů, apod. Vliv Artauda je patrný také v tom, jak Kane dává přednost emocionální reakci diváka před intelektuální. Divadelní představení má působit na celou psychiku člověka, na jeho podvědomí, představy a sny.

Co se týče formálních inovací, Kane i Crimp experimentují, podobně jako celá řada dalších současných autorů, se zažitými konvencemi dramatického díla (čas, prostor, postava, zápletka). V této práci se tedy zabýváme spíš tím, proč ve vybraných dílech tyto složky absentují, za jakým účelem byly odstraněny nebo inovovány. Diskutujeme o termínu „postdramatické divadlo“, prosazovaném Hans-Thiesem Lehmannem v jeho stejnojmenné knize, a o tom, zda se dají naši autoři k tomuto proudu přiřadit. Inovace téměř všech podstatných složek dramatu by tomu nasvědčovala, je tu však jeden závažný rozdíl: zatímco jednou ze základních charakteristik postdramatického divadla je devalvace jazyka, kdy lidský hlas je postaven na roveň hudbě, různě elektronicky upravován, atd., u Crimpa i u Kane je text hry jejím ústředním prvkem. Zmiňujeme též termín „ghosting“, převzatý od Marvina Carlsona: díky dlouhé divadelní tradici není už ani pouhá přítomnost herce na jevišti bezpříznaková, vždy se jedná o intertextualitu či, dle Carlsona, recyklaci neboli „ghosting“. Absence základních divadelních prvků tedy může být u Kane motivována snahou recyklaci předejít, stvořit něco skutečně nového. Crimp naopak recyklaci hojně využívá ve formě parodie.

Následující kapitola se zabývá mimodivadelními oblastmi, kterými se Crimp a Kane inspirují. U Kane se jedná hlavně o žánr svědectví (testimony) a o problém překonávání traumatu, který je zvláště zřejmý v její první hře (*Blasted*). S použitím textů Shoshany Felman a Petera Buse ukazujeme, že v případě traumatu se nejedná jen o krizi osobnosti, ale také o estetický problém: jak vyjádřit jedinečný prožitek bez použití klišé? Ukazujeme způsob, jakým se Kane s tímto problémem vypořádala v *Blasted*. Dále jsou stručněji zmíněny aluze na poezii a afinita jejích pozdějších her k poezii, či přesněji k lyrickému vyjádření anonymního subjektu. Jsou také zmíněna místa, kde se Kane slov zcela vzdává a poskytuje prostor pohybovému vyjádření.

Co se týče Crimpa, velkým inspiračním zdrojem jsou mu média. Převáděním filmových scén, reklamních šotů aj. na jeviště Crimp sice poukazuje na omezení divadla, zároveň ale může tímto převodem snadněji parodovat konvence jiných žánrů, a tím poukázat na jejich nedostatky. Dalším formálně zajímavým prvkem je „vyprávění příběhu“, které jsme už zmínili výše: tím, že Crimp ukazuje na scéně nikoli příběh, ale tvorbu příběhu, to, jak příběh vzniká součinností několika svárlivých vypravěčů, poukazuje na nekonečnou proměnu, kterou umožňuje tvořivost, ale zároveň na nebezpečí, které člověk podstupuje, uvěří-li jedinému vypravěči (jediné interpretaci, jediné pravdě).

Práce se dále zabývá problémem postavy a jejími inovacemi v dílech obou autorů. Ani jeden se neztotožňuje s tradičním zpodobněním postavy jako psychologického typu, ani se zažitou konvencí vyjádření vnitřních stavů postavy v dialogu/monologu. U Kane se emoce postav odráží na jejich tělesné schránce: v *Cleansed* se Grace chce ztotožnit se svým bratrem a dosáhne toho amatérskou změnou pohlaví, Carlovi je za lživé vyznání lásky ustřižen jazyk nůžkami apod. V *Blasted* se Ian, který byl vždy slepý k utrpení a trápení druhých, dočká trestu v podobě oslepení. U Crimpa se absencí hlavní postavy, o které se vždy pouze mluví, ukazuje na problém pravdivého zpodobnění, ale i dorozumění mezi lidmi: ve hře *Fewer Emergencies* mají tři vypravěči na stejnou ženskou postavu zcela rozdílný pohled. I v Crimpových konvenčnějších hrách s realistickým pojetím postav je kladen důraz na nemožnost porozumění a poznání druhého: postavy si lžou, manipulují sebou navzájem. Rodina není vnímána jako bezpečné místo, ale naopak jako zdroj psychických poruch a nezdravých vztahů. Crimp zdůrazňuje v téměř všech svých hrách motiv nešťastných, nějakým způsobem zneužívaných dětí.

V tuto chvíli je už jasné, že pro oba autory je zásadním tématem násilí, zneužívání, válka či jiné trauma. Pro Crimpa funguje násilí jako metafora manipulace, jíž je dnešní člověk na každém kroku podrobován: manipulace reklamou, různými průzkumy, společností, a

nakonec i jazykem samým a jeho nedostatečností, která nikdy nemůže vyjádřit jedinečnost individuální zkušenosti. Lidé, kteří v *Attempts on Her Life* necitelně popisují Annie, jí činí násilí. Filmoví tvůrci, kteří ve hře *The Treatment* koupí příběh zneužívané ženy a pak ho přetvoří podle svého, páchají na hrdince a jejím příběhu bezpráví. Je důležité si všimnout, že u Crimpa jsou téměř vždy oběťmi zneužívání ženy (či již zmíněné děti). Násilí tak může být i metaforou mužského názoru na ženu, který se leckdy rovná zneuznání. Crimp považuje násilí za ekvivalent manipulace, a tak se v některých hrách násilí jako takové ani neobjevuje; jde spíše o pohružku, skrytou pod povrchem běžné konverzace, o narážky a intriky. To je v přímém rozporu s Kane, jejíž přímé a krvavé zpodobnění násilí jí vyneslo nechvalnou reputaci „skandální“ autorky. Ani u Kane se ale v žádném případě nejedná o chválu násilí: naopak, tím, že privileguje pohled viníka a nikoli pohled oběti, snaží se Kane poctivě najít podstatu motivace pro brutální činy. Voják v *Blasted* není jednoznačně negativní a sadistická postava – otřesné násilí, které páchá na Ianovi, je jen opakováním toho, co cizí vojáci udělali jeho dívce. Tím, jak se Kane v pozdějších hrách stahuje do subjektivity, pojí téma násilí s problémem psychické choroby, nenávisti k vlastní osobě, která pramení z nějakého hluboce zakořeněného traumatu.

Z tohoto pohledu je už zřejmé, co mají Crimp a Kane společného. Oba znepokojuje násilí v dnešním světě, po jehož kořenech a podobách ve svých hrách pátrají. Pro oba jsou nekonečným zdrojem inspirace mezilidské vztahy, a to ty nenormální, pokřivené, ve kterých leží počátek dramatického konfliktu. Pro oba autory není tradiční divadelní forma uspokojivá pro zobrazení dnešního světa; je třeba se vyrovnat s tím, jaké možnosti zpodobnění skutečnosti nabízí média. Současně se objevují nové nástrahy: záplava informací a s ní pluralita příběhů, ze kterých je možno zkonstruovat umělý svět. Crimp a Kane svými inovacemi vyjadřují důvěru dramatickému tvaru jako přiměřenému prostředku k vyjádření naší dnešní existence.

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## *Appendix*

### The Plays of Martin Crimp and Sarah Kane in Czech Translation

#### **Martin Crimp**

*Mimořádné události*. Přeložil Julek Neuman. Praha: Národní divadlo, 2006.

„Pokusy o její život“. Přeložil David Drozd, in: *Svět a divadlo*, vol. 13.1, 2002.

„Story“. Přeložila Jitka Sloupová, in: *Svět a divadlo*, vol. 5.1, 1994.

*Venkov*. Přeložila Jitka Sloupová. Praha: Národní divadlo, 2002.

#### **Sarah Kane**

*4.48 psychóza*. Přeložila Jitka Sloupová. Praha: Divadelní ústav, 2002.

„Faidra (Z lásky)“. Přeložil Jaroslav Achab Haidler, in: *Projekt Bouda*. Praha: Národní divadlo, 2003.

*Psychóza ve 4.48*. Přeložila Jitka Sloupová. Praha: Národní divadlo, 2003.