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Experiencing Kane: an affective analysis of Sarah Kane's 'experiential' theatre in performance

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*'Performance is visceral. It puts you in direct physical contact with thought and feeling.'*¹

It is finally the Kane moment in Australia; between July and November 2004 I will have seen *Blasted*, two productions of *Crave*, the Australian premiere of *Phaedra's Love* and two productions of *4.48 Psychosis*, including its Australian premiere. It is not within the scope of this paper to analyse the political and social context of this sudden glut, the 'why now?' Rather it will focus on the possibilities for developing a critical analysis of how Kane's work functions in performance. This paper considers the language available to address Kane's ideas of 'experiential' theatre, and proposes that an effective analysis can only come through examining the affect of the work in performance. It will suggest that a phenomenological enquiry that coopts a vocabulary of 'affect' from Deleuzian philosophy offers one potential methodology for discussing the 'affective specificity' of what is actually happening before us in the experience of being at the theatre for a Kane 'play'.

Sarah Kane's reaction to Jeremy Weller's production *Mad*² essentially defined for her what she wanted theatre to be:

As an audience member, I was taken to a place of extreme mental discomfort and distress and then popped out the other end. What I did not do was sit in the theatre considering as an intellectual conceit what it might be like to be mentally ill... *Mad* took me to hell, and the night I saw it I made a decision about the kind of theatre I wanted to make – *experiential*.³

The overwhelming, visceral response that Kane had to *Mad* is what drives her aims for an 'experiential' theatre. The images and 'image structures'⁴ Kane develops throughout her work are an attempt to connect with the spectator at a physical level and the effectiveness – or affectiveness – of this imagery lies less in a request for the audience to make meaning, but in its demand for the audience to set active meaning-making aside; to allow the asignifying power of the work to take over. As such the work resists an

analysis based only on 'what is this play about?' and demands instead one that asks 'what did this theatre *feel like*?' Kane is fiercely political, but her anger and despair at the state of the world is not channelled into 'meaningful' political speeches made by characters. We won't get a nice piece of dialogue elegantly expounding the problems with the British Government's appalling Care in the Community policy, for example, but we will get a searing indictment of that policy in 4.48 *Psychosis* where it comes from a different stage landscape that allows the spectator to experience the world of the suicide, rather than intellectualise and separate oneself from this experience. Kane takes very seriously Howard Barker's call for a theatre which 'must locate its creative tension not between characters and arguments on the stage but between the audience and the stage itself.'⁵

This paper argues that Kane sees experience as the key to eliciting change in the spectator: and here the word 'spectator' fails us, as the power of Kane's work – its 'affect', even its meaning – rests within the capacity of the spectator to 'experience' the work rather than simply observe it:

If we can experience something through art, then we might be able to change our future, because experience engraves lessons on our heart through suffering, whereas speculation leaves us untouched.⁶

The need for an affective analysis Kane herself uses football and music as paradigms that offer an understanding of what she wants theatre to be, and both prove very useful starting points in approaching an analysis of her work. Almost every account of *Crave*, Sarah Kane's fourth play, or 'text for performance'⁷ as she called it, refers to its musicality. It is often likened to a string quartet, and even the introduction to the playtext states that it 'deploys language like music.'⁸ The director of its premiere, Vicky Featherstone, suggests that 'it was written for its rhythm rather than meaning through the juxtaposition of the lines.'⁹ This is a telling statement as it throws into question how one can talk about a work in performance, particularly theatre, that privileges non-significative impact over meaning, especially when our modes of analysis are overwhelmingly fixated on meaning. No-one would argue that music does not have meaning, but to consider its meaning alone without contemplating how it affects us in performance would miss the point of what is happening when we listen to it. Jeremy Gilbert asserts that

Levi Strauss was one of many commentators to remark that music's specificity lies in the fact that it is registered not just cognitively but at the level of the physical body.¹⁰

As Gilbert points out, 'to talk about what the Riot Grrrls, (bands like Hole or Babes in Toyland) *meant* without explaining what it *felt like* would be to rob it of all specificity.'¹¹ In the same way that '[m]usic is not amenable to analysis using methodologies that prioritise language as the model form of communication',¹² to talk about what *Crave* – or any of Kane's plays – mean without referring to what it feels like will never offer an effective analysis.

Bert O. States embraces a 'binocular' way of seeing that includes phenomenology and semiotics 'as complementary perspectives on the world and on art.'¹³ He rejects a solely semiotic mode of analysis on the basis that 'the danger of a linguistic approach to theatre is that one is apt to look past the site of our sensory engagement with its empirical objects' and yet this site is where 'the affective power of art' is located.¹⁴ Gilbert, writing as a cultural theorist, and greatly influenced by Deleuze, also suggests a dual-pronged analytical methodology. Taking his examples from popular music he asserts '[t]he political struggles at stake in the formation and dissolution of [various] musical assemblages can only be understood by reference *both* to the affective specificities of the musics in question, *and* to the semiotic contexts in which they are fought over.'¹⁵

This 'affective specificity' is at the core of Gilbert's ideas of an 'affective analysis.'¹⁶ He considers the term 'affect', suggesting that 'one sign, literally, of its increasing significance [is] that the meanings attached to this term seem to proliferate and slip around.'¹⁷ He selects Brian Massumi's definition:

Affect/Affection'. Neither word denotes a personal feeling...*Affect*... is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution of that body's capacity to act.¹⁸

Gilbert reads 'affect' as a term which denotes 'a more or less organised experience, an experience probably with empowering or disempowering consequences, registered at the level of the physical body and not necessarily to be understood in linguistic terms.'¹⁹ His example of the Riot Grrrls illustrates how the affective specificity of the music along with its semiotic context creates an 'affective analysis'. He suggests that the music, 'a masculine rock sound with screaming aggressive vocals and guitars, was a means by which to occupy the corporeal-affective space of masculinity and so challenge the gendered distribution of power in 1990s America.'²⁰ Gilbert maintains that 'to argue that music's effects cannot be reduced to meanings is not to say that the issue of meaning is irrelevant to an understanding of those effects.'²¹ In the example above the meaning of the work has its foundation in the affective specificity.

Therefore affective specificity is a vital tool for understanding the total effect of the impact of a work of art within any historical or cultural context. Indeed, Gilbert maintains, a 'notion of 'culture' which sees in it only 'signifying practices' is quite simply not up to the job'.²² It is not my aim here to address the supposed gaps in cultural theory, but to place Kane within this cultural moment. I would argue that in the evolution of Kane's experiments with form, she resists a solely semiotic analysis and demands that the 'experiential' dimension of her work in performance be recognised.

To this end, what is needed to produce an effective methodology for discussing Kane's work is an 'affective analysis' based on 'affective specificity'.

Phenomenological disclosure as a basis for establishing an affective analysis.

Contemporary theatre phenomenology, as developed by States and Stanton B. Garner Jr, offers one way of beginning to work out an affective analysis of Kane's work, and beginning to address its non-signifying, sensory and corporeal impact, or how Kane's theatre *feels to us*. States alerts us to phenomenological criticism's interest in 'not... all possible meanings [but] meaning and feeling as they arise in a direct encounter with the art object.'²³ This interest in the immediacy of the encounter makes it a valuable way of examining the perception of Kane's work in performance. It is this engagement with the event in the moment that Kane seeks; it is what leads her to ask why theatre can't be like football, and to set about making it so:

I frequently walk out of the theatre early without fear of missing anything. But however bad I've felt, I've never left a football match early, because you never know when a miracle might occur.²⁴

Offering an analogy with cosmological physics, States suggests that a phenomenological critique is akin to the 'first four seconds' of perceptual Big Bang – 'It is beside the point to claim that the first four seconds are always tainted by a lifetime of perceptual habit ... it is only the moment of absorption that counts.'²⁵ By seeking to create an emotional and visceral response Kane focuses on this moment of absorption, whether it is through a visual, verbal or sonic image, that makes something new and functions as if it is 'without a history of signification.'²⁶ States refers to the brief 'moment' when 'an object or an image establishes itself in our perception as something, as Shelley puts it, that 'creates for us a being within our being [and] compels us to *feel that which we perceive*'.²⁷ And this is what Kane's imagery or, perhaps more accurately her 'image structure', sets out to do: to affect the spectator through a challenge to perception. Discussing the 'press outcry' at *Blasted*, Kane noted 'The shock wasn't about the content, not even about the shock of the new, but about the familiar being arranged in such a way that it could be seen afresh.'²⁸

The formal rupture at the heart of *Blasted*, where a bomb inexplicably goes off in a hotel room in peacetime Leeds, can be understood in terms of one of these perceptual 'moments' that discloses 'a different kind of *here* than we "usually tend to be" in.'²⁹ A play that starts off like a great number of Royal Court plays, set in one room, apparently realist in form, with dialogue and action – albeit brutal and perhaps 'shocking' – creating a coherent (image) structure, is suddenly blown apart. Kane is unequivocal about her intention with this:

The form and the content attempt to be one – the form is the meaning.... The play collapses into one of Cate's fits. The form is a direct parallel to the truth of the war it portrays – a traditional form is suddenly and violently disrupted by the entrance of an unexpected element that drags the characters and the play into a chaotic pit without logical explanation.³⁰

It is this disruption of form that creates the moment of disclosure. Like a new metaphor, the putting together of two ideas: the generic hotel room (with its newly-arrived sandwiches and age-old racism and sexual abuse), and the sudden explosion of war creates a phenomenological *epoche*, whereby presuppositions are 'bracketed out' and, in that perceptual moment, there is a disclosure of something previously 'unseen'. In this case, not only do we have the suggestion of the possibility of civil war in Britain, but the racism and the sexual abuse are also recontextualised and seen anew. Edward Bond, whose scene of the stoning of a baby in *Saved* at the Royal Court (1965) caused the same sort of hysteria and calls for censorship as *Blasted*, understands this disclosure as changing reality itself: '*Blasted* changed reality because it changed the means we have of understanding ourselves. It showed us a new way in which to see reality, and when we do that reality is changed'.³¹

As States points out, the work of art 'is a place of disclosure, not a place of reference. What is disclosed cannot be found elsewhere *because it does not exist outside*', therefore it has 'perhaps altered our perception of reality'.³² Any attempt by spectators to move forward and back between memory (of 'reality') and the world Kane creates in *Blasted* is pointless.³³ It is futile to compare a familiar or 'known' world to the world of the play; the world of the play has displaced what was available before. In the case of *Blasted*, this means leaving behind the notion of a 'reality' in which Britain is immune to ethnic violence. And this phenomenological disclosure is, for me, the defining feature of Kane's imagery, whatever form it happens to take.

What is the 'experience of being in the theatre'?

To return to Gilbert's call for an 'affective analysis' based on 'affective specificity', this means looking at the specific affect created by the specific image structures Kane uses to make the specific art form that is theatre. What is theatre's specificity, or the 'experience of being in a theatre' that Kane – notoriously adamant that her work was not to be produced in any other medium – was so determined to utilise? As Gay McAuley argues,

the specificity of theatre is not to be found in its relationship to the *dramatic*, as film and television have shown through their appropriation and massive exploitation of the latter, but in that it consists essentially of the interaction between performers and spectators in a given space.³⁴

It is this relationship, grounded in the bodily presence of performer and spectator, that Kane pushes to extremes. What she really wants is to make theatre with the impact of being at a Jesus and Mary Chain concert; in other words, theatre that would make 'direct intellectual, emotional and physical contact with the needs of the audience'.³⁵ Ken Urban's response to the 2001 production of *Blasted* at the Royal Court was that 'Kane was able to use the theatre in a manner that was distinctly visceral, making intense use of the experience of being in a theatre'.³⁶ Kane exploits this specific, live, relationship of performer and spectator by creating imagery that produces a sensory impact.

How does Kane's imagery affect the spectator?

Taking as a starting point Merleau-Ponty's assertion that 'to perceive is to render oneself present to something through the body',³⁷ I suggest that the one element that remains constant in Kane's continual experimentation is her ability to exploit the 'lived bodiliness'³⁸ of the spectator to create a visceral, corporeal response. This is not to suggest that Kane's work does not seek to arouse an intellectual response, but rather that this response is deferred by the immediate physical reaction of the spectator through the body.

The SOLDIER grips IAN's head in his hands.

He puts his mouth over one of IAN's eyes, sucks it out, bites it off and eats it.

*He does the same to the other eye.*³⁹

Ken Urban's description of his reaction to *Blasted* is a perfect example of this: 'intellectual awareness comes only after you walk away from the performance. Seeing such images as the soldier devouring Ian's eyes overwhelms you...first comes the emotion, the thinking afterward'. But the thinking does come eventually: 'Later that evening, it suddenly hit me: watching the news on TV before bed I was suddenly overcome with tears'.⁴⁰ This response is reiterated by Aleks Sierz, who notes: 'it does make you think, but only after you've got over the shock of seeing it'.⁴¹ And shock, it's fairly clear, is Kane's first technique in attempting to break down familiar perceptions. Whether it is the shock of the early blood, shit and mutilation variety, or the shocking lack of 'shocking' graphic images later on, it is certainly the most obvious form taken by her attempts to create affect.

Tracing the images in Kane's work and the way they function, two main points can be made of the image structures. One is that the early works conform to a contemporary hierarchy that places visual imagery above others; and secondly, these early plays have a 'safer' image structure from the playwright's point of view, because they quite clearly spell out their images for anyone trying to realise the works in performance (not that that makes them necessarily easy or straightforward). Phyllis Nagy praises the 'sublime image structure'⁴² of *Blasted* because it is created through the dialogue and actions of the characters. For example, the image of the

journalist Ian eating the baby emerges from a development of character and narrative wherein such an event is not only conceivable, but even logical. So the visceral impact of the image, which comes from the fact that 'you had this subtle sound of tiny bones being broken... [and] he really ate the meat' (an image that Nils Tabert says 'finally did it' for some of the spectators at the German premiere production)⁴³ is backed up by a chain of events within the play.

In contrast, *Cleansed*, while it does contain images that are structured by the narratological development of the play – the gradual dismembering of Carl, for example, is inbuilt as a metaphor that reveals how relationships function in the world of the play – much of the imagery is set down by Kane in copious stage directions. This seems to place the power of affect in a visual and aural assault, such as:

*The sun gets brighter and brighter, the squeaking of the rats
louder and louder, until the light is blinding and the sound
deafening.*⁴⁴

These 'moments' in the theatre serve to remind the spectator of their own presence by making them aware of a physical impact on their body. One spectator at *Cleansed*⁴⁵ said his main reaction to the piece came from the 'seemingly endless' gunfire, which 'goes on and on and on.'⁴⁶ Kane's intention with this sonic image, I suggest, is to build a place of physical discomfort, to create an urge to cover the ears or try to escape from the sound, all of which reinforces the 'realities' of the play-world. It thus works as a place of *disclosure*: in the moment of the physical impact of the deafening gunfire the spectator does not move between an imaginary world and the 'reality' of a Kosovo or an Iraq. The referent is removed, as the spectator is not merely observing, but suffering. The lived bodiliness of both actor and spectator is deeply manifest as Kane exploits the 'earsplitting-ness' and the 'blinding-ness' to inscribe the experience of the image onto the body of the spectator, and thus render its affect.

In contrast, the image structures of the later works – *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* – are much riskier. They are both pieces in which the image structure is produced neither through stage directions, nor through a linear characterological or narratological development, but through the play of language that needs to be voiced but is located beyond a concrete/material 'reality'. They both make radical moves towards using language in a non-significative way, and their affect is grounded in the elements of theatre that are not bound up with making meaning – their corporeal impact. For example, one might want to search for narrative intent in the section of *Crave* that returns to and expands on the earlier 'yes, nos':

C: No.

M: Yes.

B: No.

A: Yes.

B: No.

C: No.

A: Yes.

A beat.

B: No.

C: No.

M: Yes.

B: No.

C: No.

A: Yes.

C: No.

A beat.

A: Yes.

C: No.

B: No.

M: Yes.

A: Yes.

M: Yes⁴⁷

But a search for individual meaning in each line is clearly resisted by Kane. This section makes odd, even tedious reading. In performance, layers of potential meaning may be introduced in terms of whom the speaker is addressing, and in what sort of tone, and with what depth of feeling, but the piece moves too quickly for the spectator to try to make sense of each utterance. What this means – if the performance is working well – is that the impact comes from the combination of the impact of the rhythms and kinaesthetic response of the actors working as a tight ensemble to become almost one organism. In the performance by Acquiesce Speck⁴⁸ in the tiny loaded space of *The Cat and Fiddle*, Sydney, the speed and intensity of this section produced a violent lurch in my stomach and sent a huge tingling down the length of my legs. This immediate visceral response was followed by a deepening sense of despair at the bleakness being played out. What becomes clear in 'experiencing' this section in performance is that Kane is not making something meaningless. The phenomenal impact, the affect, of the whole produces an utterly devastating picture of abjectness, of bodies and lives routinely abused and completely without hope.

The fragmentation of character and language in the last two works makes them even more reliant on an affective analysis, both by practitioners and critics. Having been burnt by the critical response to *Blasted*, whose *coup de théâtre* – the implication that a hotel room in Leeds could be, suddenly, a war

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

please open the curtains

The phenomenal impact of this gaping space is felt in the way these works unravel in time and space in performance. The silence Kane imposes here through the blank space on the page is heavy with its own corporeality. Phenomenologically, the silence we experience in the theatre, while it refers to 'another' silence, is still silence. It is 'the thing itself' as well as the thing it is pretending to be.⁵⁶



Arrival through the windows. *Crave* produced by Eleventh Hour, director Anne Thompson and William Henderson. September 2002 at Leicester Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne.

L-R Fiona Todd (C), David Tredinnick (B) (only just visible in window), and Heather Bolton (M). Photo: Ponch Hawkes.

My analysis so far suggests that in *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* Kane uses the corporeality of language – language used not as a sign, a symbol standing in for an absent referent, but rather phenomenally 'self-given' – as the 'site of our sensory engagement with empirical objects.'⁵⁷ The paradox of this, however, is that while she uses the corporeality of language to impact on the body of the spectator, the body of the performer is much more precarious. The highly symbolic visual world allowed by the language is thrown into crisis by the arrival of the inherently iconic body of the performer, with its gender, size, ethnicity and its material lack of ambiguity. While time – the rhythms and silences – becomes the driving force for the sensory impact, all spatial and visual aspects become much more contingent. And this is where the risk comes in, because with language as the location of the play, and no imposition of visual or spatial demands from Kane within the text or didascalia, the director (and performer) are asked to have faith in the power of the language to create its own imagery and affect. What this means in

performance is that these two plays, much more than the earlier 'blood and sperm' works, push at the boundaries of theatre's corporeality. Having placed the impact of the graphic imagery of the first three plays uncompromisingly in this very iconicity of the performers' bodies, Kane in the end puts her faith in the theatre-makers to allow the corporeality of language to produce its own disclosure.

A production of *Crave*, for example, has to find a way to allow the performers' bodies to inhabit the space without being straight-jacketed into a characterological or narratological treatment. At its best, a successful production such as the Royal Court's⁵⁸ results in a response like Urban's that 'the speakers' stories ... become almost superfluous to the concatenation of images' and these images are contained 'within the language of the plays ... through the creation of a distinctly poetic style.'⁵⁹ At its worst it can result in two extremes. One is the refusal to trust the language to make its own impact and give in to the dominance of visual imagery and the impact of the body, as in a staging like that of director Taurie Kinoshita at the University of Hawaii. In this production, in addition to the 'voices' A, B, C and M, the director added a 'Girl', 'Lover' and 'Father' who enact the abuse and rape of the girl (in the nude).⁶⁰ While this approach seeks to evoke 'affect', it diminishes the aim of Kane's later work by suggesting the spectator can only be affected by the portrayal of graphic violence on embodied flesh right in front of us.



On the pier. *Crave* by Eleventh Hour. Front to rear: David Tredinnick (B), Fiona Todd (C), Heather Bolton (M), Tom Considine (A). Photo: Ponch Hawkes

The other extreme is to place all weight in the aural blocking at the expense of utilising everything else that makes up 'the experience of being in a theatre'. My own first encounter with *Crave* at the Storeroom, Melbourne,⁶¹ was to feel disconnected from the world onstage, and uninterested in the 'voices' presented to me. The stark and fairly static aesthetic of the four bodies held separately in space did not provoke any kind of emotional engagement in me and, whatever else is true of Kane, as Saunders asserts: 'emotional intensity is undeniably integral to Kane's drama'.⁶² Vicky Featherstone, director of the premiere of *Crave*,⁶³ noted a response of audience members that it felt 'too fast and ... they needed more space to ponder the language'.⁶⁴ This comment highlights the challenge of a work for practitioners to find its affective core within its rhythmic drive. The point of *Crave* is not to have time to ponder each sentence, but rather to allow the rhythm to create its phenomenal impact.



Crave by Eleventh Hour. L-R: Tom Considine (A) Fiona Todd (C)
Heather Bolton (M) David Tredinnick (B). Photo: Ponch Hawkes.

I have now seen two productions of *Crave* in Australia that have taken utterly different approaches and found ways to use the rhythms and create a staging that produced an affective vision for the play. Both developed a performance style that allowed the performers to embody the voices without pinning them down to 'characters', and the staging allowed for a fluid continuum of an evolving environment without restricting the action to either nowhere or somewhere in particular. Each found their sensory impact in

creating a use of space that allowed time and rhythm to be the dominant force: one maximising the effect of speed, the other slowing down time.

Acquiesce Speck's production used an emotionally intense, physical style but was absolutely driven by the rhythm of the language, so that the words bouncing back and forth at breakneck speed found their corporeality in the pace. As a spectator it was like being carried along on a wave of language that spewed forth from four physical sources. Rather than feeling it was 'too fast', the relentlessness of the pace absolutely created the affect, the visceral punch to the gut. Eleventh Hour Theatre in Melbourne⁶⁵ took a very different approach to the text, avoiding a 'raw'⁶⁶ aesthetic and seeking out what co-director William Henderson describes as 'an image world beyond that which is created by the language ... that the four psyches can move in'.⁶⁷ The choice of having the cast arrive through windows created a beautiful disclosure because of the surreal strangeness of the moment. The staging, with a long catwalk representing a pier, placed the performers in a watery space, the audience in the sea, or even becoming a sea. Henderson explains the need to allow the characters to move 'because, after a while, if you have someone speaking from a fixed position, you have to assemble a persona and you start asking awkward questions in theatrical terms about why they don't move'.⁶⁸ So the space has to provide a way for the theatrical moment to exist without allowing narrative or character to take over. The company's hope was that 'the freedom that was created in the space ... allowed different parts of the psyche to emerge. It was possible to present a cubist portrait of the psyche rather than a naturalistic one'.⁶⁹ This rather accurately conveys the experience of sitting in the audience for this production, seeing figures appear and disappear, their topography suggesting a passing of time, the spatial dimension paradoxically creating a temporal sense. This was one element of the effectiveness of giving the figures freedom to move; the other was the impact of the versatile, ever-changing spatial relationship with the audience. The actor David Tredinnick (B), lying on the floor beside me at one point – whose breathing I could hear and whose stomach I could see rise and fall – remains a moment of shared hiatus with another person. At that moment he wasn't quite B and he wasn't quite David Tredinnick.

Silence and stillness

The question of incorporating silence as a rhythm and balancing movement with stillness is vital to how any production of *Crave* creates its affect. Stillness created its own power in the Eleventh Hour *Crave*; Henderson points out that it 'often seemed more powerful for people to be standing and not doing anything while others moved'. This also raises the question of acting style, and perhaps it was this choreography that allowed moments to stand out without any big 'raw acting' devices. Certainly, while the works need emotional intensity, the way the work is structured, at least by *Crave* and 4.48, asks performers and directors to find this intensity without the

safety net of character or big emotional moments. Henderson surmises that Kane presents the 'antithesis' of the big moment when 'everything turns on', so that in performance it is 'important not to decorate or illustrate the speech'.⁷⁰ The embracing of this style, for me, allowed the text to set up a 'climate' (Henderson) in which the spectator could engage with the composite of voices: the 'grazing, ruminating, grieving, roaming, remembering pack' as the actor Tom Considine named it,⁷¹ and be emotionally connected without trying to pull apart separate narratives or follow one narrative thread through. Henderson articulates *Crave's* challenge most evocatively: 'It is like walking on broken glass and you actually do have to tread pretty lightly'.⁷²

To conclude

At their best, the linguistic devices of Kane's later work are an attempt to unravel the significative coding of the words and invoke the spectator's sensory engagement through the sonic wash of the words. In this sense Kane draws on the affective aspects of music and, yes, football too. Gilbert usefully asserts that 'The most intense and significant form of verbal activity engaged in by fans at a football match is not even the chant, but a wordless or semi-articulate cheer: an activity at once expressive and affective, but without *meaning* as such'.⁷³ The rash of Kane plays in Australia – from drought to glut – brings its own problems for critical interpretation, each production backing up one expectation while annihilating another. An analysis that seems reasonable working off the written text is 'blasted' asunder by the plays in performance. The criticisms levelled at phenomenology's interpretations as mired in subjectivity are valid: what is 'affective' for one is deadly dull for another. But then, isn't that the way theatre works? Or, at least, one that is based on the 'experience of being in a theatre'? There has to be room in a critique of an 'experiential' theatre for the methodology that talks about what it felt like in those 'first four seconds' before signification kicked in. The challenge for those attempting to produce or critique Kane's work is to address its sensory impact in the moment, to ground our experience of it in our corporeal response to it, to defer searching for meaning and – whether it is based on a phenomenological disclosure or some other methodology – to create an affective analysis based on our ability to 'feel that which we perceive'.

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NOTES

- 1 Sarah Kane, 'Drama with Balls', *The Guardian* (20 August 1998): 12.

- 2 *Mad*, by Grassmarket Project, director Jeremy Weller, Edinburgh Festival, August 1992.
- 3 Letter from Kane to Aleks Sierz (4 January 1999), cited in Graham Saunders, 'Just a Word on the Page and There is the Drama': Sarah Kane's Theatrical Legacy', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 13.1 (2003): 99. Emphasis added.
- 4 The term is from playwright Phyllis Nagy: 'For me, if a play is firing on all cylinders, its image structure is generated by the language, the behaviour of the characters and its metaphor working together seamlessly'. Cited in Graham Saunders, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002) 161.
- 5 Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993) 52.
- 6 Kane, in Natasha Langridge and Heidi Stephenson, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting* (London: Methuen, 1997) 133.
- 7 Kane, 'Drama with Balls' 12.
- 8 See Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Theatre Today* (London: Faber, 2001) 118.
- 9 Saunders, *'Love Me or Kill Me'* 129.
- 10 Jeremy Gilbert, 'Signifying Nothing: "Culture", "Discourse" and the Sociality of Affect', *Culture Machine*, 2004 <http://culturemachine.tees.ac.uk>, 4 (Accessed 16 April 2004).
- 11 Gilbert 7.
- 12 Gilbert 4.
- 13 Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: U California P, 1985) 8.
- 14 States 7.
- 15 Gilbert 6-7.
- 16 Gilbert 6.
- 17 Gilbert 3.
- 18 Brian Massumi, cited in Gilbert 3.
- 19 Gilbert 3.
- 20 Gilbert 6, referencing S. Reynolds, & J. Press, *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion and Rock'n Roll* (London: Serpents Tail, 1994).
- 21 Gilbert 6.
- 22 Gilbert 4.
- 23 Bert O. States 'The Phenomenological Attitude', *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (Ann Arbor: U Michigan P, 1992) 370.
- 24 Kane 'Drama with Balls' 12.
- 25 States 'The Phenomenological Attitude' 370.
- 26 States 'The Phenomenological Attitude' 377.
- 27 States 'The Phenomenological Attitude' 370. Emphasis added.
- 28 Kane, in Langridge and Stephenson 131.

- 29 States, citing Heidegger, *Great Reckonings* 4. For a more developed example of disclosure, see States' example of Van Gogh's painting of boots, *Great Reckonings* 3-5, 11-12.
- 30 Kane, in Langridge and Stephenson 130.
- 31 Edward Bond, in Saunders 'Love Me or Kill Me' 190.
- 32 States, *Great Reckonings* 4. Emphasis added. See also Bruce Wilshire, *Role Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor* (Indiana UP, 1982) 5.
- 33 The idea of moving forward and backward between 'reality' and the play world of *Blasted* uses States' description of Van Gogh's boots as analogy: 'We know these are not real peasant shoes, and they are not painted substitutes for peasant shoes elsewhere. But that is an irrelevant factor, for it is not a matter of our vision shuttling back and forth between memory and pigment ... Everything about the painting forestalls such a movement of mind and draws us, as Heidegger says, into its "riff"' (*Great Reckonings* 4).
- 34 Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: U Michigan P, 2000) 5. Emphasis added.
- 35 Kane, 'Drama with Balls' 12.
- 36 Ken Urban, 'An Ethics of Catastrophe: The Theatre of Sarah Kane', *Performing Arts Journal* 69 (2001): 46.
- 37 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, cited in Stanton B. Garner Jr, *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca & London: Cornell UP, 1994) 27.
- 38 Garner 28.
- 39 Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays* (London: Methuen 2001) 50.
- 40 Urban 46.
- 41 Sierz 99.
- 42 Phyllis Nagy, cited in Saunders, 'Love Me or Kill Me' 160.
- 43 Nils Tabert, cited in Saunders, 'Love Me or Kill Me' 138.
- 44 Kane, *Complete Plays* 151.
- 45 Jamie Crabb, personal correspondence (16 June 2004), discussing the Royal Court's production of *Cleansed* at the Duke of York's, London, 1997, director James MacDonald.
- 46 Kane, *Complete Plays* 133.
- 47 Kane, *Complete Plays* 185-87.
- 48 *Crave*, by performed by Acquiesce Speck, directed by Matt Emond, The Cat and Fiddle, Balmain [Sydney], 19 September 2004.
- 49 Michael Billington, cited in Sierz 96.
- 50 States, *Great Reckonings* 4.
- 51 William McEvoy, 'Here I Am, and There is My Body', *Times Literary Supplement* (14 July 2000) 18.
- 52 Sigurd Burckhardt, cited in States, *Great Reckonings* 7-8.
- 53 Garner 42.
- 54 Kane, *Complete Plays* 191.

- 55 Kane, *Complete Plays* 245.
- 56 States is illuminating on this: 'theater – unlike fiction, painting, sculpture, and film – is really a language whose words consist to an unusual degree of things that are what they seem to be. In theater, image and object, pretense and pretender, sign-vehicle and content, draw unusually close. Or as Peter Handke more interestingly puts it, in the theatre light is brightness pretending to be other brightness, a chair is a chair pretending to be another chair, and so on' (*Great Reckonings* 20). See also States, 'The Phenomenological Attitude' 375.
- 57 States, *Great Reckonings* 7.
- 58 *Crave*, Royal Court Theatre, directed by Vicky Featherstone, May 2001.
- 59 Urban 43.
- 60 John Berger, 'Crave Delivers Intense Message on Love and Loss' (Honolulu 1 November 2002). Review of *Crave* by Sarah Kane, Ernst Lab Theatre, University of Hawaii, directed by Taurie Kinoshita. (Accessed 18 June 2004).
- 61 *Crave*, by In Situ, directed by Janice Muller, The Store Room, Melbourne, October 2001. This production went on to Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney.
- 62 Saunders, 'Just a Word on the Page and There is the Drama', 102.
- 63 *Crave*, by Paines Plough, directed by Vicky Featherstone, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, August 1998.
- 64 Vicky Featherstone, cited in Saunders 'Love Me or Kill me'. 130.
- 65 *Crave*, by Eleventh Hour Theatre, directed by Anne Thompson and William Henderson, Fitzroy [Melbourne], September/October 2002.
- 66 Saunders suggests that '[the] legacy from *Mad*, namely a 'rawness' in acting style that stimulates real emotional pain from the performer, has already produced a cliché regarding Kane's work', 'Just a Word on the Page' 101.
- 67 William Henderson, interview with author, 18 June 2004.
- 68 Henderson.
- 69 Henderson.
- 70 Henderson.
- 71 Tom Considine (performer [A] in Eleventh Hour's *Crave*), personal correspondence (17 September 04).
- 72 Henderson.
- 73 Gilbert 17.

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