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The Treatment of Rape in Women's Performance Art and Sarah Kane's *Blasted*

Performance art of the 1960s, 70s and 80s was overwhelmingly concerned with 'the body', and is located firmly within feminist and queer discourses from the late 60s to the present day. Visceral, uncertain, fragmented, desecrated, dead, half-dead, trapped in endless repetition, claustrophobic, diseased, raped, wounded, pornographic, bloody, shitty, masturbating, pissed on, vomiting, spat on and obscene – body acts / images permeate our performative and visual culture. They maintain a presence in the memories of spectators present at events, on the bodies and testimonies of performers and in the mass-produced photographic and filmic images documenting the acts. Conventionally located by British academia as pertaining to fine art areas, performance art is nevertheless of central concern to theatre makers, and an analysis of its influence on British theatre writing of the 1990s is long overdue.

Sarah Kane's visual and visceral work has a shape and politics to its crafting that resonates strongly with body art and performance innovations. Her work challenges audiences with its stagings of the body, inviting focus on the body's power - its actions, its sounds, its interiority, its fluids, its external construction, its capacity for deconstruction and reconstruction – and gender is central to her playing out of body themes and images. In this short account, I will analyse the treatment of sexual violence by body / performance artists Ana Mendieta, Yoko Ono, Suzanne Lacy, Judy Chicago, Niki de Saint-Phalle, Valerie Export,

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the Womanhouse project, Tracey Emin, Karen Finley and Jenny Holzer, concluding with an exploration of Sarah Kane's dramatisation of rape in *Blasted*.

i. Naming rape - Yoko Ono

In 1968, Yoko Ono asked two male cameramen to persistently follow a woman in the street, recording the responses on film. This originated from a film idea she'd published in her book *Grapefruit* in 1964 (Reckitt & Phelan, 2001, p196.). It also bore connection to work by Vito Acconci where he picked women in the street at random, and followed them home. Ono called the piece *Rape* (Iles, 1997, pp 121-128). The camera recorded the mounting fear of the woman in response to being followed, and the strategies she employed to evade or challenge her pursuers. It also showed the zeal with which the male cameramen entered into the chase and the voyeuristic pleasure they took in filming the discomfort of their 'victim'.

Ono collaborated with her partner John Lennon, setting the 'victim' up through her cousin. Eva Majlath was a 21-year-old German woman. As Majlath attempts to elicit explanation from her pursuers, her 'broken English' compounds her 'victim' status, and reinforces the 'othering' of the female subject for the spectator. 'Othering' was a theme of Ono's earlier work *Cut Piece* (1965) where she performed the traditional image of a Japanese woman in clothes and posture, and invited the non-Japanese audience to cut pieces from her clothing (Reckitt & Phelan, 2001, pp 60-61). The breaks and dissonances of communication between Majlath and the cameramen heighten the emotion of *Rape* and provide a vocal metaphor

for the 'cracks' of the exercise. Majlath's broken language disrupts, and challenges in its difference. The emotional intent of her response is nevertheless clear.

Rape marks an early feminist contribution to analysis of 'the gaze', usefully documenting the dynamics of male voyeuristic aggression in relation to the female subject - both on and off camera. It puts its female subject (Majlath) and viewers (those of us who watch the film later) 'on the spot', and poses questions for women about our responses to unwanted attention and harassment. The film makes uncomfortable viewing. We experience, without artifice, the unchecked thrill of the chase and the very real fear of the pursued simultaneously. There is no narrative, explanation or framing of the action to direct our emotional response. The film forces us to move continually between voyeur and victim. The singularity of its focus interrupts the easy cycle of Acconci's project, where once one victim reached 'home' another was selected, instead forcing attention on the specific dynamics of 'the chase'.

The complicity of the female artist in 'setting up' the game with the male cameramen and partner, poses questions for women artists about power and complicity when working within patriarchal image-making. *Rape* hints at the futility and destruction inherent in viewing other women through an unreconstructed male lens, without intervention. One effects intervention by maintaining creative ownership of the film and presenting it unedited to reveal the aggression of the chase and the authenticity of Majlath's response.

She showed that whilst male film-makers under patriarchy (read also male artists and theatre directors) can happily 'play' at rape, the threat of it – real or imagined – was very present for the woman involved; she didn't like the game or get the joke.

Ono's framing of both the cameramen and her female subject clearly marks both the male and female figure as a subject of interrogation within the film, thus distancing herself from identification with or a condoning of its actions. In doing so she effects a distance for the viewer and space for reflection on its themes, prompting questions of Acconci's original project, and his enduring identification with the role of pursuer.

ii. Gun to the head? Breaking the frame of scopis violence against women through re-appropriation of its symbols: Valerie Export, Niki de Saint-Phalle, Judy Chicago

Challenges to the patriarchal cinematic viewing of the female figure and its connection to violence against women became articulated throughout the 60s and 70s in interventionist performative acts, intended to break the frame. In 1969, Valerie Export entered a Munich sex cinema wearing a pair of jeans with the crotch removed exposing her vagina (*Genital Panic*, 1969). She pointed a gun at the heads of the audience, announcing that there were real genitals available and they could do what they wanted with them:

'Out of film context, it was a totally different way for them to connect with the particular erotic symbol.'

(Export interviewed by Ruth Askey, 1981, Reckitt & Phelan, 2001, p97).

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The gun had been appropriated to explore violence in patriarchal society by Niki de Saint-Phalle from 1961 – 3 (*Tir a Volonte / Fire at Will*. Schimmel, 1998, pp39-43). Sainte-Phalle shot at balloons filled with coloured paint using a .22 calibre rifle. She said:

“The smoke gave the impression of war. The painting was the victim. Who was the painting? Daddy? All men? Small men? Tall men? Big men? Fat men? My brother John? Or was the painting me?...The new bloodbath of red, yellow and blue splattered over the pure white relief metamorphosed the painting into a tabernacle for death and resurrection. I was shooting at myself, society with its injustices. I was shooting at my own violence and the violence of the times. By shooting at my own violence, I no longer had to carry it in me like a burden”. (Reckitt & Phelan, 2001, p52)

Notably, the image of gunfire and exploding balloons of paint made its way into the set design for *Cleansed* as Grace is raped (see Aston, 2003, pp 91-2).

In *Gunsmoke* (1971) Judy Chicago extended the critique of male cinematic and visual traditions to a critique of the literary. She juxtaposed the photographic image of a gun shooting into the arse of a crawling woman, with erotic writing from Jean Paulhan's sadomasochistic *Story of O*. The appropriation and re-working of men's writing and pictorial texts on women was central in challenging violence against women in performance art.

iii. Interrogating Texts: Suzanne Lacy, Leslie Labowitz, Tracey Emin

Textual interventions on the theme of sexual violence are encoded in Suzanne Lacy's 1972 *Rape Is*. This took the form of a book in which a chronicle of women's everyday experiences of harassment was prefaced with the statement 'Rape is...' eg. 'Rape is / When your

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boyfriend hears your best friend was raped and he asks, 'What was she wearing?' (Reckitt & Phelan, 2001, p 96).

Lacy also collaborated with Leslie Labowitz in 1977 to organise a series of collective actions / public protests against the local media's sensationalised coverage of rape-related murders for commercial gain. *In Mourning and in Rage* women in the Los Angeles area performed a high-profile, theatrical, action linked to a city-wide set of political events. The women drew attention to the rape issue by creating a memorial with their bodies. They dressed in black for mourning and red evoking both pain and anger. The costume construction artificially extended the height of each woman to 7-feet. Carrying banners, they created a strong, ritual, presence within the space of the city. Following the performance they instigated a practical agenda of events and networks, offering support to women in challenging harassment and abuse (Reckitt & Phelan, 2001, p 126).

Tracey Emin's work performs a similar function in mourning and articulating anger at rape in the public domain. Though her experience of rape when she was 13 forms an ongoing theme of her work, she encodes the experience in a wider context of everyday harassment, indicating a concern for women's social experiences beyond her immediate autobiographical reference, seamlessly weaving the two together in a carefully constructed interplay of object, text, video and body performance. Emin locates the physical, emotional and psychological memory of rape in a wider, shifting tapestry of other body experiences –

abortion, consensual sex, masturbation, sleep, smoking, bathing, pregnancy, bleeding, dancing. These body experiences / memories are represented through performance, video and art-objects – quilts, tents, neon signs, chairs, beds, fairground apparatus – and text forms a central part of these creations (see Brown, 2006 for images of her work).

Language and the things that have been said to her – often abusive – are recorded, answered and reclaimed by Emin – ‘Psycho-slut’, ‘Mad’, ‘Burn in hell’, ‘And I said fuck off back to your week world that you came from’; the shift between internal and external worlds is constant. Emin consciously locates her text to identify her origins ‘Margate’ and colloquial voice. She openly acknowledges her dyslexia in the spelling of words in her text pieces as an assertion of self / voice / presence. Her centring of autobiographical art as wider articulation of female bodily experience is epitomised by *CV – Cunt Vernacular*. Her inclusion of the rape narrative as part of a whole body of life lived, acknowledges experience, and presents her as a survivor rather than a victim of the attack. Humour, poignancy, trauma, longing, the voice in dialogue with itself and another are central features of her art.

iv. Chaos through rage, making a mess. Womanhouse, Karen Finley

Collective testimony and collaboration found performative expression in the Womanhouse’s project *Ablutions* (1972). A soundtrack of women recounting their real-life experiences of rape was played over a visceral display of performers bathing in eggs, blood, clay, nailing kidneys to a wall, wrapping themselves up in bandages, chains and ropes:

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'..until the performance area was like a spider web and all the figures were caught, contained, bound by their circumstances and their own self-victimization.' (Judy Chicago, quoted in Lucie-Smith, 2000, p26)

Karen Finley's 1989 performance *We Keep Our Victims Ready* took a similar performative strategy, and was created in response to the story of a sixteen year old girl found dead in a garbage bag smeared with her own faeces. Aware of the 'fact that everyone was blaming her..saying that she smeared the faeces on herself', Finley daubed herself in a mess of food substances representing violent and sexual acts enacted on the female body:

"I felt putting chocolate on myself would represent the situation she was in. Then I put on red heart candies to show how after you're treated like shit, you're loved more. I sprinkle alfalfa sprouts because after you are treated like shit, you're jerked off on. For thousands of years, women have been treated like this, but they still know how to dress for dinner.' (Finley, *Uncommon Sense*, 1997 quoted in Warr & Jones, 2000, p108)

Ablutions and *We Keep Our Victims Ready* showed solidarity and empathy with victims of sexual violence, through presenting a messy, painful, angry, considered and high-visual 'call to action'. The shock of their images and performance languages presented brutal truths about the way women become tied up, bound, vulnerable to, yet complicit in destruction of self and body. In effecting a chaos of substances, they challenged the conventional containment and regulation of the female body – a body characterised in Aristotelian terms by smells, fluids and inconsistency. Failure to effect containment of the feminine in Western culture has been associated with pollution, chaos, disorder and destruction – the monstrous and grotesque (see Creed quoted in Betterton, 1996, p133). The artists did not suggest a

particular way forward, rather, in their use of food substances – material conventionally associated with women's role as housekeepers and cooks – they upset the pot, allowing the rage to spill out and over, in an attempt to provoke recognition and response. The fluidity, spillage and horror of such rape performances challenged patriarchal containment of the subject, revealing a monstrously feminine rage that laid the mess, stink and effluence of the rape act at patriarchy's door.

v. Identifying rape through inscription on the body, Ana Mendieta, Jenny Holzer

'Showing' the mess, identifying (with) and performing the victim was a strategy employed by Ana Mendieta to protest against the rape and murder of a fellow student at Iowa University (*Rape Scene*, 1973). In one performance, audience members were invited to Mendieta's apartment to find her bent over a table, blood smeared across her arse, legs and thighs, her clothes pulled roughly up around her waist and her hands bound. (Warr & Jones, 2000, p100). In another performance, she lay naked in a grassy area of the university campus, face down, her legs splayed and covered in what appeared to be blood, excrement and mud (Reckitt & Phelan, 2001, p98). Mendieta did similar actions around the campus, and each separate action was identified with the same title – *Rape Scene*:

"Her direct identification with a specific victim meant that she could not be seen as an anonymous object in a theatrical tableau. Her performances presented the specificity of rape, through which she hoped to break the silence that renders it anonymous and general, denying the particular and the personal.' (Phelan & Reckitt, 2001, p98)

The performance of *Rape Scene* in different site-specific locations ensured that an encounter with at least one of the images could not easily be avoided. The shifting location of performance sites effected a feminist intervention across the university that did not allow the original incident to be forgotten. It underlined the reality– that no space domestic or otherwise could be considered 'safe' in light of the student's murder, that rape was something that could be encountered – terrifyingly – anywhere. Mendieta's changing representation of the body in each *Rape Scene* side-stepped the issue of 'voyeurism' that a too-detailed reconstruction of the original event may have invited. The multiplicity and omnipresence of her shifting images on the subject kept the horror of the attack fresh, demanding change.

It is notable that rape performances tend to work to the surface of the body – playing out the penetration, the rupturing and dismembering of rape – rather than actively cutting / wounding the body of the artist herself. Whereas the performance of fluids indicate feminine rage, the drying of fluids on the surface of the body-as-art-object represent a metaphor of violation – a testimony to scarification; a tattoo. Jenny Holzer's work *Lustmord*, (1993) made in response to the systematic use of rape as part of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, uses writing on the skin to convey the horrific mix of 'impotence, rage, rebellion, violation' of the body that military rape had effected. The texts are 'toxic' and represent shifting positions of victim, perpetrators and observers of rape. Phrases like 'She acts like an animal left for cooking' resonate horrifically, and do not allow for distance.

Women from Bosnia volunteered to have the texts written into their skin and photographed and the red ink used on some contains blood donated by the women as materials for the project. Holzer also used her own blood in the ink. *Lustmord* ('Rape-slayer' or 'sex murder') is a terrifying, cold and brutal work – the photographs of skin-text is cropped into systematic squares, the voices jumbled, random, chaotic, united by the cold regularity of the frame. The yellowing variations of skin tones, each marginally different, create an image of body decay. The work shows:

“Writing on the skin, the sign that remains on the body, the place of violence, the site of denunciation, rebellion, a place in which the signs will remain carved forever. Fragility and disintegration of the body, of identity: a multiple, fragmentary, contradictory identity, which denounces the aberrations of a universe that tolerate stereotypes, violent aggressions, arrogance based on identity, a writing on the skin as a sort of 'lexical self-portrait' the signs of condemnation inscribed on the body like a serial number or the signs of abuse. (Miglietti, 2003, pp 131-2)

And yet the making of the work emphasised empathy and connection. Produced for publication on a magazine front-cover, the finished work acted as a document of the rape camps that eschewed the distance of conventional journalistic reports and photographs on the issue. The words spoke for themselves, the bodies of the women were represented in a process that involved the artist and her participants in close, physical, connection. In the absence of figurative / portrait images of the women, Holzer effected a privacy and anonymity for her subjects, using text as a vehicle for the recounting – and exorcism – of the

rape stories. Ultimately she allowed the women to shift their positions, bearing and sharing the positions of victim, attacker and by-stander in the making of the piece.

vi. Media stink: Tracey Emin, Sarah Kane

Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995) and Tracey Emin's *My Bed* (1998) evoked hysterical, petty, snide and ridiculous responses from the London media. The reviews were couched in highly visceral terms – *Blasted* was described as 'a bucket of bilge dumped over the audience' and one reporter likened it to 'having your head rammed into an overflowing ashtray' (Sierz, 2000, p97). Another lurid condemnation came from Jack Tinker of the Daily Mail describing it as 'this disgusting feast of filth'. Emin's work was reviewed in similar terms, and Deborah Cherry notes how this response was fuelled by:

"...associations of *My Bed* with an aesthetics of dirt and disgust...provoking over-excited descriptions of 'urine-stained sheets', 'heavily soiled knickers', 'used condoms', 'empty bottles', 'discarded pharmaceuticals'.. 'a pregnancy testing kit, sanitary towels..."

(Cherry, quoted in Merck & Townsend, 2002, p144)

Most reviews indicate a fluid, smelly, chaotic interpretation of the pieces in line with an Aristotelian fear of 'the uncontained feminine' as discussed earlier. Notably both works represent an active engagement with the body in acts conventionally considered taboo (see discussion of 'the monstrous feminine' in Orlan's work; Ince, 2000, p73). *Blasted* was derided for its scenes of:

'Masturbation, fellatio, frottage, micturition, defecation..homosexual rape, eye-gouging and cannibalism' (Micheal Billington, quoted in Saunders, 2002, p.9)

Emin's work was condemned for the 'evidence' it appeared to suggest of female sexual activity, alcohol consumption, smoking, decision-making about pregnancy, a reliance on medication, menstruation and the public display of everyday bedding and underwear, unwashed.

And yet, as Cherry notes:

'*My Bed* ...is a thoughtful arrangement of items placed around a bed base. It invites ambivalent and contradictory responses. The linen is both disordered and smooth, bright white and stained; beside the soiled items are pristine objects such as the glistening clear glass of the vodka bottles. Encountered in daily life, all these items exude distinctive and powerful smells: sweaty feet, stinky ashtrays, stale bodily fluids. But *My Bed* emits no strong odour. Indeed, it does not smell at all. Nevertheless, a stink metaphor, already in circulation, drifted around *My Bed*.' (Cherry, quoted in Merck & Townsend, 2002, pp. 144 -5)

Cherry also notes the obsession of the reviewers to identify some sort of autobiographical 'truth' in Emin's *My Bed*, rather than looking at what the art work represents in itself, and this has also been the case with Kane's work (see Sierz's notes on the In-Yer-Face website about his 'qualms' before interviewing her). There is a denial of craft inherent in an undue attempt to recover biography from artwork. It denies that women's work can possibly have something to say on matters beyond their 'immediate' experience of self / world-view. It is an attitude to women artists that is patronising and reductive, ignoring women's intense engagement with cultural movements, innovations or social politics. The inability of male reviewers to take Emin and Kane's work as seriously considered, mature, contributions to Britain's cultural life resulted in a grotesquely, patronising display of pomposity. Both women were infantilised, caricatured as the 'bad girls' of their scene. Kane's debut at the

Royal Court was regarded as 'precocious' – an insult, given the years she had spent studying and making theatre of a high standard.

In reality, artists such as Tracey Emin and Sarah Kane are highly conscious of craft, making considered and careful work that frequently references more than one thing. Most performance art acts as 'the tip of the iceberg' – its wider meanings, processes and layers of construction lie compacted within or beneath its surface. The work requires engagement by the spectator and careful looking for its inner core to be revealed. Rebecca Schneider notes that:

"In many ways, contemporary feminist performance artists present their bodies as dialectical images...(creating) an object or constellation of objects..which give themselves away, showing signs of the two-way street indicating that they are not entirely that which they have been given to represent (the way cracks in face-paint or runs in mascara might show the material in tension with the constructed ideal' (Schneider, in Diamond, 1996, pp.157-8)

I would argue that this premise extends to the theatre of Sarah Kane. The rest of this essay is devoted to an exploration of the 'cracks' in the theatre body of *Blasted* and how this extends feminist performance intervention on the theme of rape.

vii. Body art images, the dialectic and rape as a theme of *Blasted*

The strength of *My Bed* and *Blasted* in revealing 'the stink metaphor' that lurks irrationally in the white, male, psyche bears testimony to a powerful performing of the female body,

encoded in both works. Kane reverses the Aristotelian dynamic in *Blasted*, clearly locating the shit and stink in the figure of Ian, whose opening lines – ‘I’ve shat in better places than this’ frame him from the outset as vile.

Ian’s power is located in the privileging of sight and language that his position as white, middle-class, middle-aged journalist affords him. Kane physically constructs the character of Ian as a man subject to body-blows (caused by disease), and undermines the power of his language by ensuring that his words constantly turn upon himself. What the audience witness is a man whose empire is gradually crumbling around him; and this empire revolves around a narcissistic, self-referential, clichéd language and the suppression / abuse of the female body. Language used to suppress and bully Cate reeks of cliché – ‘you look like a lesbos’, ‘Don’t give me a hard-on if you’re not going to finish it off, it hurts’; his racist and disabled insults – ‘wogs’ ‘Joey’, ‘spaz’ already framing him as an anachronism in the world of 1990s Britain.

The references to stink that Ian repeats in relation to his body, effect a visceral attack on the sensory imagination of the audience. A heightening of ‘body-image’ over character action challenges the privilege of visual detachment that theatre audiences prioritise. Like Emin’s *My Bed*, there is no actual ‘odour’ to the work other than that created through Kane’s crafting. The ‘stink’ hangs around Ian, culminating in his description of his rotting lung: ‘surgeon brought in this lump of rotting pork, stank’. He is ‘uncontained’ and out-of-control.

It is Ian who is monstrously fluid – spitting, defecating and wanking his way across the stage, accompanied by bilious tirades that end in the rape and cannibalism of the female body. His power comes solely through the triumph of journalistic detachment over physical, empathetic, connection and Kane illustrates this through language play:

“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 new par. Each had been stabbed more than twenty times, and placed face down comma hands bound behind their backs comma point new par. Caps up, ashes at the site showed the maniac had stayed to cook a meal caps down point new par...(he listens, and laughs)’

Ian’s delight in text-control reveals its aggression in abusive word-play with Cate, whose stammer initially compounds her ‘victim’ status:

Ian: You got a job yet?

Cate: No.

Ian: Still screwing the taxpayer.

Cate: Mum gives me money.

Ian: When are you going to stand on your own feet?

Cate: I’ve applied for a job at an advertising agency.

Ian (*laughs genuinely .*)

No chance.

Cate: Why not?

Ian (*stops laughing and looks at her*)

Cate. You’re stupid. You’re never going to get a job.

Cate: I am. I am not.

Ian: See.

Cate: St – Stop it. You’re doing it deliberately.

Ian: Doing what?

Cate: C-Confusing me.

Ian: No, I’m talking, you’re just too thick to understand.

Cate: I am not, I am not.

Kane presents a familiar pattern of abuse throughout the first scene of the play, and one in which Ian clearly has the upper-hand. He is persistent in his manipulation of Cate. The first act of *Blasted* bears similarities to Ono’s *Rape* in the unchecked harassment of its female subject, yet the writer’s creative positioning – like Ono’s framing of her male cameramen – clearly works to shift focus on the limits of this power. Cate’s stammer, like Majlath’s ‘broken English’ create cracks in the viewing narrative, giving greater emphasis to the unsaid, allowing genuine emotional response through in ways that reveal the pompous word-play and dis-regard of the male figures. Though a ‘victim’ of its impediment at first, her seizing of the gun turns the tables, and her stammer becomes a weapon, performing a violent rejection of his game in an articulation of machine-gun fire:

‘l– d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-’

Her appropriation of the gun bears similarity to use of this symbol in Export, Chicago and Saint Phalle’s work. Kane turns it on Ian with further destruction in the soldier’s derision of it and the phoney macho image it presents. Kane ultimately turns it on the figure of the soldier, creating a metaphor for the cycles of destruction, in depicting his use of the gun to commit suicide.

Cate's 'disappearance' from dialogue through her fits mark a withdrawal from the action – a complete break from the frame – that allow her to articulate anxiety, whilst also reclaiming space for an inner journey; a space she likens to masturbation. Kane herself breaks the frame of action through the alienation technique of giving the characters stage directions to speak as well as dialogue. This undermines the naturalism of the play's initial form, indicating to the audience that whilst engagement with the themes is still required, an adherence to / expectation that the conventional pattern of theatre viewing (will proceed) may prove problematic. Kane locates instinctive – even prophetic – vision in Cate, who looks outside, and can see the war. Kane's breaking of the play's naturalistic progression through the intrusion of the soldier and the magical disappearance of Cate –almost, one could imagine, down the plughole – save the play and its female figure from the inevitability of further rape that a conventionally naturalist (and Aristotelian) theatre story would assume. In shifting the focus away from male-female attack, and locating the problem in a discourse of masculine identity, Kane allows space for new relationships and dynamics to be formed.

Ian's control of language is shown to be a fallacy when his paranoia takes over, and he dissolves into a violent incoherency:

“Hitler was wrong about the Jews who have they hurt the queers he should have gone for scum them and the wogs and the fucking football fans send a bomber over Elland Road finish them off”

Kane's theatrical intervention in showing the dissonance between Ian's control of his media text and the loss of control in his paranoid rants, reveals the cracks in his construction. His media reporting of murder is eager and Kane condemns this vicariousness. In this way, the construction of *Blasted* bears relation to Mendieta's *Rape Scene* and to Lacy / Labowitz's 1977 condemnation of a sensationalist media. Kane reconstructs, through language, visual images of female murder, yet disrupts the focus on the story, to indite the misogynist who revels in its rendering.

Ian's paranoia and penchant for violent fantasy cuts no ice with the soldier in scene 3, who has worse stories to tell. Notably, Ian is raped after reading aloud from one of his own newspaper articles, then collapsing into verbal abuse of the soldier when recognising the impotence of his story's power. Ian – who cannot understand the power dynamic of male rape – is numb to the event, but the soldier 'is crying his heart out'. Both men – Ian with his violent fantasies, and the soldier with his violent actions represent a barren masculinity, incapable of creative production outside cycles of violence, and riddled with self-loathing.

A performance art parallel for Ian and the soldier can be located in the action of John Duncan who in 1980 purchased the body of a dead Mexican woman – *Blind Date*. Duncan filmed himself fucking the corpse, then having a vasectomy straight after:

'..to make sure that the last potent seed I had was spent in a cadaver.'

(Duncan, quote in Schimmel, 1998, p241)

He described his feelings after the act as being 'of indescribable, intense self-disgust' and presented the tape of his performance to an audience in California, 'to show what can happen to men who are trained to ignore their emotions'. The editor of *High Performance* magazine Linda Burnham refused to cover the event, describing his act as 'a rape of a body, whose spirit may not have yet gone from her body'. Duncan's response to her comment was that it was 'like having sex with meat.' (see discussion in Schimmel, p241).

The narratives of rape and murder recounted by Ian and the soldier reflect the disregard for the dead body, not only the dead body of the female, but of children and men also. The image of the child shot in his rectum conflates military violence, rape and sado-masochistic fantasy and is reminiscent of Chicago's *Gunsmoke*. Kane's recognition of the interconnectedness of individual acts of violence to wider systematic uses of it in war, is expressed in *Blasted*, in both form and content, and the theme of 'men trained to ignore their emotions' is a central part of Ian and the soldier's gender identity. Kane locates this problem in patriarchy:

'The logical conclusion of the attitude that produces an isolated rape in England is the rape camps in Bosnia, and the logical conclusion to the way society expects men to behave is war.' (Kane, quoted in Sierz, 2000, p104)

Her comment echoes Mary Daly's observations in *Gyn/Ecology* (1978). In reference to the training of the military, and how men's behaviour is constructed to effect the 'emptiness / barrenness' of self necessary for war, Daly comments:

'Such organized aggression / violence of males filled with fear of their own emptiness and weakness is carried out against women in concrete acts of rape, dismemberment and murder. These acts of violation / violence are expressions of the War State's essential identity as the State of Rapism, in which all invasions, occupations, destructions of "enemy territory" are elaborations upon the theme of rape/gynocide.' (Daly, 1995, p360)

Kane's *Blasted* presents us with the 'War State's essential identity'. Rape is a constant theme. The chronicling of atrocities by Ian and the soldier, resonate clearly with the stories recounted in Womanhouse's project, and with Mendieta's performative tableaux. The terse, matter-of-fact delivery of the soldier is strongly reminiscent of the violent rendering of Holzer's cropped texts. Cate's ritual mourning for the body of the baby, and her construction of a grave, attempts to heal the violence, marking the importance of human life (as with Holzer's and Lacy / Labowitz's memorials), yet Ian's self-disgust cannot contain itself, and he eats the baby in an act of blind cannibalism reminiscent of Duncan's necrophilia in *Blind Date*

As a final question, I would ask – where and what are the rapes in *Blasted*? The answer is, of course, that there are many, but none are clearly identifiable. Where would we start – the moment Ian berates Cate for not having sex with him? the moment he takes her hand and forces her to masturbate him? the night (unseen by the audience) where he overrides her stated denial of his sexual advances (or pressurizes her into agreeing?) and bites her to the point of bleeding during cunnilingus? the morning after when he forces himself on top of her with a gun to her head and simulates sex until he comes? The moment the soldier

enters the room and tells stories of multiple rapes and murder? The moment Ian is raped anally by the soldier in full view of the audience? Like the women performance artists discussed earlier, Kane presents us with narratives of rape and male violence that are shifting, messy, binding, set in the context of everyday, sometimes seen, sometimes obscured, caught in a web of word-games and communicative dissonance, emotionally located in the experiences of the characters but not presented as a definite, singular, act.

This is not to say that Kane did not address the theme of rape with precision, nor does it deny her acute, political, awareness of rape in everyday life at a micro and macrocosmic level. Her structuring of *Blasted* predicated entirely on her awareness of the connection between sexual violence in an English hotel room and systematic, military, rape in Bosnia. She encodes the geographical trajectory of this into her play, also inscribing the process of herself as a writer in England watching the telly of a woman asking for help in Bosnia, into the 'mythology' of the work's genesis. As such she imbricates herself, the woman in Bosnia and the empathetic experience of rape as shifting 'ghosts' floating under the surface of the work. She also intervened actively in the directing choices of *Blasted*, challenging directors whose representation of the rape scenes was too graphic or literal (see Sierz, p105).

It is important to note, also, the physical freedom Kane gave to her actresses when dramatising rape – take for example the rape of Grace in *Cleansed*. Grace is depicted as responding physically to the blows of her attackers – but the attackers themselves are not

embodied on the stage. As such it is left to the actress to perform a physical / emotional experience of the rape solo, an abstraction in the space, with no male actor pinning her down. This is in direct contrast, for example, to the depiction of rape in Irvin Welsh / Harry Gibson's *Marabou Stork Nightmares* where the actress is presented, her legs dangling from the back-end of a van, and three actors press themselves into her in prolonged, simulated gang-rape. It is also in contrast to the male rape in Welsh's *You'll Have Had Your Hole* where the actor – having been dangled by his arms for the entirety of the play – is taken down and bent over a table for simulated – face-on – rape before being strung up again. The freedom Kane's physical directions give mark an awareness that different actresses may wish to express through their bodies variations in the physicalisation of 'being raped'. Ultimately, Kane acknowledges the challenges for performers in playing this out.

I quote, finally, a response from Kane to criticism of the Soldier/Ian rape scene – a quote that indicates the dialectical, performative, and image-based approach Kane took to the dramatisation of rape in *Blasted*. This approach clearly eschews literal readings indicating affinity with image-based, performance arts renderings of the body, and its actions onstage:

"I was reading all these reviews and thinking, 'but that's not what I wrote at all!' What was being described was a soldier comes in and randomly rapes Ian. And what they kept ignoring was the fact that he does it with a gun to his head which Ian has done to Cate earlier – and he's crying his eyes out as he does it. Well I think both these things have changed that theatrical image completely. But then I think critics have problems discussing theatrical imagery anyway. And we've been reduced to this fear of the word so much. What's the point of writing a play that doesn't have an image structure, but that image structure seemed to be completely ignored and it takes away the meaning. And then they just take the meaning from the words...You have to look at the context of the image."

(Kane, quoted in Saunders, 2002, p46)

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