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Performance Research: Volume 24, Issue 5 - Staging the Wreckage

Wreaking havoc: the feeling of what happens in Katie Mitchell's Cleansed

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In April 2016, I experienced Katie Mitchell's controversial staging of Sarah Kane's Cleansed (National Theatre), a performance that was deeply affecting, combining the creative and arguably destructive labours of a playwright and director whose work has been variously associated with an aesthetics of wreckage: theatre which invokes beauty through acts of disruption, a poetics of violation. 'Having contemplated the worst of which humanity is capable, Kane somehow salvages something from the wreckage' reports the Daily Telegraph on the Royal Court's revival of Kane's Blasted (Spencer 2001), while Mitchell's speciality is 'smashing up the classics', according to the same theatre critic (Spencer 2007).

The encounter between Mitchell and Kane was destined to be explosive. Critics refer to the visceral power of Cleansed, but for many the catalogue of horrors produced by Mitchell's staging was overwhelming, 'a sense-numbing effect that outweighs its redemptive lyricism' (Billington 2016). Some audience members are reported to have fainted, assaulted by the escalating body mutilation. Mitchell, however, describes the play in very different terms. For her, the play presented a mechanical problem as having too many short scenes that needed to cohere in space and time, but she considers it to be one that 'knows its targets in terms of feeling: fear and beauty'.

[[note]]¹

In this essay I employ the tools of cognitive psychology to frame both the work of a director who herself also makes use of them, and my own visceral, embodied response to the play, in the twin scenes of live performance and the archive.

ARCHIVES AND DETRITUS

In revisiting my response to Mitchell's production, I draw upon the remains deposited in the National Theatre archive. The archive is a container for theatrical wreckage, preserving fragments, traces, remains and leftovers, to be studied and sometimes

re-imagined as narrative. It has been conceived as 'detritus' (Reason 2003) in a theorisation that acknowledges the archive's mutability, instability and partiality. This essay is predicated on similar notions of the archive's subjectivity, but foregrounds the interplay between my memory of the performance as an audience member and my embodied response to the material within the archive. In my encounter with the performance documentation and the associated records of Mitchell's theatre making process, I gained new understanding of the aesthetic and affective dimensions of my experience as a spectator and read this knowledge back into the work. My discussion and title refers to the work of the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio and his conceptualization, The Feeling of What Happens (2001), a book which also influenced Mitchell. Drawing on Mitchell's writing, my interview with her and the interdisciplinary theoretical context in which she situates the work, I try to make sense of my response; what happened and when (in performance or its aftermath), how meanings are made, why it matters and what is the value of the embodied archival remains?

In his programme note to Mitchell's production of Cleansed, Dan Rebellato refers to Kane's 'farewell to conventional stage realism' being replaced by 'an imaginative gap between the letter of the text and its theatrical realisation.' He contends that 'the play insists these are real events and asks us to bridge the gap between nightmare and reality' (Rebellato, 2016: np). In so doing, and through Mitchell's staging, the spectator is aware of their doubleness, of being both 'on the other side and here' (Kane 1998: 44) to use the words of the Grace/Graham character. My discussion explores the agency of spectatorship, questioning whether my responses were produced by me or done to me. This reproduction of meaning in relation to memory, affect and archival remains characterises the emerging, empathic and ethical form of knowing that has been conceptualised as a 'third space', beyond the divisions between active and passive or critical and receptive spectatorship (Muller, et al. 2018). Notions of thirdness are associated with knowledge that is in process, 'at ease with uncertainty' physical, social and psychological.

Informed by feminist, phenomenological and affect theory, I also consider the cultural politics of what might be deemed emotional wreckage, engaging with what emotions do and how they circulate, as well as with what they are. This body of work

challenges the emphasis on positive, empowering and open forms of emotion at the expense of the closed and the ugly (Ahmed 2014) This, I suggest, is important to consideration of the value of wreckage in Mitchell's production and to the embodied knowledge produced through its positioning 'in-between' reality and nightmare in the theatre and in the interspace between past and future in the archive. As Lynn Froggett has argued in her discussion of trans-disciplinary approaches to encounters with art:

Between the metrics of participation and...the intrinsic nature of an artwork lies an area that poses particular challenges for research—that of audience experience in its sensory, emotional, aesthetic and cognitive aspects. This is the ground where individuals and communities can be moved or transformed by a process, object or concept (Froggett, et al. 2017: 9).

As a spectator feeling 'wrecked' by Mitchell's staging of Kane's work, I couldn't even decide if my response was positive or negative. I wasn't sure whether I felt 'cleansed' or contaminated as it seemed to be a paradoxical mixture of both. The acute detail of Mitchell's realism contributed to the rawness of the sensations experienced. I had a profound sense of myself as cognizer, a maker of meaning, experiencing something that was strongly but critically empathic, a witness to trauma that was and wasn't mine.

OWNING FEELING AND HOW IT HAPPENS

The production left me with a profound sense of what has been described elsewhere as 'the feeling of mineness' in philosophical discussions of the concept of 'self-ownership' (Gallagher 2017, Guillot 2017). In experiencing the world, as these philosophers explain, we experience ourselves in doing so, and this was certainly true of my encounter with Cleansed. For the philosopher Marie Guillot (2017), three different notions of subjectivity, frequently conflated, can be differentiated:

'For-me-ness', the awareness a subject has of her experience by virtue of having it.

'Me-ness', the special phenomenal awareness a subject has of herself in the process of having her experience.

'Mineness', the special phenomenal awareness a subject has of her experience being her own (awareness of herself as owner of the experience).

Failure for these to co-occur are linked by Guillot to psychopathologies such as schizophrenia and depersonalization syndrome. The ongoing debates in philosophy and aesthetics about how we can understand the relations between the "I" and the "my" resonated with my reflections on spectatorship. My awareness of 'for-me-ness' was produced through the experience of attending Mitchell's production as an audience member; the staging provoked embodied responses that reinforced the sense of myself in the process of having the experience (me-ness), while "mineness" was the awareness of the experience being my own, within the theatre and outside, as my perspective differed from others. My responses were also physical, both within the theatre and the archive, as I variously flinched, gasped, braced and closed my eyes as the atrocities escalated. For the philosophy and cognitive science specialists Frédérique de Vignemont (2017) and Shaun Gallagher (2017), self-defence is fundamental to agency, bodily ownership, and hence our sense of self. Vignemont defends a reductionist approach, according to which the sense of ownership can be reduced to some specific properties of bodily experiences. She argues that one needs to distinguish between two distinct kinds of body schema: the working body schema involved in instrumental actions, and the protective body schema involved in self-defence. The action-oriented ownership posited by Gallagher defends the phenomenological account, pushing it in an enactivist direction and suggesting self-defence as a specific agentic marker equated with self-ownership. Bodily awareness is action-oriented, relying on proprioceptive and kinesthetic modalities: the sense of ownership is implicit or extrinsic to experience and bodily action, consistent with an enactivist (action-oriented, ecological) view of embodied cognition. So, the body I experience as mine is rooted in an impulse to protect it and this goes some way to explaining my sense of the 'I', 'me' and 'mine' through my kinesthetic responses to this production. Some of these were shared as the audience moved in time, gasping, jerking and shifting backwards in the torture scenes, responses that appeared to be orchestrated through the entrainment of spectatorship.

The mixed reviews of Cleansed are in some respects unified in their focus on the physical and emotional impact of the play. The body is centre stage in the commentaries, which are unusually graphic in their sensory detail: 'The first cut was the deepest' is the title of the Guardian review: 'as the torture machine sizzles you seem to smell burning flesh' (Clapp 2016). Other reviewers objectify the catalogue of assault through lists (Treneman Times) or timing the incidents (Letts Daily Mail), as cited by Matt Trueman (2016). Trueman's review describes the force feeding as 'the hardest thing to watch...a real actor really eating real chocolates -- night after night after night. You hear his throat clagging, his gasps for breath, his jaw chewing and tiring. You wonder if he'll puke.' Trueman's review, however, moves beyond the gory detail to reflect on his position as a spectator and the awareness this provoked of his sensing subjectivity:

To watch Cleansed is to sit alongside it. You have to let it go to work on you, on your emotions, on your subconscious, on your sense of self. It's not about something per se. It is something. You don't understand it. You experience it. You feel it. You live it. [emphasis in original].

This returns me to my embodied experience in the archive where my physical responses led to new understanding of the "what", "how" and "why" questions posed by Mitchell's staging of Cleansed.

EMOTIONAL WRECKAGE: FROM ACTOR TO AUDIENCE

In the first scene of the play, the sadistic Tinker (supposedly a poke at the late Daily Mail theatre critic Jack Tinker, notorious for his martinet views and, in this context, his grandstanding review of Blasted) enacts the first atrocity, injecting a lethal dose of heroin into the eye of Graham, a young man whose love for his sister (and hers for him) are at the heart of the play. There's an interplay between the eye that sees and the I that knows: a deep (and deliberate) irony that an eye and its destruction is at the centre of the opening scene in a play which makes us so acutely aware of the 'feeling of mineness', the self-ownership of

the embodied cognizer through Gallagher's tripartite of action, communication and self-defence. As an audience member, as indicated above, I was aware of myself in relation to others in the intimate space of the Dorfman theatre (the play was originally performed at the Royal Court, April 1988) and our entrained responses as we shared shudders, leaning forward, backwards and covered eyes or mouths in our involuntary gestures of self-defence. I became more critically aware of this when I watched the recording in the National Theatre archive, becoming conscious that my gasps, gulps and gestures were at odds with the protocols of this room of hushed and earnest archival retrieval. I blushed in self-consciousness, my body performing independently of my conscious volition, as I felt the eyes and registered the tut tutting of those around me.

It was here, in the archive, watching the documentation, that I became aware of myself mirroring the movements of Michelle Terry, playing Grace. In Kane's play text Grace is absent in the first scene, but Mitchell opens the production with Grace walking on stage and watching. My notes on the first scene of the film documentation describe it as follows:

Grace enters in red dress and creeps down steps. There is a dream like quality to her presence; she moves very slowly, looking dazed. Is the dress linked to the red shoes in Powell and Pressburger's magic-realist fable? Grace is witnessing the action, ignored by the other characters who enter as if she isn't there. She could be dreaming? She is absent and present. She crouches on the steps as two hooded characters assist Tinker 'heating smack on a silver spoon.' Tinker approaches with a syringe and slowly and methodically injects Gh who is strapped to the chair. Restrained by the Ass. As the needle makes contact with his eye the sound changes. Grace starts to wither, collapsing very slowly with another sound accompanying her movement, as if she is mirroring the injection penetrating Graham's body. On a count to 10 after the injection is finished, there's a release of tension and Grace returns to standing, shuddering and watching in horror, her hands slowly descending from their clenched position.

By this point my identification with Grace is embodied. My responses are orchestrated through the emotive music and physical action. When the syringe goes in and Grace responds, I feel something whither inside me, a bracing and a recoil that is mirrored in Grace's body. Whilst conscious that she is other to me, she also feels part of me. Throughout the play, the scenes of torture involve Grace registering responses physically and silently, functioning like a Greek chorus, orchestrating our emotion and commenting on the action as those that love are systematically punished. This is represented through the suffering of Carl and Rod in counterpoint with Grace's pain through tongue cutting after verbal expression, hand severing after writing, mutilation of feet after an agonising dance and finally the death of Carl's lover through the throat cutting of Rod. We only hear her scream at the end of the play, after the last dance in which she appears to be possessed, her body moving against her will. In short, Grace is performing the feeling of what happens through her physical actions. Her role as a conductor of my responses only became evident in the archive, causing me to question my experience of 'mineness.'

Grace's ghost-like presence, observing the action, on the outside and yet somehow inside is also the position of Kane as the dead playwright. Her suicide is part of the environmental context in which the production is positioned as her history is part of the collective consciousness and conscience that the audience brings to her corpus. References to her premature death and mental suffering pervade theatre reviews as if the dead author refuses to die. As the positioning of Grace is counter to Kane's original script, Mitchell's directorial authority is also felt through Terry's constant presence on stage. The sense of surveillance was overwhelming, working on a series of levels as I, for one, was constantly aware of being looked at and of my own acts of looking, much more so than in my memory of the live performance. This sense of being looked at is integral to the play's thematics. Kane's engagement with Michel Foucault is part of the fabric of Cleansed, its institutional setting functioning as a panoptic prison house through the double vision of society as both policed and self-policing (Foucault 1975). Mitchell plays with this, transposing the play from its original university setting to an environment which alludes to a concentration camp. In her programme note Mary Evans makes an important observation about the surveillance theme: 'This is no longer a matter of the ever-vigilant protestant conscience but of the way in which we take into ourselves the fantasies, dreams and

desires which are socially produced.’ Evans foregrounds the role of ‘the body, a battleground’ in the title of her commentary: ‘we are both so aware and so concerned about our bodies but also so often unconcerned about the use which is made of them’ (Evans 2017). Whilst this is key to Kane’s dramaturgy and personal experience it is also fundamental to Mitchell’s approach to directing and the shift in her focus to physical action in depicting emotion, informed by insights from neuroscience after her discovery (in 2003) of Damasio’s work on body, emotion and consciousness. In my interview with Mitchell, she discussed the importance of this influence and what she refers to as ‘the science of emotion’, developing from the account that concludes The Director’s Craft (2009) where she also refers to the influence of William James (What is an Emotion 1884) and Charles Darwin (1872). She describes an extract from The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals (1872) at a photography exhibition in which ‘helplessness’ was depicted in physical terms: ‘the text beneath described how people raise their shoulder, turn their palms outwards and swivel their eyes upwards when experiencing it. The right-hand page featured sepia photographs of men enacting the same emotion’ (Mitchell 2004). This, she explains, means emotion is ‘repeatable’ through close observation and led to a shift in her practice: ‘It was no longer necessary for the actors to feel the emotions, now what mattered was that the audience felt them. What was essential was that the actors replicated them precisely with their bodies’ (Mitchell 2009: 232).

This perspective change from actor to audience offered insights into my experience as a spectator and the implications for agency. In interview, Mitchell refers to the ‘weeding out of gestures and emotions’ as she sought ‘to get theatre a bit closer to the experience of perception.’ These were ‘two new steps’: ‘a concrete way of thinking about constructing behaviour on the basis of what we can see from the tip of the toe to the top of the head.’ The shift in understanding (that the body responds before the mind is aware) is evidenced in the example Damasio gives of seeing a bear and running before we experience the fear: ‘A feeling of emotion is an idea of the body when it is perturbed by the emoting process’ (Damasio 2000: 88). For Mitchell, this led to a move from internalisation (acting from within) to acting out and hence a different understanding of emotion. In a series of experiments (as part of a Nesta fellowship) Mitchell noticed that when actors are asked to reproduce emotion, they resort either to theatrical convention or a toned-down ‘tasteful’ version,

so her task has been to remove the conventional, romanticised and discreet. 'We studied what happened to the body in minute detail' she explains, 'and quickly discovered that it was the half-second delay between the stimulus and becoming conscious of the change in the body that was either edited out of our perceptions altogether or the hardest to recall' (Mitchell 2004). In interview she gave the example of registering surprise through raising the hands and stepping back: It was evident that in stepping back the distance was reduced when actors repeated the action. So, they measured it and then repeatedly rehearsed it to convey surprise: hence 'surprise...measured from life' (interview). The precise rendering of emotion through physical action, Mitchell explains, offers the audience more clarity: 'they can read emotion which is lifelike and life-sized'. She suggests, moreover, that 'if emotion is in place it gives more space to ideas' for both actor and audience (interview). Mitchell worked with the six primary emotions (happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise and disgust), observing and documenting the body states associated with each of these and then extended this to social emotions (e.g. embarrassment, jealousy), secondary emotions (associated with imagination) and what she refers to as 'background emotions', such as 'feeling a bit low.' What she produced was a different way of acting in which emotion was physicalised as a means to convey the feeling of what happens on stage: 'The physiology of emotions replaced psychology as my key point of reference for talking about -- and working on --acting' (2009, 232). My response to Cleansed, I realised, had been very carefully orchestrated through a rigorous process based on Stanislavski's physical action and what Mitchell describes as the 360 degree approach to encompass 'the creases and complexity' of affective staging.

ASSEMBLING THE EVIDENCE

In the archival records are further insights into the process and the influence of neuroscience on Mitchell's approach. It is evident that cognition (for audience and actors) is understood as embodied (inseparable from our physicality). It is also evident that cognition is enacted in that it is inseparable from action and is often an attribute of action. Her work also recognises the importance of affordances and potentials in the environment, the conditions of production that underpin understanding of cognition as embedded. The stage manager's meticulous rehearsal notes offer a vivid insight into the creation of the scenic environment, the use of

props, sound and lighting and how these external elements are used with precision to focus attention and convey emotion. Details include references to the pills given to Grace in scene 3 being 'an anti-psychotic/mood stabiliser', while the Scene 4 pole insertion indicates that 'Tinker's assistants will have latex gloves', followed by a props entry indicating 'there will be lubricant' and 'the pole / should be trick/telescopic so it collapses when placed against Carl's anus giving the illusion of insertion.' Mitchell describes the genre of Kane's play as surrealism and adheres to this as the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality are in some senses resolved into the absolute unreality of her staging. In addition to the rehearsal notes and prompt script there is another copiously annotated script, containing numbered sections and a title for each scene that encapsulates the action. On each opposite page there are two columns identifying the 'event' and 'intention' for each of the sections. In the opening scene, for example, the title reads: 'G [Graham] persuades T [Tinker] to give him fatal overdose.' There is a note beneath this indicating 'early Dec, 30°C, Early morn, 5.30 am.' The reference to the scene being 'just inside the perimeter of a university' is crossed out but the stage direction 'it is snowing' is retained. The EVENT, numbered 1, is Graham's entrance and the INTENTION is identified thus [capitalisation in annotated script]:

T to get Gh to be patient about his order

Gh to prepare T for a change of plan

Gc to get Gh to notice her

This is a rich resource offering an insight into Mitchell's method and the precision through which she constructs 'the feeling of what happens'. It is important to note the difference between Mitchell's version and the original in the transition from Scene One to Scene Two. In Kane's script, Tinker ends Scene One with his 'four, three, two, one, zero' countdown to Graham's death. The original Stage Direction for Scene Two is in stark contrast in its atmosphere and tone:

Scene Two [bold is in the original]

Rod and Carl sit on the college green just inside the perimeter fence of the university.

Midsummer- the sun is shining.

The sound of a cricket match in progress on the other side of the fence.

Carl takes off his ring

The cricket match is rich with connotations of pastoral tranquility, gentrification and masculinity. The soundscape is at odds with the visual brutality that precedes it as the gentility and rhythm of the wooden bat and ball seem totally out of place in this brutal landscape. This juxtaposition and the sense of unreality it generates might, however, resonate with the other setting alluded to by Kane, through her experience of a psychiatric unit. In this context, ordinary life (perhaps through a radio or television) might invade the mind space of psychosis, where the boundaries between reality and unreality are unsettled. Kane's scenario could be interpreted as an imagined world, existing within the double confines of the individual's experience of isolation and psychic distress and the institutional containment of madness through hospitalisation (which is where Kane would end her life). Mitchell refers in the programme to the 'exquisite slices of this university world' which Kane identifies as the setting for the play. The university is a reference to ES3, the ward at the Maudsley hospital (acknowledged in the play's dedication) where Kane sought to address her personal experience of mental illness. Perhaps the title alludes to the curative practices of addiction treatment Kane experienced, in conjunction with the comorbidities of depression, drugs, alcohol and eating disorders associated with her mental state. The cover note refers to 'an institution. Designed to rid society of its undesirables, a group of inmates try to save themselves through love.' In Mitchell's script, however, the ring exchange takes place in a very different context to Kane's setting as the grey steel of the clinical background replaces the sunny college green. Mitchell's stage direction refers to the 'noise of a cricket match' as a sound effect which has a different role in her choreographing of the action and environment. In the interspace between events and intentions, the affect is palpable and perceptual. The event, in contemporary art representations, becomes a process rather than an endpoint, as Jill Bennett has written in discussing her concept of practical aesthetics. It engages us through 'intersections and collisions realised where connections and perceptions fasten or are stickiest' (2012: 158). The cricket match is an example, its juxtaposition with a concentration camp is noted by Rebellato (2017) in his

commentary on the play's positioning between nightmare and reality and the bridging role of the spectator.

CLINICAL EMPATHY: DEALING WITH WRECKAGE

Mitchell's 'intention' script is indicative of both the rigour (a clinical precision in this context) and ethical care that characterizes her directing approach. The triangulation of Graham, Tinker and Grace in the staging of the opening scene (rather than just Graham and Tinker) situates the action in a wider context of positionings than Kane's text. Grace's presence and relationship to the audience moves beyond Kane's frame of individualistic reference through a relational positioning that encompasses the environment and social context. In considering the ethical implications of Mitchell's ambition to 'get closer to the experience of perception' through the encounter with traumatic material, I draw upon Matthew Ratcliffe's (2017) conception of 'clinical empathy' in his discussion of empathy and psychiatric illness as this can be seen as analogous to Mitchell's approach and the scientific rigour she brings to the staging of extreme emotion. For Ratcliffe, clinical empathy is predicated on acknowledging difference, 'recognising what is otherwise' in the conjoining of subjective experience, moral perception and clinical observation: 'one's attention remains directed at the other person and their experiences rather than turned inward towards one's own mental life' (Ratcliffe 2017: 198). This corresponds to Mitchell's shift of attention from actor to audience, directing emotion outwards, through the feeling of physical action which she describes as 'acting a construction of emotion, learning visceral responses' (interview). The process documented in the archive, moreover, is analogous to Ratcliffe's commentary on second person perspectives: 'an increasingly elaborate and nuanced narrative is assembled which continually shapes and reshapes what one experiences of the other person's world...empathy is not a matter of replicating other people's experiences so much as situating those experiences in a wider context of meanings' (Ratcliffe 2017: 198). In Mitchell's staging, the wider context of meanings include Melanie Wilson's soundscape and the ruptures it creates, as typified by the cricket match example. As Bennett writes, 'sound, in other words, shifts the register of the images, repeatedly giving rise to sensations that transform rather than reinforce it' (Bennett 2012: 68). In an entry

dated 20th January (rehearsals started on 4th January), we find the origins of Mitchell's nuanced narrative and the context that reshapes Kane's play:

Today we came up with a set of rules

it is set in Europe

It is the year 2026

The war has been going on for at least 5 to 10 years

All social structures have collapsed as has gender equality, therefore women have been relegated (sic) to their traditional roles i.e. mothers and sex workers

We have been put into a state of emergency

After a right-wing coup, the compound is run by the right-wing head of state

The people in the compound are brought here; these are people that the right-wing state doesn't tolerate- i.e drug users, homosexuals and the mentally ill

People present at the compound include doctors and soldiers.

The function of the compound is to cleanse outsiders of their perversions (addiction, gender instabilities, schizophrenia and homosexuality)

In the action of the play, the cleansing fails because of the power of love-even the torturer falls victim to the power of love

There is a crematorium onsite.

Rebellato's programme note suggests that Kane cleansed British theatre, progressively stripping it back to essentials by removing traditional dramatic structure (Blasted), stage realism (Cleansed), dramatic character (Crave), until we reach 4:48 Psychosis, 'a play as a pure event', and one that Mitchell says she 'loves.' The move towards the event addresses the issues of temporality and cohesion (caused by the short scenes) through actions that focus on being present and presence. Hence the clinical context for the exchange of rings between Carl and Rob (stripped of the sunlight in the original) foregrounds the immediacy and evanescence of his feelings:

Rod (Takes the ring and Carl's hand) [*layout, italics and bold in script.*]

Listen. I'm saying this once.

(He puts the ring on Carl's finger.)

I love you now.

I'm with you *now*.

I'll do my best, moment to moment, not to betray

You.

Now.

That's it. No more. Don't make me lie to you (scene 2, p.5).

The action gets closer to the experience of perception in Mitchell's staging of Cleansed by making us aware of our own perceptual processes; we are conscious of our bodies reacting to the violence, our senses being assaulted and confused through the dissonance between the visual and auditory, all of which contributes to our consciousness of ourselves, the "mineness" of our phenomenal awareness of processing a felt experience through our presence in the auditorium and our relationship to the others (on stage and in the theatre). This sense of being in the moment is also the now and here of the ephemeral theatre space and the spectator's awareness of being present (painfully) in performance time. This awareness and ownership of our experience as spectators moreover, interacts with and reinforces our empathic understanding of the play world being other to our own. The relationship between narrative and experience, cognition and emotion is analogous to the clinical empathy conceptualised by Ratcliffe: 'Recognition of difference is thus embellished with a positive phenomenological appreciation of experience, something that does not require "having the same experience as the other person" in a first-person way' (Ratcliffe 2017: 199).

ON THE OTHER SIDE AND HERE: WRECKAGES IN TIME

Mitchell's practice complements Bennett's theoretical account of practical aesthetics in their shared focus on event and ideas as core concepts. Indeed, one of the three

key principles of Bennett's practical aesthetics is defined as contemporaneity: 'being-in-time, in the sequence of events and of allowing oneself and one's practice to be shifted by events' (2012: 27). This means the object for practical aesthetics might 'arise from an encounter with an event'. She argues that practical aesthetics moves beyond documentation and the witnessing function of media, 'to explore the nature of the event's perception or impression and hence to participate in its social and political configuration' (Bennett 2012: 29). This recognition of the relational dimension of practical aesthetics also corresponds to Mitchell's ecological practice, the Stanislavskian 360° approach as she describes it, encompassing physical action, the psychological and the social, all of which are characteristic of third space positioning and its association with the art/science interspace. Mitchell has increasingly been drawn to psychology and neuroscience, the 'biology of emotion' and the science of behaviour. In her discussion of sensuality and aesthesis, Bennett's reference to Bruno Latour (2005) is equally appropriate to Mitchell's directing strategy in Cleansed: turning 'the solid objects of today into their fluid states so as to render visible the network of relations that produces them' (Bennett 2012: 5). In this sense, the wreckage metaphor is particularly apt as the focus of attention is generally not on the wreckage per se as an object of perception, but what the remains reveal about the cause of the destruction, the context in which this was produced and, if appropriate, how the remains might be preserved or commemorated for the future. The wreckage is situated in an in-between temporal space, embodying the past and part of a future whilst also being between art and life. There is uncertainty about whether or not the events are real, as noted by Rebellato in the programme note: 'there's certainly a way of seeing Cleansed as unfolding entirely in the dying mind of Graham as he takes the lethal dose of crack at the end of scene one.' In Mitchell's production, the presence of Grace puts her at the centre of the play's consciousness so that the events could be part of her imagination or dream state. I was not as aware of Grace when I experienced the staged production, but in seeing the documentation of the performance, my position changed as I became aware of being physically situated between the reality and unreality of watching, experiencing and having my feelings directed by Mitchell/Grace/Kane.

As Rebellato (2016: np) concludes in his programme note on Mitchell's production: 'this is why Sarah Kane was so much a woman of the theatre. There is no better

cultural form to explore the way reality splits and doubles itself than the theatre, which is always one thing and something else' [emphasis in original]. The theatre is both reality and fiction, both 'on the other side and here' as Grace/Graham puts it, which also describes the position of wreckage, as well as Kane's continuing influence on British Theatre. It is also Katie Mitchell's position as the director in between the text, actors and audience, wreaking havoc through her staging, whilst also being highly controlled in her aesthetic, hence exercising clinical empathy to ensure we have the creative space for new understanding through the ethics and aesthetics of disruption. In so doing, she is a practitioner whose work is situated in the 'third space': 'emergent, empathic, searching, infused with sensory and affective experience, at ease with uncertainty. It is also relational, presuming a provisional standpoint that holds the other continuously in mind' (Muller et al 2018: 11)

I conclude with the wreckage of the original script, giving Kane the last word and leaving it to the reader to experience the feeling of what happens in what, for me, is the heart of the play, as two bodies combine into one, whilst also working as a metaphor for Mitchell's relationship to the original script and my experience in the archive:

Graham presses his hands onto Grace and her clothes turn red where he touches, blood seeping through.

Simultaneously his own body begins to bleed in the same places (scene 10, p.26)

1. Interview with the author, 22/05/17, London. Further references are cited in the text as interview.

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